

DESIRE, DISCIPLINE, AND THE POLITICAL BODY

DESIRE, DISCIPLINE, AND THE POLITICAL BODY

IN

MICHEL FOUCAULT AND ST. AUGUSTINE

By

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### Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to develop an Augustinian response to political problems diagnosed by Michel Foucault's analysis of modern political power. Foucault argues that the primary acts of power in the modern age are not repressive acts but creative ones. Instead of prohibiting acts, political power disciplines, rehabilitates and normalizes. The result of this is a disciplined and docile subject within which relations of power are so deeply embedded that 'liberation' can only bring about their entrenchment and the absorption of all aspects of life into the political structures they represent. Foucault's alternative consists in practices of aesthetic self-creation not linked to transcendent or natural construals of order. William Connolly extends Foucault's argument by criticizing Augustine as a thinker projecting a moral order onto the world and then categorizing the world on the basis of this order. This contrasts with Connolly's attempt to derive political practice from ethical sources that do not attempt to order the cosmos unambiguously. I use John Milbank to begin an Augustinian response as Milbank understands Augustine as developing an ontology grounded in the priority of peace and plenitude to violence and scarcity. This provides the basis for my argument that within Augustine's account of the purposive nature of love and desire within the subject lies an implicit critique of Foucault's ethic of aesthetic self-creation. What follows this is an attempt to outline the significant characteristics of a political posture formed by the practice of the Eucharist. These characteristics provide an alternative to both modern political practice and Foucauldian practice. The final chapter applies this Augustinian political posture to the realms of sexuality, on one hand, and punishment and discipline, on the other.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is threefold. It is, first, an attempt to contribute to a genuine engagement of Foucauldian and Augustinian perspectives on political thought. Foucault's work on politics redefines and reorganizes the landscape of political discourse in many ways and this makes it necessary to extend and develop Augustinian categories in directions that respond to this reorientation. The most important claim of this dissertation is that, although Foucault's diagnosis of the most important modern political problems is in large part correct, Augustinian categories can respond to these problems in more satisfactory ways than Foucault himself can. To demonstrate this, I am forced to pursue the other two purposes of the dissertation. In addition to extending Augustine in ways that allow him to engage Foucault, I must, secondly, defend an Augustinian perspective from attacks launched by Foucault and Foucauldians and, finally, use this Augustinian perspective to demonstrate Foucault's own inability to provide an adequate answer to the problem he discerns so clearly.

In the second chapter I outline the basic problem that Foucault diagnoses in modern society and the reason he thinks that contemporary political theory is unable to address it. The problem is the changing nature of power from a power that represses to one that is creative, that is, creative of the subjects it holds. Foucault introduces his understanding of power by first attacking what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis.' According to this hypothesis there are natural human desires and instincts that are repressed by prohibitions. As these prohibitions are



lifted, human nature and its desires are liberated. The work of radical political theory and practice in recent times has been the lifting of these prohibitions and the subsequent freeing of human nature. Foucault argues, in contrast to this hypothesis, that the primary acts of power in the modern age are not repressive acts but creative ones. Instead of prohibiting acts, political power disciplines, rehabilitates and normalizes. Highly visible but rare exertions of power are replaced with the invisible but constant application of discipline. The result of this is a disciplined and docile subject within which these relations of power are so deeply embedded that ‘liberation’ can only bring about their entrenchment. This first chapter is not, however, devoted to the subject (an analysis of Foucault’s view of the subject takes up the third chapter) but to the political techniques that articulate it.

Foucault argues that contemporary political theory, as it is presently constituted, is unable to account for these political techniques. Political theory is still caught up in a theory of the state and state sovereignty that does not address the disciplinary functions of power. These functions become excluded from the political realm, handed over to experts or the market or the private realm. They are de-politicized by contemporary political thought yet are the fundamental ways in which power is exerted. The common categories of the state, sovereignty, rights and law do not deal adequately with what Foucault calls the rise of bio-power. This refers to the use of power to foster life rather than simply to define the limits outside of which it must not act. Bio-power is the necessary precursor

to the totalizing effects of what Foucault terms ‘governmentality,’ or the absorption of all aspects of life into the political structures of the state. Because the vocabulary of contemporary political thought is inadequate, Foucault argues that it is spending its resources in examining realms that are of only minor importance while ignoring what is most significant. De-politicized realms like criminality and delinquency, mental illness and sexuality must be reinscribed in the political realm so that their domestication is not so easily performed. Foucault’s re-narrating of the histories of these institutions and discourses is part of his attempt to reinscribe them while at the same time redefining what we understand as political.

After outlining this I move into an analysis of the political subject and its place in Foucault’s thought. The struggle Foucault sees going on in the political realm is recapitulated at the level of the subject and the constitution of the subject undergirds the political discourse Foucault critiques. In Foucault’s attempt to trace the development of this subject he targets the Christian practice of confession and its link to the sexual subject, or, as he terms it, ‘desiring man.’ This is part of the foundation for the modern disciplined subject. It opens the way for the rise of ‘pastoral power,’ a power that depends on a detailed knowledge of the inner movements of the soul and therefore on the willing participation of the one over whom power is exercised. Foucault’s practice of genealogy is an attempt to detach the reader from this model of the subject, to make its contingency and arbitrariness clear, and to make one realize other possibilities

beyond or beside the subject. This chapter ends with a discussion of Foucault's attempt to suggest what might be the broad outlines of an alternative to the docile subject. His alternative would emerge in practices of aesthetic self-creation not linked to transcendent or natural construals of order.

The political thought of William Connolly helps articulate these themes both in terms of contemporary political theory and in terms of a direct and fierce critique of Augustine. Connolly argues that Augustine is representative of a tradition of thinkers projecting a moral order both onto the world and into oneself and then categorizing the world on the basis of this order. He contrasts this to his own attempt, consistent with that of Foucault, to derive practice from ethical sources that do not attempt unambiguously to order the cosmos. The tendencies of modern political practice of which Foucault (and Connolly) are most critical can therefore be linked to a broader impulse in moderns that can be represented by Augustine and modern Augustinians. The purpose of the dissertation is to defend a particular articulation of Augustine from this charge and to re-read Augustine in a way that responds to the most important concerns expressed by Foucault and Connolly. This will require a recontextualization of Augustine to take account of modern political categories. To do this I attempt critically to appropriate the 'postmodern critical Augustinianism' of John Milbank. Milbank reads Augustine in a way that challenges Connolly's 'moralistic' reading. Milbank helps reframe the issue in terms of peace and violence instead of moral and ethical. Augustine is the hero of Milbank's narrative because he refuses to

assume an ontological priority of violence to peace. For Milbank, Connolly and Foucault and their ‘agonism’ simply continue the attempt of liberalism to found the city on the restraint of a prior violence. Their ontology is based on conflict and scarcity whereas Augustine’s is founded on plenitude. Milbank is useful for his construal of Augustine but he fails to deal adequately with Foucault, as he reduces him to a caricature. Foucault’s agonism involves reversals and negotiations of power that cannot be reduced to the single category of violence. A genuine engagement with Foucault must acknowledge and respond to his focus on pedagogical and erotic relationships as politically foundational.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation is an attempt to do precisely this. It is an attempt to develop an account of subjectivity from an Augustinian perspective while expounding a response to Foucault’s own understanding of the subject. I argue here that the most important difference between Foucault and Augustine lies in Augustine’s dependence on at least some form of eudaimonism. Foucault, on the other hand, rejects any vision of human happiness because of the fear that such visions inevitably become either stultifying and repressive or insidiously disciplinary and normalizing. This difference drives a deep wedge between the thought of Augustine and Foucault and any critical engagement of the two must take it into account. It is the argument of this section of the dissertation that within Augustine’s account of the purposive nature of love and desire lies an implicit critique of Foucault’s ethic of aesthetic self-creation. It is Foucault’s rejection of teleology and eudaimonism that causes his project to collapse into

incoherence, a collapse that can be seen when Foucault's understanding of the subject is contrasted with Augustine's.

It will still be necessary, however, to defend Augustine from the criticisms of Foucault and Connolly. As I lay out in the earlier chapters, many of Augustine's central concepts are the most important targets of Foucault and Connolly in their criticism of contemporary political theory and practice. As well as pointing out the shortcomings of Foucault's model of the subject, I attempt, in the fifth chapter, to demonstrate the ways in which Augustine's construal of the subject can be defended from these attacks. Of course, the practice of confession is a central issue for both Augustine and Foucault and an essential part of the chapter involves an attempt to defend Augustine's understanding of this practice from Foucault's construal of it. My attempt is not so much to argue that Foucault misunderstands the meaning of the practice of confession and its effects on the subject as to place the practice within the context of Augustine's view of the importance of the Incarnation and of his eschatology. The practice of confession redeems the past and a past self not for the sake of a present program or project but directed towards a future and a future self that can never be definitively known or understood but only received as a gift. I argue in this chapter that this fact allows Augustine to avoid some of the more malevolent aspects of Foucault's diagnosis of contemporary political life. I also argue in this chapter that the form that the subject's humility must take in the context of the Incarnation is not

vulnerable to the charge of ‘transcendental egoism’ launched by Connolly against Augustine.

The sixth chapter of the dissertation is an attempt to place the discussion of Augustine’s view of the subject within a more explicitly political context. Augustine’s indictment of Roman political structures provides the backdrop for his own model of true political community. Augustine is aware of the complex ways in which political institutions of discipline evoke desires that sustain their own structure. His own struggle with desires for the praise of others won through mendacity narrated in Confessions complements his critique of a ‘rhetoric of glory’ found in City of God. Augustine contrasts Roman political institutions with the community of discipline found in the Church. Again, as in the above chapter, it is argued that Augustine’s belief that the Church constitutes the only truly political community cannot be separated from his broader view of the structure of human happiness. This does not mean, however, that the structure of human happiness can be discerned through a careful examination of human potentialities. I argue that Augustine does not view human happiness as a possibility the realization of which lies immanent within humans themselves. Instead, happiness can only be received from God as a gift. For Augustine, the perfect expression of this is in the Eucharist, the fundamental practice of the Church. Augustine’s analysis of the Eucharist provides an indication of the most important characteristics of this Church.

The final chapter of the dissertation focuses on two issues important to both Foucault and Augustine. I attempt to restate some of the principles of Augustinian treatments of sexuality, on the one hand, and punishment and discipline, on the other, in a way that responds to the Foucauldian criticisms of their modern expressions. This is an attempt to provide a way forward for Augustinian thought that is both consistent with its own principles and responds adequately to both the modern political situation as diagnosed by Foucault and to the critiques launched at it by Foucault and Foucauldians.

## Chapter 2: Power and Discipline

The purpose of this chapter is to trace out some of the major political concepts suggested in the work of Michel Foucault as a way of diagnosing some of the dead ends contemporary political theory faces when it deals with modern relations of power. Foucault reverses conventional views of political power that link it to the state and to the concept of sovereignty. He replaces this language with one better able to describe (and resist) the expansion of administrative powers that organize life without being mediated by the institution of the state and its legislation. The conceptual tools Foucault provides will allow us a subtler understanding of modern institutions and forms of discourse and will also allow us to understand his suggestions for addressing the problems related to modern relations of power. Foucault describes relations of power characteristic of modern society in which sovereignty is no longer wielded over the lives of individuals. Instead, he argues, human life is now built from the inside out by being ‘governed.’

I begin by considering the ways in which Foucault attempts to redefine what is meant by the word ‘power.’ Foucault rejects what he calls the ‘repressive hypothesis’ and views power as a positive, constructive force in its operation on, and construction of, the human subject and human society. I will then examine the way Foucault uses this view of power to construct the concept of ‘bio-power’ which he uses to describe the way power operates within modern society. Finally, I will investigate Foucault’s explication of the related concept of



‘governmentality.’ This will open the way for an examination of Foucault’s understanding of the subject in the next chapter.

Foucault begins the first volume of the History of Sexuality with a summary of the major elements of what he calls the ‘repressive hypothesis’. According to this view, power manifests itself in human life primarily as repression or prohibition. This is especially clear in the domain of sexuality but the same basic pattern is seen in all areas in which power operates. According to the repressive hypothesis, power works by binding and fettering agents so as to prevent actions from being performed, words from being said, thoughts from being thought. The question Foucault asks is not who or what is doing this binding, but what it is that is being bound and fettered.<sup>1</sup> By asking this, Foucault draws attention to the view of human nature implicit in such appeals to power as repression. Repression, and a corresponding liberation, only make sense if there is something upon which it operates. An understanding of power as repression can import into its model assumptions about the nature of what is repressed that are left unexamined and that can, paradoxically, work to reinforce the relations of power the liberation is intended to undermine. Foucault also expresses suspicion about the association of sex with the depths of this human nature. This, Foucault argues, appears to retain the most important elements of the system of thought that ‘repressed’ sex in the first place. The language of ‘liberation’ that becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, an Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 97. (Hereafter HS1).

associated with the attack on sexual repression merely disguises a view of the human subject which is perpetuated and entrenched by this new movement.

The repressive hypothesis appears radical in its attack on the prohibitions laid out by power and its insistence on a liberation of what has been repressed. What this view leaves intact and, in fact, takes for granted is the understanding of the human subject constituted by the desires and instincts that are then repressed. What appears to be a liberation can now be seen, using Foucault's critique, as a deeper entrenchment of a particular view of the subject. It is this subject, and the construction of desire constituting it, that Foucault argues is the true work of power. Power is, therefore, so deeply interwoven with the desires and behaviour of the subject that the subject's liberation is no more an escape from power than the original repression was. By liberating desire and its expression in the subject, one simply allows the free reign of a power that has exerted itself in constructing these very desires. As Foucault writes, "[w]here there is desire, the power relation is already present: [it is] an illusion, then, to denounce this relation for a repression exerted after the event; but vanity as well, to go questing after a desire that is beyond the reach of power."<sup>2</sup> There is no natural self that lies under the relations of power and that could be freed through the release from repression.

But if the repressive hypothesis is invalid, how exactly does power operate in its constitution of the human subject? As much as Foucault is at pains to avoid the repressive hypothesis and its false promise of liberation, he criticizes as

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<sup>2</sup> HS1, 81-2.

strongly the tendency to identify simplistically power as constitutive of desire.<sup>3</sup> Both of these views Foucault groups under the name of a juridico-discursive representation of power which he eschews in favour of a “move less toward a ‘theory’ of power than toward an ‘analytics’ of power.”<sup>4</sup> Whether we conceive of desire as something that precedes law and the power of which it is an expression or as something that is constituted by the law, this does not allow us to escape from a model of power that “has its central point in the enunciation of the law.”<sup>5</sup> Power must be analyzed without recourse to this understanding. In an evocative metaphor, Foucault writes that “we still have not cut off the head of the king.”<sup>6</sup> It is his disavowal of the juridico-discursive model of power that allows Foucault to escape from an analysis of power tied up inextricably with the state, a development that will occupy the latter half of this chapter.

The easiest way to get at what Foucault means by power in contrast to the juridico-discursive model he rejects is to look at the five propositions about power he explicitly advances.<sup>7</sup> First, power cannot be conceived of as something one could possess or acquire. This would continue the illusion that the subject is prior to power and that the actions of the individual are somehow extrinsic to relations of power. Rather, Foucault argues, the subject is a creation of power and this power is so deeply integrated with the subject that it is not coherent to speak of the subject independently of relations of power.

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<sup>3</sup> HS1, 82.

<sup>4</sup> HS1, 82.

<sup>5</sup> HS1, 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> HS1, 89.

<sup>7</sup> HS1, 94-5.

Secondly, power does not simply regulate other types of relationships (e.g., economic, sexual, familial) by prohibiting certain of their expressions. Power is immanent within these relationships and is part of what produces their particular character. There is no way, however, to separate out which elements of these relationships are the production of power and which are ‘natural’ or inescapable parts of the relationship.

What is clear from the above points is Foucault’s insistence on the productive capacity of power. Repression and prohibition are not the only, and certainly not the most important, tools of power. Foucault’s third proposition is that power operates by producing the subject and its relations, not by simply limiting them. Furthermore, the subject is not a necessary creation of power. What I mean by this is that Foucault believes that human subjectivity is a contingent fact which is brought about by the particular expression of power in certain societies. Foucault suggests in more than one work<sup>8</sup> that it may be possible to pinpoint when power began to express itself in terms of human subjectivity. This is a view of the subject that will occupy our attention in the next chapter.

Fourthly, in addition to rejecting the view that power can be held or acquired by individuals, and related to this rejection, Foucault argues that power comes from below instead of from above. Relations of power cannot be reduced

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, (New York: Pantheon, 1980) and Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977). (Hereafter OT and DP respectively).

to the domination of an oppressed class by an oppressing class; nor is power exerted simply by the figures at the top of a hierarchy over those at the bottom. Part of what Foucault means by the phrase “to cut off the king’s head” is that we must stop thinking of power as dividing the world simply between rulers and the ruled. Foucault writes that “the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole.”<sup>9</sup> The relations of power that link people together are much more complex than relations between those above and those below. Power can be conceived of as a web that links all together and in which all are embedded. Each movement of the web effects each other part, some more than others, but no part of the web is immune to its movement.

Finally, Foucault also is at pains to make the point that, although the movements of power are purposive and intentional, they belong to no particular subject or group of subjects. Foucault is no conspiracy theorist suggesting that the plan for power relations in society lies hidden in a vault somewhere. The logic of power may be clear but this does not mean that it has been planned or that its aims have been formulated by those who implement the techniques of power. This is related to the point made above that power cannot be the acquisition or possession of a subject. The attribution of intention without subjectivity is a

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<sup>9</sup> HSI, 94.

problematic one<sup>10</sup> but the point Foucault is making is that because relations of power lie at the heart of the subject it is not coherent to understand the exercise of power as if it were the choice of a subject who could as easily choose some other expression. The movements of power lie beneath the level of subjective intention and purpose, although this does not mean they are completely without intention and purpose.

If we accept the above assertions that Foucault makes about power we would seem to be left in a situation hopelessly entangled in relations of power with no hope of escape. Even our desire for liberation from these strands of power, Foucault seems to suggest, only serves to entrench us more deeply in their grasp. But for Foucault, the key is not to attempt to live without relations of power. This would be impossible. What we need to recognize is that every movement of power creates through its movement the possibility for an act of resistance. In its exertion, power always creates a force in excess of what is necessary to accomplish its aims. This excess is the possibility for resistance to the exercises of power. This resistance is possible at every point at which power is exercised. To give in to despair because power is continuous and always present is to accept the dichotomy between freedom and power which Foucault rejects. It is not true that freedom is only possible in the absence of power. Instead, as Foucault writes, “if there are relations of power in every social field,

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<sup>10</sup> For a critique of non-subjective intentionality see Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12:2 (May 1984): 152-83. Nancy Fraser makes a similar point in “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,” *Praxis International* 1 (1981): 272-87.

this is because there is freedom everywhere.”<sup>11</sup> The key for Foucault is not to develop practices of freedom that are free of power relations (this would be an impossible task) but to develop practices that are free of domination.<sup>12</sup> These practices are expressed by an agonistic politics and subjectivity that will be the focus of the next two chapters.

The implication that human subjectivity is a product of power relations emerges in the first volume of Foucault’s History of Sexuality<sup>13</sup> but much of the development of this insight is recounted in his earlier work, Discipline and Punish. It is in this volume that Foucault indicates shifts in the nature of political subjectivity through an analysis of the development of the modern prison. The torture used to punish crimes before the modern era, Foucault argues, was a ritual in which truth was produced by the sovereign and, through confession, the accused took part in it and his or her own condemnation. It was a demonstration of the sovereign’s power and of the ability of the sovereign and only the sovereign to produce truth, namely the truth of the crime and its punishment. In the reforms that take place in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and that result in the birth of the prison, humanitarian concerns, according to Foucault, act as a mask and a distraction from ways in which power relations are redistributed within society and within the body of the offender. As the body and its pain and mutilation no longer exist as the proper object of criminal punishment, they are replaced in this

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in Michel Foucault, Essential Works of Foucault, vol. I, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994), 292. (Hereafter “Ethics of Concern”).

<sup>12</sup> “Ethics of Concern,” 298.

<sup>13</sup> HS1, 61-2

position by the offender's status as judicial subject, or by the soul as Foucault evocatively but perhaps misleadingly refers to it. It is no longer the criminal act that is punished by the work of the sovereign on the body of the offender. Instead, it becomes the work of the legal system to eliminate the criminality bound up in the character of the offender. To this end it becomes essential that the confession of the criminal, so important in establishing the truth of the crime in the former model, is extended and the offender's confession of desires, fantasies and habits becomes a necessary element of his or her rehabilitation. This rehabilitation is actually a reconstruction of the criminal in habits and desires, requiring a more or less complete surveillance and a constant and homogeneous application of disciplinary power on the individual. This necessity makes the 'total' institution of the prison and its regimentation of both space and time inevitable.

A second theme of Discipline and Punish is that law as the expression of power, along with the corollaries of compliance and transgression, is replaced in a disciplinary institution with the norm, a standard that is not transgressed against but deviated from. This shift demonstrates the inadequacy of the sovereignty model of power which is dependent on a theory of law and transgression. The norm is a standard against which an individual is measured so that punishment can be determined always with specific reference to the deviant individual. The goal of this punishment is neither expiation nor repression but correction. The standard against which the individual is placed allows for differentiation and



individualization but, paradoxically, at the same time, homogenizes by determining the basis of this differentiation in terms of its own categories. This is part of what Foucault means by attributing the invention of the modern individual subject to the outworkings of normalizing power. One is constituted as a subject and as an individual through appropriating the disciplinary structure in which one finds oneself. This includes a reconstruction of desire and habit in reference to a norm that exists outside the person. Of course, as mentioned above, such a reconstruction can never be complete and also inevitably involves excesses unpredicted by its implementation. There are, also, of course, always several reconstructions taking place at the same time in reference to different norms, sometimes complementing each other, sometimes in tension with each other and sometimes in complete contradiction. This reality makes resistance possible even if there is no fundamental or grounding human nature by which one may judge a norm. In fact, it is only the suspicion one may develop of this fundamental human nature that allows one to resist the relations of power constructing the norms that constitute it. The domain in which relations of power play out ‘games of truth’<sup>14</sup> and of domination and resistance is an ever-shifting and unstable one.

It is important to avoid two extremes when reading Foucault’s work on any particular institution, such as, for example, the prison in Discipline and Punish. On the one hand, Foucault is not disguising a description of contemporary society by pretending to talk about the prison. He is not suggesting

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<sup>14</sup> for a discussion of this phrase see “Ethics of Concern,” 297-99.

that the disciplinary practices of the prison have been unproblematically exported to other institutions and that we all now live in a sort of metaphoric glass-walled penitentiary in which we act as our own and each other's jailers. On the other hand, Foucault's work ought not to be read as a dry historical analysis of a single institution over a specific period of time with no scope given for broader generalizations about contemporary societal power structures. Foucault's work is intended to provide "a history of the present."<sup>15</sup> The fact that Foucault writes this history while ostensibly focusing on a different era is meant to startle us as readers when we both recognize ourselves in seemingly foreign times and institutions and fail to see ourselves and our deeply held values in institutions familiar to us. Foucault is attempting neither merely to describe an historical period nor to explain all of society. His unique descriptions of familiar institutions distance us from them, or 'defamiliarize' us in order to give us new understandings of both the institutions and ourselves.<sup>16</sup> It is not true that the disciplinary structures of the prison were simply exported into other institutions and now dominate contemporary society, nor does Foucault argue this. What is closer to the truth is that the impulse that can be seen behind the implementation of the disciplinary practices of the prison have had a wider application than simply this institution and that a pinpointing of this impulse as it shows itself in

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<sup>15</sup> DP, 31.

<sup>16</sup> This is a common theme in the secondary literature on Foucault. See especially Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p 110, John S. Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 80 and William E. Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," *Political Theory* 21:3 (August 1993): 367-8.

the prison can allow us to develop healthy suspicions about contemporary social and political practices. This is perhaps the greatest value in a work like Discipline and Punish.

One important example of the ways in which Foucault's work on the disciplines involved in penitential practice can be extended beyond the prison walls can be seen in his own linking of the disciplinary reconstruction of the individual and the development of social scientific method.<sup>17</sup> Because of the success that disciplinary practices have had in constructing human subjectivity it has become possible to study and predict the behaviour of masses of people. Foucault insists counter-intuitively that the techniques of discipline were not an application of social scientific theories but that these theories depended on the individual as formed from within institutions already operating as disciplinary. Of course, the dependence is not as simple as this suggests. Social science and the disciplines worked together to form a human subjectivity that would be docile and increasingly productive.<sup>18</sup>

The arena in which this alliance of disciplinary technique and the scientific study of humans was applied in its earliest manifestation was in the institutions of industrial capitalism. Foucault muses about the way in which all of the institutions of early capitalism begin to look like prisons. Hospitals, schools, the armed forces and factories all take on, not identical techniques to those at work in

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<sup>17</sup> DP 298.

<sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt points out in a parallel way the replacement in the modern world of 'behavior' for 'action' in The Human Condition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Giorgio Agamben points out this parallel in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

prisons, but practices inspired by the same goals of increased productivity and docility.<sup>19</sup> In each of these institutions space and time are rigorously divided and exhaustively oriented towards efficiency. Individuals are placed within these structures and shaped as subjects to conform to them without remainder. It is through these institutions that human bodies are inserted into the machinery of capitalism. This machinery distributes and controls these bodies according to its own rationality.<sup>20</sup> Of course, as I mentioned above, this shaping of the subject is not completely successful. If it were there would be no possibility for resistance or even for reflection on its occurrence. The constitution of the subject through the disciplines embedded in these institutions is successful enough, however, to impel the subject to subject<sup>21</sup> itself voluntarily to the norms assumed by them. The voluntary nature of the disciplines which have been exported from the prison makes them more insidious than those at work within the prison. It is less easy to conceal the coercive foundation of the prison than it is that of the hospital or workplace.

Although Foucault uses the history of specific institutions often as the basis for his discussions of discipline and power, it is not primarily the structure of these institutions that interests him. Foucault develops from the study of these institutions a reflection on the techniques of discipline and power. These techniques, and the visions that motivated them, give insight into the models of

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<sup>19</sup> DP 138.

<sup>20</sup> HS1 140-1.

<sup>21</sup> The play on words involving ‘the subject’ and the verb ‘to subject’ is a common one in Foucault.

human subjectivity at work in society not found in an analysis of how the institutions are structured. For this reason Foucault often spends a great deal of time analyzing the work of thinkers whose propositions for institutional changes were never implemented. It is to a number of the characteristics of these techniques that we will now turn our attention.

Foucault suggests that one of the major keys to the efficacy of discipline is the operation of what he calls ‘micropower.’ This term refers to the characteristic of power as something that can be implemented not simply as a clumsy imposition from above but that can be used to influence behaviour at a level smaller even than the individual. Each part of the body is isolated and trained in specific motion to allow for a habitual and completely efficient action. Foucault describes the way the simple action of raising a gun to the shoulder was broken up into several separate motions by military training to enforce both efficiency and uniformity.<sup>22</sup> The applications of this technique of discipline to the assembly line and other practices of early capitalism are clear.

Disciplinary techniques, however, are not simply mobilized in order to improve efficiency in the movements of the body. Part of what makes disciplinary power so different from forms of power prevalent before its implementation is its tendency to exert a continuous influence on those it disciplines. Power exerted by the sovereign before the invention of disciplinary institutions was highly visible and at times brutally direct but it was specific and

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<sup>22</sup> DP 152-3.

local. The power to punish was directed towards individuals on specific occasions to discourage and rebuke the particular offence. Outside of transgression and those who transgressed, the sovereign's power was not exerted and was not relevant. In order to operate effectively, the power of the sovereign needed to be visible to all but it could not but be temporally limited. The efficacy of disciplinary power lies in the fact that it is invisible to all but a few and in its constant application. Modern subjects are under the influence of disciplinary power not simply when they are transgressing the law. In fact, law and transgression are no longer relevant concepts when outlining the operation of disciplinary power. The implementation of disciplinary power in terms of norms and deviations implies the necessity of constant measuring and adjustment for the sake of approaching the norm. It is a characteristic of this operation of power that no individual is seen to have established the norm. When the sovereign enforced a law by punishing a transgressor an opportunity for resistance and rebellion was simultaneously created at the place where the transgression and the offender were isolated.<sup>23</sup> There is no correlating opportunity for resistance created in the application of disciplinary power. The discursive and institutional framework in which the subject finds itself assumes the validity and, in fact, the inescapability of the norms expressed in it. The subject, in its participation in this framework, is implicated in the construction of these norms to such a degree that it can be said that the norms have been inserted into the framework of the subject. The

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, DP 60.

subjection of the subject to the norm is voluntary, or at least no viable alternative can be seen. The norm is an ideal always implicit in the practices of the subject and always exerting an influence on the action and thought of the subject through discourse and institutional structure. This omnipresence of the norm as a standard always embedded in the day-to-day practices of the subject is what allows for normalization as a continuous application of disciplinary power.

Another characteristic of disciplinary power is the way in which it, paradoxically, individualizes at the same time as it homogenizes.<sup>24</sup> Critical to the establishment of a norm is the establishment of means with which to measure the amount of deviance from that norm. The development of the examination as a pedagogical tool, for example, allows individuals to be placed along a plane in relation to each other and to the norm. Individuals are in this way distinguished from each other for the sake of individualized treatment but this distinction has the character of transforming all difference into that which can be expressed by the measuring standard referring to the norm. Through this process the subject becomes an individual, but a certain kind of individual. A subject's individuality is derived in reference to a norm the establishment of which is unexamined. Of course, the treatment of the individual in the interest of drawing her into closer proximity to the norm is done for the sake of the individual and it clearly allows the life of the subject to fit in more easily with the institutional structures that make up the background of her life. This is, of course, how the subject itself

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<sup>24</sup> DP 191-2.

becomes a willing participant in its subjection to the norm assumed by the discursive and institutional structures that dominate its life. In fact, according to Foucault, the subject is itself constituted by this willing subjection to the norms of modern society. It is actually misleading to call this a willing subjection as the willingness of the subject only emerges within a normative framework that precedes it. It is this framework and the discursive and disciplinary practices that are a part of it that call forth the subject as something that consists in the judgments it makes of itself with reference to the norms it understands as given.

#### The Soul

It is with this in mind that Foucault suggests that “the man described for us [by the moral claims of humanism], whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself.”<sup>25</sup> According to Foucault, the power exercised on the human body by disciplinary techniques creates, through the expectation of self-surveillance and self-judgment, a duplicate body that watches over the body. This second body is what is called the soul, not a metaphysical illusion or an ideological creation but the process by which we are disciplined and discipline ourselves with reference to a norm assumed by disciplinary discourse. This soul is born “out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint.”<sup>26</sup> As supervision, training and corrective discipline are constantly exercised, not just on prisoners but on children, factory workers and those who are institutionalized, they are invited to

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<sup>25</sup> DP 30.

<sup>26</sup> DP 29.



look at themselves in the same terms as those with which they are being supervised and examined. The movements of their bodies take on the meanings attributed to them by this discourse and the posture of supervisor and disciplinarian is gradually taken on by the supervised and disciplined themselves. As Foucault sums up this process in one of his more evocative aphorisms; “the soul is the prison of the body.”<sup>27</sup>

Foucault suggests in Discipline and Punish that the history of the prison is the history of a change in the target of punishment from the body to the soul.<sup>28</sup> This is true enough but, as implied in what is written above, it cannot be understood as a claim that penal punishment began to exert itself at a certain point in history on a human psyche that had always existed but had been previously overlooked. Foucault’s argument is that this human psyche or ‘soul’ is the effect of techniques of punishment exerted over the body. The change in the tactics of punishment and discipline from those dealing with the body to those dealing with behaviour, motivation and character disguises the dependence that the two forms of punishment have on each other. It is for this reason that Foucault rejects the suggestion that the prison reform movement (which he claims was born simultaneously with the prison itself and has always accompanied it)<sup>29</sup> is a victory for compassion in punishment. The new regime of discipline in which psychology, criminology and behaviour management are given their place

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<sup>27</sup> DP 30.

<sup>28</sup> DP 16.

<sup>29</sup> DP 264-5.

alongside the judge is not a major shift in model but an adjustment of techniques towards greater efficacy. For Foucault, “the soul is the effect and the instrument of a political anatomy.”<sup>30</sup> This political anatomy is a model of relations between the individual and the political body<sup>31</sup> in which the regime of discipline is the fulfillment of the regime of torture, not its reversal or undoing.

The purpose for this realization of what I have called a regime of discipline is an increase in utility and efficiency. The techniques of discipline had existed for a long time in monasteries and the army but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they became “general formulas of domination.”<sup>32</sup> The discipline of subjects was more efficient than slavery or vassalage and was directed towards a different end than the disciplines of the monastery. As Foucault writes, “[t]he historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely.”<sup>33</sup> With the constitution of a subject in terms of its discipline the body becomes more useful and efficient but at the same time makes the body’s obedience non-political. The body as a whole is absorbed into a

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<sup>30</sup> DP 30.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault draws attention to the way his work complements the work of Ernst Kantorowicz in The King’s Two Bodies, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957). Kantorowicz argues that through the expression of the power of sovereignty the King’s body is doubled, creating a second body which is the physical but intangible sustaining of the kingdom. What Kantorowicz has done for the king’s body, Foucault suggests he is doing for the body of the condemned (DP, 28-30).

<sup>32</sup> DP, 137.

<sup>33</sup> DP, 137-8.

‘mechanics’ which arranges it in terms of utility while depersonalizing the aspect of obedience.

Foucault highlights this characteristic of disciplinary techniques when he claims that “discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.”<sup>34</sup> The docility of human bodies is both an effect of and a necessary requirement for the insertion of these bodies into the system of labour at the time of its implementation. But docility is created not simply through the training of disciplinary techniques but also through the implementation of a regimen of surveillance and normalization which Foucault calls ‘panopticism.’<sup>35</sup>

#### Pan-Opticism

Perhaps the best-known element of Foucault’s thought is his description of Jeremy Bentham’s model prison the Panopticon. The concept is quite simple. The Panopticon is a prison in which each cell is completely visible to the occupants of a central guard tower. The occupants of this tower are not, however, visible to the prisoners. The lighting of the prison subjects the prisoners to continuous and complete surveillance by those in a darkened tower. The object of this lighting is not simply to allow prisoners to be constantly watched but also to make it impossible for the prisoners to know whether anyone is actually in the guard tower or not. At any time the prisoners may be under surveillance but they cannot know if they are. The goal is to force the prisoners to act always as if they are under surveillance. The question of whether someone is in a position to watch

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<sup>34</sup> DP, 138.

<sup>35</sup> DP, 195-228.

them becomes unnecessary as the prisoner must place him- or herself in the position of the guard. The surveillance over the prisoner becomes greatly increased in power, not by its obvious presence but, paradoxically, by its absence. The surveillance of the prisoner is taken over by the prisoner and thereby gains a power and presence that the surveillance of an actual second person could not hope for. As Foucault describes it, “a real subjection is born from a fictitious relation.”<sup>36</sup>

This model of the prison and, by extension, modern disciplinary technique are clearly related in important ways to the model of power Foucault also suggests and which has been examined in the early parts of this chapter. The power exerted in the Panopticon is continuous and invisible. It is implanted directly into the constitution of the subject in which it is designed to operate. The subject is implicated in its own repression to such a degree that when the system works optimally it cannot even be said to be repressive. When the operation of discipline and surveillance is embedded so deeply in the subject the question of how to liberate the subject cannot be addressed without contradiction. Also, like Foucault’s understanding of relations of power, his description of the Panopticon is one that detaches power from sovereignty. In fact, the presence of a visible figure to whom power could be thought to belong is conspicuously absent. Foucault suggests that the Panopticon is a sign of a reversal of the ways in which power has operated. The problem of ancient societies was to ensure that the few

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<sup>36</sup> DP, 202.

powerful acts of the sovereign could be witnessed by many in order to have their effect. The modern problem is to ensure that many people and actions are visible to a few who are themselves hidden.<sup>37</sup> Our inability to develop a political language sensitive to this change is what allows their continued hiddenness and, in fact, their disappearance and replacement by our surveillance of ourselves.

What interests Foucault about Bentham's model of the Panopticon is not, of course, its place in the history of the institution of the prison (it was, in fact, never strictly implemented), but the place of the principles of panopticism in the history of techniques of discipline. The Panopticon is an excellent example of the emergence of techniques which formed the structure of the prison, but also of other institutions and of the policing of society in general. The Panopticon may have been originally conceived as an actual institution but "it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use."<sup>38</sup> The keys to the implementation of this political technology are the continuous and invisible exercise of power and its detachment from sovereignty.

The insertion of a relation of surveillance into the constitution of the subject is an important element in the growing importance of normalization and its replacement of law and constraint. It is essential that the subject take on the task of applying the norm to his or her life in a way which extends beyond the reach of any external supervision. Panopticism allows the norm to become an element of the subject's self-surveillance reaching into the domain of desire and

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<sup>37</sup> DP, 216.

<sup>38</sup> DP, 205.

intention. The norm becomes a means of characterizing the entire life (both exterior and interior) of the subject in a way which fully implicates the subject itself.

It is with this in mind that Foucault claims that the prison, despite its failure to rehabilitate, has, in fact, been a success in achieving its true goal. This goal, of course, does not have to belong to the specific intention of any person or class of people, as power operates non-subjectively for Foucault. Foucault characterizes this goal as the transformation of crime into delinquency. In order to rehabilitate or transform an individual offender, it is not enough for a penal system to punish a crime. The particular offence is considered inextricable from the entire life of the delinquent, a life which is often characterized as one of poverty, abuse and a cycle of violence. The delinquent, in contrast to the criminal, is linked to the offence “by a whole bundle of complex threads (instincts, drives, tendencies, character).”<sup>39</sup> It is the entire life and character of the delinquent that must be overhauled and transformed by a penitential system. The complexity of this rehabilitation and absorption of all of the offender’s life and not simply the elements that come into direct conflict with the law facilitate the characterization of the offender’s life in terms of the norm and not of the law.

The invention of the prison and its replacement of torture as an appropriate punishment for serious offence is often presented as a victory for humanization and compassion. Foucault suggests, however, that the result of the development

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<sup>39</sup> DP, 253.

of the prison is that crime is taken out of the explicitly political realm and placed into the less agonistic realm of normality and deviancy. For Foucault, it is not that torture, punishment, and discipline are options for the societal treatment of deviance but that in their use they constitute deviance as revolt, crime, or delinquency. When crime has been reconstituted as delinquency it is far easier to supervise it and to turn it towards less dangerous forms of illegality.<sup>40</sup> Both the crime and the criminal have been reconstituted and the political aspect of the act has been suppressed. This is not to say that the transgression of a so-called delinquent is not political but that its articulation as deviancy deflates it of political significance and redirects it towards non-political offence. The criminal act and the highly visible act of the sovereign to suppress it both held opportunities for resistance at one time.<sup>41</sup> But the reconstitution of crime as delinquency no longer allows it to function even potentially as a form of resistance. The continued existence of delinquency only emphasizes the need for disciplinary techniques.

A similar example can be found in an interview with Foucault called “Sexual Morality and the Law.”<sup>42</sup> In this example, however, Foucault deals with the constitution of a population defined not as particularly dangerous, such as criminals, but with one defined as particularly vulnerable. Foucault discusses the ways in which children in the Victorian era (and continuing until today) were seen

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<sup>40</sup> DP, 278.

<sup>41</sup> DP, 60.

<sup>42</sup> In Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 271-85.

as especially vulnerable to sexual deviance and perversion. This justified the isolation of this population and an increased and particularly careful surveillance of children with regard to their sexuality as well as an increased surveillance of those who have dealings with them. The surveillance of children and the vague and constant danger seen to be held by children's sexuality act as means for the increasing normalization of sexual behaviour among children and between children and adults. What this example allows us to understand is the way in which surveillance can help constitute and isolate a population which can then be disciplined in its behaviour. The importance of sexuality in this process is evident because of its close links to the body and to the interrelationships between bodies. This requires us to move into a discussion of Foucault's concept of bio-power.

### Biopower

It is important to note that Foucault's proposed shift to an analytics of power is related to an historical argument made in a number of his works. Foucault is not simply suggesting that power has always been misunderstood by those who have theorized it and that this can be resolved with more sophisticated theoretical tools. There is no historically independent category of 'power' which can be understood better or worse by a given theorist. Foucault's work examines the ways in which our understanding of power must shift in response to changes in the institutional structures in which human subjectivity is formed. Foucault's analyses of power are focused on historical changes in institutions like the



asylum<sup>43</sup>, the clinic<sup>44</sup>, the prison<sup>45</sup> or in practices such as the ways in which we study ourselves<sup>46</sup> or the ways we conceive of ourselves as sexual beings.<sup>47</sup> The problem with theories of power, such as the repressive hypothesis, that rely on concepts of sovereignty and law is that, because they are based on relational models that no longer pertain, they distract us from ways in which relations of power have colonized areas of life outside of the realms dealt with by traditional theories of power. Foucault's concept of biopower points to this colonization and an understanding of its place in his work allows us to come to terms with a Foucauldian critique of contemporary political practice.

Foucault's understanding of the power relations outlined above occurs in his History of Sexuality and other writings. The work he does in criticizing the repressive hypothesis allows for an understanding of the concluding essay of the book in which biopower has an important place. It is in this essay that Foucault examines the historical shift in the exercise of power which makes his analysis so important for understanding it. Foucault entitles this essay 'Right of Death and Power over Life' and it is here that he 'cuts off the head of the king'<sup>48</sup> in his analysis of power and of politics. In this essay, Foucault attempts to break free of the model of state-sovereignty which still informs our contemporary

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965).

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> DP.

<sup>46</sup> OT

<sup>47</sup> HS1

<sup>48</sup> HS1 89.

understanding of political structures and, as has been shown above, still provides the basic model through which a general understanding of power is grasped. Foucault shows in this essay that the model of state-sovereignty is a problematic one and that the mechanisms of power that have replaced it insidiously reinforce their hold on our lives because of the prevalence of the state-sovereignty model.

The closing essay of Foucault's introduction to his History of Sexuality crystallizes much of the work he had done in the past and applies it to a modern Western understanding of ourselves as sexual beings. Foucault describes the way in which power in the Western world cannot be understood as the possession of the sovereign allowing it to destroy life but has become something "working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it."<sup>49</sup> The power of the sovereign that had been evident only in highly visible acts of the destruction of life became a power always evident in its responsibility to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.<sup>50</sup> According to Foucault, this power took two major forms. The first of these he terms an anatomo-politics of the body. The body is seen as a machine that can be made more efficient and effective by the use of disciplinary techniques. We have examined these techniques and the corresponding view of the body at length in this chapter. The second pole of power Foucault outlines he calls a bio-politics of the population. This pole focuses on the species body and views this body as the basis of biological processes such as propagation, health, life expectancy. Regulatory controls are

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<sup>49</sup> HSI 136.

<sup>50</sup> HSI 138.

directed to strengthening and improving the utility of these processes. The convergence of these two exercises of power, though not through any person's or institution's explicit intention, is the emergence of bio-power and marks "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations."<sup>51</sup> Sexuality, which inhabits the axis at which the behaviour of the body and the biological processes of the species cross each other, clearly takes on a special significance in this context.

The control of sexuality that accompanies the rise of biopower is enabled by a development in techniques of government that precede the period Foucault focuses on in the first volume of his History of Sexuality. Foucault claims that the rise of Christianity in the Western world brings with it not new moral ideas about sexuality but new techniques and a new mechanism.<sup>52</sup> This new mechanism is the pastorate, a model of power relations based not on king and subject or father and household but on shepherd and sheep. Pastoral power has a number of important characteristics which we can only summarize here.<sup>53</sup> It is exerted over a group of people rather than over a territory. The end of pastoral power is not conquest but a sustaining or fostering of the lives of the sheep. As Foucault writes, "[i]t is not a triumphant power, it is a beneficial power."<sup>54</sup> For this reason, pastoral power is an individualizing power; it must allow for the development of particular knowledge about each person. The responsibility of the

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<sup>51</sup> HS1 140.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Power," in Michel Foucault, Religion and Culture, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 121.

<sup>53</sup> They are found in "Sexuality and Power," 122-4.

<sup>54</sup> "Sexuality and Power," 123.

pastor is not simply to ensure the salvation of the flock, but of each individual.<sup>55</sup>

To make possible this degree of knowledge a continuous surveillance and control must be exerted. It is the technique of confession, as it is used within the relations of pastoral power, that allows for this level of surveillance and control. The pastorate must concern itself with the intentions and motivations of the members of the flock so it finds access to these through the practice of the confession, a technique through which truth is produced.<sup>56</sup>

Foucault's use of the concept of confession is polyvalent. He means by confession not just the Christian practice taking place in the confessional but all practices by which individuals are incited to produce a discourse about themselves and their motives, desires, intentions and fantasies. This includes practices of confession that still have a place in contemporary religious and judicial institutions, but also the practices of psychoanalysis and counselling and even the popular writing of diaries, autobiographies or memoirs. All of these practices involve one in producing a discourse about oneself and often about one's sexuality. This discourse has a significant impact on the person involved in producing it. It is Foucault's assertion that the ritual of confession, though obviously quite different in effect and meaning depending on the discursive and institutional practice in which it is practiced, is a tactic involving the creation of a subject that imposes on itself the categories assumed by the limits of this discourse. The subject speaks itself into being, so to speak. The voluntary nature

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<sup>55</sup> "Sexuality and Power," 123.

<sup>56</sup> "Sexuality and Power," 124.

of most of these forms of confession simply demonstrates how deeply the incitement to speak is implanted in the modern subject. This speaking, far from liberating the subject from the power of a repressed sexuality, articulates the subject's sexuality in terms and according to the rules of the discourse which expresses it. The production of truth carried out by the practice of confession is already deeply imbued with relations of power.<sup>57</sup> The implications of the practice of confession for subjectivity will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

The same qualification I expressed when discussing Foucault's understanding of discipline and surveillance ought to be stressed in this exposition of his view of pastoral power and confession. Foucault is not arguing that his understanding of pastoral power and surveillance, arrived at through the study of ancient texts and institutions, can simply be applied to illuminate our understanding of modern society. Clearly, there are vast differences between the medieval practices of the pastorate and the confessional and contemporary political institutions and power relations. Foucault is arguing, however, that the context created by the development of pastoral and confessional discourses allowed for the emergence of a peculiarly modern political environment. This environment is characterized by what Foucault calls 'governmentality,' which is dependent on the developments discussed above although it also requires recreating the context and meaning of those developments.

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<sup>57</sup> HS1 60.

### Governmentality

Foucault's concept of governmentality will provide a nice transition to the next chapter. By this term, Foucault refers to the increasing administrative and managerial functions taken on by modern political institutions.<sup>58</sup> This increase occurred as a result of the attempt to set up a governmental system of surveillance and control directed towards the cultivation of economic growth.<sup>59</sup> The target of governmental functions is the population, the invention of which, as we have seen above, is a product of the emergence of bio-power. Instead of sovereignty exercised over a particular territory, government is exercised over a population or group of people, a characteristic we have already seen is a part of the exercise of pastoral power. The art of government is dependent on an intimate knowledge of the population, a knowledge made possible by the development of pastoral power. The development of this intimate and individualizing knowledge is complemented by two other developments that make governmentality possible.

The first of these developments is the concept of *raison d'etat* or a particular rationality understood as applying to the institution of the state and its governance.<sup>60</sup> The development of a reason of state allows pastoral power to be taken out of its context of salvation and the ecclesial institution. To quote Foucault:

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<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in Michel Foucault, Essential Works of Foucault, vol. 3, Power, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1994), 201-22.

<sup>59</sup> The similarities of this argument to Hannah Arendt's are pointed out again by Giorgio Agamben. Foucault's extended analysis of pastoral models of power gives further specificity to her claim that, under the guidance of Christianity, the *oikos*, in effect, absorbed the *polis*.

<sup>60</sup> See Michel Foucault, "Pastoral Power and Political Reason" in Religion and Culture, 135-52 and Michel Foucault "Omnes et Singulatim" in Essential Works 3, 298-325..

Reason of state is not an art of government according to divine, natural or human laws. It doesn't have to respect the general order of the world. It's government in accordance with the state's strength. It's government whose aim is to increase this strength within an extensive and competitive framework.<sup>61</sup>

The concept of *raison d'etat* assumes the existence of a form of rationality peculiar to the state. The governing party must have access to detailed information about the population for this rationality to have effect. The practical result of *raison d'etat* is the development of new diplomatic and military techniques to maintain military force.<sup>62</sup> The role of government becomes to administer life for the purpose of increasing the power of the state. This demands new techniques and new tactics.

The most important of these techniques is provided by the institution of the police and the science associated with it, the second development complementing pastoral power in the rise of governmentality. This development allows for the constant and permanent presence of government intervening in the behaviour of individuals. The correlate of the new military techniques of governmentality, the strategy behind the policing power of the state is directed towards maintaining the internal power of the state in population and commerce.

The phenomenon of governmentality is made possible by the transformation of an already existing environment of pastoral power by the emerging doctrine of *raison d'etat* and the techniques embedded in the institution

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<sup>61</sup> "Pastoral Power," 147.

<sup>62</sup> Michel Foucault, "Security, Territory, and Population" in *Essential Works 1*, 69.

of the police. The regime of power resulting from this is both totalizing and individualizing. It is based on an intimate and detailed knowledge of the behaviour of individuals and is directed towards strategic control at the level of a national population.

Foucault's use of the concept of governmentality allows him to move beyond political models dependent on sovereignty, law, and the state. Modern political power operates not through repression but through the production of the subject along with its desires, drives and instincts. This chapter has focused on the political institutions in which this process takes place, creating totalizing explanations, colonizing all the space the subject inhabits, driving out ambiguity and difference and replacing them with the homogeneous order of norms. In this context, human life is driven to express itself in this framework of norms and is thereby absorbed into it.

In the next chapter I will develop an analysis of Foucault's account of the political subject, where, according to Foucault, the lineaments of the relations of power embedded in the techniques of governmentality are both articulated and resisted. This will introduce Foucault's own response to the political situation his account of which is set out above. Foucault's attempt to open up spaces of resistance in the midst of political domination will be criticized from an Augustinian perspective in the second half of the thesis.



### Chapter 3: Foucault on the Subject

In the previous chapter I set out a number of Foucault's suggestions about the major characteristics of relations of power in modern society. Foucault argues that the most significant contemporary political challenge is the tendency of power relations to lie disguised behind misleading models of their nature. Power relationships operate in terms of discipline and biopower while they remain articulated in terms of a regime of sovereignty. Normalizing power relations are totalitarian. They colonize every aspect of life and absorb it in an administrative and organizational complex supported by surveillance and a disciplinary regime. These relations do not simply imprint themselves on the human subject and constrain it in specific ways. Power relations in contemporary society express themselves in terms of human subjectivity, constructing the subject through the discipline of the human body and the control of discourse. In this way the subject is enlisted as a participant in a regime of power to which no alternative can be seen. The subject cannot be said to be oppressed by these power relations as the subject is itself a construction of the particular deployment of power in terms of subjectivity. Resistance to power relations that expresses itself as an attempt to regain or liberate authentic human subjectivity simply serves to entrench the very power it seeks to oppose.

The modern political problem as articulated by Foucault appears insurmountable. Foucault has at times been accused of leaving the reader of his works without genuine alternatives for political action. Without a positive

articulation of the normative principles behind political action linked to an account of authentic human interests, the only alternatives seem to be a nihilistic quietism or a completely arbitrary decision in favour of a given political option.<sup>1</sup> What this criticism appears to assume, however, is that political activity requires one to present a political option that one proposes to implement. This implementation must then be justified in terms of justice or equality or some other value about which there is general agreement. Foucault's refusal to justify his politics in these terms results in the accusation of arbitrariness and relativism. This accusation, however, betrays a misunderstanding of Foucault's project, although this has not been helped by Foucault's own inconsistent statements on the subject.

This chapter will be devoted to a focused study of how Foucault's work on human subjectivity can give us insight into his broader political project. One of the most important domains in which political power is expressed, in Foucault's view, is in the realm of human subjectivity. In his work on this Foucault does not attempt to pinpoint the 'true' or 'authentic' human subject on which to found his political project. Instead, Foucault outlines a genealogy of the human subject, or a story of the ways in which human subjectivity has operated historically and politically. This genealogy does not present itself as a history that is accurate in

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<sup>1</sup> This criticism is found in several places. See especially Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory* 12:2 (May 1984): 152-183, Jurgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader* ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," *Praxis International* 1 (1981): 272-287, Ciaran Cronin, "Bourdieu and Foucault on Power and Modernity," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 22:6 (1996): 55-85.

the conventional sense of the word but is itself a critique of the ‘will to truth’ that has embedded itself in modern subjectivity. Through understanding this genealogy one is not given a clearer or fuller account of the origin or nature of the subject, rather, one is detached from one’s own subjectivity through coming to terms with its contingency and with the dubious political purposes it fulfills. The subject is displaced, leaving one free to explore ways of life potentially unmediated by the historically contingent model of the subject.

Foucault traces the history of the subject through a number of disciplines and institutions but what will provide the focus of this chapter will be his treatment of the realm of sexuality. It is in this work that Foucault best exemplifies both his genealogical method and the potential he sees in it for political resistance. I will argue in this chapter that Foucault examines human sexuality or, more generally, erotics, in such detail for two reasons. The first is that he sees the development of Western problematizations of sexuality and the development of Western political models of the subject as related. In order to understand the modern political situation we must attempt to come to terms with the articulations of sexuality embedded in our own subjectivity. The emergence of biopower outlined in the previous chapter coincides with a new formulation of the relations between the human and the social or political body. Understandings of sexuality and the subject are at the crux of the operation of biopower and represent a particularly rich subject for the analysis of this operation.

Within the context of Foucault's work on sexuality it will be important to examine more carefully his genealogical method and its political motivations and consequences. The middle section of this chapter will consist of a discussion of Foucault's genealogical method and the reasons for his use of it.

A second reason for Foucault's focus on sexuality is his belief that the practices of sexuality can be seen as techniques of the self. These techniques express movements of power that can introduce relations of domination into the subject but can also be used as tools for the expression of creative and rich articulations of the subject. From the midst of these techniques the emergence of a sexual ethic is possible that could provide resistance to modern political techniques of discipline and domination.

I will conclude the chapter with some indications of the political implications of Foucault's view. This will lead into the next chapter in which the work of William Connolly's agonistic political theory, influenced by both Foucault and Nietzsche, will be examined in contrast with the theology of John Milbank.

### Sexuality and Solitude

It may be useful to begin our examination of Foucault's work on sexuality and subjectivity with a close look at a single essay in which several of his most important concepts are articulated. In "Sexuality and Solitude"<sup>2</sup> Foucault

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," in Michel Foucault, Essential Works of Foucault, vol. I, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994), 175-84. (Hereafter cited as EW1).

pinpoints commonalities between models of the subject in 19<sup>th</sup> Century French psychiatry, 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosophy of the subject and pagan and Christian texts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries. He begins with a discussion of a psychiatric technique in which the patient is forced to admit his own madness. When this admission is made, the patient is cured. What this indicates for Foucault is the conception by the psychiatry of the day of a specific relation between the confession of the truth of the subject and the constitution of the subject. It appears that speech by the subject about itself can operate as a technique that can have a profound impact on the subject itself. Somehow, the recognition and articulation of the fact that the patient is mad by the patient himself, allows, or perhaps forces, this madness to dissipate. This is an example of a particular group of practices that Foucault defines 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.”<sup>3</sup> Foucault calls these techniques “technologies of the self”<sup>4</sup> and he asserts that the examination of these techniques is crucial for an understanding of the operation of power in the Western world.

Technologies of the self are not unique to Western civilization. Practices performed by individuals to transform themselves are a part of every society.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Foucault, however, suggests that particular patterns of these technologies of the self can be traced throughout Western civilization. He sees his own work as a genealogy of some of these patterns, particularly one in which a fundamental connection between sexuality, subjectivity, and truth obligation is expressed.<sup>5</sup> It is in this fundamental connection that Foucault sees the profound impact of Christianity on Western culture. Foucault argues that the content of Christian sexual ethics within its first few centuries is not significantly different from the sexual ethics of non-Christian cultures of the surrounding areas of the same period. The same pattern of “monogamy, faithfulness, and procreation as the main, or maybe the single, justification for sexual acts – sexual acts that remain, even in such conditions, intrinsically impure”<sup>6</sup> is prevalent in non-Christian texts of the period. This pattern became dominant, Foucault argues, not because of the general acceptance of Christianity but because of a “social transformation involving the disintegration of the city-states, the development of the imperial bureaucracy, and the increasing influence of the provincial middle class.”<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that Christianity did not introduce changes into the sexual ethics of the period. Foucault argues, however, that these changes were not changes in the sexual code but in the relationship an individual had to his<sup>8</sup> own sexual activity.

To illustrate this point, Foucault emphasizes the confessional character of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The texts Foucault analyzes in this essay focus exclusively on the male as the paradigmatic sexual actor. This is not out of the ordinary for texts from this period.

Christianity. By this, Foucault means that an obligation of truth is imposed on the practitioners of Christianity and this obligation moves in two directions. Christians are obliged to accept and attest to the truth of the Christian faith, or Christian dogma. They are also, however, obliged to examine themselves and the inner movements of their souls. Christians understand themselves as constantly subjected to temptations occurring in the mind and these must be forced into the light so that they may be renounced.<sup>9</sup> These two truth obligations reinforce each other. Faith is necessary for true self-examination and this faith can only be grasped through the purification enabled by this self-examination.

Foucault elaborates on this discussion with a comparison of both a pagan and a Christian text dealing with sexual acts. He does not use these texts to compare the contrasting sexual codes of the two authors but to examine the different ways they articulate sexuality as a problem. For Artemidorus, the pagan, the paradigmatic sexual act is penetration. This means that, for Artemidorus, the sexual act must be relational and this relationality places sexual acts within the context of other social relations. As Foucault writes, “for [Artemidorus], penetration is not only a sexual act but part of the social role of a man in a city.”<sup>10</sup>

Foucault now turns to Augustine and finds the formulation of the sexual problem to be quite different. For Augustine, the paradigmatic sexual act is not penetration but the erection. What fascinates Augustine about this phenomenon is

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<sup>9</sup> It is odd that Foucault does not include among the Christian truth obligations he examines the Christian obligation to tell no lies. This point is made by Alasdair MacIntyre in “Miller’s Foucault, Foucault’s Foucault,” *Salmagundi*, (Winter 1993), 59.

<sup>10</sup> *EW*1, 180.

the possibility of its involuntariness.<sup>11</sup> For Augustine, this represents the revolt of the body against the will of the human, paralleling the revolt of the first humans against God. This revolt of humans against God has introduced a disorder into the cosmos that has resulted in the loss of control of a man over his own body. The solution to this problem, however, cannot simply lie in reasserting the mastery of the will over the involuntary movements of the body. The libido, as Augustine terms the cause of the autonomous movements of the sexual organs, can never be separated from the will. The problem, for Augustine, is not simply a recalcitrant body but lies in the deciphering of the will in all its complexity. What this requires is “a permanent hermeneutics of oneself.”<sup>12</sup>

The shift from a perspective of penetration to one of erection, according to Foucault, is a shift, not of the legitimacy of particular acts or behaviours, but of the relationship one has to oneself as a sexual being. Augustine’s construal of the sexual problematic leads to a perpetual self-analysis and a confession of the results of this analysis in the terms given by the confession of faith required of all Christians. The self is thrown back upon itself and given the tools by which to act upon itself in order, according to Foucault, to renounce itself. This Christian view of purity Foucault contrasts with that of the pagan philosopher who, like Socrates with Alcibiades, masters his own behaviour despite being in the presence of a highly desirable person. The Christian monk is pure only when no impure images present themselves in his mind and this can only be achieved through a constant

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. John O’Meara (London: Penguin, 1972). XIV, xv.

<sup>12</sup> *EW1*, 182.



struggle within the monk to exclude the impure thoughts and desires thrown forward by the mind.

It is at this point that the significance of the opening story Foucault tells of the psychiatric cure of the madman who is cured through the admission of his own madness can be understood. Although he does not explicitly dwell upon it, Foucault suggests that the pattern of the self's relationship to itself is similar in both examples. The madman is driven to confess his madness and in that confession to renounce it. The confession of the truth of the subject is a practice with a transformative effect on the subject, a technique of the self bearing a significant resemblance to the Christian's confession of sexual desire that allowed for its renunciation and the transformation of the Christian towards purity. This is not to say that the penitential practices of the church are merely adapted by psychiatry and put to secular uses.<sup>13</sup> What Foucault does want to point out, however, are the strong links set up between sexuality, subjectivity, and truth that are consistent in these quite different practices<sup>14</sup>. Augustine's treatment of sexuality and subjectivity is an example of an understanding that laid down a pattern for the relations between the subject and sexuality that continues to exert influence today.

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault insists on this point (for example, in Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, an Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 63. (hereafter HS1.) but he also has a way of claiming that he is not saying something as simple as this while leaving you to believe it is so because he never clearly outlines why he thinks the two practices are different.

<sup>14</sup> EW1, 183.

It is this final point that remains the most controversial and the most difficult to demonstrate. Foucault suggests that the belief that the truth of the subject can somehow be approached through a confession of the subject's sexuality is a belief that has remained surprisingly resilient. Although the emphasis on the importance of renouncing ourselves and the desires of the flesh is no longer one that appeals to many, the rejection of self-renunciation has not escaped the pattern of links between sexuality and subjectivity embedded in the early Christian ethic. To proclaim that liberation instead of renunciation is now the goal of the confession of sexuality is not an adequate challenge to the regime of power relations found in the connections between the self and its sexuality. In fact, Foucault argues that the liberation of sexuality through its confession is as effective a strategy of the management of subjects as its renunciation is. This is the basic argument of the first volume of his History of Sexuality, to which I will now turn.

### The History of Sexuality

A significant amount of attention has already been paid to this text in the previous chapter. I do not wish simply to re-examine this material but to discuss its implications for Foucault's understanding of the construction of the subject, the focus of this chapter. My intention is to trace out how the model of the subject and its sexuality I have discussed above is extended in several ways through the deployment of bio-power, a concept discussed in the previous chapter.

This will give an indication of the political significance of the Augustinian pattern of subjectivity outlined above.

The structure of this extension of the Augustinian pattern is hinted at in the essay discussed above but is not developed adequately. An important thread of the argument of the first volume of Foucault's History of Sexuality is a description of the ways in which the confessional character of Christianity (especially in the Medieval era) became generalized in Western scientific discourse around sexuality. This extension of the practice of confession was (and still is, Foucault suggests) part of a larger strategy of discipline and management. In this section I will examine how Foucault argues that the practice of confession has been extended beyond the religious realm for the purposes of social control.

I have already discussed Foucault's reversal of the repressive hypothesis in the previous chapter on power. This is only one of the creative reversals of conventional understandings Foucault suggests. It is often argued that in the Victorian era sexuality was restricted to the heterosexual marriage. All expressions of sexuality outside of this narrow area of permissibility were forbidden and excluded from legitimacy through a large number of prohibitions. Foucault, however, argues that precisely the opposite is the case. During this time, instead of finding a disappearance of sex from Victorian discourse, Foucault suggests that there was a proliferation, an explosion of discourses about sex in this era.<sup>15</sup> Victorians appear to have shown an ever-increasing appetite for finding

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<sup>15</sup> HSL, 18.

sexuality and making it speak about itself in places where a simple prohibition and silence had been the norm. It no longer seemed to be enough to condemn acts such as masturbation, sodomy, and bestiality and leave it at that. An incitement to speak about these acts and to involve those who practiced them in an endless spiral of meticulous self-examination became common practice.

One of the important effects of this can be seen in an emerging tendency to categorize individuals according to sexual characteristics. Foucault draws attention to a shift in the patterns of discourse exemplified by the difference between the sodomite and the homosexual. In medieval civil or canonical codes, sodomy was an offence and the perpetrator simply the juridical subject accused of it. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the homosexual became a person with a specific nature. This nature was something to be examined and described by psychiatric and medical discourse. Homosexuality was simply one of an ever-multiplying number of perversions all given names and described in detail by medical researchers. As Foucault writes, “[t]he machinery of power that focused on this whole alien strain did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility.”<sup>16</sup> The effect of this development of discourse was not to exclude homosexuality, or any other sexual practice deviating from the heterosexual adult couple, but to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 43-4.

absorb these practices in an expanding discourse that also incited their confession as a method of integrating them into this discourse.

The result of this expansion of discourse is what Foucault calls a deployment of power over sexuality that is no longer dependent on legal intervention and no longer acts solely on the juridical subject. Instead, there is a multiplication of disparate sexualities categorized, described and explained by a network of mechanisms, discourses and centres of power.<sup>17</sup> At the same time as medicine and psychiatry are being transformed to catalogue sexual perversions, pedagogical techniques are being developed to combat an “epidemic” of masturbation among the young<sup>17</sup> and institutions of public health are emerging to aid in the battle against pornography and prostitution. A persistent attention is being paid to an enormous variety of sexualities that, far from repressing their expression, distributes them according to a scientific discourse and guarantees their permanent existence and visibility.

The crux of Foucault’s attempt to find the model of sexuality and subjectivity he attributes to Augustine in the modern West lies in his attempt to draw parallels between the practice of confession developed in Christianity and what he calls a *scientia sexualis*, a practice by which sex is allowed to emerge only within the categories of scientific knowledge. Foucault contrasts the *scientia sexualis* of the Western world with an *ars erotica* for which the “truth [of sex] is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself.”<sup>18</sup> This is significantly different from the Western *scientia sexualis*, at the root of which are “procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret,” that is, to the confession.<sup>19</sup>

Foucault’s argument is that, although the roots of confession may be in the Christian world he finds in the texts of Augustine outlined above, it has become one of the most important techniques in the West for producing truth. He writes:

confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else.<sup>20</sup>

The goal of this confession may no longer be a description that allows one to renounce the self and its sins or desires but the relationship between the subject and truth remains the same. It is the structure of the relations of power embedded in the confession that Foucault examines in light of his work on power and discipline.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 59.

It is important at this point to remember the attack made by Foucault on the repressive hypothesis.<sup>21</sup> Foucault disputes the assumption that power exerts itself only in enforcing silence and that confession can therefore free the truth that lies beneath a repressive silence. The technique of confession and the production of truth emerging from it are “thoroughly imbued with relations of power.”<sup>22</sup> These relations of power do not take on the character of a simple hierarchical structure in which one with power imposes his or her will on one subject. The confessional discourse comes from below, from the one who speaks by a compulsion laid on her but, importantly, a compulsion that cannot be completely involuntary. The confessor plays a part in his or her own transformation into a subject who has things to confess. For Foucault it is not the case that the secret truths of the subject lie underneath the surface waiting for a discourse like confession to be discovered. It is the act of confession itself that constitutes both the secrets and the subject who both conceals and exposes them in the same act of confession. What is considered legitimate knowledge in the West, especially knowledge about sex, has been ordered, Foucault argues, around confessional practices and “the slow surfacing of confidential statements.”<sup>23</sup>

As has been noted, the technique of confession became an important practice in areas such as medicine, justice, and pedagogy but it has been especially important in producing a true discourse on sex.<sup>24</sup> What is important in

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<sup>21</sup> See above, ch. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *HS1*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Foucault's argument is the way in which this already existing confessional discourse surrounding sex came to be constituted as a scientific discourse. This came about for a number of reasons but only a few are important for our purposes. First, sexual behaviour was seen as a possible cause of almost any health problem and, therefore, had to be made subject to a rigorous and exhaustive description. Secondly, the true interpretation of the inner sexual movements of the consciousness were not transparent to the consciousness itself but had to be scientifically validated by the one to whom the confession was made. Finally, the act of confession had a therapeutic effect and could be necessary not only for the diagnosis but also for the treatment for any of the health problems for which sexual behaviour was involved as a cause.<sup>25</sup> The merging of these factors and others added urgency to the desire to develop a scientific discourse surrounding and articulating sexuality. The close link between sexuality and the health of the individual made the rigorous study of sexuality a necessity. As we shall see, however, the discourse of sexuality was not limited in its influence to the discipline of medicine and its concern with the health of the individual.

The ingenuity of Foucault's work can be seen in his attempt to demonstrate that 'sexuality' is not the object of this scientific discourse but is constituted by it. What the distinct phenomena grouped under the category of 'sexuality' have in common are the methods and procedures used for coming to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 65-7.



an understanding of them.<sup>26</sup> When a number of only loosely linked practices, sensations, pleasures and desires are run through the procedures of confession and the scientific discourse outlined above, ‘sexuality’ is what emerges on the other side.

It is within this context that it can be understood that Foucault’s attempt in his work on sexuality is not an attempt to ‘recover’ sexuality or to give the body a voice in contemporary political discussions. Much of modern political history has consisted of the ways in which the body and its sex have been forced to speak. The development of ‘sexuality’ is precisely this integration of the body and its pleasures and desires into a system of discourse that allows for an exhaustive description, explanation, and, ultimately, their manipulation. This is the history told by Foucault as he concludes the first volume of The History of Sexuality with a description of bio-power and its emergence from a discourse of sexuality.

It is Foucault’s analysis of bio-power and the way in which the discursive construction of sexuality operates politically for him that remains to be described in this chapter. He argues, as we have seen, that there is no sexuality (or anything else for that matter) that could underlie political manoeuvres and strategies and, through careful description, be exposed in its pure form, unhindered by the powers that stifle it. He writes:

[s]exuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 150-7.

and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault outlines a number of strategies through which “specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex”<sup>28</sup> were formed and through which sex was integrated into disciplines of medicine and biology, pedagogy, economics and psychiatry.<sup>29</sup> Again it must be emphasized that Foucault does not claim that these strategies were attempts either to neutralize the power of sexuality or to gain control of or regulate it. These strategies and the discourses within which they operate are the very production of sexuality.<sup>30</sup>

In the last chapter I described Foucault’s argument concerning the place that the development of bio-power has in the history of political techniques of the West. The development of bio-power also has a place in Foucault’s understanding of the political subject. The deployment of sexuality has an important role in both the developing technology of power in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the genealogy of the subject during the same period.

As we have seen, the confessing self is driven deeper and deeper into itself in order to find the truth about itself. The pattern of confession Foucault finds in Augustine is transformed in remarkable ways in the centuries to follow, but a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 104-5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 105.

discernible pattern remains evident. Confession is no longer undertaken to compel the renunciation of the self and its desires and the subjection of the self before an almighty God. Instead, confession in its modern practice is understood as a tool by which the self can be liberated. But the basic structure of the technique of confession by which the truth of the self is made transparent is still in place. It is the political significance of the structure of confession, and, therefore, of the confessing self, that Foucault attempts to draw out in The History of Sexuality.

The confessing self pursues transparency of itself to itself and to others. But because it can never be fully revealed to itself, this transparency can never be achieved. There is always another level of meaning lying beneath the level just understood. The self thus becomes a hermeneutic self, a self that is constantly involved in interpreting itself to itself. The confession, and its interpretation, can never end and the pursuit of transparency can never be consummated.

What the self pursues perhaps most relentlessly within itself is its own erotic desire. Foucault argues that the roots of this pursuit can be found in Medieval Christian practices of confession and even in the pattern laid down by the Augustinian confessional model. The changing technology of power replaced the religious motives of this search for erotic desire within the subject with a wide array of motives including both physical and psychological health, concerns about offspring and population, and the fear of criminal deviance. The modern ‘deployment of sexuality’ pins this desire to an artificial category of “anatomical

elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures,”<sup>31</sup> labelled ‘sex,’ and thereby constitutes ‘sex’ as something desirable and as something to be liberated instead of renounced.<sup>32</sup> The confession of sexual desire as a means to its liberation, instead of for its renunciation, maintains the basic structure of the subject’s relationship to sex and truth Foucault finds in Augustine. This liberation, however, is an illusion.<sup>33</sup> The subject finds sexual desire in its inner recesses because it is looking for it, not because it is there. What motivates this search for sexual desire within the depths of the subject is the deployment of a discourse of sexuality, the linking of sex to the health of the individual and also the health of the society in general.

To completely understand this point one must remember that the modern subject, for Foucault, is, in fact, constituted by its search for itself. This search is structured by the deployment of bio-power. By this Foucault intends to indicate that the societal institutions of health, deviance, and production impel the subject, with its own collusion, towards categorizing and defining its body according to the discourses that pre-exist it. This deployment sends the subject searching for its sexual desire and positioning this desire within a framework of norms of health, deviance, orientation, and identity. The subject is under the illusion that this is its liberation and the liberation of its sexuality, but bio-power has already colonized the deepest realms of the subject. It has done this by forming the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 156-7.

structure of the subject's search for itself and its sexuality and, thus, guaranteeing that what is being searched for will be found.

An example that may help to elucidate this process, and one used by Foucault, is the present interest in sexual orientation. According to Foucault, to construe one's preference for sexual relations with a certain type of partner as the expression of a distinct 'orientation' is a modern phenomenon. The ancient Greeks did not see this preference as a sign that one was of a different kind than those who expressed a different preference.<sup>34</sup> Neither was the issue one of orientation for Christians. Instead, Christians understood this as an issue in the order of desire. Sodomy, and the desires that accompanied it, was an expression of disordered desires (or lusts) and not of a fundamentally different orientation. The Augustinian confessional imperative did, however, according to Foucault, pave the way for the relentless pursuit of sexual desire and the uncompromising articulation of its movements. This imperative is co-opted by the deployment of sexuality and the confession becomes an expression of an inherent sexuality that betokens a particular orientation. The expression of this matter in terms of orientation makes the issue one of identity. This identity as it is expressed, for example, in a homosexual orientation can only be 'liberated' through the social recognition found in the institutions like marriage, formerly restricted to heterosexual relations. The irony of the situation is that the expression of homosexual erotic relations in the same terms and subject to the same licensing

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<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. II, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), 188.

procedures and system of legal legitimation as heterosexual relations is understood as a liberation. Homosexual erotic relations that were previously marginalized and excluded are now integrated into systems of demographics, taxation and civic law and through these systems expressed in ways that can be articulated in the terms of bio-power.

This entire process is one that indicates particularly well the links Foucault draws between confession, sexuality, the subject, and bio-power. The subject's eye is turned upon itself and its own identity as an expression of its desire to know the truth about itself, a prerequisite, ostensibly, to one's freedom. This involves the subject in an interpretation of its own desires in aid of a search for an orientation that is, of course, found. The confession of this orientation as a part of one's identity expresses itself politically as an attempt to find recognition and affirmation. This affirmation couches itself in the form of an acceptance of demands for the legitimation of the orientation according to the same procedures as those legitimating other 'orientations' but it is also just as powerfully an integration of those who claim this orientation as part of their identity into a pre-existing system of state licenses, taxation, and so on. Again, the process, according to a Foucauldian reading, is not one in which an underlying and basic 'orientation' is absorbed by an all-embracing bio-power but one in which that bio-power is already at work, framing the self's search for itself in terms of orientation. This search for an orientation already bears the marks of a medical regime that is given authority over legitimizing its existence and diagnosing it

(even, apparently, to the degree of attempting to determine its genetic make-up). What is particularly striking is that it is the subject itself that bears this regime within it and declares itself to have an orientation. For this reason, the structures of bio-power cannot be understood as an external imposition on a repressed subject but are borne by the subject into its very heart.

### Genealogy as Political Strategy

Foucault's major criticism of modern discourse of sexuality is that it claims to ground itself on a putatively 'natural' account of sex. Foucault's assertion is that sex is itself constituted by the discourse of sexuality that is directed towards, and claims to articulate, the body. Foucault rejects a resistance to this totalizing discourse grounded by sex-desire. Such a resistance only entrenches the discourse and the power relations that it ostensibly rejects. At times, however, Foucault suggests that a grounding for resistance towards the power relations deployed against the body by the discourse of sexuality can be found in the body itself.<sup>35</sup> What has been pointed out by critics of Foucault more than once, however, is that the body can hardly be assumed to escape constitution by discourse and power relations.<sup>36</sup> How is it that Foucault, after relentlessly criticizing the attempt to uncover a 'pure' sex-desire on which to found discourse of the body without domination, can suddenly find in the body itself a resistance to domination? Isn't the body just as susceptible to a totalizing articulation and

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<sup>35</sup> HSL, 157.

<sup>36</sup> This criticism is found in Cronin, "Bourdieu and Foucault," and Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power."

wouldn't a regime founded on bodily experience have the same temptations towards totalization and mystification?<sup>37</sup> By his own lights, Foucault seems unable to find a foundation on which to ground resistance to domination.

What this criticism fails to account for is Foucault's own refusal to call the resistance to the discourse of sexuality emerging from the experience of the body and its pleasures a foundation. Foucault does not foresee a resolution to the question of the embodied subject and how it relates to itself and its pleasures. The purpose of calling for resistance to the discourse of sexuality that uses the body as what he calls a 'rallying point'<sup>38</sup> is not to return to a 'pure' experience of the body but to challenge the dominance of a particular discourse and to resist its monopolization of the body without providing an alternative to resolve all of the issues. The purpose is to allow a tension to emerge between a number of discourses and, through this tension, to create a clearing in which new experiences of the body and its pleasures and desires will be able to appear. These new experiences will, no doubt, be just as deeply submerged in relations of power as the old ones were. They will also be dangerously open to giving rise to patterns of domination. For Foucault, there is no sure escape from this danger. As he claims in a well-known interview, "it is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous."<sup>39</sup> A discourse of the body is as dangerous as one of sexuality, or rights and obligations and may be as susceptible to slipping into a

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<sup>37</sup> Cronin, "Bourdieu and Foucault," 63.

<sup>38</sup> HS1, 157.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress," EW1, 256.



totalizing discourse that attempts to embrace the individual exhaustively in its grasp. The only reasonable response to this, Foucault wants to argue, lies not in finding a ‘true,’ ‘pure,’ or ‘authentic’ experience of the subject unpolluted by relations of power but in constantly challenging discourses that begin to dominate. These challenges are constantly shifting their ground and the strategies of resistance must remain in constant flux. In his call to rally around the body and its pleasures, Foucault exemplifies his claim that the creative workings of relations of power themselves give strategic footholds for resistance to the very strategies they embody. The body and its pleasures in which Foucault places his hope are themselves the excessive creations of relations of power that can be hijacked to unsettle the very discourse that has made them so powerful.

Foucault expresses his commitment to this kind of struggle poignantly in the analysis of his own method that he makes in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”<sup>40</sup> Here he writes that his contribution towards the writing of ‘effective’ history “leaves nothing around the self, deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature...It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.”<sup>41</sup> In this quotation we see that Foucault’s genealogical method works precisely against the tendency he diagnoses in modern power structures and in the search for authentic subjectivity. Instead of

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<sup>40</sup> Found in Michel Foucault, *Essential Works, vol. 2, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1994) 369-391. (hereafter *EW2*).

<sup>41</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 380.

introducing an implicit order into the subject through discourse, Foucault's method attempts to introduce discontinuity into the subject. Foucault attempts to cast doubt on the apparent stability of the subject and its nature. The categories that express the sure and coherent self-knowledge of the subject, as well as its apparent knowledge of all else it claims to understand, are exposed as contingent constructions sustaining sinister political strategies. Furthermore, as the aphorism that concludes the above quotation indicates, Foucault's method in general also represents an opposition to what he calls the "will to truth." Foucault is deeply suspicious of the modern subject's drive to uncover the truth about itself. By suggesting that knowledge is not for understanding but for cutting, he indicates that his genealogies of the subject are not attempts to come to terms with the truth about the subject or to explain to the reader what the subject 'truly' is. Instead, a genealogy is a tool to be used in the context of political struggle.

As indicated by his title in this essay, Foucault's genealogical method is not only a way of understanding the subject but is related to his view of history as well. Foucault rejects a view of history as a result of destiny or progress underlying events. The forces of history respond to haphazard and arbitrary conflicts and it is out of the midst of this random opposition of forces that the human subject emerges. There is no necessity about it. Foucault's genealogies are an attempt to retell the histories of modern institutions while highlighting the contingency and arbitrariness of their development. Foucault writes a counter-history that emphasizes what has been excluded or marginalized in the conventional

narratives describing the modern world. Our faith in the humanity and benevolence of institutions we have come to accept, like the prison, the hospital, and the asylum, is undermined and we are detached from the understandings of progress and improvement likened to them. This does not mean that Foucault is ‘exposing’ the workings of power that operate underneath the apparent events of history.<sup>42</sup> This understanding of Foucault’s project is flawed for two reasons. First, it does not escape the implication that there is a deeper purpose or meaning to history (now found in the subterranean movements of power) that impels history towards the present. This view of history is precisely what Foucault rejects. Secondly, this view implicates Foucault in the very ‘will to truth’ he is seeking to undermine. Foucault’s historical work does not attempt to outline the truth about his subjects, either in the sense of interpreting their meaning or of describing what actually happened. Instead, Foucault’s genealogies are “effective history.”<sup>43</sup> They lose the subject amidst a sea of events without a ‘higher’ purpose or meaning. Everything is put into motion and no anchor (and this includes the concept of power) can be used to explain the grand sense of arbitrary events. This is what Foucault means when he suggests that “effective history” is no longer the handmaid of philosophy, as history has been in the past.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See John S. Ransom, Foucault’s Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 87-100.

<sup>43</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” EW2, 380.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” EW2, 379.

Foucault's use of genealogy is part of his resistance to the colonization of the human world by instrumental rationality.<sup>45</sup> This is a common enough project undertaken by critics of modern political organization but what makes Foucault different, and infuriating to his critics, is his refusal to ground his critique in a normative theory with reference to an authentic human nature. Instead, Foucault argues that the attempt to liberate a true human nature implicates any normative theory in the very structures of power it critiques. The inclination to derive a stable ethic from an account of the human subject by which to criticize contemporary society only entrenches the power structures that already constitute the human subject. What Foucault uses his genealogies to do is to examine the ways humans have been constituted both as subjects and objects in the modern world. Foucault suggests that there is no escape from the objectification and instrumentalization of humans in a turn toward the subjective. In fact, the objective and subjective understandings of the human support each other in such a way that to emphasize human subjectivity and authenticity only serves to sustain the treatment of humans as objects and the dominance of instrumental rationality in the modern world. Foucault works to delineate the history of the interrelationships between modern techniques of power and the modern drive to authenticity.

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<sup>45</sup> Taylor points this out in "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" although the point is stated in language that Foucault himself does not use.

Foucault rejects all a priori theories of the subject and instead asks how the subject is itself constituted in its practices<sup>46</sup>. As he writes in an important essay, “we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? in short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse.”<sup>47</sup> Foucault’s genealogy of the subject in its relationship to itself with regard to sexuality is an attempt to extend his study of the subject to include also an analysis of the place of bodily practices as well as patterns of discourse in its constitution.

Another aspect of Foucault’s study of modern political technology and its impact on the formation of the modern subject is his suggestion that the working of political practices on the bodies of individuals also integrates them into a social body. In the final chapter of his first volume on the history of sexuality, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, Foucault discusses the way in which the development of bio-power and the attempt to absorb life into technique to gain mastery over population are the keys to understanding power relations in contemporary times.<sup>48</sup> It is through the influence of these techniques that we begin to recognize ourselves as a social body.<sup>49</sup> As Foucault writes in his essay

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<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in EW1, 290.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in EW2, 137-8.

<sup>48</sup> “Right of Death and Power over Life,” HS1, 135-159.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” in Essential Works of Foucault, vol. 3, Power, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1997), 404. (hereafter EW3).

“Body/Power,” “the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.”<sup>50</sup> The story that modern liberal democracies tell about their founding and its social contract allows the more disturbing elements of its history and its exclusions and normalizations to go undetected. Foucault’s genealogies of the prison, the asylum, the clinic, and the practices of sexuality are part of a counter-history that problematizes liberalism’s self-history of a salvation from anarchy through calm rationality and consensus-building. For Foucault, the institutions of modern liberal democracies can be seen as exemplary instances of his claim that politics is war by other means.<sup>51</sup>

#### The Structure of Foucault’s Genealogies

This may be a point at which it will be useful to examine in more detail what precisely Foucault means by claiming to be performing genealogies. Foucault distinguishes his genealogical and archaeological studies from those which are transcendental and metaphysical.<sup>52</sup> Transcendental and metaphysical studies are a search for formal structures with universal value. They are attempts to come to an understanding of the ‘nature’ of things, particularly an understanding of human nature. What Foucault most strongly rejects about these types of inquiries is the belief inherent in them that the order of the world is

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<sup>50</sup> Michel Foucault, “Body/Power” in *Power/Knowledge* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 55.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures” in *Power/Knowledge*, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *EW1*, 315.

accessible to our understanding or, as he puts it, that “the world turns towards us a legible face which we... have only to decipher.”<sup>53</sup>

On the contrary, as with the brief genealogy of sexual orientation outlined above, Foucault’s genealogies are historical investigations into the ways that we constitute ourselves as beings capable of being understood by transcendental and metaphysical studies. The issue is not so much whether these studies are accurate or not, but rather, how these examinations are effective in our constitution of ourselves as subjects about which these studies could be accurate. Instead of quarrelling with the outcome of any particular study of universal structures or with the validity of a specific method of inquiry, Foucault introduces contingency and discontinuity into the heart of what is being studied. The human being, as Foucault studies it, is always partial and local. The precise practices and discourses that have led us to understand ourselves as subjects of these very practices and discourses are never universal or necessary but are the result of contingent historical events. Genealogies are not intended to reveal to us the meaning or purpose of these events as this would betray an attempt to order or hierarchise knowledges, something the practice of genealogy refuses to engage in.<sup>54</sup> In this way, genealogy is an anti-science, allowing us to question our own tendency to express our understanding in terms of its truth or its coherence.

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<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” in Robert Young ed. Untying the Text, (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 67.

<sup>54</sup> HS1, 83.

Foucault's method of genealogy is an attempt to undermine what he calls the "will to truth." We have examined the ways in which Foucault suggests that some of our most treasured histories of modern benevolence or liberation can also be understood as strategies of exclusion and domination. But Foucault does not simply write counter-histories in the sense of developing narratives that focus on neglected texts or authors or practices and using these to propose a contrasting meaning of the story. Foucault also attempts to ask why our histories are framed in terms of an attempt to come to the truth of the situation. Foucault wonders why we have entrusted ourselves to the truth of our stories about ourselves. How and why have we constituted ourselves in such a way that the truth of our knowledge and our understanding are of pre-eminent importance for judging their value?<sup>55</sup> The fact that even questioning such a seemingly obvious hierarchy of truth over non-truth seems absurd does not make Foucault withdraw. The method of genealogy is intended to make us question not only the accuracy of conventional accounts of political techniques but also to make us question the value of our attempts to discover the truth about these techniques and the histories in which they are embedded. Foucault's genealogies operate by casting doubt on the games of truth that validate political techniques while attempting to resist placing alternative games in their place. As he writes about his work on the history of sexuality, "the essential aim will not be to determine whether these discursive productions [about sex and sexuality] and these effects of power lead one to

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<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, "On Power," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence D. Kritzman ed. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 107.



formulate the truth about sex, or on the contrary falsehoods designed to conceal that truth, but rather to bring out the “will to knowledge” that serves as both their support and their instrument.”<sup>56</sup> It is Foucault’s view that this “will to knowledge” or “will to truth” involves us unwittingly in very specific discursive practices. These practices are, namely, those which are generally considered legitimate in determining whether a given statement is true or not. Therefore, what is able to surface as a true statement or as knowledge is limited by the discursive practices that constitute the discipline in which the knowledge seeks acceptance. These practices never operate in an environment free of the play of power relations. Again, it is important to emphasize that this does not mean that all of our so-called knowledge can be reduced to power struggles. Foucault does not claim that power is all there is, only that power is always present. While no situation can be understood simply and exhaustively as games of power, these games can never be escaped. Foucault wants to participate in these games of truth with his genealogies without, at the same time, claiming a privileged position of access to the truth of the subjects he studies.

It is with this in mind that one can see the political intentions of Foucault’s genealogical work. To perform a genealogy is, for Foucault, a practice of freedom. Of course, it goes without saying that the freedom he is referring to cannot be identified with the simplistic understanding of freedom as the liberation from power understood solely in terms of repression. The genealogical practice

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<sup>56</sup> HS1, 11-12.

of freedom cannot simply be contrasted with relations of power but is instead a tactical exercise of power on oneself with political consequences. Again in his introduction to his History of Sexuality Foucault calls genealogy “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today.”<sup>57</sup> Here, Foucault’s agonistic intentions and his belief in the “cutting” power of knowledge, rather than its purpose for understanding is highlighted. The object of the tactic of genealogy is, however, most importantly, the subject itself. Genealogy is an experiment that the subject conducts upon itself; it is a “critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as a work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings.”<sup>58</sup> It is through this experiment that we are able to open up new possibilities for being. We are able to realize that seeing ourselves as the subjects of our actions and words is a contingency of history and we are then able to “separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think.”<sup>59</sup> Foucault resists determining, or even suggesting, what positive possibilities are available to us as this would be an impossible thing to know, from this side of the process.

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<sup>57</sup> HS1, 83.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment,” EW1, 316.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 315-6.

### The Displacement and Detachment from the Subject

It is clear from what has been written above why Foucault's use of genealogy has, on one hand, been so rich in its interpretations and, on the other, been so frustrating to his critics. Foucault's use of genealogy has several aims, some of which seem contradictory. At times, Foucault appears to be unmasking the true workings of power in superficially benevolent projects and highlighting the battle lines between social groups and forces which have been effaced by history. Then, suddenly, he rejects the belief that the workings of history are accessible to our understanding and suggests that all historical retelling (including, no doubt, his own) is implicated in the same battles he has ostensibly revealed. At the same time as Foucault demonstrates the repression and domination we impose on both others and ourselves, he rejects any substantive account of the human subject that would seem to give concepts of domination and liberation normative purchase. Foucault seems to be either using his genealogical tools to cut off the branch on which he is standing or to be using the normative capital of a humanist legacy for critiques of humanism itself without acknowledging his indebtedness to it. In this section I do not wish so much to defend Foucault from these accusations as to indicate some of the things that Foucault hopes to achieve through his method and why this leads to charges such as those above. I will first examine the different types of genealogy to which Foucault refers and their respective aims. This will lead to a summary of Foucault's critique of humanism and its assumptions.

When reading Foucault, it is difficult not to experience a feeling of shock or surprise. This feeling comes from the experience of recognizing oneself and some of one's most deeply held principles in a narrative in which the context is utterly changed. I have referred to the ways in which Foucault's history of the penitential system casts doubt on the benevolence of an institution that has inserted itself deeply into our understanding of the basic elements of justice and behavioural rehabilitation. In this history, the elements are transformed in such a way that one cannot help but feel detached from the traditional story and from the principles embedded in this story that have allowed one to accept it. This is meant to inspire a new attitude of suspicion to some of our most deeply held beliefs and to the prominent ways of thinking and modes of discourse that support them. We become alienated from the conventional way in which we have looked at the world and new tools for interpretation of history become available to us. To the degree to which our own motives and purposes are implicated in the story Foucault has undermined, we become alienated from ourselves and our own projects and principles.

A second aim of the genealogies Foucault develops, and this is related to the first, is his highlighting of contingency when writing of institutions and modes of discourse that seem to us to be inevitable. Foucault draws attention to the historical details that have conspired to bring about the situation in which we find ourselves. Countless examples of small shifts in the usage of important terms are used by Foucault to focus our attention on significant changes in procedure or

institutional structure that indicate a change also in the understanding of the human subject at stake in these procedures and institutions. It is in the details of history that Foucault finds both the levers of historical change and the means for resistance. Another way Foucault highlights the contingency of history is through comparative genealogies on a single subject. The second and third volumes of his History of Sexuality are examples of this type of genealogy. In these volumes, Foucault examines not sexual norms or behaviours but sexual problematizations among early Greeks and Romans. That is, he attends to the ways in which early Greeks and Romans experienced sexual desire or pleasure as a problem. As we have seen, Foucault's argument is that there is a surprising consistency between Greek, Roman, and later Christian sexual prohibitions but that this masks a significant difference between the ways in which Greeks, Romans, and Christians formulated the problem posed by sexuality. In fact, to talk about the problem of 'sexuality' is to use a term in the discourse of the modern problematic of sexuality. By examining in detail the differences between the formulations of problematics between eras, Foucault brings to the surface fundamental discontinuities between what seem to be consistent human concerns. We can only speak of a fundamental human sexuality because we have privileged our own discursive formulation and imposed it on different traditions. While we speak of 'sexuality' the Greeks spoke of the *aphrodisia*, or the things of Aphrodite, and the early Christians spoke of 'the flesh.' Each of these alternative discourses implies a significantly different orientation towards the desires and pleasures we associate

with sexuality. A realization of the deep discontinuities between different problematizations confronts us with the possibility that things might not have been as they are. There is no necessity that dictates that we, as subjects, formulate our relationship to our bodies and their desires and pleasures in terms of sexuality. Furthermore, the fact that we tend to translate all such orientations into our own discourse of sexuality is not an indication that we, as moderns, have seen more deeply into the nature or the truth of our bodies. In fact, as I have described, Foucault's genealogy of sexuality undermines the belief that there is a nature of sexuality into which one may see more or less deeply.

Both of the above consequences of the use of genealogy, the questioning of taken-for-granted narratives and the emphasis on contingency in history, contribute to a third consequence. Foucault attempts to demonstrate in his genealogies the close relationship between the techniques and institutions that he examines and the structure of modern subjectivity. When these techniques are questioned and the foundation on which they appear to rest is undermined, the subject is implicated in the doubts that are raised. It is in these genealogies that Foucault attempts to show that there is "no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere."<sup>60</sup> Instead, the subject is constituted through practices of subjection.<sup>61</sup> Or, as Foucault quotes from Nietzsche, one "possess[es] in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal

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<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

ones.”<sup>62</sup> This detachment from the self or, as it is sometimes called, decentring of the subject, is the first step in disrupting both the techniques, procedures, and institutions of modern politics and the modern subject itself. The close interdependence of the subject and the political practices of subjection that constitute it necessitates a political critique that undermines both in a single movement. This is precisely the role that Foucault’s genealogies are intended to play. Once this detachment from the subject and its constituting practices is achieved (or, rather is, begun, as it can never be fully achieved) the possibility for new constituting practices is opened up. Foucault insists on the possibility of practices of freedom, but it must not be thought that these practices are not susceptible to the same criticisms brought to bear on other practices of subjectification.

A fourth consequence of genealogy is related to Foucault’s criticism of the will to knowledge outlined above. Foucault asserts that his genealogies are not an attempt to get at the actual things-in-themselves that purportedly lie beneath acts of power or modes of discourse. In fact, Foucault’s genealogies are an attempt to demonstrate that this endeavour to force actualities to emerge from beneath our descriptions of them or our manipulations of them is the pursuit of an illusion. There is no essence or nature of things lying beneath our acts of power. Instead, things are constituted by the acts of power and discourse that surround them. The

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *EW2*, 386. This quotation can be found in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 218.

will to ground our subjectivity and our political organization on knowledge of the truth of things is a principle of our subjection. Our realization of this gives us freedom from a normalizing discipline founded on knowledge of essences and allows us to develop techniques of the self that are not indebted to the present structures of knowledge/power and their legitimating discourses. These practices of subjectification will not be an attempt to conform to ‘authentic’ human subjectivity and will not need to be justified in these terms.

Out of all of these aims of Foucault’s genealogy, but especially the last one, emerges his critique of humanism. Foucault critiques any attempt to found a politics on the ‘authentic’ human subject, a notion that Foucault rejects. At one point in an interview, Foucault expands this definition by saying that his attack is really on the notion of happiness. He explains, “I consider that humanism, at least on a political level, could be defined as any kind of attitude that considers the aim of politics as being to produce happiness. Now, I do not believe that the notion of happiness is really thinkable. Happiness does not exist, the happiness of men even less so.”<sup>63</sup> With this statement, Foucault rejects the eudaimonism he finds at the root of politics at least since Aristotle. Because happiness in this sense can only be understood with reference to some model of human nature, the rejection of this nature involves a rejection of any understanding of human happiness as well. It appears that Foucault is rejecting happiness because of its teleological

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<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, “Who Are You, Professor Foucault?” in Religion and Culture, Jeremy R. Carrette ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 101. I’m not sure exactly what to make of the assertion that something exists “less” than something else that is non-existent. I assume this is a rhetorical statement.



implications. His indictment of human happiness is a part of his rejection of human purpose. As he states later in the same interview, “mankind has in reality no purpose, it functions, it controls its own functioning, and it continually creates justifications for this control. We have to resign ourselves to admitting that these are only justifications. Humanism is one of them, the last one.”<sup>64</sup> With the end of humanism, or what Foucault will discuss in detail in The Order of Things as the disappearance of Man,<sup>65</sup> the traditional justifications for human control of human functioning are no longer available. Foucault suggests that the concept of humanity is a myth that functioned much like the idea of God before it. With the collapse of this final myth that makes life meaningful, we are perhaps freed from myth, from meaning, and from humanity. Like the death of God, this is a moment of great danger and great possibility. It is Foucault’s hope that these possibilities may be realized, but he resists any concrete proposal of what they may be. It is not the philosopher’s role to propose alternatives but only to diagnose the present and its dangers.

#### Self-creation

Although Foucault refrains from making suggestions as to the content of the subject and its political organization after the collapse of the myth of humanity, his somewhat undeveloped though fertile reflections on techniques of the self that may emerge from this collapse are helpful in coming to understand his intentionally rather vague hopes. Instead of forming the self with reference to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>65</sup> Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Routledge, 1970), 422.

a model of the human provided by any philosophical, religious or scientific model, Foucault anticipates a developing intensification of the self's relation to itself through techniques of subjectification that can be non-disciplinary and non-coercive. He attempts to derive an ethics from this possibility, or at least to suggest what kind of ethics might emerge from techniques of subjectification not indebted to humanistic assumptions. In this section I shall outline the characteristics of Foucault's suggestion of an ethic of aesthetic self-creation before going on to analyze some of the political requirements necessary for the implementation of this ethic.

The first issue Foucault must deal with is the modern tendency to attempt to found ethics on a model of the human subject. The problem with modern liberation movements, Foucault suggests, is that because it is no longer possible to found an ethics on religion the only remaining alternative appears to be a scientific knowledge of the self, desire, or the unconscious.<sup>66</sup> As we have seen, for Foucault, this attempt to found ethics on human nature or desire only more deeply entrenches the subject in disciplines of subjectification. In contrast, Foucault proposes an ethics linked to aesthetics, to what he calls an art of existence. Foucault finds a version of this art of existence in his analysis of the early Greek problematization of sexuality. Answering questions about his series of books on sexuality, Foucault states, "If you mean by ethics a code that would tell us how to act, then of course The History of Sexuality is not an ethics. But if

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<sup>66</sup> Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in EW1, 256.

by ethics you mean the relationship you have to yourself when you act, then I would say that it intends to be an ethics, or at least to show what could be an ethics of sexual behaviour. It would be one that would not be dominated by the problem of the deep truth of the reality of our sex life. The relationship that I think we need to have with ourselves when we have sex is an ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure.”<sup>67</sup> As he claims, the key to Foucault’s suggested ethics is not its content in the sense of its rules or norms. Instead, Foucault focuses on the relationship of the self to itself. Although Foucault suggests that this relationship can be centered on an attempt to intensify pleasure, this appears to be an unsatisfactory assessment of the possibilities open to the self. It cannot be assumed that somehow pleasure is immune from colonization by a disciplinary regime. And in other places, as we have seen, Foucault finds resistance to discipline in the body instead of in either pleasure or desire. It seems more satisfying to read Foucault’s call for an ethic of the intensification of pleasure as yet another attempt to give a voice to what has been marginalized in the ethics of sexual behaviour, instead of as an attempt to propose a full-fledged alternative to modern sexual ethics.

Much of what Foucault intends to suggest in his outline of an ethics of sexual behaviour rests on a distinction he makes, though not with the rigour or explication one would like, between the discipline he is suspicious of and the *ascesis* of the Greeks and early Romans he attempts to describe in the second and

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<sup>67</sup> Michel Foucault, “An Interview by Stephen Riggins,” in EW1, 131.

third volumes of The History of Sexuality. Discipline has been thoroughly examined in the previous chapter but, to summarize, surveillance and confession conspire to implant norms deep within the subject. Discipline is the practice of bringing the subject into harmony with that norm, a norm that has, paradoxically, constituted the subject. The discipline Foucault examines is normalizing in the sense that it operates to internalize and justify standards that govern sexual (or other kinds of) behaviour. In contrast, Foucault's discussion of *ascesis* does not involve the process of normalization. Ascesis is a practice performed on the self by itself with the purpose of transforming the self. This transformation is not intended to make one a representative of a particular code of behaviour but operates on a deeper level than that of rules governing moral actions. The result of this transformation is to "[elaborate] a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct."<sup>68</sup> This fashioning of oneself is an aesthetic project. Foucault refers to his understanding of ascesis as the process of transforming one's life into an oeuvre, into a work of art. This does not mean that rules governing behaviour and codes of conduct are excluded from the practice of ascesis. Indeed, these codes can be quite important. Their meaning is transformed, however, into a tool by which one acts on one's own subjectivity. The goal of ethical behaviour is not to conform to a particular code of norms but to intensify one's relation to oneself. Although this may mean a

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<sup>68</sup> HS2, 251.

rigorously disciplined way of life this is not done for the sake of the code but for the sake of the beauty of the way of life.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps one may now more clearly understand what Foucault means by his resistance to simply setting freedom and power against each other. For Foucault, an aesthetics of existence is understood as an art of freedom, but this does not mean it is not also a series of power games.<sup>70</sup> Freedom, for Foucault, is not something existing only in the absence of power or when the force of power can be set aside. It is something that emerges from the practices in which one engages and the orientation towards oneself these practices make up. The ascesis that Foucault describes as constituting an aesthetics of existence is a work one performs on oneself in the midst of games of power using the excesses and heterogeneity of these power games to compose something unintended. The self that emerges from these practices can never be considered a finished project. The free subject is never something attained but something always in process.<sup>71</sup>

It is not the purpose of this discussion to judge the accuracy of Foucault's understanding of the Greeks and their sexual ethics. A fair amount of work has been done on this issue<sup>72</sup> and it is not unimportant. In this chapter, however, I wish to examine the political implications of his work on the sexual ethics of the Greeks. Foucault presents his reflections on the Greeks, not as an alternative to

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<sup>69</sup> In this Foucault's debt to Nietzsche can be seen. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> *HS2*, 252-3.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *EW1*, 137.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Pierre Hadot, "Reflections on the Notion of the 'Cultivation of the Self,'" in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* ed. Timothy Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Maria Daraki, "Foucault's Journey to Greece," *Telos* 67 (Spring 1986) 87-110.

the present regime of power over the body and sexuality, but as an indication of the possibility of such an alternative. As I suggested above while outlining Foucault's use of genealogy, the realization of the possibility of radically different formulations of what seem to be natural categories of thought and action can have significant political consequences. Foucault uses the Greek problematization of sexuality to indicate the contingency of our own problematizations. Foucault turns to the Greeks to avoid merely recapitulating the categories of the present disciplinary regime of power over the body. This does not mean that Foucault sees the Greek problematization of subjectivity and sexuality as a genuine alternative for modern individuals.<sup>73</sup> He does not believe that it is part of his role to propose alternatives. In addition to this, the form of life led by the aristocratic Greek male is not a genuine option for modern humans. What Foucault wants to suggest is that the intensification of the self's relation to itself can be seen as a form of resistance to disciplinary bio-power. An ethic of the aesthetics of existence continues the work of Foucault's genealogy in opening up a clearing in the midst of an homogenizing and totalizing disciplinary regime. The practices of freedom Foucault looks for emerge from this opening he attempts to create from within contemporary political structures. Again, this is not a place free from power but one in which the struggle of subjects among discourses, techniques and institutions is not shut down in favour of a smothering attempt at concord.

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<sup>73</sup> Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *EW1*, 261.

Foucault's focus on the intensification of the self's relation to itself as a response to the political crisis he diagnoses so effectively has drawn a significant amount of criticism. Much of this criticism is levelled by those already antagonistic towards Foucault for his disavowal of normative standards by which political actions can be judged. It seems that, according to Foucault's arguments, there also can be no standards by which we can judge between a 'good' or 'virtuous' self-creation and a 'bad' or 'vicious' one. I have attempted to respond in a Foucauldian manner to these objections earlier in this chapter. A related objection, however, is that Foucault's concentration on the privileging of aesthetic concerns over all others with respect to the self's relation to itself could potentially initiate a new "dandyism."<sup>74</sup> I take this to mean that critics are troubled that focus on the development of an aesthetic art of existence without an accompanying concern with the substantial commitments of such a self disguises a potentially self-involved, superficial, and politically irresponsible way of life. The question to be asked of Foucault is whether his project of intensifying self-relations has within it the political strength to provide any adequate resistance to the political structures of power he attacks. Foucault's critics suggest that significant resistance to the disciplinary regimes Foucault describes can only be maintained if one can make substantive normative commitments. We have seen the reasons that Foucault hesitates to do this, but this, in itself, does not demonstrate that Foucault's aesthetic response is adequate.

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<sup>74</sup> Hadot, "Reflections..." 230.

A related, though extended, criticism of Foucault is voiced by Alasdair MacIntyre, who turns an almost Foucauldian suspicion against Foucault himself. As he writes in a response to James Miller's biography of Foucault, "we have good reason to be suspicious of any contemporary ethics of free choice, according to which each individual makes of her or his life a work of art. For something very like this aestheticization of the moral, which places the choices of each individual at the core of her or his moral life and represents these choices as an expression of that individual's creativity, is characteristic of advanced capitalistic modernity."<sup>75</sup> With this accusation, MacIntyre suggests that Foucault's vision of an aesthetic of existence can itself be seen as the extension of the disciplines of consumption disguised by a semblance of aesthetic individuality. It may be that in the very rejection of normalization expressed in Foucault's ethic of aesthetic self-creation a deeper normalization into the practices of consumption lurks. MacIntyre, of course, opposes to Foucault's practices of freedom, the practices of a socially mediated teleology of human beings. Foucault must respond to this criticism by saying that such a critique offers a welcome corrective and is an indication of the importance of the continuing use of the method of genealogy even on its own products. According to Foucault, the means of resistance to the disciplines MacIntyre indicates cannot be to propose an established human nature, even if it is socially mediated and embedded in social practices as MacIntyre's version is. Instead, every proposal must be subjected to an offensive of perpetual

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<sup>75</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Miller's Foucault, Foucault's Foucault," *Salmagundi*, (Winter 1993), 60.



critique, in which MacIntyre's suspicions must be included. This response does not so much answer MacIntyre's criticism as attempt to defuse it by integrating it into a broader practice of political criticism. MacIntyre's criticism, however, boils down into a suspicion that Foucault's critique of contemporary political structures cannot maintain its strength without teleological or normative commitments.

Another significant criticism levelled against Foucault's aesthetic of existence is presented by Richard Rorty. Rorty is sympathetic to Foucault's political critique as well as to his aesthetic understanding of self-creation. What he doubts is that there is any necessary, or even desirable, link between these two sides of Foucault's thought.<sup>76</sup> Rorty's critique is of a different nature than those lodged by thinkers insisting on the necessity of normative commitments. Rorty does not claim that political critiques or proposals for action must be based on such commitments to maintain their strength. Rorty's own political pragmatism is a foundational and makes no attempt to ground itself in a model of human nature or in moral absolutes. He finds Foucault's criticisms of discipline and normalization useful as diagnostic tools and he does not insist that they must be grounded in procedures that can demonstrate their legitimacy in describing the 'truth' of the world. Instead, Rorty criticizes Foucault's assumption that his call for an ethic of aesthetic self-creation must have political consequences of any kind. It is fine for someone to want to stretch the limits of experience and burst

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy" in Michel Foucault: Philosopher, as well as Rorty's "Paroxysms and Politics," Salmagundi (Winter 1993).

the bonds of the subject in her or his own life. This may even be the kind of thing people should be encouraged to do. But why would we think that significant political consequences must or should flow from these practices? Quite enough work lies before us in the political sphere in simply attempting to make our immediate social world a somewhat better one. And Rorty means by 'better' only a world in which one would prefer to live, without attempting to mark by that preference any indication of a deeper harmony with human nature or with the cosmos. The revolutionary resonances of Foucault's call for the disappearance of the subject may, in fact, distract us from the minor and even somewhat banal reforms that would improve our lives or the lives of others. Instead of founding politics on either an authentic self or on a self-creation, Rorty argues that we ought to found politics simply on contingent circumstances and agreements.

It seems, however, that Rorty fails to deal with Foucault's refusal to draw a firm line between the subject's self-creation and the political world of contingent circumstances and agreements. As I have attempted to demonstrate, it is Foucault's assertion that the political structures of power relations embed themselves in the subject at the deepest levels. These power structures work to construct the conscience, desires, inhibitions and so on of the subject. Although these appear to be part of a private world accessible only to the subject, there is nothing private about them. They are a reflection of disciplinary techniques operating to construct a subject that is docile, fitting neatly into a system of discipline even when it appears to be acting on its most individual and private

desires. If it is so that the world of political discipline has colonized the subject to this degree then political resistance cannot take place without attention to the subject, the most important place of engagement between relations of power. To ignore the subject to concentrate wholly on the contingent agreements of politics can only be to entrench disciplinary relations of power unknowingly and uncritically. It is, therefore, not consistent to affirm Foucault's diagnosis of disciplinary and normalizing techniques of power while almost dismissing as politically unimportant the place where these techniques have their greatest influence. Rorty must either argue for the immunity of the subject from disciplinary and normalizing influences and argue that it is this subject that is politically inconsequential. This would seem, however, to be a retreat from the affirmation Rorty makes of the significance of Foucault's political diagnostic and his analysis of power relations. Alternatively, Rorty can agree that the subject is constituted by disciplinary techniques but argue that that, in itself, is not such a bad thing and there is no need to disrupt these relations of power when reforming the political system. At times, it seems that this is Rorty's response. The disrupting of these powers may be a worthwhile project to pursue in my own life, he seems to say, but the work we do to make political reforms does not need to integrate this project in order to be coherent. This view, however, does not attend to the interrelationships Foucault points out between the constitution of the subject and the political realm. Rorty cannot, consistently, accept Foucault's

account of discipline and normalization while rejecting the political importance of the subject and its constitution.

### Political Consequences

If Rorty is wrong to reject the links Foucault draws between the constitution of the subject and political resistance, then what are the political consequences suggested by Foucault's work? This final section will examine these consequences and provide some of the groundwork for an examination of a contemporary political philosopher influenced by Foucault, William Connolly. As I stated above, Foucault resists the temptation to propose sweeping changes to the present political structure. It is important to him that political activism remain local and tactical rather than imposing broad strategies of change. Foucault also rejects the view that the role of the intellectual is to form the political will of others. As he writes in his essay "The Concern for Truth", "the work of an intellectual is not to shape others' political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematicization to participate in the formation of a political will."<sup>77</sup> The most important work that Foucault does is critical and destructive of conventional modes of thought. It is only through this destructive work that political action that has been formed by patterns of domination can be

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<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 265.

reappropriated in practices of freedom. For this reason, Foucault makes only vague suggestions about the structure of a politics that might emerge from the critical work he, and others, have done.

It may be useful to look carefully at an example of the critical techniques Foucault makes use of in analyzing political institutions. We have already examined his account of the penitentiary but in a conversation with Maoists<sup>78</sup> Foucault attacks not just the present organization of the courts but any system of justice that might take its place. Even a people's court formed after a revolution cannot be seen as an expression of popular justice but "ensnares, controls and strangles it by inscribing it within the state."<sup>79</sup> Foucault argues that there is an ideology of domination lodged within the structure of any court that gives both access to justice and the sole authority to enforce this justice to a party uninvolved in the dispute. When this happens, justice is separated from the experience of the people. A dichotomy is established between right and wrong, just and unjust, moral and immoral and those under the authority of this institution are distributed according to these categories. This division, Foucault suggests, is used to separate the proletariat and the non-proletarian masses and to turn them against each other. The very structure of a court system reflects what Foucault argues is a bourgeois understanding of moral distinctions. A post-revolutionary establishment of a court merely entrenches the very relations of power it has been attempting to overthrow and removes power from those whose empowerment has been its goal.

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<sup>78</sup> "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in Power/Knowledge.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

What is most important about this argument of Foucault's is his suggestion that the problem with the reconstitution of a court as a system of justice indicates that the same group of relationships has been erected between the subject and the sovereign. The subject is, itself, subject to an authority that determines on which side of a line between legal and illegal she or he stands. This determination is partially constitutive of the identity of the subject and an entire order of relations between subject and sovereign state, as well as a series of dichotomies between moral and immoral, right and wrong, is imported into this subject. For Foucault, political resistance must challenge both the institutions that perpetuate these relations of power and the dichotomies on which they depend and the forms of subjectivity created by them. As he writes, "the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state."<sup>80</sup> It will be of no consequence if the political institutions of the state are dismantled only to be reconstituted because the subject constituted by these particular relations of power remains the same. Foucault's genealogy of subjectivity is meant to attack on both of these fronts.

Another aspect of Foucault's critique demonstrated by the above example is his criticism of the concept of revolution. Foucault derides the naiveté of assuming that an overthrow of the top of the pyramid can lead to wholesale

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<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in *EW3*, 336.

political and societal change. As one commentator writes, Foucault's claim is that "[w]e need to break with the myth of both the State and the Revolution that will overthrow it, decompose the complex reality that in fact constitutes the social world, and substitute a *political* ethos of critique for one that aims to transform society according to a transcendent vision of fully liberated human nature."<sup>81</sup> This political ethos of critique is one that rejects the dichotomies of political institutions in favour of a recognition of the complex reality of the social world.

The creation of this political ethos of critique is the *sine qua non* of a social context in which the self-creation Foucault writes about can be possible. At times in the writing of Foucault, as in the above example, it seems that this ethos of critique must result in the complete dismantling of every institution and restraint. Foucault does not quite say this. But he does not quite deny it either. He writes that "[t]he important question it seems to me is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system."<sup>82</sup> This appears to be a more benign rule of thumb than Foucault's usually radical critique would allow for. It doesn't seem completely clear in what this liberty to transform the system would consist but Foucault's subsequent use of the example of the necrophiliac who must be free to make his (or her) sexual inclinations socially acceptable gives an indication of where Foucault is headed. The political system must be open even to those found distasteful (if I may be

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<sup>81</sup> Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline*, 60.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in *EW1*, 147.

pardoned a significant understatement) to many or most of those within it. The political force of these often excluded groups and their views must not be allowed to be co-opted by medical, psychological, criminological, or moralistic attempts to categorize them as deviant, abnormal, or evil.

What is necessary for the construction of a social context in which aesthetic self-creation is possible is a political environment in which the multiplication of different and new types of human relationships is fostered.<sup>83</sup> Foucault expresses a concern with the gay rights movement as it maintains the model of the citizen of the state and ends up pressing for the recognition of gay relationships according to the same pattern of heterosexual relationships. By preserving the language of rights the movement for gay rights becomes locked into a construction of the individual as a bearer of rights against the state. This privileging of the model of the citizen actually obstructs the creation of different models of relationship. Although Foucault has sympathy with this movement he affirms it not as a battle for basic or foundational human rights but only as a tactical manoeuvre with the intent of disrupting conventional political categories. When these categories adapt to absorb new relationships without being fundamentally put into question they remain just as dangerous as they were when they excluded these relationships. The issue for Foucault is not to find a way to include new expressions of the old relationships within contemporary political categories but to create a space for completely new types of relationships.

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<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *EW1*, 135.



As I have emphasized several times in this chapter, these new relationships are not to be thought of as relationships free from power. Foucault disagrees with Habermas's view that communicative relations can be developed free from games of power.<sup>84</sup> Instead, he argues that power relations are inescapable and that we should not think that they are bad in themselves. Practices of freedom, as outlined by Foucault, differ from practices of domination not because they are free of power but because they are without domination, or at least that they have the potential to be without domination. I can only understand this within the context of Foucault's work as meaning that these practices include within them ruptures and discontinuities that disrupt the tendencies towards totalization within so-called practices of domination. The political ethos of critique Foucault writes of is part of an attempt to keep us aware of the domination embedded in institutions taken for granted and to allow us to resist the totalizing tendencies of these institutions.

Foucault mentions two important examples of relationships he believes are capable of being practiced without domination.<sup>85</sup> These are erotic and pedagogic relations. These types of relations are important to Foucault because they cannot be placed comfortably within a discourse of rights and are therefore not capable of being fully absorbed by a system of state-sovereignty. Domination is avoided in these relations because part of what makes them what they are is the possibility of a reversal of power inherent in them. Neither erotic nor pedagogic relationships

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<sup>84</sup> Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern..." EW1, 298.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 298-9.

can be practiced within a static hierarchy without becoming parodies of themselves. This is an important part of avoiding domination, although the potential for domination can never be completely erased.

What Foucault must deal with, however, in establishing the importance of erotic and pedagogic relationships is a version of Rorty's argument I have outlined above. There are few who would dispute the importance of both erotic and pedagogic relations but what makes Foucault think they have, or can have, the degree of political importance he seems to want to give them? Foucault may have shown that the discourse of rights is a method of domination rather than a means of protection of the individual from the state and others, but is it reasonable to believe that the erotic and pedagogic relations Foucault admires can take the place of this discourse as a medium of political relation? It must be remembered that Foucault's suggestion of the potential of these relationships is not meant to be a well-developed theoretical model of a political alternative. Foucault rejects the possibility of providing such a model as he rejects the belief that this is the role of the intellectual. It is, however, impossible to be satisfied with Foucault's suggestions in this area. In the next chapter, we will look at the work of William Connolly to fill out the gaps left by the analysis of Foucault.

Chapter 4: William Connolly's Political Agonism and John Milbank's Ontology  
of Peace

In the previous two chapters I have attempted to outline some of the most important concepts developed in the work of Michel Foucault specifically relating to modern manifestations of power and the construction of the subject. I have also tried to show that it is important to hold both of these elements of his thought together. Foucault's critique of much contemporary political theory is that it fails to account for the way in which political organization constructs a subject that fits comfortably within its structure. Political critique based in this theory and its assumed model of the subject cannot help but entrench the structures of the political regime it criticizes, even as it attempts to 'liberate' the subject. Foucault's response to this problem is to attempt to free himself from a theoretical dependence on the modern subject through genealogical critique and practices of aesthetic self-creation. While a few of the political consequences of this work were touched on at the conclusion of the previous chapter many of the potential effects of Foucault's work are left undeveloped. In this chapter I attempt to extend the work of the previous two into more explicit and concrete political theory.

To do this I have chosen to bring two quite different thinkers into conversation. William Connolly and John Milbank are brought together in this chapter for two important reasons. First, both attempt to engage what they see as the major problems of modern political organization. In this regard they have a

great deal in common. Secondly, the work of both thinkers involves a critical engagement with the texts and legacy of Augustine, the subject of the following two chapters of this dissertation. It is hoped that this middle chapter will therefore provide a transition between the works of Foucault and Augustine and set the terms for their engagement.

To be more specific in laying out the organization and purpose of this chapter, I use the work of William Connolly to move the dissertation in two different directions at once. Connolly develops several of the important themes emerging from the work of Foucault within the context of contemporary North American political theory. He creatively interprets Foucault's work (among others) within the North American political context. For this reason Connolly displays the application of some of the important concepts of a thinker who himself hesitated to develop a sustained political theory.

Secondly, Connolly develops in great detail the Foucauldian critique of Augustine. He does this in two ways. First, he carries out a sustained analysis of a number of Augustine's explicitly political texts. This is in contrast to Foucault who engages with Augustine somewhat rarely and, although his reflections are rich and compelling with regard to Augustine's model of the subject, he does so without analyzing Augustine's broader political or theological concerns. Connolly places Augustine within a theological and political context and criticizes a fuller account of Augustine's thought. Secondly, Connolly attempts to come to terms with Augustinian tendencies within modern thought and political practice.

His attempt to outline and criticize the “Augustinian imperative”<sup>1</sup> is not restricted to an analysis of specific texts written by Augustine but engages a tendency within Western thought exemplified particularly well by Augustine’s corpus. Through this technique, Connolly justifies the great attention he pays to Augustine and demonstrates the importance that many of the patterns of thought and practice laid down in Augustine’s texts continue to have in the contemporary context. A defence of these Augustinian patterns, as the second part of this dissertation will attempt to be, has a relevance that pushes beyond the boundaries of Augustine’s thought and into contemporary political theory and practice.

The final section of this chapter will involve an attempt to develop an alternative reading of Augustine’s political thought using the work of John Milbank. Milbank brings a more sympathetic reading of Augustine to an analysis of many of the same political concerns that Connolly has. In contrast to the Foucauldian agonistic construal of erotics as an alternative to an Augustinian imperative dominating Western thought, Milbank sees in Augustine a peaceful alternative to an ontology of violence implicit in paganism, liberalism and most recently represented by the agonism of figures such as Foucault and Connolly. Milbank’s ‘postmodern critical Augustinianism’<sup>2</sup> provides a number of useful tools for engaging critically the Foucauldian critique of Augustine set forth in Connolly.

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<sup>1</sup> William Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality, new ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

The attempt of this chapter will not be to refute the political alternative suggested in Foucault and Connolly but to begin to come to terms with the way an Augustinian politics would have to be construed in order to address Foucauldian concerns about contemporary political life and the Foucauldian criticisms of an Augustinian politics. This chapter, therefore, has an important place in the development of the thesis as it allows for a transition both towards contemporary political concerns and towards an understanding of Augustine that will allow him to speak to these concerns.

#### Connolly's Foucauldian Political Agonism

William Connolly's political theory develops many of the same themes that have been thoroughly discussed in the chapters above on Foucault.<sup>3</sup> What makes Connolly's work useful, however, is that he is explicitly concerned with using the conceptual tools Foucault provides to develop a critique of liberalism within the North American context. Connolly argues, like Foucault, that liberal democratic theory with its fundamental concerns with sovereignty and the state is unable to address the most important aspects of the deployment of power. In fact, he asserts, democratic theory and the most common understandings of power that accompany it obscure the normalizing tendencies embedded in modern democratic practice.<sup>4</sup> Connolly attempts to identify what he calls a 'social ontology' of liberal democracy that lurks beneath the surface of democratic

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<sup>3</sup> See above Chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>4</sup> William Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 7.

practice and theory and is assumed without reflection. This social ontology is “a set of fundamental understandings about the relations of humans to themselves, to others and to the world.”<sup>5</sup> These understandings are thought to be simply a natural part of the ordering of the world and society and are considered outside the realm of political challenge. They include such things as our concepts of subject and object and the procedures through which knowledge is legitimated. Even in the face of significant challenges to the assumptions embedded in modern liberal democratic social ontologies, the response has often been that these debates can be bracketed and left outside the political realm.<sup>6</sup> In this way some of the most important aims of Western society, like the pursuit of an economy of growth, are removed from the realm of political conflict and all members of society are absorbed into them.<sup>7</sup>

Connolly argues, however, that it may be precisely these assumptions that most need to be critically examined.<sup>8</sup> The fact that they make up the principles of a broad consensus should not make them immune from political contestation as they may be serving to obscure some of the most insidious elements of modern political practice. In Connolly’s view, far from being a given element of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Connolly discusses this response in the work of Hans Blumenberg on one side and in the work of John Rawls and Richard Rorty on the other in “The Irony of Interpretation,” in Daniel Conway and John Seery, *The Politics of Irony* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992). What both sides have in common is a tendency to marginalize challenges to the social ontology embedded in modern democratic practice. Blumenberg argues that none of the other perspectives are adequate to maintain themselves so modern liberal thought apparently prevails by default. Rawls and Rorty argue that liberal democratic theory does not have to prove itself true since we all seem to agree to it and this consensus is a good enough basis on which to build common political practices.

<sup>7</sup> William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 148.

<sup>8</sup> “The Irony of Interpretation,” 121.

world and society, social ontologies are in fact maintained by disciplines that subjugate individuals and integrate them into a pre-existing system of manipulation. Social ontologies invest the universe with an order into which the individual is believed to fit. The happiness of the individual is dependent on her harmony with this order. Disciplines are practices of the self that bring this self into harmony with the order of the social ontology. For Connolly, however, these disciplines in fact are attempts both to recreate the subject in the terms given by the social ontology and to silently entrench the social ontology lying beneath the surface of these disciplines. Any friction between the demands placed on one by the practices emerging from a social ontology and the constitution of one's identity provides only a further reason for the submission of the subject to these disciplines. The failure of these disciplines to completely recast the individual in the image of the system's requirements can then be reinterpreted as a failure of the individual. This failure, instead of indicating the need to re-evaluate the disciplines, actually re-affirms their indispensability. This process can perhaps be made more clear with one of Connolly's more poignant examples.

In what he calls a "Letter to Augustine,"<sup>9</sup> Connolly refers to the discovery of a so-called 'procrastination syndrome' announced in the headlines of the New York Times.<sup>10</sup> This syndrome is described in terms that are probably too obvious to outline and the damage caused to those who suffer from it is depicted in careful detail. The research reported by the Times declares, of course, that the cause of

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 5 of *Identity/Difference*.

<sup>10</sup> cited in *Identity/Difference*, 148-50.



the ‘procrastination syndrome’ lies within the sufferer himself. The specific reasons for it may differ from person to person but the solution can be found through the application of various therapies to the sufferer that may address the problem. In Connolly’s words:

This analysis and hundreds like it in areas such as weight gain or loss, drug addiction, criminality, nutrition, personal health, sexual orientation, test performance, hyperactivity, unemployment, humor, corporate dress codes, premenstrual syndrome, aggressivity, and so on rest upon assumptions that established standards of performance are natural or true, that the suffering is due to some deep defect in the self, that the remedy must involve techniques applied to the self by itself or by others to bring it into line, that the true identity of the self will be advanced another step through its more complete integration into established practices.<sup>11</sup>

A constant concern in Connolly’s work, illustrated by the above example, is the way in which modern attitudes ‘depoliticize’ contestable relational structures.<sup>12</sup> This demonstrates the influence of Foucault and extends his arguments into the contemporary political scene. Connolly attempts to pinpoint an increasing number of areas in which conflict is drained from an issue and the matter is turned over to experts, bureaucrats and managers. What is more chilling

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<sup>11</sup> Identity/Difference, 148-9.

<sup>12</sup> It is this point that is salient in addressing Jean Bethke Elshtain’s dismissal of the political agonists, of whom Connolly is one, when she suggests that the agonists have ‘discovered’ conflict and are now congratulating themselves for having reinvented Hobbes “Response to Panel Papers,” Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 21 (2001): 151-4. Where the agonists are at their strongest is in highlighting again where conflict exists in modern society but has been muted and suppressed through our articulation of the issues. Hobbes’ own attempt to define the political arena is part of the attempt to ‘manage’ conflict in a way that actually excludes and suppresses it. Connolly’s attempt to make identity a central political concept, in all its contestable and contingent glory, is quite different from the exclusion of Hobbesian liberals on one hand and the co-optation of consensus building liberals on the other. Elshtain’s remarks are in response to a helpful essay by Charles T. Matthews that, though it does not deal with Connolly, has had an influence on my thought with regard to a Christian political alternative to agonism. See Charles T. Matthews, “Faith, Hope and Agony: Christian Political Participation Beyond Liberalism,” The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 21 (2001): 125-50.

is the methods by which these experts are bypassed and the management of behaviour according to the disciplines of the prevailing social ontology is woven into the constitution of the subject itself. This makes every instance of resistance to these disciplines an example of the failure of the subject to live up to its ‘true’ identity. Connolly, like Foucault, highlights this process in the formulation of the categories of mental illness, criminality, and terrorism.<sup>13</sup> The phenomena behind these categories are defined in such a way as to deprive them of political force and recast them so that they do not provide a challenge to modern conceptions of normality and rationality. Instead of signifying a challenge to contemporary formulations, our understandings of criminality and madness serve to emphasize the need for modern disciplines. These disciplines are understood as the practices necessary to bring the self into harmony with the natural order but, in actual fact, they found and sustain this order and inscribe it within the self.

This process of depoliticization and normalization does not, however, mean that people become more and more similar, eventually resulting in an homogeneous culture. In fact, what occurs is just the opposite. As Connolly writes, “the sign of a normalizing society is not that everyone becomes the same but that more and more people deviate in some way or other from evolving standards of normality, opening themselves through these multiple deviations to disciplinary strategies of neutralization. A normalizing society is defined more by its proliferation of failures or near-failures and its tactical orientations to them

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<sup>13</sup> See Politics and Ambiguity, 105-6 and Identity/Difference, 207-8 where Connolly also addresses the use of welfare aid.

than by its pristine examples of normality.”<sup>14</sup> The application of norms and disciplines more and more rigorously and to more and more aspects of life results, paradoxically, in greater and greater deviation. Again, it is this deviation that demonstrates the necessity of these disciplines. The differences represented in these deviations must be, however, differences that can be accounted for in terms commensurable with the norms that measure them. These norms and the therapies or disciplines designed to impose them are always coming up against resistance from the practical and material substance on which they are at work. This resistance, however, can never gain traction against the norm as it is always redefined as a failed attempt to approach the norm. The response to this failure is renewed effort in discipline and the application of norms that always, in its redoubled efforts, results in more closely measured deviation and a new cycle of therapy and discipline.

To this point, Connolly’s critique of contemporary political practice shows the strong influence of Foucault, especially as it emphasizes the process of normalization and the correlating disciplinary techniques. His attempt to develop this Foucauldian critique within the terms of contemporary North American political theory lies, to some degree, in his reliance on the concept of identity as one of the strongly contested elements in liberal theory. Connolly’s basic view is that much of modern democratic theory relies on a universal and unambiguous construal of identity that is undermined by a Foucauldian critique. In its place,

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<sup>14</sup> Identity/Difference, 150.

Connolly proposes a view of identity and the self that is historically contingent and relational. This, he claims, will have a significant impact on the political ethos emerging from this identity and in which it is embedded. A more careful look at the place identity has in Connolly's thought will give us a better understanding of his broader political critique.

The problem of identity is not an uncommon one on which to focus a contribution to political theory. Despite attempts within some circles to bracket identity and exclude it from the realm of political debate,<sup>15</sup> it remains an important element of several attempts to develop contemporary political theories.<sup>16</sup> Connolly's major dispute with much of this literature is not with the high place that it gives to the concept of identity but with the assumption often implicit in it that the stable founding of politics on identity must assume an unambiguous and stable founding of identity itself. The problem, for Connolly, is not that the identity of the subject is fractured and unstable. Rather, his argument is that a fractured identity is a result of the application of normalizing disciplines on the subject. This process creates more and more abnormalities and fragmentations as the substance of the subject resists its comfortable normalization.<sup>17</sup> This continuing failure to establish a stable identity through the use of normalizing disciplines, instead of releasing the self from an unreasonable attempt to ground itself unambiguously, creates a pressure to found the identity of

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<sup>15</sup> For the most commonly cited example of this see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> *Identity/Difference*, 172.

the self transcendently. Because the contingent realm in which the subject actually exists is seen to be fleeting and unstable, a realm impervious to this contingency is hypothesized and is assumed to be the source of ‘true’ identity. This tactic of projecting the source of identity into a transcendental realm is a means of removing identity from the political realm. The fear of anarchy or relativism caused by the inability to found the subject in a stable way is used to justify this depoliticization and transcendentalization of the identity of the subject. Those who resist the universalization of the subject in this way are accused of being relativists and this relativism is assumed to be a much worse alternative than the universalizing of a contingent model of the subject and the marginalizing of those who fail to meet its demands.

One of Connolly’s most important projects is his attempt to trace this process through liberal political theory. Connolly attempts to demonstrate the dependence of significant contemporary political thinkers on a model of the subject that is autonomous and the identity of which is fixed, intrinsic, and unambiguous. What makes Connolly’s work interesting in this regard is that his targets are not liberals such as Rawls and Nozick, conventional targets of communitarian political theorists, but are those who view the subject as a relational and contingent product.<sup>18</sup> What the thinkers Connolly criticizes will not give up is a foundational model of the subject whose alienation within a particular

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Connolly addresses the thought of Jürgen Habermas in Politics and Ambiguity, 57 and Charles Taylor in a number of places including his article “Taylor, Foucault and Otherness,” Political Theory 13:3 (August 1985): 365-76 and in Identity/Difference, 89-92.

political order can act as a normative standard of critique of that order. Individualist and communitarian thinkers differ on the locus of identity of the subject, i.e., whether this locus resides in the choices and commitments of the individual or in what is inherited by the individual from the community, but both tend towards an agreement that the identity of the subject is stable enough to found a political society unproblematically. This tendency, Connolly argues, is a “modernization of the Augustinian imperative to go more deeply into the self (or language or community) in search of a reliable foundation for itself.”<sup>19</sup> This is an endless task and results in the extension of a disciplinary society into more and more intimate corners of the self.

Connolly’s response is a paradigmatically Foucauldian one. The problem with the liberal project, in Connolly’s view, is not that it gives such an important place to the identity of the subject but that it attempts to universalize this model of the subject in order to use it to found a stable political society. It is inevitable that an identity is crucial to those who bear it, whether as individuals or as a collective. Connolly does not dispute this or question its importance in the formation and ongoing operation of the political community. What Connolly wants to argue for, however, could almost be called a sense of guilt at the necessity of giving this privileged place to identity.<sup>20</sup> It may be necessary that the identity of subjects and the structures of a political society form each other and marginalize expressions of

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<sup>19</sup> Politics and Ambiguity, 127.

<sup>20</sup> This can be seen in Connolly’s article “Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault,” Political Theory 21:3 (August 1993): 365-389 in which Connolly talks about the need not to liquidate ethics but to be ashamed of the transcendentalization of contingent identities.

identity that cannot be integrated easily into the society, but this can be held in tension with a view of identity that sees it as “historically contingent in its formation and inherently relational in its form...because it treats as true the proposition that no identity reflects being as such; no identity is the true identity because every identity is particular, constructed and relational.”<sup>21</sup> This view has clear parallels to Foucault’s understanding of the self, described by Connolly as being that “there is no essence, telos, or purpose in the self which could be realized through a well-ordered society and hence no self-alienation in the existing order; but every order, by creating a self appropriate to it out of the raw material available, simultaneously organizes and subjugates the self.”<sup>22</sup> This recognition of contingency and arbitrariness in the very constitution of the self does not, in Connolly’s view, undermine the importance of identity in political formation. Instead, it introduces into the basic and most fundamental structures of political society a sense of ambiguity. This ambiguity and recognition of the contingency of one’s own collective and individual identity discourages one from either enforcing one’s own ‘transcendentalized’ identity on others because one believes that this calls them to their ‘true’ identity or from marginalizing others because their differently constructed identity appears to be a threat to one’s own formulation of ‘true’ identity.

Connolly, therefore, rejects several of the options suggested by contemporary political theory. Liberal individualists tend to place issues of

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<sup>21</sup> Identity/Difference, 46.

<sup>22</sup> Politics and Ambiguity, 124.

identity outside of the political realm as matters that can be bracketed from discussion about procedural issues regarding rights and laws. This tendency does not account for the assumptions embedded in its view about the autonomy of the subject and its intrinsic identity. In Connolly's view, a close look at the ways in which identity is actually constructed will demonstrate that it cuts across the divide between what liberal theorists include in and exclude from the realm of political contestation.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, communitarians assume an equally intrinsic identity but place its locus in the community instead of the individual. This shift in focus demonstrates the recognition of an important fact about the construction of identity that Connolly suggests when he writes that "my identity is what I am and how I am recognized rather than what I choose, want, or consent to. It is the dense self from which choosing, wanting, and consenting proceed."<sup>24</sup> Here, Connolly rejects an autonomous and atomistic view of the subject. At least on this point, Connolly suggests that he is in agreement with the communitarians on the issue of identity and its political importance.

His disagreement with the communitarians, however, is just as fundamental as his disagreement with the individualists. Although Connolly concurs with the communitarians that the identity of the subject is historically mediated and inherently relational or intersubjective, he departs from what he calls a harmonious or teleological model of the subject.<sup>25</sup> In challenging this

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<sup>23</sup> Identity/Difference, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Identity/Difference, 64.

<sup>25</sup> Identity/Difference, 66.



Connolly wants, like Foucault, to challenge the possibility of the development of an ‘authentic’ expression of subjectivity, closer to the ‘true’ nature of the subject, even if this ‘true’ nature is historically mediated and intersubjective as it is for the communitarians.<sup>26</sup> For Connolly, as we have seen, every organization of society simultaneously orders and subjugates the self. This poses a challenge to harmonious and teleological construals of subjectivity that understand the subject as coming to its fulfillment or realization in social organization. Connolly does not, however, then posit an alternative subjectivity that liberates the self. The difference between Connolly’s vision of political organization and the communitarians or individualists is not that Connolly has discovered a form of inter-relational subjectivity that does not subjugate the self and repress some of its intransigent elements. Connolly’s vision of political order, in contrast, is one that does not hide its darker side from itself either through a teleological vision of harmony or through an arbitrary marginalization of challenging expressions of selfhood to an apolitical realm invented for this purpose.

To this end, Connolly highlights the paradoxical nature of ethical reflection. What he means by this, in his own words, is that “[w]ithout a set of standards of identity and responsibility there is no possibility of ethical discrimination, but the application of any such set of historical constructions also

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<sup>26</sup> The most compelling articulations of this model of the subject come in the work of thinkers like Charles Taylor (see Sources of the Self and The Malaise of Modernity (Concord, ON: Anansi, 1991)) and Alasdair MacIntyre (see After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981)).

does violence to those to whom it is applied.”<sup>27</sup> All construals of political order are forced to deal with a subject that it constructs ‘all the way down’ and that, at the same time, is resistant to its full determination. In fact, as Connolly argues, the very constitution of subjectivity encourages the formation of that which does not fit easily into its bounds.<sup>28</sup> The very process of drawing a line of definition around the subject must leave something outside that line, if only enough to define oneself against. The temptation is to absorb, exterminate, or strive to contain that which does not easily conform to the measure of the subject. The ordering of the subject, then, cannot avoid doing violence to what is being made into a subject. This does not mean that in a perfect world we could live without political order and thus without violence. Connolly does not imagine that we could avoid drawing lines around the subject and therefore avoid the exclusion of what does not integrate easily into our understanding of the subject. In fact, even this formulation of the problem is founded in a fundamental misunderstanding. It implies that there is an autonomous subject that could make decisions about whether and how to construct a subject. For Connolly, we find ourselves already in a world within the bounds of which we have been formed. The formation of the subject is the ground of choice, desire, and consent.<sup>29</sup> Connolly’s political vision is not one in which the violence implicit in the construction of a subject is denied but one in which some of the more insidious effects of this are avoided.

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<sup>27</sup> Identity/Difference, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Politics and Ambiguity, 133.

<sup>29</sup> Identity/Difference, 64.

Connolly espouses political practices and beliefs that he believes defuse the anxiety and fear (and their occasional eruption into violence) that can characterize the engagement with those others (and those other parts of ourselves) that challenge our harmonious models of subjectivity. He proposes to do this by reinscribing the conflict between them in the political sphere once again. Connolly's view is that those who propose an harmonious and teleological view of the subject and its political expression use the spectre of anarchy and uninhibited violence to suppress or exclude expressions of subjectivity that challenge their own expression. The greatest threat facing modern democracies, in Connolly's view, is not really that they will descend into violent chaos because of moral disintegration but that the 'management' of conflict entrenches a violence within our society that cannot be recognized or analyzed using the tools of contemporary political discourse.

#### Moral vs. Ethical Sources for Action

In an attempt to trace out more clearly the dichotomy he draws between his own view and that of his opponents, Connolly describes in rough terms two alternate sources for our attitudes towards the cosmos. He argues that there is a fundamental difference between deriving our orientation towards the world from moral sources and deriving it from ethical sources.<sup>30</sup> Augustine, Charles Taylor and, to some degree, Habermas are the figures Connolly deals with most explicitly as 'moral' thinkers. His own attempt is to use the thought of figures

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<sup>30</sup> This is a major element of both The Augustinian Imperative and Identity/Difference and colours much of Connolly's work throughout his career to the present.

like Foucault, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida to develop an ‘ethical’ orientation towards the world. I will now attempt to give some indication of the ways in which Connolly distinguishes between these two orientations.

One of the most important themes in Connolly’s work is his attempt to deconstruct what he calls a moral orientation to the world. He means by this an attitude that holds that the world is somehow predisposed to us, that its principles are discernible and comprehensible to us. This basic orientation can be found in two different manifestations that are seemingly opposites but, Connolly argues, share this understanding of the universe. On one hand, there are those who view the world as a plastic medium susceptible to human manipulation and control.<sup>31</sup> Through technology and scientific observation the principles of nature can be wrested from it and used to master it. On the other hand, and seemingly in stark contrast, are those who suggest that the cosmos bears within it principles to which humans can become attuned. The world bears within itself a higher direction with which humans can achieve a harmony.<sup>32</sup> Instead of suggesting that the role of humans is to master the world and turn it towards their own purposes, these argue for the submission of humans to higher principles embedded in the universe, often invoking either a theism or a communal spirit of some kind. Although these two alternatives seem to be as different from each other as possible, Connolly argues that both views look to the world to find a logical order that is open to our understanding. This order is the basis for human action in the world, whether

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<sup>31</sup> “Irony of Interpretation,” 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

conceived of as the order (in the sense of command) of a God, nature or a transcendental subject or as the inherent order of being.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to this assumption of the predisposition of the world to our understanding and our aims, and related to it, is a further similarity between these two views. Both attitudes towards the world work to legitimate the kind of disciplines Foucault analyzes. These disciplines can be justified, on one hand, because they involve the mobilization of people towards the mastery of the world or, on the other, because they allow the individual or community to achieve a deeper harmony with each other and the world.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, both of these attitudes domesticate contingency in our lives.<sup>35</sup> The attempt to attain mastery over the world is an attempt to extirpate contingency and the possibility of tragedy that accompanies it. The illusion of control that this view gives allows us to believe that our mastery of the world can act as a bulwark against a chaos lurking just beyond its protection. The attempt to delve into a deeper harmony with the world is also an attempt to escape contingency. Tragedy is recast either as an example of the friction suffered by an individual or group that is out of step with the order of the cosmos or as a deeper purpose in the universe working itself out. Neither view allows itself to receive the contingent event as an event that is not easily absorbed by human understanding. It is in this inability to accept the contingent and the possibility of

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<sup>33</sup> “Beyond Good and Evil,” 369.

<sup>34</sup> “Irony of Interpretation,” 133.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 135.

tragedy that Connolly believes he sees a lurking *ressentiment* behind both of these attitudes towards the world.

Connolly's assertion is that "every concept of a moral order first expresses *ressentiment* against the absence of a moral foundation in being and then intensifies it through the way in which it enforces the orders it receives or conforms to the harmonious design it discerns."<sup>36</sup> The inability of the self to recognize and accept the indifference of the world to its existence draws forth a revenge against this world in the form of what Connolly calls a 'transcendentalization' of the ego. The desires, aims, and purposes of the self are projected into the world and thereby universalized. The stability and safety of one's own identity becomes conflated with finding an order in the world parallel to the order one so desperately searches for, and finds, in oneself. Of course, the most important problem with this process, in Connolly's view, lies in what it leads one to do to those who do not accept the particular order one has embraced. This aspect will be more carefully examined when I deal with Connolly's critique of Augustine. What is most important to understand is Connolly's claim that the disciplines of modern society can be understood as efforts to entrench a particular concept of moral order that itself serves to justify these disciplines.

In contrast to these moral sources founded in a view of the world as ordered and predisposed to human understanding and purposes, Connolly proposes what he calls an ethical attitude towards our relationships with each

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 139.

other and the world. For Connolly it is not necessary to link reverence for life to “some common theistic faith, consensual tradition, transcendental argument, or interior attunement to a deep identity.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, Connolly suggests that ethical sources can be fugitive and unstable “like ‘life’ ‘bodies’ ‘earth’ ‘will to power’ ‘the oblivion of difference’ ‘difference’ ‘resistances’ ‘untamed exteriority’ and ‘untruth.’”<sup>38</sup> These can play a similar structural role to the moral sources Connolly rejects but, in his view, they do not have the same drawbacks. This is a result of their very instability and fugitive nature. Because of this, one is not tempted to derive from them a systematic moral theory or to impute an order to the cosmos.

What Connolly struggles to do is to recognize the need for an ethical orientation towards life without using this as an excuse to project a moral order into the character of the world. Connolly’s ethical attitude is, therefore, antiteleological and alogical. He reads Foucault as someone who attempts to develop an *ontology* instead of an *ontology*.<sup>39</sup> Foucault, by doing this, recognizes the alogical character of being and the arbitrariness of our attempts to read a logic into the nature of the cosmos. It may be true that we cannot survive without ordering our lives in some manner but the major concerns Connolly has are encountered when we forget that this order is arbitrary and without foundation.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Beyond Good and Evil,” 371.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 374.

### The Case Against Augustine

The process of projecting a moral order into the cosmos and the resulting political effects are exemplified, in Connolly's view, in Augustine. Connolly examines Augustine, not as an originator of a moral imperative to search for an order in the self that is recapitulated in the cosmos, but as an example of an imperative that is still present in contemporary political and moral thought. His examination of Augustine is intended to expose the more dangerous tendencies of this orientation and to provide a contrast with Connolly's own proposed alternative.

In Connolly's analysis, Augustine is a proponent of the moral attitude towards life. What is important about Augustine's articulation of this attitude is his linking of it to the practice of confession. In this practice, Augustine looks within himself to discover the hidden truths of his own motives and intentions and comes to an understanding of his own nature as God's work in his life is revealed to him. This confession is also a never-ending and self-renewing process of purification.<sup>40</sup> As one enters into oneself and descends into the hidden depths of the self, one finds that one is never finished with the practice of confession. There are always more truths to uncover and a deeper level of the self into which one is obliged to enter.

As I have outlined above in chapters on Foucault, the practice of confession is one in which the confessor's self is constructed according to the

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<sup>40</sup> The Augustinian Imperative, 67.



order of the confession. Connolly's concerns, however, do not simply involve the use of confession as a justification of disciplinary practices that both entrench and construct the order of the soul. Connolly argues that Augustine's particular practice of confession appears to be unable to resist the temptation of universalizing its findings and institutionalizing its practice. In order for Augustinian confession to have the desired effects of integrating and purifying the soul, it must be directed towards an infinite, absolute and universal deity. It is the grace of this deity that delivers the individual from disintegration and ambiguity or, in Augustine's terms, from sin. In Connolly's view, Augustine seeks deliverance from the tension and ambivalence that is inherent in existence and derives it by projecting a stable and perfect order and a guarantor of that order (i.e. God) into a transcendent realm. He then performs a confessional critique by comparing his own disordered soul to this order. The tension of existence is not thought of as an ineliminable element of human existence but is recast as a personal failure.

A further problem arises when Augustinian confession rubs up against those who articulate this problem in ways that cannot be easily absorbed into Augustine's particular confessional expression. If the deepest purpose of the self is found in its confession to a universal and absolute God, then anything within or outside the self that resists this confession must be excluded, co-opted or annihilated. Connolly argues that an intensification of confession is the proposed Augustinian solution to this when it comes to elements within the individual. The

dark twin of this confession, however, is the process of anathematizing those who represent alternative orientations to existential ambiguity in the description of them as heretics.<sup>41</sup> This was Augustine's own response to both the pagans of his day and those like the Donatists and Pelagians who questioned his own articulation of the Christian faith. This description results in a drive to exclude or normalize one's political opponents.

The alternative that Connolly suggests is an agonistic politics that sees its opponents not as heretics whose existence throws into question its own existence but as rivals who are to be respected. Because those who propose an agonistic politics are alive to the ambiguity and instability of their own existence, they are not, in Connolly's view, thrown into a panic by the challenge put to them by those who oppose them and whom they, perhaps, cannot even completely understand. They expect to find alternative and incommensurable orientations to the world. Connolly's explanatory matrix, as we have described it, places the Augustinian imperative at the root of many of the alternatives available in contemporary political theory, even as they appear to be polar opposites, and suggests, as an

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Heilke in "On Being Ethical without Moral Sadism: Two Readings of Augustine and the Beginnings of the Anabaptist Revolution," *Political Theory* 24:3 (August 1996): 493-517 suggests that Connolly's real problem with Augustine's confessional techniques is when they are universalized and then when they are supported with coercive power. This allows him to maneuver Connolly into becoming a critic of 'Constantinianism' and allows Heilke to bring in Anabaptist sources as an alternative. Connolly's focus on engaging political theorists involves him often in concentrating on issues of coercion and violence in the political realm but, at his best, Connolly resists making the issue of violent coercion the central one. Whether the attitude towards those anathematized is persecution, toleration or management, the process is almost identical. In many ways, Heilke's dependence on the concept of Constantinianism recasts the Foucault/Connolly critique in the terms of state and sovereignty, precisely what they are careful to avoid. As Connolly suggests, the best tools for society's integration of 'others' may be doctors and priests (*The Augustinian Imperative*, 28).

alternative, his own brand of agonistic pluralism unindebted to the moral order on which his opponents are dependent.

#### An Ontology of Peace

Connolly's agonistic politics is described in compelling terms as it is contrasted with political alternatives stemming from the moral imperative exemplified by Augustine and others. Connolly's argument, however, depends on a number of contestable ways of articulating the alternatives. His division of orientations towards the world into moral and ethical and his corresponding descriptions of them is not inevitable and his attempt to establish and defend an 'ontology' rests on assumptions that clearly can be questioned. Connolly does not so much demonstrate his own ontological assumptions about the inescapability of conflict and the unavoidably tragic nature of the cosmos as he attempts to show that those who deny them (like Augustine) display a particularly insidious and resentful denial of them. This section will look at John Milbank's alternative interpretation of Augustine that challenges, not simply Connolly's interpretation of Augustine, but the assumptions underlying it and the entire interpretive matrix he uses to understand contemporary political theory. It will be argued that Milbank's interpretation of Augustine provides richer resources for coming to terms with precisely the contemporary political issues about which Foucault and Connolly are most concerned.

The purpose of this section is not to point out the problems with Connolly's interpretation of Augustine. Several commentators have disputed the

accuracy of Connolly's reading of Augustine or the fairness of his focus.<sup>42</sup> Even when Connolly's possible misreadings of Augustine are corrected, however, significant areas of fundamental disagreement remain and it is these areas that I want to concentrate on in comparing Connolly's reading of Augustine with Milbank's. Milbank provides us with an interpretation of Augustine that may allow him to resist the pitfalls Connolly rejects in his description of the moral orientation to the world.

Milbank's interpretation of Augustine comes at the end of a sweeping account of Western intellectual history and is used by him to propose, like Connolly, an interpretive dichotomy of orientations towards existence. Instead of distinguishing between commitments to moral or ethical sources for action, however, Milbank makes the choice one between an ontology of violence and one of peace. Milbank's basic argument is that the history of political theory since Machiavelli is rooted in an ontology of violence that makes conflict and force fundamental in political life. Foucault and Connolly are, on this reading, simply some of the latest representatives in a long line of theorists who are carrying forward an ontology of violence.

In order to understand the contrast that Milbank presents to Connolly, it may perhaps be easiest to understand his thought in terms of a series of refusals of the choices Connolly offers. Recall that Connolly contrasts a universalized and

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<sup>42</sup> See Robert Dodaro "Augustine's Secular City" in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless eds. Augustine and His Critics (London: Routledge, 2000) and J. Joyce Schuld, Foucault and Augustine (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

‘transcendentalized’ ontology with his own attempt to develop an ontology that dispenses with the drive to read our own desire for logic and order into the nature of the universe. Milbank’s own attempt to construct an ontology is subtly different, however, than either of the alternatives Connolly presents. As Milbank writes, he seeks “to elaborate a Christian *logos*, or a reason that bears the marks of the incarnation and pentecost. At the same time, it seeks to define a Christian *Sittlichkeit*, a moral practice embedded in the historical emergence of a new, and unique community. Both tasks, indeed, are in turn situated in the re-narration of Christian emergence, a story which only constitutes itself as a story by re-narrating previous stories, both of past history, and of the relation of creation to Godhead.”<sup>43</sup> Milbank sees his own attempt at ontology not as a drive towards mastery disguising itself as a more accurate description of the actual workings of the universe but as an attempt to theorize an ontology that enters the world in the person of Christ and the community he founds. Instead of a transcendentalizing narcissism, Milbank sees his re-narration embedded in a community practice that refuses the practices of mastery and *dominium* altogether. Connolly’s inability to see this in Augustine is, for Milbank, a symptom of the ontology of violence he assumes.

Milbank also rejects, and in this he is similar to both Foucault and Connolly, a foundationalism that would attempt to uncover ‘deeper’ or ‘hidden’ truths beneath the stories about the world we tell ourselves. This foundationalism

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<sup>43</sup> Theology and Social Theory, 381.

in theology can take the form either of grounding faith “in a series of propositions about ‘objects’ available to our rational gaze,”<sup>44</sup> or equally in “the idea that Christian beliefs are somehow ‘expressions’ of experiences entirely preceding those beliefs.”<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, Milbank suggests what he calls metanarrative realism. By this he means that narratives are the only way in which we can orient ourselves within the world and, in fact, the only way in which the world, and ourselves, make an appearance at all. As he writes, “narrative is our primary mode of inhabiting the world, and it characterizes the way the world happens to us, not, primarily, the cultural world which humans make. There is, therefore, no special ‘human’ sphere of narrative action, and no sphere of ‘ethics’ which uniquely characterizes human life.”<sup>46</sup> For Milbank, there is nothing that stands behind the narrative by which we could test its accuracy. The only considerations that can persuade one to adopt one narrative rather than another (when two or more come into conflict) are those that appeal to one’s aesthetic sense of what makes a narrative persuasive. This is particularly the case at the level of metanarratives, or overarching narratives that are “seen as the key to the interpretation and regulation of all other stories.”<sup>47</sup> It is at this level that Milbank wants to contrast the Christian metanarrative assuming an ontology of peace with a collection of metanarratives associated with an ontology of violence.

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<sup>44</sup> Theology and Social Theory, 382.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Theology and Social Theory, 359.

<sup>47</sup> Theology and Social Theory, 386.

Milbank argues that this ontology of violence is rooted in a particular narrative or series of narratives all dependent on violence as a basic assumption. In contrast to these narratives, Milbank offers his own narrative that is not dependent on a violent ontology. Milbank does not believe that it is possible to refute the narrative offered by Foucault and Connolly as any attempt to do so must adopt a dialectical rationality that depends on the very ontology it attempts to refute.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Milbank suggests that “the relationship of God to the world becomes, after Christianity, a rhetorical one.”<sup>49</sup> Because of this, Milbank offers not a refutation of the ontology of violence but an alternative narrative that assumes an ontology of peace. Because the assumptions of Connolly and Foucault are as contestable as the assumptions of the ontology they attack, Milbank wants to show that his assumption of the priority of peace to violence is just as plausible, and more persuasive, than its alternative. Milbank thus devotes himself to ‘out-narrating’ the antique, liberal, and post-modern narratives he accuses of dependence on a privileging of violence over peace.

Milbank sees an example of this type of re-narration in the way Augustine traces out the history of the Earthly City and the City of God. Augustine’s creative leap in the City of God, Milbank argues, is to retell the history of Rome and its gods as a contrast to the history of a city that has existed alongside it. Augustine’s attempt is to shift the locus of history away from the Roman story of empires and *dominium* and interpret it within the broader narrative framework of

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<sup>48</sup> Theology and Social Theory, 429-30.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

biblical theology. To do this, Augustine gives an account of history that does not view it as the resolution of conflict. For Milbank's Augustine, peace is not the result of this resolution of conflict; if it were it would be dependent on this conflict. Instead, peace is an eschatological goal revealed in God's work in Christ and the defining vision of the Church.

The story Augustine tells is of a contrast between two cities devoted to two contrasting loves. The Earthly City is made up of those who "love themselves, even to the contempt of God."<sup>50</sup> The inhabitants of this city are driven by their passions and these passions can only be controlled by coercion and force. The peace (if it can be called peace) that is maintained by this coercion is for the sake of satisfying these passions. The continuation of the struggle is therefore guaranteed as only violence is able to constrain the violence of the passions and the endless cycle of desire they initiate. The violent origin of this city is represented mythically by the murder of Remus by Romulus at the founding of the city of Rome. The Roman gods are then conceived of as those who constrain a violence that is always lurking at the edge of the city's walls.

Augustine's portrait of the City of God contrasts sharply with this account of the Earthly City. It is made up of those who love God, even to the contempt of self.<sup>51</sup> This God, Milbank emphasizes, is understood as initiating a creation, not as the violent ordering of chaos but a creation *ex nihilo* flowing forth from plenitude. This ontological assumption finds its mythical representation in the

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<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. John O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1972). Book XIV, 28.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



memory of the murdered Abel, killed by Cain the founder of the first city. As Milbank puts it, “[w]hereas the *civitas terrena* inherits its power from the conqueror of a fraternal rival, the ‘city of God on pilgrimage through this world’ founds itself not in a succession of power but upon the memory of the murdered brother.”<sup>52</sup> This narrative, and the ontological assumptions that undergird it, allow for the founding of a peaceful city, constituted by practices that sustain this peace.

Milbank points out that Augustine’s denial of the possibility of true justice in pagan society is based on his assertion that the pagans fail to give proper worship to the true God.<sup>53</sup> This does not mean simply that the failure of the pagans was in the area of religious practice as Augustine proposes that the true worship of God consists in the mutual forgiveness of sins. As Milbank writes, “[t]he pagans were for Augustine unjust, because they did not give priority to peace and forgiveness.”<sup>54</sup> For Milbank, the practice of forgiveness is made possible by the ontology of peace he has outlined and that he believes is narrated by Augustine. This ontology allows us “to unthink the necessity of violence, and exposes the manner in which the assumption of an inhibition of an always prior violence helps to preserve violence in motion.”<sup>55</sup> It is this offer of forgiveness made possible by a faith in the priority of peace to violence that suggests that exclusion, co-optation, elimination or even respectful rivalry are not the only

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<sup>52</sup> *Theology and Social Theory*, 392.

<sup>53</sup> *City of God*, XIX, 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Theology and Social Theory*, 409.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

alternatives one has when confronted with difference either within oneself or in others. As Milbank writes, “given the persistence of the sin of others (as well as our own sinfulness, which we cannot all at once overcome, but remains alien to our better desires) there is only one way to respond to them which would not itself be sinful and domineering, and that is to anticipate heaven, and act as if their sin was not there, by offering reconciliation.”<sup>56</sup> This practice is what the organization and assumptions of the ecclesial community are intended to allow.

The importance of Milbank’s work within the context of this work lies in the suggestion it provides for an alternative to Connolly’s development of the political problem of the encounter with otherness. Connolly suggests that his own political ideal of relationships of agonistic respect and rivalry is preferable to the options opened up by those who privilege concord over conflict. These options appear to be limited to the exclusion and anathematizing of those who cannot be absorbed easily into one’s construal of reality. Milbank’s development of Augustine, however, appears to suggest that there are alternative ways of construing identity and difference that are not indebted to an ontology of violence and are therefore not simply sublimations of violent desires for domination and control.

Milbank’s account of the ontology underlying the work of those such as Foucault and Connolly is not, however, completely adequate. He is overly casual about distinguishing between an ontology of peace and one of violence and his

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

attempt to characterize his opponents as assuming this violent ontology leads him, at times, to misread them.<sup>57</sup> Foucault's suggestion of the possibility of erotic and pedagogical relations of power that are without domination is an indication that he cannot simply be dismissed as assuming an ontology of violence.<sup>58</sup> Foucault's belief in the ubiquity and inescapability of power relations and his attempt to understand difference 'differentially' cannot quite be reduced to an example of an ontology of violence.

The final element of this dissertation will involve an attempt to interpret Augustine along the lines of Milbank but in a way that responds to the issues of discipline, normalization, and depoliticization raised by Foucault and Connolly.

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<sup>57</sup> This point is made by David Toole in *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 77-87 with respect to Milbank's reading of Gilles Deleuze. Milbank's misreading of Foucault is quite similar.

<sup>58</sup> This point was addressed in the above chapter.

## Chapter 5: Augustine and the Subject

The preceding chapter was an attempt to draw the discussion into more direct engagement with contemporary interpretations of Augustine. William Connolly and John Milbank read Augustine carefully but in deeply contrasting ways. Connolly's attack on Augustine for his 'transcendental egoism' and as a representative of the defenders of moral order is met, to some degree, by Milbank's defence of Augustine as a thinker attempting to trace out a politics that does not assume a fundamental priority of violence to peace. In the end, it seems that Connolly is unable to think difference without also thinking violence. And, as has been argued by others<sup>1</sup> and emerges in Connolly's own work,<sup>2</sup> when met with this violence, even the agonists resort to the coercive and disciplinary measures of a police force. Milbank's evocation of Augustine's vision of a City founded on the victims of a violence that can only be parasitical on a prior peace and founded on a non-disciplinary love that flows from God is an attempt to develop an alternative to a violent agonistics.

In this chapter I will begin an attempt to develop an interpretation of Augustine that responds to the problems raised by Foucault and Connolly. To this point, it is hoped, the argument has been clear. I have argued, basically, that Foucault and Connolly are right about the shifting nature of power, from a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Thomas Heilke, "On Being Ethical without Moral Sadism: Two Readings of Augustine and the Beginnings of the Anabaptist Revolution," Political Theory 24:3 (August 1996) 502-3.

<sup>2</sup> William Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 163, n. 35; William Connolly, Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 120.

primarily prohibitive force to one that is creative and disciplinary, and about the growing danger of the processes of depoliticization and normalization. They are also right to focus particularly and with some suspicion on the realm of sexuality and its place in modern political life. Foucault and Connolly have provided an insightful set of diagnostic tools for an interpretation of contemporary political life. The significant departure I take from their work, however, will begin to be fleshed out in this chapter. It is my argument that the responses they suggest to these problems, the practices of aesthetic self-creation and an agonistic politics, do not adequately address these issues. The practices cannot successfully perform the work expected of them.

The concluding chapters of this thesis will attempt to use the resources found in Augustine to derive a response to the political problems Foucault and Connolly demonstrate so clearly. On the other hand, I will also be forced to outline specifically the ways in which the particular abuses Foucault and, especially, Connolly point out in an Augustinian outlook can be avoided. Foucault and Connolly are rightly suspicious of several tendencies within Augustine's thought and it is my assertion that taking seriously these suspicions will strengthen an Augustinian political model. The only adequate way to respond is to develop a theologically sensitive interpretation of Augustine, a project in which neither Foucault nor Connolly engaged.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The theological shortcomings of Foucault are pointed out in Jeremy R Carrette, Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality (London: Routledge, 2000), 27. Connolly's lack of theological sensitivity is criticized in J. Joyce Schuld, Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 213-8 and

It is at this point that it might be best for me to state explicitly the relation of this work to a text recently published, also on Foucault and Augustine. J. Joyce Schuld's book Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love is an attempt to develop a conversation between the two thinkers that shows how much they share. Instead of reading them as intellectual threats against each other, Schuld argues that the work of each thinker can be used to fill out the gaps and extend the insights of the other. To this end, she argues that, though there may be innumerable disagreements between the two, their works are not fundamentally at odds and each can benefit from an engagement with the other.

Schuld's work has a great deal of insight and develops a number of creative and quite valid bases for comparison. Foucault and Augustine share rich and complex accounts of subjectivity, moral decision-making and responsibility. They each recognize the ambiguity of acting in the world, both in terms of the human capacity for self-deception and the inability to predict or control the consequences of our actions. Both thinkers challenge many of the assumptions and dichotomies that govern the political and moral structures of their respective societies by subverting and undermining the rhetorical movements at work in relatively unquestioned discourses. And, finally, both thinkers proposed techniques through which one could perform a work on oneself that could change one's own relationship to these practices and that were intended to have important

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in Robert Dodaro, "Augustine's Secular City," in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless eds., Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner (London: Routledge, 2000) 231-259.

political consequences. Schuld has done an admirable job of bringing these comparisons forward in the thought of both Foucault and Augustine and of analyzing them with insight and sensitivity.

With that said, however, it is also true that a great rift remains between the work of Foucault and Augustine, a rift to which Schuld often alludes, but does not fully analyze. This rift includes differences such as Augustine's insistence on the need to rely completely on the grace of God for the enactment of individual or social transformation, or even for the desire for this transformation. Foucault, on the other hand, as we have seen, proposes an ethic of aesthetic self creation that implies a confidence in, or at least a reliance on, human capacities for this that Augustine does not accept. Further, Foucault's bracketing of meaning in his analyses of discourse and his eschewing of purposive or teleological language flies in the face of Augustine's declaration of hope in the eschatological meaning of history. Schuld acknowledges each of these differences<sup>4</sup> but either fails to develop or, at times, dismisses their importance. To my mind these differences so colour the work of the two thinkers that they cannot be left in the background. Any adequate engagement between Foucault and Augustine must not only acknowledge these differences but recognize the significance of them to allow the two thinkers to engage on these profoundly important issues as well. Although Schuld is right that there are many ways in which Foucault and Augustine can

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Schuld., 17-8, 93, 100, 103, and 128.

complement each other's thought, on some of the most important questions with which we are faced, they could not be further apart.

One of the most egregious examples of Schuld's lack of engagement with the significant and substantive differences between Foucault and Augustine lies in her discussion of the similarities between Foucault's call for the 'disappearance of Man' and Augustine's 'ethic of humility.'<sup>5</sup> In this section, she argues that Foucault's attack on the image of humanity, which he outlines in The Order of Things and which he thinks may one day be washed away completely, is not significantly out of step with Augustine's own critiques of prideful social patterns in Roman society. In fact, Schuld argues that Augustine's 'self-emptying' practice of confession is a practice that can be 'decentring' and keep one mindful of one's dependence on God.<sup>6</sup> For Schuld, and, she argues, perhaps for Augustine as well, the 'disappearance of Man' Foucault foresees is not something to be decried but "the washing away of a human image of our own making can be experienced as a confirmation of creatureliness and the need to depend on God's sustaining love."<sup>7</sup>

There is something that, on the surface, appears quite similar between these two ways of thinking about the human subject and this can lead us to see them as, if not complementary, at least able to support each other in their quite different projects. A closer look, however, suggests that these similarities do not

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<sup>5</sup> Schuld, 125.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 126.



extend below the surface and they disguise a radical and fundamental disagreement. Schuld's treatment of these two obscures the fact that Foucault's attack on the social construction of 'Man' is betrayed if 'Man' is erased only to be replaced by what Schuld calls a 'confirmation of creatureliness.'<sup>8</sup> This is because Foucault's attack on the image 'Man' is not simply an attack on the pridefulness of the assumption that we can have a full knowledge of the norms implied in this figure and can therefore force others into its mold. Foucault is attacking 'Man' as part of an attack on understandings of human happiness or fulfillment that support an ethical eudaimonism. As he declares in support of this reading, "happiness does not exist. The happiness of man even less so."<sup>9</sup> This eudaimonistic drive towards defining and outlining human flourishing and using these models to develop an understanding of morality lies beneath both the 'Man' that Foucault decries and the 'confirmation of creatureliness' that Augustine defends. Schuld's emphasis on the common ground between Foucault and Augustine inhibits her acknowledgment of this fundamental disagreement between them. In spite of the language of self-emptying that Augustine's practice of confession can be made to support, he does not escape from, nor does he want to, a eudaimonism that is precisely what Foucault most strongly resists.

The pivotal issue in the conflict between Foucault and Augustine in this area is not simply what their hopes are for the results of their thematically similar

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "Who Are You, Professor Foucault?" in Religion and Culture, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 101.

practices of self-emptying. A true engagement between Foucault and Augustine requires a resolution of the issue of eudaimonism. Augustine's thought has much in common with Foucault's but in order to withstand the Foucauldian critique it must either be purged of its commitment to human fulfilment (after which I would argue it could hardly continue to be called Augustinian) or it must find resources within itself to resist the Foucauldian attacks on both humanity and happiness and to demonstrate that Foucault's disavowal of these concepts is ultimately incoherent. It is the latter of these projects that I intend to pursue in the remainder of this chapter.

The challenge in the project I am outlining is that of maintaining a commitment to Augustine's vision of human happiness and its moral importance while simultaneously addressing the Foucauldian critique of humanism. The danger is that while rejecting the coherence of Foucault's vision of aesthetic self-creation, one falls back into a defence of the normalizing and disciplining practices that Foucault helps us to recognize and refuse. This chapter represents an attempt to develop an understanding of the importance Augustine places on the order of one's loves (*ordo amoris*) that allows for the resistance of bio-power and its disciplinary and normalizing institutions and practices without falling into arbitrary and incoherent aesthetic commitments.

The following chapter has several purposes. I will first attempt to outline a number of similarities between the Foucault's understanding of desire and Augustine's understanding of love. There are several comparisons that can be

made between these concepts and the part they play in the thinkers' respective anthropologies. These points, however, must be developed within the context of the striking contrast that Augustine's insistence on the need for a dramatic re-ordering of loves presents when compared to Foucault's anthropology. Reflections on the re-ordering of loves inspire both Foucault and Augustine to launch critiques of their respective forms of cultural organization. I will examine Augustine's criticism of Roman imperial society and its similarities to Foucault's criticisms of modern society by means of an analysis of the cultural formation of the subject's loves and the political implications this holds. Although both Augustine and Foucault provide us with tools for cultural criticism and self-criticism, the grounding of this criticism is starkly different. I will attempt to outline these differences as I examine an implicit Augustinian critique of the Foucauldian self-constituting subject. This critique will depend on a reading of Augustine's Trinitarian account of the re-ordering of the subject's love found in De Trinitate. I will end the chapter with an analysis of Augustine's practice of confession as a means of re-ordering the subject's loves and opening oneself up to a transformation of oneself as one is given a new nature by God. In this way, the practice of confession can be understood as a technology of the self loosely defined. It will be important, however, to keep in mind the significant areas of difference between Foucault and Augustine if this phrase is not to be misleading. Confession, according to Augustine, is not an act of aesthetic self-creation and it cannot be brought under this rubric without falling into incoherence. It is my

argument that an authentic understanding of confession can only be maintained alongside an account of Augustine's understanding of the importance of the doctrine of the Incarnation. For that reason, the chapter will end with a brief exposition of the place of this doctrine in Augustine's thought.

It will be the attempt of the final two chapters to outline some of the fundamental differences between Foucault and Augustine and to defend an Augustinian response to the political problems that Foucault's analysis has pinpointed. The first of the two chapters will attempt an analysis of some of the links in Augustine between desire, confession and his understanding of the Incarnation. Augustine's analysis of desire in Confessions has much in common with Foucault's use of the same concept.<sup>10</sup> For Augustine, our desires are what make us irreducibly relational beings. Our needs and our loves for others and for God bind us to them in ways that are both joyful and, because of the fragility of all human relational ties, laced with danger. Like Foucault, Augustine is aware of the creative capability of social relations and the ways in which these 'power relations,' to use Foucault's terminology, can implant deeply within the self desires that recapitulate and entrench these relations as they integrate the individual into a pre-existing set of practices and discourses. Also like Foucault, Augustine attempts to undermine the power of socially implanted desires through practices that challenge the claim that these desires are 'natural' or 'foundational.'

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<sup>10</sup> This point and an extended demonstration of it is made in Chapter III of Schuld, Foucault and Augustine.

Confession can indeed be compared to Foucault's technologies of the self<sup>11</sup> and understood as a practice through which Augustine attempts to allow a work to be performed on his soul that will both detach it from certain desires as well as inflame it with love for God. The contrasts that Augustine's practice of confession has with Foucault's technologies of the self are just as significant as the similarities, however. In this chapter I will attempt to outline the ways in which Augustine's practice of confession addresses the concerns Foucault has with the ordering of desires through social relations of power. To be complete, however, I must also describe how Augustine's confessional practice can avoid the dangers of the domestication of erotic language as it is placed in an established and stable order or of the transcendental egoism that Connolly attributes to Augustine. It is my view that these two dangers of confessional language can only be met with an analysis of the importance that Augustine gives to the doctrine of the Incarnation in his thought. The final section of this chapter will attempt to give a fuller expression of this element of Augustine's thought in preparation for the final chapter dealing with Augustine's thought on political society and ecclesiology.

#### The Disorder of Desire

It is impossible to read the Confessions without recognizing that its most consistent theme is Augustine's struggle with the disorder of his desires. From his first seemingly misanthropic reflections on an infant's attempt to get what is

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<sup>11</sup> This point is made in James K.A. Smith, "How (Not) To Tell a Secret: Interiority and the Strategy of 'Confession,'" American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly LXXIV: 1 (2000), 148.

bad for it and revenging itself on those who deny it this by weeping,<sup>12</sup> to his descriptions of his early education,<sup>13</sup> Augustine sees, with hindsight, a perversion in his loves that introduced him to a constant cycle of grasping and misery. In all of these reflections Augustine shifts his attention effortlessly between the desires of the individual to “bend another to one’s will”<sup>14</sup> and the reality of the social context, in which the “moral conventions of the world he entered”<sup>15</sup> held a higher view of the ability to describe one’s vices with beautiful language than to “make mistakes describing virtues.”<sup>16</sup> Augustine refuses to draw a clear line between individual and social responsibility, resisting the temptation to distinguish them from each other. In this way, Augustine demonstrates the possibility of an alliance between his own thought and the analysis Foucault provides of the dynamic and intersubjective nature of relations of power and their identity with human desires. To this degree, Schuld is quite right to develop an analysis of the two thinkers based on the comparison between their reflections on the links between love and power.<sup>17</sup>

There are several other similarities between Augustine’s treatment of his loves and Foucault’s more general understanding of desire. In an important description of his struggle with conversion, Augustine writes, “[t]he consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit

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<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) I.vi.

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.*, I.ix.

<sup>14</sup> *Conf.*, I.viii.

<sup>15</sup> *Conf.*, I.xix.

<sup>16</sup> *Conf.*, I.xviii.

<sup>17</sup> Schuld, esp. Chapter I.

to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint.”<sup>18</sup> It is not difficult to draw parallels between this description of the power of habit and Foucault’s descriptions of the disciplining institution of the prison. The power of habit for Augustine and discipline for Foucault flows throughout the person’s body and soul, binding them together in service to passion or desire. The power of this passion is not understood as repressive but rather lays down patterns that reach deeply into the subject. Augustine’s language of ‘bondage’ and ‘restraint,’ though on the surface evocative of the repressive hypothesis Foucault rejects, in fact does not refer to the repression of desire by power but to the formation of desires entrenched in the subject.

As Augustine continues his story he writes “[t]he new will, which was beginning to be within me a will to serve you freely and to enjoy you, God, the only sure source of pleasure, was not yet strong enough to conquer my older will, which had the strength of old habit.”<sup>19</sup> Augustine’s response to the problem of his disordered and enslaving passions does not rely on repression or discipline but on a desire to be inflamed with the love of God. In this passage, however, we can also see some of the differences between Foucault and Augustine when it comes to their understandings of desire. I have argued above that Foucault’s claim that the sexual ethic of the intensification of pleasure he suggests in his History of Sexuality should not be understood to imply a view that pleasure and its

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<sup>18</sup> Conf., VIII, v.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

intensification are politically unproblematic.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, Foucault intends to propose the intensification of pleasure as an ethic that can resist and subvert tendencies towards ethics of discipline and normalization. Foucault wants to detach pleasure from a concrete model of the subject and use its intensification to undermine the unquestioned assumption of the validity of this model. For Foucault, there is no question of unmasking and liberating a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ subject underneath the accretions of habit or unresisted passion. Augustine’s reliance on the language of bondage and restraint, although it is not founded on a simple repressive hypothesis, is still indebted to a model of subjectivity understood as genuine. For Augustine, the new will struggling with the force of habit is a spiritual will, not because it is associated with the soul as opposed to the body, but because it comes from God.<sup>21</sup> This spiritual will is associated with Augustine’s true nature but, significantly, this true nature and its will are not understood as immanent within Augustine’s subjectivity. Instead they are a divine gift received fully only when offered up again to God, their source.

Another of the more intriguing bases for comparison between Foucault and Augustine can also be indicated by means of an interpretation of the text quoted above. Augustine’s suspicion of pleasure and its collusion with passion in forming habits that bind both body and soul is matched by a strongly positive account of the pleasure found in God, whom Augustine calls “the only sure source

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<sup>20</sup> See above, chapter 3, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> CD XIII. 4,5.



of pleasure.”<sup>22</sup> In many ways, as Margaret Miles has pointed out, Augustine’s ethic can also be called an ethic of the intensification of pleasure. For Augustine, however, a pleasure as fleeting and as wracked with uncertainty and contingency as the orgasm cannot be called true pleasure. As Miles writes, “Augustine’s model of pleasure is one in which rest, peace, and equilibrium is held together with emotional intensity and permanence.”<sup>23</sup> For Augustine, a pleasure like this must have its source in God or risk an impermanence that taints even its most intense moments. This point, however, can be more effectively made with an example that takes us outside the specifically sexual realm and uses more broadly erotic categories.

Relatively early in Augustine’s life he experiences the sudden death of a close childhood friend. He is consumed with grief and describes his feelings in rich detail. The lesson that emerges from his experience is the futility he suffers in loving his mortal friend as if he would never die. The grief Augustine suffers at this time he interprets as a reflection of the bitterness of his soul even when he is not explicitly in grief. He writes, “I was in misery, and misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost. Then the soul becomes aware of the misery which is its actual condition even before it loses them.”<sup>24</sup> It is at this point, in the midst of the self-reflection his grief inspires in him, that Augustine admits that “I had become to myself a

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<sup>22</sup> Conf. VIII.v.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret R. Miles, Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 37.

<sup>24</sup> Conf. IV. vi.

vast problem.”<sup>25</sup> Augustine repeats this phrase after his conversion and, in fact, with reference to the state of his soul at the time of the writing of the Confessions, indicating that the struggle to love in a way appropriate to what is loved and always in reference to God, the only thing worthy of our unqualified love, is something that stayed with him all his life.

The lesson that Augustine must learn from this experience is one that he repeats in a pastiche of Scripture verses and his own thoughts. “Happy is the person who loves you and his friend in you, and his enemy because of you. Though left alone, he loses none dear to him; for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost.”<sup>26</sup> And in an even stronger statement with several parallels throughout the Confessions Augustine writes, “For wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you, it is fixed in sorrows, even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you.”<sup>27</sup> Because of the fragility and fleeting nature of all temporal goods, including the mortal life of all friends and lovers, the attachment of one’s soul to these only propels one into the misery that particular griefs expose but don’t create. The only release from this misery is the embrace of the eternal God (in whom we are held, not whom we hold) and the love of all temporal goods only as they are held within this primary relationship of the soul to God, its source and sustenance.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., IV. iv.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., IV. ix.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., IV. x. See also II. v, VII. xi and X. xxvii.

This example of Augustine’s struggle to order his loves appropriately leads us into a discussion of his well-known distinction between use and enjoyment (*usus* and *fruitio*). This distinction is an important one in Augustine’s thought and, as we shall see, is in the background as Augustine discusses his reaction to the death of his friend. It is in the first book of De doctrina Christiana that Augustine discusses this distinction most fully and explicitly in reference to the relations of people to each other. He defines the terms in the following way: “To enjoy something is to cling to it with love for its own sake. To use something, however, is to employ it in obtaining that which you love, provided that it is worthy of love.”<sup>28</sup> Of course, the use of something to obtain what is unworthy of one’s love is not use at all but rather abuse. The distinction appears clear enough and from what we already know of Augustine it is not surprising that he later argues that “only those [things] are to be enjoyed which we have described as being eternal and immutable; others are to be used so that we may be able to enjoy those.”<sup>29</sup> It is only in those things that are eternal and immutable that one can find one’s true blessedness and therefore it is only these things that one may appropriately love for their own sake. We have already seen in Confessions the consequences of loving something that is mutable as if it can bring one to true blessedness. This love is already a kind of misery, even if it is unrecognized until the object loved is lost.

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<sup>28</sup> Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) I.iv.4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, I.xxii.20.

The proper love of things therefore is dependent on a certain kind of judgment. The proper use of things towards the enjoyment of true goods can only be discerned through wisdom, i.e. the proper use of the judgment of reason. This reason, however, meets its limit when it comes up against the eternal and immutable good. As Augustine writes in De diversis quaestionibus, “Only about God does reason make no judgment, because it is in relation to God that it judges all the rest. It does not use God but enjoys God. For God is not to be related to anything else.”<sup>30</sup>

The major issue that perplexes Augustine about the distinction between use and enjoyment is under which category to classify our relationships with other human beings. The Scriptural injunction to love one’s neighbour and the high view that Scripture has of human community in the Church makes Augustine uncomfortable with the implication that others are to be ‘used.’ As Oliver O’Donovan argues, Augustine seems dissatisfied with his preliminary conclusion that love of neighbour fits under the category of use.<sup>31</sup> This understanding bears along with it too many associations of pure instrumentality and Augustine hesitates to describe human relationships only in these terms. Augustine concludes his discussion with a formulation more similar to the one quoted above in his treatment of friendship in Confessions. He shifts his language slightly to account for his discomfort with the implication that others are to be used

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<sup>30</sup> Augustine, Eighty-three Different Questions, trans. David L. Mosher (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, “Usus and Fruitio in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I,” Journal of Theological Studies 33:2 (1982), 361-97.

instrumentally and writes that “the greatest reward is that we enjoy Him [God] and that all of us who enjoy Him may enjoy one another in Him.”<sup>32</sup> Again, the important qualification of love or enjoyment “in God” modifies the concept.

The intention of this modification is to transform the discussion from one concerned with the struggle of the individual to order her own loves into one focused on the binding of the human community together in the love of God. In what may be his most poignant description of the enjoyment of one another in God, Augustine describes the integration of the believer into the Body of Christ. He writes that “by loving he [the believer] also himself becomes a member and by love comes to be situated in the structure of the Body of Christ, and there will be one Christ loving himself. For when the members love one another, the Body loves itself.”<sup>33</sup> For Augustine, the love of others must not be reduced to either the instrumental use of another for another purpose (even if this is a good purpose) or to the enjoyment of another person if this means that one’s blessedness is found in this person. Instead of these options, Augustine proposes not simply a balancing of loves or a mean between extremes but an inherently social resolution guaranteed by the prior and sustaining love of God. At the heart of his description of the Heavenly City, Augustine depicts the peace of the body and soul of the individual but then moves on to explain that “the peace of the Heavenly City is a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God,

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<sup>32</sup> On Christian Doctrine. I.xxxii.35.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, Tractates on the First Epistle of John, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) 10.3.

and a mutual fellowship in God; the peace of the whole universe is the tranquillity of order – and order is the arrangement of things equal and unequal in a pattern which assigns to each its proper position.”<sup>34</sup>

In many ways, this Augustinian vision of the tranquility of order and the proper placement of each of the elements of the Heavenly City is precisely the target of the most rigorous critique by Foucault and Connolly. For them, this vision is an attempt to escape the inevitable tragedy of human life by projecting one’s own wishes for a perfect world into either an otherworldly heaven or an eschatological future. The anxiety caused by this tragic character of human life is reinterpreted as a flaw in oneself or in others and, often, in both. The vision of this perfect world then becomes the motivation for desperate strategies of exclusion and normalization practiced on others and on oneself.

It must be understood, however, that an eschatological future world such as Augustine imagines is only one of the most egregious examples of this process of resentment and normalization. The “Augustinian imperative,” as Connolly calls it, can operate as effectively in the absence of eschatological aspirations. Connolly argues that what he calls moral sources of thought and action are examples of this Augustinian imperative and ought to be replaced with the ethical sources he suggests.<sup>35</sup> This is similar to Foucault’s suggestion that Man is the last myth to be destroyed (partially through his own iconoclastic project).<sup>36</sup> His

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<sup>34</sup> CD, XIX.13.

<sup>35</sup> *The Augustinian Imperative*, ch. 5, “Beyond the Moral Imperative.”

<sup>36</sup> “Who Are You, Professor Foucault,” 102.

attacks on humanism and even on human happiness are a part of his project of undermining what Connolly calls moral sources.

An Augustinian response to these attacks must address a number of issues raised by Foucault and Connolly. In answer I will first attempt to show that Augustine's eschatology and his distinction between use and enjoyment give him a perspective from which to criticize Roman imperial aspirations and the 'rhetoric of glory'<sup>37</sup> associated with these attitudes. This part of my project will continue into the next chapter on Augustine's ecclesiology. Secondly, I will attempt to show that Augustine's model of subjectivity found in De Trinitate contains an implicit critique of Foucault's model of subjectivity and Connolly's use of the term identity. Finally, I will argue that Augustine's eschatology and his doctrine of the Incarnation allow him to avoid some of the most important criticisms launched at him by Foucault and Connolly.

#### The Social Implantation of Desire

Augustine's inability to refrain from enjoying what he ought only to use is responsible for his frustration and despair. It is also a tendency that allows him to be swept up into political and social practices that introduce him into a circle of futility and despair. The use/enjoyment dichotomy also becomes the ground of a critique of Roman political society that Augustine applies to himself as he is formed within his society, his family and the Roman Empire in its religious and

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<sup>37</sup> A term I borrow from Dodaro's essay "Augustine's Secular City".

political practices. This basis for critique has no correlative in Foucault or Connolly and, as I will argue, this significantly impairs their critical value.

It is important in studying Augustine to recognize the ways in which his analysis of his disordered desires and his struggle to reorient them towards God is part of an implicit critique of the political and social context of Roman imperialism. One of the most important examples of this critique is Augustine's experience as both a student and a teacher of rhetoric. The desires inculcated in him as a student and that drive him towards a career in rhetoric that supports the political and imperial power structures of his time are a constant theme in the Confessions. His first reflections on his own attitude towards his studies are filled with insight into the complexity of the relationships between beauty, education and the vices of the society into which he was being introduced. Augustine recognizes that he was justly punished for neglecting his studies in order to pursue childish games with his friends.<sup>38</sup> His own description of his participation in these games demonstrates his desire to win at them even if it meant that he cheated, lied or "let [his] rage have free range rather than to give ground."<sup>39</sup> The education that he was being given, however, was not intended to draw him towards higher or better things than these games but, instead, introduced him to adult pursuits that were just as trivial and vicious. He offers a particularly poignant example, "the schoolmaster who caned me was behaving no better than I when, after being refuted by a fellow-teacher in some pedantic question, he was

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<sup>38</sup> Conf., I:ix.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I:xix.



more tormented by jealousy and envy than I when my opponent overcame me in a ball-game.”<sup>40</sup> The corporal punishment that is inflicted on Augustine in punishment for avoiding his studies is intended to encourage his learning so that he can earn his living with the skills of rhetoric and become as gifted as the schoolmaster he mentions, and just as deeply implicated in the pedantry and torment of jealousy and envy. Yet somehow Augustine’s fear of punishment motivates him to a genuine petitioning of God, whose aid he desired to help him escape a beating. Augustine seems to be half-smiling condescendingly at these prayers but he never doubts their authenticity or that they make up a part of the confession that he has practiced throughout his life and is continuing in the text he now writes.

As his education continues he describes the goal of his studies as “leading [him] to distinction as an advocate in the law courts, where one’s reputation is high in proportion to one’s success in deceiving people.”<sup>41</sup> His success in his studies is only a success in the mendacity and deceit entrenched in the structures of the society in which he lives. As he writes, “This was the society in which at a vulnerable age I was to study the textbooks on eloquences. I wanted to distinguish myself as an orator for a damnable and conceited purpose, namely delight in human vanity.”<sup>42</sup> The desire to be praised by others and therefore to feel as though one is loved has become a driving force in Augustine’s life and one

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., I, xix.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., III, iii.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., III, iv.

that, he will come to recognize, compels him to support the very political institutions of a society of which he becomes one of the harshest critics.

Augustine's encounter with the beggar at Milan occurs at perhaps the climax of his struggle with the overwhelming desire for human praise and his willingness to engage in a studied project of deceit to achieve it while at the same time supporting the political structures of an imperial "rhetoric of glory" based in this deceit. The encounter occurs when Augustine "was preparing to deliver a panegyric on the emperor."<sup>43</sup> His description of the speech he is writing is suitably brusque. "In the course of it I would tell numerous lies and for my mendacity would win the good opinion of people who know it to be untrue. The anxiety of the occasion was making my heart palpitate and perspire with the destructive fever of the worry."<sup>44</sup> At this point Augustine notices the carefree life of a beggar attempting to solicit a few coins to maintain his drinking habit. Although Augustine cannot call the Milan beggar happy, he recognizes an attraction to a life that offers a false happiness that does not end in making one "a bundle of anxieties and fears."<sup>45</sup> Augustine's education and pursuit of a way of life as a rhetor implicates him in a pursuit of human glory dependent on deceit and rhetoric devoted to the perpetuation of imperial glory. This voracious pursuit of praise and wealth makes his life an experience like that of running on a treadmill, ceaselessly pursuing a happiness that is constantly just out of his grasp.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., VI, vi.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The critique Augustine launches at his own life at this time must be seen as a personal example of his broader critique of Roman society. Augustine is giving a concrete and deeply personal account of the emptiness of an imperial rhetoric of glory and the pursuit of dominance and praise embedded within it. The alternative exemplified by the Milan beggar is one of a person who bows completely out of this system of deceit and vanity. Significantly, the example is followed by a discussion of the obsession Augustine's good friend Alypius begins to show for the circus games. In this case, another alternative to the life Augustine is leading of implicit collaboration with Roman imperial power is described. Each of these alternatives is ultimately futile and serve to increase Augustine's desperate unhappiness until he comes to his conversion experience.

It is also possible to link both of these examples to the pivotal Scripture Augustine quotes when relating his conversion experience. After hearing the exhortation to 'Pick up and read,' Augustine opens the book of Romans randomly and reads "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts."<sup>46</sup> Here, the image of drunkenness and the revelry of the games as an alternative to the life he had been living are unconditionally rejected and a richer life is given in its place. As the description of Alypius' fascination with the circus games followed Augustine's reflections on the Milan beggar, Alypius' conversion follows Augustine's experience of the divine condemnation

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., VIII, xii. The quotation is from Rom. 13:13-14.

of “riots and drunken parties.”<sup>47</sup> It is not enough for Augustine to reject the false happiness of his pursuit of human praise and wealth; he knew the emptiness of this life even as he lacked the strength to leave it. This emptiness must be filled by something; his desires must be reoriented by what is worth desiring. The negative rejection of false happiness does not give Augustine the strength to change. There must be a reorientation of his desires and this must be done in the light of his conversion and in light of the instruction to “put on Jesus Christ.”

Augustine is here describing in personal and existential terms the critique of Roman society he will continue in the City of God in terms of Roman religion and political policy. I will attempt to explicate that critique in the next chapter of the thesis. Both prongs of Augustine’s critique, however, share in common this basic distinction between use and enjoyment understood eschatologically. The importance of the Augustine’s eschatology will become clearer in the next few sections.

I will now examine in more depth Augustine’s understanding of the state of the soul that is not ordered in its desires towards God, the greatest good. This will provide an Augustinian response to Foucault’s attempt to develop a model of the subject formed by practices of aesthetic self-creation. An Augustinian understanding of the soul’s relationship to itself and to God and of the ways in which this relationship collapses into incoherence when the soul is conceived as being independent of God will provide the basis for a critique of Foucault’s model

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

of the subject. Our account of Augustine and subjectivity will only be adequate, however, when we have also developed an understanding of what, for Augustine, it means to “put on Jesus Christ.” It is hoped that an account of Augustine’s doctrine of the Incarnation will help us to address Connolly’s charges against Augustine of *ressentiment* and transcendental egoism.

#### The Mind’s Search for Itself

In order to address the political alternative to Augustine’s thought proposed in Foucault and Connolly it will be necessary to extend a number of Augustine’s insights into areas to which, on the surface, they do not appear to be relevant. Foucault and Connolly are engaged in a project to frame our most pressing political issues without using the dichotomies of law and transgression, sin and grace, or harmony and chaos. It is precisely these dichotomies, and the thinking bound up with them, from which Foucault and Connolly are attempting to free themselves in order to bring a fresh approach to the contemporary political and ethical situation. Augustine’s thought categorizes human experience in ways that rely precisely on the characterizations rejected by Foucault and Connolly and has been influential in entrenching these categories in the history of political and ethical thought. When addressing the thought of critics like Foucault and Connolly with the work of a figure like Augustine there are two significant temptations that must be avoided. The first is the temptation simply to insist on the validity of dichotomous thinking and to redraw the line so that Foucault and Connolly are on the wrong side of it. According to this strategy, Augustine helps

us understand and demonstrate the dangers of relativism and the fractured or disintegrated self. At this point, it should be clear that my interest does not lie in a simple reassertion of Augustine over against Foucault. On the other hand, it can be just as tempting to reinterpret Augustine in a way that glosses over significant differences and highlights less significant similarities in an attempt to bring them into concert. This is an alternative that I will attempt to avoid in the following pages.

With that said, the following section is an attempt to develop a model of Augustine’s practice of confession as a ‘technology of the self’ as Foucault uses the phrase, but at the same time to recognize the significant differences between the two thinkers in their motives and intentions. Because of these differences it is hard to describe Augustine’s practice of confession as “Foucauldian”<sup>48</sup> or to say that rather than “discerning the truth about himself or the universe,” Augustine in the Confessions is concerned with “trying to mould desires and construct habits such that he can move closer to what he envisions as a glorious or ‘beautiful existence.’”<sup>49</sup> In fact, as I will attempt to show, framing the issue in these terms obscures more than elucidates what it is that Augustine intends. It is true that Augustine is not attempting to come to an understanding of the truth about himself or about the universe as if this truth were an object that could be discovered by an inquiring mind. But neither is he involved in an attempt to

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<sup>48</sup> As James K.A. Smith does in “How (Not) To Tell a Secret: Interiority and the Strategy of ‘Confession,’” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, LXXIV.1 (2000), 148.

<sup>49</sup> Schuld, 83-4.

recreate himself aesthetically independent of his relation to the creator and sustainer of the truth of his life and the universe. Any attempt to do a work on the self that is not in this relation is doomed to failure for reasons that we will now examine.

Augustine's implicit critique of Foucault's project of aesthetic self-creation is found in what could be called an existential account throughout the Confessions. It is also, however, given attention in a more general way in De Trinitate.<sup>50</sup> It is this account that will be the focus for the following section.

As I have described above,<sup>51</sup> Foucault's political thought culminates in the support for a political system in which the subject's aesthetic self-creation is allowed for and encouraged. For Foucault, this is part of a rejection of the disciplinary and normalizing tendencies of modern political structures. Normalization occurs when a subject embraces norms implanted in it by means of disciplinary regimes. Disciplinary regimes, however, emerge in concert with models of human nature and happiness (although neither of these can simplistically be assumed to depend on the other). Thus, Foucault rejects substantive accounts of human nature or a human *telos*. His rejection of human happiness is an attempt to undermine models of human subjectivity associated with normalization and disciplinary regimes and to prepare the way for a political

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<sup>50</sup> This point is made in James Wetzel, Augustine and the Limits of Virtue, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 41-44. My analysis is much indebted to his study.

<sup>51</sup> See above, ch. 3.

society welcoming of a plurality of models of subjectivity and the development of new practices of self-creation.

Of course, Augustine never deals explicitly with this series of problems. Much of Foucault's vocabulary is foreign to Augustine's concerns and it can be argued that Augustine does not deal adequately with the possibilities for a pagan ethic of the cultivation of the self.<sup>52</sup> This does not mean, however, that no Augustinian response can be developed. As I demonstrated above, Augustine is alive to the processes of political discipline as it forms desires and then liberates them as they exert themselves in precisely the way that will reinforce the present regimes of power. Foucault and Augustine are, in this way, allies in their attacks on these political processes and in their recognition of the importance of the subject as a reflection of broader political conflicts. While Foucault and Augustine may be allies to the degree that they have a similar enemy, they do not, however, turn to the same place for a resolution. Foucault's turn to the "care of the self" is in stark contrast to Augustine's turn to the transcendent source of his own existence. For Augustine, Foucault's turn to an ethic of aesthetic self-creation cannot help but reinforce the worst problems of the political situation he is criticizing. We will now turn to an analysis of Augustine's implicit critique of Foucault's ethic of self-creation.

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<sup>52</sup> Connolly argues in *The Augustinian Imperative*, Chapter 2, "Confessing the Moral God" that Augustine's account of a pagan ethics not based on an omnipotent God who guarantees eternal felicity does not take seriously its advantages or the cost of erecting one's morality on such a deity. There are certainly examples of Augustine being too quickly dismissive of ethical attitudes that don't come to the table with the same presuppositions he does. My attempt in this chapter is to begin to develop an Augustinianism that would take these ethical options seriously and withstand their critiques.



Augustine examines in Book X of De Trinitate the fall of the mind into itself as it falls away from the enjoyment of God. He writes, “[the mind] sees certain inner beauties in that more excellent nature which is God; but instead of staying still and enjoying them as it ought to, it wants to claim them for itself, and rather than be like him by his gift it wants to be what he is by its own right.”<sup>53</sup> Because of this pride, the mind is released from God and loses itself in the images of its own mind. As this process develops, the mind “can find satisfaction neither in itself nor in anything else as it gets further away from him who alone can satisfy it.”<sup>54</sup> The mind invests itself in the world through the love it has of material things and it becomes “stuck to them with the glue of care.”<sup>55</sup> The most important problem now is that when the mind is forced to make judgments it has cut itself off from the source of its understanding of what is good, i.e. from God. The mind is so deeply invested in the mutable and chaotic world that this becomes its only standard for judgment. When one begins to reflect, as in the process of ethical decision-making, one’s mind is so caught up in the mutable and material world that it can no longer distinguish itself from what is mutable. Unable to find a stability forsaken when the mind forsook God, the mind seeks a stability imposed by its own will. As Wetzell points out, the problem here is not that this results in one having a materialist philosophy of mind but that one ends up believing that “the world has no value apart from what the human mind chooses

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<sup>53</sup> Augustine, De Trinitate, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), X.2.7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

to accord it. In reality the world derives its value from having been approved of by God. When the human mind looks for the source of value elsewhere, it turns to itself and supposes its own approval to be creative of value.”<sup>56</sup> Or, as Rowan Williams writes, “When it [the mind] loves something other than its own loving action (towards God and neighbour), when it is so attached to particular objects and their remembered images that it can no longer distinguish itself, its fundamental orientation to love, from the succession of transient impressions, it fails in self-knowledge.”<sup>57</sup> The project of recreating the self as a work of art collapses into incoherence because it drains the world and the self of the true value it has in reference to God. This is what Augustine means when he writes that the mind often acts “as though it had forgotten itself.”<sup>58</sup> The identification of oneself and one’s mind with the transient and mutable physical universe results not in the breezy recognition of the tragic impermanence of one’s life but in a desperate act of self-assertion, an attempt to remake the world in one’s own image. As the world is no longer the bearer of a value that transcends itself and the interests we bring to it, no limit to this recreation can reign in the self-assertion of the will. According to Augustine, the aestheticism of Foucault and Connolly can provide no adequate check on the desperate striving of a will unleashed from its appropriate loves. In fact, this aestheticism can only

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<sup>56</sup> Wetzel, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De Trinitate*,” *Collectanea Augustiniana* (1993): 129.

<sup>58</sup> *De Trin.* X.7.

perpetuate the very tendencies within modern political structures that Augustine and Foucault would agree in opposing.

In contrast, Augustine uses his reflections on the Trinity to outline an alternative model of subjectivity. This is not the place for an extended analysis of the entire De Trinitate but I will attempt to indicate some of Augustine's points about the structure of the subject that are germane to our discussion. The last half of De Trinitate (Bks 8-15) is an attempt to draw tentative analogies between the doctrine of the Trinity as a description of the nature of God and the Trinitarian vestiges in creation that reflect its Creator. But Augustine also wants to give an account of the relation of these analogies to the process of sanctification in the believer. He wants to show how the human subject in its memory, understanding and will can come to participate in the activity of God.<sup>59</sup> Influenced by the Creation account in Genesis, Augustine is convinced that the human subject is created in the image of God. He does not, however, understand this image as a static structure of faculties that reflect God. For Augustine, the subject is a dynamic entity, drawn always towards what it loves. Although Augustine can make a distinction between the memory, understanding, and will, he claims that they all make up a single life.<sup>60</sup>

To this point it is not clear that there are significant differences between Augustine and Foucault in their contrasting accounts of the subject. Both see the

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<sup>59</sup> This has been helpfully described by Rowan Williams. See especially "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," Collectanea augustiniana, 1 (1990), 317-52.

<sup>60</sup> De Trin. X.18.

self as dynamic and in constant movement as it is drawn by love or, as Foucault is more apt to say, desire. What makes Augustine's thought on the subject so radically different from Foucault's, and what makes them finally irreconcilable, is Augustine's insistence on a teleology of the subject. For Augustine, the love of the subject is a love that draws one towards God. Only when the mind is participating in God, i.e. when it fully knows and loves God, can it know and love itself and its neighbour. It is only when the object of the soul's thought and love is God that the subject becomes its true self. De Trinitate, and especially the final books, is an attempt to outline this process of sanctification.

This is not to say that the truth of the subject is hidden within the subject and that a careful enough search for it will force it to the surface. Augustine, although at times his language suggests the opposite, does not believe that the truth of the subject is immanent within the subject, even potentially. The truth of the subject is found, not in the subject itself, but in the subject's knowing and loving God, i.e. confessing God. The impact this has on the confessional practices of the subject will be examined in the next section but what is highlighted by this formulation of the issue is that Augustine's model is one of the subject drawn out of itself towards both God and neighbour. The subject only finds itself in being drawn out into God in its acting, desiring, and willing. This process can never, however, be completely and finally achieved in this life. Augustine's eschatological hope is that we will know ourselves as subjects whose

object is God.<sup>61</sup> Because, however, God cannot be an object that can be appropriated, this means that one must be drawn into the subjectivity of God. This losing of oneself is the only way to find oneself, it cannot be achieved but only received as a gift and its promise will only be fulfilled in the indeterminately future of the eschaton.

The most important question facing us now is how Augustine can avoid the same self-assertion and will to knowledge we have been critical of above but now hidden within a projection of oneself into a transcendent God. This is the question raised by Connolly's accusation that Augustine is a representative of a colossal transcendental egoism. To address this problem we will look at Augustine's understanding of the practice of confession and his construal of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

#### Confession as a 'Technology of the Self'

In order to begin to come to terms with the issues raised by Foucault, an Augustinian alternative must develop its understanding of the relationship between confessional language and subjectivity. Foucault and Connolly distrust the practice of confession because of its place within the regime of discipline, surveillance and normalization they describe and reject. Confession brings light into the inner recesses of the human subject, at the same time configuring it according to the language it uses. It allows for a surveillance that extends into the

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<sup>61</sup> De Trin XV.21.

deepest reaches of the subject and co-opts the subject itself in this extension.<sup>62</sup> Just as disconcerting as this process is the tendency of confession to take on universal application. When the practice of confession is universalized it becomes an integral part of the establishment of norms that press into the darkest corners of the subject and judge its failure or success as a subject. An Augustinian account of confession must address this accusation and its political implications.

To come to terms with Augustine's account of the practice of confession it is important first to understand why confession has such an important part in Augustine's thought. An extended description of Augustine's complex anthropology is not possible here but some of his most important theological reflections arise as he tries to understand the mystery of his own mind. For Augustine, the mind is the seat of "the fields and vast palaces of memory, where are the treasuries of innumerable images of all kinds of objects brought in by sense-perception."<sup>63</sup> The memory is "a vast and infinite profundity."<sup>64</sup> But the memory is not just an aspect of subjectivity for Augustine. As he writes, "[g]reat is the power of memory, an awe-inspiring mystery, my God, a power of profound and infinite multiplicity. And this is mind, this is I myself."<sup>65</sup> It is through this vast inner space of memory, through coming to a genuine understanding of it, and

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<sup>62</sup> I have described this process in more detail above, see ch. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Conf.* X.8.12.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, X.8.15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, X.17.26.

through the search for the happy life that all pursue,<sup>66</sup> that one may encounter God. As Augustine writes, “I will pass beyond even that power of mind which is called memory, desiring to reach you by the way through which you can be reached, and to be bonded to you by the way in which it is possible to be bonded”<sup>67</sup> and then “when I seek for you, my God, my quest is for the happy life. I will seek you that ‘my soul may live,’ for my body derives life from my soul and my soul derives life from you.”<sup>68</sup>

The search for God and the happy life within the interior reaches of the mind does not, however, mean that Augustine is retreating into solipsism. The God that Augustine encounters is a universal and mysterious God. This God is transcendent and infinitely above the human mind but is the only source for its life and happiness. The universality of the God Augustine confesses becomes the ground of a common bond for all who confess this God and this common bond is an essential element of the happy life for which Augustine is searching. All who confess God are bound together by the love of God in the unity of the invisible Church.<sup>69</sup>

This process can be clarified in an example from a sermon of Augustine’s on a passage in John’s Gospel that is worth quoting at length. Augustine writes, commenting on the resurrection of Lazarus, that:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., X.20.29.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., X.17.26.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., X.20.29 the quotation is from Isaiah 55:3.

<sup>69</sup> See Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, vol. III, *On the Donatist Controversy*, ed. Marcus Dods, trans. J.R. King (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), II.xvi (21).

the voice of the Savior broke through the hardness of the rock. And your heart is so hard that that divine voice does not yet break through to you! Rise in your heart; come forth from your tomb. For you were lying dead in your heart as in a tomb, and you were weighted down as by the rock of evil habit. Rise, and come forth. What does this mean, rise and come forth? Believe and confess. For he who believed arose; he who confesses has come forth.

Why did we say that he came forth confessing? Because before he confessed, he had been hidden; but when he confesses, he comes forth from darkness to light.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly, this text presents a number of dichotomies that structure the experience Augustine is attempting to describe. The act of confession takes place as part of a movement from death to life, from darkness to light, and from imprisonment in rock to a freedom to come forth when this rock is broken. The confession comes also as a response to the act of Christ, the call from the Savior that breaks through the imprisoning “rock of evil habit.”

Several characteristics of Augustine’s understanding of the practice of confession can be gleaned from this passage that demonstrate both its structure and how different a practice it is from a ‘Foucauldian’ technology of the self. First, the ‘coming forth’ of confession is a response to the call of Christ to the soul. For Augustine, this is the call of the Divine Word to the believer encountered in the mind but mediated by the Incarnation, a doctrine we will take up in the next section. The act of confession and the breaking of the rock of habit is not something that can be initiated by the believer. Confession comes only as a response to a divine act that precedes it. The ‘rock of evil habit’ that imprisons the soul is not something that can be broken through by the act of confession

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<sup>70</sup> Tractates on the First Epistle of John. 22.7.3-4.



itself. Confession is drawn forth only after the binding power of habit has been overcome through the salvific act of Christ. The act of the subject itself cannot break through the power of habit and can only succeed in entrenching this power more deeply within the subject. Augustine believes that the reshaping of desire Foucault suggests, occurring without reference to God, cannot but be a desperate act of willing value on oneself and the world. The only intelligible reshaping of the self comes, not from a technique that one could perform on oneself, but from opening oneself to be broken and remade by God.

This breaking of the tomb of rock and the resurrection of the subject inside, however, ought not to be understood as a simple liberation in the sense criticized by Foucault. Recall that Foucault argues that language of liberation assumes the prior existence of a human nature that is then repressed by prohibitions. The removal of prohibitions is all that is necessary then for the restoration of a pristine human subject. In contrast to this model, Foucault argues that the subject is formed by means of disciplines at the deepest levels in its very desires. The ‘liberation’ of these desires is, therefore, an entrenchment of these disciplines and not a liberation at all. In fact, the language of liberation is deeply misleading and one that Foucault rejects in favour of a pluralistic vision of competing and conflicting desires from which emerges a subject with no illusions of unity or integrity.

The image of the resurrection of the subject from the dead suggests, however, that Augustine also does not view the salvation he describes as a simple

liberation. As I have suggested above, Augustine does not believe that the conditions for an integrated subject are immanent within the subject itself. Happiness is not a possibility for the subject apart from the gift of a transcendent donor. There is an odd agreement between Foucault and Augustine on the non-existence of the ‘happiness of man,’ at least as an immanent possibility of the subject. For Augustine, this possibility is brought about by the gratuitous act of God by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As he writes in an exposition of Psalm 50, “confession of sin and the will to punish sin cannot be present in any of us by our own doing; and so when we are angry with ourselves and find ourselves displeasing, it can happen only by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>71</sup>

The complexity of Augustine’s understanding of confessional practice is evoked in the following passage from another sermon on the Gospel of John. Augustine writes that, “many have loved their sins, many have confessed their sins. For he who confesses his sins and accuses his sins now acts with God. God accuses your sins; if you, too, accuse them, you are joined to God.”<sup>72</sup> In this passage, Augustine finds in confession a disintegration of the subject that finds the subject against itself and for itself. The subject’s identification with God is grounded in this fracturing of the subject against its own sins. The technique of confession operates for Augustine not so much as a liberation of one’s true self as

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<sup>71</sup> Augustine, Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 2, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 50.16.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 12.13 (3).

the fracturing of the self for the sake of one's identification with God and the forming, in this identification, of a remade, or reborn, self.

Augustine emphasizes this in a word play he makes on the Latin *invocare* or 'to call upon' when he writes, "confess, in order to prepare a dwelling place for the one you are calling on, that is to say calling in."<sup>73</sup> Here, Augustine highlights confession as a prerequisite to the calling upon God that is also a calling to God to dwell within one and remake one. Confession is a prerequisite to this indwelling because it brings about a humility that can come to one in no other way. As Augustine writes in the same sermon, "what does confessing to God mean, but humbling oneself before God, not arrogating to oneself any merits?"<sup>74</sup> And as he concludes, "so confession, my brothers, humbles us, humbled it justifies us, justified it lifts us up on high."<sup>75</sup>

The humility initiated in this practice of confession is also, for Augustine, the basis for ethical action and reflection. As he writes, "the beginning of good works is the confession of evil works...You do not caress yourself, you do not flatter yourself, you do not fawn upon yourself. You do not say, 'I am just,' although you are wicked, and you begin to do truth." It is only in this humble confession of sin and the reliance on God's grace it demands that allow one to act truthfully. Only an accurate understanding of humanity's place in the created order can allow one to begin to act rightly. For Augustine, this understanding is

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<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *Sermons II (20-50)*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990), 23A.4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 23A.1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

not simply an intellectual comprehension but necessarily involves a posture of humility before the Incarnate God, an element of Augustine's thought that is the focus of the following section.

### Incarnation

Even with this understanding of the practice of confession it is still important to respond to Connolly's accusation that Augustine is a representative of what he calls a 'transcendental egoism.'<sup>76</sup> Recall that Connolly suggests that Augustine's confession is perhaps made to a God that Augustine himself has created. Desperate to find an order in a universe that seems tragically to be unconcerned with human happiness, Augustine constructs an order he desires and defines any tragedy as a failure in himself or in others. The practice of confession is Augustine's attempt to bring himself into harmony with an order he has himself projected into the fabric of the universe. The humility that Augustine professes is, in fact, an insidious and self-serving posture that disguises his secret grasp at a power that flows from the ability that God has given him to discern the nature of the universe. This ability, of course, belongs only to those who share Augustine's confession and the only way to demonstrate one's ability is to affirm the truth of the confession Augustine (and those who make up the Church) imposes.

In this section, I will attempt to find in Augustine's doctrine of the Incarnation the outline of a response to this criticism of Augustinian subjectivity. Augustine's reorientation of the subject before the Incarnate Christ will give him

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<sup>76</sup> Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, 145.

the resources to resist the temptation towards a transcendental egoism of which Connolly is rightly suspicious. This doctrine will also indicate the framework of an Augustinian subjectivity that is neither a Foucauldian aesthetic self-creation nor a Procrustean bed of human nature reinforced by disciplinary techniques and norms.

For Augustine, the doctrine of the Incarnation, that God became fully human in the person of Jesus Christ without suffering any diminishment in divinity, is central to his understanding of salvation in Christ. Augustine argues that the movement of the mind of humans towards God is hindered by “long-standing faults which darken it.”<sup>77</sup> These faults weaken the mind to the degree that it is unable to endure the truth for which it was made. The mind, therefore, “must first be renewed and healed day after day so as to become capable of such felicity.”<sup>78</sup> The way in which this renewal and healing must occur is through the training and purifying of the mind by faith. But the content of this faith is the key to the healing of the mind. As Augustine writes, “God the Son of God, who is himself the Truth, took manhood without abandoning his godhead, and thus established and founded this faith, so that man might have a path to man’s God through the man who was God...As God, he is the goal; as man, he is the way.”<sup>79</sup> For Augustine, it is through the humanity of Christ that we are able to participate

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<sup>77</sup> CD XI.2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

in God. It is through the mystery of God's participation in our human existence that we are able to enter into God's divinity.

The links between the Incarnation and human salvation are made even more explicit, and are placed in an eschatological context, in the City of God where Augustine writes, "for God's only Son by nature was made the Son of Man for us by compassion, so that we who by nature are sons of men might become sons of God through him by grace. He, as we know, while continuing changeless, took our nature to himself from us so that in that nature he might take us to himself...And yet no one should be confident that he has passed over from the one state to the other, until he has arrived where there will be no more temptation."<sup>80</sup> It is God's participation in human existence that makes possible our own participation in the divine life but this participation is only a partial and fleeting one in our temporal life. Our participation in God's life cannot be fully appropriated or subsumed in rational patterns of thought. In this way it is utterly unlike the life depicted in the social sciences and articulated within the modern disciplinary regime. Instead, Augustine's life of participation in the divine can only be received as a gift of the anticipation of a life that is never fully achieved but is always in the process of being given. The development of the mutually supporting disciplinary regimes and articulations of knowledge in the social sciences criticized by Foucault, can be understood, therefore, as a denial of the eschatological anticipation of the fullness of life and the attempt to appropriate

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<sup>80</sup> CD, XXI.15.

fully an understanding of human nature. For Augustine, the response to this crisis is not the refusal of any concept of humanity or human happiness. This leads only to a desperate act of willing value on oneself and one's aims. Instead, the response must be a recognition of the incompleteness of any articulation of humanity and a posture of patient anticipation of its disclosure.

It is clear in the above passages that Augustine gives the doctrine of the Incarnation a central place in his understanding of salvation. It is also important, however, to come to an understanding of the effects this doctrine has on Augustine's conception of the subject. There are a number of places where Augustine spells out with some clarity the specific impact that he believes the Incarnation ought to have on human life and action. Connolly's construal of Augustine has him confessing to the God who has established a cosmic order to which one must conform or be destroyed. Connolly suggests that Augustine refuses to acknowledge the possibility that his own anxiety before the mystery of the universe compels him to assert the existence of an order that must be accepted on faith. Augustine's humility before this order is then, according to Connolly, a covert projection of his own desires onto the universe and a universalization of a correlative regime of discipline. The humility that Augustine professes, however, is not primarily before a transcendent God who establishes the order of the universe. In fact, Augustine claims that belief in such a God does not necessarily result in humility at all. His rejection of the pride of the Platonists is evidence of

this.<sup>81</sup> For Augustine, the key to both self-knowledge and saving knowledge is not only one's own humility before God, but one's humility before that supreme example of God's humility, Christ.

This knowledge must involve a re-orientation of one's understanding of strength and weakness as well as a new comprehension of the relationship between human happiness or fulfilment and human nature. Augustine gestures towards this understanding in a description of his own struggle to understand the mystery of the Incarnation in Confessions. He writes, "I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you [God]; but I did not find it until I embraced 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus'...To possess my God, the humble Jesus, I was not yet humble enough. I did not know what his weakness was meant to teach."<sup>82</sup> And Augustine continues, about those who put their faith in Christ, that "they are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak. They see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our 'coat of skin.' In their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which rises and lifts them up."<sup>83</sup> The humility of God in Christ is, for Augustine, the cure for human pride.<sup>84</sup>

It is this paradox of God's humility that provides the Augustinian response to the accusation of transcendental egoism. The guarantor of the order that Connolly sees as a projection of ego and the confession of whom Foucault argues

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<sup>81</sup> Conf., VII.8.12.

<sup>82</sup> Conf., VII.xviii.24. Quotation is from 1 Tim 2:5.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Quotation is from Gen. 3:21.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. De Trin. 13.22.



is a means of implanting an arbitrary order into the structure of the subject is precisely who is seen crucified in Christ. Our submission before this example of divine humility is our means of participating in it. This crucifixion thus becomes a crucifixion of one's own pride as one's own drive towards order, towards fulfilment and happiness finds its expression in the weakness of the cross. Any imposition of this vision of happiness, any colonization of the body and society by this model must be brought up short by the scandal of the cross. This is Augustine's attempt to avoid the incoherence of a denial of eudaimonism criticized above while also avoiding, on the other side, a totalizing and unyielding order. The order of human happiness is only grasped, according to Augustine, when it is broken in the paradox of the cross, a paradox that must not be resolved lest order, happiness, and the cross itself be lost.<sup>85</sup>

The remaining chapter will attempt to examine the political implications of the preceding account of an Augustinian understanding of the subject. In it, I will examine Augustine's conceptual model of the two cities as a means of redefining political community and of developing a critique of Roman political society. A Foucauldian critique of this Augustinian model will be met with an account of the central importance of the Eucharist in an Augustinian political theory. It is hoped that the concluding account of the Eucharist and the community founded in its practice will suggest both a response to the Foucauldian

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<sup>85</sup> Although my argument is quite different, I have been strongly influenced by Gerald Schlabach's essay "Augustine's Hermeneutic of Humility: An Alternative to Moral Imperialism and Moral Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 80:1 (2000): 317.

critique of an Augustinian construal of politics and the beginnings of a response to the political problems of discipline, surveillance, and normalization Foucault so powerfully criticizes.

## Chapter 6: Augustine and the Eucharist

In the previous chapter I developed a model of subjectivity based on Augustine's doctrine of the Incarnation. This must still, however, be placed within the context of Augustine's political thought. It will also be necessary to use this contextualization to develop a response to the political dangers of depoliticization and normalization emphasized so strenuously by Foucault and Connolly. I have criticized the practices of aesthetic self-creation and an agonal politics through an account of Augustine's ontology of peace and his model of Incarnational subjectivity. I am now obliged to indicate the outlines of an Augustinian politics that would respond more adequately to the political concerns that the practices of self-creation and agonism are intended to address. It is my view that an account of Augustine's description of the Eucharist as the paradigmatic practice of the Church is the only adequate way to address these issues.

I am, of course, not the first to critically engage with the political alternatives suggested by Foucault and Connolly. I have not, however, attempted to show how these alternatives fail on their own terms. Instead, I have tried to develop a theological response robust enough to address the concerns Foucault and Connolly have with the contemporary political context and that is not as vulnerable to their critiques. I am not involved in a project that uses Foucault and Augustine to complement each other's work without developing the significant

ways in which they contradict each other.<sup>1</sup> Foucault and Augustine, for all they have in common, cannot finally be reconciled on many of the most important issues. My purpose in these pages has been to use the critique of Foucault and Connolly directed both at contemporary political structures and at Augustinian principles to both develop an Augustinian politics sensitive to the modern political problematic and to strengthen this Augustinian alternative as it is forced to respond to some of its most important critics.

To this end, the following chapter will engage in a reading of Augustine's critique of his own political context in The City of God with special attention to the ways his concerns parallel to some degree the criticisms that Foucault and Connolly level at our own political context. The response that Augustine develops however is also heavily criticized by Foucault and Connolly and traced by them to the development of many of the most insidious and dangerous elements of the contemporary political situation. Their most trenchant critiques will be analyzed and a response to them will be developed that attempts to take account of their strengths and is also consistent with the spirit of Augustinian political thought. This response will involve an attempt to develop the political implications of Augustine's description of the Eucharist and the way it structures the complex relationship between God, the individual and the broader community. Augustine's treatment of this practice within an eschatological framework will allow for a theologically sensitive reappraisal of his political thought that

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<sup>1</sup> In this way, my project is quite different from that of J. Joyce Schuld. See Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

responds to the criticisms levelled by Foucault and Connolly. The chapter will end with some suggestions regarding the implications of Augustine's thought on contemporary political practice.

### The Two Cities

As I have written in detail, the most significant issue for Augustine in the life of the individual is the ordering of her loves. The integrity and coherence of one's own life is possible, in Augustine's view, only when all that one loves is loved for the sake of God who is loved for His own sake. In the above chapter the implications of this were examined with reference to the formation of one's desires and the possibility of forms of self-formation that resist contemporary constructions of the self embedded in and supporting malevolent political structures. It is important, however, to place this discussion within the context of Augustine's development of an analysis of the social relationships that reflect and embody the loves that Augustine analyzes within the individual life.

Augustine develops his account of these two loves by engaging in an extended analogy between the individual and the body politic or, as he refers to it, the city.<sup>2</sup> Augustine argues that the nature of every political community is determined by the loves of its citizens. In a particularly important section, worth quoting at length, Augustine compares the loves of two types of people and the corresponding cities that they make up:

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<sup>2</sup> An extended and insightful analysis of this analogy in Augustine can be found in Patricia L. MacKinnon, "Augustine's *City of God*: The Divided Self/The Divided *Civitas*," in Dorothy F. Donnolly ed. *The City of God: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 319-52.

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord. The former looks for glory from men, the latter finds its highest glory in God, the witness of a good conscience. The earthly lifts up its head in its own glory, the Heavenly City says to its God: ‘My glory; you lift up my head.’ In the former, the lust for domination lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those put in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love, the rulers by their counsel, the subjects by obedience. The one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God, ‘I will love you, my Lord, my strength.’<sup>3</sup>

Augustine goes on to describe the attitudes of the two cities to human wisdom and concludes that “in the Heavenly City, on the other hand, man’s only wisdom is the devotion which rightly worships the true God, and looks for its reward in the fellowship of the saints, not only holy men but also holy angels, ‘so that God may be all in all.’”<sup>4</sup> The antithesis between the two cities is a reflection of the antithesis between the loves (of God and self) Augustine sees as fundamental in individual formation but this antithesis does more than describe the social results of these two loves. At the same time, the two cities appear as alternatives competing for the allegiance of human beings as they live their earthly lives. The loves that form the two cities do not only express the loves of the individuals but recapitulate them in a way that entrenches that love in the individual who is a part of that city. This will be seen more clearly in an analysis of Augustine’s description of the origins of the cities and their relationship in the present.

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972) XIV, 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

The above description of the contrast between the two cities comes at the end of one of the major sections of the City of God in which the origins of the two cities are explained. In Books XI to XIV Augustine summarizes, with a number of digressions, the familiar history of Creation, Fall and Redemption with a view to explaining the origins of the two cities. The first sin of Adam and Eve initiates a history of conflict and war that permeates the relationships between humans and God and that therefore corrupts human interrelationships and even the relationship that one has with oneself. The integrity of the human subject and its relations with others is thrown into chaos by the soul's rejection of its proper master, God. The human rebellion against God results in the rebellion of one's own flesh against one's will and in the fragmentation and division of the will against itself. Augustine's personal experience of this division is described in Confessions<sup>5</sup> but is summarized by him thus, "in fact, to put it briefly, in the punishment of that sin the retribution for disobedience is simply disobedience itself. For man's wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that because he would not do what he could, he now wills to do what he cannot."<sup>6</sup> Because they have thrown off the divinely instituted order, humans find themselves in a situation in which they are no longer able to command even something as near to themselves as their own will. As Augustine continues, "through the justice of God, who is our Lord and master and whom we refused to serve as his subjects, our flesh, which had been subject to us, now gives us trouble through its non-

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<sup>5</sup> Book VIII.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 15.

compliance, whereas we by our defiance of God have only succeeded in becoming a nuisance to ourselves, and not to God.”<sup>7</sup> This situation is particularly evident in its sexual manifestation which Augustine refers to immediately after the above discussion. He writes about sexual pleasure that, “not even the lovers of this kind of pleasure are moved, either to conjugal intercourse or to the impure indulgences of vice, just when they have so willed. Sometimes the impulse is an unwanted intruder, sometimes it abandons the eager lover, and desire cools off in the body while it is at boiling heat in the mind. Thus strangely does lust refuse to be a servant not only to the will to beget but even to the lust for lascivious indulgence; and although on the whole it is totally opposed to the mind’s control, it is quite often divided against itself.”<sup>8</sup> This division of the self against itself is recapitulated in any social relations that the individual has. Any community founded by individuals at war with their own desires cannot help but reconstitute this war at a social level. Augustine’s historical narrative of the earthly City is one of a long series of bitterly fought wars interrupted by brief and fragile periods of peace with a tendency to be crueller than even the wars were.<sup>9</sup>

Out of this situation of perpetual war both within the individual and in her social relationships comes a need for some guarantee of at least a minimal level of peace. It is true that the Heavenly City longs toward an eternal peace but both cities, and, Augustine assumes, all of those who inhabit them, desire at least an

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., XIV, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., III, 28.



earthly peace.<sup>10</sup> Humans, according to Augustine, are social creatures and, although their proper love for each other has been abandoned in their sin, they cannot find peace by isolating themselves from each other. Just as humans desire an ordering within their bodies that indicates physical health, even if this is only desired to help them attain their own selfish goals, they also desire a mutual concord in political society, even if its purpose is only to allow them to pursue the fulfillment of their own desires.

Here we see the crux of Augustine's attack on Roman triumphalism. The peace that Rome provides can only be called peace in a derivative sense. Because it is not referred to the love of God, that is, it does not flow from a common humility before God but is pursued for the sake of human glory, it cannot provide a lasting peace. Instead, what looks like peace is actually only the suppression of human vices by the single-minded pursuit of a single vice, glory. As Milbank interprets Augustine, the earthly city protects its peace only through a regulation of power by power.<sup>11</sup> Augustine attempts to show that the structures of Roman rule are not ordered towards justice but towards dominion as an end in itself.

Augustine's criticism of Roman political society is paralleled by his criticism of pagan understandings of virtue. As he writes about virtue, "what is its activity in this world but unceasing warfare with vices, and those not external vices but internal, not other people's vices but quite clearly our own, or very own? And this is the particular struggle of that virtue called in Greek *sophrosyne*, which

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., XV, 4.

<sup>11</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 390.

is translated ‘temperance’ – the virtue which bridles the lusts of the flesh to prevent their gaining the consent of the mind and dragging it into every kind of immorality.”<sup>12</sup> Augustine argues that this temperance is the control of the spirit over the desires of the flesh. This can give a semblance of virtue but, as Augustine writes:

What in fact, do we want to achieve, when we desire to be made perfect by the Highest Good? It can, surely, only be a situation where the desires of the flesh do not oppose the spirit, and where there is in us no vice for the spirit to oppose with its desires. Now we cannot achieve this in our present life, for all our wishing. But we can at least, with God’s help, see to it that we do not give way to the desires of the flesh which oppose the spirit by allowing our spirit to be overcome, and that we are not dragged to the perpetration of sin with our own consent. God forbid, then, that, so long as we are engaged in this internal strife, we should believe ourselves to have already attained that happiness, the end we desire to reach by our victory. And who has reached such a height of wisdom as to have no struggle to maintain against his lusts?<sup>13</sup>

What Augustine understands as pagan virtue is, for him, only the overcoming of the flesh by the spirit, a victory that can never be more than fleeting and maintained through constant vigilance. In this way, the peace of the virtuous pagan is no different from the peace of Imperial Rome; it is, in actuality, a façade disguising a perpetual and ineradicable civil war.

A parallel can be drawn here between Augustine’s criticism of pagan virtue described above and the discussion he develops at the beginning of Book XIX on the origins of the two cities. In this section, Augustine replaces the

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<sup>12</sup> CD XIX, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

common distinction between the flesh and the soul<sup>14</sup>, or between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the soul, with a distinction he finds preferable between those who live according to God and those who live according to ‘man.’<sup>15</sup> Augustine accepts a hierarchy between the flesh and the soul but refuses to grant that those who live according to the soul and who therefore regulate the flesh with the soul are closer to virtue. For Augustine, the soul has no capacity of itself to reliably control the flesh. This pitting of the soul against the flesh and the flesh against the soul can only make the entire person miserable. Instead, the resolution Augustine suggests is for the individual to live according to God. Living according to the soul cannot be understood as virtue as true virtue is living according to God and neither the flesh nor the soul can be happy unless they are living according to God. This ‘living according to God’ is not a pitting of the various elements of the human person against each other in an attempt to regulate them through vigilance and control. Instead it is the offering of oneself up to God to be remade as a subject. As the City of God continues Augustine attempts to trace out the practices that demonstrate this living according to God and to contrast them concretely with those practices that embody the alternative. The most important of these practices, the Eucharist, will be the subject of the final part of this chapter.

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction here is between *caro* and *anima*, often translated carnal and animal but clearly evoking the distinction between flesh and soul.

<sup>15</sup> CD XIV, 4 and 5.

Again, the analogy between the human individual and the body politic provides a clue to the broader context of Augustine's thought. For Augustine, a political community that lives according to its own standards, no matter how exalted those standards may appear, is in precisely the same situation as the individual described above, pitting soul against flesh in order to control damaging behaviour. In an oft quoted and particularly poignant illustration, Augustine tells the story of the response of a captured pirate to Alexander the Great, "the king asked the fellow, 'What is your idea, in infesting the sea?' And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, 'The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I'm called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you're called an emperor.'"<sup>16</sup> The effect of this story is to undermine the confidence of the reader in the established definitions of political structures. Augustine uses this story to follow up on his claim that bands of robbers also have a claim to be a political community and to anticipate his later attempt to re-examine the definition of a republic.<sup>17</sup> Augustine's purpose, however, is not simply to identify the emperor with the leader of a gang of robbers and then to dismiss all practice of political power as hopelessly corrupt. The crux of this story is Augustine's claim that these two types of communities are equivalent when they do not include justice in their operation. This makes Augustine's unmasking of Roman justice as the balancing of vices against each other to provide a furtive and uneasy peace an essential part of his project.

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<sup>16</sup> CD IV, 4.

<sup>17</sup> See CD XIX, 21 and 24.

Augustine still, however, needs to provide an account of the way in which Rome maintains its peace (even if this peace is limited and fleeting) despite its lack of justice and to develop an alternative understanding of a political community that would somehow include both true justice and true peace. It is the first of these projects to which I will now turn.

In Book XIX, Augustine returns to a discussion of the definition of a republic he delayed in Book II until he had completed a fuller discussion of the origins of the two cities. He uses as a basis for discussion Cicero's definitions of a commonwealth, put in the mouth of Scipio in De Republica, as the 'weal of the community' and of a community as 'an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest.'<sup>18</sup> Using these definitions, Cicero goes on to establish the necessity of justice to the existence of a commonwealth. When Augustine takes up the topic again in Book XIX he attempts to show that, by this definition, "there never was a Roman commonwealth, because the Roman state was never the 'weal of the people.'<sup>19</sup> Augustine then argues that, as there can be no people when there is no common sense of right and there can be no right where there is no justice that there can therefore be no commonwealth where there is no justice. And, since justice "is that virtue which assigns to everyone his due"<sup>20</sup> there can be no justice where the subject of this commonwealth is taken away from the true God and subjected to unclean demons. This seems to be a bit of

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<sup>18</sup> CD II, 21.

<sup>19</sup> CD XIX, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

sleight of hand to define any pagan community out of being a commonwealth because of their religious allegiances. Augustine, however, does not take the discussion in exactly this direction. Instead, he proposes an alternative definition of both people and commonwealth that accounts for the ability of the Roman body politic to hold together surprisingly successfully. Augustine redefines a people as “the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love.”<sup>21</sup> This definition accounts for the ability of Rome to hold together as a society and it also places the loves of those in a society at the centre of their definition as a people as Augustine has placed an individual’s love at the centre of her integrity as a person. Thus, Augustine both recognizes the capacity of the earthly city to join its members together (a characteristic that Rome shares with both Athens and Babylon)<sup>22</sup> and at the same time refuses to grant it a share in a justice that can only belong to the City of God.

The attack Augustine makes on Roman religion is not, however, secondary to his point. Augustine wants to indicate that the disorder of loves that is indicated in the religion he has spent much of the City of God criticizing is responsible not just for ‘theological’ failures in Roman society but that these failures make the political stability of Rome, as a commonwealth directed to the ‘weal’ of the people, impossible. To frame the issue simply in terms of order, as Foucault and Connolly do, is somewhat misleading as the fundamental issue, for

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<sup>21</sup> CD XIX, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Augustine, is not simply order but justice. And to frame the issue in terms of justice demands an understanding of the ‘good’ of the people.

For Foucault, of course, the discussion cannot be allowed to take this turn. Foucault’s genealogies are an attempt to undermine the privileging of any particular order that occurs when it is labelled just. The use of terms like ‘good’ and ‘just’ are in themselves attempts to privilege arbitrary expressions of order and place them outside of the realm of political struggle. It may be impossible to live without some kind of order, but at least its arbitrary and provisional nature can be recognized and it can thereby be placed within the realm of political contention.

The conventional response to this<sup>23</sup> is that Foucault’s refusal to frame his political critique in terms of justice cripples his ability to criticize society and its structures. The success of this response, however, is dependent on what one expects from social critique. If one expects social critique to found a transcendental, or even simply a conventional, justice and then to judge society from the standpoint it provides, then Foucault’s refusal to use this terminology is problematic. Foucault, however, does not intend to base his critique on a transcendental justice, but simply to undermine the privileging of arbitrary order

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<sup>23</sup> Found in Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Political Theory* 12:2 (May 1984): 152-183, Jurgen Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader* ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), Nancy Fraser, “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,” *Praxis International* 1 (1981): 272-287, Ciaran Cronin, “Bourdieu and Foucault on Power and Modernity,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 22:6 (1996): 55-85.

and thereby to introduce contingency into conventional structures used to marginalize and exclude.

An important element of the following chapter will be my attempt to develop an Augustinian social critique that is framed in terms of justice and the good but is not vulnerable to the criticisms of Foucault and Connolly. It is hoped that this will allow this critique to continue to wield the critical weight that concepts of justice and the good provide without falling into the difficulties Foucault and Connolly diagnose.

#### The Foucault-Connolly Critique

In many ways, Augustine's description of the subject and the subject's social relations has much in common with Foucault's model of the subject outlined above.<sup>24</sup> For Foucault, what we call the self is constituted by conflict and division that operate at a level just beneath the surface. Although Foucault is not as explicit about the parallels as Augustine is, the conflict within the subject is recapitulated in the body politic in his thought as well. Like Augustine, Foucault recognizes the danger of the regulation of violence by violence but this is not what he sees as the greatest danger in political society. Instead, Foucault warns against the attempts to bring peace to both the self and society through practices that normalize our desires and exclude, exterminate, or make irrelevant whatever implies or causes disunity. Foucault's alternative of aesthetic self-creation is an attempt to avoid this alternative and to acknowledge the tension and fracturing

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<sup>24</sup> See especially chapter 3 above.



that exists within the individual. Connolly's political agonism is an attempt to develop a political theory out of this understanding of the subject.

From this perspective, Augustine's vision of a peaceful Heavenly City presents a more insidious danger than the earthly city to which he contrasts it. Augustine cannot resist the temptation to bring integrity to the self and, in doing so, to the body politic. This temptation, according to the critique, drives Augustine to identify and marginalize through confession what resists integration into a coherent model of his own subjectivity. The same drive that results in confession when turned on Augustine himself becomes an exercise in scapegoating and labelling others as heretics when their difference is perceived as a threat to Augustine's own certainty of identity. Connolly's most significant criticism of Augustine is that he closes himself off to the potentially tragic nature of existence. His anxiety at the prospect that there is a rift at the heart of existence that cannot be healed, drives him to find fault either within himself or in others. When blame is placed, the possibility for patching over this rift is made available to Augustine. For Connolly, the price to pay for this is simply too high. Connolly's work is an attempt to develop a political theory that does not give in to the temptation of trusting itself with the job of healing this rift.

Augustine's attempts to order and bring peace to the inescapable conflict within him and his society masks a muted violence of normalization and scapegoating. Augustine's 'peace' is itself crueller than war. The Augustinian practice of confession and its corollary of the endlessly desiring self searching

ever deeper for the truth of the self have brought us to the widespread practice of ‘pastoral’ power and the governmentality of the present political context.<sup>25</sup>

Milbank’s argument construes the debate between Augustine and postmodern political attacks on him as one between an ontology of violence and one of peace. He claims that an ontology of violence cannot understand difference except in violent antagonism with all other difference. The end result, therefore, is not the creative maintenance of rivalry but the nihilistic extermination of all difference.<sup>26</sup> In this, however, Milbank appears to misread, or give insufficient weight to, appeals like Foucault’s to base power relations on those found in erotic and pedagogical relations.<sup>27</sup> Milbank here assumes Augustine’s principle that war is waged only for the sake of peace.<sup>28</sup> This is not the case, however, in the examples to which Foucault desires to give priority. In these examples, difference cannot be subsumed by the categories of either a violent and destructive antagonism or an Augustinian harmony of order.

Although it may be true that antagonism is not excluded from erotic and pedagogical relations, this does not mean that they can only aim towards the extermination of difference. In fact, the resistance of both the lover and the student, and in this resistance the difference they embody, is partially constitutive of the relationship. What must be determined, however, is how these relationships can be maintained in their integrity as relationships that can be

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<sup>25</sup> See above, chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> Milbank, 279.

<sup>27</sup> See above, chapter 3.

<sup>28</sup> CD III, 28.

characterized in terms of difference, resistance and even, at times, rivalry and yet could not be maintained at all without at least some harmony and commonality of purpose.

To this end, I want to develop an Augustinian response that insists on the need for both erotic and pedagogical relationships to point beyond themselves, and not simply to one's own aesthetic pleasures, if they are not to collapse into unintelligibility. To do this it will be necessary to examine Augustine's account of the Church's practice of the Eucharist and the way he places it within the context of his eschatology. The final section of this chapter will attempt to do this.

#### The Eucharist

I have argued in the previous chapter that Foucault's excision of a transcendent and eschatological referent from his understanding of desire or eros cripples its effectiveness in reforming the self as a work of art. In essence, Foucault appears to hang political hope on a power for resistance that he at the same time drains of adequate force by refusing to accept that it can refer to anything outside of itself. In the previous chapter I tried to point out the weaknesses of Foucault's ethic of self-creation without falling into the abuses he criticizes. Above, I have argued that Foucault's social critique is muted in a similar way without an account of justice. Augustine's critique of Roman political society provides resources for this response to Foucault. In the following section, I will attempt to develop an Augustinian response to the political

problems of a disciplinary regime of normalization founded in his understanding of the Church's practice of the Eucharist. This is not so much an attempt to describe the Church as an alternative *polis* as an attempt, in harmony with Augustine's City of God, to use the practices of the Church as a basis for a critique of the political abuses of contemporary society. At the same time, I will attempt to demonstrate that the political posture found in the practice of the Eucharist need not result in the problems Foucault and Connolly associate with appeals to justice and moral order.

It is clear that my own project is quite different from Augustine's in City of God. In this work, Augustine develops the conceptual tool of the two cities to criticize the rhetoric of glory that both founded and sustained the Roman Empire in which he found himself. This rhetoric of glory is still an element of contemporary political discourse and perhaps little has changed about its place in supporting the structures of imperial power. Both Foucault and Augustine provide resources for the criticism of these structures and of the rhetorical techniques that undergird them.<sup>29</sup> The purpose of the first chapter of this thesis, however, was to outline a more subtle and insidious danger at the heart of contemporary political life. This danger is a regime of discipline and normalization that has been a constant theme of the preceding pages. Foucault's work suggests that Augustine's thought not only does not help protect us from the

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<sup>29</sup> An excellent account of Foucault's criticism of this rhetoric can be found in Schuld, 180-205. A good Augustinian analysis of a fairly contemporary political issue can be found in Robert Dodaro, "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's *City of God* in a 'Postmodern' World," in Augustinian Studies 25 (1994) 77-138.

danger of normalization but, in fact, perpetuates it through his espousal of the discipline of confession and the order that this discipline is able to implant in the deepest reaches of the human subject. In this section, I want to develop an Augustinian ethic that, far from perpetuating these abuses, helps us respond to and resist them in a more coherent way than Foucault's own principles can allow.

The first task facing us when drawing out the political implications of Augustine's understanding of the Eucharist is a description of some of the most important characteristics this practice of Christian worship displays. For this, it will be useful to examine Augustine's account of the Eucharist as it appears in the context of his discussion of worship at the end of the first part of City of God. This account comes at the conclusion of his discussion of human happiness, a theme the importance of which I have dealt with in the previous chapter. After rejecting the claims of pagan religion and philosophy to provide either a temporal or an eternal happiness, Augustine turns to a description of what he believes is the only sure happiness. He writes that "the true sacrifice is offered in every act which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship, every act, that is, which is directed to that final Good which makes possible our true felicity."<sup>30</sup> Augustine goes on to suggest that the body "when we discipline it by temperance"<sup>31</sup> can itself be a sacrifice to God. He then, however, continues to describe in more detail the process by which the soul can become a sacrifice as well. He writes that the soul can become a sacrifice, "when it offers itself to God, so that it may be

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<sup>30</sup> CD X.6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

kindled by the fire of love and may lose the ‘form’ of worldly desire, and may be ‘re-formed’ by submission to God as to the unchangeable ‘form’, thus becoming acceptable to God because of what it has received from his beauty.”<sup>32</sup> The happiness of the soul is a gift from God, received as the soul is re-formed according to the only true source of this happiness.

A look at Augustine’s description of a mystical experience he undergoes before his conversion can help fill out some of the elements of this model. In Book VII of the Confessions Augustine has a mystical experience in which a voice “from on high” says to him “I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me.”<sup>33</sup> Here, Augustine suggests an analogy of the Eucharist to our daily food but he reverses the relationship. Instead of appropriating the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, to our own needs, we are appropriated by it. On this model, we cannot look at ourselves, at our own needs and desires as an indication of what we actually are. This self, along with its needs and its welfare, needs to be re-figured according to the image of Christ.

Secondly, the practice of the Eucharist is an offering up of oneself out of a desire to undergo this transformation. This action recalls the action of Christ submitting to death on the cross. As Augustine writes, Christ “is both the priest, himself making the offering, and the oblation. This is the reality, and he intended the daily sacrifice of the Church to be the sacramental symbol of this; for the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. VII. 10.

Church, being the body of which he is the head, learns to offer itself through him.”<sup>34</sup> It is this posture, that of offering oneself to God, that is at the heart of this foundational Christian practice. It is in this posture of offering oneself, and only in it, that one can find oneself united with God as this unity comes not after the pattern of a triumph or victory but in the submission modeled by the humility of God in Christ. As Augustine explains while writing on Psalm 33, “by imitating [Christ’s] humility we may have life. By holding fast to Christ’s humility we can strike down Goliath and conquer our pride.”<sup>35</sup> It is in submitting ourselves, not to a dominant or dominating power, but to the perfect example of submission in humility that we are able to participate in the body of Christ. The ‘form’ of happiness thus takes on the form of offering oneself up to being remade in Christ.

For Augustine, the Eucharist is also a socially integrating practice. As we draw near to Christ through imitating his humility, we also draw near to each other. Again, the humility of the practice of the Eucharist is essential in creating the social unity of the Church. As Rowan Williams points out, Augustine is intentionally drawing a contrast between the socially disintegrating pursuit of glory and honour and the practices of the Church binding it together with the bonds of *caritas*.<sup>36</sup> Augustine’s portrayal of the earthly city is one in which the loves that make it possible to call it a community at all are the pursuits that fundamentally undermine its ability to maintain enough unity to hold together.

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<sup>34</sup> CD X. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Maria Boulding, OSB (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2000), 33 (1), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Rowan Williams, “Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*,” *Milltown Studies* 19 & 20 (Spring & Autumn 1987): 60.

The pursuit of glory and honour are fundamentally atomistic projects and therefore undermine both the justice essential to a true commonwealth and the commonality necessary for any kind of community. As I suggested above, Augustine's claim that only the City of God is a true commonwealth as only it gives to God what is due to God is not simply a critique of pagan religion but part of a larger argument Augustine is making about glory, honour, and humility. Augustine suggests that the only remedy for the socially disintegrating pursuit of honour and glory that lies at the heart of Rome in both its politics and religion, is the proper humility before God sustained by the practices and teaching of the Christian Church. It is for this reason that the political and theological elements of City of God, and their links to an Augustinian account of subjectivity found in Confessions and De Trinitate and traced out in the previous chapter, cannot be separated. As Williams puts it, Augustine in City of God attempts "to show that the spiritual is the *authentically* political."<sup>37</sup>

It is along these broad lines that a response to the charge of depoliticization, levelled by Foucault and Connolly, must be engaged. Both Foucault and Connolly see as part of their project the attempt to reinscribe conflict in the political sphere. Both thinkers reject the strategies common in contemporary politics to either exclude alternative voices or to integrate them within the lineaments of a dominant discourse. These discourses can include the medical, managerial or therapeutic but all appear to operate with assumed ends

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 58. Italics in original.



that are outside the realm of political discussion. The power at work in their operation (or ‘deployment’ as Foucault prefers to say) is disguised and conflicts are ostensibly resolved as failures to approach the norms given within the various discourses. The Foucauldian response is to re-narrate the history from the perspective of those colonized by the dominant discourses and to re-envision this process not as one of gradual enlightenment but as a war.

Augustine’s thought does not lie beyond accusations of complicity in the processes of depoliticization and normalization. Augustine’s practice of confession throws the self back on itself as it attempts to interpret its own desires. Inner depths open up continuously in the farthest reaches of the self and the anxiety this produces is interpreted as an indication of a lack of integrity and of harmony with the order of the universe. Through confession and a recognition of the authority of the order this harmony can be restored. Any threat to this harmony, whether these are aspects within oneself that are not easily integrated into it or others who refuse to acknowledge the authority and universal application of Augustine’s own process of ‘soul-making,’ must be defined as a failure and forcibly integrated, excluded, or eliminated. Augustine’s rigor in his self-examination and his tendency to brand others as heretics are two aspects of the same process, a process the rough outlines of which remain in contemporary articulations of political order.

An Augustinian response to this accusation is not so much a denial of this characterization (although it is a caricature) as an attempt to redefine the terms.

Augustine's own construal of public life refuses to reduce it to an account of the conflicts between and within people. For Augustine, this reduction cuts off political life not only from determinations of justice but from a love that might sustain political life. It is only in the fullness of the love of God expressed in Christ and offered continually in the offering of the Church of itself in the Eucharist that true public life can be maintained. This will be a public life founded not in a lack that propels us towards one another but in a fullness that allows us to offer ourselves for the other. For Augustine, it is because of the fullness of Christ's love that we are able to love one another. This love is the meaning of all of our relations with each other but it is a love that cannot be sustained by human capacities alone. The Eucharist is the practice through which the Church is given the gift of Christ's life and through which those within it are able to love one another freely and without reservation. It is only because we are first recipients of God's gift in the Eucharist that we are able to love one another in this way. In Augustine's view, any public life that does not remain open to the fullness of God's love, and one can only remain open in this way through an offering of oneself as Christ offered himself, cannot sustain the virtues that allow it to be a public life at all.

This is not, however, to say that the Church is now, or ever will be before the eschaton, such a body of free and excessive love. Nor does this mean that this model of the Church is an ideal to which practice attempts to attain but always fails. This model is not so much an ideal as an eschatological gift for which one

human life, both individually and politically, drops out of the discussion that principles such as utility and efficiency can slip into the gap. Augustine's development of the distinction between use and enjoyment<sup>39</sup> is intended to demonstrate the necessity of maintaining one's relationships to others within the context of their, and one's own, final end. The exclusion of the consideration of these ends cannot help but make these relationships incoherent. Augustine's alternative, however, is not simply a 're-inscribing' of this issue within the political sphere that opens up the possibility of agonistic relations between rivals. Instead, Augustine wants to redefine public life in a way that recognizes that it can only be sustained in the orientation of oneself and one's community towards God.

Secondly, the fundamental lesson of the Eucharist is that it teaches us how to offer ourselves.<sup>40</sup> The fundamental political posture of the Church for Augustine therefore, is the offering of itself through Christ. This is a posture that must be understood as utterly different from the orientation to a norm. It is a posture that is inter-relational and personal instead of individualizing and abstract. It is a posture that is radically open to the other but at the same time recognizes that this openness cannot be taken up as a posture on one's own resources. Instead, the movement of offering oneself to another is, simultaneously, a movement of offering oneself up to God. It is only because the Church's offering of itself allows it to be filled with the love of God that it may engage in the

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<sup>39</sup> Discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>40</sup> CD X. 20.

sacrificial love of others. The Church's dependence on God becomes, therefore, the source of the Church's offering itself to others. The posture of offering oneself found in the Eucharist is neither polemical (as in an agonistic politics) nor therapeutic (as in a normalizing politics) but offers an alternative to both. The Church's purpose is found in this posture of offering itself and it is sustained in this purpose by God, not by its self-assertion or by the protection of the temporal power of the state or its representatives.

Thirdly, the image of offering oneself that is an essential element of the practice of the Eucharist is complemented by an image of receiving oneself having been reformed in the act of offering. This image presents a striking contrast with the pattern of normalization in which the norm is considered the ideal of human life. In contrast, Augustine, following Saint Paul, traces out a contrast between being 'con-formed' to this age and being 're-formed' in newness of mind.<sup>41</sup> All of this language of formation, however, is discussed within the context of Augustine's assertion that the Church's sacrifice unites it with God in Christ "under the *form* of a servant."<sup>42</sup> It is true that a subject is constituted in this act of worship. As Augustine writes, "So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, you are the mystery that has been placed on the Lord's table; the mystery that you receive is you."<sup>43</sup> It appears that Augustine means by this that it is only in this act of offering oneself to God, in sacrificing one's own desires and

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<sup>41</sup> CD X. 6. The quotation is from Romans 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Here Augustine is quoting Philippians 2:7. Italics mine.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *Sermons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993) Sermon 272.

loves in this act of worship that one is constituted as a true subject. It is, therefore, in the practice of servanthood, made a reality in the Eucharist, that one receives oneself as a gift from God. And it is the pattern of this servanthood, again shown forth in the practice of the Eucharist, that provides us with the ground for a critique of the ‘con-forming’ that the age presses upon us. Apart from this pattern, critique of this order can only be a desperate act of self-assertion that is destined to recapitulate its most chilling features. The submission of Christ to obedience to God gives us an *exemplar* of this servanthood and our practice of the Eucharist makes it present in the social organization of the Church.

The offering of the Eucharist is, therefore, an irreducibly social act. As Augustine preaches, “Remember that bread is not made from one grain, but from many. When you were being exorcised, it’s as though you were being ground. When you were baptized it’s as though you were mixed into dough. When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit, it’s as though you were baked. Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”<sup>44</sup> And, as he continues with reference to the wine, “many grapes hang in the bunch, but the juice of the grapes is poured together in one vessel.”<sup>45</sup> In these images the themes of receiving oneself and that of social unity are combined with reference to the elements of the Eucharistic service. The bringing together of many individuals to form a single body is done, not through exclusion and marginalization but through the reception of oneself as a gift, received only as it is offered up, to God and to others.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Another important characteristic of the Eucharist with political implications is its eschatological nature. The practice of the Eucharist anticipates the final consummation of the faith of the Church in Christ. Both the present enjoyment and the anticipation of this consummation are dependent on receiving it as a gift from God that is never possessed in a determinate or predictable way. Whereas a norm must be measurable and determinable to be useful, the subject constituted within the practices of the Church is, as understood by Augustine, always receiving its subjectivity from the future and as a gift. The fulfillment of one's subjectivity can never be definitively known or understood, but must always be allowed to come to one as a surprise.

Augustine's model of political subjectivity must, therefore, be seen as one constituted not by a norm but by a relationship outside of oneself, from which one receives oneself. One participates in this relationship by offering oneself to it and to others. This offering is made possible through the fullness of love given by God. It is teleological but this does not give us knowledge of it in the sense of mastery. The ends of both the subject and the political community are not determinable in the sense of being exhaustively accessible to our understanding. These ends can only be waited on eschatologically.

This is a model of political relationships that is radically different from both Foucault's and the modern political model. To this point, however, the discussion has been theoretical. What remains is to delineate the way in which this alternative vision of political community can have an impact on contemporary

political life. After a brief discussion of this in the final chapter, I will attempt to outline the type of contribution an Augustinian articulation of contemporary political issues could make.

## Chapter 7: An Augustinian Political Posture

In the previous chapter I have attempted to develop an Augustinian political posture based on the practice of the Eucharist. I have tried to show that this political posture can respond to the most pressing political problems of the disciplinary and normalizing regime in which we live. Foucault diagnoses these problems in insightful ways but fails to address them in a coherent and satisfying way. In contrast, I have argued that Augustine's understanding of both the political subject and the political community contains an implicit critique of Foucault's response of aesthetic self-creation and responds to these issues in a fuller and more satisfactory manner.

The Augustinian response I have articulated is doubtlessly derived from the doctrines and practices of the Christian Church. Augustine never contends that an adequate response to the political and personal problems of his age can be developed without reference to the revelation of God found in Christ and embodied in the Church. Any faithful Augustinianism must resist the temptation to bleed out the particularity of Augustine's political theory in order to make a more general 'contribution' to the field as it is now constituted. On the other hand, however, an Augustinian political response must have a broader application than simply to those who happen to be Augustinian Christians. This broader application must be described without slipping in to the same totalizing discourse of mastery that has been criticized. An Augustinian politics must be able to



indicate its own relevance without justifying this in terms of a sole and transparent appropriation and articulation of the truth.

I have tried to indicate this aspect of my attempt to articulate an Augustinian politics by terming my description an Augustinian political ‘posture’ rather than a theory. This posture provides an implicit critique of and an alternative to both a Foucauldian political agonism and a politics of discipline and normalization. What remains to be addressed is the way in which this critique and alternative can have an impact on the secular political sphere. The relationship between this Augustinian political posture and the contemporary political context cannot be conceptualized in the same way that Augustine conceived of the relationship between the City of God and the earthly city. It has become clear through our discussion of the regime of discipline and normalization that, despite its modern character and its secular application, it is, at least in some ways, derived from Augustinian practices. These practices have, however, as this dissertation has attempted to show, been cut off from the overall context within which they are coherent. This fact complicates the relationship between modern political practice and an Augustinian politics to which it is not altogether unrelated. An Augustinian critique must consist not only in the criticism of political practice but also in the reminder of the original context in which these practices are coherent.

Of course, I cannot here develop a complete model of the proper relations between Church and State or between religion and politics, even simply from the

perspective of the Augustinian political posture I have outlined. Such a project would require an entire book or, more likely, several. Instead, I will attempt to sketch out some broad principles for an Augustinian encounter with the secular political order.

First, it has been my claim that one of the most prominent characteristics of an Augustinian politics is that it takes up the posture of offering oneself. An Augustinian political posture of offering oneself can scarcely coherently exert itself in seeking mastery over the political order. The place of the Church is not to make demands on the political realm because of its privileged access to truth. This should not, however, preclude Christian participation in this order. The form of this participation must be founded in the fundamental Christian practice of the Eucharist and exemplify the offering of the Church as Christ is himself offered in the Eucharist.

A second characteristic of an Augustinian encounter with secular politics is related to this posture of offering oneself. According to Augustine, the Eucharistic community looks toward the consummation of history as it is enclosed in the work of God. The hope of an Augustinian political community is dependent only on the work of God and not on its own ability to exert its will. This eschatological character of the Church is what allows it to offer itself without desperation or anxiety at the prospects of its success.

What sets an Augustinian political posture apart from the contemporary political context perhaps most clearly is that it cannot accept the view that the

ends of political life, or of the political subject, lie immanent within them. It is this immanent view, I have argued, that paves the way for a totalizing regime of biopower. This regime can only be coherently resisted when the ends of political (and other) relations as well as the ends of the subject are found outside of them.

This concluding chapter will be a preliminary attempt to outline in more specific terms some of the possible practical implications of an Augustinian political posture. It is hoped that this analysis will allow for a clearer distinction between this posture and both a Foucauldian agonistic politics and the politics of normalization. To this end, I will develop an analysis of two important contemporary political issues that also correspond to Foucault's assertion that erotic and pedagogical relations provide the most hope for developing a politics that resists totalization. A closer look at Augustine's sacramental view of sexuality and his understanding of correction and reproach will give an indication of some of the avenues that future work could take in tracing out the practical applications of an Augustinian political posture. It will not be possible to outline a complete Augustinian sexual ethic or to exhaustively delineate Augustine's understanding of pedagogy. Instead, I will only be able to suggest in the broadest strokes the distinctions entailed between an Augustinian view of these issues and Foucault's diagnosis of the contemporary political situation. At particular points it will also be useful to point out the specific contrasts between Augustine's view and Foucault's positive response to the problems of the modern disciplinary regime of bio-power.

### Augustine's Sacramental Sexuality

Much of Foucault's project can be understood as an attempt to free the erotic from its modern domestication in sexuality. This formulation is somewhat misleading, however, because it perpetuates an image of a primary 'erotic' force that is somehow imprisoned in the medical and psychological discourse of sexuality. Foucault does not really intend to 'liberate' the erotic but to cast doubt on the modern assumption that the 'natural' constitution of the erotic is within the sexual. Part of Foucault's ethical project intends the demonstration of the contingency of this particular 'deployment' of the body and the erotic and the attempt to hint at alternatives to this. Foucault is attracted to the erotic because, although it is saturated with power relations, it also allows for their reversal and ambiguity.<sup>1</sup> Erotic relations can no longer be called erotic when the structure of the relations atrophy and are static. For this reason, Foucault sees opportunities lodged within these relations for a politics that does not fall into domination and totalization. Erotic relations resist these tendencies despite the ease with which they can be integrated, though never without residue, into existing relations of power.

I have already dealt extensively with the important place that love has in both Augustine's understanding of the subject and his view of political community. Here I want to suggest that Augustine's articulation of continence can provide resources of resistance to a regime of biopower as it is diagnosed by

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<sup>1</sup> See Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern..." *EW1*, 298. This passage is discussed above in Chapter 3.

Foucault. By this I do not mean to suggest that Augustine anticipates the modern world and its particular political challenges. I do, however, want to suggest that Augustine, like Foucault, discerns the links between erotics and politics and between sexuality and power. Furthermore, in examining Augustine's account of continence we will be able to see these links more clearly and to develop a response to the particular political vulnerabilities of sexuality that is not susceptible to the difficulties of Foucault's "ethic of the intensification of pleasure"<sup>2</sup> dependent on an aesthetics already criticized above.

For Augustine, the realm of human sexuality allows an observer a particularly clear view of the frailty of human moral life. He is especially conscious of his own frailty in this regard and describes in Confessions his realization that his own continence would require celibacy.<sup>3</sup> Although it is true that, for Augustine, sexual continence is only an example of a higher continence of the heart<sup>4</sup> it certainly remains the case that sexual continence is deeply important to Augustine as a particularly powerful example. I do not wish to contribute to an overemphasis on Augustine's concern with sexuality that has been often decried<sup>5</sup> but I will focus on Augustine's understanding of sexual

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "An Interview by Stephen Riggins," in EW1, 131.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, Confessions, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), VIII. 11 and 12.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine says this himself in On Continence, in Marriage and Virginity, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Ray Kearney, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 1.2-2.4. Gerald Schlabach traces Augustine's use of this concept of a higher continence through much of his work. See "Love is the Hand of the Soul": The Grammar of Continence in Augustine's Doctrine of Christian Love," Journal of Early Christian Studies 6.1 (1998), 59-92.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gerald Bonner "Libido and Concupiscentia in St. Augustine," Studia Patristica 6 (1962): 303-14, Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Chapter 19, Robert Dodaro

continence for the purpose of developing a possible Augustinian response to Foucault's concern with biopower and governmentality.

Augustine's concern with continence must be understood within the broader context of his understanding of love, made clear in his account of the contrast between use and enjoyment. This distinction in Augustine has been examined in detail in the previous chapter and it lies at the background of his discussion of continence and concupiscence. Continence lies in refraining from enjoying what must only be used in order that one does not utterly give oneself over to what cannot make one happy. Continence makes room for the true enjoyment of God in *caritas* and this founds a right relationship with everything else in the world. In contrast, concupiscence is the enjoyment of what must rightly only be used and results in a grasping and desperate attempt to possess what can never truly belong to one.

Perhaps the best known passage in which Augustine reflects on continence comes in Book X of Confessions in which Augustine writes, “[b]y continence we are collected together and brought to the unity from which we disintegrated into multiplicity. He loves you less who together with you loves something which he does not love for your sake. O love, you ever burn and are never extinguished. O charity, my God, set me on fire.”<sup>6</sup> In this passage, Augustine envisions the restraint implied in continence as a process of being gathered together. He is

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“Augustine's Secular City” in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless eds. Augustine and His Critics (London: Routledge, 2000) and Schuld, Foucault and Augustine.

<sup>6</sup> Confessions X. 29. 40.

striving for an integrity that is possible, he suggests, only when one's loves are ordered towards the love of God. It is continence that allows for this ordering of loves and, as is clear from Augustine's passionate language, this ordering is not meant to make him less erotic, but more so. It is meant to focus and intensify his love by ordering it towards the source from which it flows.

A useful way to understand Augustine's use of the concept of continence is offered by Gerald Schlabach who contrasts Augustine's description of the action of grasping with that of clinging.<sup>7</sup> Augustine writes, "consider a man's love: think of it as, so to say, the hand of the soul. If it is holding anything, it cannot hold anything else. But that it may be able to hold what is given to it, it must leave go what it holds already. This I say, see how expressly I say it; 'Whoever loves the world cannot love God; he has his hand engaged.' God says to him, 'Hold what I give.' He will not leave go what he was holding; he cannot receive what is offered."<sup>8</sup> The act of grasping, as understood by Augustine, represents an attempt to acquire and possess goods (these can be objects or other people) for the sake of private control instead of in community with others. Paradoxically, the attempt to grasp temporal goods and other human beings results in one's enslavement to them instead of one's ownership of them.

In contrast, when these things are released from one's grasp, one is free to receive the gifts of God. It is in embracing God without a desperate desire to possess and control that one is able to open oneself to receive the gifts one was

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald Schlabach, "Love is the Hand of the Soul."

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Schlabach. The quotation is from Augustine, Sermon 125.7.

never able to possess when grasping at them. In a parallel paradox, Augustine suggests that even in clinging to God we do not really hold onto God, but are in fact held by God, that is, caught up in his charity along with those goods to which we now have a right relation and those other people with whom we share this desire to cling to God.<sup>9</sup> This contrast between a more broadly conceived continence and concupiscence allows us to understand the context of Augustine's understanding of sexual continence and its relation to his understanding of the loves of the human subject.

To this point, however, no real response to Foucault's construal of biopower has been offered. In fact, it would seem that Augustine's focusing and intensification of erotic desire within the context of a proper ordering of loves plays nicely into the hands of a regime of biopower. It is an essential element of Foucault's thought that power is not simply repressive but sustains and fosters life by implanting and evoking desire. The continent fostering of a properly ordered erotic life that Augustine proposes does not resist the structure of biopower but, in fact, can be used within this structure. The historical expansion of the structure of pastoral power, its secularization and the growing importance of medical and psychological discourses provided a context in which the continence approved by Augustine could be turned towards significantly different purposes. These purposes include the growth of surveillance and discipline as means of political control.

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<sup>9</sup> This theme occurs in *De Trin* IX.1.



The response to this challenge must come from the particulars of Augustine's view of what he calls the goods of marriage.<sup>10</sup> These goods are threefold for Augustine and include offspring, fidelity, and, thirdly, the sacramental nature of marriage. By the last of these Augustine means to suggest that marriage is a sign or symbol of an eternal reality. He describes this aspect of marriage by writing that "the sacrament of monogamous marriage of our time is a symbol that in the future we shall all be united and subject to God in the one heavenly city."<sup>11</sup> So the meaning of marriage must be referred both to the love of God and to the future consummation of history. It is not simply an issue of either repressing or fostering the erotic life but of developing it within a transcendent and eschatological context. Marital love conceived as a sacrament is referred to the God from whom can be received a love that does not need to manipulate or control its object because it is received as a gift only insofar as it gives itself. Because this sacramental marriage looks outside of itself and the realm of temporal goods it can escape the totalizing tendencies of biopower and governmentality. A sacramental view of marriage, in which the erotic life of those married is sustained and given its meaning from an end that it can never definitively appropriate, can never be fully integrated into a system of totalizing and exhaustive categories such as those in operation in a regime of biopower.

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<sup>10</sup> The Good of Marriage is the title of a work of Augustine's on marriage. It can be found in translation as Augustine, The Excellence of Marriage, in Marriage and Virginity, ed. David G. Hunter, trans. Ray Kearney (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>11</sup> The Excellence of Marriage, 18.21.

Of course, the issue of marriage has recently moved into the centre of contemporary political discussion. It has done so over the issue of whether marriage should be ‘redefined’ so as to include homosexual relationships or whether such relationships fail to meet the criteria of marriage and can therefore only be called, at the most, a civil union. In dealing with this issue I do not intend to examine Augustine’s own views on homosexuality or on normative sexual relations. Instead I want to discuss how an Augustinian approach to the issue can provide a critique of the way in which it is framed in contemporary political discourse and can help frame it in a more satisfying way.

Before developing an articulation of the issue in Augustinian terms, it will be necessary to outline some of the assumptions implicit in the contemporary modes of discourse that must be avoided. The first concerns the tendency of political discussion on this issue to take the form of a debate over whether marriage should be redefined or the traditional definition of marriage should be maintained. The implicit assumption that marriage lies both under our jurisdiction to define or redefine as we see fit and that it lies within our grasp to understand exhaustively and without excess indicate a belief that we are masters of the forms of our own relationships. The desire to exert mastery over marriage as an expression of normative sexuality is seen equally in those attempting to maintain a traditional definition and those seeking a redefinition. Both sides assume that marriage relationships lie under human jurisdiction and can either be

recast in new molds or must be re-affirmed by the broader social community to maintain their efficacy.

The attempt to exert mastery over marriage and over sexuality by means of this strategy is not defused in the view that marriage is not under human jurisdiction but that its normativity is immanent because of the gendered nature of human beings. This merely pushes the desire for mastery back one step. The claims made about the definition of marriage and its transparency to full and exhaustive knowledge are now made about gendered humans and their appropriate ends. As this view works itself out practically, an immanent human nature and a normativity implicit in it are established for the subject to which it must orient itself. This is precisely the process of normalization that has been criticized above.

Of course, marriage is socially mediated in a more complex way than allows it to be thought of as either biologically ‘given’ or as under our jurisdiction to define or redefine at will. The social mediation of marriage and its diverse cultural articulations is an important area for study but would take me too far afield to devote adequate time to it. Instead I want to demonstrate how these normalizing understandings of marriage can be resisted by the sacramental view that Augustine develops in which marriage points beyond itself and draws the subjects involved beyond the bounds of their own relationship while also allowing for the good of fidelity.

Before giving an indication of how an Augustinian understanding of the sacramental nature of marriage might allow us to avoid the normalization and attempt at mastery implicit in contemporary political discussion regarding marriage, I must also discuss the drawbacks of the Foucauldian response to this issue. Augustine's view also has the advantage of avoiding the assumption that normalizing relations of biopower can be resisted in the rejection of marriage in favour of the multiplication of erotic relations that do not conform to the model of marriage. An Augustinian critique of this multiplication of erotic relations has already been outlined in a parallel form with regard to Foucault's proposal of aesthetic self-creation. Without a reference beyond the bounds of the particular relations to which the erotic is directed and by which it is sustained, these relations cannot help but collapse into their own insularity and desire for mastery. The erotic can only be sustained when it is received as a gift that comes freely and can therefore be the source of one's ability to offer oneself to others. Without this reference beyond the subject and the subject's voluntary relations, the erotic can be referred only to the subject's own self-creation and its pleasures. This is itself the collapse of the erotic into solipsism and incoherence.

Another important aspect of contemporary political discourse surrounding marriage involves the argument that the secular authority should be called upon to legitimate 'civic unions' while leaving the solemnization of marriage to those cultural and religious institutions that concern themselves with it. This solution has the *prima facie* advantage of defusing the controversy through the reassertion

of the separation of Church and State, a principle at the foundation of the modern state. This resolution does not, however, address the concerns expressed above that the definition or redefinition of such relationships paves the way for the establishment of the normativity of particular relations that are shot through with biopower. Although it seems appealing to establish civic unions for the sake of bureaucratic and administrative efficiency without addressing the more contentious issues of human nature and the nature of erotic relations, this is precisely the type of efficiency of which we must be most suspicious. Dividing powers between the recognition of civic unions and the performing of marriages does nothing to dismantle a regime of discipline and normalization. In fact, by splitting off those aspects of marriage that reach beyond the temporal and beyond the couple and their immediate bureaucratic context, this division places the only characteristics of marriage able to resist a regime of discipline and normalization into an apolitical and, finally, irrelevant realm. The reduction of marriage, in its political manifestation, to a civic union forces it to take the form of a contract, bleeding eros out of it and allowing it to be subsumed under a regime of biopower.

Augustine, in contrast, insists that sacramentality is an irreducible element of marriage and, therefore, by extension, of erotic relations in general as marriage is the model of other such relations. In Augustine, we have a recognition that these relationships point both beyond and above themselves and are themselves received as gifts. This understanding of marriage is necessary both for the sake of

the resistance of normalization and to avoid its collapse into insularity and incoherence.

In the above section, I have been able to give only the outline of an Augustinian attempt to redefine the terms of political discourse. Much more work must be done to develop an adequate Augustinian response on this issue. It will be useful, however, to attempt a similar engagement between Augustine and contemporary political discourse in the domain of punishment.

#### Punishment, Correction, and Reproach

Michel Foucault points to both erotic and pedagogical relationships as models for his own attempt to develop paradigms of relationships without domination. In response to this I have given some indication of an Augustinian construal of erotic life and would now like to do the same with regard to Augustine's view of punishment and correction. This will allow for a cautious defence of elements of Augustine's view of discipline criticized by Foucault and for an Augustinian critique of Foucault's own view of the possibilities of pedagogical relationships.

Augustine uses a number of terms to cover several concepts that it will be important to distinguish. *Correptio*, meaning reproach or admonishment, must not be confused with *correctio*, meaning the improvement that comes from *correptio*. For Augustine, *correptio* is a medicine that is meant for the cure of the soul. This can include punishment but is more often meant to refer to a verbal reproof. Of course, for Augustine, the admonishment of humans belongs

primarily to the work of God.<sup>12</sup> God both knows the state of the soul that is in need of reproach and the type of admonishment most appropriate to it. Those within the church are also required by charity to admonish those who are practicing evil but this is a more complicated matter. It is made complex by our inability to judge rightly the soul of another and our own tendency to make judgments that are polluted by self-righteousness and pride. Both of these difficulties are indicated in the famous objection in the Gospel of Matthew that one must “first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s.”<sup>13</sup> For Augustine, our attitude must be sincere and our reproach motivated only by love if it is to be a genuine example of *correptio* tending towards *correctio*.

The necessity of this attitude makes judgment, as well as reproach and correction, a difficult matter. Augustine’s famous description of the judge forced to make a judgment about the guilt or innocence of the accused without adequate or infallible information exemplifies this difficulty. This duty is unavoidable but the judge must tremble with terror at its weight. It is impossible to see with absolute confidence into the heart of another and to be able to declare without doubt their guilt or innocence. The judge shows his worth if he “acknowledges this necessity [of judging despite a lack of complete information] as a mark of human wretchedness, when he hates that necessity in his own actions and when, if he has the wisdom of devotion, he cries out to God, ‘Deliver me from my

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<sup>12</sup> De Trin 3.19.22 and Conf 10.3.3 and 12.16.23.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 7:5, quoted by Augustine in Expositions of the Psalms 54.7.

necessities!’”<sup>14</sup> The wise judge must recognize both his own fallibility and his own position as one under judgment. Any judgments must therefore be made in both humility and terror.

This humility must also be a characteristic of the reproach of those within the church. Augustine does not despair of the salvation of any person, no matter how unrepentant or stubborn. This stubbornness is never a reason to desert or exclude those who do not accept reproach.<sup>15</sup> One can never be sure of the future possibilities for repentance and one cannot avoid the danger of uprooting the wheat with the tares if one excludes the unrepentant.<sup>16</sup> The use of this metaphor highlights Augustine’s view that one cannot see reliably into the soul of another and certainly not with enough confidence to make a declaration regarding their salvation.

The humble attitude Augustine proposes both when reproaching another and when engaging in necessary judgment does not answer Foucault’s critique adequately. For Foucault, it is precisely the Augustinian fear at not being able to see into the soul of another and yet being forced to make judgments based on the order of this soul that is the problem. Augustine may be humble about what lies in the soul of another, and even about what lies within his own soul, but he retains at least a degree of confidence about his ability to judge between right and wrong if he could see into the soul. The judge we described above must be humble

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<sup>14</sup> CD XIX.6. The quotation is from Psalm 25:17.

<sup>15</sup> See Augustine, *On the Donatist Controversy*, vol. 3, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine* trans. J.R. King (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872) Epistle 185. 2.7.

<sup>16</sup> Epistle 105.5.16.



because of his own lack of reliable information but Augustine does not seem to undermine the judge's ability to come to sure judgment if such information were accessible. Foucault's critique of this attitude is that it creates within one, and within those who must make such judgments, a drive to make transparent the soul, both one's own and the other's. The result of this drive is the practice of confession. This is a practice that appears to solve the problem by forcing the inner depths of the soul to the surface. As I have described in a previous chapter, however, Foucault argues that the practice of confession can be better understood as almost constructing a soul from the inside out.<sup>17</sup>

Foucault's proposal of an ethic of aesthetic self-creation is an attempt to detach the soul from any normative order. This would introduce a humility into the act of judgment that would not simply be a result of an inability to see into the depths of the soul but that also would not claim confidence in judging the proper order of the soul. Foucault does not reject judgment or even the admonishment Augustine defends. His own work is filled with examples of these practices.<sup>18</sup> Foucault refuses, however, to appeal to a transcendent normative foundation for these judgments. Foucault appeals instead to a humility that recognizes that judgment, while necessary, is arbitrary and does not restore a normative order of which we can be sure.

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<sup>17</sup> See above, Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists" in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) and "Confronting Governments: Human Rights," in Michel Foucault, *EW3*.

An Augustinian response, however, must be modeled after the same pattern as those responses outlined above. Augustine's reference to the wheat and tares referred to above places his understanding of discipline, punishment, admonishment and correction within an eschatological framework. This very framework is a critique of totalizing systems of discipline and control. The order of the soul cannot be established by any system and, although admonishment is directed towards correction, it is unable to achieve this correction simply through its effect on the person admonished. For it is only by God's grace that one can perform God's commandments. This grace, and the ordering of the soul towards the good, can only be received as a gift, not achieved as an accomplishment of the soul itself.

For Augustine, discipline cannot simply remake the soul from the ground up. Nor, however, is the order of the soul simply a play between discipline and resistance. The admonishment Augustine suggests cannot construct a soul but can only recall one to a posture of offering oneself to be remade by God. At his best, Augustine leaves the remaking of the soul to God and sees admonishment as an, at times necessary, spur to a penitence that allows one to be remade by God, not by the discipline applied. The practice of confession is not a step towards a transparency to others or even to ourselves, this is always out of reach, but a practice of offering oneself as one is offered in the Eucharist.

This can, perhaps, be highlighted by a brief account of what some of the characteristics of an Augustinian pedagogical relationship might be in distinction

from a Foucauldian model of this relationship and the model that appears to be dominant in the contemporary context. Augustine's eschatological understanding of rebuke and correction provides a stark contrast to contemporary concerns with instilling a spirit of entrepreneurial innovation and adaptability in the subjects of education. The shift from a pedagogical focus on the development of skills to the attempt to inculcate the ability to adapt to the changing demands of the workplace bears several of the marks of a normalizing society I have analyzed above. The discipline necessary to teach someone a skill has taken one further step and the subject is required to internalize the purposes of the discipline and exert them on herself. The demands made on the subject are assumed to be 'given' by the context of the market and it is the responsibility of the subject to predict the shifting of these demands and conform himself to their movements. Of course, these changes are almost impossible to predict as their source has all the inscrutability and fickleness of any of the pagan deities Augustine describes in his analysis of Rome.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the victims of these changes who are made redundant or obsolete are responsible themselves for their lack of adaptability. They themselves bear the guilt for their failure to reach norms that multiply and shift with alarming unpredictability. This guilt can be addressed with retraining (some of which includes a renewed focus on ways to adapt oneself to the changing demands of the workplace, one presumes) but the focus on adaptability never allows one to call into question the broader system.

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<sup>19</sup> See CD, especially Book IV.

Foucault's response to this situation is to provide methodological tools that can help one perform such a calling into question of the system. I have already examined Foucault's use of genealogy as a tool that creates a detachment from the assumptions of one's own social context. A Foucauldian genealogy highlights the arbitrariness of any particular collection of norms and casts doubts on the perception that these norms are an inevitable outworking of human nature or of the impersonal operation of unchanging laws. The detachment brought about by a genealogy can allow for a new freedom of the subject within her social context. From the midst of this freedom the subject can locate herself in the play between discipline and resistance and forge a subjectivity that relates to itself no longer in terms of the norms it approaches or fails to approach but in terms of its own aesthetic sensibilities.

Clearly, an Augustinian response cannot take exactly the same path that the above response does.<sup>20</sup> Augustine also detaches the subject from his immediate context but he does so through an insistence that all social contexts stand under the judgment of God. For Augustine, the transformation of the subject must take place according to the eschatological and relational pattern of the Eucharist. This pattern is in sharp contrast to the adaptation of the subject to a norm that is no longer imposed from without but embedded within any subject that construes itself as student or employee.

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<sup>20</sup> A more complete analysis of an Augustinian pedagogy would have to take into account Augustine's epistemological reflections, especially in *De Magistro*. This is beyond the scope of this dissertation which is more narrowly focused on political concerns.

The thrust of the Augustinian critique of this situation is in the insistence on the eschatological nature of the ends of all aspects of human life. This relativizes all present configurations of human society as they all stand equally under the judgement of God. This judgement is anticipated but not ever definitively known or understood. It therefore provides a basis for critique of the present context without falling into the trap of imagining that this critique must originate from a transparent and totalizing understanding of the human good.

For this Augustinian view, the transformation of the subject comes neither through the orientation of the subject towards norms, nor through the play between discipline and resistance. Instead, the transformation of the subject comes only through the work of God on one's soul, a work that is not initiated by oneself nor imposed on one from without. Nor is it found in the desperate attempt to adapt oneself to the present context or circumstances.

What is required in this context is a humility regarding what can safely and surely be achieved by any pedagogy. An Augustinian critical pedagogy must have a fairly circumspect hope for any educational system. The best that any verbal reproof or instruction can hope for is to act as a spur to the learner to open herself to the work of God. This makes for a humbler attitude towards the possibilities found in any pedagogical techniques but it also serves to limit the dangers that are always nearby at the attempt to intentionally form the subject.

I have been able to give only the briefest of accounts of an Augustinian approach to some of the pedagogical principles that seem to be a characteristic of

the modern political context. I have not given an exhaustive account of either an Augustinian sexual ethics or an Augustinian explanation of the links between discipline, rebuke, and correction. It is hoped, however, that these suggestive examples of an Augustinian engagement with the contemporary political context can indicate some of the fruitful ways in which such an encounter can be pursued. This Augustinian posture must insist that the subject and her political relations are teleological but that this telos does not lie immanently within them but is received eschatologically.

The fundamental question that I have been trying to address is what it means to be a political Augustinian after the political critique of Foucault. It is not enough simply to reassert Augustine in the face of Foucault. Foucault has been too successful in tracing out the more insidious aspects of modern political practice and implicating Augustinian attitudes in them. Augustine must be reformulated to address Foucault's concerns substantively. This reformulation of Augustine in the light of Foucault's criticism will allow for a more adequate response to the contemporary political situation than Foucault is able himself to provide.

It may be true that an Augustinian political posture rests on principles that are just as contentious as Foucault's own political alternative. It is not likely that a final resolution of their differences is possible and this thesis has not attempted that task. My attempt, instead, has been to suggest what the outlines of an Augustinian response to Foucault must be.

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