

demanded by God, even if, perhaps especially if, the rebellious individual did not desire it.

This moment, in which proper self-government was constituted as a form of self-renunciation that welcomed the domination of the subject by a more expert subject, was a tremendously important moment in the lineage that would give rise to contemporary disciplinary relations. It is at this moment that the subject turns away from itself as a source of acceptable self-government and looks in obedience and compliance to another in order to find the proper direction. The monastery dominates the becoming and constitution of individuals in God's name; it dominates individuals for their own good so that they may achieve their proper ends regardless of whether they desire or even fully understand those ends. In the name of God, the almighty, infallible, and loving Father of all, the monastery authorizes itself to impose a form of subjectivity on individuals that the individual had to prepare for through continual self-renunciation and accept with obedience. The ethical Expert (God), His discourse (the Bible and by extension the *Rule*), and His emissaries (the abbot and his deans), gain a legitimate domination over the body and soul of the brothers in which it is necessary that the brothers renounce themselves and work in total obedience for his own good.

Although Foucault patiently documents the translation of technologies of hierarchy, space and temporal control between the monastery and the disciplines, he almost never explores the genealogy of this self-relation of renunciation and obedience as it moves into the disciplinary context. It will be our job in the next section to flesh out this insight in the context of disciplinary power relations.

The Disciplinary Self-Relation

First, we must begin by marking a difference: the disciplines introduce the opposite disturbance into the self-relation that Christianity brought to the Greco-Roman care of the self in that the disciplines return the *telos* of moral practice to life from the afterlife. The goal of disciplinary practice shifts from salvation to a variety of 'worldly' ends, such as a well-trained effi-

ciency; coordination with other subjects; docility; and standardization:

Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was also a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility.³⁴

The disciplines took their aims from the growing administration and coordination of the population to create the "perfect society" through training people in a military fashion, progressively moving them ever more towards an "automatic docility" that would allow them to work like the "meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine."

To achieve this dream of a perfect society, the disciplines did not return to the positive valuation of human nature that permitted the Greco-Roman culture to believe that people could master and govern themselves. The aim of self-renunciation remained along with obedience to an expert who possessed the truth about how the individual should conduct its own conduct. In the disciplines as in the monastery, subjects were not to determine the direction of their own formation as subjects by following their own inclinations, pleasures, and best ideas but by submitting to a series of experts who possessed the truth according to which subjectivization should occur:

With this new economy of power, the carceral system, which is [discipline's] basic instrument, permitted the emergence of a new form of "law": a mixture of legality and nature, prescription and constitution, the norm. . . . The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the "social worker"-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements.³⁵

As Foucault indicates in this quote, the 'truth' of disciplinary doctrines is not drawn from God, the

Bible, or the *Rule* as was the case in the monastery, but from the “judges” of the human sciences. These human scientists produced a scientific discourse that prescribed how bodies should conduct themselves. The psychologists, doctors, industrial engineers, evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, educators, political scientists, and criminal justice experts were and are thought to be able to scientifically determine a normal range of acceptable behaviors from their scientific regard of the human body and psyche. Although the disciplines differ from the monastery in that their aims are earthly and that their authority extends from the sciences instead of from God, both aim at the renunciation of the individual’s self-governance and see obedience to an expert discourse as a significant part of subjectivization.

The obedience of the disciplinary subject was not an accidental holdover from the monastery but was actively sought as one of the primary benefits of disciplinary power relations: “While jurists or philosophers were seeking in the pact a primal model for the construction or reconstruction of the social body, the soldiers and with them the technicians of discipline were elaborating procedures for the individual and collective coercion of bodies.”³⁶ Knowledges were being constructed to make individuals fearful of their own self-governance and ready to renounce their own insufficient attempts at self-governance:

And the mere fact that one claimed to be speaking about it from the rarefied and neutral viewpoint of a science is in itself significant. . . . Claiming to speak the truth, it stirred up people’s fears; the least oscillations of sexuality, it ascribed an imagined dynasty of evils destined to be passed on for generations; it declared the furtive customs of the timid, and the most solitary of petty manias, dangerous for the whole society; strange pleasures, it warned, would eventually result in nothing short of death: that of individuals, generations, the species itself.³⁷

Here we have many of the elements of the monastery translated into the disciplinary context: the assumption that the public would wickedly bring “civil disorder” if left to its own guidance; the demand that individuals renounce their own self-leadership for obedience and docility to an expert

authority; the establishment of a true form of self-constitution that can only come from binding oneself in a deep relationship of obedience to the higher authority of the discipline; and, finally, the goal of establishing a network of disciplinary institutions across society to teach self-renunciation, docility and obedience and establish, not God’s Kingdom, but a perfectly coordinated apparatus that maintains all of the individual pieces of society in docility and clockwork order.

Looked at from the perspective of the relationship of the self to the self we can see further reason why disciplinary power relations are so pernicious. Disciplinary power relations exert such a dominant form of control, not just because they seek to impose their own normative standards of conduct through meticulous and rigorous training methods, but also because they teach the individual to distrust and renounce their own self-leadership. Disciplinary power relations offer a strong one-two punch of the imposition and effective training of the “true” forms of subjectivity and the introduction of self-renunciation that undermines the self’s own resources to refuse their subordination. Disciplinary obedience is formed not just by the coercion imposed by others but also by the individual’s own deep-seated practices of self-renunciation.

In contrast, Greco-Roman morality proceeded from norms to their stylization as part of a process of self-mastery and self-formation: “it was a means of developing—for the smallest minority of the population, made up of free, adult males—an aesthetics of existence, the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game.”³⁸ Although the ancients still had a number of requisite norms, they gave space to a few individuals to stylize the way that they came to embody these norms. This practice of self-formation reflected their confidence in the individual to seek out and embody the good and a distinct distaste for becoming enslaved to another person or doctrine for leadership.³⁹ In fact, when certain Romans began seeing moral teachers later in life, it seemed ridiculous to their peers because it was an embarrassment to submit oneself to another in obedience beyond one’s youth: “This extreme

eagerness of adults to look after their souls, the zeal with which, like schoolboys grown old, they sought out philosophers so that they might be shown the way to happiness, irritated Lucian, and many others with him.”⁴⁰

In the disciplines, one also begins with norms but one seeks to apply those norms through a normalizing process in which one renounces self-mastery and seeks to apply that norm in the regular way demanded by the scientific discourses of the discipline. The disciplines seek to apply these norms in standardized ways to their obedient and docile charges, giving individuals little freedom to alter, transform or even to interject themselves in the process of their own formation as subjects except to reject their own urge to interject themselves. Where the Greeks and Romans responded to norms with stylization, the disciplines took to normalization with the end result that subjectivity was constituted as a kind of permanent obedience to the norm in the regular way required by the scientific code. Foucault refers to this state as domination: “one sometimes encounters what may be called situations or states of domination in which the power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen.”⁴¹

Implications of the Disciplinary Self-Relation and Conclusion

Keeping in view the relation of the self to itself, two of Foucault’s pronouncements on disciplinary relations gain new dimension and sense. New clarification on these two statements by Foucault is especially helpful because their meaning is uncustomarily opaque. First, I would like to look at this quote, focusing on the last sentence, and see how an attunement to the self-relation within disciplinary relations sheds new light on it:

From Antiquity to Christianity one passes from a morality that was essentially a search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules. And if I have taken an interest in Antiquity, it is because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. To this

absence of a morality, one responds, or must respond, with an investigation which is that of an aesthetics of existence.”⁴²

Without the ethical genealogy of the disciplines that has been assembled in this essay, it would be hard to make full sense of this claim. Why must one respond to the loss of morality as a code with a study of the aesthetics of existence? It becomes clearer if one sees that as part of Christianity and disciplinary power relations, the code had to serve as the basis for how one applied social norms because of the low estimation of individuals’ capacity to lead themselves and develop their own moral practice. If morality as adherence to moral code begins to wither, then one needs another way to apply the norms that seemingly every society has.⁴³ If we follow Foucault, we will have to agree that the aesthetics of existence has been the other major form of applying norms in the West, at least since antiquity. As I argued earlier, the aesthetics of existence works to apply norms based on a process of stylization in which the individual takes up the socially requisite norms and alters them into a memorable form “in which one could recognize oneself, be recognized by others, and in which even posterity could find an example.”⁴⁴ The aesthetics of existence provides an alternative relation of the self to itself based on freedom and self-mastery, instead of self-renunciation and obedience. Dumm suggests that Foucault turns to antiquity precisely to gather resources for establishing a form of self-relation not based in self-renunciation, “Foucault’s turn to ancient Greece and Rome is inspired by the search for an ethos concerning the body that would not be associated with the renunciation of the bodily being itself that is to be found in the sort of asceticism he had traced to the emergence of normalizing discourse.”⁴⁵

However, we should note that Foucault did not say that we must adopt the aesthetics of existence but only investigate it. This is for several reasons: First, ancient morality and its quest for self-mastery is also deeply implicated in many of the dominating aspects of our society. We should notice that the practice of self-mastery in antiquity results in the self dominating itself, with the rational part of the self dominating the other parts: “This principle of ‘internal regulation’ involves a

domination over oneself.”⁴⁶ This ethical self-relation is not far from Christianity or disciplinary relations; after all, what happens when the individual is not seen as able to lead itself towards the good? Where will the force of domination come from if the self is not able to provide it? Whether one stands on the position that the subject can and should master itself or that it needs to be mastered by another who possesses the truth, one is still legitimizing the domination of the self in legitimizing self-mastery. Once one accepts self-mastery as a principle, it becomes a debate about who is the best agent of domination, the self or others? But it is already a foregone conclusion that the self must be dominated. It is likely that a new form of self-relation that wants to avoid the domination of the subject will also have to challenge basic assumptions about the role of self-mastery in moral life; challenges that Greco-Roman morality may not be able to muster.

Second, and more simply, Greco-Roman morality was set in its own unique historical context and functioned as part of that social reality; any morality today will have to establish connections with the present—connections that will inevitably shape and alter the morality. Politically and historically, the aesthetics of existence as the ancients practiced it is an insufficient response to the present; however, as an object of investigation and inspiration for a new moral practice, it might contain the promise that Foucault hoped in an example of a society that related to norms on something other than normalization grounded in self-renunciation and obedience. Although it does not seem wise to attempt a return of Greco-Roman morality *in toto*, the aesthetics of existence can hold promise in its stylizing approach to norms.

Likewise, the analysis of the disciplinary self-relation is also able to draw out similar implications in another persistently vague and opaque area of Foucault’s thought. Foucault insisted at the end of *The History of Sexuality Volume I* that, “The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.”⁴⁷ What interests me here is Foucault’s insistence on pleasure

as a rallying point for the resistance to the normalization of sexuality.

A focus on pleasure makes sense if one notices how disciplinary self-relations use pain to teach one to renounce oneself and turn to the expert “other” to provide guidance. Disciplinary power relations employ pain to turn individuals away from themselves and towards the “other” in order to find out how to stop the other from applying the pain. Pain typically only ends once the self becomes focused on the other for leadership and submits in self-renunciation. Foucault writes, “At the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism”—a small mechanism of pain, self-renunciation and, if successful, obedience.⁴⁸ Pain for the disciplines is a means towards achieving the end of self-renunciation and obedience.

To follow one’s pleasures can turn that look for government back towards the self. Unlike the disciplinary use of pain, which was created, refined and applied by the other as a means to an end, the use of pleasure does not have its end or goal outside of itself. The use of pleasure is not just a reversal of the use of pain—a trading of the stick for the carrot—as if instead of using negative means to induce self-renunciation one would turn to more positive and pleasurable tactics to insure the same goal. Pleasure is used quite differently than pain in that it is an end in itself; a turn to pleasure is a turn to pleasure itself. The self-relation would be based on growing an attunement to one’s own pleasures that would allow one to diversify, intensify, and even to render them more complex and nuanced. To base a process of subjectivization on pleasure is to abandon self-renunciation as the central mode of self-relation and to base a process of subjectivization on the cultivation and knowledge of one’s pleasures; to turn to pleasure is to listen to oneself and one’s pleasures as a source of leadership. Pleasure focuses one on oneself as a guide rather than on the pain that serves as a bridge to obedience and submission. The cultivation of one’s pleasures would be much more likely to lead to an art of stylization, an idiosyncratic practice of developing and maturing one’s capacities for self-leadership, something much more like the ancient art of

existence than the contemporary disciplining of the subject.

What both of these examples together reveal is the way that a focus on the self-relation in disciplinary power facilitates the development of individual strategies of resistance. After all, as Foucault notes, power is always a provocation to freedom; a focus on the work a self must do in order to discipline itself is a provocation to perform that work in some other way, threatening the subject's good "self-discipline." Revealing the prevalence of a code morality is a provocation to render oneself a subject through some other means and the use of pain as a means to secure self-renunciation and obedience invites reflections on how pain, self-renunciation, and obedience can be subverted or surpassed. Bringing the operation of power into explicit relief opens it to critique: "power is tolerable on the condition that it mask a considerable portion of itself."⁴⁹ But, to return to those critics that I addressed at the outset of this essay, it should be acknowledged that the later Foucault is no panacea. Certainly, the later work can help to develop an account of the work one must perform in order to render oneself a subject and drive new ways to perform one's own self-relation differently, but it is unquestionably important to alter one's relationships with others to change the present as well. Foucault's focus on truth and subjectivity is neither a replacement for an account of power and knowledge relations nor is it likely to sidestep the resistance that could be generated by a collectivity of individuals seeking to alter their relationships with one another. Choosing the later work over the earlier threatens to leave one with just the sort of one-dimensional account that many protested in Foucault's lack of focus on the individual in his middle genealogical

work. Foucault's later work is situated on a different level than his earlier work, but it is not a "higher" level that can serve as a replacement of earlier accounts. What I hoped to have accomplished in this essay is to show how an account of the relationship of the self to itself in disciplinary power relations can expand the earlier account, bringing out a new dimension of analysis without replacing the old. This relatively unused level of ethical analysis was used to "intensify" the view of disciplinary relations through uncovering elements of its operation and providing for more robust opportunities for individual resistance.

In sum, this essay developed a new account of the work the self must perform on itself in disciplinary relations through the cultivation of resources from Foucault's later work. By tracing the ethical self-relation from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Benedictine monastery, I was able to provide insight into the relationship of self-renunciation that underlies disciplinary docility and obedience. This self-renunciation undermines individuals' ability to lead themselves and makes them reliant on another who has mastery of the truth by which the subject must be constituted. Disciplinary relations were thus seen to be doubly efficacious in producing relations of domination: they attempt to eliminate the self-leadership of the individual which not only undermines the individual's potential to resist; it leaves them in need of the dominating training that disciplinary relations institute. This insight into the activity of the individual in the production of their own docility was then used to clarify and develop aspects of two perennially enigmatic but powerful areas of Foucault's work, his focus on "bodies and pleasures" and his turn to the "aesthetics of existence."

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Taylor, "Foucault, Freedom, and Truth," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 154–84; Eric Paras, *Foucault 2: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2002); Nancy Fraser, "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?" *Ethics* 96 (1985):164–84.
2. Fraser, "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?" 180.
3. Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensifications Since 1984* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 8–9.
4. *Ibid.*, 46.
5. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in

- Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1964–1983* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 327.
6. Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," trans. Phillis Aranov and Dan McGrawth, in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. Sylvève Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 459.
 7. Michel Foucault, "The Return to Morality," trans. Colin Gordon, in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, 466.
 8. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 162; *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 46.
 9. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 159; "The Concern for Truth," 451.
 10. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 6.
 11. "The Subject and Power," 342.
 12. "Ethics and the Concern for the Self," in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, 225.
 13. David Hoy, *Critical Resistance: From Post-structuralism to Post-Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 70.
 14. "The Subject and Power," 326, 327.
 15. *Security, Territory, Population*, 46.
 16. *Discipline and Punish*, 162.
 17. For a closer view of how Foucault relates the monastery to the disciplines, see *ibid.*, 137, 140–43, 146, 149, 150, 154, 160–62, 172, 179, 238.
 18. *Security, Territory, Population*, 47.
 19. Daniel Marcel La Corte, "Introduction" to *Regular Life: Monastic Canonical, and Mendicant Rules*, ed. Daniel Marcel La Corte (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 5.
 20. *History of Sexuality Volume II*, 30.
 21. *Ibid.*, 38.
 22. *Ibid.*, 78.
 23. *Ibid.*, 79.
 24. Michael Clifford, *Political Genealogy After Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 68.
 25. "The Concern for Truth," 439.
 26. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. Anthony Meisel and M. L. del Mastro (Garden City: Image Books, 1975), 105–06.
 27. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 300.
 28. Michel Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, 451.
 29. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 43.
 30. *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 250.
 31. *Ibid.*, 485.
 32. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 57–58.
 33. *Ibid.*, 55.
 34. *Discipline and Punish*, 169.
 35. *Ibid.*, 304.
 36. *Ibid.*, 169.
 37. *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 53–54.
 38. *The History of Sexuality Volume II*, 253.
 39. "An Aesthetics of Existence," 451.
 40. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume III: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988), 49.
 41. "The Concern for Truth," 434.
 42. "An Aesthetics of Existence," 451.
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 44. "An Aesthetics of Existence," 451.
 45. Thomas Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 137–38.
 46. Keith Robinson, *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Thought* (Lewiston, ME: Edward Mellen, 2001), 218.
 47. *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 157. For a wider ranging reading of this phrase, see Ladelle McWhorter's excellent exegesis and development of this phrase in *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalizations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 176–92. For myself, I remain confined here to the specific insights this study can generate around this enigmatic phrase.
 48. *Discipline and Punish*, 177.
 49. *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 86.

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MORALITIES OF SELF-RENUNCIATION AND OBEDIENCE

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