Foucault Studies

REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

Foucault's *On the Government of the Living*[1]

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ABSTRACT: In *The Government of the Living*, Foucault demonstrates elegantly and convincingly the emergence of a new idea and practice of penitence within the early Church, one that traced its origins to the Bible but in fact represented a departure from earlier Christian beliefs. This shift occurred largely under the influence of monastic and ascetic tendencies that came to play an increasingly powerful role in the second and third centuries after Christ. I suggest that this is the fundamental contribution of the lectures, rather than the framing narrative concerning truth and power. In my comments, I focus on the ideas of conversion, change of heart, remorse, and repentance, and show how the classical Greek and Latin terms for a change of mind (*metanoia*, *paenitentia*) assume meanings as widely different as "conversion" and "penitence." This semantic slide or instability mirrors and enables the reinterpretation of Biblical faith as penitence. I also discuss the relationship between self-disclosure, as the classical writers understood it, and confession, and relate this to a new conception of the inviolable self.

Keywords: Self-disclosure; conversion; repentence; *Metanoia*; *Paenitentia*

Let no one be misled by the title, which is in any case uninformative; as Michel Senellart observes in an appendix on the "Course Context," Foucault changed his plan and the book is rather about something like "the Government of men by the truth" (327). But even this latter description does not capture the thrust of the argument, although Foucault himself doubtless conceived of it in this way. Regimes of one sort or another, and in particular the kind that depend on subtle cognitive techniques rather than open violence, were very much to Foucault's way of thinking, and conceptions of the truth, and our relationship to them, of special interest. For if our very idea of the truth is variable, then power too will assume different forms in different societies. At the beginning of the lecture series, Foucault coins a new term, "alethurgy," compounded from the roots *aletheia*,

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Greek for "truth," and *ergon*, "work" or "practice" (compare "theurgy," "metallurgy"), which he explains as "the manifestation of truth as the set of possible verbal or non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light what is laid down as true as opposed to false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten," and he adds that "there is no exercise of power without something like an alethurgy" (7). And again: "Where there is power, where power is necessary, where one wishes to show effectively that this is where power lies, there must be truth" (9). Foucault had already, in previous lectures, discussed the shift from ideology to "knowledge-power"; here, he introduces a "second shift from the notion of knowledge-power to the notion of government by the truth" (11).

The trajectory of the book is indeed determined by a focus on the theme of truth, and the various ways in which it is conceived and manifested. Foucault begins with an analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, which is all about ferreting out the truth, in this case, the truth behind Oedipus' identity, to which he devotes most of three lectures and over fifty pages; and the lecture series concludes with an analysis of the practice of confession, which inaugurates a new relationship to discovering the truth, one that is in a sense adumbrated by Sophocles' tragedy but takes on a new meaning in the context of late antique Christianity, and which will retain its influence well into the modern era. Confession was, of course, a theme close to Foucault's heart, and he illustrates the emergence of this new practice of alethurgy through close and often brilliant readings of early Christian texts, selecting, as is his custom, key moments rather than attempting an exhaustive survey. The move from the classical drama to Christianity is abrupt: as Foucault says in the opening sentence of the fifth lecture, "So, in the following lectures we will be studying Christianity" (93), and so he does to the end of the book. In the course of this intellectual history, Foucault demonstrates elegantly and convincingly the emergence of a new idea and practice of penitence within the Church, one that traced its origins to the Bible, needless to say, but in fact (I maintain) represented a departure from earlier Christian beliefs. To lay my cards on the table in advance, let me say that Foucault's analysis of this development is to my mind the real contribution of the lectures. I have grave doubts about the value of the framework about truth and power, to which Foucault is committed: on the whole, Foucault himself seems to me to ignore this scaffolding for much of the book and to concentrate on how Christian writers moved from a notion of conversion to one of repentance, without blinking an eye and retaining the same vocabulary–it is just this that allows the new interpretation to insinuate itself so cunningly, so that it becomes the dominant view in late antiquity and beyond. Just how the practice of confession enables a new idea of power, however, remains vague, at least if one is thinking of power outside the monastery. In my comments, then, I will concentrate on the ideas of conversion, change of heart, remorse, and repentance, as Foucault handles them, and largely leave aside the business of alethurgy and "government by the truth." However, I will first, and briefly, locate this argument in its context in the book, before proceeding to my more particular observations.

Oedipus the King sets the scene, illustrating three different ways in which the truth may be brought to light and confirmed; for Foucault, this is "the problem of the relations between the exercise of power and the manifestation of the truth" (23), a matter about which one may entertain

some reservations. One way of obtaining the truth—the truth, that is, of Oedipus' birth and identity—is through prophecy, whether on the part of the all-knowing Apollo or his blind priest, Teiresias, who compensates for his loss of sight by the gift of insight. A second way is direct witnessing of the events, which in the *Oedipus* falls to two slaves: one is from Thebes, and he disobeyed the order to slay the infant but instead handed him to a slave from Corinth, who in turn gave him to the king and queen of Corinth to raise as their own. As Foucault puts it, "the alethurgy [...] is effectively accomplished twice: once at the level of the gods [...], and then at the level of the slaves and servants" (33). Needless to say, these are different processes: the gods look to the future, the human actors to the past; the truth resides within Apollo and Teiresias, who have no need to be present at the event, whereas the slaves "are in the truth and not inhabited by it" (38). Foucault suggests, with due self-irony (in a way "which would horrify any historian who is at all serious," (48)), a kind of progression from archaic Greek poetry, where the king's grip on the truth is authorized by his grip on the staff or scepter that he holds while speaking, to the importance placed on autopsy. But Oedipus' own method is neither intuition nor presence: it is rather discovery, inference by way of signs, yet another way of obtaining truth (after all, he solves the riddle of the sphinx neither by divination nor by witnessing). What is more, the object of Oedipus' search, as it turns out—that is, the murderer of Laius—is none other than himself. This is the link to the later practice of confession, with its insistence on self-revelation.

Foucault, however, treats Oedipus as the example of the tyrant, who is concerned chiefly to preserve his power, not to uncover the truth: "for Oedipus it is a question of power until practically the end, and that is what preoccupies him throughout the play" (61), and he adds: "The Oedipal story could be described as a typical story of tyranny" (63). But is this really Oedipus' primary concern and the reason why he seeks out the truth about the assassination of the previous king? His city has been stricken by a plague, and to end it he is told that he must find the killer; he pursues the quest doggedly, even when he perceives that he himself will turn out to be the accursed murderer. Where everyone else is eager to hide the truth, Oedipus alone insists on unveiling it and declaring it before all. And yet, what is it that he discovers? He finds out that the king he slew was his father and therefore that the woman he has married is his mother. This discovery is enough to undo him, causing him to blind himself and to abdicate the throne. That king, his father, had exposed him as an infant in the hope that he would die, crippling his ankles so that no one would wish to rescue him; and when Oedipus again met him as an adult, he blocked Oedipus' way and attempted to thrash him with a staff, to which Oedipus reacted, one could well argue, in self-defense. Is Oedipus really as guilty as he imagines (a guilt that he will deny some years later, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*)? The search for the truth has led Oedipus to a secret about himself that he regards as unbearable, and yet in the end what he did was involuntary and the result of mere circumstance, of accident. Here, I think, is the real connection with the discipline of penitence, in which the penitent too takes the condition of being born, which bears with it original sin, as a sign of unredeemable worthlessness, and is blocked from perceiving that the fault, that profound sense of guilt, derives from elsewhere. I wish Foucault had meditated more on this aspect of Oedipus' fate.

When he turns to the Christian tradition, Foucault distinguishes three aspects of the process of contrition: "the subject's role as operator of alethurgy," his role as spectator of it, and his role as "the object itself of the alethurgy" (81), the last, or "reflexive truth act," occurring when the truth one discovers concerns oneself. Here the precedence of Oedipus is clear, though Foucault's attention from now on will be on the act of confession, which is not Sophocles' theme. Note how all three processes coincide in confession: I bring the truth to light, I am witness to it, and I am the object of the investigation. This is the regime of truth introduced by Christianity, according to Foucault. The content of the truths uncovered in this way is of secondary importance, or almost irrelevant; the crucial thing is to be perpetually engaged in "exploring them endlessly" (84). Now, in one sense the power of truth resides in the felt necessity to recognize and yield or submit to what is perceived to be the truth, as revealed by just those procedures that we acknowledge as leading to the truth. Foucault offers the example of scientific logic: if we understand the proof, we feel obliged to accept it. But there are other such procedures, and Foucault asks: "How has Western man bound himself to the obligation to manifest in truth what he himself is?" (101). In other words, how did confession achieve the power to oblige us to recognize the truth that it discloses?

Foucault identifies three phases: baptism, canonical penance, and spiritual direction or the supervision of conscience. He notes that Justin Martyr, in his first *Apology* (mid-second century), treats baptism as a "cycle that starts with teaching, is continued with the act of faith, is carried on by free choice and knowledge, and ends with illumination," and is thus a "cycle of truth" (106). But it is with Tertullian, half a century later, that the doctrine of original sin and its relation to baptism is most clearly developed. For Tertullian, baptism does not purify but rather follows upon purification; at all events, one cannot sin as much as one pleases and then be exonerated by the mere ritual of baptism. But purification is never secure: the danger of lapsing into sin is always with us, even the saintliest among us. As Foucault says, "The Christian must never abandon fear when he prepares for baptism, and after he has been baptized. Danger never subsides; he is never safe, he must never relax" (126). As a result, "Fear, for the first time in history—well, fear in the sense of fear about oneself, of what one is […], and not fear of destiny, not fear of the gods' decrees—this fear is, I think, anchored in Christianity from the turn of the second and third century" (127), that is, from the time of Tertullian. This is the basis of a new subjectivity, one that Foucault relates to a new regime of truth that will endure until our own times.

Broadly speaking, Foucault is right: there was a change in the third century in Christian conceptions of guilt and repentance. A key term in this transformation, as Foucault notes, is *metanoia*, etymologically signifying a kind of afterthought (*meta-* = "after," and *noia*, as in paranoia, deriving from *nous*, the Greek for "mind"); the word is normally rendered into Latin as *paenitentia*. Foucault's account of the evolution of this word, however, is incomplete, and since I have examined the ideas of regret, remorse, and repentance, all signified by *metanoia*, in a forthcoming article in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, I may be permitted to fill in some of the details, which complement but do not invalidate Foucault's argument. In classical Greek, *metanoia* (like its close relative, *metameleia*) does not necessarily carry a moral significance, but simply means "regret." There is a possible ethical implication when Xenophon speaks of restraining anger so as not

to regret one's actions afterwards (*Memorabilia* 2.6.23; cf. *Anabasis* 2.6.9,); so too Plato affirms that people who act impulsively or out of anger later regret their actions (*Laws* 866E). By contrast, in Xenophon's *Cyropedia* (5.3.6) a king declares: "I am not sorry that I killed your son, but that I did not kill you as well": this is hardly a case of ethical remorse. In a similar vein, Suetonius, in his *Life of Julius Caesar* (75), reports that while Caesar was negotiating the surrender of Afranius and Petreius at Ilerda, the two consuls "with a sudden change of mind" (*subita paenitentia*) killed all the partisans of Caesar in their camp: they were not stung by a feeling of remorse for not having slain their enemies, but simply regretted their earlier decision to surrender, presumably in the belief that they could hold out against Caesar.

To go by traditional translations of the New Testament, *metanoia* unambiguously signifies "repentance." Thus, the message of John the Baptist recorded by Mark (1:4) and Luke (3:3) is rendered in the King James Bible as "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" and by Luther as "die Taufe der Buße zur Vergebung Sünden" (*Buße* = "repentance"). But many recent versions of these passages render the term rather as "conversion" or more literally a "turn to God." Thus, the Spanish La Palabra version has "un bautismo como signo de conversión," and the Traducción en Lenguaje Actual "¡Bautícense y vuélvanse a Dios!" ("be baptized and turn toward God"); the Gute Nachricht Bibel in turn reads "Kehrt um und lasst euch taufen!," where "kehrt um" literally means "turn round" or "convert." Efforts have been made to reconcile the two senses of conversion and repentance in various dictionaries and encyclopedias of the Bible, but they are hard pressed to combine them. Morna D Hooker, in her *Commentary on the Gospel according to St Mark* translates "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in the lemma, but notes: "The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means literally 'a change of mind.' Although in popular usage it often has a sense of regret for what is past, it is generally used in a more positive way in the New Testament, implying a deliberate turning, or conversion, to God."[2] According to Acts 19:4, Paul said that "John baptized with the baptism of *metanoia*, telling the people to believe [*pisteusôsin*] in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." In what is clearly an expansion of Luke 3:3, the injunction to adopt the new faith can be read as specifying the sense of *metanoia*. In the statement, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43), belief takes the place of *metanoia* as the condition of the remission of sins (cf. Acts 13:39). When Paul says: "as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about *metanoia* toward God and faith [*pistis*] toward our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21), *metanoia* and *pistis* appear to be roughly equivalent.

Metanoia continues to signify a change of heart in early Christian literature, as distinct from grief for past sins, but the association between the two becomes stronger. In *The Shepherd of Hermas* (2nd century), a shepherd described as an "angel of *metanoia*" gives warning to those who do not heed and alter their ways but persist in their errors. There follows instructions on proper behavior, which Hermas is ordered to remember so that his *metanoia* and that of his household may

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[2] Morna D Hooker, *Commentary on the Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Continuum, 1991), 37.

be found to be sincere. The angel insists, for example, that a wife who has committed adultery and repents is to be received back by her husband. As Diane Lipsett remarks, *metanoia* in this text indicates "a broad change of heart and social practice to which the protagonist, his household, and all the saints are called."[3] In patristic writings there is an increasing association of *metanoia* with terms signifying grief and pain. The word *penthos* ("grief," "mourning") and the related verb *pentheô* occur relatively rarely in the New Testament (noun 5 times; verb 10 times), and where they do, as in the third beatitude ("blessed are those who mourn," Matthew 5:4), they do not signify remorse. As Guy Stroumsa observes, "Originally, repentance (*paenitentia*) is identical to baptism"; later, however, it comes to be conceived "as an act of mourning [...] at the remembrance of sins past."[4] Grief takes the place of *metanoia* and *pistis* or "faith" as the route to divine forgiveness; thus John Chrysostom affirms, "mourning [*to penthêsai*] wipes away sins" (*Homily* 3.4 = 49.289.36 Migne; cf. *Homily 15 On the Statues*, where John argues that *penthos* is more profitable than laughter). What is more, mourning becomes a permanent condition; as John Chrysostom puts it, "one must mourn and weep and suffer, not only for one or two days, but one's entire life" (*On Compunction* 1.9 = 4.7.408 Migne), and Basil of Caesarea writes to the Neocaesarians: "I pray that you all live amid tears and perpetual *metanoia*" (*Epistulae* 207.4). So Hannah Hunt writes: "repentance and *penthos* [...] describe a continual process in which individuals become aware of their sins, regret them, and know that they cause a division and distance from God."[5] Such a deep sense of guilt borders on "a kind of *hopelessness*" and the feeling that "the wrong one has done is so deep [...] that one can in no sense ever make it right again."[6] Mortification of the self becomes the hallmark of the change of heart required of sinners. Ambrose insists that a person who has committed sins in secret, if he repents sincerely, will be reintegrated into the congregation of the church: "I wish that the guilty person hope for pardon [*venia*], beg for it with tears, beg for it with groans, beg with the tears of all the people, entreat that he be pardoned [*ignoscatur*] [...]. I have people who, during penitence, have made rivulets of tears in their faces, hollowed their cheeks with continual weeping, prostrated their bodies so that they might be trampled by all, and with their faces forever pale with fasting, presented the appearance of death in a breathing body" (*On Penitence: Against the Novatians* 1.90–91). Repentance is all but equated with suffering.

To express the pain that accompanies the consciousness of sin, new words were coined and old words pressed into new meanings. The noun *katanuxis*, based on the stem *nussô*, "sting" or "prick," appears once in the New Testament, where Paul says that God bestowed upon those

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[3] Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Asenet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

[4] Guy Stroumsa, "From Repentance to Penance in Early Christianity: Tertullian's *De paenitentia* in Context," in Jan Assman and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 176.

[5] Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 14.

[6] Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Punishment and the Moral Emotions: Essays in Law, Morality, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 140.

Israelites who were not among the elect a *pneuma katanuxeôs* or "spirit of compunction" so that they might not see or hear (Romans 11:8.3); the word *katanuxis* renders a Hebrew word signifying a deep sleep or stupor. Just how the translators of the LXX understood the Hebrew here is not entirely clear, and it took some time before *katanuxis* acquired the moral sense of "compunction" among patristic writers, above all Origen (*Commentary* on Psalm 4:5), Gregory of Nazianzus, Ephraem Graecus, and John Chrysostom.[7] In his essay *To Demetrius, On Compunction* (*Peri katanuxeôs*), John writes: "I know, o divine one, that you are thoroughly possessed by the fire of compunction: your sleepless nights bear witness to me of this, and the streams of your tears, and the passion for solitude that continually resides and rages in your soul" (47.394.1-9 Migne).

There is a parallel development in Latin, with the introduction of the new term *compunctio*, a calque on *katanuxis* and specific to Christian texts, along with *contritio* or "contrition" (the distinction between *contritio* and *attritio* is a Scholastic development, and was formalized by the Council of Trent). Augustine interprets the thorn that pricks in Psalm 31:4 as *compunctio poenitentiae* (*Sermon* 175.4); Ambrose, in turn, affirms that those who are resurrected at judgment day will be crushed (*conteruntur*), the normal sense of the verb (equivalent to *suntetrimmenon* in the Septuagint), but adds that this is a good *contritio* (*De interpellatione Job et David* 1.5).

The above discussion, which is basically lexical, tracks a semantic shift that insinuated a new way of conceiving of self-awareness. Foucault continued to be intrigued by the concept of *metanoia*, in part under the influence of Pierre Hadot. In the present work, he remarks of neo-Platonic thought: "*Metanoia* is what permits the soul to recognize, both to recognize itself in the truth and to recognize the truth deep in itself" (144); in this regard, it is equivalent to a kind of conversion. Early Christianity departed from this schema, according to Foucault, by splitting *metanoia* in two. On the one hand, there was dogma, which Foucault calls "memory institutionalized as tradition" (145); on the other hand, there will no longer be an emphasis on "the rediscovery of being in the depth of oneself, but the soul's obligation to say what it is" (146), grounded in the practice of the catechumen, the novice who receives instruction or catechism. Foucault wonders whether this procedure involved confession, and notes that it is not easy to be sure. As he points out, "*paenitentia* translates the Greek word *metanoia*," but this does not necessarily signify ritual penance; and he rightly explains: "When we come across the word *paenitentia* in the texts of this period, we should think that it is a matter of conversion and not penance" (153). Already in Origen, as Foucault notes, "mortification [...] constitutes the main meaning of baptism" (156); what is more, "the tests of truth take on the meaning of authenticating the mortification in which the path towards the truth must consist" (157). Mortification there certainly was, as we have seen, and in the third century and afterwards it began occupy the place of conversion, as the emphasis on regret or remorse came more and more to reside in the inherited sinfulness of humanity which could never be wholly overcome, save perhaps by the grace of God, which was forever uncertain: hence it was the most devout who grieved and punished themselves the most, since they were

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[7] See Marguerite Harl, "Les origines grecques du mot et de la notion de 'componction' dans la Septante et chez ses commentateurs," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes,* vol. 32 (1986), 3-21.

most aware of their sinful condition. As Foucault puts it, "*metanoia* is a constant dimension of the life of the Christian [...]. It is not only a break, but a state" (177); or as he expresses it a few pages later, "Christianity was forced to think the repeatability of *metanoia*" (118), at least (I would specify) in the sense of repeated remorse rather than conversion. Just how hidden sin was conceived as being, however, is unclear to me: no doubt, sinners were required to examine themselves in all honesty, to disclose their failings to their priest and, in monastic communities, to one another. But is this exactly a process of offering "the truth of what we are"? For Foucault, such self-examination is implicated in "the whole problem of the subject's relationship to the truth" (171), and up to a point I can agree. But there are also other issues at stake. Let me indicate one of these.

In the late fourth century, Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, published a treatise *On the Duties of Ministers* (in one of his rare slips, Foucault dates Ambrose to the second half of the third century, 254). The essay is clearly modeled on Cicero's *On Duties* (also in three books), which deals with friendship in the finale, and also on Cicero's essay *On Friendship*. One way in which Ambrose departs from Cicero, however, is in the emphasis he places on self-disclosure between friends. Ambrose advises the novice priests: "Open your bosom to your friend, so that he may be faithful to you and that you may derive from him pleasure in your life. 'For a faithful friend is the medicine of life, and the blessing of immortality' [Ecclesiastes 6:16]" (3.22.128). Ambrose urges the members of the community: "Preserve, then, my sons, the friendship that has been entered upon with your brothers, than which nothing in human affairs is more lovely. For it is the solace of this life that you have one to whom you may open your bosom, with whom you may share hidden things, to whom you may commit the secret of your bosom" (3.22.131); and again:

> [God] gave the form of friendship we follow, that we may perform the wishes of a friend, that we may open our secrets, whichever we have in our bosom, to a friend, and that we may not be ignorant of his hidden things. Let us reveal our bosom to him, and let him reveal his to us. 'Therefore,' he said, 'I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you' [John 15.14]. Therefore a friend hides nothing, if he is true: he pours forth his mind, just as Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of his Father (3.22.135).

The idea of openness between friends advanced by Ambrose has classical precedents. Cicero, for example, exclaims: "What sweeter than to have one with whom you are bold to speak as with yourself?" (*On Friendship* 22) Pliny, in turn, remarks in a letter: "I speak no differently with you than with myself" (5.1.12). Nevertheless, recognition of the advantages or delights of speaking openly with a friend is a different matter from Ambrose's injunction to disclose one's inmost concerns. Closer to Ambrose's concern with self-disclosure is Seneca's counsel on how to behave with a friend: "Speak as boldly with him as with yourself [...] share with your friend all your worries, all your thoughts [...]. Why should I hold back any words in the presence of my friend?" (*Moral Epistles* 3.2-3) Seneca was writing within a tradition in which the candid revelation of one's fears and desires was an element in a program of philosophical therapy that would enable the disciple to overcome resistances to the claims of reason. In particular, the Epicurean philosopher Philo-

demus, who was a contemporary of Cicero and lived in Rome (his treatises have survived, in mutilated form, thanks to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD), was concerned with the proper means by which to help disciples along the path to philosophical wisdom, neither criticizing so harshly as to discourage them entirely nor being too lenient, which would leave them without motivation. This treatment demanded openness and the revelation of personal faults.

The role of self-disclosure in Ambrose's treatise may seem similar to the modern demand for self-revelation among friends. There is, however, a deep gulf between ancient, including Christian, conceptions of the self and modern notions of authenticity, and Ambrose does not seek to encourage personal intimacy as an end in itself. He is concerned rather with friendship among a company of "brothers" whom he addresses as his sons, and whose relationship depends on their common faith and participation in the offices of the church. In insisting on the importance of self-revelation, Ambrose is seeking to promote a harmony of sentiment and collective loyalty within a community organized around a shared vision of life, in a way not entirely different from the practices of the Hellenistic philosophical schools. In addition, self-disclosure may be a means of firming up the cohesion of small groups by inhibiting private relations among individuals. Injunctions against secrecy are a feature of rules for monastic life. In this way, the classical ideal of friendship is subtly altered, as particular bonds between individuals are displaced by a concern for a broader concord among communicants as such.[8] Foucault largely overlooks this aspect of the context in which self-disclosure was encouraged in Christian communities.

Foucault does, however, fully recognize the importance of the monastic model, or "the institutionalization of a monastic discipline" (195), in the development of rituals of self-examination and self-disclosure. He also perceives, in this connection, a tension in the practice of self-abasement, central to the revelation of one's sinful condition, which he cleverly compares to the liar's paradox: "I am all the less a sinner as I affirm that I am a sinner" (215). For Foucault, the Christian imperative to explore oneself and verbalize one's sins marks "the beginning of an ultimately very lengthy process in which the subjectivity of Western man is developed" (225), and the coupling of these two processes—self-analysis and verbalization—emerged in the monasteries. What is more, this development occurred in tandem with the advent of asceticism (226)— Foucault is, I believe, absolutely right about this connection. But ascetic practices involved a third element, and that is the surrender of one's will to the guide or instructor, or rather, willing what the guide wills one to will; as Foucault explains: "I do not cede my own will, I continue to will [...], but to will in every detail and at every moment what the other wants me to will" (230). This voluntary "subordination of the will to the other" is a tricky and dangerous business, it seems to me, since it comes close to the notion of brainwashing, in which one's will is broken or crushed. Yet Christians and pagans alike in this period were certain that their will was inviolable, and could retain its integrity despite the most extreme torture of the body. Let me offer a couple of examples. The last of the fourteen poems in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, which narrate the martyrdoms of var-

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[8] I treat these themes in my book, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), from which some of the above material is taken.

ious saints, is devoted to the persecution of St. Agnes. Agnes is first humiliated by being exposed naked in a brothel, where the one man who is so bold as to look at her becomes blind. Her persecutor then orders a soldier to slay Agnes with his sword. But Agnes is not in the least intimidated: "I shall receive his whole blade in my breasts, draw the force of his sword into my deepest bosom. Thus, as the bride of Christ, shall I overleap all the darkness of the firmament, loftier than the heavens" (14.67-80). Here is Saint Eulalia, from the third poem in the *Peristephanon*: "Come on, torturer, burn and cut, split my limbs compacted of clay. It's easy to break so fragile a thing, but my inner spirit will not be penetrated, though pain torment it" (3.91-95). This sense of the autonomy of the soul was not just a Christian phenomenon. In the Greek novel *Ephesiaca*, composed in the first or second century AD by one Xenophon of Ephesus, the protagonist affirms his fidelity to his wife Anthia when he is threatened with torture by a young woman named Manto, who is in love with him (he is at this point the slave of her father, a pirate chief): "I am a slave, but I know how to keep my promises. They have power over my body, but I have a soul that is free. Let Manto threaten me, then, if she wishes, with swords and nooses and fire and everything that can compel the body of a slave; I will never be persuaded willingly to wrong Anthia" (2.4). So too, in the anonymous epistolary novel about the tyrannicide Chion of Heraclea (second century AD), Chion declares (14.4):

> Know that I have become the kind of man, thanks to philosophy, whom Clearchus will never make a slave, even if he ties me up, even if he does the most terrible things to me; for he will never conquer my soul, in which slavishness and freedom reside, since the body is always at the mercy of fortune, even if it is not subject to a tyrannical man (14.4).

Thus, even as the disciple was prepared to surrender his will to the guide, his will was somehow protected against physical coercion. The forms of psychological compulsion that characterize modern torture, and which threaten to undermine the very notion of the autonomous subject, were still, I think, not fully realized in this period.[9]

Foucault knows that the idea of surrender to another's direction had roots of a sort in Epicurean practice, where there was "a whole activity of spiritual guidance" (234). Indeed, Foucault suggests that the Christian examination of the conscience, which emerged in the fourth century (253), revived a method familiar from Seneca and other pagan philosophers, and was "taken up again in Christianity within and because of the monastic institution" (258). Nevertheless, Foucault sees the classical instance as wholly different from Christian spiritual direction: "the subjectivation of Western man is Christian, not Greco-Roman" (236). Classical self-examination, or the examination of one's conscience, allowed one to identify one's errors and correct them; it was not a matter of guilt and remorse, as Foucault correctly observes (244). There was a quality of perfec-

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[9] For further discussion, see my essay, "Torture and Identity: Paganism, Christianity and Beyond," in Clare K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson (eds.), *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 283-98.

tionism in classical philosophy, the sense that it was possible to achieve a state of virtue (according to the Stoics) or ataraxy (according to the Epicureans), and it is worth noting that the classical philosophers rarely mention *metanoia* or a change of mind, for the sage would have little need for it. Penance is Christianity's answer to human imperfection: "it enables the effects of salvation to be maintained in the non-perfection of existence" (259). This is why it is crucial to subordinate oneself to another. Christian direction enjoins one "to obey in everything and to hide nothing" (266); or, as Foucault puts it with epigrammatic brevity: "Obedience is not a transitional period, it is a state" (268), like *metanoia* itself. Foucault cites Cassian for the rule that the young require permission even to satisfy their natural needs (I confess that this reminds me of elementary school), and records another example in which Dositheus required the permission of Saint Barsanuphius to die (272; I think here, perhaps too irreverently, of the finale of *The Story of O*). This degree of surrender of the will is the ultimate manifestation of Christian humility, which indeed was a new kind of virtue in the classical world. Obedience thus joins self-examination and confession in the triad of Christian principles (289).

Why is the Christian so terrified of hidden sin, so much in doubt of his innocence, so in need of introspection and self-revelation, so dependent on the guidance of others? The answer in part is that the self was not conceived of as autonomous but rather as a battle ground in which external forces duked it out. What we think may not be our own thoughts but thoughts planted by the devil or one of his ministers, and so it is impossible to be sure of one's own convictions. This leads to a profound moral insecurity, quite different from the proud demeanor of the classical Greeks and Romans. It is also what makes it so hard to get to the truth about oneself, and why self-exploration is endless. It is a far cry from Oedipus' confident search, which led to a definite conclusion, however catastrophic for him. Foucault concludes his lectures with a rhetorical flourish, to the effect that we do not have to be an Oedipus any more in order to interrogate ourselves and unveil a secret truth: Oedipus' tormented self-discovery is now the human condition.

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