

ARTICLE

Sirens in the Panopticon: Intersections Between Ainslean Picoeconomics and Foucault's Discipline Theory

YEVHENII OSIIIEVSKYI & MAKSYM YAKOVLYEV

National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine

ABSTRACT. In this article, we attempt to synthesize the findings of the branch of behavioral economics known as "*picoeconomics*" (developed by George Ainslie) with insights from Foucauldian thought in order to demonstrate that a richer and more nuanced understanding of strategies for self-managing human irrationality can be achieved when both approaches are mobilized. Picoeconomic games can be modeled as an intrapsychic exercise of the disciplinary power thereby suggesting an important contributing factor to the formation of effective Ainslean will. On the other hand, picoeconomic descriptions of the functioning of mind do not only align with Foucault's concept of the "*techniques of the self*" but also point to the possibility of the transformation of disciplinary practices into modes of subjectivation once the former are fully internalized. On the basis of these findings, we propose an empirically testable hypothesis about the biographical correlates of strong Ainslean will and a prospective area of subjectivity research in the vein of Foucauldian studies.

Keywords: picoeconomics, discipline, disciplinary power, techniques of the self, Foucault, Ainslie, hyperbolic discounting

INTRODUCTION

The following is an exercise in Foucauldian critique and a sidenote to several of his works. The authors endeavor to demonstrate how the current understanding of human irrationality and strategies of dealing with it can be enriched by the explanatory potential of the concepts of "*techniques of the self*" and "*disciplinary power.*" Another crucial component of the argument presented hereby is the methodological framework of picoeconomics developed by behavioral economist George Ainslie and his followers. The authors believe that the bridging of these fields of inquiry has significant cumulative potential and will prove beneficial for Foucauldian and Ainslean thought alike.

From the perspective of Foucault studies, such bridging allows to outline the missing link between the domains of Foucauldian thought the author referred to in the

introduction to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*. That is to say, our demonstration aims to show that the fold between the “the games of truth (*jeux de vérité*) [...], as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and [...] their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices” on the one hand and the “the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject”¹ on the other is an area of intensive exchanges and appropriations and that power relations, once internalized by subjects, may transform into modes of subjection.

From the vantage point of picoeconomics, our epistemological intervention bears the prospects of establishing causal links between the biographical backgrounds of individuals and their ability to exercise Ainslean willpower. If the hypothesis presented in the current paper is to withstand empirical testing, new discipline-based interventions for treatment of addictions and other self-defeating behaviors may be designed and implemented into clinical practice. Trials specifically devised to test the predictions of our reconstruction would allow to measure the hypothesized effect sizes and specify conditions under which they can be observed.

PRUDENT PIGEONS AND SMOKING ANGELS: A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF PICOECONOMICS

Human irrationality still remains a puzzle despite recent advances in the field. Even the appearance of such groundbreaking studies as the celebrated work of Kahneman and Tversky² did not help to completely dissolve the problem of self-defeating and inherently inconsistent behaviors in economics or psychology, and even less so in philosophy. One of the promising theoretical approaches in this regard is the branch of behavioral economics known as *picoeconomics*.

Developed by George Ainslie on the basis of earlier studies by Richard Herrnstein as well as his own theoretical and experimental work, picoeconomics describes the dynamics of individual choice in terms of cooperative game theory and envisions the self as a “marketplace of choice” – an arena for struggle between interests attempting to determine human behavior. Despite the apparent counterintuitiveness of this scheme, it proved to be valuable in explaining some forms of economic behavior³ and the psychological mechanisms of addiction, with Ainslie being credited as “a leading theorist and researcher on addictions.”⁴

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* [1984] (1990), trans. Robert Hurley, 6.

² Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2013).

³ Nava Ashraf, Dean Karlan and Wesley Yin, “Tying Odysseus to the Mast: Evidence from a Commitment Savings Product in the Philippines,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121:2 (2006), 635-672; Michal Bauer, Julie Chytilová and Jonathan Morduch, “Behavioral Foundations of Microcredit: Experimental and Survey Evidence from Rural India,” *The American Economic Review* 102:2 (2012), 1118-1139; David Laibson, “Golden Eggs and Hyperbolic Discounting,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112:2 (1997), 443-477.

⁴ Stephen Morse, “Addiction, Genetics, and Criminal Responsibility,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 69:1/2 (2006), 184.

Despite the importance of earlier contributions, the history of picoeconomics can be traced back to one specific box. Or, to use the author's description "a sound-proof chamber that measured 30 by 32 by 33 cm" with "white noise piped into" it "to mask environmental sounds."⁵ The box contained White Carneaux pigeons presented with the task to peck the key implanted in one of the walls of the apparatus. The animals were taught that a peck at the key while it was lit red gave them immediate access to a small amount of grain. If they did not peck it while it was red, the pigeons would get access to a thrice larger amount of grain in 15 seconds. Most subjects preferred smaller sooner rewards (SS) to the larger later (LL) ones on more than 95% percent of trials.⁶ There was another option, though. If a bird pecked the key while it was lit green early in the experiment, it prevented the appearance of the red light. In this case, the animals deprived themselves of the *possibility of access* to SS reward in the experiment thus safeguarding the attainment of the LL one at the end of the test.

Only three pigeons out of ten tested mastered this forestalling technique. Yet, the ones that succeeded pecked the green key "between 50% and 90% of trials."⁷ Thus, two important patterns of behavior were experimentally demonstrated. First, *the preference conflict*: the same animals seemed to behave differently depending on how temporarily close the food reward was. They preferred SS to LL amount of grain when the former was immediately available but LL to SS ones when they could make choices in advance. Second, *the commitment intervoention*: the pigeons whose cognitive capacities allowed to grasp the mechanism behind the pecking of the green-lit key chose this option to outplay *their future selves* and limit the range of choices available to them.

Later experiments with similar results were conducted on rats and other animals. As of 1989, "every organism so far studied" had also demonstrated preference reversal.⁸ Tests were even conducted on that inconvenient beast that behaviorist theories are notoriously reluctant to work with – homo sapiens. Thus, in a 2002 study, Ariely and Vertenbroch discovered that 73% of students in their research sample preferred to impose a series of deadlines on themselves in order to prevent procrastination and last-minute processing of the assigned tasks.⁹ In a 2007 experiment, McClure and his co-authors observed a motivational conflict in human subjects choosing between different quantities of juice and water available at varying delays that was traceable all the way back to the activation of specific regions of their brains.¹⁰ And in a 2010 study conducted by Hofmeyr, Ainslie, Charlton, and Ross, undergraduates exhibited conflict between the preference for smaller monetary rewards delivered sooner and larger ones available after a larger delay (one day

⁵ George Ainslie, "Impulse Control in Pigeons," *Journal of The Experimental Analysis of Behavior* 21:3 (1974), 486.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁷ Ainslie, "Impulse Control in Pigeons," 488.

⁸ George Ainslie, "Freud and Picoeconomics," *Behaviorism* 17:1 (1989), 14.

⁹ Cited in Katherine Milkman, Todd Rogers and Max Bazerman, "Harnessing Our Inner Angels and Demons: What We Have Learned about Want/Should Conflicts and How That Knowledge Can Help Us Reduce Short-Sighted Decision Making," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3:4 (2008), 333.

¹⁰ Samuel McClure, Keith Ericson, David Laibson, George Loewenstein and Jonathan Cohen, "Time Discounting for Primary Rewards," *The Journal of Neuroscience* 27:21 (2007), 5796-5804.

versus ten days respectively). Interestingly, regular smokers within the sample were significantly more likely to shift from choosing SS to choosing LL rewards when introduced to the idea that their current choice may influence the outcomes of similar choices in the entire series of trials, as the experiment involved a prolonged sequence of analogous decisions.¹¹

The appearance of smokers in the last study is not accidental. The manifested type of behavior discussed up to this point is by no means new to the scholars of the human psyche. The self-defeating actions of individuals or the complicated schemes in which they engage to outplay their future selves are familiar to economists and philosophers as “the Odysseus problem.” The title refers to the famous episode from Homer’s *Odyssey* in which the ship of the Trojan war hero sails near the island of sirens. The magic songs of these bird-women are powerful enough to lure any sailor into the rocks, so the cunning Odysseus (with a little help from Circe) devises an ingenious way to circumvent the threat. He orders his sailors to seal their ears with wax so they may continue to steer the ship undisturbed. As for himself, he orders the crew to tie him to the mast and to not loosen the rope under any circumstances, so he would both remain alive and hear the sirens’ warbles.

The behavior of Odysseus is completely, even ideally rational, but the real-life phenomena this story is used to model are anything but. Why do people invest their money in illiquid assets, thus rendering their funds unavailable to themselves in the future? Why do they succumb to overeating and other self-harming actions even though they know about the negative consequences and do not desire them? Why, to use the example perhaps painfully familiar to any reader of this article, do we *first* set alarm clocks at early hours in the morning and *then* put them at the opposite side of the room in order to deprive *ourselves* of the option to instantly turn them off and continue sleeping the next morning? Finally, the behavior of the addicts can be viewed as the epitome of the self-contradictory Odysseus-like actions. How many breeds of sirens should nest inside the head of an individual to make her grow addicted to a certain substance, then willingly enroll into a rehabilitation program and subsequently start smuggling the drug inside the rehab facility?

Classic economics has little to answer to these questions. The rational actor should *never* reverse her preferences unless new information became available; not to mention the fact that she should *never* willingly limit the range of choices and resources available to her.¹² Generally, economists assume that individuals discount their future rewards exponentially, with the value of the item steadily decreasing as the time elapses (Figure I). The array of observations gathered throughout the preceding decades (including but not

¹¹ Andre Hofmeyr, George Ainslie, Richard Charlton and Don Ross, “The relationship between addiction and reward bundling: an experiment comparing smokers and non-smokers,” *Addiction* 106 (2010), 402-409.

¹² The only possible exception to this rule in traditional rational choice theory is the situation in which the actor precommits to the unfavorable outcome of the interaction in order to coerce her opponent into changing the latter’s strategy of behavior. The throwing of the steering wheel outside the car’s window in the “chicken” game is a classical game-theoretic example. However, the application of this model to the Odysseus problem is incompatible with a conventional view of the human agent as a unitary entity with a consistent set of preferences.

limited to the ones cited above), however, paints a rather different picture. The rewards seem to be discounted hyperbolically along the time axis, forming two distinct regions. In the first of which (when the SS item is immediately available), the preference for SS gratification dominates the preference for LL gratification, while in the second (when both items are sufficiently delayed), the LL becomes more desirable (Figure II). In formal terms, this means that reward functions from different valuables available at different intervals in the future intersect, creating self-contradicting preferences and urging an individual to turn to various forestalling techniques to steer her own future actions around the irresistible attractiveness of the immediate gratification.¹³ Although the assumptions of this model are rather modest and rooted in empirical observations, its implications are profound and far-reaching.

Ainslie argues that the existence of hyperbolic discount curves (Figure II) demands the introduction of the radically different model of human decision behavior. The self should be envisioned not as an overarching unitary structure but as the space of negotiation between interests – the “marketplace of choice.”¹⁴ The entities that compete in this space are called interests

since they are constituted within the person much like interests within the legislature: non-dominant interests maintain their integrity and some degree of power insofar as they are likely to become dominant in the future.¹⁵

Figure I. From Ainslie's *Breakdown of Will*, p. 32.

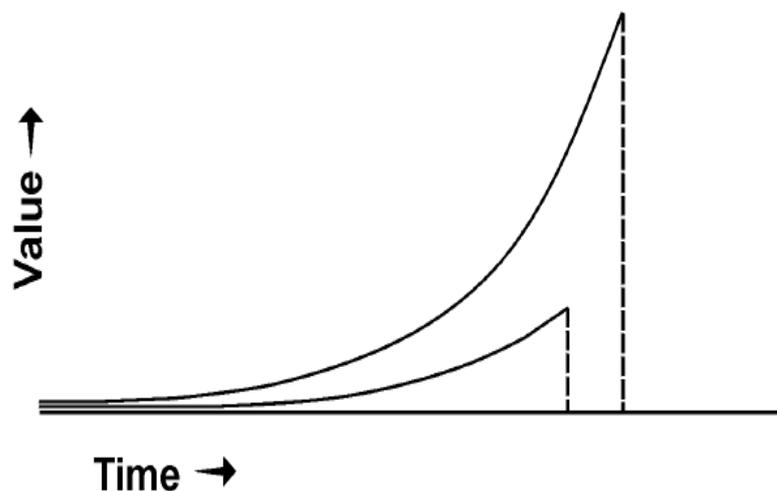


Figure I. Conventional (exponential) discount curves from two rewards of different sizes, available at different times.

¹³ George Ainslie, *Breakdown of Will* (2001), 27-47.

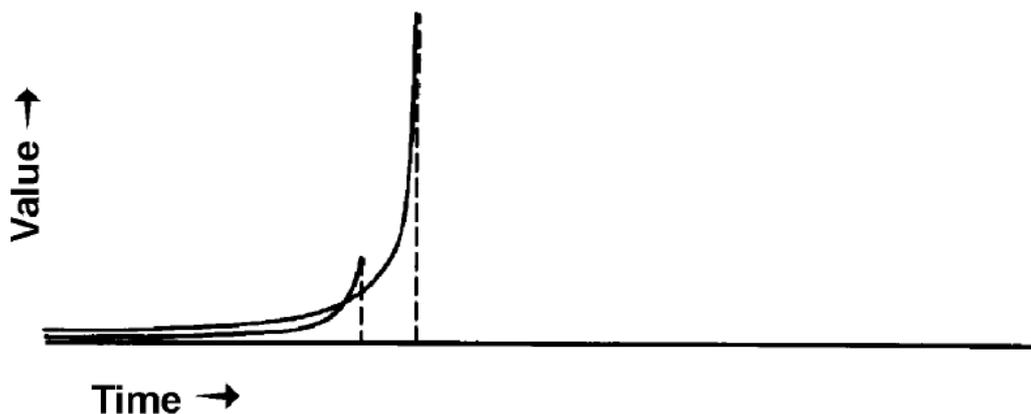
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ Ainslie, “Freud and Picoeconomics,” 14.

These sub-agents employ various tactics to dominate the behavior of the person as a whole, but if the tactics of the short-term interests are relatively straightforward – just wait until the appropriately salient reward will be in sight and seize it without letting the realization of the long-term consequences interfere – what possible mechanism can long-term interests employ to secure the success of such projects as sexual or dietary abstinence, regular physical exercise, or any undertaking requiring the prolonged series of behavioral investments?

The answers are plentiful, and they will be discussed in the following section, but one important method needs to be addressed immediately. The dilemma an individual faces in the situation where she, say, wants to quit smoking is the one known to game theory research as the tragedy of the commons. The individual understands that the role of one specific cigarette in the success of the enterprise to quit smoking is minuscule at best. After all, one smoke never killed anybody, and if she manages to combine savoring *this specific* cigarette with abstaining from addiction in the future, she will win in both gambles. Thus, she may let herself give in to the temptation at hand. The problem is that the same reasoning is invoked by the concerned interest with *every cigarette*. Ultimately this may lead – and often leads – to disastrous failures.

Now let us assume, as John Monterosso did in his beautifully crafted thought experiment¹⁶, that an angel appeared to the lady thus tormented with a choice to light or not light her cigarette and whispered that, regardless of her decision, she is destined never to smoke again from tomorrow on. Of course, she, as a rational actor, would then proceed to ask an angel for a lighter, as far as her current choice cannot affect the general outcome of the whole undertaking. She would react similarly if the angel was to tell her that from



Hyperbolic discount curves from two rewards of different sizes available at different times. The smaller reward is temporarily preferred for a period before it is available, as shown by the portion of its curve that projects above that from the later, larger reward.

Figure II. From Ainslie's *Breakdown of Will*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Cited in George Ainslie, "The Effect of Hyperbolic Discounting on Personal Choices," Speech, Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

tomorrow she is destined to smoke until her (probably not so distant) death. Once again, the smoking of that concrete cigarette would have no significance per se *if it was divorced from the long-term end to which it paved a path.*

This fable suggests the means by which long-term interests can counteract the awesome power of the short-term ones. They should define the choice at hand – this specific cigarette, this specific training at a gym, this specific opportunity to cheat – as the predictor of all future choices of the similar kind. Then with every smoke the individual will stake not the presence of five minutes of nicotine intoxication against the future years of abstinence, but the perspective of smoking until her last days against the perspective of quitting the bad habit altogether. The ability to cast individual choices in such terms and stick to the accepted strategies is called will power.¹⁷ Ainslean theory predicts that people suffering from chronic addictions will be less prone to conceptualizing their decisions-at-hand as predictors of the whole series of future choices, i.e., will have weaker long-term interests forestalling machinery than the rest of the population. This effect was already observed in the laboratory – in the 2010 experiment referred to earlier in this section, the behavior of the chronic smokers was more profoundly affected by the suggestion that their current choice may influence the whole series of choices they were making than the behavior of non-substance-addicted subjects.¹⁸ In other words, Ainslean theory does what any good theory is supposed to do – it predicts the results of empirical trials.

THE MICROECONOMICS OF THE SELF

What follows, Ainslie claims, is economics. The transactions between sub-personal interests may be studied by methods developed in game theory and behavioral economics, hence the proposed name of the field – *picoeconomics*, or “micromicroeconomics.”¹⁹ Through the prism of Ainslean modeling, self-defeating behaviors of an individual may be read as the results of repetitive strategic interactions between *rational* agents that comprise her mind. Ainslie even proposes a classification of the “zones of temporary preference durations” (i.e., types of interests) that vie for control in the marketplace of choice (Figure III). The list includes pains²⁰ that last “fraction of a second,” itches (“seconds”), addictions (“hours to days”), compulsions (“months to years”), and “optimal” zones of temporary preference which have no cycle or duration and are never recognized as a problem.²¹

¹⁷ George Ainslie, *Breakdown of Will*, 90-104.

¹⁸ Hofmeyr et al., “The relationship between addiction and reward bundling: an experiment comparing smokers and non-smokers,” 402-409.

¹⁹ *Breakdown of Will*, 47.

²⁰ Based on the neurological and experimental evidence, Ainslie views pains (*Breakdown of Will*, 54-58) and emotions (*ibid.*, 65-67) as sub-conscious volitional processes that compete for the attention of the individual and, therefore, can also be viewed as interests in picoeconomic terms. Although interesting, this assumption is too strong in view of the present authors. All propositions expressed in this article do not depend on the accurateness of this maximalist view of picoeconomics, even though they do not contradict it.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Zones of Temporary Preference Duration

Descriptor	Distinguishing Feature	Duration of Cycle	Time Until Recognized as a Problem	Examples
Optimal	Never aversive	No cycle	Never	Conflict-free satisfactions, "to love and to work."
Compulsions	Controlled by willpower; ambiguous feeling of aversion	Months to years	Decades	"Workaholism"; constrictions of personality like miserliness; anorexia nervosa
Addictions	Clear periods of pleasure and aversion	Hours to days	Days to years	Substance abuse, explosive emotional habits
Itches	Ambiguous pleasurable phase but conscious participation	Seconds	Minutes	Physical itches, obsessions, tics, mannerisms, hypochondria
Pains	Never pleasurable, no participation	Fraction of a second	Fraction of a second	Physical pain, panic

Figure III. From Ainslie's *Breakdown of Will*, p. 64.

Ainslie and his followers also created impressive catalogs of stratagems that can be used in the war of interests. Generally, they fall into four categories.

Extrapsychic devices mobilize physical or social factors that will render access to temptation practically impossible or connected with inevitable reputational loss.²² In the simplest scenario, an addict may lock a substance supply inside a safe and throw a key into a river. Alternatively, a person may put her "reputation in a community at stake"²³ by assuring her relatives, friends or whatever reference group she chooses that from date x she will start losing weight. Failure to act on the promise will result in disappointing the chosen reference group and consequent loss in self-esteem.

Manipulation of attention. This tactic focuses on combatting temptation through willful ignorance. An overeater may choose not to walk through the sections of the department store where junk foods are sold or not to watch culinary TV channels while she is on a diet. In a more clinically-relevant example, Ainslie describes patients, "who have told of "fighting off" panic attacks, dissociative episodes, and even epileptic seizures by vigorously directing their minds away from the feeling that these events were about to occur."²⁴

²² George Ainslie, "Self Reported Tactics of Impulse Control," *The International Journal of Addictions* 22:2 (1987), 168.

²³ *Breakdown of Will*, 75.

²⁴ *Breakdown of Will*, 76.

Preparation of emotion is resorted to when an individual intentionally cultivates emotional response that will inhibit the satiation of the unwanted craving. The same process is at work when a person teaches herself not to react with disgust to the prescribed medication even though it may have an extremely unpleasant taste. Ainslie compares this to the psychoanalytic technique of “reversal of affect”²⁵ and quotes similar opinions of the famous thinkers on the subject. For instance, David Hume once observed that “Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion but a contrary impulse.”²⁶

Personal rules are the most popular tactic, and they are at the center of Ainslie’s argumentation. They naturally follow from Monterosso’s angel thought experiment. If each specific choice in itself can be reasoned to be irrelevant to the achievement of an overarching goal (of becoming slimmer, or not cheating in the relationship, or quitting drinking), then the long-term interests can counteract this dangerous and potentially defeating mode of reasoning by staking the success of the whole project on the choice at hand: if I drink this glass of whiskey I will drink every other glass of whiskey that will end up in my hand and I will never overcome my drinking problem. *The current choice should be viewed as a precedent for all future similar choices according to the personal rule.*²⁷ This, of course, leaves a huge field for machinations and ad hoc reasoning with short-term interests attempting to define the choice at hand as an exception to the relevant rule (if it is permissible to drink on *proper* occasions what constitutes one?). That is why the battles with oneself can be so difficult to win. What may appear as a sufficient excuse at the time when the temptation is directly available may, in hindsight, turn out to be simply an *excuse*, thus rendering the whole enterprise of following personal rules a constant dispute of definition and re-definition.

Ainslie (as he readily acknowledges) was not the first one to recognize the self-regulatory nature of these methods. Loewenstein and O’Donoghue quote a passage from the 1984 article by Nobel prize laureate Thomas Schelling in which he lists such techniques of self-regulation as

relinquishing authority to someone else; committing, disabling, or removing oneself; removing resources; submitting to surveillance; incarcerating oneself; arranging rewards/penalties; rescheduling one’s life; avoiding precursors; arranging delays; using teams; automating behavior; and setting bright line rules.²⁸

Ainslie also embraces the notion of the “bright line rules” as a tool frequently used in the definition wars among interests of varying durations.²⁹ This legal term refers to the conditions or circumstances that can be defined so clearly that they cannot possibly be subject to redefinition, so the “crossing” of them should inevitably lead to the imposition of sanctions or penalties. Using the example mentioned earlier, the personal rule “I should drink

²⁵ Ainslie also was first to acknowledge the existence of non-accidental similarities between piceoeconomics and Freud’s psychoanalysis – see “Freud and Piceoeconomics,” 11-19.

²⁶ *Breakdown of Will*, 78.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-85.

²⁸ George Loewenstein and Ted O’Donoghue, “‘We Can Do This the Easy Way or the Hard Way’: Negative Emotions, Self-Regulation, and the Law,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 73:1 (2006), 186, note 5.

²⁹ *Breakdown of Will*, 94-100.

only on proper occasions” does not have distinct bright lines insofar as any event can be defined in and out of its reach through ad hoc reasoning. On the other hand, the rule “I should never drink” is a bright line in and of itself because there is no negotiable middle ground between violating and not violating it.

The rationale behind all these recommendations is a game-theoretic one. The relations between interests in the marketplace of choice are described by Ainslie as a “limited warfare” situation³⁰ in the same sense the concept is used by game theory practitioners. Moreover, the current-choice-as-a-precedent mechanism is said to be based on the “self-enforcing contract” solution to the repetitive prisoners’ dilemma analyzed by Stahler.³¹ Yet, there is an alternative (or, rather, complementary) way in which relations between sub-agents inside the piceoeconomic self can be conceptualized. They, and this is the central argument of the current paper, may be envisioned as an exercise of *discipline*.

THE MYSTERY OF TWO VERDICTS: FOUCAULT’S DISCIPLINE THEORY³²

Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* was published in 1975 and used analysis of the evolution of penitentiary mechanisms to gain insight into the wider logic of the functioning of power and objectification in modern societies. The volume assumed the form of a scholarly detective. It opened with a vivid four-page description of the execution performed on “Damiens the regicide” in Paris on the 2nd of March 1757. According to the verdict, the criminal was to be

taken [...] to the Place de Grève, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs, and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said patricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds.³³

On the same page this account ended, the author reproduced twelve articles from Leon Faucher’s “rules for the House of young prisoners in Paris,” written eight decades after Damiens’ execution. The document is aggressively, hilariously precise in the limitation of how much time the prisoners should spend on making their beds in the morning (“At the second drum-roll, they must be dressed and make their beds. At the third, they must line up and proceed to the chapel for morning prayer”), where their bread rations should be

³⁰ *Breakdown of Will*, 90.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86; 215, note 27.

³² The observations presented on the following pages do not constitute the only existing intersection between Ainslean and Foucauldian thought. It would be interesting to study the way in which Ainslie’s insights into the phenomenon of dissociation disorders (George Ainslie, “The Dangers of Willpower, Including the Exacerbation of Addiction and Dissociation,” in *Getting Hooked*, eds. J. Elster and O. Skog (1999), 65-92) inform and are informed in by Foucault’s exploration of “monomaniacs” (Michel Foucault, *Istoriya bezumiya v klasicheskuyu epokhu* [A History of Madness in the Classical Age; Russian translation; 1961], trans. I. Staf, (1997)).

³³ Cited in Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1995), trans. Alan Sheridan, 3.

distributed (“At a quarter to six in the summer, a quarter to seven in winter, the prisoners go down into the courtyard where they must wash their hands and faces, and receive their first ration of bread”), and how much time should be dedicated to the pious reading (“For a quarter of an hour one of the prisoners or supervisors reads a passage from some instructing or uplifting work”). The contrast between these two verdicts is stupendous and question-begging. How did the majestic “ritual play of excessive pains, spectacular brandings in the ritual of the public execution”³⁴ transform into “the attentive ‘malevolence’ that turns everything to account”³⁵ in less (or slightly more) than a century?

First of all, it was not only the world of punishment that underwent a tectonic change. The process of judging itself evolved away from the pattern championed by Medieval and Renaissance jurists. As the classical age dawned on European society, courts started to evaluate not so much the crimes as the individuals that committed them, putting emphasis not on the punishment of the delinquent but on the perspective of transforming him and “repairing” his personality. The establishing of motives and emotions that preceded or accompanied the wrongdoing alongside the introduction of the concept of affect all signified the adoption of the new optics and new penal methodology. The revenge coated in the suit of renewing the balance of justice gave way to a “therapeutical” judiciary that aimed at the minds of the individuals, not at their bodies, “not only on what they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be.”³⁶ Through quoting numerous eighteenth-century pamphlets, projects, and treatises, Foucault convincingly demonstrates that the primary drive behind this omnipresent movement was not the wish to “humanize” the system of punishment and erase its savage and bloodthirsty side but rather the mere objective of making it more effective while simultaneously making it more economical. The public “theatre of torture” with a power of sovereign looming in its background was simply too clumsy and redundant to cater to the needs of a newly formed capitalist society. That is why the architects of the emerging penal mechanisms found a new point of impact, a new target at which the punishment machine was to act from now on, the soul. “The soul” as “the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul” as “the prison of the body.”³⁷

The rise of several institutions in the eighteenth century allowed to find the most efficient and most elegant technology of reprocessing these “souls.” In the popularly recruited armies, pedagogically innovative schools, and reformed hospitals, the *episteme* of the classical age invented techniques and instruments of exerting power on and extracting knowledge from its human subjects.³⁸ The political technology that was born out of these findings is called *discipline*, and the society it allowed to build should be called a *disciplinary society*. The introduction of the universal daily routines and training programs in the armies, the emergence of classificatory spatial distribution of pupils in schools, the implementation of the permanent clinical supervision in hospitals, the omnipresent growth of

³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 101.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁸ For the thorough and insightful analysis of the *epistemes* as systems of knowledge production, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (2002).

the amount of documentation, the creation of the examination as a near-universal form of testing all met to reinvent the existing vector of social control. Discipline allowed to use the productive powers of individuals more effectively while simultaneously making them more obedient and less likely to protest.

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering the machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born, it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines.³⁹

The scrupulously detailed regulation of the position in which the pen should be held while writing, the prescription of the exact spot at which the view of the soldiers marching in the rank ought to be directed, the delineation of what movements are allowable inside the factory production line all eventually end up sculpting the *souls* of the individuals even though they are primarily directed at their bodies.

The fact that political control inside disciplinary systems literally starts at the fingertips of its subjects and penetrates the entirety of their being made power overzealous about trivialities. Indeed, "discipline is a political anatomy of detail."⁴⁰ And the increased significance of details brought about the need for them to be constantly seen. In facilitating this demand, the architecture of the society in both the most literal and the most arcane meaning of this word was remolded. The endlessly transparent and precisely hierarchized space of the classroom is only the most familiar example: the desks are placed in rows so that the placement of the pupil in the specific spot attests his aptitude and the level of reliability; the passages between the rows are arranged to facilitate the constant supervision by the instructor that can effortlessly pass through them; the very construction of the tables makes students maximally visible and prevents the formation of concealed regions.

Behind all these very physical yet very formal structures looms one paradigmatic building that was never practically realized but informed and inspired thousands of schools, hospitals, and prisons around the world. Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*. The ideal penitentiary that was supposed to put an end to all deficiencies of the prison system by the merit of its construction alone. Bentham's project included the circular arrangement of transparent cells (the daylight had to pass through them unobstructed) and an observation tower in the centre of the circle, inside which the overseer supposedly resided (Figure IV). The tower contained a complex system of inner seclusions, so that even when the change of guards occurred or when there was nobody inside it, the prisoners would have no opportunity to establish this. The only thing they would constantly see is the towering mass of the supervision point from where every movement of the inmate was possibly

³⁹ *Discipline & Punish*, 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

observed by the warden ready to impose sanctions. The very *realization* of such a possibility was the mechanism that changed the behavior of prisoners. “The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad”⁴¹;

in short, it arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the function it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact.⁴²

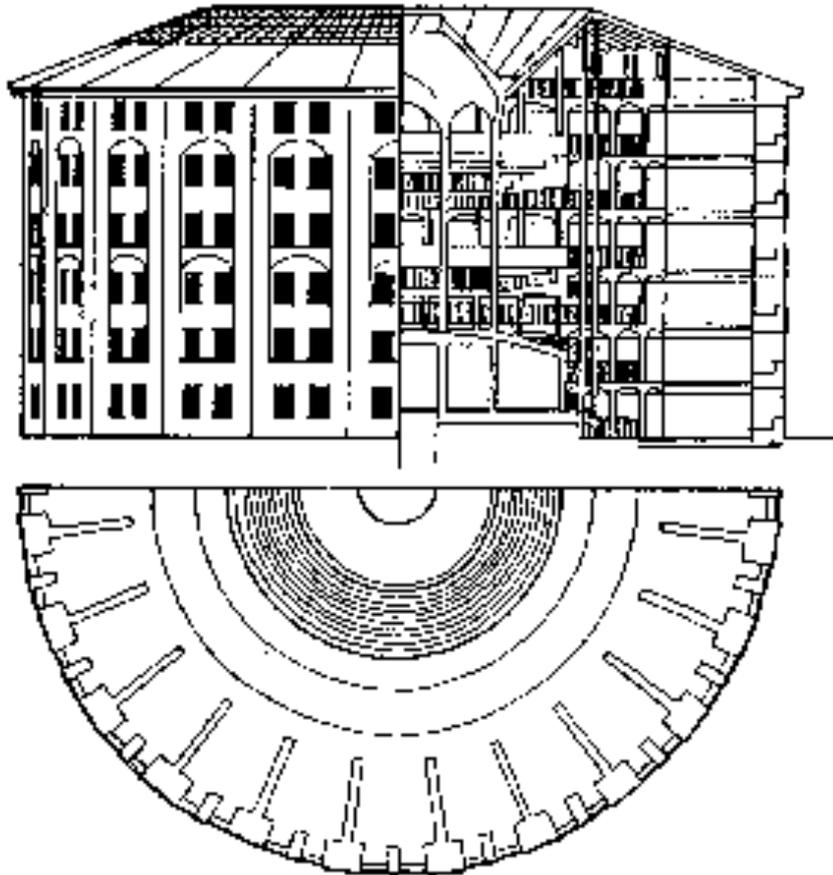


Figure IV. The plane of the Panopticon prison from Bentham's treatise. Reproduced in the first French edition of *Discipline & Punish*.

Originally hatched inside disciplinary institutions, mechanisms of discipline came outside their walls and flooded the society as a whole, being dispersed throughout its structures by police, registration procedures, educational routines, and global changes in the governmental policies. Eventually, the primary role ascribed to discipline underwent a principal transformation:

At first, they [the disciplines] were expected to neutralize, to fix useless or disturbed populations, to avoid the inconveniences of over-large assemblies; now they were being

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 206.

asked to play a positive role, for they were becoming able to do so, to increase the possible utility of individuals.⁴³

Discipline now is not the ultima ratio of the desperate public order; it is its very staple. After the ill, the mad, and the immature were disciplined, the whole of society followed in their footsteps.

Foucault described three principal techniques of disciplining power:

1) *Hierarchical observation*.⁴⁴ The subjects of such power are constantly placed under the penetrating disciplinary gaze. Indeed, they are “objectified” by its very presence, rendered both visible and manipulatable. Characteristically, in such a scheme of power relations, the possibility to have respites from observation is a privilege, the access to which is available in direct proportion to the importance of the position occupied by an individual on the power vertical.

2) *Normalizing judgment*.⁴⁵ Discipline establishes the norm that is used as a standard of evaluation of the qualities of individuals or even the *quality* of individuals. It constantly produces judgments about the performance of its subjects, their competencies, their *normality*. The economy of sanctions and countenances it creates uses the movement along the normal-abnormal spectrum as a currency. The individual that successfully performs the task is productive, and “reliable” is confirmed as “normal.” The ones that fail are designated as sub-normal and punished by this designation alone.

3) *The examination*:

the examination is at the center of the procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge. It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgement, assures the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification, maximum extraction of forces and time, continuous genetic accumulation, optimum combination of aptitudes and, thereby, the fabrication of cellular, organic, genetic and combinatory individuality.⁴⁶

Foucault draws the line here. Individuals are fabricated by the knowledge-power system; they are shaped by the disciplines and objectified by the social system. The individual consciousness for Foucault (as of the time of writing of *Discipline & Punish*) constitutes the horizon beyond which the analysis could not (or, at least, should not) venture. The operation of discipline inside one’s “soul” is presumed to happen in silence or in the impenetrable haze.

TECHNIQUES OF THE SELF

In 1984, nine years after the emergence of *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault authored what proved to be his last major lifetime publication – the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* series subtitled *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* respectively.

⁴³ *Discipline & Punish*, 210.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-177.

⁴⁵ *Discipline & Punish*, 177-184.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

These texts marked a substantial departure from the research program underlying both the first volume of the same series and Foucault's monograph on the genealogy of the French penal system. Foucauldian analysis now was not dealing with the institutional and discursive practices through which the matrixes of subjectivity were created in the Modern West. Instead, the author focused on the domain of sexuality to investigate

those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. These "arts of existence," these "*techniques of the self*"⁴⁷

Utilizing Classical Greek (Volume II) and Roman (Volume III) texts, Foucault shed light on the existence of the vast body of knowledge preoccupied with devising and testing the practices for transforming the constitution of one's subjectivity at the subject's own initiative.

In the introduction to the second volume, he defined his field as "a whole rich and complex field of historicity in the way the individual is summoned to recognize himself as an ethical subject."⁴⁸ To facilitate his analysis, Foucault elaborated four principal components of the *techniques of the self*:

1) "[T]he determination of the ethical substance; that is, the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct."⁴⁹ The ethical substance represents a fulcrum on which the subject should rely to usher change in his mode of existence.

2) "[T]he mode of subjection; that is, with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice."⁵⁰ In essence, this is an answer to the question why a person should obey a certain norm or principle.

3) the forms of *elaboration*, of *ethical work* that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior.⁵¹

This component may be identified with *ascesis*, which the author defines in his essay "Self Writing" as "the fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action."⁵²

4) the *telos* of the ethical subject: [...] a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject⁵³

⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 10-11, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ *The Use of Pleasure*, 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27, emphasis in the original.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

⁵² Cited in Frederic Gros, "Course Context," in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82*, ed. F. Gros (2005), 529.

⁵³ *The Use of Pleasure*, 27-28, emphasis in the original.

Foucault employs this theoretical framework throughout the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* to explore the established paradigms and subtle shifts in the understanding of techniques of the self in the Greek and Roman worlds. He works with a great variety of texts, ranging from the Platonic corpus to Seneca's letters, and extracts from them a plethora of exercises and principles of conduct purposefully invented for the "forming of oneself as a subject."⁵⁴ In some cases, these techniques are pronouncedly physical, as in the following excerpt from Plutarch,

One began by whetting the appetite through the practice of some sport; next one placed oneself in front of tables laden with the most succulent dishes; then, having gazed on these, one left them to the servants and made do with the kind of food that slaves ate⁵⁵

In others, they consist of a set of conceptual metaphors and attitudes one has to adopt:

The subject's relation to himself [...] is more like an act of inspection in which the inspector aims to evaluate a piece of work, an accomplished task. The word *speculator* (one needs to be a *speculator sui*) designates this role exactly⁵⁶

In *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, Foucault limits his scope only to those techniques that were devised and prescribed by experts in the sphere of care of the self – philosophers – and disseminated among the rest of the population with an express aim of accomplishing ethical work upon oneself. He admits that these techniques bear more than accidental resemblance to the principles of conduct characteristic for the society at large, but leaves this thread unexplored. For instance, in the Classical Greek context

What one must aim for in the agonistic contest with oneself and in the struggle to control the desires was the point where the relationship with oneself would become isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy, and authority that one expected, as a man, a free man, to establish over his inferiors⁵⁷

Evidently, Foucault conceived of *techniques of the self* and *techniques of disciplinary power* as two separate domains without any transactions occurring between them. We present a different picture below, one in which a kind of osmosis between the two is not only possible but constantly occurs, as evidenced by Ainslean reconstructions of the processes of irrationality control.

SIRENS IN THE PANOPTICON

In their analysis of risk-taking behaviors heavily influenced by Ainslean insights, Valerie Reyna and Frank Farley state that

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ Cited in Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality* [1984] (1986), trans. Robert Hurley, 59.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 62, after Seneca, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁷ *The Use of Pleasure*, 83.

planning ability, future orientation, lack of impulsivity, and delay of gratification have each been linked to socially desirable outcomes, such as higher educational attainment and lower propensity for risky and antisocial behavior⁵⁸

They cite three sources in support of this (rather common sense) observation. Let us take a closer look at what is said here, though. The authors postulate that personal characteristics which are most valued in the psychological portrait of a mature, self-conscious, and *disciplined* individual are also the ones that open the way to the attainment of a higher position in society, and decrease the possibility of committing undesirable acts. The perfect Ainslean inner negotiator happens to be the ideal Foucauldian disciplinary citizen.

In another paper that bears strong traces of picoeconomic theoretical influences (the author cites the works of Ainslie, Liabson, and Ross), Carsten Hermann-Pillath proposes that institutions of the modern capitalist society might mutate the type of agency exhibited by individuals.⁵⁹ Instead of the inconsistent and compulsive behavior characteristic of hyperbolically discounting actors, people acquire the capacity to process the information and make actions in the predominantly rational and inherently concerted manner (which makes the existence of classical economics as a science possible). The author hypothesizes that

standard rationality might apply in certain institutional settings [...] generally speaking, human economic behavior emerges at the interface between institutions and mental phenomena.⁶⁰

Institutional mechanisms remold human beings into some sort of centaurs made of their chaotic “nature” on the one hand and shiny social machines on the other.

In one of the most famous passages from *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault urges to discard the view of power as merely a repressive and restrictive mechanism that ‘censors,’ ‘excludes,’ and ‘conceals’.

In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.⁶¹

The individuals manufactured by power should have disciplinary mechanisms internalized deeply in their psyche and absorb them into the core structures (or appropriate them as principal practices, for that matter) of their selves. The aim and the endpoint of disciplinary society is the individual that disciplines and punishes *herself*. It is the exercise of the discipline over the urges and itches of her own mind that prepares her for inclusion

⁵⁸ Valerie Reyna and Frank Farley, “Risk and Rationality in Adolescent Decision Making: Implications for Theory, Practice, and Public Policy,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 7:1 (2006), 14.

⁵⁹ Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, “Elements of a Neo-Veblenian Theory of the Individual,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 43:1 (2009), 189-214; Ainslie provides a brilliant analysis of the process that allows hyperbolically discounting individuals to behave as if they were exponential discounters in the economic markets and situations involving money. See *Breakdown of Will*, 100-104.

⁶⁰ Herrmann-Pillath, “Elements of a Neo-Veblenian Theory of the Individual,” 208.

⁶¹ *Discipline & Punish*, 194.

into the mechanisms of modern education, modern healthcare, modern military service, modern career making, and modern life in general. Panopticon is a form of the head.

If this is the case, Ainsliean “types of impulse control” should be viewed as extensions of the disciplinary tentacles operating inside the mind of the person. *Extrapsychic devices, manipulation of attention, preparation of emotion, and personal rules* should be put on the same list as *hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination*. The former set, in effect, presents the reflection and the extrapolation of the latter. In terms of Foucault’s conceptual architecture, methods of disciplinary power, once they are absorbed by an individual, become her techniques of the self. That is to say, although they are not necessarily self-conscious, they are certainly self-perpetuated procedures of exerting pressure upon oneself.

Indeed, in order to keep track of the shady transactions in the marketplace of choice, the self should constantly *examine* itself, its line of behavior and driving motives⁶². It ought to produce judgments about the *normalcy* and desirability of its own ongoing psychological processes. It has to constantly *observe* and categorize the individual in the way an external observer would have.

In his writings, Ainslie dedicates a lot of attention to what he calls the “dangers” of the excessive exercise of willpower. At a certain point, when the behavior of the individual over-relies on the observation of personal rules, he may fall prey to the danger of losing “authenticity” (a concept borrowed from the vocabulary of Existentialism).

The existentialists said that authenticity comes from a responsiveness to the immediacy of experience, a responsiveness that is lost when people govern themselves according to preconceived “cognitive maps”⁶³

In the earlier paper, he lists other negative side effects caused by the hypertrophy of the will.⁶⁴ First, *categories of choice overshadow their individual members*, making a person incapable of appreciating the uniqueness and singularity of objects or events. The legalism and minuteness of the inner legislature’s bureaucracy drains the vividness and intensity of sensual and intellectual experience. Second, *rules make lapses disproportionately damaging*. A former addict that failed to withstand the temptation once is likely to view it as a failure of the whole abstinence strategy (rather than an individual lapse) and will likely stop trying to correct his destructive behavior altogether. Third, *rules create a motive to distort the perception of reality*. If a failure to comply has such long-lasting and dramatic consequences, the individual has a strong incentive to reshape her vision of reality in order not to notice the fact of the lapse. This process may take many forms, starting with complex intellectual acrobatics, which allows to safely redefine the bout, and ending with actual split-

⁶² Sometimes the results of such intrapsychic exams can have truly dramatic consequences, “David Premack described the example of a father who put off picking up his children in the rain to get a pack of cigarettes, and, *when he noticed what this meant about his character*, gave up smoking on the spot” (George Ainslie, “Free Will as Recursive Self-Prediction: Does a Deterministic Mechanism Reduce Responsibility?” in *Addiction and Responsibility*, eds. J. Poland and G. Graham, (2011), 72; emphasis added).

⁶³ *Breakdown of Will*, 6.

⁶⁴ Ainslie, “The Dangers of Willpower, Including the Exacerbation of Addiction and Dissociation”, 65-92.

personality disorders. Fourth, *rules need not be in the person's longest-range interest*. For instance, the personal rule of being hardworking and dedicating all available time to career advancement may pave the way to the cardiology wing in the nearest hospital rather than the highest title in the office hierarchy. Ainslie even compares personal rules to that very institution which Foucault viewed as an epitome of the disciplinary society, its model, and its mode: "The artificiality of personal rules, may make them seem like *prisons*."⁶⁵

And vice versa. When Foucault attempts to imagine the ultimate punishment in the disciplinary model of the penitentiary, something morphologically analogous to the "infinite segmentation" methodically carried out on the body of the criminal responsible for the unspeakable crime of regicide, he conjures up the following image:

The ideal point of penalty today would be an indefinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation, a judgement that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed, the calculated leniency of a penalty that would be interlaced with the ruthless curiosity of an examination, a procedure that would be at the same time the permanent measure of a gap in relation to an inaccessible norm and the asymptotic movement that strives to meet in infinity.⁶⁶

That is to say, an eternal piceconomic tribunal.

THE BIRTH OF PICOECONOMICS

Foucauldian studies in the genealogy of economic knowledge allow to situate Ainslie's thought in the landscape of the late-twentieth-century science more precisely. During the 1978-1979 season of lectures at the College de France, Michel Foucault pinpointed an important epistemological shift in neo-liberal economics that differentiates it from the mode of reasoning of classical economists of the Adam Smith type. The expansion of economic methodology into the realms which were not traditionally considered as domains susceptible to such analysis (family life, education, and the utility of capital punishment, to use the examples discussed by Foucault) became possible due to a crucial reformulation. The departure point for Smith and his peers was constituted by an individual endowed with an interest which he actively pursued. This specific type of subject was indispensable and put limitations on the exercise of governmentality by the sovereign. The inaugural move of neo-liberals – especially American "anarcho-liberals" (the Chicago School) – is to displace this subject from the centre of their discipline and substitute it for a procedure, a type of calculation, or a form of "conduct":

[W]e find the possibility of a generalization of the economic object to any conduct which employs limited means to one end among others [...] any purposeful conduct which

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17, emphasis added.

⁶⁶ *Discipline & Punish*, 227.

involves, broadly speaking, a strategic choice of means, ways, and instruments: in short, the identification of the object of economic analysis with any rational conduct⁶⁷

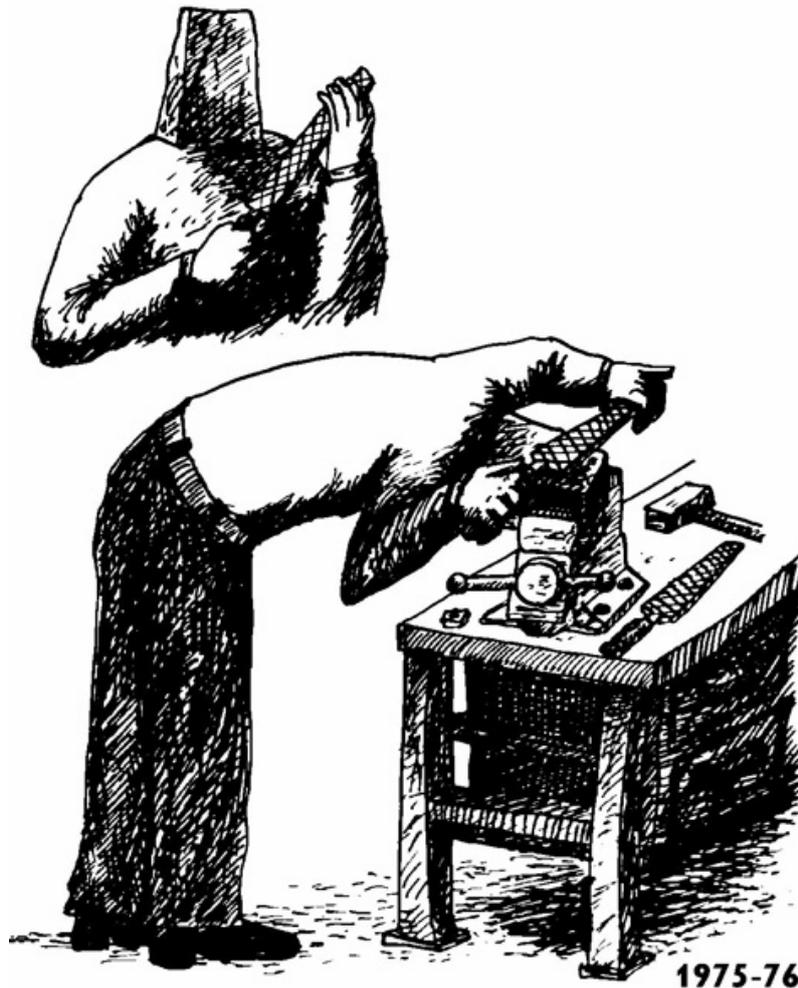


Figure V. A sketch from the “Blockheads” series by Vyacheslav Sysoev, the only Soviet dissident artist to receive a prison sentence for political cartoonism. Courtesy of Larisa Sysoyeva.

Significantly, this is not an anthropological position but a methodological one. Neo-liberals do not identify real-life human subjects with the agents of their analyses and do not endeavor to demonstrate that the messy psychological or ontological subject of the human sciences does not exist. “We only move over to the side of the subject himself inasmuch as [...] we can approach it through the angle, the aspect, the kind of network of intelligibility of his behavior as economic behavior.”⁶⁸ Later on, Foucault mentions in passing that this epistemological displacement makes possible the type of behavioral analysis most famously represented by the works of Skinner.⁶⁹ Ainslie and picoeconomists perfectly fit into the same disciplinary lineage.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell (2008), 268-269.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

The metaphor of the marketplace of choice and the Ainslean mode of reasoning in general is a product of assigning rational conduct to the psychological drives of the person without at any given point considering her as a singular subject. The paradox of picoeconomics – and the reason why it, as we argue, overlooks the existence of the very disciplinary mechanisms which are responsible for the large number of the effects it describes – is the consequence of the original exile of the subject from the economic field undertaken by neo-liberals.

The scientific project of Ainslie and his followers has as its horizon the aspiration to circumscribe the individual subject in its complexity without considering her as a wholesome unit of agency. Conversely, the universal and singular understanding of the subject is the point of application of the classical disciplinary mechanisms analyzed by Foucault. Discipline owes its success to such a total perspective. It ties together body and psyche, self-image and conduct towards others. It is, after all, the instrument of *subjectivation*, of giving shape to human beings.

Ainslean picoeconomics is overwhelmingly descriptive. George Ainslie hardly ever formulates recipes for self-transformation for his readers. That is why picoeconomics cannot be considered a *technique of the self* in strictly Foucauldian terms. Yet, if picoeconomic tactics for combating interest reversals are to be viewed through a “self-technical” mode⁷⁰, one is faced with a curious discrepancy that was brought to our attention by Aljosa Kravanja, PhD, an independent researcher and translator. The techniques of the self devised by Ancient Greek philosophers on the one hand and picoeconomics considered as a technique of the self on the other aim at the creation of different objects. Greeks sought “an aesthetics of existence, the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game.”⁷¹ The end point of *ascesis* is a victorious, virtuous *being* that mastered his desires. Greek techniques of the self presuppose success. Picoeconomics is a lore of effective defeats. It is a secret knowledge of the person that constantly fails in her willful efforts but understands how to exploit her own weaknesses so that they may eventually occasion a favorable *result*. Even in theory she always remains internally split and pitiful. Aesthetics versus effectiveness. Wholesome *being* versus satisfactory *results*.

In our opinion, this discrepancy can be correlated with a significant parameter that was constantly present in the life of the Greek *polis* but is almost completely lacking from the urbanized late capitalist world. That parameter is *transparency* understood as the *impossibility to divorce appearance from achievements*. There are three privileged loci in the life of the Greek city-state, the performance at which determines the measure of respect and recognition the citizen of the *polis* commands among his peers. Those loci are his *oikos*, hoplite *phalanx*, and the *agora*. The conduct of the adult male on the field of battle, in managing

⁷⁰ An example of prescriptive picoeconomics can be found in the works of Jon Elster, who, in a number of publications (but perhaps most famously in the monograph *Ulysses and the Sirens*), advocated the use of various kinds of self-constraints as a tool for boosting individual or group performance across a variety of domains. For instance, in one of his later works, *Ulysses Unbound*, Elster writes about the beneficial effects of constraints in fine arts (240-246), Hays Code era Hollywood films (227-234), and jazz music (246-263), among many others.

⁷¹ *The Use of Pleasure*, 263.

his household, and in the city assembly (predominantly as a participant in the decision-making process or judicial proceedings but also as an athlete) determined the “quality” of a citizen and a human being.

Both *phalanx* and *agora* are environments of total mutual visibility in two respects. First, everything a person does there becomes immediately known to *all* others. If a line is breached during the battle, the consequences are instantly felt by the entire regiment, and usually the person who is responsible is easy to identify. Analogously, the warrior that broke the enemy’s *phalanx* becomes universally known and respected after the battle. *Agora* is even more susceptible to simultaneous observation by the entire body of *polis* citizens since it was specifically constructed for this purpose. Secondly, in these environments appearance equals achievements. It is impossible to deliver a great legal or political speech without simultaneously projecting an aura of authority and inner strength. It is impossible to acquire a reputation of the famous warrior if the results of your activity – dead or wounded enemies – are not supported by your own demeanor and skill in the field of battle.

Oikos, it must be admitted, is not as radically and irreducibly visible. On the contrary, some parts of the household should never be seen by outsiders. However, in Greek thought, the economic success of the *oikos* is frequently construed as dependent on the type of singular and wholesome exercise of self-mastery required in war or politics. Thus, when Michel Foucault analyzes the recommendations given by the character of Ischomachus to his wife in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, he comments:

The young wife of Ischomachus asks him directly: what can she do not just to seem beautiful but to be beautiful and remain so? And once again, by a logic that may appear strange to us, the household and the government of the household will be the crucial factor. According to Ischomachus, at any rate, the wife’s real beauty is sufficiently guaranteed by her household occupations, provided that she goes about them in the right way. He explains that by performing her appointed tasks, she will not sit about, huddled up like a slave, or remain idle like a coquette. She will stand, she will observe, she will supervise, she will go from room to room checking the work that is in progress; standing and walking will give her body that certain demeanor, that carriage which in the eyes of the Greeks characterized the physique of the free individual (Ischomachus will later show that a man becomes vigorous as a soldier and free citizen through his active participation in the responsibilities of a taskmaster).⁷²

Thus, even though the Greek household is not as *transparent* as the *agora* or *phalanx* in ancient thought, it is rendered so by the commonly held belief that the quality of its management has direct and visible repercussions for the appearance and psychological constitution of the individual held responsible for it. Those visible and unfalsifiable signs of mastery, appearances inseparable from essences, were the objects that the techniques of the self were expected to produce.

It is even possible to identify a self-conscious preoccupation with preserving *polis* as a space of total mutual visibility in one of the foundational texts of the Greek philosophical

⁷² *The Use of Pleasure*, 162.

tradition. When Aristotle sets out to delineate the optimal size of his ideal city in Book VII of *Politics*, he takes into account both the size of its *agora* as a physical space:

one [polis] that consists of too many [citizens], while it is self-sufficient in the necessities, the way a nation is, is still no city-state, since it is not easy for it to have a constitution. For who will be the general of its excessively large multitude, and who, unless he has the voice of Stentor, will serve as its herald?⁷³

And the ability of its citizens to evaluate each other's qualities:

But in order to decide lawsuits and distribute offices on the basis of merit, each citizen must know what sorts of people the other citizens are. For where they do not know this, the business of electing officials and deciding lawsuits must go badly, since to act haphazardly is unjust in both these proceedings.⁷⁴

With further detalization being beyond the scope of the present paper, we believe that the preoccupation with *aesthetics* and *singularity* in ancient Greek techniques of the self was a corollary of a way of life that centered around the spaces of *transparency* characterized by the profound salience of the personal manner of conduct and factual inseparability of performance and achievement. The striking difference lying in the preoccupation with *results* and *effectiveness* characteristic of piecoeconomics (considered prescriptively), then, is the necessary correlate of the organization of modern urban late capitalist lifestyle. The lifestyle that separates the domains of professional performance, political activity, sexual appeal, familial life, and communication with a reference group so thoroughly that any concern with appearance that would remain consistent across these regions of behavior appears at best redundant and possibly unachievable in principle.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS

Due to his academic background in behavioral economics and game theory, George Ainslie never tackles the question of where piecoeconomic will comes from. He treats the inner transactions of the successful piecoeconomic negotiator as a given, as if the mind of the individual was solving itself in a manner a mathematician solves an equation: in the vacuum of high abstractions. As we have demonstrated, this is by no means a limitation, merely a consequence of the methodology he adopts. However, when dealing with real-life individuals and devising concrete intervention programs, the question of biographical background, which contributes to the increased ability to constrain one's irrationality, becomes impossible to ignore.

The present analysis suggests that one group of people is particularly likely to be successful in the consistent self-application of personal rules. These are the individuals with a substantial degree of exposure to the discipline-based institutional environments. If our reconstruction is correct, subjects with backgrounds in the armed forces, ballet schools, and classical boarding schools – to name just a few institutions most deeply rooted in the

⁷³ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (1998), 199. Stentor being a Homeric hero with a very loud voice.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

disciplinary regimens devised throughout the classical age – have a higher likelihood of displaying the pattern of behavior characteristic for successful piceoeconomic negotiators. We propose this as a hypothesis for empirical testing.

Foucauldian thought also has something to gain from the encounter with piceoeconomics. In the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*⁷⁵ as well as in the College de France lectures, Foucault analytically separates techniques of the self from the kind of institutional influences on the constitution of the subjectivity he investigated in his archaeologies of mental health or penitentiary institutions. He groups under the heading of techniques of the self proper only the methods explicitly devised as instruments for self-transformation. However, his own writings contain numerous indications that the boundary between these domains may be porous.

For instance, in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault remarks that

Governing oneself, managing one's estate, and participating in the administration of the city were three practices of the same type. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* shows the continuity and isomorphism between these three "arts," as well as the chronological sequence by which they were to be practiced in the life of an individual.⁷⁶

In *The Care of the Self*, when commenting on the techniques of the self prescribed by Epictetus, he traces how an everyday economic activity gets appropriated as a matrix for the examination of one's own mind:

he suggests that one exercises on oneself the functions of a "tester of coinage," an "assayer," one of those moneychangers who won't accept any coin without having made sure of its worth⁷⁷

Two pages later, Foucault draws attention to the conceptualization of one's relationships with oneself through

the juridical model of possession: one "belongs to himself," one is "his own master" (*suum fieri, suum esse* are expressions that recur often in Seneca); one is answerable only to oneself, one is *sui juris*⁷⁸

Finally, in his February 17th 1982 lecture at College de France, he goes as far as to state that

power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics⁷⁹

⁷⁵ The authors were not able to consult the recently published fourth volume of the same series, but judging by the extensive review of *Confessions of the Flesh* conducted by Sverre Raffnsøe, the book's treatment of the techniques of the self follows the pattern established in the second and third volumes (Sverre Raffnsøe, "Michel Foucault's *Confessions of the Flesh*. The fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*," *Foucault Studies* 25 (2018), 393-421).

⁷⁶ *The Use of Pleasure*, 76.

⁷⁷ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 63, after Epictetus.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82*, trans. Graham Burchell (2005), 252.

If the relations between the domains of institutional structuring of subjectivity on the one hand and self-fashioning of the subjects on the other are so intense, so intricate, and permeated by so many connections and exhibit so many isomorphisms, should we not pay more attention to the processes occurring in the fold between them? Perhaps a new type of study can be envisioned – one that investigates the topological transformations occurring when subjects take routine practices, disciplinary mechanisms, modes of behavior, and operative metaphors from their social milieu and convert them into practices of the self. We believe the current paper has shown that such studies are not only possible but have significant potential in the context of the Foucauldian research tradition and the archaeology of subjectivity in general.

CONCLUSIONS

The authors endeavored to demonstrate that the concepts of discipline in the philosophy of Michel Foucault and piceoeconomic will in the behavioral economics of George Ainslie are structurally homologous. The efficient piceoeconomic negotiator can be viewed as a psychological extension of the disciplinary individual. The implications of such an equation are significant for both research traditions. From the point of view of piceoeconomics, our conceptualization suggests biographical variables that may correlate with increased capacity for overruling one's short-term-interest preferences. From the point of view of Foucauldian studies, it offers a new research area in analysis of the origins and application of techniques of the self and points to the important locus of transactions between institutionally imposed practices of subjectivation and technologies of self-fashioning. A combination of studies into these domains might also be extended to the critique of political projects of so-called *libertarian paternalism* which rely on proactive "choice engineering", and are advocated in the writings of Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein,⁸⁰ among many others. Generally, the approach that interrogates concealed institutional influences as well as seemingly politically "innocent" psychological predispositions and brings into conversation disciplinary and behavioral discourses presents a useful tool for the analysis of neo-liberal societies.

References

- Ainslie, George, "Impulse Control in Pigeons," *Journal of The Experimental Analysis of Behavior* 21:3 (1974), 485-489. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jeab.1974.21-485>
- Ainslie, George, "Self Reported Tactics of Impulse Control," *The International Journal of Addictions* 22:2 (1987), 167-179. <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826088709027421>
- Ainslie, George, "Freud and Piceoeconomics," *Behaviorism* 17:1 (1989), 11-19. [10.2307/41236080](https://doi.org/10.2307/41236080)
- Ainslie, George, "The Dangers of Willpower, Including the Exacerbation of Addiction and Dissociation," in *Getting Hooked*, eds. J. Elster and O. Skog, 65-92. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁸⁰ Richard H. Thaler., Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (2008).

- Ainslie, George, *Breakdown of Will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Ainslie, George, "The Effect of Hyperbolic Discounting on Personal Choices," Speech, Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, IL, August 22, 2002. Picoeconomics. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e317002004-001>
- Ainslie, George, "Free Will as Recursive Self-Prediction: Does a Deterministic Mechanism Reduce Responsibility?" in *Addiction and Responsibility*, eds. J. Poland and G. Graham, 55-88. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2011.
- Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.
- Ashraf, Nava, Dean Karlan and Wesley Yin, "Tying Odysseus to the Mast: Evidence from a Commitment Savings Product in the Philippines," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121:2 (2006), 635-672. <https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.2006.121.2.635>
- Bauer, Michal, Julie Chytilová and Jonathan Morduch, "Behavioral Foundations of Microcredit: Experimental and Survey Evidence from Rural India," *The American Economic Review* 102:2 (2012), 1118-1139. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.102.2.1118>
- Elster, Jon, *Ulysses Unbound: Studies in Rationality, Precommitment, and Constraints*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality* [1984], trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* [1984], trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Foucault, Michel, *Istoriya bezumiya v klassicheskuyu epokhu* [A History of Madness in the Classical Age; Russian translation; 1961], trans. I. Staf. Saint Petersburg: Universitetskaya Kniga, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966]. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Gros, Frederic, "Course Context," in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82*, ed. F. Gros, 507-550. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Herrmann-Pillath, Carsten, "Elements of a Neo-Weberian Theory of the Individual," *Journal of Economic Issues* 43:1 (2009), 189-214. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEI0021-3624430109>
- Hofmeyr, Andre, George Ainslie, Richard Charlton and Don Ross, "The relationship between addiction and reward bundling: an experiment comparing smokers and non-smokers," *Addiction* 106 (2010), 402-409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2010.03166.x>
- Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

- Laibson, David, "Golden Eggs and Hyperbolic Discounting," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112:2 (1997), 443-477. <https://doi.org/10.1162/003355397555253>
- Loewenstein, George and Ted O'Donoghue, "'We Can Do This the Easy Way or the Hard Way': Negative Emotions, Self-Regulation, and the Law," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 73:1 (2006), 183-206.
- McClure, Samuel, Keith Ericson, David Laibson, George Loewenstein and Jonathan Cohen, "Time Discounting for Primary Rewards," *The Journal of Neuroscience* 27:21 (2007), 5796-5804. <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.4246-06.2007>
- Milkman, Katherine, Todd Rogers and Max Bazerman, "Harnessing Our Inner Angels and Demons: What We Have Learned about Want/Should Conflicts and How That Knowledge Can Help Us Reduce Short-Sighted Decision Making," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3:4 (2008), 324-338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00083.x>
- Morse, Stephen, "Addiction, Genetics, and Criminal Responsibility," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 69:1/2 (2006), 165-207. [10.2307/27592127](https://doi.org/10.2307/27592127)
- Raffnsøe, Sverre, "Michel Foucault's *Confessions of the Flesh*. The fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*," *Foucault Studies* 25 (2018), 393-421. <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v25i2.5593>
- Reyna, Valerie and Frank Farley, "Risk and Rationality in Adolescent Decision Making: Implications for Theory, Practice, and Public Policy," *Psychological Science in The Public Interest* 7:1 (2006), 1-44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1529-1006.2006.00026.x>
- Thaler, Richard H., Sunstein, Cass R., *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008.

Authors info

Yevhenii Osiievskiy,
 PhD Student
 Department of Cultural Studies
 National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
 Ukraine
ye.osiievskiy@ukma.edu.ua
 (Corresponding author)

Maksym Yakovlyev, PhD
 Associate Professor
 Department of Political Science
 Director of School for Policy Analysis
 National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
 Ukraine