Michel Foucault on the Wreck of Leviathan and the Constitution of a New Stylistics of Love

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Recognizing the subtle yet pervasive changes that have come about in the operations of power since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from sovereign power with its emphasis on interdiction, prohibition, refusal, and constraint, to modern disciplinary power and its concern to ensure and optimize the life of the social body by subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations, Michel Foucault, in his later writings, works out the details of a set of methodological principles for conceptualizing power in a new way. Power, he tells us, should not be understood according to "the model of Leviathan," or in terms, that is, of the contractual handing over to a monarch, a dominant class, or even the political State, by the social body, of the "right" to exercise a generalized domination over all. For, in his view, such a conception of power is both profoundly misleading and politically dangerous. It makes investigations into the genealogy of discourses and institutions appear uncalled-for, belittles the importance of studying the particular historical circumstances by which political behavior and the processes of social change are shaped, and encourages a discursive preoccupation with questions of power's legitimacy (which regimes are legitimate?), its legality (which actions are lawful?), its connection with right (which powers can be rightfully exercised?), that blocks access to the multiple yet subtle ways in which power is dispersed in modern societies, under the impact, not of "law," but of the more open-ended "infra-law" or "counter-law" (that is, the administrative rules and procedures), to be found in such heterogeneous and localized arenas as the hospital, the prison, the asylum, the school, the workplace, the

recreational domain, the family, the home, the street, the deviant or criminal subculture, the truth regimes of humanism, the discourses of sexuality. Foucault is not saying power is incompatible with law, only that the obsessive concern in conventional political analysis to locate power in the relations between ruler and ruled, or citizen and State, obscures its operations in a variety of settings, traditionally regarded as "non-juridical," where peripheral or subordinate agents (and agencies) dispose of power no less than "hegemonic" or "dominant" ones. Foucault writes: "Each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power" (PK, 72).

I don’t want to say that the State isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State which, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth . . . but this meta-power with its prohibitions, can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power. (PK, 122)

It is characteristic, therefore, of Foucault’s concern to study power in all of its various guises that he examines the local operations of power before he takes up the question of their “investment, colonization, utilization, transformation, displacement, extension, etc.,” by


3. On this score, the constitution of a mad subject is instructive: “You know full well that the mad subject is not a non-free subject, and that the mentally ill constitutes himself a mad subject in relationship and in the presence of the one who declares him crazy” (Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of the Care of the Self,” trans. J. D. Gauthier, SJ, Philosophy and Social Criticism [Summer 1987], 122 [hereafter cited as ECS]).
more general powers or economic interests (PK, 99). For, in his view, unless power is analyzed at the "lowest level" of social structures, where it "invests itself in institutions," and becomes "embodied in the 'micro-practices,'" that is, the social practices that comprise everyday life in modern society," it escapes analysis, leaving intact the impression that power radiates from the center of a structure of domination outward to the margins when it, in fact, is "never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth," and is always multidirectional, "circulat[ing]... or function[ing] in the form of a chain." Foucault's metaphor of the "chain," on which every link never merely "pulls" but always and at the same time is "pulled," is especially apt in light of his observation that it is never merely as partners that subjects encounter one another in actual political life, but always as agents with "competing objectives" who must "meet and contend for the achievement of their aims" (BSH, 220). "Every relationship of power leans toward the idea that if it follows its own line of development and comes up against direct confrontation, it may become the winning strategy" (BSH, 226). But even as Foucault speaks of power's propensity to turn at any moment into a confrontation, even an enmity, between adversaries, he underscores its distinctness from "domination," in which the "free play" of a plurality of agents has given way to the "stable mechanisms" of a single dominant agent who "directs, in a fairly constant manner and with reasonable certainty, the conduct of all" (BSH, 225). Quite unlike a state of domination, a relationship of power does not coerce or victimize, does not reduce the ostensive target of power "to total impotence...[does not turn him] into the enemy," but "recognizes and maintains [him instead] to the very end as a person who, [because he] acts," "constitutes for [the one who exercises power] a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal" (BSH, 225, 220). Even granting that domination will to some degree be operative in particular situations, it is never so total or invariable as to leave "freedom" with no room at all in which to operate.

If one or the other were completely at the disposition of the other

and became his thing, an object on which he can exercise an infinite and unlimited violence, there would not be relations of power. ... Even though the relation of power may be completely unbalanced or when one can truly say that he has "all power" over the other, a power can only be exercised to the extent that the latter still has the possibility of committing suicide, of jumping out of the window or of killing the other. That means that in relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance—of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation—there would be no relations of power. This being the general form, I refuse to answer the question that I am often asked: "But if power is everywhere, then there is no liberty." There is necessarily the power of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance there would be no relations of power. If there are relations of power throughout every social field it is because there is freedom everywhere. (ECS, 123)

Foucault foregrounds the nexus between power and freedom because no matter how unequally or hierarchically power might appear to be distributed in particular relations (as in the prison setup, where guards and wardens have the advantage of power over inmates⁵), there is always the possibility that things could still get reversed. Relationships of power, after all, are notoriously "changeable relations." They are "not given once and for all," but "modify themselves" in "a sort of open strategic game, where things could be reversed" (ECS, 122–23). This means, of course, that even when they have to live under the impact of domination, people retain the ability to organize resistance, which, like power itself, exists everywhere in the social body. Indeed, "[t]here can be no relations of power without resistances," and no "real and effective" resistances which have not been "formed at the point

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⁵ Foucault is not blind, nor does he mean to be insensitive, to the historical enforcement of fixed and often impersonal power differentials or inequalities between people. "I do not believe," he tells us, "that power is the best distributed thing in the world" (PK, 99). "[T]he mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes, and so on" (Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson, "Michel Foucault, An Interview: Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," The Advocate, 7 August 1984, 29). Even so, he wishes to underscore the point that no matter how seriously the exercise of freedom might be limited by a state of domination, room would still be left in which freedom (in the form of resistance) could operate.
where relations of power are exercised” (PK, 142).

Foucault, of course, is careful to stress the point that this power which he is calling “resistance” is produced by specific agents struggling to modify the physical, social, and historical conditions that impinge upon them at specific sites, and that to the extent that they derive their incentive for struggle from such local conditions, whatever forms of resistance they produce will exist only for as long as those conditions themselves continue to exist. Each form of resistance is, in that sense, “a special case”—one being “possible, necessary, improbable,” another, “spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerned, rampant, or violent,” yet another “quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial.” But if Foucault is right in saying that the forms of resistance to modern power are irreducibly plural, and that they proliferate and thrive at the local and capillary levels of society, and only subsequently are taken up by larger institutional structures, then it follows that forms of resistance that attempt to bring about large-scale social transformations through “revolution” fail, in the end, to engage power in its productivity. There can be, in that sense, “no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary” (HSI, 95), no project of comprehensive “political” reform that will bring about the “liberation” of everything and everyone from power relations in general. For while relations of power are subject to change and reversal, the forms of resistance that underwrite these changes are “never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (HSI, 95). Foucault writes:

The overthrow of [systems of domination] does not . . . obey the law of all or nothing; it is not acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions; on the other hand, none of its localized episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up. (DP, 27)

Notwithstanding his assertion that mass uprisings against systems of interdiction and repression fail, in the final analysis, to be effective and worthwhile, it would be a mistake to see Foucault as being a fatalist with respect to social and political change. For despite his intense

vision of the political technologies through which individuals and identities are "normalized" (that is, purged of all social and psychological irregularities, and submitted to obedience and conformity), he does not present human beings as passive and helpless victims of power who are unable to break its deadlock. He presents them, rather, as always capable, on the basis of precise strategies, of modifying, and even of breaking, its grip on them. "[A]s soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy." For while modern "disciplinary" power is omnipresent, it is not omnipotent. While it is everywhere, it is indissociable from contestation and struggle. While it cannot be abolished, the abuses that emerge out of its operations wherever the work of normalization is carried on, in homes, schools, prisons, therapists' offices, factories, can to a greater or lesser degree be modified and even curtailed. Indeed, Foucault's own genealogical descriptions of the forms of resistance to power that have developed in response to the advance of power in these settings, to say nothing of his personal interventions in political struggles and debates, would make little sense if he felt that the complex grid of disciplinary, normalizing, panoptic powers that survey, judge, measure, and correct individuals was unbreakable. Such forms of resistance, along with the divisions and oppositions which they operationalize, are precisely what give us a basis for facing the future with openness and optimism. For as much as we find ourselves in the thick of "an extended battle against conditions which are essentially and constantly unfavorable," it is a "battle" that proceeds by way, not of "a generalized negation," but of "an affirmation" (cf. LCMP, 33–36), indeed, of that "optimism" which is tied to a growing awareness of the


8. In Discipline and Punish, for instance, he briefly discusses the "popular illegalities" and strategies of indiscipline which emerged to counter the mechanisms of discipline and "normalization" (DP, 273ff). Similarly, in The History of Sexuality, he argues that while the discourses of "perversity" multiplied the mechanisms of social control, they also produced a reverse discourse where homosexuals appropriated them in order to demand their legitimacy as a group (HSI, 101). Finally, there is a clear shift in emphasis in his last works from the "technologies of domination" to the "technologies of the self," that is, from the ways in which individuals are transformed by others to the ways in which they transform themselves.
fact that while certain forms of social, economic, and cultural hegemony can never be completely removed or permanently abolished, they nonetheless can be effectively contained or held in check. Foucault writes:

There’s as optimism that consists in saying that things couldn’t be better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints. (PPC, 4)

Quite the reverse, therefore, of maintaining that the human subject is inextricably ensnared in networks of power relations that effect an unmistakable domination, Foucault maintains that there is scope for human freedom, expression, and action in personal and everyday life. Because every individual can, according to a precise strategy, always modify his susceptibility to the specific distribution of power in which he finds himself, he is not just the victim of inexorable and victimizing political structures from which there is no release except in death. It is not the case "that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined," but rather that "the analysis, elaboration, and questioning of power relations... is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence" (BSH, 233). Things are "bound up more with... complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints." Thus, people can always ask, "what else can we make work, what new game can we invent?" That is, they can restructure and refashion the familiar, habitual, and accepted "way they do and think things," move from pro to contra, contemporize, move ahead (PPC, 265). They can, in other words, be "free"—not "emancipated" from the hierarchical, asymmetrical domination of some by others in a "panoptical" society, but prepared to suspend or bracket their taken-for-granted identification with certain natural or pre-given states, to make way for new spaces and possibilities for action. Surely this is why he describes his work as the work of "critique," by which he means an "attitude" and an "art of not being governed in a certain way and at a certain price," an art of "voluntary

insubordination, of thoughtful disobedience." Such a "will not to be governed," which does "not deduce, from the form of what we are, what it is possible for us to do and to know, [but instead] separates out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, or do, or think," is ultimately the only thing that can prevent the closure of normalizing power (FR, 46). It would be a mistake, of course, to construe the project or task of "no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, or do, or think" as an act of pure anarchy. Although Foucault clearly asserts the right of the individual to be different—giving, as he does, a place of honor in his researches to artists, visionaries, madmen, deviants, and the like, in part because these individuals appear to have displayed a willingness to accept the terrifying freedom of hyper-individuality—he does not believe in the existence of a utopian order of freedom from which constraint, control, and disciplinarity have been eliminated. These are too much a part of the warp and weft both of "private life" and contemporary social organization, to be completely displaced and dispensed with. Freedom is always found in a context, a dynamic of constant struggle against power. Yet there is freedom in knowing that the game is yours to play.10

The important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable, but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. Obviously constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. . . . A system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don’t have the means of modifying it. This can happen when such a system becomes intangible as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or as a necessary consequence of medical science. (PPC, 294)

Thus, in asserting that freedom must exist for power to be exerted, Foucault does not mean to abrogate, or to soften in any way, his posi-

10. He tells a young gay man: "Don’t look to authorities; the truth is in yourself. Don’t be scared. Trust yourself. Don’t be afraid of living. And don’t be afraid of dying. Have courage. Do what you feel you must: desire, create, transcend—you can win the game" (as quoted by James Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault [NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993], 352).
tion against essentialist conceptions of freedom and subjectivity. Of political situations in general he writes: "the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them" (HSI, 95). In other words, power relations may be intentional, but they are at the same time non-subjective. For while political agents may not be pawns of power, and their activities at the local level not unmarked by intense planning, plotting, and decision-making, they are powerless to control the broader consequences of their local actions. They cannot bring the comprehensive systems that result from power's push to reproduce its tactics, proliferate its sites, and amplify its effects, in line with their autonomous desires and intentions. Quite the reverse, therefore, of assuming the status of intentional agents who put power into play, they become "the element[s] of power's articulation" (PK, 98). Foucault writes:

There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; . . . the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed [the local cynicism of power], tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems. (HSI, 95)

The axis of ethics

The focus on freedom as practice—as oppositional action, as a collection of various strategies and practices aimed at countering the positions into which power tries to maneuver subjects—leading away from the passive description of a subject constituted by power, toward the active voice of a "subject [who] constitutes himself" (ECS, 121), brought about a dramatic change in Foucault's theoretical emphasis. Thus, Foucault could assert in 1982, "[i]t is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research" (BSH, 209). Most of his previous work, which treated of the effects of power on the body (cf. DP, HSI) had parlayed an understanding of social agents as passive bodies that did little to explain how they might understand themselves as social beings capable of fashioning their own identities. It dawned on him,
however, in light of his new interest in the question of the subject in Western civilization, that it was important to account not only for the various technologies responsible for the production, management, and adaptation of individuals by hegemonic groups to fit their own games of power and control, but also for "the technologies of individual domination" through which an individual is able to act upon himself (TS, 19). 11 One's relation to oneself, after all, also involves developing and maintaining certain restrictions and allowances for oneself. It is the consistent experience of such self-imposed patterns of behavior, together with the relationships of power that operate between individuals, in the bosom of the family, in an educational relationship, in the political body, etc., that causes a more or less coherent self or subject to rise out of the human being's initial state of indeterminacy. It was in connection with his new interest in the question of the subject that he began to speak of the "practical systems" of any society as stemming "from three broad areas: relations of control over things, relations of action upon others, relations with oneself, . . . three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics" (BSH, 48). On the interconnection between knowledge and ethics, there is perhaps no better statement than his own remark in an interview:

It seemed to me there was one element that was capable of describing the history of thought: this was what one can call the element of problems or, more exactly, problematizations. What distinguishes thought is that it is something quite different from the set of representations that underlie a certain behavior. Thought is not what


Foucault writes: "If one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, one has to take into account not only techniques of domination, but also techniques of the self. One has to show the interaction between these two types of self. When I was studying asylums, prisons, and so on, I perhaps insisted too much on the techniques of domination. What we call discipline is something really important in this kind of institution. But it is only one aspect of the art of governing people in our societies. Having studied the field of power relations taking domination techniques as a point of departure, I should like, in the years to come, to study power relations, especially in the field of sexuality, starting from techniques of the self" (Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," Humanities in Review 1 (1982): 10.)
inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.\textsuperscript{12}

While the model of thought operative here—of a disinterested intellect conducting a transcendent investigation of the meaning, conditions, and goals of experience—is recognizably Kantian, Foucault puts his own unique twist to it by identifying thought with “problematization”—“parodic, directed against reality, dissociative, directed against identity, sacrificial, directed against truth” (LCMP, 160). Kant, on Foucault’s reading, exhorts men to have the courage to modify that part of their will “that makes [them] accept someone else’s authority to lead [them] in areas where the use of reason is called for,” and to become instead, through the activity of their own thought, lawgivers for themselves. Trust, in that sense, has to be replaced by mistrust, in light especially of the connections that thought discovers between the elements of understanding and mechanisms of coercion. To think is, therefore, to resist the violence and arbitrariness of what hitherto had been taken to be self-evidently true. It is to demonstrate that “things weren’t as necessary as all that,” that “it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock him up; it wasn’t self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through the individual examination of bodies.”\textsuperscript{13} In that sense, it does not pursue “the Kantian question . . . of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing,” but “takes the form of a possible transgression.”\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{13} Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” \textit{Ideology and Consciousness} 8 (Spring 1981), 6.

\textsuperscript{14} “What Is Enlightenment?,” in \textit{The Foucault Reader}, 45. What Foucault rejects about Enlightenment thought is the linking of moral codes to a global perspective which is generally a notion of universal reason. Foucault regards discourses of universal reason as indissolubly linked to the rationalization of society of which he has a
If the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce breaching, then it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one. ... The point in brief is to transform the critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transcendence or transgression.¹⁵

Foucault, accordingly, is led to a modernist aestheticism reminiscent of Nietzsche's aesthetic interpretation of history. As an antidote to the malady of a scientific history that calcified time by turning it into an object of knowledge, we know that Nietzsche proposed a twofold remedy consisting of the "un-historical" (Dionysus), that is, "the power of art, of forgetting and of drawing a limited horizon around oneself," and the "super-historical" [Apollo], that is, the power to turn "the eyes from the process of sheer becoming to that which gives existence as eternal and stable character—to art and religion." For "only if history can endure to be transformed into a work of art will it perhaps be able to preserve instincts or even evoke them."¹⁶ Such a return of historical thinking to a poetic, metaphorical comprehension of the world would free both thought and the imagination from the need to find definitive meaning in the historical field, committing them instead to making an immediate response to the world lying there before them.¹⁷ The negative view: "The relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident. And we should not need to wait for bureaucracy or concentration camps to recognize the existence of such relations" (BSH, 210).


¹⁷. What each of the three modes of historical knowledge that he discusses in his seminal essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" has the potential for teaching men is, in Nietzsche's view, the fact that a true understanding of history is vouchsafed, not to him who passively observes history, but rather to him who actively uses it, who harnesses it to the real needs of the present. It is Nietzsche's purpose, in other words, to draw historical knowledge back within the confines of human needs, to use it for life and action, and not merely as a convenient way to avoid life and action. Historical study is fruitful for the future only if it allows itself to be guided and dominated by the demands of the concrete, and does not itself seek to guide and dominate. He distinguishes, accordingly, between a life-denying perspective on history, which insists on the point that history can be made sense of only by the forces of continuity (tradition, development, evolution), and a life-affirming perspective.
historian in particular would not be bound to saying anything definitive about the past. Like the free artist combining the elements of perception in the field of art to produce the "beautiful," he need only work with the elements of the historical field to produce "stories," or, if you will, ingenious "melodies" that would be as low on plot, explanation, or ideological implication as they would be rich in fiction, myth, and fabulation. Foucault makes it clear in a 1977 interview that he accepts Nietzsche's notion of history as something that propagates fictions or myths that disorder order, break up what is extant, and turn the present into a past:

As for the problem of fiction, it is for me a very important problem; I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to go so far as to say that fictions are beyond truth. It seems to me that it is possible to make fiction work inside of truth, to induce truthful effects with a fictional discourse, and to operate in such a manner that the discourse of truth gives rise to, "manufactures," something that does not yet exist, that is, "fictions" it. One "fictions" history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one "fictions" a politics not yet in existence on the basis of an historical truth. (PK, 193)

which welcomes the proliferation of as many visions of history as there are human projects of self-realization and self-articulation. Because human beings look at the world in ways that conform to the purposes that motivate them, and because even remembering is never a generalized activity, but always a remembering of something—and, in that sense, an act of the will with purpose, aim, and object—he argues on behalf of an understanding of historical truth which casts it not so much in terms of knowledge, as in terms of "lived-experience." The "science of history" is deadening and without value precisely because it leads away from the actual "lived-ness" of human experience. It fails to raise the crucial question, "What is the value of history for life?" So against nineteenth-century historical science's "idolatry of facts," Nietzsche articulates a new, relativistic historicism in which historical rationality is grounded, not on impartiality, objectivity, and exactitude, but in the creative actuality of lived human experience. History is not a process rooted in teleology and causality, but is a series, rather, of moments related to one another by the intentions of the agents on the scene at the time.

18. Nietzsche writes: "History is nothing but the manner in which the spirit of man apprehends facts that are obscure to him, links things together whose connection heaven only knows, replaces the unintelligible by something intelligible, puts his own ideas of causation into the external world, which can perhaps be explained only from within; and assumes the existence of chance where thousands of small causes may be really at work" ("The Uses and Disadvantages of History," 91).
Drawing at this juncture upon the work of Baudelaire, Foucault asserts that such “fictions” cannot “have any place in society itself, or in the body politic,” but only in another, “a different place, which Baudelaire calls art.” Foucault is thinking, of course, not of Baudelaire the poet, but of Baudelaire the “dandy” who was animated by a “burning need to create for oneself a personal originality,” and who, accordingly, made of “his body, his behavior, his feelings, and his passions, his very existence, a work of art.” Baudelaire, in that sense, was the paradigmatic modern individual, a poet of the flesh devoted to a “kind of cult of the self,” an artist of everyday life who by pursuing the free play of imagination wherever it may lead, succeeded in extracting the “poetry within history,” the one who, without inhibition, and in such a way as to put his freedom to the test, attempted “to pass beyond each and every specified limit.”

Art, as we find it incarnated in Baudelaire, no longer occupies its own private niche, but passes over into the sphere of life:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the house or the lamp be an art object, but not our life? . . . From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art. . . . [W]e should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity.

The critical attitude of modernity, in that sense, is an experimental one. “Modern man is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.” This endless task of self-invention brings us directly to the axis of ethics, where the cen-

19. All preceding quotes are from Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” 40–42.
tral question is "how [is the self] constituted as [a] moral subject of [its] own actions."\textsuperscript{21}

The ethical practice of antiquity

A crucial component of the new focus on the self is Foucault's account of how, for the individual in ancient Greece, ethics involved the "labor of self on self," and was connected to liberty in a "measure where being free means not being a slave to one's self and one's appetites, which supposes that one establishes over one's self a certain relation of domination, of mastery, which was called archē—power, authority" (ECS, 117). Whatever Foucault really thinks about how fully we should take ancient Greek ethics as a guide for the conduct of our own lives, in bringing us to reflect on the fact that it accorded the individual with a high degree of freedom in interpreting and applying the demands of morality to his own life, he clearly is seeking to provide us with an experience of defamiliarization that he hopes will stimulate reflection on the ways we might overcome the impoverishing effects of modernity's subjection of individual moral conduct to the forces of conformism and panoptical control.\textsuperscript{22} With that in mind, I propose to discuss the axis of ethics in exactly the terms in which Foucault most forcefully presents it, namely, the virtues and practices that formed a more or less coherent ethos that was of importance to the Greeks.

For the Greeks of antiquity, morality did not revolve around the internalization, justification, or formalization of a code of conduct or set of interdictions. Neither did it revolve around the systematization of values and actions to be imposed on everyone. It revolved, rather, around the "the care of the self"—a notion Foucault describes as "an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being" (ECS, 113). In order to behave properly, in order to practice freedom properly, it was necessary, according to this view, to form the relationship with the self—to better know oneself, to improve oneself, to surpass oneself, and to master the appetites that threatened to engulf oneself. Forming such a relationship with the self was less a matter of simple conformity to the demands

\textsuperscript{22} Foucault's most extensive discussion of modernity's dark side can be found in \textit{Discipline and Punish} and the first volume of \textit{The History of Sexuality}. 
of a code of conduct or set of interdictions than it was of the interpretation, adjustment, and application of such demands in light of the need to "give . . . existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible." 23 "We are a long way [here]," Foucault tells us, "from a form of austerity that would tend to govern individuals in the same way, from the proudest to the most humble, under a universal law" (UP, 62). For while ancient Greek ethics operated around a certain number of rules of conduct, or of principles which were at the same time truths and regulations, at its core were certain practices of liberty that enabled the ethical practitioner to establish a relationship with himself and to stylize his existence with a view to maximizing the beauty and the power he could expect to obtain from it. In and through these different "practices," which ranged from the concrete process by which one ordered his day-to-day activities, to the spiritual significance that one attached to them, the ethical practitioner interpreted his experience and a meaning to his activities. Because these practices were not theoretical or critical, but concrete and intuitive, it remained for the practitioner, to determine "how and with what margins of variation or transgression" he ought to conduct himself in relation to them (cf. UP, 25–26). 24 The care of the self was connected, in that sense, to liberty, but in "a measure


24. An individual either conforms to, or disregards, a given set of values or prescriptions according under four different rubrics (UP, 25ff): (1) The "determination of ethical substance," referring to the way in which an individual can choose to make a part of himself or a mode of behavior the prime material of his ethical conduct. For instance, there may be a general moral rule of conjugal fidelity, but in relation to this rule the individual may choose to make his behavior conform only from an external perspective (keeping up appearances), or he may decide that the essence of fidelity consists in the mastery of one's internal desires. (2) The "mode of subjection," referring to the way in which an individual chooses the conditions under which he will recognize and carry out obligations. For instance, one practices conjugal fidelity to the extent that one has chosen to join or remain part of a group that for traditional or spiritual reasons it is an abiding principle for. (3) The "forms of elaboration of ethical work," referring to the individual's chosen means. For instance, sexual austerity may be practiced through "a long effort of learning, memorization, and assimilation," or it can be practiced in a "sudden, all embracing and definitive renunciation of one's pleasures" (HS1, 27). (4) The "telos of the ethical subject," referring to the place the "ethical substance" occupies in a pattern of conduct. For instance, conjugal fidelity could be an element in a schema of moral conduct aspiring to make its practitioners complete masters of themselves, or it could be an element in a moral program of radical
where *being free means not being a slave to one’s self and to one’s appetites*, which supposes that one establishes over one’s self a relation of domination, of mastery, which was called *arche*—power, authority.  

The Greeks denoted the condition of “being free” by the word *sophrosyne*, referring to a “moderation” based on the exercise of “prudence, reflection, and calculation in the way one distributed and *controlled his acts*” (UP, 53–54). Even granting that the boundary between immoderation and moderation, excess and restraint, was not always self-evident (excessive indulgence harmed the body, but so, too, did rigorous restraint), it was the difference between the two that constituted the moral framework within which the Greek notion of the ethical self was situated and structured. It is well to bear in mind, however, that the condition of “being free” associated with the practice of *sophrosyne* had nothing to do with the absence of slavery, but had to do, rather, with one’s achievement of a certain degree of mastery over oneself. “The enslavement of the self by oneself” was, therefore, at the pole opposite to *sophrosyne* (UP, 79). “Individual liberty was very important to the Greeks.” “Not to be a slave (of another city, of those who surround you, of those who govern you, and of your own passions) was an absolutely
detachment from the world. All in all, by analyzing the self’s relationship to itself in terms of four distinct components, Foucault makes it possible for us to see precisely how to write a history of ethics that will not collapse into a history of moral codes. Furthermore, his conceptualization allows us to examine the connections, the relations of dependence and independence, that exist among these four aspects of ethics, thus showing us the various ways in which continuities, modifications, and ruptures can occur in one or more of these four dimensions of our relation to ourselves.

25. Cf. ECS, 117. Because such appetites and desires tended by their very nature toward excess, the moderate use of them necessitated an unremitting vigilance on the part of the self-constituting subject. In this regard, Aristotle speaks of adopting a combative attitude (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1150a, 1150b, 1148a) toward the pleasures, particularly those that are violent (VII, 2, 1146a). Plato, for his part, spoke of a person being “stronger” or “weaker” than himself (*Republic* IV, 430c): “The expression self-control seems to want to indicate that in the soul of the man himself there is a better part and a worse part; whenever what is by nature the better part is in control of the worse, this is expressed by saying that the man is self-controlled or master of himself, and this is a term of praise. When, on the other hand, the smaller and better part, because of poor upbringing or bad company, is overpowered by the larger and worse, this is made a reproach and called being defeated by oneself, and a man in that situation is called uncontrolled” (431a). In any case, one crossed swords not with “the Other” that a later Christianity understood as “a different, ontologically alien power,” but with oneself (UP, 68).
fundamental theme” (ECS, 116). Greek citizens sought to attain to a condition of self-mastery in three main areas of daily life: dietetics, economics (marriage), and erotics (boys). In what follows is provided a brief discussion of each one.

Dietetics 26 One of the ways in which the moral person established mastery over himself was by “cultivating harmony in the body for the sake of consonance in his soul” (Republic, IX, 591c–d). This consisted in various physical regimens of diet and exercise for increasing the health, strength, and beauty of the body, but also and primarily for cultivating in the practitioner a spirit of moderation and of openness to change. Thus, behavior that encouraged in the practitioner either an obsession with sports or an excess of hypochondria (cf. III, 406a–407), or that caused him to fail to adjust his behavior to fit the circumstances, was unacceptable. “For it was not even health that he aimed at, nor did he consider it important that he should be healthy, strong or beautiful, unless he acquired moderation as a result” (IX, 591c–d). The practitioner was expected, therefore, to be able to exercise a kind of “circumstantial vigilance,” that is, to turn a sharply focused and yet wide-ranging eye upon the external world, its elements, its sensations, etc. Foucault brings up in this connection Plato's image of the warrior as a dog, always on the move and always on the alert. Despite the “frequent changes of drinking water and food, of summer and winter weather” that were characteristic of military campaigns, the good warrior could still be counted on to maintain an “unvarying health” (III, 404a–b).

Economics The freeman-citizen similarly found in marriage, particularly in his relationship with his wife, an opportunity to bring to public visibility the exacting self-mastery that he had established over himself. How? By having sexual relations with no one but his wife. Sexual fidelity, for the classical Greeks, was a form of caring for the self because the principle by which men did not engage in extramarital liaisons was based, not on reciprocal fidelity, but on what Foucault calls a “stylization of dissymmetry,” referring to the fact that there did not exist a domain of valid rules for the two sexes in common. Greek ethics, after all, was an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written, and taught by freemen and addressed to freemen to give form to their behavior. It spoke to them concerning precisely those conducts in which they were

26. Foucault’s discussion of this can be found in The Use of Pleasure, 99–139.
called upon to exercise their rights, their power, their authority, their liberty. Women figured in it only as objects, or at the very most, as persons that, if one had them under one’s power, one then did best to train, educate, and watch over, but if one did not then one did best to avoid, because they were under someone else’s power (father, husband, tutor). So even if the Greeks assumed that the community or koinonia of husband and wife was bound by a common purpose—the household, its maintenance, its increase—they also simply took it for granted that within the hierarchically configured oikos, each had an immutably distinct nature, form of activity, and place. Thus, while a wife’s inferior status obliged her to be faithful to her husband (she was both under his effective control and statutorily dependent on him), the husband’s superior position did not similarly obligate him. Thus if a husband had sexual relations only with his wife, it was not because she was authorized to demand it of him, but because “for [him], having sexual relations only with his wife was the most elegant way of exercising his control” (HSI, 151). In the context of the ancient Greek faith in the isomorphic relation between the household and the state, this public display of self-control and, concomitantly, of one’s ethical worthiness was crucial. It was crucial insofar as the good marriage benefited the city. The sexual obligation of a husband to his wife inhered, therefore, not in an interpersonal bond intrinsic to the matrimonial relation itself, but in the particular interplay of duties and demands, connected to the political self, that his marriage had committed him to. “The double obligation to limit sexual activities relates to the stability of the city, to its public morality, to the conditions of good procreation, and not to the reciprocal obligations that attach to a dual relation between husbands

27. Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics brings together the elements of justice, inequality, virtue, the aristocratic form of government, in its effort to define the special nature of the husband’s friendship for his wife. The philia between spouses is the same as that which is found in an aristocracy, where, though it might be the best who ruled, everyone still had his share of authority, his role, his worth. “The association of man and wife seems to be aristocratic (not “oligarchic” in which case the husband would try to do everything himself): for the man rules in accordance with his fitness, and in those matters in which man should rule.” Thus, he delegates to his wife all of the parts that she is suited to play (VIII, 1161a).

28. Foucault cites the example of Nicoles, King of Cyprus, who is faithful to his wife not out of some heteronomously prescribed sense of duty, but because, as a king who commands others, he must also demonstrate that he is in command of himself.
and wives” (HSI, 170). Just as the freeman-citizen’s public status as a citizen obliged him to accept certain limitations on his power to act within the public space, so, too, his public status as a married man obliged him to accept certain restrictions on the options (including, and especially, the sexual) available to him within the private space. At stake were his reputation, his relation to others, his prestige in the city, his reverence for the law, his willingness to give to his own life a certain form.

Erotics  
Moderation vis-a-vis the aphrodisia or sexual activity was considered to be especially important. In this connection, it is well to bear in mind that the Greeks did not consider sexual activity to be bad in itself. It was not anything insidious, resourceful, dreadful, or analogous to a Christian sense of a primordial Fall. If a man loved another man, he did so, not under the impact of a perverse or demented nature, but under the impact, rather, of the same natural desire that attached to anything, or anyone (boy or girl), desirable. Even so, since to ensure the propagation of the species, nature had connected sexual activity to an extremely intense pleasure, there was always the danger that the craving for such pleasure would be reason for men to upset the limits set by nature. The sexual appetite could, in other words, take control over the soul (cf. UP, 49). In face of the pull toward rebellion, riotousness, exaggeration, surplus, and excess, a meticulous economy of controls was called for that would discourage such unnecessary self-indulgence. “For classical Greek thought, the force of pleasure was potentially excessive by nature, and the moral question was how to confront it, how to control it and regulate its economy in a suitable way” (UP, 50). So if the classical Greek person struggled with sexual desire, it was not because he sought to maintain himself in a state of “sinlessness” redolent of the holiness of God (“Be holy as I am holy!”), but because “he wanted to be free (of its tyranny) and to be able to remain so” (UP, 78). Foucault writes:

29. This, obviously, had implications for the question of domestic violence. Although the potential to tyrannize one’s wife and social inferiors was built into the structure of ancient society, the ethical Greek man who adhered to an aesthetics of existence refrained from such behavior. Many a thing, after all, about a married woman’s situation—her position of weakness, the fact that she had been uprooted from the household of her birth to live in his own, etc.—called for benevolence, restraint, and limitation on her husband’s part. Indeed, a man who cared for himself correctly was likely to behave correctly in relation to others. Another point I would like to make here is that the care of the self did not run the risk of “absolutizing itself” into some kind of a “cult of the self” by which the “other” could be completely dominated.
[Greek ethics] did not speak to men concerning behaviors presumably owing to a few interdictions that were universally recognized. . . . It spoke to them concerning precisely those conducts in which they were called upon to exercise their rights, their power, their authority and their liberty: in the practice of pleasures that were not frowned upon, in a marital life where no rule or custom prevented the husband from having extramarital relations, in relationships with boys, which . . . were accepted, commonly maintained, and even prized. These themes of sexual austerity should be understood, not as an expression of, or commentary on, deep and essential prohibitions, but as the elaboration and stylization of an activity in the exercise of its power and the practice of its liberty. (UP, 23)\(^3\)

Now, while the type of self-mastery practiced by the Greeks must be understood as giving access to an "active freedom," this freedom was always determined, in the final instance, by larger cultural constraints. It was a freedom that was "indissociable from a structural, instrumental and ontological relation to truth" (UP, 92). In other words, while caring for the self entailed a certain relationship which the individual installed and preserved with himself, it was also a work guided by wider social, cultural, and political imperatives. The individual might exercise a degree of choice in the attitude which he assumed toward himself and in the manner in which he played out his desires and fashioned his existence, but whatever he did, he would always be conditioned and overdetermined by the sociocultural context, always subsumed to the happiness and good order of the city. Foucault tells us: "Ethos implies a relation with others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community or in inter-individual relationships which are proper" (ECS, 7). So far from being tied to the obsessive introspection or "cult of the self" that predominates in so many Western lifestyles (FR, 362), caring for the self as conceived by the ancient Greeks was inextricably bound up with the exigency of caring for

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30. Foucault tells us in an interview: "Ethos was the deportment and the way to behave. It was the subject's mode of being and a certain manner of acting visible to others. One's ethos was seen by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacted to events. For them, these were the concrete expressions of liberty. That was the way they problematized their freedom. The man who has a good ethos, who can be admitted and held up as an example, is a person who practices freedom in a certain manner" (ECS, 118).
others within a distinct social and political community. That is to say, it involved practices that carried the constructed self over to the political realm. "Being occupied with oneself and political activities," Foucault tells us, "were linked."\(^{31}\) Indeed, the more an individual subsisted in the public eye because of his rank and status in the city, the more he was responsible for adopting and maintaining, freely and deliberately, rigid standards of ethical conduct that could yet become the basis for his fashioning an identity that both he and those under him could take pride in.\(^{32}\)

**The case of Artemidorus, the love of boys, and problematizations leading to the emergence of new subjectivities**

Foucault continues his analysis of the ways in which the Greeks articulated, situated, and structured an aesthetics of daily life vis-a-vis the *aphrodisia* by providing a brief description and epistemological interpretation of a text by a second century AD "oneirocritic" (that is, interpreter of dreams), Artemidorus. Quite unlike certain modern forms of dream analysis, Artemidorus's work embodied not so much a curiosity about extraordinary dreams and their "deep" sources as an appropriation of the principle, operative for the Greeks, that "with the exception of a few precepts that applied to everyone, standards of sexual morality were always tailored to one's way of life, which was itself determined by the status one had inherited and the purposes one had chosen" (UP, 60). Commenting on Artemidorus's work, Foucault states: "Addressed to several types of readers," it was "a handbook-for-daily-

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32. Plato's *Republic* is awash in these themes. Self mastery and mastery over others were deemed to have the same form, and, as such, to have no need, in what concerned their development, for separate methods. Hence, music and gymnastic, endurance trials and practice in hunting and warfare, the concern with one's demeanor in public, and things of that nature, were regarded as providing moral training for the one who intended not only to master himself, but also to gain authority over others. If, upon finally getting to the point where he could lead others, such a one continued to exercise a meticulous control over himself, all in the state could flourish. But if, on the contrary, he became a tyrant incapable of mastering his own passions, the damage he was capable of inflicting upon his subjects and upon the collective life of the city was incalculable. Opposite the tyrant there was, of course, the positive image of the leader who exercised a strict control over himself in the authority he exercised over
living” that was “almost entirely centered not on the prophetic marvels of dreams but on the *techne* that enables one to make them speak correctly.” Accordingly, with the book as guide, a person could take up a particular dream, and through certain practices, conform his own being to the particular “mode of being” to which, in Artemidorus’s catalogue, it had been matched. Artemidorus was not so much concerned with passing judgment on the morality or immorality of the particularities of actions as he was with producing “in connection with dreams, a catalog of different possible acts and relations” that could help “ordinary individuals” make the best of their lives in the everyday (CS, 6–7). While it is true that Artemidorus believed that “the dream ‘tells what is real’ . . . the dream tells the event, the good fortune or misfortune, the prosperity or sorrow, that will characterize the subject’s mode of being in reality, and it tells it through a relationship of analogy with the mode of being . . . of the subject as an actor on the sexual stage of the dream” (CS, 16), he also believed that just as it was in the nature of dreams to be fluid and unpredictable so also it was in the nature of a human life to be endlessly pliable. A human life for him was not a substance but a form, that is to say, not a given, but something that, through practices, can be made, unmade, and remade.

But what is really instructive about Artemidorus’s work is its conceptualization of the *aphrodisia* in terms of the model act of penetration, considered pivotal in a society where the problematization of ethical behavior in sexual matters revolved around the negatively viewed passive role and the positively valued active role. Indeed, the sexual dreams of which Artemidorus treats in his book are ones in which someone sees himself in a little drama of penetration and pas-

"others. To avoid becoming excessive, to keep himself from falling into the trap of tyrannical authority, such a one exercised power over himself. The most kingly man, Plato tells us, was king over himself (IX, 580c). It should also be noted that while Plato would have liked to give the entire “republic” the virtue of moderation, he recognized at the same time that not all in the state were equally self-controlled. The craftsman’s soul, he tells us, “is naturally weak and cannot rule the animals within but pampers them and can learn nothing but ways to flatter them.” He must, accordingly, be placed under the authority of the “the best man who has a divine ruler within himself” (IX, 590c). In the moderate state, therefore, the “appetites and pleasures and pains” of the unprincipled multitude (children, women, and slave) were to be controlled by the “desires and knowledge of the fewer and better” (IV, 1154a), that is, by people who in addition to being the best by nature were also the best educated."
sivity, which tells of his fortune. The category of penetration was an important category of ethical reflection for the Greeks insofar as activity, or penetration, symbolized for them a way of commanding what needed commanding, of coercing what was not capable of self-direction, of imposing principles of reason on what was wanting in reason, and of being active in relation to what was by nature passive and ought to remain so, in short, a way of being a man with respect to oneself. Passivity, or reception, on the other hand, symbolized immoderation, a shameful type of femininity. From this standpoint, the line of demarcation passed, not between men and women, or even between “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals,” but between active men and passive men. Only that role which consisted in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, and in asserting one’s superiority, could be regarded as intrinsically honorable and worthy of being valorized without question. It was assumed that in sexual matters the ethical man (by definition also an adult freeman-citizen) would not consider taking anything but the active role. “Concern for the self,” Foucault tells us, “always referred to an active erotic state” (CS, 24). Indeed, the ethical man expressed his superior prestige and authority over women of any age, over free males past the age of puberty who were not yet old enough to be citizens, over foreigners and slaves of either sex, in his power to initiate a sexual act, and in his right to obtain pleasure from it. Conversely, it brought shame upon a free man to willingly bear the marks of inferiority, to submit to domination, to accept servitude, in his sexual behavior. Even to be sus-

33. Thus, if, in one’s dream, one finds oneself in a passive position with an inferior, things do not augur well. If, however, it is with a superior, the dream counts as a favorable sign. “For instance if a person dreams that he has sex with his mother, that means he will succeed as a magistrate, since his mother is obviously the symbol of his city or country” (CS, 22). On the other hand, “to place oneself ‘beneath’ one’s servant in a dream, thus overturning the social hierarchy, is ominous: it is a sign that one will suffer” (CS, 19). These claims on the part of Artemidorus provide us with a clear presentation of the fact that sex was not viewed in classical Athens as an activity in and through which an individual expressed his inmost dispositions. It was viewed, rather, as an activity in and through which an individual asserted his position within the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity. Signs of domination in sexual encounters were correlated with mastery over oneself and others in everyday dealings; signs of passivity, on the other hand, were correlated with losing face. In any event, the particularities of sexual expression were always accommodated to one’s present commitments, and one’s aspirations for oneself and one’s place in the city.
pected of it exposed a man to moral censure. "For a man, excess and passivity were the two main functions of immorality in the practice of the aphrodisia" (UP, 47).

It is in this context that Foucault brings up the matter of antiquity's "dilemma of passivity" (CS, 207), whereby "an older male who had finished his education—and who was expected to play the socially, morally, and sexually active role"—had sexual relations with "a younger one, who had not yet achieved his definitive status and who was in need of assistance, advice, and support" (UP, 195). 34 As with all movement toward beauty, the attraction to a freeborn boy was considered natural, and even morally honorable, in Greek antiquity. Quite the reverse of bringing dishonor to a boy, the pursuit of him by would-be lovers brought focus to bear upon the very qualities which made him desirable. Still, because he was a long way from benefiting from the rights and powers that would be his upon attaining to his full status as a free-man-citizen in the polis, his status, though not quite that of a woman or a slave, was that of an "inferior" whose conduct of himself during this period of training for manhood had to reflect his growing preparedness to dispose of the powers and responsibilities of the position he would someday occupy in the city. His future depended on the manner, honorable or not, in which he conducted himself even during the period of his minority. 35 He thus could not allow himself to become too obliging a partner in the sensual pleasures of his partner without first testing his worth. He could not permit himself to offer his body, out of weakness, lust, or self-interest, to whomsoever it pleased and

34. Sexual liaisons between two adult free-man-citizens, for the reasons outlined previously, were always subjected to opprobrium. Sexual liaisons between two school-boys of the same age were accepted, though perhaps not dwelt upon.

35. Unlike the relationship between husband and wife, which was regulated, to some extent, by the institutional constraints of the "oikos," the principles of regulation in relationships between men had to be drawn from the relation itself. Whereas in the areas of dietetics and marriage, the dominant male exercised self-restraint, in the relation between men, the male loved object was also supposed to exercise self-restraint. Apropos to this, Foucault writes: "In economics and dietetics, the voluntary moderation of the man was based mainly on his relation to himself; in erotics, the game was more complicated; it implied self-mastery on the part of the lover; it also implied an ability on the part of the beloved to establish a relationship of dominion over himself; and lastly, it implied a relationship between their two moderations, expressed in their deliberate choice of one another" (HSI, 203).
however it pleased him. The relationship that [the boy] was expected to establish with himself in order to become a free man, master of himself and capable of prevailing over others, was at variance with a form of relationship in which he would be an object of pleasure for another" (UP, 221). It was not possible for him to take the role of the subordinate partner in the game of pleasure relations and still hope to attain one day to a position of dominance in the game of civic and political activity. In this consisted the "dilemma of passivity," that while not everything could be refused, not everything could be consented to.

The problem and element of anxiety presented by the "antinomy of the boy" produced an oscillation in Greek thought on the morality of the love for boys. While, in one respect, the sex of the loved object continued to be irrelevant, in another respect, attention came increasingly to be placed on how love for a boy could not be morally honorable, unless within it were elements that could change it into a socially honorable tie (HSI, 225). Although Greek culture at this point was still more tolerant of homosexual relations than, say, Christian culture has ever been, one nevertheless begins to find emerging in their literature certain images of "intense negative reactions" and "forms of stigmatization" that would extend into the Christian period (UP, 19–20). This already is evident in Socratic and Platonic reflections on love where there is a shift of focus from the deontological question about what constitutes proper conduct in love and courtship between men, to an ontological investigation of the subject of love and of the relation between love and truth. The love of boys came to be subsumed under the problematic concerning how pure love is drawn to pure truth, how the person who is nearest to the truth by virtue of being the one who is the most in love is the master, not the boy. The master, as opposed to the boy, became the central figure in the relationship, and he was no longer the lover but the master of truth; from the standpoint of the boy, the love of the master of truth replaced his previous concern with social and political status (cf. CS, 229–46).

36. Concomitantly, the love of the older man for the boy implied a moderation rooted in respect for the boy’s freedom, for his ability to refuse or give his consent. The adult suitor, in other words, was expected both to be able to show his ardor but at the same time to restrain it. Unless the boy was slave born, he could exercise no statutory authority over the boy, and the boy was free to choose, free to accept or to reject. Indeed, the boy’s unpredictable freedom was the very thing that made the pursuit of him interesting.
What for Foucault is instructive about the shift in philosophical focus from the deontological question of pleasure and the aesthetics of its use to the ontological investigation of the desiring subject is that it produced the possibility of new “subjectivities,” along with the possibility of new “truths” about the relations of selves to each other. Thus, in inverse relation to the philosophical disinvestment of boys, there occurred, at least in the case of Greek (and Roman) antiquity, the gradual privileging of the relation between men and women (CS, 192). Indeed, because the dilemma of passivity could be avoided in “the double activity of loving, by husband and wife” (CS, 208), boys came to be elided altogether in favor of women, the “naturally passive” sex. That is, “woman” assumed a new centrality in the context of this reconceptualization of the social ethos. In many areas of the common life of husband and wife reciprocity replaced domination. In the matter of fidelity, for instance, men began to be held to the same standards as women. We find, too, in this regard, Plutarch formulating a “new stylistics of love” that transposed the *philia* hitherto reserved for same-sex male lovers to the conjugal heterosexual couple (cf. UP, 181ff; CS, 229ff). Heterosexual married love eventually displaced pederastic love as the valorized model of eroticism and became the privileged locus of problematization. There “no longer [could] be a place for boys in this great unitary and integrative chain in which love is revitalized by the reciprocity of pleasure” (CS, 210). Not that homosexual love ceased to be practiced, only that the love for boys came less and less to be problematized.

In a way that may be surprising at first, one sees the formation in Greek culture and in connection with the love of boys, of some of the major elements of a sexual ethics that will renounce that love by appealing to the above principle: the requirement of a symmetry and reciprocity in the love relationship; the necessity of a long

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37. While it is tempting to see in the shift here from boys to women a “distant mirror” of our own homophobic society, it is important “not to be misled by the analogy” (CS, 239). What must be kept in mind about Plutarch’s denigration of the love of boys (“pederasty”) in the third century as a “shameful” and “unnatural” thing (CS, 206) was not that it anticipated the nineteenth-century classification of homosexuality as “deviant” and “perversion,” but that it took place within a discursive field marked, not by “the conflict of two forms of sexual desire,” but by “the confrontation of two forms of life, two ways of stylizing one’s pleasure, and of the two philosophical discourses that accompany these choices” (TS, 218).
and arduous struggle with oneself; the gradual purification of a love that is addressed only to being per se, in its truth; and man's inquiry into himself as a subject of desire. (UP, 245)

Remarks in conclusion

Foucault's analytics of both power and ethics are clearly an extension of his deepening concern to balance the claims of the local (micropower, the ethical individual, etc.) and the general (systems of domination, sets of interdictions). What is more, it mirrors the balance he seeks to strike between the individual and society in his description of the "anti-authority struggles" and the "anarchistic struggles" that he sees as characteristic of contemporary politics. Indeed, he describes the so-called new social movements (e.g., feminism, the gay and lesbian movement, various civil rights groups) in the following terms:

[They are] struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back in himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. These struggles are not exactly for or against the "individual," but rather they are struggles against the "government of

38. Writing, in 1976, about the accelerating spread of "heretical sexualities," Foucault sounds warmly optimistic: "Never have there existed more centers of power, never more manifest and prolix thoughtfulness; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more hotbeds for kindling, for disseminating still further the strength of pleasures and the stubborn waywardness of powers" (HSI, 39, 45, 49). It was Foucault's view, John Rajchman writes, that never before was a time "so palpably marked by a new dissatisfaction, a new refusal, a new 'problematization' in our conception of our erotic being and its possibilities: that we would want another kind of 'erotic subjectivity' than the ones based on the virile model of penetration and status, the Christian model of sin and confession, and the therapeutic model of hidden emotion and cure. That is, a new kind of ethic whose principles would not be derived from the demands of the superego, the will of God, or the requirements of a normal development" (Truth and Eros [NY: Routledge, 1991], 95). In a similar vein Peter Brown writes: "The body is poised on the edge of a transformation so enormous as to make all present notions of identity tied to sexual differences, and all social roles based upon marriage, procreation, and childbirth, seem as fragile as dust dancing on a sunbeam" (The Body and Society [NY: Columbia University Press, 1988] 168).
individuation.” . . . All these present struggles revolve around the question “Who are we?” They are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific and administrative inquisition which determines who one is. (BSH, 211–12)

He notes, in other words, that the new social movements are torn between models of individual autonomy and images of more satisfying communities. At the same time, however, he notes that the social struggles of our own day find a distant mirror in ancient Greece and Rome, in apparatuses that, by producing the possibility of new “subjectivities” and new modalities of being, sought to strike some sort of a middle ground that avoided both absolute passivity and absolute activity in understanding how selves are formed. While the impressive work of scholarship that he produces in this regard must not be seen in terms of a campaign on his part to take the principles that were operative then—the “practices of the self” as he calls them—as a blueprint for behavior now, it must nonetheless be understood as an affirmation of the value of the study of an ethical praxis and thinking that is

39. In 1976, he stated: “The real strength of the women’s liberation movement is not that of having laid the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality. The American homosexual movements make that challenge their starting point. Like women, they begin to look for new forms of community, coexistence, pleasure” (PK, 220).

40. Asked in one interview if he found the Greeks admirable, Foucault replied, “No,” and added that “all of antiquity appears to me to have been a ‘profound error’” (FL, 319). While the context shows that Foucault is to some extent joking, he still would like to be clear that in no sense does communiting with the dead spirit of Greek and Hellenistic culture offer any immediate solution to contemporary political quandaries about what we ought to believe, how we ought to behave, and what limits we ought to observe. Philosophical and ethical thinking, he believes, cannot be thought of as having a “basis” that can be discovered, a “ground” from which it has strayed or to which it must be recalled. Indeed, Foucault does everything he can to cultivate a sense of the fact that the study of history can offer us no constants, no comfort, no consolation. It is not possible, he tells us, to “find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people” (Foucault Reader, 343). Indeed, “History, and the meticulous interest applied to history, is certainly one of the best defenses against this theme of the return. For example, the history of madness or the studies of the prison . . . were done in that precise manner because I knew full well . . . that I was carrying out an historical analysis in such a manner that people could criticize the present, but it was impossible for them to say: ‘Let’s go back to the good
different in many ways from the dominant western traditions as an important exercise in “de-familiarization.” It is, in other words, an affirmation of the value of throwing the needs and aspirations of our own time into relief against those of a time when the structuring principle behind the practice of the care of the self was not so much the attempt to limit freedom as it was the effort to promote it; of a time when sex was viewed, not as an activity by which an individual expressed some fixed inward disposition, but rather as one in and through which he ne-

old days when madmen in the eighteenth century, or ‘let’s go back to the days when the prison was not one of the principal instruments.’ No; I think that history preserves us from that sort of ideology of the return . . . History protects us from historicism—from a historicism that calls on the past to resolve the questions of the present” (FL, 269–70).

41. To be sure, from certain perspectives, ancient Greeks and early Christian moral injunctions around sexuality appear very similar. Not only do both cultures share injunctions relating to the prohibition of incest, male domination, and the subjugation of women, but they also share similar attitudes and anxieties about sex. Both Greek and Christian cultures express fear about the deleterious effects of uncontrolled sexual activity on the health of the individual (UP, 15–17). Both cultures valorize fidelity within marriage as a manifestation of the virtues and inner strength of the partners involved. Finally, both cultures privilege an ascetic ideal in which abstention from sexual activities and other pleasures is linked to a “form of wisdom that brought them into direct contact with some superior element in human nature and gave them access to the very essence of truth” (UP, 20). The focus of Christian morality is a strongly authoritarian and quasi-judicial system of rules which the individual is expected to conform to. Subjectivation within such a morality occurs in “a quasi-juridical form, where the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, a set of laws, to which he must submit at the risk of committing offenses that may make him liable to punishment. In ancient Greek thought, on the other hand, such demands are not grounded in a unified, authoritarian moral system, but are more in the nature of a “supplement” of a “luxury” in relation to the commonly accepted morality. Individuals enjoy much greater freedom in the interpretation and application of the demands of austerity to their own lives.

42. In the context of Christianity, the care of the self became somewhat suspect. It was denounced as a kind of self-love, a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others. It was no longer a question of determining the appropriate or healthy occasions for sexual activity, no longer a question of attaining to the proud virility of the master, but a question rather of attaining an inner purity of being. Sexuality is problematic, not because of the dangers of an excessive, unhealthy, or dignified indulgence, but because the flesh is forever impure. The dietary, medical, poetic, and erotic means the ancients devised to maintain a noble self-possession were replaced by the endless and arduous task of deciphering one’s inner thoughts: the temptations, the seductions, the deceptions that the devil has put in our heads.
negotiated his position in a network of social relations; of a time when modes of life were developed, not according to some central truth about who the human being is, but according to the ways in which one cared for the self, not by “absolutizing” the self in and through a domination and abuse of others, but by caring for others in and through the celebration of one’s connections with them.

43. It is, accordingly, in light of a more general project of offering resistance to modernity’s transformation of sexuality into “a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (HSI, 116), that we must view his extended discussion of the fact that ancient Greek ethics neither codified sexual acts, nor sought to subordinate anyone to external rules of conduct motivated by negative values and anxieties about sex, but aimed instead, through certain “exercises of self upon self,” to balance excess with temperance, the uses of pleasure with the refusal to surrender to their intoxicating force. In bringing reflection to bear upon such a culture, he stimulates interest in his own project of counterpoising, to the hegemonic discourse that “it is through sex . . . that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility” (HSI, 155), a discourse based on the insight that sexuality is “without any norm or intrinsic rule that might be formulated from its own nature” (HSI, 149).

44. “The risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power only comes from the fact that one did not care for one’s self and that one has become a slave to his desires. But if you care for yourself correctly, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you also know of what you are capable, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen in a city . . . if you know what things you must fear and those you should not fear . . . if you know, finally, that you should not fear death, well, then, you cannot abuse your power over others” (as quoted in ECS, 8).