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Michel Foucault reconceived more than once the structure of his multivolume *History of Sexuality*. An originally proposed series of five volumes was replaced by a four-volume version, of which three were published in Foucault's lifetime: *The Will to Know* (1976), *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), and *The Care of the Self* (1984). According to Foucault's own last-minute insertion into volumes 2 and 3, the fourth volume was to deal “with the experience of the flesh in the first centuries of Christianity; and with the role played in it by the hermeneutic, and purifying decipherment, of desire” (p. viii). Foucault was at work editing the typescript of this last volume at the time of his death; working from that typescript and from Foucault's handwritten manuscript, editor Frédéric Gros has brought out, with translator Robert Hurley, *Confessions of the Flesh: The History of Sexuality, Volume 4*, finally completing the series as Foucault last envisioned it.

He outlines that vision in an appendix, “What Is to Be Demonstrated.” He first sets up the continuity with the earlier volumes—that there is a fairly consistent core of moral prescription in early Christian thought, developing out of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy. The last two points set out this volume's novelty—the changes in the relations of subjectivity, truth, and pleasure; and the distinction between laws that permit or forbid and the Christian focus on “experience as a condition of knowledge.”

The volume is itself a combination of the new and the familiar. Foucault had turned to its themes and texts, spanning the second through fifth centuries of the common era, in several lecture series, and so they may be familiar to particularly interested readers. The organization and presentation of the work here, however, sets up and clarifies both connections among these texts and ideas, and Foucault's sense of the historical progress of the conceptions of flesh, desire, truth, and self in Christianity of the period. Even within familiar notions, then, new points of interest appear. Besides the changes set forth in the appendix, this volume offers several close readings of texts and some useful further clarity on pastoral power.

*Confessions of the Flesh* is divided into three major parts, dealing respectively with the emergent sense of self through both ritual practice and self-examination, virginity, and marriage. Without becoming formulaic, each section unfolds an un-
nderstanding of truth, particularly of the self, and a way of knowing it, which is also to say an analysis of the power relations at work. The practices of the body and confessional speech are at work in both.

The first section, “The Formation of a New Experience,” has at its heart the mix of continuity and alteration in early Christian thinkers’ uses of ancient and “pagan” philosophers. Ancient practices of self-knowing, such as the Stoic daily review of one’s actions, are altered by their interactions with new theologies, new prescriptions, and the emergence of a new kind of elusive self that demands a new making and telling of truth. Christianity demands new practices, but above all a new self-scrutiny. Though it is not made explicit, this first section is organized along lines that will become sacramental: Clement of Alexandria on marriage, Tertullian on baptism, and Cyprian on penance, before a final chapter turns to John Cassian to consider monastic self-examination, bringing forth the strange self-annihilating character of the Christian and especially monastic will.

A similar structure (minus the sacramental aspect) organizes the book’s other sections—a focus on a particular figure and text for each chapter; a beginning in continuity and divergence in relation to pre-Christian or even the earliest Christian thinking; the shifts in relevant arts and practices; and the accompanying deeper changes in self-knowing. In “Being Virgin,” Foucault notes the continuity of the moral code that valorizes virginity. Christianity changes not the valuing, but the underlying practices and conceptual elaborations. Virginity becomes a precondition for a dramatic sense of truth, “a relation of the soul to itself in which the unending life of the body is at stake” (p. 134). An important tension emerges between virginity’s role in enabling a tranquil life—a carry-over from ancient philosophies—and its part in a lifelong spiritual combat with temptation. Eventually this combat takes its place in a constant vigilance against a range of sins. Inner progress—including progress against unconscious temptations, such as those that appear in dreams—is a process of subjectification, remaking the realm of thought and the relation of body to soul in a continuing recreation of flesh.

That combative re-creation is likewise the end point in the development of Christian thought on “Being Married.” Marriage is less a focus in early Christianity than virginity is. But because it becomes central in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, who is in turn central to the development of Christian theology and doctrine from the fifth century onward, any consideration of desire and flesh has to consider marriage too. The legitimation of marriage as a status for Christians is strengthened as church and state become more closely allied and as, at roughly the same time, the ascetic ideal expands beyond the confines of monastic communities and has to encompass more kinds of lives. In a major difference from views more widespread in modern and even contemporary Christianity, sexual relations are an obligation of spouses to one another—they should not even impose abstinence except by mutual agreement—and while children are likely to follow, they are not central to the moral or theological value of marriage. The discipline imposed upon the spouses is, at least in the earlier texts, symmetrical. Marriage controls sinfully wandering desire not by suppressing it but by offering it a direction; the chief good of marriage is friendship, not offspring.

In the book’s final chapter, a still greater complexity of the subject’s relation to desire emerges through further consideration of Augustine and the movements of desire. The very form of the fallen will is its tendency to disobedience—of God, but also in tension with itself. We attempt self-governance when in fact we need to obliterate self-will in obedience to God, delicately balancing consent and nonconsent in a new form of spiritual combat now centered not on the avoidance of cer-
tain acts but on the creation and decreation of the subject of desirous flesh.

After the outline of the ideas, a final trio of appendices adds detail to the accounts of guilt and confession. One outlines the development of pastoral power as it increasingly emphasizes mutual accountability and thus the generation of truth. Another analyzes John Chrysostom's presentation of the story of Cain as a theology of confession, where refusing to admit the murder is a less forgivable sin that murder itself. The last returns to Augustine for more detail on his understanding of sexual desire, noting the ways that corruption and mortality are co-created in the fall.

The flesh, desire, and knowing that Foucault sets out to reconsider here are always entangled with relations of power. An understanding of pastoral power emerges from the text, though aside from the second appendix its discussion is largely indirect. The power to demand and hear constant confession resembles the ubiquitous scrutiny of disciplinary power, and we know that Foucault cites monastic architecture and practice as one of the origins from which that power develops. But the self scrutinized for confessional purposes is related neither to efficiency nor to production, as disciplinary power is; in fact, it is necessarily indefinitely repetitive and incomplete. The distinction from biopolitical power is marked in the discussion of marriage, where the production of children, so central to some later Christian conceptions of marriage, is at most an aside in another imperfect and incompletable process, the direction of postlapsarian desire. Even having these points juxtaposed to each other enriches our sense of them.

It is gratifying simply to have this volume, to finish out Foucault's conception for his own series. It will not be startlingly new to readers familiar with the earlier volumes and with lectures, or with articles such as 1982's “The Subject and Power.” But enough new connections and explorations emerge to make the volume worthwhile to those intrigued by any of its entangled considerations.
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