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Reading *Confessions of the Flesh* as the Second Volume of the *History of Sexuality*

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Summary: In this article, I propose a different reading of Foucault's newly published work than suggested by the publishers and in initial reviews. I question the claim that it represents the fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* and rather propose to regard it as an intended second volume. Comparing Foucault's final plan of publication of the series with the background and stated purpose of *Les aveux de la chair*, I hold that it is part of a different philosophical project than volumes two and three. Foucault wrote *Les aveux de la chair* to explore the roots of modern power in the experiences that early Christianity occasioned. This makes the work relevant for current theology and the philosophy of religion.

Keywords: Foucault, Confessions of the Flesh, moral codes, History of Sexuality, governmentality

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Beitrag schlage ich eine andere Lesart von Foucaults neu veröffentlichtem Werk vor als die, die die Verleger und erste Rezensionen nahelegen. Ich hinterfrage die Behauptung, dass es den vierten Teil von *Sexualität und Wahrheit* darstellt und schlage dagegen vor, es als einen beabsichtigten zweiten Band zu betrachten. Ausgehend von einem Vergleich von Foucaults letztem Publikationsplan dieser Serie mit dem Hintergrund und der Absicht von *Les aveux de la chair*, argumentiere ich, dass es Teil eines anderen philosophischen Projektes ist als die Bände zwei und drei. Foucault schrieb *Les aveux de la chair*, um die Wurzeln moderner Macht in den Erfahrungen zu erforschen, die das frühe Christentum hervorgebracht hat. Das macht das Werk bedeutsam für gegenwärtige Theologie und Religionsphilosophie.

Schlüsselwörter: Foucault, Die Geständnisse des Fleisches, moralische Kodizes, Sexualität und Wahrheit, Staatlichkeit

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I. Introduction

In February 2018, Gallimard published *Les aveux de la chair* as the fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*.¹ I will here argue that it makes little sense to read it as such. The work does not conclude the second and third Greco-Roman volumes of the series; *The Use of Pleasure* (*L'usage des plaisirs*) and *The Care of the Self* (*Le souci de soi*), which Foucault completed, and Gallimard immediately published, in 1984.² I will maintain that *Les aveux de la chair* and the two 1984 works are expressions of different and, in a certain sense, incompatible philosophical projects.

The availability of the text of *Les aveux de la chair* more than three and a half decades after its completion provides an opportunity to understand the significance of Foucault's works on Christianity within his oeuvre. The information that the editor, Frédéric Gros, supplies concerning the becoming of this book shows that it, overall, renders the text of the manuscript that Foucault deposited at Gallimard in 1982.³ If we trace the interventions that Gros made into the early manuscript, mainly based on the few corrections that Foucault made to the typescript after he retrieved it from the publisher just before his serious illness and death, it becomes clear that these changes, all but one, are insignificant.⁴

The thesis of this article is that *Les aveux de la chair* emerged from Foucault's hand as the second volume of the *History of Sexuality* and that the work belongs to another stage and philosophical project than the 1984 volumes. I will dispute the

1 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité IV : Les aveux de la chair* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018). English translation: *The History of Sexuality Volume 4: The Confessions of the Flesh*, trans. by Robert Hurley. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2021). This translation appeared after the final editing of this article. The translations here are thus mine. The proofreading gave an opportunity to refer the reader to Hurley's translation where this seems relevant.

2 Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). English translation: *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Hurley. (London: Penguin Books, 1992); Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité III, Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). English translation: *The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. by Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

3 See, Frédéric Gros, "Avertissement", in, Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above n. 1), I–XI, VII; Gros, "Foreword", in, Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), VII–XIII, XI.

4 Gros marks the most important of these interventions with square brackets in the text and substantiates them in eleven asterisked notes at the bottom of the relevant pages. See, Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above n. 1), 29, 37, 51, 57, 71, 77, 82, 116, 192, 201, and 214. Besides this, the final editorial work has mainly consisted in correcting the punctuation to ease the flow of the texts, adjust the format of references to that of the published volumes two and three, and corrections, if necessary, of the citations. See, Gros (see above n. 3), VIII; Gros, "Foreword", (see above n. 3, English), XI–XII. The one more significant change, which I will return to, is on page 51; 36 (English).

assumption that Foucault wrote *Les aveux de la chair* with the intention of concluding the Greco-Roman works.⁵ I will also question if he wrote these later works to introduce the already completed volume. I will rather maintain that he soon was caught up in the new material and derailed from his earlier project.

II. Foucault's Final Plan of Publication

Foucault conceived the final publication plan of the *History of Sexuality* in the fall of 1983, just over half a year before he completed volumes three and four.⁶ This, as I will go on to demonstrate, was almost two years after he had completed the manuscript of *Les aveux de la chair*. Foucault formulated the final plan in a leaf that he inserted in the 1984 volumes. There, he announced *Les aveux de la chair* as the fourth, final, and forthcoming volume. Despite the separation in time between the completion of *Les aveux de la chair* and the conception of the final plan of publication, despite Foucault's expressed will of "no posthumous publications", and despite the fact, finally, that he never revised the original manuscript, Gros concludes his introduction by stating that the 2018 publication of the work fulfills Foucault's wish and final plan of publication, "C'est désormais chose faite."⁷

The final editing and publication of the work of *Les aveux de la chair*, as the fourth volume of Foucault's sexuality series, evidently, constitutes a main cause of the perception of the work as the final volume of the series, concluding the previously published volumes on Greco-Roman sexual ethics. This perception, however, reaches back to Foucault's original announcement of an unpublished fourth and final volume of the *History of sexuality*. This gave rise to both speculations and expectations. Myths clouded this existent but unavailable piece. In 2016, Stuart Elden comments that this book, "for now ... remains something of a

⁵ See below for this.

⁶ See, Stuart ELDEN, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 168–170. As late as April 1983, in an interview at Berkeley, California, Foucault presents a very different and, seen retrospectively, quite confusing plan for the series. See, FOUCAULT, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul RABINOW (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 340–372, 340–342.

⁷ See, Gros (see above n. 3) XI ; Gros, "Foreword", (see above), XIII; ELDEN, "'No Posthumous Publications' – responses to some questions about Foucault and the future publication of the *History of Sexuality Vol IV*", in *Progressive Geographies* (October 16, 2015). URL= <<https://progressivegeographies.com/2015/10/16/no-posthumous-publications-responses-to-some-questions-about-foucault-and-the-future-publication-of-the-history-of-sexuality-vol-iv/>>. Last accessed, 29.10.2020.

holy grail for Foucault scholars.”⁸ Elden cites several sources when expounding his expectations, and thus represents a shared understanding of the nature of this work and its textual history.

Elden looks forward in excitement to the publication of *Les aveux de la chair*. Taking the only published excerpt of the work, “Le combat de la chasteté”, from May 1982, as his point of departure, he assumes that Foucault completed a major revision of the work before his death to make it fit into the final publication plan.⁹ Given the time between the completion of the manuscript and the conception of the final publication plan of the series, he surmises that the differences between the excerpt and the parallel section in the final work will be significant. “The Battle for Chastity,” he says, “dates from a few years before and precedes the new arrangement of the historical plan made in late 1983.”¹⁰ Citing different sources, he expects the revision to be major and clearly visible in a comparison between the texts.

After the publication of *Les aveux de la chair*, we can conclude that, except for the introductory and concluding paragraphs, which he added to structure the contribution as an article rather than as a section of a book, there are no differences. The texts are the same.¹¹ Taking Gros’s information concerning the final editorial process into concern, we can reasonably suppose that this is valid for *Les aveux de la chair* as a whole. Notwithstanding these facts, the thesis of a close connection between Foucault’s work on Christianity and the Greco-Roman works, which he wrote later, seems resilient.

In their reviews of *Les aveux de la chair*, Elden and other Foucault scholars assume that the purpose of the work was to conclude the subsequently published volumes.¹² In his review, Elden comments Foucault’s introductory chapter on

8 ELDEN, Foucault’s Last Decade (see above n. 6), 190.

9 FOUCAULT, “Le combat de la chasteté”, in *Dits et écrits IV*, ed. by Daniel DEFERT and François EWALD (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 295–308. Originally published in *Communications*, no. 35: *Sexualités occidentales* (May 1982), 15–25. See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 230–245, for the parallel section; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh*, (see above n. 1), 178–189.

10 ELDEN, Foucault’s Last Decade (see above n. 6), 189.

11 Gros has made one marked intervention in this part of the manuscript, informed by “Le combat de la chasteté”, namely to replace “approach” the Eucharist with “participate in” it, in the question of what the coenobites could do after a night when they had soiled themselves. FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1) 241; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh*, (see above n. 1), 186; “Le combat de la chasteté” (see above, n. 9), 304.

12 See, Sverre RAFFSNØE, “Michel Foucault’s *Confessions of the Flesh*. The fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*”, in *Foucault Studies*, no. 25 (October 2018), 393–421, 396; Gros (see above, n. 3), X, note 1; Alexandre GEFEN “Michel Foucault. *Les Aveux de la chair*, vol. 4 of *Histoire de la sexualité*,” trans. by. Haun SAUSS, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 45, no. 2 (Winter 2019), 558–559, 558;

Clement of Alexandria. Elden says, “He quickly summarises the notion of *aphrodisia* (p. 9), though of course intends the discussion to flow from the previous volumes.”¹³ Elden’s point is not that, given the death of the author, we are free to relate works independent of the original motivation of the writer. He underlines that the relation of *Les aveux de la chair* to *L’usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi* “of course” was Foucault’s intention in the writing of the work.

Sverre Raffsnøe, in his review, takes the same stand. Citing the inserted leaf in the first edition of the 1984 volumes, he says, “[T]he now published volume four is intended to inscribe itself within the new trajectory of this ‘genealogy of the desiring human from Classical Antiquity through to the first centuries of Christianity’.” This interpretation of *Les aveux de la chair* as a continuation of the Greco-Roman works, Raffsnøe adds, is necessary. “[T]he resulting fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* must be read as an intermediate link that prolongs and resituates the in-depth examination of Greek and Roman Antiquity that Foucault concluded in volumes two and three.”¹⁴ Gros, Elden, and Raffsnøe thus maintain, despite Foucault’s inability to revise the completed manuscript according to the new plan, that we should read *Les aveux de la chair* as the intended fourth volume of the series.

III. The Background and Purpose of *Les aveux de la chair*

I have established that the work that Gallimard published in 2018 as the fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* renders the text of the manuscript that Foucault deposited at Gallimard around the summer of 1982.¹⁵ Tracing the becoming of this text, and not least determining its time of completion, will prove important. After

Nancy Luxon, “*Les Aveux de la chair* : Vol. 4 of *L’Histoire de la sexualité*”, in *Contemporary Political Theory* vol. 19 (2020), 192–196, 193.

13 ELDEN, “Review: Michel Foucault, ‘Confessions of the Flesh’”, in, *Theory, Culture & Society* (20 Mar 2018). URL= <<https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/blog/review-michel-foucault-confessions-of-the-flesh>>. Last accessed 29.10.2020.

14 RAFFSNØE (see above n. 12), 396. My italics.

15 Gros dates this deposit to the fall. The reference that he gives for this dating is that there is a sticker saying “October 1982” attached to the folder containing the typescript that was produced based on the deposited manuscript. It is not obvious, however, that the dating of this typescript refers to the time of the deposit of the manuscript rather than to the date of the completion of the typescript, which would have taken some months, especially since Foucault, as Gros refers, underlined that there was no haste. See, Gros (see above n. 3), VII; Gros, “Foreword”, (see above n.3), XI.

the publication of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge* (*La volonté de savoir*), at the end of 1976, Foucault started to work on the second volume, *La chair et le corps*. He there explored the revival of spiritual practices after the Reformation.¹⁶ As Michel Senellart points out, it was the combined discovery of governmentality and its ancient roots in the Christian pastorate in his 1978 governmentality lectures that convinced Foucault of the necessity to restart the work with the second volume.¹⁷

Facing the enormity of the task of writing a comprehensive history of the pastorate, he decided to focus on some “features that were formed, from the outset.” These are “practices and reflections ... I will take [from] some old texts from around the third to the sixth century.”¹⁸ By the end of 1978, Foucault reached a novel conception of the second volume of the sexuality series and adjusted the area of research to become Christian practices and reflections from the second to the fifth century.¹⁹ A major coalescence conditions this new conception. He now understands the experiences and avowals of the flesh of the early church as the formation of Western subjectivity. I will argue below that this subject constitutes a premise for the exercise of pastoral power, conceived as the “conduct of conduct”. Foucault’s motivation is to explore this premise. In January 1979, he starts to write *Les aveux de la chair* to prepare a history of the pastorate, conceived as a genealogy of governmentality.²⁰

Foucault, therefore, did not write the book to conclude a Greco-Roman pre-history of the Christian “subject of concupiscence”. At the beginning of the last part of *Les aveux de la chair*, Foucault announces that he, after he has completed *Les aveux de la chair*, will start the work with a sequel. He says that he will conclude the work with “the conception of Saint Augustine.” This is because this conception both gathers the loose threads of early Christianity and because it will have an enormous influence in the history of the West. It will, therefore, Foucault continues, “constitute the point of departure for the study that will follow (*elle*

16 FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). English translation: *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by HURLEY (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 30, n. 1. For the preservation of parts of *La chair et le corps*, see, Michel SENELLART, “Situation du course”, in FOUCAULT, *Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collège de France 1979-1980* (Paris: Gallimard, Seuil, 2012), 321–350, 344–345 and 345, n. 127, and the references that Senellart there provides regarding this text

17 See, SENELLART, “Situation du course” (see above n. 16), 344–345.

18 FOUCAULT, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. by SENELLART, transl. by BURCHELL (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 166.

19 See, DEFERT, “Chronologie”, in *Dits et écrits I, 1954–1969*, ed. by Daniel DEFERT and François EWALD (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 13–64, 56.

20 See, DEFERT, (see above, n. 19), 56.

sera le point de depart de l'étude suivante).²¹ We should read this to mean that the conclusion of the work makes up a starting point for a sequel.

Foucault wrote *Les aveux de la chair* with a forward-looking perspective and a major purpose of the work was to establish a starting-point for further research and publications on subsequent developments. This forward-looking perspective is detectable throughout the work.²² In the final part, this perspective quite naturally moves to the foreground of the exposition.²³ Foucault presents the Augustinian subject of desire or concupiscence as a precondition of “the subject of right (*le subject de désir*)” that will be an essential component in the exercise of pastoral power.²⁴

If we accept this identification of the purpose of *Les aveux de la chair*, it also becomes easier to delimit the work. Foucault makes clear that the experiences and avowals of the flesh, which follows from the coenobitic techniques of self-direction and direction by others, are not part of the history of the pastorate, “even if it is under the sign of the pastorate that it will later be localized.”²⁵ The reason behind the distinction between the practices that belong to the constitution of subjectivity and the institutionalization of the pastorate is their qualitative difference as discursive events. Subjectivation occurs at the level of the individual. As an increasingly intense relation of the self to itself, subjectivation is contractive.²⁶ The history of the pastorate is expansive. It “must assure the salvation of all.”²⁷ The pastorate institutionalizes and implements the global pretensions of Christian faith. By neatly separating these discursive events, we can hold them together and understand how they interact in the subsequent history of the pastorate.

21 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 254; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 197.

22 See e.g. FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 100–101, 104–105, and 236–237.

23 See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 269–270, 280–282, 288, 305, 322–324, 351–352, 355, 357, 358, 359–361.

24 See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 351–352, and below; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 276–277.

25 FOUCAULT, *Du gouvernement des vivants* (see above, n. 16), 249.

26 See, e.g., FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 50–51 and 230–245.

27 FOUCAULT, *Security, Territory, Population*, (see above, n. 18), 168.

IV. Manuscript Completion and a Changed Publication Schedule

Having presented the background and purpose of *Les aveux de la chair*, we will have to ask the question of when and why Foucault changed his plans. When did he decide to give up, or at least postpone the sequel on the Christian pastorate and decide that he would rather provide the work with a Greco-Roman prelude? Did he make this decision so early, moreover, that it influenced the writing of *Les aveux de la chair*? The above exploration of the background, motivation and purpose of this work, as well as the both implicit and explicit forward-looking perspective are already strong indications that Foucault made the decision to write a prelude rather than a sequel after the redaction of the work and that it emerged from his hands as the second volume of the series. A closer exploration of the course of events around the completion of the manuscript and Foucault's deposit of it at Gallimard will confirm this.

The combined evidence from the order of filing of the manuscript and the themes of his lecturing during this period strongly suggests the order in which he wrote the different parts of *Les aveux de la chair*.²⁸ He firstly wrote most of the first part. He then composed the third part, before he added the first chapter, on Clement, and, finally, the second part, on virginity. Gros dates the final editing to 1981–1982. This, in my view, is unnecessarily vague. An important milestone, which can assist in determining the time of the completion of *Les aveux de la chair*, is the before mentioned publication of “Le Combat de la Chasteté”, in May 1982. The text renders the last pages of the second part of *Les aveux de la chair*, that is, the last section of the work that Foucault wrote. Allowing a reasonable time for the planning, communication with contributors, editing, typesetting, and printing of the journal, we should place the latest day of the completion of the manuscript of *Les aveux de la chair* to the first months of 1982.

The dating of any extensive work on *Les aveux de la chair* to the beginning of 1982, however, is improbable. From the beginning of January and throughout March 1982, Foucault gave his yearly lectures at Collège de France. This year, Foucault doubled his contributions from one to two lectures each week. The published text of these lectures constitutes the distinctly longest of all the published

²⁸ For this, see See, SENELLART, “Situation du course” (see above n. 16), 335 and 346–348, Gros (see above n.3), V and IX-X, note 6; FOUCAULT, “Sexuality and Solitude”, in *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984*, ed. by RABINOW (New York: The New Press, 1997), 175–184; FOUCAULT, “About the Beginning of Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Dartmouth Lectures”, in *Political Theory* (Vol 21, No. 2, May 1993), 198–227.

courses.²⁹ The material he had gathered was to a great degree new, and he gave his lectures in view of writing a work separate from the sexuality series on the becoming of the subject throughout Antiquity.³⁰ This extensive and intense research and lecturing make it unlikely that he could dedicate the required effort to complete the final manuscript of *Les aveux de la chair* during the first months of 1982.

If we turn to a comparison of the theme and content of his 1982 lectures with his earlier position, it becomes clear that they express a distinctly different stance. The Christian constitution of Western subjectivity, as I have shown, is a core focus of *Les aveux de la chair*. In his efforts to present the novelty of this event, he consistently contrasts it to Greco-Roman practices and cultures of the self. His point is simply, as he formulates it in his spring 1981 lectures, “the Greeks did not know what subjectivity is ... they did not have the notion.”³¹ The characteristics of Christianity are a conversion from the world and one’s earlier life, the prospect of an absolute end, and a continuous discovery in ourselves of what we most authentically are. “There,” Foucault maintains, “we have (with these three characteristics) the general matrix of Western and Christian subjectivity.”³² This is also the conclusion of the 1981 lectures. Subjectivation, he there makes clear, “is something that appears with the spiritual techniques of the fourth and fifth centuries in Christianity.”³³

In his Louvain lectures in May 1981, he repeats and clarifies the same position. Greco-Roman practices of the self, in general, and late Stoic practices, in particular, are superficial, void, and vainglorious.³⁴ The practices, which refer to recommendations that rest on rules of conduct, only concern how past, present,

29 See, FOUCAULT, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at Collège de France 1981–1982*, ed. by Gros, transl. by BURCHELL (New York: Picador, 2005).

30 In the February 3, 1982 lecture, Foucault refers to “this lengthy genealogy that I am trying to recount from *Alcibiades* to Saint Augustine”. See, FOUCAULT, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (see above, n. 29), 188. In an interview, one year later, Foucault reveals that in the work with this material, he has “a book separate from the sex series” in mind. This book will contain diverse texts, among them “a commentary on Plato’s *Alcibiades*.” FOUCAULT, “On the Genealogy of Ethics” (see above, n. 6), 342. For this, see also, ELDEN, *Foucault’s Last Decade* (see above, n. 6), 152–153.

31 FOUCAULT, *Subjectivité et vérité. Course au Collège de France 1980–1981*, ed. by Gros (Paris: Gallimard and Seuil, 2014), 255.

32 FOUCAULT, *Subjectivité et vérité* (see above, n. 31), 256. See also, ELDEN, *Foucault’s Last Decade* (see above, n. 5), 146.

33 FOUCAULT, *Subjectivité et vérité* (see above, n. 31), 289–290.

34 See, FOUCAULT, *Wrong-Doing and Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed. by Fabienne BRION and Bernhard E. HARCOURT, transl. by Stephen W. SAWYER (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 101.

and future acts appear in relation to these rules. The stoic subject is not a subject in the profound meaning that it will later acquire. In late Stoicism, “[T]he subject is nothing more, essentially, than the intersection between rules of conduct that must be remembered and the point of departure for future actions that should conform to this code. He adds, “[The Stoic art of memory] is by no means a hermeneutics of the self, nor the decoding of a secret that is sealed deep within oneself. There is no subjectivity in Seneca’s examination of conscience.”³⁵

The hermeneutics of the subject, Foucault makes clear, was born later, in the Christian coenobiums. “I believe that this moment marked the birth of what we might call a hermeneutics of the self in the Western world.”³⁶ Importantly, he reiterates the argument in the last written section of *Les aveux de la chair*, which was published separately as “Le combat de chasteté”. He there distinguishes the Christian monastic practices in the fourth and fifth centuries from the Greco-Roman focus on acts. Subjectivation, he claims, first took place in these Christian practices. “In this asceticism, we can recognize a process of subjectivation, which relegates a sexual ethics that centers on an economy of acts to an inferior position.”³⁷ Subjectivation does not emerge from relating acts to rules of conduct. It emerges from a profound and incessant deciphering of the soul. At this stage of Foucault’s thinking, we can only think subjectivity, and the hermeneutics that is particular to it, within a Christian framework.

V. An Abrupt Change of Position

In the 1982 lecture series, an abrupt change occurs. The theme of the series is Greco-Roman subjectivity. The few references to Christianity are now in passing. They serve as a contrast to the proper theme of the lectures. He calls the series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (*Herméneutique du sujet*). The focus is on the constitution of the subject in the Greco-Roman world. That, which he up until then had presented as the negative background of the hermeneutics and constitution of subjectivity, has now become the very site of this hermeneutics and constitution.

Subjectivity is no longer about a coenobitic scrutinizing search for the hidden secrets of the soul. Selfhood is rather a pure and caring relation to oneself. Seneca, who one year earlier did not know subjectivity, has now become Foucault’s

³⁵ FOUCAULT, Wrong-Doing and Truth-Telling (see above, n. 34), 100.

³⁶ FOUCAULT, Wrong-Doing and Truth-Telling (see above, n. 34), 148.

³⁷ FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 244–245; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 188–189, and, FOUCAULT, “Le combat de la chasteté” (see above, n. 9), 306–307.

example of its proper constitution. Foucault says that, according to Seneca, “The individual should not strive for a status as subject that he has never known at any moment of his life. He has to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self’s relationship to the self. He has to constitute himself as subject.”³⁸ Foucault, interestingly, refers to his former position. Taking the advices given by Seneca as his point of departure, he says, “[W]e can always think that they were vain, empty recommendations ... that it was a sort of code.”³⁹ This, he now claims, is only in appearance. In Stoicism, earlier fields of practices are “reintegrated as a reflexive surface, as the occasion ... for the self to test itself, train itself, and develop the practice of itself which is the rule of life and its objective.”⁴⁰

The rules, recommendations, and advice, that is, the whole codification that late Stoicism appropriates, renews and promotes, and which previously, for Foucault, appeared like a shallow exterior, has now become a reflective plane in which the soul can mirror and find itself. This Stoic self-relation, he now claims, is the true rule and goal of life. From 1981 to 1982, the shift could hardly be more radical.

Foucault’s discovery of a commendable selfhood in the Greco-Roman tradition turns his research interest from the planned sequel on the pastorate to a focus on the ethical resources of the Greco-Roman world. We should understand the decision to write a Greco-Roman prelude to *Les aveux de la chair* from this new appreciation of the cultures of the self that surrounded and preceded early Christianity.

External evidence supports this conclusion. We find the first evidence of this decision in the introductory paragraph that he added to “Le combat de la chasteté”, probably in April 1982.⁴¹ When he some weeks later announces his decision to his publisher, he presents it as new information.⁴² The spring 1982 Greco-Roman ethical turn motivates the decision. The answers to the questions that I asked should thus be clear. Foucault completed *Les aveux de la chair* in late 1981. He decided to provide it with a prelude rather than a sequel after this completion. The decision did not influence the text of the presently published volume.

³⁸ FOUCAULT, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (see above, n. 29), 129.

³⁹ FOUCAULT, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (see above, n. 29), 156.

⁴⁰ FOUCAULT, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (see above, n. 29), 162.

⁴¹ See, FOUCAULT, “Le combat de la chasteté” (see above, n. 9), 295.

⁴² See, GROS (see above, n.3), VII; GROS, “Foreword”, (see above n. 3), XI.

VI. The Deletion of a Passage

A significant “performative” act demonstrates clearly the changes that occurred in Foucault’s approach from 1981 to 1984. In April–May 1984, after having completed the manuscript of *Le souci de soi*, he finally starts the revision of the typescript of *Les aveux de la chair*. The only substantial change Foucault accomplished was the deletion of a passage. The translation of this passage requires a more precise determination of Foucault’s terminology, which I will provide later. Accordingly, I will here quote the French, before providing my English translation towards the end of this article.

En bref le schéma du code, de la répression et de l’intériorisation des interdits n’est pas capable de rendre compte de ces processus qui permettent précisément aux codes de devenir des conduites ou aux conduites de dessiner des codes — à savoir les processus de “subjectivation”. La chair est un mode de subjectivation.⁴³

This passage belonged to the four separate pages at the end of the first chapter, the section which comes closest to an introduction of the work. The theme of the paragraph, from which he removed the passage, is the role of codes.

VI. 1. The code

To understand the performative significance of this deletion, we must explore the significance of moral codes and codification in Foucault’s thinking in 1981, when he formulated the passage. At this stage, Foucault conceived the history of sexual codes in Antiquity in four phases. First, there was the “conjugalization” of sexual ethics in the *umwelt* of Christianity in the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era.⁴⁴ Foucault’s main point in identifying this development in Roman ethics is that the sexual code that we usually associate with Christianity was already in place in the late Stoa.

The second phase is the Christian adoption of this code. This happens without much resistance. The injunctions and prohibitions might have become more austere. Foucault’s main point, however, is that early Christianity just took over an already existing moral code.⁴⁵ In a third phase, this code, in its literal form,

⁴³ FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 51 n. *.

⁴⁴ See, FOUCAULT, *Subjectivité et vérité* (see above, n. 31), 163–170.

⁴⁵ See e.g., FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 9–10 and 48; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 3–4 and 33.

becomes secondary to spiritual practices that radically transform the relation of the self to itself. This phase covers the theme of *Les aveux de la chair* and I will treat it more exhaustively.

The transformation of the relation of the self to itself is observable already in the early developments of baptism, the catechumenate, and the second penance.⁴⁶ The decisive practice, however, is the ascetic detection, formulation and avowal of the experiences of the flesh, the *exagoreusis* or “examination-avowal”. In this exercise, the code is only an outward occasion for a transformation of the relation of the self to itself, in other words, for the constitution of Western subjectivity. “[T]his examination-avowal,” Foucault states, “does not relate to a definite category of elements (as acts or infractions [of a code]).” The one practicing *exagoreusis* “has an indefinite task in front of him: to penetrate ever deeper into the soul, to always know, without delay, even the most tenuous thoughts, to seize secrets – and secrets that hide behind the secrets – going as deep as possible toward the root.”⁴⁷ It is a descending movement, a “falling line (*ligne de pente*)”, inclining indefinitely towards that which is hardly perceptible in oneself.

VI. 2. The disappearance and reappearance of jurisdiction

It is incumbent on Foucault to say that this trial is not like facing a tribunal that judges on formal or external grounds. This is not jurisdiction, in the conventional sense of the term. It is a testing of one’s soul in terms of an ultimate truth, like a moneychanger tests a coin.⁴⁸ “We are in the order, not of jurisdiction, but of ‘veridiction’.” The relation of oneself to oneself is essential in this practice. “It is a work of uncovering, not only to the other, but also to oneself, of that which goes on in the mysteries of the heart and in its indistinct shadows.”⁴⁹ The concrete presence of and avowal to the spiritual director is not the essential moment in the

⁴⁶ See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 52–105; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 36–78.

⁴⁷ FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 144; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 109.

⁴⁸ See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 137–138; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 103–104.

⁴⁹ FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 144; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 109.

practice of examination-avowal. It is rather “to pronounce it in the direction of someone, of someone = x.”⁵⁰

Foucault’s main example of this Christian *askēsis* is the sexual abstinence that is required from the coenobites. It takes up the middle part of *Les aveux de la chair*.⁵¹ In the practice of virginity, the code is both clear and detailed. A virgin, of course, should avoid sexual intercourse, as well as masturbation. Both more decisive and difficult is that one should keep every temptation at bay, including physical contact and proximity, memories, images, and thoughts. These rules, regulations, and recommendations, however, are only the negative and limiting side of virginity. The novelty of these practices, that which separates the Christian from the Greco-Roman, is the *positivity* of the art of virginity.

Foucault quotes Gregory of Nyssa to underline the importance of this art. “The vocation [*profession*] of virginity is an art and a skill [*science*] of divine life.”⁵² In this art, conceived in its positivity, the descending progress towards the hidden secrets at the depths of the soul is, at the same time and in the same movement, an ascension towards God. “Virginity is capable of establishing an unalterable relationship with realities above.”⁵³ Concluding this middle part of his work, and contrasting it to the then current Roman approach, Foucault again stresses that these experiences and avowals of the flesh are not about the interiorization or obedience to a moral code. “It is not at all about an interiorization of a catalogue of interdictions ... That, which, therefore, is at stake, is not a code of acts that are permitted or prohibited.” It is rather “the opening of a whole new domain ... it is a comprehensive technique.”⁵⁴

In the surveillance, analysis, and diagnosis of the soul, according to Foucault, a new relation of the self to itself occurs. Foucault calls the processes that appears in this new domain “subjectivation”. “This subjectivation,” he continues, “cannot be dissociated from a process of consciousness which makes the obligation of searching for and saying the truth of oneself into an indispensable and

50 FOUCAULT, *Du gouvernement des vivants* (see above, n. 16), 301.

51 See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 149–245; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 111–189.

52 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 177. Foucault refers to, GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Virginity*, IV, 9. The Greek word translated as *science* is *dynamis*.

53 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 177; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 135.

54 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), ; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 135. 244 ; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 135 “Le combat de la chasteté” (see above, n. 9), 306–307.

permanent condition of this ethics.”⁵⁵ The structure of this subject is permanent because the work of the self on itself never reaches its goal. It is indefinite and incessant.

The Augustinian stabilization of the Western subject as the “subject of concupiscence” prepares subjectivity to become “the subject of right”. The precondition of this, according to Foucault, are the notions of *consent*, or non-consent, to this fallen nature and the use of it, for good or for bad.⁵⁶ This conclusion to the constitution of subjectivity heralds the emergence of the comprehensive history of the pastorate that Foucault originally planned to venture upon in the announced sequel to *Les aveux de la chair*. This institutionalization of the pastorate is the fourth phase, which *Les aveux de la chair* points to but which reaches beyond it into a genealogy of governmentality. In this phase, both codification and jurisdiction, in a novel meaning, reappears.⁵⁷ How should we understand this reappearance?

I have shown that neither jurisdiction, in the conventional sense of the term, nor codification touches the core of Christian subjectivation, according to the Foucault of *Les aveux de la chair*. In his 1980 lectures, he says that that truth-telling – veridiction – and not codification and jurisdiction was the goal of the spiritual practices.⁵⁸ In the final part of *Les aveux de la chair*, Foucault seems to gain-say this, when he associates the subject of desire and the subject of right so closely. Augustinianism, he says, “provides the fundament of both a general conception of the human of desire [*l’homme de désir*] and a fine-tuned jurisdiction of acts ... which together mark the morality of the Christian West profoundly.”⁵⁹

Schematically, codification and jurisdiction does not condition subjectivation, nor do they constitute the goal of the early spiritual practices. Subjectivation rather conditions the reappearance of codification and jurisdiction within a new constellation of power in the pastorate. A chronology and a transformation is implicit in this schema. Rules, laws, and codes, in the Roman era, according to Foucault, concern objectifying judgments that a sovereign passes from a distance. This can either be a sovereignty that is exercised in the public or political domain,

55 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 245 ; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 189. “Le combat de la chasteté” (see above, n. 8), 307.

56 See, FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 325–361 ; FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 256–285.

57 See e.g., FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 324, 360 ; FOUCAULT, “Annexe 2”, in *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 366–395, 375, and below.

58 See, FOUCAULT, *Du gouvernement des vivants* (see above, n. 16), 302.

59 FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 324 ; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 255.

or a sovereign self that evaluates its thoughts and actions from a distance and *après coup*.⁶⁰

In the post-Augustinian subject, this distance disappears. Jurisdiction intersects with veridiction. Within the framework of the pastorate, the incessant telling of the truth to oneself, and to x, will start to happen in terms of the moral and legal code. The subject appropriates the moral and judicial apparatus. Jurisdiction moves from an outer framework “to the subject who is guilty, pronounces the authority, accuses, and judges.”⁶¹ In the operationalization of pastoral power, a juridification of the event of truth-telling, of veridiction, takes place. The code becomes a way of relating to oneself in one’s behavior (*conduite*).

VI. 3. The conduct of conduct

The unearthing of this form of subjectivity, which actively subjects itself to and partakes in the power that is wielded over it, makes up the nexus of Foucault’s discovery of governmentality and of its profound relationship with the Christian pastorate. The need to explore the becoming of this subject motivates *Les aveux de la chair*. In his governmentality-lectures, Foucault condenses the intricate dynamics at work in pastoral and governmental power into one word. This word catches the power-dynamics between the shepherd, the flock, and the individual sheep, between the pastor, the congregation and the individual believer, and, between the one governing, the population and the modern subject. Foucault states,

The word, obviously, is “conduct (*conduite*)” ... Conduct is the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*), is conducted (*est conduit*), and finally, in which one behaves (*se comporter*) as an effect of a form of conduct (*une conduite*) as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*).⁶²

The term “conduct” gathers and connects the threads of a complex and inextricable net of relationships at work in pastoral and governmental power. It denotes the governing or leadership of the flock or population. It also signifies the act of

⁶⁰ See, FOUCAULT, *Du gouvernement des vivants* (see above, n. 16), 297.

⁶¹ FOUCAULT, “Annexe 3”, in, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 396–403, 399 ; cf. FOUCAULT, “Appendix 3”, in, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 315–320, 318.

⁶² FOUCAULT, *Security, Territory, Population* (see above, n. 18), 193.

submitting to this leadership and to the code that it establishes. Finally, it means the everyday behavior of subjects within the framework of this leadership and code.

In the years of writing *Les aveux de la chair*, Foucault returned to this theme several times, most importantly in a text that he kept in a separate folder in the same boxes as the manuscript of *Les aveux de la chair* but excluded from the deposited manuscript because he deemed it to belong to the planned sequel.⁶³ The theme of this text is the institutionalization of the Christian pastorate, in the way this happened from the end of the sixth century and onwards. This institutionalization “is about ... the establishment of institutions and procedures, across society, to regulate the ‘conduct (*conduite*)’ of humans.” We should understand this term, he says, in the dual sense of “a way to direct them” and “a way for them to behave (*se comporter*)”. It is “a general power capable of directing behavior [*conduire le conduit*].” Foucault connects the institutionalization of this power explicitly to the purpose of the work to which this text is appended. It allows us “to understand the importance accorded to the avowals of the flesh.”⁶⁴ The subjectivity that the early church practices constitutes, according to Foucault, is a condition of the institutionalization of pastoral power.

VI. 4. The changed position

The subjectivity that emerges from the experiences and avowals of the flesh preconditions the reappearance of codification and jurisdiction as an integrated part of the complex power relationship that Foucault designates by the term “conduct”. We should read the paragraph from which Foucault three years later deleted the last passage on this background.

On account of [Christianity], it, in essence, took over [the current code]. It was only during its subsequent developments and through the formation of certain technologies of the individual – penitential discipline, monastic asceticism – that a form of experience was constituted. This experience gave a new role to the code, and made it manifest, in a very different

⁶³ FOUCAULT, “Annexe 2”, in, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 366–395; FOUCAULT, “Appendix 2”, in, *Confessions of the Flesh* (see above n. 1), 291–214. See also, FOUCAULT, “Le pouvoir, comment s’exerce-t-il?”, in *Dits et écrits* IV (see above, n. 9), 232–243, 237. The term “conduct of conduct” also appears here (p. 237): “The wielding of power consists in ‘directing behavior [*conduire des conduits*]’ and controlling probability.”

⁶⁴ FOUCAULT, “Annexe 2”, (see above, n. 63), 390 cf. FOUCAULT, “Appendix”, (see above n. 63), 310–311.

way, in the behavior [conduite] of individuals. *In short, the order of the code – of repression and interiorization of prohibitions – is not capable of accounting for the processes of “subjectivation”, namely those processes, which precisely allow codes to become ways of comporting oneself [conduites] or allow ways of direction [conduites] to design codes. The flesh is a mode of subjectivation.*⁶⁵

Given Foucault’s view of the code and “the conduct of conduct”, at the time, the forward-looking perspective and purpose of *Les aveux de la chair* here becomes blatant. Foucault wrote the work to explore the constitution of a subjectivity that serves as a precondition of the institutionalization of the pastorate and the unique and particular form of power that it represents. In the greater trajectory of his thought, the form of this power bridges the gap between Christian antiquity and the developments that took place through the Reformation, the post-Reformation era, and the Classical Age, and which, in early modernity, led to the adoption of this form of power as governmentality.

This background also shows why Foucault, in an unaccomplished effort to rewrite the work as the fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*, deleted the passage. In this paragraph, Foucault had distanced his work from Roman morality, seeing it as a morality of codes, he had referred to subjectivation as resulting from Christian practices, and he had explicitly connected this subjectivation to crucial and later developments that played an important part of his work at the time.

The deletion of the passage follows from a fundamental change of Foucault’s philosophical position. When Foucault crosses out the last and unambiguous part of the passage, it is because he has come to see Christian morality as a strict and self-effacing obedience to an established code. Foucault now draws the picture of Christian morality as a contrast to the genuine ethics of Greco-Roman antiquity. “From Antiquity to Christianity one passes from a morality that was essentially a search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules.” “Ancient morality,” Foucault claims at this final stage, “was essentially a practice, a style of liberty ... In the will to be a moral subject, the search for an ethics of existence, was principally an effort to affirm one’s liberty and to give to one’s life a certain form in which one could recognize oneself.” “In Christianity,” Foucault says, “with the religion of the text, the idea of God’s will and the principle of obedience, morality took more the form of a code of rules.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ FOUCAULT, *Les aveux de la chair* (see above, n. 1), 51, and 51, n. *; cf. FOUCAULT, *Confessions of the Flesh*, (see above, n. 1), 36, and 36, n. *. The deleted passage is in italics.

⁶⁶ FOUCAULT, “An Aesthetics of Existence”, in *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. by Sylvère LOTRINGER, transl. by Lysa HOCHROTH and John JOHNSTON (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 450–454, 451.

This view comes close to a reversal of the position that he held three years earlier. In 1979–1981, subjectivation was on the side of early Christianity. The Greeks did not know it. The rule of the code, seen as a superficial administration of acts, belonged to the Greco-Roman *umwelt* and prehistory. In 1984, Foucault finds a proper and commendable relation of the self to itself in the Greco-Roman world, especially among the late Stoics. Christianity, on its side, represents a morality of uniform obedience to a code. Now, the profundity of the subjectivation that occurred in coenobitic practices, and which Augustine stabilized, is absent. Foucault has deflated the paradox of the Christian constitution of subjectivity, in which he saw freedom and obedience as contrasting and dynamic elements in a movement that both reached the depths of the soul and aspired to the heavenly spheres. Missing from Foucault's final focus are also the intricacy and complexity of the pastoral and governmental power-relations to which this subjectivity gave rise. Foucault's ethical turn is at the core of this change.

VI. 5. The ethical turn

The incongruity of the second and third volumes of the sexuality series with *Les aveux de la chair* is not due to a change of themes. The final sentence of *The Care of the Self*, which might have been the last published words he wrote, makes clear that the Greek and Christian moral code and subjectivation remained at the center of his thinking to the end. "The code elements ... may remain analogous," he says. This analogy, however, should not mislead us. "[T]hey will derive from a profoundly altered ethics and from a different way of constituting oneself as the ethical subject of one's sexual behavior."⁶⁷ The result of Foucault's abrupt change between 1981 and 1982 is a different perspective. He now sees Christianity from a Greco-Roman standpoint rather than the other way around.

This, however, is not the core difference between *Les aveux de la chair* and the Greco-Roman volumes of the series. The works are incongruous because Foucault's approach, in the final stage, becomes normative. In the interviews from this time, Foucault leaves no doubt concerning which ethics and way of self-constitution he prefers. He emphasizes that, in our time, it is pertinent to repeat the whole of the Greco-Roman experiment of an autonomous relation and care of the self for itself. We should see to it "that European thought get started again on Greek thought as an experience given once." It is only from the experiences that follows from this total restart on Greek ground that we can learn to differentiate

67 FOUCAULT, *The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin Press, 1990 [1986]), 240.

regarding the relevance of this heritage. “The whole Greek experience can be taken up again in nearly the same way.”⁶⁸

The works from these different stages of Foucault’s development are close to incompatible because one is ethical, and the other is not. From the end-point, Foucault claims that one can constitute oneself as subject in two ways. One is commendable in our time. The other is condemnable. “[T]he subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or ... through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in [pagan] Antiquity.”⁶⁹ The novelty of the final publication plan of the sexuality series is that Foucault, from a contemporary perspective, values the Christian subject negatively. In pre-Christian culture, he finds ethically preferable practices of the self.

In the common introduction to the published second, third, and planned revised fourth volumes of the series, Foucault states that what he has found in his Greco-Roman adventure are “reflected and voluntary practices ... through which humans ... seek to transform themselves ... and make of their life an oeuvre which carries certain aesthetical values and respond to certain criteria of style.” He calls this culture of the self “an aesthetics of existence.”⁷⁰ In one of his final interviews, he defines Christian “morality as obedience to a system of rules.” This morality “is now disappearing, has already disappeared.” He concludes that one must respond to this with “an aesthetics of existence.”⁷¹

This immediate and ethical applicability of the findings of his research, skip-jumping two millennia of European history, separates *L’usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi* radically from the project of which *Les aveux de la chair* is the major expression. In this earlier project, the two millennia of history was the theme. By exploring and identifying the becoming of Western subjectivity, Foucault wanted to describe the preconditions of later ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the institutionalization of the pastorate and its particular power, which modern governmental power eventually would adopt. At the final stage of his work, he no longer aims at exploring how we have become who we are. He rather wants to propose who we can be.

The one minor editorial gesture that Foucault accomplished in his return to *Les aveux de la chair* demonstrates how far he had moved in the three years from the formulation of this text to its deletion. It also shows the immense task that lay

⁶⁸ FOUCAULT, « The Return of Morality », in Foucault, Foucault Live (see above, n. 66), 465–473, 470.

⁶⁹ FOUCAULT, “An Aesthetics of Existence”, (see above, n. 66), 452.

⁷⁰ FOUCAULT, *L’usage des plaisirs*, (see above, n. 2), 16–17.

⁷¹ FOUCAULT, “An Aesthetics of Existence”, (see above, n. 66), 451.

in front of him if he were to transform the work from being the second volume of the *History of Sexuality* to become the fourth.

VII. Conclusion

The negative part of the conclusion of this contribution is that Foucault did not write *Les aveux de la chair* to conclude the history of subjectivity and sexual morality in pagan and Christian Antiquity. He neither wrote the subsequently published works of the series to introduce *Les aveux de la chair*. The consequence of the derailment of his late philosophical project was that he would have had to rewrite his former work. A task that his illness and death interrupted when he had barely started. Why, then, should we read *Les aveux de la chair* as the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*? Why is this important? The answer to this question makes up the positive part of the conclusion.

On the immediate level, the conclusions reached here facilitate an interpretation of *Les aveux de la chair* that is unrestrained by the expectations of finding a culmination of the developments that Foucault described in his subsequent works. This frees a reading of the work in terms of its original intention, namely, to explore the becoming of Western subjectivity in spiritual practices that are described and recommended in the works of early church fathers. Foucault is not a historian, and his expertise is certainly not within the more limited field of church history, not to say patristics. His research, moreover, stems from 40 years ago, and one should thus not expect him to relate to the forefront of research within these fields of research.

I will still claim, however, that Foucault's novel approach to these themes remains important. From the perspective of a coalescence of the histories of subjectivity and sexuality, he provides close readings of a limited selection of ancient Christian texts. From this, he maintains that these texts have exerted an enormous influence on posterior developments, not in the history of dogmas but through the practices, experiences and self-understanding they caused. These claims are intriguing. They are open to questions, and thus to further research.

On the level of Foucault scholarship, the identification of an abrupt change in his philosophical development suggests that we should understand his contributions from his final years, 1982–1984, as expressions of a clearly separate and ethical stage. This enables us to distinguish the years from the mid-1970s to 1981 as a stage with its own distinguishing marks. The focus of this period, including *Les aveux de la chair*, is the becoming and nature of modern power. At this stage, therefore, governmentality becomes the hinge that all the important Foucauldian concepts revolve around. Disciplinary power, aiming at the individual, and bio-

power, focusing on the population, would constitute preliminary attempts to conceptualize modern power. These concepts of power only comes to fruition in the combined discovery of governmental and pastoral power. Seen thus, his work from 1979–1981 would be attempts to explore the origin and nature of this power in the particular form of subjectivation that took place in the early church.

Finally, and related to this, on the level of application of Foucault's thinking within a variety of disciplines, a reading of *Les aveux de la chair* as a groundwork to identify, in this subjectivation, the premises, historicity, history, and nature of modern power could lead to both adjustments of existing theories and new theory formations. In a situation when governmental power, and the reactions to it, become global, an in-depth understanding of this power, making it inseparable from Christian subjectivation, could inspire new research into themes such as sexual orientation and gender identity, populism, the status of truth-telling in politics and social media, and how to exercise power in a pandemic.