

**Michel Foucault and the Possibility of Value: Ethics of Creativity vs. Ethics of Truth**

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Statement of Purpose:

The article further explores, via Foucault, the ethics of creativity as an epistemological alternative of the rationales of value to the ethics of universal or absolute Truth. The objectives of this study are to re-present Foucault's genealogical analysis of the operational mechanisms of what he calls pastoral power as self-constitutive circuits of power/knowledge or power/truth relations. This analysis instigates a transactional critique of modernity, advanced in terms of the possibilities of evaluating the normative or dis-empowering effects of universal truth (Truth), which replaces the aesthetics of the ethics of Truth with the aesthetics of the ethics of creativity as a viable framework of value based on its serviceability as a critique. In other words, the merits of the ethics of creativity are rationalized as enabling or empowering to intercept and critically interrogate the governmental value-projecting processes as coordinated by pastoral power mechanisms operating ac circuits of power/knowledge or value/Truth relations. Foucault's work, and particularly his terms of critique of modernity is notoriously difficult and continues to be largely misunderstood in the literature. The primary objective of this essay is to clarify Foucault's critical project by recasting it into more tangible effects of its deployment onto the larger culture as a critique and re-orientation of the coordinates of a possible value.

The article explores, via Foucault, the ethics of creativity as an epistemological alternative of the rationales of value to the ethics of universal or absolute Truth. The objectives of this study are to re-present Foucault's genealogical analysis of the operational mechanisms of what he calls pastoral power as self-constitutive circuits of power/knowledge or power/truth relations. This analysis instigates a transactional critique of modernity, advanced in terms of the possibilities of evaluating the normative or dis-empowering effects of universal truth (Truth), which replaces the aesthetics of the ethics of Truth with the aesthetics of the ethics of creativity as a viable framework of value based on its serviceability as a critique. In other words, the merits of the ethics of creativity are rationalized as enabling or empowering to intercept and critically interrogate the governmental value-projecting processes as coordinated by pastoral power mechanisms operating ac circuits of power/knowledge or value/Truth relations. Particular emphasis will be given to the culturally constituting or value-defining role of the concept of universal truth (Truth), with its attendant humanistic ethics in the religious as well as secular humanistic sense. The genealogical analysis of the socio-cultural or political role of the concept of Truth will help to isolate its subjectifying and objectifying effects and clarify their function within specific historical contexts in governmental rationalization of individual as well as social identity in terms of sovereignty. The basic operational element of this cultural mechanism, producing the coordinates of rationalization of conduct, as instituted by culturally paradigmatic pastoral figures of the sovereign identity, will be also further articulated

The conceptualization of the pastoral figure as endowed with the divinely privileged faculty of the soul, and thus as being able to access the knowledge of Truth, conditions its authority or right to rationalize the ethical and governmental rules of conduct. This right to determine the values of existence in terms of good and evil is justified in terms of access to the knowledge of Truth and is defining the right of the pastoral figure as that of the sovereign. As Foucault's analysis of the present culture shows, the individual's rights to self-rule or freedom, as well as the concept of Human Rights in general, are being legitimized as the sovereign's rights. It is the individual's

identification with the soul, as the means of accessing his/her true self and thus the knowledge of the (T)truth of the common humanity, that constitutes the individual in terms of sovereignty, and thus is also the basis of individual rights, law, and other cultural values. In the preceding schematic outline of a possible re-construction of one of the earliest recorded examples of cultural organization in terms of Truth, and thus sovereignty, an attempt was made to emphasize the governmental mechanisms that translate the knowledges of Truth into the constituting processes rationalizing specific values of individual identity and conduct. The figure of the sovereign individual, as the organizing principle of the present culture, does not fully emerge until the democratized access to the knowledge of Truth as (T)truth is made individually possible by re-locating and re-conceiving the divine Truth as a humanistic and possibly secular (T)truth, dwelling within and constituting the true nature of humanity in general and the identity of each individual. This democratized or individualized access to (T)truth did not diminish, but in fact, intensified the pastoral forms of governmental rationality since, as Foucault contends, the privileged forms of access to (T)truth, on the basis of special individual capability or knowledge, remained culturally operational. With the presence of the more complete or “true” revelations of human identity or nature, the coordination of the formation of correlative values of individual and social conduct could thus be continually culturally administered on the basis of their normative standards of value. The privileged access to the knowledge of (T)truth retained, thus, the pastoral forms of rationalization of the ethics of conduct or the values of human existence and kept the rest of the population dependant on the needed “supply” of (T)truth for cultural consumption as the coordinates of individual and social ethical conduct.

Foucault centers his critical project around the figure of the sovereign individual and analyzes its constitution as an effect of the deployment of the pastoral power relations as cultural practices of domination that secure the superior right to rationalize conduct:

When we say that sovereignty is the central problem of right in Western societies, what we mean basically is that the essential function of the discourse and techniques of right has been to efface the domination intrinsic to power in order to present the later at the level of appearance under two different aspects: on the one hand as the legitimate rights of sovereignty, and on the other, as the legal obligation to obey it. The system of right is centered entirely upon the King, and it is therefore designed to eliminate the fact of domination and its consequences.<sup>1</sup>

The critical implications of Foucault's project emerge when a rationale for the organization of individual and social conduct is re-articulated not in the terms of the (T)truths that condition it, but in terms of the subjugating effects that the particular (T)truth-derived rules of conduct produce. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault undertakes an analysis of the principles of cultural organization by isolating individual and social conduct, as it is coordinated by the concepts of individual identity, and deployed in terms of the historico-cultural constructs of the concepts of sexuality. Foucault reads the concepts rationalizing the organization of the present culture as a continuation or extension of the religious/metaphysical tradition of the (T)truth-embodiment concepts defining human identity:

We must make no mistake here: with the great series of binary oppositions (body/soul, flesh/spirit, instinct/reason, drives/consciousness) (...) the West has managed (...) to bring us almost entirely – our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history – under the sway of a logic of concupiscence and desire. Whenever it is a question of knowing who we are, it is this logic that henceforth serves as our master key.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the values of cultural and individual existence are established through the processes of the unceasing pursuit to isolate and measure the degree of (T)truth in the origins conditioning individual conduct to determine its ethical identity. The concern with the knowledge of the true nature of humanity, and of individual identity and conduct, is in principle the continuation of cultural organization in terms of (T)truth, as grounded either in metaphysics or biology. The knowledge of the (T)truth of human nature, in its religious or secular sense,

continues to be rationalized as the only path to the promised bliss of self-realization and fulfillment, if not the old-fashioned salvation and outright divine existence.

As Foucault demonstrates, the notion of true human nature or identity conditions the formation of multiple objectifying and subjectifying techniques of social and individual self-surveillance and examination aiming to define the ethical content or value of the individual's nature or identity in terms of its correlation to (T)truth. Individual ethical value would not only lie in the re-production of (T)truth in conduct, but also in the individual's pastoral ability to access and produce the knowledge of (T)truth itself. The identification of the individual's desires, their true origins that is, in effect, the individual's degree of goodness or deviance, would thus be of significant importance by making possible the ethical evaluation and classification of the (T)truth of human nature which the individual is able to express. Foucault's emphasis on the cultural practices of individual self-formation as an ethical subject/object of desires helps him to isolate the cultural processes coordinating the possible patterns of rationalization of individual self-identity in terms of the culturally dominant ethical values of conduct. As the exemplary cultural model of an ideal true self becomes socially and thus rationally dominant, the individual is compelled to embark upon a continuous self-search and examination in order to model or re-adjust his/her identity in order to become socially viable as truly human and thus a valuable and reliable individual. Total subjection to or self-identification with the culturally operational (T)truth of human nature as the ethical principles of conduct, must be demonstrated by the individual if he/she is to be regarded as reliable and thus permitted to participate in the exercise of power, that is, in the production and exchange of the knowledge of (T)truth and thus wealth. In other words, the cultured or social individual must self-constitute as, or become an extension of (T)truth on the very deepest level of existence and demonstrate a controlling presence on the ethical principles of value in his/her rationalization or recognition of the meaning of the environmental events in their relation to Truth. The concept of (T)truth demands total and unconditional subjection or identification with itself. Thus, as Foucault points out, the content of the most secret and intimate desires have to be scrutinized and evaluated in terms of their correspondence to or deviance from the (T)truth. It seems that the concept of the final determination of the ethical value of individual identity, or of the Last Judgment, was culturally relegated from beyond the grave into the present, intensifying the individual's subjection to the processes of self-examination and classification in terms of (T)truth and, in effect, validating and thus securing the operating modes of cultural organization with its patterns of wealth accumulation and preservation.

As Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* shows, by treating sexuality as a historical concept, and by re-constructing its association with the search for the knowledge of individual ethical self-identity or self-truth, the analysis of the concept as an indicator of the conditions of the formation of the ethical subject in the context of the larger culture carries certain critical implications. Foucault seems to aim primarily to further elaborate on the circular governmental relations of power/knowledge with regard to their constituting effects on individual self-conception and thus conduct. By comparing the Greek, Roman, and the Christian models of individual self-relations in terms of access to or exclusion from the processes of formation of the individual self-conception, Foucault also establishes the circular link between their conditions of possibility and the functions of governmental rationality. The individual culturally conceptualized as a subject/object of (T)truth, as most of the above discussion was dedicated to emphasize, is essentially condemned to a compulsive self-formation as an ethical subject/object of (T)truth. Within a culture organized as a regime of (T)truth, the individual not actively pursuing the conduct in accordance with the total identification with the conceptualization of the divine soul as the seat of (T)truth, would face social criminalization or other forms of banishment from participation within the cultural circuits of power. Power, within a cultural environment of values organized in terms of (T)truth, could only be exercised as the rationalization of individual and social conduct and only by a sovereign, that is, by someone who could claim a privileged access to (T)truth and thus the right to rationalize values of conduct. The forms of self-relations open to an individual would then be governed by the directives of identification and renunciation of the non-divine and thus un-true parts of the individual self-identity that do not desire the ideals of the heavenly (T)truth sensed by the spirit, but the earthly pleasures of the flesh. The dynamics of

individual self relations or self-constitution, as framed by the life and death combat between the wills of the spirit and of the flesh, characterize the ethical individual, whose life-mission would be to become an extension of the will to (T)truth by totally eradicating or purifying himself/herself of the evil will of his/her "own heart."

The notion of (T)truth is arguably the perfect governmental tool. Its claim to sole explanatory validity strives immanently for subordination of conduct to its premises. Cultural and thus individual values of modes of existence could only be rationalized as a function of the matrix of (T)truth. But perhaps the chief merit of (T)truth as the culture organizing principle is its usefulness as a mechanism of social wealth security. While the democratization of (T)truth offers or distributes certain individual rights and a possibility to access the established patterns of wealth accumulation and preservation, it also secures or entrenches those patterns as an expression of (T)truth. This feature of security is an effect of the democratization process or the way (T)truth distributes itself within culture by aggressively re-forming the coordinates of the very identity of each cultured individual as its explanatory rationale implants itself as dominant. It seems that when the concept of (T)truth operates most efficiently at this point of delineating the space of what is rational, of the limits of the thinkable, that the most subjugating governmental effects are produced. Foucault's analysis of a culture organized not in the terms of (T)truth, and its prescriptive binary oppositions of good and evil, but based on an open-ended rationality of the ethics of aesthetic self-constitution, offers an implicit critical perspective with regard to the conditions of possibility of thought. The cultural ideal of individual, perfect identity with (T)truth would mean an ontologically divided self where the possibility of ethical conduct would rest with the elimination of the part of the self, considered as alien or evil, desiring anything that is perceived as deviation from (T)truth. The entire conceptual effort, in such a mechanism of self-relations based on the ethics of (T)truth, is oriented toward the totality of this elimination and, in reverse, toward the search for and identity with the knowledge of (T)truth.

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault presents his take on an ancient Greek model of individual self-relations where the ontological division of the self in terms of (T)truth is apparently absent and the desiring self is accepted and *used* in aesthetic self-constitution. The absence of (T)truth, at least in its active or governmental deployment in the cultural organization of conduct, seems to be the primary condition for the possibility of the rationalization of existence that is not confined to the binary terms of good and evil, but is left open to the individual rationalization of self constitution as ethically viable on the grounds of aesthetic re-conception of the possible terms of existence. In fact, as Foucault points out, the maintenance of the possibility of the open ended rationalization of conduct constituted the objectives of the ethics of self-relations. It seems important to note at this point that Foucault does not claim that there were no concepts circulating as cultural truths, but rather a lack of a dominating or totalizing (T)truth. At issue here is individual access to or participation in the formation of cultural truths that, while necessary for cultural stability, must remain relative and a subject of transformation through a process of aesthetic rationalization. The "objectivity" or ethical viability of this process of individual aesthetic rationalization of conduct was maintained through "the ethical attitude of the individual vis-à-vis desires and pleasures"<sup>3</sup> where their controlled or rationalized *use* was subjected to a consciously structured or aestheticized as a possible form of existence.

The Greek ethical directive "to know oneself" would then mean, for Foucault, not a compulsive self-examination and evaluation of one's relation to (T)truth, but the degree to which one can subject oneself to one's desires and pleasures while not becoming enslaved by them, and remaining intellectually able to gage their effects on the control of one's rationalization. The individual thus positioned would then be able to *use* his/her desires and pleasures as aesthetic values to extend the possible paths of rationalization of his/her conduct in terms of those values as well. The ethical conduct of classical Greek thought is, as Foucault projects it, oriented toward the preservation of the individual's position where the aesthetically rationalized existence could be proposed and accepted into circulation as not only valid, but also admired as a valuable model of individual and social conduct or governmentality. By the same token, an individual subjected to self-identification with (T)truth would be viewed as enslaved by a prescriptive mode

of conduct and not in a position to freely or controllably rationalize or consider his/her desires and pleasures from a variety of perspectives and values in order to be able to *use* them in aesthetic self-formation. Even for Plato, Foucault notes, who struggles to re-introduce the concept of the divine or universal Truth as the organizing principle of culture, the philosopher was still able to “set up the government of his soul”<sup>4</sup> through contemplation of the possibilities of existence.

Foucault clearly distinguishes between the conditions of rationalization of conduct in either environment: in classical Greek thought

The principle according to which this activity [of the use of pleasure] was meant to be regulated, the “mode of subjection,” was not defined by a universal legislation determining permitted and forbidden acts; but rather by a *savoir-faire*, an art that prescribed the modalities of a use that dependent on different variables (need, time, status).<sup>5</sup>

Whereas in a culture organized in terms of (T)truth, for example in a Judeo-Christian culture, “Subjection was to take form not of a *savoir-faire*, but of a recognition of the law and the obedience to pastoral authority.”<sup>6</sup> Aesthetic self-formation within a culture based on the absolute values as prescribed by (T)truth would not only be perceived as evil and deviant, but also irrational. Freedom or individual independence could only be conceivable within such a culture as the ability to know and conduct oneself in terms of (T)truth. The concept of individual freedom operating within classical Greek culture, as Foucault admittedly schematizes, is in effect the opposite of the one defined by (T)truth, as it posits an individual in control, that is, as being able to evaluate the effects of the values of his/her pleasures and thus enabled or empowered to rationalize aesthetic values as individual truths organizing existence in an intellectually creative way. Foucault elaborates the point further:

A moral value that was also an aesthetic value and a truth value since it was by aiming at the satisfaction of real needs, by respecting the true hierarchy of the human being, and by never forgetting where one stood in regard to truth, that one would be able to give one’s conduct the form that would assure one of a name meriting remembrance.<sup>7</sup>

One could also describe the issue in terms of an attitude or ethics of creativity. The individual as a subject of (T)truth is directed to search, both within and without the self, for the knowledge of an order of things that is already pre-existing, and pre-dating, in fact, the creation itself. It is a search for the origins, for the eternal (T)truth of the nature of humanity that is already there, in need to be re-discovered and re-lived, if life is to be meaningful. This regressive orientation of thought, of continuous re-construction or recovery of a humanism that is already there, strikes one as profoundly inhuman: as a retardation of the potential of intellectual creativity, undermining the conditions for a conceptual re-evaluation of the possibilities of existence – a quality which seems to be precisely the most human. But a culture organized in terms of the ethics of aesthetic creativity or intellectual virility, as Foucault calls it, where the conceptualization of existence as a difference in the individual relations to the self and the environment was not only possible, but also it was a measure of the individual’s ethical value. The coordination of individual conduct as a form of *savoir-faire* did not mean its moral and thus conceptual enclosure, but rather served as a springboard from where the individual was optimally positioned to re-conceive values of conduct, that is, for cultural transaction. *Savoir-faire* as well as self-knowledge of the individual’s physical and emotional conditions “defined a circumstantial strategy involving the body and the elements that surrounded it; and finally, it proposed to equip the individual himself for a rational mode of behavior.”<sup>8</sup> The knowledge of the conditions of possibility of thought or of rationalization of conduct permitted the individual to intellectually construct the aesthetic principles of conduct as rational even if uniquely personal. This circular relation between aestheticized reason and reasonable aesthetics could be better understood when the totalitarian, linear, humanistic rationality originating in (T)truth, that progressively organizes values in their perceived relation to it, is abandoned. Aesthetic

perception, in the cultural environment dominated by (T)truth, would be either rejected as irrational or colonized and embraced as a prophetic or artistic vision and a direct link to (T)truth that is treasured and used as coordinator of value of conduct.

Alternatively, as Foucault suggests, the conditions of rationalization of values should be considered not as an object but a subject of the human intellectual existence. In the cultural environment organized in terms of the ethics of creativity, an aesthetic perception of an individual, modified by the self-knowledge of his/her emotional and physical conditions, is immanently rational and vice versa. In his search to identify the conditions of possibility of an open-ended or value-relative space of individual constitution of values defining self-rationalization of conduct, Foucault describes a cultural environment characterized by an ethics of creativity or competition in formation of aesthetic values of conduct. One of the conditions of possibility of the aesthetic ethics of forms of self-relations is the recognition of the existing norms of *savoir-faire*, that is, of the modes of one's subjection to certain relativized cultural truths. It is this relativized status of those truths that enables the individual to aestheticize or modify their relations by subjecting them to their conceptual re-constitution rationalized in terms of the informed or self-conscious perception of individual experience in terms of individual desires and pleasures. Such a critical attitude or control of values co-ordinating individual conduct permits a re-conception of the relations between the individual and the environment, thereby conditioning the possibility of different modes of rationalization of existence.

The clarification and articulation of the possible terms of rationalizations of individual and social conduct, as an interaction of relations between forms of ethics, aesthetics, and thus politics, produce the primary critical effects of Foucault's work. It becomes apparent that the individual's access to or participation in the rationalization of ethics or values of conduct, through the aesthetic re-evaluation of cultural values, also empowers the individual politically as a governmental rationality of conduct is subjected to individual re-conception. When compared to the dis-empowering processes of individual self-rationalization as a subject of (T)truth, where the possibility of thought or rationalization of values is enclosed within the terms of (T)truth, the prospects for individual or social conduct must reflect those limitations. It scarcely needs to be said that the access to the rationalization of the controlling principles of individual and social conduct is an immanently political issue, and it is, in fact, the principal objective of politics. The individual's roles in the conceptualization of conduct as an ethical subject/object of (T)truth and within an environment of the ethics of aesthetic creativity of possible terms of conduct, would be clearly reflected in their modes of participation within the circular power/knowledge relations, that is, in the rationalization processes of the rules of wealth accumulation and preservation. The Egyptian model of cultural organization empowers or conditions the individual rationalization of conduct and access to wealth only in terms of an unconditional and total subjection to the divine Truth, that is, as embodied and distributed by the administration of the Pharaoh. In the classical Greek cultural environment, as Foucault sees it, it was the individual ethical aspiration to deploy an aesthetic re-conception of cultural principles of value and thus conduct as an ethically valid alternative coordinating individual and possibly social existence. By contrast, then, in the second case, the cultural ideal of individual value would lie in the individual's access to the rationalization of the principles of conduct not in terms of the pre-determined ethics of the rules of (T)truth, but in terms of the ethics of the intellectual re-conception of the possible rules of conduct.

After elucidating the coordinates of rationalization and conduct within classical Greek culture in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault, in *The Care of the Self*, turns the focus of his analysis to the rules of self-relations or self-governmentality within the Roman imperial culture. The pastoral principles of individual conception of the values of conduct in terms of (T)truth were not unknown in classical Greek culture and, they were, in fact, present and practiced, but the cultural ideal of individual conduct was based, for Foucault, on the exercise of the individual's aesthetic rationalization of conduct. The Greek ethics of virility, of individual participation in a conceptual competition of rationalization of possible forms of self-conduct, are contrasted with Roman ethics that are oriented toward individual adaptation to the established norms of conduct based on the

prevailing cultural (T)truths, codified as law and thus prescribing the possible forms of individual and social conduct. Foucault summarizes the climate of the cultural requirements of ethical conduct in the Roman imperial culture as follows:

What the Roman administration needed was a “managerial aristocracy,” as R. Syme says, a service aristocracy, which would furnish the different kinds of agents necessary to “administer the world”: “officers in the army, financial procurators, and senatorial governors of provinces.”<sup>9</sup>

The presence of the practically singular legislating figure of the emperor, considered as divine or at least divinely sanctioned, also helped to exclude individual participation in rationalizing possible norms of conduct and led instead to the formation of the ethics of individual conduct subjected to or coordinated by the knowledge of (T)truth. The cultural ethical ideal of the rationalization of conduct of the Roman citizen was not to re-conceive the values of cultural organization and thus the rules of existence, but to affirm the validity of the existing ones through self-formation as a devout or obedient subject of (T)truth that co-ordinates the possible forms of conduct as delineated by the law.

Within a culture organized in terms of the ethics of a code of law and centralized governmental authority, the individual’s participation in the rationalization of the public policy of conduct is marginalized and effectively precluded as obedience to law becomes the cultural ideal of ethical conduct. The ideal of cultural and individual conceptual activity, as Foucault suggests, is exemplified by the Stoic philosophy where it became relegated to the remaining conceptual space of the so-called individual “inner life,” where the rationalization of some private aspects of conduct was still possible. The Stoic philosophy theorizes the ethics of individual values of conduct as a search for an understanding of the expressed divine will revealing the presence of (T)truths or principles organizing nature, including human nature, and all occurrences. The individual, then, as a part of that nature, is consequently prompted to co-ordinate his/her ethical self-constitution in terms of the values that correlate to those (T)truths using various techniques of cultivation of the self and thus, in effect, to deploy the concept of the sovereign individual as the dominant mechanism of cultural rationalization of conduct. This mechanism of governmental rationalization of conduct or social organization secures its viability by presenting itself as an expression of the (T)truth of human nature codified in the law and thereby culturally instituting the formation of the individual as an ethical subject of the law who identifies his/her interests with the pursuit of the (T)truth of human nature within the self. This mechanism of circulation of the pastoral power as the rationalization of ethical or legal conduct is produced and coordinated by the democratizing effect of the deployment of (T)truth as the constituting principle of true human nature. The principal effect of such a democratization of the access to (T)truth is, as it has been observed earlier, the social security of the location of and access to wealth. The individual sovereignty or the right to rationalize conduct in terms of access to (T)truth would be modified, however, by the divine status of the imperial authority and thus a privileged access to (T)truth, giving it a superior sovereignty or legislative right. Foucault considers the rationalization of individual and social, ethical conduct, within Roman imperial culture, and its grounding in law understood as the expression of the (T)truth of human nature, as a pastoral form of governmental rationality that would be re-utilized as a blueprint for the juridical organization of Western culture up to the present:

We must not forget that the re-vitalization of the Roman Law in the twelfth century was the major event around which, and on whose basis, the juridical edifice which had collapsed after the fall of the Roman Empire was reconstructed. This resurrection of the Roman Law had in effect a technical and a constitutive role to play in the establishment of the authoritarian, administrative, and, in the final analysis, absolute power of the monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault notes some of the characteristics of the conditions underlying the rules of self-rationalization as an ethical subject in early imperial Roman culture

as they transform the objectives of the classical Greek ethics of the aesthetic or intellectual conceptualization of the values of conduct:

But this art [of self-constitution as an ethical subject] refers more and more to universal principles of nature or reason, which everyone must observe in the same way, whatever their social status.<sup>11</sup>

The classical principles of aesthetic self-constitution seem to be still operational in Roman imperial culture, but only superficially. The individual self-formation occurs as internalization of the universalized or totalitarian (T)truths which, as such, are not subject to aesthetic re-conception by the individual, but instead must be accepted as the core or framework of individual identity. The individual can only stylize his/her conduct in terms of the universal (T)truths as the ethical coordinates of the rationalization of conduct. It seems also worthwhile to notice here again the “democratizing,” or, perhaps more appropriately put, totalitarian effects that the universal principles of ethical conduct produce, when deployed as organizational or culturally dominant, as their (T)truth-status demands universal observance. Once the universal principles or (T)truth is established as organizational or culturally dominant, a mechanism is set in motion conducting a circuit of access or right to rationalize conduct in terms of (T)truth, which thus grants access to power democratically to potentially everyone who claims to speak in the name of that (T)truth. The position of the pastoral figure, possessing a special or privileged access to (T)truth remains, nevertheless, preserved as the final legislative authority. In the cultural environment rationalized in terms of universal (T)truth, the renunciation of control over an individual’s aesthetic or intellectual rationalization of values of conduct, is viewed as a virtue. Foucault comments on Pliny’s surrender to his amorous passions as another example of the transformation of the Greek classical notion of the aesthetic self-constitution of ethical conduct:

Now, these behaviors that belong to the classic and negative image of passion are presented in a positive light; or rather, the husband’s suffering, the passionate movement in which he is taken up, the fact that he is ruled by his desire and his sorrow are offered as a positive tokens of conjugal affection.<sup>12</sup>

This signals, in fact, a reversal of the objectives of classical ethics, which is to position the individual in a way that opens the widest possible space of the individual’s conceptual environment as a subject to his/her aesthetic re-conception. Pliny, on the other hand, suggests an ethics that abandons or rather discourages as unethical the individual’s conceptual control or right to rationally or aesthetically re-evaluate the operating principles of ethical values. For Pliny, and for the Stoic tradition in general as Foucault points out, ethical conduct is recognized as a search for one’s true identity, a careful discerning of the presence of the divine principles of (T)truth within the existing organization of nature and culture:

What one is, and what one needs to devote one’s attention to as to an ultimate purpose, is the expression of a principle that is singular in its manifestation within each person, but universal by the form it assumes in everyone, and collective by the community bond it establishes between individuals. Such is, at least for the Stoics, human reason as a divine principle present in all of us.<sup>13</sup>

Foucault also calls on Epictetus, who clarifies in no uncertain terms the origins of true human identity and conditions of rationalization of individual self-constitution and conduct:

Yet when God himself is present within you and sees and hears all things, you are not ashamed of thinking and acting thus: so slow to understand your nature, and estranged from God!<sup>14</sup>

Like any good preacher, Epictetus seems to be ahead of his time, one could almost say prophetic: there is no doubt, for him, who one is or ought to be and therefore what one should be ashamed to think and how one should conduct oneself. For an individual whose identity or

ethical self-conception rests on such unquestionable values, the possibility of their aesthetic re-evaluation would seem unthinkable or certainly unethical. One can sense in Epictetus' admonition such a certainty of conviction of the presence of the divine Truth, that the urgent demand of absolute subjection to it betrays a lack of tolerance and impatience with its implementation as coordinating the processes of individual rationalization of values and thus conduct. Within the conceptual environment dominated by the divine or universal (T)truth, the possibility of critical thought becomes necessarily one dimensional, which is to say absolutist or totalitarian. If thought, as a process of aesthetic rationalization or re-conception of values, is to be considered the most human quality, then the reduction of its conditions of possibility into a set of universal (T)truths should be regarded as the essentially dehumanizing form of subjugation that a culture can inflict on its subjects. In addition to identifying the conditions of possibility of aesthetically critical thought, Foucault's ethico-political analysis aims to expose the brutalities resulting from its deprivations or limitations that are reflected in their effects on individual and social conduct. This recasting of the operational framework of cultural ethical norms, and thus forms of conduct, as the principles of governmental rationality is intensely political. This approach also clarifies the processes of circular conditioning within the power/knowledge circuit whereby the sovereign individual, culturally constituted as the ethical subject of (T)truth and therefore as also an object of human rights, is transformed into a subject of law.

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), Colin Gordon ed., p. 95.

[2] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 78.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 68.

[4] Ibid., p. 71.

[5] Ibid., p. 91.

[6] Ibid., p. 92.

[7] Ibid., p. 93.

[8] Ibid., p. 108.

[9] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 84.

[10] Foucault, in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 94.

[11] Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 67.

[12] Ibid., p. 79.

[13] Ibid., p. 93.

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[14] Ibid., p. 168.