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HEXIS AND GRACE:
THE FORMATION OF SOULS AT PORT ROYAL AND ELSEWHERE

INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the seventeenth century the Cistercian convent known as Port Royal became simultaneously, and connectedly, a centre of pedagogic innovation and religious controversy. Its “little schools,” which educated (separately) both girls and boys, are now famous largely for the publication of two textbooks, one on logic and another on grammar, which have been seen by some commentators as early documents of the Enlightenment.¹ These were associated exclusively with the education of the boys. The girls’ education, however, also produced an important document: the *Rule for Children* of Jacqueline Pascal,² who directed the girls’ school at Port Royal des Champs (the old site that lay outside Paris) during the 1650s. This paper gives an interpretation of this text and the educational practice it records and suggests not only that this practice has deep roots in the Christian tradition but also that it continues to exert a powerful, albeit indirect, influence on our thinking about education today.

I begin by discussing in some detail the related notions of *hexis* and divine grace, which in Augustine come together to create a doctrine that had a profound influence on Jansen and his followers. I then proceed to read Pascal’s *Rule* in the light of this doctrine. I show that the purpose of the regime she supervised was the preparation of the soul to receive grace, making it an early example of a formative pedagogy as opposed to an “informative” one. My aim is to understand the theory embedded in the pedagogic practices Pascal describes rather than to import a theory of practice from elsewhere.³ The extent to which the roots of Pascal’s pedagogy

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1989), 46; 67 *et passim*; 104 *et passim*; 195.

² Jacqueline Pascal, *A Rule for Children and Other Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Cited hereinafter as “Pascal.”

³ Since the Latin translation of Aristotle’s word *hexis* was *habitus*, the framework developed in Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) might seem particularly

are also the roots of more modern formative practices and the extent to which both share similar theories of practice are larger questions than can adequately be answered here; in the last section, however, I make some indicative connections with so-called “reflective practice” in contemporary teacher education.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF JANSENIST PEDAGOGY

This section follows a thread of ideas from Plato through Aristotle to Augustine to the Jansenists of Port Royal, of whom Pascal was one. I begin with the Greek notion of *hexis* and end with seventeenth-century version of the doctrines of grace and *theosis*. I offer neither a novel or a complete account but draw out particular details that I consider decisive for Pascalian pedagogy. Consequently, I lean heavily on recent scholarship to which the reader is referred for both detailed textual support and dissenting interpretations.

The Pedagogy of Plato’s Cave

The Platonic education, as described in the opening of Book VII of *The Republic*, looks at first as if its goal is the acquisition of knowledge of the forms, but the modern term “knowledge” is misleading if it is taken to refer to predicative knowledge of objects. In the allegory of the cave, sight stands for the faculty of understanding, and the objects in the world outside the cave for the forms. The educative process involves the acclimatization of the ex-prisoner’s sight to the sunlight, which enables the objects to be seen for what they are. Analogically, the prisoner liberated from the cave does not acquire predicative knowledge *about* the forms, except in a very limited sense (for example, the knowledge that some forms are higher than others), but knowledge *of* them. For this the development of the gaze is the proper goal of pedagogy. This cultivation is described precisely by Plato as the acclimatization (*synetheia*) of the eyes to light, beginning with the contemplation of shadows, moving through the use of indirect reflections until the pupil is able to gaze directly at the sun.

As Heidegger points out, in his characteristically tendentious but penetrating reading of the allegory of the cave in *The Essence of Truth*, “[h]e who *in his ownmost self* has adapted in this way, secures for himself, by becoming free for the light, i.e. through familiarity with and towards light, a new standpoint.”⁴ The process requires gradual training, an educational practice whose goal is formative rather than informative. The point is not that particular information should be absorbed by the student but that the very nature of the understanding (analogically, the eyesight) should be molded to fit it for its proper purpose, as opposed to the seemingly rational

apposite to the present discussion. Given the restricted nature of the Port Royal environment, however, and the very conscious construction of its Rule, the relatively heavy machinery of Bourdieu’s theory, which is designed with more pervasive social phenomena in mind, is not employed here.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plat’s Cave Allegory and the Theaetetus* (London: Continuum, 2002), 32 (emphasis added).

but actually debased purpose to which it is put among the prisoners. *Hexis* is not a *knowing* but a *having*.⁵

The relationship between *hexis* and Platonic enlightenment is made clearer in a passage in *Phaedrus* that concerns education. Socrates and Phaedrus have just been discussing a number of linked examples in which a person has acquired some knowledge or skill but cannot be said to have understanding, such as “a man who thought he understood harmony because he could strike the highest and lowest”⁶: what this man lacks is *hexis*. He lacks knowledge of harmony itself, *ta harmonica*,⁷ which in a Platonic context can only mean that form of which all harmonious things partake by virtue of which we call them “harmonious.” The “musical hack”⁸ knows how to sing an octave or a scale, but does not know *music*. That requires an entirely different kind of pedagogy, that of the liberating *philosophos*. No amount of informative learning will do as a substitute.

Similarly, in *Theaetetus* Socrates refers to the theory that learning is “procuring knowledge for oneself” (*epistemes ktesin*) and carefully distinguishes this procuring or possessing from *having* knowledge (*epistemes hexin*).⁹ The former case, he says, is like a person who owns a cloak but does not wear it, and so does not have the *hexis* of the cloak even though he has the *ktesis* of it. For him, the cloak has not become a “habit.” A similar point is made by Derrida in “Dissemination,” who finds in a number of Plato’s dialogues a contrast between the dead hand of written knowledge represented by the Sophists (what we might in this context call “book-learning”) and the true knowledge of the forms (*anamnesis*):

Insofar as writing *lends a hand* to hypomnesia [impaired memory] and not to live memory, it, too, is foreign to true science, to anamnesia [recollection of what was once known] in its properly psychic motion [...] Writing can only *mime* them.¹⁰

This simulacrum of knowledge is precisely what the musical hack has and what the prisoners in the cave reward with their foolish “prizes and distinctions.”

From Aristotelian *Hexis* to Augustinian Grace

Much of the literature on *hexis* in ancient philosophy emphasizes the contrast between Plato’s and Aristotle’s uses of the term and the increased importance it has in the latter. My aim in the foregoing has been to foreshadow with the Platonic notion of *hexis* the more familiar version

⁵ On this see also Plato’s *Republic* IV, 433:e.

⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 268d.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, 268e.

⁸ G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato’s Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 72.

⁹ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 197b; see also Rosemary Desjardins, *The Rational Enterprise: Logos in Plato’s Theaetetus* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 220.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (London: Continuum, 2004), 110.

found in Aristotle, because the similarities between the two are for our purposes more important than the differences. The reason is historical: Augustine developed his doctrine of grace largely from Plato, yet by the time of Jansen and Pascal the supreme Greek pagan authority was Aristotle. If we are to understand the seventeenth century notion of grace as a *hexis* then we must, it seems to me, see it as a synthesis of the two traditions, Platonic-Augustinian and Scholastic-Aristotelian.¹¹ We shall therefore briefly set forth those aspects of Aristotelian *hexis* that most clearly demonstrate the debt to Plato.

It is known that Augustine had read Aristotle's *Categories* at an early stage in his life.¹² There we find the following:

It is evident that men incline to call those conditions habits which are of a more or less permanent type and difficult to displace [...]. Thus habit [*hexis*] differs from disposition [*diathesis*] in this, that while the latter is ephemeral, the former is permanent and difficult to alter.¹³

To be understood, however, this passage needs to be read in conjunction with remarks on habit from a number of other works,¹⁴ and scholarship on the precise place of *hexis* in Aristotle's system remains incomplete.¹⁵ Aristotle sometimes, as here, distinguishes *hexis* from disposition (*diathesis*), and at others treats the former as a species of the latter.¹⁶

The goal of the cultivation of *hexis* is *arete*: excellence or virtue, the formation of which takes

¹¹ The educational regimes at Port Royal might be expected to reflect explicit Augustinian ideas about pedagogy, which would make it unnecessary to reach further back into Augustine's sources, but matters are not quite so simple. One of his earliest works, *Against the Academics*, does contain a somewhat worked-out educational theory. Yet it comes before the development of the theory of grace and is concerned with an Aristotelian education that involves the learning of truth as a means to happiness in the mortal life that, as we shall see below, is in no way reflected in Pascal's practice. Another early work, *Concerning the Teacher*, outlines a pedagogy that is specifically concerned with *anamnesis* as opposed to the storing-up of facts as possessions: see Gareth B. Matthews, "Augustine on the Teacher Within", in *Augustine's Confessions: Critical Essays*, ed. W. E. Mann (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 34 *et passim*. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that either of these works was influential on Pascal and they shed little light, if any, on the practice we shall observe at Port Royal.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.16.28.

¹³ Aristotle, *Categories*, VIII 8b27-9.

¹⁴ Principally the *De Anima*, the *Metaphysics* (5:20 1022b5-12), the *Ethics* and the *Physics* (Book VII). Augustine was at least acquainted with some of the central ideas in the *Ethics*, including the cultivation of habit, second-hand thanks to works such as Cicero's *Hortensius* on which see William I. Collinge, "Hortensius", in J. C. Cavadini (ed.) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 437.

¹⁵ See Deborah Achtenberg, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 111 and Zev Bechler, *Aristotle's Theory of Actuality* (Albany: SUNY Press: 1995), 7.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5:20 1022b5-12.

place through *praxis* by way of *hexis*: doing leads to having, which leads in turn to the Good. The Aristotelian model of the ethical education would, on this reading, have at its centre the impression of a form being left in the soul by a sustained practice that leads to *hexis*.¹⁷ In the Christian tradition, *arete* will become the state of participation in the divine nature given to us by God,¹⁸ and Augustine believes that this state, traditionally referred to as “deification” or *theosis*, is at least partially attainable by mortal Christians who pray for and receive the grace of perseverance and who participate in the life of the church.¹⁹

It was to Augustine’s doctrine of grace that Jansen gave the heaviest emphasis.²⁰ This doctrine is derived first, although not solely, from Plato.²¹ Grace enables the believer, in spite of her fallen nature, to exhibit “perseverance,” a state of willing oneself to lead the religious life:

Thus God gives perseverance. God is able to make those who are standing stand fast, so that they stand fast with the utmost perseverance, or to make those who have fallen stand upright again.²²

This grace is that “without which” no human being could persevere in the faith²³: in modern language it is a necessary but insufficient condition for perseverance. Elsewhere, citing Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Augustine argues that the grace of God does not curtail free choice but offers the opportunity for choosing well: an opportunity it is our duty to seize.²⁴ We can see clearly, then, that something else is required for grace not to be given in vain, and that something cannot be another gift of God; if it were, then the role of the will would vanish. The will must be conditioned to receive the gift of grace advantageously, to cultivate it and bear fruit in the life of the Christian.

In opposing the Pelagian heresy, which claimed a central role for individual free will in salvation, Augustine moves to an intellectually defensible position perilously close to fatalism.

¹⁷ See, for example, the detailed account given by Lear (1988: 139). As I mentioned above I am deliberately emphasising a Platonist reading of Aristotle, which I believe to be the perspective that best clarifies Augustine; other, even strongly counter-Platonic interpretations are, of course, attested. It is not the purpose of this paper to take a position on which is more correct, only on which is presently more pertinent.

¹⁸ See II Peter 1:3.

¹⁹ Mary T. Clark, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Continuum, 1994), 47. See also Michael J. Christensen, “The Problem, Promise and Process of Theosis” in *Partakers in Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. M. J. Christensen and J. A. Wittung (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2007).

²⁰ Robert Gotwald Remsberg, *Wisdom and Science at Port Royal and the Oratory: A Study of Contrasting Augustinianisms* (Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press, 1940), 90.

²¹ Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27.

²² Augustine, “On Reprimand and Grace”, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. P. King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.36.

²³ *Op. cit.*, 12.34.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, 5:12.

It is true that, for Augustine, perseverance is only made possible through a gift that the human being can do nothing to merit.²⁵ As Pascal herself puts it, “By our own strength we can only be lost. God alone can save us” (Pascal: 114). This is even more the case for the Jansenists, for whom God was immeasurably distant from the human condition.²⁶ Yet this does not mean that human action does not matter: far from it. The exercise of the will remains indispensable for salvation in Augustine. He states the most important practical consequence of the choices made by the will as follows, “If you want Him to turn His face from your sins, then turn your face away from yourself and do not turn your face away from your sins.”²⁷

This confessional state is what perseverance maintains, and it is this, of course, that is essential to salvation. Perseverance is possible only through grace *and* the exercise of the will together, leading to a continual turning towards one’s sins in confession and away from oneself as a source of pride. Note that this is by no means a passive habit or default state like the habit of sin,²⁸ which Hannah Arendt poetically describes as, “The creature, in the search for its own being, seeks security for its existence, and habit, by covering the utmost limit of existence itself and making today and tomorrow the same as yesterday, makes it cling to the wrong past and thus gives it the wrong security.”²⁹

The anxiety Arendt describes springs from a desire to possess oneself securely: a variety of *ktesis*. Perseverance is by contrast a *hexis*, a formation of the soul over time that, alongside the gift of grace, gives it the strength to persevere on the path of salvation. A Jansenist education that takes the role of grace in salvation with the utmost seriousness, then, might be expected to have as its goal the development of the will such that the gift of grace will not be given in vain but will rather be joined with the will in perseverance. It is hardly surprising that the Jansenists “came to consider the work of education of first importance as a means to salvation.”³⁰

Pascal’s Rule

The *Rule* consists of a daily order followed by some miscellaneous remarks on “spiritual and physical welfare.” At one point during the former section Pascal lets slip a curiously downbeat remark, “Although [the smallest children] are present for everything we say in the common room to instruct all the pupils, they understand nothing. Even if we speak to each of them in private, they still do not understand what we are trying to say” (Pascal: 87).

²⁵ Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, 11.25.

²⁶ A detailed discussion of this topic is provided by L. Goldmann, *The Hidden God* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

²⁷ Augustine, “Homily on Psalm 122”, in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, ed. M. T. Clarke (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 3.

²⁸ James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 150 and Keith David Wyma, *Crucible of Reason: Intentional Action, Practical Rationality, and Weakness of Will* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 231.

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 83.

³⁰ H. C. Barnard, *The Little Schools of Port Royal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1884), 57.

To a modern educator this sentiment—which appears in an offhand remark that receives no further comment—might seem extraordinary. If these children have not understood what was said in the classroom it might appear that little of value can have been conveyed to them. If so, is the educational process not entirely wasted on these children? It is my central claim that the *Rule* is non-informative, and hence that understanding the “content” of a lesson, in the sense of understanding what has been said by the teacher during its course, is by no means its principle aim. Indeed, in some cases such content seems entirely absent and elsewhere it is always relegated to a secondary position behind what we might call a “formative” pedagogy.

Evidence for this can be found in the fact that the work and study undertaken in the classroom, and other practices followed outside it, are clearly and explicitly designed to be repetitive and habit-forming rather than progressive. Consider the portion of the day allocated for “work,” by which is meant needlework. Pascal makes it clear that the product of the work is not at all important; it is a way by which to “keep them in God’s presence” during which they are encouraged to “offer their work to God, making it out of the love of God” (Pascal: 75). It is precisely this love that, on the Jansenist view, cannot be achieved through fear of damnation but only through grace.

Although children who finish their work early are permitted to play, no mention whatsoever is made of productivity. It does not seem to matter how much a child gets done, nor is there any emphasis on the progressive development of skill. Unsurprisingly, no attempt is made to develop the children’s pride in their work, “We exhort them not to be too attached to their needlework, putting it down as soon as the bell rings[...]. They must always be ready to surrender their tasks to God, attaching themselves to God alone” (Pascal: 75). This strongly suggests that the purpose of the lesson is not to teach needlework but to form in the students certain habits of humility and sacrifice, “We try to accustom the children to practice mortification [...]. That is why we tell them that the work they are doing will please God more if it pleases them less. [...] They must *develop the habit* of doing their work in a penitential spirit” (Pascal: 75, emphasis added). The work undertaken in this lesson is clearly intended to be devotional rather than functional. Once its habit is formed, living virtuously becomes natural and “is no longer a burden” (Pascal: 76).

The writing lesson, which comes later in the day, is strikingly similar, with the actual work being mechanical and receiving little emphasis from Pascal, who stipulates that “[t]he pupils do not write letters, notes or even sentences to each other without the permission of the schoolmistress” (Pascal: 79). Their task, apparently regardless of age, is to “simply imitate the model given or, when they are truly advanced and have been given permission, they transcribe something” (Pascal: 79). In an environment already threatened with accusations of heresy the dangers of allowing pupils to compose their own texts is obvious.³¹ The real point appears to be

³¹ It must be said that the *Rule* is written in the knowledge that it might be read by outsiders, including church authorities. As the brief transcript of Pascal’s interrogation following the formulary affair

the manner in which the work is done rather than what is done or how far the student progresses. It is true that Pascal refers to older students being more or less “advanced” and helping their younger peers to read, yet if any kind of progressive curriculum existed, in either writing or needlework, it would be strange for no mention of it to be made here. The overall impression is of an educational approach radically different from the one obtaining in most schools in the contemporary West, in which continuously-improving performance is the all-important goal. No mention is made, either, of any standards the pupils might have been expected to attain at any stage. This omission certainly suggests that the content of these lessons—learning the skills of needlework and writing—was not their most important feature. Instead, as we shall see below, successes are described in terms of habitual virtuous behaviour, and what constitutes progress is greater consistency of this behaviour.

This near-contentless pedagogy is not carried through into the reading lesson, in which what is read is a devotional text whose message is to be understood by the children. Yet this is a special sort of understanding that must be contrasted with mere “curiosity,”³² “We should always try to have them develop the habit of never listening to the readings in a spirit of amusement or of curiosity. Rather, they should listen with a desire to apply their lessons to their lives” (Pascal: 117).

This is the way in which Pascal’s radically formative education treats informative content in a lesson: by presenting it to the students as a matter of the utmost personal seriousness. The point of the reading is not to become learned or to hear distracting stories, much less to develop pride in one’s own cleverness. The point remains formative, albeit in a different way from the formativity of the needlework and writing classes. As the most famous quotation from the book has it, “[i]t is more important to become a good Christian woman and to correct their faults than to become a woman scholar” (Pascal: 117).

This is echoed in Pascal’s approach to the sacrament of confirmation, for which students are prepared at the school if they have not already taken it. Here she notes, “we do not set great store by what the pupils have been able to memorize. We put a greater stress on the sentiments in their heart, as much as we can judge these sentiments by their external action and by their concern to correct their faults” (Pascal: 114). Elsewhere we read that students will “not understand anything” if they “read it by rote, without any personal reflection” (Pascal: 85).

indicates, she is perfectly capable of donning the disguise of the meek and humble woman when necessary. Hence, for example, when the *Rule* refers to the strict way in which the girls’ access to books is controlled we cannot say precisely to what extent it is true, but we may suspect that it is emphasized in order to reassure the reader that nothing is taking place that might be likened to Calvinism, the Protestant sect to which the Jesuits sometimes compared the Jansenists.

³² Here Pascal may be thinking of Augustine’s brief condemnation of curiosity in the *Confessions*, in which the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is identified with the impulse to look at a horrible sight such as a dead body despite not wishing to see it. In both cases a “diseased craving” is at work: Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991), 211. The author is grateful to a reviewer for pointing out this connection.

There is a trace of Cartesianism in these requirements that students *satisfy themselves* as to the truth of the things they are learning.³³ The uselessness of rote repetition—an excellent practice where the goal is memorization alone—is very much a Cartesian sentiment and contrasts with the scholastic tradition that inherited from the Greeks a high estimation of memory. This “understanding” may without triviality be related back to the *nous* exercised by the philosopher who has emerged from the cave: it is not a matter of knowing doctrine but of allowing it to form the soul.

Under Pascal’s *Rule*, however, this formation of the soul is not what in modern terms would be called a learning outcome for some particular lesson or group of lessons. It pervades every aspect of life at the school and no opportunity is missed for its development. This is achieved by means of a very deliberately cultivated ethos that pervades every place and every moment at the school. Almost every part of the day is used as an opportunity to develop good habits, and by living cheek-by-jowl with the pupils and rarely, if ever, leaving them, the teacher obtains unique insight into their spiritual states. Indeed, no time is free from supervision and no opportunity for instruction passed up. At mealtimes, for example, “[w]e exhort them to eat indifferently, to start with the foods they like least—this fosters a penitential spirit” (Pascal: 81). Even when a child is sick it is the teacher’s role “to help them offer their suffering to God” (Pascal: 118). The development of habits of penitence, humility and “mortification” persists throughout the entire waking day.

This pervasive approach to formative pedagogy is most obvious in relation to the central use of confession in the school routine, which in this case amounts to an all-pervasive regime of reflection. It begins immediately after morning prayers, when students:

have a short time [...] to consider before God what they have to do throughout the day. They may also consider the principal faults they have committed the preceding day, in order to ask God for the grace to foresee and to avoid the occasions for sin that make them fall. (Pascal: 74)

Jansen emphasized a rigorous doctrine of confession that required not only the performance of satisfaction but that the celebrant genuinely hate their sins and love God; when successful, it should effect a discernible change in behaviour. To make a good confession, then, self-awareness is indispensable, and the analytical introspection required to be able to enumerate all of one’s faults is inculcated in various ways during the day. Therefore, “when someone commits some fault, we correct her in front of everyone. We use this occasion to represent to them the horror of vice and the beauty of virtue” (Pascal: 76). This introspection is not about gaining knowledge, however. It is, like everything else here, intended to be formative and to develop the confessional habit. Pedagogically, this is achieved in a number of ways; one of the most striking is when, “we have them [...] ask God’s pardon for some fault we believe they haven’t noticed but that was committed in front of everyone. This slowly accustoms them to

³³ See Remsberg, *Op. cit.*, 87 *et passim*.

make a good examination of conscience" (Pascal: 80).

The most content-oriented of the lessons, which is based on fostering an understanding of the gospel, begins with another public self-accusation, "Whoever is moved to say one of her faults aloud does it, but we force no one to do so. On the contrary, we let them see that this is made possible by grace but that it is not commanded. Nonetheless, they have the habit of doing so gladly" (Pascal: 84). When the student who thus admits a fault is admonished for it by the teacher, they must "truly experience some humiliation and shame" (Pascal: 84), and "give some penance for each major fault they accuse themselves of" (Pascal: 85) so as to avoid insincere or mischievous confessions. This is not a sacrament of penance (the teacher is not a priest) but is something like a simulation of it designed to improve the students' performance by forming in them the necessary habit.

Throughout the section on confession it is "we", the teachers, who drive the process: the teachers determine whether confession is bearing fruit in changed behaviour (something particularly emphasized by Jansenists) and who recommend "practices that mortify them and that are clearly opposed to their faults" (Pascal: 110). In carrying out this duty they insist, through the pervasiveness and repetition of the confessional mode, that the pupils exhibit a certain transparency before them. As Conley suggests, "[t]he nun-teacher, not only the priest-confessor, will strive to have a complete picture of the moral character of the pupil."³⁴

Here Foucault's frequent discussions of the Christian confession are clearly relevant but must be handled with care. He represents the development of confession from a special sacrament into a general-purpose, secularized technology as an emergent project of self-knowledge and "the production of truth"³⁵ achieved through the rational disposition of character traits and desires,³⁶ "Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse."³⁷

The word "desire" is important here, since for Foucault it is sexual sin that is the central concern of Christian confession, since sex is so often hidden. As the institutional power of the church wanes in the eighteenth century, on his account, control over sex remained important and so the confessional technique, far from becoming obsolete like other sacraments, was reproduced in a wide variety of other social contexts: medicine, education, the treatment of criminals, psychology, and so on. In all cases Foucault sees sexuality being transformed from a hidden desire into an object of knowledge.

³⁴ Editor's introduction to Pascal, *op. cit.*, 70.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 58; 65-67.

³⁶ See John D. Caputo, "On Not Knowing Who We Are: Madness, Hermeneutics and the Night of Truth in Foucault", in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* Bernauer, ed. J. W. and Carrette, J. R. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) and Jeremy R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³⁷ Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Pascal, however, significantly predates these Enlightenment developments and it is hard to see her institutional context as in any way post-Christian or proto-secular. The danger, then, is that genealogy becomes teleological and, against Foucault's own counter-Hegelian methodology, claims that what comes after explains what came before.³⁸ However convincing, Foucault's account of the contribution of confessional methods to the scientific and instrumental practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries does not license us to read these practices back into the earlier period: that would go strongly against his own approach. In secular, post-Enlightenment contexts the accumulation of knowledge is presented as (and taken to be) a key goal because this allows for power to be configured in clandestine ways; that goes for the development of self-knowledge as for any other kind. In Pascal's practice, however, the goal of self-knowledge would be entirely out of place, representing a source of pride and hence a failure of proper mortification. The explicit purpose of confession is not to *know* but to *do differently*.

The same emphasis can be observed in another sacrament in which power is played out within the *Rule*, which is to say communion. The Jansenists placed enormous importance on this sacrament and took it rarely, expecting each time to be a transformative event, "We try to make them understand that a single communion must bring about some change in their heart and that this change should be obvious even in their external conduct" (Pascal: 111). For those children who are not making progress in their formative education, the withholding of communion is therefore perfectly legitimate. A student deprived of communion is expected to place herself "in a prolonged state of mourning to ask God for the grace to recover what she has lost" (Pascal: 113). Once again, the formative effect of the action provides the sole justification for it.

Hexis and Schön's Reflective Practice

Although somewhat anachronistic, it does not seem to be too much to claim that power at Port Royal is deployed somewhat in the manner of Bentham's Panopticon and with similar, formative goals in view. It will hardly be necessary to labour here the relevance of Foucault's analysis of discipline.³⁹ Yet the roots of Pascal's *Rule* in the medieval cloister fully account for the "timetable" that comprises its first half despite its modern appearance. Furthermore, while its focus is on the training of the individual this again, as we have seen above, derives from the

³⁸ This charge is also leveled against Foucault, and urged more strongly, by Richard Rorty in "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres", in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* ed. J. B. Schneewind et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Lawlor makes an interesting observation on the Kantian and explicitly teleological origins of Foucault's method, although as he points out it is important to contrast a view that the past produces the present with a psychoanalytic one in which the present is transformed by a more active engagement with the past. See Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2003), 26.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 170 *et passim*.

Christian soteriological tradition rather than any emerging humanist or capitalist individualism. Foucault himself emphasized the difference between “Christian-pastoral” governance and the critical, negative approach to governance he believes is typical of the Enlightenment.⁴⁰ On this analysis, the *Rule* would appear as a reactionary response to seventeenth-century anxieties about governance that attempts to construct a nostalgic, medieval utopia. Yet it would be premature to suggest that the Augustinian tradition that I have been emphasizing has today been fully subsumed by more recognizable modern and secular forms of discipline. On the contrary, it may very well be that the long Christian tradition that founds Pascal’s practice continues to found modern formative pedagogies, perhaps even to a greater extent than ideas of the acquisition of knowledge derived, allegedly, from the *philosophes*. Consider the section of the *Rule* headed “Class Instruction” (Pascal: 84-5), which contains a brief but interesting example of reflective writing in which the teacher considers her successes and confesses her shortcomings to the reader. This is strongly reminiscent of the practice of journal-keeping and other “reflective” methods into which we initiate trainee teachers today. There are differences: after three and a half centuries it would be bizarre were there not. Yet the similarities are striking, too.

Today there are countless books in print on the subject of reflective practice in a variety of professions, and the notion is widespread in both initial training and principles of continuing professional development.⁴¹ The proximate cause of this vogue was Schön’s much-cited 1981 book *The Reflective Practitioner*.⁴² The book begins by describing a crisis of knowledge resulting from the failure of the American military project in Vietnam. Schön argues that this event cannot be blamed on the lack of technical knowledge but must be faced as a failure of “professional effectiveness in a larger sense” (Schön: 13). No amount of additional information during training would have fixed the problem, he believes, since it lies at an altogether different level. Nor can it be a matter of developing specific practices, for the pace of change will eventually render whichever practices were learned during training obsolete (Schön: 15). Both abstract theoretical knowledge and devised schemes of “best practice” are counted by Schön as “higher learning,” which is handed down from academia and must be absorbed by practitioners (Schön: 37), a model that Schön believes has proved inadequate. What must be developed instead is “knowledge-in-action”:

Common sense admits the category of know-how, and it does not stretch common sense very much to say that the know-how is *in* the action – that a tight-rope walker’s know-how, for example, lies in, and is revealed by, the way he takes his trip across the wire [...]. There is nothing in common sense to make us say that

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “What Is Critique?”, in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteen Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, ed. J. Schmidt (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Surveys may be found in the essays in Part III of Nona Lyons ed. *Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Enquiry* (New York: Springer, 2010).

⁴² Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1981). Cited hereinafter as “Schön.”

know-how consists in rules or plans which we entertain in the mind prior to action. [...] [I]n much of the spontaneous behaviour of a skilful practice we reveal a kind of knowing which does not stem from a prior intellectual operation. (Schön: 50-51)

This spontaneity might suggest that Schön, who studied at the Sorbonne with Sartre,⁴³ will take an existential approach; indeed, one finds occasional explicit references to that tradition in his work.⁴⁴ Reaching for a philosophical reference to support this sentiment, however, Schön offers not Sartre but Gilbert Ryle, whose classic essay on “knowing-how” addresses the question of *hexis* in Aristotle head-on:

Aristotle was talking about how people learn to behave wisely, not how they are drilled into acting mechanically. [...] When the recruit reaches the stage of learning to shoot and read maps he is not drilled, but taught. He is taught to perform in the right way, i.e., to shoot and use maps with “his head.” [...] [H]e becomes a judge of his own performance – he learns what mistakes are and how to avoid or correct them. [...] He acquires not a habit but a skill.⁴⁵

Here Ryle is giving every bit as tendentious an interpretation of Aristotle as Heidegger’s is of Plato; the challenge is to hear both the dissonances *and* the consonances between Pascal and Ryle, Pascal and Schön and Schön and Ryle. Obviously a major difference between Pascal and the others is that her pedagogy has the explicit aim of salvation, whereas Ryle and Schön are writing from a secular and instrumentalist perspective. For Pascal, intellectual engagement is usually an obstacle to formative education; for Ryle it is quite the opposite. This in turn distances Ryle from Schön, for what Ryle describes is much closer to what Schön calls “technical rationality” than “knowing-in-action.” Yet all three writers are brought together around three linked motifs: the centrality of reflection, the role of the instructor as one who forms and facilitates the operation of the reflective faculty, and the teleological orientation of formative pedagogy towards excellence.

Ryle’s ideal is that the student “learns how to teach himself and so to better his instructions,”⁴⁶ and Schön’s examples are all about the development of knowledge-in-action as a process of improvement. This is, in fact, part of a tradition⁴⁷ that can be traced back through Dewey’s call

⁴³ See Camilla Stivers, Mary R. Schmidt, “You Know More Than You Can Say: In Memory of Donald A Schön”, in *Public Administration Review*, 60:3 (2002).

⁴⁴ See Bairbre Redmond, *Reflection in Action: Developing Reflective Practice in Health and Social Services* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 7.

⁴⁵ Gilbert Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 46 (1946): 14.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, 15.

⁴⁷ The connections with Rousseau and Dewey can only be mentioned in passing here; the author is grateful to Andrew McGettigan and participants in the Different Class group for alerting him to them. On Dewey’s explicit debt to Rousseau see Patrick Riley and Jennifer Welchman, “Rousseau, Dewey

for an integration of the supposedly separate “academic” and “vocational” forms of education, on the grounds that practical skill contains a sort of knowledge and authentic knowledge is a sort of skill; the point is to allow the two to reflect on one another and provide the child with “the instruments of effective self-direction,” leading to nothing less than “a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious” – a social excellence that flows from that of its members.⁴⁸ The genealogy goes back at least to Rousseau, whom Dewey often quotes approvingly, citing *Emile* as the founding text of a formative education that “is not something to be forced upon children and youth from without, but is the growth of capacities with which human beings are endowed at birth.”⁴⁹ Pascal’s writing shows that pedagogy as the formation of individual excellence predates Rousseau, and the Enlightenment, although of course what counts as excellence and the nature of its source have undergone modulations in the transition through Rousseau to Dewey, Schön and contemporary exponents of reflection in formative education. All of these writers assume that a definition of excellence is fixed and known in advance, and that no amount of intellectual or practical learning alone can achieve it; only reflection, often through mechanisms clearly similar to Pascal’s use of confession, is effective in forming the subject. For all their significant differences, the Aristotelian account of *hexis*, filtered through Augustinian Christianity, remains a thread that ties them together.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Pascal’s pedagogy was above all formative rather than aiming at the progressive cultivation of a store of knowledge or practical skill in the students. The specific nature of this formativity, its purpose and the pedagogic methods it implied are entirely consonant with Jansenism in particular and, indeed, with mainstream Augustinian Christianity in general. It is my view that the latter tradition has left a deep, perhaps indelible impression on Western European ideas, such that it would not be surprising if we were to find it informing educational practices and institutional structures even today, long after the Enlightenment and the waves of secularization that allegedly followed it. I have suggested, with reference to Schön, that this impression can still be found, albeit much transformed, in work that continues to inform mainstream ideas about educational practice in the West and that is far removed in terminology and apparent intent from the practice of girls’ education at Port Royal. Perhaps it is true that “[t]he obligation to confess [...] is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive

and Democracy”, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. R. Durren (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) and James Arthur, Liam Geardon and Alan Sears, *Education, Politics and Religion: Reconciling the Civil and the Sacred in Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 74.

⁴⁸ John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 28. The description of a programme of study centred on the making of cloth (17-20) is especially illustrative of this ambition for a pedagogy that allows the practical and theoretical to reflectively illuminate one another and produce, as a kind of synthesis, personal and social excellence. While the development of technical knowledge and skill are important for Dewey, clearly this formative outcome is, too.

⁴⁹ John Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1915), 1-2.

it as the effect of a power that constrains us,"⁵⁰ making such pedagogies appear natural, even inevitable. To provide a genealogy of an educational idea is to open a space for the adoption of a critical stance towards it, for it suggests that the idea is a product of contingent socio-cultural forces. The great claim of Schönian pedagogy is its instrumental rationality, its claim to present a quasi-scientific, empirical approach that objectifies the learning process by externalizing it. Placing it in the tradition of Pascal suggests that there is another side to the contemporary dominance of reflection and formative learning that may run historically deeper and that ought to be taken into account by future assessments of it.

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⁵⁰ Richard Edwards, "Actively Seeking Subjects?" in *Foucault and Lifelong Learning: Governing the Subject*, ed. A. Fejes, K. Nicoll (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 31.