ON FIRST LOOKING INTO FOUCAULT'S 'HISTORY'

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Introduction

In 1998, a note promoting the forthcoming Colloquium on *VOpacité Sexuelle* in the *Ecole Lacanienne de Paris* announced, almost as if it were now a received truth, that Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* had 'cut the ground from under the feet of psychoanalysts'. Up to this I had held the rather complacent view that while Foucault was of course one of the more important contemporary thinkers he was not of central relevance to psychoanalysis. Even a yearlong staff seminar on *The Birth of the Clinic* had done little to modify this view.

But this startling and indeed sobering remark coming from such a prestigious source is certainly worthy of investigation and assessment! I am not aware that anybody has in fact taken it up either in the Colloquium or elsewhere and this article by a non-specialist is far from being the complete response that it deserves. I have simply tried to look carefully at the three-volume work in question, to see whether in fact it undermines my own position as a Lacanian psychoanalyst. I have also tried to provide enough introductory material to encourage colleagues to read this remarkable work, which so far seems to have been relatively neglected by English-speaking analysts.

Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan

Michel Foucault's detailed knowledge of psychoanalysis, especially in its Lacanian incarnation, is beyond question. From his twenties he was reportedly 'haunted' by the question of whether he should go into analysis

and his biographer goes as far as to say that 'his entire archaeological enterprise in the work that made him famous was really based on Lacan'.[1]

Readers of Lacan's seminars will recall a brief exchange between them on the 18th May 1966 when Foucault had come to listen, drawn no doubt by Lacan's challenge to his commentary on *Las Meninas* and by the praise that had earlier been lavished on *The Birth of the Clinic.* Lacan had encouraged his audience to go out and buy what he considered a work of fundamental importance and they had in fact boosted the miserable sales it had enjoyed up until then. Later in the sixties Lacan proclaimed how happy he was to be put in the same structuralist basket as Althusser, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault and spoke of the great esteem in which he held their work. Although he could be critical of what he saw as Foucault's out-of-date humanism, he made a point of mentioning his attendance at the famous lecture on ^*What is an Author?** and generally encouraged his pupils to raise the critical level of their psychoanalytic discourse by measuring it against his work.

We have no information on how Lacan received the publication of the first volume of the *History* in 1976 and by the time the final two volumes were published in 1984 he had departed the scene.

This much about their relationship can be gleaned directly from the seminars. But we learn from his biographer that his knowledge of Lacan's work went back to the early fifties when he had investigated the 'mirror stage' as it was presented in *The Family.* He not only read and quoted him but also according to an informant 'went every week to hear the psychiatrist who was then not yet famous'.[2] In so doing he was following the example of his revered teacher Jean Hippolyte who had taught him as he prepared for the entrance examination to the Ecole Normale Supérieur and for whom Foucault retained a life-long affection and admiration. Hippolyte had made his name as the translator of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and had played a major role in introducing Hegel to French intellectual life. Lacanians know him from his participation in the 1953/54

[1] D. Eribon. *Michel Foucault.* Trans. B. Wing. London, Faber & Faber, 1991. p. 272.
[2] ibid, p. 71.

seminar on *Freud's Papers on Technique* and his commentary on Freud's article on '*Negation*'. Lacan thought so highly of this that it was included as Appendix I when the *Ecrits* were published in 1966.

When Foucault returned to Paris after his 1955-60 'exile' as cultural attaché in various French embassies, psychoanalysis was prominent in his teaching. He was very attached to Freud and recommended his students to read Lacan's articles as they appeared in *La Psychanalyse.* After the publication of *The Birth of the Clinic,* whose importance Lacan was one of the first to recognise, he often dined with the Lacans. Sylvie Lacan recalls a phrase of his from one of those evenings: 'There will be no civilisation as long as marriage between men is not accepted'.[3]

The History of Sexuality - a history

An account of Foucault's changing views on sexuality throughout his career is beyond the scope of this article. The remark at the Lacans suggests a desire to take on the most fundamental prohibitions of our Western societies and to sweep them aside in order to reach a truly civilised way of living. However when the first volume of the *History* appeared he seems to have radically changed his perspective and this was to result in misunderstandings and criticisms that continue to this day.

Foucault had a lot of trouble acknowledging and accepting his homosexuality especially in his early years. It was its condemnation by the Communists as a sign of bourgeois decadence that forced him to leave the Party in 1953, so he saw the project of writing *The History of Sexuality* as involving him at the most personal level:

> As for what motivated me, it is quite simple ... it was curiosity ... Not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself ... It was a philosophical exercise. The object

[3] **ibid, p. 154.**

> was to learn to what extent the effort to learn to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks and so enable it to think differently.[4]

Not surprisingly the interfacing of such personal and academic concerns caused difficulties that resulted in several different versions of how the work was to be undertaken and lengthy delays in its completion. It turned out, in fact, to be Foucault's last will and testament and was his principal preoccupation during the last ten years of his life. He was still correcting the proofs of the final two volumes in the early months of 1984, unaware, say some friends, that the nasty flu-like symptoms he complained of were in fact the terminal stages of the AIDS from which he would die on June 25 at the age of 58.

The *History* as we have it today is in three parts: *The Will to Know, The Uses of Pleasure, The Care of the Self* but initially something different and much more extensive was planned. Of the original layout published in 1976 only the first volume remains:

1 *The will to know*	4 *Woman, mother and hysteric*
2 *The flesh and the body*	5 *The perverts*
3 *The children*s crusade*	6 *Population and race*

These six volumes were to be crowned by a further work entitled *The Power of Truth.*

M. Foucault. *The History of Sexuality,* (1: *The Will to Know;* 2: *The Uses of Pleasure;* 3: *The Care of the Self).* Trans. R. Hurley. London, Penguin, 1976 & 1984. (2 7/8). In some instances I have modified Hurley's translation, for example, *dispositif is* changed from deployment' to 'construct' and *interdit* from 'taboo' to 'prohibition'.

Modifications

Following on the reaction to the publication of the first, introductory, volume Foucault changed his plans realising that he had to ground his disputed assertions in the literature of the first centuries of Christianity. He accepted the invitation to work in the Dominican house of studies in Paris and it was there he brought to near completion *The Confessions of the Flesh.* At this point he revamped his programme and announced the second and third part that we now have. These would be completed by the work on Christianity:

> *The Confessions of the Flesh,* finally, will treat the experience of the flesh in the early centuries of Christianity and the role played by hermeneutics and the purifying process of deciphering desire.[5]

In fact this concluding work was not published. Towards the end of 1983 he tackled it again, reckoning that he needed a month or two to finish it off. He never did and a dispute still continues about whether the almost completed version should have appeared. In a private letter before his illness he expressed a wish that there be no 'posthumous publication', and his heirs, knowing his insistence on perfection in what he offered the public have respected this wish. Some of those close to him, including Georges Dumezil - father of the analyst - whom Foucault regarded as his director of conscience and his spiritual master, thought that the manuscript was so near completion and represented such an important element of Foucault's overall plan that his wish for non-publication should be disregarded. But those who have held firm were no doubt aware of the fact that it was very hard to know when Foucault had said his last word on a topic, so tormentedly did he re-write his work. Answering critics who had mocked the changes and delays of publication that had characterised his *History* he said:

[5] **Eribon, op.cit, p. 321.**

> As for those for whom to work hard, to begin and begin again, to attempt and be mistaken, to go back and rework everything from top to bottom, and still find reason to hesitate from one step to the next - as to those in short, for whom to work in the midst of uncertainty and apprehension is tantamount to failure, all I can say is that clearly we are not from the same planet.[6]

In the light of this it is hard to be sure what Foucault would have come up with if he had been given the few months he wanted and one can understand the reluctance to publish. On the other hand the lack of the study on Christianity is obviously a near fatal flaw in a work that attempts to understand how the experience of sexuality has been constituted in Western civilisation. The fact that such a study was planned and almost completed goes some way towards mollifying the reaction of disbelief that anyone should try to write a history of the subjective experience of sexuality in the West without a study of the Judaeo-Christian contribution to it.

The Will to Know

To give a quick sense of the style and content of this slim volume I cannot do better than the reviewer in the *Spectator* quoted in the English paperback edition:

> A brilliant display of fireworks, attacking the widespread and banal notion that 'in the beginning[1] sexual activity was guilt-free and delicious, being repressed and blighted only by the gloom of Victorianism.

[6] **M. Foucault, op.cit, 2, 7.**

Foucault's French style is certainly brilliant and fiery and his English translator, Richard Hurley, who worked on all three volumes, has caught some of it. As regards content the book is of course far more nuanced and subtle than this sound bite can convey. I will attempt to sketch out briefly the lines of his argument with a particular emphasis on the points that are of interest to psychocinalysts.

Lacan's name is not mentioned throughout the *History* but for a student of the seminars - especially those of the late sixties - much of this first volume reads like a dialogue with him and constantly returns to his crucial reference points of power, knowledge and sex. This is no accident. Having drawn so much on Lacan in his earlier work, Foucault now sets out on a 'genealogical quest' against him. 'The history of the constructs of sexuality, as it has evolved since the classical age, can serve as an archaeology of psychoanalysis'.[7] This exploration of origins was in part motivated by a break with Lacan who for him was, like the Marxists, still caught within the constructs of knowledge and power.

The Repressive Hypothesis

The best guiding thread though *The Will to Know* is Foucault's trenchant attack on the view that the history of sexuality can be reduced to the history of its repression by Church and State. The title of the first part, 'We Victorians' - not 'We, 'other Victorians" as Hurley confusedly puts it - gives the tone. Twentieth century man and woman are supposedly still struggling in their sexual lives with the effects of wave after wave of sexual repression, which culminated in Victorian puritanism. Only the advent of the new tolerance introduced in the 1960's allowed them to recover some of the natural sexual freedom enjoyed by our mediaeval forbears.

> At the beginning of the seventeenth century, we are told, a certain frankness was still common ... It was a time of direct

[7] **ibid, 1,130.**

> gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves.

But by the nineteenth century silence and inhibition had descended and the conjugal family had taken charge of sexuality:

> The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law ... A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as in the heart of every family, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom.[8]

A sanitising of every form of thought, word and action regarding sex - outside this legitimate locus and to a large extent within it - became the norm, according to this widely held version of historical events. This is the 'repressive hypothesis' that Foucault sets out to disprove starting from historical facts and the contemporary documents that initiated or recorded them. He does not deny that sex has been prohibited, censored, hidden and misunderstood since the seventeenth century. His argument is rather that it is a mistake to see in prohibition the basic and constitutive element that would allow us to write a history of sex in the modern epoch. All the censorships, defenses and denials are simply component parts of the more fundamental mechanisms that have changed our experience of sex over these centuries. These are 'a transformation into discourse, a technology of power, and a will to know'[9] and these cannot be reduced to simple repression.

"ibid, 1,3.
[9] ibid, 1, 13.

The incitement to discourse and sexual science

Over against the assumption that sex was silenced and driven into hiding, Foucault sets out his argument that in fact the modern era saw the beginning of a massive encouragement by educators, doctors and politicians for people to talk about sex in all its forms. Far from being silenced, sex was driven out of hiding and forced to show its face in different public forums as it was subjected to the exercise of educational, medical and political power.

This requirement to speak about sex had been anticipated by the Church in its practice of 'the millennial yoke of Confession'.[10] Foucault had made a serious study of the changing pastoral theology and confessional manuals that had guided confessors in the line of questioning they were to adopt with the faithful who came to ask pardon for their sins. Penitents had above all to speak about their sexual lives and in this way 'a great archive of the pleasures of sex was gradually constituted'.[11] Thus Confession became the first technique for producing the truth about sex and it formed the nucleus of the new technologies of power that began to focus on sex with the birth of modern science.

Central to Foucault's discussion of sex is his analysis of the role of power. The main point seems to be that the nature of power is misconstrued if it is pictured in terms of the monarchical model where the centre of power is at the top of the pyramid and flows down to lower levels of the hierarchy. Nor should power be seen in terms of the enforcement of the law with the power to take life as its ultimate sanction. Especially since the birth of capitalism, political power has become not simply the right to kill but the duty to foster life. 'It was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body'.[12]

[10] **ibid, 1,61.**
[11] **ibid, 1, 63.**
[12] **ibid, 1, 143.**

Teachers, doctors and politicians at the beginning of the modern era did not simply see sex as a stubborn instinctual drive to be driven under ground by the force of law but rather as;

> ... an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population.[13]

The mastery of this 'transfer point' required not so much prohibitive legislation as the development of a technology by which sex could be managed.

The four strategies

To develop this technology the authorities chose four areas in particular about which they required knowledge: women, children, procreation and perversion. Beginning in the eighteenth century, four great strategies formed 'specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centring on sex'.[14] These were:

a) *Hysterising women's bodies:* 'The Mother, with her negative image of 'nervous woman', constituted the most visible form of this hysterisation'.[15]

b) *Educating children's sexuality:* This was especially evident in the 200-year war waged in the West against masturbation by the young.

[13] **ibid, 1, 103.**
[14] **ibid.**
[15] **ibid, 1, 104.**

c) *Socialising procreative behaviour:* Economic and political measures were taken to favour the family and contraceptive practices condemned by doctors as pathological.

d) *Fsychiatrising perverse pleasure:* What was normal and abnormal in the manifestations of the sexual instinct was defined, for example, the emergence of the 'homosexual' as a type in the 1870's.

Four figures were created then who have remained, almost to our own day, the central targets for the investigation of human sexuality: 'the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult.[16]

The production of sexuality

What was fundamentally at stake in these strategies, says Foucault, was neither a struggle against sex, nor an attempt to control it, nor limit its manifestations to the economically useful:

> In actual fact, what was involved rather, was the very production of sexuality. Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct.[17]

For many centuries sexual relations had been governed by the systems of marriage law and breaches of this law were the main focus of Confession in the mediaeval period. Now a new historical construct or system emerged, sexuality, which was concerned with pleasure and the sensations of the body. Even in our own day sexuality has not yet

[16] **ibid, 1, 105,**
[17] **ibid, 1, 106.**

replaced marriage law, but Foucault imagines a day when it will have done so - bringing us back to his provocative statement at the Lacans about what would constitute true civilisation.

In the West...

> the project of a science of the subject has gravitated, in ever narrowing circles around the question of sex ... We demand that sex speaks the truth ... and we demand that it tells us our truth ...[18]

Foucault speaks very highly of the role of psychoanalysis in this scientific project. The three-century long exploration of sex that preceded Freud had always tried to hide what it was really talking about. Only with him was the hypocrisy of the medical discourse on sex exposed as ideological with little or no basis in biological science. Freud placed himself within the scientific endeavour but in many ways his true precursors were the Christian confessors and spiritual directors who required penitents to speak of their sexual lives. The last page of *The Will to Know* is a paean of praise to Freud:

> … how wonderfully effective he was - worthy of the greatest spiritual fathers and directors of the classical period - in giving a new impetus to the secular injunction to study sex and transform it into discourse.[19]

More than anyone else, he taught us to seek our intelligibility and our identity in what for centuries had been excluded from rational discourse and regarded as madness.

[18] **ibid, 1,69/70.**
[19] **ibid, 1, 159.**

Transition

Style

No reader can fail to be struck by the complete change in Foucault's style in volumes two and three. No more fireworks now! Instead we have writing that has been described as calm, dispassionate, almost neutralised. For some, this was the result of fatigue brought on by his illness. But his biographer sees it in a more positive light.

> It is as if approaching death and the foreboding he had of it for several months had led Foucault onto the path of serenity. Seneca, whose works were among his favourite reading would have praised such a model of 'the philosophic life'. [20]

Some English readers breathed a sigh of relief that he - as Lacan never would - had 'abandoned his protracted war against everyday intelligibility and familiar intellectual forms' (Roy Porter). He showed here that he could write conventional history and master an extraordinarily complex body of ancient texts. But despite their clarity and comprehensiveness and the radically new perspectives they often introduce these volumes do not have the dazzling seductive quality of *The Will to Know*. There is also a new reliance on secondary sources, which were almost entirely absent from the earlier work, and Foucault's admission that he was neither a Hellenist nor a Latinist meant he had to rely on the assistance of others, in particular that of his friend Paul Veyne.

Another 'repressive hypothesis'

Foucault summarises his revised project as follows:

Eribon, op.cit, p. 331.

> As [he] went back from the modern era, beyond Christianity all the way to antiquity, he came up against a question that was very simple and, at the same time, very general: why are sexual behaviour and the activities and pleasures derived from it an object of moral preoccupation?[21]

The main point here seems to be that once again a generally accepted viewpoint proves to be false. Despite the almost universally held belief, Christianity did not find in the Graeco-Roman world a sexually uninhibited and untroubled paganism into which it introduced a killjoy morality. This early form of the 'repressive hypothesis' accepts that pre-Christian societies prohibited incest and generally believed in the superiority of men and the subjugation of women. But what Christianity is supposed to have injected into the lives of men, is a view of the sexual act as evil and death-bearing, an insistence on monogamous marriage, an exclusion of sexual relations between men, and a promotion of abstinence or even life-long celibacy.

Foucault's claim is that it is quite inaccurate to attribute these strictures to the coming of Christianity. On the contrary he argues that at the core of Greek and Roman thought there is a fear of sexual activity particularly because of the weakness it is supposed to induce; an ideal of monogamy and mutual fidelity especially in writings of the Stoics; a suspicion of male homosexuality in its passive form; and an exaltation of the ideal of abstinence above all in the Socratic/Platonic tradition.

Ethics by and for men

In this male-centred ethics, written by and for men, the supposedly 'Christian' theme of austerity was already present although this does not prove that it meant the same thing for the pagan world as it later would for the Christian. For the Greeks and Romans there was no question of a centralised authority laying down codes of practice to be followed under

[21] **ibid, p. 320.**

pain of sin and eternal damnation. What was at stake for them was an 'art of existence' or a 'technique of the self' which was to be practised in order to gain mastery over oneself and thus enable a man to be a master in his own household and in the life of the city.

The revised project then is to construct…

> … the genealogy of desiring man, from classical antiquity through the first centuries of Christianity. I have followed a simple chronological arrangement: … *The Use of Pleasure,* is devoted to the manner in which sexual activity was problematised by philosophers and doctors in classical Greek culture of the fourth century BC. *Care of the Self* deals with the same problematisation in the Greek and Latin texts of the first two centuries of our era.[22]

Finally, the unpublished *Confessions of the Flesh* was to have dealt with the formation of the doctrine and pastoral practice of the first centuries of Christianity.

The uses **of** pleasure

Foucault sets out his second volume in five parts, but if the layout is conventional enough the content is anything but. In describing his project he had earlier designated the very simple question that allowed him to approach the subjective position of the ancients: *Why is sexual activity an object of moral concern?* Here, he tries to spell out the ways in which this concern was articulated, with a particular emphasis on the difference between the modern and contemporary approach to sex and the angle from the philosophers and physicians of Greece's golden age tackled it. The novel headings he chooses already upset our assumption that we know all we need to know about Greek sexuality from Lacan's commentary on *The Symposium.* Foucault invokes the categories of

[22] **Foucault, op.cit., 2, 12.**

Dietetics, Economics, Erotics and *True Love* to give us a much broader frame within which we can try to grasp how the subjectification of sex was considered at the beginnings of our Western civilisation.

Setting out the problems

The object of the Greeks' concerns was not 'sexuality' in its modern form, nor the Christian 'flesh' weakened by original sin, but what Foucault feels the need to characterise by a Greek term: *Aphrodisia.* We do not have a concept that covers that notion precisely but perhaps 'sensual pleasures' or the 'the pleasures of love' help us to see what is at stake. A man's relation to these pleasures was not governed by a code of conduct but by the requirement to develop a certain style of living with regard to them.

The principal focus is on the virtue of temperance (a much richer concept than the 'moderation' by which Hurley translates it). This is closely linked to another virtue, self-mastery or self-control, which is how the Greek *Enkrateia* can be best rendered. As far back as Socrates' advice to Alcibiades - advice that did not seem to be too closely followed - philosophers and physicians had advocated a style of sexual behaviour based on a respect for nature and an acknowledgement of the respective roles of man and woman. In addition, there was a time for sexual activity, a proper season, which for example forbade incest between the different generations. One's status in the city, or the status one aspired to, also made its demands, in that public figures were required to exercise temperance to a very high degree and displays of incontinence were strongly criticised, especially in the powerful.

Although usually insisting on the lack of continuity between pagan and Christian thought Foucault does see here the beginnings of the idea of a 'spiritual combat' which had to be waged against pleasure and one's attraction for it. This involved not simply knowledge but 'spiritual exercises' and ascetic practices. There are few details in this period about what these involved in the concrete. But we can identify the beginning of a tradition that would flower in the first centuries of our era and is hard to

distinguish from the training undertaken in religious orders and lay congregations up to our own day.

The goal of this temperance and asceticism is freedom from the tyranny of the passions and a self-mastery that allows one to also be master of one's own household and of the area of public life to which one was called. Temperance was also a necessary condition for the search for truth. Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic* already highlighted the need for a well-ordered approach to sexual pleasures as a contribution to a certain aesthetics of existence and further prescriptive texts will continue to develop these requirements in the succeeding centuries. But what we have seen thus far is enough to allow Foucault to affirm that…

> … some of the great themes of sexual austerity - themes that would have a historical destiny well beyond Greek culture - were formed and elaborated in the thought of the fourth century.[23]

Dietetics

The reflections on *Dietetics* can be taken as a footnote to the discussion on temperance. In the view of ancient medicine, the use of sexual pleasure, like eating and exercise, was part of a regimen directed at ensuring a healthy mind and body. Here, it is the risks and dangers that sexual activity brings to health that are to the fore. Sperm comes from the marrow of the bone or from the foam of agitated blood and therefore sex should be as infrequent as possible in order to conserve this vital substance. A kind of corollary of this is that during intercourse the mind should not wander into phantasy but should remain firmly fixed on the goal of procreation. Otherwise the resulting progeny run the risk of being weak in mind or body. Finally, death reminds us that while eternity is not for the individual, sexual activity can ensure it for the species, a theme echoed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* But while the exchange of

[23] **ibid, 2, 93.**

our sexual substance guarantees this physical eternity there is also the choice for the wise man to perpetuate himself not in his physical offspring but in the spiritual children who are his students and disciples.

In the light of these considerations it is clear that in-ancient times sex was already a privileged domain for the ethical formation of the subject.

Wives in the economy of the household

> Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.[24]

This pragmatic aphorism, attributed to Demosthenes, is quoted by Foucault to show that it is not obvious why sexual relations between husband and wife should have been a moral problem in Greek thought. After all, he was the master. But problematic they were and would continue to be more and more so until an eventual ideal of monogamy and reciprocal fidelity was established - independently of the influence of Christian teaching. In the fourth century BC the wife was seen as completely subject to the husband. The husband had sexual liberty both outside the house, and inside with his slaves, and the only adultery that could be contemplated was that of the wife. But it slowly came to be appreciated that the most elegant way to exercise mastery over one's own sexual tendencies and one's wife was in fact to have sexual relations only with her.

Foucault brings forward a number of contemporary texts that describe married life as the Greeks saw it. The first is a quaint treatise by Xenephon describing the central place the wife should have in the home once she had been trained by her husband in the: management of the household economy. Isomachus, the hero of Xenephon's fable, has his place outside the home where of course he can take his pleasures as he

[24] **ibid, 2, 143.**

wishes. But his wife has his life-long respect as his representative in the house and her privileged place at the centre of home affairs is guaranteed. When she tries to interest him sexually by putting on make-up she is firmly told that 'a wife's real beauty is sufficiently guaranteed by her household occupations provided she goes about them in the right way'[25] and that painting the face and other forms of deception are best left to mistresses and prostitutes!

Other texts by Plato, Isocrates and Aristotle further develop the husband/wife relation within the economy of the household, with a constant stress on the need for temperance, and a dawning realisation that some reciprocity in sexual matters is called for. This will eventually culminate among the late Stoics in a call for the renunciation of all extramarital sex which, Foucault once more hastens to assure us, should not be seen as an anticipation of Christian ethics.

The austere erotics of pederasty

We have referred earlier to the trouble Foucault reportedly had in accepting his own homosexuality and to his conception of this *History* as an attempt to get free of himself. When he now finally comes to tackle what is always taken to be the most central aspect of Greek erotic life, he begins by accentuating how anxiety-provoking it was, even then:

> The uses of pleasure in the relationship with boys was a theme of anxiety for Greek thought - which is paradoxical in a society that is believed to have 'tolerated' what we call 'homosexuality'. But perhaps it would be just as well if we avoided those two terms here.[26]

Sexual desire for someone of the same sex was not a problem for the Greeks since they valorised the desire itself rather than its object - a

ibid, 2, 162.
ibid, 2, 187.

difference from our contemporary viewpoint that was noted by Freud in the *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And far from being indiscriminately tolerated, the love of boys was subject to very strict rules. Why do we speak here about the love of boys, rather than homosexuality? Because this was the aspect of sexual relations between males that most interested philosophers and moralists. Relations between two grown men was apt to be a subject of irony since passivity in an adult man was always disliked, and relations between schoolboys of the same age was of little interest. The problematic relationship was the one that developed ...

> … between two men … who were considered as belonging to two distinct age groups and one of whom was still quite young, had not finished his education, and had not attained his definitive status.[27]

This kind of relationship was often understood and justified on pedagogical grounds with Socrates' leading of young men to wisdom as the original model. However, even here sex played a major role and the categories of lover and beloved - the *erastes* and the *eromenon* so well explored by Lacan in his commentary on the *Symposium* - were central ones in philosophical and moral education.

What made it peculiarly problematic was the place that the boy was destined to occupy in the future government of the city. A young man had to tread a very fine line. On the one hand he was not meant to reject the love of older men particularly if they were wise or powerful. On the other hand he had to protect his honour and above all not be perceived to have a passive sexual role since this would be seen as undermining his future capacity to lead. Therefore he was advised to reject any sexual practices that would be humiliating for him with sodomy and passive fellatio the subject of special misgivings. Foucault concludes:

[27] **ibid, 2, 193/4.**

> … what is important to grasp here is not why the Greeks had a fondness for boys but why they had a 'pederasty'; that is why they elaborated a courtship practice, a moral reflection and … a philosophical asceticism, around that fondness.[28]

Friendship

In some cases this love between the older and younger man can evolve from sexual desire into friendship. In this way an essentially precarious and fleeting relationship would develop into 'an affinity of character and mode of life, a sharing of thoughts and existence, mutual benevolence'.[29] One of the factors that caused this love of boys to be rated so highly on the scale of human relationships was that it necessarily involved *eros* and in this way it surpassed the marital relationship. Matrimonial morality might sometimes include *eros* but its basis was elsewhere, principally in the production of legitimate children, as the aphorism of Demosthenes illustrates.

However, in the course of the centuries-long evolution that was now to take place the focus of moral preoccupation will shift from the love of boys and slowly begin to centre on that for women. This will mean in particular according a greater value to virginity and to married life and will end up by seeing sexual desire as principally an affair between men and women.

The care of the **self**

Artemidorus ofDaldis

The third volume of the *History of Sexuality* begins with the analysis of a book that Foucault himself describes as 'singular' and whose inclusion

ibid, 2,214.
ibid, 2,201.

is a pleasant surprise for the psychoanalyst. This is the second century AD work by Artemidorus of Daldis which Freud refers to as the *Oneirocritica,* Foucault as *La clefdes songes,* and Hurley, more questionably, as *The Interpretation of Dreams.*

It is a practical handbook written by the greatest authority on dreams in antiquity in order to encourage people to take their dreams seriously as messages from the gods and give them practical advice on how to interpret them. It does not really fit into the tradition of moral and philosophical reflection he has been considering up to this, but Foucault's interest in dreams goes back at least as far as his 1952 collaboration on the translation of Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* and the well known preface he contributed to it. Besides this is the only work we have come across that actually describes the different forms of sexual activity even though these are only dreamt about.

There are four chapters on sexual dreams - chapters which, Freud notes, were omitted by the translator. They detail types of sexual acts dreamt of, the variety of their objects, and how they are to be interpreted in terms of one's practical affairs. Foucault's discussion of this is interesting but it seems to me to be a distraction from the line of argument he has been pursuing and we will not consider it further at this point. Suffice it to say that it stands as a monument to a way of thinking about sex that dates back to general principles already formulated in the fourth century BC. It thus allows us to measure the novelty of the thinking that was to emerge in the Roman world more or less contemporaneously with its publication.

The new man of200 AD

For Foucault the four centuries between 200 BC and 200 AD witnessed a radical change in human sexual subjectivity particularly in relation to the nature of the marriage bond. His discussion of this, it seems to me, is what is most valuable in volume three.

True, he devotes a great deal of time to philosophers like Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius who brought the teaching on the ideal of self-mastery and austerity in sexual matters to new heights and anticipated much of the severity that would characterise later Christian doctrine. He also devotes many pages to the way in which Galen refined what he had earlier called the 'dietetics' of sexual behaviour. All of this may amount to a new style of 'caring for oneself' in the light of changing political and social circumstances but in many ways it is simply a development of basic principles established centuries earlier and gives an impression of repetitiousness.

So our focus here will be on the new role assumed in this era by 'the wife' and the consequent modifications of subjective position that it entailed for the husband. The most fundamental change seems to lie in the emergence of the notion of the couple. From being a master in his own house, along the lines outlined in volume two, the husband becomes a 'conjugal being' and a text by Pliny brings to light the new kind of intense affective life he is now beginning to experience. His wife is no longer simply the trustworthy manager of the household and the bearer of legitimate heirs but a companion with whom he has a personal relationship that involves a greater sharing of life and a heightened valorisation of the sexual aspect of their relationship. This led for the first time to the notion that the wife too had a right to fidelity from her husband, and that the concept of adultery could be extended to cover his behaviour. Seneca is only one of those for whom to have sex outside marriage - even with a slave or a mistress - is an insult to the wife. Thus we see emerging a strict ethics of marriage based on two principles:

> First, given its nature, sexual pleasure cannot be allowed outside marriage, which implies practically that it should not even be tolerated in an unmarried individual. Second, the marriage bond is such that the wife risks being hurt not just by the loss of her status, but also by the fact that her

husband might take his pleasure with someone other than her.[30]

But even within marriage the pleasures of sex must be measured. One must not approach one's wife like an ardent lover for this is to treat her like a mistress. Nor should one make pleasure the goal of an act that nature has designed for procreation, and at the very least the sexual act should always be open to procreation.

In summary, this pre-Christian doctrine that is now emerging sounds like an uncanny anticipation not simply of the Christian position in general but of the natural law arguments against contraception that finally won the day within the Catholic Church with the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

But if pleasure should not be the principal goal, it is far from being excluded in the interplay of affective expression between husband and wife. And it is the heightening of the place of sexual pleasure within the couple that finally leads to a renewed debate on the role to be granted in the present circumstances to the centuries-old practice of the love of boys.

Boys or girls?

Sexual desire for boys had a place in the first century of our era but it was directed towards young slaves rather than towards the freeborn boys of great beauty and promise who were its objects in the classical period. It was no longer the major problem it once was for moralists and philosophers but Foucault does isolate some contemporary texts that take on a special value because they illustrate the way in which the love of women is beginning to take over.

Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* illustrates how relations with women had now taken on the same ethical importance as that previously enjoyed by those with boys. The notion that the love of women is more animal-like in that its principal goal is procreation is rejected on the basis of a

[30] **ibid, 3, 167.**

unified erotics based on grace *(charis).* Pederasts may claim that their love aims more directly at the boy's soul - an assertion rather dented by the fact that their object is not wise old men, and by the constant fascination in the literature with the beloved's thighs - but virtue and friendship can also be found with women. In fact love for a boy is imperfect if it is compared to that between husband and wife. It is graceless, in the sense that boys cannot like being sodomised, unless they are naturally soft and ferrunine, and will therefore carry a certain resentment towards their older partners. The woman on the other hand can learn to willingly and gracefully *{charis* again) grant her consent to sexual relations with her husband. Sexual pleasure is in fact at the heart of a marriage and strengthens the respect, kindness and loyalty the couple have for one another. We are thus finally led to the formation of a new erotics and to a radical demotion of the whole structure of pederasty.

The issue of boy versus woman flares up again in the debate between a pederast and a Stoic on *Affairs of the Heart,* attributed to Pseudo-Lucian. The old arguments are rehashed as to which love is superior. Although the Stoic asserts that a woman can offer everything a boy can, and a bit more, victory is with the boys in this contest, mainly because their simplicity and truth is portrayed as being in happy contrast to the guile and deceptions of women.

But the man-woman erotic conquers. And we soon see the emergence of a different type of text, the romantic novel, which promotes what would later develop into courtly love with a special valorisation of the virginity that might be required in order to be worthy of one's beloved.

Conclusion

My main purpose has been to carry out an initial investigation of the claim that *The History of Sexuality* has cut the feet from under psychoanalysts. At the end of this long survey of an often brilliant, sometimes repetitive work what can a psychoanalyst say of this proposition?

First, it has to be said that Foucault demonstrates with great clarity the limits of the view of the history of sexuality as dominated by 'repressive hypotheses'. Our problems with sex are not due to the condemnations of a Christianity that saw it as hopelessly disordered by the effects of Original Sin. Nor do they result from the ruthlessness of a scientific capitalism that restricts sexuality to the legitimate couple charged with the production of future workers and consumers. In broad terms this does undermine a certain type of psychoanalysis that sees its principal goal as dismantling the defences against sex that the educative effects of church or state had caused to be erected, in the name of a new enlightened sexual ethics.

Secondly - an associated point - this does not mean that sex is a natural given which 'of itself is inherently unmanageable. For Foucault it is always the product of discourse and different historical discourses have produced different versions of what we now call 'sexuality'. This might subvert a style of analysis that sees the id as the seat of natural instincts of sex and aggression that must be brought under control though the operation of a reasonable ego.

But Foucault must have well known that, in Freud and Lacan at any rate, these simplistic views of analysis had long been rejected. With Lacan in particular, the notion of the primacy of the signifier in the fifties, and of the effects of discourse in the sixties, seem to have largely anticipated Foucault's criticisms of this naturalistic psychoanalysis.

But is this his main contribution to our contemporary subjective position with regard to sexuality and the place of psychoanalysis as one of the most important formative influences on it? I must confess in concluding that I feel I may be missing something and that this something has to do with Foucault's claim that Lacan is still caught up in the constructs of knowledge and power. My sense is that there is room for a debate on the relevance of the notions of knowledge and power, which he exploited so brilliantly throughout his meteoric career, to psychoanalytic theory and practice. They would surely contribute something to the

knowledge, power and sex questions that Lacan explores in his later work, but as for cutting the feet from under him …

It was towards the end of the first volume that the lines of John Keat's '*On first looking into Chapman's Homer** came to mind: -

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise -
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

For me the next two volumes were a disappointment. Both the new planet and vast expanse of ocean turned out to be mirages. But this may be me. And I would look forward to a confrontation between this work and that of Lacan by analysts whose appreciation of Foucault's achievement is more developed than mine.

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