

# VANITY FAIR



NOVEMBER 1983

\$3.00

**FRANCINE  
DU PLESSIX GRAY:  
KLAUS BARBIE,  
THE FRENCH,  
AND THE JEWS**

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS:  
THE BARON  
FLIES AGAIN**

**MICHEL FOUCAULT:  
SEX AND ETHICS**

**PLUS...  
CARMEN ACCORDING  
TO PETER BROOK,  
FRANK STELLA BY STAR-LIGHT,  
HELMUT NEWTON'S VIEWS  
OF UNMADE BEDS,  
AND THE QUALITY OF  
MERCY ON THE RIVIERA**



**ARCHAEOLOGIST OF THE MIND**  
Michel Foucault in Paris. The poststructuralist philosopher and critic continues to teach us how to think about our civilization. Now, at the age of fifty-seven, he turns his brilliant gaze on classical Greek culture, exploring the "aesthetics of existence."

# HOW WE BEHAVE

Michel Foucault

NO SERIOUS THINKER CAN AFFORD TO IGNORE MICHEL FOUCAULT. HE IS A FORMIDABLE INTELLIGENCE. HE IS ALSO POP, "DIFFICULT," AND CONTROVERSIAL. NOT SINCE ARISTOTLE HAS A MAN BEEN SO OBSESSED WITH CATEGORIES—AS HE WORKS TOWARD A CHALLENGING, IDIOSYNCRATIC SYNTHESIS OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL HISTORY IN HIS BOOKS DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH, MADNESS AND CIVILIZATION, AND THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY. AS FOUCAULT EXPLAINS TO INTERVIEWERS PAUL RABINOW AND HUBERT L. DREYFUS IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, HIS NEW PROJECT IS TO DRAW "A GENEALOGY OF ETHICS." BEGINNING WITH CLASSICAL GREEK CULTURE, THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN PERIOD AND INTO THE PRESENT DAY, HE LOOKS AT CHANGE IN, AMONG OTHER THINGS, FOOD, SEX, AND WRITING. IT IS A CLICHÉ TO CALL THIS MAN BRILLIANT. HE ALSO, UNEXPECTEDLY, EMERGES HERE AS SOMETHING ELSE—A CHARMING, ACCESSIBLE, CONTRADICTORY MAN WITH AN ODDLY CHEERFUL VIEW OF OUR CIVILIZATION

## HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Question: *The first volume of your work The History of Sexuality was published in 1976. Do you still think that understanding sexuality is central to understanding who we are?*

Foucault: I must confess that I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that rather than sex... sex is boring.

Q: *It sounds like the Greeks were not too interested either.*

F: No, they were not much interested in sex. It was not a great issue. Compare, for instance, what they say about the place of food and diet. I think it is extremely interesting to see the move, the very slow move, from the privileging of food, which was overwhelming in Greece, to interest in sex. Food was still much more important during the early Christian days than sex. For instance, in the rules for monks, the problem was food, food, food. Then you can see a slow shift during the Middle Ages, when they were in a kind of equilibrium... and after the seventeenth century it was sex.

Q: *Yet volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, L'Usage des Plaisirs, is concerned almost exclusively with, not to put too fine a point on it, sex.*

F: What I wanted to do in volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality* was to show that you have nearly the same restrictive, prohibitive code in the fourth century B.C. as with the moralists and doctors at the beginning of the Roman Empire. But I think that the way they integrate those prohibitions in relation to the self is completely different. I don't think one can find any normalization in, for instance, the Stoic ethics. The reason is, I think, that the principal aim, the principal target, for this kind of ethics was aesthetic. First, this kind of ethics was only a problem of personal choice. Second, it was reserved for a few people in the population; there was no question of prescribing a pattern of behavior for everybody. It was a personal choice for a small elite. The reason for making this choice was the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave to others memories of a

beautiful existence. I don't think that we can say that this kind of ethics was an attempt to normalize the population.

Reading Seneca, Plutarch, and all those people, I discovered that there were a very great number of problems about the self, the ethics of the self, the technology of the self—and I had the idea of writing a book composed of a set of separate studies, papers about such and such aspects of ancient, pagan technology of the self.

Q: *What is the title?*

F: *Le Souci de Soi*, which is separate from the sex series, is composed of different papers about the self (for instance, a commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades* in which you find the first elaboration of the notion of *epimeleia heautou*, "care of oneself"), about the role of reading and writing in constituting the self, maybe the problem of the medical experience of the self, and so on...

What strikes me is that in Greek ethics people were concerned with their moral conduct, their ethics, their relations to themselves and to others much more than with religious problems. For instance, what happens to us after death? What are the gods? Do they intervene or not? These are very, very unimportant problems for them; they are not directly related to ethics, to conduct. The second thing is that ethics was not related to any social—or at least to any legal—institutional system. For instance, the laws against sexual misbehavior were few and not very compelling. The third thing is that what they were worried about, their theme, was to constitute an ethics which was an aesthetics of existence.

Well, I wonder if our problem nowadays is not, in a way, similar, since most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private lives. Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any ethics other than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious

is, and so on. I am struck by this similarity of problems.

Q: *Do you think that the Greeks offer an attractive and plausible alternative?*

F: No! I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of any problem in a solution of a different problem raised at another time by other people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that's the reason why I don't accept the word alternative. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.

I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger. Take as an example Robert Castel's analysis of the history of the antipsychiatry movement (*La Gestion des Risques*). I agree completely with what Castel says, but that does not mean, as some people suppose, that the mental hospitals were better than antipsychiatry; that does not mean that we were not right to criticize those mental hospitals.

## WHY THE ANCIENT WORLD WAS NOT A GOLDEN AGE, BUT WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IT ANYWAY

Q: *So, Greek life may not have been altogether perfect; still it seems an attractive alternative to endless Christian self-analysis.*

F: Greek ethics was linked to a purely virile society with slaves, in which the women were underdogs whose pleasure had no importance, whose sexual life had to be oriented only toward, even determined by, their status as wives, and so on.

Q: *So the women were dominated, but surely homosexual love was better than now.*

F: It might look that way. Since there is an important and large

literature about loving boys in Greek culture, some historians say, "Well, that's the proof that they loved boys." But I say that proves that loving boys was a problem. Because if there were no problem, they would speak of this kind of love in the same terms as love between men and women. The problem was that they couldn't accept that a young boy who was supposed to become a free citizen could be dominated and used as an object for someone else's pleasure. A woman, a slave, could be passive: such was their nature, their status. All this philosophizing about the love of boys—with always the same conclusion: please, don't treat a boy as a woman—is proof that they could not integrate this real practice in the framework of their social selves.

You can see through a reading of Plutarch how they couldn't even imagine reciprocity of pleasure between a boy and a man. If Plutarch finds problems in loving boys, it is not at all in the sense that loving boys was antinatural or something like that. He says, in effect, "It's not possible that there could be any reciprocity in the physical relations between a boy and a man."

*Q: There seems to be an aspect of Greek culture, which we are told about in Aristotle, that you don't talk about, but that seems very important—friendship. In classical literature, friendship is the locus of mutual recognition. It's not traditionally seen as the highest virtue, but both in Aristotle and in Cicero you could read it as really being the highest virtue because it's selfless and enduring, it's not easily bought, it doesn't deny the utility and pleasure of the world, but yet it seeks something more.*

**F:** But don't forget, *L'Usage des Plaisirs* is about sexual ethics, it's not a book about love, or about friendship, or about reciprocity. And it's significant that when Plato tries to integrate friendship and love for boys, he is obliged to put aside sexual relations. Friendship is reciprocal, and sexual relations are not reciprocal: in sexual relations, you can penetrate or you are penetrated. I agree completely with what you say about friendship, but I think it confirms what I say about Greek sexual ethics: if you

have friendship, it is difficult to have sexual relations. If you look at Plato, reciprocity is very important in a friendship, but you can't find it on the physical level; one of the reasons why the Greeks needed a philosophical elaboration in order to justify this kind of love was that they could not accept a physical reciprocity. You find in Xenophon, in the *Banquet*, Socrates saying that between a man and a boy it is obvious that the boy is only the spectator of the man's pleasure. What they say about this beautiful love of boys implies that the pleasure of the boy was not to be taken into account. Moreover, that it was dishonorable for the boy to feel any kind of physical pleasure in the relation with the man.

What I want to ask is, Are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other? Is the pleasure of the other something which can be integrated in our pleasure, without reference to law, to marriage, to I don't know what?

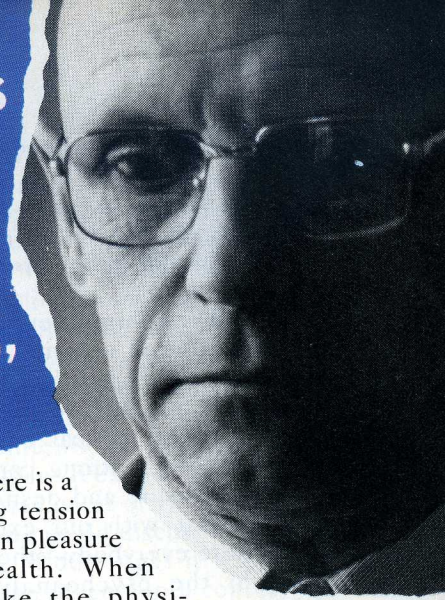
*Q: It certainly looks like nonreciprocity was a problem for the Greeks, but it seems to be the kind of problem that one could straighten out. Why does sex have to be virile? Why couldn't women's pleasure and boys' pleasure be taken into account without any big change to the general framework? Or is it that it's not just a little problem, because if you try to bring in the pleasure of the other, the whole hierarchical, ethical system would break down?*

**F:** That's right. The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to nonsymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. All that is quite disgusting!

*Q: Okay, granted that sexual relations were both nonreciprocal and a cause of worry for the Greeks, at least pleasure itself seems unproblematic for them.*

**F:** Well, in *L'Usage des Plaisirs* I tried to show, for instance,

**"In the rules for monks, the problem was food, food, food"**



that there is a growing tension between pleasure and health. When you take the physicians and all the concern with diet, you see first that the main themes are very similar during several centuries. But the idea that sex has its dangers is much stronger in the second century A.D. than in the fourth century B.C. I think that you can show that for Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C. the sexual act is already dangerous, so you have to be careful and not have sex all the time, only in certain seasons and so on. But in the first and second centuries it seems that physicians considered the sexual act much closer to *pathos*. And I think the main shift is this one: that in the fourth century B.C. the sexual act is an activity, and for the Christians it is a passivity. You have an interesting analysis by Augustine, which is, I think, quite typical, concerning the problem of erection. The erection is for the Greek of the fourth century the sign of activity, the main activity. But since for Augustine and the Christians the erection is not something which is voluntary, it is a sign of a passivity—it is a punishment for the first sin.

*Q: So the Greeks were more concerned with health than with pleasure?*

**F:** Yes, about what the Greeks had to eat in order to be in good health we have thousands of pages. And there are comparatively few things about what to do when you have sex with someone. Concerning food, it was the relation between the climate, the seasons, the humidity or dryness of the air and the dryness of the food, and so on. There are very few things about the way they had to cook it, much more about these qualities. It's not a cook-

ing art; it's a matter of choosing.

Q: *So despite the German Hellenists, classical Greece was not a Golden Age. Yet surely we can learn something from it?*

F: I think there is no exemplary value in a period which is not our period... it is not anything to get back to. But we do have an example of an ethical experience which implied a strong connection between pleasure and desire. If we compare that with our experience now, where everybody—the philosopher or the psychoanalyst—explains that what is important is desire, and pleasure is nothing at all, we wonder if this disconnection wasn't a historical event, one which was not at all necessary, not linked to human nature or to any anthropological necessity.

Q: *But you already illustrated that in The History of Sexuality by contrasting our science of sexuality with the Oriental ars erotica.*

F: One of the numerous points where I was wrong in that book was what I said about this *ars erotica*. I should have opposed our science of sex to a contrasting practice in our own culture. The Greeks and Romans did not have any *ars erotica* to be compared with the Chinese *ars erotica* (or at least it was not something very important in their culture). They had a *techne tou biou* in which the economy of pleasure played a rather large role. In this "art of life" the notion of exercising a perfect mastery over oneself soon became the main issue. And the Christian hermeneutics of the self constituted a new elaboration of this *techne*.

Q: *But after all you have told us about nonreciprocity and obsession with health, what can we learn from this third possibility?*

F: What I want to show is that the general Greek problem was not the *techne* of the self, it was the *techne* of life, the *techne tou biou*, how to live. It's quite clear from Socrates to Seneca or Pliny, for instance, that they didn't worry about the afterlife, what happened after death, or whether God exists or not. That was not really a great problem for them;

the problem was: Which *techne* do I have to use in order to live as well as I ought to live? And I think that one of the main evolutions in ancient culture has been that this *techne tou biou* became more and more a *techne* of the self. A Greek citizen of the fifth or fourth century B.C. would have felt that his *techne* was to take care of the city, of his companions. But for Seneca, for instance, the problem was to take care of himself.

With Plato's *Alcibiades*, it's clear: you have to take care of yourself because you have to rule the city. But taking care of yourself for its own sake starts with the Epicureans—it becomes something very general with Seneca, Pliny, and so on: everyone has to take care of himself. Greek ethics is centered on a problem of personal choice, an aesthetics of existence.

The idea of the *bios* as a material for an aesthetic piece of art is something which fascinates me. The idea also that ethics can be a strong structure of existence, without any relation to the juridical *per se*, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure. All that is very interesting.

Q: *How then did the Greeks deal with deviance?*

F: The great difference in sexual ethics for the Greeks was not between people who prefer women or boys or have sex in this way or another, but was a question of quantity and of activity and passivity. Are you a slave of your own desires or their master?

Q: *What about someone who had sex so much he damaged his health?*

F: That's hubris, that's excess. The problem is not one of deviance but of excess or moderation.

Q: *What did they do with these people?*

F: They were considered ugly, they had a bad reputation.

Q: *They didn't try to cure or reform such people?*

F: There were exercises in order to make one master of oneself. For Epictetus you had to be able to look at a beautiful girl or a beautiful boy without having any desire for her or him. You have to be-

come completely master of yourself.

Sexual austerity in Greek society was a trend or movement, a philosophical movement coming from cultivated people in order to give to their life much more intensity, much more beauty. In a way it's the same in the twentieth century, when people, in order to achieve a more beautiful life, have tried to get rid of all the sexual repression of their society, of their childhood. Gide in Greece would have been an austere philosopher.

Q: *In the name of a beautiful life the Greeks were austere, and now in the name of psychological science we seek self-fulfillment.*

F: Exactly. My idea is that it's not at all necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge. Among the cultural inventions of mankind there exists a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on that cannot exactly be reactivated, but at least constitutes, or helps to constitute, a certain point of view which can be useful as a tool for analyzing what's going on now—and for changing it.

We don't have to choose between our world and the Greek world. But since we can see that some of the main principles of our ethics have been related at a certain moment to an aesthetics of existence, I think that this kind of historical analysis can be useful. For centuries we have been convinced that between our ethics, our personal ethics, our everyday life and the great political and social and economic structures, there were analyzable relations. We believed that we couldn't change anything, for instance, in our sex life or our family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on. I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures.

Q: *So what kind of ethics can we build now, when we know that between ethics and other structures there is only historical coagulation and not a necessary relation?*

F: What strikes me is the fact that in our society art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individ-

uals, or to life. That art is something specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not the life?

**Q:** *But if one is to create oneself without recourse to knowledge or universal rules, how does your view differ from Sartrean existentialism?*

**F:** I think that from the theoretical point of view, Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something which is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves—to be truly our true self. I think that the only acceptable practical consequence of what Sartre has said is to link his theoretical insight to the practice of creativity—and not authenticity. From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as works of art. In his analyses of Baudelaire, Flaubert, et alia, it is interesting to see that Sartre refers the work of creation to a certain relation to oneself—the author to himself—which has either the form of authenticity or of inauthenticity. I would like to say exactly the contrary: We should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation he has to himself to a creative activity.

**Q:** *That sounds like Nietzsche's observation in The Gay Science that one should create one's life by giving style to it through long practice and daily work.*

**F:** Yes. My view is much closer to Nietzsche's than to Sartre's.

## THE STRUCTURE OF GENEALOGICAL INTERPRETATION

**Q:** *How do the next two books after The History of Sexuality, volume 1—L'Usage des Plaisirs and Les Aveux de la Chair—fit into the structure of your genealogy project?*

**F:** Three domains of genealogy are possible. First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation

to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.

So three axes are possible for genealogy. All three were present, albeit in a somewhat confused fashion, in my book *Madness and Civilization*. The truth axis I studied in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things*. The power axis I studied in *Discipline and Punish*, and the ethical axis in *The History of Sexuality*.

The general framework of the book about sex is a history of morals. I think, in general, where the history of morals is concerned, we have to distinguish acts from moral code. The acts (*conduites*) constitute the real behavior of people in relation to the moral code (*prescriptions*) which is imposed on them. I think we have to distinguish between the code that determines which acts are permitted or forbidden and the code that determines the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviors—you're not allowed to have sex with anyone but your wife, that's an element of the code. And there is another side to the moral prescriptions, which most of the time is not isolated as such but is, I think, very important: the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rapport à soi*, which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions.

This relationship to oneself has four major aspects. The first aspect

answers the question: Which is the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct? For instance, you can say, in general, that in our society the main field of morality is our feelings. (You can have a girl in the street or anywhere, as long as you have good feelings toward your wife.) Well, it's quite clear that from the Kantian point of view, intention is much more important than feelings. And from the Christian point of view it is desire—well, we could discuss that, because in the Middle Ages it was different from the seventeenth century...

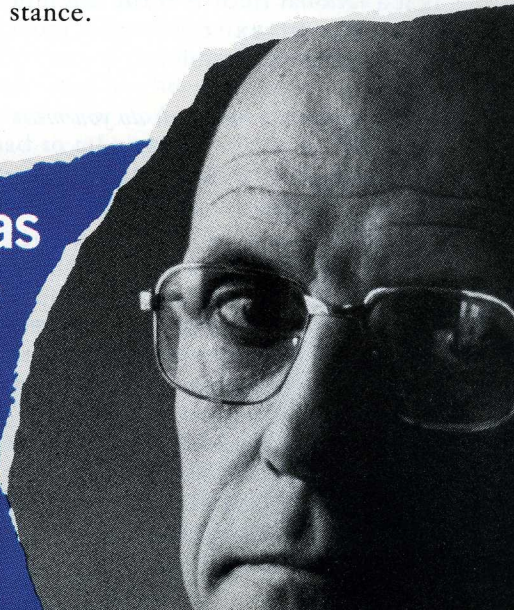
**Q:** *But, roughly, for the Christians it was desire, for Kant it was intentions, and for us now it's feelings?*

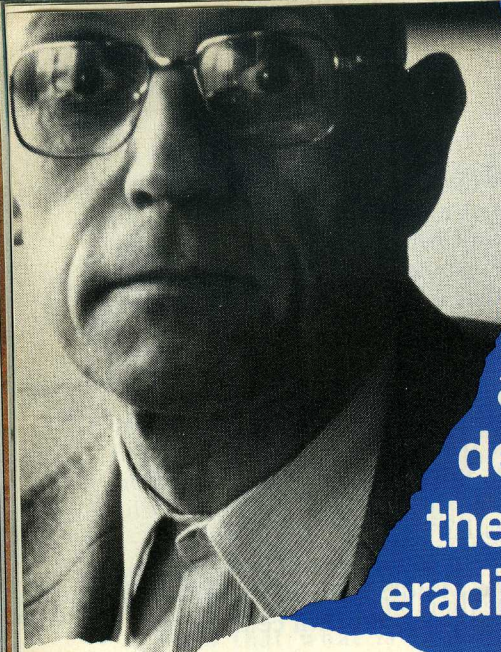
**F:** Well, you can say something like that. It's not always the same part of ourselves, or of our behavior, which is relevant for ethical judgment. That's the aspect I call the ethical substance (*substance éthique*).

**Q:** *The ethical substance is like the material that's going to be worked over by ethics?*

**F:** Yes, that's it. And, for instance, when I describe the *aphrodisia* in *L'Usage des Plaisirs*, it is to show that the part of sexual behavior which is relevant in Greek ethics is something different from concupiscence, from flesh. For the Greeks the ethical substance was acts linked to pleasure and desire in their unity. And it is very different from flesh, Christian flesh. Sexuality is a third kind of ethical substance.

**"Greek ethics was linked to a purely virile society in which the women were underdogs"**





## “The Christian formula puts an accent on desire and then tries to eradicate it”

Q: What is the difference ethically between flesh and sexuality?

F: For the Greeks, when a philosopher was in love with a boy, but did not touch him, his behavior was valued. The problem was: Does he touch the boy or not? That's the ethical substance: the act linked with pleasure and desire. For Augustine it's clear that when he remembers his relationship to his young friend when he was nineteen years old, what bothers him is: What exactly was the kind of desire he had for his friend? So you see that the ethical substance has changed.

The second aspect is what I call the mode of subjection (*mode d'assujettissement*), that is, the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations. Is it, for instance, divine law, which has been revealed in a text? Is it natural law, a cosmological order, in each case the same for every living being? Is it a rational rule? Is it the attempt to give your existence the most beautiful form possible?

Q: When you say rational, do you mean scientific?

F: No, Kantian, universal. For instance, the Stoics move slowly from an idea of an aesthetics of existence to the idea that we have to do such and such things because we are rational beings—as members of the human community we have to do them. In Isocrates you find a very interesting discourse, supposedly presented by Nicocles, who was the ruler of Cyprus. There he explains why he has always been faithful to his wife: “Because I am the king,

and because as somebody who commands others, who rules others, I have to show that I am able to rule myself.” And you can see that this rule of faithfulness has nothing to do with the universal and Stoic formulation:

I have to be faithful to my wife because I am a human and rational being. In the former case, it is because I am the king! And you can see that the way the same rule is accepted by Nicocles and by a Stoic is quite different. And that's what I call the *mode d'assujettissement*, the second aspect of ethics.

Q: When the king says “because I am the king,” is that a form of the beautiful life?

F: Both aesthetic and political, which were directly linked. Because if I want people to accept me as a king, I must have a kind of glory which will survive me, and this glory cannot be dissociated from aesthetic value. So political power, glory, immortality, and beauty are all linked at a certain moment.

The third one is: What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?

Q: How we work on this ethical substance?

F: Yes. What are we to do? Moderate our acts, or decipher what we are, or eradicate our desires, or use our sexual desire in order to obtain certain aims like having children, or what?—all this elaboration of ourselves in order to behave ethically. In order to be faithful to your wife you can do different things to the self. That's the third aspect, which I call the self-forming activity (*pratique de soi*) or *l'ascétisme*—asceticism in a very broad sense.

The fourth aspect of ethics is: What is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way? For instance, do we want to become pure, or immortal, or free, or

masters of ourselves, and so on. So that's what I call the *telos* (*téléologie*). In what we call morals there is the effective behavior of people, there are the codes, and there is this kind of ethical relationship to oneself with the above four aspects.

Q: Which are all independent?

F: There are relationships between them as well as a certain kind of independence. For instance, you can understand that if the goal is an absolute purity of being, that the techniques of asceticism you are to use are not exactly the same as when you try only to be master of your own behavior. In the first place you are inclined to a kind of deciphering, or purification, technique.

Now, if we were to apply this general framework to pagan or early Christian ethics, what would we say? First, in the code—what is forbidden and what is not—you see that, at least in the philosophic code of behavior, you find three main prohibitions or prescriptions. One is about the body—that is, you have to be careful with your sexual behavior since it is very costly, so do it as infrequently as possible. The second is—when you are married, please don't have sex with anybody but your wife. And with boys—please don't touch boys. And you find this in Plato, in Isocrates, in Hippocrates, in late Stoics, and so on—and you find it also in Christianity, and even in our own society. So I think you can say that the codes in themselves don't change a great deal. Some of those interdictions changed; some of the prohibitions are much stricter and much more rigorous in Christianity than in the Greek period. But the themes are the same. So I think that the great changes which occurred between Greek society, Greek ethics, Greek morality and how the Christians viewed themselves are not in the code but are in what I call the “ethics,” the relation to oneself.

Q: Would it be fair to say that you're not doing the genealogy of morals, since you think the moral codes are relatively stable, but instead what you're doing is a genealogy of ethics?

F: Yes, I'm writing a genealogy of ethics. The genealogy of



the subject as a subject of ethical actions, or the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem. So if we take ethics in classical Greek philosophy or medicine, what is the ethical substance? It is the *aphrodisia*, which are at the same time acts, desire, and pleasure. What is the *mode d'assujettissement*? It is that we build our existence to be a beautiful existence; it is an aesthetic mode. You see, what I tried to show is that nobody is *obliged* in classical ethics to behave in such a way as to be truthful to his wife, not to touch boys, and so on. But if one wants to have a beautiful existence, if one wants to have a good reputation, if one wants to be able to rule others, one has to do that. So they accept those obligations in a conscious way for the beauty or glory of existence. The choice, the aesthetic choice or the political choice, for which they decide to accept this kind of existence—that's the *mode d'assujettissement*. It's a personal choice.

In late Stoicism, when they start saying, "Well, you are obliged to do that because you are a human being," something changes. It's not a problem of choice; you have to do it because you are rational. The *mode d'assujettissement* is changing.

In Christianity what is very interesting is that the sexual rules for behavior were, of course, justified through religion. The institutions by which they were imposed were religious institutions. But the *form* of the obligation was a legal form. There was a kind of internal juridification of religious law inside Christianity. For instance, all the casuistic practice was typically a juridical practice.

Q: *After the Enlightenment, though, when the religious drops out, is the juridical what's left?*

■ F: Yes, after the eighteenth century the religious framework of those rules disappears in part, and then between a medical or scientific approach and a juridical framework there was competition with no resolution.

Q: *Could you sum all this up?*

■ F: Well, the *substance éthique* for the Greeks was the *aphrodisia*. The *mode d'assujettissement* was

a politico-aesthetical choice. The form of discipline was the different *technai* which were used. We find, for example, the *techné* about the body; or economics as the rules whereby you define your role as husband; or the erotic as a kind of asceticism toward oneself in loving boys; and so on. And the *téléologie* was the mastery of oneself. So that's the situation I describe in the two first parts of *L'Usage des Plaisirs*.

Then there is a shift within this ethical system. The reason for the shift is the change of the role of men within society, both in their homes toward their wives and in the political field, since the city disappears. So, for those reasons, the way they recognize themselves as subjects of political, economic behavior changes. We can say roughly that along with these sociological changes something is changing also in classical ethics—that is, in the elaboration of the relationship to the self. But I think that the change doesn't affect the ethical substance: it is still *aphrodisia*. There are some changes in the *mode d'assujettissement*, for instance, when the Stoics recognize themselves as universal beings. And there are also important changes in the *ascétisme*, the kind of techniques you use in order to recognize, to constitute yourself as a subject of ethics. And also a change in the goal. In the classical perspective, to be master of oneself meant, first, taking into account only oneself and not the other, because to be master of oneself meant that you were able to rule others. So the mastery of oneself was directly related to a nonsymmetrical relation to others. You should be master of yourself in a sense of activity, nonsymmetry, and nonreciprocity.

Later on, because of the changes in marriage, society, and so on, mastery of oneself is something which is not primarily related to power over others: not only do you have to be master of yourself in order to rule others, as it was in the case of Alcibiades or Nicocles, but you have to be master of yourself because you are a rational being. And in this mastery of yourself you are related to other people, who are also masters of themselves. And this new kind of relation to the other is much more re-

ciprocal than before.

So we now have this scheme. If by sexual behavior we understand the three poles—acts, pleasure, and desire—we have the Greek "formula," which is the same at the first and second stages. In this Greek formula what is underscored is "acts," with pleasure and desire as subsidiary: *acte—plaisir—(desir)*. I put desire in parentheses because with the Stoic ethics begins a kind of elision of desire; desire begins to be condemned.

The Chinese formula would be: *plaisir—desir—(acte)*. Acts are put aside because you have to restrain acts to get the maximum duration and intensity of pleasure.

The Christian formula puts an accent on desire and then tries to eradicate it. Acts have to become something neutral; you have to act only to produce children, or to fulfill your conjugal duty. And pleasure is both practically and theoretically excluded: *(desir)—acte—(plaisir)*. Desire is practically excluded—you have to eradicate your desire—but it is theoretically important.

And I could say that the modern formula is desire, which is theoretically underlined and practically accepted, since you have to liberate your own desire. Acts are not very important, and pleasure—nobody knows what it is!

## FROM THE CLASSICAL SELF TO THE MODERN SUBJECT

■ F: For the Epicureans there was a kind of adequation between all possible knowledge and the care of the self. The reason that one had to become familiar with physics or cosmology was that one had to take care of the self. For the Stoics the true self is defined only by "what I can be master of."

Q: *So knowledge is subordinated to the practical end of mastery?*

■ F: Epictetus is very clear on that. He prescribes as an exercise that you should walk every morning in the streets looking, watching. And if you meet a consul, you say, "Is the consulship something I can master?" No; so I have nothing to do. If you meet a beautiful girl or

beautiful boy, you ask, Is their beauty, their desirability, something which depends on me, and so on. For the Christians things are quite different; for Christians the possibility that Satan can get inside your soul and give you thoughts you cannot recognize as Satanic but that you might interpret as coming from God leads to uncertainty about what is going on inside your soul. You are unable to know what the real root of your desire is, at least without hermeneutic work.

This work on the self, with its attendant austerity, is not imposed on the individual by means of civil law or religious obligation, but is a choice about existence made by the individual. People decide for themselves whether or not to care for themselves.

Q: *In the name of what does one choose to impose this life style upon oneself?*

■ F: I don't think it is to attain eternal life after death, because the Greeks were not particularly concerned with that. Rather they acted so as to give to their life certain values (reproduce certain examples, leave behind them an exalted reputation, give the maximum possible brilliance to their lives). One made one's life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *techné*—for an art.

We have hardly any remnant of this idea in our society, that the principal work of art, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence. We do find this in the Renaissance, but in a slightly academic form, and again in nineteenth-century dandyism, but those were only episodes.

Q: *But isn't the Greek concern with the self just an early version of the self-absorption which many consider a central problem in our society?*

■ F: You have a certain number of themes—and I don't say that you have to reutilize them in this way—which indicate that in a culture to which we owe a certain number of our most important constant moral elements, there was a practice of the self, a conception of the self, very different from our present culture of the self. In the

Californian cult of the self, one is supposed to discover the true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytic science, which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is. Therefore, I would say that this ancient culture of the self and the Californian cult of the self are diametrically opposed.

What happened in between is precisely an overtuning of the classical culture of the self. This took place when Christianity substituted the idea of a self which one had to renounce because clinging to the self was opposed to God's will for the idea of a self which should be created as a work of art.

Q: *We know that one of the studies for Le Souci de Soi concerns the role of writing in the formation of the self. How is the question of the relation of writing and the self posed by Plato?*

■ F: First, to bring out a certain number of historical facts which are often glossed over when posing this problem of writing, we must look into the famous question of the *hypomnemata*. *Hypomnemata* has a very precise meaning. They are copybooks, or notebooks. Precisely this type of notebook was coming into vogue at Plato's time for personal and administrative use. In the technical sense, *hypomnemata* could be account books, public registers, individual notebooks serving as memoranda. Their use as books of life and guides for conduct seems to have become a current thing for a whole cultivated public. Into them one entered quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions which one had witnessed or of which one had read the account, reflections or reasonings one had heard or which had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought; they were an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation. They were also raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and the means by which to struggle against some defect (such as anger, envy, gossip, flattery) or to overcome some difficult circumstance (mourning, exile, downfall, disgrace).

Q: *But how does writing connect up with ethics and the self?*

■ F: No technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; neither can one learn the art of living, the *techné tou biou*, without an *askesis*, which must be taken as a training of oneself by oneself: this was one of the traditional principles to which the Pythagoreans, the Socratics, and the Cynics had for a long time attributed great importance. Among all the forms this training took (and which included abstinence, memorization, examination of conscience, meditation, silence, and listening to others), it seems that writing—for oneself and for others—came quite late to play a sizable role.

Q: *What specific role did these notebooks play when they finally became influential in late antiquity?*

■ F: As personal as they were, the *hypomnemata* must nevertheless not be taken for intimate diaries or for those accounts of spiritual experience (temptations, struggles, falls, and victories) which can be found in later Christian literature. They do not constitute an "account of oneself"; their objective is not to bring the *arcana conscientiae* to light, the confession of which—be it oral or written—has a purifying value. The movement that they seek to effect is the inverse of this last one. The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non-said; but on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself.

The *hypomnemata* are to be resituated in the context of a very sensitive tension of that period. Within a culture strongly affected by tradition, by the recognized value of the already-said, by the recurrence of discourse, by the "citational" practice under the seal of age and authority, an ethics was developing which was explicitly oriented to the care of oneself toward definite objectives, such as: retiring into oneself, reaching oneself, living with oneself, being sufficient to oneself, profiting by and enjoying oneself. Such is the objective of the *hypomnemata*: to make

of the recollection of the fragmentary *logos* transmitted by teaching, listening, or reading a means to establish as adequate and as perfect a relationship to oneself as possible.

**Q:** *How was the role of the notebooks transformed when the technique of using them to relate oneself to oneself was taken over by the Christians?*

**F:** One important change is that the writing down of inner movements appears, according to Athanasius' text on the life of St. Anthony, as an arm in spiritual combat: while the demon is a force which deceives and which makes one deceived about oneself (one great half of the *Vita Antoni* is devoted to these ploys), writing constitutes a test and something like a touchstone: in bringing to light the movements of thought, it dissipates the inner shadow where the enemy's plots are woven.

**Q:** *How could such a radical transformation take place?*

**F:** There is, indeed, a dramatic change between the *hypomnemata* of Xenophon, where it might only be a question of remembering the elements of a diet, and the description of the nocturnal temptations of St. Anthony. An interesting place to look for a transitional set of techniques seems to be the description of dreams. Almost from the beginning one had to have a notebook beside one's bed in which to write one's dreams, in order either to interpret them oneself the next morning or to show them to someone else who would. By means of this nightly description an important step is taken toward the description of the self.

**Q:** *It is a commonplace in literary studies that Montaigne was the first great autobiographer, yet you seem to trace writing about the self to much earlier sources.*

**F:** It seems to me that in the religious crisis of the sixteenth century—the great rejection of the Catholic confessional practices—new modes of relationship to the self were being developed. We can see the reactivation of a certain number of ancient Stoic practices. The notion, for example, of proofs of one-

“The ancient culture of the self and the Californian cult of the self are diametrically opposed”

self seems to me thematically close to what we find among the

Stoics where the experience of the self is not a discovering of a truth hidden inside the self, but an attempt to determine what one can and cannot do with one's available freedom. Among both the Catholics and Protestants the reactivation of these ancient techniques in Christian spiritual practices is quite marked.

Let me take as an example the walking exercise recommended by Epictetus. Each morning, while taking a walk in the city, one should try to determine with respect to each thing (a public official or an attractive woman) one's motives, whether one is impressed by or drawn to the other person, or whether one has the self-mastery to be indifferent.

In Christianity one sees the same sort of exercises, but they serve to test one's dependence on God. I remember having found in a seventeenth-century text an exercise reminiscent of Epictetus, where a young seminarist out walking does certain exercises which show his dependence vis-à-vis God—which permit him to decipher the presence of divine providence. With Epictetus, the individual on his walk assures himself of his own sovereignty over himself and shows that he is dependent on nothing. But in the Christian case the seminarist walks and before each thing he sees, says, “Oh, how God's goodness is great! He who made this holds all things in his power, and me, in particular,” thus reminding himself that he is nothing.

**Q:** *So discourse plays an important role but always serves other practices even in the constitution of the self.*

**F:** It seems to me that all the so-called literature of the self—private diaries, narratives of the self, et cetera—cannot be understood un-

less it is put into the general and very rich framework of these practices. People have been writing about themselves for two thousand years, but not in the same way. I have the impression—I may be wrong—that there is a certain tendency to present the relationship between writing and the narrative of the self as a phenomenon particular to European modernity. Now, I do not deny it is modern, but it was also one of the first uses of writing.

So it is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real, historically analyzable practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them.

During the Renaissance you see a whole series of religious groups (whose existence is, moreover, already attested to in the Middle Ages) which resist this pastoral power and which claim the right to make their own statutes for themselves. According to these groups, the individual should take care of his own salvation independent of the ecclesiastical institution and of the ecclesiastical pastorate. We can see, therefore, not a reappearance of the culture of the self, which had never disappeared, but a reaffirmation of its autonomy.

In the Renaissance you also see—and here I refer to Burckhardt's text on the famous aesthetics of existence—the hero as his own work of art. The idea that from one's own life one can make a work of art is an idea which was undoubtedly foreign to the Middle Ages and which reappears at the moment of the Renaissance. □

