

1

Modifications

This series of studies is being published later than I had anticipated, and in a form that is altogether different. I will explain why.

It was intended to be neither a history of sexual behaviors nor a history of representations, but a history of “sexuality”—the quotation marks have a certain importance. My aim was not to write a history of sexual behaviors and practices, tracing their successive forms, their evolution, and their dissemination; nor was it to analyze the scientific, religious, or philosophical ideas through which these behaviors have been represented. I wanted first to dwell on that quite recent and banal notion of “sexuality”: to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyze the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated. The term itself did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century, a fact that should be neither underestimated nor overinterpreted. It does point to something other than a simple recasting of vocabulary, but obviously it does not mark the sudden emergence of that to which “sexuality” refers. The use of the word was established in connection with other phenomena: the development of diverse fields of knowledge (embracing the biological mechanisms of reproduction as well as the individual or social variants of behavior); the establishment of a set of rules and norms—in part traditional, in part new—which found support in religious, judicial, pedagogical,

and medical institutions; and changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams. In short, it was a matter of seeing how an “experience” came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a “sexuality,” which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints. What I planned, therefore, was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture.

To speak of sexuality in this way, I had to break with a conception that was rather common. Sexuality was conceived of as a constant. The hypothesis was that where it was manifested in historically singular forms, this was through various mechanisms of repression to which it was bound to be subjected in every society. What this amounted to, in effect, was that desire and the subject of desire were withdrawn from the historical field, and interdiction as a general form was made to account for anything historical in sexuality. But rejection of this hypothesis was not sufficient by itself. To speak of “sexuality” as a historically singular experience also presupposed the availability of tools capable of analyzing the peculiar characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that constitute it: (1) the formation of sciences (*savoirs*) that refer to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice, (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality. Now, as to the first two points, the work I had undertaken previously—having to do first with medicine and psychiatry, and then with punitive power and disciplinary practices—provided me with the tools I needed. The analysis of discursive practices made it possible to trace the formation of disciplines (*savoirs*) while escaping the dilemma of science versus ideology. And the analysis of power relations and their technologies made it

possible to view them as open strategies, while escaping the alternative of a power conceived of as domination or exposed as a simulacrum.

But when I came to study the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects, the problems were much greater. At the time the notion of desire, or of the desiring subject, constituted if not a theory, then at least a generally accepted theoretical theme. This very acceptance was odd: it was this same theme, in fact, or variations thereof, that was found not only at the very center of the traditional theory, but also in the conceptions that sought to detach themselves from it. It was this theme, too, that appeared to have been inherited, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from a long Christian tradition. While the experience of sexuality, as a singular historical figure, is perhaps quite distinct from the Christian experience of the "flesh," both appear nonetheless to be dominated by the principle of "desiring man." In any case, it seemed to me that one could not very well analyze the formation and development of the experience of sexuality from the eighteenth century onward, without doing a historical and critical study dealing with desire and the desiring subject. In other words, without undertaking a "genealogy." This does not mean that I proposed to write a history of the successive conceptions of desire, of concupiscence, or of libido, but rather to analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behavior was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain. Thus, in order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of a

“sexuality,” it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire.

A theoretical shift had seemed necessary in order to analyze what was often designated as the advancement of learning; it led me to examine the forms of discursive practices that articulated the human sciences. A theoretical shift had also been required in order to analyze what is often described as the manifestations of “power”; it led me to examine, rather, the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques that articulate the exercise of powers. It appeared that I now had to undertake a third shift, in order to analyze what is termed “the subject.” It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject. After first studying the games of truth (*jeux de vérité*) in their interplay with one another, as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then studying their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices—I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called “the history of desiring man.”

But it was clear that to undertake this genealogy would carry me far from my original project. I had to choose: either stick to the plan I had set, supplementing it with a brief historical survey of the theme of desire, or reorganize the whole study around the slow formation, in antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self. I opted for the latter, reasoning that, after all, what I have held to, what I have tried to maintain for many years, is the effort to isolate some of the elements that might be useful for a history of truth. Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the “games of truth,” the games of truth and error through which being is historically con-

stituted as experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought. What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives of himself as a living, speaking, laboring being; when he judges and punishes himself as a criminal? What were the games of truth by which human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals? It seemed to me that by framing the question in this way, and by attempting to develop it for a period that was rather far from the horizons with which I was familiar, I would be going more closely into the inquiry that I have long been committed to—even if this approach were to demand a few years of additional work. This long detour carried risks, to be sure; but I was motivated, and I seemed to have discovered a certain theoretical advantage in the research that I envisaged.

The risks? First, there was the likelihood of delaying and upsetting the publication schedule that I had projected. I am grateful to those who followed the advances and detours of my work—I am thinking of my auditors at the Collège de France—and to those who had the patience to wait for its outcome—Pierre Nora in particular. As to 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.

There was also the danger that I would be dealing with documents with which I was insufficiently acquainted.* I

*I am neither a Hellenist nor a Latinist. But it seemed to me that if I gave enough care, patience, modesty, and attention to the task, it would be possible to gain sufficient familiarity with the ancient Greek and Roman texts; that is, a familiarity that would allow me—in keeping with a practice that is doubtless fundamental to Western philosophy—to examine both the difference that keeps us at a remove from a way of thinking in which we recognize the origin of our own, and the proximity that remains in spite of that distance which we never cease to explore.

would run the risk of adapting them, without fully realizing it, to alien forms of analysis or to modes of inquiry that would scarcely suit them. In dealing with this risk, I have benefited greatly from the works of Peter Brown and those of Pierre Hadot, and I have been helped more than once by the conversations we have had and the views they have expressed. In the effort to familiarize myself with the ancient texts, I also ran the contrary risk of losing the thread of the questions I wanted to raise; Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow at Berkeley enabled me, through their comments and their rigorous questioning, to undertake a theoretical and methodological reformulation. François Wahl offered me invaluable advice.

Paul Veyne has given me constant assistance throughout these years. He knows what the true historian's search for truth is about, but he also knows the labyrinth one enters when one sets out to trace the history of the games of truth and error. He is one of those individuals (rare nowadays) who are willing to face the hazard that the history of truth poses for all thought. His influence on what I have written here is pervasive. As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: 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. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable-ness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what

is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The “essay”—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an “ascesis,” *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.

The studies that follow, like the others I have done previously, are studies of “history” by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a “historian.” Which does not mean that they summarize or synthesize work done by others. Considered from the standpoint of their “pragmatics,” they are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.

Was I right to take these risks? That is for others to say. I only know that by shifting, as I did, the theme and chronological frame of reference of my study, I obtained a certain theoretical benefit; I could go on to make two generalizations that enabled me both to widen its scope and to specify its method and its goal more precisely.

It seemed that by starting from the modern era, and pro-

ceeding back through Christianity to antiquity, one would not be able to avoid raising a question that was at the same time very simple and very general: why is sexual conduct, why are the activities and pleasures that attach to it, an object of moral solicitude? Why this ethical concern—which, at certain times, in certain societies and groups, appears more important than the moral attention that is focused on other, likewise essential, areas of individual or collective life, such as alimentary behaviors or the fulfillment of civic duties? A reply comes to mind immediately, I know: they have been the object of fundamental interdictions, and transgressing the latter is considered a serious offense. But this is to make an answer of the question itself; and further, it shows a failure to recognize that the ethical concern over sexual conduct is not, in its intensity or its forms, always directly tied to the system of interdictions. It is often the case that the moral solicitude is strong precisely where there is neither obligation nor prohibition. In other words, the interdiction is one thing, the moral problematization is another. It seemed to me, therefore, that the question that ought to guide my inquiry was the following: how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain? Why this ethical concern that was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity? Why this “problematization”? But, after all, this was the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviors or representations: to define the conditions in which human beings “problematize” what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live.

But in raising this very general question, and in directing it to Greek and Greco-Roman culture, it occurred to me that this problematization was linked to a group of practices that have been of unquestionable importance in our societies: I am referring to what might be called the “arts of existence.” What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre*

that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. These “arts of existence,” these “techniques of the self,” no doubt lost some of their importance and autonomy when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity, and later, into educative, medical, and psychological types of practices. Still, I thought that the long history of these aesthetics of existence and these technologies of the self remained to be done, or resumed. It has been a long time now since Burckhardt pointed out their significance for the epoch of the Renaissance, but their perpetuation, their history, and their development do not end there.* In any case, it seemed to me that the study of the problematization of sexual behavior in antiquity could be regarded as a chapter—one of the first chapters—of that general history of the “techniques of the self.”

There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one’s way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from there. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking? Perhaps at most they made it possible to go back through what I was already thinking, to think it differently, and to see what I had done from a new vantage point and in a clearer light. Sure of having traveled far, one finds that one is looking down on oneself from above. The journey rejuvenates things, and ages the relationship with oneself. I seem to have gained a better perspective on the way I worked—gropingly, and by means of different or successive fragments—on this project, whose goal is a history of truth. It was a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their “ideologies,” but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. The archaeological di-

*It is not quite correct to imply that since Burckhardt the study of these arts and this aesthetics of existence has been completely neglected. One thinks of Benjamin’s study on Baudelaire. There is also an interesting analysis in Stephen Greenblatt’s recent book, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980).

mension of the analysis made it possible to examine the forms themselves; its genealogical dimension enabled me to analyze their formation out of the practices and the modifications undergone by the latter. There was the problematization of madness and illness arising out of social and medical practices, and defining a certain pattern of “normalization”; a problematization of life, language, and labor in discursive practices that conformed to certain “epistemic” rules; and a problematization of crime and criminal behavior emerging from certain punitive practices conforming to a “disciplinary” model. And now I would like to show how, in classical antiquity, sexual activity and sexual pleasures were problematized through practices of the self, bringing into play the criteria of an “aesthetics of existence.”

These, then, are the reasons that led me to recenter my entire study on the genealogy of desiring man, from classical antiquity through the first centuries of Christianity. I have followed a simple chronological arrangement: this volume, *The Use of Pleasure*, is devoted to the manner in which sexual activity was problematized by philosophers and doctors in classical Greek culture of the fourth century B.C.; *Care of the Self* deals with the same problematization in the Greek and Latin texts of the first two centuries of our era; lastly, *The Confessions of the Flesh* deals with the formation of the doctrine and ministry concerning the flesh. The documents I will refer to are for the most part “prescriptive” texts—that is, texts whose main object, whatever their form (speech, dialogue, treatise, collection of precepts, etc.) is to suggest rules of conduct. I will appeal to the theoretical texts on the doctrine of pleasures and passions only to look for clarifications. The domain I will be analyzing is made up of texts written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should: “practical” texts, which are themselves objects of a “practice” in that they were designed to be read, learned, reflected upon, and tested out, and they were intended to constitute the eventual framework of everyday con-

duct. These texts thus served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects; in short, their function was “etho-poetic,” to transpose a word found in Plutarch.

But since this analysis of desiring man is situated at the point where an archaeology of problematizations and a genealogy of practices of the self intersect, I would like to dwell briefly, before getting started, on those two notions—that is, to account for the forms of “problematization” that I chose to examine, to indicate what is to be understood by “practices of the self,” and to explain how I was led, through certain paradoxes and difficulties, to substitute a history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self, for a history of systems of morality based, hypothetically, on interdictions.

2

Forms of Problematization

Suppose for a moment that we accept categories as general as those of “paganism,” “Christianity,” “morality,” and “sexual morality.” Suppose that we ask on which points the “sexual morality of Christianity” contrasted most sharply with the “sexual morality of ancient paganism.” Prohibition of incest, male domination, subjugation of women? These are not the replies that will be given, no doubt; the extent and constancy of those phenomena in their various forms are well known. Other points of differentiation will more likely be submitted. For example, the meaning of the sexual act itself: it will be said that Christianity associated it with evil, sin, the Fall, and death, whereas antiquity invested it with positive symbolic values. Or the definition of the legitimate partner: it would appear that, in contrast to what occurred in the Greek and Roman societies, Christianity drew the line at monogamous marriage and laid down the principle of exclusively procreative ends within that conjugal relationship. Or the disallowance of relations between individuals of the same sex: it would seem that Christianity strictly excluded such relationships, while Greece exalted them and Rome accepted them, at least between men. To these three points of major opposition might be added the high moral and spiritual value that Christianity, unlike pagan morality, accorded to strict abstinence, lifelong chastity, and virginity. In short, regarding all these points that have been considered for such a long time to be so important

—the nature of the sexual act, monogamous fidelity, homosexual relations, chastity—it would seem that men of ancient times were rather indifferent, and that none of this claimed much of their attention or constituted very serious problems as far as they were concerned.

But this picture is not accurate; moreover, it would be easy to show that it is not. One would only have to point out the direct borrowing and strict continuities between the first Christian doctrines and the moral philosophy of antiquity. The first great Christian text devoted to sexual practice in married life—Chapter X of Book II of *The Pedagogue* by Clement of Alexandria—is supported by a number of scriptural references, but it also draws on a set of principles and precepts borrowed directly from pagan philosophy. One already notes a certain association of sexual activity with evil, along with the rule of procreative monogamy, a condemnation of relations between individuals of the same sex, and a glorification of self-restraint. Furthermore, given a longer historical frame to consider, one could trace the persistence of themes, anxieties, and exigencies that no doubt marked the Christian ethic and the morality of modern European societies; but not only, since they were already present at the core of Greek and Greco-Roman thought. Below is some evidence to consider, comprising: (1) the expression of a fear, (2) a model of conduct, (3) the image of a stigmatized attitude, and (4) an example of abstinence.

1. A fear. Young people afflicted with seminal weakness “of necessity become old in the habit of their body, dull, languid, dispirited, sluggish, stupidly silent, weak, wrinkled, incapable of any exertion, sallow, wan, effeminate; they lose their appetite, feel cold, a sense of weight in their limbs, and torpor in their legs, their strength fails, and they become paralyzed in every effort, and with many the disease goes on to palsy. For how could it be otherwise, that the power of the nerves should suffer when the generative principle is chilled?”

This disease, which is “shameful in itself,” is “dangerous in that it leads to stagnation; harmful to society in that it goes against the propagation of the species; and because it is in all respects the source of countless ills, it requires prompt treatment.”¹¹* One has no trouble recognizing in this text the obsessive worries that medicine and pedagogy nurtured on the subject of pure sexual expenditure—that unproductive and partnerless activity—from the eighteenth century onward. The gradual exhaustion of the organism, the death of the individual, the destruction of his offspring, and finally, harm to the entire human race, were regularly promised, through an endlessly garrulous literature, to those who would make illicit use of their sex. These solicited fears seem to have been the “naturalistic” and scientific legacy, in medical thought of the nineteenth century, of a Christian tradition that consigned pleasure to the realm of death and evil.

Now, this description is actually a translation—a free translation, in the style of the period—of a text written by a Greek physician, Aretaeus, in the first century of our era. And one could find many other statements from the same epoch, testifying to this fear of the sexual act, which was liable, if it got out of control, to produce the most deleterious effects on the life of the individual. Soranus, for example, thought that sexual activity was in any case less favorable to health than virginity and plain abstinence. Even prior to that, medicine had earnestly recommended prudence and economy in the use of sexual pleasures: avoid their untimely enjoyment, take into account the conditions in which they are to be experienced, fear their peculiar violence and the effects of errors of regimen.

*In his French translation, L. Renaud offers this comment on the passage from Aretaeus: “The gonorrhoea in question differs essentially from the disease that goes by that name today, which is more correctly called blennorrhoea. . . . Simple or true gonorrhoea, of which Aretaeus is speaking here, is characterized by an involuntary discharge, outside coition, of the spermatic humor mixed with the prostatic humor. This shameful disease is often provoked by, and the result of, masturbation.”¹² The French translation slightly alters the meaning of the Greek text, which can be found in the *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*.

Some even advised to indulge only “if one wants to do harm to oneself.” A very ancient fear, therefore.

2. *An ideal of conduct.* We know how Saint Francis of Sales exhorted people to conjugal virtue. He held out a mirror to married couples, recommending the example of the elephant and the good morals it manifested with its mate. It was “only a large beast, but the most worthy of all the animals on earth, and the one with the most intelligence. . . . It never changes females and it is tenderly loving with the one it has chosen, mating only every three years, and then only for five days, and so secretly that it is never seen in the act; but it can be seen again on the sixth day, when the first thing it does is go straight to the river and bathe its whole body, being unwilling to return to the herd before it is purified. Tell me if these are not good and honorable habits.”³ Now this text is itself a variation on a theme that had been handed down by a long tradition (via Aldrovandi, Gesner, Vincent of Beauvais, and the famous *Physiologus*); one finds it already formulated in Pliny, whom Saint Francis of Sales follows rather closely in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*: “Owing to their modesty, elephants never mate except in secret . . . the female at the age of ten; and mating takes place for two years, on five days, so it is said, of each year and not more; and on the sixth day they give themselves a shower-bath in the river, not returning to the herd before. Adultery is unknown among them.”⁴ Of course, Pliny was not proposing a schema as explicitly didactic as that of Saint Francis of Sales; he was, however, referring to a clearly recommended model of conduct. It is not the case that mutual faithfulness among marriage partners was a generally acknowledged and accepted imperative among the Greeks and Romans. But it was a lesson given emphasis in some philosophical currents such as late Stoicism; it was also a conduct that was valued as a manifestation of virtue, inner strength, and self-mastery. Thus, the younger Cato was praised because,

up to the age at which he decided to marry, he still had not had relations with any woman; or better yet, there was Laelius: "in the course of his long life, he knew but one woman, the wife of his youth."⁵ One can go back even further in the definition of this model of mutual conjugal fidelity. Nicocles, in the speech attributed to him by Isocrates, shows the moral and political importance he accorded to the achievement of not "having approached any woman but my own wife" from the time of his marriage.⁶ And in his ideal city, Aristotle would have sexual relations of a husband with another woman, or the wife with another man, considered "dishonorable . . . in any circumstances whatsoever."⁷ The sexual "fidelity" of a husband with respect to his legitimate wife was not required either by law or by custom; it was nevertheless a question that people raised and a form of austerity on which some moralists set a high value.

3. *An image.* In nineteenth-century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body, are regularly included in this disparaging description. The image alludes both to the theme of role reversal and to the principle of a natural stigma attached to this offense against nature. It was as if "nature herself had become an accessory to sexual mendacity."⁸ One could doubtless trace the long history of this image (to which actual behaviors may have corresponded, through a complex play of inductions and attitudes of defiance). In the deeply negative intensity of this stereotype, one might read the age-old difficulty, for our societies, of integrating these two phenomena—different phenomena at that—of the inversion of sexual roles and intercourse between individuals of the same sex. Now this image, with the repulsive aura that surrounds it, has come down through the centuries. It was already clearly delineated in the Greco-Roman literature of the impe-

rial age. One encounters it in the portrait of the *Effeminatus* drawn by the author of an anonymous treatise on physiognomy of the fourth century; in the description of the priests of Atargatis, whom Apuleius makes fun of in *The Golden Ass*; in the symbolization that Dio Chrysostom offers for the *daimōn* of immoderation in one of his lectures on monarchy; in the fleeting evocation of the petty orators, with their perfume and their curls, whom Epictetus calls on at the back of his class, asking them if they are men or women.⁹ One could see it again in the portrait of decadent youth, such as Seneca the Elder notices around him, with great repugnance: "Libidinous delight in song and dance transfixes these effeminates. Braiding the hair, refining the voice till it is as caressing as a woman's, competing in bodily softness with women, beautifying themselves with filthy fineries—this is the pattern our youths set themselves. . . . Born feeble and spineless, they stay like that throughout their lives; taking others' chastity by storm, careless of their own."¹⁰ But in its essential traits, the portrait is more ancient still. Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* alludes to it, when he voices disapproval of the love that is given to soft boys, too delicate to be exposed to the sun as they are growing up, and all made up with rouge and decked out in ornaments.¹¹ And it is with these same traits that Agathon appears in *The Thesmophoriazusae*: pale complexion, smooth-shaven cheeks, woman's voice, so much so that his interlocutor wonders if he is in the presence of a man or a woman.¹² It would be completely incorrect to interpret this as a condemnation of love of boys, or of what we generally refer to as homosexual relations; but at the same time, one cannot fail to see in it the effect of strongly negative judgments concerning some possible aspects of relations between men, as well as a definite aversion to anything that might denote a deliberate renunciation of the signs and privileges of the masculine role. The domain of male loves may have been "free" in Greek antiquity, much more so at any rate than it has been in modern European societies; the fact remains that one sees

the very early expression of intense negative reactions and of forms of stigmatization that will extend well into the future.

4. *A model of abstention.* The virtuous hero who is able to turn aside from pleasure, as if from a temptation into which he knows not to fall, is a familiar figure in Christianity—as common as the idea that this renunciation can give access to a spiritual experience of truth and love that sexual activity excludes. But equally well known in pagan antiquity was the figure of those athletes of self-restraint who were sufficiently masters of themselves and their cravings to be able to renounce sexual pleasure. Long before a thaumaturge like Apollonius of Tyana, who vowed chastity once and for all, and then had no more sexual relations for the rest of his life,¹³ Greece had known and honored similar models. In some people, such extreme virtue was the visible mark of the mastery they brought to bear on themselves and hence of the power they were worthy of exercising over others. Thus Xenophon's Agesilaus not only “kept at arm's length those whose intimacy he did not desire,” but kept from embracing even the boy he did love; and he was careful to lodge only in temples or in a place where “all men's eyes became witnesses to his rectitude.”¹⁴ But, for others, this abstention was linked directly to a form of wisdom that brought them into direct contact with some superior element in human nature and gave them access to the very essence of truth. The Socrates of the *Symposium* was like this, the one everybody wanted to be near, everybody was enamored of; the one whose wisdom everybody sought to appropriate—a wisdom that manifested and proved itself precisely in the fact that he was himself able to keep from laying hands on the provocative beauty of Alcibiades.¹⁵ The thematics of a relationship between sexual abstinence and access to truth was already quite prominent.

We must not ask too much of these few references, however. It would be a mistake to infer that the sexual morality of

Christianity and that of paganism form a continuity. Several themes, principles, or notions may be found in the one and the other alike, true; but for all that, they do not have the same place or the same value within them. Socrates is not a desert Father struggling against temptation, and Nicocles is not a Christian husband; Aristophanes' laughter at the expense of Agathon in drag has few traits in common with the disparagement of the invert that will be found much later in medical discourse. Moreover, one must also not lose sight of the fact that the Church and the pastoral ministry stressed the principle of a morality whose precepts were compulsory and whose scope was universal (which did not rule out differences of prescription relating to the status of individuals, or the existence of ascetic movements having their own aspirations). In classical thought, on the other hand, the demands of austerity were not organized into a unified, coherent, authoritarian moral system that was imposed on everyone in the same manner; they were more in the nature of a supplement, a "luxury" in relation to the commonly accepted morality. Further, they appeared in "scattered centers" whose origins were in different philosophical or religious movements. They developed in the midst of many separate groups. They proposed—more than they imposed—different styles of moderation or strictness, each having its specific character or "shape." Pythagorean austerity was not the same as that of the Stoics, which was very different in turn from that recommended by Epicurus. From the few similarities I have managed to point out, it should not be concluded that the Christian morality of sex was somehow "pre-formed" in ancient thought; one ought to imagine instead that very early in the moral thought of antiquity, a thematic complex—a "quadri-thematics" of sexual austerity—formed around and apropos of the life of the body, the institution of marriage, relations between men, and the existence of wisdom. And, crossing through institutions, sets of precepts, extremely diverse theoretical references, and in spite of many alterations, this thematics maintained a cer-