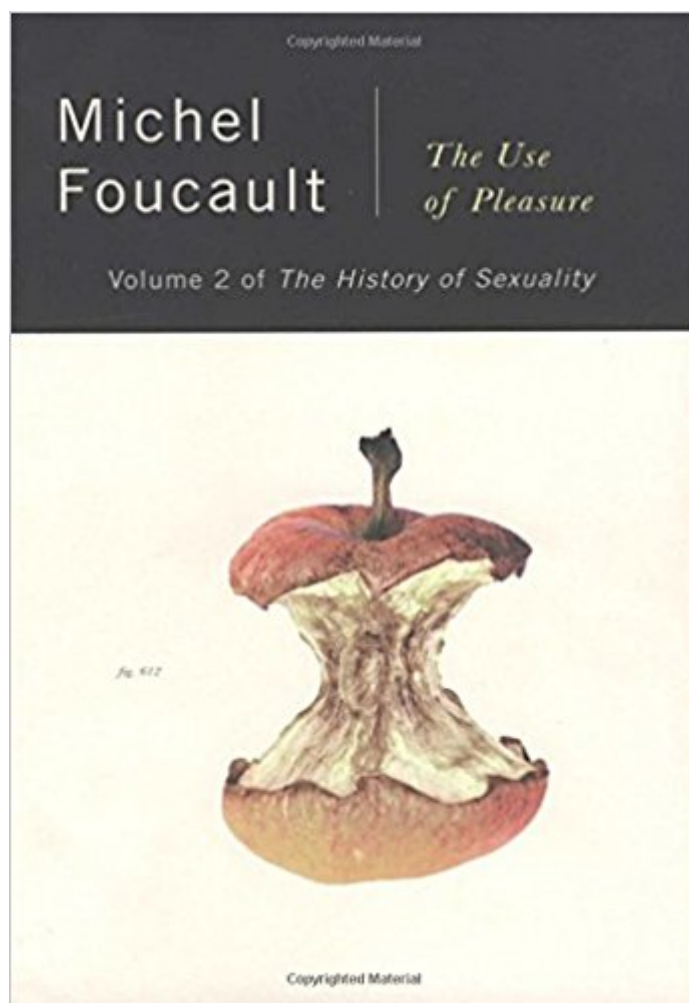


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The History Of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use Of Pleasure



Synopsis

In this sequel to *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, the brilliantly original French thinker who died in 1984 gives an analysis of how the ancient Greeks perceived sexuality. Throughout *The Uses of Pleasure* Foucault analyzes an irresistible array of ancient Greek texts on eroticism as he tries to answer basic questions: How in the West did sexual experience become a moral issue? And why were other appetites of the body, such as hunger, and collective concerns, such as civic duty, not subjected to the numberless rules and regulations and judgments that have defined, if not confined, sexual behavior?

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Customer Reviews

"Required reading for those who cling to stereotyped ideas about our difference from the Greeks in terms of pagan license versus Christian austerity or their hedonism versus our anxiety."-- Los Angeles Times Book Review

Text: English, French (translation)

interesting history in parts

Great!

love it

three quotations from the use of pleasure: 1) the work that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior is ethical work. Pg 272) an 'aesthetics of existence' is a way of life whose moral value does not depend either on one's being in conformity with a code of behavior, or on an effort of purification, but on certain formal principles in the use of pleasures, in the way one distributed them, in the limits one observed, in the hierarchy one respected. through reason and the relation to truth that governed it, such a life was committed to the maintenance and reproduction of an ontological order; moreover, it took on the brilliance of a beauty that was revealed to those able to behold it or keep its memory present in mind. Pg 893) the principle according to which sexual activity was meant to be regulated, the 'mode of subjection' was not defined by a universal legislation determining permitted and forbidden acts; but rather by an art that prescribed the modalities of a use that depended on different variables (need, time, status). Pg 91 if a man could successfully regulate and master his behavior and, a modern word, passions, he was in a pretty good position to maintain a functioning household of which included a wife, servants and children. and success with his household indicated he was fit to govern. the man, since time immemorial went out and brought home the bacon and the wife stayed home doing housework until the husband arrived with the bacon which she would prepare, and later, if the time was right, make ready for sexual duties in hope that sons would be born who would continue the bloodline. girls were pretty much forgotten. probably they observed their mothers as they busied about the house ordering servants as to chores done until someone wanted to marry them and they left the house of the father for the house of a husband who instructed her in the ways of maintaining his household. boys, on the other hand, had education to look forward to, and the free men, the professional class, the teachers, physicians, philosophers, many of whom found the boys beautiful instead of the stinky booger eaters the girls perceived them as being. in ancient greece, the literature informs us, there was the object of desire, the erotic object of desire, and for many free men that object was a boy, a relationship not of a legal matter but a problematic concern of certain philosophers, in particular Socrates and his biographers, plato and xenophon. there was an entire erotics, foucault tells us, games of love, courtships, devised by those desirous men surrounding the boys, not much different than the mass marketing campaign based on the word and undefined concept 'sexy' (just because a jacket is sexy does not mean the jacket or the wearer wants to engage in sexual activity) in the late 20th century. nor either were the boys supposed to take the erotic pressure seriously, they

were, after all, out in the world of men to get an education; however, the boys did not know they were not to take the presents, the stalking, the fawning, the invitations, seriously, and if they did, well, that was alright if they responded with the proper decorum, and if their lovers were not compromising the boy's honor and, as men, their own honor. so the male philosophers agreed, the boys are beautiful; however, you may want to consider that more beautiful than the bodies of boys are the souls of boys, and if you really want to be master of yourselves you should cultivate a desire for beauty, beauty in its highest nature, the soul, instead of beauty of the body for the sake of brief pleasures, for there is true love.now on to volume 3.

Great Book!!! Fast shipping !!

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French philosopher, historian of ideas, and social theorist and activist; he wrote many books, such as *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: An Introduction, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self, etc. Openly gay [see the James Miller biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*], he died of AIDS---the first "public figure" in France to die of the virus. He wrote in the opening chapter of this 1984 book (by which time he knew that he was dying), "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 or representations, but a history of 'sexuality' | 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." (Pg. 3) He continues, "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 the 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." (Pg. 4) He adds, "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. 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 the object of desire. (Pg. 5-6) He goes on, "I had to choose: either stick to the plan I had set or reorganize the whole study around the slow formation, in antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self. I opted for the latter." (Pg. 6) He says, "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 a moral domain? Why this ethical concern that was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity?" (Pg. 10) He concludes, "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" this volume is devoted to the manner in which sexual activity was problematized by philosophers and doctors in classical Greek culture. (Pg. 12) He observes, "In the reflection of the Greeks of the classical period, it does seem that the moral problematization of food, drink, and sexual activity was carried out in a rather similar manner. Foods, wines, and relations with women and boys constituted analogous ethical material; they brought forces into play that were natural, but that always tended to be excessive, and they all raised the same question: how could one, how must one make use of this dynamics of pleasures, desires, and acts? A question of right use." (Pg. 51-52) Later, he adds, "in classical Greek thought, the ascetics that enabled one to make oneself into an ethical subject was an integral part of the practice of a virtuous life, which was also the life of a free man in the full, positive and political sense of the word." (Pg. 77) He states, "Were the Greeks bisexual, then? Yes, if we mean by this that a Greek could be enamored of a boy or a girl that it was common for a male to change to a preference for women after boy-loving inclinations of his youth. But we need to take note of the fact that they did not recognize two kinds of desire each claiming a share of men's hearts of appetites. To their way of thinking, what made it possible to desire a man or a woman was simply the appetite that nature had implanted in man's heart for beautiful human beings,

whatever their sex might be. (Pg. 188) He adds, “The Greeks could not imagine that a man might need a different nature in order to love a man; but they were inclined to think that the pleasures one enjoyed in such a relationship ought to be given an ethical form different from the one that was required when it came to loving a woman.” (Pg. 192) He suggests, “what is important to grasp here is not why the Greeks had a fondness for boys but why they had a fondness for pederasty; that is, why they elaborated a courtship practice, a moral reflection, and a philosophical asceticism, around that fondness.” (Pg. 214) While this series becomes increasingly controversial with each succeeding volume, it offers keen insight into Foucault’s thought at the twilight of his life.

Got interested in this series after reading Foucault’s Last Decade by Stuart Elden. Realizing these represented much of the last work Foucault did, but in reading this it occurred to me that the History of Madness was much the better book. But why? The approach is similar though the topic is different. Something must be wrong in this comparison. My best guess is that Foucault hurried his research and writing in this history more so than in the other. The writing strikes me as about the same but then I am comparing different translated works and the translation may be the main element in that as opposed to the difference in the originals which I should read but I am too lazy. French takes me a lot more time. In short, if I recommend Foucault readings to students they will be from the History of Madness (or some of his lectures) and not this.

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