

Introduction: Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*:  
The Fourth Volume, or, A Field Left  
Fallow for Others to Till

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THE UNTIMELY DEATH of Michel Foucault in 1984 left unfinished his influential and controversial multivolume *The History of Sexuality*. Indeed, volumes 2 and 3 appeared on bookshop shelves in Paris only a few days before his death. The fourth volume, entitled *Les Aveux de la chair* (Confessions of the flesh) and devoted to the discourse of sexuality in late ancient Christianity, remains at Foucault's request unpublished.<sup>1</sup> In the intervening years since the publication of volumes 2 and 3, *The History of Sexuality* has been the object of intense engagement and critique, and it has left its imprint on a wide body of scholarship and inquiry. Whether one greets Foucault's *History* with enthusiasm or suspicion, its impact is undeniable. This special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* is devoted to exploring some of the Jewish and Christian sources from the period Foucault sought to explore in his fourth volume and thereby to engaging imaginatively in a continuation of Foucault's work—a continuation that, at important moments, necessarily includes some measure of critique. This introduction attempts to articulate a theoretical response to Foucault and his critics as a framework for reading the essays included in this issue.

<sup>1</sup>See Jeremy R. Carrette, ed., *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault* (New York, 1999), part 3: "Christianity, Sexuality, and the Self: Fragments of an Unpublished Volume," 153–97, for a convenient collection of some components of the fourth volume. (Also worthy of note is Carrette's monograph *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* [New York, 2000].) Other relevant materials can be found in English translation in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York, 1994), which excerpts the comprehensive anthology of Foucault's occasional writings: Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits, 1954–1984*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris, 1994).

Numerous readers of Foucault's writing after 1976 (by which is generally meant the final two published volumes of *The History of Sexuality*) have described it as departing from or even renegeing on the promise of his earlier work.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we argue here that this body of work can also be read as a substantive continuation of the same intellectual, ethical, and political project that energized "the early Foucault."<sup>3</sup> "Sexuality" constitutes for Foucault the modern hermeneutics of the self and as such is as much a "modern" institution as the prison and the asylum. If we provisionally accept this seemingly paradoxical notion, we are led to imagine a time "before sexuality."<sup>4</sup> For Foucault, the history of sexuality is not the narrative reconstruction of the changing forms of a transhistorical essence but rather the history of a discourse and culture within which a certain modern institution came into existence. It is, in short, a genealogy.<sup>5</sup> Foucault defined the history of sexuality as an integral part of his general archaeology of the subject: "And now, I wish to study those forms of understanding which the subject creates about himself. Those forms of self-understanding are important I think to analyse the modern experience of sexuality."<sup>6</sup> This formulation of

<sup>2</sup>Compare the discussion in Alain Vizier, "Incipit Philosophia," in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, ed. David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Princeton, 1998), 67, of other readers of Foucault who have seen in the final work on sexuality a retreat and reversal of his earlier project.

<sup>3</sup>The debate over Foucault in the field of religious studies has been as contentious as anywhere else, including over the question of periodizing Foucault's oeuvre. See the recent debate in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*: Ivan Strenski, "Religion, Power, and Final Foucault," *JAAR* 66 (1998): 345–67, followed by two responses: David Chidester, "No First or Final Solutions: Strategies, Techniques, and Ivan Strenski's Garden in the Study of Religion," *JAAR* 66 (1998): 369–76, and Gary Lease, "Public Redemption: Strenski's Mission for Religious Studies," *JAAR* 66 (1998): 377–80. See also Strenski's rejoinder, "Respecting Power, Worshipping Power, and Knowing the Difference," *JAAR* 66 (1998): 381–83. Finally, see also the theologically inflected readings of Foucault in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>An analogy may be helpful here. We not infrequently find texts or courses on the history of religion. However, according to many modern scholars—among them, William Cantwell Smith (*The Meaning and End of Religion* [London, 1978]); Talal Asad (*Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* [Baltimore, 1993]); Jonathan Z. Smith ("Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor [Chicago, 1998], 269–84); and Timothy Fitzgerald (*The Ideology of Religious Studies* [New York, 2000])—"religion" itself in its modern sense simply did not exist before the Enlightenment, just as sexuality did not before the Enlightenment for Foucault. But in the case of neither sexuality nor religion should this be taken as a statement that no changes in the past prepared the way for the modern epistemic shift. Interestingly enough, we would locate those preparatory shifts in the case of religion in the fourth century, much as Foucault, as we shall see, locates them then for the case of sexuality.

<sup>6</sup>Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self (1980)," in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Carrette, 161.

"forms of the understanding which the subject creates about himself" is crucial to the framing of Foucault's object of analysis. The history of sexuality is not a history of bodies, practices, attitudes, and positions but a history of the formation of a "himself."<sup>7</sup> The history of sexuality documents a critical dimension of the broader modern project of subjectivation. Foucault's earlier histories of the prison, the hospital, and the asylum showed how these institutions produce the prisoner, the patient, and the insane through discourses and practices of power/knowledge. The history of sexuality, meanwhile, locates the process of subjectivation in the activity of the subject himself on himself—in the practices of self-knowledge and self-control—and via the institutional disciplines of sexology (the site of categorization) and psychoanalysis (the site of confession). The history of sexuality, or perhaps more exactly put at this juncture, its prehistory,<sup>8</sup> is part of a history of the present, the present within which one now experiences oneself as possessing a sexuality or embodying a sexuality with all of the regulatory and productive force—productive of shame, productive of desire, productive of pleasure, productive of love—of that experience.<sup>9</sup>

In a series of three texts published originally in the early 1980s, Foucault began to put forward some of the reflections that would have become part of the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*. The discursive shift to Christianity would have, by all accounts, been a watershed in the development of the subject. As we have already observed, "sexuality" is not and cannot be for Foucault an autonomous object of inquiry; instead, it is intimately bound up with the production of "selves" and, in particular, the modern self. Hence, it is not surprising that the fourth volume would engage with the Christian ascetical and monastic realms, sources par excellence of discourses and practices of self-knowledge and self-regulation.

The first text in Foucault's fragmentary fourth volume is a transcription of lectures given at Dartmouth College and at the University of California

<sup>7</sup>The masculinist bias of Foucault's work on sexuality is, of course, undeniable. Whether and how Foucault's work might still remain useful for feminist work has produced a much more varied discussion. In addition to the critiques by feminist classicists discussed below, see also Carolyn Dean, "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality," *History and Theory* 33 (1994): 271–96; Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston, 1988); Susan J. Hekman, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park, 1996); Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism* (Boston, 1992); Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism* (New York, 1993); Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York, 1991).

<sup>8</sup>See Joel Black, "Taking the Sex out of Sexuality: Foucault's Failed History," in *Rethinking Sexuality*, ed. Larmour, Miller, and Platter, 46. Just below, we shall be making a terminological proposal that avoids this infelicitous locution.

<sup>9</sup>In this sense, we understand the *History of Sexuality* as part and parcel of the same project as *Discipline and Punish*.

at Berkeley in 1980. It concerns “the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self” and deals with sexuality only peripherally and in passing—as, indeed, do large sections of volumes 2 and 3.<sup>10</sup> Foucault’s central argument in these lectures is that “confession” in a very different sense from its pre-Christian use<sup>11</sup> is the heart of the new Christian subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> This Christian subjectivity is both product and producer of a “hermeneutics of the self,” a constant investigation that Foucault carefully distinguishes from the accounting of the self by Stoics such as Seneca, on the one hand, and the Buddhist enlightenment, on the other. This new Christian confession

does not reveal the self as an illusion. It gives place to a task which cannot be anything else but undefined. This task has two objectives. First, there is the task of clearing up all the illusions, temptations and seductions that can occur in the mind, and discovering the reality of what is going on within ourselves. Second, one has to get free from any attachment to this self, not because the self is an illusion [hence the distinction from Buddhism], but because the self is much too real. The more we discover the truth about ourselves, the more we have to renounce ourselves; and the more we want to renounce ourselves the more we need to bring to light the reality of ourselves.

Foucault goes on from there to cite Peter Brown’s oral communiqué to him that “what we have to understand is why it is that sexuality became, in Christian cultures, the seismograph of our subjectivity.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most brilliant insight of this essay is that the essential pattern of what we might call Christian (married) sexual morality, including its generation and reification of something called “love,” its insistence on monogamy, and its suspicion of sexual intercourse even with the sober goal of procreation, was—however contested—already in place before the Christians, and the Christians simply inserted this piece of “pagan” morality into their own burgeoning sexual ethic. The change that constitutes a “history of sexuality” here is, then, “in the relationship everyone has to his own sexual activity.” As Foucault decisively remarks, “Christianity proposed a new type of experience of oneself as a sexual being,”<sup>14</sup> as true for the married

<sup>10</sup>Foucault, “About the Beginning,” 158–81. Originally published in *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (May 1993): 198–227.

<sup>11</sup>Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley, 2001), 159–95.

<sup>12</sup>Foucault continues this argument in another lecture given in 1980, “Sexuality and Solitude,” which appears in several different versions. See Michel Foucault, “Sexuality and Solitude (1980),” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Carrette, 182–87; see Carrette’s introduction at 182 for the publication and translation history of this text. All quotations here are from Carrette’s edition.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 184.

Christian of late antiquity as for the more radically “queer,” the ascetic.<sup>15</sup> For Foucault, this move is exemplified by Augustine’s repeated figuration of the rebellious will in the penis that moves without its “owner” desiring it to. Augustine “bears witness to the new type of relationship which Christianity established between sex and subjectivity” because “the main question is not, as it was in Artemidorus, the problem of penetration: it is the problem of erection. As a result, it is not the problem of a relationship to other people, but the problem of the relationship of oneself to oneself.”<sup>16</sup> The new regime consists of some change not in sexual morality but in the “permanent hermeneutics of oneself.” This self-interpretation involves less an attempt to clock one’s conformity to a norm than a regularized exposure to oneself and (through confession) to others the truth of one’s sexual being, the involuntary movements of the libido against the will.

With this point Foucault moves us toward John Cassian, the great articulator and synthesizer of the monastic life for European Christianity in the fifth century. As Foucault argues, Augustine’s theory of libido had been developed in the monasteries and the ascetic milieu and would have a “huge influence on Western technologies of the self.” The task of the monk was the perpetual self-control of his very thoughts, which required his investigating hidden (ultimately unconscious) motivations in an unending search for sexual purity and thus purity of the self. Foucault theorizes a shift from a Platonic notion of purity epitomized by Socrates lying down with Alcibiades and not touching him—mastery over oneself through a victory of the will—to the insistence by Cassian and other Christian ascetical theorists that purity consists of a constant and brutal struggle with the thoughts and images in one’s mind. For Socrates, the struggle is not to do what he knows he desires to do; for Cassian (and his monastic siblings), it is not to desire. In this shift from resisting desire to suppressing it altogether lies the crux of the matter, for it would seem that it was this reconfiguration of the relationship between the self and desire that eventually enabled the movement, much later on, from the prohibition of same-sex acts to the identification of the homosexual as a species of human being, the most central argument of Foucault’s *History*.<sup>17</sup>

The main question of sexual ethics has moved from relations to people [i.e., from relations to others to relation to oneself] and from the

<sup>15</sup>See the essay by Virginia Burrus in this volume and, for an earlier and very different interpretation, Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

<sup>16</sup>Foucault, “Sexuality and Solitude,” 186.

<sup>17</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Introduction* (New York, 1980). This volume, called “introduction,” seemingly represents the conclusion of the *History*, the point to which it was leading, but, of course, that is the whole point of an explicit genealogy, a history of the present. The Christian epistemic shift is thus an absolutely necessary step in the argument.

penetration model to the relation to oneself and to the erection problem. Sexuality, subjectivity and truth were strongly linked together. This, I think, is the religious framework in which the masturbation problem—which was nearly ignored or at least neglected by the Greeks, who considered that masturbation was a thing for slaves and for satyrs, but not for free citizens—appeared as one of the main issues of sexual life.<sup>18</sup>

Foucault, in an elegant exemplification of his thought, identifies the growing concentration, even obsession, with nocturnal emissions and masturbation as a product of wider discursive forces.<sup>19</sup> These are the forces that had shifted the entire self-technology from the classical penetrative model to the erectile model with its concomitant panoptical surveillance of the involuntary movements of concupiscence in the soul and in the flesh.

Oddly, and interestingly, in the end Foucault's actual reading of Cassian seems to have led him in a somewhat different direction, for rather than inscribing an absolute difference between the pre-Christian and the Christian in the history of sexuality, he writes:

These new fashions in monastic sexual mores, the build-up of a new relationship between the subject and the truth and the establishment of complex relations of obedience to the other self all form part of a whole whose coherence is well illustrated in Cassian's text. No new point of departure is involved. Going back in time before Christianity, one may find many of these elements in embryonic form and sometimes fully shaped in ancient philosophy—Stoic or Neo-Platonic, for instance. Moreover Cassian himself presents in a systematic way (how far he makes his own contribution is another question which need not concern us here) a sum of experience which he asserts to be that of Eastern monasticism. In any case, study of a text of this kind shows that it hardly makes sense to talk about a "Christian sexual ethic," still less about a "Judaeo-Christian" one. . . . The coming of Christianity, considered as a massive rupture with earlier moralities and the dominant introduction of a quite different one, is barely noticeable. As P. Brown says, in speaking of Christianity as part of our reading of the

<sup>18</sup>Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," 187. This point might be exemplified as well with respect to shifts in biblical meanings. For example, as presented in Genesis, the sin of Onan is relational; he sinned against his brother and his widow by spilling his seed on the ground when he was supposed to provide them with "seed." In the postbiblical ("Christian" era), however, the sin of Onan has become the sin of masturbation, paralleling Foucault's analysis of a shift from "relations to people" to "relation to oneself" at the center of a practice of sexual subjectivity.

<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of this particular monastic problem in a range of early Christian settings, see David Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 419–60.

giant mass of antiquity, the topography of the parting of the waters<sup>20</sup> is hard to pin down.<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, there seems to be some tension within Foucault's own sketches for the fourth volume. On the one hand, in the former essays considered here, albeit very briefly, he is arguing for some kind of absolute—or near absolute—break between pre-Christian and Christian epistemes, while in the quotation just given, which serves as the end-point of these studies, it would seem that he claims the exact opposite. We would hardly wish to ascribe such an unthematized inconsistency to Rabbi Foucault, however, at least not within such a short space of text. This tension would seem to be the product or symptom of a larger and very productive ambiguity within the *History* itself, an ambiguity between the history of the production of that modern subject of the discourse we call “sexuality,” on the one hand, and a history of interdictions, permissions, practices, and pleasures, on the other. The former might better have been called using Foucault's own Nietzschean formulation, the genealogy of sexuality,<sup>22</sup> in order to distinguish its project much more clearly from the latter, more conventional one that appears as a history of a something:

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 of the experience of sexuality from the eighteenth century onward, without doing a historical and critical study dealing with desire and desiring subject. In other words, without undertaking a “genealogy.” . . . In short, with this genealogy the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behavior was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain.<sup>23</sup>

Given this, it seems plausible to us that *The History of Sexuality* has indeed a doubled scheme, or, put otherwise, that “history” functions in two senses in that work. In the *genealogical* sense, it would seem that Christianity—or better, certain dominant Christian discourses—produced

<sup>20</sup>It would seem that Brown said “watershed.”

<sup>21</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Battle for Chastity,” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Carrette, 188–97, quotation at 196–97.

<sup>22</sup>Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, 1977), 139–64.

<sup>23</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (repr. ed.; New York, 1986), 5.

a decisive paradigm shift or epistemic break that was a necessary step on the way to “sexuality.” In the *historical* sense, the break, if there was any at all, was evolutionary and not revolutionary. At another level, we might wish to locate this very strain in the inner stress produced in the subject of a sexuality who, nevertheless, calls his own subjective experience into question.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps even better, rather than seeing a site of tension here, we simply have a richer sense of what the Foucaultian historiographical project always was: not only the record of epistemic shifts and breaks but also the inscription of deep continuities within cultural development. Although Foucault’s interest was always—even in the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*—oriented toward the break that constituted modernity, as his writing developed we see more and more of the switchbacks and shifts along the way. Where others have seen continuous development, Foucault sees a *longue durée*; and where others have seen no change at all, Foucault surprisingly locates the movements of epistemes. Furthermore, this understanding of the Foucaultian project opens a space for research that is precisely local and specific, research that breaks open the paradigm of a Judeo-Christian sexual ethic, investigating the local and specific histories, the minor narratives, of particular Jewish and particular Christian sexual ethics. In other words, we suggest, against some other readers of Foucault, that *The History of Sexuality* comprises two noncontradictory but tensely articulated projects—projects that are continuous with Foucault’s own prior work, in which the subject is a function of an enunciation.

We shall begin, however, by setting up the Judeo-Christian precisely as a problematic. Foucault’s *History*, as we have already mentioned, makes virtually no mention of the “Jews” or of the products/texts of Jewish

<sup>24</sup>See David M. Halperin, “Is There a History of Sexuality?” *History and Theory* 28 (1989): 257–74. See also “something about the idea of writing a history of sexuality, or perhaps something within the discourse of sexuality itself, undermined the project of writing such a history and made it impossible to carry it out” (Black, 43–44). We would question, however, any attempt to situate that “failure” as falling in the gap between *The History of Sexuality: Introduction* and *The Use of Pleasure*. It will be obvious why it is impossible for us to accept, for instance, the following formulation: “The original project was a failure not because Foucault’s interests changed but because his project was based on the mistaken belief that he could take the sex out of sexuality, that he could treat sexuality as a separate discursive phenomenon apart from an ethics of the self, on the one hand, and an erotics of the imagination, on the other. One could not simply transpose a specifically modern discourse of sexuality into the past, or even compare ancient and modern sexual attitudes” (ibid., 59). There seems to be no moment in the *Introduction* or in the latter volumes that suggests that such was Foucault’s conception of his project at any time. A *productive* tension nevertheless remains, precisely because “the twentieth-century sexual historian simply [could not] turn his back on the present and ignore the specific disciplinary and technological features of sexuality in his time—the private fantasies of the individual discovered by psychoanalysis.”

cultural history. This is not an ethical complaint against Foucault. It could only be such a complaint if one were to understand the *History* as a history of the vicissitudes of an already existing object, "sex" perhaps, and not a genealogy of the coming into discourse of "sexuality." One way that we might articulate this further would be to suggest that the "other voices" that Foucault seeks to expose in his second and third volumes are indeed those of "others" and to insist that we not read the elite males of Greece and Rome as people like us dressed up in togas. Of course, this does invite other scholars, in a kind of necessarily infinite regress, to follow in Foucault's wake by seeking to hear the otherness of other voices in antiquity.

We suggest, therefore, that some of the critique of Foucault's *History* comes from mistaking his discourse for another. There is no question that Foucault's project is a genealogy through the male line, as it were, of particular present masculinist discourses of control of large populations (sexuality). There is a compelling feminist concern that the way that Foucault framed his project around dominant discourses might well produce the unsalutary effect of simply reinscribing the values embedded in these discourses and thereby providing little ground for subverting or critiquing them or, indeed, for imagining that there were historical subjects capable of forms of agency outside of these overarching discourses. However, one might keep in mind a central tenet of Foucault's theory of power, which holds that every power relation implies the presence of resistance. Moreover, another way of reading Foucault's genealogy is to understand that the discourse of sexuality Foucault uncovers is itself a mode of occlusion and therefore the most salient site for critique. The degree to which Foucault's genealogy is successful resides precisely in its capacity to render visible the occlusions for which some critics have blamed him. Such a reading emphasizes that the history of sexuality is a genealogy of the discourses that produce and constrain desiring subjects, not a history of "sex" as a transhistorical given. Insofar, however, as the history of sexuality is understood as the history of an object called sexuality through time, then both critiques come into play.

One might also, by analogy, recall Foucault's work on other subjectivating discourses such as his history of madness. In this work, Foucault does not attempt a historical account of something eternal called "madness," which would, therefore, require him both ethically and intellectually to attend to the experiences of the "mad" as well. Instead, he undertakes to render visible the history of discourses that led up to the modern, hegemonic, oppressive discourse of psychiatry. We can understand his "history of sexuality" to be performing a similar kind of work. Although we acknowledge the potential danger embedded in Foucault's project that some feminists have diagnosed, we align ourselves with a feminist reading of

Foucault that appropriates his genealogies of dominant discourses in the service of challenging their supremacy.<sup>25</sup>

The occlusion of Jews from Foucault's work is, thus, we claim, not an ethical problem, though it may in fact constitute an empirical problem for the genealogy itself. Insofar as Foucault claims certain moments of causality or even of nonfactitious co-occurrence in his history, then possible counterexamples from Jewish cultural history (and we privilege Jewish here over, for instance, Chinese, solely because the Jews lived and wrote within the same historical contexts as early Christians) might put into question some of the central claims of Foucault's genealogies.

Here is an example: Foucault, as we have seen, built much of his argument in the fragments of the fourth volume on the growing preoccupation in monastic circles of the late fourth and early fifth centuries with masturbation and nocturnal emissions. Foucault argues that this represents a shift from a relational sexual ethic to a hermeneutics of the self centered around sex, a hermeneutics that, on our reading, paves the way for the ultimate production of the discursive regime of sexuality.<sup>26</sup> However, it should be noted that a similar obsession with masturbation developed among the rabbis during approximately the same centuries and

<sup>25</sup>See Lin Foxhall, "Pandora Unbound: A Feminist Critique of Foucault's 'History of Sexuality,'" in *Rethinking Sexuality*, ed. Larmour, Miller, and Platter, 122–37; Amy Richlin, "Foucault's *History of Sexuality*: A Useful Theory for Women?" in *ibid.*, 138–70. We disagree with the statement that Foucault made either of the primitive mistakes of "taking [the products of a dominant masculine ideology] literally" or of "construing the part for the whole" (Foxhall, 123). Foucault is *not writing about the lived reality of Greek society* but about the prehistorical (that is, prior to the invention of sexuality) development of discourses that lead into the modern, masculinist, power-laden discourse of sexuality. We suggest that in part this misprision of Foucault's project is the result of the gap in the published record of the crucial fourth volume, the available fragments of which render the design clearer. The problem is clearly foregrounded in Richlin's comment that "what looks to a philosopher like Foucault's 'late work on ethics' looks to me—and other classicists—like Foucault's late work on Greece and Rome" (138). We think it is easy to see why classicists and others would read Foucault's last work in this fashion, but it may not be the most useful way of reading him, and it may not align easily with his own contextualization of the work. From this perspective the claim that "Foucault's aim, as set out in the first volume of the *History*, is a much narrower one than the title of that series would lead the reader to expect" (*ibid.*, 142) assumes the very opposite of Foucault's argument.

Feminists and feminist classicists are by no means of one mind on these questions, as the sources cited in note 7 above make clear. See also Page duBois, "The Subject in Antiquity after Foucault," in *Rethinking Sexuality*, ed. Larmour, Miller, and Platter, 85–103.

<sup>26</sup>We would argue that this makes Foucault a better historian than he is usually taken to be, for his epistemic breaks seem less mysterious on this reading. In a sense, Foucault is operating in one aspect of a structuralist paradigm on this reading; cumulative incremental shifts build in a certain direction until finally there is a restructuring of the whole system, but when that restructuring occurs, it is sudden and total. Insofar as the epistemic break that Foucault argues for took place in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, it is not surprising, then, to find that the earlier preparations were more gradual and continuous in nature.

seemingly without the beginnings of a hermeneutics of the self.<sup>27</sup> Foucault is right, we think, to look for the meanings of the histories of sexual mores in broader sociocultural developments, but how would consideration of the rabbinic material have forced him to modify his explanatory mechanisms? Similar arguments could no doubt be made about the ways that the inclusion of Greek and Roman women in the narrative might have led to a modification of some of Foucault's specific points. Page duBois, for example, has provided us with a useful critique of Foucault's *History* that proceeds from a sound reading of his project, writing, for instance, that "Foucault's argument in *The Use of Pleasure* is that the very notion of sexuality as a category must be put into question."<sup>28</sup> However, here too there are grounds for demurral. DuBois writes of Foucault's nondiscussion of Sappho (seventh century B.C.E.): "There was radical change, particularly in Athens, between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.E. But—and I believe this is a very important issue—the methodological decision to discuss only classical culture is *significant*, not inevitable or self-evident. It turns 'the Greeks' into our ancestors, visibly devoted to misogyny and the control of women and their desires."<sup>29</sup> But, of course, this is the whole point of a genealogical exercise, to uncover "our ancestors," or perhaps, at any rate, "their ancestors," the ancestors of those who oppress "us." That said, duBois contributes a fascinating and important reading of how the suppression of Sappho is constitutive of the very discourse of the use of the pleasures that Foucault treats and convinces us that a reading of Sappho would have led to a richer and deeper understanding of the men of the classical period as well. As duBois writes, "In my view, the most compelling feature of Foucault's volumes on the ancient world concerns his delineation of the gradual production of a desiring subject, a masculine ethical and philosophical subject, through the medium of prescriptive philosophical texts. His is a descriptive account of a culture radically different from our own, a version flawed, in my view, principally by its failure to take into account dialectically what the 'quadrithematics of austerity' displaced."<sup>30</sup> DuBois goes on to articulate

<sup>27</sup>Michael L. Satlow, "'Wasted Seed,' the History of a Rabbinic Idea," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65 (1994): 137–75.

<sup>28</sup>DuBois, 86.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 88. Interestingly, only two pages after berating Foucault for writing of the relations of persons to "their wives" and remarking that not everyone has a wife (has anyone who has made this charge against Foucault paid attention to the fact that he too was not the marrying type?), duBois also adopts rhetorically the stance of the sources that she treats, "our ancestors devoted to the control of women."

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 89. Might we not discover some of the archaic roots of the thematics of austerity in a thematics of scarcity as discussed by Froma Zeitlin, "Signifying Difference: The Case of Hesiod's Pandora," in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago, 1996), 53–86?

lucidly just how Foucault's *History* has been useful for her, indeed, the ways that it is a "revelation," one that makes possible her own reading of Sappho,<sup>31</sup> at the same time that she demonstrates how the occlusion of the female subject of desire distorts Foucault's picture, or, better put, how Sappho's inclusion would make the text richer and more nuanced with respect to Foucault's own problematic and not some other one entirely.

This should not be taken, however, as an argument that Foucault should have done that or could have done that but rather as a present intervention in the future of this discourse. The time has come to begin this work. Although the essays included in this issue are not (nor were they invited to be) explicitly positioned with respect to the Foucaultian genealogy of sexuality, this is the context in which we have chosen to frame them together, as interestingly and crucially raising some of the questions of where a reconfigured sense of the fourth volume might lead. Despite Baudrillard's claim that Foucault is a mythmaker and only his epigones are concerned about "truth," the question of the usefulness of Foucault's particular myths for the interpretation of late antiquity remains open and compelling. Obviously, this is quite different from treating Foucault as if he were writing the kind of history that most of us—and most work in this journal—perform; in other words, the question here is not whether Foucault is "right" but how his problematic opens us up to new work, such as the studies contained in this issue.

Far from seeing a shift toward a hermeneutics of the self, Dina Stein proposes in her essay that "rabbinic literature is a cultural production in which social identities are negotiated and renegotiated." These "identities" are not of individuals but of social groups—the Jewish people, the rabbis. In studying a group of rabbinic narratives about Rabbi (Judah the Prince, patriarch of the Jews of Palestine in the late second and early third centuries) and his anonymous maidservant, Stein works directly with Foucault's idea that relations of power are immanent in all relations. In a remarkable reading of these narratives, she argues that the figure of the female slave of Rabbi is productive of a self-reflexive critique of the lack of rabbinic self-reflexivity. Like Foucault, who saw the difference between antiquity and modernity in the figure of Artemidorus's dream interpretation, in which sex is a cipher for relations of power (and not the opposite, as it is in our own dream interpretation), Stein reads the narrative of sexual resistance on the part of Rabbi's maid as signifying the rabbis' suspicious take on their own hegemony over self, others, and especially language. In sum, while Foucault claims that the late ancient (i.e., Christian) discourse of (pre)sexuality is implicated in a partly new hermeneutics of the self, Stein sees the parallel developments within the rabbinic texts as part and parcel of a multivalent reflection on language and discursive power.

<sup>31</sup>DuBois, 90.

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert examines similar rabbinic discourses of sexuality in order to articulate what the rabbis themselves understood to be Jewish identity. Her central question is whether, by exploring the available evidence for women's subjectivity, we might be able to construct a better genealogy of rabbinic power as well as begin to treat women as subjects of history. Fonrobert seeks to accomplish this goal by exposing the mystifications within the rabbinic genealogy of their own authority. Through a careful reading of selected rabbinic and contemporary texts that address menstruation and sexuality, Fonrobert teases out some knowledge of the ways that women's religion in the third century might have contested, *inter alia*, the male constructions of "Jewish" and "Christian" entities and identities.

Jill Gorman considers her essay to be part of the work of a "historian of ancient sexuality," hence clearly outside of the *general* Foucaultian inquiry. At the same time, she situates her work explicitly within a *specific* Foucaultian project, the one that allows for different Christian sexual ethics to operate at the same time. Gorman discusses a fourth-century Christian text that inscribes female-female desire within the structure of an already-queered Christian novelistic tradition within which *queer* desire is the heterosexual, celibate desire of a woman for a man (typically an apostle). Reading the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena* (*AXP*) as a revision of the second-century romance of Paul and Thecla, Gorman notes that it is the celibate but highly eroticized desire of two women for each other that is the center of the novel's plot. At the same time, Gorman argues that the "instances of male intrusion into female relationships provide evidence of the desire of the *AXP*'s author to unsettle and control the female same-sex bonds the narrative has produced." Paradoxically and compellingly, Gorman understands the rewriting of the story of Paul and Thecla's male-female celibate Eros in the female-female celibate Eros of Xanthippe and Polyxena to be the *less* queer, more policed version of the story, one that might have served as propaganda against the pseudomarriages of male and female ascetics in the fourth century. Gorman argues that the author of this text attempted to contain the potentially subversive effects of the earlier *Apocryphal Acts* while, possibly, unaware of the potential subversion implied in this new narrative.

A more directly queer study is that of Virginia Burrus, who treats the three famous hagiographies of Jerome as an instance in the production of a "new" Christian desiring subject, along the lines of Foucault's Cassian (Jerome's contemporary) but quite different in substance. In a very Foucaultian move, Burrus sees in the discourse of celibacy an incitement to and enactment of desire that are rather different from Foucault's Cassian. Positioning the typology of the three texts as "gay," queerly heterosexual, and bisexual, Burrus queers sexuality, thus inscribing the inescapability of that discursive regime. Rather than highlighting the shift toward a

confessional subjectivity, Burrus focuses on the developing “power of fantasy to shape—and reshape—a human life.” The first text that she focuses on is an autobiographical confession but a fantasmatic one. Like the author of the *AXP*, Jerome uses the novelistic genre, but he does so to develop a new kind of textuality, the fitful beginnings of Christian hagiography that leave the reader “with the impression of an ongoing, even restless experimentation at work in these texts.” In her reading of the first of Jerome’s saints’ lives, the *Life of Paul the Hermit*, Burrus suggests that “its interruptive and repetitive narrativity contributes to the (paradoxical) work of psychic deformation, restlessly resisting the fixation of ‘identity.’ It contributes thereby to the purification of desire, to the production of a queerly pure desire—a desire whose end of self-dissolution turns out to be no end at all.” Although it is the way that these texts dramatize the development of a new Christian subjectivity through their discourses of desire that renders them grist for the Foucaultian mill, there is also, as Burrus makes clear, an element of the more purely queer in their erotic content. While the first of these narratives presents the love of two old men for each other in romantic and eroticized terms, in the next of the Hieronymian lives, *On the Captive Monk*, we find an even queerer narrative of sexless desire between a married monk and his bride. In the third of these texts, *The Life of the Blessed Hilarion*, Burrus claims and shows that “it is precisely by playing at generic conventionality that Jerome achieves his queer results.”

In his essay on love magic in Coptic Egypt David Frankfurter investigates the involvement of monks not only with their own desiring “selves” but also with the complications of desire among the worldly in late ancient Egypt. Frankfurter’s narrative of a magic spell in which a young woman was transformed into a mare and then back to a woman also relates to “a social dilemma in late antique Egypt.” Here too—as indeed in most of the essays in this collection—we find the erotic deeply intertwined with questions of identity and social change. An intriguing connection between several of these essays is the way that apparently different discourses such as ascetical theory and practice, on the one hand, and erotic magic spells, on the other, are similarly (in Frankfurter’s formulation) “dealing with ritual attempts to disentangle women, and often men as well, from tightly enmeshed family environments.”

In the closing essay, David Brakke explores the function of the “Ethiopian demon” within the very monastic literature that Foucault considered so pivotal. While Brakke invokes (and is informed by) Homi Bhabha’s work on stereotypification and the production of subjects in the colonial framework, he makes the Foucauldian move of seeing “the seemingly repressive aspect of ascetic behavior [namely, its ‘Ethiopianization’ of demons] within a creative program intended to produce ‘a new subjectivity.’”

Brakke, moreover, conducts his investigation as a study of the eroticized guide-disciple relationship upon which Foucault had so concentrated in the essays considered at the beginning of this introduction, the relationship that constituted a primary site in which “speaking of one’s sexuality produced knowledge of the self.” Working within the Foucauldian paradigms of research, Brakke, by extending the literary reach of the inquiry, contributes important correctives and supplements to Foucault’s paradigm. In his fascinating study, Brakke articulates relationships among the blackness of the Ethiopian demon, his stereotyped hypersexuality, and questions of “paganism,” heresy, repentance, and conversion that were at the heart of the production of Foucault’s own new Christian subjectivity. As in Burrus’s essay, the very celibate asceticism of the new monastic movements within Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries is understood as an integral part of the history of the desiring subject, as indeed an incitement to multiple forms of desire, queer desires. Strikingly, Brakke shows through his analysis that encounters with Ethiopian demons almost always indicate within the monastic literature a point of crisis in the homoerotic attachment of disciple to master.

Taken together, the essays collected in this special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* offer examples of how the challenges of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* have been taken seriously by scholars working closely with late ancient Jewish and Christian sources. These are obviously not the essays Foucault himself would have written, and the authors themselves engage and contest Foucault’s ideas in quite different ways. Each essay, in its own fashion, invites its readers to consider the continuities and discontinuities, the paradoxical strangeness and familiarity of the late ancient world from the vantage point of the present. We hope that these essays contribute to a deepening and complicating of Foucault’s project and legacy *and* to the ongoing, collaborative work of writing and debating the history of sexuality—and *The History of Sexuality*.

We would also like to add a note of thanks to a number of people whose time, energy, expertise, and hard work have made this special issue possible: the contributors, the scholars who graciously served as anonymous reviewers, and the editors of the journal.

#### ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READING

When deciding to prepare this special issue, it occurred to the guest editors and the editors that many regular readers of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* might not be familiar with the existing scholarship on the history of sexuality in classical and late antiquity and in Judaism and early Christianity. Therefore, we have drawn up a brief supplementary bibliography to accompany the material cited in the footnotes to

the introduction to this special issue. Obviously, this is an incomplete list, but it provides some guidance for readers who are interested in reading more.

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