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ON MARRIAGE
OFF-SKEW AND OUT-OF-CENTER
(AN APPROACH VIA MICHEL FOUCAULT)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the marriage relationship have concerned men and women since well before there were philosophers and psychologists to sit down and write their views on the subject — since well before there was writing at all. While on the surface, the work of Michel Foucault and this topic may seem far removed from each other but we might gain some insights into the subject of marriage by exploring it through the writings of the philosopher. It is very possible that Foucalut's approach to the marital problem may help shed some new light upon the subject.

In this paper, we will introduce the basic points and positions of Foucault on the topic of marriage. We will discuss the methodologies and foci of each of his discussion of the topic as well as the emphasis in various of his writings regarding marriage.

Upon a a cursory examination we might come to the false

conclusion that Foucault does not seem to have much to say on the subject — he never wrote a major work which is wholly focused on the marriage problem, although he did devote a great deal to discussing the issue in works concentrating on other related issues — such as in various chapters in The History of Sexuality. While Foucault seems more interested in marriage as a socio-economico-political or *"power"* institution than as an interpersonal/self-actualizing relationship or in terms of *"psychological"* potentials, many of the issues explored in his discussions are enlightening in those respects. By exploring what Foucault maintained the *"power"* and *"psychological"* dynamics of the various marital phenomena are, we may perhaps gain further access to the *"truth"* of the matter both in terms of Foucault's understanding and in terms of what marriage really is.

2.0 FOUCAULT

We begin our discussion with an introductory survey of some of Foucault's statements on marriage. While Foucault did not devote any single work to an archaeology of the marriage institution, he committed a large part of his three-volume The History of Sexuality to this topic, particularly in The Care of the Self while The Use of Pleasure devotes one major section to marriage. However, his exploration of marriage in these texts is as part of his overall examination of sexuality (albeit a highly related subject) and his theory of power. Foucault explains his premise for the study:

> For me, the whole point of the project [of The History of Sexuality] lies in a re-elaboration of the theory of power. I'm not sure that the mere pleasure of writing about sexuality would have provided me with sufficient motivation to start this sequence of at least six volumes, if I had not felt impelled by the necessity of reworking this problem of power a little. (Power/Knowledge 187)

Due to his death in 1984, Foucault was unable to complete the entire

series as he had intended. While writing the works, his research interests took new form and his focus often strayed.

3.0 GENERAL ISSUES

Sexuality and marriage do gain admittance into some of Foucault's other works, which are primarily what he called *"archaeologies"* of various sciences or institutions — all of which deal extensively with the question of power. This was a central concern of Foucault's thought:

> Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between every one who knows and every one who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function. (Power/Knowledge 187)

For Foucault, one must not only look at sexuality in terms of who has the power (men, husbands) and who does not (women, wives), but rather for the patterns in the modifications in the relationships (HS1 99). One may examine the marriage institution in one episteme and find dynamic relationships which are in some ways similar and in others quite dissimilar to those of another episteme. For Foucault, an *"episteme"* seems to be a historical period made up of discrete social and discursive formations. Oftentimes, though, the term does seem to be too formallistically applied and may shift in meaning. As Charles Lemert and Carth Gillan point out, one can understand Foucault perfectly well without using it (Michel Foucault 131).

In each historical period, the problem of sex takes on a

different character in society. For instance, the nature of power and its relationship to women changed from one period to the next. This had an enormous impact upon the nature of the sexual problem:

> The problem of sex in the eighteenth century was the problem of the male sex, and the discipline of sex was put into effect in boys' colleges, military schools, etc. Then, from the moment the woman begins to take on importance in medico-social terms, with the connected problems of childbearing, breast-feeding, etc., at that point female masturbation comes to be on the order of the day. In the nineteenth century this seems to become the dominant problem. At the end of the nineteenth century, at any rate, great surgical operations are performed on girls, veritable tortures: cauterization of the clitoris with red- hot irons was, if not habitual, at least fairly frequent at that time. In terms of the masturbation problem, this was a dramatic development. (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 217)

Thus, as women become more of a socio-economic power, their sexuality becomes more of a *"problem"* in the medico-social discourse.

This process continues even today. One factor which Foucault found interesting was how various groups reacted to this process in setting up the dynamics of post-modern sexuality. He showed particular interest in the sexual liberation movements — especially in relation to women and to homosexuals. At one point he had this to say of the women's liberation movement:

> Well, regarding everything that is currently being said about the liberation of sexuality, what I want to make apparent is precisely that the object *"sexuality"* is in reality an instrument formed a long while ago, and one which has constituted a centuries-long apparatus of

> subjection. The real strength of the women's liberation movement is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality. (Power/Knowledge 219-20)

While a great many of the surface constructs of the morality of antiquity may seem to be the direct precedents for modern morality, there are differences underneath which are directing these constraints on man's behavior which are quite different. Modern morality tends to be a morality of the self. Foucault contested the premise that we can read these same functions into the morality of the ancients:

> I would not entirely agree that one could say that the morality of antiquity was, throughout its history, a morality of attention to the self; rather, it became a morality of the self at a certain moment. Christianity introduced some perversions, some quite considerably modifications, when it organized extremely extensive penitential functions which involved taking account of oneself, telling about oneself to another.... (PPC 247)

While throughout his work, Foucault finds similarities in the moralities which form the basis of the marital institutions of the various epistemes, he does find many dissimilarities. For instance, in the texts dating from the fourth century B.C. to the second century there is hardly any conception of love which would qualify to represent the experiences of madness or of great amorous passion which are more common in later periods (Foucault, PPC 247-8).

4.0 FOUCAULT'S WORKS DEALING WITH MARRIAGE

Foucault produced several works which dealt explicitly with

marriage. The most thorough explorations of the topic are found in the The History of Sexuality series.

4.1 HS1 — AN INTRODUCTION

Foucault's first major work to deal with issues directly related to marriage was The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction first published in French in 1976. The English translation first appeared in 1978. This book primarily explores the changes in discourse on sexuality and power in the nineteenth century from earlier periods. This is related to the post-modern era of today:

> For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality.
>
> At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. (3)

This change in the nature of sexuality is directly related to the codes within which sexuality, particularly that of the marriage relationship, was controlled:

> Up to the end of the eighteenth century, three major explicit codes...governed sexual practices: canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law. They determined...the division between licit and illicit. They were all centered on matrimonial relations: the marital obligation, the ability to fulfill it, the manner in which

> one complied with it, the useless or unwarranted caresses for which it was a pretext, its fecundity or the way one went about making it sterile, the moments when one demanded it..., its frequency or infrequency, and so on. (37)

We will find these dynamics of control and power the major focus throughout Foucault's writing on sexuality and its relationship to marriage. Unlike the period of antiquity, in the Victorian period the sex of husband and wife was

> beset by rules and recommendations. The marriage relations was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more than anything else; more than any other relation, it was required to give a detailed accounting of itself. It was under constant surveillance: if it was found to be lacking, it had to come forward and plead its case before a witness. (37)

It is well worth noting that these different codes did not make a distinction between violations of the rules of marriage and deviations with respect to the genital sex of the violator. Breaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation to men and to women (Foucault, HS1 37-8). This is a significant change from the period of antiquity.

In discussing sexuality, Foucault proposes four rules to follow, which he did not intend as methodological imperatives, merely as cautionary prescriptions. These rules cross-over very well when one examines Foucault's approaches to marriage. They are: (1) *the rule of immanence*, (2) *the rule of continual variations*, (3) *the rule of double conditioning*, and (4) *the rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses* (HS1 98-102). Foucault noted that in approaching the problem we can distinguish four great strategic unities which formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex. These strategies did not come into being fully developed in the

eighteenth century; but it was then that they took on a consistency and gained an effectiveness in the order of power (HS1 103-4). These four strategies are: (1) a hysterization of women's bodies, (2) a pedagogization of children's sex, (3) a socialization of procreative behavior, and (4) a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure (HS1 104-5). From these four strategies came changes in the socio-sexual discourse of the day:

> Four figures emerged from this preoccupation with sex, which mounted throughout the nineteenth century — four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. (Foucault, HS1 105)

Foucault finds in the sexuality of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries changes in the very foundation of marriage and in morality. He compares the phenomenon of sex of that period to the phenomena of others, discovering a deep-structure change in the nature of deployment:

> It will be granted no doubt that relations of sex gave rise, in every society, to a *deployment of alliance*: a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions. This deployment of alliance, with the mechanisms of constraint that ensured its existence and the complex knowledge it often required, lost some of its importance as economic processes and political structures could no longer rely on it as an adequate instrument or sufficient support. Particularly from the eighteenth century onward, Western societies created and deployed a new apparatus which was superimposed on the previous one, and which, without completely supplanting the latter, helped to reduce its importance. I am speaking of the

> *deployment of sexuality*: like the *deployment of alliance*, it connects up with the circuit of sexual partners, but in a completely different way. The two systems can be contrasted term by term. The deployment alliance is built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden, the licit and the illicit, whereas the deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power. (HS1 106)

This *deployment of sexuality* as opposed to the more traditional *deployment of alliance* is a significant change in the nature of marriage.

4.2 HS2 — THE USE OF PLEASURE

Foucault's second volume of The History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure, was originally published in 1984, the year of the author's death. The English translation appeared in 1985. Here Foucault switches his period to that of Greek antiquity. For the purposes of our present study, the first chapter *"Part Three — Economics"* on *"The Wisdom of Marriage"* holds the most interest.

Foucault demonstrates that in the age of antiquity there seems to have been a definite distribution of the roles of women in relationship to the man and his needs. These roles seemed to be distinct and culturally sanctioned within and without the marriage system:

> At the end of the legal argument Against Neaera, attributed to Demosthenes, the author delivers a sort of aphorism that has remained famous: "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households."

(HS2 143)*

This apparently rather formal distinction between the roles of women in relationship to the man is quite different than that of the later periods. Interestingly this system was developed within a monogamous culture. There are even further differences between it and a polygynous culture like that of ancient China:

> With a formula like this one, which seems to speak of a strict distribution of roles, we could not be further from the arts of conjugal pleasure such as one finds, according to Van Gulik, in ancient China.† There, prescriptions concerning the woman's obedience, her respect, and her devotion were closely linked with advice on the correct erotic behavior to manifest in order to increase the partners' pleasure, or at least that of the man, and with opinions on the right conditions for obtaining the best possible progeny. This was because, in that polygamous society, the wife found herself in a competitive situation where her status was tied directly to her ability to give pleasure; questions concerning sexual behavior and the forms of its possible improvement formed part of the society's reflection about existence; the skillful practice of pleasures and the

Foucault uses the L. Gerner translation of Against Neaera *by Demosthenes. The English version used for the translation is that of A.T. Murray.*

†*Here Foucault is referring to R.H. Van Gulik's classic work* Sexual Life in Ancient China. *He uses L. Evrard's French translation, but the English is widely available. Some of the specific lessons for the prospective wife on which Van Gulik goes into some detail are a wide range of techniques and positions, potions, as well as proper manners and obedience. It is unfortunate that Foucault was either uninterested in or unable to conduct a more thorough archaeology of Chinese sexuality. This is a field ripe for such an exploration, that is for the more properly prepared researcher.*

> equilibrium of married life belonged to the same set of concerns. (Foucault, HS2 143-4)

In Athens, a married woman's familial and civic status made her subject to the rules of a conduct that was characterized by a sexual practice which was strictly conjugal (Foucault, HS2 145- 6). The husband was also bound toward his wife by a certain number of obligations (one of Solon's laws required the husband to have sexual relations with his wife at least three times a month‡ if she was an "*heiress*"), but having sexual relations only with his wife was not one of his obligations (Foucault, HS2 146). The man's restrictions were practical, not sexual:

> [T]he married man was prohibited only from contracting another marriage; no sexual relation was forbidden him as a consequence of the marriage obligation he had entered into; he could have an intimate affair, he could frequent prostitutes, he could be the lover of a boy — to say nothing of the men or women slaves he had in his household at his disposal. A man's marriage did not restrict him sexually. (Foucault, HS2 146-7)

The marriage relationship was seen less as a sexual relationship than one of status and power. In the marriage, it was the

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‡*It should be understood that three times a month for sexual intercourse should in no way be considered as some sort of concession in favor of the wife. This obligation was meant more as a guarantee of at least the minimum chances for pregnancy. The wife's sexuality is not a factor here. It seems a rather small allotment considering that the Diagram Group's* Sex: A User's Manual *shows us that among today's young men and women aged 18-24, the average frequency of coitus is 3.25 times per week and for those aged 25-34 it is 2.55 times per week (218). We should also compare the Greek prescription with today's levels of desired frequencies for coitus: for men, the highest desirability rating was 35% preferring 3-4 times a week, while only 6% chose 2-3 times a month; for women, the highest desirability rating was 30% preferring once daily or more, while only 1% chose 3-4 times a month (231). That's quite a significant difference!*

man's authority over the woman which was the controlling factor. A man had power and control of her sexuality, not she his. The situation was such that the penalty for the rapist who forcefully had used a woman sexually was less severe than that for the seducer who had her consent. This was because the "rapist violated only the woman's body, while the seducer violated the husband's authority" (Foucault, HS2 146). Under the dynamics of this power system, adultery

> constituted an infraction only in cases where a married woman had relations with a man who was not her husband; it was the marital status of the woman, never that of the man, that made it possible to define a relation as adultery. (Foucault, HS2 147)

Unlike the systems which would eventually evolve out of it, the marriage relationship of Greeks was not based upon the interpersonal or psychological relationship of the husband and wife. The ethical considerations of sexual pleasure were not an issue:

> [M]arriage ought not to have raised any questions as far as the ethics of pleasure was concerned, for the reasons we have just considered: in the case of one of the partners — the wife — the restrictions were defined by status, law, and custom, and they were guaranteed by punishments or sanctions; in the case of the other — the husband — marital status did not impose precise rules on him, except to designate the woman from whom he must expect to obtain his legitimate heirs. (Foucault, HS2 147)

In the relationship between husband and wife, sexual fidelity and ethics was not the concern, but that of power and authority. Of course, things were not quite as sexually unfair to the wife as might easily be construed. Foucault does demonstrate some of the mechanisms within the society which informally restricted the

husband's sexual behavior:

> [I]t would be incorrect to think that things were so simple that the behavior of women — as wives — was too imperiously set to need any reflection, or that the behavior of men — as husbands — was so free that there was no need to question oneself concerning it. First, we have many statements about feelings of jealousy; wives commonly reproached their husbands for the pleasures they would go elsewhere to enjoy.... More generally, public opinion expected a man who was about to be married to exhibit a certain change in his sexual behavior.... (Foucault, HS2 148)

There were in effect certain cultural pressures which helped to regulate the husband's sexuality as well as the wife's, albeit he was afforded far more leeway than she.

Reconsidering the Against Neaera aphorism which seems to delineate the roles of women — mistress, concubine, and wife — in relationship to the man, Foucault makes clear that one should consider the context of the original saying:

> [O]ne has to consider the context in which this harsh-sounding maxim was formulated. It was part of a litigant's attempt to invalidate the apparently legitimate marriage of one of his enemies, as well as the claim to citizenship of the children born of that marriage. And the arguments given had to do with the wife's birth, her past as a prostitute, and her current status, which could only be that of a concubine. The object therefore was not to show that pleasure was to be sought elsewhere than with the legal wife, but that legitimate descendants could not be obtained except with the wife herself. (HS2 149)

However, even in light of this newer reading, we still see in the marriage bond itself a primary concern for legitimate heirs from the wife for the husband. There is still not the formal concern for mutual fidelity we see developing later.

While it is unfair to place the question of marital pleasure too highly on the marital agenda of antiquity, it is also unfair to disregard it completely. Marriage held a special place in the system of relations of antiquity. It's purpose seems primarily political-economic, but it seems that pleasure did hold some role in the relationship:

> It needs to be understood that in Athens marriage was not the only kind of union that was accepted; it actually formed a particular and privileged union, which alone could lead to matrimonial cohabitation and legitimate offspring. Further, there exists a good deal of evidence testifying to the value that was attached to the wife's beauty, to the importance of sexual relations that one might have with her, and to the existence of mutual love.... The radical separation between marriage and the play of pleasures and passions is doubtless not an adequate formula for characterizing marital life in antiquity. (Foucault, HS2 149-50)

This mutual gaining of pleasure within the marriage eventually evolved into a system of mutual fidelity — wherein both man and woman were restricted to sexual relations only of a conjugal nature. There is a danger of over-reading this and interpreting it in later terms:

> Often in these [Greek] texts where good behavior is conceived, evaluated, and regulated in the form of "sexual fidelity," people are tempted to perceive the first draft of a still nonexistent moral code: the code that was to symmetrically impose the same obligation on the

> two spouses to engage in sexual relations only within the marital union, and the same duty to give these relations procreation as the privileged if not exclusive aim. (Foucault, HS2 150)

While the practice may have been the same as the later Christian era, the purpose and the theory underlying that purpose were certainly different:

> [I]t becomes clear that the principle that obligated a man to have no partner outside the couple he formed was different in nature from that which tied a woman to an analogous obligation. In the case of the woman, it was insofar as she was under the authority of her husband that this obligation was imposed on her. In the man's case, it was because he exercised authority and because he was expected to exhibit self-mastery in the use of this authority, that he needed to limit his sexual options. For the wife, having sexual relations only with her husband was a consequence of the fact that she was under his control. For the husband, having sexual relations only with the wife was the most elegant way of exercising his control. (Foucault, HS2 151)

We see that the dynamics of authority and power is what regulated the sexual behavior of husband and wife. She was constrained while under his power, and he was constrained while exercising power. Their contexts of constraint were radically different. While on the surface appearing equal, they certainly were unequal underneath.

4.3 HS3 — THE CARE OF THE SELF

In the final volume of The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self (first published in French in 1984 with the English translation first appearing in 1986), Foucault explores the marriage relationship in much greater detail. However, a significant portion of the

discussion seems to relate more to the love older men showed to young boys.

While moving his focus from Greek antiquity to the transitional periods from Greek to Roman culture, Foucault discusses the difficulties confronted in his study of sexuality and marital relations. He notes that for the different regions and social strata of Hellenistic or Roman civilization, it is difficult to determine the actual extent of marital practice. He does clarify, however, that historians have been able to identify certain transformations affecting either the institutional forms, the organization of conjugal relationships, or the meaning and moral value that could be given to the latter (HS3 72).

One of these transformations was the gradual appropriation by public law the sanctions and obligations which had previously been under the less formal traditional, familial, system:

> A set of legislative measures marks little by little the hold of public authority on the marriage institution. The famous law *de adulteriis* is one of the manifestations of this phenomenon. A manifestation all the more interesting because in condemning for adultery the married woman who has sexual intercourse with another man and the man who has intercourse with a married woman (and not the married man who has relations with an unmarried woman), this law offers nothing new in the way of legal definition of acts. It reproduces precisely the traditional schemas of ethical valuation, merely transferring to public power a sanction previously under familial authority. (Foucault, HS3 73)

According to Foucault, this gradual appropriation of marriage by public law accompanies many other transformations, of which it is at once the effect, the relay, and the instrument (HS3 73-4).

While for both upper and lower classes marriage retained its economic basis, the practice was still quite different. For the upper classes marriage was largely dynastic and political,[§] while for the lower classes it seemed to be more related to the wife and children being a source of labor for the free man who was poor[**] (Foucault, HS3 74). At this stage, upper class marriages were largely motivated by politics and economics. This changed, however, as the political system of the Empire transformed:

> The economico-political imperatives that governed marriage...must have lost some of their importance when...status and fortune came to depend on proximity to the prince, on a civil or military "career," on success in "business," more than simply on the alliance between family groups. Less encumbered with various strategies, marriage became "freer": free in the choice of a wife; free, too, in the decision to marry and in the personal reasons for doing so. It could be, too, that in the underprivileged classes, marriage became — beyond the economic motives that could make it attractive — a form of tie that owed its value to the fact that it established and maintained strong personal relationships, implying the sharing of life, mutual aid, and moral support. (Foucault, HS3 74-5)

[§] *This reference comes from J. Boswell's* Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. *Foucault was much impressed with Boswell's study and explores its ramifications in far more depth in his comments on homosexuality (PPC 286-301). It may be interesting to further the comparison of Foucault and Jung by looking at their respective references to homosexuality. As Foucault is writing as an outsider on marriage, Jung is such concerning homosexuality (albeit he did have much to say on it — Robert H. Hopcke's* Jung, Jungians, and Homosexuality *being an excellent treatment of his statements).*

[**] *Foucault is referencing S.B. Pomeroy's* Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity.

With this transformation in society, marriage appeared more as a voluntary union between two partners whose inequality began to diminish but did not cease to exist (Foucault, HS3 75).

This change in the perception of the nature of the relationship between husband and wife can be seen in the marriage contracts of the period:

> In documents dating from the end of the fourth century B.C. or from the third, the wife's pledges implied obedience to the husband; prohibition from leaving the house, day or night, without the husband's permission; exclusion of any sexual relations with another man; and the obligation not to ruin the household and not to dishonor her husband. The latter in turn must support his wife, must not establish a concubine in the house, must not mistreat his wife, and must not have children from relationships he might maintain on the outside. Later, the contracts studied specify much stricter obligations on the part of the husband. (Foucault, HS3 76)

These changes in the marriage contracts, clearly demonstrate a definitive change in the nature of marital practice. The new forms of conjugal life were much more closely defined than in the past. This clearly indicates transformation:

> The prescriptions could not have been formulated in the contracts if they did not already correspond to a new attitude; and at the same time they must have carried such weight for each of the marriage partners that they impressed on their life, much more clearly than in the past, the reality of the couple. (Foucault, HS3 77)

These changes in Greek society, according to Foucault, were

analogous to similar changes in Roman society: under the Republic each spouse had a specific role to play and beyond that emotional relations were whatever they happened to be; under the Empire the very functioning of the marriage was understood to depend upon a couple's mutual understanding and the law of the heart†† — the new idea of the couple composed of the master and mistress of the house was born (Foucault, HS3 77). The evolution of this new marital practice held many paradoxes:

> It looked to public authority for its guarantees; and it became an increasingly important concern in private life. It threw off the economic and social purposes that had invested it with value; and at the same time it became a general practice. It became more and more restrictive for spouses, and gave rise at the same time to attitudes that were more and more favorable.... It appears that marriage became more general as a practice, more public as an institution, more private as a mode of existence — a stronger force for binding conjugal partners and hence a more effective one for isolating the couple in a field of other social relations. (Foucault, HS3 77)

More emphasis was beginning to be given to the affective quality of the relationship between the husband and wife than in the past.

The role of the husband clearly underwent a transformation. We see an ethics of *"conjugal honor"* taking form. More emphasis was placed on the nature of the husband's attachment to his wife, on several levels:

> In the literature of the imperial epoch, one finds testimonies to a far more complex experience of

†† *See P. Veyne's "L'Amour a Rome" for Foucault's reference.*

> marriage; and the search for an ethics of "conjugal honor" is clearly manifested in the reflection on the role of the husband, on the nature and form of the bond that attached him to his wife, on the interplay between a superiority at once natural and statutory and an affection that could extend to the point of need and dependence. (Foucault, HS3 78)

As Foucault explains, in many texts, like Pliny's Letters, the relation between husband and wife seems to detach itself from matrimonial functions, from the status-determined authority of the husband and the reasonable government of the household, and take on the character of a singular relation having its own force, its own difficulties, obligations, benefits, and pleasures (HS3 79).

Foucault makes a point that these texts demonstrating a radical change in the nature of the marriage relationship and its emotional content do not necessarily represent the true form of most marital practice. They do however represent a new situation in the discourse wherein marriage was submitted to a form of evolutionary deconstruction:

> Of course it is not in texts like these [Pliny's Letters, et al] that one should look for a representation of what matrimonial life may have really been like in the period of the Empire.... They should be taken not as the reflection of a situation, but as the formulation of an exigency.... They show that marriage was interrogated as a mode of life whose value was not exclusively...linked to the functioning of the *oikos*, but rather to a mode of relation between two partners. They also show that...the man had to regulate his conduct, not simply by virtue of status, privileges, and domestic functions, but also by virtue of a "relational role" with regard to his wife. Finally, they show not only that this role was a governmental function of

> training, education, and guidance, but that it was involved in a complex interplay of affective reciprocity and reciprocal dependence. (Foucault, HS3 80)

While not reflecting universal marital practice, these texts still played an important role in the day and can serve today to provide us with insights into the system they were reacting to and written within.

Most of the more significant texts from antiquity dealing with marriage linked it to the city and the household:

> The great classical texts that dealt with the question of marriage — Xenophon's Oceanomicus, Plato's Republic and Laws, Aristotle's Politics and Nicomachean Ethics, the Aristotelian Economics — inscribed their reflection on marital relations within a broad context: the city, with the laws or customs necessary to its survival and its prosperity; the household, with the organization that made possible its maintenance or enrichment. (Foucault, HS3 147)

Although marriage was subordinated to civic and familial utilities, we cannot infer that it was considered in itself to be unimportant with no value other than the production of descendants for the benefit of families and the state (Foucault, HS3 147).

In a series of texts which spread out from the first two centuries B.C. to the second century A.D., Foucault notes that the ethics of matrimonial behavior appear in a much different light (HS3 147-8). Over the length of the period, there are changes in the very practice of marriage. The first change

> appears to consist in the fact that the art of matrimonial existence, while continuing to be concerned with the household, its management, the birth and procreation of children, places an increasing value on a particular

> element in the midst of this ensemble: the personal relationship between husband and wife, the tie that joins them, their behavior toward each other. And this relationship...seems to be regarded as a primary and fundamental element around which all the others are organized, from which they derive, and to which they owe their strength. In sum, the art of conducting oneself in marriage would appear to be defined less by a technique of government and more by a stylistics of individual bond. (Foucault, HS3 148)

While the first change is concerned with the nature of the marriage bond, the second is concerned more with marital fidelity and "resides in the fact that the principe of moderate conduct in a married man is placed more in the duties of reciprocity than in mastery over others (Foucault, HS3 148). The final change in this period is a transformation in the nature of sexual relations between the two partners:

> [T]his art of marriage — in the form of a symmetrical relationship — accords a comparatively greater place to the problems of sexual relations between spouses. These problems are still treated in a rather discreet and allusive manner, but the fact remains that one finds...a concern with defining a certain way for marriage partners to act, to conduct themselves in pleasure relations. Here the interest in procreation is combined with other significations and values, which have to do with love, affection, understanding, and mutual sympathy. (Foucault, HS3 149)

Thus, there was a transformation of the marital relationship into a new form in which a "stylistics of living as a couple emerges from the traditional precepts of matrimonial management: it can be observed rather clearly in an art of conjugal relationship, in a doctrine of sexual monopoly, and in an aesthetics of shared pleasures" (Foucault, *HS3*

149). This new art of married living defined a relation that was *dual* in its form, *universal* in its value, and *specific* in its intensity and its strength (Foucault, HS3 150-164).

This new definition of the marriage relationship as one which was exclusive as possible regarding the practice of the *aphrodisia* raised "a number of questions pertaining to the integration, the role, and the finality of acts of pleasure in the interplay of affective or statutory relations between husband and wife" (Foucault, HS3 176). While this rigorous ethics demanded the monopoly of pleasure by marriage, little was said as to which pleasures were to be allowed and which others excluded (Foucault, HS3 176). In the discussions relating to this issue, two general principles were often evoked. The first had to do with the inclusion of love in the marital relationship:

> First, it is made clear that the conjugal relation must not be foreign to Eros, to that love which some philosophers wished to reserve for boys; but neither must it ignore or exclude Aphrodite.... He [Musonius] invokes the three great deities who watch over it [the marital state]: Hera... Aphrodite... and Eros.... Together, these three powers have the function of "bringing together man and woman for the procreation of children."‡‡ (Foucault, HS3 176-7)

The second principle was a balance for the first. It had to do with limiting the sexual nature of the relationship:

> In correlation with this presence of amorous passion and physical pleasures in marriage, another principle, opposite to the first one but also quite general, is brought into play; namely, that one must not treat one's wife as a mistress and one should behave as a husband rather than

‡‡*From the Hense edition of* Reliquiae *by Musonius.*

> as a lover. (Foucault, HS3 177)

The second principle was very evident in the advice given to couples on all levels. It had a great impact and would become even more important in the Christian traditions:

> One encounters the principle in several forms. In the form of a...counsel of prudence: by introducing one's wife to overly intense pleasures one risks giving her lessons she will put to bad use and which one will regret having taught her. Or in the form of advice to both spouses: let them find a middle way between an excessive austerity and a conduct too close to that of profligates, and let the husband always remind himself that "I cannot have the society of the same woman as wife and paramour".... Or, further, in the form of a general thesis: behaving too ardently with one's wife amounts to treating her as an adulteress. The theme is important, for it will be reencountered in the Christian tradition, where it will appear very early..., and where it will persist for a very long time.... (Foucault, HS3 177)

Intraconjugal austerity was justified by two great natural and rational finalities that were ascribed to marriages at that time. The first was procreation, for if "the desires of love were given to men, this was not in order that they might enjoy sensual pleasure, but that they might propagate their kind" (Foucault, HS3 178). Marriage's second great finality calling for intraconjugal austerity was that of making a life together, or a life entirely shared (Foucault, HS3 179).

Plutarch approached the marital relationship and sexuality from a different tack. He placed a good deal of importance on the benefits and dangers inherent in sexual relations between husband and wife. For instance, he saw compromising dangers in a couple's first sexual intercourse:

> Plutarch attaches a good deal of importance to the dangers that can compromise, in a married couple's first sexual relations, subsequent mutual understanding and the solidity of the bond to be formed. He draws attention to the risk of bad experiences that the bride may have. He advises her not to dwell on them, for the benefits of marriage may appear later: not to behave like those who "submit to the bees' stings, but abandon the honeycomb."[§§] But he also fears that too intense a physical pleasure experienced at the outset of marriage may cause the affection to be lost when this pleasure disappears. It is better for the love to owe its vitality to the spouses' character and disposition. (Foucault, HS3 181)

While discussing Plutarch's position on some of the dangers which sexual intercourse might bring to the marital relationship, Foucault also discusses the pair-bonding opportunities for relationship-building which Plutarch saw in sexuality: Plutarch observes in Dinner of the Seven Wise Men[***] that

> just as the task of Dionysus is not in the fact of drinking intoxicating wine, the task of Aphrodite...is not in the mere relating and conjoining of bodies...; it is in the feeling of friendship..., the longing..., the association..., and the intimacy...between two people. Sexual intercourse, in married life, ought to serve as an instrument for the formation and development of symmetrical and reciprocal affective relations.

[§§] *From* Economics *attributed to Aristotle. Foucault uses the French translation by A. Wartelle.*

[***] *Foucault uses F.C. Babbitt's English translation of* Deptem sapientium convivium *(*Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*).*

(Foucault, HS3 182)

We will see this very same sort of attitude towards relationship-building and sexuality within marriage later in our discussion of Jung.

Not all of the Greeks would have agreed with Plutarch's notions of sexual pleasure within marriage. Others had far more practical reasons for restricting sex to marriage. For Plato, the obligation to "integrate all sexual pleasure into the matrimonial structure had for one of its chief justifications the need to supply the city with the children it required to survive and maintain its strength" (Foucault, HS3 183). Foucault states that while the Christian age would have the same restriction, it would be for far different reasons, for in "Christianity...the link between sexual intercourse and marriage will be justified by the fact that the former bears the marks of sin, the Fall, and evil, and that only the latter can give it a legitimacy that still may not exculpate it entirely" (HS3 183).

While concluding his more detailed discussion of marriage, Foucault makes the observation that this intensification of the value of the *aphrodisia* in marital relations with its role of communication and relationship between husband and wife had an impact upon other amorous relationships of the man in Greek societies. The impact was particularly important in calling to question the common practices regarding older men and young boys (Foucault, HS3 185). It is to this question that he addresses the significant portion of The Care of the Self.

5.0 FOUCAULT ON MARRIAGE — CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Foucault's discussion of the morality of antiquity documents the changing structures, philosophical and practical, of sexuality. We can see that marital practice and experience was greatly transformed while these structures underwent these changes.

There was an evolution of morality from being that of the few to that of the many, but we are unsure of how many:

> At first, the morality of antiquity addressed itself only to a very small number of individuals; it did not require everybody to obey the same pattern of behavior. It concerned only a very small minority of the people, even of the free people.... Then this morality expanded. At the time of Seneca or even more so at the time of Marcus Aurelius, it might have been valid for everybody, but there was never a question of making it an obligation for all. Morality was a matter of individual choice; anyone could come and share in it. It is nevertheless very difficult to know who did participate in it during antiquity or under the Roman Empire. We are thus very far from the moral conformities, the structures of which are elaborated by sociologists and historians by appealing to a hypothetical average population. (Foucault, PPC 245)

For Foucault, what becomes interesting is the comparisons and contrasts of ancient moral systems and those of our own era:

> From a strictly philosophical point of view the morality of Greek antiquity and contemporary morality have nothing in common. On the other hand, if one considers these respective moralities in terms of what they prescribe, intimate, and advise, they are extraordinarily close. It is important to point out the proximity and the difference, and, through their interplay, to show how the same advice given by ancient morality can function differently in a contemporary style of morality. (Foucault, PPC 247)

This kind of insight becomes quite useful to our own explorations on the meaning of marriage as an intimage relationship.

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