INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this book is to clarify the moral concern about sexuality and sexual activities expressed by leading authors in classical antiquity. Michel Foucault was, of course, the first thinker to undertake this clarification, and one aim of his stimulating study was to demonstrate the way in which his new ethics programme worked. Therefore my starting point is the reconstruction of claims about the control of the desires and the creation of the moral subject in classical philosophical, medical, economic and rhetorical texts which Michel Foucault presents in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasure* (*UP*)). There is now a mass of literature on Foucault's programme of ethics, some of which also deals with his interpretation of ancient sources. But most authors treat his analyses of these texts as documents illustrating his intellectual development, which is their primary interest.[1] None of them subjects his thoughts on ancient sources to a detailed critical assessment in order to suggest alternative readings that are based not only on the general theoretical premises of Foucault's project, but also on modern standards of textual interpretation

1 See e.g. Bernauer (1988); Bernauer and Mahon (1994); Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983); Mahon (1992); Rajchman (1991); Schäfer (1995); Schmid (1990); Smart (1991) or the articles in the volumes of essays Erdmann et al. (1990); Ewald and Waldenfels (1991); Rabinow (1986); Seitler (1993), A. Davidson (2001).

and the present state of philosophical and historical knowledge of the ancient world.[2] What follows is intended to reduce this deficit.

Much of what I have to say is a critical reconstruction of Foucault's own reconstruction – while at the same time I try to maintain the systematic aspects of his perspective. It is a bold attempt to say what Foucault's historical perspective and better historical knowledge should have led him to say about the texts he studied, but which he did not. In my view, the main reason why Foucault did not say what, in his own best theoretical interest, he should have said is that, when he first introduced his programme of ethics at the beginning of *UP*, he held that the ethical creation of the subject could more or less be separated from the archaeological and genealogical dimension developed in his earlier works. Thus he almost completely neglects what the ancient texts have to say about epistemology and the analysis of power, or in the case of Plato attributes far too little significance to it.

In chapter 1 I point out that Foucault's restrictive approach to the ancient sources was an initial misunderstanding of his own general project that he later corrected. However, if the incorporation of the analysis of power and archaeology into Foucault's ethics is to be successful, a suitable reappraisal of his ideas on the intrinsic connection between power and knowledge, and the concept of 'productive' power, is required. The rest of the first chapter is devoted to a lengthy and detailed explication of these ideas. One of the most important results is the introduction of a concept of regulative power that is not necessarily repressive, but is productive in a clearly definable way. It is primarily this kind of power that is intimately related to the games of truth that determine the historical forms of knowledge. This interpretation explains why Foucault's relativistic neutrality is nothing more than systematic coquetry and why his critics, as well as leading post-modernists, are all mistaken in their vociferous complaints and cynical observations that power permeates even reason.

After this introduction the next four chapters turn to the ancient texts that Foucault studied in *UP*. In chapter 2 I prove that in focusing on the

2 The two best exceptions are Geoffrey Lloyd's review of *UP* in *The New York Review of Books* 33, (4 March 1986), 24–8 and Pierre Hadot's study 'Überlegungen zum Begriff der Selbstkultur', in Ewald and Waldenfels (1991), 219–28 (see also the afterword in Hadot (1991)). Lloyd concentrates mainly on a critical discussion of Foucault's analysis of ancient medical texts, while Hadot criticises the fact that Foucault prunes ancient ethics to an ethics of desire, self-observation and stylisation of the self, and neglects the extent to which it is concerned with *eudaimonia*. Both critiques are on the right track, but do not pay enough attention to Foucault's general theoretical perspectives; all told they are too brief, too one-sided and lack detail.

ancient analysis of sexual desire, Foucault neglects the comprehensive role played by *eudaimonia*. This was always an important concept in antiquity, incorporating sexual desire into a broader register of desires in order to optimise them. At the same time it becomes clear that Foucault's one-sided view leads to an inappropriate exaggeration of the part played by aesthetic stylisation. Classical dietetics is then the central topic of chapter 3. Foucault regards it as a comprehensive art of existence and a thoroughly regulated practice of the self, but it is soon apparent that, at the most, this view can only be applied to an excessive, prophylactic form of dietetics that was in no way representative of the classical world. Above all, during the course of the fifth century philosophical ethics separated itself from medicine, with the result that medicine was reduced to being just one of several important elements of the good life while at the same time attaining a new theoretical status as an empirical natural science. Foucault would doubtless have had no difficulty in describing this historical process in archaeological terms, but he pays no attention to this archaeological aspect, just as he pays no attention to how dietetics, as it became increasingly empirical, lost all reference to eudaimonic practices of the self, which now became the domain of philosophy.

This restricted view of ancient teleology and dietetics had the effect that Foucault arrived at an incorrect model of the regulation and practice of sexual desire: ancient authors did not recommend a model of domination and restriction intended to rein in the dangerous dynamic of sexuality, but entertained instead the model of self-controlled integration of sexual desire into the overall complex of higher and lower desires which had been optimised and kept in equilibrium as a constitutive part of the good life (if not as its goal). All told, specifically *sexual* desires played only a relatively unimportant role in the works of Aristotle and the Hippocratics that deal with human desires.

Foucault's interpretation of pederasty and marital relations in the ancient world has quite rightly attracted a great deal of attention, but it is flawed by a number of serious misjudgements. This I demonstrate in chapter 4. Historical studies have shown that in classical Greece pederasty as a primary love relationship was restricted to the small circle of political elites, and otherwise was regarded with a great deal of moral and legal reservation. The moral concern that manly activity might be endangered in pederastic relationships, which Foucault identified in the ancient texts, in fact only refers to a small group of speakers who played a leading part in the political business of the *polis*. Other parameters generally applied to relationships between full male citizens than to those between freeborn

and slaves. Ancient moralists could only think of pederastic relationships in terms of a relation of dominance, endangering the status of the beloved as a freeborn citizen, as well as threatening the most important boundary that the classical world knew – that between the freeborn and the slave.

Reciprocal homoerotic relationships were a taboo for ancient moralists, and they could only conceptualise homosexuality in a particularly low form – as an exchange of desire and benefit that for the lover was generally materially expensive and permitted him no more that limited bodily contact and occasional sexual gratification between the thighs of the beloved, while the young beloved was allowed to accept expensive presents, but never to experience sexual arousal. Foucault remains silent on these aspects of homoerotics in the ancient world, just as he is not interested in the fact that reciprocal marital relationships would have posed a threat to the patriarchal dominance of the husband, and that for this reason ancient moralists were only able to think of marriage as an asymmetrical relationship between an older husband and a younger wife – structurally analogous to homoerotic relationships. However, the circumstances were more complicated in the case of marriage than pederasty, above all since marriage was the central institution of the most important social and economic unit in ancient city-states – the farm or estate (*oikos*), an institution that ancient politics was particularly concerned to ensure continued to flourish. Thus the moral concern for the husband's sexual behaviour on the part of ancient moralists was not focused, as Foucault claims, on the conditions that enabled the husband to qualify for a political career, but on the threat to the *oikos* and the husband's honour, which might lead him to a total loss of self-respect. In order to deal with the complex problems involved in this context, the Greeks invented a new science – the science of management of the *oikos*, economics. As a science economics was concerned essentially with the art of leadership in the dealings the head of the household had with his wife, manager, employees and slaves. But again, Foucault paid no attention to the dimensions of archaeology and the analysis of power that are involved here.

The way in which Foucault looks at Plato's theory of eros is particularly unsatisfactory, as I show in chapter 5. Although he makes some correct and interesting observations, for example about the exchange of roles between the lover and the beloved, Foucault misses the decisive points of Plato's thinking about eros, and his neglect of the exact epistemological background and the corresponding games of truth has particularly negative consequences. Plato's view of eros can only be understood against

the background of advanced interpretations of Platonic epistemology, and these reveal the deficiencies of Foucault's ascetic reading of Plato.

The final chapter is more of an appendix or excursus. It is an attempt to reconstruct the naive reference to different sexes that Foucault relies on in his historical analysis of the relationship between sexuality and truth, and seeks to defend this reference in the face of criticism, in particular from post-modern feminists who try to incorporate the concept of (biological) sex completely into the notion of (social) gender. In the face of this criticism, I defend a thin concept of sex that takes into account all ideological and anti-essentialist feminist reservations, and plead for a complete dissolution of the category of gender as an answer to the fraying of this category that is particularly apparent in post-modern feminism.

Should the ideas and suggestions proposed in this book indeed be correct, and improve Foucault's analysis of classical Greek texts, then of course this does not mean that critical interpretation has priority over creative theoretical work. Rather I would like to see the comments presented here as an example of a rational approach to post-modern thought, that takes its intuitions seriously, but without renouncing exact explication and critical examination according to the usual standards of philosophy and science. One of the most important results of the book is the realisation that Foucault's theoretical approach in no way prevents this, but in fact makes it possible in the first place. For although regulative power may indeed permeate language and reason, this does not render rationality obsolete; on the contrary, it creates space for and stabilises it. Thus this book develops its own methodology for a critical assessment of important aspects of post-modern thought.

1

MORALS, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

According to one influential interpretation, in his later years Foucault turned his attention to the 'practice of an intellectual freedom' which 'goes beyond the modern relationships between will, power and subjectivity'.[1] This reading claims that Foucault's ethics aims to be – at least partly – free of the process of regulation and discipline which the analysis of power had revealed to be the all-pervasive element of the modern age, and maintains that it is concerned with 'effective resistance to a wide-spread type of power' and to modern 'forms of dominance and exploitation'.[2] It is in precisely this sense that Foucault's ethics is supposed to be political, while at the same time it is the last, perhaps even the most important, step in his attempt to subvert psychoanalytically based interpretations of the self, and to demonstrate that they are a form of coercion and political power to which psychoanalysis subjects our desire and our unconscious. Finally, the ethics as a practice of liberation is intended to provide an aesthetics of existence 'which resists the science of life' and 'frees us from the empire of scientific knowledge'.[3]

1 See Bernauer and Mahon (1994), 603. Their article is undoubtedly one of the best recent studies of the 'ethics' of Foucault's later years.
2 Bernauer and Mahon (1994), 599.
3 Bernauer and Mahon (1994), 606 f.

The general direction of this interpretation is quite clear. Foucault's opposition to universal anthropological, moral and rationalist categories has reaped criticism from influential authors such as Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas, who accuse him of abandoning all critical potential, with the result that he is unable to appreciate his historical analyses as an integral part of an emancipatory movement.[4] Faced with his typical relativistic coquetry, some of the best Foucault scholars, and many of those who interviewed him, have posed disturbing questions about the central political, moral and socio-political message of his works.[5] His ethics is regarded as an important element of the answer to these questions – an answer which is intended to combine in a consistent manner an emancipatory message with the denial of universal anthropological, moral and rationalist categories.[6] At the same time, nearly all Foucault's interpreters agree that he regarded 'ethics' as a research programme which went beyond the limits of the archaeological analysis of discourse and the historical analysis of power. At best it had a negative systematic relationship to the analytical tools of his earlier studies. For example, it is noted that the 'ethics' represents a realignment of his project to write a history of sexuality, which initially had prevented him from working on a comprehensive analysis of bio-power and drawn his attention to a subversion of the Christian–Freudian hermeneutic subject.[7] It is in connection with the programme of ethics that we hear of a 'subject-theoretical realignment', which marks a 'radical break' with Foucault's archaeological and genealogical studies.[8] The general opinion is that the 'three axes' of Foucault's historical studies – archaeology, genealogy and ethics – each specifies quite different

4 See the articles by Taylor (1986) and Habermas (1986a), esp. 93 and 108. Schäfer (1995) has recently presented an intelligent and detailed assessment of this and other criticisms.

5 See e.g. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), 205 ff. on the questions of 'resistance' and 'truth'. See also the interview 'On the genealogy of ethics', in Rabinow (1986), 340–72 (esp. 344, 347, 350) on, 265–81 (esp. 268, 271, 273) the 'alternatives' which ethics as Foucault understood them can offer 'today', or the question of what 'we today' can learn from them. The enquiries by Martin (in Martin, Gutman and Hutton (1988), 9–15) and various US philosophers (e.g. Jay and Löwenthal) (in the interview 'Politics and ethics', in Rabinow (1986), 373–80) have the same tenor.

6 See e.g. also Schäfer (1995), 141: 'The concept of an "aesthetics of existence" is in fact more than just a consequence of Foucault's general strategy to promote an anarchic form of subjectivity. For that is associated, above all, with a denial of any form of universal ethics.'

7 Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), 3 f.

8 Fink-Eitel (1989), 98–100; a similar view is presented by Visker (1991), 104–16. Schmid (1990) talks of Foucault's 'Apollonian turning-point' (23).

systematic orientations, and proceed from a discussion of epistemic discourses and their truth-goals, via the analysis of sub-institutional power, to an enquiry into the constitution of the subject.[9]

Support for this view can indeed be found in a number of Foucault's own statements. His justification for the analysis of ancient techniques of the self at the beginning of *The Use of Pleasure* (*UP*) is a particularly impressive and prominent example. Under the title 'Modifications', it assumes there are three axes of sexuality as a historical experience – the formation of the knowledge of sexuality; of the power systems which regulate its effect; and of the forms in which individuals recognise themselves as subjects of sexuality. At the same time Foucault emphasises that he introduced these three analytical levels into his work successively as 'theoretical shifts', and that above all the last of these shifts, towards work on a programme of ethics, was an attempt at introducing a 'new approach' to his analyses.[10] Shortly before his death Foucault was still distinguishing between four major types of technology, each a 'matrix of practical reason', and between 'three traditional problems: the relations to truth, the relationship to others, the relationships between truth, power and self'.[11] In the process, the formation of subjectivity in particular would seem to be identified with the field of study of ethical investigations.

However, there are good systematic reasons, as well as evidence in Foucault's own works, that suggest that the prevailing picture of the systematic role of ethics within the framework of the Foucauldian programme is very much one-sided. The 'modifications' that introduce and justify the programme of ethics in *UP* indicate that the three axes, or aspects, of the analysis of sexuality as a historical experience 'should also be investigated

9 Even authors like Arnold Davidson, who certainly accept that there is a tension between archaeology, genealogy and ethics, do not attempt a more exact reconstruction of the relationship of the three levels to each other. Above all they do not investigate how the archaeological analysis of discourse and the genealogical analysis of power keyed into the ethics (see on this Davidson (1986), who essentially deals with the three levels in isolation, and in particular discusses ethics separately from archaeology and the analysis of power (227–32). However, at least in the case of modern sexuality he notes: 'An attempt to study modern sexuality would have to combine all three axes of analysis, the self, power, and knowledge, and would take many more volumes than the six Foucault originally planned' (230)). In his report on Foucault's last course at the Collège de France in the summer of 1984, Flynn (1988) reports that in the context of the discussion of *parrhesia* ('truth-telling') as an ancient cultural practice, Foucault attempted to bring all three methodological layers into play – which Flynn rightly described as a theoretical desideratum (see above all Flynn (1988), 114 f.).

10 *UP* 4–5.

11 Martin, Gutman and Hutton (1988), 15 and 18.

in their context'. They can all be integrated into an overall project, a 'history of truth' in a specific sense – a history of 'games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature'.[12] Accordingly, Foucault feels that a specific relationship to 'games of truth' is at the centre of each of the axes of his studies. The coy terminus 'games of truth' apparently refers to rules and methodological norms for the acceptance of claims. Therefore, in trying to write a 'history of truth' Foucault seems to opt for a definition of truth that today is often classed as 'verificationist'. Thus archaeological, genealogical and ethical studies all analyse, each in its own way, historical 'games of truth' which are linked with the constitution of scientific self-experience, with an intrinsic reference to power relationships, and with the constitution of moral self-experience.[13]

In Foucault's later works the tendency towards a systematic integration of archaeology, the analysis of power and ethics into one all-embracing programme becomes stronger, and there is an increased emphasis on how they are interwoven. For example, in his interview 'On the genealogy of ethics', the title of which combines two of these three axes, Foucault tries to describe the three layers as separate forms of a 'historical ontology of the self', within which we constitute ourselves as subjects in three respects.[14] Not only are the games of truth one of the leading analytical aspects of all three areas, so too is the constitution of the subject. Among the most succinct texts on this topic is the terse explanation in the so-called *Autobiography*, not all of which was actually written by Foucault himself.[15] It identifies and explains 'the relationship between subject and truth as the main thread' of all of Foucault's analyses. More precisely, this relationship is supposed to be 'an analysis of the ways in which the subject can be introduced as the object into the games of truth'. In other words, Foucault's central question is 'what are the processes of subjectivisation and objectification which can lead to the subject, in its role as subject, becoming the object of knowledge?' In this context 'subjectivisation and objectification are not independent of each other', but rather 'their reciprocal

12 *UP* 6, 7.

13 See the comment in Foucault's late article 'Technologies of the self', in which he sums up his entire programme: 'My objective for more than twenty-five years has been to sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves . . . the main point is . . . to analyze these so-called sciences as very specific "truth games" related to specific technologies that human beings use to understand themselves' (Martin, Gutman and Hutton (1988), 17–18).

14 Rabinow (1986), 351.

15 In the following I refer to the German translation, which first appeared as: 'Autobiographie', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (42 (1994), 699–702).

relationship leads to what can be called games of truth'. At the same time it is assumed that power relationships as 'different and particular forms of the "rule" of individuals' play a leading role 'in the various manners of objectification of the subject'. It goes without saying that the process of 'subjectivisation', or of the 'constitution of the subject', is to be understood neither in terms of traditional subject philosophy nor in terms of the constitution of personal identity. Here too Foucault is, among other things, a nominalist – the existence of human individuals is taken for granted. It is only through the double process of subjugation to power relationships and the reflexivity of epistemic self-reference that individuals become subjects. Subjectivisation in this sense also implies an objectification of the subject and its adaptation to specific historical games of truth.

However this systematic connection is to be understood exactly, one thing should now be clear: neither is the constitution of the subject specific to ethics, nor in the context of the programme of ethics are the analysis of power and the archaeological study of the formation of (scientific) fields of knowledge irrelevant. Inasmuch as it claims exactly the opposite, the traditional characterisation of the ethics programme is thus indeed one-sided and misleading.

For this reason, in what follows I assume that Foucault's work is to be regarded essentially as a historical theory of knowledge. His main concern is a historical description of how the fields of study and subjects of human science have taken shape,[16] and how this process was interconnected with forms of power relationships. It would seem that Foucault had some remarkable intuitions in mind, but his thoughts are often terminologically somewhat unclear and unsystematic, so that it often takes a great deal of explicatory work to reconstruct them in a satisfactory form. Particular attention must be paid to a precise clarification of the intrinsic links between subjectivisation, objectification and power, which is the intention of this chapter. I shall proceed as follows: (1) first of all I shall reconstruct the concept of the subject in the Foucauldian definition of power in terms of a nominalistic approach, as well as clarifying what the intelligibility of the forms of power comes down to; (2) then I shall turn to a number of indications that Foucault attempted to link power and

16 This aspect is introduced, for example, by Gutting (1989) in his excellent study. See also the works by Hacking (1979, 1986a and 1986b), Rorty (1986) and Rouse (1987 and 1994). As for the controversy between Hacking and Rorty as to whether Foucault developed and presented a new (form of the) theory of knowledge, I agree with Rorty in assuming that Foucault effectively makes no contribution to questions and problems of the classic theory of knowledge, but follow Hacking in believing that fruitful insights into aspects of it can be obtained from Foucault's analyses of the relationship between knowledge and power.