Introduction

> doce me, quid sit pudicitia et quantum in ea bonum, in corpore an in animo posita sit
>
> Teach me what *pudicitia* is, and how good it is, and whether it is located in the body or in the soul.
>
> (Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 88.8)

Sexual behaviour was a central ethical concern of Roman authors, whatever Foucault may have suggested.[1] The ethical problems of sex are treated at length, for instance, by two (rather different) didactic works of the late Republic, Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Virgil's *Georgics*, both of which depict *amor* as a wild and destructive force.[2] For the early imperial moralist Valerius Maximus, *libido* (or lust) is one of the most dangerous vices, and he devotes one of his longest chapters (6.1) to the subject of sexual crime and sexual virtue (*pudicitia*).[3] Granted there was no Latin term corresponding to the English word 'sexual': a cluster of terms such as *venus*, *amor*, *voluptas*, with their own semantic ramifications, referred to the phenomenon of sex.[4] Neither was there a Latin word to convey our abstract notion of 'morality', although this English term is derived from the Latin *mores* which signifies both behaviour and codes of behaviour – custom or convention and then more generally ways of behaving, moral conduct, morality.[5]

[1] Foucault 1979, cf. 1985. Edwards 1993 shows how central the theme of sexual immorality was to political discourse in ancient Rome.

[2] Lucr. 4.1037–1191, Virg. *Georg.* 3.209–283.

[3] See Chapter 3 below.

[4] See Adams 1982: 118–213. Sexual activity is often referred to in the ancient sources as *venus*, *usum veneris*, *voluptates venereae*, *concubitus*.

[5] Edwards 1993: 3–4 on the lack of an equivalent in ancient Rome of our 'immorality'. The word *mos* is often encountered in the phrase *mos maiorum* – 'the customs of our ancestors' – to refer to a way of life conducted in previous generations that embodies the morally upright, see Linke and Stemmler 2000. Unlike some scholars, I use the terms 'morality' and 'ethics' interchangeably to mean *both* values and codes of behaviour *and* critical engagement with these, believing the two to be inextricable; I also use them to denote not only the area of thought and behaviour dealing with right and wrong, good and bad, but also more generally that which pertains to conducting oneself and interpreting and structuring everyday experience.

A key ethical concept that did exist in Latin, however, was *pudicitia* (and its converse, *impudicitia*), loosely translatable as 'sexual virtue' (and 'sexual vice'), together with the related adjectives *pudicus* and *impudicus*; such is the focus of this book. *Pudicitia* is not the only Latin concept pertaining to sexual virtue; there is a cluster of such terms in the Latin vocabulary of related and overlapping meaning: *castitas*, *sanctitas*, *abstinentia*, *continentia, verecundia, modestia*. Among them, however, *pudicitia* stands out in several ways:

- It has a more specific meaning than all the other terms, always referring to sexual behaviour, whereas the others have a broader semantic reach that can sometimes include reference to sex in some contexts, but also refers to religious purity and purity more generally, to consumption of food and drink and accumulation of wealth, and to the regulation of non-sexual relationships throughout society.[6]
- *Pudicitia* is the only one of these qualities consistently to win pride of place in political philosophy, and to appear alongside such qualities as justice, liberty, peace, dignity and temperance in Roman philosophical works.[7]
- It is a virtue which is explicitly said to 'strengthen men and women alike'[8] and this is an area of ethics where women play as substantial a role as men. Our sources therefore offer the sort of information about women's engagement with the moral sphere usually lacking in Roman moral discourse. We are given a rare chance to compare the moral development of men and women, and to explore evidence for women as moral subjects (as opposed to objects of control) in parallel with that for men.
- *Pudicitia* was also a personified deity with her own cult worship (explored in Chapter 1 below).
- *Pudicitia* was a controversial and unsettled topic, provoking all kinds of deliberation about wide-ranging moral issues such as the differences between men and women, the relation between body and mind, and the ethics of power and status differentiation within society.
- Finally, *pudicitia* is a peculiarly Roman concept; there is no direct ancient Greek equivalent, in contrast to many Roman moral concepts, so it develops separately from the Greek philosophical tradition, although related to the Greek concepts of *sophrosyne* (self-control) and *aidos* (shame).[9]

[6] See below, for definitions of and distinctions between these terms: *castitas* and *sanctitas* p. 30, *abstinentia* and *continentia* pp. 134–6, *verecundia*, *modestia* and *pudor* pp. 18–19.
[7] See Chapter 6 below for Cicero and Sallust, pp. 281–4. Cf. Sen. *Clem*. 1.19; *Dial.* 4.13.2; *Epist*. 49.12; Apul. *Plat*. 2.1.
[8] Val. Max. 6.1.praef.
[9] For substantial monographs on these Greek concepts see Cairns 1993, North 1966.

Indeed, as we shall see in Chapters 1 and 2, it is at the heart of Roman ideas about the development of the city and culture and is described by some authors as a paradigmatically Roman quality.[10]

For all these reasons *pudicitia* is an intriguing topic that offers us an entry point of rich potential into Roman morality and culture. It is also peculiarly Roman in that there is no corresponding term in the English language; there is no 'pudicity' in our vocabulary. This is beneficial for us; it prevents us from falling into the trap of thinking that we already understand what the term signifies and what its nuances are.[11] *Pudicitia* is a concept that belongs to a different and distant culture and a different way of thinking about sex and about ethics. This book is an attempt to probe the term, to elucidate its nuances and ramifications, and through this exercise to cast light more generally on how Romans thought both about sex and about morality.

Despite the grip that Roman sexual morality has on the modern public imagination – which pictures orgies and decadence – it has not been accorded an important place in the recent history of Western sexual ethics.[12] Ancient Rome has not traditionally been thought of as a place of great thinkers, and histories of ethics usually skip straight from the Greek philosophers to the early Christian thinkers without reference to the Roman Republic and empire.[13] Foucault famously skimmed over the Roman contributions in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*, drawing instead on the later developments in Greek philosophy under the empire.[14] However, the culture of ancient Rome was by no means devoid of ethical debate and education, as the following chapters will show. Moreover, discussions of the history of sexual ethics are very often focused on philosophical and theological texts and ideas, rather than more widely disseminated social issues; this book concentrates not on rarefied philosophical analyses of issues in sexual ethics, nor on systematic rules of conduct (such as those codified in

[10] E.g. Ps. Quint. *Decl.* 3, see Chapter 5 below.

[11] In French, on the other hand, the word *pudique* is a direct derivation from *pudicus* and Nicole Böels-Janssen wisely cautions her Francophone readers not to be too eager to impose upon Latin terms our understanding of contemporary semantics (Böels-Janssen 1996: 57). In modern Italian too, *pudicizia*, though an old-fashioned term, is still in parlance; in the week in which I write this I came across a website of a woman's magazine inviting me to complete an online quiz to discover whether I was 'pudica o spudorata?' (www.donneinlinea.it).

[12] Given the prevalence of Greek philosophy and early Christian thinkers in the modern tradition of sexual ethics, it may be historically significant that *pudicitia* had no ancient Greek equivalent, was not a liturgical term (although it is discussed at length in the work of the early Christian writer Tertullian) and has no modern English equivalent.

[13] See especially Gaca 2003 for a recent example of a work on the history of Christian sexual ethics; also Primoratz 1999, Bordo 1993.

[14] For a critique of Foucault's use of classical material see Larmour, Miller and Platter 1998, especially Richlin 1998, Fredrick 2002b.

laws or philosophical systems), but on the debates taking place throughout society beyond the strict confines of the philosophical elite.[15]

The following seven chapters include discussions of a range of ancient Roman literary sources that offer us some kind of 'take' on *pudicitia*. Despite its prominence in Roman thought and society, *pudicitia* is not the most commonly used of Roman moral terms in the extant sources, and it is employed primarily only in certain Latin works, which form the foundation of my research: it is found in the plays of Plautus (and especially concentrated in the *Amphitryo*), but barely in those of his fellow writer of comedies Terence, in the elegiac poems of Propertius, but not in those of Tibullus, liberally in Cicero's public invective speeches, but not in his private correspondence, in Juvenal's satires, but not in the poetry of Horace or of Virgil.[16] The chronological range of this study is from the second century BCE until the beginning of the second century CE, with some reference to later material where appropriate; this is a period from which most of the extant sources that deal with *pudicitia* date, and for which we have considerable historical context. My focus on a single term has led me to concentrate almost exclusively on the literary sources, and this book is a work of literary criticism, aiming to make valuable contributions to the study of the range of texts and genres that form my source material and to contribute towards the development of strategies for approaching the study of the culture of the ancient world through sensitive critical readings of its literary productions.[17]

The chapters of the book focus in turn upon individual sources or bodies of material, and this generic structure also reflects specific themes in the ancient deployments of *pudicitia*. None of the sources that I examine sets out to discourse abstractly on the topic of *pudicitia*;[18] rather each applies the moral abstract to specific instances, to particular contexts, particular dilemmas, particular individuals and scenarios, with the result (intended or otherwise) of working through its ethical possibilities. What the extant corpus of Latin literature offers us is not a systematic exposition of what *pudicitia* meant, but an accumulation of specific instances of *pudicitia* put

[15] Such culturally embedded debates were as much the context for the development of Christian thinking about sex and morality as the Greek philosophical schools that influenced the early theologians; this book therefore should be of interest to those studying the development of early Christian sexual ethics.

[16] One question to ask of our corpus is whether there is any particular reason why some sources are more concerned with the quality than others.

[17] Although I do make reference to instances of *pudicitia*'s depiction on coins and inscriptions (and believe that these merit further attention in the light of my analysis of the literary sources).

[18] Although there must have been such texts in ancient Rome; cf. Aulus Gellius' reference to a disquisition on *pudicitia*, or Seneca's request to Lucilius (*Epist.* 88.8), see epigraph to this chapter, above.

to work, gathered from a heterogeneous Roman morality.[19] As much as revealing Roman moral codes and prescribing modes of behaviour, these texts confront issues and embrace the uncertainty of *pudicitia*, provoking debate, deliberation and resistance.

WHY STUDY SEXUAL ETHICS, WHY STUDY CLASSICS?

Sexual ethics are a focus of concern throughout our own cultures, from popular media to academia; awareness of them permeates our relations with all other members of our communities. However, they are not a body of detachable concerns, but one whose ramifications spread throughout cultures. Anthropological approaches show that 'sexuality is embedded in numerous other social relations'[20] – that pertinent to the understanding of ideological and ethical structures relating to sexual behaviour is an understanding of how they function within a culture more generally and interact with other moral fields. For this reason, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, 'the study of sexuality . . . provides critical insight into the wider organisation of a culture'.[21] Studying sexual ethics in ancient Rome therefore, embedded as they are in structures of power and status, politics, religion, rhetoric and other aspects of ancient Rome, will help us to understand better ancient Roman culture in general.

Pudicitia governs an individual's sexuality and relationships with others and with society as a whole, and it also has profound implications for non-sexual behaviour. In Roman culture, virtue is something to be displayed and demonstrated to others through action, whereas sex is essentially an exclusive, private and often socially invisible practice. In addition, *pudicitia* is often about *not* participating in prohibited sexual activity. Hence the importance of non-sexual behaviour such as dress, gesture and the use of space and language, as a means of communicating this virtue, and also the strange tales of heroic deeds through which *pudicitia* is put to the test. Thus, the area of sexual morality provides us with a rare opportunity to examine the relationship between the public face of virtue in Roman society and the ethical development of the individual.

Meanwhile, contemporary philosophy acknowledges 'the importance of knowledge of human diversity for ethics' as a means of overcoming ethnocentricity and broadening ethical perspectives.[22] The past is one useful

[19] For the particular as opposed to the universal in ethics see Benhabib 1992.
[20] Caplan 1989: 16; cf. Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 24. [21] Weeks 2002: 32.
[22] Shrage 1994, introduction: xii. See also Martha Nussbaum's work on the moral significance of Classics for contemporary ethical philosophy: Nussbaum 2002, 1999.

source of coming to know of human diversity – history as a form of anthropology. As a recent work on the history of sexuality puts it: 'one of the benefits of studying history is that it enables recognition of the strangeness of contemporary society'.[23] Moreover, the study of the classical past, of the ancient world, has attributes that make it a special, and a particularly useful, form of history: its age and its status.

First, it has a peculiar, long-standing, yet historically situated status as the origin of Western civilisation and Western philosophy. Contemporary scholarship on sex and ethics almost always makes reference to the ancient world. Yet such reference is often misguided and almost always without any mention of Rome at all – an allusion to Greek pederasty is followed by reference to Christian asceticism.[24] Secondly, the length of time that Classics has been seriously studied offers us an extremely rewarding vista. We can compare how source material has been differently studied by scholars from a whole range of different ages and contexts – something that is unusual in the history of sexuality. One of the things that Classics itself can add to the history of sexuality, then, is a sense of the differing methods and concerns that have led over the years to different interpretations of the culture and its material products.

Much has been written in recent years about sex and sexual ideology and morality in the ancient world. Scholarship has tended to focus almost exclusively on the male subject, and more specifically on the *desiring* male subject: that is the male as subject of erotic urges and experiences that are shaped by cultural forces.[25] Debates are often focused on the extent to which what we know as 'homosexuality' can be recognised in other cultures, and the field has sparked heated debates around the questions of essentialism.[26] Ancient sexual ideology has long been seen as operating around a 'priapic' model, where what matters is who penetrates whom with a penis (or occasionally an imitation penis).[27] Sexual intercourse is seen as penetration, which confers (social) power on the penetrator and detracts power from the one who is penetrated – the active–passive model. A particularly clear account of the ideological framework surrounding this idea is offered by Holt Parker, who presents the various sexual relations one

[23] Phillips and Reay 2002: 3; cf. their introduction, *passim*.
[24] E.g. Primoratz 1999 on Greek paedophilia, Bordo 1993 on ancient Greek and Christian attitudes towards the body. Foucault himself, of course, turned to the ancient world in his quest to understand the modern sexual self; on this point see also Fredrick 2002b.
[25] On women as desiring subjects see now Rabinowitz and Auanger 2002.
[26] Particularly articulate exponents and opponents are the American scholars Amy Richlin and David Halperin. See also Davidson 2001.
[27] See Housman 1931, Wiseman 1985, Williams 1999 for the Priapic model, and Davidson 2001.

might find in the form of a 'teratogenic grid'.[28] This analytical model is a useful tool for dismantling the modern concepts of homosexual and heterosexual as inevitable categories of persons, and the modern concepts of 'gender' and 'sexuality' as devices of historical analysis have been fruitfully applied to ancient Rome in recent years. For instance, Craig Williams has convincingly argued that, despite the title of his book, our 'homosexuality' would not be a meaningful concept for ancient Romans, who did not differentiate fundamentally between male and female sexual partners.

However, sexual morality is not and was not always about penetration, and moral agents are not and were not always phallic men. Although such systematic analyses help to structure our understanding of ancient cultures, they also obstruct our observation of further nuances of moral and emotional aspects of Roman experience. *Pudicitia* offers us a new route into studying ideologies of sex in Roman culture, one which allows us to move beyond the idea of penetration, of sex as necessarily phallic and involving activity and passivity (although these will inform our understanding too) and beyond the male desiring subject, to deal with women, children and even slaves as moral subjects. Foucault's study was avowedly of the ethics of a male elite. *Pudicitia*, on the other hand, was clearly a moral concern of men and women, slaves and free, children and adults. This book is therefore able to broaden the scope of ethical understanding by examining the moral development of a range of ethical subjects (although inevitably we are constrained by the provenance of our extant sources).

While this book in no way represents a systematic attempt to recover an account of female agency and subjectivity from our Roman sources (and certainly has no aspiration to reconstruct the lived experience of Roman women as ethical subjects), it is nevertheless concerned to listen to the considerable amount that our extant sources have to say about women's as well as men's moral subjectivity. In ancient Rome, women were portrayed not only as the objects of moralising discourse, but as subjects too; Roman ethics are more complex than just a 'male ethics' as envisaged by Foucault.[29] Although all the sources examined in this work are, as far as we know,

[28] Parker 1998a. See Martial 2.28 for a helpful ancient illustration, where the various possible sexual roles are set out in a crude epigram; the addressee Sextillus laughs at the accusation that he is a *cinaedus* (penetrated anally) and gives his accuser the finger, but Martial responds that Sextillus is not on the other hand a man who penetrates others, whether anally, vaginally or orally (*pedico*, *fututor*, *irrumator*), and that there are only two roles left for him, which are almost certainly intended to be understood as *cunnilingus* and *fellator* – he is orally penetrated by men and/or women. Cf. Williams 1999: 202.

[29] See Richlin 1998 for a feminist critique of Foucault's study of the ancient world.

written by men, they are, even so, products of a culture in which women functioned as moral agents and were engaged in ethical deliberation.[30] Even when Roman ideology strives hardest to be exclusively male, it cannot help but admit female subjectivity within its remit.[31] Examination of the sources bearing in mind a female-identified as well as a male-identified reader brings out some new interpretative possibilities of the sources, as well as allowing us to see some of the moral positions available to Roman women, some of the material and ideas with which they might have shaped their moral selves. If we understand culture as exerting a 'direct grip' on bodies through *habitus*, and the body as the 'site of production of new modes of subjectivity',[32] then a quality such as *pudicitia*, which moderates the relationship between mind and body, is a perfect place to look for the female subject.[33]

In the Roman sources themselves, the figure of Lucretia, traditional paradigm of the virtue of *pudicitia*, is representative of the very same uncertainties and theoretical debates – about how texts should be read and how we should understand the (gendered) identity of the reader – that preoccupy modern critics.[34] In some representations she becomes a figure of split subjectivity, mind divided from body, male from female. Some texts make her a cipher in the dealings of men, others flesh out her subjectivity and moral power; some make her a figure to be identified with by men, others by women, others invite us, with a juxtaposition of different reading positions, to think about the very differences and similarities in male and female morality.[35]

Discussions of ancient source material are inevitably framed in terms of our own contemporary concerns, and it is right that they should be, since in this way they most helpfully contribute to modern debates.[36] I want to move beyond these, however, to examine more broadly how individuals in ancient Rome were invited to shape themselves, and their attitudes and actions, in response to encounters with the culture around them. The aim of this book is to gain some understanding of the issues that were critical for the Romans, at least as far as we can tell from the available sources. To this end this book takes as its starting point a Roman concept,

[30] For some theoretically informed discussion of reading and female subjectivity in Roman literature see Spentzou 2003 on Ovid's *Heroides*; cf. Younger 2002 on women as viewers of ancient sculpture.
[31] Langlands 2004.
[32] Bordo 1993: 302, n. 16; cf. Bourdieu's work on *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).
[33] On female subjectivity see de Lauretis 1990.
[34] See Dixon 2002 for a recent attempt to summarise the impact of feminist theory on the discipline of Classics, and to indicate the areas of contention.
[35] See below Chapters 2 and 3. [36] Nussbaum 2002, Davidson 2001.

pudicitia. In doing so, it obtains a certain freedom from contemporary preoccupations, since there is no equivalent for the term in the English language.

SEXUAL MORALITY OLD AND NEW

Whenever, over the past couple of years, I have mentioned to non-Classicists that I am writing a book about sexual morals in ancient Rome, I have been struck by the consistency of the response that I get. Almost invariably my interlocutor asks rhetorically and with a knowing smirk: 'Did they have any?' In the popular imagination Roman sexual practice is characterised by excess and depravity, unfettered by the prudery of subsequent eras. One thinks of orgies, of slave girls dangling grapes into the mouths of reclining men, of classy courtesans in transparent dresses, of insatiable empresses and the incestuous desires and perversions of emperors.

Such ideas are drawn from a variety of sources, not least Gibbon's vivid depiction of Rome's decline and fall, the Claudius novels of Robert Graves and their BBC televisation in the 1970s, films such as the Penthouse-produced *Caligula*, Fellini's *Satyricon*, and Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*[37] as well as from the descriptions found in widely read ancient Roman authors such as Suetonius and Juvenal, and the explicit images of sexual intercourse such as those found on the walls of buildings in Pompeii, now beginning to be displayed in museums around the world.[38]

Consider, for example, Juvenal's grotesque description of Messalina, the wife of the emperor Claudius,[39] prostituting herself in a brothel every night, yet unable to get sexual satisfaction:

> . . . Hear what Claudius
> Had to put up with. The minute she heard him snoring,
> His wife – that whore-empress – who dared prefer the mattress
> Of a stews to her couch in the Palace, called for her hooded
> Night-cloak and hastened forth, alone or with a single
> Maid to attend her. Then, her black hair hidden
> Under an ash-blond wig, she would make straight for her brothel,
> With its odour of stale warm bedclothes, its empty reserved cell.
> Here she would strip off, showing her gilded nipples and
> The belly that once housed a prince of the blood. Her doorsign

[37] On cinematic representations of Roman decadence and sexuality see Wyke 1997, Joshel, Malamud and McGuire 2001.
[38] Clarke 1998. The 'Secret Museum' has recently opened in the Museum of Naples.
[39] For Tacitus' take on the couple, see Chapter 7 below, p. 359.

> Bore a false name, Lysica, 'the Wolf-Girl'. A more than willing
> Partner, she took on all comers, for cash, without a break.
> Too soon, for her, the brothel-keeper dismissed
> His girls. She stayed till the end, always the last to go,
> Then trailed away sadly, still with a burning hard-on,
> Retiring exhausted, yet still far from satisfied, cheeks
> Begrimed with lamp-smoke, filthy, carrying home
> To her imperial couch the stink of the whorehouse.[40]

Or here is the biographer Suetonius, describing the sexual and theatrical perversions of the notoriously depraved emperor Nero:

> Nero practised every kind of obscenity, and after defiling almost every part of his body finally invented a novel game: he was released from a cage dressed in the skins of wild animals, and attacked the private parts of men and women who stood bound to the stakes. After working up sufficient excitement by this means he was despatched – shall we say? – by his freedman Doryphorus.[41]

The next response of my interlocutor, informed by such images, is usually one of somewhat prurient interest in my research topic, which I am reluctant to disappoint with a book that in fact will not turn out to be the description of unremitting debauchery that some might expect.

One thing is certain: the Romans were concerned about sexual morality. The passages from Juvenal and Suetonius cited above are not evidence of a lack of moral structures in Roman society; far from it: they speak of deep concerns about the right and wrong ways to conduct oneself sexually.[42] They are not providing us with neutral descriptions, but serve as moralising texts which inveigh against or deplore the practices they describe. Even the most sexually explicit Roman texts, which appear to invite the ascription of licentiousness (perhaps Ovid's *Arts of Love* or Petronius' *Satyricon*), are engaged in thinking through the ethics of sexual behaviour, and they work with categories of good and bad, of pure and defiled, of ideal and transgression.[43]

However, this book also focuses on very different stories, sometimes equally dramatic, which provide a counterpoise to this image of licence and sensuality; these evoke a Rome perhaps more reminiscent of other times and other cultures.[44] Take for instance these accounts of husbands'

[40] Juv. 6. 115–32, translation from Oxford World Classics edition by Niall Rudd 1991.
[41] Suet. *Nero* 29, quotation from the Penguin edition (tr. by Robert Graves 1957, revised by Michael Grant 1979).
[42] And, as we shall see, represent a particular take on sexual morality located in a specific imperial era; see below Chapters 1, 4 and 7.
[43] This point also made by Edwards 1993: 19. On Petronius see Chapter 4 below, pp. 227–31.
[44] For parallel phenomena in modern Sri Lanka see de Silva 2002, where the Singhala quality she discusses bears a close resemblance to *pudicitia*; on contemporary India see John and Nair 1998.