



# Foucault's 1960s Lectures on Sexuality

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## Abstract

In this extended review essay we discuss the lectures on sexuality which Foucault delivered in the 1960s, published in a single volume in 2018. The first part of the volume comprises five lectures given at the University of Clermont-Ferrand in 1964 to psychology students. The second part is Foucault's course 'The Discourse of Sexuality', given at the experimental University of Vincennes in 1969 in the philosophy department. We explore both the themes of the lectures, and the important editorial materials provided by Claude-Olivier Doron which situate these themes in relation to recent developments in the history and philosophy of biology, gender and sexuality. These lectures provide some important and surprising additions to Foucault's more familiar interest in sexuality, with discussion of plant and animal biology, sex differentiation, the question of sexual behaviour, perversion and infantile sexuality.

## Keywords

Biology, Foucault, medicine, psychoanalysis, sexuality

Michel Foucault, *La Sexualité: Cours donné à l'université de Clermont-Ferrand* (1964), *Suivi de Le Discours de la sexualité: Cours donné à l'université de Vincennes* (1969), ed. Claude-Olivier Doron. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2018, viii + 279 pp.

Foucault was interested in the question of sexuality for almost his entire career. While apparently outraged by it being part of his *agrégation* exam in 1951, his early teaching career in psychology required him to address the topic (see Elden, 2021). In the original preface to the *History of Madness* he anticipated a future study on the theme, saying that it 'will

be necessary to write the history of sexual prohibitions' (1961: iv; 2006: xxx). The *History of Madness* already discusses sexuality and the bourgeois family, venereal disease, prostitution, the libertine and the sodomite. The indicative comments about homosexuality in this early book have been explored in two pioneering studies: Didier Eribon's *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (2004: Part III, Ch. 4) and Lynne Huffer's *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (2010). Sexuality was also the theme of some of Foucault's literary works in the 1960s, especially in his writings on Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski and the Marquis de Sade.<sup>1</sup>

Foucault told Gerard Lebrun in 1965 that sexuality would be the next project after the completion of *The Order of Things*, although he also acknowledged the challenges of the topic (reported in Eribon, 1991: 270). Various ways of approaching this project were discussed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969 and in his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France in December 1970. But it was not until the mid-1970s, following the completion of *Discipline and Punish*, that Foucault began work in earnest on what was to become the *History of Sexuality*. At the Schizo-Culture conference at Columbia University in November 1975, Foucault begins by saying: 'I have taken on a piece of work that is a sort of sequel to my book on the history of madness' (2013b: 144). That project, with its first volume in 1976 and the two published in 1984, occupied him for much of the rest of his life (see Elden, 2016; Moore, 2020b). The fourth volume, *Confessions of the Flesh*, was published posthumously in 2018, and translated into English in 2021 (Foucault, 2018a, 2021b; see Elden, 2018; Downham Moore, 2020a). Further draft materials from the project across this period exist in the Paris archives.

The archives also contain some material from earlier in his career which relates to this theme. The volume under review here is the key source for Foucault's interest in sexuality before the 1970s. It is the first volume of a new sequence of lecture courses and manuscripts from Foucault's time before he was appointed to the Collège de France in 1970. In time the series will comprise material from his early teaching in Lille and at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, a visiting lecture course in Brazil, his time in Tunisia, and from his posts at the Universities of Clermont-Ferrand and Vincennes in France. Yet while a lot has been preserved, much has also been lost. Only some of Foucault's lecture materials still exist, and there appear to be no audio recordings from this period.

Lectures which do survive include those in courses on philosophical anthropology and philosophical discourse, some material on Nietzsche, and a visiting course from Brazil on the material destined for *The Order of Things*. Manuscripts which develop themes from his teaching include an extensive reading of Ludwig Binswanger (forthcoming as 2021a) and one on the relation between phenomenology and psychology, which is mainly a reading of Edmund Husserl. Several of the other contributions

to this theme issue discuss these materials in detail. The current volume comprises two lecture courses, one from 1964 at the University of Clermont-Ferrand where Foucault lectured on psychology and sexuality and the multidisciplinary lectures on sexuality at the new experimental University of Vincennes in early 1969. Although five years separate the two courses, their thematic relation makes their publication together eminently sensible. Alone they would have made quite short volumes.

The editorial planning of the current volume was overseen by François Ewald, co-editor with Daniel Defert of the widely acclaimed 1994 collection of Foucault's shorter writings and interviews, *Dits et Écrits* (Foucault, 1994), and one of the two series editors of the Collège de France lectures, with Alessandro Fontana, who sadly died before the sequence was complete. Ewald now leads a new team of mainly younger scholars for the pre-Collège de France material, and the editor of this volume is the University of Paris-Diderot philosopher of race and biology, Claude-Olivier Doron. The procedures for publishing this material follow those established in the publication of the Collège de France courses, but because there are no recordings to transcribe, Foucault's notes are being published instead. These vary in quality and style but are necessarily more fragmented than transcriptions. The closest comparisons from the Collège de France courses are the first two – *Lectures on the Will to Know* and *Penal Theories and Institutions* (2011, 2013a, 2015, 2019) – neither of which had extant recordings. As with those two courses, the current volume retains the lecture-note features of diagrams, numbered lists and bullet points of topics. Foucault would have expanded on this framework as he spoke, and as readers we are required to do something similar as we read. Missing words are indicated with suggested insertions, and passages which Foucault crossed out or rewrote are reproduced in the footnotes and endnotes. This format is not without its own charm, drawing the reader's attention to Foucault's unfolding thought in progress during the early years of his emergent work on sexuality.

The published lecture-note volume as a scholarly genre was common throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, but such volumes were generally either pre-written orations or complete transcriptions from an oral exegesis. Like many scholars from the second half of the 20th century onwards, following the massification of French universities, Foucault's notes were not of this kind, providing only the outline of an exposition of ideas, with some areas more or less elaborated. It would probably have been excruciating for Foucault to imagine these notes being read by any public in such a form, given his fastidious reworking of multiple drafts for his books, essays and even interviews, as well as his specific testamentary proscription of posthumous publications. Yet the care with which they are presented, and the alternative of leaving these papers only in the archive, means they do deserve a wider

audience. The editors have consulted substantial additional materials from the Foucault archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France for clues as to what he had been reading and thinking about during both lecture series.

As such, there is an immensely rich intellectual contextualization provided both in the dense provision of citations and editorial explanatory remarks, and in the two supplementary essays at the end of the volume by Doron. These essays and notes provide both a detailed elaboration of the specific texts to which Foucault alluded in his lecture materials, as well as of some of the wider intellectual contexts which informed his specific reflections, with reference to works Foucault had clearly read. This substantial critical apparatus also includes triangulation with the personal notes taken by some of Foucault's students present during the oral lectures, providing further elaboration of themes sketched only briefly in Foucault's own materials (Vincennes Lecture 3, 130–4; Lecture 4, 147). There is also a substantial excerpt reproduced from one of Foucault's notebooks on the topic of 'Sexualité, reproduction, individualité', which has a thematic link to the material presented here (2018b: 211–16). The endnotes are the place where much editorial explanatory work occurs, providing extensive relation of specific ideas indicated in the lecture notes to Foucault's published works, supplemented with reference to Foucault's additional unpublished personal notes, and with exhaustive referencing of all the works he mentioned either explicitly or more vaguely which the editors have kindly hunted down.

There is also some citation of later major works of scholarship (mostly French works, but some in English, German and Italian), which have since pursued lines of historical inquiry to which Foucault had merely gestured – a bonus addition which could hardly be expected of a volume of this kind since it refers to works published after Foucault's death and which clearly did not inform his ideas. These citations help to illustrate how imaginative and generative Foucault was in mapping countless new research possibilities. The Clermont-Ferrand and Vincennes lectures both elaborated substantially on matters of sex differentiation and enumeration of the sexes in the history of science and medicine. Foucault's extensive reflections on such matters clearly wanders into some of the very same territory explored extensively by several internationally renowned scholars whose related major works were published within a few years of Foucault's death, notably Thomas Laqueur's equally diachronic, though much shorter survey, *Making Sex, from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), which was translated into French in 1992 and is already widely known to French gender and sexuality scholars; Londa Schiebinger's two ground-breaking monographs on the history of the biological sexing of plants, and on the role of gender in the formation of the natural sciences, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern*

*Science* (1993) and *The Mind Has No Sex* (1989); and Alice Dreger's later *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (1998). Schiebinger's works, despite appearing in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, German, Hungarian and Greek, have never been translated into French. Ann Laura Stoler's widely acclaimed critical attempts to bring Foucault's account of the history of sexuality into conversation with the historical anthropology of colonialism, also known to many French readers, would surely warrant mentioning here too (Stoler, 1995, 2002, 2009). Clearly though, the edition could not cite every important work that has engaged with the specific themes mapped by Foucault in both the 1964 and 1969 lectures, given the tremendous worldwide expansion of histories of sexual science after him.

While there are therefore extensive resources for understanding Foucault's work on sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s, the two courses presented here in contrast provide all the extant material on how Foucault approached the question in the 1960s. Here it is clear that early in his research on the theme, he had developed a consideration of sexual concepts being enmeshed in the larger discursive architecture of scientific thought, with reference to the bifurcation of plant and animal life into two sexes and the foregrounding of sexual reproduction as the alternative biological mode of organisms detached from their capacity for self-growth. He specified the object of his inquiries, not as the cultural representation of sexuality but as a specific 'practice of scientific discourse' (Vincennes Lecture 6, 170).

### **Clermont-Ferrand: Sexuality**

Foucault was appointed to the University of Clermont-Ferrand as a *maître de conférences* – somewhere between an assistant and associate professor – in psychology in 1960, while his doctoral theses on the history of madness and his translation of Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology* and its introduction were being assessed. After he was awarded his doctorate in May 1961, he was able to be promoted to professor. While his teaching was in psychology, this was in a philosophy department, as was most teaching of psychology in France at the time. Among his colleagues at Clermont-Ferrand were Jules Vuillemin – who succeeded Maurice Merleau-Ponty at the Collège de France in 1962, and who would be instrumental to Foucault's own election there in 1970 – and Michel Serres.

The five lectures edited here appear to be the only surviving lectures from Foucault's time at Clermont-Ferrand. They are likely part of a longer course on psychology rather than a separate treatment. One immediate thing which is crucial to bear in mind is that, unlike with his Collège de France courses, Foucault was teaching students for a degree. The unique nature of the Collège de France meant he could

specify the topics and the themes to be covered each year himself, without a preordained curriculum and driven by his ongoing research interests, and with auditors rather than students. But in his earlier teaching career he was required to cover certain topics by the nature of the academic environment. This is especially true for the course at Clermont-Ferrand, with Vincennes being expressly a more experimental educational environment.

The lectures cover a lot of ground, including scientific knowledge of sexuality, sexual behaviour, perversion and infantile sexuality. In these lectures, Foucault roamed widely into modern biological descriptions of the instincts which stimulate sexual behaviours in humans and other animals, before explaining why humans, while sharing identical hormones and evolved responses with other animals, are also particularly complicated by virtue of our prefrontal cortical development, making sexual matters subject to multiple layers of meaning and a wide variety of possible forms (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 3, 43–9). At the same time as sexuality is ‘anchored in the biological, it is also totally penetrated by cultural formations’ (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 3, 40). The attribution of animality to human sexuality is also described in its conceptual historical emergence, helping to produce modern utopian myths about sexuality as a primitive force which has been repressed and needs merely to be liberated (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 3, 51). Here Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, but also certain forms of anthropological thought which take biology as a sort of stable ground on which cultural variation forms, are targets of both explicit and implicit critique.

Interestingly, given 1964 was almost the high point of structuralism within France, Foucault says that he will explore these questions both diachronically and synchronically. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan, while not mentioned in Foucault’s notes, are not so far away, and Doron’s notes provide some helpful orientations. And while Foucault’s focus is the Judeo-Christian world, he indicates that the issues he identifies operate in socialist countries as well as ‘reactionary’ ones. At the height of the Cold War he makes the claim that socialist countries have still largely followed bourgeois categories of morality, and while they aim for equality, still have tensions about labour distribution in the family, restrictions concerning monogamy and divorce, and both show the male dominance of politics (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 1, 8).

Despite referring to sexuality as the historical object in question, and mapping some of the familiar territory that Foucault elaborated in the four volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, these lectures were also very much about the science and psychology of sex-differences, and of what is now called *le genre* (gender) – a 1950s novel use of an old word, being an English linguistic innovation deriving from the American psychologist John Money around this same time. This had not yet entered French scholarship during the 1960s, being exported into other languages,

including French, after the 1980s (see Germon, 2009; Repo, 2017). As such the word ‘gender’ was not part of Foucault’s vocabulary, but in these lectures, perhaps more than anywhere else in his work, it is apparent that he was intensely interested in the way discourse attributes meaning to sexed difference, as much as to sexuality. Consequently, the volume will interest scholars in gender, feminist, queer and transgender studies as much as those interested in Foucault’s intellectual development and the formation of his ideas about the history of sexuality. There is, for instance, a conceptual sketch of the work he began on the history of hermaphrodites in medical description, which appeared in more example-specific form in his 1980 *Arcadie* article on Herculine Barbin, ‘Le vrai sexe’ (the true sex), reproduced in the *Dits et Écrits* volume (1994: Vol. IV, 115–23; a shorter version was the preface to the English edition, 1980).

Foucault also discussed hermaphrodites in his 1974–5 *Abnormal* lecture course (1999, 2003), and compiled notes towards a planned book on this theme. In these lectures, on the other hand, the larger terrain of modern medical enumeration of the sexes is mapped in relation to the conceptual archaeology of early-modern plant and animal biology, in relation to the concept of intersexuality in the work of early 20th-century sexologists, and in relation to the medical discovery of sex-steroid hormones in the 1920s (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 2, 27–30; Lecture 3, 40–44; Vincennes Lecture 6). While there is a surprisingly large amount of material in this lecture series focused on hormones, the editors do not locate this as an important theme worthy of appearance in the index of notions (Clermont-Ferrand Lectures 2 & 3). On this theme, the lectures refer to some of the same material in the work of early-20th-century gynaecologists and endocrinologists treated in greater detail by Chandak Sengoopta in *The Secret Quintessence of Life* (2006). The material discussed in these lectures points to a considerable archival research that Foucault had undertaken, and which is nowhere explored in his published works.

### **Vincennes: The Discourse of Sexuality**

After his two years at the University of Tunis, Foucault did not return to Clermont-Ferrand but was exploring options in Paris. While he had an offer to teach at the University of Nanterre, to the west of the city, he declined this post for a rather different opportunity. This was to join the new experimental University of Vincennes, set up following the events of May 1968 (see Dosse, 1997: Ch. 14; Djian, 2009; Tessarech, 2011). Foucault had been contacted by Hélène Cixous to help set up the philosophy programme at Vincennes in September 1968, and he was appointed to a chair in philosophy in December. Teaching began at the beginning of 1969, and Foucault gave a course on ‘The End of

Metaphysics', together with François Regnault, and a course on 'The Discourse of Sexuality'. The following academic year he gave a course on Nietzsche and genealogy, and one on the 'Epistemology of the Life Sciences'.<sup>2</sup> Some parts of the Nietzsche course exist in the archive of Foucault's papers at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, along with some material which seems likely to have been used for the life sciences course, and some student notes are available online for the Nietzsche course. Nonetheless, the nine lectures of 'The Discourse of Sexuality' edited in this volume are the most complete and detailed material to survive from this period.

Foucault would later claim that his time in Tunisia was a political awakening for him, seeing the protests of his students against the regime of Habib Bourguiba. In this account, March 1968 in Tunisia, rather than May 1968 in Paris, was his key moment (Foucault, 2000: 279–80; Droit, 2004: 119–20). Although published in March 1969 while the Vincennes course was being delivered, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is still a largely apolitical text. But Foucault's political commitments come through very strongly in his involvement with the Prisons Information Group in the early 1970s, along with his more peripheral involvement in a Health Information Group, and numerous other campaigns (see Hoffman, 2014; Elden, 2017 and their references).

The Vincennes lectures make a distinction between the discourse of sexuality, the discourse of desire and a history of the science of sexuality, whether in biology, psychology or anthropology. Here, Foucault also places the modern emergence of sexuality within what he later referred to as 'biopolitics', pinning it both to demographic changes in Europe from the 18th century onwards, and the emergence of a 'stimulating milieu' for a science of sexuality, where the idea that ideology is the outside of scientific practice and 'the obstacle from which it has to detach itself by a break (*détaché par une coupure*)' should be carefully demolished (Vincennes Lecture 3, 132). Contra Gaston Bachelard, and in implicit dialogue with Louis Althusser, he insists here that it is not a matter of grand collective ideologies controlling what science may study because knowledge itself is not the terrain for the settling of ideological battles (Vincennes Lecture 3, 132–3). Althusser's essay on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' was written at the very time this course was being delivered, January–April 1969, and first published in French the following year (1970, 2014: 232–72). In Foucault's text there is extensive discussion of 18th-century French natural science and the elaboration of sexed difference in relation to medical vitalism, with an emphasis on the importance of reproduction in 18th-century life sciences and the modes of operation of living organisms (Vincennes Lectures 2 & 6).

Here too Foucault mapped a procedure for critically historicizing what he called the 'epistemologisation of sexuality', which is clearly



one of the key themes of the entire *History of Sexuality* series – especially striking in the title of the first volume: *La volonté de savoir* (*The Will to Know*) (Vincennes Lecture 1, 110; Lecture 5). Notably though, in the published series there is minimal discussion of the methodology underpinning the project, save from some crucial remarks on power. The lack of a discussion of historical methodology is something which has long frustrated both historians and historical theorists attempting to make sense of Foucault's obviously unusual approach. In the first lecture he sketches an array of possible approaches to the study of sexuality, before specifying that his own study will be of sexuality as a 'referential of discourse' (Vincennes Lecture 1, 109). When he refers to 'epistemologisation', he describes how sexuality became more an object of knowledge and less a matter of valorisation; more about transgression and less about prescription; how it became both a 'domain of knowledge and field of liberation' (Vincennes Lecture 1, 110–11).

These lectures place the project squarely within the archaeological current of Foucault's conceptions, referring to 'different discursive stratifications' (everyday, literary, moral/religious/ juridical and scientific), which emerged in the modern confluence of sexuality with madness, displacing medieval and early-modern concerns with sorcery, and the significant turning-point located in the emergence of the biosciences and biomedicine (Vincennes Lecture 3, 134). Volumes two, three and four of the *History of Sexuality* clearly went in a rather different direction to this and there is no hint in the 1960s lectures of the new lines of inquiry Foucault opened during the next decade into ancient Greek natural philosophy in *L'Usage des plaisirs* (*The Use of Pleasures*) and *Le Souci de soi* (*The Care of the Self*), and into early Christian theology in *Les Aveux de la Chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) (1976, 1978, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1986, 2018a). However, 12th and 13th-century theologians do appear here in Foucault's account of the elaboration of medieval concupiscence, asceticism and the emergence of the concept of 'debauchery' (Vincennes Lecture 6, 164).

While some of the lectures certainly refer to familiar content elaborated later in the four volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, there are substantial sections of several of the Vincennes lectures on material which he never published, for which Foucault had clearly undertaken considerable research, with the lectures often referring to specific historical sources. In lecture six, for example, he discusses sexuality in relation to botany, as well as animal biology. His quite technical discussion draws upon some of the research he had done for the discussion of the shift from natural history to biology in *The Order of Things*. It also links to his long-standing interest in the question of heredity and seems to have continued into his course on 'Epistemology and the Sciences of Life', given the following academic year at Vincennes. In lecture seven, he maps a history of sexual utopianism which has links both to his wider

work on sexuality but also his lectures on the idea of heterotopia. Here, his analysis begins with 16th-century chivalric homosexual societies, predictably passing via both the Marquis de Sade and Herbert Marcuse (the latter whose normative assumptions about perversion he critiques), and including 1960s sexual liberation communes of the US west-coast; but he focuses for much of the lecture on 19th-century French and German medical sources, none of which are cited in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (Vincennes Lecture 7). These lectures show quite clearly that the familiar critique Foucault elaborated in that first volume of the ‘repressive hypothesis’, as a myth about the 19th century forged in the 20th-century sexual revolution, was just one element of a much larger set of questions he was grappling with about the historical emergence of the attribution to sex of political or personal utopias.

## Conclusion

Foucault’s extensive discussion of the contemporary biology of sexual reproduction of the 1950s and 1960s found in both sets of lectures will perhaps surprise readers accustomed to aligning him with social constructionism as constituted in the Anglophone social sciences of the 1970s. Here Foucault expresses scepticism about the oppositional view of biology and culture as itself a legitimate frame for historical analysis, instead locating this very dichotomy as one of the ‘characteristics of western civilisation’ that are the objects of his inquiry (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 1, 4). In both lecture series, there is an obvious engagement with history and philosophy of science, reflecting a close reading of recent contemporary works of biological science (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 2; Vincennes Lecture 6). A path is mapped which begins with recent scientific accounts of sexual reproduction and its expression in different forms of animal life, toward the understanding of how sexuality historically became integrated into the architecture of modern scientific knowledge itself (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 2, 21–30). At the same time, he counterposes the psychoanalytic perspective that sexualizes the entire psyche with his own attempt to locate the emergence of sexuality as an object of scientific discourse (Vincennes Lecture 6).

There is certainly much in these lectures that sheds light on the dissimilarity of Foucault’s perspective with social constructionist approaches to sexuality, pointing instead to a greater congruence of his view with approaches in the bio-humanities and medical anthropology located at the bio-psycho-social nexus. In the Clermont-Ferrand lectures he refers to sexuality as the ‘privileged site for the imbrication of the psychological and the physiological’, and as ‘certainly determined by anatomy and physiology, while at the same time being an ensemble of psychological behaviours’ (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 2, 22). In one of the Vincennes lectures, he addresses the view of sexuality as something

merely the 'object of discourse' which is counterposed to a biological ground and rejects this dichotomy as a frame for his own inquiries, which are 'neither this nor that' but are instead 'situated in-between these two borders' (Vincennes Lecture 1, 109). Might some forms of sexual arrangements be universally replicated in the majority of cultures? Foucault appears to admit this possibility too in relation to the general practice of demarcating specific spatio-temporal zones for sexual education and expression, with reference to brothels, military caserns and schools (Vincennes Lecture 7, 188).

Those hoping to see evidence that Foucault imagined the history of sexuality as a global phenomenon which included discourses located outside the designated 'West' will naturally also be disappointed with this volume. While Foucault does indicate that this is an inquiry specific to Western culture (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 1, 3), we will have to await his courses from Tunisia, where he did begin to interrogate this question more directly. In the current volume, there are blanket statements such as 'Western culture was undoubtedly the only one to have made sexuality into an object of science' (Clermont-Ferrand Lecture 4, 63), which confirm that he was entirely unaware of the significant premodern sexual medicine traditions of the Middle East, Asia and the Indian subcontinent, which still today have not been adequately historicized in their relation to the emergence of modern European sexual science (see Newman, 2014). Notably, the Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's doctoral thesis on medieval Arabic *ilm al-bāh* (science of coitus) was completed at the Sorbonne in 1978, just after the publication of Foucault's first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, but neither he nor Foucault appear to have recognised each other (Bouhdiba, 2010). In the first Vincennes lecture Foucault refers to a possible field of inquiry of a comparative kind, indicating the sexual ethics of Christianity and Islam as simply non-equivalent: '≠' (Vincennes Lecture 1, 107).

The history of sexuality has since the 1990s undergone an important global turn, often via direct critical engagement with Foucault's work, but the apparatus of the current volume makes no mention of this (the omission of Stoler in the citations being indicative), perhaps not wishing to draw attention to the Eurocentrism of Foucault's perspective. Recent historical scholarship on medieval Arabic and Persian sexual medicine has notably cast serious doubt on the view that only the West made sexuality a substantial object of naturalistic discourse, and while Foucault was undoubtedly correct in seeing Islamic views of sex as unlike Christian conceptions, he also massively underestimated the importance of the Islamicate traditions in rendering sexual matters into a medicalized object (see especially Ragab, 2015; Myrne, 2019).

While reading this volume is somewhat fragmented and requires a good existing knowledge of Foucault's existing work on this theme and from this period generally, there is much to digest here. His lectures of

the 1960s clearly show how seriously Foucault read into the source material of medieval, early-modern, 19th-century theology and natural philosophy and medicine, and into more recent biomedical thought, formulating an elaborate network of questions only a few of which he managed to treat in the *History of Sexuality* book series he published. Some of the material here may resolve questions about the methodological and theoretical frames of Foucault's own approach to the history of sexuality, indicating particularly that it may be questionable to assimilate him to social constructionism. They also show that he engaged deeply, and from early in the development of the project, with copious source material from the different eras of his diachronic view – contra the image of him as a philosopher who presumed to pronounce on historical matters from an abstract ground, which is sometimes evoked by specialist historians critical of his conceptions. These lectures, more than any other body of texts hitherto available in print, provide a rich illustration of the conceptual ground of Foucault's early embarkment on the vast endeavour of mapping the historical emergence of sexuality as an object of knowledge.

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### Notes

1. In English, most of these texts are included in the second volume of *Essential Works* (1998).
2. The philosophy department's course list is reproduced in Djian (2009: 52). See also Eribon (1991: 207).

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