Foucault, *Care of the Self* pp. 189-210,235-240
Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics" (interview)
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

Aphrodisia: "acts, gestures and contacts that produce a certain form of pleasure" (*History of Sexuality Vol. 2*, p. 40)—Foucault is using this to focus on sexual pleasure
-- includes acts that produce pleasure, the pleasure itself, and the desire for such pleasure that leads one to the acts (HS2 42-43)

Eros and Aphrodite: both gods of love in Greek pantheon
-- in Plutarch (HS3 Part 6 Chpt. 1 on boys), Aphrodite is connected to sensual pleasure that, without Eros, can be "bought for a drachma" (202)
-- in Plutarch, Eros seems to be linked with friendship, love for the virtue in the other (203-204), but it needs Aphrodite too: "Eros without Aphrodite, when physical pleasure is lacking, is no less imperfect. A love without Aphrodite is 'like drunkenness without wine, brought on by a brew of figs and barley" (205, quoting Plutarch).

Love of women and boys, and difference from later Christian views

1. In 5th & 4th centuries BCE, which Foucault studied in Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, some argued that the love of boys was better than that of women

   a. the latter is just a matter of giving in to physical, natural appetites like animals do (200)

   b. love for women involves pleasure (nature has arranged it this way for procreation)

      -- but this means one can get a strong desire for pleasure that can carry one away: "a violent movement, with no internal regulation, which has 'pleasure and enjoyment as its goal'" (200)

   c. love for boys does not involve such sensual pleasures, but is about "a friendship this is indissociable from virtue" (201)

2. Plutarch's dialogue praises love of women over love of boys

   a. one can have Eros, the sort of love that involves friendship and appreciation of virtue with women too, not just with other men (203-204)

   b. Eros without sensual pleasure, though, is imperfect (like drunkenness w/o wine, acc to quote above) (205)

      -- and with women you can enjoy pleasure along with Eros

   c. Eros keeps one's desire for pleasure in check; it allows one to be moderate and self-controlled, calm, reserved, in a space of "mutual trust" (204)

   d. can't have sensual pleasure well with boys

(i). either the boy consents, in which case he becomes effeminate and an object of contempt, or he resists and one has to take pleasure by force (206)

(ii). the relationship lacks *charis*: "the gentleness of consent" (207) that "integrates sexual relations … into reciprocal relations of kindness and to bring physical pleasure into friendship" (206-207)

-- physical, sexual activity can be a basis for friendship and reciprocal unity; but this can't happen in pederasty (209)

-- to get friendship in pederasty you need to leave out physical activity (which earlier Greeks did say one ought—see "On the Genealogy of Ethics" p. 345))

Conclusion to *Care of the Self*

1. Differences in beliefs and practices re: sex between 5th & 4th centuries BCE in Greece and 1st & 2nd CE in Greece and Rome (238-239)

-- increased apprehension about sex, increased sense that it is dangerous, a fragile area of life, something we must be more careful about because it can have unhealthy consequences (See "On the Genealogy of Ethics" p. 346)

-- greater valorization of marriage, an emphasis on more reciprocal relations between husbands and wives, more of a close bond forged between them

-- greater preoccupation with the self, shaping and forming the self through exercises and tests; in earlier periods this was considered important so one could rule over others well. Here it's valorized in itself as an important practice of living well. (See "On the Genealogy of Ethics" p. 348)

2. Differences re: Christianity

-- see last 6 lines or so of the long paragraph on p. 239

-- "On the Genealogy of Ethics" on Plutarch and boys: "If Plutarch finds problems in loving boys, it is not at all in the sense that loving boys was anti-natural or something like that. He says, 'It's not possible that there could be any reciprocity in the physical relations between a boy and a man'" (345)

The book ends with a list of the four elements of ethics and what they look like in Christianity, but he explains this much better in "On the Genealogy of Ethics."

"On the Genealogy of Ethics" interview

Moral codes, rules, prohibitions didn't change much between ancient Greece and Rome and Christianity, and even today; what has changed is "in what I call the 'ethics,' which is the relation to oneself" (355).

Differences in the 4 elements of ethics between ancient Greece & Rome and Christianity

1. ethical substance: the part of the self that is the object of ethical concern

a. for the Greeks and Romans, it was the *aphrodisia*: the links between act, pleasure and desire as noted above (OGE 353)

-- same ethical substance from the Greeks of the 5th-4th centuries BCE to Greeks & Romans of first 2 centuries CE

b. for Kant, e.g., it's intention that matters morally (OGE 352)

c. For Christianity, desire becomes the focus of attention (353); also "concupiscence, flesh" (358)

-- Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures* (Indiana UP, 1999): "...after the Council of Trent [1545-1563] the issue for Christians was not so much intercourse itself, a bodily function, as the agitations of the soul that its performance … might provoke. … [W]hat was at issue now wasn't the bodily act … but the desire for pleasure that might become a motivation for committing the act when commission wasn't physically necessary. … What was problematized, therefore, was desire. The most important concern a good Christian had was how to master and eradicate his or her desire" (McWhorter 119-120).

-- Christians at this time could have sex but should not "allow the necessity of sexual performance to give rise to desire for it; one could have sex, but one couldn't enjoy, want, fantasize, or even think about it" (McWhorter 119)

-- "Bodily functions … were not slated for eradication; they were viewed as, perhaps, unfortunately, inevitable. What was to be eradicated instead were the desires that one might feel in association with the performance or undergoing of those functions" (McWhorter 118).

2. mode of subjection: what underlies the obligation to act morally, why one should do so

a. for Greeks of 5th-4th centuries BCE, it's because one wants to make of the self a beautiful object: "it is an aesthetic mode," a choice one makes if one wants to "have a beautiful existence," a good reputation, etc. (OGE 356)

b. For later Greeks & Romans (in *Care of the Self*) there still a sense of an aesthetic practice, but also more emphasis on following certain ways of living as universal valid for all (CS 238).

-- less of a sense of personal choice, because one should act in certain ways that all rational beings should act in (OGE 356)

-- Still, these practices only undertaken by a few: "The ethics of marriage and the advice on conjugal life are at the same time universally valid principles and rules for those who wish to give their existence a noble and honorable form. It is the lawless universality of an aesthetics of existence that in any case is practiced only by a few" (CS 185; not in assigned reading)

c. In Christianity, the form of obligation was legal (OGE 356); it is "divine law" (OGE 358)

3. exercises on the self, ascetics

a. Greeks & Romans of first 2 centuries CE:

(i). Some exercises of the Roman Stoics: "you have to do some exercises like depriving yourself of eating for two or three days, in order to be sure that you can control yourself. … And you have to do that for all the pleasures" (OGE 358).

— Epictetus' walking exercise: "Each morning, while taking a walk in the city, one should try to determine with respect to each thing (a public official or an attractive woman), one's motives, whether one is impressed by or drawn to it, or whether one has sufficient self-mastery so as to be indifferent" (OGE 368).

(ii). writing for oneself: quotations, arguments, examples of good or bad actions, reflections on one's own thoughts and actions (OGE 364)

-- But this writing was not like later "confessions": "The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the unsaid but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself" rather than the discovery of something hidden within oneself (OGE 365).

b. In Christianity, the exercises one engages in involve self-decipherment

(i). "This new Christian self had to be constantly examined because in this self were lodged concupiscence and desires of the flesh. From that moment on, the self was no longer something to be made but something to be renounced and deciphered" (OGE 366)

(ii). One must engage in deep and comprehensive self-decipherment to root out any hidden desires that shouldn't be there

-- McWhorter book (cited above): "One must purify oneself of all sensual desires in order to satisfy the only desire a moral, finite, dependent, and essentially lacking being should have: the desire for God, who is Truth" (118)

4. telos: the kind of ethical being one is trying to become: "Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?" (355)

a. Ancient Greece and Rome: mastery of the self

-- in 5th and 4th centuries BCE this was closely related to mastery over others: should be master of self to be master over others

-- later it became something one should do as a rational being, and other rational beings are also masters over themselves (OGE 357-358)

b. Christianity: "immortality, purity, and so on" (OGE 358)

-- "the reason why you have to take control of yourself is to keep yourself pure" (OGE 365)