**Presentation on Part 4, Chapter 4 of Foucault’s *The Care of the Self***

PHIL 449, Spring 2014

Introduction to Part 4

-- The body is seen as fragile, the medical practice provides a “regimen” more than being reactive

-- “[Medicine] was also supposed to define, in the form of a corpus of knowledge and rules, a way of living, a reflective mode of relation to oneself, to one’s body,… various activities, and to the environment. Medicine was expected to propose, in the form of a regimen, a voluntary and relational structure of conduct” (100).

Part 4, Chapter 4

-- Examines the relationship between the sexual body and the soul

-- Importantly, the soul provides a source of both mis- and re-direction to and from nature

-- Relationship between body and soul is not combative; rather, the soul must match itself to the natural needs of the body: “it is a matter of the soul’s correcting itself in order to be able to guide the body according to a law which is that of the body itself” (134).

3 ways the appetites can go beyond their “natural” level

1. movement of desire

-- desire of the body can go beyond that of the soul (e.g., in priapism when there is sexual tension without any desire of the soul)—this can be cured by medicine

-- desire of the soul can go beyond the natural sexual needs of the body (e.g., want to have sex more often than just the natural needs of the body would require)—this requires ethical work to fix

-- Need to have the desires of the soul match those of the body; need practices to subdue the soul, make it adhere to the rational order governing the body: “The voluntary submission of the soul to the body should be understood as obedience to a rationality that has presided over the natural order and has designed, for its own purposes the mechanics of the body.” (135)

2. presence of images

-- imagined, dreamed, remembered images about sexual pleasure or fantasies can lead to excess of desire; same for actually perceived scenes (such as in a theatre)—distrust of these images

-- interestingly, images can also be used to curb desire: they can induce disgust, a way to reduce excess desire (e.g., if you see too much of a lover, in too much light, see their physical faults, etc.)

3. attachment to pleasure

-- one should pursue sex only as necessary for bodily functions, not for the sake of pleasure—pleasure should be a byproduct rather than a cause of sexual activity

Medical regimen re: sex much smaller role than that re: diet—sex was not as much of a concern as it became later

Sex considered inherently dangerous, but not inherently bad or evil—later, good and bad sexual acts were delineated more clearly

-- “the sexual act is not an evil; it manifests a permanent focus of possible ills” (142).

-- focus was on how the passive element in sex, the way desire or the body can carry you away involuntarily; it was important to reestablish mastery over such things that can overtake you

**Questions**

1. Do you think that (2) and (3) above (presence of images and attachment to pleasure) are subsidiary causes of the imbalance noted in (1), or is there a subtlety that I’m missing?

*Discussion*

-- Yes, 2 and 3 are subsumed under 1, but they are also separate—imbalance can come from different causes, and these are two of the possible ones. So (2) and (3) are not necessary to (1). But they are probably sufficient for (1)

-- (2) seems to be more focused on the soul, (3) more on the body, though the soul can also experience pleasure (pleasure is not something just connected to the body for the ancients).

2. Do you find the use of the word “soul” to be dissatisfying or problematic? The way it is spoken about in this chapter suggests that it is in contention with the body, needing to adhere to the natural order of the body, so the soul appears as if it is not natural itself. The soul seems to be identified here as both the problem—can go beyond the body—and the solution—one needs to use the soul to engage in the proper regimen re: sex and the body.

*Discussion*

-- We might consider that there doesn’t have to be a purely binary relationship here between the soul and the body. The body is good because it is created by nature, and sexual pleasure is good too because it is how nature allows for the species to keep going even though individuals are mortal. The soul is both the problem and the solution because the soul is the part of the self that adjust parts of itself to achieve the proper mean needed. It can adjust well, and it can adjust badly, so it can be both the problem and the solution.

*Question from a student*

When one reasserts mastery over one’s desires, who/what is doing the reestablishing?

-- [presenter] It seems to be the soul having mastery over the body, but the soul can also establish mastery over itself, over its own desires.

3. How do we place this section of the text in the context of the larger arguments in the book?

*Discussion*

-- [presenter]: This part of the text shows how the different elements of individuals relate to themselves, or how one can control parts of the self by the self.

-- [presenter]: Also, this section shows that there is a concern for a truth about the self, but not a truth in the same way as later; rather, a truth of whether one’s desires of the soul are going beyond the body, and then what to do if that is the case

-- This whole section focuses on aiming for a kind of equilibrium, a balance—imbalance is considered negative

-- Foucault wants to show how we got to the idea that the body and sex are bad or evil (see, e.g., p. 68). He goes into detail in his genealogical study here to provide evidence for how we eventually got to that point in the future. We can start to see the beginnings here of the later ideas of sex that we see in Christianity.

-- e.g., in the reading for today Foucault talks about how the Greeks and Romans of this time period were worried about the dangers of sex, how it was linked to numerous illnesses, how one had to pay careful attention to when/how one engaged in it; the quotes on p. 117 about how it is linked to illness aren’t that different from the discussion on p. 65 of HS volume 1 about how 19th century physicians linked all kinds of maladies to sex. There is also talk in Part 4 about abstinence being considered a good thing for some (but not all, because it depends on your circumstances)

-- [presenter]: Foucault talks about parallels between the view of and practices around sex in this period and in Christianity, but there is a difference between how individuals view themselves in relation to the rules, suggestions about sex between these two time periods.

-- [Christina]: That’s precisely what my notes on Parts 2 and 4 of HS3 are about, so you can look there for more on that.