

**Presentation on first part of *The Care of the Self***  
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

**Focus is on Artemidorus' book on interpreting dreams**

- it's meant as a handbook for daily practice as well as theoretical discussion
- book is important for MF b/c captures current modes of valuation and generally accepted attitudes at the time
- while Artemidorus doesn't make explicit judgments about sexual acts, he makes indirect reference to their value through his discussion of favourable or unfavourable dreams
- Foucault is interested in what Artemidorus' interpretation of dreams says about the moral values that were common at that time

3 categories of sexual acts: (1) in conformity to the law; (2) those contrary to the law; (3) those contrary to nature (p. 17)

- acts in conformity o law: "For Artemidorus, what determines the predictive meaning of a dream, and hence in a certain way the moral value of the act dreamed of, is the condition of the partner and not the form of the act itself" (18)
- Foucault sees in A's text that social status is what is important in the sexual activity in dreams: different values of dreaming of sex with wife, prostitute, women with high or low social status
- acts contrary to the law: mostly consist of incest. Here, again, it's social position that's important—who is in the active role in the sexual act should be the person who is in superior social position (e.g., dreaming of sex between father and son, when the son is in the active role is a bad omen)
- acts contrary to nature: 5 unnatural relations: with gods, animals, corpses, oneself, between women; here, too, the important thing is not the act so much as social status

Two important elements of Artemidorus' analysis: (1) the dreamer is always present as the main actor of his dream; (2) and it is very rare for a dream to foreshadow sexual acts or pleasure/displeasure (26)

- From this Foucault notes that the most important elements for analysis are the "personages" (the dreamer and the dream partner) and the act that occurs
- need to think about the act in terms of who is active and who is passive, in addition to the social status of the people involved
- don't really have an analysis of the act itself so much as the social context, social statuses of the partners

A main point

Artemidorus finds favourable dreams in which the dreamer has sex with his partner in a way that conforms to the social status of the partners in real life (31-32)

- Foucault points out here that in seeing such dreams as favourable, Artemidorus is revealing something important about sexual ethics at the time
- Foucault remarks that what is interesting in Artemidorus is that the quality of the act, rather than the act itself, is the most important interpretive element (35)

This left me with the feeling that

While there have always been social norms, there have also been resistances; although art represents particular norms, this doesn't necessarily mean that these are the norms of that society—they are the norms in that work.

## Questions

1. Do you believe Foucault's interpretation of Artemidorus' work to be a sufficient analysis of social and ethical conventions during that period? Or might he be potentially missing valuable information about underground movements or social taboos that could potentially offer a different insight?
  - Obviously not enough to look at the writing of one person and think you're getting a full picture of what's going on in a particular society, but you may not get much different from looking at "resistant" discourse. Often movements of resistance don't really give us anything terribly different, but in reacting against the dominant forces these are reinforced. You're just saying 'no' to these.
  - Shift from looking at particular acts to power relations, relationships between people, runs throughout his work. In DP he points to how there began to be less of a focus on the wrongness of acts against the law and more on the person of the criminal and the power relations that that person is involved in.
  - Why does MF study a text about interpretation of dreams that doesn't really talk about anything like practices of the self, ways to shape oneself—all those things he discusses as part of "ethics" in the Intro to HS Volume 2?
    - But your dreams do tell you something about yourself, about what you want—the dreams you have could say something about your aspirations, the type of person you want to be, that you want your inside thoughts and dreams to reflect the outside social relations you have, the type of social status you want to have.
2. Is Foucault's analysis merely trying to demonstrate how terms such as sexuality define and structure life according to power relations, or does the deconstruction of sexuality serve a more ambitious purpose for Foucault, perhaps ethical (among others)?