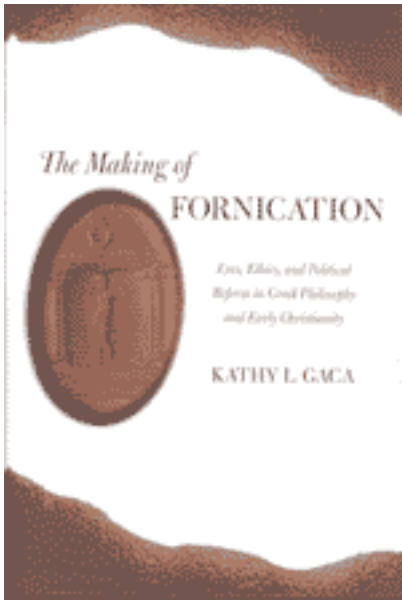


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The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity

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Twenty years after his death, there remain many different Foucaults, and this, one suspects, is how the late Michel Foucault would have wanted it. (Maybe each of us gets the Foucault we deserve?) The Foucault whose work inspired the title of Averil Cameron's lucid review essay—"Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault" (*JRS* 76 [1986]: 266–71)—is the author of *The History of Sexuality*, specifically volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, and volume 3, *The Care of Self*. Even so, the relevant figure may be less the Foucault of these volumes than the Foucault who, before his death, described the contours of an as yet unpublished fourth volume on ancient Christianity. For a close, brief encounter, there is no better place to look than an extract from a 1980 lecture (now available as "Sexuality and Solitude" in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault* (ed. Jeremy R. Carrette; New York: Routledge, 1999), 182–87). Here he identified "the new type of relationship which Christianity established between sex and subjectivity":

Augustine's conception is still dominated by the theme and form of male sexuality. But the main question is not, as it was in Artemidorus, the problem of penetration: it is the problem of erection. As a result, it is not the problem of a relationship to other people, but the problem of a relationship of oneself to

oneself, or, more precisely, the relationship between one's will and involuntary assertions. (186)

For this Foucault, the new religion of Augustine caused a rupture, separating the bishop and his ilk from the dream interpreter and the strange but predictable calculus of coupling apparent in the *Oneirocritica*.

But there are many Foucaults. The one that Kathy Gaca selects as a foil in her important book is not the Foucault of rupture and discontinuity but the Foucault of continuity between Christian and pagan sexual ethics. *The Making of Fornication* represents a sustained, cogent dissent from the “continuity thesis,” buttressed by a careful survey and analysis of Greek philosophy, the writings of Paul and Philo, and the diverse approaches to sexual morality among second-century Christians. Out of this investigation Gaca's main thesis emerges: early Christians adapted and altered classical Greek views nearly beyond recognition. Where the philosophers saw in sexuality the potential for social reform, most Christian authorities discerned instead “fornication” (*porneia*), something to avoid at all costs.

Where did Foucault and others—the “continuity” scholars—go wrong? They overlooked, among other things, the Septuagint. *The Making of Fornication*, perhaps more than any recent comparable study, gives the Septuagint its due, not only as a cache of images and language for Paul, Philo, and others, but as a conversation partner in its own right. “Continuity” scholars also misconstrued the sexual ethics of Greek philosophy. Moreover, while social historians have plotted the rise of ascetic practices and sensibilities among early Christians, they have yet, according to Gaca, to expose the “the motivating philosophical and religious principles” behind this restrictive lifestyle. “Surely the stimulus was not one of merely irrational frenzy due to some undetectable potion that early Christians drank,” Gaca drolly comments (9). To correct these problems, Gaca applies a “philosophical methodology,” an approach, she pledges, that will not only deliver an accurate, subtle analysis of relevant philosophical and biblical texts but will also lay out the “underlying principles” that shaped the sexual morality of ancient Christianity (10).

The book's prose is dense, but on almost every page close reading repays the effort. (The erudition on display in the footnotes alone is staggering.) This review can only hint at the riches inside the book. Part 1 presents the views of Plato, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans, all of which link sexual principles to social reform. Chapter 2, “Desire's Hunger and Plato the Regulator,” shows that, for Plato, sexual desire gives rise to the most significant problems of the human condition: for the individual, sexual passion impedes the progress of the soul; for society, it, along with other corporeal needs, is the

source of crime and warfare. Hence the lesson of the *Republic*: regulate desire and the rest will fall in line. Here, as elsewhere in the book, Gaca embellishes the discussion with style and wit. Anticipating that her readers might wrongly associate Plato's social model with Marxist communalism, Gaca casts the Greek philosopher as "the first voice of the Platonist Temperance Union," and not as a proto-Engels (45). Plato wants to change the world from the inside out.

For readers used to seeing Stoicism cited as a support for the status quo, chapter 3, "Crafting Eros through the Stoic Logos of Nature," will be both illuminating and dissatisfying. Gaca positions early Stoics such as Zeno and Chrysippus over against "popular Greek thought"; while most Greeks cowered before Aphrodite and Eros, blaming the gods for the passions that made slaves of all, the Stoics dismissed such fears as a "misconception." Furthermore, the early Stoics stress communalism, rejecting marriage in favor of cultivating friendships. What about later Stoics? Gaca concedes that there is a "social mainstreaming" of Stoicism, as represented, for example, by Musonius, a staunch proponent of marriage. "The social mainstreaming of later Stoicism is an example of the process by which a revolutionary set of ideas gets tamed, loses touches with its origins and thereby gains middle-of-the-road popularity," laments Gaca (90). But isn't this—Stoicism's "middle-of-the-road popularity"—why later Stoics loom large in the study of early Christian morality and in Foucault's models of sexual ethics and subjectivity?

Gaca continues to de-Stoicize Seneca and Musonius in chapter 4, "The Reproductive Technology of the Pythagoreans." Here she locates the origin of "procreationism"—sex for the purposes of propagation alone—in the Pythagorean camp. Though the Stoics Seneca and Musonius support this principle, Gaca remains unyielding: "It does not follow . . . that procreationism is philosophically Stoic simply because two Roman Stoics happen to advocate it" (98 n. 10). Seneca distances himself from Stoic sexual ethics by limiting the experience of eros to reproduction, as does Musonius. Gaca declares: "Both Seneca and Musonius are ascetic Pythagoreans in Stoic clothing, at least with regard to their sexual ethics" (115). No one will deny the importance of accurate classification, but here the payoff is unclear. Whatever its provenance, "procreationism" seems to have gained traction among non-Christians under the Roman emperors.

Part 2 turns to the place of the Septuagint in the writings of Paul and Philo, bringing us to the heart of the study: the making of fornication in Jewish and Christian traditions. In chapter 5, "Rival Plans for God's Sexual Programs in the Pentateuch and Paul," Gaca reiterates the basic, salient difference between Greek philosophical and biblically based sexual ethics: the latter made approved sex an expression of devotion to God; this possibility did not even occur to the philosophers. Paul molds the Septuagintal program

to fit his own instruction, according to which Christians had one of three options: marry a Christian spouse for procreationist sex; remain single; or, for those already married, convert one's spouse to Christianity and procreationist sex.

Chapter 6, "From the Prophets to Paul: Converting Whore Culture into the Lord's Veiled Bride," examines "spiritual fornication." Paul raised the stakes even higher than the Prophets had by locating "sexual fornication in a class of danger by itself because of the body with which he associates the violation" (180). Focusing on 1 Corinthians, Gaca suggests that for Paul the "virginity of Christian monotheism" will be preserved for the parousia only if the "collective bride of the Lord" remains pure, untainted by sexual transgressions (178–79). Philo takes center stage in chapter 7, "Philo's Reproductive City of God," which both outlines the elements of Philo's "Jewish Middle Platonist" procreationism and anticipates its adaptation and redeployment by Clement of Alexandria.

Part 3 details the "Patristic Transformations of the Philosophical, Pauline, and Philonic Rules" in the proposals of Tatian, Clement, and Epiphanes. In chapter 8, "Driving Aphrodite from the World: Tatian and His Encratite Argument," Gaca contends that behind Tatian's renunciatory demands were, on the one hand, the Greek appreciation of the controlling potency of Aphrodite, and, on the other, Paul's admonition to his followers to "flee from fornication" or else. By comparison, Clement of Alexandria occupies a moderate position, as Gaca describes in chapter 9, "Prophylactic Grace in Clement's Emergent Church Ethic." Following Philo, Clement insists that "any deviation from procreationism reveals the sexual appetite fornicating against God in its hedonistic pursuit of Eros and Aphrodite" (270). This perspective, Gaca smartly stresses, is forged in conflict with the encratite Tatian and his followers: any allowance for sexual pleasure would deal a fatal blow to Clement's position. Thus Clement points to a special dispensation, a "prophylactic grace," granted by God to Christians alone, which renders intercourse "passionless" as long as it remains solely reproductive. Chapter 10, "The Fornicating Justice of Epiphanes," describes the sexual ethics of the obscure second-century heretic who argued for sexual communalism. But this view, with its roots in the reformist agenda of Plato and the early Stoics, never stood much of a chance. As Gaca reiterates in the conclusion, the future belonged to the Bible of Paul, Philo, and Clement, not to the ideal city of the Greek philosophers.

The book possesses too many strengths to enumerate; the only glaring weakness, in my view, is its treatment of Foucault and his legacy. The Foucault repeatedly invoked in these pages seems incapable of appreciating difference; the same seems to hold true for the other scholars that Gaca lumps together under the rubric of the "continuity thesis." But this is only one Foucault, or rather, only one way of assessing this work. As Daniel

Boyarin and Elizabeth A. Castelli have suggested, “the Foucaultian historiographical project” is “not only the record of epistemic shifts and breaks but also the inscription of deep continuities within this cultural development” (“Introduction: Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality: The Fourth Volume, or, A Field Left Fallow for Others to Till*,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 [2001]: 364). When, in his 1980 lecture, Foucault himself wished to throw into relief the object of inquiry, he recalled a remark by the inimitable Peter Brown: “what we have to understand is why it is that sexuality became, in Christian cultures, the seismograph of our subjectivity” (183). To adapt the metaphor, *The Making of Fornication* has precisely recorded tectonic shifts, but it is equally important to notice when the plates are still.