Erotics*

MICHEL FOUCAULT

translated by ROBERT HURLEY

A Problematical Relation

The use of pleasures in the relationship with boys was a theme of anxiety for Greek thought—which is paradoxical in a society that is believed to have "tolerated" what we call "homosexuality." But perhaps it would be just as well if we avoided those two terms here.

As a matter of fact, the notion of homosexuality is plainly inadequate as a means of referring to an experience, forms of valuation, and a system of categorization so different from ours. The Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior. The dividing lines did not follow that kind of boundary. What distinguished a moderate, self-possessed man from one given to pleasures was, from the viewpoint of ethics, much more important than what differentiated, among themselves, the categories of pleasures that invited the greatest devotion. To have loose morals was to be incapable of resisting either women or boys, without its being any more serious than that. When he portrays the tyrannical man—that is, one "in whose soul dwells the tyrant Eros who directs everything"[1]—Plato shows him from two equivalent angles, so that what we see in both instances is contempt for the most fundamental obligations and subjection to the rule of pleasure: "Do you think he would sacrifice his long beloved and irreplaceable mother for a recently acquired mistress whom he can do without, or, for the sake of a young boy recently become dear to him, sacrifice his aged and irreplaceable father, his oldest friend, beat him, and make his parents slaves of those others if he brought them under the same roof?"[2] When Alcibiades was censured for his debauchery, it was not for the former kind in contradistinction to the latter, it was, as Bion the Borysthenite put it, "that in his adolescence he drew away the

* This essay is chapter four of Foucault's *L'usage des plaisirs: Histoire de la sexualité* (Vol. II), Paris, Gallimard, 1984. The English translation will appear this fall as *The Uses of Pleasure. Volume II of the History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books.

1. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis, Hackette, 1974, IX, 573 d.
2. *Ibid.*, IX, 574 b-c.

husbands from their wives, and as a young man the wives from their husbands."[3]

Conversely, if one wanted to show that a man was self-controlled, it was said of him — as Plato said concerning Iccus of Tarentum[4] — that he was able to abstain from relations with boys and women alike; and according to Xenophon, the advantage that Cyrus saw in relying on eunuchs for court service was that they were incapable of offending the honor of either women or boys.[5] So it seemed to people that of these two inclinations one was not more likely than the other, and the two could easily coexist in the same individual.

Were the Greeks bisexual, then? Yes, if we mean by this that a Greek could, simultaneously or in turn, be enamored of a boy or a girl, that a married man could have *paidika*, that it was common for a male to change to a preference for women after "boy-loving" inclinations in his youth. But if we wish to turn our attention to the way in which the Greeks conceived of this dual practice, we need to take note of the fact that they did not recognize two kinds of "desire," two different or competing "drives," each claiming a share of men's hearts or appetites. We can talk about their "bisexuality," thinking of the free choice they allowed themselves between the two sexes, but for them this option was not referred to a dual, ambivalent, and "bisexual" structure of desire. To their way of thinking, what made it possible to desire a man or a woman was simply the appetite that nature had implanted in man's heart for "beautiful" human beings, whatever their sex might be.[6]

True, one finds in Pausanias's speech[7] a theory of two loves, the second of which — Urania, the heavenly love — is directed exclusively to boys. But the distinction that is made is not between a heterosexual love and a homosexual love; Pausanias draws the dividing line between "the love which the baser sort of men feel" — its object is both women and boys, it only looks to the act itself (*to diaprattesthai*) — and the more ancient, nobler, and more reasonable love that is drawn to what has the most vigor and intelligence, which obviously can only mean the male sex. Xenophon's *Symposium* shows very well that the choice between girls and boys in no way relates to the distinction between two tendencies or to the opposition between two forms of desire. The dinner is given by Callias in honor of the very young Autolycus whom he is enamored of; the boy's beauty is so striking that he draws looks from all the guests as "the sudden glow of a light at night draws all eyes to itself"; "there was not one . . . who did not feel

3. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, London, Cambridge, Mass., Loeb Classical Library, IV, 7, 49.
4. Plato, *Laws*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle, New York, Basic, VIII, 840 a.
5. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller, London, Cambridge, Loeb Classical Library, VII, 5.
6. On this point cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 60–63.
7. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton, London, Penguin Classics, 1980, 181 b-d.

his soul strangely stirred by the boy."[8] Now, among the participants, several were engaged or married, like Nicaratus—who felt a love for his wife that she reciprocated, in the play of Eros and Anteros—or Critobulus, who was nonetheless still of an age to have suitors and male lovers.[9] Further, Critobulus tells of his love for Cleinias, a boy he has met at school and, in a comic joust with Socrates, he matches his own beauty against that of the latter. The contest prize is to be a kiss from a boy and one from a girl: the boy and girl belong to a Syracusan who has taught them a dance whose graceful charm and acrobatic movements are the delight of everyone present. He has also taught them to mime the loves of Dionysus and Ariadne; and the guests, who have just heard Socrates say what true love for boys should be, all feel extremely "excited" (*anaptoromenoi*) on seeing this "Dionysus truly handsome" and this Ariadne truly fair "exchanging real kisses"; one can tell from the lover's vows pronounced by the young acrobats that they "are now permitted to satisfy their long cherished desires."[10] So many different incitements to love put everyone in the mood for pleasure: at the end of the *Symposium*, some ride off on their horses to reunite with their wives, while Callias and Socrates leave to rejoin the handsome Autolycus. At this banquet where they felt a common enchantment with the beauty of a girl or the charm of boys, men of various ages kindled the appetite for pleasure or serious love, love which some would look for in women, others in young men.

To be sure, the preference for boys or girls was easily recognized as a character trait: men could be distinguished by the pleasure they were most fond of;[11] a matter of taste that could lend itself to humorous treatment, not a matter of topology involving the individual's very nature, the truth of his desire, nor the natural legitimacy of his predilection. People did not have the notion of two distinct appetites allotted to different individuals or at odds with each other in the same soul; rather, they saw two ways of enjoying one's pleasure, one of which was more suited to certain individuals or certain periods of existence. The enjoyment of boys and the enjoyment of women did not constitute two classificatory categories between which individuals could be distributed; a man who preferred *paidika* did not think of himself as being "different" compared to those who pursued women.

As for the notions of "tolerance" or "intolerance," they too would be completely inadequate to account for the complexity of the phenomena we are considering. To love boys was a "free" practice in the sense that it was not only permitted by the laws (except in particular circumstances), it was accepted by opinion. Moreover, it found solid support in different (military or educational)

8. Xenophon, *Symposium*, ed. Samuel Ross Winans, Boston, J. Allyn, 1881, I, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, II, 3.
10. *Ibid.*, IX, 5-6.
11. Cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1964, VII, 4. 7.

institutions. It had religious guarantees in rites and festivals where the protection of the divine powers was invoked on its behalf.[12] And finally, it was a cultural practice that enjoyed the prestige of a whole literature that sang of it and a body of reflection that vouched for its excellence. Mixed in with all this, however, there were some quite different attitudes: a contempt for young men who were too "easy," or too self-interested; a disqualification of effeminate men, who were so often mocked by Aristophanes and the comic authors.[13] A disallowance of certain shameful behaviors, such as that of the catamites, which Callicles could not bear to talk about despite his boldness and plainness of speech, and which he saw as the proof that not every pleasure could be good and honorable.[14] Indeed it seems that this practice—though it was common and accepted—was surrounded by a diversity of judgments, that it was subjected to an interplay of positive and negative appraisals so complex as to make the ethics that governed it difficult to decipher. And there was a clear awareness of this complexity at the time; at least, that is what emerges from the passage in Pausanias's speech where he shows how hard it is to know if people in Athens are favorable or hostile to that form of love. On the one hand, it was accepted so well—better still: it was valued so highly—that certain kinds of behavior on the part of male lovers were honored which were judged to be folly or dishonesty on the part of anyone else: the prayers, the entreaties, the stubborn wooings, all their false vows. But on the other hand, one noted the care fathers took to protect their sons from love affairs, how they demanded that tutors prevent them from occurring, and one heard boys' comrades teasing each other for accepting such relationships.[15]

Simple linear schemas do not enable us to understand the singular kind of attention which people of the fourth century gave to the love of boys. We need to take up the question afresh, using other terms than those of "tolerance" towards "homosexuality." And instead of trying to determine the extent to which the latter was free in ancient Greece (as if we were dealing with an unvarying experience uniformly subtending mechanisms of repression that change in the course of time), it would be more worthwhile to ask how and in what form the pleasure enjoyed between men was problematical. How did people think of it in relation to themselves? What specific questions did it raise and what debate was it brought into? In short, given that it was a widespread practice, and the laws in no way condemned it, and its attraction was commonly

12. Cf. Félix Buffière, *Éros adolescent: la pédérastie dans la Grèce antique*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1980, pp. 90-91.
13. For example, Cleisthenes in the *Acharnians* or Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae*.
14. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Terence Irwin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, 494 e: "Socrates: The life of the catamites isn't that strange and shameful and wretched? Or will you dare to say that these people are happy if they have what they need without restrictions? Callicles: Aren't you ashamed to lead the discussion to such things, Socrates?"
15. Plato, *Symposium*, 182a-183d.

recognized, why was it the object of a special—and especially intense—moral preoccupation? So much so that it was invested with values, imperatives, demands, rules, advice, and exhortations that were as numerous as they were emphatic and singular.

To put things in a very schematic way: we tend nowadays to think that practices aimed at pleasure, when they are carried out between two partners of the same sex, are governed by a desire whose structure is particular; but we agree—if we are "tolerant"—that this is not a reason to refer them to a moral standard, to say nothing of a legislation, different from the one that is shared by all. We focus our questioning on the singularity of a desire that is not directed towards the other sex; and at the same time, we affirm that this type of relations should not be assigned a lesser value, nor given a special status. Now, it seems that the Greeks thought very differently about these things: they believed that the same desire attached to anything that was desirable—boy or girl—subject to the condition that the appetite was nobler that inclined towards what was more beautiful and more honorable; but they also thought that this desire called for a particular mode of behavior when it made a place for itself in a relationship between two male individuals. The Greeks could not imagine that a man might need a different nature—an "other" nature—in order to love a man; but they were inclined to think that the pleasures one enjoyed in such a relationship ought to be given an ethical form different from the one that was required when it came to loving a woman. In this sort of relation, the pleasures did not reveal an alien nature in the person who experienced them; but their use demanded a special stylistics.

And it is a fact that male loves were the object, in Greek culture, of a whole agitated production of ideas, observations, and discussions concerning the forms they should take or the value one might attribute to them. It would be less than adequate if we only saw in this discursive activity the immediate and spontaneous representation of a free practice that chanced to express itself naturally in this fashion, as if all that was needed for a behavior to become a domain of inquiry or a focus of theoretical and moral concerns was that it not be prohibited. But we would be just as remiss if we assumed that these texts were only an attempt to clothe the love one could direct to boys in an honorable justification: such an undertaking would presuppose condemnations or disqualifications which in fact were declared much later. Rather, we must try to learn how and why this practice gave rise to an extraordinarily complex problematization.

Very little remains of what Greek philosophers wrote on the subject of love and on the subject of *that* love in particular. The idea that one can justifiably form concerning these reflections and their general thematics is bound to be rather uncertain considering that such a limited number of texts have been preserved; moreover, nearly all these belong to the Socratic-Platonic tradition, while we do not have, for example, the works which Diogenes Laertius mentions, by Antisthenes, Diogenes the Cynic, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Zeno, and Crantor. Nevertheless, the speeches that are more or less ironically reported by Plato can give us some notion of what was at issue in these reflections and debates on love.

I.

The first thing to note is that the philosophical and moral reflections concerning love did not cover the whole field of sexual relations. Attention was focused for the most part on a "privileged" relationship — a problem area, an object of special concern: this was a relationship that implied an age difference and, connected with it, a certain difference of status. The relationship that concerned people, that they discussed and reflected upon, was not the one that joined together two mature adult males or two schoolboys of the same age; it was the relationship that developed between two men (and nothing prevented them from both being young and rather near in age to one another) who were considered as belonging to two distinct age groups and in which one was still quite young, had not finished his education, and had not attained his definitive status.[16] It is the existence of this disparity that marked the relationship with which philosophers and moralists concerned themselves. This special attention should not lead us to draw hasty conclusions about either the sexual behavior of the Greeks or about the details of their tastes (even though there is evidence from many areas of their culture that very young men were both represented and recognized as highly desirable erotic objects). We must not imagine in any case that only this type of relation was practiced; one finds many references to male love relationships that did not conform to this schema and did not include this "age differential." We would be just as mistaken to suppose that, though practiced, these other forms of relations were frowned upon and regarded as unseemly. Relations between young boys were deemed completely natural and in keeping with their condition.[17] On the other hand, people could mention as a special case — without censure — an abiding love relationship between two men who were well past adolescence.[18] Doubtless for reasons having to do, as

16. While the texts often refer to the difference of age and status, it should be noted that the real age that is given for the partners tends to "float" (cf. Buffière, pp. 605–607). Further, we see characters who play the role of lover in relation to others: e.g., Critobulus in Xenophon's *Symposium* where he tells of his love for Cleinias, whom he has met at school and who is a very young man like himself. (Regarding these two boys and their very slight age difference, cf. Plato, *Euthydemus*, 271 b.)

17. In the *Charmides*, Plato describes the arrival of a youth whom everyone fastened their eyes upon, adults *and* boys, "down to the very smallest" (154c).

18. There was the long cited example of Euripedes who still loved Agathon when the latter was already a man in his prime. Buffière (p. 613, note 33) notes in this connection an anecdote told by Aclian.

we shall see, with the polar opposition of activity and passivity, an opposition regarded as necessary, relations between two grown men were more apt to be an object of criticism and irony. Passivity was always disliked and for an adult to be suspected of it was especially serious. But whether these relations met with easy acceptance or tended to be suspect, the important thing for the moment is to see that they were not an object of moral solicitude or of a very great theoretical interest. Without being ignored or nonexistent, they did not belong to the domain of active and intense problematization. The attention and concern was concentrated on relations in which one can tell that much was at stake: relations that could be established between an older male who had finished his education—and who was expected to play the socially, morally, and sexually active role—and a younger one, who had not yet achieved his definitive status and who was in need of assistance, advice, and support. This disparity was at the heart of the relationship; in fact, it was what made it valuable and conceivable. Because of it, the relationship was considered in a positive light, made a subject of reflection; and where it was not apparent, people sought to discover it. Thus, one liked to talk about the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus, trying to determine what differentiated them from one another and which of the two had precedence over the other (since Homer's text was ambiguous on this point).[19] A male relationship gave rise to a theoretical and moral interest when it was based on a rather pronounced difference on either side of the threshold separating adolescence from manhood.

II.

It does not appear that the privilege accorded to this particular type of relation can be attributed solely to the pedagogical concerns of moralists and philosophers. We are in the habit of seeing a close connection between the Greek love of boys and Greek educational practice and philosophical instruction. The story of Socrates invites this, as does the way in which the love of boys was constantly portrayed in antiquity. In reality, a very large context contributed to the valorization and elaboration of the relationship between men and adolescents. The philosophical reflection that took it as a theme actually had its roots in practices that were widespread, accepted, and relatively complex. Unlike other sexual relations, it seems—or in any case, more than they—the relations that united man and boy across a certain age and status threshold that separated them were the object of a sort of ritualization which by imposing certain rules on them gave them form, value, and interest. Even before they

19. Homer gave one the advantage of birth, the other the advantage of age; one was stronger, the other more intelligent (*Illiad*, XI, 786). On the discussion about their respective roles, cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 180 a-b; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 143.

were taken up by philosophical reflection, these relations were already the pretext for a whole social game.

"Courtship" practices had formed around them. Doubtless these practices did not have the complexity found in other arts of loving such as those that would be developed in the Middle Ages. But by the same token, they were something quite different from the formalities that one observed in order to qualify for the hand of a young lady. They defined a whole set of conventional and appropriate behaviors, making this relation a culturally and morally overloaded domain. These practices—the reality of which has been amply documented by K. J. Dover[20]—defined the mutual behavior and the respective strategies that both partners should observe in order to give their relations a "beautiful" form; that is, one that was aesthetically and morally valuable. They determined the role of the *erastes* and that of the *eromenos*. The first was in a position of initiative, he was the suitor, and this gave him rights and obligations; he was expected to show his ardor, and to restrain it; he had gifts to make, services to render; he had functions to exercise with regard to the *eromenos*; and all this entitled him to expect a just reward. The other partner, the one who was loved and courted, had to be careful not to yield too easily; he also had to keep from accepting too many tokens of love, and from granting his favors heedlessly and out of self-interest, without testing the worth of his partner; he must also show gratitude for what the lover had done for him. Now, this courtship practice alone shows very well that the sexual relation between man and boy did not "go without saying": it had to be accompanied with conventions, rules of conduct, ways of going about it, with a whole game of delays and obstacles designed to put off the moment of closure and to integrate it into a series of subsidiary activities and relations. In other words, while this type of relation was fully accepted, it was not a matter of "indifference." One would be missing the essential thing if one regarded all these precautions that were taken and the interest that was shown merely as proof that this love was freely engaged in; it would be to ignore the distinction that was made between this sexual behavior and all the others whose recommended modalities were of little concern. All these preoccupations make it clear that pleasure relations between men and adolescent boys already constituted a delicate factor in society, an area so sensitive that one could not fail to be concerned about the conduct of participants on both sides.

III.

But we may note at once a considerable difference in comparison with that other focus of interest and inquiry, matrimonial life: in the case of relations between men and boys, we are dealing with a game that was "open," at least up to a certain point.

20. Dover, pp. 87–97.

Open "spatially." In Economics and the art of the household, we saw a binary spatial structure where the spaces of the two marriage partners were carefully distinguished (the exterior for the husband, the interior for the wife, the men's quarters on one side, the women's on the other). With boys, the game unfolded in a very different space: a common space, at least from the time when they had reached a certain age—the space of the street and the gathering places, with some strategically important points (such as the gymnasium); but a space in which everyone moved about freely,[21] so that one had to pursue a boy, chase after him, watch for him in those places where he might pass and catch hold of him where he happened to be; it was a theme of ironic complaint on the part of lovers, that they were obliged to haunt the gymnasium, go hunting with the *eromenos*, and pant alongside him in exercises which they were no longer in any condition to do.

But, more important, the game was also open in that one could not exercise any statutory authority over the boy, that is, as long as he was not slave-born: he was free in his choices, in what he accepted or rejected, in his preferences or his decisions. In order to get from him something that he always had the right to refuse, one had to be able to persuade him; anyone who wished to remain his favorite had, in his eyes, to outshine such rivals as might present themselves, and for this it was necessary to highlight one's achievements, one's qualities, or one's presents; but the decision was the boy's alone to make: in this game that one had initiated, one was never sure of winning. And yet, this was the very thing that made it interesting. Nothing illustrates this better than the charming complaint of Hiero the tyrant, as reported by Xenophon.[22] Being a tyrant, he explains, does not make things pleasant either in regard to a wife or in regard to a boy. For a tyrant cannot help but take a wife from an inferior family, thus losing all the advantages of marrying into a family "of greater wealth and influence." As for the boy—and Hiero is enamored of Daïlochus—the fact of having despotic power at one's disposal raises other obstacles; the favors which Hiero would like so much to obtain, he would like the boy to give them out of friendship and of his own accord; but "to take them from him by force," he would sooner desire "to do himself an injury." To take something from one's enemy against his will is the greatest of pleasures; but when it comes to the favors of boys, the sweetest are those that are freely granted. For example, what a pleasure it is to "exchange looks, how pleasant his questions and answers; how very pleasant and ravishing are the struggles and bickerings. But to take advantage of a favorite against his will seems to me more like brigandage than love."

21. In the schools, this freedom was supervised and limited. Cf. what Aeschines says about the schools and the precautions the schoolmaster had to take, in *Against Timarchus*, 9–10. On the meetings places, cf. Buffière, pp. 561 ff.
22. Xenophon, *Hiero*, I.

In the case of marriage, the problematization of sexual pleasures and of the practices associated with them was carried out on the basis of the statutory relation that empowered the husband to govern the wife, other individuals, the estate, and the household; the essential question concerned the moderation that needed to be shown in exercising power. In the case of the relationship with boys, the ethics of pleasures would have to bring into play—across age differences—subtle strategies that would make allowance for the other's freedom, his ability to refuse, and his required consent.

IV.

In this problematization of relationships with adolescent boys, the question of timing was important, but it was raised in a singular fashion; what mattered was not, as in Dietetics, the opportune moment for the act, nor, as in Economics, the continual maintenance of a relational structure; rather, it was the difficult question of precarious time and fugitive passage. It was expressed in different ways—as a problem of "limit" first of all: what was the age limit after which a boy ought to be considered too old to be an honorable partner in a love relation? At what age was it no longer good for him to accept this role, nor for his lover to want to assign it to him? This involved the familiar casuistry of the signs of manhood. These were supposed to mark a threshold, one that was all the more intangible in theory as it must have very often been crossed in practice and as it offered the possibility of finding fault with those who had done so. As we know, the first beard was believed to be that fateful mark, and it was said that the razor that shaved it must sever the ties of love.[23] In any case, one should note that people criticized not only boys who were willing to play a role that no longer corresponded to their virility, but also the men who frequented overaged boys.[24] The Stoics were criticized for keeping their lovers too long—up to the age of twenty-eight—but the argument they gave, which was more or less an extension of that given by Pausanias in the *Symposium* (he held that in order to make sure that men only became attached to youths of merit, the law should prohibit relations with boys that were too young),[25] shows that this limit was less a universal rule than a subject of debate that permitted a variety of solutions.

This attention to the period of adolescence and its boundaries no doubt helped to increase people's sensitivity to the juvenile body, to its special beauty, and to the different signs of its development; the adolescent physique became the object of a kind of cultural valorization that was quite pronounced. That the male body might be beautiful, well beyond its first bloom, was something

23. Plato, *Protagoras*, 309 a.
24. Cf. the criticism of Meno in Xenophon, *Anabasis*, II, 6. 28.
25. Plato, *Symposium*, 181 d–e.

that the Greeks were not blind to nor inclined to forget; classical figure sculpture paid more attention to the adult body; and it is recalled in Xenophon's *Symposium* that in choosing garland-bearers for Athena, they were careful to select the most beautiful old men.[26] But in the sphere of sexual ethics, it was the juvenile body with its peculiar charm that was regularly suggested as the "right object" of pleasure. And it would be a mistake to think that its traits were valued because of what it shared with feminine beauty. It was appreciated in itself or in its juxtaposition with the signs and guarantees of a developing virility. Strength, endurance, and spirit also formed part of this beauty; hence it was good in fact if exercises, gymnastics, competitions, and hunting expeditions reinforced these qualities, guaranteeing that this gracefulness would not degenerate into softness and effeminization.[27] The feminine ambiguity that would be perceived later (and already in the course of antiquity, even) as a component—more exactly, as the secret cause—of the adolescent's beauty, was, in the classical period, more a thing from which the boy needed to protect himself and be protected. Among the Greeks there was a whole moral aesthetics of the boy's body; it told of his personal merit and of that of the love one felt for him. Virility as a physical mark should be absent from it; but it should be present as a precocious form and as a promise of future behavior: already to conduct oneself as the man one has not yet become.

But this sensibility was also connected with feelings of anxiety in the face of those rapid changes and the nearness of their completion; by a sense of the fleeting character of that beauty and of its legitimate desirability; and by fear, the double fear so often expressed in the lover, of seeing his beloved lose his charm, and in the beloved, of seeing his lover turn away from him. And the question that was then posed concerned the possible conversion—an ethically necessary and socially useful one—of the bond of love (doomed to disappear) into a relation of friendship, of *philia*. The latter differed from the love relation, out of which it would ideally and sometimes actually be formed: it was lasting, having no other limit than life itself; and it obliterated the dissymmetries that were implied in the erotic relation between man and adolescent. It was one of the frequent themes in moral reflection on this type of relation, that they needed to rid themselves of their precariousness: a precariousness that was due to the inconstancy of the partners, and that was a consequence of the boy's growing older and thereby losing his charm; but it was also a precept, since it was not good to love a boy who was past a certain age, just as it was not good for him to allow himself to be loved. This precariousness could be avoided only if, in the

26. Xenophon, *Symposium*, IV, 17.
27. On the opposition between the sturdy boy and the weakling, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 239 c–d, and *The Lovers*. Regarding the erotic value of the masculine boy and the evolution of taste towards a more effeminate physique, perhaps already under way in the fourth century, cf. Dover, pp. 69–73. In any case, the notion that the charm of a young boy was connected with a femininity that inhabited him would become a common theme later.

fervor of love, *philia*, friendship, already began to develop: *philia*, that is, an affinity of character and mode of life, a sharing of thoughts and existence, mutual benevolence. The beginning of this cultivation of indestructible friendship in the love relation is what Xenophon is describing when he portrays two lovers who look into each other's faces, converse, confide in one another, rejoice together or feel a common distress over successes and failures, and look after each other: "It is by conducting themselves thus that men continue to love their mutual affection and enjoy it down to old age."[28]

V.

On a very general level, this inquiry concerning relationships with boys took the form of a reflection on love. This fact should not lead us to conclude that for the Greeks eros had no place except in this type of relation, and that it could not play a part in relations with a woman: eros could unite human beings no matter what their sex happened to be; in Xenophon, one can see that Niceratus and his wife are joined together by the ties of Eros and Anteros.[29] Eros was not necessarily "homosexual," nor was it exclusive of marriage; and the marriage tie did not differ from the relation with boys by being incompatible with love's intensity and reciprocity. The difference was elsewhere. Matrimonial morality, and more precisely the sexual ethics of the married man, did not depend on the existence of an erotic relation in order to constitute itself and define its rules (although it was quite possible for this kind of bond to exist between marriage partners). On the other hand, when it was a matter of determining what use they might make of their pleasures within the relationship, then the reference to eros became necessary; the problematization of their relationship belonged to an "Erotics." This was because in the case of two spouses, marital status, management of the *oikos*, and maintenance of the lineage could create standards of behavior, define the rules of that behavior, and determine the forms of the requisite moderation. But in the case of a man or boy who were in a position of reciprocal independence and between whom there was no institutional constraint, but rather an open game (with preferences, choices, freedom of movement, uncertain outcome), the principle of regulation of behaviors was to be sought in the relation itself, in the nature of the attraction that drew them towards one another, and in the mutual attachment that connected them. Hence the problematization would be carried out in the form of a

28. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 18. This whole passage of Socrates' speech (VIII, 13) is a good illustration of the anxiety that was felt in view of the precariousness of male love relationships and of the role that the permanence of friendship was supposed to play in the scheme of things.
29. *Ibid.*, VIII, 3.

reflection on the relation itself: an inquiry that was both theoretical about love and prescriptive about the way one lived.

But in actual fact, this art of loving was intended for two classes of individuals. To be sure, the wife and her behavior were not completely absent from reflection on Economics; but she was placed under his exclusive authority and while it was right that she be respected in her privileges, this was in so far as she proved worthy of respect, the important thing being that the head of a family remain master of himself. The boy, on the other hand, could be expected to maintain the reserve that was appropriate at that age; with his possible refusals (dreaded but honorable) and his eventual acceptances (desired but likely to be suspect), he constituted an independent center vis-à-vis the lover. And this Erotics would have to be deployed from one fixed point of this elliptic configuration to the other. In Economics and Dietetics the voluntary moderation of the man was mainly based on his relation to himself; in Erotics, the game was more complicated; it implied self-mastery on the part of the lover; it also implied an ability on the part of the beloved to establish a relation of domination over himself; and lastly, it implied a relationship between their two moderations, expressed in their deliberate choice of one another. One can even note a certain tendency to privilege the boy's point of view. The questions that were raised had to do with his conduct in particular, and it was to him that one offered observations, advice, and precepts: as if it were important above all to constitute an Erotics of the loved object, or at least, of the loved object in so far as he had to form himself as a subject of ethical behavior; this is in fact what becomes apparent in a text like the eulogy of Epicrates, attributed to Demosthenes.

A Boy's Honor

In comparison with the two great *Symposiums*, Plato's and Xenophon's, and with the *Phaedrus*, Demosthenes' *Erotic Essay* looks rather mediocre. A formulaic speech, it is both the encomium of a young man and an exhortation addressed to him. This was in fact the traditional function of encomia, and the function that Xenophon alludes to in the *Symposium*: "in the very act of flattering Callias, you are educating him to conform to the ideal."[30] Praise and lesson at the same time, therefore. But despite the banality of the themes and their treatment—a kind of insipid Platonism—it is possible to discover a few traits that were characteristic of other discourses on love and of the way in which the question of "pleasures" was posed within them.

30. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 12. On the relationship between eulogy and precept, cf. also Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 9.

I.

One preoccupation animates the entire text. It finds expression in a vocabulary that refers constantly to honor and shame. Throughout the speech it is a question of *aischunē*, that shame which is both the dishonor with which one can be branded, and the feeling that causes one to turn away from it; it is a question of that which is ugly and shameful (*aischron*), in contrast to that which is fine, or both fine and honorable. Much is said, too, about that which results in blame and contempt (*oneidos*, *epitimē*), as opposed to that which brings honor and leads to a good reputation (*endoxos entimos*). In any case, Epicrates' admirer states his objective from the very start of the *Erotic Essay*: may this praise bring honor to his beloved, and not shame, as sometimes happens when eulogies are delivered by indiscreet suitors.[31] And he returns again and again to this concern: it is important that the young man should remember that because of his birth and standing, the least negligence where honor is at stake may well cover him with shame; he must always keep in mind the example of those who, by being vigilant, have managed to preserve their honor in the course of their relationship;[32] he must take care not to "dishonor his natural qualities" and not to disappoint the hopes of those who are proud of him.[33]

The behavior of young men thus appears to have been a domain that was especially sensitive to the division between what was shameful and what was proper, between what reflected credit and what brought dishonor. It was this question that preoccupied those who chose to reflect on young men, on the love that was manifested for them and the conduct they needed to exhibit. Pausanias, in Plato's *Symposium*, calls attention to the diversity of morals and customs having to do with boys. He points out what is considered "disgraceful" or "good" in Elis, in Sparta, in Thebes, in Ionia, or in areas under Persian rule, and lastly, in Athens.[34] And Phaedrus recalls the principle that should be one's guide in the love of young men as well as in life in general: "shame at what is disgraceful and ambition for what is noble; without these feelings neither a state nor an individual can accomplish anything great or fine."[35] But it should be remarked that this question was not confined to a few exacting moralists. A young man's behavior, his honor, and his disgrace were also the object of much social curiosity; people paid attention to it, spoke about it, remembered it. For example, in order to attack Timarchus, Aeschines had no qualms about rehashing the gossip that may have gone round many years previously, when his adversary

31. Demosthenes, *The Erotic Essay*, trans. N. W. and N. J. Dewitt, London, Cambridge, Mass., Loeb Classical Library, 1.
32. *Ibid.*, 5.
33. *Ibid.*, 53. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (I, 9) shows the importance of the categories of *kalon* and *aischron* in speeches of praise.
34. Plato, *Symposium*, 182 a–d.
35. *Ibid.*, 178 d.

was still a very young man.[36] Moreover, the *Erotic Essay* shows very well in passing just what sort of distrustful solicitude a boy could quite naturally be subjected to by his entourage; people watched him, spied on him, remarked on his demeanor and his relations; vicious tongues were active around him; spiteful people were ready to blame him if he showed arrogance or conceit; but they were quick to criticize him if he was too gracious.[37] Naturally, one cannot help but think about what the situation of girls in other societies must have been when—the age for marriage being much earlier for women—their premarital conduct became an important moral and social concern, of itself and for their families.

II.

But in regard to the Greek boy, the importance of his honor did not concern—as it would later in the case of the European girl—his future marriage: rather, it related to his status, his eventual place in the city. Of course, there is abundant evidence that boys of dubious reputation could exercise the highest political functions; but there is also evidence that this very thing could be held against them—without counting the substantial judicial consequences that certain kinds of misconduct might produce: the Timarchus affair makes this clear. The author of the *Erotic Essay* points it out to the young Epicrates; part of his future, including the rank he will be able to occupy in the city, depends this very day on the manner, honorable or not, in which he conducts himself: considering that the city cannot call upon just anyone, it will have to take account of established reputations;[38] and the man who scoffs at good advice will be punished all his life for his blindness. Two things are necessary, therefore: to mind one's own conduct when one is still very young, but also to look after the honor of younger men, when one has grown older.

This transition age when the young man was so desirable and his honor so fragile thus constituted a trial period: a time when his worth was tested, in the sense that it had to be formed, exercised, and measured all at the same time. A few lines at the end of the text point up the test-like characteristics which the boy's behavior assumed in this period of his life. In exhorting Epicrates, the author of the encomium reminds him that he will be put to the test (*agōn*), and that the debate will be a *dokimasie*:[39] this was the word that designated the examination upon whose completion young men were enrolled among the ephebi or citizens, were admitted to certain magistracies. The young man's conduct owed its importance and the attention that everyone needed to give it, to the fact that everyone saw it as a qualifying test. The text says this plainly, moreover: "I

36. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 39–73.
37. Demosthenes, 17–19.
38. *Ibid.*, 55.
39. *Ibid.*, 53.

think . . . that the city will appoint you to be in charge of some department of her business, and in proportion as your natural gifts are more conspicuous, it will judge you worthy of greater responsibilities and will the sooner desire to make trial of your abilities."[40]

III.

What exactly was being tested? And with respect to what type of behavior was Epicrates supposed to draw the line between that which was honorable and that which was disgraceful? The test pertained to the familiar points of Greek education: the demeanor of the body (carefully avoid *rhathumia*, that sluggishness which was always a defamatory sign); one's gaze (in which *aidos*, dignity, could be read), one's way of talking (don't take the easy option of silence, but be able to mix serious talk with casual talk); and the quality of one's acquaintances.

But it was especially in the sphere of amorous conduct that the distinction between what was honorable and what was shameful operated. On this point, we may note first of all that the author—and this is what makes the text both a eulogy of love and praise of a young man—criticizes the opinion that would tie a boy's honor to the systematic rejection of suitors; doubtless certain lovers defile the relation itself (*lumainesthai tōi pragmati*);[41] but one should not put them in the same class as those admirers who show moderation. The text does not draw the boundary line of honor between those who spurn their suitors and those who accept them. For a Greek youth, to be pursued by would-be lovers was obviously not a dishonor; it was rather the visible mark of his qualities; the number of admirers could be an object of legitimate pride, and sometimes an object of vainglory. But to accept the love relation, to enter the game (even if one did not exactly play the game the lover proposed) was not considered to be a disgrace either. The man who praises Epicrates explains to him that being beautiful and being loved constitute a double stroke of fortune (*eutuchia*);[42] it only remains for him to make the right use (*orthōs chrēsthai*) of it. It is this point that the text emphasizes and makes a "point of honor," so to speak: these things (*ta pragmata*) are not, in themselves and absolutely, good or bad; they vary according to who practices them (*para tous chrōmenous*).[43] It is "use" that determines their moral value, according to a principle that one sees often formulated elsewhere; in any case, we find quite similar expressions in the *Symposium*: "The truth of the matter I believe to be this. There is, as I stated at first, no absolute right and wrong in love, but everything depends upon the circum-

40. *Ibid.*, 55.
41. *Ibid.*, 3.
42. *Ibid.*, 5.
43. *Ibid.*, 4.

stances: to yield to a bad man in a bad way is wrong, but to yield to a worthy man in a right way is right."[44]

Now, as for knowing precisely how the distribution of honor is to be carried out in the love relation, one must admit that the text is extremely elliptical. While it does offer specifics regarding what Epicrates should do or has done in order to exercise his body and develop his courage, or to acquire the philosophical knowledge that he will need, nothing is said concerning what is acceptable or objectionable in physical relations. One thing is clear: not everything should be refused (the young man "grants his favors"), but not everything should be consented to: "Not one finds himself disappointed of favours from you which it is just and fair to ask, but no one is permitted even to hope for such liberties as lead to shame. So great is the latitude your discreetness permits to those who have the best intentions; so great is the discouragement it presents to those who would fling off restraint."[45] The moderation—the *sōphrosunē*—that is one of the major qualities required of boys clearly implies a discrimination in physical contacts. But it is not possible to infer from this text the acts and gestures that honor would compel one to refuse. It should be noted that in the *Phaedrus* the lack of precision is almost as great, even though the theme is developed more fully. Throughout the first two speeches on the advisability of yielding to a lover or a nonlover, and in the great fable of the soul as a team with its restive steed and its obedient steed, Plato's text shows that the question of what constitutes "honorable" practice is crucial: and yet, the acts are never designated except by expressions like "to gratify" or "to grant one's favors" (*charizesthai*), "to do the thing" (*diaprattesthai*), "to derive the greatest possible pleasure from the beloved," "to obtain what one wants" (*pleithesthai*), "to enjoy" (*apolauesthai*). A reticence inherent in this type of discourse? Without doubt, the Greeks would have found it improper that someone would call by name, in a set speech, things that were only vaguely alluded to even in polemics and law court addresses. One imagines, too, that it was hardly necessary to insist on distinctions that were common knowledge: everyone must have known what it was honorable or shameful for a boy to consent to. But we may also recall an observation that was made in our discussion of Dietetics and Economics, where it became apparent that moral reflection was less concerned with specifying the codes to be respected and the list of acts that were permitted and prohibited than it was concerned with characterizing the type of attitude, of relationship with oneself that was required.

44. Plato, *Symposium*, 183 d; cf. also 181 a.
45. Demosthenes, 20.

IV.

Actually, while the text does not indicate the practical forms that are to be respected and the physical boundaries that are not to be crossed, it does at least designate the general principle that determines the way to conduct oneself in these matters. The entire eulogy of Epicrates refers to an agonistic context where the worth and brilliance of the young man must affirm itself through his superiority over others. Let us quickly review these motifs that were so frequent in set speeches: The individual being eulogized is greater than the praise that one offers him, and the words risk being less beautiful than the one to whom they are addressed;[46] or the boy surpasses all others in physical and moral qualities;[47] not only his gifts but his conversation places him above all others;[48] among all the exercises in which one can excel, he has chosen the most noble, the most rewarding;[49] his soul is prepared for "the rivalries of ambition"; and not content to distinguish himself by one quality, he combines "all the qualities of which a man might justly feel proud."[50]

However, the merit of Epicrates is not just in this abundance of qualities that enable him to outstrip all his rivals and bring glory to his parents;[51] it also consists in the fact that with respect to all those who approach him he always maintains his eminent worth; he does not allow himself to be dominated by any of them; they all want to draw him into their intimacy—the word *sunētheia* has both the general meaning of living together and the specific meaning of sexual relations;[52] but he surpasses them in such a way, he gains such an ascendancy over them they derive all their pleasure from the friendship they feel for him.[53] By not yielding, not submitting, remaining the strongest, triumphing over suitors and lovers through one's resistance, one's firmness, one's moderation (*sōphrosunē*)—the young man proves his excellence in the sphere of love relations.

Given this general indication, must we imagine a precise code based on the analogy—so familiar to the Greeks—between positions in the social field (with the difference between "the first ones" and the others, the great who rule and those who obey, the masters and the servants) and the form of sexual relations (with dominant and subordinate positions, active and passive roles, penetration carried out by the man and undergone by his partner)? To say that one must not yield, not let others get the best of one, not accept a subordinate position where one would get the worst of it, is doubtless to exclude or advise

46. *Ibid.*, 7, 33, 16.
47. *Ibid.*, 8, 14.
48. *Ibid.*, 21.
49. *Ibid.*, 30.
50. *Ibid.*, 30.
51. *Ibid.*, 31.
52. *Ibid.*, 17.
53. *Ibid.*, 17.

against sexual practices that would be humiliating for the boy, putting him in a position of inferiority.[54]

But it is likely that the principle of honor and maintenance of "superiority" refers — beyond a few precise prescriptions — to a kind of general style: it was not good (especially in the eyes of public opinion) for a boy to behave "passively," to let himself be manipulated and dominated, to yield without resistance, to become an obliging partner in the sensual pleasures of the other, to indulge his whims, and to offer his body to whomever it pleased and however it pleased them, out of weakness, lust, or self-interest. This was what dishonored boys who accepted the first comer, who showed off unscrupulously, who passed from hand to hand, who granted everything to the highest bidder. This was what Epicrates did not and would not do, mindful as he was of the opinion people had of him, of the rank he would have to hold, and of the useful relations he might enter into.

I would just like to mention again briefly the role which the author of *The Erotic Essay* has philosophy play in this safeguarding of honor and these contests of superiority by which the boy is invited to test himself in a manner that befits his age. This philosophy, whose content is not specified apart from a reference to the Socratic theme of *epimeleia heautou*, "care of the self,"[55] and to the necessity, also Socratic, of combining knowledge and exercise (*epistēmē — meletē*) — this philosophy is not presented as a guide for leading a different life, nor for abstaining from all the pleasures. It is invoked by Demosthenes as an indispensable complement of the other tests: "Reflect that . . . of all things the most irrational is to be ambitious for wealth, bodily strength, and such things, and for their sake to submit to many tests . . . but not to aim at the improvement of the mind, which has supervision over all other powers."[56] What philosophy can show, in fact, is how to become "stronger than oneself" and when one has become so, it also enables one to prevail over others. It is by nature a leadership principle since it alone is capable of directing thought: "Of the powers residing in human beings we shall find that thought leads all the rest and that philosophy alone is capable of directing it rightly and training it."[57] It is clear that philosophy is an asset that is necessary for the young man's wise conduct; not however in order to guide him towards another form of life, but to enable him to exercise self-mastery and to triumph over others in the difficult game of ordeals to be undergone and honor to be safeguarded.

The entire *Erotic Essay* revolves, as we see, around the problem of this twofold superiority over oneself and over others in that difficult phase when the

54. On the importance of not being dominated and on the misgivings that were felt apropos of sodomy and passive fellation in homosexual relations, cf. Dover, pp. 100–109.
55. Demosthenes, 39–43.
56. *Ibid.*, 38.
57. *Ibid.*, 37.

boy's youth and beauty attract one man after the other, each trying to "get the best" of him. In Dietetics it was mainly a question of mastery over oneself and over the violence of a perilous act; in Economics it was a question of the control that one had to exercise over oneself in the practice of the authority that one exercised over one's wife. Here, where Erotics takes the boy's point of view, the problem is to see how the boy is going to be able to achieve self-mastery in not yielding to others. The point at issue is not the sense of measure that one brings to one's own power, but the best way to measure one's strength against the power of others while ensuring one's own mastery over self. In this regard, a brief narration that appears in the middle of the speech acquires a symbolic value. It is a commonplace account of a chariot race, but a direct relation is established between the little sports drama that is reported and the public test which the young man undergoes in his behavior with his suitors. We see Epicrates driving his team (a likely reference to the *Phaedrus*); he is on the verge of defeat, his chariot is about to be smashed to pieces by an opposing team; the crowd, despite the taste it ordinarily has for accidents, cheers for the hero, while he, "stronger even than the vigor of this team, manages to win the victory over the most favored of his rivals."[58]

This prosaic address to Epicrates is certainly not one of the highest forms of Greek reflection on love. But in its very banality it does bring out some important aspects of "the Greek problem of boys." The young man — between the end of childhood and the age when he attained manly status — constituted a delicate and difficult factor for Greek ethics and Greek thought. His youth with its particular beauty (to which every man was believed to be naturally sensitive) and the status which would be his (and for which, with the help and protection of his entourage, he must prepare himself) formed a "strategic" point around which a complex game was required; his honor — which depended in part on the use he made of his body and which would also partly determine his future role and reputation — was an important stake in the game. For him, there was a test in all this, one which demanded diligence and training; there was also, for others, an occasion for care and concern. At the very end of his eulogy of Epicrates, the author declares that the life of the boy, his *bios*, must be a "common" work; and, as if it were a matter of a work of art to be finished, he urges all who know Epicrates to give this future figure "the greatest possible brilliance."

Later, in European culture, girls or married women, with their behavior, their beauty, and their feelings, were to become themes of special concern; a new art of courting them, a literature that was basically romantic in form, an exacting morality that was attentive to the integrity of their bodies and the solidity of their matrimonial commitment — all this would draw curiosities and

58. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

desires around them. No matter what inferior position may have been reserved for them in the family or in society, there would be an accentuation, a valorization, of the "problem" of women. Their nature, their conduct, the feelings they inspired or experienced, the permitted or forbidden relationship that one might have with them were to become themes of reflection, knowledge, analysis, and prescription. It seems clear, on the other hand, that in classical Greece the problematization was more active in regard to boys, maintaining an intense moral concern around their fragile beauty, their corporal honor, their ethical judgment and the training it required. What is historically singular is not that the Greeks found pleasure in boys, nor even that they accepted this pleasure as legitimate, it is that this acceptance of pleasure was not simple, and that it gave rise to a whole cultural elaboration. In broad terms, what is important to grasp here is not why the Greeks had a fondness for boys but why they had a "pederasty"; that is, why they elaborated a courtship practice, a moral reflection, and—as we shall see—a philosophical asceticism, around that fondness.

The Object of Pleasure

In order to understand how the use of the *aphrodisia* was problematized in reflection on the love of boys, we have to recall a principle which is doubtless not peculiar to Greek culture, but which assumed considerable importance within it and exercised a decisive authority in its moral valuations. I am referring to the principle of isomorphism between sexual relations and social relations. What this means is that sexual relations—always conceived in terms of the model act of penetration, assuming a polarity that opposed activity and passivity—were seen as being of the same type as the relationship between a superior and a subordinate, an individual who dominates and one who is dominated, one who commands and one who complies, one who vanquishes and one who is vanquished. Pleasure practices were conceptualized using the same categories as those in the field of social rivalries and hierarchies: an analogous agonistic structure, analogous oppositions and differentiations, analogous values attributed to the respective roles of the partners. And this suggests that in sexual behavior there was one role that was intrinsically honorable and valorized without question: the one that consisted in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, in asserting one's superiority.

This principle has several consequences relating to the status of those who were supposed to be the passive partners in this activity. Slaves were at the master's disposition of course: their condition made them sexual objects and this was taken for granted; so much so that people could be astonished that the same law would forbid the rape of slaves and that of children. In order to explain this anomaly, Aeschines submits that the aim was to show, by prohibiting violence even in the case of slaves, what a serious thing it was when directed at children of good birth. As for the woman's passivity, it did denote an inferiority of nature and condition; but there was no reason to criticize it as a behavior, precisely because she was in conformity with what nature intended and with what the law prescribed. On the other hand, everything in the way of sexual behavior that might cause a free man—to say nothing of someone who by birth, fortune, and prestige, held or should hold one of the first ranks among men—to bear the marks of inferiority, submission to domination and acceptance of servitude, could only be considered as shameful: a shame that was even greater if he offered himself as the obliging object of another's pleasure.

Now, in a game regulated according to such principles, the position of the (freeborn) boy was difficult. To be sure, he was still in an "inferior" position in the sense that he was a long way from benefiting from the rights and powers that would be his when he attained the full enjoyment of his status. And yet, his place was not assimilable to that of a slave, nor to that of woman. This was true even in the context of the household and the family. A passage from Aristotle's *Politics* makes this clear. Discussing the authority relations and forms of government that are appropriate for the family, Aristotle defines the position of the slave, of the wife, and of the (male) child in relation to the head of the family. Governing slaves, Aristotle says, is not like governing free beings; to govern a wife is to exercise a "political" authority in which relations are permanently unequal; in contrast, the governing of children can be called "royal" because it is based "on affection and seniority."[59] Indeed, the deliberative faculty is lacking in the slave; it is present in the woman, but she doesn't exercise the decision-making function in her house; in the boy, the deficiency relates only to his incomplete development. And while the moral education of women is important, seeing that they constitute half the free population, that of male children is more so, for it concerns future citizens who will participate in the government of the city.[60] We can see therefore that the specific nature of the boy's position, the particular form of his dependence, and the manner in which he is to be treated, even in the space where the considerable power of the patriarch is exercised, were marked by the status that would be his in future years.

The same held true up to a point in the game of sexual relations. Among the various legitimate "objects," the boy occupied a special position. He was definitely not a forbidden object; at Athens, certain laws protected free children (from adults who at least for a time did not have the right to go into the schools, from slaves who incurred the death penalty if they tried corrupting them, and from their fathers or tutors who were punished if they prostituted them);[61] but nothing prevented or prohibited an adolescent from being the openly recognized sexual partner of a man. Yet, there was a sort of intrinsic difficulty in this role:

59. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 5, 1259 a-b.
60. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 5, 1260 b.
61. Cf. the laws cited by Aeschines in *Against Timarchus*, 9-18.

something that simultaneously made it hard to define clearly and specify exactly what the role implied in the sexual relation, and nonetheless drew attention to this point and made people attach much importance and value to what should or should not occur in that regard. All this constituted something of a blind spot and a point of overvaluation. The role of the boy was a focus of a good deal of uncertainty combined with an intense interest.

Aeschines, in *Against Timarchus*, makes use of a law that is very interesting in itself because it concerns the effects of civic and political disqualification that a man's sexual misconduct—"prostitution" in the precise sense—could entail in that it would prohibit him from subsequently "becoming one of the nine archons or discharging the office of priest or acting as an advocate for the state." An individual who had prostituted himself was debarred from holding any magistracy in the city or abroad, be it elective or conferred by lot. He could not serve as a herald or ambassador, nor become a prosecutor of ambassadors or a paid slanderer. Further, he could not address the Council or the Assembly, even though he were "the most eloquent orator in Athens."[62] Hence this law made male prostitution an instance of *atīmia*—of public disgrace—that excluded a citizen from certain responsibilities.[63] But the way in which Aeschines conducts his prosecution, and tries through a strictly juridical discussion to compromise his adversary, points up the relation of incompatibility—ethical as much as legal—that was recognized as existing between certain sexual roles assumed by boys and certain social roles assumed by adults.

Aeschines' legal argumentation, which is based on Timarchus's "bad conduct" as alleged via rumors, gossip, and testimony, consists in going back and finding certain factors that constitute prostitution (number of partners, indiscrimination, payment for services) whereas others are lacking (he hadn't been registered as a prostitute and he hadn't stayed in a house). When he was young and good looking, he passed through many hands, and not always honorable ones since he is known to have lived with a man of servile status and in the house of a notorious lecher who surrounded himself with singers and zither players; he received gifts, he was kept, he took part in the excesses of his protectors; he is known to have been with Cedonides, Autocleides, Thersandrus, Misgolas, Anticles, Pittalacus, and Hegesandrus. Thus it is not possible to say simply that he has had many relationships (*hetairēkōs*), but that he has "prostituted" himself (*peporneumenos*): "For the man who practises this thing with one person, and practises it for pay, seems to me to be liable to precisely this charge."[64]

62. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
63. Dover, (pp. 19–20) points out that what was punishable was not prostitution itself; rather it was the fact of violating the disqualifications that resulted from having been a prostitute.
64. Aeschines, 52.

But the accusation also operates on a moral level that makes it possible not only to establish the crime, but to compromise the adversary politically and in general. Perhaps Timarchus is not formally a professional prostitute, but he is definitely not one of those respectable men who make no secret of their taste for male loves and who maintain honorable relations with free boys, relations that are valuable to the young partner: Aeschines acknowledges that he is partial to this kind of love. He describes Timarchus as a man who in the course of his youth placed himself and showed himself to everyone, in the inferior and humiliating position of a pleasure object for others; he wanted this role, he sought it, took pleasure in it, and profited from it. And this is what Aeschines would have his audience see as morally and politically incompatible with civic responsibilities and the exercise of political power. A man who has been marked by this role which he was pleased to assume in his youth would not now be able to play, without provoking indignation, the role of a man who is over others in the city, who provides them with friends, counsels them in their decisions, leads them and represents them. What was hard for Athenians to accept—and this is the feeling that Aeschines tries to play upon in the speech against Timarchus—was not that they might be governed by someone who loved boys, or who as a youth was loved by a man; but that they might come under the authority of a leader who once identified with the role of pleasure object for others.

It is this feeling, moreover, that Aristophanes had appealed to so often in his comedies; the point of mockery and the thing that was meant to be scandalous was that these orators, these leaders who were followed and loved, these citizens who sought to seduce the people in order to rule over them, such as Cleon or Agyrrhius, were also individuals who had consented and still consented to play the role of passive, obliging objects. And Aristophanes spoke ironically of an Athenian democracy where one's chances of being heard in the Assembly were greater the more one had a taste for pleasures of this sort.[65] In the same way and the same spirit, Diogenes made fun of Demosthenes and the morals he had while pretending to be the leader (*dēmagōgos*) of the Athenian people.[66] When one played the role of subordinate partner in the game of pleasure relations, one could not be truly dominant in the game of civic and political activity.

The extent to which these criticisms and satires may have been justified in reality matters little. There is at least one thing that they show clearly by their mere existence; namely, the difficulty caused, in this society that accepted sexual relations between men, by the juxtaposition of an ethos of male superiority and a conception of all sexual intercourse in terms of the schema of penetration and male domination. The consequence of this was that on the one hand the

65. Aristophanes, *Knights*, v. 428 ff. *Assemblywomen*, v. 112 ff. Cf. Buffière, pp. 185-186.
66. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 34.

"active" and dominant role was always assigned positive values, but on the other hand it was necessary to attribute to one of the partners in the sexual act the passive, dominated, and inferior position. And while this was no problem when it involved a woman or a slave, the case was altered when it involved a man. It is doubtless the existence of this difficulty that explains both the silence in which this relationship between adults was actually enveloped, and the noisy disqualification of those who broke this silence by declaring their acceptance, or rather, their preference for this "subordinate" role. It was also in view of this difficulty that all the attention was concentrated on the relationship between men and boys, since in this case one of the two partners, owing to his youth and to the fact that he had not yet attained manly status, could be—for a period which everyone knew to be brief—an admissible object of pleasure. But while the boy, because of his peculiar charm, could be a prey which men might pursue without causing a scandal or a problem, one had to keep in mind that the day would come when he would have to be a man, to exercise powers and responsibilities, so that obviously he could then no longer be an object of pleasure—but then, to what extent could he *have been* such an object?

Hence the problem that could be called the "antinomy of the boy" in the Greek ethics of *aphrodisia*. On the one hand, young men were recognized as objects of pleasure—and even as the only honorable and legitimate objects among the possible male partners of men: no one would ever reproach a man for loving a boy, for desiring and enjoying him, provided that the laws and proprieties were respected. But on the other hand, the boy, whose youth must be a training for manhood, could not and must not identify with that role. He could not of his own accord, in his own eyes, and for his own sake, be that object of pleasure, even though the man was quite naturally fond of appointing him as an object of pleasure. In short, to delight in and be a subject of pleasure with a boy did not cause a problem for the Greeks; but to be an object of pleasure and to acknowledge oneself as such constituted a major difficulty for the boy. The relationship that he was expected to establish with himself in order to become a free man, master of himself, and capable of prevailing over others was at variance with a form of relationship in which he would be an object of pleasure for another. This noncoincidence was ethically necessary.

Such a difference explains certain characteristic features of the Greeks' reflection on the love of boys.

In the first place, there was an oscillation—enigmatic for us—concerning the natural or "unnatural" character of that type of love. On one side, it was taken for granted that the attraction to boys was natural in just the same way as all movement that carried one in the direction of the beautiful was natural. And yet, it is not unusual to find the assertion that relations between men, or more generally, between two individuals of the same sex, is *para phusin*, beside nature. Of course one can infer that these two views indicate two different attitudes, one favorable and the other hostile to that kind of love. But the very possibility of these two opinions was probably owing to the fact that while people deemed it quite natural that one might find pleasure with a boy, it was much harder to accept as natural that which made a boy an object of pleasure. So that one could take exception to the very act that was carried out between two male individuals on the grounds that it was *para phusin* — because it *feminized* one of the partners whereas the desire that one could have for beauty was nevertheless regarded as natural. The cynics were not against the love of boys, even though they heaped sarcasm on all those boys whose passivity caused them to accept being estranged from their own nature, thus becoming "worse than they were."[67] As for Plato, there is no reason to suppose that, having been a believer in male love as a youth, he later "got wise" to the extent that he condemned it as being a relationship "contrary to nature." It should be noted, rather, that at the beginning of the *Laws*, when he draws a contrast between relations with women as an element of nature, and relations between men (or between women) as an effect of incontinence (*akrasia*), he is referring to the act of copulation itself (provided for by nature) and he is thinking of institutions that are likely to promote or on the other hand pervert citizens' morals.[68] Similarly, in the passage from Book VIII where he foresees the need — and the difficulty — of a law concerning sexual relations, the arguments he puts forward have to do with the harmfulness of "using" men and boys "like females" in sexual intercourse (*mixis aphrodisiōn*): in the one seduced, how might a "courageous, manly disposition (*to tēs andreias ethos*) be formed? And in the seducer, what would nurture "the offspring of the idea of a moderate man"? "Everyone blames the softness of the one who gives in to the pleasures and is incapable of mastering them," and "reproves the resemblance in image of the one who undertakes the imitation of the female."[69]

The problem of considering the boy as an object of pleasure was also manifested by a noticeable reticence on several points. There was a reluctance to evoke directly and in so many words the role of the boy in sexual intercourse: sometimes quite general expressions are employed, such as "to do the thing" (*diaprattesthai to pragma*);[70] other times the "thing" is designated by the very impossibility of naming it;[71] or again — and this is what says most about the problem posed by the relation — people resorted to metaphorical terms that were "agonistic" or political: "to yield," to "submit" (*hupēretein*), "to render a service" (*therapeuein, hupourgein*).[72]

67. *Ibid.*, VI, 2, 59 (cf. also 54 and 46).
68. Plato, *Laws*, I, 636 b–c.
69. *Ibid.*, VIII, 836 c–d. In the *Phaedrus*, the physical form of the relation where the man behaves like a "four-footed beast" is said to be "unnatural" (250 e).
70. Or *diaprettesthai*, cf. *Phaedrus*, 256 c.
71. Xenophon, *Symposium*, IV, 15.
72. Xenophon, *Hiero*, I and VII; of Plato, *Symposium*, 184 c–d. See Dover, pp. 44–45.

But there was also a reluctance to concede that the boy might experience pleasure. This "denial" should be interpreted both as the affirmation that such a pleasure could not exist and as the prescription that it ought not to be experienced. Having to explain why love so often turns into hatred when it is mediated by physical relations, Socrates, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, speaks of the unpleasant feelings that may arise in a youth because of his relationship (*homilein*) with an aging man. But he immediately adds as a general principle: "A youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love's intoxication."[73] Between the man and the boy, there is not—there cannot and should not be—a community of pleasure. The author of the *Problems* admits the possibility only for a few individuals and only in the case of an anatomical irregularity. And no one was more severely criticized than boys who showed by their willingness to yield, by their many relationships, or by their dress, their makeup, their adornments, or their perfumes that they might enjoy playing that role.

Which does not mean, however, that when the boy happened to give in, he had to do it coldly somehow. On the contrary, he was supposed to yield only if he had feelings of admiration, gratitude, or affection for his lover, which made him want to please the latter. The verb *charizesthai* was commonly employed in order to indicate the fact that the boy "complied" and "granted his favors."[74] The word does suggest that there was something other than a simple "surrender" by the beloved to the lover; the youth "granted his favors" through a movement that yielded to a desire and a demand on the part of the other, but was not of the same nature. It was a response; it was not the sharing of a sensation. The boy was not supposed to experience a physical pleasure; he was not even supposed quite to take pleasure in the man's pleasure; he was supposed to feel pleased about giving pleasure to the other, provided he yielded when he should; that is, not too hastily, nor too reluctantly either.

Sexual relations thus demanded particular behaviors on the part of both partners. A consequence of the fact that the boy could not identify with the part he had to play; he was supposed to refuse, resist, flee, escape.[75] He was also supposed to make his consent, if he finally gave it, subject to conditions relating to the man to whom he yielded (his merit, his status, his virtue) and to the benefit he could expect to gain from him (a benefit that was rather shameful if it was only a question of money, but honorable if it involved training for manhood, social connections for the future, or a lasting friendship). And in fact it was benefits of this kind that the lover was supposed to be able to provide, in addition to the customary gifts which depended more on status considerations (and whose importance and value varied with the condition of the partners). So

73. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 21.
74. Plato, *Symposium*, 184 e.
75. *Ibid.*, 184 a.

that the sexual act, in the relation between a man and a boy, needed to be taken up in a game of refusals, evasions, and escapes that tended to postpone it as long as possible, but also in a process of exchanges that determined the right time and the right conditions for it to take place.

Thus, the boy was expected to give—out of kindness and hence not for his own pleasure—something which his partner sought with a view to the pleasure he would enjoy; but the partner could not rightfully ask for it without a matching offer of presents, services, promises, and commitments that were altogether different in nature from the "gift" that was made to him. Which explains that tendency which was so visibly marked in Greek reflection on the love of boys: how was this relation to be integrated into a larger whole and enabled to transform itself into another type of relationship, a stable relationship where physical relations would no longer be important and where the two partners would be able to share the same feelings and the same possessions? The love of boys could not be morally honorable unless it comprised (as a result of the reasonable gifts and services of the lover and the reserved compliance of the beloved) the elements that would form the basis of a transformation of this love into a definitive and socially valuable tie, that of *philia.*

One would be quite mistaken to think that since the Greeks did not prohibit this kind of relationship, they did not worry about its implications. It "interested" them more than any other sexual relation and there is every indication that they were anxious about it. But we can say that in a thinking such as ours, the relationship between two individuals of the same sex is questioned primarily from the viewpoint of the subject of desire: how can it be that in a man a desire forms whose object is another man? And we know very well that it is in a certain structuration of this desire (in its ambivalence, or in what it lacks) that the rudiments of an answer will be sought. The preoccupation of the Greeks, on the other hand, did not concern the desire that might incline an individual to this kind of relationship, nor did it concern the subject of this desire; their anxiety was focused on the object of pleasure, or more precisely, on that object in so far as he would have to become in turn the master in the pleasure that was enjoyed with others and in the power that was exercised over oneself.

It was here, at this point of problematization (how to make the object of pleasure into a subject who was in control of his pleasures), that philosophical erotics, or in any case Socratic-Platonic reflection on love, was to take its point of departure.