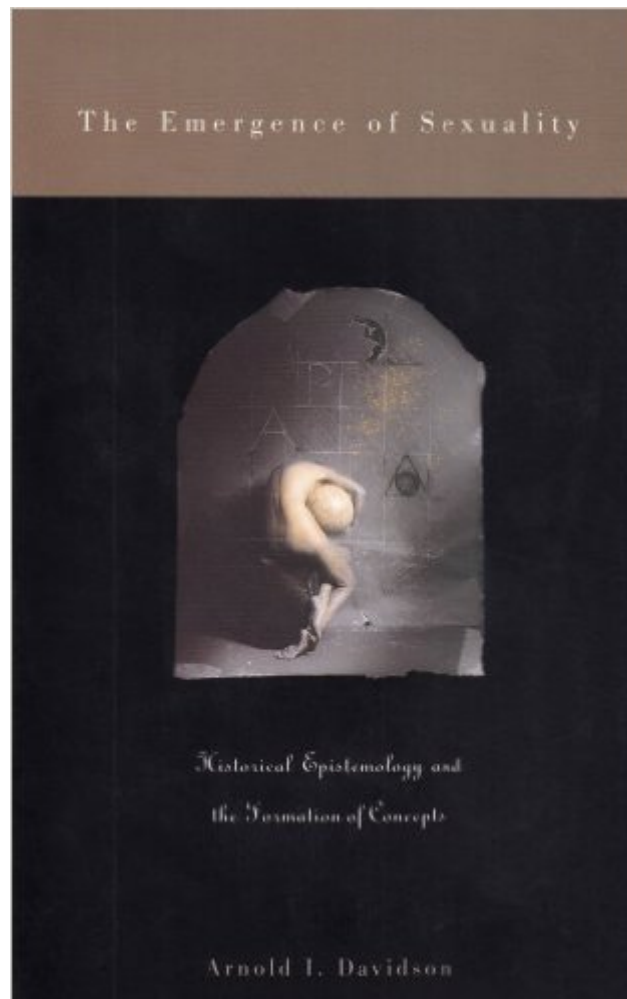


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The Emergence Of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology And The Formation Of Concepts



Synopsis

In a book that moves between philosophy and history, and with lasting significance for both, Arnold Davidson elaborates a powerful new method for considering the history of concepts and the nature of scientific knowledge, a method he calls "historical epistemology." He applies this method to the history of sexuality, with important consequences for our understanding of desire, abnormality, and sexuality itself. In Davidson's view, it was the emergence of a science of sexuality that made it possible, even inevitable, for us to become preoccupied with our true sexuality. Historical epistemology attempts to reveal how this new form of experience that we call "sexuality" is linked to the emergence of new structures of knowledge, and especially to a new style of reasoning and the concepts employed within it. Thus Davidson shows how, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, a new psychiatric style of reasoning about diseases emerges that makes possible, among other things, statements about sexual perversion that quickly become commonplace in discussions of sexuality. Considering a wide range of examples, from Thomas Aquinas to Freud, Davidson develops the methodological lessons of Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault in order to analyze the history of our experience of normativity and its deviations.

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Customer Reviews

Davidson offers a very conversational collection of essays that help to illuminate Foucault's archaeology. They are also thoughtful ventures in their own right, particularly the essay on monsters, which was almost a satirical take on Foucault's project (though it is quite a serious essay). My worry is that this work doesn't offer itself to a very wide audience. It's very much a

supplement to Foucault, and I wonder whether it could stand on its own, or whether it was ever meant to.

This collection of essays is a remarkably erudite and creative continuation of the Foucauldian project. Davidson investigates the formation of our conceptualization of human sexuality by revealing the transition from a medical to a psychiatric delimitation of pathology. There are a wide variety of texts here, ranging from an exegesis of monsters to epistemology. Davidson also provides some of the most authoritative commentary on Foucault's work in the entire secondary literature; he draws out a nuanced analysis of Foucault's evolution as an archeologist and genealogist, providing helpful clarification of the two methods. A seminal work of historical and philosophical inquiry.

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