

# A Communitarian Perspective on Sex and Sexuality

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## Foreword

Both religious and liberal secular thinking offer comprehensive approaches to considering the place of the sexual drive in our personal lives and communities. What has communitarian thinking to offer? How does it compare to these other bodies of thought, especially to religious ones?

It goes without saying that there are significant differences among religions, as well as within each religion, on the issue; likewise all liberal writing is not cut from one cloth. Still, two polar positions emerge, between which one can place many divergent and more moderate approaches. One position, which we will refer to as ‘containing’, considers sex and sexuality a weakness or a failing, if not an outright sin, which should be carefully circumscribed, if not repressed. This approach strongly advocates sexual restraint. Indeed, for many Christians, even sexual thoughts are considered ‘impure’ and must be overcome. (The term ‘containing’ refers merely to the attitude towards sex. It might well be said, in this approach, that to repress sex is to liberate a person from a compulsion, from being driven by an animal instinct, and to free that person to fully dedicate themselves to other pursuits, and to Jesus Christ. Still, sex is being repressed rather than expressed.)

The opposite extreme position, which we refer to as a ‘liberating’ one, favors making sex free from any legal constraints, as well as from limiting social mores and customs, and giving sexual desire and practice free range because sex is considered natural and basically good. Moreover, repressing sex is considered the source of many personal and societal problems. This is a position held by some of the early Communists and by several leading counterculture thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

To reiterate: many more moderate and nuanced approaches are found between these two extremes of full repression and unlimited liberation. But these polarized characterizations help highlight the basic issue at hand and allow one to ‘place’ intermediate positions as relatively more constraining or freeing. It also should be further noted that the behavioral prescriptions of most religions fall on the relatively repressive side, while a good part of psychoanalytical and psychological theory and ‘progressive’ thinking leans toward the liberating end. The place of a communitarian

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approach on this continuum has not been spelled out as far as we can determine, hence this endeavor. We proceed by discussing the two polar views in some detail and then drawing on this discussion to provide a preliminary outline of a responsive communitarian position, not to be conflated with Asian or authoritarian communitarian thinking.<sup>2</sup> In the process we are forced to avoid numerous important but corollary issues, such as attitudes toward homosexuality and how the sexual roles of men and women are and ought to be conceived.

## I. Sexual Urges in Select Major Religious Traditions

It is essential to take into account that our purpose here is not to carry out a study of the complex and varied traditions of Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam regarding sexuality. Our goal here is to point out several common threads that run through the mainstream teachings of these three religions. Although each of these religious traditions values sex, both for its procreative purposes and for its role in bonding married couples, each also has a concept of the potentially dangerous nature of sexual desire and sees a compelling need to control sexual urges and limit sexual acts by a set of moral if not legal boundaries. They all are ‘containing’ approaches, as they set various limits on sexual expression.

### A. Catholicism

In popular culture, Catholicism is associated with containment if not repression of sexuality. The common understanding of the Catholic position on sex is that sex is not to be enjoyed, even by married people; it is always morally inappropriate unless its purpose is conception. Actually, even strict interpretations of Catholic teachings on sex are not quite that restrictive. Rev. Ronald Lawler and scholars Joseph Boyle and William May write in their book *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation, & Defense*, ‘With remarkable uniformity and insistence the Church, over many centuries, has taught that sex is fundamentally a good and wonderful gift of God, and that intelligently ordered sexual activity can be a humanly perfecting and even sanctifying thing.’<sup>3</sup>

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which serves for observant Catholics as a means for teaching doctrine, explicitly says that sex is allowed to be ‘a source of joy and pleasure’ and that it is not evil for a married couple to enjoy sex so long as they ‘keep themselves within the limits of just moderation.’<sup>4</sup> More specifically, this means couples should avoid lust, defined as a ‘disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure.’ The Catechism does warn that ‘Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.’<sup>5</sup> This is understood as weighing in against birth control and not sexual pleasure.

The concept of ‘disordered’ desires and passions is central to mainstream Catholic teachings on sex and chastity. The Church’s teachings hold that people’s passions are

neither good nor evil in themselves, but become good or evil when applied to good or evil objects.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas writes that passions are voluntary ‘either because they are commanded by the will or because the will does not place obstacles in their way’.<sup>7</sup> We have an innate, God-given sense of what is right and wrong, and it ‘belongs to the perfection of the moral or human good that the passions be governed by reason’.<sup>8</sup> The Catechism cautions that ‘either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy’. Chastity, therefore, does not mean total abstention from sex, but rather is an ‘apprenticeship in self-mastery’.<sup>9</sup> As William Cardinal Baum, former prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, writes in his forward to *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, ‘Freedom is not found in surrendering to inner and outer pressures. It is found by those who achieve self-possession’.<sup>10</sup> In short, an underlying theme in Catholic teachings is that sexual desire is a force that threatens to break away from its moorings and needs to be kept in check; a feat that requires constant and considerable human effort.

The Catholic tradition, reflected in the Catechism, derives from a variety of sources, including Scripture, papal edicts, and the writings of Catholic theologians. Most theologians at least reference the writings of Paul in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Paul upheld the Old Testament view of the goodness of sex, while cautioning against the dangerous nature of desire.<sup>12</sup> He believed celibacy to be the highest calling, but too difficult for everyone. He urged those without the discipline and self-control required by a life of celibacy to marry in order to avoid sin, for, as he put it, ‘it is better to marry than to burn’.<sup>13</sup> He advised a man that ‘if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin’, but added that ‘he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better’.<sup>14</sup>

Another substantial source of Catholic tradition regarding sexual ethics lies in the writings of St. Augustine. There is less than total agreement among modern scholars on the meanings of his teachings, and his writings display some amount of development over time, but the core of Augustine’s teachings on sexuality is clear, as is the continuity between his position and the position of the contemporary Church. Augustine did not consider sex evil in itself, but believed it to be among a number of goods which are not to be pursued for their own sake, but because they are necessary for something else.<sup>15</sup> Like later Medieval theologians, he held that sex was created pure by God, but was then tainted with lust when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus, concupiscence, the destructive desire for sexual gratification, comes from Original Sin, as all evil instincts do. Concupiscence distorts natural human desires, and men must choose to resist the sins concupiscence suggests by following good natural desires instead. Our sexual conduct thus reflects our human fallibility, our basic weakness. Having been unable to resist temptation in the Garden of Eden, we have fallen from grace and are living in an impure state. We can only struggle, with God’s help, to overcome our limitations, but we will not be free of them in this lifetime. Hence, we are condemned in this life to struggle with the temptations sexual desire puts in front of us.

Augustine holds that marriage is the remedy God gave us to counter evil sexual urges. Married couples can have sex for procreation without it being sinful. But human sexuality can be good *only* within marriage, and even within marriage intercourse for the sole purpose of satisfying concupiscence is a sin and is degrading. He is clear that sex taking place beyond the need for procreation is a venial sin, and he urges spouses to help each other exercise self-control, rather than seek to satisfy each other's desires.

He recognizes, though, that many married couples would give in to concupiscence, and he considered it a lesser sin than sexual activity outside of marriage. 'Marriage has also this good, that carnal or youthful incontinence, even if it is bad, is turned to the honorable task of begetting children, so that marital intercourse makes something good out of the evil of lust'.<sup>16</sup> Augustine writes that it is necessary to 'distinguish the concupiscence associated with marriage, i.e. the concupiscence of conjugal purity, concupiscence for the legitimate engendering of children, or the concupiscence of the social bond by which each sex is tied to the other, from the concupiscence of the flesh which hankers after the illicit as well as the licit indifferently and through the concupiscence of marriage which uses it well is restrained from the illicit and permitted only the licit'.<sup>17</sup> However, even when couples, compelled by 'evil habits', have sex for the 'illicit' purposes of lust, or without the purpose of procreation, Augustine believed that 'marriage protects them from adultery and fornication'. Lust within marriage is not permitted, but it is pardonable—because it helps protect us from a greater evil.<sup>18</sup>

Augustine firmly believes in the procreative functions of sex, calling children 'the only worthy fruit' of sexual intercourse.<sup>19</sup> Modern scholars disagree about the extent to which Augustine accepts that sex could be a way for spouses to express their fidelity and love, and that this could be a good similar to procreation. In furthering contemporary teachings about the 'unitive' goods of sex, some scholars attempt to find justifications from within Augustine's work.<sup>20</sup> The prevailing understanding of his thought, however, seems to be that he does not hold the view later adopted by the Church that sex can have good purposes within marriage besides procreation. He urges married couples to refrain from sex not only late in life, out of necessity, but as soon as they no longer wish to bear children.

Augustine's basic views about the procreative purposes of sex and the sinfulness of lust were developed by medieval scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas, who synthesized Augustine with the newly rediscovered writings of Aristotle. Aquinas held that men are capable of controlling their passions with reason, and because of this, passions can be judged as morally good or evil.<sup>21</sup> He did not hold that *all* passions are morally evil, however, arguing that passions are only evil when they go uncontrolled by reason. 'The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to reason, incline us to sin', he writes, 'but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue'.<sup>22</sup> He applies this principle to sex, arguing that 'lust consists essentially in exceeding the order and mode of reason in the matter of venereal acts',<sup>23</sup>

but also that ‘venereal acts can be without sin, provided they be performed in due manner and order, in keeping with the end of human procreation.’<sup>24</sup>

Aquinas drew on both Aristotle and Augustine in developing a system of ethics in line with what is known as natural law. As theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill points out, he ‘derives moral norms from what humans are essentially and ought to strive to become’. The source of ethics for him is ‘his reflective understanding of what “human” or “human nature” comprises, not in the actual, but in the ideal sense.’<sup>25</sup> When discussing sexual ethics, he draws heavily on what he considered to be the biological facts of the human body. Thus, seeing the necessity of sex for continuing the human race, Aquinas held that both marriage and sex were justified only by procreation.<sup>26</sup>

Aquinas’ teachings and natural law theology were still dominant in the beginning of the twentieth century when the Vatican set out to create the Code of Canon Law.<sup>27</sup> Not until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s did the Catholic Church adopt a position validating the purpose of sex to enhance the love and respect between married people, regardless of whether or not it resulted in procreation.<sup>28</sup>

The teachings laid out so far reflect the official position of the Catholic Church, as promoted by the Vatican. As scholars of Catholic sexual ethics point out, Catholic theology has built an ‘elaborate moral code’ that is directive and specific, focusing on actions and on sins.<sup>29</sup> Many contemporary scholars criticize this focus and attempt to develop alternative positions on sex and sexuality.

Joseph Selling writes that while traditional Catholic teachings are not wrong, they are overly narrow, putting too much emphasis on the mechanics of sex and not enough on spirituality. He writes that while sex is indeed linked to procreation, there is more to it than that. He argues that though the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* discusses a valid ‘unitive’ purpose of sexuality (secondary to the procreative purpose), even this is too narrow, as it leaves out the meaning sex has for the family, kinship networks, and society. He seeks to create a more positive view of human sexuality that focuses on the ‘relational’ aspects of sex.<sup>30</sup> He suggests that a Catholic sexual ethic should focus less on setting out behavioral norms—to the point of remaining silent about which specific behaviors are permitted and which are not—and teach instead an ‘ethic of care’ that aims at sensitivity and respect towards the needs of others, and is ‘value-oriented’, teaching the importance of positive values such as fidelity, commitment, and responsible parenthood.<sup>31</sup>

Lisa Sowle Cahill has also attempted to develop an alternative set of teachings on sexual ethics. She points out that people tend to be drawn to extremes when it comes to sex, seeing it either as ‘anti-human’ because it doesn’t conform to an ideal of pure rationality, or seeing it as so natural that it is pointless to deny or sublimate it. Cahill says such simplification is false and does not reflect the reality of sex and sexual desire. She argues that humans are animals, and thus sexual desires are natural to us, but we are a special sort of animal, one that is self-conscious and able to make choices rationally. She sees a duality in sexual experience: urgent and physical, spiritual and affective.<sup>32</sup> She argues that humans are capable of evil, pettiness, and harm to one

another, and when sinfulness results from sex, it is usually because someone was unable to rule in other sins or weaknesses of character.<sup>33</sup>

Cahill writes that sexual ethics always presuppose a social vision. Current Western views of sexual morality are in line with Enlightenment teachings on freedom and rationality and focus on individual fulfillment. Liberalism thus supports any sexual liaison between consenting adults that is mutually agreed upon and causes no harm, while ignoring a person's communal nature and the important role sex does have in procreation. She believes that Christian sexual ethics can add an important reminder of the communal and service-oriented aspects of sex to liberal relativism. She writes: 'Perspectives on sexuality in both Testaments favor the institutionalization of sexuality in heterosexual, monogamous, permanent, and procreative marriage that furthers the cohesiveness and continuity of family, church, and body politic, and that respects and nurtures the affective commitments to which spouses give sexual expression.'<sup>34</sup>

Cahill is pleased that Christian sexual ethics has progressed beyond a view that sex is only for procreation, embracing the view that 'passionate sexual love is not only to be controlled, but to be affirmed; not only to be of service, but to be enjoyed.'<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, she would like to see further de-emphasis of the idea of sin associated with lust and sexuality, in favor of an emphasis on responsibility. She suggests two new criteria to serve as basic guidelines for responsible sexual activity. There should be: '(1) an intentionally permanent commitment to partnership and love; and (2) the willingness of the couple to welcome and nurture as a couple any children that result from their union'. Under this rubric, sex without any attachment between the partners is wrong, as is any sexual coercion. Cahill leaves room for the interpretation that committed pre-marital sex might be acceptable, as well as attempts to avoid conception, and even homosexual sex.<sup>36</sup>

Such views as Selling's and Cahill's, which leave room for sex to occur outside of marriage, are still out of keeping with official Catholic teachings. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a body empowered by the Vatican to police Catholic teachings, explicitly rejects any attempts to justify sexual activity outside of marriage, no matter how committed and responsible the couple might be. It asserts that:

No matter how definite the intention of those who indulge in premarital sex, the fact is that such liaisons can scarcely ensure mutual sincerity and fidelity in a relationship between a man and a woman, nor, especially, can they protect it from inconstancy of desires or whim . . . Experience teaches that love must be protected by the stability of marriage if sexual intercourse is really to meet the demands of its own finality and human dignity.<sup>37</sup>

Such statements not only reaffirm the importance of the procreative function of sex, but harken back to Augustine's belief that marriage is necessary to control sexual desires and make them less sinful. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also reaffirms Paul's notion that man is held captive by his 'bodily members' which

make him a slave to sin, as well as Augustine's belief that concupiscence is always with us as a result of Original Sin.<sup>38</sup>

### *B. Judaism*

Within Judaism, the primary source of law is the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and interpretations included in the Talmud. It is important to note that although the Torah and the Talmud are the basis for the beliefs and practices of all religious Jews, there are highly different interpretations of these texts and how strictly various Jewish groups (such as Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) expect their members to adhere to these laws. In our presentation of the Jewish tradition, we draw mainly on Orthodox (and Conservative) interpretations. Reform Judaism is in many ways closer to the secular liberal position depicted below than to Orthodox Judaism.

There is a current that runs through these Jewish traditions, to wit that because sex is a gift from God, it cannot be sinful. A thirteenth-century scholar writes 'Let a man not consider sexual union as something ugly or repulsive, for thereby we blaspheme God'.<sup>39</sup> Judaism does not separate sex and sexual desire from procreation, as modern culture often does. At the same time, it not only permits, but encourages, sexual activity even when conception is not possible. Pleasure and intimacy are seen as equally valuable and accepted purposes of sex.<sup>40</sup> Tenth-century philosopher and Talmudic scholar Saadiah Gaon writes that sex 'increases the soul's gladness and gaiety, it drives gloomy thoughts from the mind and serves as an antidote to melancholy. And there cannot be anything reprehensible about the sex act since God's holy men in the Bible engaged in it with His approval'.<sup>41</sup>

Sex is seen as something clean and neutral, which can either be used for good purposes, such as expressing love or conceiving children, or abused for purely personal gratification. As Nachmanides, a Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, writes, 'For just as the hands of a human being can write a Torah and can create the highest sanctity, and at the same time they are high and praiseworthy, and when they steal and murder they are evil and loathsome, so too in this area of life'.<sup>42</sup>

This position about sex is consistent with Judaism's general view of human nature. Judaism holds no illusions that humans are by nature pure and good, unless influenced otherwise by outside forces. Though man is created in the divine image of God, human nature contains both a 'good urge' and an 'evil urge'. Thus theologian Abraham Heschel reflects on the 'mystery of the evil urge that is in the heart of man' and observes that because of it 'the human species is capable of producing not only saints and prophets, but also scoundrels and "enemies of God"'.<sup>43</sup>

In the Talmud, a collection of rabbinical interpretations of the Hebrew bible, the desire for illicit sex, such as adultery, is portrayed as inextricably linked to positive, licit sexual desire, which is necessary for the continuation of life. The Rabbis of the Talmud did not consider it possible to have a world in which only productive, positive sexual desire exists. Sexual desire in general is referred to as the Evil Desire,

because it has so much potential to be destructive and uncontrollable. At the same time, sexual desire is recognized as a good, because it comes from God.<sup>44</sup> In discussing the concept of 'evil inclination', Rabbi Samuel ban Nahman writes, 'But how can an admittedly evil inclination be considered *good*, let alone *very good*? Because without it, man would not care to build a home, he would neither marry nor beget children, nor would he pursue a livelihood'.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear, however, that the Jewish tradition recognizes the potentially dangerous nature of sexual desire. 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is included among the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses in Exodus, showing that from the earliest days of the Jewish people, sex was recognized as something that needs to be contained within clear boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable. The Torah places numerous controls on sexual activity, many of which serve to maintain social order, particularly by protecting the institution of marriage and the stability of households.<sup>46</sup> Men are forbidden from having sex with other men's wives, including with women betrothed to other men.<sup>47</sup> A man who has sexual relations with an un-betrothed girl is obligated to marry her.<sup>48</sup> Sexual relations are prohibited not only among blood relations, but also among people likely to live within an extended household. Thus, a man is prohibited from having sex with his brother's or father's wives, or with his daughter-in-law.<sup>49</sup> (Indeed, as in much of Judaism, which is a way of life more than a theology, one can divine much about its assumptions from its long list of do's and don'ts.)

In Judaism, the ability to be disciplined and take an active role in shaping one's own character is considered to be one of the greatest accomplishments toward which humans can strive. Rabbi Ben Zoma writes, 'Who is strong? He who subdues his passions. For it is written: "Greater is the person who rules over his personality and spirit than he who has conquered a city"'.<sup>50</sup>

Like in most religions, Judaism traditionally teaches that sex outside of marriage is morally wrong and an offense to God. Within marriage however, sex is considered a *mitzvah*, or religious duty and a joy, rather than something shameful. The Torah actively prescribes sexual relations within marriage and even specifies that couples should have sex on the Sabbath and on certain holidays as a way of sanctifying the days. The purpose of sex is not only for reproduction, but also to strengthen and deepen the marital relationship.<sup>51</sup> The Hebrew word *yichud*, which refers to the final part of the marriage ceremony, and more generally to marital love, encompasses both the commitment and the sex act that bind a married couple together.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the law requires that the sex act be accompanied by *kiruv*, or closeness, and *simchah*, or joy.<sup>53</sup> The twelfth-century scholar Maimonides taught that intercourse should only happen if both partners are willing, conscious of what they are doing, and 'in a happy mood'. He further cautioned that 'A wife is not to be treated as a concubine . . . The bedroom atmosphere must have honor'.<sup>54</sup>

To ensure that one does not get carried away and forget to treat his or her partner with sufficient respect, allowing the partner to become merely an object that serves to provide sexual gratification, it is important that one learns to control his or her sexual desires.<sup>55</sup> Orthodox scholar Maurice Lamm writes that sex can be a 'blind, nearly

irresistible force seeking wanton release on the biological level, and in this way its sanctity is perverted. Paradoxically, sex—the most chaotic, powerful, and untutored drive—can only be fully experienced when it includes an element of discipline and precision.<sup>56</sup> He further asserts that ‘Judaism is suspicious of powerful drives that cannot be disciplined, regarding ‘blind decisions’ as non-ethical.’<sup>57</sup> Lamm interprets the wording of God’s commandment in Deuteronomy that ‘Thou shalt not *desire*’ (*lo tit-aveh*) another man’s wife to imply that man is able to control his desires, otherwise God would not command him to do so.<sup>58</sup>

Marriage has a role in Judaism, as it has for Augustine: helping one to maintain control over his or her sexual desires. One passage in the Talmud teaches, ‘He who reaches the age of twenty and has not married, spends all his days in sin. Sin actually? Say better in the thought of sin.’<sup>59</sup> The need for purity in thought and desire, as well as in action, is underscored by the law of *tsnius* (modesty, humility, and privacy), which requires restraint and self-discipline with the goal of keeping sex from coming to dominate one’s conduct and thoughts. *Tsnius* calls on men and women to be modest in their dress and behavior in order to help those around them control their own lust and desire. The Torah teaches that men are responsible for looking on women with respect, and women are responsible in turn for helping men by refraining from consciously trying to be seductive.<sup>60</sup>

Among Orthodox Jews, physical contact of any kind is forbidden between unmarried men and women once they have reached maturity. They hold that once a man and woman make physical contact—even in so mild a form as touching hands—their ability to exercise control over their desires becomes much more difficult. Physical contact is an important border separating a relationship of friendship from one of sexual intimacy. The prohibition against touching also helps young people maintain a respect for the opposite sex and for the meaningfulness of physical affection. It prevents them from developing the habits of casual physical affection common to contemporary American youths. Rabbi Pinchas Stolper writes in *Jewish Alternatives in Love, Dating and Marriage*, a book published by the National Conference of Synagogue Youth and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and aimed at an audience of young men and women, ‘Any sort of physical contact or intimacy, as it brings people closer together, tends to bind—a kind of glue as it were—but as a glue should be used to *bind* together *only* when a permanent bond is decided upon, physical contact should begin only after the marriage itself has been formalized.’<sup>61</sup>

Rabbi Stolper argues, ‘Without God, *man and woman* lose control, sink to the level of the beast, and their relationship assumes the nature of ‘fire’, with all its potentially negative, destructive, self-consuming and dangerous possibilities. For this reason, young people are cautioned not to *play with fire*. They may lose control and destroy not only their relationships, but themselves as well.’<sup>62</sup>

Men and women are called on to control their sexual desires after marriage as well, in observing the law of *tabaras hamishpacha*, which prohibits a woman from engaging in sex during menstruation and for a week after.<sup>63</sup> When a woman is in this

state of *niddah*, she and her husband must refrain not only from sexual acts, but from any form of intimacy that might lead to arousal or sexual thoughts.<sup>64</sup>

Laws such as the *tabaras hamishpacha* and *tsnius* could be misinterpreted as implying that sex and sexuality are somehow impure or sinful, contrary to the Jewish teachings that sex is holy. Aryeh Kaplan, an Orthodox Rabbi, explains the connection thus: ‘the Torah’s strictures surrounding sex can be compared to those surrounding the permissible uses of a Torah scroll’, he writes. ‘It is precisely because a Torah scroll is so sacred that the uses to which it can be put are so severely restricted. The same is true of sex.’

Many of these points, including different interpretations—some very strict and some quite a bit less so—are also found in Islam.<sup>65</sup> As our purpose is not to survey religious views of sex and sexuality but merely depict the containing view of sex, which we hope we’ve done by this point, we move on—to the liberating position.

## II. Liberation Views of Sex and Sexuality

### A. Sexual Freedom

As of the 1960s, a conception of sex, sexuality, and sexual ethics developed that was radically opposed to the traditional teachings of both Judaism and Christianity. Claiming to be based on rationality, and drawing heavily on psychology and physiology, according to this conception because sex is natural, sexual expression is important for psychological health. Moreover, many sexual and social problems are caused by social, cultural, and parental repression of the sexual drive. Thus, creating healthy individuals and a healthy society requires liberating sex by removing the old prohibitions and taboos created in the past by ignorance, traditions, myth, and religion.

This view is well-represented, albeit in particularly extreme form, by the writings of French jurist and intellectual Rene Guyon, whose volumes *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*<sup>66</sup> and *Sexual Freedom*<sup>67</sup> attempt to formulate, as he puts it, a new ‘doctrine of sexual legitimacy and sexual freedom.’<sup>68</sup> Writing in the 1930s, Guyon held that ‘prohibitions lie at the root of neuroses’. Because the sex drive is not only natural and legitimate, but necessary and unavoidable, one who is forced by society to deny his sex drive becomes ‘engaged in an unceasing warfare with nature and with physiological laws’. Guyon thus concludes that ‘neuroses which are the outcome of censorship, repression, and prohibition entail serious harm to the bodily and mental stability of the individual’.<sup>69</sup>

Guyon and other proponents of sexual freedom attribute to sexual repression not only the neuroses of individuals, but many of the ills of society as a whole. As Guyon writes, ‘There are, to-day, numerous sexual malcontents; it is the existence of this vast army of agitated and anxious persons which explains the modern unrest . . . for anti-sexuality has here been imposed very stringently and is responsible for innumerable evils.’<sup>70</sup> He holds that a large number of crimes are caused directly by a lack of sexual

freedom, including assault, rape, and murder. Guyon explains: 'People suffocate under the load of prohibitions; they turn troubled eyes towards some means of escape from interference with and persecution of their natural tendencies, and finding none within the confines of the legal, they slip downward into a pit of baseness wherein they commit the most heinous offences'.<sup>71</sup>

The principles of sexual freedom seek to overturn dominant, old fashioned systems of sexual morality, and attack in particular those that are religiously based. Guyon blames Christian teachings about carnal sin for 'poisoning Western civilization' with paranoia and guilt complexes regarding sex, as well as with 'ludicrous' customs, such as chaperones for young couples.<sup>72</sup> He holds that any belief in sin is incompatible with the idea that sexual acts can be legitimate.<sup>73</sup> He interprets Jewish and Christian teachings that passions need to be controlled as meaning that desire must be totally suppressed 'in deference to a futile asceticism or a metaphysical chimera'.<sup>74</sup> He believes the sexual mores encouraged by 'Christian dictatorship' are immoral as they encourage 'falsehood, hypocrisy, and cowardice'.<sup>75</sup> Guyon holds that chastity 'is veritably the triumph of neurosis'<sup>76</sup> and attacks the 'rule of abstinence as illogical and monstrous', comparing it to training oneself to do without eating.<sup>77</sup>

Against the sexual morality taught by religion, Guyon promotes 'rationalism', which understands sex scientifically. He asserts that sexual acts are 'plainly beyond good and evil as are any other physiological functions' and are 'as legitimate as our other bodily needs'.<sup>78</sup> He denies any link between sex and human dignity and insists that sexual gratification 'is a simple physiological act devoid of moral significance'.<sup>79</sup> If in some Christian texts procreation was held up as the only valid end of a sexual act, Guyon goes to the opposite extreme, implying that the sex act is an end in itself. He writes, 'the sexual object does not form a necessary part of the appreciation or performance of a sexual act, every mechanical realization being a sufficient end in itself'.<sup>80</sup> Affection, he says, has no necessary link to sex, and 'the union of the two is accidental and episodic'.<sup>81</sup>

Guyon holds that there is 'no warrant for the contention that either men or women really like specialized love, and cannot find full satisfaction in unions which do not look forward to the morrow'.<sup>82</sup> He describes women's interest in marriage as 'parasitism' and denies that a wife can offer a husband anything a mistress cannot.<sup>83</sup> He writes with disgust of elderly women who 'being misshapen and no longer objects of desire, take advantage of the ties of marriage to go on imposing themselves upon the husbands who are fettered to them but are sick of them'.<sup>84</sup>

Guyon believes that jealousy comes naturally to both humans and other animals and is related to man's most primitive proprietary instincts. 'Jealousy', he writes, 'is a distortion of the idea of ownership, which has here assumed an exaggerated and atrociously selfish form'. He argues that sexual jealousy derives from society's conventional interpretation of property rights, which see married men and women as each other's property. 'Jealousy has received most scandalous encouragement from social morality', Guyon argues, using as evidence society's condoning of crimes committed against an unfaithful spouse. In polygamous societies, he argues, women

bear no jealousy towards their husband's other wives, because their existence is accepted. As Guyon sees it, his principles of rationalism and sexual freedom will help to prevent jealousy by convincing men and women that they have no proprietary claims on one another.<sup>85</sup>

Guyon does not view sexual expression as inappropriate for any age group. Indeed, he speaks specifically of the negative effect of sexual repression on young people, arguing that it makes them moody, dull, and unenergetic. 'The true gala of boy or girl', he writes, 'is the gala of sex, the festivity of possessing and of being possessed.'<sup>86</sup>

There is no hint in Guyon's writings that he finds any form of sexual expression dangerous or degrading, and he explicitly states that 'a sexual act, of whatever kind, needs no other justification than the preference of the persons concerned'. He sets the limit of sexual freedom at injuring or doing violence to another person, but sees no need for further boundaries.<sup>87</sup> He admits the possibility that a man or woman may take sexual freedom to a point of excess, resulting in harm of one sort or another, but he regards this as a choice that an individual makes, and not a valid concern of either the law or social norms. In addition, he sees social and religious values as useless in preventing such excess. 'Moral education', Guyon writes, 'proves incompetent to restrain the ardors of sex.'<sup>88</sup>

Guyon provides an extreme, albeit influential, example of the liberation approach to sexuality. More moderate versions of the same ideas are found in many progressive and 'scientific' writings about sex, for instance, in works of sex researchers Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson.<sup>89</sup> We limit ourselves here to examining only one other position, that of Freud, because it differs in important ways from that of Guyon.

### B. Freud

Freud is subject to different interpretations, especially when one compares some of his works to others. We examine here only his ideas on sex as presented in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In what is his most widely read work, Freud considers the question of why people seem to harbor discomfort, and even hostility, in regards to civilization, in spite of the many comforts it provides. He considers the possibility, which he admits as 'astonishing', that 'what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions'.<sup>90</sup>

Civilization, Freud argues, requires men to ignore, or repress, their natural instincts to seek pleasure. The 'pleasure principle' 'dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start', but is 'at loggerheads with the whole world, with the macrocosm as much as with the microcosm'. The external world contains many dangers and sources of suffering, so while 'unrestricted satisfaction of every need' might seem the easiest and most attractive way to live, it involves a lack of caution and fore-planning, and it usually backfires. Instead, most people learn to moderate their desire for happiness and heed the 'reality principle', accepting less suffering as a

more realistic reason to be happy than unbridled pursuits of their pleasures.<sup>91</sup> Hence, without fully giving up on the pleasure principle, people attempt to control their instincts in order to avoid suffering. Thus, their reason is not moral concern or regard for others, but a better economy of self-benefit.

Additional insight into the issues raised by Freud is gained by examining his concept of sublimation. Freud argues that we can sublimate our natural instincts by shifting the drives involved into areas of conduct in which we are less likely to be frustrated by external barriers, often to internal, intellectual pursuits. In the most successful cases, one sublimates by following a talent, thus an artist takes pleasure in creating, a scientist in discovering, and so on. Freud adds that even when one does possess the needed talent, sublimation may fail to protect against suffering.<sup>92</sup> In short, sublimation (according to at least one major line of interpretation) cannot spare one frustrations and a desire to regress to less mature, more self-satisfying, and less socially-constructive behavior. At the same time, sublimation is a key component of civilization because it makes possible pursuits of the mind, such as science and art.<sup>93</sup>

According to Freud, containing sexual expression is not merely at the root of civilization as the term is widely understood, but also at the root of sound interpersonal relations. Freud argues that a man's desire not to be separated from his sexual partner and a woman's desire not to be separated from her off-spring, binds families and communities together.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Freud maintains that all forms of non-sexual love—friendship, affection, love of mankind—derive from 'sensual' (or sexual) love. He calls these non-sexual forms of love 'aim-inhibited love' because they result from the sublimation of sexual needs. Freud believes that a small number of people find happiness by transferring sexual love of one person to a non-sexual love of mankind, thus sublimating their need for sex into external pursuits. More commonly, affection and friendship occur when the aims of sexual love are inhibited—but sexual quest remains in the subconscious.<sup>95</sup> That is, being repressed sexually will keep gnawing at the person.

Aside from sublimation, civilization restricts sex to varying degrees in different societies through taboos, laws and customs. This restriction, Freud argues, is necessary in order to divert energy away from sexual life and towards economic life. Thus, in the West, society restricts the type of sexual activity that is acceptable to heterosexual genital sex and confines even that to marriage.<sup>96</sup> Freud believes that people who cannot adjust to these limitations on their sexual lives become neurotic.<sup>97</sup> (Freud makes a similar argument regarding another instinct; he argues that civilization also places limits on human aggressiveness. But aggressiveness is also basic to human nature, and is rarely given up voluntarily, as 'instinctual passions are stronger than reasonable interests'.<sup>98</sup>)

Thus, Freud concludes, 'If civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man's sexuality, but on his aggressiveness, we can understand better why it is hard for him to be happy in that civilization. In fact, primitive man was better off in knowing no restrictions of instinct'. Freud recognizes, however, that humans gain a great deal

of security and protection from civilization when they sacrifice the satisfaction of their instinctual desires. He points out that studies of primitive cultures suggest that 'their instinctual life is in no way to be envied for its freedom.'<sup>99</sup>

Civilization also allows humans to control the outside world to a great extent, and has been successful in protecting them and fending off physical suffering. Civilization also brings 'beauty, cleanliness and order', which have come to be seen as necessities and sources of pleasure to modern man.<sup>100</sup> Civilization may restrict liberty and regulate human relationships, but this is necessary in order to prevent brute force from ruling, and to guarantee equality and justice.<sup>101</sup>

Thus while Guyon sees not merit nor benefit in controlling sexual expression, Freud is highly ambivalent. On the one hand he is clear about the great benefits generated by sublimation and mores that set some boundaries for sexual expression, but on the other hand, he is painfully aware of the high costs exacted by such inhibitions set against unbounded sexual expression.

### III. A Communitarian Approach

As both the religious and the secular views—containing and liberating—briefly surveyed indicate, one's view of sexuality and the ways it ought to be treated is much affected by one's view of human nature and the relations between the self and the community (or society), often referred to as a question of the foundation of social order.<sup>102</sup> Thus, if one views people as fully-formed individuals who are free agents and rational actors, and whose social relations are based on voluntary contracts that serve the self-interests of the parties involved, there is no fundamental reason to fear or restrict sexual expression. (Rape and even undesired advances would be considered aggression rather than sexual expressions and treated like all acts of violence, by the law, itself based on a social contract freely reached by those subject to it.) The sexual approach that suggests that any conduct consenting adults engage in is socially and morally acceptable is a logical conclusion of this libertarian viewpoint, shared by a fair number of contemporary liberals. It also has become increasingly prevalent in the 'hook up' culture of high school and college students.<sup>103</sup>

The libertarian approach, highly optimistic about human nature and social order, has one core weakness that stands out even if one accepts its basic assumptions and is particularly relevant for the issue at hand: its view of children.<sup>104</sup> Most libertarians simply do not address the question of whether their theory in general, and its implications for sexual conduct in particular, applies to children. Some do imply that minors should be treated as free agents, akin to adults; in its most extreme form, the argument has been made that the age of consent should be done away with altogether. More moderate versions hold that minors should be given information (e.g., about contraception), but schools should not engage in sexual *education* in the sense of trying to introduce moral do's and don'ts. Sex education is to be taught as part of human biology and not imbued with either religious or liberal values. Indeed, along these lines, advocates have favored providing teenagers, in the nurse's office or

otherwise, with bowls full of condoms. Sexuality, according to the Sexuality Information and Education Council, a highly influential liberal body that promotes secular sex education, sex is healthy and so is its expression.<sup>105</sup> In line with the same basic approach, consequences for the common good are not considered as an independent factor. Thus, if a person is informed about the risks of HIV (or driving without seatbelts or without a motorcycle helmet) and still seeks to proceed unsafely, he ought to be free to do so because, as it is assumed and repeatedly stated, he would have to live with the consequences. Consequences for others (say his children if he dies) or the community (saddled with the costs of attending to the children) are not considered.

In contrast, a communitarian<sup>106</sup> may well hold not only that children are unlike adults, but that adults both young and old also need a measure of social protection. People are influenced by their culture and sub-cultures, and if these promote unsafe behavior, there is a public interest (a common good) in providing advocacy for proper conduct and, under some conditions, safety promoting government regulations.

Next, a communitarian would note that individual actions have significant, sometimes inevitable, consequences for the common good. If a whole generation of professionals, educators, and artists die of HIV, as they are doing in some African countries, the societal costs are enormous and fall on many not directly involved in the decisions whether or not to engage in unsafe behavior, including their wives, parents, and children, as well as other members of the community. This also holds, albeit less dramatically, for STDs and teen pregnancy. Thus, *society, a communitarian would stress, has a compelling interest in limiting certain forms of sexual conduct.*

Religions, in all but their most ascetic forms, tolerate sex if devoted to procreation. Libertarians view procreation as a choice people make akin to purchasing consumer goods. (Indeed, studies show many ponder whether they can afford another child or should instead purchase a new good, often a car.) Recently there has been a movement of sorts that argues that children are an ‘inconvenience’ and a ‘nuisance’, and that people should not be under any social pressure to have any.<sup>107</sup> Many contemporary societies, including Germany, Italy, and Japan, have fallen well below a healthy birth rate as fewer and fewer people ‘bother’ to have children and prefer the freedoms that come from having sex only without procreating. A communitarian would point to the societal value of having children not only for the economic well-being of society, but also for attending to the aging population, for societal innovation and adaptability to a constantly changing world, and a major source of profound nurturing affective relationships, essential for human flourishing.

Communitarian thinking is particularly supportive of the idea that sexual expression—if part of a sustained relationship (not what colloquially is called casual sex or more recently hooking up)—is a major reinforcement of human bonding. Sexual expression, from this viewpoint, ought not to be treated as if it were a mere personal act (the way masturbation might be), but as a profoundly relational act, with deep personal, interpersonal, and societal consequences. One need not consider

detached sexual encounters between people a crime or sinful to note that the more sex is carried out in such a detached manner, the poorer the social relationships, the more atomistic society, and the more frayed the societal fabric. And the less such sex serves to reinforce personal well-being, which requires being part of sustainable relationships.

Furthermore, the more sex is detached from meaningful relationships, all other things being equal, the higher levels of anti-social behavior are to be expected, not merely or even primarily directly from casual sex, but from the anomie that results from impoverished social relationships. It might be argued that we are confusing cause and consequence, that the decline of societal bonds encouraged casual sex, rather than that casual sex undermined these relationships. Although this cannot be documented here, we suggest that even if a decline in societal bonds preceded much of the casualness of sex, as it feeds on itself and expands, casual sex becomes a contributing factor to societal demise. Such is especially the case when it is promoted by strong sexual liberation ideology.

There is another profound reason casual sex is incompatible with a good, communitarian society. Sexual encounters have obvious consequences, ranging from pregnancy to disease. When sex occurs within social relationships, these relationships help define the responsibilities involved. If there is an unwanted pregnancy, how will it be treated, and who will bare the economic and social costs? If one person is infected, what are his or her duties toward previous and prospective partners? And so on. None of these issues are resolved when sex is casual. Attending to responsibilities, and not merely rights, is a core tenet of responsive communitarianism.

Casual sex is not only likely to weaken the role sex can play in constructing a relationship, but also to undermine other relationships that are in place. A community that does not contain sexual expression in some set of approved relationships, that scoffs at monogamous inclinations as an obsession with private property and sees jealousy as a sickness, disregards that both are found in practically all societies in all cultures throughout recorded history. Indeed, study after study of attempts to abolish marriage and replace exclusive sexual relationships with uninhibited ones—from socialist experiments of the early twentieth century to the communes of the 1960s—show that such relationships cannot be sustained.<sup>108</sup> Sociologist Barrington Moore found a ‘panhuman desire to cast a veil of privacy over the sexual act.’<sup>109</sup> He posits that all societies have an interest in making sexuality a private thing not because sex is considered immoral in itself, but because sexual passions can be disruptive to relationships, especially when accompanied by aggression or jealousy. Therefore ‘one reason for privacy may be to keep these explosive and socially dangerous impulses under control.’<sup>110</sup> Adultery and infidelity may be common, and there are greater threats to personal and social well-being than detached sex (e.g., violence), but a communitarian—mindful of the importance of social bonds—will place them on the negative side of the societal balance sheet rather than viewing them as signs of growing liberation. Hence, a communitarian would advocate mores that help to sustain relationships rather than undermine them.

At the same time, there is no reason for a communitarian to hold that 'recreational sex' (sex not related to procreation) is in any way troublesome. The relevant question for a communitarian is not whether sexual activity is tied to procreation, but whether it is casual or embedded in a relationship.

In reference to the social mores against casual sex that communitarian thinking ought to embrace, it is important not to view a person as a unitary actor with unambiguous preferences, who either desires to engage in sex or not. People are deeply conflicted along many lines, above all between their animal base (which includes sexual urges) and their meta-preferences, which are in part socially-constructed. Thus, a man may be tempted by his neighbor's wife, but also realize that it is morally unacceptable to approach her sexually. The resulting view of human nature is one of profound, continuous, and unavoidable conflict between one's desires and various moral-social tenets.<sup>111</sup>

The next step is to recognize that the results of the struggle between desires (which themselves are in part socially shaped, but have a strong biological base and cannot simply be ignored or shaped at will) and moral tenets reflect the strength of the social fabric and of moral education. The more harmonious and effective the messages conveyed by schools, places of worship, and the media that urge channeling sexual expression into socially approved relationships, the more the actors are going to voluntarily sublimate their sexual urges. The more conflicted and otherwise poorly-advanced these messages are, the more the actors are going to feel that they are being arbitrarily restrained and seek to undermine or circumvent socially-set constraints.

Although in principle a society cannot function if it allows unfettered sexual expression, nor can its members lead a contented, let alone flourishing, life, it does not follow that the more sexual expression is restrained, the sounder the human environment will be from a sociological and or psychological viewpoint. Moreover, although sexual expression must be channeled, the channels can be too narrowly constructed. This is a matter that theocracies and authoritarian societies have to contend with, but it is hardly an issue for contemporary free societies. Indeed, many of the texts of sexual liberation, even in their more moderate forms, read as if they were written in earlier periods or still speak to an age when people were made to feel profoundly guilty about sexual thoughts or premarital relationships. There may well be some pockets of Western society where sexual expression is unduly oppressed, but by and large the main challenge it faces is whether one can find ways to re-channel more of the sexual expression into sustainable relationships.

Once it is understood that channeling sexual expression is essential for personal and social well-being, a communitarian would next note that a society and its members are better off the more compelling are the moral tenets. When strong moral tenets are in place, less policing by the state is needed to prevent people from conducting themselves in ways that are sexually inappropriate or damaging to themselves and to the common good. Given the strength of sexual urges, rarely, if ever, is socialization fully successful or is sublimation free of distortions. However, societies and communities are better off the more they (a) are able to help people

truly accept the limitations on sexual expression their well-being requires; (b) do not curb sexual expression to the point that the resulting distortion significantly undermines the social order; and (c) are able to channel some sexual energy into other pro-social pursuits.

The communitarian position as outlined here differs greatly from both the strongly religious-containing and the secular-liberating models. The communitarian position draws on Freud's insight of the conflicted nature of human nature, but goes beyond his concern for the economy of the self to be also strongly attentive to the common good.

#### IV. Implications for Sexual Education

The communitarian position etched out above is reflected in a position paper, 'Education for Interpersonal Relations, Family Life, and Intimacy,'<sup>112</sup> prepared by the Task Force on Interpersonal Relations, Family Life, and Intimacy,<sup>113</sup> composed by the Communitarian Network. Segments of the position paper follow to illustrate the implications of the communitarian position for specific policies.

##### A. *The Basic Program Outline*

Education for interpersonal relations, family life, and intimacy ('intimacy,' in short) should occur in all public schools, at least in junior high schools (or middle schools) and high schools. The program should include discussion of human nature, an examination of human beings as social creatures who require one another; who find deep satisfaction, longer and healthier lives, when they are part of lasting social relations; and who have transcendental needs for meanings and moral values. The program would explore the responsibilities that we have for one another as members of a community, and ways we can strengthen our relations with one another, as co-workers, neighbors, friends and potential family members. This topic includes teaching ways to work out differences, by techniques such as improved communication skills and conflict resolution. Discussion of family life will explore matters such as the nature of the commitments involved in marriage; sharing decision-making in such matters as relocation and forming and adhering to budget; and the issues raised by intimate relations, ranging from the avoidance of exploitative relations to the use of contraceptives.

Schools now cover a good part of these topics in a variety of classes such as social studies and home economics, while ignoring other topics. Our main recommendation is to combine some of these elements already in place with new ones, to provide a comprehensive and morally sound approach to interpersonal relations and to provide the needed context for teaching sex education.

We call for the abolition of value-free sex education, but oppose those who would bar education about sexual topics from public schools. Instead of approaching the discussion of sex in public schools as a matter of health and safety bereft of moral

content or forbidding discussion of sex out of traditional moral concerns (seeking to rely exclusively on the family and religious institutions for this purpose), we stand forthrightly for a new approach. We favor a program of education that provides our children with the facts they need to know, within the context of values that responsible and moral persons seek to affirm and embody in their lives. Hence, we maintain that sex education should not be taught as a chapter in human hygiene or human biology, akin to dental care or car mechanics. We can find better sources and role models for teaching this subject than what the birds and the bees do. Nor should sex education be treated as if it is, was, or could be value-free.

Specifically, a public school program of sex education should be folded into a much more encompassing treatment of interpersonal relations, family life, and intimacy, to be developed by taking into account the premises and principles here articulated. We provide only a general outline of such program. Working out the details of the suggested approach and adapting it to various age groups, remains to be carried out.

### *B. The Context of Character Building*

Developing a strong character needs to be at the core of all education programs, and particularly of programs dedicated to interpersonal relations, family life, and intimacy. Persons of weak character cannot take responsibility for their actions, abide by values they themselves believe in, be good partners in a relationship, or be upstanding members of a community. Character development is essential because without it, all other educational efforts will be undermined (as we see in disorderly classrooms), and whatever education is imparted will be woefully lacking.

Two personality capabilities stand out as leading the agenda of character building: First, a person of good character is able to restrain his or her raw impulses by channeling them into socially constructive and morally sound avenues rather than mindlessly yielding to them. Such a person can express affection and commitment in socially and morally appropriate manners. Second, a person of good character can empathize with the other person involved who may have different needs or be in a different stage of sexual and social development.<sup>114</sup>

### *C. Implications for Sex Education*

Specifically, when the general orientation of the program is brought to bear on sex education, the program should stress that bringing children into the world is a moral act, one that entails a set of personal and social responsibilities. We all need to appreciate that sex is not a merely biological act, sex is much more than 'recreational'. It is an act that can carry with it serious consequences, including loss of life. Responsible persons weigh the moral issues involved; they take into account that yielding to impulse in this area can lead to dire consequences for the child to be born,

restrict the life chances of the parents, and corrode the values of the communities in which we are all members.

*Education for intimacy seeks to encourage children to refrain from having children.* Children born to children often suffer considerably physiologically, psychologically, and otherwise. These babies are more prone to illnesses, anxieties, and other afflictions. They often become public charges in a society that is increasingly disinclined to attend to children properly.

Children who have babies often find their life opportunities seriously constricted. They are much less likely to complete their studies, find work, and otherwise develop their own lives, economically, socially and otherwise.

When educational programs favor that young people defer engaging in sex, the question is raised, should sex be deferred until a person is 18? 21? Married? The question is often raised by those who argue that sex is only proper within marriage. While much is to be said for deferring sex until two people have made the kind of permanent commitment and mutual responsibility implied by marriage, marriage does not provide the only criterion. We would urge young teens to defer both sex and marriage on the ground that they are likely not to be ready to make a responsible decision in either department. And we are less troubled by intimate relations between mature adults than between children. Maturity is measured by behavior rather than chronological age, but it is more common among those who are older than those who are younger.

#### *D. 'Responsible Sex' or Abstinence?*

Many discussions of sex education start with the question of which sex education methodology to follow. We deliberately delayed addressing this issue to emphasize that if proper values and interpersonal skill development are included in the intimacy education program, intercourse is no longer the only issue or main focus. At the same time we maintain that programs that deal only with values or relations but exclude specific sex education are insufficient for reasons that will become evident shortly.

The methodology we favor diverges from the notion that sex should be described simply as a natural, healthy act and that children should be taught how to proceed safely, but not be discouraged otherwise. Statements such as 'sexuality is natural and healthy part of living' and 'all persons are sexual' may be correct by some standards of psychiatry (which consider all erotic responses sexual) but are open to gross misinterpretation when given to children, especially without the proper normative context. To state that 'the primary goal of sexuality education is the promotion of sexual health' is particularly unfortunate in this context. At the same time, we suggest approaches that treat sex not tied to procreation as sinful, shameful, or dirty should be avoided. To confess, in this context, that 'most merciful God, we confess we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves', may speak to some people with religious

commitments (but surely offends others); provided as a part of a statement about 'human sexuality' it sends a rather different message than the one we endorse here.

As we see it, sex should be viewed originally as a primordial urge. Like all others, it cannot be ignored and should not be suppressed, but its expressions must be subject to self-control. What is needed is (a) that a person will form judgments before he or she acts and (b) that a person will channel expression of this urge into morally and socially proper, responsible channels.

We cannot embrace narrow sex education programs that favor sharing full information about safe sex with young children. These programs tend to assume that the resulting effects of encouraging sexual activity are minimal. We oppose programs that address contraception in '... a tone of value neutrality, focusing on clinical information to the exclusion of social, emotional, and moral aspects of sex', as some do.<sup>115</sup>

At the same time we are also concerned about programs that promote abstinence only and do not take sufficiently into account the moral issues that arise by the many (even those in highly religious groups) who do not adhere to the high standards involved, engage in sex, and hence risk exposure to AIDS and other STDs, or experience unwanted pregnancies. These effects can be significantly reduced, albeit not eliminated, if they are convinced to learn about safer sex.

*We strongly urge educators, parents, community members, and policy-makers to note that there are ways to strongly urge young people to defer sexual behavior and still provide information for those who proceed anyhow, without making these two messages cancel each other out or seem contradictory.* We favor those programs that urge children to wait—at least until they are mature enough to deal with the consequences of their sexual acts—but also provide them with information on how to conduct themselves if they do not wait. Responsibility should include the notion of deferring sex and engaging in it in a responsible manner. We note that this position is advocated, among many others, by Bishop Albert Rouet, the chairman of the French Roman Catholic bishops social committee.<sup>116</sup>

In dealing with other topics, divorce for instance, religious groups have found ways to extol the importance of preserving marriage and still counsel those who divorce. The same can be done for sex education. One can strongly advocate abstinence, but also provide youngsters with age-appropriate sex information and ways to proceed responsibly and more safely, lest they rely on misconstrued notions provided by much less wholesome and irresponsible sources. (This approach is sometimes referred to as 'abstinence, plus'.)

#### *E. The School as a Total Environment*

The program envisioned should not be limited to lectures and reading material. Role playing, role modeling, peer mentoring, school assemblies, plays, tapes, and other educational techniques should be used. Acquiring communication skills allows people to fend off unwanted and premature sexual advances without feeling

inadequate, guilty, or isolated. They enable youngsters to handle conflicts that arise when the pace of development of two or more young people vary. Assemblies, peer juries, and other such educational techniques help develop the moral voice of the school community.

## Notes

- [1] See, for example: Califia, Pat. (1994) *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, Cleis Press, Pittsburgh, PA; Ginsberg, Allen (2000) *Deliberate Prose*, ed. Bill Morgan, Harper Collins, New York, pp. 167–172; Goldman, Emma (1983) *Red Emma Speaks*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, Schocken Books, New York, pp. 150–214; Reich, Wilhelm (1983) *Children of the Future*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York; Smith, Andy (2000–2001) ‘Group sex: communal ethics of eroticism, free love, and the extended family’, *The Fifth Estate*, Fall/Winter, vol. 35 #2.
- [2] ‘The responsive communitarian platform’, in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni, Rowman and Littlefield, New York (1998), pp. xxv–xxxix. On the difference between responsive or new communitarian thinking (on which we draw here) and others see [www.communitariannetwork.org](http://www.communitariannetwork.org); also Etzioni, Amitai (1996) *The New Golden Rule*, Basic Book, New York.
- [3] Lawler, Rev. Ronald, Boyle, Joseph & May, William E. (1985) *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation, & Defense*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, IN, p. 9.
- [4] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC (2002), p. 2362.
- [5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2351.
- [6] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1767.
- [7] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1767, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I–II.24.1 *corp. art.*
- [8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1767–1768.
- [9] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2339.
- [10] Baum, Cardinal William, Foreword to *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation, & Defense*, by Lawler, Rev. Ronald, Boyle, Joseph & May, William E. (1985) Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, IN, p. 7.
- [11] It is important to note that the Catholic discussion of sexuality recognizes sources of theological authority not as strongly held by all Christians. The sources of theological authority generally fall into four categories: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. For Protestant Christianity, scripture is primary, and the other three sources are relegated to hermeneutical tools for the interpretation of scripture. In Roman Catholicism, the tradition of the Church is primary. Thus, protestations to the contrary, scripture is held in nearly equal regard with reason and experience, which are generally combined in the category of natural law. Contemporary debates about sexuality in Roman Catholicism generally operate in the field of natural law with, at best, general or token overtures to scripture.
- [12] Fox, Thomas C. (1995) *Sexuality and Catholicism*, G. Braziller, New York, pp. 15–16.
- [13] 1 Corinthians 7: 8–9.
- [14] 1 Corinthians 7: 36–40.
- [15] St. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, Chapter 9, as cited *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Clark, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC (1996), p. 51.
- [16] St. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, Chapter 3, as cited in Clark, 46

- [17] St. Augustine, Epistle 6, as cited in Clark, 100.
- [18] St. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, Chapter 5, as cited in Clark, 48.
- [19] St. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, Chapter 1, as cited in Clark, 43.
- [20] Lawler, 37–40.
- [21] Aquinas, Thomas (1981) *Summa Theologica*, Fathers of the English Dominican Province, trans. Christian Classics Allen, TX, I–II.24.1.
- [22] Aquinas, *ST*, I–II.24.2.
- [23] Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.153.3.
- [24] Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.153.2.
- [25] Cahill, Lisa Sowle (1985) *Between the Sexes: Foundation for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA, p. 107.
- [26] Cahill, 112.
- [27] Fox, 25–28, 32–33.
- [28] Fox, 251–252.
- [29] Selling, Joseph, ‘The Development of Catholic Tradition and Sexual Morality’, in *Embracing Sexuality*, ed. Joseph Selling, 151.
- [30] Selling, 152–154.
- [31] Selling, 157–160.
- [32] Cahill, 2–3.
- [33] Cahill, 4.
- [34] Cahill, 143.
- [35] Cahill, 140–141.
- [36] Cahill, 149.
- [37] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. ‘Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics’, in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 8: Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching*, eds Charles E. Curran & Richard A. McCormick, Paulist Press, New York (1993), 379.
- [38] *Ibid*, 286.
- [39] As quoted in Lamm, Maurice (1980) *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, CA, p. 29.
- [40] Boyarin, Daniel (1995) ‘Dialectics of Desire’, in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathan Maganet, Berghahn Books, Providence, p. 35.
- [41] As cited in Lamm, 135.
- [42] As cited in Stolper, Pinchas (1984) *Jewish Alternatives in Love, Dating, and Marriage*, National Conference of Synagogue Youth/Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of American, New York, 22–23.
- [43] Heschel, Abraham (1959) *Between God and Man*, Harper & Brothers, New York, p. 239.
- [44] Boyarin, 28–29.
- [45] As quoted in Lamm, 30.
- [46] For a discussion of this, see Frymer-Kensky, Tikva (1995) ‘Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible’, in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathan Magonet, Bergahn Books, Providence, RI, 4–16.
- [47] Deuteronomy 22: 22–25.
- [48] Exodus 22: 16–17.
- [49] Leviticus 18. See discussion in Frymer-Kensky, 10–11.
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- [51] Stolper, 17.
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- [57] Lamm, 13.
- [58] Lamm, 43.
- [59] Rockman, 194.
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- [61] Stolper, 52.
- [62] Stolper, 24.
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- [69] Guyon, *Sexual Freedom*, 2–3.
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- [74] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 38.
- [75] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 50.
- [76] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 7.
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- [82] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 303.
- [83] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 206–209.
- [84] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 71.
- [85] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 281–293.
- [86] Guyon, *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*, 34.
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- [89] See, for example, Kinsey, Alfred C., Pomeroy, Wardell B. & Martin, Clyde E. (1948) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Saunders, Philadelphia; Kinsey, Alfred C. & the staff of the Institute for Sex Research (1953) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Saunder, Philadelphia; Masters, William H. & Johnson, Virginia E. (1966) *Human Sexual Response*, Little and Brown, Boston; Masters, William H. & Johnson, Virginia E. (1974) *The Pleasure Bond: A New Look at Sexuality and Commitment*, Little and Brown, Boston; Masters, William H., Johnson, Virginia E. & Kolodny, Robert C. (1982) *Human Sexuality*, Little and Brown, Boston.
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- [93] Freud, 44.
- [94] Freud, 46.
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- [105] *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2nd edition, National Guidelines Task Force, SIECUS (1996), p. 29.
- [106] Reference is to 'a' communitarian because communitarian positions differ from one another as those of other schools, and the views represented here are those of the authors and not of this 'school' of thought.
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- [112] Task Force on Interpersonal Relations, Family Life, and Intimacy, 'Education for Interpersonal Relations, Family Life, and Intimacy', (Washington, DC: The Communitarian Network). Available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/Intimacy.html>, accessed 2 June 2003.
- [113] The members of the Task Force included: William D'Antonio, Professor, Catholic University of America; Margaret Pruitt Clark, President, Advocates for Youth; Amitai Etzioni, Founder and Director, The Communitarian Network; Neil Gilbert, Acting Dean and Chernin Professor of Social Welfare and Social Services, University of California at Berkeley; Helen Liebowitz; Luigi Mastroianni, Director, Division of Human Reproduction, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center; David Meyers, Professor of Psychology, Hope College; David Popenoe, Professor, Rutgers University; and Isabel Sawhill, Senior Fellow, The Urban Institute.
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