

X. Sexual Nihilism & Alternative Stances

X.0 Preview of setting aside alternative stances,

I diagnose other stances as leading to moral nihilism whose prognosis, in a secular setting, is nihilism. All alternative stances hold that there is no right way for human sexuality to be and to be exercised. This is the moral neutrality of sexuality or sexual nihilism. Sexual nihilism amounts to holding that a significant part of human life has no right way to be – no morally proper goal. As a result, there is a threat that human life has no right way to be because such a significant part of human life has no right way to be. If there is no morally right way for human life to be, there is a serious threat that there is no significance for human life. Openness to nihilism via sexual nihilism is my main objection to alternative stances.

A negative attitude to nihilism is not the same as my attitude towards any sexual practices. My attitude towards sexual nihilism is existential; not moral. To avoid any impression that the negative feature I oppose is sexual wantonness I emphasize that sexual nihilists, as I oppose them, support legal and moral restrictions on expressions of sexuality. The sexual nihilism lies in holding that nothing in human sexuality supports these restrictions. My anxiety about the meaninglessness of sexuality is not distress about current sexual practices. I do not know enough about past or present practices to engage in cultural critique of the present age's sexual behavior. Indeed unless we are cultural imperialists who hold that one society represents the age we cannot talk about the sexual beliefs and practices of the present age. This chapter is not an expose of sexual decadence. See, though, a 2012 secular lamentation about sexuality in the U.S.A¹. Readers who are aware of sexual decadence in their societies are invited to consider whether or not a progressive stance on sexuality is a factor generating that decadence.

X.1 Not a complete list of alternative stances

For more than ten years I have been planning a book on sexual morality. Again and again, I tried to chart an exhaustive set of stances toward sexuality and morality. If I could have developed a small set of stances and shown that all except the parental stance led to sexual nihilism and then to moral nihilism, I would have had a strong case for the parental stance which supports the Paternal Principle. I kept striving for four, based on some type of “square of opposition.” I still present a chart of four alternatives. However, I do not claim that it is complete. In any event, the progressive stance is the main alternative I criticize.

X.1.1 Charting by moral attitude towards sexuality

I shall not torture readers with my many typologies to stay with the four: Progressive, Dualist, Romantic and Parental. My efforts to get a complete chart of all stances has had heuristic value for articulating my options. I hope it is useful for organizing some discussions of sexual morality. Most of my principles of division were based on differences about the moral significance of sexuality. I used a trichotomy of: morally neutral, morally positive, morally negative. The Parental stance found sexuality morally positive, the Dualistic stance found it morally negative while both the Progressive and Romantic stances found sexuality by itself morally neutral but naturally valuable.

Well aware of the dark side of sexuality Progressives and Romantics nevertheless focus on the joys of sex. Progressives and Romantics find sexuality’s human value in the play of courting, the pleasures of mating or emotional excitements such as romantic love and conquest. The reproductive function of sexuality is acknowledged. However, even when off-spring are highly valued, the off-spring are not the human value of sexuality. Dualists find no human value in sexuality. Fearfully acknowledging the voluptuous pleasures of sex, they focus on the dark

side of sexuality. Even when off-spring are highly valued, dualists value them despite the less than human way of their generation.

The chart below is a square of opposition based on the trichotomy.

X.1.2 Alternative stances as varieties of sexual alienation

Another way to characterize the alternative stances is as separating human sexuality from what it is to be human, viz., humanity. Progressives do not take it seriously with the hope of separating it from conception and specific sexual rules. Being human is serious. Romantics scorn the rule and character restriction while being fascinated by the demonic. Humanity is not a demonic force; it is rule governed by free will. Dualists aim to suppress the romantic and voluptuous side and tend not to respect the marital unit. In human sexuality there is a proper place for voluptuousness and romance. We are that kind of animal. The human male/female reproductive unit has special privileges and obligations. To ignore or oppose one of the humanizing features of human sexuality is to separate sexuality from what it is to be human. But the living which we find significant or insignificant includes sexuality. So alienating our sexuality from what it is to be human provides an obstacle to finding our actual lives significant.

X.2 Square of opposition chart of four stances.

Parental

1. Physical sexuality is morally positive.
2. Rules from our psycho-physical nature.

Progressive

1. By itself sexuality is morally neutral but a natural good.
2. Sexual acts evaluated by physical satisfactions or laws of reason.

Dualistic

1. Physical sexuality is morally negative.
2. Rules are laws of reason or God.

Romantic

1. By itself sexuality is morally neutral but a natural good.
2. Sexual acts evaluated by “spiritual” satisfactions or emotional satisfactions.

X.2.1 Limitations of the chart

I follow the four stances charted above to present and evaluate my options for stances on sexual morality. I have set aside hopes for charting out the ways human reason confronts sexuality under normative constraints. Human reasoning is far too complex and my categories are far too simplified. For instance, those who evaluate sexual acts by satisfactions produced do not sharply divide pleasures into physical and emotional and then choose one or the other as *the* sexual satisfaction. Because of the simplistic character of my categories, I cannot make a case that logical consistency requires people to take one or the other of these stances. So, there is no “critique of sexual reasoning.”

I have no evidence that many people take one or the other of the stances to the exclusion of others. So I have little evidence of psychological reality for these stances. However, I have found that the four-part typology helps me interpret various aspects of other people’s opinions and attitudes toward sexuality and morality. In most people, from my anecdotal evidence, there are indications of uses of opinions and attitudes from all four stances. In me there are the opinions and attitudes of the four stances. The chart presents my one choice and three temptations.

X.2.2 Heuristic value of the chart

What is accomplished by evaluating these four artificial stances? The typology brings order to discussions of sexual morality. The chart brings out that the stances are not reducible to moral theories. Thus discussion of the stances is not primarily an exercise in moral theory. Also the final chapter, on dimensions of stances, brings out the wide range of views encompassed within a stance. Reserve judgment on the heuristic utility of my four part division until after dimensions are discussed.

X.2.3 Basic principles of the alternative stances

The other stances do not have a basic principle which corresponds exactly to the Paternal Principle. The Paternal Principle is for men. The other stances are not sexist as is the parental stance since being a parent is not as fundamental in these stances. Basic principles will be stated when the stance is considered. It is the basic principles which reveal the belief in the moral neutrality of sexuality, viz., sexual moral nihilism.

X.3 A principle of sexual progressivism

My main critical target is the progressive stance. Aspects of my religion pull me towards the dualistic stance while aspects of my culture push me towards the progressive. Perhaps some type of insensitivity renders me unsuitable for a romantic stance. Under constant influence from United States general culture and my partiality towards the physical there is a danger of dismissing a concern for meaning of life and character as mere thoughts or vague longings whose physical base is all that really exists. So, for philosophical reasons, if not for reasons based in my religious tradition, I find progressivism the most tempting alternative. After the option of the paternal stance, the progressivism is, in Jamesian terms, “my next most live option.” But from where I stand now, life would not be worth living if I were to become progressive about sexuality. At least life would not be worth living once the prospects for good times seriously diminished by health or social conditions. What is a principle for sexual progressives?

Any attainment of a sexual climax is permissible as long as its attainment involves no violation of general moral rules regulating interpersonal relations.

Put rather loosely the progressive principle holds that any sexual satisfaction is permissible as long as its attainment hurts no one else. The principle is not vacuous. The

progressive principle can support severe judgments on sexual conduct. I interpret many of the harshest critics of the Catholic Church during the late twentieth century scandal about priests and young boys as holding the progressive principle. It is so easy to hurt others with our sexual conduct. A progressive may well reflect with shame and regret on those he has merely used as means for his pleasure. Henry, the happy horndog of my fourth chapter, is a cartoon of a sexual progressive.

X.3.1 Utilitarian (consequentialist) reasoning and progressivism

The discussion of progressivism and consequentialism is complex because of my strategy of criticizing progressivism as leading to nihilism. In order to use a more familiar term, let me use “utilitarianism” rather than the moral theory term “consequentialism.” If I could reduce the moral thinking of what I call progressivism to utilitarianism calculation of what is right, then I could dismiss progressivism by showing that utilitarianism is an inadequate moral theory which tends towards amoralism or by showing that it lacks an obligation to be the right kind of person. Moral nihilism cannot be confronted without an obligation to form character. Reducing what I call progressivism to utilitarian moral reasoning would be setting up a “straw man” to criticize the dominant stance on sexuality in our culture. Holders of a progressive stance on sexuality can hold non-utilitarian theories of what makes acts right and hold that there are moral obligations to develop moral character. That is why I chart the Progressive position on rules as “Sexual acts evaluated by physical satisfactions or laws of reason.”

However, because utilitarian moral theory, with an implicit bias towards amoralism, is so plausible to a secular outlook, I elaborate on progressivism using an act utilitarian moral theory to exhibit the moral nihilism of that brand of progressivism. It is not important for my purposes to digress into moral theory to distinguish varieties of utilitarianism such as that between act and

rule theories. When I think as a utilitarian or more broadly as a consequentialist I find myself ultimately thinking as an act consequentialist. Rules are used only because of difficulties in evaluating each and every act.

X.3.1a Overview of utilitarianism as presented here

For those who use utilitarian reasoning at the fundamental moral level nothing ultimately matters except human happiness and satisfaction. There is movement toward not limiting concern to human happiness and satisfaction. Perhaps all positive sensations in sensing organisms are to be considered. Someone, e.g. Peter Singer, might have the stance that there are positive sensations, roughly satisfaction of an individual organism's preference, and negative sensations, roughly frustration of an individual organism's preference. All that matters with respect to calculating which act is right is that on balance there be more positive than negative sensations. I borrow a label from Singer to call such a moral theory for right acts without a provision for character development *preference utilitarianism* which I usually shorten to plain *utilitarianism*.

X.3.1b Progressivism as utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a moral theory well suited for a progressive stance on sexual morality. The moral neutrality of sexuality is simply a corollary of the moral neutrality of everything. Utilitarians can set aside the epistemological problems as not undercutting the notion of what it means for an act to be morally right. They can accept the requisite skepticism about whether or not we can even have good approximations to correct moral judgments as just a burden of the human condition.

Utilitarians come close to contending that everything is, in principle, permitted. Utilitarians contend that for every act X there are conditions under which X is permitted.

However, there are some acts X such that under present conditions it is very unlikely that they are permitted and some other acts such that it is very unlikely that there will ever be conditions under which they are permissible.

For instance, the facts may show that under present conditions it is very unlikely that tolerating homosexual relations between adult men and fourteen-year-old boys produces more good than harm. Perhaps, though, with developments in communal understanding of homosexuality there will be a time when such relations are, all things considered, beneficial. At present, there may be enough evidence about changes in communal opinion and psychological development to show that it is very unlikely that there will ever be a time when homosexual relations between adult men and four-year-old boys produces more human happiness and satisfaction than human misery.

One reason I use the term “progressive” to label a stance on sexual morality is that the stance regards all sexual satisfaction as a positive non-moral good. On the chart this is a defining feature of progressivism. The hope is that progress in human thought and conditions will progressively reduce bad effects associated with sexual satisfactions. A tendency in progressivism is to work towards removal of the notion of moral harm, introduced in from human considerations. Moral harm is a primitive notion such as taboo, hex or curse. Acceptance of a notion of moral harm inhibits pursuit of some natural goods.

I can entertain technological dreams about complete separation of sexuality from reproduction. In this dream world there would be the satisfactions of courting, performance of former mating acts, and romantic bonding periods. Reproduction would be taken care of by cloning committees although some may be permitted to initiate it with sexual intercourse or in-vitro fertilization. In this progressive dream world sexuality is for nothing but fun. Practicing

artificial birth control can lead to this attitude even in marriage. For me reflection on this dream world of trivialized sex turns into a nihilistic nightmare. I regard myself as blessed because neither I nor anyone I care about will live long enough to live in such an empty progressive society. I submit that it would be a great challenge for any author to write a story of such “utopias” where human lives are worth living. People as shallow as the incestuous Julie and Mark of Pinker’s example are not very interesting. Would not having to tell yourself that other people chose to make you rather than thinking of yourself as given to the world regardless of whether or not the world wanted you detract from your dignity? Reflecting on such sexually nihilistic scenarios is an aspect of what I call in the next chapter having life experiences which lead one to be convinced of the correctness of the parental stance. Making human life that empty needs to be wrong – morally impossible. I concede that it is technically possible.

X.3.1c Utilitarians & an obligation to have a good character

It does not follow directly that a utilitarian is a nihilist. But as noted in the previous chapter a theory of what is morally right does not provide a moral antidote for moral nihilism. One needs to be a moral realist and hold that one is obliged to develop oneself as a moral agent. Utilitarians can introduce a notion of the moral good. Having a notion of the moral good is having a goal of being the kind of person who does what is right for the sake of doing what is right. Here, what is right would be determined by utilitarian calculation. However, *utilitarians do not have an obligation to be morally good*. There is no reason for thinking that pleasure will be maximized by someone striving to minimize pain in their small daily contacts. Utilitarianism needs to be extended to have an obligation to develop character.

It is profitable to consider such an extension. The profit is to appreciate the full extent of the “in principle” acceptance of any sexual activity as permissible while appreciating a struggle to have a significant life under such permissiveness.

X.3.2 Peter Singer’s sexual progressivism and bestiality²

The following passage supports a judgment that Singer is a utilitarian who consistently follows a theory of what makes acts right to a morally nihilistic sexual progressivism, under which everything is permissible. Nothing supports a judgment that Singer engages in any sexually inappropriate behavior from the perspective of the parental stance on sexuality. Indeed subsequent quotations from Singer indicate that he is rather puritanical. However, Singer does accept as morally permissible acts categorically condemned by the Paternal Principle. Singer, I assume, simply prefers not to engage in such acts.

The following is quoted from a website. Before the quoted material there was a report about the death of a forty-five-year-old Seattle man who died in an emergency room of acute peritonitis caused by anal intercourse with a horse. The report went on to report the investigation of the King County sheriff who discovered a barn in the Enumclaw area in which sexual relations between men and various animals were video taped.

X.3.2a Quotation on Singer and sex with non-human animals

“The Enumclaw case highlights two increasingly important ideological debates. The first, and seemingly the more minor of the two (for the time being) is within the animal rights movement, and centers around whether animals should be treated as identical to humans. On the one side stand PETA and Peter Singer, a founder of the animal rights movement. On the other stand the Humane Society and Friends for Animals.

Peter Singer, a father of the animal rights movement, is no stranger to controversy. For his support of infanticide, euthanasia and abortion as morally justifiable, he has earned the ire of individuals and groups from all across the political spectrum from the National Council on Disability to the *Wall Street Journal*.

This is completely unsurprising given Mr. Singer's political position, preference for utilitarianism; the belief, traditionally tied to hedonism, that the action that an individual must take is the one that best minimizes suffering and maximizes pleasure. In a 2001 review of a book³, he defended bestiality, noting that while taboos against oral sex, contraception, masturbation and homosexuality have all largely been done away with, bestiality has not.

He went on to explain that its taboo was a mere pretext for distinguishing ourselves from animals, "erotically and any other way", and thus denying them fair treatment. He explained that some intra-species relationships could lead to "mutually satisfying conclusions".

Alexander Rubin, on line essay *PETA, perverts and horses*

X.3.2b Utilitarian permissibility of animal sex not theoretically interesting

Developing sexual progressivism with utilitarianism is not intellectually interesting. It may lead to shocking conclusions. But the thinking to reach these conclusions is uninteresting. At the theoretical level concluding that "shocking" behavior may be morally permissible, assuming utilitarianism, is noting the physical and psychological possibility that these behaviors satisfy more preferences than they frustrate. From my anecdotal evidence, the tracing out of the physical and psychological possibilities is hardly scientific. The utilitarian reasoning is common sense consideration of consequences subject to our lack of information, biases and self-deceiving rationalizations about harm done, as noted in the chapter on sexual trivialization. When moral intuitions are offended, the faint of heart are tempted to feel that a moral harm might be done.

But because moral harm is an inadmissible category, there is postulation of a “genuine” harm by those who are not as ruthlessly consistent a utilitarian as is Singer.

A sexual progressive has something interesting if he proposes guidelines for a meaningful life. Singer proposes guidelines on existential question of a meaningful life. For my project of evaluating sexual moralities’ tendencies toward nihilism, I need to confront Singer on existential issues; not merely note how my moral intuitions conflict with his.

X.3.3 Singer’s character stance

When I taught Singer’s essays in Ethics courses, I realized that Singer’s primary interest lay in urging students to develop concerns and character. So, despite tremendous differences in judgments about right acts, I found myself in fundamental agreement with Singer about what was important in morality. The passages below copied from his Website⁴ show how Singer proposes finding purpose in life.

X.3.3a Singer’s Website proposals for a meaningful life THREE EASY WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“Want to do something to make the world a better place? Here are three easy ways to do it:

1. DO SOMETHING FOR THE WORLD'S POOREST PEOPLE

Donate some of your spare income to help those in great need. I support Oxfam, an organization that works directly with local grass roots organizations in developing countries, and supervises the way its money is used to prevent corruption and waste

2. DO SOMETHING FOR ANIMALS

No single human practice causes as much suffering to nonhuman animals as factory farming. Right now, billions of animals are locked in small cages so that they can't even stretch their limbs, or turn around, or are crowded into large sheds, tens of thousands of them in each shed, unable ever to go outside or enjoy fresh air and sunshine. Boycott this inhumane system of

production. Don't buy factory farmed meat, eggs or dairy products. Better still, go vegetarian or vegan.

3. DO SOMETHING FOR OUR PLANET'S ENVIRONMENT

Reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. Use public transport, walk or ride a bike whenever you can. If you must drive, get a fuel-efficient one, perhaps a hybrid. And remember, factory farming is a wasteful form of production that requires a lot of fossil fuel, so eating fewer - or no - animal products will cut the amount of emissions for which you are responsible.

These three points are all about living in a way that is ethically responsible. Try it - you'll find it gives more meaning to your life and it's a great antidote to boredom. There is always so much to be done. And talk to others about what you are doing. Don't preach or be self-righteous, or fanatical about it, that just puts people off, but at the same time, don't be shy about setting an example, and use opportunities that arise to let others know what you are doing.”

Peter Singer's website

X.3.3b Maxim for Singer's progressive character stance

A maxim expressing a character stance associated with the Singer type preference utilitarianism can be formulated and actually lived as Singer does. Here I call a person who adopts this as his or her maxim: a progressive. Progressives are not sexists. *I am to become the kind of person who acts to promote the greatest balance of preference satisfactions insofar as we can reasonably determine such a balance.*

X.3.3c Ways of criticizing progressive character stance

I do not give a moral criticism of Singer's proposals for living a meaningful life. My moral criticism would be along the lines of pointing out that his proposals leave out how to deal with family members. They also leave open the possibility of sexual wantonness. For instance, a

man with status such as a professor, living this secular monk life style might be very appealing sexually to certain young women. The proposals allow there to be multiple mutually satisfying sexual relations between the man and the women. I cannot give such moral criticisms because they would be question-begging. The question at issue is “What stance to take towards sexual morality?” The stance taken determines what is sexually moral. For instance, it is the parental stance which determines family obligations. Singer’s refusal to give special weight to family relations is a result of his not taking sexuality as morally serious. So, moral criticism of the sexual morality of an alternative stance is clearly assuming what needs to be proved. I shall not criticize the stance as being unrealistic about whether or not people can live in accord with it. As with any theory of character development there needs to be a place for tolerable immoralities.

I criticize the progressive character stance in two quite different ways. One way is theoretical. The other is personal. The personal way is to imagine trying to live in accordance with the stance while considering whether it protects against nihilistic thoughts and feelings. I start with the theoretical critique.

X.3.4 Progressive character stance only a choice

On the progressive moral theory being human is not significant. This means that no obligation is imposed or privilege bestowed simply because one is a human. (Singer is explicitly anti-specieist or anti-humanist.) So what we are does not require us to take the progressive character stance. We are not obliged to be this way by our humanity and the point above about it being empirically questionable that being a progressive comes close to maximizing preferences satisfaction makes it dubious that we have any preferences utilitarian obligation to strive to be progressives. A satisfactory antidote to moral nihilism needs to be something to which we are morally obligated.

So as admirable the ascetic and altruistic life style of someone such as Singer 's may be it is nonetheless a distraction technique for combating nihilism. We need an obligation, not an option, to combat nihilism.

X.3.5 Progressive character stance only a distraction from nihilism

I take a personal approach to dismissing Singer's recommendations as an antidote for nihilism by asking myself whether following his proposals would give me a sense of a significant life.

I do much of what Singer describes. For over fifty years bicycling has been my major method of transportation. My households have always owned an automobile as an appliance. My wife owns the car. When our five children were young there was need to transport them and haul groceries etc. Still for personal transportation, including all commuting, I bike. This involves biking on icy streets in sub-zero temperatures. I do this partly to save natural resources and parking fees. I suspect, however, that I do it mostly because I like doing it. I love to feel the bite of the cold and the blaze of the sun. I realized my small conservation of natural resources is negligible. Besides it was a way of getting exercise when, because of the children, I did not have time for long marathon training runs.

I give regularly to NGOs such as CARE, Doctors without Borders, Catholic Relief. I give out of a sense of obligation but I am not reluctant to give. I recall my sense of pride when my assistant professor wages enable me to contribute \$5.00 monthly to CARE. It meant I was "growing up" and could start to "pay back." I have been increasing my contributions with increase in income and inflation. Of course, I could give more and I gradually do so. However, I doubt that I will ever have enough strength in generosity to give until it hurts. After retirement, I felt obliged to participate in considerable hands-on volunteer work with the poor and needy

through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Surprisingly, Singer did not mention doing hands-on work. But I am pretty sure he does.

Taste preference, and lazy chewing habits, would lead me to vegetarianism. However, I will not be a vegetarian because I do not want to cause the minor family and social disruptions connected with being a vegetarian amongst those who are not. I am concerned about the pain factory farming inflicts on animals. I have an obligation to do something or other; but I am not sure what. I dislike micromanaging my own life as much as micromanaging the lives of other people. So, I totally ignore the fussiness of trying to be a vegan. Over the years, an artistic appreciation of animal life, especially insects, has lead me to have some vague concern for their preferences. For instance, if working in my yard I disturb an ant colony, I am biased towards putting things back the way they were so that the ants can “get on with their lives.”

The ascetic, secular monk, Singer life style would not provide me an answer when nihilistic anxiety afflicted me. I already live somewhat that way and have some of the concerns about preferences of all sentient beings. Of course, I am concerned much more about the people close to me than sentient beings in general. What is the significance of living this way? Singer most likely realizes better than I that such a life style will have an indiscernible effect, if any, on the balance of satisfied preferences over frustrated preferences throughout the whole world. So, the significance has to lie in what it is for me.

Let us note, though, that Singer does not claim to offer an antidote to nihilism. He offers an antidote to boredom. Nihilism is not boredom. The thought and sense of insignificance can strike one in the midst of an exciting life. Because of obligations one might be trapped in a boring life. Still the person trapped in a boring routine can have a sense of his life being significant because he is being what he ought to be. He is fulfilling his duties in his station. I

would add that he might have an obligation to try to find some diversions since boredom might be a temptation to abandon his duties for some exciting diversions. I am not so sure that Singer has a long term solution for boredom. Once his suggestions became routinized the simple life style might become boring. When nihilism strikes it is the sense and thought that we are obliged to continue living and to continue fulfilling our duties that give significance. If Singer's proposals are to offer an antidote to nihilism he needs to make a case that we are obligated to live this life-style. However, I think by his own admission he cannot make a case from his theory of obligation, viz., utilitarianism, that anyone is so obligated.

I suspect that Singer is a nihilist and that his proposals are very much like Hume's recommendations that we seek distractions when dark nihilistic thoughts and feelings afflict us. I doubt that my accusation of nihilism would bother Singer. If I can partially put myself in his place and think that if there are any obligations they are given by the utilitarian principle, I would be a nihilist.

X.3.6 Progressivism with a non-consequentialist theory of justice

People may take a progressive stance towards sexuality without being utilitarians. They may hold that there are non-utilitarian rules of justice which place restrictions on sexuality. Sexual acts by themselves are morally neutral. It would be only a matter of fact that certain sexual acts conflict with rules of justice. The obvious case, of course, is forcible rape. As argued below, though, such a progressivism tends toward the rationalist or dualistic stance.

X.3.6a Dilemma for progressivism with a theory of justice

The rules for justice, i.e., rules for interpersonal relations, are within human nature as are the sexual rules for parentalists or the rules are external to human nature as are the sexual rules for dualists.

If rules of justice are within human nature, then a burden of proof is on progressives to show how dealing with people economically is fundamentally different from dealing with them sexually.

If rules of justice are external to human nature, then a burden of proof is on progressives to account for the status of these rules apart from some moral theology.

So, sexual progressives who are not fundamental utilitarians have the burden of proof of explaining why sexual relations are morally neutral or have the burden of making a case for there being objective moral laws apart from humans which are not in the “mind of a moral God.”

X.3.6b Informal critique of progressivism with a theory of justice,

Social contract theories of justice, such as Rawls', show how abstract from actual human conditions the practice of justice lies. Being just lies far above what goes on in daily life although its principles are for guiding daily life. To be a just person you need the right principles about distribution of goods and the strength to implement them. I in no way want to disparage the virtue of justice. I want only to argue that being a just person is not a sufficient purpose for being what one ought to be as a human being. To focus on being a just person as what we really ought to be we focus on our selves as being some high level administrator apart from human life with obligations to control what occurs in human life in accordance with principles of justice. The stuff of daily life which we control with justice does not matter for our ultimate purpose. There is no way that stuff ought to be. It is just material for us to deal with in accordance with justice. Our human nature is to be controlled not developed. In the theory of justice we hold nature, including human nature, at “arm's length.” In effect, such a progressive stance defaults to a dualistic stance which is nihilistic without God.

X.3.6c Metaphysical critique of progressivism et al., with a theory of justice

I have just revealed a tactic for opposing alternative stances. My chart set the stage for this tactic. The chart allows identifying the progressive and dualist positions on the status of moral rules for sexuality. If Progressives can show that a way of life leaving sexuality morally neutral is a morally obligatory way of life, then they have an antidote to moral nihilism. But showing that a way of life leaving sexuality morally neutral is a morally obligatory assumes a metaphysics of moral law abstracted from actual human reasoning and moral agents abstracted from actual human beings. The character stance does not have the metaphysics of an abstract morality and abstracted moral agents. In so far as the alternatives require a metaphysics of rules to confront the intellectual dimension of moral nihilism they are equal. From this equality the character and parental stance have as much right in the public arena as arguments on sexual morality from the other stances. None need be religious, all have metaphysics. All need pragmatic arguments to open themselves to belief in moral realism. However, I think that the metaphysics behind the secularized humanism I propose is less theoretically burdensome and more compatible with “scientific” metaphysical biases than the abstract moral law/abstract moral agent metaphysics of other stances except for the progressivism of a Singer type utilitarianism.

It is ironic that I struggle to avoid emotivism in ethics and nominalism in metaphysics; yet a moral theory closer to emotivism and metaphysics closer to nominalism are used to recommend my stance because of this closeness. The moral theory I have been struggling to articulate offers more promise to what could be called “naturalization of morality.” Such a naturalization requires more than the preferred metaphysics of the dominant philosophies in English-speaking universities. Yet it requires less metaphysics than the dominant moral philosophies in these universities. Anecdotal evidence based on being an active member of philosophy departments from 1959 to 2000, show me that the preferred metaphysics of so-called

“analytic” philosophy is biased towards a moral theory such as I attribute to a Singer utilitarianism and the ensuing nihilism. The legacy of logical positivism is long.

X.4 Dualism or rationalism,

I use the labels “Rationalists” and “Dualists” interchangeably because typically Dualists hold a dualistic metaphysics that there is a deep division between the mental and physical or soul and body. But the mental which is fully separate from the body is called reason. When the person functions properly it is reason which controls everything else. Dualists share a *traditional core* with the Paternal Principle. *A male may intentionally attain a sexual climax only in sexual intercourse open to conception with a consenting woman to whom he is bound by a life-long monogamous marriage contract.*

Some familiar with sexual morality of the Roman Catholic tradition might be surprised by a Catholic advocating the parental stance.⁵ Does not the second sentence about sexual enjoyment of the parental stance’s Paternal Principle clash with the tradition? Would not the next principle, which I also call the dualist principle, better expresses the tradition in which I locate my principle? A dualist principle can be stated as follows.

A male may intentionally attain a sexual climax only in sexual intercourse open to conception with a consenting woman to whom he is bound by a life-long monogamous marriage contract. In addition he should strive with his spouse to engage in sexual activity only for the sake of procreation while trying not to seek sexual satisfactions and train themselves to avoid sexual intercourse when it is known that it is unlikely to result in conception.

To put it succinctly: A man should strive to be a virginal bridegroom, a faithful husband and a cooperate with his wife so that they have sexual intercourse only for the sake of

conception. If he was not a virginal bridegroom, a faithful husband or seeks sexual pleasures with his wife for the sake of pleasure he should feel shame and regret.

I feel the tensions in my tradition which give rise to such challenges. The traditional core demands such frequent and regular repression of sexual inclinations that sexual desire and pleasure are misperceived as evils to be eliminated. It is easy to foster a smoldering rage that we are so physical. Even as someone with an emotional temptation towards what is called the “dualist” principle I do not think that refusing it exclusive right to the label “traditional” misrepresents it. A dualist would concede that the position preserves the best part of the tradition with the traditional core. However, the tradition is a bit too “earthy” or even “pagan” in its enthusiastic acceptance of the physical pleasures of marital sexuality. When dualists encourage the use of the symbols, gestures and words for enriching marital life the tendency is to present them as non-physical or even spiritual goods. Dualists are not offended with a suggestion that they rises above the traditional or conventional.

I do not confront in this book the theological issues of whether or not the dualism and dualistic principle better reflects Roman Catholic doctrines. In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II has reminded us of a tradition in the Judeo/Christian scriptures that the courting and marital bonding of men and women is suitable for representing the relation between God and humanity. It would have been unsuitable for a Pope to elaborate on mating in a public addresses. Development of themes from *Theology of the Body* will allow the parental stance to be a Catholic stance on sexuality. I have been advised that work by Dietrich von Hildebrand, especially his *The Nature of Love*,⁶ helps overcome the stereotype of Catholics as dualists about sexuality. A major difficulty is metaphysical; not moral. The theory of reasoning as being inseparable from physical activities such as sexuality, prudence, commerce etc., might be in

conflict with a notion of a reasoning soul separable from the body. I conjecture, and hope, that a clever adaptation of Thomism could enrich the meager metaphysics I use to argue for the Paternal Principle in a secular setting.

X.4.1 Cartoon of a dualist

My cartoons of men taking the various stances are all cartoons of sinners. Of course, millions of men taking any of the four stances may lead exemplary lives by the standard of the Paternal Principle. Nonetheless, it is well to remember that sexuality is also a great equalizer by exposing our common tendency to sexual misbehavior.

At forty-four, Thomas still accepts the strict sexual morality of his parents. Sexuality is for reproduction and bonding husbands with their wives to help rear the children. Unfortunately, strict sexual morality is not well correlated with **mild** sexual inclinations. Because his inclinations are so frequently towards the forbidden he soon internalizes the prevailing attitude of his family and friends that sexuality lies in their “animal nature” and is not really suited for rational beings. Thomas is married with three children while his income as a stock analyst enables him to support his family well. Discretion about his one affair maintains his reputation for respectability. That affair regularly torments him with shame and regret. It ended with an abortion. His guilt has been almost unbearable. A lesser casualty of his affair has been his hatred of love. Love, intense love, and not merely sexual desire, drove them into the affair. He now believes that emotions are more corrupting than “biological” urges. His slowly disappearing marital sexual activity offers him hope that all of that will someday be behind him. He hopes for a few remaining years of life in which he will be *defacto* asexual but still rational enough to devote himself to intellectual, civic and charitable pursuits. Thomas longs, then, for a time when he might be a rational being and no longer a rational animal. Thomas finds no meaning in being

a rational animal. Thomas is not a happy man but he does have hope that some how other he can find a meaningful life which is not a natural human life.

X.4.2 Dismissal of the dualistic stance

My critique of dualism is brief because I am focusing on tendencies towards nihilism. In the secularized forum in which I am arguing dualism with its contempt for the physical is almost explicitly nihilistic about what is of most importance in a consistent secular outlook. The body counts for nothing.

Suppose, along with dualists and other demonizers of sexuality, we despise sexuality as an animal operation for reproduction but not really part of a genuine human life. Rules for its proper use are not based in sexuality but come from some authority outside sexuality such as reason or perhaps divine commands. If human life has a purpose it is not given by an animal operation which is not genuinely human. So supposing human sexuality is only an animal aspect of our lives is to dismiss our sexuality itself as an ingredient of what is significant in a meaningful human life. Such disregard is sexual nihilism. Again total nihilism threatens. After all what is left of human life to have meaning if sexuality is dismissed as part of human life?

Now dualists who hold that there is a moral God or some type of quasi divine moral authority who can provide rewards for morally correct behavior and character, are not nihilists. However, arguing from such a stance is weak in the secular arena. Furthermore, there is a vulnerability to nihilism in all religious belief and founding of morality in religious believing. There are temptations against faith. Simply doubting does not undercut faith. But abandoning the struggle to hold firm despite doubts is loss of faith. That can happen! With loss of faith comes nihilism and, especially moral nihilism as expressed with “If there is no God, then everything is permitted.”

X.5 Romantic principle

I write defensively in my brief treatment of the romantic stance because I admit that I am unsympathetic towards the stance. I do not think it is only age. When I read Proust's *Swan's Way* as a very young man, I thought that the section on Swan in love was an excellent diagnosis of what is an uncomfortable emotional condition. When I recently looked through Denis de Rougemont's 1940 *Love in the Western World* I found myself nodding in agreement with his depiction of the folly of pursuing romantic love as a foundation for marriage.

I call my fourth option the "romantic principle." I am well aware of the philosophical and cultural influences towards a dualistic interpretation of the human person. So sometimes when I think dualistically about sexuality but still try not to dismiss the physical I tend towards a "glorified" version of the physical. I am not insensitive to the glorification of love. Romanticism is a version of the physical in which the physical is masked by either thoughts or feelings. When so masked the physical is innocent. It is from this perspective from which I formulate a romantic principle which I think is widely held although it is my least lively option. A "macho" mentality which excuses seductions which are "bold conquests" is another example of a romantic stance on sexuality. A romantic principle may be stated as follows.

Any attainment of a sexual climax is permissible if obtained in condition of innocence. A paradigm of a condition of innocence is physical intercourse with a person one loves and who loves you. Other sexual satisfactions are worthless but may be permissibly attained if its attainment involves no violation of general moral rules regulating interpersonal relations.

X.5.1 Cartoon of a sexual romantic

Richard is married with three children. At forty-six his partnership in a prestigious law firm enables him to support his wife and three children in a fine style. Richard is a romantic in

love with love. His discretion about his affairs enables him to provide an example of a respectable man. His wife, whom he once loved, knows but will hardly admit, even to herself, Richard's infidelity. Richard dismisses his marital sexuality as insignificant now that his relationship to his wife is simply that of husband and wife. He keeps himself emotionally alive with new loves since without sexual love his life becomes a dull routine. So, Richard is always seeking and frequently has a mistress whom he loves intensely and who loves him. Their sexual activity is innocent because its expression of love puts it beyond all ordinary rules. While the love lasts the meaning and significance of Richard's life is that affair. While the affair lasts could the point of his life really be that love which so soon will diminish and die? If Richard lives beyond the prospect for more affairs there will be no more meaningful events let alone a meaningful life for him. If he died at the peak of an affair, Richard would die while feeling "most alive." If he dies in due course, he will die with memories of past loves and nothing more for which to live.

X.5.2 Dismissal of the Romantic stance

When I try to understand how I would take a romantic stance, I think of sexuality not as a moral matter but as a subject for aesthetics. Appropriate sex is that which is modeled on a "good story." Bad sex comprises acts and types of character which cannot be fit into a good story. A romantic might ask us to admire the conquest of a clever seducer as is suggested in Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*." Personally growing contempt for the seducer has been influential in my developing a notion of a romantic stance on sexuality and refusal to take such a stance. I do not give serious sympathetic consideration to a romantic stance.

Much more needs to be considered about the role of stories in moral life and character development. Readers should recall the role of stories to guide their actions and mold their

character. I hinted above how stories can extend the experiences of living which are important in pragmatic arguments for a stance. Nonetheless, despite the effectiveness and necessity for stories in moral education, principles are needed to separate the morally proper “love” stories from the morally improper ones.

My existential critique of sexual romanticism portrays it as holding that “love” stories – stories for guiding love- are rated only on aesthetic merits. This leads to moral relativism and nihilism about sexuality. There is relativism about sexual morality because of the relativism in aesthetic appraisal. There is nihilism about sexuality because so much proper sexual activity is routine; it does not matter. Living happily ever after is the end of the story. A romantic stance on sexuality tends to a romantic stance on the whole of life. This leads to nihilism. The great, be they saints or sinners, have fascinating stories. In so far as they have fascinating stories their lives are significant. From this stance on life, the ordinary lives are worthless. As bumper stickers say “Good women do not go down in history.” But the interest of the story does not give significance to the life of the person acting out the story. The script of story, which selects dramatic moments, has the significance. But the script is not the individual who lives twenty-four hours each day. The story, abstracted from the individual’s life, has the significance of being interesting. The individual has no significance. This is nihilism.

X.6 The stances on Zero Grazing Principle and the Paternal Principle

Before going on to discuss the role of pragmatic arguments to defend taking a stance, understanding the stances might be increased by answering two questions from the perspective of the stances. What would each of the stances say about the Zero Grazing Imperative? What would each of the stances say about the Paternal Principle

X.6.1 The four stances on Zero Grazing Principle.

None of the stances would propose violating the minimal demands of Zero Grazing Imperative (ZGI).

- Progressives would regret that adherence to ZGI may occasionally lead to loss of satisfactions which would harm no one.
- Romantics might deplore the emphasis on a hygienic need for the imperative. It would be very unlikely that a romantic would find circumstances for violating the Zero Gazing Imperative arising. The satisfaction of the violation would be of the “vulgar” type on which romantics place low value.
- Dualists would despise the ZGI for a suggestion that many other pursuits they condemn are permissible. They would not even consider it to be a step in the right direction. It is not based on the right reasons, viz., opposition to the voluptuous. I attribute to Dualists as a dominant sentiment the sentiment Kolnai finds nearly universal.
- Parentalists would object that the rule is founded without reference to what is right or wrong with certain sexual behaviors per se. As a result the rule explicitly accepts immoral behavior.

The four stances on the Paternal Principle

- Progressives would find Paternal Principle absurd
- Romantics would find Paternal Principle dangerous because it might cut off so many rich satisfactions.
- Dualists would be uncomfortable with the Paternal Principle. They would fault it for not indicating a condemnation of seeking sexual satisfactions. For dualists the right order for sexual matters is not, strictly speaking, a right order for sexual activity. Sexual activity is a chaos and a right order for it is an order imposed by reason. Reason uses it only for the ends set for reason

which in this case is reproduction. For dualists the right order is for reason to control inclinations as alien material

- The Paternal Principle expresses the “male half” of the core of a parental stance. The rationale is that in this way reason is in harmony with the way the sexual ought to be. Allegedly the rule is obtained from reflection on sexuality itself.

¹ “The Sex Addiction Epidemic,” by Chris Lee, *Newsweek*, Dec. 5, 2011, laments conditions in the United States

² The quotations are from a webpage Guest Column in:

<http://canadafreepress.com/2005/rubin072105.htm>

PETA, perverts and horses, *By Alexander Rubin*, Thursday, July 21, 2005

³ The book is *Dearest Pet*, by Midas Dekkins, trans. Paul Vincent, W.W. Norton & Co. 1994.

The Singer review is in an on-line journal *Nerve* in 2001. I cannot access *Nerve*.

⁴ From Peter Singer’s website: http://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/make_a_difference.html

⁵ *The body and society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity*, Peter Brown, Columbia U. Press, New York, 1988

⁶ St. Augustine Press, 2009