

XII: CONFLICT EVASION: DIMENSION OF STANCES ON SEXUALITY

XII.0 Chapter theme

Let us explore how takers of the parental stance can contribute to public debate about social restrictions on sexuality without appeal to religious teachings or expressing fanaticism and bigotry. We remind ourselves of sexual topics on which people may disagree and agree without taking a stance on fundamental principles for sexual morality. Despite the fact that this book is a criticism of the moral neutrality of sexuality, this chapter shows how a strategy of assuming the moral neutrality of sexuality, on particular issues, can be used to protect and promote the values of a stance rejecting the moral neutrality of sexuality.

Development and application of the notion of stance dimension continues my pragmatic defense of the parental stance and the Paternal Principle. Letting the Paternal Principle guide me along its various dimensions in reflection on current issues and in conversations provide experiences convincing me of its correctness. I am not always convinced of the correctness of my position along a dimension. But I am convinced that the principle is relevant for guiding me towards correct positions.

XII.1 Dimensions of stances

A dimension of a stance is a variable aspect of a stance. If two people with the same stance can disagree about an aspect of sexuality without threat of giving up their stance, their disagreement lies on a dimension of a stance. If two people taking a different stance agree about an aspect of sexuality, their agreement lies on a dimension of a stance. It must be emphasized that there can be, and usually is, debate about the correct point on

a stance dimension. For a simple example, let the dimension be the number of violations of a firm's sexual harassment code to tolerate before job action. Points on the dimension might vary from 0 to 5. This simple example would certainly become more complex by adding a dimension of severity of sanctions.

XII.1.1 Dimensions & stance types

Accepting stance dimensions recognizes that people with the same stance differ on beliefs, attitudes and even judgments about sexuality. For instance, one man taking the parental stance might favor severe legal restrictions on divorce while another might argue for no-fault civil divorce. Accepting stance dimensions also recognizes that people with different stances may share beliefs, attitudes and judgments about sexuality. For instance, a progressive might agree with a holder of a parental stance about restricting adult book stores from being located close to schools. So I write of stance types because there are, for instance, liberal and conservatives amongst both Parentalists and Progressives. Would it surprise anyone that there is significant disagreement on sexual matters between men and women despite taking the same stance on sexuality?

Not all stance types have the same dimensions. For instance, progressive stances may have a dimension about morally permissible homosexual relations with boys. Takers of the parental would have no such dimension. Takers of the parental stance may have a dimension of the legally permissible homosexual relationships with boys although such relations can never rise above tolerable immoralities. (We could locate all dimensions in all stances by agreeing that on some dimensions some stance have only a "zero point.") Recognition that stances have dimensions rationalizes the tenth chapter's restriction to

critical evaluation of four stance types because so much diversity of opinion is included within a stance.

XII.1.2 Nonmoral dimensions

Some stance dimensions are not about moral matters. Not all sexual issues are moral issues! For instance, how to rate romantic love is a dimension. It is very important for couples to coordinate how they stand on romantic love. Actually for a couple to work out where they stand on some of these nonmoral dimensions is part of fulfilling the obligation to be good lovers. Also most of the dimensions alluded to below are complex. Discussion might well divide them into moral and non-moral dimensions.

XII.1.3 Assumption of moral neutrality of sexuality

The strategy for evading conflict on fundamental principles of sexual morality is framing disputes as if sexuality were morally neutral *with respect to that issue*. A tactic in this strategy is reducing problems to non-moral problems. For instance, distribution of condoms in an African nation plagued with AIDS could be framed as a public health measure. Then the issue is whether or not the distribution is effective. In this situation, though, some parties may need to be cajoled into accepting certain sexual behaviors as tolerable immoralities. In communities where there is agreement on some non-sexual moral claims, such as having specific civil rights, there can be discussion about sexual rules without taking a stance on sexual morality. For instance, discussions about what degree of touching amounts to sexual battery need not go into fundamental stances on sexual morality.

History suggests that we cannot find a common ground for settling all disputes. We may be forced back to our fundamental stances. Indeed a special stance dimension is

when to go back to holding forth about their stance. My position is to do so as little as possible. But if you have to take a stance, there is nothing illegitimate about doing so in public discussion. That is what I am doing in this book. However, I think that out of respect for others we should indicate that we are now arguing philosophically. On one hand we divide ourselves with our philosophic reasoning to attain visions of life. On the other hand we use our philosophical reasoning to find common ground by making many narrow and precise distinctions. Both are important. We should note that finding common ground does not mean finding final agreement on an issue. We may find common ground on which to argue about our disagreements.

] XII.2 Elaboration on various dimensions

I cannot list all dimensions with which people are concerned ; let alone comment on them. I list and comment only upon a few. Back in the fifth chapter, I commented on the crucial dimensions of the role of utilitarian and factual reasoning. This reasoning dimension is crucial for all other dimensions because the dimensions are topics on which people reason. When I state my position along the various dimensions I am giving my current opinions, which are sometimes not carefully thought through. They are similar to what I would write in a Blog. (Recall the hopes expressed in the Preface for continuing themes of this book in a Blog.) Take seriously the notion of dimension. Take my opinions for what they are worth. They are only preliminary remarks for discussion.

XII.3 Various stance dimensions concerning interactions of the sexes

Look over a “laundry list” of various stance dimensions. This incomplete list enables me to state my position on topics in sexual morality. My main goal is not to persuade readers to share my opinion. The main goal is to exhibit the flexibility in

discussion of many topics in a person such as I who is now irrevocably committed to the Paternal Principle. Another advantage of stating my opinions is to give a better picture of my judgments. Such a picture will aid in evaluation, positive or negative, of the main theses of the book. Recall that these theses are the correctness of the Paternal Principle and its legitimacy for use in the secular “market of ideas.” The first topic below led me to use the term “dimension.”

XII.3.1 Attitude towards sexual pleasure

Reconsider, from the introductory chapter, statements of Aurel Kolnai¹ who believes any sexual morality required a type of aversion to what he calls voluptuousness. Kolnai held: “In general sexual pleasure arouses misgivings of a very special kind.²” He elaborates: “Without this fundamental moral rejection of voluptuousness in the sense indicated and this demand to keep a watch on sexual arousal as such sexual morality would be simply unthinkable and indefensible.³” He goes even further: “It is clear, and often touched on in this work, that the special sexual ethical role of the idea of ‘moral dirt’ is linked with the ethical questionableness of sex as a kind of ‘material,’ or ‘life content.’ ”⁴

Did Kolnai’s phenomenological introspection put him in a position to claim the universality of this dread of the voluptuous and its dominance? Since I have set aside social-psychological speculations about the origin of morality, I set aside the claim that sexual morality is unthinkable without dread of voluptuousness. I concede that what Kolnai writes about is dominant in some people. Indeed it is the dominant sentiment I incorporate in a dualistic stance. The empirically safe statement runs: All people dread

voluptuousness to some degree. Here the degree may be zero! (I never used ‘voluptuous’ until I read Kolnai. It sounded too quaint and erotic.)

The attitude towards the sexual pleasure of mating is an important dimension for being a proper sexual person. The parental stance accepts sexual pleasure properly attained as a natural good to be enjoyed. If "voluptuous" is a suitable term for characterizing sexual pleasure, holders of the parental stance may welcome voluptuousness properly attained. The dimension is not how much to enjoy sexual pleasure since you have little control over how much you actually enjoy it when it occurs. Also not much of a twenty-four-hour day is spent in this voluptuousness. So, I consider a dimension of a proper attitude towards pursuit of this pleasure. The correct position along a dimension is not always some “Aristotelian” mean. Sexual pleasure should be pursued neither too much nor too little. Too much or too little for what? The answer is “Neither too much nor too little *for conforming to the Paternal Principle.*”

I consider primarily the situation where the mating could not violate the Paternal Principle, viz., that between a husband and wife who could mate within, say, forty-eight hours. For most men, most of the time, sexual pleasure is not properly attainable within a such a time. This includes men separated by job, bad mood, etc., from their wives. For such men almost any explicit consideration of sexual pleasure is too much. Since something like the Paternal Principle is held in many cultures, I conjecture that a dread of sexual voluptuousness has been widely taught to help men live with the principle. How could there be excessive pursuit of sexual pleasure in a married couple? A couple could focus so much on sexual pleasure that they become “Horn dogs” as characterized by Elaine Blair. This could lead them to use of pornography and sex toys which in turn lead

them to trivialize sex as only for pleasure. Forgetting that mating is the human procreative activity subverts fidelity to the Paternal Principle. With sex viewed as only for pleasure the marital bonds are threatened with temptations to “wife-swapping,” etc. The indicators of excess are temptations to do these things.

The attitude of the parental stance is respect for sexuality as part of our humanity. If sexual activity such as sadistic acts or acts clinical psychologists treat as fetishes, lead a couple to develop a contempt for their sexual activity despite finding pleasure in it, they should avoid it as a temptation to undercut their stance. A feeling of disgust would be an indicator of treating humanity, under the guise of sexuality, as a means for pleasure only.

Also excessive pursuit of pleasure leads to disappointment with one’s spouse because in fact marital sex is not always aptly described as voluptuous. Great dissatisfaction with one’s wife as a sexual partner could be an indicator of excessive preoccupation with sexual pleasure. Too little focus on the sexual pleasure of one’s wife is one way of having of having insufficient interest in sexual pleasure. One way to have a deficient interest in sexual pleasure with one’s wife is to place her “on a pedestal” as too pure to have fun with. This can be a serious temptation to have fun elsewhere

Other ways to have deficient interest in sexual pleasure is to have excessive interest in your research, work, hobby, sport, etc. A man may need to be told by his wife when he has too little interest in sexual pleasure.

The above concerns internal discussion amongst holders of the parental stance. Disputes would concern the strength of temptations allowable by concern, or lack of it, with sexual pleasure. For the general public the disputes would be about threats to good

order and good taste by pursuit of sexual pleasure. Here the disputes would, I think, be about what causes disruptive concern with sexual pleasure, eg., bodily display.

Consider some of these dimensions where the focus of discussion is on good order. I try to indicate how the discussion can stay in the general public arena. This means that “too little” and “too much” would not be measured by temptations to violate the Paternal Principle. Rather the mean would be sought relative to some implicit notion of good order.

XII.3.2 Gender distinctions

This dimension is too complex to say anything significant without addition of principles of justice, sensitivity to traditions and the differences between men and women. The Paternal Principle gives only a few guidelines. The father should be involved with the care of any children and this, with the differences between males and females, likely leads to the mother and father doing different jobs. The sexes should not be so mingled in society that extra-marital and pre-marital mating is very likely. I acknowledge again that the parental stance is essentially sexist. In this book I have been arguing that males have special moral obligations because they are human males.

XII.3.3 Modesty in dress and action

Displaying the body is fundamental in courtship. For good or ill we humans are almost constantly in a courtship mode. In the following, I do not sharply divide sexuality into courting, mating and bonding. In life these are all causally interconnected. For instance, courting behavior may be necessary to stimulate mating to preserve bonding. There are prudential and moral grounds for restricting bodily display. The suitable points on this dimension I leave primarily to women. My prudential advice to women is that

although the fashion of the season will determine how you dress, many of the fashions are not flattering to those with less than an ideal body shape.

My moral advice to men is not to look closely at women who display too much. It sounds prudish; but controlling your eyes is important towards keeping a good character. This can be difficult. For instance, when young girls, with loose blouses, bent over the handle bars are racing towards me on the bike path averting my eyes is difficult and dangerous.

My general advice in this area, and the following about erotic stimulation, is to make the problem your problem of controlling your reaction to the stimulation. Control yourself; do not blame the “stimulator.” Support from this approach comes from Dov Linzer in a *New York Times* opinion piece of Jan 19, 2012. He writes of men being sexually stimulated by seeing women in everyday life: “ This is not a problem unique to Judaism. But the Talmud, the basis for Jewish law, offers a perhaps surprising answer: It places the responsibility for controlling men’s licentious thoughts about women squarely on the men. Put more plainly, the Talmud says: It’s *your* problem, sir; not hers." Men should be reluctant to develop and enforce modesty in dress codes for women. Some Islamic societies provide cautionary tales.

XII.3.4 Flirting and gallantry

Humans engage in courtship behavior throughout life. Ideally they bond once. Courtship, flirting and gallantry, enrich human life from puberty into old age. So although mating should be only between a husband and wife general courting may continue. But how much? Courting which leads to adultery is too much. Oppressive jealousy about one’s husband or wife interacting with someone of the opposite sex is a

deficiency along this dimension. Obviously men need to respect their wives feelings in this matter. There is so much to be said about this dimension such as appropriate courting behavior in various places. I note only two points. Men should engage in courting behavior with their wives. Men should learn to dance.

XII.3.5 The erotic, the pornographic, raunchy, bawdy, the off-color etc.

This is a fascinating dimension for aesthetic discussions as well as moral discussions along with discussions about fashion and manners.

What pictures and descriptions are sexually stimulating lies in the eye of the beholder. But some are stimulating to almost all men. Pornographer's marketing skills lie in selecting such works. They know it when they see it! Certainly not all erotic art is pornographic. Developing working definitions of "erotic," "pornographic," "bawdy," "raunchy," etc. is thinking along stance dimensions. Such labels guide thinking along repression dimensions. Depending upon the definitions some may find suitable places and occasions for the bawdy, fewer for the raunchy and none for the pornographic.

The erotic is more difficult to deal with because it involves so much great and prestigious art. Some propose destroying and censoring all erotic art. Others propose half-way measures such as placing fig leaves over genitalia. My recommendation is for self-censorship alone. Look away from works which give you inconvenient erotic stimulation. Being sexually stimulated is in these cases an aesthetic distraction. I am not so tolerant of the pornographic. Some such as sadistic and so-called "kiddie porn" should probably be banned. But I am uncertain about the restraints to be imposed. Giving young men a life-long legal status of a sexual predator for downloading "kiddie porn" seems excessive.

There needs to be a place for the off-color and especially the bawdy. They are effective antidote for prudishness. Our humanity, which includes our sexuality, is, as Kant tells us, an end in itself. Nonetheless, it is “good for the soul” to realize the comic features of our humanity. Chaucer and Shakespeare *et al.* offer models for appropriate use of the bawdy.

A last word on this topic concerns a possible appropriate use of pornography. It may provide safe therapy for a married couple in which the husband is afflicted with penile erection dysfunction. Because of side-effects, I am biased against use of therapeutic drugs. TV ads warn us that Viagra has a possible side-effect of an erection lasting beyond eight hours. It is highly unlikely that there is any porn potent enough to cause an eight-hour erection.

XII.3.6 Modesty in speech

Detailed talk of mating should not be public. There is no possibility of people not talking of sexual relations; especially improper ones. However, as written above there should be almost no talk of homosexuality. I think that reports of President Clinton’s sexual misconduct drifted into inappropriate detail. The films are boring when you see them more than once, but corporate orientation films on avoiding sexual harassment in the work place, give good advice on avoiding sexually immodest talk.

There is a dimension which troubles me greatly. This is finding the proper point for description of sexual detail in contemporary fiction. I will not tell how many significant works I have stopped reading or how many pages I have skimmed through until “the story resumes.” For me the tolerance for description of sexual intercourse is near zero. It causes erotic distraction. So, I should warn readers that although I have

referred to novels in this book and emphasized their importance, I did skip over what some call the “juicy parts.” Perhaps there was a writing challenge early in the twentieth century to describe sexual intercourse. But the challenge has been faced. Should not literature move on? Literature is different from the visual arts since looking away leaves gaps in the narrative as the reader receives it. Looking away from the painting does nothing to the painting.

Maybe I am wrong. Maybe only current literature shows us sexual nihilism leading to full nihilism. Maybe current fiction, with its erotic excess and borderline pornography, will lead us to confront sexual nihilism.

XII.4 Repression dimensions

Repression is a fact of human sexuality. Acceptance of some repression rules is a dimension of a stance while sanctions for the rules is yet another dimension. There is a wide range of thoughts and attitudes towards repressive rules. Some may think that they should be minimal and it is unfortunate that we need them. Some might find them a helpful guide towards self control. Some may think they are in good order as they stand while another thinks they need serious revision.

I think sexual repression is essential to living a decent sexual life. Furthermore, If there is no self repression, there will be communal repression. I cannot even judge repression as bad or negative. Appetite repression simply comes with the human condition of having prudential and normative control in several areas of our lives. Of course, repression can be overdone. Think of people suffering from *anorexia*. Another stance dimension, then is, is determination of when repression is excessive. When repression becomes damaging requires careful consideration of an individual’s condition.

For sexual matters, I cannot make general pronouncements. I do not think, for example, that daunting repression of Catholic priestly celibacy is an unhealthy repression. But it could be for some who probably should not be priests.

XII.4.2 Sanctions

Related to the dimension of attitudes towards rules there is a dimension of thoughts about the sanctions attached to repressive rules. Again there can be a range of thoughts and attitudes about these sanctions. I shall not focus much on sanctions and will allow a wide range of sanctions under each stance types For instance, someone who has a very strict sexual morality with respect to behaviors condemned may seem almost permissive because the sanctions applied are so light. However, someone who has what could be called a permissive sexual morality because so many sexual practices are tolerated may hold that the violations of the few impermissible sexual acts need to be punished very harshly. There are hints of such a difference in Catholic Bishops who practiced lenity with priests who had homosexual relations with boys and progressives, who accept homosexuality, demanding harsh treatment for such wayward priests. I admit that the repressive conditions from my stance are highly repressive. However, my beliefs and attitudes towards sanctions are, I admit, extremely, lenient. But there are at least two sources of sanctions: Communal disapproval and legal punishments.

XII.4.2 Communal sanctions

Communal sanctions are very difficult to apply. By definition there is no clear procedure for determining guilt or degree of guilt. There is a temptation for some to take vigilante action. I reject any actual attack on a person's body or property outside the legal system. (This does not include a girl fighting off an attacker with a taser.) I think that it is

best for there to be clear expression of disapproval for certain sexual behavior. Part of public education should be to have children internalize these rules. Then, in my judgment, the major communal sanction is a sense of guilt. This is not as weak as it sounds.

However, some public exposure is also helpful. So many political careers are ruined merely by exposure. I wonder, though, if the ruin of so many careers effectively deters other men in public life. Let me note that I think the communal censorship of Dominique Strauss-Kahn was an inappropriate use of communal censorship to ruin a career.

Recall the incident. The head of the International Monetary Fund was accused of rape by a hotel maid after having sexual relations with her, This event which dominated the news in late 2011 is probably only a faint memory now. A good synopsis can be found in Wikipedia. The result of the charges was public humiliation of Dominique Straus-Kahn including a so-called “perp walk” from the airport to jail, his resignation as chairman of the IMF and inability to run for presidency of France. The charges were dropped because discrepancies in the maid’s story.

XII.4.3 Legal sanctions

Statutory law can be used to guide people in certain directions as well as to deter them from others. I do not agree with Kant that laws should not be made for the purpose of helping people form their character. The role of law in character building is a dimension of stances. I am not sure how effective laws can be in these areas. I suggest that restrictions on pornography can be justified by protecting men from moral harm. It seems to me that restricting pornography because it does physical or psychological harm

is sometimes a rationalization for those who find it morally offensive but are ashamed to admit it. With respect to legal sanctions, I state here only my conviction that there should be no laws against consensual sexual relations over a certain age, such as sixteen. I think that there can be communal sanctions against adultery of the type sketched above. For homosexual relations, “don’t ask, don’t tell” is the appropriate policy. Kant suggested banishing homosexuals. My version of Kant’s suggestion is to ignore homosexuality socially. Give it no social standing! This is not cruel. That is what I would want if I had the courtship disorder of homosexuality.

XII.4.4 Tolerable immoralities

In the sixth chapter we reminded ourselves that both individually and collectively we tolerate immoralities. Consider a few of several dimensions here. There needs to be discussion of whether to tolerate immoralities at all and if so which and how many. There needs to be discussion of how to maintain correct thinking on morality while tolerating violations. There needs to be discussion about what is to be tolerated in oneself, in a family and in wider communities. In general excess is tolerating so much that allegiance to the Paternal Principle will seem dishonest. Deficiency would be being so harsh and puritanical that the Paternal Principle seems totally unfit as a guide for ordinary people who inevitably violate it.

XII.5 Our immorality vs. nihilism

This reminder that we are all sexual sinners is an ingredient of an antidote to nihilism. In the short run we tolerate sexual immoralities. But in the long run they are intolerable. Our immoralities give all of us the task of redeeming ourselves. We have something to do with our lives: Make up for our past failings and strive to make ourselves

as we ought to be. By confronting sexual nihilism we have found a meaning for human life.

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THE END.

END NOTES

¹ Aurel Kolnai's *SEXUAL ETHICS: The Meaning and Foundations of Sexual Morality*, trans. and edited by Francis Dunlop, Ashgate Pub., Burlington VT. 2005

² Kolnai, p. 4

³ Ibid p.44

⁴ Ibid 62