"SEXUAL MORALITY" (optional)

SEXUAL DESIRE

A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic

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SEXUAL MORALITY

The subject of this chapter is of such importance that my treatment must inevitably limit itself to first suggestions. I hope that those who disagree with my conclusions will at least find, in the supporting arguments, a procedure whereby to refute them. My purpose is not to provide a comprehensive philosophy of morals, but to show how a plausible account of moral reasoning may, when combined with the foregoing theory of sexual desire, lead to an intuitively persuasive sexual morality.

Morality, in its fundamental meaning, is a condition upon practical reasoning. It is a constraint upon reasons for action, which is felt by most rational beings and which is, furthermore, a normal consequence of the possession of a first-person perspective. Morality must be understood, therefore, in first-person terms: in terms of the reasoning that *leads* to action.

Our life is limited by what is forbidden, and fulfilled in what is valuable. Kantian philosophy, which subsumes both those facts under the idea of duty, has been of enormous appeal, partly because it imposes a coherent and unified structure on moral thought, and partly because it shows moral thinking to be a necessary consequence of rational agency, and an expression of the first-person perspective that defines our condition. It is now evident, however, that Kant's attempt to derive morality from the categorical imperative, and the categorical imperative from the first-person perspective (the perspective that forces on us the idea of a 'transcendental freedom'), is unlikely to succeed. For Kant, the sympathy that we feel for the virtuous, and the benevolent emotions that prompt us to do what virtue commands, are not genuine expressions of morality, but merely 'empirical determinations', which intrude into the realm of practical reason only to deflect it from its categorical purposes. Many have entirely rejected Kant's theory on account of this, while others have tried to modify it, reinterpreting the categorical imperative, either as a

special kind of *thought* contained within the moral emotions,[1] or as a kind of normative emotion, which may perhaps grow from human sympathy, but which spreads its charge over the whole human world.[2] Those modifications of Kant's view retain what I believe to be its central idea: that moral reasoning expresses the view of ourselves which is imposed on us by our existence as persons, and by our interaction with others of our kind. Moral reasoning is the formal recognition of the strictures placed upon us by our interpersonal attitudes, from which in turn our existence as persons derives.

The position expressed in that last sentence owes much to Kant, and much to Hegel and Bradley.[3] There is also another central tenet of Kant's theory, which must be accepted in something like its original form: the idea that moral reasons close the subject's mind to alternative courses of action. Whether we wish to analyse this 'closing of the mind' as a kind of inner force,[4] as an internal property of moral reasons,[5] as the result of a 'barrier to information',[6] or perhaps as a mere blindness, it yet seems evident that it exists, and that it is one of the most striking characteristics of the moral being. *Because* the moral being is rational, there are certain courses of action which he cannot consider. If Kant is right, it is man's very rationality that leads him to close his mind to actions for which a thousand prudential reasons might be given.

How are such extraordinary constraints on practical reasoning to be justified, and which? For Kant, the problem of morality is posed always from, and within, the immediate first-person point of view, in response to the question 'why should *I* do *that*?' To step outside that point of view is to lose the perspective from which practical questions must be asked, and hence to lose the hope of answering them. The question what to do is either mine or no one's, and the significance of the categorical answer – the answer embodied in an *ought* – is that it addresses itself to me as agent, and also lays claim to a validity that transcends all that is merely mine. Hence, for Kant, the standard of validity in moral reasoning must be internal to it: it must at the same time provide a motive for *me* to act, and also lay down a universal law.

Kant was aware of the enormous difficulties that beset such a view. It seems impossible to derive a *standard of validity* which is also, at the same time, a first-person reason for action. If there is such a standard, then, by its very universality, it must avoid all mention of *me*; in which case, how can it have the motivating force required by a genuine first-person reason? Conversely, if it is such a reason – a reason which motivates *me* – its claim to universal validity must be doubted. This conflict emerges at a metaphysical level, in the divide between the transcendental and the

empirical self. The first is a kind of abstract ego, released from the constraints of concrete existence, and with no *principium individuationis* that would enable us to identify it with an 'empirical self'. It is the empirical self who must act, and only the transcendental self that can listen to instructions. Their non-relation (indeed, the strict *inconceivability* of a relation between them) provides an immovable obstacle to Kantian ethics.

The conflict emerges also at the level of practical reasoning itself, between the motive that prompts me here and now, and which grows from my empirical circumstances, and the claim to validity which, because it must abstract from all that is merely mine towards a universal law, removes me from the circumstances which motivate my action. The conflict stems from the contradictory requirements of abstraction and concretion – the requirements that I be removed from my circumstances, and that I be identified with them.

Modern Kantians, such as Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice*, encounter some equivalent of the same objection. Rawls, for example, affirms that 'the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it,'[7] meaning that our values and aims belong to our individual (one might say, empirical) circumstances, and cannot therefore be considered by any theory of justice that is to be universally applied. The correct theory of justice must attain its standard by abstraction – by winnowing away the features which distinguish persons one from another, so as to approach the hypothetical position in which agents have no other basis for their choice than the fact of choice itself. (This procedure, whereby almost everything that matters to a person is discounted, is part of what Rawls means by 'fairness'.) The abstracted chooser who occupies Rawls's 'original position' is still a self, who retains whatever is necessary freely to enter a 'social contract' with similar 'disprivileged' beings. As Michael Sandel has argued,[8] however, this is to suppose precisely the same metaphysical vision as is supposed by Kantian ethics: the vision of a purely noumenal self, who, while being detached from all empirical constraints, may yet have, through his reason, the motive to choose. In abstracting from my values, my everyday aims and preferences, from all that constitutes my contingent condition, I abstract also from the circumstances of my act – and, in particular, from the desires and interests which initially raised for me the question of action.

Kant's approach is the most beautiful and thorough of all the theories which try to find the basis of morality in the first-person perspective, and its failure must serve as a warning. We should, I believe, follow the path of those philosophers – notably Aristotle – who have looked for the grounds

of first-person practical reason outside the immediate situation of the agent. Kant's principal opponent – Hume – was such a philosopher. But his scepticism, and his grotesque caricature of the human mind, render him a doubtful authority. I propose, like Hume's predecessors, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, to return to the philosophical intuitions of Aristotle, and to refurbish them for the needs of a modern moral perspective.

The weakness of the Kantian position lies in its attribution of a 'motivating force' to reason – in its denial of Hume's principle that reason alone cannot be a motive to action.[9] The Aristotelian position involves no commitment to the idea of a 'pure practical reason'. It recognises that practical reasoning concludes in action only because it begins in desire. The 'practical syllogism' has a practical premise, and to the agent with evil desires no reason can be given that will, by its sheer force as a reason, suffice to make him good.[10]

It might seem that, from such a realistic premise concerning the nature of practical reasoning, only moral subjectivism could emerge. For the premise suggests that practical reasoning does not change, but merely realises, the desires of the agent, and hence that it can concern itself only with means and never with ends. And indeed, from the immediate first-person point of view – the point of view of my present motives – such a conclusion is unavoidable. However, there is also the long-term point of view, and it is the distinctive feature of Aristotelian ethics that it makes this point of view central to its argument. It develops a kind of third-person reasoning which, while containing its own incontrovertible claim to validity, may also be applied by each agent to himself, so becoming practical, by transforming his desires.

The model for this reasoning is the practice of moral education. In educating a child I am concerned, not merely with what he does, but with what he feels and with his emerging character. Feeling and character, which provide his motives, determine what he will do. In moulding them, I mould his moral nature. I know that my child's desires will, if he is rational, determine his behaviour – for I know the truth enshrined in Aristotle's practical syllogism, according to which rational action is the realisation of desire. Moreover, I know that my child has (in normal circumstances)[11] reason to be rational, for no other gift can compensate for the lack of this one. Hence I must, if I care for him, devote myself to the education both of his reason and of his desires.

Of course, given his present childish nature, I cannot easily persuade him to change in the preferred direction: only his love and my authority may elicit in him the disposition to do willingly that which is in his long-term interests. However, unlike him, I take an overview of his future life. I

see that there is reason for him to have some desires rather than others, even if he cannot at present appreciate this fact. What, then, will guide me in his moral education?

We must note that the practical syllogism, which arises from the concrete circumstances of action, cannot be anticipated. I cannot solve now the specific practical problems that will encumber my child's existence. Nevertheless, I can anticipate, in a general way, the difficulties which any rational being must encounter on life's way, and I can consider the character which might generate fulfilment. To engage in such reflections is to invoke an idea of happiness, or *eudaimonia*.

Aristotle's strategy, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is not easy to grasp, and is open to many interpretations. The strategy I shall propose may or may not be identical with Aristotle's; at least, it is inspired by Aristotle's and leads to similar conclusions. I suggest that Aristotle's invocation of happiness, as the final end of human conduct, is essentially correct. Happiness is the single final answer to the question 'why do that?', the answer which survives the conflict with every rival interest or desire. In referring to happiness we refer, not to the satisfaction of impulses, but to the fulfilment of the person. We all have reason to want this fulfilment, and we want it reasonably, whatever our other desires, and whatever our circumstances. In moral education this alone is certain: that the child ought to be happy, and hence that whatever disposition is essential to happiness is a disposition that he has reason to acquire.

But what is happiness? Kant dismissed the idea as empty: happiness, he argued, simply stands for the generality of human desires: it means different things for different people, and provides no coherent motive of its own. Following Aristotle, however, I shall propose an idea of happiness as a kind of 'flourishing'. A gardener who tends a plant has reason to see that it flourishes. The unflourishing plant is one that tends towards non-existence. Flourishing pertains to the *being* of the plant, and to care for the plant is to care for its flourishing.

As a plant flourishes when it has what it needs, so does my child flourish when he has what is necessary to him. To act in order to flourish is always to act in accordance with what is reasonable, since to act otherwise is to destroy the possibility of being moved by reason at all. From the parental point of view, therefore, I must secure at least this for my child. At this point, the theological and secular moralities tend to diverge. Some say that man flourishes only in proximity to God, and only when he walks in God's ways. Others say that he flourishes here and now, in accordance with a law of his own. I shall argue for the second view, but my conclusions would also follow, I think, from the first – although by a

more roundabout route.

Obviously my child is not a plant; nor is he just any kind of animal. So it remains to determine what 'flourishing' means in his case. This is exactly the same question as the question of his nature. For flourishing is the activity of his *essence*: it is the successful employment of those capacities that are integral to his being. (An essence is that which cannot be lost without ceasing to be.) Aristotle himself defines *eudaimonia* as 'an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue',[12] and once again I believe it is instructive to follow him.

My child is essentially (but also only potentially) a rational being or person. He may flourish or decline as such, and his potential for being such may not be realised: he may grow up as a mere animal, an instance of *homo faber*, nurtured by some gentle wolf. Supposing, however, that his potential for rational conduct is realised; what then constitutes his flourishing? We may divide the answer to that question into two parts: health and happiness. Health is the state in which I flourish as an animal; happiness the state in which I flourish as a person. And it is an important feature of the ontological dependence of personhood – of its need to find *embodiment* in an animal life – that health is such an important precondition of happiness. But health is not everything; happiness requires that we flourish as rational beings. We must exercise our rational capacities successfully: we must be fulfilled as persons, through the decisions which guide our lives.

It is clear that, if I have reason to do anything, I have reason to be successful in what I do. But success is not merely a matter of choosing the right means to my ends; it is also a matter of rightly choosing the end itself. Consequently, there is a distinction between virtue (which involves the disposition to make appropriate choices of ends) and skill (which involves mastery of the means whereby to accomplish them). This is the origin of Aristotle's distinction between *aretē* and *technē*.

Virtue is the disposition to choose those courses of action which contribute to my happiness: which cause me to flourish as a rational being. In educating my child I am educating his habits, and it is clear therefore that I shall always have reason to inculcate a habit of virtue, not for my sake, but for his own. At least, that is so provided we accept that my main concern is what matters for *him*, in the future to which *he* is destined. At the same time, I do not think of virtue as a *means* only: it consists in the right choice of end.

Consider friendship. To say that an action was done out of friendship is already to describe an end. Indeed, there is a sense in which there cannot be a further end which is still compatible with this motive. To say that I

was friendly to John because of the advantage that I hoped to gain from him is to imply that I was not moved by *friendship*. Nevertheless, one may justify both the general disposition to friendship (which Aristotle was not alone in believing to be one of the rewards of virtue) and the individual friendship for John, by pointing to the connections between these dispositions and the happiness of the person who possesses them. Hence there is no contradiction in saying that a person values what he does (when acting out of friendship) as an *end*, and that there is also a further reason for doing it, namely, that such is the way to happiness.

Virtue, like friendship, is a disposition to intentional action. It is the disposition to want what is justified or reasonable, in the face of the natural impulse to act in despite of reason. Consider the classical virtue of courage. All human beings have rooted in their animal nature two rival instincts: that of aggression and that of fear. In the case of threat one instinct prompts to attack, the other to flee. The conflict between them may resolve itself without reasoned calculation, purely on the basis of their relative strengths. At the same time, however, the rational being wants to do what reason commands. In particular, he wants to take into account those 'unconditional' imperatives which the Kantian rightly emphasises as the true forms of moral constraint. He wants to do what he judges to be right or honourable, even in the occasion of mortal fear. To have this disposition is to be (to some degree) courageous.

Note that this disposition to want to do what is right in the face of danger is a disposition to act for a reason. It overcomes the instinct of fear, but not as the instinct of aggression may overcome it. As John Casey has argued,[13] courage does not enter the situation as one competing desire among others. It enters through a decision, which is not balanced against fear as one force against another, but which discounts fear as a factor irrelevant to the present course of action. The courageous man does not pit his rage against his fear and become thereby a battle-ground for conflicting humours. He acts in defiance of fear: his action is not the victory of a force, but the conquest of all forces, a subduing of animal nature. The resulting action is therefore attributed to *him*, as springing from his nature as a rational being. There are, of course, false virtues: the foolhardiness of the raging man, which may be mistaken for courage; the meanness and self-love of the prudish man, which might be taken for temperance. There are those circumstances in which:

> Patience hardens to a pittance, courage
> unflinchingly declines into sour rage,
> the cobweb-banners, the shrill bugle-bands

> and the bronze warriors resting on their wounds.
> [Geoffrey Hill, *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*]

But those are circumstances, not of virtue, but of the vice which imitates virtue, and into which virtue declines.

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean has proved, in this regard, especially confusing. It may seem as though the virtue is a disposition to choose a course of action between two extremes. But the course of action between the two extremes dictated by fear and anger is not a course of action at all: it is a state of paralysed inertia, such as may indeed afflict an animal but which has nothing to do with the motives of the courageous person. The mean is simply that which reason commands, despite the prompting of fear and anger.

It is clear that virtue is a part of rational fulfilment. For without the disposition to want what is reasonable, there is no such thing as an *exercise* of reason. And while this may seem a rather trivial assertion, it is, in the context, far from trivial. For if I have reason to aim at anything, I have reason to acquire the dispositions that enable me to fulfil my aims. I therefore have a reason to acquire courage – and perhaps other virtues too. I will also try to inculcate these dispositions in my child, since whatever his desires his long-term fulfilment will depend upon his acquisition of the habits which prevent their frustration. And these habits will constrain his desires, so that he will learn to want what is reasonable.

That sketch of the Aristotelian strategy enables us to draw an interesting conclusion. The reasoning that justifies a given course of moral education may underpin and justify the present ends of conduct, even when they seem to entail pain and disaster for the agent. Consider the courageous man in battle: he will expose himself to risk and may die as a result, where the coward escapes with his life and prospects. In what way is the courageous man more rational? How can it be rational to do knowingly that which leads to the extinction of life and reason? The answer is obvious. Both the coward and the brave man act in a way which is, from the immediate first-person point of view, wholly rational. The first desires to save himself and acts accordingly; the second desires to do what is right and honourable, and he too chooses the course appropriate to that end. The question which of their ends is appropriate is, however, not to be settled from a consideration of the present moment, nor does it depend upon their first-person reasons for action: their present motives. It can be settled only by rehearsing again the arguments of the moral educator. These arguments dwell, not on the specific occasion of choice, but on the overall structure of a rational life. It is more in the interests of the rational being to have the disposition of courage than to be at the

mercy of fear. The view of the moral educator justifies the disposition which, in the peculiar circumstances of battle, subjects the agent to a mortal danger. In so far as there is a rational justification of the *ends* of conduct, it is the courageous man, and not the coward, who acts in accordance with reason, even if he dies.

I can take the same overall view of my own nature and fortune as I take of my child's, and endeavour to inculcate in myself those virtues which I would wish on my child. This endeavour is, of course, necessarily enfeebled by the urgency of present desires; but it will always engage with one of my desires – the desire to be happy. Moral education is important, since, while I have little control over my own corrupted temperament, I may still control the unformed temperament of my child. However hopeless my own situation, however sunk in vice I may be, I may yet judge the wretchedness of my condition and seek to ensure that others do not share in it. For the Aristotelian, the real question of morality is not whether I, here and now, can be persuaded to alter my course, but whether there are reasons why another, who may yet be corrected, should alter *his* course.

The Aristotelian approach offers hope to those who seek for a secular morality of sexual conduct. Not only does it place in the forefront of moral thinking the crucial practice through which sexual morality arises – the practice of moral education; it also gives cogency to prohibitions and privations – something that a secular morality seems otherwise incompetent to do. Thus, in the same way as the sacrifice of the brave man in battle may be shown to be supremely reasonable, so too might we justify such peculiar practices as chastity, modesty and sexual hesitation. Although these block the road to present pleasure, and seem, from the immediate first-person point of view, wholly irrational, they may yet be justified in terms of the disposition from which they spring. It may be in the long-term interests of the rational agent that he acquire just this kind of control over his sexual impulses. Thus Sidgwick regarded the function of sexual morality as twofold: the maintenance of a social order believed to be most conducive to the prosperous continuance of the human race, and 'the protection of habits of feeling in individuals believed to be generally most important to their perfection or their happiness'.[14] We could interpret the second of those functions as the one to which the Aristotelian strategy is directed. (The first is arguably not part of morality at all, even if it is a foreseeable offshoot of moral conduct that our genes will be the ultimate beneficiaries.)

In order to settle the question, whether any such thing be true, we must return to the idea of happiness or fulfilment which underlies the

Aristotelian strategy. Fulfilment here means fulfilment of the person, and, in order to describe it, we must delve a little more deeply into the obscure regions of the self. That is, we must attempt to make sense of the first-person perspective, as it is revealed in practical reasoning. For it is in this – the defining feature of persons – that the reality of human fulfilment will be found. The thought of a person is self-conscious thought, expressing a rational conception of the world and of his place within it; his action is self-conscious action, stemming from practical reason. The 'self' is a name for these distinctive thoughts and feelings, and in what follows I shall refer to 'self-fulfilment', in order to denote the fulfilment of the rational being – the being with a first-person perspective.

In Chapter 3 I referred to two closely related features of the first-person perspective: privileged access and responsibility. Both have been frequently invoked in the subsequent discussion, and the first is to some extent accounted for in Appendix 1. In dealing with rational fulfilment, however, we are more concerned with the second feature, which defines the relation of the person to his own past and future. Responsibility denotes a pattern of thought and feeling, whereby a person anchors himself, not in the moment, but in the stretch of time which is his 'life'. Derek Parfit has argued that personal identity ought not to matter in our practical reasoning: what matters, or ought to matter, he believes, is something else, which has been confused with identity on account of a metaphysical illusion.[15] In what follows I shall be arguing that, from the first-person point of view, it is *precisely* identity that matters, for it is by virtue of a self-identifying thought that my practical reason engages with the future at all. This thought is, perhaps, an illusion. But so, as we have seen, is much else that informs our first-person view of ourselves.

I begin by introducing the 'minimal self'. This is a creature who has command of language, and in particular of the first-person case, sufficient to obey the rules of self-attribution concerning his present mental states. The difference between animality and selfhood is one of kind, and admits of no degrees: either a creature grasps self-attribution or he does not, and the conditions on grasping it are fairly stringent. However, the transition – which can be described, in Hegelian idiom, as the transition from object to subject – is built up of certain stages or 'moments'. That which begins in self-attribution leads towards intention and responsibility – towards the 'maximal self' who projects himself forward and backward in time, and lives according to the logic of a human biography.

As we have seen, the minimal self is already the repository of authority. His voice is not the observer but the expression of his present mental state. He has a unique and irreplaceable authority in all matters relating to his

own mental condition. Hence he may reveal himself to others, and also hide himself from them. He can pretend, just as he can be honest. He can also be argued with and learned from. All this creates, as I have argued, the foundation of interpersonal existence, by providing distinct responses and reactions, the subject and object of which are creatures with the first-person point of view.

Let us consider, now, the various attitudes that the minimal self may have towards his past and future. It is clear that, without a conception of my identity through time, many of my mental states would be strictly unintelligible to me. I cannot attribute to myself beliefs of a theoretical character, or moral beliefs, without also supposing that I endure long enough for such beliefs to make a difference in my behaviour. An instantaneous monad, who is no sooner born into the world than taken from it, has no time for serious belief, and to the extent that we see ourselves as theoretical and enquiring creatures, to that extent must we inevitably think of ourselves as enduring in time. The minimal self exists fully in the present, therefore, only by also asserting his identity over time. He attributes to himself both a past and a future, and although he may be mistaken in this attribution (as he may perhaps be mistaken in any assertion of identity over time)[16] it is part of his nature to make it. On the basis of this attribution of self-identity, the present self may take up a variety of attitudes towards both past and future.

Consider, for example, remorse. If I say sincerely, 'I am remorseful over what happened,' not only do I assert my identity with a preceding person, I also incorporate the actions and omissions of that person into my own present accountability towards the world – my present sense of my debts and liabilities. The case should be contrasted with the sincere assertion 'I regret what happened,' which is more like a statement of wish, and makes no essential reference either to my own previous existence or to my present responsibility.

Now clearly it is possible to feel either regret *or* remorse for one and the same occurrence: a person who never felt anything stronger than regret would have a different attitude to his past from one who also felt remorse. Suppose John had desired Lucy's death and in pursuit of that desire had brought it about that Lucy died. With hindsight John might reflect on what happened and say, 'I regret Lucy's dying; moreover I see that she died as a direct result of my desire that she should do so: my desire was the real cause of her death.' If that is all there is to it, it is clear that John is in some way dissociating himself from his past. He is supposing that he, the present self, is not answerable for the actions of that previous self, in the manner of the gentleman in *The Jew of Malta*, who reports that it was in a

foreign country, and besides, the wench is dead.

John's case should be contrasted with that of Harold, who, perceiving that his own desire for Lucy's death was also the cause of her death, is stricken by remorse. (Where John says, 'My desire caused her death,' Harold says, '*I* caused her death' – and the intrusion of the 'I' into the centre of thought is the mark of responsibility.) The very feeling of remorse contains an affirmation of unity with the previous self – a sense that his actions belong to me, and form the ground of my present liability. Remorse links the present self to its past, in a self-conscious bond. It constitutes an *inner* link, one that depends for its strength precisely upon the present capacity to feel it. In this feeling the minimal self enlarges himself, enriching his mental content with a lived sense of his own duration.

Suppose Harold, having expressed his remorse, goes on to say, 'but of course, I have no intention to avoid or refrain from such things in future; what will be will be.' We should at once doubt the sincerity of his previous expression of feeling. To take responsibility for one's past is also to project that responsibility forward into the future. To feel remorse is to acquire a motive to refrain. Indeed, in the normal case, remorse involves something like a decision: a resolve that, in future, things will be otherwise.

However, just as a self-conscious being may have distinct attitudes to his past, so too may he have distinct attitudes to his own future. His outlook on the future ranges between two contrasting poles – which we may name, following Hampshire's seminal discussion,[17] predicting and deciding. He may see himself in the future merely as the vehicle of impersonal forces which act through him but not from him, or else as an irreplaceable agent, the originator of actions of his own. As many philosophers have argued, intention involves a kind of certainty about one's future. In deciding, I lay claim now to a future event, and to the extent that I am sincere I must be certain that it will occur. An expression of the form 'I intend to do it but I do not know if I will' cannot be sincere – unless it amounts to no more than the admission that I may change my mind.

Imagine now someone who never made decisions: the extreme case of the predictive person. We could never affect what he will do simply by arguing with him: no change of his view of the world will introduce a decision to alter it, and therefore nothing we say to him can give us grounds for thinking that he will do one thing rather than another. (After all, his *predictions* are no better than ours.) We cannot treat him as having any particular authority concerning his future conduct, nor will our

desire to influence his conduct be furthered by consulting his expressed interests. If we are to engage with his future at all, it is only by steering him towards it independently of any expressed plan, intention or resolve. Just as he sees himself in the future as the helpless vehicle of impersonal forces, so must we *treat* him as such: as a means whereby those forces seek expression and not as an 'end in himself'. So if he sees himself as an object, so too must we. (There begins a proof of a fundamental Hegelian and Marxian contention, that alienation from self is alienation from other.)

The example shows us how the self-conception of the minimal self may be enriched. In acquiring a decisive attitude towards his own future, as in acquiring a responsible attitude to his own past, the minimal self ceases to be merely a vehicle for the transmission of impersonal forces and becomes instead an active subject, whose relation to the world is one of freedom. He now *belongs* where he was previously an observer. However, there is more to the transition than the passage from predicting to deciding. He could make that transition merely by a few decisions, about matters of no importance. This alone will not amount to that full sense of the responsibility for his own future which is required of the mature rational agent. The truly decisive person also reasons about the future, and takes upon himself in the present the task of his remaining life.

How do we characterise this fully responsible being? One suggestion is that we suppose him, not merely to *have* desires, but also to stand in a critical relation towards them. We suppose him to engage in the reasoned criticism of desires, selecting those whose influence he would wish to prevail. Some philosophers have considered, therefore, that we should characterise the rational agent as the possessor of 'second-order' desires.[18] He desires some things, and desires to desire others. But again, it would be odd, and incomplete, if this were seen by the agent himself as simply another personal peculiarity, that he not only desired health, say, but also desired to desire it. Why should this new desire suffice to change his image of himself from that of a thing acted on to that of an agent who takes full responsibility for his future life?

What is required, I believe, is not a new order of desire, but a new conception of the object of desire – a conception that attributes to the object a specific importance, over and above the fact of being desired. In short, the subject should not only desire the object, but *see it as desirable*. He must attribute to it a *claim* over his desire, so that it becomes *right* to desire it. He must perceive the object of desire under the aspect not of desire only, but also of value.

Many philosophers have argued that values are not objective properties of things but subjective colourings, or (more usually) human

artefacts.[19] Such arguments are irrelevant to our purpose. They also tend to be based on peculiar assumptions: nobody ever thought that because a temple is an artefact it is therefore unreal. It does not matter that values are artefacts: what matters is that something vital to self-consciousness is omitted by those who fail to construct them. Whether there are rules (as Kant supposed) which constrain us to construct our values according to a certain pattern is a philosophical question that we may be unable to answer. But, to the extent that we have reason to pursue self-consciousness in its fullest form – and so enlarge the realms of subjectivity beyond those occupied by the minimal self – to that extent do we have reason to manufacture values. A world without values is one in which all activity has an ending, but no activity has an end. Consider the difference between the man who desires x, which he values, and the man who just desires x. The latter might satisfy his desire with no sense of improving his lot. He had a desire; now he has abolished it, and, if he is lucky, quietus falls. The first man, however, had a desire and, in abolishing it, obtains something of value – something which ministers to his sense of well-being. His lot has significantly improved; had it not improved, this would signify a change in his values.

To recognise the object of desire as desirable is to attribute to one's desire a new role in deliberation. In pursuing what he holds to be desirable, the agent is engaged, not merely in the calculation of means, but also in the rational choice of ends. It is this kind of deliberation that enables the present self to incorporate its own future into its practical reasoning, so as to pursue, not merely that which is presently desired, but also that which is conducive to satisfaction.

If values are artefacts, it is from the stuff of interpersonal emotion that they are constructed. Consider the emotion of pride. Someone who, upon obtaining the object of desire, feels proud of it, shows thereby that he regards it as desirable. The characteristic thought of such a person is that to obtain this object casts *credit* on himself. This thought grows from the personal interaction that leads us constantly to compare the actions of those around us with our own. In pride, as in remorse, the self is viewed from outside, as one among many social objects, defined in part by his relation to his kind. Implicit in these emotions is the idea of a rational community – the Kantian 'Kingdom of Ends' to which all rational beings by nature belong.

It thus seems plausible to suppose that the minimal self advances towards responsibility for its past and future only by also enlarging its perspective, so as to confront itself as the object of interpersonal attitudes, one member of the class of beings who may be praised, blamed and

criticised. Let us now pose the Aristotelian question: would it be better for my child to be a minimal or an 'enlarged' self? Would it be better for him, overall, to avoid the sense of responsibility that causes him to answer now for his past and future, or to acquire it? The answer, I believe, is evident. In advance of any knowledge of the particular circumstances of his future, I must surely wish to inculcate in him the faculty of choice, and the outlook on himself that permits him, not only to desire things, but also to find fulfilment in obtaining them. For without such gifts my child cannot conceivably flourish according to his nature – which is that of a rational person.

This means, however, that I must wish also to prepare my child for interpersonal relations, and to inculcate in him the dispositions – pride, remorse, admiration, contempt – which are involved in constructing a concept of the desirable. The 'maximal' self must not only acquire this concept, but also give it the place in practical reasoning necessary to secure an active attachment to his past and his future. Finally, he must learn to see as desirable only that which, in general human conditions, is the occasion of fulfilment. When he has learned that, he has learned virtue.

That brief sketch raises, of course, as many questions as it answers. But it suffices to suggest a way out of the impasse presented by Kantian ethics: a way of circumventing the paradoxes of the first-person case, while retaining the fundamental Kantian intuition that practical reason is built upon a concept of the self and its freedom. The Aristotelian strategy presents us with a view upon the self from a point of view outside it, and then derives conclusions – which, in principle at least, are of universal validity – concerning the well-being of that which it observes. This strategy provides us, I believe, with an important insight into the foundations of morality. It implies that the first-person perspective is fulfilled only when the world is seen in terms of value. On the Aristotelian principle, that *to telos phuseis estin* (the end is the essence), we might say that morality belongs to the *nature* of the self. The argument also implies that the building of the first-person perspective comes about precisely through the exercise of interpersonal responses – through a developing third-person perspective on the attitudes of others, which leads us to perceive both them and ourselves as belonging to a single moral kind, distinguished by the 'self-hood' which makes this perception available. The building of the self is the building of a social context, in which the self takes its place beside the other, as object and subject of the universal attitudes of praise and blame – the attitudes which encapsulate the reality of 'respect for persons'. Thus the Aristotelian perspective that led us to

seek for the grounds of morality in the third-person perspective of the moral educator leads us back to the Kantian subject, as the locus of moral existence.

We must now attempt to apply the Aristotelian strategy to the subject-matter of this book, and ask whether there is such a thing as sexual virtue, and, if so, what is it, and how is it acquired? Clearly, sexual desire, which is an interpersonal attitude with the most far-reaching consequences for those who are joined by it, cannot be morally neutral. On the contrary, it is in the experience of sexual desire that we are most vividly conscious of the distinction between virtuous and vicious impulses, and most vividly aware that, in the choice between them, our happiness is at stake.

The Aristotelian strategy enjoins us to ignore the actual conditions of any particular person's life, and to look only at the permanent features of human nature. We know that people feel sexual desire; that they feel erotic love, which may grow from desire; that they may avoid both these feelings, by dissipation or self-restraint. Is there anything to be said about desire, other than that it falls within the general scope of the virtue of temperance, which enjoins us to desire only what reason approves?

The first, and most important, observation to be made is that the capacity for love in general, and for erotic love in particular, is a virtue. In Chapter 8 I tried to show that erotic love involves an element of mutual self-enhancement; it generates a sense of the irreplaceable value, both of the other and of the self, and of the activities which bind them. To receive and to give this love is to achieve something of incomparable value in the process of self-fulfilment. It is to gain the most powerful of all interpersonal *guarantees*; in erotic love the subject becomes conscious of the full reality of his personal existence, not only in his own eyes, but in the eyes of another. Everything that he is and values gains sustenance from his love, and every project receives a meaning beyond the moment. All that exists for us as mere hope and hypothesis – the attachment to life and to the body – achieves under the rule of *erōs* the aspect of a radiant certainty. Unlike the cold glances of approval, admiration and pride, the glance of love sees value precisely in that which is the source of anxiety and doubt: in the merely contingent, merely 'empirical', existence of the flesh, the existence which we did not choose, but to which we are condemned. It is the answer to man's fallen condition – to his *Geworfenheit*.[20]

To receive erotic love, however, a person must be able to give it: or if he cannot, the love of others will be a torment to him, seeking from him that which he cannot provide, and directing against him the fury of a disappointed right. It is therefore unquestionable that we have reason to

acquire the capacity for erotic love, and, if this means bending our sexual impulses in a certain direction, that will be the direction of sexual virtue. Indeed, the argument of the last two chapters has implied that the development of the sexual impulse towards love may be impeded: there are sexual habits which are vicious, precisely in neutralising the capacity for love. The first thing that can be said, therefore, is that we all have reason to avoid those habits and to educate our children not to possess them.

Here it may be objected that not every love is happy, that there are many – Anna Karenina, for example, or Phaedra – whose capacity for love was the cause of their downfall. But we must remind ourselves of the Aristotelian strategy. In establishing that courage or wisdom is a virtue, the Aristotelian does not argue that the possession of these virtues is in every particular circumstance bound to be advantageous. A parable of Derek Parfit's, adapted from T. C. Schelling,[21] adequately shows what is at stake: Suppose a man breaks into my house and commands me to open the safe for him, saying that, if I do not comply, he will begin to shoot my children. He has heard me telephone the police, and knows that, if he leaves any of us alive, we will be able to give information sufficient to arrest him if he takes what the safe contains. Clearly it is irrational in these circumstances to open the safe – since that will not protect any of us – and also not to open it, since that would cause the robber to kill my children one by one in order to persuade me of his sincerity. Suppose, however, I possess a drug that causes me to become completely irrational. I swallow the pill, and cry out: 'I love my children, therefore kill them'; the man tortures me and I beg him to continue; and so on. In these changed circumstances, my assailant is powerless to obtain what he wants and can only flee before the police arrive. In other words, in such a case, it is actually in the interests of the subject to be irrational: he has overwhelming circumstantial *reason* to be irrational, just as Anna Karenina had an overwhelming circumstantial *reason* to be without the capacity for love. Clearly, however, it would be absurd, on these grounds, to inculcate a habit of irrationality in our children; indeed no *reason* could be given, in the absence of detailed knowledge of a person's future, for acquiring such a habit. In so far as reasons can be given now, for the cultivation of this or that state of character, they must justify the cultivation of rationality before all else – for how can I flourish according to my nature as a rational agent if I am not at least rational?

In like manner, it is not the particular personal tragedy but the generality of the human condition that determines the basis of sexual morality. Tragedy and loss are the rare but necessary outcomes of a

process which we all have reason to undergo. (Indeed, it is part of the point of tragedy that it divorces in our imagination the right and the good from the merely prudential: that it sets the value of life against the value of mere survival.) We wish to know, in advance of any particular experience, which dispositions a person must have if he is successfully to express himself in sexual desire and to be fulfilled in his sexual endeavours. Love is the fulfilment of desire, and therefore love is its *telos*. A life of celibacy may also be fulfilled; but, assuming the general truth that most of us have a powerful, and perhaps overwhelming, urge to make love, it is in our interests to ensure that love – and not some other thing – is made.

Love, I have argued, is prone to jealousy, and the object of jealousy is defined by the thought of the beloved's desire. Because jealousy is one of the greatest of psychical catastrophes, involving the possible ruin of both partners, a morality based in the need for erotic love must forestall and eliminate jealousy. It is in the deepest human interest, therefore, that we form the habit of fidelity. This habit is natural and normal; but it is also easily broken, and the temptation to break it is contained in desire itself – in the element of generality which tempts us always to experiment, to verify, to detach ourselves from that which is too familiar in the interest of excitement and risk. Virtuous desire is faithful; but virtuous desire is also an artefact, made possible by a process of moral education which we do not, in truth, understand in its complexity.

If that observation is correct, a whole section of traditional sexual morality must be upheld. The fulfilment of sexual desire defines the nature of desire: *to telos phuseis estin*. And the nature of desire gives us our standard of normality. There are enormous varieties of human sexual conduct, and of 'common-sense' morality: some societies permit or encourage polygamy, others look with indifference upon premarital intercourse, or regard marriage itself as no more than an episode in a relation that pre-exists and perhaps survives it. But no society, and no 'common-sense' morality – not even, it seems, the morality of Samoa[22] – looks with favour upon promiscuity or infidelity, unless influenced by a doctrine of 'emancipation' or 'liberation' which is dependent for its sense upon the very conventions which it defies. Whatever the institutional forms of human sexual union, and whatever the range of permitted partners, sexual desire is itself inherently 'nuptial': it involves concentration upon the embodied existence of the other, leading through tenderness to the 'vow' of erotic love. It is a telling observation that the civilisation which has most tolerated the institution of polygamy – the Islamic – has also, in its erotic literature, produced what are perhaps the

intensest and most poignant celebrations of monogamous love, precisely through the attempt to capture, not the institution of marriage, but the human datum of desire.[23]

The nuptiality of desire suggests, in its turn, a natural history of desire: a principle of development which defines the 'normal course' of sexual education. 'Sexual maturity' involves incorporating the sexual impulse into the personality, and so making sexual desire into an expression of the subject himself, even though it is, in the heat of action, a force which also overcomes him. If the Aristotelian approach to these things is as plausible as I think it is, the virtuous habit will also have the character of a 'mean': it will involve the disposition to desire what is desirable, despite the competing impulses of animal lust (in which the intentionality of desire may be demolished) and timorous frigidity (in which the sexual impulse is impeded altogether). Education is directed towards the special kind of temperance which shows itself, sometimes as chastity, sometimes as fidelity, sometimes as passionate desire, according to the 'right judgement' of the subject. In wanting what is judged to be desirable, the virtuous person wants what may also be loved, and what may therefore be obtained without hurt or humiliation.

Virtue is a matter of degree, rarely attained in its completion, but always admired. Because traditional sexual education has pursued sexual virtue, it is worthwhile summarising its most important features, in order to see the power of the idea that underlies and justifies it.

The most important feature of traditional sexual education is summarised in anthropological language as the 'ethic of pollution and taboo'.[24] The child was taught to regard his body as sacred, and as subject to pollution by misperception or misuse. The sense of pollution is by no means a trivial side-effect of the 'bad sexual encounter': it may involve a penetrating disgust, at oneself, one's body and one's situation, such as is experienced by the victim of rape. Those sentiments – which arise from our 'fear of the obscene' – express the tension contained within the experience of embodiment. At any moment we can become 'mere body', the self driven from its incarnation, and its habitation ransacked. The most important root idea of personal morality is that I am *in* my body, not (to borrow Descartes' image) as a pilot in a ship, but as an incarnate self. My body is identical with me, and sexual purity is the precious guarantee of this.

Sexual purity does not forbid desire: it simply ensures the status of desire as an interpersonal feeling. The child who learns 'dirty habits' detaches his sex from himself, sets it outside himself as something curious and alien. His fascinated enslavement to the body is also a withering of

desire, a scattering of erotic energy and a loss of union with the other. Sexual purity sustains the *subject* of desire, making him present as a self in the very act which overcomes him.

The extraordinary spiritual significance accorded to sexual 'purity' has, of course, its sociobiological and its psychoanalytical explanations. But what, exactly, is its *meaning*, and have people been right to value it? In Wagner's *Parsifal*, the 'pure fool' is uniquely credited with the power to heal the terrible wound which is the physical sign of Amfortas's sexual 'pollution'. He alone can redeem Kundry, the 'fallen' woman, whose sexual licence is so resistant to her penitent personality, that it must be confined to another world, of which she retains only a dim and horrified consciousness. That other world is a world of pleasure and opportunity, a world of the 'permitted'. It is governed, however, by the impure eunuch Klingsor, whose rule is a kind of slavery. Wagner finds the meaning of Christian redemption in the fool's chastity, which leads him to renounce the rewards of an impure desire for the sake of another's salvation. Parsifal releases Amfortas from the hold of 'magic', from the 'charm' which tempts Szymanowski's King Roger towards a vain apotheosis.[25] Parsifal is the harbinger of peace and freedom, in a world that has been enslaved by the magic of desire.

The haunting symbols of this opera owe their power to feelings that are too deep to be lightly dismissed as aesthetic artefacts. But what is their meaning for people who live unsheltered by religion? The answer is to be found, not in religious, but in sexual, feeling. The purely human redemption which is offered to us in love is dependent, in the last analysis, upon public recognition of the value of chastity, and of the sacrilege involved in a sexual impulse that wanders free from the controlling impulse of respect. The 'pollution' of the prostitute is not that she gives herself for money, but that she gives herself to those whom she hates or despises. This is the 'wound' of unchastity, which cannot be healed in solitude by the one who suffers it, but only by his acceptance into a social order which confines the sexual impulse to the realm of intimate relations. The chaste person sustains the ideal of sexual innocence, by giving honourable form to chastity as a way of life. Through his example, it becomes not foolish but admirable to ignore the promptings of a desire that brings no intimacy or fulfilment. Chastity is not a private policy, followed by one individual alone for the sake of his peace of mind. It has a wider and more generous significance: it attempts to draw others into complicity, and to sustain a social order that confines the sexual impulse to the personal sphere.

Chastity exists in two forms: as a publicly declared and publicly

recognised role or policy (the chastity of the monk, priest or nun); or as a private resolution, a recognition of the morality that lies dormant in desire. Thus Hans Sachs, in *Die Meistersinger*, who has the opportunity to fulfil his desire, chooses rather to renounce it, knowing that it will not be reciprocated. Sachs is loved and admired for the irreproachable aloneness which makes him the property of all. He is the buttress of Nuremberg, whose satisfactions are public satisfactions, precisely because his own seed has not been sown. His melancholy and bookish contemplation of the trivialities of progenerative man are in one sense a sigh from the genetic depth: the species is alive in this sigh, just as the individual dies in it. In another sense, however, his melancholy is the supreme affirmation of the reality of others' joys: the recognition that desire must be silenced, in order that others may thrive in their desire.

The child was traditionally brought up to achieve sexual fulfilment only *through* chastity, which is the condition which surrounds him on his first entering the adult world – the world of commitments and obligations. At the same time, he was encouraged to ponder certain 'ideal objects' of desire. These, presented to him under the aspect of an idealised physical beauty, were never *merely* beautiful, but also endowed with the moral attributes that fitted them for love. This dual inculcation of 'pure' habits and 'ideal' love might seem, on the face of it, to be unworthy of the name of education. Is it not, rather, like the mere *training* of a horse or a dog, which arbitrarily forbids some things and fosters others, without offering the first hint of a reason why? And is it not the distinguishing mark of education that it engages with the rational nature of its recipient, and does not merely mould him indifferently to his own understanding of the process? Why, in short, is this moral education, rather than a transference into the sexual sphere – as Freud would have it – of those same processes of interdiction that train us to defecate, not in our nappies, but in a porcelain pot?

The answer is clear. The cult of innocence is an attempt to *generate* rational conduct, by incorporating the sexual impulse into the self-activity of the subject. It is an attempt to impede the impulse, until such a time as it may attach itself to the interpersonal project that leads to its fulfilment: the project of union with another person, who is wanted not merely for his body, but for the person who *is* this body. Innocence is the disposition to avoid sexual encounter, except with the person whom one may fully desire. Children who have lost their innocence have acquired the habit of gratification through the body alone, in a state of partial or truncated desire. Their gratification is detached from the conditions of personal fulfilment and wanders from object to object with no settled

tendency to attach itself to any, pursued all the while by a sense of the body's obscene dominion. 'Debauching of the innocent' was traditionally regarded as a most serious offence, and one that offered genuine *harm* to the victim. The harm in question was not physical, but moral: the undermining of the process which prepares the child to enter the world of *erōs*. (Thus Nabokov's Lolita, who passes with such rapidity from childish provocativeness to a knowing interest in the sexual act, finds, in the end, a marriage devoid of passion, and dies without knowledge of desire.)

The personal and the sexual can become divorced in many ways. The task of sexual morality is to unite them, to sustain thereby the intentionality of desire, and to prepare the individual for erotic love. Sexual morality is the morality of embodiment: the posture which strives to unite us with our bodies, precisely in those situations when our bodies are foremost in our thoughts. Without such a morality the human world is subject to a dangerous divide, a gulf between self and body, at the verge of which all our attempts at personal union falter and withdraw. Hence the prime focus of sexual morality is not the attitude to others, but the attitude to one's own body and its uses. Its aim is to safeguard the integrity of our embodiment. Only on that condition, it is thought, can we inculcate either innocence in the young or fidelity in the adult. Such habits are, however, only one part of sexual virtue. Traditional morality has combined its praise of them with a condemnation of other things – in particular of the habits of lust and perversion. And it is not hard to find the reason for these condemnations.

Perversion consists precisely in a diverting of the sexual impulse from its interpersonal goal, or towards some act that is intrinsically destructive of personal relations and of the values that we find in them. The 'dissolution' of the flesh, which the Marquis de Sade regarded as so important an element in the sexual aim, is in fact the dissolution of the soul; the perversions described by de Sade are not so much attempts to destroy the flesh of the victim as to rid his flesh of its personal meaning, to wring out, with the blood, the rival perspective. That is true in one way or another of all perversion, which can be simply described as the habit of finding a sexual release that avoids or abolishes the *other*, obliterating his embodiment with the obscene perception of his body. Perversion is narcissistic, often solipsistic, involving strategies of replacement which are intrinsically destructive of personal feeling. Perversion therefore prepares us for a life without personal fulfilment, in which no human relation achieves foundation in the acceptance of the other, as this acceptance is provided by desire.

Lust may be defined as a genuine sexual desire, from which the goal of erotic love has been excluded, and in which whatever tends towards that goal – tenderness, intimacy, fidelity, dependence – is curtailed or obstructed. There need be nothing perverted in this. Indeed the special case of lust which I have discussed under the title of Don Juanism, in which the project of intimacy is constantly abbreviated by the flight towards another sexual object, provides one of our paradigms of desire. Nevertheless, the traditional condemnation of lust is far from arbitrary, and the associated contrast between lust and love far from a matter of convention. Lust is also a habit, involving the disposition to give way to desire, without regard to any personal relation with the object. (Thus perversions are all forms of lust even though lust is not in itself a perversion.) Naturally, we all feel the promptings of lust, but the rapidity with which sexual acts become sexual habits, and the catastrophic effect of a sexual act which cannot be remembered without shame or humiliation, give us strong reasons to resist them, reasons that Shakespeare captured in these words:

> Th'expence of Spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action, and till action, lust
> Is perjur'd, murdrous, blouddy, full of blame,
> Savage, extreame, rude, cruell, not to trust,
> Injoyd no sooner but dispised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated as a swollowed bayt,
> On purpose layd to make the taker mad:
> Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreame,
> A blisse in proofe, and prov'd, a very woe,
> Before a joy proposd, behind, a dreame,
> All this the world well knowes, yet none knowes well
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

In addition to the condemnation of lust and perversion, however, some part of traditional sexual education can be seen as a kind of sustained war against fantasy. It is undeniable that fantasy can play an important part in all our sexual doings, and even the most passionate and faithful lover may, in the act of love, rehearse to himself other scenes of sexual abandon than the one in which he is engaged. Nevertheless, there is truth in the contrast (familiar, in one version, from the writings of Freud)[26] between fantasy and reality, and in the sense that the first is in some way destructive of the second. Fantasy replaces the real, resistant, objective world with a pliant substitute – and that, indeed, is its purpose. Life in the

actual world is difficult and embarrassing. Most of all it is difficult and embarrassing in our confrontation with other people, who, by their very existence, make demands that we may be unable or unwilling to meet. It requires a great force, such as the force of sexual desire, to overcome the embarrassment and self-protection that shield us from the most intimate encounters. It is tempting to take refuge in substitutes, which neither embarrass us nor resist the impulse of our spontaneous cravings. The habit grows, in masturbation, of creating a compliant world of desire, in which unreal objects become the focus of real emotions, and the emotions themselves are rendered incompetent to participate in the building of personal relations. The fantasy blocks the passage to reality, which becomes inaccessible to the will.

Even if the fantasy can be overcome so far as to engage in the act of love with another, a peculiar danger remains. The other becomes veiled in substitutes; he is never fully himself in the act of love; it is never clearly *him* that I desire, or *him* that I possess, but always rather a composite object, a universal body, of which he is but one among a potential infinity of instances. Fantasy fills our thoughts with a sense of the obscene, and the orgasm becomes, not the possession of another, but the expenditure of energy on his depersonalised body. Fantasies are private property, which I can dispose according to my will, with no answerability to the other whom I abuse through them. He, indeed, is of no intrinsic interest to me, and serves merely as my opportunity for self-regarding pleasure. For the fantasist, the ideal partner is indeed the prostitute, who, because she can be purchased, solves at once the moral problem presented by the presence of another at the scene of sexual release.

The connection between fantasy and prostitution is deep and important. The effect of fantasy is to 'commodify' the object of desire, and to replace the law of sexual relationship between people with the law of the market. Sex itself can then be seen as a commodity:[27] something that we pursue and obtain in quantifiable form, and which comes in a variety of packages: in the form of a woman or a man; in the form of a film or a dream; in the form of a fetish or an animal. In so far as the sexual act is seen in this way, it seems morally neutral – or, at best, impersonal. Such criticism as may be offered will concern merely the dangers for the individual and his partner of this or that sexual package: for some bring diseases and discomforts of which others are free. The most harmless and hygienic act of all, on this view, is the act of masturbation, stimulated by whatever works of pornography are necessary to prompt the desire for it in the unimaginative. This justification for pornography has, indeed, recently been offered.

As I have already argued, however, fantasy does not exist comfortably with reality. It has a natural tendency to realise itself: to remake the world in its own image. The harmless wanker with the video-machine can at any moment turn into the desperate rapist with a gun. The 'reality principle' by which the normal sexual act is regulated is a principle of personal encounter, which enjoins us to respect the other person, and to respect, also, the sanctity of his body, as the tangible expression of another self. The world of fantasy obeys no such rule, and is governed by monstrous myths and illusions which are at war with the human world – the illusions, for example, that women wish to be raped, that children have only to be awakened in order to give and receive the intensest sexual pleasure, that violence is not an affront but an affirmation of a natural right. All such myths, nurtured in fantasy, threaten not merely the consciousness of the man who lives by them, but also the moral structure of his surrounding world. They render the world unsafe for self and other, and cause the subject to look on everyone, not as an end in himself, but as a possible means to his private pleasure. In his world, the sexual encounter has been 'fetishised', to use the apt Marxian term,[28] and every other human reality has been poisoned by the sense of the expendability and replaceability of the other.

It is a small step from the preoccupation with sexual virtue, to a condemnation of obscenity and pornography (which is its published form). Obscenity is a direct assault on the sentiment of desire, and therefore on the social order that is based in desire and which has personal love as its goal and fulfilment. There is no doubt that the normal conscience cannot remain neutral towards obscenity, any more than it can remain neutral towards paedophilia and rape (which is not to say that obscenity must also be treated as a *crime*). It is therefore unsurprising that traditional moral education has involved censorship of obscene material, and a severe emphasis on 'purity in thought, word and deed' – an emphasis which is now greeted with irony or ridicule.

Traditional sexual education was, despite its exaggerations and imbecilities, truer to human nature than the libertarian culture which has succeeded it. Through considering its wisdom and its shortcomings, we may understand how to resuscitate an idea of sexual virtue, in accordance with the broad requirements of the Aristotelian argument that I have, in this chapter, been presenting. The ideal of virtue remains one of 'sexual integrity': of a sexuality that is entirely integrated into the life of personal affection, and in which the self and its responsibility are centrally involved and indissolubly linked to the pleasures and passions of the body.

Traditional sexual morality has therefore been the morality of the body. Libertarian morality, by contrast, has relied almost entirely on a Kantian view of the human subject, as related to his body by no coherent moral tie. Focussing as he does on an idea of purely personal respect, and assigning no distinctive place to the body in our moral endeavour, the Kantian inevitably tends towards permissive morality. No sexual act can be wrong merely by virtue of its physical character, and the ideas of obscenity, pollution and perversion have no obvious application. His attitude to homosexuality is conveniently summarised in this passage from a Quaker pamphlet:

> We see no reason why the physical nature of the sexual act should be the criterion by which the question whether it is moral should be decided. An act which (for example) expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both, does not seem to us to be sinful by reason *alone* of the fact that it is homosexual. The same criteria seem to apply whether a relationship is heterosexual or homosexual.[29]

Such sentiments are the standard offering of the liberal and utilitarian moralities of our time. However much we may sympathise with their conclusions, it is not possible to accept the shallow reasoning that leads up to them, and which bypasses the great metaphysical conundrum to which all sexual morality is addressed: the conundrum of embodiment. Lawrence asserts that 'sex is *you*', and offers some bad but revealing lines on the subject:

> And don't, with the nasty, prying mind, drag it out from its deeps
> And finger it and force it, and shatter the rhythm it keeps
> When it is left alone, as it stirs and rouses and sleeps.

If anything justifies Lawrence's condemnation of the 'nasty, prying mind', it is the opposite of what he supposes. Sex 'sleeps' in the soul precisely because, and to the extent that, it is buried there by education. If sex is you, it is because you are the product of that education, and not just its victim. It has endowed you with what I have called 'sexual integrity': the ability to be *in* your body, in the very moment of desire.

The reader may be reluctant to follow me in believing that traditional morality is largely justified by the ideal of sexual integrity. But if he accepts the main tenor of my argument, he must surely realise that the ethic of 'liberation', far from promising the release of the self from hostile bondage, in fact heralds the dissipation of the self in loveless fantasy: th'expence of Spirit, in a waste of shame.