

UNITARY AND BINARY CONCEPTIONS OF SEX:
A DEFENSE OF THE UNITARY PERSPECTIVE

By

Marcia Thomas-Rittenhouse

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Philosophy

December, 1991

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Date:

John J. Long

11/8/91

Robert R. Quinn

11/8/91

Mark A. ...

11/8/91

...

11/8/91

Susan Ford Wiltshire

11/8/91



©Copyright by Marcia Thomas-Rittenhouse 1991
All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	iv
 Chapter	
I. THE FOUNDATIONAL BASIS.....	1
Variety, Difference and Risk as Characterizing the Philosophical Enterprise.....	1
The Anthologies.....	4
Introducing the Question What Sex Is.....	9
Characterizing Sex-as-Purposeful Performance..	14
Masturbation in the Current Scheme.....	17
Masturbation: The Intended Scheme.....	22
Summary Conclusions.....	29
II. THE ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL CONCEPTS.....	32
Reductionist and Expansionist Conceptions of Sexuality.....	32
Binary and Unitary Conceptions of Sexual Desire.....	37
The Binary-Expansionist Account.....	39
The Unitary-Expansionist Account.....	40
The Binary-Reductionist Account.....	43
The Unitary-Reductionist Account.....	45
Alan Goldman's "Plain Sex".....	47
Jerome Shaffer's "Sexual Desire".....	56
Robert Gray's "Sex and Sexual Perversion".....	78
Summary Conclusions.....	84
III. ON MASTURBATION.....	86
Pervasiveness, Disapprobation and Devices.....	86
The Fantasized Other.....	102
Allegations of Theoretical Bias.....	111
Puzzles Generated By Subjecting Masturbation to Philosophical Analysis.....	124
A Proposal, and Its Consequences.....	138
Primacy of the Unitary Model.....	152
Sex, Self and Others.....	160
Parsimony.....	170
Summary Conclusions.....	173

	Page
IV. DWORKIN AND SARTRE: TWO PHILOSOPHIES OF SEX.....	180
Dworkin's "Intercourse in a Man-Made World"...	181
"The Female Condition" and "Power, Status and Hate".....	196
Dworkin Summary.....	202
Sartre's Self and Other.....	213
Indifference, Desire, Hate and Sadism.....	221
Sartre Summary.....	232
Sartre and the Direction of Sexual Philosophy.	237
V. CONCLUSION.....	258
The Reformulation of Sexual Desire.....	259
Readdressing Soble's Queries.....	262
The Parameters of Good and Bad Sex.....	275
Sex, Self and Society: Of Couple-ism, Communitas et. al.....	304
Summary.....	318
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	322

PREFACE

This dissertation offers a critical examination of what has come to be called 'sexual philosophy,' through a consideration of the way in which writings representative of this genre have treated the phenomenon of masturbation. In the dissertation, I contend that the body of literature collectively representative of this genre has failed to adequately understand the phenomenon of masturbation and that, on the basis of this failure, the entire foundational basis of this area of philosophical concern must necessarily be rethought. I will argue: 1) that masturbation is best understood on the basis of a 'unitary model' of sexuality, in which properly sexual acts may be carried out by one person alone; 2) that the peculiar conceptual confusions emerging from the philosophical analysis of masturbations calls into question the presumed clarity of the more standard 'binary' (i.e., interpersonal) model of sexuality; 3) that resolving the problems of conceptual analysis promoted by this less than standard model, will permit us to better appreciate the role of the more standard one; and 4) that the failure to secure, or even to acknowledge the necessity of securing such a resolution, undermines the entire project initiated by this area of philosophical investigation.

This is not, however, strictly a dissertation on sex, in that it will not presume to address those other areas on which sex may or may not be said to impact. That remains for some other theses (and well, given the breadth of the related concerns, it ought). Neither is this a dissertation on the history of conceptions of sexuality per se, nor on the explanations offered for the nature of "sexual being" from the perspectives of either anthropological, sociological, or psychological analyses. Although such explanations and analyses may in fact prove illuminating, each has been made the focus of other writings. Rather than giving exclusive focus to the issue of "how sex is" and providing explanation gathered in defense of its current status, the point of this effort will be in posing an answer to the question whether, and under what set of circumstances, the phenomenon of sex might be alternatively conceived. What this dissertation intends, is the provision of a basis for changing the philosophical, social and (hopefully) political attitudes toward, and treatment of persons with "unusual" sexual preferences. It intends, furthermore, to accomplish this by providing a view of sex as itself liberated from too restrictive an analysis.

The dissertation delineates, as its specific object of focus, that body of philosophical literature dealing with sexuality, written largely by analytic philosophers, and published since 1968. Represented, though not exclusively,

by two major anthologies (one edited by Robert Baker and Frederick Elliston, published in 1975 and 1984; the other, edited by Alan Soble, released in 1980), the writings evidenced a common concern for directing philosophical attention to matters having to do with sex, and for initiating meaningful discussions in this area. Although it was not denied that there had previously been some attention directed toward the importance of sex and its attendant institutions, what these authors noted--and their written work reveals--was both a paucity of existent contributions to the subject, and an evidenced assumption that whatever there might actually be to say about sex, was more likely than not the province of some other discipline. The impression that philosophy might have something to say about sex, and specifically about sex in relation to more contemporary issues, became the magnet point for the contributors that emerged during the cited period. Curiously enough, with so little of a serious philosophical nature to precede it, what also emerged was a view of sex as relatively non-problematic; less an act to be understood, than one capably gauged by existing social criteria.

My own initial assumption is that sex is not as easily definable as it appears to be and that it is, moreover, extremely individualized. Beginning with the diversity of sexual expression with which one is confronted and from which one might choose as particularly explicative of one's

own sexual being, I was led to question the appearance and reappearance of binary (favorably heterosexual) genital-genital intercourse as the paradigm of sexual activity. As the assumption went, this paradigm case was relatively free of conceptual confusion and additionally bore the advantage of a distinct moral clarity. Having so begun, and having thus prevailed, sexual philosophy was--by the early 1970's--already focusing on the relative virtues and attendant view of selecting the one or ones with whom sex was to be had. Since serious consideration had not been given to the possibility that sex might as easily (not to mention as efficiently, or as expediently) be the sort of thing one has with oneself, I began to seek reason(s) for the absence of this proposal in the prevailing philosophical literature.

Four theses, only three of which are given serious consideration here, appear to offer an explanation for the predominance of arguments in support of binary sexuality, and in either disparagement or disregard of its unitary alternative.

The first of these, easily dismissible, promotes a view of sex as divinely, inexorably linked with the fulfillment of the reproductive function. This view, granted credence in the "Humanae Vitae" of 1968 and elsewhere, locates the necessity of the binary model in the biological necessity of those paired heterosexual couplings required for its performance. But what this view gains by way of providing

sex with 'purpose,' is lost in the confrontation of an alleged sexual teleology with the reality of an advanced 'sexual technology,' i.e., one that now makes possible such previously unaccomplishable feats as in vitro fertilization, surrogate pregnancy, and an attendant host of contraceptive devices. Also, given the view that sex not only has a reproductive function but a pleasure-producing or intimacy-seeking function as well (and that the latter can, and frequently does, exist without the former's limited intent), the argument from biological teleology must ultimately be abandoned. Appeals to the Divine notwithstanding, it is questionable whether this position deserves strong philosophical adherence.

The remaining three explanations far better approximate the complexity of the issue, but offer different--and in at least one case, radical--explanations for the commanding (binary) position accepted by sexual philosophy.

Alan Soble, founder of the American Philosophical Association's "Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love" and editor of Philosophy of Sex, locates the explanation in a particular philosophical bias in favor of heterosexuality, couple-ism, and a binary descriptive he refers to as "theoretically paired activities." On his view these concepts explain the preoccupation with 'family,' and the assumption that paired activities are somehow more fulfilling than their non-paired correlates. He cites the

disparagement of masturbation as unsurprisingly related to social, economic and political realities; related to these realities, are the disparagement of homosexuality and the oppression of women. One gets the sense that, for Soble, the chant is "Unsettle the Family, and you Unsettle the State."

A third explanation for the philosophic preference for binary sexuality and hence the relative absence of meaningful analyses of any other sort, comes also from Soble. But here it is not a matter of Soble's own commentary, but his pointing in the direction of those commentaries which might possibly hold the answer. In the "Introduction" to his Philosophy of Sex, Soble suggests that the answer is no more complex a matter than examining those original offerings to sexual philosophy that appeared circa the 1968 "initiation date"; that date around which philosophical journals began featuring the initial articles on philosophy's relation to sexuality. Soble notes that almost all these initial offerings, and those written in response to them, assumed that the philosophical approach to discussions of sex ought properly be "Sartrean," i.e., ought have as their focus some rendering of the relation of self to Other, and so of sexual self to sexual Other as "sexual relating." Although it may well be argued that these Sartrean interpreters were in error, their influence by what they took to be the case is undeniable. Whether there is

any strength to what Soble infers as the Sartrean connection, or whether it is an example of post hoc reasoning, will not function as central to my thesis. Rather, this view, which actually arises as a consequence of Sartre's ontology, will be examined only insofar as it is referenced by these early theorists, and warrants comparison to a more recent--albeit infelicitous--attempt at rationalizing the adequacy of a binary model.

This final explanation has as its spokesperson the radical feminist Andrea Dworkin, whose attack on heterosexual relations in her book, Intercourse, is simultaneously both a derision of those patriarchal, paternalistic conceptions of sexual activity she takes to be the norm, i.e., as genitally focused, male (dominant)/female (passive) interaction and an attempt at explaining the denigration or underplay granted sexual activities of any other sort. But since the thrust of her discussion is directed to the former as opposed to the latter points, Dworkin unfortunately manages to underplay some of her own more significant implications. In fact, what I gather from her discussion allows for the possibility of altering the current path of sexual philosophy in years to come; allows, moreover, that a new ability to conceptualize sexual activities and a correspondingly novel sex-speak will emerge to challenge our arguably patriarchal past/present views on sexuality. This optimism is, however, my own. If Dworkin

is correct in her assumptions, such a possibility is indeed negligible; that, as witnessed by prevailing themes in art, in literature, in philosophy and political policy-making, our patriarchal unconscious is far more tenacious than we might immediately be led to suspect. But since the discussion I propose intends to focus on issues relative to the most significant commentaries on sexuality by analytic philosophers for the period 1968-1986 inclusive, it deserves note that only those issues raised by Dworkin's Intercourse (1987), from which some concluding statements are drawn, extends the discussion beyond the cited end-publication date.

But whereas Dworkin is quick to cite the tenacity of a sexuality modeled on patriarchy (and hence, promotes a disdain of heterosexual relations), neither she nor Sartre emerge as ideologically capable of shaking off the necessity of beginning from the standpoint of binary sexual relations; Sartre, because his ontology forces him to find all human relations conflictual, and Dworkin because her arguments regarding sex are inexorably rooted in what she finds specifically conflictual in women's sexual relations with men. Although both reach the conclusion that sexual relations with others are--on their stated grounds--either hapless or hopelessly ineffectual, neither Sartre nor Dworkin manage to sufficiently distance their preferred

model of sexuality to see that perhaps it, rather than its implications, warrants change.

But if there are at all to be changes in the way we are to view sexuality, it seems only reasonable to assume that those changes will owe existence to a few noted theorists who currently see that a problem exists and advise that we would do well to alter our standard approach to the problem. With few exceptions, the fresh philosophic voices on sexuality noted here emerge from an ideological wilderness. Some of the voices are male, some female; some are favorably disposed to feminist issues, some less than disposed; some relate to the thin-boundaried existence of what society refers to as 'alternative' lifestyles, some do not; some are mainstream philosophers and, again, some are not. But what binds them here is, first, their concern for the path taken in philosophizing about sex and, secondly, the fact that their concerns took voice during the stated period of publication.

Chapter I, "The Foundational Basis," focuses on the peculiar philosophical climate that fostered the development of sexual philosophy in the late 1960's and early 70's. I try to indicate how, given these beginnings, the initial offerings would (either intentionally or coincidentally) eliminate the possibility of conceiving alternatives to both the nature and purpose of sex. What I argue, is that anything warranting assessment as a philosophical discussion

of human sexuality must include an answer to the question what sex is, and whether there are necessary conditions under which an act, or set of acts, ought to be considered 'sexual.' My examination of the predominate literature reveals that sexual philosophy has, since its inception, failed to adequately respond to either question and that this failure forms at least one major basis for the absence of meaningful discourse on masturbation.

Chapter II, "The Analysis of Sexual Concepts," outlines as central to this literature, the distinction between unitary and binary conceptions of sexuality and discusses each in relation to conceptions of sexual desire that either include or exclude the necessity of attendant phenomena (e.g., 'love,' commitment, exclusivity, projections into the future). To the expansionist, an activity warranting assessment as "sexual" must necessarily involve criteria of this latter sort; to the reductionist, sexual activity is little more and no less than the manifestation of pleasure said to emanate from intimate physical contact; of one's skin rubbing, and being rubbed against another's. This Chapter raises questions relative to the merits of each sort of sexual model, and to what emerges when both the schemes of sexuality and of sexual desire are juxtaposed. I argue that masturbation is properly understood as paradigmatic of unitary-reductionist sexuality, and that the philosophic bias directed against it (as reflected in the early

commentaries) merely reflects a baseless theoretical preference for the alternative, binary account. Utilizing the more salient qualities of a modified propositional theory (one that maintains, in this case, that sexual desire, not unlike other sorts of desire, is in fact a desire for something), I argue that intentional sexual experience (here, meaning the 'experience' of sex-as-'activity') is both individualized and predicated upon an expectation to produce pleasure(s) one identifies as sexual; hence, that although there clearly are distinctions between the two models, a distinction may not be made on the presumption that sex experienced on the basis of one model is qualitatively better than sex experienced on the basis of the other.

Chapter III focuses exclusively on conceptions of "Masturbation," aspects of its history and puzzles generated by attempts at subjecting it to philosophical analysis. I argue that the disparagement of masturbation evidenced by its treatment in sexual philosophy, mirrors a similar treatment of independent, non-paired activities discussed from the standpoints of psychology and the social sciences; that at root, the seeming problem of the efficacy of masturbation arises only from a theoretical preference for activities that either promote or necessitate the involvement of others. Since I argue for the primacy of unitary over binary sexuality, not on qualitative grounds

but on the more objective grounds of parsimony, I further propose that an act's assessment as sex act, is more properly based upon features as described on the unitary model rather than on the binary one.

The focus of Chapter IV, is a discussion of binary sexuality from the perspective of the third and fourth explanations given (above) for this model's persistence. It presents and then assesses the consequences of both Sartre's overall disdain for the prospect of successful sexual relations (as undermining the 'ideal' state of sexual desire) and Dworkin's more specific cynicism regarding the future and worthwhileness of heterosexual relations. I attempt to show how the conclusions of each view would be altered from the standpoint of a unitary framework.

In the Conclusion, I map out a proposed framework for a more inclusive sexual philosophy; one which acknowledges the primacy of the unitary model and, on that basis, explains features of the binary model. Contained in this proposal will be a defense of the theses: 1) that there is no act or set of acts which are, in and of themselves, prima facie or intrinsically sexual; 2) that although there are admittedly two acceptable models on which one might assess sexual activity; that 3) the one most inadequate is the unitary account. Attendant to the Conclusion, is a view toward the moral implications of the sexual philosophy I propose.

CHAPTER I

THE FOUNDATIONAL BASIS

Variety, Difference and Risk as Characterizing the Philosophical Enterprise

In How to Be Happy Through Human, author W. Beran Wolfe reduces life's problems to the simplistic level of a coin-in-the-slot machine which, for the cost of a penny, delivers a single piece of chocolate neatly wrapped in silver foil. We are told that not all packets contain the same quality of chocolate, and (we are at least led to suspect) not all those who insert their coins are sufficiently aware of variations in 'chocolate quality' to know the difference. He notes at any rate that

If you do not risk your penny, you get nothing. And it will not avail you one whit to call the machine bad names, to cast ashes on your head and bewail your past sins, to shake your fist at those who have contributed their pennies and are enjoying their rewards, to believe that you have been discriminated against by a harsh fate, to rail about the uselessness of all penny-in-the-slot machines, or to question the wisdom of this particular type of cosmic arrangement.¹

There is more to Wolf's semicomical assessment of the human condition than might first be apparent, and more relation to the nature of philosophic inquiry than he perhaps intended. For, in describing possible human

¹W. Beran Wolfe. How to be Happy Though Human. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 225.

experiences in terms of variety, difference and risk, he is not far from some characterizations of the philosophical enterprise as a whole. One proponent of this view in fact maintains that the would-be philosopher who cannot (or who will not) be brought to a stage of "risking of self" in the real involvement of his/her task; who cannot (or who will not) be made to challenge those ideas held most dear; whose existential "leap of faith" too hastily precedes a potentially unsettling scrutiny, has actually ceased to do the business of philosophy.²

If, moreover, we are to make a specific application of Wolfe's point to the subject of philosophic interest in sex, it becomes immediately evident that when philosophers talk about sex they risk not only the 'coins' they have invested in Wolfe's envisioned machine, but also those that have been invested by others. Although it is true that "it is now some time since philosophers stopped being sages who told us about ultimate reality or the meaning of life,"³ it is no less true that the league of contemporary philosophers who

²Henry W. Johnstone. "Argument and Truth in Philosophy," in Philosophy and Argument, (Pennsylvania: University Press, 1959), p. 23.

³John Wilson, Logic and Sexual Morality, (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1965), p. 7.

have 'unwrapped chocolates' since 1968,⁴ have had an increasing amount to say about all our lives as sexual beings. And, as philosophers began to talk about sex, we all became increasingly aware of the risks that such discourse could take; the risks of discovering our differences and preferences, and the possibilities for alternatives to life-style and life-choice. But as Wilson's Logic and Sexual Morality has noted, philosophers are not (even on this issue) sages, nor were they meant to be.⁵ As the philosopher unwraps his/her own piece of chocolate, the evaluation of its contents is not meant to relieve any other person of performing the same evaluation. Though free to argue its quality, similarity or dissimilarity to any other piece warranting examination, the only expectation we might

⁴On this point, Baker and Elliston write:

To appreciate the significance of the date, it is important to take cognizance of the fact that of the major twentieth-century philosophers . . . Austin, Carnap, Heidegger, Husserl, James, Peirce, Whitehead and Wittgenstein--not one wrote on sexual philosophy. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (published in 1967) has no entries under 'adultery,' 'contraception,' 'engagement,' 'marriage,' 'feminism,' 'libertinism,' 'monogamy,' 'perversion,' 'procreation,' 'sex,' or 'women.' The Philosopher's Index indicates that no articles were published on these topics in 1967. Yet in the very next year articles began to appear in philosophical journals--hence the significance of the date.

Robert Baker and Frederick Elliston, Philosophy and Sex (New York: Prometheus Press, 1984), p. 34.

⁵op. cit.

reasonably have, is that the philosopher's examination: 1) not relieve us of the responsibility for making evaluations of our own; 2) reaffirm the existence of risk, diversity and difference at the examination's core; and 3) force the individual examiner's attention back to those issues which continue (for reasons other than mere taste) to be problematic.

The Anthologies

With what Baker and Elliston note as the official initiation of philosophical sex-talk in 1968, it is clear that philosophers had not shied from the subject of sex and sexual relatedness for want of anything to say. Though in the Introduction to their revised edition of Philosophy and Sex they attribute the formal emergence of and interest in sexual philosophy to as varied a set of conditions as: 1) the counter-cultural revolution of the latter 60's; 2) the existential-phenomenological tradition's struggle to overturn the popularity of analytic philosophy; 3) the foundation, in 1965, of NOW as catalyst to the feminist movement; and, 4) a postulated time lag between "inspiration and publication,"⁶ it is in their Preface to this second

⁶Baker and Elliston, pgs, 34-35. Although the gay and ecology movements are recognized as having influenced this genre, they are viewed as 'new' influences only, i.e., as serving the secondary rather than the primary wave of interest.

edition that a somewhat more plausible explanation for the upsurge of philosophical interest in sexual issues is found.

Granting what they maintain to have been the 'relative' ease with which the original anthology was assimilated (dismissing, for the moment, the matter of its publication) we read that the two "had only to review the few articles that had managed to find their way into published philosophical literature, peruse a variety of nonstandard sources, discover unpublished manuscripts, commission some essays to fill in the gaps [and] create a short bibliography."⁷ But the instant success of Philosophy and Sex (the original, published in 1975) as both a text and a reference book, had what appears to have been the effect of summarily forcing--if not merely creating--a future market for its own material. We read, for instance, that

. . . once philosophers knew a text was ready to hand, they created courses on the subject . . . [with the effect that] the natural concatenation of teaching, reflection, research and writing led, in turn, to a new generation of literature on the subject--a literature that cited PAS more than any other volume, but ironically was not reflected in the original volume."⁸

Although some measure of understanding might actually be gained by testing the socio-political, psychological and

⁷Ibid., 7.

⁸Ibid.

philosophical waters of the period both immediately preceding and following the 1968 date, the date is hardly as significant as the formal initiation of philosophical sex-talk itself. The question of possible 'timeliness' of the issue is properly the subject of some other body of writing; it is certainly beyond the scope of what is intended here. But it seems to me that statements to the effect that philosophers have only recently been concerned with human sexuality, obscure the more obvious fact of receptivity on the part of an audience. On the contrary, human sexuality has always been a part of the foil packet we all unwrap in Wolfe's analogy; all that was required, to paraphrase Baker and Elliston's comments on their publisher, was for someone with the perspicacity and gumption to ignore the shibboleths of the profession and support the continuation of this sort of discourse.⁹ Consider, as substantiation for this point, that Wayne Brokriede's "Arguers as Lovers" (Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol 5, Winter, '72, pgs. 1-11) and Wm G. Kelley's "Rhetoric as Seduction" (Spring, '73, pgs. 69-80), both of which utilized explicitly sexual metaphors in their development of similar theories of communication, were received as inappropriate, absurd and unscholarly

⁹Ibid.

'contributions' to deciphering the realm of rhetoric.¹⁰ If Baker and Elliston are correct in their assumption of philosophical sex-talk's sudden receptivity on the basis of socio-political (or psycho-philosophical) timeliness alone, we can only conclude that what was apparently timely for philosophers in 1968, was not at all timely for rhetors in either 1972 or 1973.

Alan Soble's Philosophy of Sex, published in 1980, trailed the original Baker and Elliston anthology by five years. Where the earlier pair had gone to great lengths to explain the impact of philosophical sex-talk, it was Soble who, in his Introduction to POS, first hinted at the risks taken by the philosophical discussion of the subject, and the different philosophic problems that arise in the attempt at giving explanation to human sexuality. Whereas the previous anthology (Baker and Elliston's) had been introduced by a section which presumed the necessity of laying a philosophical framework and explaining the absence of significant works on sexuality written prior to its publication, Soble's Introduction enjoys the advantage of moving from the primary 'why' of absence, to the more

¹⁰As related by Lloyd Bitzer, Chairman of the Communication Arts Department, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Bitzer is also an editor of the Journal, Philosophy and Rhetoric.

significant matter of 'what' philosophers might actually have now found to say.¹¹

But if contemporary discussions about sex involve risks, then isn't it conceivable that a certain cognizance of these risks have influenced (either directly or indirectly) the kinds of things philosophers have found to say about the subject? To put it another way, is it possible that philosophical discussions of sexuality might expose us to the risks of certain types of discovery? If so, could these risks not be reflected in the questions that these authors have chosen to ask? How useful can the answers to a question be, if we have not succeeded in posing the right kinds of questions? Are the right sorts of questions those that the majority of persons would consider relevant? Or is relevance, blind to number, a criterion of assessment for the few (who might practice a particularly isolated sexual act) as well as for the many (whose sexual practice is more common)?

While it is obvious that other disciplines have taken an active role in the discussion of sex, it is equally obvious that philosophical discussions on the subject are

¹¹I do not find it necessary to provide a recanting of those few mentions of sex that have managed brief appearances in the annals of Western Philosophy. or these, see particularly Donald Verene's Sexual Love and Western Morality. It deserves mention, however, that in none of these accounts was sex central to the author's philosophical point of view.

particularly inclined to be more risk-laden. Although, for instance, we might find it interesting or even amusing to know the kinds of sexual performances alleged indicative of "mature, emotionally stable behavior," or the frequency with which sexual intercourse (or its equivalent) is experienced by individuals of a particular race, lifestyle or geo-cultural grouping--questions from psychology and sociology, respectively--neither the queries themselves nor the compilations of data forming their objective-response bases, are likely to make one iota of difference to the individual's attempt to understand what it means for her or himself to be a sexual human being. To speak of risk is to speak of relevance underscored by self-involvement, and such is seldom the case with analyses drawn from statistical evidence and the objectivity of cold data. Rather, the discussions of human sexuality which involve risks are those that begin with the nature of sexuality itself; more than merely titillating our senses or arousing some ribald sort of curiosity, the risky questions are those that involve the questioning self's involvement with coming to an understanding of itself, as it either chooses or refrains from making the choices that affect its own sexuality.

Introducing the Question What Sex Is

Indispensable to both this more individualized choice-making and the groundwork required for exploring the

problems inherent to a philosophical discussion of human sexuality, is the question what sex is; whether any particular kind(s) of act(s), under circumstances deemed appropriate for this assessment, could necessarily be said to constitute a sex act (or sexual activity). Is there an act (or set of acts) such that

At t, H [performs] X =Df.
 "At t, H engages in a sex act"

is either true or false of H? What, moreover, are the limitations imposed by either the conventions of language or acceptable behavior on H in its¹² performance of X? Must, for instance, the act, X, correspond to yet some other set of criteria in order for it to be judged a sex act? That is, in such a way that the statement

"At t, H [performs] X" or
 "At t, H Xs by him/herself"

reduces to nonsense, while, by contrast,

"At t, H [performs] X with Y" =D. "At t, H engages
 in a sex act with Y"

(where by 'Y' is meant some nonspecific agent or thing), is meaningful? Finally, if the addition of 'Y' should prove a necessary component to the defining of a sex act, are there limits as well to what can substitute for 'Y' and within the limits of X (or of doing X)? May 'Y', in keeping with the

¹²For much of what remains, except where meaning would otherwise be lost, 'it' will be utilized in place of the more standard pronouns and pronoun phrases.

requirements of X, be anything whatsoever, e.g., a shoe, or other article of clothing? A mechanical device, animal or food item? Or, is it the case that when we naturally say,

"At t, H Xs with Y"

(if, in fact, this is what we take the statement that "At t, H engages in a sex act" to mean) that what we normally have in mind is that 'Y' is a person, another human being?

But even in response to this latter question (i.e., assuming the existence of 'Y' as person-Other), the bulk of philosophical sex-talk bears witness to there being a paucity of definitive answers to the question of what a sex act is; the focus, rather, being made to shift from what, as 'Y', would sufficiently satisfy the criteria of X, to the kind of person--as 'Y'-- which would satisfy the criteria of X's being a morally viable, practicable act. Hence the concern that the Y-as-Other be more than an "any-other-whatsoever" (as mirrored, for instance, in Sara Ruddick's *Better Sex*"; Shulamith Firestone's "Love: A Feminist Critique," from her The Dialectic of Sex; and, Marilyn Frye's "Critique of Ehman's 'Adult-Child Sex'") raises questions of an entirely different sort. With attention removed from the sexual act, and instead made to focus on such variables as obligation, dominance, fulfillment, reciprocity and the presence (or absence) of "feelings of genuine intimacy-disclosure" toward the other, it is not

surprising that we find Marilyn Frye arguing that, given the consideration of sexual-partners-as-persons, the subjects of power and gender have arisen at the center of what has increasingly become a decidedly 'moral' picture.¹³

In contrast with this latter approach, the argument contained here will be that the question of what sex is, is ultimately unanswerable if approached from the standpoint of whom or what one has sex with; that, moreover, focusing on the types and qualities of sexual relations is as ultimately unrevealing of sex, as is Wolfe's discussion of foil wrappers to the matter of gaining wisdom about chocolates. To speak of sex in terms of 'relations' (i.e., as a something to be had with an other or others) is already to beg an important question at hand. That is, to prematurely conclude that this frame of reference is necessary, is tantamount to precluding as even remotely sexual any act from which the 'Other' is excluded, or the sorts of experiences for which this 'Other' might prove superfluous. It is altogether conceivable, for instance, that someone might view a romp through gelatin or triabadic wrestlings with an oilskin coat as suitable preludes to sexual activity, and no less conceivable that these 'preludal' pleasures themselves be performed as substitutes for, or

¹³Marilyn Frye. "Critique of Ehman's "Adult-Child Sex'," in PAS, pg. 451.

examples of, sexual activity. But, we would hardly be justified in labeling such acts as obscene, immoral or perverse. That such terms are at all employed is nearly always the result of conceiving sex as a 'relation-with,' and more often than not implies an inequity of the sort that damages a presumed parity in sexual relations. Whereas given the current status of sexual philosophy the negative assessment of sexual relations is a matter of one's having those relations with particular others, the present point is that we recognize as destructive to our task the employment of such theoretical frameworks as reciprocity (Nagel), communication (Solomon), power parity (Firestone; Frye) and bodily contact with others (Goldman), which effectively render useless any discussion of the sexual, as distinct from the discussion of others with whom one might be sexually related.

Even granting the view that attempts at unravelling the inherent nature of a thing (i.e., what the thing 'is') are little more than an "essentialist's dream," I maintain this current proposal preferable to those owing emergence to attempts at forcing our conceptions of sex and sexuality into the mold of dualistic experience. By not asking the question of what a sex act is, contributors to this body of philosophical literature have committed a form of naturalistic fallacy. The unfortunate consequence is that

the bulk of philosophical sex-talk has set the parameters of its discussion in advance and without benefit of relevant discussion. To argue that sex (however defined) is nothing if not a 'relation with,' is precisely to defeat the purposes of having posed the question.

Characterizing Sex-as-Purposeful Performance

In addition to addressing the question of what sex is, I will explore the question of what purpose is served by sex. Specifically, I will attempt to determine whether such a question is coherently answerable. If it were to be shown that sexual acts serve some telos, some 'thing' or state of being X+ without which the non-specific act, X, fails at being a sex act (excluding, again, the previously discounted argument from reproductive necessity), then it would follow that: i) acts which fail at being sexual (acts of X, such that they seek but fail to attain X+) could be relegated to a realm entirely different from that of X+; ii) coherence could be lent to the notions of 'plain,' 'good' and 'better' sex, i.e., the ability to grade sex acts to the extent that they conform to the prescribed formula; and, iii) further discussion on the subject of what either does or does not satisfy the criteria of a 'perversion' could be significantly, and meaningfully modified. An act, X, would either be a sex act by virtue of an agent's intention to produce/experience X+, or by neither intending to produce or

failing to experience $X+$, fail at being an act of sex. Similarly, given the conception I propose, it becomes logically impossible to designate as non-sex an act which (to the individual whose experience it is) is in fact sex.

I propose to begin with an examination of sex as pure activity, abstracted from those considerations (e.g., moral, cultural, reproductive, etc.) more frequently taken as impinging upon it. What will emerge is a conception of sex not altogether devoid of significance, but as possessing significance apart from these particular considerations. If we begin an examination of sex on this assumption, then the conclusions mentioned in (i) above would follow: someone's activities previously taken to be sexual, and in which there is some inordinate interest and/or preference, may emerge as an interest/preference having no sexual significance whatsoever; similarly, some act(s) previously presumed to have no sexual significance, might now be conceived as having such significance.

Let us assume, for the sake of exploring (i), that an elusive property, \mathfrak{f} , is that to which any act of the sort X aims, and by virtue of which the act, X , becomes distinguished as an act of sex ($X+$). Our formula for defining the sex act, then, would be:

(a)

(x) ($\mathfrak{f}x=sx$) =Df. "For any act x , x is a sex act iff x aims at \mathfrak{f} "

And, as a consequence of (a), it would follow that

- (b)
 (x) $(\sim \mathcal{F}x = \sim sx)$ =Df. "For any act x, if x is not \mathcal{F} , then x is not a sex act"

Thus, as suggested in (1), if (a) be accepted, any X which fails to aim at \mathcal{F} must be something other than a sex act.

Similarly, as noted in (ii) above, if (a) be accepted, it would follow that the closer an act comes in its attainment of \mathcal{F} , the more 'perfect'--as sex act--an act it is. Conversely, to the extent that an act aims at \mathcal{F} but falls short of its attainment, the more 'imperfect'--as sex act--an act it is. But (ii) would also allow that an imperfect sex act is still a sex act, and no less so than one which (by its more perfected assimilation with \mathcal{F} more perfectly attains \mathcal{F} .

Finally, as in (iii) above, and as directly entailed by (i) and (ii), the common notion of a sexual perversion as currently understood, would be all but eliminable. If an act either is or is not an act of sex by virtue of its agent's intended attainment of \mathcal{F} , then any act failing to so aim (or to so attain) is--by the given assumption--not an act of sex. If, as I propose, a sex act is defined along the lines of an individual's attempt at attaining the state of being, \mathcal{F} , then an act is a sex act even or in spite of its failure to actually attain \mathcal{F} , or in its attainment of \mathcal{F}

to a lesser degree. Since the proposed conception of sexual activity is one which leaves the question of a particular act's being a sex act to the individual agent, the judgment of 'sexual perversion' would function only: 1) where the activity's assessment is made by some Other, presumably non-practicing agent; or 2) where the practicing agent intentionally aims at thwarting its own accomplishment of ¶.

Masturbation in the Current Scheme

If the type of groundwork I have suggested is successfully done, it seems reasonable to expect that a number of those problems inherent to the philosophical discussion of sex (e.g., "What counts as sexual activity?," "What is sexual response?," "What is the [paradigmatic] form of this activity?") could be given more satisfactory reply than presently available. Though the groundwork alone would not lead to the immediate resolution of such problems, it would assure that the burden of proof in posing such problems would fall on whomever it is that sees the problem to exist.

If, for instance, a particular commentator takes an act to be deficient in either a moral or nonmoral sense, then we are justified in demanding to know what there is about the act that warrants this negative assessment. It no less follows, then, that if the allegations are made in reference to a sex act, we have the right to know--and the

commentator the responsibility to demonstrate--what there is about the act that warrants its classification as 'sexual.' Perhaps some further example of what I mean here would be helpful, for this is a point that simply cannot be trivialized or given less account than it is due. When philosophers¹⁴ speak on the subjects of--say--social justice or injustice, the morality (or immorality) of life/death issues, or the establishment of criteria for the assessment of a State, they normally do so in certain ways: 1) they point out the specifics of some problem (e.g., systems of inequality, discrimination or reverse discrimination; the validity of acts such as abortion, suicide and euthanasia; the apparent worthwhileness of one political system as opposed to any other. Then (2) they refer to some body of knowledge which either stands opposed to, or is in agreement with a given standard or prevailing practice (e.g., theories explicative of authority versus freedom, of the value/disvalue of life and the quality of that or those lives, of the theoretical 'good' state and the real or imagined possibilities for its attainment).

¹⁴To be sure, this type reasoning neither is, nor ought be, the exclusive property of philosophical argumentation. But by virtue of its subject matter and treatment of same, it is all the more necessary that argumentation proceed along these lines.

Now if someone were to intone the vices of abortion, then we are justified in expecting that what has taken place is a pattern of argumentation somewhat like the following:

Abortion is wrong, because it intends the interference of fetal continuation, and any act which intends such interference is wrong.¹⁵

In short, what we'd have is an argument to the effect that abortion is wrong because it is an instance/example of fetal discontinuation, and although we might disagree with a proponent of such a view for any number of reasons, we could at the very least agree on the nature of our disagreement because we would agree on what it is about--namely, abortion.

I maintain that this is not the case with the majority of philosophical discussions of human sexuality, and that the most blatant difficulty with discourse of this genre, has been that of determining precisely what the 'difficulties' are. In their collective silence on this singular aspect of their tasks, those contributing to the burgeoning interest in this area of philosophic concern have promoted a 'sexual philosophy' which avoids attention to the very questions which demand philosophical analysis. What we instead encounter is an attitude similar to that of Alan

¹⁵This is offered only as an example of the form that such an argument might conceivably take, and is by no means meant to convey that any or all 'anti-abortion' advocates reason in this manner.

Goldman who simply says that "We all know what sex is, at least in the obvious cases, and do not need philosophers to tell us."¹⁶ It is odd that such a statement should appear in an essay purporting to give an analysis of sexual behavior, and odder still that the remainder of his "Plain Sex" is devoted to a discussion of an activity (masturbation) which he does not consider sexual. It is as though, having a full knowledge of elephants, one would need dredge through a treatise on non-elephants in order that our 'elephant knowledge' might somehow be enhanced.

But in contrast to Goldman's counter-intuitive claim it is not at all clear that we know what sex is, even in what he refers to as "the obvious cases." As one who has elected to shed some light on the subject, his duty--as well as that of others who have chosen to discuss it--would seem to be to give a coherent account of both the nature of the subject, and the reason(s) why we or anyone else ought approach it in this (or quite possibly, some other) particular way. To do otherwise, i.e., to neglect the necessity for an analysis of what sex is prior to its philosophical analysis, is to parody the proverbial blind men who thought they 'saw' the elephant when they didn't.

¹⁶Alan Goldman. "Plain Sex," in Philosophy of Sex (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Company, 1980), pg. 122.

I have previously argued: 1) that the business of sexual philosophy has seemingly overlooked its need to focus on the real issue of what sex is; 2) that the absence of such an analysis has had the effect of rendering null the discussion of such concepts as 'sexual activity,' 'sexual desire,' and 'sexual response'; 3) that the assumption, as expressed through philosophical sex-talk, of our "already knowing what sex is," is an assumption consistently betrayed by prevailing discourse representative of this genre; and 4) that conceptions of what suffices as authentic sexual response have almost unanimously reflected a distinct bias toward describing the sexual experience as an experience of 'relating with.'

It remains to demonstrate two further claims: 5) how, by answering the question whether sex is definable, a significant amount of non-critical and pseudo-philosophical writing could be eliminated with impunity; and 6) how, given (1)-(5), we might now admit masturbation into the discussion of a vita sexualis from which it has previously been excluded or into which it has been grudgingly admitted with the reservation that it in some sense mimic 'true' sex, which is always interpersonal.

Masturbation: The Intended Scheme

If I am correct in assuming that what masquerades as groundwork for sexual philosophy has actually been a series of concessions to a preconceived notion of sex as an experience of 'relating with,' then it would follow that examining an activity farthest from this paradigmatic model should tell us something about the ideal itself, as well as what appears to have become a strong philosophical preference for it. Given the standard model's emphasis upon the presence of some 'Other' with whom the sexual relation is to be had, the anti-thesis of this model would naturally take the form of an activity which eliminates the necessity of such a relation. If, further, I have correctly assumed this standard to have established a philosophical norm such that deviations from it are considered deviations from an otherwise acceptable practice, then we should expect to find some continued difficulty with (or resistance to) granting bona fide philosophical status to an investigation¹⁷ of the antithetical practice.

¹⁷This is not meant to imply that other areas of philosophical concern have not been similarly influenced by the development of sexual philosophy, as the following listing can be taken to indicate: Clark, Lorenne M.G. and Lynda Lange, eds. The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction From Plato to Nietzsche (1979); Sargent, Lydia, ed. The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism (1981); Harding, Sandra and Merrill P. Hintikka, eds. Discovering Reality (1982); Eisenstein, Zillah, ed. Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (1979); Kosok, Michael. "The Phenomenology of Fucking"

Given this expectation, it is not surprising that we find Alan Soble remarking that

Despite the fact that we are living in a time of sexual 'permissiveness,' there persists a disparagement of masturbation. During the last decade . . . much has been written defending masturbation, but that the practice requires such continual defense indicates to me that some very strange, hidden and powerful forces are at work in our society.¹⁸

Despite the fact that Soble goes on to charge these same 'powerful forces' with responsibility for the continued oppression of women and the failure of our 'liberal society' to extend the notion of one's right to be to the homosexual community, he neglects to mention that much of the recognition given autoerotic sexuality in the last decade has come precisely from members of these eschewed groups. It would in fact appear that the activity's most forthright appraisal and defense has come from the ranks of radical feminism. But even here, its defense has come about primarily in response to the morass of heterosexual relationships, or as a means of sexual easiness and instruction for nonorgasmic women (e.g., "I know what he is doing wrong, but I had no idea until now how to show him what to do right"). Even in their defenses of autoerotic masturbation, it is clearly not masturbation per se that is

(1971); Plaskow, Judith and Joan Arnold Romero, ed. Women and Religion (1974); Wilson, John. Logic and Sexual Morality (1965).

¹⁸Alan Sobel, ed. Philosophy of Sex, pg. 5.

being defended. What emerges, instead, is the acceptance of masturbation as a substitute for the two-person heterosexual couplings which are, after all, the 'real thing.'¹⁹ But are they, these couplings, really paradigmatic of sexual activity? Might we not raise the more radical question whether autoerotic activity itself might not be paradigmatic instead? If we take as fact that, "sex involves someone else," and that "masturbation requires a quorum of one," masturbation is rather interestingly relegated to the ranks

¹⁹It is interesting to note, for instance, Mopsy Strange Kennedy's "The Sexual Revolution Just Keeps on Coming" (Mother Jones, December, 1976, pgs. 25-29). It is unclear whether Ms. Kennedy is defending or criticizing masturbation as an act in its own right, or as an exercise designed to broaden the chasm between men and women engaged in heterosexual relationships. She is caught, apparently, somewhere between being amused ("At first the idea of getting together to 'learn' masturbation struck me as an example of silliness . . . next they'll be teaching us to pee . . .") and anxious over the effects of female masturbation on the course of women's relationships with men ("Men whose lovers masturbate regularly sometimes feel that a combination of automation and women's growing self-sufficiency has taken away their job. I think this is a situation in which liberation has distorted the significance of things and forced men into an apologetic posture . . . a phrase one hears nowadays is 'woman's right to orgasm.' Women's right to blow her nose? Woman's right to immortality of the soul? The listing of these things as specifically female prerogatives seems like a legalistic travesty of good faith between lovers"). She then goes on to say that male impotency is, after all, a worse show-stopper than being anorgasmic! One can only wonder whether, for Kennedy, the 'show' has a single, male version. Of even greater significance, is the number of times the words 'husband,' 'lover' (male), and 'a man' are employed in her discussion of masturbation as it allegedly pertains to women.

of either 'failed,' distorted, pseudo- or non-sexual activities.

Masturbation is philosophically interesting for yet another reason, one that Soble hints at in his Introduction to POS, but apparently does not choose to pursue in the context I propose. Having offered a number of theses intended as guides to his organization of the essays contained in his anthology, Soble turns to the probable causes of the continued social disparagement of masturbation. He states that, with the possible exception of the 'family,' the single most effective impetus for the production of a consciousness capable of sustaining oppression of both women and homosexuals, is our system of political economy: liberal capitalism. Soble finds it plausible that the functional requirements of the system would include the sustaining of family, and so, the predominance of heterosexuality.²⁰ Curiously enough, he does not emphasize that the predominance of heterosexuality and the maintenance of 'family' if required for the functioning of liberal capitalism, stands diametrically opposed to the autoerotic's scenario; a scenario, again, in which sex is not a 'relation with.' While Soble does acknowledge the potential for autoeroticism's undermining of

²⁰Sobel, pg. 5.

sexism and for re-establishing women's sexuality,²¹ he concludes that it (masturbation) would subsequently

. . . support economic domination by encouraging [emphasis mine] the individualistic philosophy of liberal-capitalistic theory [such that] a defense of masturbation . . . may produce a more extreme form of atomization of society that [sic] occurs within capitalism (an atomization which is likely to serve the established order by increasing consumer demand).²²

Side-stepping, for the moment, the question of precisely which consumer items stand to be affected by one's decision in favor of autoerotic sexuality, there is the more immediate problem of deciphering the argument Soble has presented. He has previously argued that the sustaining of a liberal-capitalist political economy requires the tandem promotions of family and the predominant pattern of heterosexuality. This latest claim, however, is that autoerotic sexuality would not only fail at alleviating economic domination, but would ultimately bring it about in a more extreme form.

Now, the conclusion I take him to imply by all this is the following: Either we support the existing political economy as practicing heterosexuals, or we (by his argument) perpetuate a more extreme form of this economy's more negative effects as practiced and exclusive autoerotics.

²¹Ibid., pg. 43.

²²Ibid.

But, rather than deny or raise doubts about whether political choices must at all times be sexual choices (which is roughly the equivalent of asking whether, and to what extent, we are all political beings), Soble finds ideological solace in the emergence of the extended 'family' (i.e., in ostensibly non-coupled, heterosexual groupings that collectively raise children to avoid strictly defined social roles and that, by alleviating the need for duplicate purchases, fail to support the consumer economy). But could there yet be room for autoerotic sexuality in extended family groupings? Soble thinks not. The difficulty with finding "philosophical room for a defense of masturbation within the theory of extended families . . . [is that] . . . such behavior would be seen as a sign of withdrawal from the [family-as] community, a sign that in some way the family is failing the individual and the individual is failing the family."²³ But what is constituted by 'failure' here? Who precisely has failed whom, and on what basis? Could it be that the real difficulty with finding "philosophical room" for a defense of masturbation, is that a philosophical bias (mirroring, perhaps a progenerative bias?), rather than those murky societal reasons, is at work? If so, it would explain why, in the final analysis, Soble fails to deliver support to his thesis that masturbation requires continual

²³Ibid., pg. 44.

defense solely because it is eschewed by nebulously empowered forces said to be at work in our society. I submit that Soble has "Q'd" himself; that he has drawn a false conclusion from insufficient evidence and said Q.E.D. too soon. He succeeds, after all, in establishing yet another reason for the disparagement of autoerotic sexuality, i.e., that it fosters the need to be alone sometimes, which alone-ness stands opposed to some archtypal 'good'; the good of which is unquestioned and which has been posited as an irretractable given. But I am led by his conclusion to question this assumption, and to question the 'good' it is assumed to oppose. Far from agreeing with those whole conception of autoerotic sexuality is of an activity which (at best) is a substitute for sexual activity or (at worst) an activity with the potential or corrupting the individual, undermining the political economy, contributing to the political economy, becoming the linchpin of women's sexuality, unhinging the linchpin of male sexuality.²⁴ etc., I find no logical, social, moral,

²⁴I find it odd, but quite telling that in those few commentaries on masturbation that exist, it is the female that is exclusively the agent who 'learns' through or by virtue of the masturbatory experience. This would indicate that a certain male bias also infiltrates these analyses, one borne out by observing those expressions which popularly define the practice. Mopsy Strange Kennedy, for instance, has observed the absence of "exhilarated and accurate words to describe the act of masturbation among women," and that those words used to describe the act as it is practiced by men ("Getting your rocks off? How about getting your

practical or political contradiction in arguing masturbation as a legitimate sexual activity in its own right. To use Soble's analogy, the difficulty with finding philosophical room for a defense of masturbation within prevailing theory, is the clutter of conceptual biases (among them, coupleism, a tendency toward patriarchy, and what would appear to be a strong preference in favor of 'community' as opposed to individualism), that suffice to render it "homeless." A defense of masturbation, then, would only require that we in some way manage to expand the philosophical "home."

Summary Conclusions

At the outset of this discussion, I quoted Wolfe's reduction of life's problems to "penny-in-the-slot-machine" wisdom. The slot machine image was utilized as a means of setting the stage for the discussion of risk, diversity and difference as hopefully underscoring all aspects of the philosophical enterprise. The question was put whether a sexual philosophy could provide any significant answers to the questions posed by human sexuality, if it did not first succeed in asking the right kinds of questions; if attention were not paid to those same qualities of risk, diversity and difference that exist at its core. Given the focus of the

Roxannes off?") sound conspicuously penis envious when applied to women. Where, then, are all the Portnoy's of philosophical example?

present essay upon sexual philosophy and its suggested direction, Wolfe's analogy can be restated:

Boil it down to essentials, and the problem of sexual philosophy is as simple as a penny-in-the slot machine. Deposit your penny, and you get your sexual paradigm nicely wrapped in a substantiating theory. If it so dictates, you can share this paradigm with another, like-minded depositor; if it does not, then your tea party as dictated by the childhood rhyme²⁵ will only require the attendance of one. And it will not advantage you one bit to direct indelicate remarks at the machine, to promulgate extensive theories descriptive of the exclusive joys of sharing, to speak negatively of one-party teas, to wag your finger at those who have deposited their coins and are enjoying the rewards of theory, to argue that the contents of all such machines ought be more uniform, or to question the wisdom of this particular type of sexual arrangement.

In keeping with this new analogy, and with attention to the varieties of experience underscored by risk, diversity and difference alluded to in the former, Chapter II will: 1) examine two diametrically opposed accounts of sexuality (reductionist and expansionist), and two equally opposed models of sexual desire (unitary and binary) in a move toward delineating the possibilities of answering the question what sex is; and 2) argue that one's answer to the

²⁵I had a little tea party
 This afternoon at three.
 T'was very small
 Three guests in all,
 Just I, myself, and me.
 Myself ate all the sandwiches
 While I drank all the tea,
 T'was also I who ate the pie
 and passed the cake to me.

question of what purpose(s) sex serves, makes possible an answer to the more extensive question of what constitutes 'sexual activity,' but that answering either question is ultimately dependent on the model of sexuality one presumes. Following an examination of some of the more acknowledged historical and anthropological aspects of sexual self-stimulation in Chapter III, it will be argued that, although masturbation has primarily been viewed as a substitute for (i.e., 'in lieu of') sexual activity rather than as warranting its own legitimacy and fulfilling its own purpose(s), such a view not only betrays the conceptual confusion as to what constitutes a sex act, but also reflects the pervasively patriarchal tendency to view sex as primarily being a specific sort of 'relation with'; this as opposed to those other conceptions of sex which are possible, and of which masturbation is itself paradigmatic.

CHAPTER II

THE ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL CONCEPTS

Reductionist and Expansionist Conceptions of Sexuality

The real virtue of a scheme of analysis that begins by posing the question (of) what something is, is not--perhaps--that it will yield the most definitive of answers, but rather that it will allow for the possibility of there being answers not entirely ruled out by prevailing dogma. If the question concerns 'what sex is' (or might be), then the answer(s) will undoubtedly reflect whether or not we begin with a reductionist or an expansionist account.¹

According to the 'reductionist' account, sex is an occurrence of no greater significance than the sensations produced by a certain variety of "skin rubbing against skin"; it serves no greater purpose, recognizes no inherent goals, and admits to no specific moral or aesthetic boundaries. For the sexual reductionist, sex is simply the manifestation of whatever the experiencing individual determines the act primarily to involve. This primary or

¹Though these terms are standard in the philosophical discussion of sex, I take credit for their alignment into coherent models (i.e., of sexuality and of sexual desire) as presented in this Chapter.

'core' experience becomes identical with the sexual experience itself, and functions for this experience in such a way that its absence electively nullifies a given experience's being an act of sex.

Writers who have acknowledged the possible existence of such a core phenomenon, have most frequently focused on the orgasm. It is not surprising, given this focus, that Moulton² chides the benevolent sexism of those who argue that women care more for the "warmth and closeness of a meaningful relationship," than the attainment of a orgasm resulting from sexual intercourse. Less surprising still, is Moulton's overall thesis (in "Sex and Reference") that "concern about [the infrequency of female orgasm in intercourse] embodies a confusion about the concept of sexual intercourse."³ To be sure, if what it is that one perceives as the core of sexual activity is the orgasmic experience, then it would seem reasonable to question the worthwhileness of an activity whose presumed character is

²Janice Moulton, "Sex and Reference." In Philosophy and Sex, 1st edition, pages 34-44. Moulton's footnote #4 is a reference to Eustace Chesser's An Outline of Human Relationships where she states that: ". . . the misfortune of premature [preceding the male's orgasm] ejaculation is extremely common. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that intercourse is more beset with difficulties for a man than a woman. A woman may take no pleasure in it for a variety of reasons, but if she cares deeply for her husband, she can pretend." Difficult as it may be to believe, Chesser's comments were made in 1959.

³Ibid., p. 34.

sexual yet which failed to bring about the particular end that (to the experiencing individual) would render it distinct from an otherwise non-sexual activity. But this example should by no means be taken as firmly establishing orgasmic activity as the reductionist ideal. It would at least be conceivable that someone elect some other 'basic' experience to this status. It suffices to say that for the sexual reductionist, there is a core experience which identifies the sexual experience. To the extent that an experience involves the demanded phenomenon, it is, or becomes, a sexual experience; to the extent that it does not, then it has simply failed at being an act of sex.

The 'expansionist' account of sexuality broadens the notion of a core phenomenon suggested by the reductionist account. Whereas for the latter, sex is identical with a particular experience, for the expansionist it is a panoply of phenomena whose existence combine to enrich the (basic) experience and thereby to redefine the notion of sexual activity as necessarily involving these phenomena. To the individual whose conception of sexual activity is expansionist, the absence of these attendant phenomena effectively reduces the likelihood that the less adorned activity will be viewed as a strictly sexual activity; the greater likelihood being that these latter activities will, in comparison, be seen as base, 'incomplete,' or even

perverted. Given this sort of focus, a number of contributions to sexual philosophy have expounded upon the numbers and kinds of attendant phenomena which might be taken as fulfilling the stated criterion, i.e., as enhancing the sexual experience. Whereas for the reductionist the problematic case involves whether a particular act can be a sex act (if, in fact, it fails to bring about some specific phenomena associated with 'sex,' e.g., the orgasm), for the expansionist (who sees that the sexual experience involves more than any one core element), it is the problem of determining precisely what sorts of combined phenomena bring about the desired enhancement.

The list of possible enhancers to the sexual experience is extensive, and includes such elements as reciprocity, love, faithfulness (exclusivity), completeness, ambiance, passion and intimacy. Though in his "Sexual Immorality Delineated," Bernard Baumrin appears more than slightly amused at the prospect of a sexual relationship founded upon expansionistic expectations, he nonetheless manages to capture its caricature when he writes concerning

. . . the mythology of perfect sexual harmony, of two minds . . . conceptually indistinguishable, of two hearts beating as one, of two bodies locked together like bronze equestrian sculptures . . .⁴

⁴Bernard Baumrin, "Sexual Immorality Delineated." In PAS, pg. 301.

Even if we allow for Baumrin's having obviously overstated his case, he is not far from the inherent romanticism of the expansionist ideal. This same romanticism is prevalent in numerous examples of popular 'literature' aimed at the teen and young adult (particularly female) markets, that would have us believe that when lovers truly love, the sheer magic of their being is sufficient to usher in the celestial chorus, cause the earth to move, and bring about an uncontested meshing of souls. Unfortunately, the consequence of this view is that it effectively renders sex some 'thing' conducive to bringing about some other 'thing(s)' deemed higher than the experience of sex itself. If for instance, in Alan Goldman's view, the most narrow account of sexuality is the rubbing of skin-against-skin (a reductionist view), then for the expansionist this skin-rubbing process only serves to initiate those other phases deemed higher on the scale of sexual experience. Although a number of sexual philosophies have sought to argue that sex is related to eating,⁵ this relation could only mean--to the expansionist--that the eaten meal is of less importance (in the long and short of it) than the multitudinous benefits heaped upon the body by its ingestion. By

⁵For example, Frederick Elliston's "In Defense of Promiscuity," Janice Moulton's "Sex and Reference," Thomas Nagel's "Sexual Perversion," Sara Ruddick's "Better Sex," Robert Gray's "Sex and Sexual Perversion."

expansionist accounting, sex is a matter of digestion rather than of taste.

Binary and Unitary Conceptions of Sexual Desire

Now these manners of describing the bases of sexuality would be insufficient, were there not also a set of theses corresponding to accounts descriptive of sexual desire.

The first of these positions is the unitary account. According to it, sex is said to occur primarily to the experiencing individual. For the sexual unitarist, sex is solely a matter of individual experience, to the extent that each one is responsible for his or her own arousal and may in fact have this arousal as the source and object of his or her own sexual desire. Although it is typically the case that for the unitarist that which defines 'sex' is a matter of solitary accomplishment, it is no less the case that another person or persons might also be present and/or involved in the activity designated as 'sexual' activity. That this is so, follows from the sexual unitarist's premise that even those activities assumed most paradigmatic of 'involved' sexuality, e.g., sexual intercourse, actually involve the attempt of each participant to utilize the 'Other' as a means of self-stimulation only.

As opposed to this view, the binary account of sexual desire alleges that 'sex'--however it is to be defined--necessarily requires a minimum participation of two. By

this account, what one does by oneself or through (as distinct from with) another either completely fails to be an act of sex or, at the very most, is an example of incomplete or perverted activity. By this account, the term 'sexual experience' cannot be made to apply to an individual, solitary experience.

Given the models of sexuality (reductionist/expansionist) and of sexual desire (unitary/binary), we ought expect discussions of their combined relevance to take either of the following four forms:

1. BINARY - EXPANSIONIST
2. UNITARY - EXPANSIONIST
3. BINARY - REDUCTIONIST
4. UNITARY - REDUCTIONIST

Since it will be my intention to introduce, at the conclusion of this chapter, an inclusive model of what is sufficient for an act to be a sex act (and so, of sexual activity), it might be useful to examine some other view of the subject which points directly toward the difficulties imposed by the four forms of analysis. I will refer to Alan Goldman's much contested proposal, not because it comes closest to having laid the question (of what sex is) to rest, but because it gives some indication of what has hitherto been the extent of such philosophical analyses.

For Goldman, the matter is quite simple:

. . . sexual desire is (the) desire for contact with another person's body and for the pleasure which such contact produces.⁶

From this it follows that sex has itself to do with the 'pleasurable' rubbings of skin-against-skin. Though this position will later be subjected to criticism, it suffices now as a means of discussing the four possible forms of sexual philosophy that have been distinguished.

The Binary-Expansionist Account

As defined by the binary-expansionist account, sex necessarily involves an experience shared by two (or more) persons, and extends beyond the simple performance of any single physical activity. Although it is no less the case that in this account skin (one person's) is rubbed against skin (some other's), what it involves is much more. It is, given the foregoing criteria of assessment, the most 'relationship' oriented of the four forms of sexual analysis---comprising not only an expectation of intimate contact with some (presumably significant) Other on the physical level, but the emotional level as well. Involved in this account are all those attendant phenomena lauded by the expansionist (love, reciprocity, exclusivity, etc.) as essentially enhancing a performance which would otherwise

⁶Alan Goldman, "Plan Sex." Philosophy and Public Affairs, vol. 3 (Fall 1977): 267-287, pg. 268. Reprinted in Soble's POS, 119-138.

resemble the everyday mundanity of driving a car or of brushing one's teeth.⁷ In emphasizing sexual relatedness as a necessary condition of an act's being a sex act, the binary-expansionist account allows that defining sex as the process of skin rubbing against skin is as much a failure at actually defining sex, as the process of "chewing and swallowing" is a failure at defining what it means to eat.

The Unitary-Expansionist Account

In accordance with the unitary-expansionist account, sex is again more than the simplistic rubbings of skin against skin. The entire panoply of phenomena deemed invaluable to sexual experience by the expansionist rendering still apply, but in this particular case, the experiencing subject feels neither the obligation nor the necessity to have this experience be a shared experience. In keeping with the unitary account of sexual desire, if sex is a matter of 'flesh rubbings' for the purpose of bringing about the pleasure that is said to accrue to such rubbings, then there need be no attempt to convey--say--the pleasure of those rubbings to any other whose flesh might be being rubbed. In fact, to say that sex reduces to a matter of those pleasurable sensations produced by fleshly contact, does not preclude the possibility of producing such

⁷This is the sentiment echoed by Peter Singer in and throughout the Introduction to his Practical Ethics.

sensations of one's own accord, and as directed toward pleasing oneself. It is true that in this particular conception of sex it would be necessary to modify Goldman's conception of sexual desire. It might, for instance, be possible to read it such that sexual desire is desire for ". . . contact with a body and for the pleasure which such contact produces." On this assumption, it could be argued that someone--let us call him Jones--is able to bring about a wave of pleasurable sensations by moving his palm in a left-to-right motion across his knee. Now this certainly meets the criterion of fleshly contact, and is no less believable than the original assumption that such palm-on-knee motions would automatically be pleasing to Jones if performed on someone else. But, if Jones is a unitary-expansionist, then: 1) the question whether Jones' palm-on-knee motion is performed on himself or on some Other, is not as significant a fact (to Jones) as that he finds pleasure in the performance of this act; and 2) that some other non-specific stimuli (e.g., whispers, dimmed lights, the promise of future encounters of a similar sort, moistened palms) enhance this experience for Jones in a way that were this (or these) stimuli to be absent, Jones would not consider the experience as stimulating as given its (or their) presence.

With his own perspective on sexuality, it would not be difficult to conceive of Jones boasting of his own sexual enlightenment. Not only does he know that sex (knee-palming) is basically a matter of providing maximum pleasure to himself, but he also knows (as he may well presume that few others do) how to enhance or prolong that pleasure by the addition of, or emphasis upon, an assortment of other criteria. These might range from the purely physical, i.e., including, but not exclusive of, technique (he may, for instance, find the knee-palming experience to be enhanced if his palms are oiled, or if he is allowed to assume a favored position) to the matter of sheer ambiance (e.g., whether or not the shades have been drawn, or whether--if another person is involved--there is a strong sense of wanting to continue having this kind of activity performed with this same person).⁸ The more important point to emphasize, however, is that for the unitary-expansionist, the presence/existence of the Other is not necessary in order to elicit the sort of pleasure that sex (in this case, knee-palming) is alleged to produce.

⁸It might be argued that any strong sense of wanting to continue performing 'knee-palming' with--say--Beatrice, would mean that Jones was displacing his desire to please himself, with the desire that Beatrice be pleased, i.e., that Jones might 'like,' 'love,' etc. Beatrice. But this need not necessarily be the case. Beatrice might, after all, be the most proficient at facilitating Jones' pleasure, and might even agree with Jones that his pleasure is more important than her own.

The Binary-Reductionist Account

In accordance with the previously noted discussion, the binary-reductionist account stresses: 1) that, whatever sex is, it necessarily involves more than one person for its completed performance; and 2) that 'sex' demands nothing for its being sex, but the 'skin-rubbings' of those persons engaged in the performance of its activity.

From (1), it follows that the binary-reductionist would not consider solitary activities to be sexual activities. If solitary activities are non-sexual (or, at best, marginally sexual) activities, then it would similarly follow that any truly sexual activity must be a coupled activity.

From (2), it follows that the binary-reductionist has little need for the host of attendant physical/emotional phenomena deemed indispensable by expansionist demand.

Let us assume that Smith, a binary-reductionist, considers 'sex' to be a matter of having someone blow softly in her ear. Since 'ear-blowing' is not an activity normally accomplished in isolation,⁹ Smith requires that someone be a 'sex' (i.e., 'ear-blowing') provider. But it is in

⁹Actually, Smith might be sufficiently ingenious to devise some instrument making 'ear-blowing' a solitary activity. In this case, in order for her to continue as a binary-reductionist, it would be necessary to allege--of Smith-- a definite preference for, rather than a necessity of, a participatory other.

keeping with the binary-reductionist account, that this assistance with 'ear-blowing' is all that Smith requires from this Other. In having no need for the trappings of a typically expansionistic scenario, she finds it altogether unnecessary and superfluous to the sex act, that her 'ear-blower' love, or be committed to blowing in her ear; that the experience include the promise to blow in her ear only, or even that she be required to return these (or any other) set of favors. In fact, since it would be difficult for Smith to both give and receive this ear-blowing service simultaneously, she does not see either act as leading naturally or reciprocally to the other, nor does she consider it necessary that anything, in addition to her own pleasure, be involved.

Now this should not be taken to mean that the provider's pleasure does not enter into the binary-reductionist's scheme. Perhaps the provider's pleasure comes from blowing in Smith's ear. Perhaps it emerges as a result of eliciting certain reactions in Smith to having her ear blown. But this one's pleasure is not something with which Smith is even remotely concerned; the acts of 'pleasing one's provider' or assuring that one's provider be pleased are concerns that, if they arise at all, must emanate from some source other than the binary-reductionist herself. It is simply not within the dictates of Smith's

conception of sex, that she initiate any proposal to investigate the provider's sexual-emotional state. The cooperating Other merely exists as a means to sexual gratification and to the accomplishment of what is called 'sex.'

The Unitary-Reductionist Account

For the unitary-reductionist, sex is an activity whose performance negates the necessity of a 'provider' who is distinct from the recipient. Similarly negated, is the necessity of those attendant phenomena alleged (by expansionist claim) to heighten the sexual experience. We may say for this one, that sex is sex whereas company is an entirely different matter; to the unitary reductionist, there is no required relation between the two.

In line, again, with Goldman's allegation that sex might actually resolve itself to a matter of skin-rubbing-against-skin, then as is the case with the unitary-expansionist account, Jones' palm-on-knee motion actually suffices as the harbinger of pleasure to Jones. But in this case, Jones does not find the performance heightened by the availability of Brown's knee, his own oiled palms, or any of a presumed number of emotional stimuli. In much the same way, the unitary-reductionist, in disfavoring the employment of the sex-provider as a mere tool for the completion of sex, opposes the means-end view of the binary-reductionist.

That the models of analysis (1-4) are at all presumed useful to the discussion of sexual being, seems based on the corresponding assumption that there is a single coherent manner in which the question of sex can be posed; some coherent criterion (or criteria) according to which "J is engaged in X" indicates that J is performing a sex act. The question can be put this way: On the assumption that X is an act of sex, what is the criterion or set of criteria by which X (and any other act corresponding to the same criterion or criteria), is correctly understood to be a sex act?

Before proceeding with the intended analysis, it may be useful to consider three treatments of a similar sort whose merits or failures deserve consideration: Alan Goldman on "Plain Sex,"¹⁰ Jerome Shaffer on "Sexual desire,"¹¹ and Robert Gray on "Sex and Sexual Perversion."¹²

¹⁰Alan Goldman, op. cit. Parenthetical page references to Goldman will be to this article.

¹¹Jerome Shaffer, "Sexual Desire." The Journal of Philosophy 75 (1978): 175-189; parenthetical page references to Shaffer will be to this article.

¹²Robert Gray, "Sex and Sexual Perversion." In Sobel, POS, 158-168; parenthetical page references to Gray will be to this article.

Alan Goldman's "Plain Sex"

For the first, Goldman begins his "Plain Sex" with a criticism of the "means-separable-end analyses" (121) he sees to prevail in philosophical writings on sexuality. He argues that conceptions of this sort:

. . . attribute a necessary external goal or purpose to sexual activity, whether it be reproductive, the expression of love, simple communication, or interpersonal awareness . . . [and] analyze sexual activity as a means to one of these ends, implying that sexual desire is a desire to reproduce, to love or be loved, or to communicate with others. All definitions of this type suggest false views of the relation of sex to perversion and morality by implying that sex that does not fit one of these models or fulfill one of these functions is in some way deviant or incomplete. (120)

What Goldman proposes in lieu of this dominant approach, is that sexual desire be construed as the "desire for contact with another person's body and for the pleasure which such contact produces"; sexual activity as "activity which tends to fulfill such desire of the agent" (120). The benefits said to accrue to this redefining of sex are, according to Goldman: 1) it avoids explicitly listed or defined sexual activities (e.g., kissing, embracing, massaging or hand-holding) and focuses, instead, upon the context, purposes, needs or desires that such activities fit; 2) it refuses to overemphasize orgasm as the goal of sexual desire or activity; 3) it refuses to focus on genital contact as the one norm of sexual desire; and 4) it

emphasizes physical contact as the goal of both sexual desire and sexual activity (120).

Goldman says of sex that it "is an intensely pleasurable physical activity and acute physical desire" (122); that it is a "physical activity intensely pleasurable in itself" (127); that it is "a way of relating to another" (129); that the desire for sex "lets us know that we are physical beings" (130); that it has no intrinsic morality, i.e., that sex "is not in itself a moral category" (130); and, that the concept of 'sexual perversion' applies only in those cases where there is a deviation from the norm to desire "pleasurable physical activity" with whomever is the object of sexual desire (122, 135-136). On the subject of perverted sexual practice, Goldman adds that

The desire for physical contact with another person is a minimal criterion for [normal] sexual desire, but it is both necessary and sufficient to qualify normal desire as sexual (121)

and gives further credence to what he considers the primacy of this desire, with the further claim that

. . . the desire for physical contact in itself, without the wish to express affection or other feelings through it, is sufficient to render sexual the activity of the agent who fulfills it. (121)

This would perhaps be well and good, were we to have some grasp of the differences between sexual feelings, the feelings of affection, and the all too ambiguous assortment of 'other' feelings which might lead us to have (or desire

that we have) physical contact with another person. Having previously allowed (121) that "various activities . . . qualify as sexual even without the presence of genital symptoms of sexual excitement," and further, that "the genital symptoms of sexual excitement are not a necessary criteria" for the assessment of an activity as sexual activity, the reader is left to ponder what determines one "desire for physical contact" to be sexual, and another such desire to be otherwise.

It would appear at this point that it might have been wise for Goldman to have adopted a more reserved approach to his subject or, failing that, to at least lend some further clarity to the process of distinguishing sexual desires for physical contact, from those desires for physical contact which, by some analysis or other would be non-sexual. Though he allows (121) that his proposed analysis might appear either over- or under-inclusive of sex and sexual desire, Goldman holds fast to the merits of his own observation. He first allows that his theory may give the appearance of being too broad,

. . . in leading us to interpret physical contact as sexual desire in activities such as football and other contact sports . . .

and this initially appears to be an important concession. But this initial appearance is shortly dismissed, for he

says of even these (football and miscellaneous contact sport) cases, that

. . . [although] the desire is not for contact with another body per se, [but rather with] the goal [of] winning or exercising or knocking someone down or displaying one's prowess . . . If the desire is purely for contact with another specific person's body, then to interpret it as sexual does not seem an exaggeration. (121).

What Goldman appears to be saying is this: Sport-touching (i.e., physical contact associated with the 'playing' of a game) is non-sexual only in those cases where such touching (physical contact) is associated with the goal of the particular sport (winning, exercising, knocking someone down, displaying power over one's opponent) and sexual in all those cases not so associated.

There are several, seemingly obvious, difficulties with this view; not the least of which being that it neglects to incorporate any extrinsic goals to the sorts of touchings to which Goldman refers. Are all those "posterior pats" the lay viewer associates with professional football really cases of sexual innuendo? Goldman leaves no explicit theoretical room for these. Neither does he leave room for the tennis champ who jumps the net to embrace an opponent (knocking her down is allowable, but embracing her is not?), or the winning major league team that runs through the field with fellow players and coaches held aloft. Surely such contact does not serve to enhance one's winning the game,

and it is surely as clear that such contact does not serve to display one's prowess over an opponent; in this case, a knock-down would be a fairer indicator. Even if we allow for the 'joy of winning' (i.e., the extrinsic goals of 'encouragement' or 'congratulations') to enter into Goldman's sexual contact theory, aren't we obligated to query whether some other indicator (for the pleasure of accomplishment?) might not have been more appropriate? Shall (or should) such conventions as sport-contact be written into the rules of the game, so as to avoid the possibilities of misinterpretation?

If we allow for a more Wittgensteinian analysis of what it means to play a game, Goldman's case is made all the more questionable. Suppose that someone has simply learned the game all wrong (from television, for instance)? That someone, not knowing the rules of play firsthand, has naively assumed the game to involve precisely what it has been seen to involve. It would certainly be an error to consider such mistaken contact as sexual contact, and no less an error to say of a player's desire to intentionally bring him/herself in physical contact with another, that the motive--apart from winning the game--was sexual; Goldman does not allow, for instance, that such contact might be for the purpose of throwing the game, for retaliation, or even the desire to simply hurt the other player. Since he

ultimately concludes that even a baby's desire to be cuddled and our corresponding desire to cuddle it are either sexual or protosexual urges in the direction of "experiencing physical contact and the pleasure that such contact brings," it seems altogether plausible to conclude that he has simply allowed too broad an application of his theory.

Goldman then proceeds to disclaim the point that his theory might also appear too narrow. He allows, after all, that a person's personality, rather than its body, may be the conveyor of sexual attractiveness, and that both looking and conversing in certain contexts can be 'sexual' without bodily contact (122). To this he charges that it is the personality as embodied in certain manners of behavior rather than the "contents of one's thoughts per se that are sexually appealing." Since we may hold that it is impossible that there are 'disembodied personalities,' it comes as no revelation that what Goldman intends by assuming this line of reasoning is the claim that

. . . if a person is sexually attracted by another's personality, he or she will desire not just further conversation, but actual sexual contact. (122)

As before, the problem with this is what Goldman intends 'sexual attraction' to mean. Since by his previous reckoning, to be sexually attracted to Smith is the equivalent of desiring physical contact with Smith for its own sake, then to be sexually attracted to Smith's

personality would somehow mean, "to desire physical contact with Smith's personality by way of that which is its harbinger." But as one's 'personality' is not a detachable quality, we are left to wonder what it would mean for it (a personality) to be the object of our sexual desire. Even if we were to allow that there were some sense to be made of desiring physical contact with Smith's personality, it would normally make sense to say that what is desired is physical contact with Smith. There is nothing about such desirings that is *prima facie* sexual, if by 'sexual' is meant anything having to do with intimate physical contact. Might one not be sexually attracted to the 'personality' of a music or screen idol, without having this attraction reach the proportions assigned by Goldman? I think so. It may, for instance, be that what one finds 'sexually attractive' in these Others, is precisely that sort of thing (e.g., money, prestige, power) the perceiver identifies as the focus of such desire. Or, it might reasonably be the case that in admitting a sexual desire for Smith's 'personality,' what we really intend is an admission of our desire to emulate Smith; to be what, and where Smith is. But even if Goldman were correct in his assumption that such desirings naturally culminate in the desire for sexual activity, need they necessarily (also naturally) lead to the desire for realizable activity? I think not. Though he says

. . . while looking at or conversing with someone can be interpreted as sexual in given contexts, it is so when intended as preliminary to, and hence parasitic upon, elemental sexual interest. (122)

it is nonetheless clear that sexually desiring the lead singer of DEPECHE MODE while simultaneously admitting his ultimate unavailability is not only preferable, but a considerably better indicator of one's state of mental health, than desiring the lead singer of DEPECHE MODE and considering it the prelude to some real activity.

What Goldman takes to follow from his own case, however, is perhaps more revealing of his theory of sexual desire than any of those points previously raised. For it is from this latter claim (that sexually desiring X, must be intended as prelude to an actual sexual activity with X), that he concludes

Voyeurism or viewing a pornographic movie qualifies as a sexual activity, but only as an imaginative substitute for the real thing . . . the same is true of masturbation as a sexual activity without a partner. (122)

Since for Goldman, sexual activity is activity that 'tends to fulfill' sexual desire and, for him, that which tends to fulfill this desire is physical contact with another body and the pleasure that such contact is alleged to produce, we might rightly classify his position as binary-reductionist. He certainly does criticize those expansionist (his own term is 'means-end') accounts that would have sex be a matter of fulfilling some other set of criteria. But although this

would make understandable his criticism of masturbation (and, to a lesser degree, voyeurism)¹³ on the grounds of its failure to require a participatory Other, it is not clear why Goldman disallows its even being a legitimate sexual activity within the frame of sexuality allowed by reductionist accounting. We are led to believe that although he seeks to discuss "Plain Sex," masturbation is simply plainer sex than he can theoretically afford; given what he sees as the necessary condition that sex be a binary experience, his view allows that even the 'imagined Other' of fantasy be preferable to the conceivability of sexual activity as solitary activity.¹⁴ The consequence of his

¹³Goldman allows that voyeurism is more the sexual activity than masturbation, in that it involves the observance of an actual Other or Others, even though the observer's role is not a participatory one. As such, Goldman's preference is clearly for the binary model.

¹⁴Sobel, in his Introduction to POS (16-17):

It is not true that one who masturbates while thinking about physical contact with another person is no closer to tending to fulfill the desire for contact with the particular body imagined or any other body, than one who masturbates without such fantasies? The person who masturbates while gazing on centerfolds is equally distant from satisfying sexual desire in Goldman's sense (this, though Goldman had charged that there was a difference). If so, then the presence in the imagination of "pictures" of bodies, or the presence before one's eyes of a photograph, does not change an otherwise nonsexual activity into a borderline case. There is a connection, I think, between Goldman's attempt to admit masturbation as a borderline case of sexual activity when it is accompanied by imaginings and his saying that masturbation, like voyeurism, is a substitute or "the real thing."

position (that masturbation is a substitute for, rather than itself being a sexual activity in its own right), denies that masturbation epitomizes his own paradigm case of sexuality (reductionist), if not of sexual desire (binary). In having, at the outset of his "Plain Sex," presumed as superfluous to his task an answer to the question of what sex is, Goldman begs the questions warranted by his own discussion. On the assumption of there being some degree of relevance granted each of the proposed models of analysis previously noted, and in keeping with the demands of the unitary models of sexuality, Goldman's thesis must be rejected as both counter-intuitive and (given what clearly ought be a more inclusive focus for this type philosophical investigation) counter-productive as well.

Jerome Shaffer's "Sexual Desire"

In "Sexual Desire," Jerome Shaffer criticizes Thomas Nagel,¹⁵ Robert Solomon,¹⁶ and Goldman's "Plain Sex," for having perpetrated the misconception that **sexual desire is a "desire for something"** (176). According to Shaffer, theories corresponding to this type see sexual desire variously as the desire for sex or the desire that one

¹⁵Thomas Nagel, "Sexual Perversion." The Journal of Philosophy, LXVI, 1 (Jan. 16, 1969): 5-17.

¹⁶Robert Solomon, "Sexual Paradigms." The Journal of Philosophy, LXXI, II (June 13, 1974): 336-345.

engage in something (namely, sexual activity). He identifies these as the class of 'propositional theories,' i.e., as those that take the situation to be one in which a person [S], at some time [t], sexually desires either some other person or thing [O]. This type theory, says Shaffer, takes the form

At t, S sexually desires O =Df. 'At t, S desires
that s/he have sex with O.

Since Shaffer's major criticism is directed toward propositional theories of sexual desire (in general), and the particular theory I intend to defend follow the lines of those theories criticized, it would be useful to examine precisely what it is about such theories he finds to warrant correction. We are given a clue to his dissatisfaction with these theories when, on the heels of his announced intention to argue against them, he says that even should we leave open what is to count as "having sex," the theory is necessarily false since neither side of the purported equation entails the other; that 1) desiring sex does not entail having sexual desire; and 2) that having sexual desire does not entail desiring sex.

For the first, Shaffer points to those cases where someone's desire that sex take place, occurs for some reason other than a purposefully directed (sexual) desire for any particular individual. If S could be said to desire sex

with 0 "for its own sake," i.e., intrinsically, it would still not follow that S sexually desires 0, because

. . . S might have been informed that sex with 0 would be "intrinsically" good or good "for its own sake" and, thereby, come to desire sex with 0 "intrinsically" or "for its own sake" without sexually desiring 0. (177)

For the second, Shaffer poses as probable the case of a person's sexually desiring someone, but finding it unthinkable that s/he actually have sex with that person (because, or instance, the one desired is a relative, or a small child). As further support of this thesis, we are given the cases: of a widow who finds herself thinking, with sexual desire, of her dead husband; of a person who, being extremely naive sexually, would be incapable of forming the desire that a certain sexual activity take place; and, of a confirmed heterosexual who suddenly and unaccountably experiences sexual desire for someone of the same sex.

For the first of these, the case of the 'ambivalent desirer,' Shaffer concludes that there is a logical contradiction in assuming someone's desire for a state of affairs, the desiring or real occurrence of which would--to the desirer--be abhorrent; from the widow's case, that although it is illogical to want what is impossible, there is no loss to reason to wish for it; from the sexual nait's case, that S's sexually desiring 0 cannot entail S's desire

for sex with O, if S has no concept of 'sexual' activity/behavior; from the confirmed heterosexual that lacking a prior context for same-sex behavior, would make impossible the desire for such behavior.

What emerges is that Shaffer's disagreement with propositional theories of sexual desire comes to rest on his belief that sexual desire is simply not a case of desiring that (178). He admits that although sexual desire can entail a desire that a certain state of affairs come about and, conversely, that the latter desire can entail the former, the two are at any rate logically independent. As only the sexually experienced have specific things in mind for the objects of their sexual desires, sexual desire itself may not be said to necessarily involve either an aim or an object (181). Sexual desire differs markedly from the standard case of desire, says Shaffer, in that

Ordinarily, to desire something is necessarily to envisage favorably some future state of affairs that is one's goal or aim; so it makes sense to ask, of someone who expresses a desire, what is it you desire? This is obviously true of desiring that. It is a strength of the propositional theory that its generalized version also accounts for cases of desiring to. To desire to be a doctor is to desire that one become a doctor. It also accounts for many cases where "desire" takes a direct object, as in desiring a new car; to desire a new car is to desire that one should have a new car. But sexual desire is the exception. (178-179)

Shaffer also summarily maintains the deviation of sexual desire from the standard set of emotional states.

Both are typically (though not, in at least the pathological sense, necessarily) directed toward an object. Given that S can think of O with either sexual desire, or with the emotions of anger, pity or fear, both sorts of states are attitudes directed toward a subject; both involve feelings, bodily expressions, consequences, and agitations (181). But there are alleged to be two important differences between emotions and sexual desire. Emotions are "tied to our rationality in a way that sexual desire is not" (183); whereas our feelings of anger, fear, pity and the like can be either reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified, Shaffer insists that in the case of sexual desire

We might not understand what S sees in O, we might not share S's taste in these matters, we might think S is doomed to frustration, we might even think that S's desire is neurotic, sick or self-destructive, but we cannot say that S has bad reasons or even that S has no reason for desiring O. (183)

We are further told that sexual desire differs from emotions in that the act of desiring something is necessarily connected to the idea of obtaining satisfaction. But in the case of emotion, "there is no such thing as satisfying one's grief, anger, or pity, neither are these emotions doomed to frustration either" (184). Since for Shaffer sexual desire need not entail, of S, an ability to conjure up "some pre-envisioned state which is to be attained, got, fulfilled, or realized" . . . the fact is

that there may be no desired outcome, not even an unconsciously desired outcome, which is necessarily present in sexual desire (184-185).

Following an account of what it is that makes sexual desire sexual (and with the understanding that he has already shown that sexual desire is a kind of desire), Shaffer summarizes his account of sexual desire as being

. . . a state of a subject which is directed toward an object but [which] does not necessarily involve any desiring that concerning the object and which is such that, if it is followed by sexual arousal, then certain subsequent events will be felt as constituting the satisfaction or frustration of that original state. (187)

Although it goes without saying that Shaffer's proposals would have been greatly enhanced had we some inkling what he intended 'having sex' (and so, it would seem, 'having sexual desire') to entail, it is equally clear that a good deal of his descriptive analysis comes to rest upon questionable reasoning, linguistic manipulations, and an almost conscious refusal to allow his 'test cases' (of the widow, the nait, and the aspiring same-sex desirer) to be accommodated by the original propositional formula. Since I argue that such an accommodation is in fact possible, use can be made of examining what each of the purported theses (of 'desiring sex' and 'sexual desire') would ordinarily imply, as opposed to what this author's more narrow analysis would have them mean. My point here is

to demonstrate why, given the choice between an interpretation based upon ordinary discourse and Shaffer's own, the former not only renders a clearer view of what is occurring in his test cases, but also is the only one that makes the cases at all intelligible. I will argue, moreover, that since propositional theories (in general) maintain an equation of the two theses such that the given proposition is taken to be illuminated by that one generated from it, what has occurred in Shaffer's case is not that propositional theories regarding sex have been found to be ineffectual, but that Shaffer has repeatedly misused the equation.

(1) For the first of his claims (that 'desiring sex' does not entail 'having sexual desire'), Shaffer manages a distinction which he alleges to pose a real difference between the two terms. He takes 'desiring sex' to refer to a mere state of sexual anxiety (e.g., 'horniness') and 'sexual desire' to be a particular state of such anxiety as directed toward a specific individual (e.g., 'passion,' 187-188). In itself this would not be problematic, and it is the case that his interpretation could be made to fit within the realms of ordinary discourse. But since Shaffer's criticisms of propositional theories about sex hinge on a presumed disunity of the equated terms, his determination to argue 'desiring sex' as distinct from 'sexual desire' is

hardly without purpose. What Shaffer clearly wants to argue, given the original propositional formula, is that

'At t, S sexually desires O'

does not mean that 'At t, S desires that s/he have sex with O.' But it is not at all clear that this distinction is possible through his simply having delineated the difference between 'sexual desire' and 'desiring sex.' In fact, even were we to grant Shaffer the distinction he proposes, we are left with little more than the vacuous conclusion that 'desiring sex,' or

'S's experience of sexual anxiety'

devoid of an object, is distinct from 'sexual desire,' or

'S's experience of sexual anxiety as directed toward a specific Other, O.'

What is obviously omitted from the analysis Shaffer proposes, is that the object of sexual desire, O, is present in both parts of the original proposition. If he would have us discard the propositional formula regarding sex because--on his view--"neither side of the purported equation entails the other," then we are within our rights to demand that we continue to work with the same equation that he has elected to criticize. I do not believe that anyone would seriously want to dispute that one's merely "being horny" is the general or functional equivalent of one's "being horny" because of (as directed toward) a specific Other. I certainly would not. So the best that can be granted here

is that Shaffer has correctly--though perhaps not insightfully--focused on a distinction between 'desiring sex' and 'sexual desire'; but it is a distinction that fails to make a difference to our hopes of uncovering why, if 'O' is the object in both of the following cases,

'At t, S sexually desires O'

ought not be taken as the equivalent of

'At t, S desires that s/he have sex with O.'

Since Shaffer's disagreement with propositional theories of sexual desire is tangentially based on his belief that sexual desire is simply not a case of 'desiring that . . . ,' it appears that this would be true for him no matter what the equated terms or theses happened to be.

But there is a second, similarly problematic, issue to be raised in reference to Shaffer's rendering of the propositional theory in this case. Like the first, it has to do with the importance of the presumed Other [O].

Whereas my first comments focused on Shaffer's having omitted 'O' from consideration in forming his distinction between 'desiring sex' and 'having sexual desire,' I would now like to focus on the limits of O's inclusion. I maintain that if we begin by distinguishing propositional from cognitive verbs, it becomes all the more evident that Shaffer's specific criticism of the propositional formula is semantically ill-focused. Given this distinction, only the

cognitive verbs (i.e., know, see, hear, taste) require a grammatical accusative or object. If S attests to knowing, seeing, hearing, or tasting, then it is assumed that S knows, sees, hears or tastes something. If it turns out that S is mistaken--that what S had professed to know, or to have seen, heard or tasted has no objective status--then we would expect S's claim to be withdrawn.

Contrarily, the class of propositional verbs (think, wish, hope, believe) in which 'desire' and 'want' are frequently included, require no such objectively determined accusative. If S wishes that X were Y, it would make no sense to check whether X's being Y were really the case; neither would we--under normal circumstances--find it necessary to make of S's wish that X be Y, an issue of any particular sort. Likewise, if we are told that S desires O, we might reasonably inquire as to the truthfulness of the report, but we could not logically say that S's desire for O was itself true or false, meaningful or meaningless, rational or irrational without seriously distorting (or objectifying) what it means for S to admit to a desire for O.

The problem with 'sexual desire,' and with Shaffer's account of it, is that like the standard case of desire (or want), S can simply desire (or want), or S can desire (or want) some specific object. He comes close to admitting

this when he says (180, 188) that we would do well to distinguish between sexual desire as an attitude toward a specific object, and sexual arousal as consisting of "identifiable, locatable physiological processes and the sensations concomitant with them."

On the face of it, and with an eye to the way words are used and meanings gathered, there is nothing prima facie misleading in the propositional rendering that

At t, S sexually desires O =Df. 'At t, S desires that
s/he have sex with O.'

if what we mean is that S's sexual desire for O is manifested by a desire for sex with O. The particular rendering need not, after all, directly entail the pursuit of O by S, nor, as previously noted, that S is particularly comfortable with the idea of sex with O as a real possibility. To say that at t, S's sexual desire for O translates (at t) into a desire for sex with O, does not preclude the possibility that at t . . ._n, S could have chosen either not to act upon the still felt desire, or indeed to no longer possess it.

Shaffer's intention to have his 'sexual desire' function differently from the sense of 'sexual desire' implied by a common-sense view of the propositional formula, leads him to take, 'At t, S sexually desires O' to mean that, 'At t, S sexually desires sex,' where O is not a person, but an experience accepted by S as desirable. He

has at any rate completely failed at telling us anything about what it means for S to experience sexual desire, and this amounts to an avoidance of what the propositional theory intends for this particular case.

(2) The second of his claims, is that 'having sexual desire does not entail desiring sex.' Here Shaffer begins by having us suppose that someone experience sexual desire for some Other, but (given a conflict of desire, ambivalence, repressions, etc.) have no real desire that sex with that Other occur; in fact, says Shaffer, there may be a total horror at the idea of sex occurring (177). But there is a perfectly satisfactory alternative analysis on the propositional approach. It is simply that there are some whose sexual desires are directed (at some given time) toward others whom--for any number of reasons--they also feel uncomfortable desiring sexually. Words such as 'ambivalence,' 'repression' and the like certainly come to mind here, but they no more effectively negate the fact that the thing or person is desired, than was Humbert's attraction to Lolita negated by virtue of her being his stepdaughter. That it is not faithful to the situation to say that actually having sex with Lolita is the issue, is clearly borne out by reference to the same propositional formula that Shaffer criticizes. We are not, after all, allowed to reason from Humbert's sexually desiring Lolita at

t, to his having sex with Lolita at t_1 . No such direct connection is implied by the proposition, nor is an assumption of the sort intended by Shaffer allowed by any but the most stringent of psychological analyses. Since the question whether 'At t, Humbert sexually desires Lolita' should actually be taken to mean that Humbert's desiring sex with Lolita is either identical to, or as theoretically weighted as his actually having sex with Lolita (which was Shaffer's suggestion) has previously been discussed, it remains to say this much about whether desiring X directly entails doing X: since one normally expects some performative stage to exist between desiring X and doing whatever is required in order to bring it about that X, the interpretation of these events given by Shaffer is far too broad. Similarly, by altering the meaning of S's desire that s/he have sex with O to somehow mean that S is in fact intending sex with O, Shaffer effectively creates the same propositional disunity that he finds it necessary to criticize. It is no less a problem in those 'test cases' that follow.

This grammatical shadow-play is quite evident in the case of the widow ravaged with sexual desire for her dead husband. Shaffer claims that she might

. . . well wish he were alive so that she could have sex with him, but she knows he is dead and therefore knows that sex with him is impossible.

From this it follows for Shaffer that: "A person cannot want what she believes to be impossible, although she may wish for it" (177). Given this emphasis upon the nuances of language, it is questionable that Shaffer did not opt for substituting "knows to be impossible" for the "believes to be impossible" phrase. Although it is clear that there are at least some cases in which the semantic difference between 'wishing X' and 'wanting X' are significant, we are by no means guaranteed our assumption that their difference will be assured for every case whatsoever. The most prominently noted difference concerns one's ability to bring the desired end to fruition as opposed to one's desire that the proposed end be brought about (e.g., by some other agent or force). Given this distinction one might reasonably 'want' a promotion (and, to this end, do more than the amount of work required for merely maintaining a current position), while simultaneously 'wishing' that (given a different experimental background or a rosier financial picture) one owned the entire company. But someone's saying that he wished to win at the lottery seems hardly distinct from his wanting to win at the lottery; and the distinction is all the less so if, in both cases, the agent so desiring has purchased a ticket. If we dismiss the possibility of our dear widow's harboring of necrophilic tendencies, then it is quite clear that she will not get what she desires. But

this fact is not likely to alter the widow's desire, and this case fails even in the absence of knowing what, for Shaffer, counts as distinguishing a case of wanting X, from one of wishing X.

A preferable solution to this case, one that admits to analysis by ordinary language, is that the widow's sexual desire for her now dead husband does in fact mean that she desires (were it now possible) to have sex with him; the impossibility of fulfilling her wish in no way mitigates against her actually wanting what it is that she has wished. To be sure, the reality of the situation does make it impossible to bring her wish to fruition; neither is there the likelihood that this "proposed end" will be brought about by any other person(s). But this consequence does not, as Shaffer would have us believe, make what she wishes were the case, distinct from what she would otherwise want the case to be. As in the previous analogy, having failed to win at the lottery the loser is not likely to stop wishing that s/he had won, or wanting the situation of his/her loss to be other than it is. Accommodating the propositional theory to this case, only requires the addition (which common-sense admits, even if Shaffer does not) of the "if it were now possible phrase,"

"At some non-specific time [t], a widow[S] sexually desires her (now dead) husband[0]" =Df. "At some non-specific time [t], a widow [S] desires (that it were now possible) to have sex with him [0]."

without any loss of meaning, or loss of integrity for the sense of the propositional formula.

We are now asked to imagine the case of one who is so extremely naive sexually (i.e., having neither sexual experience, nor sexual education) that for this person there is no concept of sexual behavior or sexual activity. Such a person, says Shaffer, would be incapable of forming the desire that a certain activity take place, precisely because s/he would have no notion of such activity. But since his idea would also imply that anything desired must already have been the explicit focus of some pre-desiring state, Shaffer conjures--as further evidencing his point--the case of

. . . a confirmed heterosexual who suddenly and unaccountably finds himself or herself for the first time sexually desiring someone of the same sex. Such a person might have no idea of what sort of sexual activity would be appropriate and, therefore, would not even know what to desire. (178)

But here, as in the previous case, the 'desire for X' has been linked with some sort of pre-knowledge of X; and, although this can sometimes arguably be the case, it by no means has to be.¹⁷ Furthermore, by introducing the 'confirmed heterosexual' into his envisioned scheme, he

¹⁷Interestingly enough, Shaffer concedes this point on pg. 180 (effectively contradicting his own thesis) when he says that ". . . although sexually experienced people will often have pretty definite ideas concerning what counts as getting X and what they want to do with X, these plans are not essential to sexual desire."

succeeds in denying 'sexual ignorance' or sexual innocence as his initial point of argument. A person who might have only 'had sex' in only one position might certainly be convinced to attempt another without any significant loss of expertise, or gain in ignorance. Having once been driven to Detroit, one tends to remember the way; even should a subsequent trip be made with an entirely different driver, we normally have little difficulty knowing that we've arrived.

Now these are views from the vantage of common-sense. It remains to demonstrate whether both or either case can be accommodated by the propositional formula

'At t, S sexually desires O' =Df. 'At t, S
desires that s/he have sex with O'

which Shaffer finds cause to dismiss as unworkable. The key to unravelling the case of the sexual nait is found in Shaffer's insistence that the nait would be incapable of forming the desire for sexual activity because s/he would have no idea what sort of activity (or activities) would be involved (178). This insistence, however, admits to at least two disclaimers; one having to do with the natural emergence of human sexual response, and the other with answering the question whether it is ever possible that someone might come to desire an experience of any sort that s/he had not previously experienced, and about which s/he had no real knowledge.

The first of these questions is adequately answered by referencing an abundance of data relative to the fields of both psychology and human development. Even should we find cause to dismiss with prejudice the Freudian notions of "libido" and infantile "unconscious sexuality," we would yet find it difficult to argue the common occurrences of 'sexual awakening'; of one's coming to oneself as a sexual being. This latter process has less to do with one's exposure to the range of possible sexual activities than with the unprompted, naturally occurring sequence of events orchestrated by one's own--apparently preset--biological clock. But since the propositional theory of sexual desire points to 'O' as the object of sexual desire, we would have to allow (given S-as-sexual-nait) that

'At t, S sexually desires O' = D. 'At t, S desires that s/he have [some new set of experiences identified by the nait as pertaining to] sex with O.'

This proposal is at least preferable to Shaffer's, since on his view there is no coherent explanation possible for the emergence of sexual desire. Given his view, only those previously exposed to sexual activities would know how to form a desire for them. Since his idea (e.g., that one's desiring sex could only emerge from previous sexual experience) would directly contradict our learned understanding of human sexual response and its emergence, we

have better reasons for accepting this latter, than the former (Shaffer's) explanation.

The case of the ambivalent heterosexual warrants a somewhat similar treatment. Though the heterosexual cannot be said to lack sexual experience (as was the case with the nait) we can concede to Shaffer that for this one, sex with a same-sex partner would in fact be a different sort of sexual experience. But here there is much from sexual-experience-in-general that would translate to the new experience; perhaps much more than Shaffer can admit, or that his own experience allows him to realize. It seems at any rate an affront to reason to say that the heterosexual cannot possibly desire the same-sex partner he desires, because he has no 'prior' set of experiences on which this desire can be based. The propositional formula used for the nait can, with a bit of modification, accommodate this case as well.

'At t, S sexually desires 0' =Df. 'At t, S desires that s/he have [some new set of experiences identified by the heterosexual as pertaining to] sex with 0.'

The significant and motivating factor here, is that in both the nait and heterosexual's cases, it is not important that the one who desires be able to completely "map out" the complete range of activities desired with 0.

If any single (or combination of) "imagine that . . ." scenarios created by Shaffer was intended to substantiate

his case that sexual desire neither entails nor is entailed by the desire for sex, then it must be concluded that no such point has been made. More importantly, however, Shaffer never manages to remain cognizant of the demands imposed by the propositional theory of sex; in fact, at certain points he seems determined to deny that it is this type propositional theory with which he is working. Having denied that propositional theories in general are false, but that propositional theories about sex are the real issue, he determines to demonstrate that sexual desire is not a case of "desiring that . . . , " while leaving in abeyance an answer to the question precisely what sort of thing (if not another kind of desire) sexual desire could possibly be. If, in fact, it is to be taken as another kind of desire (e.g., as distinct from those more familiar kinds of desire which are in fact desires for something), then we would need know its type before attempting application of the propositional formula. If, contrarily, sexual desire is to be considered so very distinct from any other sort of desire that it is altogether atypical of desire in general, then we need some explanation as to why we ought consider it a type of desire at all. Shaffer leaves us with no strong reasons for assuming either that S's sexual desire for 0 does not also entail S's desiring sex with 0, or that there is

anything intrinsically deficient in the nature of propositional theories of sexual desire per se.

What I have suggested here is that, even if we were to allow for those cases in which S's sexual desire for O is ambiguous, disastrous, socially unacceptable or in S's own view repulsive, we are by no means justified in asserting that this sexual desire for O is not also and simultaneously a desire for sex with O. This common-sense view of what it means to 'sexually desire' is borne out by other examples of desiring X. S's 'eating desire,' for example, is easily translated as a desire that S eat; 'power desire,' as the desire for power; a 'love desire,' as the desire that one love or be loved. If, on the same basis, sexual desire is construed as a case of one's desiring to engage in sex (or sexual activity), then to say that

At t, S experiences 'sexual desire'

could be taken to mean that

At t, S desires that s/he engage in the performance of some activity or set of activities identified by S as sexual.

The above formula allows--as Shaffer's had intended--our truly "leaving open" what is to count as 'having sex,' yet manages to retain what our intuition would have us accept about the matter, i.e., that sexual desire is in fact a desire for something. Although Shaffer offers much in support of his claims as to the differences between sexual

desire and sexual arousal, he never fully appears to accept their differences as expressed in ordinary language. For, if it is truly the case that 'sexual desire,' unlike sexual arousal, requires an object, then S's sexual desire as directed toward O requires our admission of O as the object of S's sexual desire. Contingencies notwithstanding, whatever it is that S can be said to mean by its desire for O, O is that one with whom S wants it.

Finally, Shaffer's conception of sexual desire, if accepted, would present us with yet another consequence, one directly related to the central concern of this dissertation. It is unclear, on his view, whether masturbation could have any relation to sexual desire and unlikely that such activity would be seen as sexual. Since we might, with little difficulty, imagine a case of autoerotic sexual activity in which neither sexual arousal nor sexual desire (in Shaffer's sense) played any part whatsoever, neither appears to be necessary or sufficient to specify what constitutes sexual activity. However valuable some of his analyses may be, they simply presuppose the binary model of sexuality which we have found reason to question.

Robert Gray's "Sex and Sexual Perversion"

Robert Gray's "Sex and Sexual Perversion" sets out to answer the question whether it makes sense to say of 'perverted' sexual activities that they are 'unnatural' or 'dysfunctional' activities. That much, in and of itself, would hardly qualify as distinguishing Gray's from other offerings in sexual philosophy. What Gray does accomplish, however, is to emphasize an aspect whose relation to the subject has previously been all but ignored. In particular, the issue is motive. What Gray demands is that we know precisely what it is a particular agent intends to bring about by engaging in an activity which is recognized by that agent as a 'sexual activity.'

According to Gray, the criterion by which an activity is alleged to be a sexual activity, is the degree of sexual pleasure determined by the agent as deriving from that activity (161). He says that sexual activities are those "which serve to relieve sexual feeling . . . [and] which give rise to sexual pleasure (160). But again, we are left with having to puzzle out for ourselves what the 'sexual' aspects of sexual pleasure are, and by virtue of what feature any given activity becomes a 'sexual' activity. We are not, for instance, made privy to any significant insights into the matter when we learn that "activities not serving to relieve sexual feeling, or from which no sexual

pleasure is derived, would thus not be sexual activities at all" (161-162).

But this latter point does suggest that we would be misled in presuming a necessary, cross-directional link between sexual activity, sexual behavior and sexual satisfaction. Since the test case for sexual activity is for Gray the existence of sexual pleasure, then if X has failed to experience such pleasure, X has not experienced such activity, i.e., 'sex.' Gray's view has very specific implications for reconsidering the implications for 'sex' on the binary model. Since this model demands the participation of at least two persons for the performance of any activity warranting assessment as 'sexual,' it would be imperative--given Gray's treatment of bona fide sexual activities, that the pleasure of both persons be considered. According to Gray, it is a type satisfaction or pleasure (presumably of the sort noted as 'sexual') received that makes the activity sexual, rather than a particular activity which we ought continue considering as sexual regardless of any consideration for the satisfaction (or pleasure) anticipated by the agents in the act's performance. In having put his case this way, Gray is not far from agreeing with those previously noted feminist theorists (e.g., Moulton and Firestone), who demand that heterosexual activities must be reciprocal activities. We must similarly

concede to Gray, that he has managed to elevate his own philosophical discussion of sexuality to a more human frame of reference; one that takes stock of human consciousness and intention, as opposed to the more narrow focus on the mere performance of an activity presumed to possess characteristics of an undeniably 'sexual' nature. What Gray would have us accept, is that 'sex' occurs on the basis of the intentions of those who are involved in an activity's performance, not because they are involved in the performance of an activity that we ought otherwise consider sexual.

The fact remains, however, that we are left with the conventions of ordinary language. The same appeal to linguistic conventions which appeared so helpful in deciphering the shortcomings of Shaffer's proposal pose almost insurmountable difficulties for Gray's; for it is precisely these conventions that hold sexual intercourse to be the paradigm case of sexual activity, whether regarded as a pleasurable experience, or not. One would not ordinarily presume that X's failure to enjoy sex with Y, sufficed as denial of the activity's occurrence. But it is precisely here that Gray makes his strongest case for reassessing the implications for binary sexual activity in both the philosophical and ordinary language contexts. His analysis does not allow our saying that in the case of X, there has

been no activity whatsoever; it does, however, allow that whatever activity has involved X and Y has not been a 'sexual' activity. Gray's analysis has rather specific implications for the reassessment of rape as a 'sexual' activity. From the point of view dictated by former analyses, the rape victim has engaged (or been engaged) in a sexual activity; from that allowed by Gray, the experience need not have been sexual at all. We may admit on the given basis that "there is nothing intrinsically objectionable in the suggestion that what is, from the point of view of one of the participants, a sexual activity, may not be so from the point of view of the other" (162). Though the conventions of ordinary language and at least some sexual philosophies would either minimize or altogether negate the difference between rape and sex, from the standpoint of Gray's analysis (and that of the rape victim's experience) the difference is quite significant.

But let us suppose that someone, engaged in an activity not intentionally designated as a sexual activity, should suddenly find that activity to be 'sexually' satisfying; the activity being such that, to the participating agent, it is found to promote feelings identified as sexual quite apart from the agent's intention that this activity do so. Is the activity in this case a

sexual activity?¹⁸ Gray's response to this, and one with which I strongly concur, is that given an activity's ability to satisfy the criteria of either relieving sexual tension or giving rise to sexual pleasure, then "it is quite possible that any activity might become [emphasis mine] a sexual activity unintentionally" (163). From this it would follow that sexual pleasure, i.e., that pleasure identified by the participating agent as sexual, is both the necessary and sufficient condition for an activity's assessment as sexual activity. It is, however, sufficient for a determination of sexual activity that an intending agent: 1) perform an activity for the purpose of deriving sexual pleasure; and 2) acknowledge the activity's performance for the purpose of fulfilling the desire for such pleasure.

The implications of Gray's thesis are highly significant for a philosophical analysis of masturbation and particularly for an ongoing philosophy of sex which has all

¹⁸From Gray (162):

Dr. David Reuben relates that, in the early days of the garment industry, women found that the operation of treadle sewing machines could be employed as a masturbatory technique, and, to the extent that they so employed it, I think it is clear that they would, in ordinary parlance, be said to be engaging in sexual activity. We must assume, however, that at some point the sexual possibilities of operating a treadle sewing machine must have been discovered, presumably, at least in some cases, by accident. Those women who made this discovery would then have found themselves engaging in sexual activity quite unintentionally.

but ignored the conceptual significance of the practice. It does, after all, appear wrongfooted to have forced an ideologically favored model of sexuality onto the notion of what it means to experience sexual desire; to have accepted, as paradigmatic of sexual activity, an experience which may or may not be voluntary or pleasurable; to have concluded, prior to the grounding of philosophical investigation, that there can be any clear definition of sexual activity apart from what is taken as sexual by a participating agent. There would seem, for instance, to be no equivalent difficulty in distinguishing the act of X's sitting down to eat, from X's being tied down for a forced feeding.

It emerges that under the individualistic conception of sexual activity proposed by Gray, where the agent's intention and the pleasure pursued determine the activity's assessment as sexual, masturbation would clearly qualify as a bona fide sexual activity. The same would not be true under those schemes where activities alleged to be sexual, are defined concomitant with a more narrowly focused set of criteria (i.e., as a 'coupled' activity, as a means to reproduction, as either 'interpersonal' or 'relational' in nature). It is now fitting that the question be raised as to whether, and under what conditions, masturbation might suffice to satisfy the criteria of sexual activity.

Summary Conclusions

Where the agent's own intention to pursue sexual pleasure determines the distinction between sexual and non-sexual activities, masturbation not only qualifies as sex, but also provides some degree of certainty that what is discussed as a sexual activity, will actually be a sexual activity from the standpoint of the agent who performs it. This would seem preferable to those discussions focusing on activities objectively assessed as sexual but which, from the standpoints of one or more of the agents involved, might not be 'sexual' at all. Since Gray's rather individualistic view of sex is just this sort of analysis, he leaves us with the suggestion that the exclusion of masturbation from the complete range of sexual behaviors betrays a confusion as to what sex is. Even where the judgement of sexual activity is made contingent upon the aforementioned, binary model's, set of criteria, it would be a mistake to identify a specific sexual paradigm with what makes an act sexual. In Gray's words, to do so is to be

. . . left squarely facing the problem that any sexual activity that does not have that specific end [or criterion] is not, in fact, sexual activity or is somehow less than fully sexual. (165)

But this can only mean that if we begin with an end other than the promotion of sexual pleasure, some obviously (or at least intuitively) sexual practices will be excluded as sexual practices. On the assumption that sexual activity

is distinguishable from other kinds of activities on the basis of the intention to produce, in an agent, those sensations agent-identified as being sexually pleasurable, I propose in Chapter III to re-examine the issue of masturbation's placement in the range of sexual activities. I argue that, if we assume the primacy of sexual pleasure as both necessary and sufficient condition for the assessment of sexual activity, masturbation is not only paradigmatic of unitary sexuality, but is arguably the base of binary sexuality as well. In conclusion, and utilizing the frequently encountered analogy of sex to eating, I will propose a reinterpretation of binary reductionist and expansionist sex that salvages the integrity of the binary model, but that is consistent with the primacy of the unitary account.

CHAPTER III

ON MASTURBATION

Pervasiveness, Disapprobation and Devices

Autoeroticism,"¹ says Allen Edwardes, "has historically been veiled with a kind of mystic power." It entails "pleasure without responsibility, a psycho-physiological release for self-love" and is selfish, both in its being an essentially personal, private affair and in its existence as contrary to the "obsessive socialization tendencies of philoprogenitive communities."² Edwardes' points are doubtlessly well-taken. They certainly reveal nothing of a surprising nature about the consideration typically granted an elected masturbatory practice. The masturbator may, with varying degrees of frequency, shun the sort of sexual involvement necessitating either concern or

¹From Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary for 'autoeroticism,'

n. [auto-, and erotism]

1. ". . . a term coined by Havelock Ellis. Sexual sensation arising without external stimulus, direct or indirect, from another person.
2. self-generated sexual activity directed toward oneself as masturbation.

²Allen Edwardes. "Self-stimulation among Arabs and Jews." In Sexual Self-Stimulation (SSS). R.F.L. Masters, ed. Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1967: 304-314.

responsibility for a partner, or for fulfilling the demands presumed by procreative functionings; may, for these reasons, be seen not only as selfish but also immature.

But where Edwardes' statement fails at revealing anything new about common conceptions of the practice itself, it succeeds in expanding our understanding of who and where the masturbators are. In this case the discussion involves masturbatory proclivities as observed in inhabitants of the Middle East and North Africa, and Edwardes' reader is made to realize just how widespread the practice is. Actually, the overwhelming evidence points directly to the conclusion that masturbation is in fact an ancient practice; one that crosses the barriers otherwise imposed by ethnic or geographic regions, by culture or by either the presence or absence of technology.

We know, for instance, that masturbatory devices were already being made for (and also may safely assume, being utilized by) both the men and women of ancient Greece. Eduard Lea, in his "Instruments for Autoerotic Stimulation," says of these that

The artificial phallus, called BAUBON or OLISBOS, was very well known in ancient Greece. The city of Miletus was very famous for its manufacture of these items, and from there they were exported to many other places . . . The sixth mimiambus of Herondas informs us how young girls passed [them] around among themselves, and also exchanged information as to which craftsmen were producing the most satisfactory ones. Evidently it was common for two or several girls to

get together and share and OLISBOS, each using it in turn.³

According to Lea, the activity described as "sharing an olisbos" was considered neither an aberrant nor a lesbian activity.⁴ So common was the practice, that there are in existence ancient Greek bowls showing hetaira preparing the olisbos for use. Havelock Ellis adds to this that Aristophanes' Lysistrata speaks of the Milesian women's manufacture of an olisbos (v. 109) and that Herondas' mime, "The Private Conversation," concerns a dialogue between two such women, one of whom refers to the instrument as a "dream of delight."⁵ F.C. Forberg, whose Manual of Classical Erotology focused entirely on the varieties of erotic phenomena given mention in classical literature, has maintained that the word, 'masturbation,' literally meant

³Eduard Lea. "Instruments for Autoerotic Stimulation." (SSS), 315-329: 316-317.

⁴Ibid. According to Lea,

. . . the stimulation anally of a male by a female employing an artificial penis . . . evidently was not uncommon among the ancient Romans. And Petronius, in a usually censored passage, writes that 'Enothea brought out the leather penis which she rubbed with oil and nettle seed and then inserted gradually up my anus.' Roman prostitutes reportedly stimulated men in this way to help them overcome impotence. Many of these doubtless were predominately homosexual men. But the same practice was employed with males who, whether homosexual or not, had no potency problems in relation to women.

⁵Havelock Ellis. "Varieties of Autoerotic Phenomena." (SSS), 277-303: 286.

"to excite the member by function with the hand"--from masturbate i.e., manu stuprare--to pollute with the hand, and allows that this might be accomplished either with one's own hand or someone else's. Since, says Forberg (in regard to males) if accomplished by one's own hand it is the left hand that is generally employed, the "left-hand whore" referred to in Martial (IX, 42) is actually a reference to masturbation.

You never, Ponticus, enter a woman, but use your left-hand whore, making your hand the mistress for your pleasure . . . Believe me, that nature's voice confirms it--what escapes 'twixt your fingers,' Ponticus, is a human being.

A similar reference is to be found in the VIth book of Ramusius (pg. 62 of the Paris edition)

What are you to do? Is your left hand safe and sound? Well use it, then you will not want a whore. Why pay for what your left hand gives you gratis?

This ought by no means be taken to imply that the right hand did not also appear as 'the facilitator' in this body of literature. For, the same Ramusius (book IV, p, 61) discloses that:

I suffer, dear Donatus, from so fearful an erection, I am fearful for my member, if you do not help me. My right hand, being wounded, can do nothing . . .

Also, in Pacificus Maximus, Elegy XII, pg. 126 (Paris edition) we read:

What shall I do? . . . It is long since my member has known a vulva, long since it has stirred the entrails of a man . . . No youth, no girl will listen to my

prayer, no help--my right hand must then do the service.

Martial's reproachment of Ponticus, a masturbator, for letting the essence of a 'human being' slip between his fingers, is similar to the injunctions--present in both the Yahwic and Mosaic traditions--to eschew the masturbatory practice. According to Edwardes,

. . . following the idealistic Yahwic-Mosaic injunction to "increase and multiply" for the preservation of Israel, orthodox Jewish opinion condemns masturbation; and so too Islamic dogma, though more with a frown than a grinding of teeth. Where not condemned, it is chided as childish; where not chided, it is laughed at like a dirty joke; where not mocked, it is simply ignored; and all these attitudes are commonly encountered in Judeo-Arabic culture.⁶

But even so significant an injunction apparently did little to thwart the prevalence of the masturbatory practice.

A word frequently used, either in relation to the masturbatory act or (more commonly, but erroneously) synonymous with it, is 'onanism,' which derives from the Biblical account of Onan (Genesis 38: 4-10). According to this text, Onan, a son of Judah, was elected to impregnate his sister-in-law following the death of Er, his brother. But

Onan knew that the offspring would not become his; and it occurred that when he did have relations with his

⁶Edwardes, op. cit., 305.

brother's wife he wasted his semen on the earth so as not to give offspring to his brother . . . Now what he did was bad in the eyes of Jehovah; hence He put him . . . to death.

That onanism ought not be considered party to masturbation, is on the grounds of its having emerged--not from a case of autoeroticism--but from one of the earliest chronicled cases of coitus interruptus. Given Onan's case, however, it is interesting to note that Lester W. Dearborn, in his treatise on "Masturbation" concluded that a probable origin of the masturbation taboo had less to do with a sexual sanction, than with a social one. He says that

When people lived in tribes that fought with other tribes, group survival was of paramount importance. The elders of the tribe considered it a social sin to waste sperm by any practice that did not procreate children . . . The condemnation [of Onan] did not occur because of the loss of an easily renewable supply of spermatozoa, but rather because of Onan's anti-social attitude in refusing to father children.⁷

Dearborne's assessment of the matter is made all the more intriguing when taken in conjunction with a statement made by Edwardes: the confirmed homosexual is more tolerated than the confirmed masturbator, if only because the former is not 'anti-social' in the matter of his sexual choice.⁸

The question, I allege, is not strictly whether this has in fact been a characterization of masturbation. Surely

⁷Lester W. Dearborn. "Masturbation." In Human Autoerotic Practices (HAP). Manfred F. De Martino, ed. New York: Human Science Press, 1979: 37.

⁸Edwardes, cp. cit., 305.

worse claims have been made than that the masturbator, in often preferring the solitude of self-discovery, has failed to contribute to a particular group's overall well-being. Yet, it has been argued, "masturbation is but a specialized form of a tendency which in some form or degree normally affects not only man, but all the higher animals."⁹ If this is so, then should we not expect to find some further evidence of the tenacity of the practice?

Such a pattern of practice certainly exists, particularly if traced through the employment of certain masturbatory instruments. One of these is the previously mentioned olisbos, or artificial penis. The instrument surfaces again in the Middle Ages as one whose use was specifically probated by clergy. According to Havelock Ellis,

In Burchard's Penitential (cap. 142-3) penalties are

⁹Havelock Ellis, op. cit., 279. Also, according to Ellis, "Among animals in isolation, and sometimes in freedom . . . various forms of spontaneous solitary sexual excitement occur. Horses . . . may be observed flapping the penis until some degree of emission takes place. Welsh ponies . . . habitually produce erections and emissions [while not bringing] their hind quarters up . . . and they close their eyes during this process, which does not take place when they have congress with mares . . . bulls and goats [use] their forelegs as a stimulus, bringing up the hind quarters, and mares rub themselves against objects . . . [goats] sometimes take the penis into the mouth and produce actual orgasm, thus producing autofellatio . . . sheep masturbate, as also do camels, pressing themselves down against convenient objects . . . Apes are given to masturbation, even in freedom . . . Male monkeys use the hand in masturbation, to rub and shake the penis.

assigned to the woman who makes a phallus for use on herself or other women.¹⁰

But the olisbos did not, as clergy had intended, either disappear or wane in popularity. Instead, it experienced a series of modifications doubtless taken as 'improvements' on the original, if judged on the basis of its users. Fortini, a 16th century novelist and author of Novelle dei Novizi, refers to the "glass object filled with warm water which nuns use to calm the sting of flesh and to satisfy themselves as well as they can."¹¹ Ellis also inform us that

In France, Madame Gourdan, the most notorious brothel keeper of the eighteenth century, carried on a wholesale trade in consolateurs [the olisbos] . . . and at her death numberless letters from abbesses and simple nuns were found among her papers, asking for [one] to be sent.¹²

In 16th century France, the instrument--by now popularly made of glass--was called 'godemiche' (Ellis, 287); in Mirabeau's l'Education de Laure, it is referred to as a 'consolateur' whose hollow chamber could be filled with a whitish solution capably expelled by its user at will.¹³ In 18th century Germany, it was a 'Samthanse' and was

¹⁰Ibid., 286.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 287.

¹³Ibid., According to Ellis, the "compressible scrotum" was probably first added in the 18th century.

allegedly an object of common use among aristocratic women; at much the same time in Italy, it was called 'passatempo' and also 'dilleto,' from which the English 'dildo' is said to have evolved.¹⁴ In England, an historical and literary account was given of the instrument by Iwan Bloch in his Sexual Life in England and Sexual Life of Our Time.

According to Bloch, brothel prostitutes (circa 1900) were using "leathern dildos almost exactly like those described by Herondas and Aristophanes" (Lea, 322).

Havelock Ellis' "Varieties of Autoerotic Phenomena" notes with some degree of bemusement that devices "somewhat similar" to the godemiche or dildo "May be traced to all centers of civilization" (287). In Japan, for instance, a common name for the artificial penis became HARIGATA (Lea, 317), while in Islam the device has not only been sold at open market in Smyrna to Turkish women, but is regarded there as having been an Arab invention (Ellis, 287). There is also in Japan a dual-headed phallus called HIYOKU-GATA intended for use by two persons--both of whom are generally female--simultaneously. The pleasures alleged to accrue from the use of such a device have been celebrated by the Indian poetess Jun S'aheb. The women of Zanzibar employ a two-headed phallus in an act called KUJITA MBO YA MPINGO (which roughly translates, "applying the ebony penis"),

¹⁴Ibid., 286, Footnote.

while in Hindustani the same act is called CHAPTI, and the shared dildo is a SABURAH (Lea, 323; 318).

The instruments which in France were called 'pommes d'amour,' and in Japan (which is credited with their invention) RIN-NO-TAMA, have enjoyed a degree of popularity distinct from that of the artificial penis or dildo. This device, which continues to be found primarily in the East, but which for centuries has been used by the women of China, India, Europe (and, to a latter, lesser extent in the United States), typically consists of two metal or ivory balls--one of which is hollow, and the other (called the 'male') being filled with either mercury or some other appropriately weighted liquid substance. When placed in the vaginal opening--the empty ball first, then the other 'filled' one--"the slightest movement of the pelvis or thighs, or even spontaneous movement . . . causes the metal ball or the quicksilver to roll," and the resulting vibrations are thereby alleged to assure its user's orgasm (Ellis, 284; Lea, 318-321).

The means to solitary sexual gratification need not, however, be so elaborate as to involve the employment of any instrument specifically designed for this purpose. Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker's Life in Lesu revealed a fondness among women there, for responding to solitary sexual excitement by assuming a squat position and rubbing

the heel against the vulva. These women, who never use their hands for manipulation, learn in childhood that they are expected to masturbate "in case they become aroused and there is no male about to give them satisfaction."

According to Lawrence Gichner, an authority on erotic art of the Far East, the depiction of women in this particular position is a favored theme in Japanese erotica. Though in this latter representation the practice is called ASHI-ZUKAI and is often accomplished by an especially designed HARIGATA worn attached to the heel, the scene--which dominated in Japanese art until the end of the 17th century when it yielded to oral-genital depictions--is otherwise the same as that recorded among the Lesu (Lea, 318).

For his own part, Havelock Ellis, whose name has become synonymous with contemporary explorations into the psychological and anthropological aspects of human sexuality, seems more inclined to provide witness to those implements more commonly improvised by their users. Though Ellis' point here is that devices specifically designed for masturbatory practice

. . . appear to be frequently confined to the world of prostitutes and to women who live on the fashionable or semiartistic verge of the world . . .

and, moreover, that

Ignorance and delicacy combine with a less versatile and perverted concentration on the sexual impulse to prevent any general recourse to such highly specialized methods of sexual gratification

it would nonetheless appear that his conclusions are contradicted by the very evidence from which they are drawn. Unless Ellis' gauge of 'versatility' both differs significantly from the norm and is of serendipitous discovery, it is difficult to dismiss as mundane the varieties of ordinary objects and everyday implements which have made their way into the masturbator's usage. Of these, Ellis notes that bananas are a favored 'tool,' as are a host of other vegetables (e.g., cucumbers, carrots) and plant roots.¹⁵ But he is quick to add that there is another set

¹⁵Ibid., and Eduard Lea, *cop, cit.*, 324:

. . . an artificial penis employed by 'lesbians,' or at least between women, of the aboriginal Nuer tribes of the Upper Nile Valley is of particular interest. These women . . . [make] . . . an unusual phallus from the roots of the mandrake, a plant believed throughout history to have magical and erotic properties. It is dug up by the "male-role" Neur lesbian . . .

After the inner leaves of the mandrake are formed into a 'spiral tube,' the 'husband' rubs the leaves with a paste-like substance made from "aniseed ground to a fine powder and softened with honey. Into it she inserts male semen which she has obtained by masturbating a man. This prepared leaf is then carefully rolled and its tips folded over about three inches from the pointed end . . . the Neur lesbian 'husband' places this mandrake leaf in a uniquely designed phallus made from a root of the mandrake plant hollowed out for this purpose. The mandrake root phallus is about eight inches long and two and a quarter or so inches in circumference at the back, or upper end. It has a small opening at its head so that the end of the mandrake leaf containing the semen may be pulled through . . . The 'male' of the two lesbians bites off the end of the leaf to permit the transference of semen to her mate." There is much to be said for the ingenuity of this device, and to the purpose for which it was devised. It becomes necessary to entertain

of these that are, and can be dangerously employed. Perhaps more curious than the extent of the list of prohibited items themselves, is the tenacity of a human will that would seek the employment of such items as "pencils, sticks of sealing wax, cotton reels, hairpins, knitting needles, crochet needles . . . corks, forks, toothpicks [and] toothbrushes."

On the subject of 'surgical interference' or removal of the aforementioned set of implements, Ellis refers to an early medical commentary which gives the following account:

Gunfeld (Wiener medizinische Blatter, November 26, 1986), collected one hundred fifteen cases of foreign body in the bladder--sixty-eight in men, forty-seven in women; but while those found in men were usually the result of surgical accident, those found in women were mostly introduced by the patients themselves. The patient usually professes profound ignorance as to how the object came there; or she explains that she accidentally sat down upon it, or that she used it to produce freer urination. The earliest surgical case of this kind I happen to have met with, was recorded by Plazzon, in Italy, in 1621 (De Partibus Generaitoni Inservientibus, lib. ii, Ch. XIII); it was that of a certain horrible maiden . . . who, seeking to lull sexual excitement with the aid of a bone needle, inserted it in the bladder, whence it was removed by Aquapendente.¹⁶

Lest it be supposed that the instruments and techniques which have been the subject of this discussion have little to do with current practices, we need only look to the role of masturbation in the treatment of sexual dysfunction as

further arguments attesting to masturbation as related to advanced "technological" societies only.

¹⁶Havelock Ellis, op. cit., 289; (footnote)

perceived by Masters and Johnson.¹⁷ The sexual analogs of Hite (not to mention those of "J" and "M"), and the 'sexual self-discovery' clinics (of which Betty Dodson's is an excellent example) which have not only ceased to shock the public, but which show every indication of having become acceptable vehicles to sexual self-exploration. The dildo that might some time ago have been purchased through clandestine arrangement in this country, is no longer (or necessarily) endowed with the stigma of 'brown paper wrappings'; nor does it (of necessity) reach its previously designated mail-order customer under the guise of some sort of 'separate cover.' Not only are we finding that most major cities have some area where so-called 'erotic goods' or 'sex aids' are openly available for purchase, but also that underground newspaper and commercial magazine advertisements for such items are becoming more explicit in the matter of how the item is to be used, and what the consumer should expect as to its stated rate of success.¹⁸

¹⁷Lea (325-326) notes that the Dresden Criminal Museum houses an elaborate 'masturbation machine' (circa 1900's) which shares an erie resemblance to the device employed for research by Masters and Johnson. The latter machine, developed by radiophysists, is 'penile adjustable' for user comfort-satisfaction, and is fitted with a transparent unit that allows for photographs of the vagina during the makeshift 'intercourse.'

¹⁸Hustler magazine, for instance, runs a regular back-section feature which rates such items on the basis of actual effectiveness as opposed to the effectiveness-claims of the item's manufacturer/distributor.

It should be noted that, as nearly all the items discussed here have reached the stage of "hi-tech" mechanization (e.g., the 'dildo' being, for all but the hardest core of its lesbian user's population, replaced by the electronic vibrator; the 'Japanese balls' having relinquished popularity to a battery-powered device which, in shifting focus from the vaginal to the clitoral orgasm, is user controlled by a connecting unit held in the palm of the hand), the conception of these devices as primarily geared to a 'female-only' population has now been significantly altered. Although Lea, in accepting this now outdated position, writes that "information concerning masturbation devices used by males is much less copious" and the instruments themselves (in comparison to those used by females) less functionally satisfying,"¹⁹ the number and

¹⁹The only masturbatory device intended for use by males as discussed by both Ellis (footnote, 286) and Lea (326) is the 'cunus succedaneus.' This device was, in England, known as the 'merkin,' and was defined in old editions of Bailey's Dictionary as a "counterfeit fair for women's privy parts." Lea does admit to the existence of newer, slightly more radical (his term) devices, including the life-size rubber dolls which he seems to consider state-of-the-art. Lea adds, however, that if it is not strictly a matter of manufactured devices, that men do not suffer a shortage of objects with which to masturbate. According to Lea,

Information concerning masturbation devices used by males is much less copious and the instruments themselves have been, in general, less satisfactory and therefore not so often used . . . men and boys manufacture their own artificial vaginas with varying degrees of imagination and effectiveness. Farm youths

variety of instruments currently available to men has increased. Moreover, if articles appearing in these same newspapers and magazines are to be believed, then an increasing tendency toward bi-sexuality and the exploration of sexual fantasy combine to render 'moot' any argument which would have us believe that potential users of either sex have been unable to find the device that suits their particular needs.

Of less interest than the question whether males or females have the greater number of these devices at their disposal, however, is the question why anyone at all would resort to their employment. Eduard Lea, in concluding his "Instruments for Autoerotic Stimulation," makes the point that masturbatory aids are more likely utilized for the psychological than the physical stimulation they provide, adding to this that only on the rarest of occasions

. . . does the crude masturbatory instrument provide stimulation the equal of that which the fingers are able to afford. What these instruments may give, then, that the fingers cannot, is the sense, however faint, of an OTHER--a sex partner and an act that involves SOMETHING MORE than just one's own body. With varying degrees of success the imagination builds a human other upon the slight foundation of the masturbatory object--and loneliness is that much more assuaged (329, emphasis Lea's).

have frequently reported incidents of 'copulating' with mud along river banks, or with watermelons warmed by the sun and into which they have cut holes. Vaginas made of modeling clay are frequent, as are efforts to line cylinders such as drinking glasses with thin slices of meat . . .

In deference to Lea, the motivation behind one's decision to employ a masturbatory device (as distinct from one's decision to enter into a masturbatory practice) is one to which scant attention has been paid. Actually neither subject can be said to have reached the zenith of investigative analysis. But the absence of evidence to the contrary ought not be taken to imply that masturbation, sans instrument, is less popular or fulfilling than its more adorned correlate; neither should it be taken as summarily forcing the conclusion--unless we are motivated by the binary model of sexual desire--that the masturbatory instrument functions as a substitute participant.

The Fantasized Other

Even should we admit the existence of mutual masturbation between either heterosexual or homosexual (and lesbian) couples, there remains the fact that neither of these acts is--by virtue of a participant's presence--more the masturbatory act than is the equivalent act performed alone. Similarly, he or she who masturbates 'by instrument' has in fact neither more nor less masturbated, than one who has accomplished the same job by hand.

But what Lea and others²⁰ seem to be saying is that

²⁰Lea is not alone in having theorized that either the masturbatory instrument is the essence of an imagined other, or that the fantasized other is actually the fantasy of a real other. Lukianowicz's "Imaginary Sexual Partners and

the particular instrument functions to enhance the imagination, making the instrument a 'fantasized partner' whose presence in and through this object, effectively renders the act (as in-the-imagination) both non-solitary and presumably more satisfying. It is arguable, however, that the issue of "enhanced satisfaction via the masturbatory instrument" is really the issue of whether the instrument itself enhances the 'sexual' nature of a masturbatory act. If, as Lea suggests, the masturbator's hands and fingers are usually task-sufficient and the masturbatory instruments add--not to the dimension of sexual pleasure, but to the sense of experiencing "more than just one's own body"--it seems appropriate to question whether the presumption of enhanced satisfaction is not really based upon this (unitary-expansionist) model's shadow resemblance to a binary relation.

Implicit in Lea's suggestion is the view that the masturbatory practice involving an instrument's employment achieves (if not through an actual partner, then at the very least through a fantasized one) the impression of one's not being alone and, therefore, is more definitive of 'sexual pleasure.'

Visual Masturbatory Fantasies," R.F.L. Master's "Sexual Self-Stimulation and Altered States of Consciousness" and Gabriel De La Veag's "Crime as the dramatization of a Masturbatory Fantasy" are but a few that argue the same or a similar point.

In combination, the actual gist of these arguments granting elevated status to the fantasized other in masturbatory practice is not just that the masturbatory instrument or fantasized partner renders the act more satisfying, but that it benefits a more standardly conceived 'sexual' imagery. Given a predominant conception of sexual activity as essentially non-solitary activity (the binary view), it becomes all the more understandable why--for instance--Goldman's adherence to this model allows for his conclusion that voyeurism is more the 'sexual' activity than masturbation; at least the former case presupposes the existence of real, i.e., actively observed, or photographed others, while in the latter the participant is neither real nor even necessarily imagined.

And yet, in an inverted paraphrasing of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, the question is whether this binary frame of reference is to be "master," in the sense of its being sufficient, by itself, to explicate what it means in every case, for an act to be 'sexual'; whether any such conception can be made to mean so many things. Even if one must use some model of sexuality, does this preclude the possibility of some other model as well, and so the possibility for any other way of being sexual? I think not. In fact, that a fantasized participant should be seen to render the act more 'sexual,' says less about the conception of the act

(masturbation) than about the sexual frame from which it is referenced. What the conception reveals, is the predominance of a scheme which presumes that, for any assessable case of sexual desire, there must be some other apart from the desiring subject who must be the object of that desire.

Oddly enough, what is taken to be the strength of the argument for binary sexuality is at the same time a harbinger of its most obvious weakness; its particular fallacy is in having neglected to consider the relation of the binary to the alternative, unitary point of view. As I see it, the difficulty with existing theories of sexuality is in having erroneously presumed their discussions to involve points of view that are necessarily in contradiction. If in fact the binary and unitary proposals were contradictory, then it would logically occur that proving one to be false, would necessarily entail the other's being true, and vice versa. But since the two proposals are actually contraries, and the relation of contrariety allows that both propositions may be false, proving only one of the two to be false would require an ability to demonstrate that only one of the two were true. What has previously sufficed as the required 'proof,' however, has been little more than a series of arguments seeking to reaffirm the predominance of the binary, as

opposed to the unitary position. But simply because more favorable attention is paid to the binary than to the unitary activity, is hardly sufficient grounds for concluding that this predominant relation is the single true basis for assessing the existence of what is to be called 'sexual' activity.

Perhaps a brief analogy will suffice to make my point. Let us imagine a culture in which the unitary account prevailed as "master" to sexual explication. And suppose that for this culture the paradigm of sexual activity was called "masturbation," and that this term was used to describe an assortment of practices having in common: 1) the provision of sexual pleasure; and 2) the exclusion of a participatory other, either as necessary to the activity's performance or as the intended recipient of the pleasure said to accrue from its performance.

So ingrained would be this masturbatory custom, that its reflection would be seen in all aspects of the language, attitudes and behaviors of the people who practiced it. Speaking to oneself would be considered the height of another kind of pleasure, known as 'self-communication.' Though sometimes people would speak to others, it would always be a matter of great embarrassment to everyone concerned and was, more often than not, consented to with profuse apology; those who persisted in the practice would

be routinely shipped off to specially conceived Institutions where this aberrant form of communication could be professionally analyzed, and hopefully cured.

While un-media experts evaluated means for the non-dissemination of information and un-sociologists wrote tomes on the virtues of solitude (specifically, how the most advanced and successful of societies had been those in which the inhabitants had stayed to themselves), the body of literature on sex grew; every authority on the subject, particularly the Proclaimers of Better Births Through Technology, agreed that evidence supported the view of sex-as-solitary.

In time, philosophers generated their own legacy of writings attesting to the natural rightness of 'masturbatory sex,' and cast suspicion on those presumably sexual activities necessitating a participant's involvement. They concluded that coupled intimacy assumed a more 'sexual' character when evidenced to reveal no mental images (fantasies) of a participant during its performance. Fantasy, it was argued, determined the extent to which non-masturbatory acts were either closer to, or more removed from, the masturbatory norm. Of course there were some instances of perverted, anti-social sexual practice. Occasionally the more artistic, avant-garde of the society's members would participate in something called "sexual

intercourse," and the fact that some found recourse to the act was common knowledge to all (though the Keepers-of-Those-Who-Talk-To-Others certainly knew more than most). The practice was openly disdained, but politely tolerated; everyone being given to understand that those who "masturbated with Others" did so only because of severe personal inadequacies: They were simply incapable of masturbating by themselves. But to the extent that "those who intercoursed" fantasized only on themselves, the philosophical opinion was that the act was at least a 'borderline' sexual activity; rather the equivalent of masturbation-for-two (or, as it was less frequently called, "mutual" masturbation).

In this imaginary culture, the process of qualifying an act as sexual on the basis of thoughts and fantasies would strike us as both arbitrary and unreliable. It is no less the case for the binary proposal, which stands as challenge to the masturbator's endorsement. In short, what--given the predominance of a unitary frame of explanation--appears ludicrous, is no less so for a binary frame whose difficulty with masturbatory practice is tantamount to a difficulty with any sexual practice failing to necessitate a participatory Other.

In light of the importance that at least some binary theorists have placed on the "minimally fantasized Other"

whose existence is alleged to lend dimension to an act's being sexual, it would be interesting to question whether (in the more standard version of coupled intercourse) the same criteria can be made to apply and carry the same implications. For instance, can X's sexual activity with Y actually qualify as sexual activity with Y, if in fact X's thoughts while engaging in coupled intercourse with Y, involve the prospect/remembrance or fantasy of having coupled intercourse with Z? Would this in fact be an activity performed with Y, but at the same time a sexually fantasized (but non-) activity with the fantasized partner Z? Also, given the criteria established in the previous chapter (and on the assumption that it was in fact X's intention that Y be substituted for Z), X's act might arguably qualify as sexual activity for X, but would be less the case for Y, whose position in regard to X is rather as substitute for Z; this, of course, unless it was also Y's intention to substitute for Z in an act of sexual surrogacy with X.

But even more curious is the position we are forced to accept if X's sexual fantasies are narcissistic or automonosexual, i.e., if X, in sexually fantasizing while albeitly engaged in coupled intercourse with Y, not only envisions him/herself in relation to him/herself, but is also sexually aroused by what he/she envisions. In this

case, although X's activity is performed in relation to Y, X's sexual activity (or, X's sexually fantasized non-activity) is both self-contained and self-directed.

Those theorists who make short-shrift of masturbation on the grounds of its being mere counterfeit for some activity which--in requiring a participatory other--is alleged to be more 'sexual,' ought be forced to acknowledge that it is no less possible to argue that this more 'sexual' activity is instead a substitute for the masturbatory practice. Are we not, then, obliged to consider the possibility of there being some error in the standard view? Is it not possible that masturbation, rather than counterfeiting the 'reality' of coupled sexuality, is itself the mask behind which the more 'standard' activity is performed? Is it not preferable to a no holds barred defense of binary sexuality, that we at least admit to there being no more a single frame of reference for sexuality (one whose existence is as "master") than there is a single frame of reference for what we call 'reality?' Just as in the case of 'reality' there can be general agreement, except among the terminally confused, on a SOMETHING that has occurred (e.g., an anvil's dropping on John's foot), if not on the cause of that occurrence (e.g., John's carelessness, John's subconscious desire to hurt himself; a cruel prank played on John), so there can be a means of reaching

agreement on the occurrence of sexual activity (the intention for pleasure as generated by and for its participant), if not on how it is that this pleasure is to come about (e.g., by John's own inducement, or by some Other's).

At any rate, it stands to reason that in the absence of any single frame for sexual reference, questions of whether masturbation is performed by hand or by instrument, or whether its practitioners' thoughts are of a fantasized participant or simply of him/herself, are at best only peripheral to the larger issue of what a sex act is, and (given this reference) whether the masturbatory act is in accord with the stated criteria.

Allegations of Theoretical Bias

In The Evolution of Human Sexuality, Donald Symons refers to questions of why (or whether) humans naturally pair-bond, as "belonging to the same realm of discourse as talk of why the sea is boiling hot and whether pigs have wings." According to Symons:

Since the intelligent, responsible, and experienced scholars seem to believe that [human sexuality is indistinguishable from human sexual pair-bonding] I assume that this way of describing human relationships in some measure reflects their personal and professional experiences; but their belief is the only evidence I know in favor of these views.²¹

²¹Donald Symons. The Evolution of Human Sexuality. New York: Oxford University Press, 1942: 108.

Now it certainly could be argued that 'evidence' of human pair-bonding does exist; even if we were to dismiss as non-convincing the accounts of those "intelligent, responsible and experienced" scholars who argue in its favor, it would be difficult to dismiss what we see and take to be a 'normal' occurrence as representing anything less than the way things ought to be. But, herein lies the problem: Are we not obliged to consider that what merely describes an overwhelming number of cases, is insufficient to determine a prescribed or normative behavior? Symon's own work, which in its entirety calls for "evolutionary or genetic theorizing on the subject of sexual psychology"²² rather inadvertently points to a set of observations he finds to warrant attention: namely, 1) that theories which purport to describe human conduct often dictate either implicitly or explicitly, a binary conception of human sexuality; and 2) that these theories manage to justify paired sexual activity by giving primacy to some model of paired activity or activities said to underlie all behavior. That is, Symons holds that the real motivation behind the tendency to describe sexual activities as paired activities is the desire to apply a set of (theoretical) activity models²³

²²Ibid., v-vii.

²³The concept of a "theoretical paired activity" is owed to Alan Soble, who suggested it in his article on "Masturbation" (Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 61 (July,

which may (or may not) describe "ordinary" human behavior, but which have no prima facie relation to the discussion of sex. From (1) and (2), it would follow that these non-sexual, theoretical, paired activity models would effectively function as conceptual biases toward non-paired sexual activities, and hence toward masturbation.

The most prevalent and perhaps convincing of these activity models, is 'communitas'; the notion that human beings are not only enhanced (e.g., morally, aesthetically, socially) through their communal relations with others, but that such relationships also serve to render the individual more 'complete." On a microcosmic scale, 'communitas' is an application of what psychologists and social scientists have been intoning from the beginnings of their individual and collective histories--specifically, that people need other people; that 'man' is a social animal, meant to live in groups, meant to crave the company of others, and meant to rely upon the existence of those others for the development of its own social self-hood.

In keeping with this view, the desire for sustained periods of solitude, for increased self-sufficiency and for minimized contact with others is more apt to conjure up the image of a closet eccentric, than of a 'normal' person. The

hermit, the loner, the individual whose involvements with others is (by choice) reduced to the barest of levels, is deemed antisocial, narcissistic, 'incomplete,' or even bizarre. From the basic thesis that the individual "needs to belong . . . ," and that there is no higher virtue than that of "community," comes the correspondingly negative emphasis on concepts such as 'alienation'--with philosophical and psychological queries into the probable (negative) effects of alienation from self and from others; sociological investigations concerned with alienation from one's creative and productive activities; alienation within the context of our "advanced technological society," and from "nature." Neither is it surprising that, on at least one view, there can be alienation from sex.²⁴ In sum, the essence of talk about any level of what we call 'society'--be it primitive or advanced--is never without similar reference to 'group interaction' as the norm, and to alienation as a deviancy from that norm. It is questionable then, given this emphasis upon the group, the community and the social (or political/economic) order, whether the individual in exclusive relation-to-itself, exists as the subject of any contemporary analyses. The individual,

²⁴Bernard Gendron. "Sexual Alienation" in his Technology and the Human Condition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977, 114-133. Gendron's thesis is drawn, not surprisingly, from the views of Marcuse, Slater and Roszak.

absorbed both by and into the group (i.e., the family, the community . . .) as consciousness, as activity and as will, functionally ceases to exist.

Closely resembling the spirit of 'communitas' in its assault on the solitary individual, and differing only in its emphasis on a significant Other-among others, is the activity model referred to as 'couple-ism.' According to it, individuals naturally pair-bond in activities assumed to be essential activities, and paired activities are considered essentially more directed, purposeful and complete than non-paired, or solitary activities. The bias in favor of couple-ism coupled with that toward community, serve to both promote the disparagement of solitude ("Two heads are better than one," whereas 'solitary confinement' is among the harshest of punishments!), and give added force to the societally imposed pressure to enter into partnered activities, and into "relationships." Interesting to note on this score, is the vast difference in societal attitude afforded one's proficiency in some areas that do or do not necessitate another's participation. One who professes to be a master at solitaire, for instance, is hardly as appreciated as one whose mastery is of--say--Bridge, Pinochle, or Chess. The self-professed gourmet cook who insists on cooking only for himself, is as ludicrous as the infamous barber in an unpopulated Seville. Given the

emphasis on the group, even so-called 'individual' sports fade into 'team' activities; and even though it would not be surprising to find someone take to the floor to demonstrate a novel or particularly difficult dance step, it would strike us as odd that someone always preferred to dance alone. Likewise, the dinner guest who arrives alone can always be excused to become a part of the larger invited group, whereas one who consistently preferred her solitary status would likely face the onslaught of well-intentioned matchmakers, or be gently urged to "bring someone special along" next time. The single person, and particularly the single woman, is not only seen as being deficient²⁵ by virtue of not having a partner, but is further pressured into overcoming the alleged deficiency by securing one.

The "couple" is the finished mini-group on its way to becoming party to some larger group's activities; on its way toward mirroring the more complete, 'finished' grouping called 'community.' A song made popular in the 1960's and immortalized by the Syndicated Children's Network program "Schoolhouse Rock" says it all: "One is a Lonely Number," in fact the "loneliest number that'll ever be." The same, but more currently commercialized view, is expressed by those merchandisers for the product "Certs," who would have

²⁵Alan Soble. "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sex." In Philosophy of Sex. New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Company, 1980. pg. 42.

us believe that "One just ain't no fun . . . 'cause two is better than one." Given the media's well documented effectiveness at promulgating our chosen prejudices, it is presumably well and good that the young develop their biases as soon as possible. What we teach by this, is that the only thing worse than being single ('One'), is non-being (Zero).

On the heels of couple-ism, are two closely related activity models that entreat the presence or cooperation of more than one person. The themes are incorporated into both Solomon and Nagel's theses on sexuality as 'communication' and as 'escalating reciprocal relations', respectively.

In Solomon's scheme, the essence of sexuality is located in its requirement of at least two persons, it being conceptually (though not without bias) revealed that 'communicating' is a dual-party procedure. In Nagel's account, the specific activities distinguishing themselves are those featuring mutually escalating relations and the recognition, by the parties involved, that the involved-Other's relations will be of a reciprocal sort. On the first account, it is presumed that one does not communicate with oneself and so, we are made to believe, anything occurring between the individual and itself cannot therefore be communication. On the second, if there is to be an escalating recognition of intentions, then there must be at

least two persons whose intentions are mutually and reciprocally recognized. 'Failure' within the first scheme occurs when there is misunderstanding during a linguistic exchange; during the second, when certain unspoken cues are taken to mean more or less than intended. From Nagel's point of view, autoerotic masturbation is an example of perverted behavior precisely because it denies an Other's access to its performance-as-activity, and because this denial does not yield to analysis based on the binary framework. From Solomon's, it is the equivalent of frustrated dialogue, the inability or refusal to say what one wants to say. As with Nagel, the 'failure' of autoerotic masturbation from the standpoint of Solomon's case is precisely in its disaccord with the binary framework, for it assumes: 1) that the individual involved in sexual activity does in fact have something to say; and 2) that in the preferred scheme of this sort of 'saying' the dialogue is more relevant than the soliloquy.

Jacqueline Fortunata's "Masturbation and Women's Sexuality"²⁶ dubs as 'patriarchal' those schemes that in any sense whatsoever either undermine masturbatory behavior, or stipulate criteria promoting 'interpersonal' activities as 'higher' achievements. As she sees it, discussions that

²⁶Jacqueline Fortunata. "Masturbation and Women's Sexuality." In POS, 389-408.

give higher priority to communication, to couple-ism, to communitas and the like, are actually giving the basis for denigrating solitary sexual behavior.

Although Ms. Fortunata's thesis is specifically that the "ideal sexual act is, at least in part, an act of inquiry and of coming to know" she further argues that our cultural views of sex, by reflecting a bias in favor of heterosexuality, intercourse and sex with a partner, effectively foster a one-dimensional view of sex. On these views, sex is ascribed a purpose, "be it reproduction, orgasm or communication" and consequently "suggest that sex is . . . one kind of experience, uniform for all people in our culture."²⁷

What Fortunata does not go on to say, however, but which is arguable on the basis of her assessment of "one-dimensional sex," is that the theses involving community, couple-ism, reciprocity and communication have no necessary bearing on the way sexuality is best analyzed. Why should an argument which purports to explain the prevalence of paired behavior, be immediately taken to give support to what ought be the nature of sexual behavior? Not only should appeals to overtly non-sexual and inherently prejudicial theoretical activity models be avoided in the discussion of sexual activity, but it is all the more

²⁷Ibid., 389.

important that such models not be utilized as establishing a sexual norm. As Soble, in his essay on "Masturbation" has argued,

Accounts of sexuality embracing the binary framework are not likely to be illuminating.

. . . It is true that much of our ordinary sexual behavior involves a desire to have physical contact with other persons, and it is true that for most people this desire is one for contact with a person of the complementary gender. What is true, in short, is that there is much heterosexual activity going on . . .

But an account that exemplifies the binary framework will not yield an explanation, for such an analysis will assume precisely that which requires explanation.²⁸

What accounts of this 'unhelpful' sort provide, is a begging of the question of what sex is. To begin the investigation into the nature of sexuality by embracing the binary framework, is to argue that ordinary people behave in paired sexual groupings "because the essence (or basic pattern) or ordinary sexuality is of a paired activity."²⁹ Moreover, to begin an investigation into the nature of sexuality by embracing a set of theoretical models of activity, e.g., those of couple-ism, communication, reciprocity and the like, is no less to begin with a predisposed bias toward an activity (masturbation) which

²⁸Alan Soble, "Masturbation," op, cit., 236-237. Emphasis mine.

²⁹Ibid., 237.

such models either fail to qualify, or marginally qualify as even being sexual.

But as Fortunata's essay reveals, there is every reason to believe that if patriarchy is the linchpin of binary sexuality, philosophical feminism will ultimately provide the same theoretical services for unitary sexuality. When Jack Litewka, for example, discusses his concept of "The Socialized Penis,"³⁰ he credits a "woman friend" with having brought him face-to-face with the "disaster of sexuality in its present form"; with the disaster of sexual couplings that, far from enhancing the social/emotional well-being of either the individual or the sexual partners-as-couple, instead manage to promote disharmony, sexual dissatisfaction, and the realization of failed expectations. On his view, those whose job it ought be to investigate and settle out this 'disaster' are the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists: in short, the psycho-healers. What Litewka's optimism leads him to de-emphasize, however, is that these healers are, more often than not, already a part of the same patriarchal unconscious (norm), and so close to the problem as to become its primary contributors. Although these alleged 'healers' have ceased to classify masturbatory

³⁰Jack Litewka. "The Socialized Penis." In Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Men and Women. Allison Jagger and Paula Rotenberg Struhl, eds. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978: 63-74.

practice as a disease warranting its own peculiar (and quite often disastrous) treatment,³¹ they nonetheless persist in the consensus opinion that the activity is unhealthy when used "exclusively as a sex outlet when other sex outlets are easily available."³² One is left to conclude, then that even though Litewka now admits to having had his penis 'socialized,' he would do well--should he ever find himself in need of further "treatment"--to check the predisposition of his elected 'psycho-healer' toward the standard, patriarchal norm; all the more so, should he ever have need to "treat" any sexual dis-easing of a less than social sort.

Lennie Garfield Barbach's For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality,³³ begins the chapter, "Why Masturbation?"³⁴ with the observation that "Masturbation is

³¹Among the treatments assigned this 'pollution' were clitorectomy, confinement and the sort of in-depth psychoanalysis reserved for those committed to institutions for the insane. See, for example, F.R. Sturgis' early "Treatment of Masturbation," Albert Ellis' "Myths Concerning Autoeroticism," and Jacobus Sutor's "Onanism in Women." S.A.D. Tissot's Onania: A Treatise on the Diseases Produced by Onanism, first published circa 1767 and in its 110th edition by 1832, is a veritable minefield of pseudo-medical misinformation on the subject, including the odd contention that all illness is rooted in masturbatory behavior and the loss of semen.

³²De Martino, op. cit., 32.

³³Lonnie Garfield Barbach. For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality. New York: Anchor Books, 1976.

³⁴Ibid., 88-115.

one of the best ways to learn about [one's] sexual responses. No doubt this is so. Even Litewka's 'healers' agree to the therapeutic employment of masturbation in cases of sexual dysfunction.³⁵ But if we can speak of masturbation in Robert Gray's terms (i.e., as a language spoken primarily to oneself), are we yet obliged to consider it always a language learned for the purpose of its being spoken to some Other or Others?

Barbach's own proposal, one that might easily be taken to represent the conclusions of both unitary sexuality and the concerns of philosophical feminism, argues for just this possibility. Though the bulk of her "Why?" chapter concerns the "transferability" of a woman's masturbatory responses to partnered intercourse, she concludes with the following observation:

Instead of looking at self-stimulation from an antiquated perspective--as a substitute for the "real thing"--why not view it as one of many alternative forms of sexual expression--provided by nature for a party of one.³⁶

Barach's "party of one" is masturbation; no less, with a measure of creative imagery, could it be the Introduction's "tea," and any number of Wolfe's machine-dispensed chocolates. In "Masturbation," Soble notes as trivial the revelation that there is "a lot of heterosexual

³⁵De Martino, op. cit., 273-317.

³⁶Barbach, op. cit., 115.

activity going on," and well he might. Given, moreover, the comments of another set of observers, there is also an appreciable amount of both lesbian and homosexual activity going on.³⁷ But when the discussion is made to focus on masturbation, the question is not whether there is any of it going on (for surely there is), but rather whether what goes on when one masturbates is sexual activity.

Puzzles Generated By Subjecting Masturbation
to Philosophical Analysis

Alan Soble's "Masturbation," by far the most extensive philosophical investigation of the subject to date, begins with the assertion that "there are a number of interesting conceptual, ethical and social questions that can be raised about masturbation" (233). Certainly the most basic of these is the matter of its conceptual characterization. We have, of course, the paradigm case of masturbation: a solitary agent manually manipulating the sensitive genital areas of his/her body to orgasm. But these features are all logically eliminable. Masturbation may not require solitude; manual manipulation may be replaced by a similar manipulation by any other suitable material or object; and the genital areas need not be involved. Neither should we necessarily assume the masturbator's goal to be the

³⁷Lee C. Rice's "Homosexuality and the Social Order," in POS (256-280) provides a compilation of material on the changing attitudes toward homosexuality.

attainment of orgasm. For it is altogether conceivable that someone should find in the masturbatory practice the equivalent of an activity whose performance either is, or becomes self-gratifying, not unlike the situation in at least some instances of coupled intercourse. What does seem essential for the determination of masturbatory behavior however, is that the person who produces the pleasurable sensations be the same person who experiences them.

We have, similarly, the paradigm case of mutual masturbation: two persons manually stimulating one another's genitals simultaneously. But as in the first case, there is much in this that is logically eliminable. Although the expressions "playing with oneself" and "playing with one another" may aptly refer to masturbatory behavior, it is not clear why acts of mutual masturbation are at all considered masturbatory. As the issue is surely not exhausted by mere reference to the number of persons involved, are we then to distinguish between activities which do, and do not involve insertion (with 'insertion' taken to be some essential way in which two bodies coalesce)? Soble thinks not. For although on the stated criteria male/female genital intercourse and male/male anal intercourse would not be masturbatory (because they involve insertion), a further consequence would be that neither fellatio nor male intercourse with an animal would be

masturbatory; this, for the latter case, even though only one person would be involved. Equally disturbing, would be the conclusions that: 1) male insertion into a melon and female use/insertion of a vibrator would count as non-masturbatory in that they involve insertion; while 2) tribadism would be masturbatory only when not involving the insertion of either the tongue or the fingers. Since cunnilingus--for example--either may or may not involve insertion (of the tongue or lips), Soble rightly sees that "one act of cunnilingus might then change from masturbatory to non-masturbatory and back again several times" in the course of one commission (234). The view that masturbation is sexual activity not involving insertion fails.

But now suppose that someone might argue for masturbation as sexual activity not involving insertion of a real penis into some orifice or other of some living being. Though this view would label as masturbatory any and all acts of necrophilia, such penile insertions into animals (or a shoe, for that matter) would yet be sexual and non-masturbatory. If we were then to modify our attempts conceptually to include masturbation in the realm of sexual activity with the stipulation that there be a living human being (i.e., that an activity, X, is sexual activity if it involves the insertion of a real penis into some orifice or other of a living human being), we would in fact gain an

easily applied criterion but at a considerable loss. In addition to providing a wildly narrow account of non-masturbatory activity and coming quite close to giving consent to the view that the only patently viable sexual activity is male/female genital intercourse, this view is unavoidably sexist in its characterization of sexual activity as referenced from the male organ and its insertions. On this point Soble notes as "no coincidence that both 'perverted' and 'masturbatory' are terms of [sexual] disparagement" (234).

Is there, then, any obvious solution or possible set of solutions to the problem of setting out the necessary and sufficient conditions for sexual activity to be masturbatory? Given, in other words, the apparently simple task of distinguishing between autoerotic sexual activity and the sort of sexual activity involving at least two persons, the problem is one of differentiating those sexual activities occurring between two persons that are (mutually) masturbatory, from those that are not while preserving the idea that autoerotic acts are masturbatory (234). Since Soble's point here has been to argue that autoerotic acts are masturbatory acts (233), and that both are within the realm of sexual activity whether or not they involve insertion, he takes recourse in the very model for standard sexual activity which excludes the masturbatory practice.

To wit: "Under certain plausible descriptions, there are no essential differences between the paradigm case of mutual masturbation and the paradigm case of sexual activity itself, heterosexual genital intercourse" (235): that all sexual activity is (only) masturbation; that the mutual rubbing of sensitive areas that occurs during mutual masturbation is indistinguishable from the mutual rubbing that occurs during heterosexual genital intercourse.

Having concluded that the mere physical differences between mutual masturbation and heterosexual genital intercourse fail to establish an essential difference between what is apparently implied by their paradigm cases, Soble's search for a difference/criterion comes to focus on the intentions of the persons involved. He first proposes (235) that sexual activity between two persons each of whom is concerned not only with his/her own pleasure but also with the pleasure of the other person might be seen as non-masturbatory, while such activity in which at least one person is concerned solely with his/her own pleasure be seen as masturbatory. This proposal has the advantage of positing as masturbatory those instances of sexual intercourse in which self-gratification takes precedence over any attempt or desire to enter into the schemes of 'relatedness' and 'reciprocity' so basic to the binary-expansionist accounting of sexual being (i.e., particularly

evidenced by the case of rape). Nonetheless, the proposal has at least two clear disadvantages. For the first, it would imply that the male who intends to produce pleasure for his victims by raping them, would not be masturbating. Unless we add to our case, for example, something such as "most males who rape other persons are minimally and/or delusionally if at all concerned with producing pleasure in/for the other" or "concern for the other is denied by forcible rape and ergo masturbatory if only primarily so," Soble's point would hold. We need, however, only contrast this odd consequence of the 'intention' thesis to the paradigm case of mutual masturbation (where each rubs the genitals or other sensitive areas of the other's body and so produces pleasure for the other). This paradigm case makes it difficult to imagine that the other's pleasure is not the mutual masturbator's concern; one must be at least minimally concerned not only with the sensations produced, but also with desiring to continue producing those sensations in the Other. Odder still, this intention thesis has the consequence that the paradigm case of mutual masturbation (with its concerns for producing pleasure in the Other) would not at all be a case of masturbation.

There is an approach to the intention thesis which Soble labels as being more 'radical' and so discards along with what one is led to assume is his more 'liberal' initial

proposal. Here he allows that any sexual activity between two persons in which the only goals they have is to produce pleasure for themselves and/or for each other would be masturbatory, and non-masturbatory with the addition of some other goal or goals (e.g., expressing love, the desire for pregnancy). Without noting any clear advantages to the acceptance of this view, Soble moves immediately to what he sees to be its disadvantages: 1) that the view is committed to saying that it is an insufficient sign or criterion of two persons loving each other that they are generally able to have good sexual relations; and 2) given that there are times when two persons who love one another are concerned only with reciprocally producing pleasurable sensations and not with expressing their love, this proposed thesis would be unsatisfactory even if it were to be argued that good sex leads to love or love to good sex (235). This would mean, for two persons X and Y who masturbate one another when they intend only to experience mutual pleasure but who do not masturbate when they intend something more than this, that the "something more" of their intentions lacked the mutual pleasure of their masturbatory experience. Soble concludes on this score that it would "be best if the characterization of sexual activity as masturbatory were done using some sort of physical criterion, leaving the ethical or aesthetic evaluation of sexual activity to a criterion referring to

intentions." But on this point it is unclear what sort of blow Soble wishes to strike, or in what direction he would have it go. It is clearly non-surprising and trivially true that the relationship between love (whatever its definition) and "good sexual relations" is spurious. Neither could the fact of X and Y's gratifying masturbatory (sexually pleasurable) experiences in comparison with their more purposeful sexual activity, qualify as anything on the level of an eye-opening revelation. If we begin with the assumption that sex has to do with the production in either self or Other (though these need not be mutually exclusive cases) of pleasurable sensations, then there is nothing of grandiose inconsistency in allowing that such activity be designated 'masturbatory. Nothing, that is, apart from a lingering semantic bias. Soble's self-defined radical approach does manage to avoid granting negative status to the presence or absence of insertion, and stresses the importance of the intention for mutually pleasurable sensations. Moreover, the troublesome case of rape could be explained along the lines of a non-masturbatory activity that is (if its goal is the expression of dominance, aggression, violence, or a qualified form of theft) only marginally if at all sexual.

What emerges from Soble's analysis, is this: if we begin with a unitary account we can give explanation to the

paradigm of genital intercourse. But, if we begin with the opposing, contrary account (i.e., the binary) the other paradigm case, i.e., of masturbation, does not emerge (236). It comes as no surprise to Soble that most accounts of sexuality appearing in the philosophical post-1968 literature yield, either deliberately or accidentally, the conclusion that autoerotic masturbation either: is not a sexual activity at all (Goldman), is perverted sexual activity (Nagel), or is "second rate" sexual activity (Solomon). Even if we could overlook Goldman's undisguised abhorrence of the subject and dismiss as either counter-intuitive or counter-sexual his claim that a fantasized Other or Others grant a more "sexual" character to the masturbatory experience, the fact that both Nagel and Solomon explain ordinary paired sexual activity by reference to theoretical "paired activity" models does nothing to illuminate the phenomena of sexual pairing.

How, then, would an account of sexuality which operated without a denial of the unitary frame proceed? Soble suggests that

. . . one possible account exemplifying the unitary framework would say that sexual desire is no more complicated than the desire for certain pleasurable sensations, and that sexual activity is activity which does produce these sensations. (240)

Here Soble is left with the problem of determining precisely what it is about some sensations that makes them sexually

pleasurable, while some others are merely deemed pleasurable but not sexually so. In a footnote (his number eleven) to his own inability to arrive at a plausible point of difference between the two sorts of sensation, Soble observes that he is

. . . not satisfied with any of the following answers to this question. 1) The sexual sensations are those sensations produced by the manipulation (and so forth) of the sexual organs and those organs closely related to the genitals.

Here he makes specific reference to Jerome Shaffer's "Sexual Desire" in which it is maintained that sexual arousal consists of bodily sensations and attendant phenomena that are "centered in and radiate from the genital area." (186) But how, asks Soble,

. . . can we say that the lips, the nipples and the inner part of the knee "radiate out from the genitals"?

After similarly dismissing as untenably "Freudo-Reichian" the suggestion (2) that "all pleasurable sensations produced by the manipulation of any part of the body [should] count as sexual (i.e., this, by observing the obvious distinction between the "oral pleasure" of a drink of cold water on a hot day, and the presumed "oral pleasures" associated with the performance of an oral sex act), Soble considers Goldman's suggestion that "sexual sensations are those produced by contact with another

person's body," and sexual desire the desire for such contact. To Soble,

. . . this view is at the same time too broad and too narrow. For one can produce many (not all) of these sensations without having contact with another persons' body and one can have contact with another person's body without having these sensations. (243)

But if we accept as workable the plausible claim that sexual desire is no more complicated than the desire for certain pleasurable sensations (and, as 'sexual,' that activity which succeeds in producing these sensations), then even if we should leave aside the issue of what--in general--makes some sensations sexually pleasurable while others are not, it would be extremely odd if one were to require convincing that his/her sensation and act had in fact been sexual, apart from the subject's (subjective) assent to this assessment. Perhaps, in treating the fact of sex and sexual activity as the relatively uncomplicated 'givens' of human physical and/or emotional experience, we are not unlike Goldman in his presumption that there is little in the nature of sexual experience that warrants further analysis. Perhaps too, it is this reduction to simplicity in philosophical attitudes toward sex, that leads to the predominant attitude that "we all know what sex is, and don't need philosophers to tell us."

But the divergence of actual sexual experience, as witnessed by Fortunata's thesis in "Masturbation and Woman's

Sexuality" illuminates the error inherent in such a presumption; specifically, the error committed in presuming that "sex is, ideally, one kind of experience, uniform for all people in our culture." The error is further borne out by what I take to be an analogous case: Suppose Jones has been picked up by friends whose promise to Jones is the provision of 'fun' for the evening. Unbeknownst to Jones, his friends have managed to obtain tickets to an immensely popular, long-running Broadway musical-comedy; unbeknownst to his friends, Jones's distaste for musical comedies is exceeded only by his disdain for the Ris de Veau a'la Creme selected by his friends for the dinner meal. Ultimately, the evening is not assessed by Jones as having approached the limits of his expectations of 'fun,' though the evening's other participants (who had, in fact, planned the evening along the lines of their expectations for Jones' pleasure) did not share or even understand Jones' disappointment.

Now someone seeking to intercede on Jones' behalf would probably hasten to point out that the problem with this particular case does not reside with Jones per se; that Jones did not assume--as the evening's primary objective--the tasks of making either himself or those others in the evening's assembly miserable. That Jones did not have 'fun' is not the fault of Jones and, unless we are to assume

Jones' friends to be a sadistic group who planned the entire evening with malice and forethought, neither are they to blame. This might, after all, have been a 'surprise' party planned for Jones with the best of intentions. The real issue here is not blame, but a sort of benign misunderstanding; a rather specific misunderstanding as to those activities, foods, etc., that Jones might literally find enjoyable, and a general misunderstanding that by "fun" we necessarily mean the same sort of thing.

The question I am raising, is whether we might do well to consider "sex" in a similar light. If, again, we accept as even remotely plausible that sexual desire is "the desire for certain pleasurable sensations" (and 'sexual' that activity which succeeds in producing these sensations), then the question of what--in general--makes some sensations sexually pleasurable while others are merely pleasurable (and non-sexual) is in fact answerable, but only by the person or persons to whom the question is put.

What I am suggesting, and which goes beyond Soble's own analysis, is that it is altogether conceivable that one might give explanation to the real existence of the binary model of sexuality within the context of the unitary frame of reference. Soble does, however, suggest the form that such a proposal might take, by having us "consider an example made plausible by recent advances in technology":

Suppose there is a life-size doll whose covering feels like skin, whose genitals have the odor and flavor of the genitals of either sex, and which is programmed to rub, to squirm in response to being rubbed, and to omit noises. (240)

According to Soble, the binary account of sexuality would likely pose either one of three explanations for someone's engaging in a 'sexual' activity with this doll and that each explanation would to some degree or other be too strong. First, the binary account might say that the described activity fails as a bona fide sexual activity because it is in fact nonsexual (the equivalent of playing chess with a computer), or that it is simply perverted sexual behavior (the equivalent of masturbation on or with some inanimate object). It might, secondly, charge that even if we are to count as sexual some activity between this doll and a human being, that it is not 'quality' sex; that it is empty, and in its failure to require anything akin to reciprocity, less 'good' than sex with Others (the equivalent of talking to a book). Finally, the binary account might suggest that to the extent there is anything at all sexual about such an activity, it is because the doll "reminds us" of a real person (itself a claim reminiscent of those that would have us see masturbation as sexual, but only to the extent that it involves fantasies about other persons). But because the unitary framework does not find it necessary to categorize sexual activity in terms of an

activity essentially occurring between two persons, a more plausible explanation for someone's activity with the doll becomes possible; specifically that, "logically speaking, there is no difference between activity with a person and activity with this doll, as long as the doll is capable of producing the pleasurable sensations its user demands of it." (240)

A Proposal, and its Consequences

On the basis of those theories of sexuality argued in this and previous chapters, the frequent failure of masturbation to qualify as more than a quasi-instance of sexual activity, has been on the basis of its failure to exemplify the dominant, binary model of sexuality. According to this model, an act of 'sex' is such that it involves the presence/existence of some other participant, and something in the way of 'shared intimacy' and physical--if not emotional--activity between them. In the strongest form of this view, intercourse is the paradigm case of sexual activity, and masturbation the 'paradigm' of an activity one performs until--or during the more prolonged absences of having--the "real thing." My own argument is 1) that masturbation not only is a legitimate instance of sexual activity, but also; 2) that we can more aptly characterize the nature of masturbation as a sexual activity if we take 'sexual' activity to mean the provision of

sexually pleasurable sensations. Let me summarize my reasons in what follows.

In Chapter I, I suggested that the groundwork required for the philosophical discussion of sexuality necessitated answering the question what kind(s) of act(s), and under what circumstances, serve to constitute sexual activity. One can put the question this way: is there some act or set of acts $x \dots x_n$ such that

'At t, H [performs] X' =Df. 'At t, H engages in
a sex act

is either true or false of H?

On the basis of preceding discussion, I propose that an act, X, is (or becomes) a sex act when intentionally engaged in by the participating agent in order to elicit pleasurable sensations identified by that agent as "sexually pleasurable," or when found by that agent to do so unintentionally. It follows from this conception of a sex act,

1. that there is no act such that it is an intrinsically sexual act. On the premise that the binary model of sexuality is admittedly one, but not the only possible model of sexuality, it follows that neither genital-genital couplings nor any act so focused on the genital areas is necessarily sexual;

2. that an act, e.g., 'intercourse,' is a sexual activity only if perceived as such by the participating agents; that rape, by the intended criteria, would fail to constitute a sex act;
3. that the concept of sexual 'perversion' collapses. On the assumption of a particular act's either being (or becoming) a sexual act for an intentionally participating agent, and in acknowledgement of their being no activity such that it is intrinsically sexual, it follows that there is no behavior such that it is intrinsically (sexually) perverted behavior;
4. that the statement, 'At t, H [performs] X' (where X is taken to be a sex act) is either true or false in relation to the status of X as maintained by H;
5. that the statement 'At t, H Xs with Y' (where X is taken to be sexual activity and Y the other person with whom that activity is performed), is true only when the status of X is affirmed by both H and Y; that, the statement is false if either H or Y fail to assess the act, X, as evoking those pleasurable sensations associated with 'sexual' activity;

and,

6. that, given no act's being an intrinsically sexual act; given, moreover, the distinctions between unitary and binary accounts of sexual desire, that the statement 'At t, H Xs with Y' (where X is sexual activity and Y a non-person) may be either true or false of H as dictated by 4.

I have argued that the statement,

'At t, H [performs] X' =Df.
'At t, H engages in a sex act'

is meaningfully true or false of H only if the act, X, is intentionally perceived by H as eliciting sensations identified by H as 'sexually pleasurable sensations,' or when the commission of X is unintentionally found to elicit such sensations in/for H. If, on this basis, H fondles a particular area of its anatomy because it has found this fondling to produce sexually pleasurable sensations, then this fondling by H qualifies the act, X, as sexual activity. Assume now that while in the process of fondling this now familiar spot, H discovers a completely different spot which--previously unsensed by H--produces the same sensations. Does H's unintentional fondling-discovery of this previously unfondled part of its anatomy negate the act's being determined a sex act? My argument is that it does not; that the sex act happens as the result of H's having elicited the pleasurable sensations identified (by

the agent, H) as being sexually pleasurable, and that this is so regardless of the agent's own intention to do so.

Assume now, that by fondling some area of its anatomy, H intends to bring about the pleasurable sensations it identifies as being sexually pleasurable. Assume, further, that H's decision to fondle this particular area has been fostered by literature purporting to demonstrate the 'Art of Precise Fondling' i.e., of locating those areas demonstrated to have the highest rate of success at eliciting sexually pleasurable sensations. But, upon fondling this spot, H elicits sensations which, rather than being sexually pleasurable, are painful, numbing, tickling, etc. Would H's act, on the basis of intentions alone, qualify this act as sexual? On the basis of my argument, H's act would fail to be a sex act, and the proposition

'At t, H [performs] X' =Df. 'At t, H engages in
a sex act'

would be false of H. Contrariwise, if by the terms 'sex act' and 'sexually pleasurable sensations' H understands and takes as pleasurable the painful, numbing, tickling sensations produced by his/her ministrations, then H's fondlings would in fact be sexual fondlings. From this it follows that the criteria for determining sexual pleasure rests with the participating agent, and that the only sex acts which 'fail' are those acts found deficient in producing the 'pleasurable' sensations required by the agent

whose performance it is. This ought not be taken as precluding some cultural or societal prescription for sex, or that there will in fact be those whose sense of 'sexual pleasure' derives within those limits of societal expectation. Rather, where the latter conception treats as 'deviant' those forms of sexual expression not socially accepted, the former leaves open the possibility that an agent might find 'sexual pleasure' in some other (non-sanctioned) activity altogether.

On the basis of my contention that the criteria for assessing a sexual activity are determined by the participating agent, it follows that there is no single model of sexual activity; that the binary and unitary frameworks are/can be equally descriptive of activity which is sexual activity. But an odd, if not telling, consequence of the view I propose is this: If we take the statement

- (1) 'At t, H [performs] X' =Df. 'At t, H engages in a sex act'

as specifically modeling a case of unitary sexuality, and

- (2) 'At t, H [performs] X with Y' =Df. 'At t, H engages in a sex act with Y'

as similarly descriptive of binary sexuality, then it occurs that only in (1)--the case of unitary sexuality--is there any immediate assurance (granted the reporting agent's credibility) that a sex act has taken place. On the binary account, given the required participation of an Other-as-

agent, there is always the possibility for either 'failed' or 'non-sexual' encounters: 'failed' if what was from the point of view of one agent 'sex' (i.e., in having produced those sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable) not similarly identified/experienced by the other; 'nonsexual,' as in the case of rape (pg. 116) if the intentions of only one of the agents is taken into account, and the other's "participation" is neither intentional nor voluntary. As a proposition whose truth or falsity has any value whatsoever, (1) is at all times demonstrably true or false of H, whereas (2) may be true for H but false for Y, and so, false for X and Y. If the bases for conclusions (1) and (2) hold, then not only is masturbation a sexual activity, but it is the more assured activity of those paradigmatically assigned to the respective models of sexuality; more assured than 'intercourse' as viewed within the context of the binary framework. Masturbation, in other words, comes to its own and is granted both legitimacy and credibility as a sex act under the proposed analysis.

But it might be argued that what is wrong with this odd set of conclusions is just that its premises erroneously represent the case. Specifically, one might hold that: a) there is no 'unitary' framework of sexuality; or b) that there is, or there are, some act(s) such that they are intrinsically, by the nature of their performance, sex acts;

or c) that a sex act remains so regardless of the intentions of the individual(s) involved. To all this, I would argue the following:

1. those who deny the sheer existence of a unitary model of sexuality, must either deny the existence of masturbation, or affirm its existence as a non-sexual response to a sexual situation (i.e., as a substitute for X). The former option is clearly counter-intuitive; masturbation exists. The second, that masturbation is but a non-sexual response to an otherwise sexual situation, has the advantage of dismissing unitary sexuality, but the disadvantage of forcing its adherent into some position on what masturbation is. If masturbation is a non-sexual activity but one which many have found to substitute for the 'reality' of sexual activity with a partner, then some evidence attesting to the reality of coupled sexuality would be required. If, for instance, the standard of sexual reality is made to be reproduction, then masturbation is no less 'real' than are homosexuality, oral-genital sex, or sex with an infertile partner. If the standard is a measure of one's relationship to a 'partner,' then masturbatory activity fares no worse than casual sex (casual sex is not sex?), or sex granted on the bases of any other dubious set of criteria (e.g., power, privilege, monetary gratification, security, etc.). If, however, the standard is one of

pleasure both anticipated and received (in the sense that one might argue sex with a partner to be intrinsically 'better'), then this alleged 'reality' settles comfortably into the fog of contradictory subjective claims, and loses force. Dismissed with similar ease, is the mere preference for the more standard binary model of sexuality. And this leads us to:

2. that there is (or there are) some act(s) such that they are, by the nature of their performance, sex acts. To hold that there are acts such that they are intrinsically sexual, is to maintain that a given act, X, is sexual even if not perceived as such by an agent engaged in its performance. This conception of sexual activity is, as I will again charge, counter-intuitive except for the rarest of cases, and involving agents of the most naive sort. It would be rather odd to have someone inform us that we had just engaged in a sex act, contrary to our knowledge, barring either ignorance or a rather coy dishonesty on our part of having performed one. Now suppose that someone were to argue in this way

Don't we often do things the nature of which we are unaware? We know that we've done something, but not what the something is or what it means to have done it. For instance, the child knows that s/he has done something (a sort of exploratory manipulation, perhaps) but not that s/he has "masturbated."

But this case does not fit the criterion I have previously set--whereby what it is that the agent intends by the act's

performance counts toward the act's assessment as sexual or non-sexual. The following analogy will bear out this distinction, which I take to be crucial to my thesis. Let us grant that someone caught in the act of doodling is told that the figure sketched on paper directly resembles a map of Iberia. The doodler, who may be pleasantly surprised with this interpretation, might very well react in a number of different ways: 1) by saying that she has no idea as to the geographical configuration of Iberia, and so can neither agree nor disagree with the observer's assessment; 2) by agreeing, on the basis of her knowledge of Iberia, that she has, in fact, unintentionally represented the area in question; 3) disagree, on the basis of her knowledge of Iberia, that such a resemblance exists; or 4) simply deny that Iberia is what she intended that the doodled figure represent. All but the final option open to the doodler have to do with naming the drawn figure, and she is open in each of the other cases (1-3) to accept for this figure the name, "Iberia." But in the latter case (4), if it was the doodler's intention to merely move the pen in some aimless fashion across the page (or to mark the mental tracings of the dimensions of a room, etc.) it clearly makes no sense to insist on the representation of Iberia, except as a matter of the observer's own objective interpretation. In like manner, the child who performs some act taken by an observer

to be 'masturbatory' might very well be informed that the act is so called. But herein lies the problem. If the child now asks the sort of thing that masturbation is, the observer may either indicate that masturbation is a kind of solitary sexual activity (at least primarily so), or indicate that it is some other type of activity altogether. If the observer takes the latter track, then s/he will be forced to state just what sort of activity it is, and why it is so classed. If, for instance, the observed incident involved certain genital rubbings, the observer might--given a particularly inquisitive child--be asked to explain precisely what about some such rubbings made them masturbatory, and others not (e.g., washing, riding a bicycle, straddling a rocking horse, etc.). But suppose the observer were to elect the former option; specifically, were to say that masturbation was a sort of sexual activity involving "self-stimulation." If, as has been argued, the assignment of 'sexual activity' requires the provision of sexually pleasurable sensations, which assignment requires the agent to distinguish those sensations which are sexually pleasurable from those which are not, then we are left in the paradoxical position of 'naming' as masturbatory an act performed by a child who may not see it as masturbatory at all. What emerges is that this proposed disclaimer (e.g., on the alleged existence of acts deemed intrinsically

sexual) either forces our discussion back to those same issues raised and discounted in an attempt to defend the first (e.g., that one denying the existence of a unitary frame of sexuality), or leads to an indefensible position on the nature and purposes of language; one that would seemingly deny the worthwhileness of subjective truth-claims while simultaneously labeling as 'public' what is perhaps best understood as a 'private' experience. What proponents of the argument for the assigning of intrinsically sexual acts neglect to consider, is that sex--understood as the evoking of sexually pleasurable sensations--is very much a matter of individual prescription. As well as falling within the category of reflexive acts (in this analysis a matter of self-pleasure), it is more often than not intentional. Whereas it is not within the limits of linguistic convention to say of myself that, "I participate with myself in (doing) X," it would certainly be understandable to say of myself that, "I intend X for myself." Given the negative consequences of a defense of this second disclaimer, it is best that it be abandoned as was the first. This leads to the final disclaimer that one might use to oppose my conclusions on masturbatory sex:

c. that a sex act remains so regardless of the intentions of the individual(s) involved. The errors of this view are no more blatantly revealed than in the

standard treatment of rape; a treatment denied by that one I propose. For rape to be considered an act of sex, what the rapist does would have to be intrinsically sexual (making even forced intercourse, by at least some views, "intercourse" nonetheless) or considered sexual from the points of view of the rapist, the rapee, or both. Since on my view the existence of acts possessing an intrinsic sexual significance has been denied (in disclaimer (b) and elsewhere), it may not be argued that rape's involvement of intercourse forces the conclusion that rape is thereby necessarily involved with sex, or that rape is--by virtue of what it "accomplishes"--sex of any prima facie sort. But is rape not 'sex' on the basis of the rapist's intention that it be viewed as such? That is, is it a sufficient condition of an act's assessment by a single participant as sexual, that it be an act of sex? Though by the criteria allowed in (a) and elsewhere (involving the unitary frame of sexuality) an act may either be, or become endowed with sexual significance for its sole participant, the same would not be true from the standpoint of binary relations. Even if it were to be argued that rape provided the basis for eliciting "sexually pleasurable" sensations from the rapist's point of view (e.g., from the accomplishment of domination, the acting out of fantasies or the desire to do violence), none of this mitigates against its being a binary performance;

that, given rape's existence as binary and the view that I propose, the promotion of sensations deemed sexually pleasurable by both participants is required. But what if someone were to argue that at least some rapes concur with their rapists in considering rape a 'sexual' act i.e., as promoting sensations identified by both as "sexually pleasurable?" Here I would need only produce one of any number of rape victims whose experience with being raped was non-pleasurable, to deny as true the assertion that rape is fundamentally sexual and hence, universally pleasurable.³⁸

If any single or combination of disclaimers (a-c) were intended to deny my conclusions regarding the validity of masturbatory sex, then it (or they) have failed to do so. Not only is a unitary accounting of sexuality possible through an understanding of masturbation, but it is masturbation--as paradigmatic of unitary sexuality--that best accounts for the assessment of sexual activity. If, as I have argued, what counts as 'sex' is that which promotes those pleasurable sensations intentionally identified by the participating agent as "sexual" (or is found unintentionally to do so), then it would appear that unitary sexuality is the more assured sexual framework than is its alternative; that, from the standpoint of binary sexuality, there is

³⁸See, particularly, Susan Griffin's "Rape: The All-American Crime," Ramparts, September 1971, 26-35, and "Possession" from Intercourse, by Andrea Dworkin.

always the possibility that what one participant views as 'sex' may fail to be sex from the standpoint of the other.³⁹

Primacy of the Unitary Model

It is trivially true that masturbation, once alleged the "Monster Hideous in Mien,"⁴⁰ is paradigmatic of a particular frame of reference which designates, as recipient of those sensations identified as "sexually pleasurable sensations," the agent who produces them. Of far greater significance, however, are the rather interesting parallels between this model, labeled unitary-reductionist in the

³⁹It is perhaps interesting to note that under the binary prescriptive where an act counts as being sexual on the basis of something akin to 'insertion,' lesbianism either does not count as sexual, or is only sexual on those occasions where such insertion takes place. On the basis of unitary sexuality, however, the act of sex between lesbian lovers escapes inclusion, because it defies the paradigm case of solitary sexual activity. And, as noted in Soble's "Masturbation," it is further unclear how even a case of 'mutual masturbation' if taken as descriptive of lesbian sex, is a case of masturbation at all. It is particularly in the case of this form of sexual being (or, of being sexually oriented toward X), that a thesis concerning the evoking of sexually pleasurable sensations is warranted.

⁴⁰Edward Lea. "The Monster Hideous in Mien," in SSS, 22-31. The title comes from comments allegedly made by a certain Dr. S.G. Howe, who appeared before the Massachusetts Senate to speak on the subject of "idiocy," which he claimed was brought on by masturbation. He referred to masturbation as "a vice, a monster so hideous in mien, so disgusting in feature, so beastly and loathsome" that "decent" people found it difficult to even mention the word.

previous Chapter, and what is similarly labeled the binary-reductionist account.

If we begin, as does the binary account, with the presumption of sexual desire as a type of relation (or, desire to . . .) with an Other or Others; if, moreover, we count as "sexual" those activities with others that are motivated by that desire, then solitary masturbation unquestionably fails at being a sexual activity. Those binary theorists willing to grant masturbation even conditional admission into sexual discussion, have done so only with the stipulation of a "fantasized Other"--the equivalent of sex-by-proxy--whose 'presence' is taken to render the act "that much more sexual." On closer view, however, the actual gist of this argument appears to be that the fantasized Other merely renders the act "that much more binary." But if we follow the threads of this argument to its conclusions, two equally devastating consequences emerge to challenge the credibility of the binary account.

For the first, the proponent of binary sexuality would be put in the puzzling position of having to admit into discussion--as sexual-- cases of mutual masturbation, while simultaneously denying similar status to those cases where an actual Other is treated as a fantasized Other. Even if it is alleged that we are warranted in assessing mutual masturbation as sexual by virtue of its inclusion of an

Other, we are left with the problems of deciphering why mutual masturbation should even count as masturbation, and what it is about it which (apart from its inclusion of an Other) warrants its acceptability while its parent case, solitary masturbation, does not. If the argument is offered that mutual masturbation is at least sex with a partner, then it would follow that solitary masturbation is sex without a partner, but not that it was not sex. If, on the other hand, one argues that mutual masturbation is sexual because the desire is for 'sex' (in this case, 'masturbation') performed with or in the presence of an Other, then what are we to make of those cases where the agent's desire is actually directed toward some (non-present) fantasized Other, or even toward the agent's own pleasure rather than toward any Other at all? This latter option is after all allowed on the binarist's scheme; the fact that for this one whatever is 'sex' requires the minimum participation of two, does not preclude the possibility of one's using an actual Other as substitute for an imagined or fantasized one. It would appear that the binary theorist seeking to admit mutual masturbation into sexual discussion, can do so only by inadvertently undermining the very principle of binary theorization. If the act of mutual masturbation more closely assimilates the binarist's ideal by virtue of its inclusion of an Other--

even an Other who is substitute for one of fantasy--then the significance of an Other's presence as actual presence, is questionable. A defense of mutual masturbation either points in the direction of solitary masturbations' being included in the range of sex acts as well, or opens a gateway to discussions concerning whether one's thoughts or fantasies during sex ought hold any relevance for a sex act's assessment.

In fact, the second of these 'puzzling' consequences owes existence to the same gateway. For, from the conclusion that those acts purporting to be sexual are all and only those whose actions (and, presumably, whose desires) are directed toward some Other or Others, it would further follow that at least some instances of the previously mentioned binary-reductionist sort are not instances of 'sex' at all. If, as has been alleged, masturbation is not sex but that masturbatory acts involving fantasized partners make such acts even marginally or pseudo-sexual, then it would seem that some account is due those cases of binary 'sexual' activity where an Other(s) is employed, but only as a means to the agent's own enhancement of sexual pleasure. This would not only include those cases where the Other is merely employed as a means to that end, but also those where the agent's actual partner in the alleged sexual activity is not the one about whom the agent

fantasizes while engaged in that activity. If masturbation is open to the charge of being non-sexual, or pseudo-sexual, because it either fails to employ, or only imaginatively employs a fantasized Other, then this same charge ought hold on the binary model in those cases where the employment of an actual Other is either a mere matter of utility (i.e., as means to a desired end) or substitute for an equally actual, but non-present Other. It emerges that the binary theorists' haste to exclude masturbation from the realm of sexual activities would, by a similar argument, exclude certain cases of binary sexuality, and thus cast serious doubt on the adequacy of the binary model itself.

In Chapter II, it was argued that a sufficient distinction between reductionist and expansionist conceptions of unitary sex was that, according to the former, sexual accomplishment required nothing beyond its agent's own ministrations, whereas on the latter, sexual accomplishment was said to require some additional stimuli. For the binary conception, a similar distinction was made between reductionist and expansionist views, depending upon whether sex is accomplished with any Other whatsoever, or is somehow endowed with significance derived from the experience of a specific, 'significant Other.' Upon re-evaluation, there now appears to be more commonality between two of these models (unitary-expansionist and binary-

reductionist) than was immediately evident. In the first place there is a consequential link between them, since there seems to be no way to question the validity of one without simultaneously questioning the validity of the other. But, in addition, both effectively reduce sex to a matter of utility. Although it is true that for the unitary-expansionist account what is "useful" (for the promotion of those sensations counting as sexually pleasurable) might be an object or a particular atmosphere, it is equally possible that a fantasized, or in the case of mutual masturbation, an actual Other be employed. The similarity of unitary-expansionist to binary-reductionist accounts of paired sexual relations is evident in this last sort of case: unless we are able to argue that there is some essential difference between two persons "mutually masturbating" and two persons each utilizing the other to produce--in themselves--sensations which each takes to be "sexually pleasurable sensations," the two cases are theoretically indistinguishable.

But if unitary-expansionist and binary-reductionist accounts of sex are at least in some very significant cases indistinguishable, what can then be said of the remaining two accounts?

I take the contrast between the unitary-reductionist and binary-expansionist conception of sex to express those

characteristics most essential to the unitary and binary proposals. That is, whatever is basically meant by the unitary conception of sexual desire is contained in the unitary-reductionist account, whereas what is basically meant by the binary conception is summed up by the binary-expansionist. As initially proposed and as reflected in the subsequent philosophical literature, the difference between the unitary and binary accounts of sexual desire was made to focus on the number of persons thought to be requisite for the performance of a sex act. But it seems now that such a "performance judgement" is much more likely to lead us off the mark than to allow us to focus on what is important about the contrast between the two accounts of sexuality. To say that someone's conceptions of sexual desire is unitary simply because her focus is on the promotion of her own pleasure, is to say too little. It has, after all, been argued that one might be a sexual unitarist and still have sexual relations with (through?) an Other or Others, with no loss of consistency. Likewise, we ought not be any more assured of someone's being a sexual binarist by her preference for sex with Others, when we ought be assured of someone's religious fervor by her presence at Church. It has, after all, been shown that someone's sexual relations with Others, might actually be a sexual activity with (and primarily for) herself.

What I am arguing is that in its failure to risk asking some rather crucial questions concerning the nature of sex and sexual activity, sexual philosophy not only began its discussion too soon, but apparently presumed the most essential issues about sex to involve a head count. In particular, those binary theorists who have continued to limit sexual activities to those involving at least two persons, have consistently failed to focus on what it is about the activity of these two persons that ought make their activity 'sexual' at all. If we begin instead with the view that sexual activities are those that promote sexual pleasure, we are more reasonably positioned to ask the question who the recipient of that pleasure is.

Now if the only pure positions allowed by juxtaposing the conceptions of sex and sexual desire are unitary-reductionist and binary-reductionist (i.e., having demonstrated that the unitary-expansionist and binary-reductionist accounts are, in at least some cases, indistinguishable), then putting the question as to the recipient of sexual pleasure will both: 1) answer the question whether one or both these models is in fact "sexual"; and 2) answer the question whether either model explains or can be explained by the other. Answering (1), would lay to rest the question whether masturbation suffices as a sexual activity, while answering (2) would explain

whether, on the grounds of parsimony rather than aesthetic or moral criteria, either of the two conceptions can be argued to be primary to the other.

Sex, Self and Others

The core of the framework of unitary sexuality is the self in its known and felt relation with itself; it is the self that not only wills, intends and experiences, but that is also capable of understanding its role in promoting its own self-interest. For the unitary-reductionist in sex, those pleasures presumably associated with sexual performance are self-directed; whatever sensations, benefits or pursuant pleasures thought to accrue from sexual experience, derive directly from that experience and to the individual whose experience it is. The question of what suffices to be called sexual activity is answered by the individual whose activity it is, and is a matter of the individual's own performance. In the case of unitary reductionism, the success or failure of a sexual performance is determined by the individual's own ability to actualize his/her own intentions. Masturbation, the paradigm case of unitary-reductionist sexuality, suffices as a bona fide sexual activity if it is an activity performed with the intention of producing--in an agent--those sensations identified by that agent as "sexually pleasurable sensations." If this agent's intention is to produce these

sensations and s/he succeeds in doing so, then the activity is a successful sexual activity. If the agent's intention is to produce the cited sensations, and there is an attempt, but a failure to actually produce them, then the act fails in the production of sensations judged to be "sexually pleasurable," but is an act of masturbation--and so, of sex--nonetheless.

The core of the framework of binary sexuality is the self in relation to some other self or selves. To the binary sexualist, anything warranting discussion as a sexual activity must arise in relation to some Other(s) and a specific or non-specific desire to incorporate that Other(s) in the performance of the activity. Consistent with the previous case, activities warranting assessment as "sexual," must still be all and only those capable of producing "sexually pleasurable sensations" in the agent whose conception of sex it is. But in this (unlike the previous) case, what counts as sex must not only be intended to produce these sensations in the one agent, but in the other agent as well. To the extent that each agent intends and successfully produces sensations identified by the Other as "sexually pleasurable," the act qualifies as a bona fide sexual activity. To the extent that each intends, but fails at producing, sensations identified by the Other as

"sexually pleasurable," the act is no less sexual but is less than successful.

Because it includes an agent-Other, it is apparent that in the case of binary sexuality an act's achievement as sexual is beset with difficulties that do not occur in the unitary account. In order that its act count as sexual on the grounds that I have argued, the binary agent must both intend to produce (or have produced) sensations s/he identifies as "sexually pleasurable" in itself, and intend the same production or inducement in its agent-Other. Though this does not mean that the sexual binarist need necessarily hold little hope for achieving 'sex' on the stated ground, it does mean that the inclusion of an Other whose "sexually pleasurable" sensations also count in the sexual equation, demands an assiduous commitment to the Other's pleasure rendered needless by the unitaristic account. In fact, given the stipulations for successful binary sexual relations and the differences between the reductionist and expansionist accounts, those binary relations that are expansionist are more likely (given the level of commitment required to the Other and the Other's needs) to approach the sexual ideal, than are those that are reductionist (e.g., where the Other's 'participation' is at best minimal, and at worst a means to completing some pre-envisioned scheme).

It has already been argued that a sexual binarist whose primary concern is for his or her own sexual pleasure, misses the mark of 'sex' as delineated by the binary proposal (pg. 157-158); neither is the binarist's act made "any the more sexual," by virtue of its inclusion of, or performance with, an Other. As has been suggested, it is not inconceivable that this 'Other' be a fantasy substitute for an Other who is altogether distinct from that one whose 'participation' is being counted. Given my theory's emphasis on an act's capacity to promote sexually pleasurable sensations for the person(s) whose sex act it is, the focus for sexual assessment shifts from the number of persons involved (which had been of tantamount importance to previous schemes of sexual philosophy) to the issue of whether the required sensations are actually being produced; it is precisely this latter issue which must be addressed prior to establishing the primacy of the unitary to the binary account of sexuality. The following cases, far from merely presenting interesting or abstract possibilities for the binary scheme of sexual relating, demonstrate inherent difficulties in the binary proposal about sex and what is possibly entailed by an act's being counted as sexual. On the presumption that sex has to do with the promotion--in the person whose sex act it is--of sensations identified as "sexually pleasurable," we ought expect to gain some insight

into the binary account of sexuality as it specifically relates to the 'pleasurable sensations' criterion. For each of these cases, the question to be borne in mind is whether the described activity is to be counted as 'sexual.' A second question, relative to the first, is whether--given the "pleasurable sensations" criterion--any conclusions might be drawn relative to the issue of primacy in the binary account, i.e.g, of the binary model's proximity to the sexual ideal. What, now, can be said of the following cases?

1. Two agents, A and B, each intend to produce in/for the other those sensations identified by that other as "sexually pleasurable sensations." But while A willingly (and, let us assume capably) produces these sensations in/for B, and B in/for A, neither A nor B generate sexual pleasure (for themselves) from the act performed for the other's behalf.
2. Two agents, A and B, each identify those sensations taken by the other to count as "sexually pleasurable sensations" and in fact do succeed (for the other) in producing them. But what A takes to count as sex and expects that B produce is \$, while what B takes to count as sex and expects that A produce is non-\$. So from the

points of view of A and B, the intention is to produce sensations that both are and are not sexually pleasurable.

3. Of two agents, A and B, only A had identified the set of sensations [¶] it takes as fulfilling the criteria of "sexually pleasurable sensations." When producing [¶] in/for A, B experiences an assortment of emotions [±] which, though not "sexually pleasurable," are nonetheless sufficiently pleasurable to warrant B's continued performance of [¶], for B's own promotion of [±].

Given the current status of sexual philosophy, each of the cases (1-3) would count as reflecting binary sexual situations: binary, because the agents involved depend on some Other for the successful performance of a specific act or ongoing activity; sexual, because each agent's relation to the other is based on the success, failure or attempt at producing the types of sensations associated with a particular view of sex. But given the conception of sex that I have proposed, the relation of A to B is in none of these a "sexual" relation. This will become evident in what follows. If we begin by dismissing as necessarily sexual any act involving physical contact of a specific sort, genital contact, or what might otherwise be classified as "physical intimacy"; if we dismiss, moreover, the relation

of any of these kinds of contact to the number of persons deemed requisite for a sex act's completion or what is--or ought be--on the minds of the agent-participants (e.g., the 'fantasy' thesis, then

1. In the first case, although A and B each intend that their actions promote "sexually pleasurable" sensations in the other, neither A nor B takes its own sexual pleasure as crucial to these sensations' promotion.
2. In the second case, it follows that from the points of view of A and B, what each provides the other is not sex; it being logically (if not psychologically) inconceivable that someone find sexual pleasure in the performance of an activity that s/he finds personally distasteful, repulsive, or repugnant. This would not discount the possibility of one's finding some (e.g., abusive, self-abusive, or neurotic) pleasure in the activity, but only that this 'pleasure' would not count as sexual.

and

3. In the third case, as in (2), the situation does not allow for sensations derived from B's performance to count as "sexually pleasurable,"

though they may count as sensations of some other sort.

Despite appearances then, because these situations involve agents one or both of whom fail even to intend his or her own sexual pleasure, these relationships have to be seen as non-sexual. Adding criteria deemed relevant by the expansionist account (e.g., commitment, exclusivity, 'love,' etc.) will not mitigate this assessment given the criteria I propose, although understanding the relationship of A to B in terms of "love" would explain the otherwise puzzling insistence of each agent to please the other. Moreover, these sorts of cases would not even count as mere failed attempts at sex. Rather, they are simply not sexual. To repeat, this is because either one or both the agents involved has not set his/her sexual pleasure as the goal of the activity i.e., beyond the idea and the desire to promote sexually pleasurable sensations in the agent-Other.

What is suggested by these cases, and is additionally required by the "pleasurable sensations" criterion, is that assessing binary relations as 'sexual' demands not only that one intend to provide the requisite sensations for the Other, but also that one's Other intend to provide the same sorts of sensations for oneself. Similarly requisite for this (now mutual) provision of "sexually pleasurable sensations," are criteria such as knowing what the Other

takes to be sexually pleasurable, and the willingness--on both the part of an agent and its Other--to cooperate in these pleasures' provision. To echo Soble, if there is "an awful lot" of binary sex going on, then we should expect an equivalent amount of communication about sexual needs and expectations regarding the Other's sexual performance because without it, on the "pleasurable sensations" criterion, what the agents do is not (unless they are both superbly cooperative telepaths) likely to be sex at all. This is not to say--nor is it meant to imply, again--that achieving sex on the binary model is impossible. But it certainly is to say that such an achievement is made all the more difficult by the addition of an Other; a difficulty that is apparently eased only if expansionist criteria are made to apply. If our agents A and B either fail to intend their own or the Other's sexual pleasure in the performance of an act, X, then X will not count as sex (though again, it might very well count as an activity of another sort). This would also mean that cases of binary-reductionist 'sexual' activity (about which questions have been raised) would be placed in an even more questionable light. Where the Other is at best a means to the agent's own promotion of sexually pleasurable sensations, the Other's significance to the scheme of sexual accomplishment is little more than that of an ordinary instrument i.e., interchangeable, and

distinguished only by function. This issue is one about which more will be said in the final Chapter. It suffices now to say that for two agents, A and B, X is a sexual activity only if X is the product of sexual intentions made by and for both A and B.

Contrarily, on the unitary-reductionist account, once we grant that an agent's intention (in doing X) is to promote those sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable, then that agent may either be said to have succeeded or to have failed in its attempt to promote X; we would not, however, be warranted in saying that because X was not achieved, that X was not attempted or intended. So although unitary-reductionist sex may admit to failed attempts at achieving those sensations agent-identified as "sexually pleasurable," we would hardly be justified in arguing against the reality of the attempt (i.e., as an attempt, albeit an unsuccessful one) at 'sexual activity.'

In unitary-reductionism, unlike either of the binary relations (reductionist or expansionist), the assessment of "non-sexual" activity does not come into play in what would otherwise purport to be a sexual situation. Rather, acts performed on this frame are--given the attempt/intention to promote agent-identified "sexually pleasurable" sensations--either successful or fail at being successful. In either of the binary relations, an act purporting to be sex may be

assessed as successful or failed (given the attempt/intention of both agents to promote, both in themselves and in the Other, those sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable), but non-sexual if an intention toward achieving "sexually pleasurable" sensations in oneself or the other is not made.

If the paradigm of sexual activity is located in that or those acts whose performance generates sensations taken by its agent(s) to be "sexually pleasurable"; if, moreover, in this paradigm case sex has to do with the promotion--in the person whose act it is-- of those sensations taken to be "sexually pleasurable," then that model of sexuality which more closely approximates the sexual ideal is unitary-reductionist.

Parsimony

Having answered the question as to which model or models might actually be paradigmatic of sexual activity, it remains to question whether--for the binary-expansionist or unitary-reductionist accounts--either explains, or can be explained by the other. Contained in the answer to this question, is the issue of parsimony; whether, of the two admittedly valid models, there can be a theoretical reduction to one.

Consistent with the view that I have expressed, sexual activities are all and only those that promote sensations

agent-identified as "sexually pleasurable" sensations. In the paradigm case of unitary-reductionist sex, the agent promotes these sensations in and for itself; what counts in this case as successful sexual performance is an act that begins with the agent's intention to produce these sensations (or--if unintentional--with the discovery that such sensations can be produced), and culminates in the fulfillment of that intent. For the unitary-reductionist, "sexual desire" corresponds to the desire to experience those sensations associated with sexual pleasure, but not for an Other or Others on whom that pleasure is dependent.

Given the perspective of binary-expansionist sex, sexual desire designates a desire, not only for those agent-identified, "sexually pleasurable" sensations of the previous account, but for some Other(s) to both provide and be recipient of those sensations. I have further argued that an agent whose sole concern is for the Other's pleasure, does not fulfill the conditions set for this model of sexual activity.

Common to both the unitary-reductionist and binary-expansionist conceptions of sexuality, is the provision of self-pleasure through the agent's identification of those sensations taken to be "sexually" pleasurable. How these sensations are to be provided, i.e., by oneself or by some Other(s), is at best secondary to the demand that the

pleasure be really produced. This alone would point to the primacy of the unitary over the binary account. But I find it also significant that beginning with the unitary account makes the binary account understandable, whereas the reverse is not possible. I noted earlier that Alan Soble had made this observation. Although Soble does not go on to argue for the theoretical primacy of unitary over binary sex, I maintain that this is precisely the case; that understanding the point of providing sexual pleasure for Others presupposes one's having accepted the value of providing the same experiences for oneself.

The primacy of unitary sex I allege ought not, however, be taken to evidence its being "better" (on either moral, aesthetic or performative grounds) than its binary correlate. Rather, the primacy of unitary over binary sex has more to do with a parsimonious equation, than with the relative complexities of either individual or theoretical preferences. Does this then mean that there is not, in actuality, anything which corresponds to the binary conception of sex? That, since all sexual activity reduces to the unitary frame of reference, relations strictly corresponding to the binary frame simply cease to exist? The answer to both these questions, negative in both cases, is contained in the following analogy.

Summary Conclusions

In what is perhaps its simplest form, "eating" is understood to be an activity that involves taking a tangible substance into one's mouth, e.g., 'food,' chewing and swallowing. A number of things are implicit in this understanding of "eating." For the first (1), it is implicit that the activity is intentional in the sense that we would not normally say of an agent who had been bound and made to ingest something involuntarily that she had "eaten," but instead that she had been "force-fed." Similarly, (2) it is true that in the normal sense of what it means "to eat," the agent who is eating is aware of having eaten. It would be rather odd to have someone inform us of our "having eaten" unawares, or of our not "having eaten" when experience suggested that we had in fact done so. Finally (3), whatever benefits can be said to accrue from "eating" accrue primarily to that one whose eating behavior it is. This is not meant to suggest the inconceivability of aberrations on this standard theme. On the contrary, we might easily conceive of a situation where an agent, hypnotized in relation to its eating behavior, might lack a direct awareness of what, or whether, it had eaten; or someone diagnosed with an eating disorder, who would compulsively consume any number of things without intending to do so. This is, however, to reaffirm the non-standard

nature of these cases. Though we might not agree with an agent's choice of what to eat, if in fact the agent has admitted to having eaten (or denied that "eating" is the activity that had taken place), then unless there is some strong reason for doubting either the agent's credibility or mental state, there is greater reason to accept than to reject the agent's own claims.

Suppose now that two agents, Smith and Jones, both acknowledge "eating" to be precisely the mouth-opening, chew and substance-swallowing activity allowed by the standard case, but that Jones finds it more enjoyable--if not expedient--to perform its "eating activity" alone. Jones may, after all, have been convinced that since "eating" is primarily a matter of taste and experience for that one who eats, it is both distracting ("Is the other finding the meal satisfactory?") and potentially threatening (Jones' fear of getting enough) to eat with others. Since the core of the "eating experience" requires not only the more observable mouth-opening sorts of behaviors, but also the actual consumption of food, if Jones is more than disinclined at the prospect of sharing his meal, it is perhaps preferable that he continue to eat alone.

But consider that Smith, though sharing Jones' more rudimentary conception of what it means to eat, considers this basic experience significantly enhanced by an Other's

presence; that, for Smith, eating alone is not only dull and unstimulating, but also alters the interest in eating that Smith may have. This would not mean that Smith would be incapable of eating alone (by necessity), but only that she would find it difficult to comprehend anyone's clear preference for doing so. Smith has been convinced by an entirely different set of beliefs that eating ought "naturally" involve an assortment of attendant experiences, impossible to achieve in solitude. Learning the Other's tastes and preferences, the order of serving a particular meal, and sharing items from the Other's plate, all count as significant to Smith's eating experience. So do communicating (to this Other) Smith's own tastes and--perhaps--her desire to make plans for eating together exclusively in the future.

It is obvious that from the standpoints of both Smith and Jones, there is less disagreement on the issue of what it means to eat than on the matter of how, and under what circumstances, this "eating activity" is properly to take place. But if we admit that the pragmatic reality of one's "eating experience" necessitates one's actually getting something to eat, then the how of accomplishment is relatively unimportant.

But if this is true, then it makes no sense to say of either Smith or Jones that the one has eaten "better" than

the other, or to pose the question as to which of the two agents has actually eaten. If Jones, faced with the prospect of sharing his meal, becomes so distressed as to make his "eating" impossible, then it would prove counter-productive for us to insist, in his case, that eating ought involve "at least two." If, likewise, Smith finds herself only staring at her plate in the absence of a dinner companion, then it is advisable that someone be invited to share her meal. Need either choice be permanent and exclusive of the other? It would not seem so. There are those who might, like Jones, choose eating alone as a means for perfecting--in private--those skills which would otherwise be unsuccessfully demonstrated in public; or there might be those who, like Smith, find that variations upon preparing a standard meal for others can fundamentally alter the course of preparing the same meal for themselves.

In the case of Smith and Jones, what counts as "having eaten" has basically to do with getting food. The observable behaviors (mouth-opening, chewing, etc.) are significant, but only insofar as they point in the direction of distinguishing it from observably similar sorts of activities (e.g., gum-chewing, choking, gasping for air, etc.). Mouth-opening, chewing, etc. are part of the performance, but are not to be confused with whatever purposes there are to eating; neither are they in any way

necessary and/or sufficient guarantees that "eating" is the activity that has taken place.

Those differences alleged to exist in the preferred eating behaviors of Smith and Jones, mirror the misconceived differences between unitary and binary conceptions of sex. On re-evaluation, the initial disparity between one's eating alone or in the company of others fails to be as important as somehow managing to get oneself fed; and this, only after an expressed desire that one get something to eat. Similarly, with an eye to the fact that sexual activity involves the promotion of sensations agent-identified as "sexually pleasurable," the question whether these sensations emerge relative to some Other or are self-directed does not mitigate against their being sexual. Focusing on the distinctions between the two proposals only obscures the similarity of their intent. Masturbation is no more disqualified as sex, than is eating alone disqualified as eating. Only if we begin by building "the Other" into our understandings of both sex and eating, is it possible to conclude anything to the contrary. If we begin by acknowledging that (just as eating is quite basically a matter of consuming food) the idea of sex is linked to the inducement of sexual pleasure, then the number of persons involved in these sensations' production ceases to be a matter of primary significance.

But while questions of qualitative difference are easily dismissable, those of primacy, i.e., of proximity to a paradigm case, are not. While we may choose to discuss the paradigm cases of both unitary and binary sex (or, the analogous cases of eating behaviors preferred by Smith and Jones) we might find it more useful to discuss--as paradigmatic of sexual activity itself--the inducement of those "sexually pleasurable" sensations on the basis of which we assess the activity. If what counts as sex is at base a matter having to do with inducing sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable, then we can speak of one, rather than two paradigm cases. The other, binary case, is not less sexual but less paradigmatic. Just as Smith's eating activity is no less an eating activity than Jones', those who "have sex" with themselves are no less having sex, than those who perform the same act with others.

Failure to relinquish the binary conception of sex, and specifically the view of sex that would have us require the existence of a participatory Other, has led philosophical conceptions of sex to place entirely too much importance on sex as an experience one has with Others. In what follows, Chapter IV, I will demonstrate how the philosophies of Sartre and Dworkin were both influenced by this aberrant ideal, and how relinquishing this ideal would

have significantly altered the negative conceptions of sex that each proposes.

CHAPTER IV

DWORKIN AND SARTRE: TWO PHILOSOPHIES OF SEX

In Intercourse,¹ radical feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin delivers a scathing commentary on the act she takes to be at the very root of women's oppression. Rather than give credence to those views whereby intercourse is alternately seen as an enhancement to intimacy, or as a means to heterosexual (inter-personal) physical or emotional "communion"; rather, also, than merely echo the longstanding feminist rhetoric of men's social, economic and psychological dominance over women, Dworkin's focus is upon the effects she sees to flow from the mere nature of an act that allows the penetration of one person's body by another. It is from this act of penetration that Dworkin argues a basis for the continued subjugation of women; a subjugation whose basis is intercourse. Utilizing references drawn primarily--though not exclusively--from religious and secular literature, Dworkin argues her thesis through the book's three divisional headings: "Intercourse in a Man-Made World," "The Female Condition," and "Power, Status and Hate."

¹Andrea Dworkin. Intercourse. New York: Free Press, 1987. All references to Dworkin, unless otherwise indicated, are to this text and are given in parentheses.

Dworkin's "Intercourse in a Man-Made World"

Her first Chapter, "Intercourse in a Man-Made World," is Dworkin's vehicle for discussing five topics she takes as specifically relevant to the discussion of intercourse: 'repulsion,' 'skinlessness,' 'stigma,' 'communion' and 'possession.' The repulsion concept is borne out by extensive reference to the lives of Sophie and Count Leo Tolsty, and to Tolsty's The Kreutzer Sonata, written sometime after their marriage in 1862.² Used within the context of Dworkin's proposal, repulsion is (for males) a sort of reflexive misogyny. It involves an intense hatred of the female sex as sex; a hatred of sex as intercourse, and of the female as "she, the penetration of whom," the sex act becomes sex. But repulsion has its reflexivity in that there is disdain, not only for that one through whom intercourse occurs, but for that one who desires it as well.

The repugnance is not only rooted in ongoing desire, but also in satiation, it too being real, a discrete phenomenon, and aversive (Dworkin, 4).

In other words, the desire for intercourse is in and of itself loathsome--no less so than the act's accomplishment. The Kreutzer Sonata, censored by the state because it

²Dworkin notes the first public reading of Tolstoy's The Kreutzer Sonata as October, 1889. Dworkin refers to the Sonata as reprinted in Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy, Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (pp. 353-449), New York Perennial Library, 1967.

opposed intercourse (particularly intercourse in marriage),
Tolstoy--says Dworkin--

locates his repulsion not in the woman's body, not in her inherent nature, but in sexual intercourse, the nature of the act: what it means; the inequality of the sexes intrinsic to it; its morbid consequences to the dignity and self-esteem of men. (8)

The story begins with an on-train meeting of an outspoken young feminist, and an old man who represents their common past--as-rooted in male domination. Their discussion, which takes the form of an argument that ultimately includes the story's narrator, concerns the status/treatment of women, and specifically the question of what ought be the proper basis of marriage. Tolstoy's "feminist" argues for love, mutual respect and reciprocity as the only means of insuring that marriage will not become (for women) the equivalent of enslavement. The old man repudiates her view, claiming instead that for women the proper basis for marriage ought be obedience; obedience as rooted in an orthodox, effective system of male dominance and in which woman is kept compliant, housebound, servile and fearful of her husband's power to control through sheer physical force. He particularly disavows, as either constructive or real, the view that women ought have recourse to sex acts in which they are active, passionate participants; that women ought have a right to demand

intercourse as the expression of the physical love inherent to a marital relationship.

The repulsion of intercourse is voiced by a third passenger, identified through and questioned by the story's narrator. He is a man who has killed his wife, been tried and acquitted. Citing as reason for the murder the depravity of the sex act (a depravity which Dworkin insists has a "political meaning rooted in a comprehension, almost unique in male literature, of the fundamental simplicity and destructiveness of sexual exploitation"), the killer/husband insists that

the enslavement of women lies simply in the fact that people desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment . . . [and though the courts might seek to legalize her freedom and set her as man's equal] . . . there she is, still the same depraved slave, and the man still the same depraved slave-owner. (10)

But it is further in the killer/husband's own personal story--one which Dworkin sees to precisely parallel the real life relationship of Tolstoy to his wife, Sophie--that the repulsion of intercourse is clarified. For the husband, who conceives of his wife as one without status, only sees her as human--as someone warranting his love and understanding--after he has killed her. His hatred is directed, not toward the wife in her social/political powerlessness, perniciously transformed (by the killer/husband) into revenge-as-power. This revenge is experienced by the killer/husband as the

sexual dominance of men by women who effectively control the sex that men need (15). Thus begins a vicious cycle of hatred, repulsion and sex-desire, and from sex-desire to hatred and repulsion. The killer/husband documents a hatred of his wife which becomes the impetus for sex; not a desire for sex as the reflection of love, but a desire wrought of the hatred of sex-desire. By Dworkin's interpretation,

The woman must be reduced to being this sexual object to be pleasing to men who will then, and only then, want . . . her; once she is made inferior in this way, she is sexual to men and attracts them to her, and a man's desire for her--to use her--is experienced by him as her power over him. (16)

The inferiority of women is established with the loss of virginity and so, to Dworkin, is inexorably rooted in the act of intercourse. Intercourse is similarly the beginning of women's inequality, and it is precisely this inequality which intercourse (here, to Dworkin, "the fuck")³ requires. And so, in killing his wife, the husband ends the anguish of

³It is perhaps an overriding criticism of Dworkin's view of heterosexual sexuality as expressed in Intercourse, that she either intentionally or coincidentally assimilates intercourse with 'fucking.' But, even were we to ignore the more philosophical proposals of Kosak ("The Phenomenology of Fucking") and Moulton ("Sex and Reference") the two words have quite different semantic functions and correspondingly different implications for the acts they are taken to denote. That there are women who enjoy intercourse may, in fact, not be as problematic as Dworkin seems to assume, but that any person should find pleasure in "fucking" and its attendant demands for inferiority on the part of that one who accepts it, is a different matter altogether. It is unfortunate that Dworkin's extreme feminism does not allow for this distinction.

his failure at controlling her, and also his failure at controlling his sexual desire for her. Of Tolstoy himself, Dworkin concludes that

In art, he articulates with almost prophetic brilliance the elements that combine to make and keep women inferior, all of them originating, in his view, in sexual intercourse, because sexual intercourse requires objectification and therefore is exploitation. In life, he blamed and hated Sophie, feeling antagonism and repulsion. (19)

On the strength of her interpretation, Tolstoy's killer/husband--not unlike the author himself--hated the wife with whom he had intercourse; in fact, hated her because of the intercourse with her, while

. . . For Sophie, being used, being hated, being fucked, meant loving him as a wife was supposed to. (20)

In "Skinless, Dworkin inquires into the effects of intercourse for both males and females. She begins by noting as fact, the degree of (hopefully mutual) vulnerability required by those relationships which assume a sexual dimension. Her beginning observation, that

Sometimes the skin comes off in sex . . . the people merge, skinless . . . The body loses its boundaries. (21)

intends reference to intercourse as making impermissible (or otherwise distorting) the qualities of intermittent distance, withdrawal and privacy demanded by all human beings.

In sexual intercourse the boundaries required for the self-consciousness of one's human-being, are stripped away; and they are stripped away precisely as the result of that impulse to have oneself thrust head-first into the other's space. But the obsession with, and absorption in the other is precarious. The other might, after all, choose to withdraw and instead opt for a return to personal space. Dworkin equates this 'return' with that to the boundaries of one's own skin.

The skin is a line of demarcation, a periphery, the fence, the form, the shape, the first clue to identity . . . it is a thin veil separating the outside from the inside . . . [it] is our human mask . . . the formal limits of a body, a person . . . (22)

Since on her terms intercourse is "the self in the act of meeting the world" through the other, this other embodies not self-privacy, but everything outside it; intercourse creates a need for others outside the individual self and who are in the world as separate. So the tension created by intercourse is of being "skinless" in a world where this same skin is the necessary boundary of self to others, and of self to world.

For the development of this concept, Dworkin draws on three works by author Kobo Abe. In The Face of Another, a man who has been facially disfigured assumes a mask so that his wife will not find him repulsive. In wearing the mask, and particularly in having her discover him as an other

during intercourse, he hopes to "discover" her as she is for others.

. . . he wants to know her, he wants sex beyond the constraints of his identity, but first his real face, and then the mask, keep it from happening; his wife has sex with the mask, but it is not breakthrough or abandonment; in the end, she has known him all along-- it is his selfishness, she says, that keeps him from getting outside his skin and near her . . . (24)

Because he insists it is the mask that causes the distance, and because he cannot overcome the humiliation of her having known and having had intercourse with this "mask"--which for him epitomizes the skin-real face of another--he shoots her.

In The Woman in the Dunes, a man held captive by "dunes people" realizes that the impersonal, random nature of fate is the same sort which gives reality--if not dignity--to the nature of human passion. The sand in the dunes becomes life itself, and at the same time the crushing, abrasive reality of sex-as-sexual response. In this fictionalized society, there is little for men to do but accept the necessities of woman's life in the dunes; a life defined by "work, sex, a home, (and) the common goal of keeping the community from being destroyed by the sand." (29) Moreover, men are doomed to these tasks without recourse to personality, freedoms or power. For the dunes people

The sex is not cynical or contaminated by voyeurism; but . . . realizable in a world of dangerously unsentimental physicality. Touch, then, becomes what

is distinctly, irreducibly human; the meaning of being human. (29)

For Abe, touch is not only this "meaning of being human," but also "the way of knowing what human being is, the way of knowing others, the world, anything outside the self, anyone else who is also human . . . the basis of human knowledge (and) of human community (31). Abe's The Box Man gives up his skin to live in a box and the box becomes, for him, the skin that has been discarded. For the sake of intercourse, he emerges from his box 'skinless,' his lover in the relative skinless state called nudity.

. . . (the) skin is the mask that love strips away; in love, there is the pleasure of removing the mask, so that the lover is truly naked, beyond disguise, unable to hide. (25)

But it is precisely in this skinless state that the man finds himself to be most vulnerable. Not only is he vulnerable in the sense that--in erasing those boundaries that allow for admitting the other--he had made possible the hurtful invasion of himself by any other, but also in the sense that this "invasion" is so commonplace as to simply lie within the realms of social expectation, i.e., in the sense that "skinless" is what one ought to be in intimate relations with others.

Intercourse creates a need for society, for humans outside oneself; it pushes one toward others, who are in the world, separate, different. But that society imposes itself--by creating the necessity for identity, by making rules--between two humans, keeping them separate, even during intercourse. (23)

Skinlessness, then, becomes synonymous with the state of consciousness required for the possibility of intercourse. But it is a requirement whose attendant conditions of vulnerability both destroy (individual) and establish (social) identity.

Dworkin's concept of sexual "Stigma" bears out the ill-fated effects of intercourse in this "skinless" state, especially for those who become compulsively attached to intercourse as a sexual activity.

Inside a person, sexual desire--or need or compulsion--is sometimes experienced as a stigma, as if it marks a person . . . a sign (differentiating) the individual carrying it, both attracting and repelling others, in the end isolating the marked one, who is destroyed by the intensity and ultimate hopelessness of a sexual calling. (35)

Given the radical focus of this author, it is not surprising that Dworkin locates examples of her stigmatized ones in the personification of women--those who, by her defining, are societally issued, e.g., "made," for sex. She draws three examples from contemporary literature to illustrate this obsession with sexual desire: Tennessee Williams' Sarafina from The Rose Tatoo; Alma, from his Summer and Smoke; and, from A Streetcar Named Desire, the ill-fated Blanche DuBois. Each character experiences social disapprobation and eventual downfall directly related to an act (or acts) of sexual intercourse. Each is thereby marked for shame and discredit (35); each is stigmatized, not only by a "vocation

for sex," but also by a "vocation for human consequence-- loss, suffering, despair and madness." (40) Each, moreover, is a character created out of Williams' own obsession with the idea that "to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place [oneself] in the vulnerable position" of being a possible if not probable loser of what one most desperately wants (45).

Dworkin's treatment of sexual "communion" has as its dual focus the denunciation of intercourse as a seemingly unquestioned, universally accepted *prima facie* good, and the failure of common analyses to take stock of the connection between sex and the complexity of human identity. For the first of these foci, she takes as sufficient evidence for her point that the argument concerning sex--as conducted between the political Right and Left--has less to do with sex per se, than with the act's moral permissibility outside marriage or between same-sex couples. Even conservative Christian literature, most notably Marabel Morgan's The Total Woman, has maintained that neither the husband's attitude toward sex, nor the virtue of the act itself, ought be questioned; at issue, rather, is the married woman's willingness to fulfill whatever fantasy-conception of sex that her husband might happen to have. Although, as opposed to this view, the Left could be said to prefer either a greater assortment of partners or a same-sex partner to the

Right's heterosexual arrangement, it remains Dworkin's contention that the "simple-minded prosex chauvinism of Right and Left" ignore the real meaning, the tangledness and the complexity of human consciousness. With this as impetus for her second focus, she utilizes the words of James Baldwin to argue that

It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn't, by an act of imagination, made one's own. (48, emphasis mine)

It is on this basis that Dworkin observes the lack of 'imagination' in the fetishness of mere conformity to a sexual norm. Imagination, she says, distinguishes itself from the "fantasy" of more common sexual analyses in that, whereas the latter repetitiously resounds upon a given theme, the former aggressively seeks "new meanings, new forms . . . complex and emphatic values and acts" specifically chosen by the participating agent. Imagination is introduced into Dworkin's scheme, not simply as a preferred option, but as a matter of ontological necessity.

The person with imagination is pushed forward by it into a world of possibility and risk, a distinct world of meaning and choice; not into a nearly bare junkyard of symbols manipulated to evoke rote responses. (48, emphasis mine)

The implications of and for intercourse are seen as extending from the act itself and into the realm defined by individual self-knowledge; to ignore, to miss the connection

between intercourse and the complexity of human identity can only result in devastation and self-destruction for that individual.

To underscore the importance placed on the concept of communion, Dworkin parades a few of the more tragic characters from two of Baldwin's novels--Another Country and Givanni's Room--whose destroyed identities (either self-chosen or imposed by an uncompromising society) render them incapable of disclosure. And it is the absence of this disclosure, which renders them incapable of reaching another through the physical act of intercourse. Only with the "grace," she says, of self-knowledge can intercourse be communion; become

. . . violent feeling transformed into tenderness . . .
 . [become] larger than an individual personality . . .
 a radical experience of seeing and knowing,
 experiencing possibilities within one that had been
 hidden. (60)

In the last of her chapters dealing with "Intercourse in a Man-Made World," the point is raised that intercourse is, more often than not, both written about and comprehended as a form or as an act of 'possession.' It is an act described, not only in terms of male dominance, but as a peculiar physical relation warranting a semantics of ownership and surrender; of rule and occupation; of taking and being taken; of having and having (or being) had. (63)

Although arguments are offered that would have us see

intercourse as variously a matter of either divine or biological necessity, it is Dworkin's view that both conceptual schemes are unerringly loyal to the creed of male dominance. Both, on her view, maintain intercourse to be in some elemental (as opposed to socialized) inexorable relation to the expression of male and female, of the presumed "essence" of masculinity and femininity.

In Theodore Van De Velde's Ideal Marriage, a proposal antedating Marabel Morgan's by nearly fifty years, the alleged asymmetry of sexual relations is used to force the conclusion that the objective of intercourse is the joint experience of maleness (power) as expressed through the absolute possession of the woman.⁴ (64) This "stunning logic of male supremacy," e.g., that men possess women during intercourse because in intercourse women are made to vicariously experience the power and the spirit of maleness, effectively demands the woman's disappearance as a discrete, autonomous individual. Dworkin questions why it is not the male, rather than the female, who ought be subjected to this theoretical disappearance/possession, since it is after all the male who enters; the male who fantasizes the terrors of

⁴Dworkin's page 190: Georges Bataille, a philosopher of the erotic, defines eroticism in terms of the death of the female who, in intercourse, is dissolved. "The passive female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. . . ." (from Bataille's Death and Sensuality, p. 11).

castration, who is engulfed. Her answer, is that the vocabulary intrinsic to the act's presumed elemental reality--a reality described in terms of an unchanging relation between male and female--simply refuses to allow it. Whenever the 'possession' of the male has at all been suggested, the consequences for women have been particularly disastrous. These episodes of possession (historically shrouded, for instance, in allegations of witchcraft) are those that traditionally characterize women as evil, carnal beings; capable of sexually exploiting men while they sleep--a male charge of rape--without his consent and in a way violative, even corruptive of the expected dominance of females by males. (66)

Dworkin contrasts this infrequent, episodic and fantasized sexual possession of men with the more common institutionalized possession of women, and concludes that the latter is more pedestrian; women are 'possessed' as wives, as prostitutes, as sexual and reproductive servants. Establishing the synonymy of possession with ownership, and of ownership with "being fucked"--though not necessarily with intercourse--Dworkin argues that it is nonetheless this "fucking" which establishes the quality of the relationship. The level of one's dominance over another, or as she would have it, the specific "geography" (best defined as an equation of extent in relation to rationale) of women's

possession, can take either of two forms. Possessed as an individual, she is a gender-issued expression of private ownership; a single slave in direct relation to a single, distinct and recognizable master. Or the fuck, the possession, can be an impersonal expression of a collective right to all members of her gender-assignment.

Now according to Dworkin, the reality of the fuck and its corresponding possession is mistakenly experienced by women as the intensity of male desire, and the desire itself as the standard by which her own individual worth is to be gauged.

Being that person who is owned and fucked means becoming someone who experiences sensuality in being possessed . . . And therefore, being possessed is phenomenologically real for women; and sex itself is an experience of diminishing self-possession, an erosion of self. (67)

Sufficiently captured in this first, integral part of Dworkin's treatise, is the view of "Intercourse in a Man-Made World" that she would have us accept: that men collectively exhibit a repugnance toward women, rooted not only in sexual desire, but also its satiation (repulsion); that intercourse requires, yet is inherently incapable of insuring, mutual vulnerability (skinlessness); that some are societally marked as too enamored of sex (stigma), while others, in a destructive venture against self-knowledge, exploit sex as a means to some other end or end-set (communion); that intercourse is a means by which men

express their dominance of women through both the physical act of penetration, and the specific rules of the society/community which exists to perpetuate male power (possession).

The Female Condition" and "Power,
Status and Hate"

So strongly is Dworkin's point made in the previous section, that the remaining two--"The Female Condition" (Chapters 6 and 7) and "Power, Status and Hate" (Chapter 8 and 9) do little more than flesh out the implications for those themes that have already been developed. "Virginity" (Chapter 6), by Dworkin's rendering a preferred and sacred state of being held in defiance of the woman-as-accessible model (96), can be directly drawn from her discussion of sexual stigma; Bran Stoker's Mina epitomizing the new virginity, his Lucy the essence of the old (118). The same theme emerges in "Occupation/Collaboration" (Chapter 7), when she contends that

There is no analogue anywhere among subordinated groups of people to this experience of being made for intercourse; for penetration, entry, occupation. (123, emphasis mine)

To be "made for sex" is to be stigmatized, and to be stigmatized is in opposition to virginity. Likewise (in the same "Occupation/Collaboration" chapter), her statement to the effect that

A human being has a body that is inviolate; and when

it is violated it is abused . . . There is never a real privacy of the body that can coexist with intercourse; with being entered. (122)

she echoes much the same sentiment as was expressed in her chapter on "Possession." Perhaps more revelatory of the "Occupation/Collaboration" theme, though no less radical than the theme's basis in "Possession,"⁵ is that women adopt the language and hence the expressed reality of males, to either the detriment or total omission of any language that they might have labeled their own (134-135); the equivalent of a charge--given Dworkin's descriptions of, and questions raised about intercourse--of 'collaborating' with one's enemy.

But, basic to the collaboration scheme as envisioned, is what in Chapter 4 she refers to as the failure of intercourse to bring about sexual 'communion.' If, as Dworkin allows

In [intercourse], the deepest emotions one has about life as a whole are expressed . . . however random or impersonal the encounter. Rage, hatred, bitterness, joy, tenderness, even mercy, all have their home in this passion . . . (52)

and intercourse is also

⁵That there is an adoption of the language and the expressed reality of the more societally privileged Other is not new; neither its correlation to philosophy's application to matters of sex and human sexuality (see, for example, Baker, Moulton, et. al.). Only Dworkin's extreme view could have this otherwise understandable event seen in light of anything akin to an atypical sort of collaboration.

where, how, why [and] when these emotions become accessible as both self-knowledge and truth. (52)

then, given both the presumed inferiority of women ('Repulsion'; 'Possession') and the alleged interposition of a society that creates a need for others while simultaneously creating rules and conventions of gender to keep them apart (23), it is not surprising that she should hold so little hope for the attainment of sexual "Communion." Dworkin holds "Collaboration" to also be responsible for the undermining of values, vision and dignity held between women; saying, in essence, that it is difficult if not impossible for any woman to appreciate the worthwileness of any other woman, as long as all women are either altogether devalued, or only valued as sexual or progenitive agents. "Knowing one's own human value is fundamental to being able to respect others," (141) and since the ability to respect others is at the very crux of freedom, the failure to value oneself leads quite naturally to a failure to value the merits of freedom. 'Collaboration' is then for Dworkin more significant than a necessary effect of 'occupation.' It is an impediment to freedom. Since on her view

Collaboration by women with men to keep women civilly and sexually inferior has been one of the hallmarks of female subordination . . . (142)

and the collaboration has had the effect of driving women to take the initiative in their own self-destruction, Dworkin

concludes that intercourse, whatever it is, is not freedom.
(143)

In Dworkin's part III, "Power, Status and Hate," she speaks of "Law" (Chapter 8) as in complicity with the domination of women by men through the act of intercourse. Intercourse is, moreover, on her view less the private act we envision than one conducted in the public sphere.

Any act so controlled by the state, proscribed and prescribed in detail, cannot be private in the ordinary sense. [If] privacy is essentially a sphere of freedom immune from regulation by the state . . . intercourse has never occurred in private. (147)

Intercourse, which for its performance requires a society of at least two, is supported by a state whose primary concern--second only to self-preservation--is control. (148) But, for control to be assured there must be order, duties, hierarchies and assignments such that the state's interests are met. The state is then concerned, not only with the formation of society, but with its constitution as well, e.g., who it is that makes up the society, and of those that do, who--specifically--is best positioned to serve the interests of that society and hence of that state as well. Dworkin's answer, the basis for her arguments in this chapter on "Law," is that given our present society's predisposition toward male dominance, what this state seeks is control through gender; with priority given to increasing the interests of males and to the

diminished interests of females (except, of course, to the extent that the interests of the former can be served through satisfying those of the latter class). Although such laws are by no means limited to sexual experience, this would explain the overwhelming, often ludicrous set of laws prohibiting so presumably private an activity. Laws which

. . . create nature--a male nature and a female nature and natural intercourse . . . [while society] makes laws that say who will put what, where, when; and though folks keep getting it wrong, law helps nature out by punishing those who are not natural enough and want to put the wrong thing in the wrong place. (149)

This "assumed nature," synonymous both with Van De Velde's "primitive urges" and the notion of an elemental as opposed to a socialized expression of one's sexuality, finds expression in laws forbidding those sex acts which break down gender barriers while simultaneously licensing those that heighten gender polarity. Of these, laws forbidding homosexual activity are perhaps the most notorious. Seen as an activity whose disparagement is based in the vilification of male "nature," homosexuality defies precisely that which the elemental view of sex-difference would have us accept; that we are, by either biological or divine order, inherently masculine or feminine, dominant or passive, made to enter or made for entry. Though de Sade may have been correct in his assessment of the human sexual condition, e.g., that there are several points on the body capable of sustaining penile penetration and that either of these is as

good as any other, sodomy is in all forms still "prohibited" by law. That one area of the (or a particular woman's) body ought be sanctioned for penetration and others not, would be irrational were it not for some meaning attached to the act of intercourse itself; a meaning necessarily absent in other expressions of sexual interaction. Dworkin opts for the obvious answer here, maintaining that

. . . sensual pleasure is not what distinguishes homosexual sodomy from heterosexual [intercourse]: the woman bearing the child does. (155)

but avoids the more obvious, frequently offered conclusion that intercourse is therefore only for the point of procreation. Her view, rather, is that homosexual sodomy is condemnable because it treats men as if they were women, and only women ought--by both biological and divine imperatives--be the objects of intercourse. Similarly, so that the aims of gender might be advanced, there are prohibitions against wasting sperm in non-procreative sex acts (i.e., masturbation) because pleasure does not necessarily advance power. The same laws existing to keep men from intercourse with other men, are those that legislate women as the act's proper recipients and insure the advancement of gender polarity. Dworkin's conception of intercourse is of a "legally defined hierarchy in which the one who fucks has sovereignty over that one who submits";

(163) the very act of submission denoting an inferior class status reinforced by and through law.

In her final chapter (9) "Dirt/Death," Dworkin's total focus is this same conception of woman's inferiority, imbued now with questions as to whether genuine affection can be felt for those who accept their own debasement. Defining inferiority as "the deep and destructive devaluing of a person . . . a shredding of dignity and self-respect . . . an imposed exile from human worth and recognition," (169-70) she notes that basic to any such conception is the view of one's "inferiority" as somehow embodying filth; without it (filth) as a motivating actor, the debasement of the person, the race, the class or gender group is--on her view--not possible.

Dworkin Summary

What distinguishes Dworkin's proposal is not the abysmal prospect for heterosexual relationships, or even the negative, highly politicized and gender-polarized status accorded intercourse in the scheme she envisions. Given her self-acknowledged radical feminism, there is nothing of a revelatory nature in her having adopted either of these views. Neither is her overall proposal likely to be 'distinguished' for its having consistently avoided the error of hastening a conclusion, where a premise may actually have been more appropriate. But, in having argued

for conflict as actually inherent to the sexual relationship (i.e., as specifically inherent to 'hetero-sexed,' sexual relationships) she manages more than a mere descriptive analysis of how these relationships are; though it is arguable that Dworkin actually accomplishes the task of answering the question why a sexual mode of being with (or for) others should be accomplished with such difficulty, she does accomplish the task--difficult in an for itself--of endowing the question with some relative significance.

Not unlike Shulamith Firestone, whose The Dialectic of Sex preceded Intercourse by sixteen years, Dworkin locates the difficulty with heterosexual relations in a power disparity taken to exist between males and females, expressed in the act of intercourse, and further reinforced by the laws and customs of (what one is led to suppose are) male dominated societies. But if this were all that her treatise offered, we would only have yet another feminist 'polemic' on the diminished social, legal and economic status of women. What Dworkin argues, beyond this "given" of feminist rhetoric, is that the subjugation of women has a basis that belies the cultural, the socio-political or the economic bases. The true subjugation of women, she says, is rooted in something no less significant as her physical being; in nothing so overlooked as the fact of her body's allowing for penetration. So, long before male dominance--

though doubtless, on her view, reinforced by it--are the themes of repulsion, skinlessness, stigma, communion and possession as underscoring the anguish of heterosexual intercourse. As if the overwhelmingly negative nature of the act she describes were not enough (i.e., only skinlessness and the failure to achieve communion appear to be even remotely avoidable), she grants only two levels of response for women (as virgins, as collaborators) and, for males, a response that the single world 'Hatred' can hardly approximate.

Although her discussion of sexual-being as expressed via intercourse is conducted without benefit of a specific ontology, that intercourse is discussed in terms of an ongoing/mutual suspicion and animosity between the sexes is significant--if only for what she apparently omits to consider. In arguing that the oppression of women is rooted in the physical act of intercourse (and, in fact, that an elected virginity itself constitutes a special--albeit more often temporary--condition of being female), she effectively maintains intercourse as both the necessary and sufficient condition of the oppression women are alleged to suffer (8, 14). But this is not the same as her argument that the denigration of women is correlative to her sex; to, that is, her sexual being as synonymous with entry (133, and following). If, as the first of these theses maintains,

intercourse (qua penetration) is the absolute condition for maintaining women's oppression ($0 \equiv I$), then it would be logical to assume the denial of intercourse (i.e., penetration) to entail the denial of the oppression that it--penetration--entails ($\sim I \supset \sim 0$). That is, that:

1. $0 \equiv I$
2. $(0 \supset I) \bullet (I \supset 0)$ 1, Equiv.
3. $0 \supset I$ 2, Simp.
4. $\sim I \supset \sim 0$ 3. Trans.

But given what I contend to be her second thesis, one which she argues concurrently with the first, it is not the actual penetration incurred in intercourse that is problematic; instead, Dworkin now contends that

She [woman] is defined by how she is made . . . [her body being] . . . synonymous with entry; and intercourse . . . has consequences to her being that may be intrinsic, not socially imposed. (123, emphasis mine)

Now in the first of these, what I shall call Dworkin's lesser, but explicit thesis, the oppression of women is rooted in the physical act of intercourse. She would have us believe that this physical act, and women's submission to it, is the basis on which men's hatred of women is formed--a hatred which, according to Dworkin, subsequently takes the form of a presumed male dominance--fostering power and status, and wherein "he who enters" is made superior to that one who allows bodily entrance. We would expect, given this

equation of intercourse to oppression as expressed in this thesis, to find that for those women determined to forego intercourse, there might (for them, as a particular subclass) be some possibility of similarly foregoing the attendant oppression. The problematic presented by the "first" of her theses ought, then, be resolvable--and it at least seems to be so until the conclusion of her "Virginity" chapter. There, and in her "Occupation/Collaboration" chapters (from which the above quote was taken), Dworkin expresses what I take to be a more radical, albeit less explicit thesis; specifically, that women's oppression, rather than merely being rooted in the physical act of intercourse, is instead rooted in the physical being of women themselves. Having argued women's oppression on the grounds of intercourse-as-penetration, Dworkin shifts her focus from the theorized consequences of actual acts of intercourse, to consequences of the act as inherently (i.e., physically) possible. This latter thesis not only disallows the possibility of resolution (though to be sure, Dworkin promises none), but also contradicts the first. If the bodies of women--as the second thesis suggests--are at issue, then the consequences alleged by Dworkin to flow from intercourse per se, cannot in theory be said to hold. Given this second thesis, intercourse is less a factor in women's oppression, than is the potential for intercourse in those

bodies physically capable of sustaining intercourse. Her conclusions for intercourse, i.e., for penetration-as-oppression are, given the first thesis, escapable; given the second however, there would be no escaping the conclusion that if oppression has less to do with an act than with the potential for that act's performance, women's bodies are synonymous with oppression whether or not intercourse ever takes place. If, moreover, the anus were to be given the same focus Dworkin allows the vagina, we would be left with the uncomfortable conclusion that--whether or not one chooses to use it--this bodily aperture would convey no lesser implications for potential exploitation, and the corresponding oppression.

But a second charge, equally applicable to either the first, or this second concurrent thesis, is that Dworkin takes as a priori precisely what her argument wants to prove. Neither of her theses here--either alone or in conjunction with the other--is able to sustain an argument for the inferiority/debasement of women through allegations to her physical sex or sexual activity, without a prior assumption of this sex or activity as inherently debase. An analogous argument will bear out my point.

Suppose that in a particular society women were allowed certain social, legal and economic advantages denied to men. In this society, intercourse would be described in

terms of "being engulfed" and the penis as synonymous with "engulfment." The women of this society would hate the men precisely because of their (i.e., the women's) ability to engulf them (the men), and pass this hatred on in the form of allegations that engulfment carried with it implications of inferiority, and so, that "he who allowed engulfment" was a willing participant in his own debasing. Of course, more men than not would allow themselves to be "engulfed" at some point in their lives, though those few who chose to abstain would be held in the highest regard both by those men who did not, and those women who nonetheless viewed the abstentions as violations of an essential male nature. But, belief in the connection between engulfment and inferiority would be so persistent, that even those who abstained were unable to escape the assessment of their inferiority; it was maintained, after all, that even the refusal to be engulfed did not alter the possibility of its occurrence. Since men by nature were made for "engulfing," their inherent inferiority was assured whether or not an actual "engulfing activity" ever in fact took place.

In this analogous society, as in Dworkin's view of our present one, the problem of alleging the inferiority of a particular group on the basis of its 'inferior' position in sexual activity, is not only arbitrary but also absurd. Unless one already has in mind which position and which

group is the inferior, the mere fact of voluntary intercourse is not likely to be terribly revealing. If it is in theory possible to explain prevailing social inequities by reference to sexual activity, we will have to look beyond a theory which takes as embodied in the activity, the very inferiority it seeks to explain.

Finally, Dworkin's concepts of 'repulsion,' 'skinlessness,' 'stigma,' 'communion' and 'possession' are less the exclusive province of relationships involving sexual intercourse than she seems willing to acknowledge. What she describes as 'repulsion,' for instance, can as easily be made applicable to encounters between members of differing racial or status groups, as to anything having to do with intercourse. "Skinlessness" and the failure at attaining 'communion' are equally descriptive of any relationship requiring mutual exchanges of respect and vulnerability, while 'stigma' and 'possession' as aptly attend any of those demanding zealous commitment to either an Other, or an ideal. In fact, it could be argued that the thread common to all Dworkin's concepts emerging from "Intercourse in a Man-made World" is similarly common to any assortment of other interpersonal relationships. It is the presence of the other, not sex itself, which ultimately proves problematic; the other, not sex itself, that prompts conflicting desires for privacy and personal disclosure, for

independence and security, for tenaciously "occupying" one's own space, while simultaneously hurtling oneself into that space "occupied" by another. In having de-emphasized the mundanity of conflictual relations with others in non-sexual contexts, Dworkin effectively creates a scenario wherein such conflicts occur only in sexual situations (and, we are at least led to presume) only when what is called 'sex' involves an other.

But even if we were to grant her the conclusion that intercourse is inexorably connected to our society's perceptions of gender identity--and specifically to implications for the inferiority and oppression of women) we would still be far from forging a necessary connection between these conclusions about intercourse and any conclusions about sex in general. Having fixed on a conception of sex that is binary, Dworkin's thesis fails to provide her theoretical room for distinguishing between problems inherent to sex, and those inherent to one's being with (or for) others. Moreover, since the 'other' in her sexual paradigm is not--at least for the most part⁶--a same

⁶It is perhaps worth noting that, although Dworkin manages to discuss neither masturbation nor lesbianism in the course of discussing intercourse, she makes several references to male homosexual activity. Ironically, she does not see that the negative effects of interpersonal sexual relations are exhausted by heterosexual relationships, or that these sexual 'disasters' occur only when the matter of gender 'identity' is involved. That even homosexual lovers may find in one another "the dwelling

sex partner, she is forced to contend with the additional complexities imposed by what each partner believes to be the case with the other's socio-sexual identity.

Dworkin's explicit focus is admittedly the heterosexual activity called intercourse, and although she makes not a single reference to masturbation her thesis would not--under the context of binary sexual relations--demand that she do so. But given my proposal for the analysis of activities warranting assessment as 'sexual,' it is not immediately clear that the type activities Dworin cites would even fit this criteria. To be sure, it is not altogether inconceivable that someone might seek to elicit sexually pleasurable sensations through means that involve loathing, contempt and sex-hatred (as directed toward the other), or even self-degradation. In fact, Dworkin notes a particular case from Sartre's Anti-Semite and Jew that speaks of just this arousal/aversion syndrome. According to Sartre, while

In Berlin [he] knew a Protestant in whom sexual desire took the form of indignation. The sight of women in bathing suits aroused him to fury; he willingly encouraged that fury and passed his time at swimming

place that each had despaired of finding" (51); that even these lovers can find themselves either facing or together creating issues relative to the twin spectors of dominance and power disparity in their relationship, is quite revealing. It would seem to point in the direction of the need to question whether relationships in general, rather than heterosexual relationships in particular are harbingers of conflict.

pools. The Anti-Semite is like that, and one of the elements of his hatred is a profound sexual attraction toward Jews. (178-79)

But while it may not be inconceivable that someone's sexually pleasurable sensations might emerge from this arousal/aversion syndrome, the sensations taken to count as sexually pleasurable would at best be secondary to those primary sensations taken to foster the aversion. Dworkin's commentary on male-dominance and sex-hatred, is not unlike Sartre's assessment of the hypocritical Protestant; the participants in her scheme of sexual intercourse are made to seem as interested in actual sexual activity, as is Sartre's character in merely languishing about the pool. If sexual activities are those that not only involve the promotion of sexually pleasurable sensations for oneself but (in the binary arrangement) for one's other as well, then it is questionable whether either of the two conditions is met by the activity Dworkin describes. The other's being-in-sex, as previously argued, adds another dimension to sexual activity and so to its accomplishment. In choosing to focus on sex as a necessary reflection of what she takes to be an elemental hatred of women by men, Dworkin presumes it similarly necessary that this sex-hatred be synonymous with the act of sex itself. But we not only lack compelling reasons for assuming that this is the case, but the assimilation of sex with so negative a set of emotions would

create a definition of sex that is far too narrow. If, contrarily, we begin with the assumption that sex has primarily to do with promoting those sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable, then not only is it unnecessary to associate sexual activity with anything having to do with gender, but the other need not at all be involved.

But, what Dworkin de-emphasizes in her consideration of the other in sex, Sartre carries to the opposite extreme.

Sartre's Self and Other

Sartre's ontological point of view develops from the basic premise that any thing called 'consciousness' must, of necessity, be a consciousness of something. Yet at the moment of our perception/consciousness of a thing, X, we are obliged to be both aware of it and at the same time (non-reflectively or non-positionally) aware of the awareness of it. To say, then, that "S is aware of X" is to say that "S is non-reflectively (or non-positionally) aware of itself as aware of X"; to say, however, that "S deliberately awares itself (or, is deliberately aware) of X," is to say that "S's awareness of itself as being aware of X, has the effect of positing itself (S) as conscious of X"--i.e., it is a reflective consciousness of itself as conscious of X.

Left unchecked, this scheme of awareness would have the individual's interpretation of the world be uncontested;

with one's perception of the world linked only to one's own possession of consciousness, individual consciousness would be little more than what is constituted by a consciousness of one's own apprehension of the world. In short, the awareness of a thing, X, would be the awareness of X by this particular consciousness, and the objects of one's awareness would be incapable of either confirming or denying the facticity of that individual's perception.

It is by ushering in the 'other' that Sartre avoids the consequences, if not the fact, of solipsism. For, even though it would be impossible to prove the other's existence, we can nonetheless be made aware that our awareness of others is essentially an awareness of our being made an object of their awareness. The other's existence is made a matter of 'factual' or 'contingent' necessity; we might just as well doubt our own existences as that of the other whose 'look,' unlike other objects in the subject's perceived world, is a reflection of the look that the subject reserves for it (i.e., the other).⁷ The fact remains that the other, if not proven to be a possessor of consciousness, effects the individual consciousness such that the individual is compelled to react to the other as it

⁷Jean-Paul Sartre. Being and Nothingness. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, pg. 234. Future references to Sartre will refer to this text, unless otherwise noted.

would not react to a mere object. Sartre says of this compulsion that

consciousnesses are directly supported by one another in a reciprocal imbrication of their being . . . [the Other] . . . is the one who is other than I . . . this Other is also a self-consciousness . . . In fact it is only in so far as each man is opposed to the other that he is absolutely for himself. Opposite the other and connoting the Other, each one asserts his right of being an individual . . . the road of interiority passes through the Other. But the Other is of interest to me only to the extent that he is another Me, a Me-object for Me, and conversely to the extent that he reflects my Me--i.e., is, in so far as I am an object for him. (236)

and further, that

. . . the Other's existence is necessary in order for me to be an object for myself. (242)

What, then, can be said of the Other's look? The Other's look has the effect of reducing me to an object. Whereas I might look upon other things as objects in the world, subject to my own unquestioned evaluation, the point at which I approach the Other, is the point at which I lose whatever evaluative priority I might have possessed. For, the Other also sees me, and in its seeing me I cease to be the voyeur or solitary activist I might have been. The Other's look has this effect: its point of view holds my own in check. Were this not the case, "my body, myself, would be designated as alienated." (353)

If I desire to reaffirm myself as a self-totaling entity, then I must make something of this Other whose look reduces me to shyness. Moreover, as "we are by no means

dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself but with reciprocal and moving relations," any relations with the Other--as concrete relations with the Other--are subject to conflict. For Sartre, conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others (364). In his chapter, "First Attitude Toward Others: Love, Language, Masochism," Sartre opines that

If we start with the first revelation of the Other as a look we must recognize that we experience our apprehensible being-for-others in the form of possession. I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret--the secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he possess(sic) me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me . . . the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes "there to be" a being which is my being. (364)

For Sartre, this tension results in a need to "stretch out one's hand and grab hold of this being presented to me as my being," but whose presentation is held off at a distance. But this can only mean that the Other, whose very being fixes me, has in some sense stolen my freedom--a freedom that is recoverable only through a fundamental project of absorbing the Other's freedom while at the same time leaving both my own (and the Other's) freedom intact. (365)

This project to act upon the other's freedom is at all times both conflictual and unrealizable. In much the same way, Sartre maintains that love is a conflict. (366) If the

Other's freedom is the foundation of my own being, then my own freedom is endangered. My own freedom, if it is to be recovered, must be reduced to a freedom subject only to my control. The lover, in wanting also to be loved, acts out a version of this same scenario; what the lover wishes to 'capture' is a consciousness. But, the desire to possess or capture the beloved is not the desire to possess the Other-as object; rather, to love the Other is to desire to possess the Other's freedom as freely given. (367)

Yet this "freely given freedom" is itself given to a series of conflicts that eventually reduce love to a contradiction. The lover cannot, after all, be contented with the form of free-freedom that was originally desired. Not only would a statement such as, "I love you because I promised to love you and I don't want to go back on my word" distress the beloved, but

. . . the lover demands a pledge, yet is irritated by a pledge. He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free. He wishes that the Other's freedom should determine itself to become love--and this not only at the beginning of the affair but at each instant--and at the same time he wants this freedom to be captured by itself, to turn back upon itself . . . so as to will its own captivity . . . [which captivity] . . . must be a resignation that is both free and yet chained in our hands. (367)

What, then, is it that the lover wishes to capture from the beloved? One answer, of course, is the consciousness of the Other. But, more than (or perhaps in addition to) this--

more than a "determinism of the passions or a freedom beyond reach," what one wants of the beloved is a freedom "which plays the role of a determinism of the passions . . . caught in its own role."

Ultimately, the lover's desire to be the whole world for the beloved is matched only by the desire that the beloved's whole world be this lover. Though the lover is, and consents to be an object for this lover, it is assumed that the beloved take no lesser a stance in relation to this one whose freedom and whose investment of consciousness determines the level of relation it is.

But as an object which the Other causes to come into being, my uneasiness takes two forms. First, wanting to be loved is an act of infecting the Other with my own facticity, and in doing so I condemn this Other to an ongoing project of recreating me as the condition of a freedom which submits itself and is engaged; it is, at any rate, to wish that a some-thing have pre-eminence over freedom itself--which wish contradicts the pre-eminence of freedom. The second phase of uneasiness occurs when it is apparent that the Other's conception of me is unlike my conception of myself. Expressions like, "God knows what I am for him" and "God knows what he thinks of me" really betray a confusion as to what the Other has made of me in his eyes, or what the Other's perception of me really is.

In fact, the Other's love of me makes me transcend myself. So, if I am 'in love,' I do not know and am uncomfortable with whom the Other has made me be--with whom, in the eyes of the Other, I am.

Sartrean love is ultimately destructive, and triply so. It fails, first, because love is in essence a deception and a reference to infinity, i.e., in that the act of loving is for him tantamount to wishing to be loved, and hence to wishing that the Other wish that I love him, and so on. As the amorous intention is an "ideal out of reach," (377) the more I am loved the more I lose my being, and it was of course my being that I had intended that love promote. Secondly, since the Other's awakening (from love) is at all times a possibility, I can at anytime be reduced by this Other to an object and so, am made perpetually insecure.⁸ In the third sense, my love for the Other is made relative by the existence of others. The others which are not the Other, make me constantly aware of their judgements and

⁸This tendency is no better treated than in Marilyn French's The Woman's Room (p. 362) when she gives the following account of one woman's awakening from 'love': ". . . one day, the unthinkable happens. You are sitting together at the breakfast table and you're a little hung over, and you look across at beloved, beautiful golden beloved, and beloved opens his lovely rosebud mouth showing his glistening white teeth, and beloved says something stupid. Your whole body stops midstream . . . your temperature drops. Beloved has never said anything stupid before. You turn and look at him . . . you're sure you misheard. You ask him to repeat. And he does . . ."

hence my feeling of pride might at any time be reduced to shame, or disillusionment or some other more negative set of feelings.

It is then, concludes Sartre, useless to attempt 'losing oneself' in the Other. For, to do so is to

. . . provoke a total despair and a new attempt to realize the identification of the Other and myself. Its ideal will then be the opposite of that which we have just described; instead of projecting the absorbing of the Other while preserving in him his otherness, I shall project causing myself to be absorbed by the Other and losing myself in his subjectivity in order to get rid of my own. This enterprise will be expressed concretely by the masochistic attitude. (377)

But masochism, even by Sartre's standards, is not love. Rather than "seeking to exist for the Other as the object-limit of his transcendence," the masochist insists on a project of making himself be treated as an object or instrument of the Other's use. Similarly, rather than attempting to capture the freedom of the beloved, the masochist's project is defined by a desire that its own freedom be freely engulfed by this Other. Moreover,

Masochism is an attempt, not to fascinate the Other by means of my objectivity but to cause myself to be fascinated by my objectivity-for-others; that is, to cause myself to be constituted as an object by the Other in such a way that I non-thetically apprehend my subjectivity as a nothing in the presence of the in-itself which I represent to the other's eyes. (378)

The specific failure of masochism is that it begs that one be fascinated by one's own alienation. Even though the masochist might attempt in any number of ways to make of

himself a ridiculous, comic or lifeless instrument, these things are done for the sake of the Other. It is, after all

. . . for the Other that he will be obscene or simply passive, for the Other that he will undergo these postures . . . [but] the more he tries to taste his objectively, the more he will be submerged by the consciousness of his subjectivity--hence his anguish. Even the masochist who pays a woman to whip him is treating her as an instrument and by this very fact posits himself in transcendence in relation to her.
(378-79)

Beyond this doom to failure, Sartre holds masochism to be a 'vice,' i.e., an activity which, by his definition, exhibits a "love of failure." It is significant to note, however, that he does not find it necessary to "describe the structures peculiar to vice," though he concludes this "First Attitude Toward Others" with a footnoted reference to at least one other act to be included in this category--exhibitionism.⁹

Indifference, Desire, Hate and Sadism

The failure of the first attitude toward the Other leads Sartre to postulate the existence of another; in this case, "Indifference, Desire, Hate and Sadism." If it is impossible to identify with the Other's consciousness through the intermediacy of object-ness, could it not be

⁹Ibid., 379: "Consistent with this description, there is at least one form of exhibitionism which ought be classed among masochistic attitudes. for example, when Rousseau exhibits to the washerwomen "not the obscene object but the ridiculous object,' Cf. Confessions, Ch. III.

possible to posit the self-in-freedom as directly confronting the Other's freedom, i.e., to turn deliberately toward the Other and meet the Other's stare as a being who is also free? To Sartre, it seems that this project must also fail. For, as soon as I confront the Other's stare it ceases to become a simple stare that I see, but instead an other-as-object. (380) I cannot succeed at appropriating the Other's freedom using this tac. If, however, I choose--by looking at the Other's look--to build my subjectivity upon the collapse of the Other's subjectivity, then my specific attitude toward Others will be one of indifference. In this mode of being, the individual chooses to deal with Others as though blind to their actual existence. In practicing a sort of a-factual solipsism, says Sartre,

I act as if I were alone in the world. I brush against 'people' as I brush against a wall; I avoid them as I avoid obstacles. Their freedom-as-object is or me only their 'coefficient of adversity.' (380)

Although the mode of indifference carries with it the relative 'advantages' of reassurance and self-confidence (e.g., because I am not made ill at ease by the Other's look; because I am in a state opposite to those called 'shyness' or 'timidity'; because I do not sense myself as being 'outside'), it nonetheless fails at resolving either of the fundamental projects whose resolution is intended by relations with Others: 1) first, that of really providing protection against the Other's freedom; and 2) secondly,

that of making me my own totality, i.e., of making me complete in the face of the realization that only through apprehending the Other's freedom am I, myself, made free.

But, given (1), the failure of indifference is that the act of avoiding the Other's look merely throws me back upon the resources of my own subjectivity--that is, I lose the 'check and balance' of the Other as a subject whose interpretation of the world must, by necessity, hold my own in check; and 2) the fact of ignoring, so to speak, the existence of the Other (Sartre's own term is 'blindness') merely has the effect of making me more aware of his real existence, i.e., that ignoring the Other carries the danger of having this Other's look "alienate me behind my back." It is, then, that this project, though capably sustained for prolonged periods of time, is ultimately doomed to failure.

(381-82)

The project defined by one's "getting hold of the Other's free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me" is sexual desire. (382) Sexual desire, far from being a phenomenon specifically classified among the "psycho-physiological reactions" is, for Sartre, the original mode of realizing Being-for-Others. Far from being in strict correlation with the mere nature of our sexual organs, for Sartre,

Just as the sex organs are a contingent and particular formation of our body, so the desire which corresponds

to them would be a contingent modality of our psychic life; that is, it would be described only on the level of an empirical psychology based on biology. (383)

To speak, then, of a 'sex instinct' is to speak of desire and the psychic structures referring to it. Though sexual desire is more often understood as a "fact of consciousness in direct connection with the sexual organs" it is for Sartre problematic that a For-itself should be only 'accidentally' sexual--that is, by the pure contingency of one's having a body that must, by the conditions stipulated of 'human reality,' be specified as either 'masculine' or 'feminine.' On this point, he questions whether we can

. . . admit that this tremendous matter of the sexual life comes as a kind of addition to the human condition? . . . It is evident that if sexuality derives its origin from sex as a physiological and contingent determination of man, it can not be indispensable to the being of the For-Others . . . Man, it is said, is a sexual being because he possesses a sex. And if the reverse were true? If sex were only the instrument and, so to speak, the image of a fundamental sexuality? If man possesses a sex only because he is originally and fundamentally a sexual being as a being who exists in the world in relation with other men? (383)

As justification for his point, Sartre notes that infantile sexuality certainly precedes the mature development (and, we need suppose, the knowledgeable utilization) of the sex organs; that, moreover, both eunuchs and elderly men do not cease to feel sexual desire. To Sartre, one's ability to utilize the sex organs to bring about fertilization and/or

enjoyment, is but one phase and one aspect of our sexual lives. For although he would maintain that there is only one mode of sexuality with the possibility of satisfaction (that represented by 'developed,' e.g., adult, sexuality), he admits that other modes of sexuality (e.g., those that do not resolve themselves in satisfaction) do exist, and

. . . if we take these modes into account we are forced to recognize that sexuality appears with birth and disappears only with death. (383-84)

Whatever sexual desire then is, it is not an experience/phenomenon capably explained by reference to the sex organs alone. Rather, Sartre argues that if sexual desire is to be understood, its understanding must emerge--not from an exclusive understanding of bodily functions per se, but from reference to our being-in-the-world and to being-for-others. To "desire a human being, not an insect or a mollusk" is to desire an Other as the Other is, and as the individual is in the world.

On the assumption, then, that there is a fundamental question which attaches to human sexuality, it is the question whether sexuality is: 1) a contingent accident bound to our physiological nature; or 2) a necessary structure of being-for-itself-for-others. Sartre's answer (which he takes as demonstrating the power of his ontology) is that the dialectic of self-other can explicate the

experienced structure of sexual desire, for he maintains that

. . . ontology can decide the question only by determining and fixing the meaning of sexual existence for-the-Other. To have sex means . . . to exist sexually for an Other who exists sexually for me . . . The first apprehension of the Other's sexuality in so far as it is lived and suffered can only be desire; it is by desiring the Other [or by discovering myself as incapable of desiring him] or by apprehending his desire for me that I discover his being-sexual. Desire reveals to me simultaneously my being-sexed and his being sexed, my body as sex . . . therefore in order to decide the nature and ontological position of sex we are referred to the study of desire. (384)

But what is desire, to Sartre? This new question can be answered only by delimitation, i.e., by asking, "Desire of what?"

First abandoned, he says, are the companion notions that by 'desire' is meant either pleasure, or the desire of pain's cessation. How, after all, does the desiring subject get so far as to 'attach' his desire to a particular object? How is it that desiring a particular person differs from desiring our sexual satisfaction? Rather than taking this path toward discovery, it is better that we define desire by its transcendent object; (385) it is similarly inaccurate, claims Sartre, to define desire as a desire for 'physical possession' of the desired object, if what we mean by desire, is a desire to "make love to" this desired Other. If desire for the desired Object/Other is--say, painful and/

or fatiguing, the sexual act has the effect of momentarily freeing us from desire, but here it is necessary that the desire be itself posited as an expression "to be overcome" by means of a reflective consciousness. But, desire is itself 'non-reflective' and could not ever posit itself as an object to be overcome. Only, concludes Sartre, would a roue

represent his desire to himself, treat it as an object, excite it, "turn it off," vary the means of assuaging it, etc. (385)

For, in this case it is the desire which itself becomes the desirable fulfillment of itself, the mistake here being the roue's having learned that this or that other sexual act suppresses the desire. We know now that there is/exists pleasure, even apart from there being either an object to or goal of one's desire (e.g., "of procreation, the sacred character of maternity, the exceptional strength of the pleasure provoked by ejaculation, the symbolic value attached to the sexual act"). That some see no other goal for sexual desire than ejaculation, allows them to conceive of sexual desire's having this and this only as its immediate end. But desire, says Sartre,

. . . by no means implies the sexual act; desire does not thematically posit it, does not even suggest it in outline, as one sees when it is a question of the desire of very young children or of adults who are ignorant of the 'technique' of love. (385)

Desire, far from being the sum of an illusive set of amorous practices (as proven by the diversity of sexual practices varying with social groups), is not a general desire of doing. If it were, then what we know as 'sexual desire' would have only to do with apprenticeship and technique.

But suppose now that we allow for sexual desire's being the desire of a body. In one sense, says Sarte, we would be more correct in this than in the former supposition. Yet, though it is the body (e.g., a breast, thigh, etc.) which might initially attract us, it must be as immediately allowed that this breast, this thigh remains an object of attraction only insofar as they are attached to another whole body--one whose ultimate attractiveness is that of the person who possesses this body. There is, however, a further question--one that follows from the act of desiring an Other: what does desire wish from the object of desire? Also, who is the one who desires?

For this latter question, we must at all times assume that desire is a particular mode of someone's subjectivity, i.e., that in all cases, to say that someone is desired is to posit the existence of someone who desires. It is much the same with another form of desire--that of hunger. To Sartre, sexual desire--like hunger--presupposes a certain impoverishment of the body; desire, in addition, has the effect of indicating (for the body) the 'troubled' character

of murky water. The phenomena attendant to the desire for food (e.g., the impoverishment of the blood, abundant salivary secretion, contractions of the tunica, etc.) are described and classified from the point of view of the other, but are a matter of purest facticity from the point of view of that one whose hunger it is. It is much the same for sexual desire. But what distinguishes the former from the latter case, according to Sartre, is that in hunger the body 'flings' itself toward the possibilities of its fulfillment in a way that it does not in sexual desire. Hunger is a surpassing of corporal facticity and the body becomes the past or passed-beyond facticity (i.e., of a hunger that was not, yet is now fulfilled). Though in sexual desire we find, as common to hunger, a negligent body-state, the consciousness that desires to exist sexually exists the facticity of its desire and, as such 'coalesces' with the desire for the Other. Whereas we commonly use certain expressions to describe the specificity of sexual desire (e.g., that such a desire has "taken us over" or has "overwhelmed us"), sexual desire effectively comprises the desiring individual's desire; as in hunger, the individual who desires is seen as being an accomplice to his/her own desiring state. The desiring consciousness is that consciousness which wills itself 'devoured' by the consciousness of another. It is, in fact, an appetite

directed toward the Other's body--a consciousness making itself body. (389) In grasping the Other, the grasping body is made aware of both the Other's flesh and its own flesh as facticity. If sexual desire can be said to have its own goal, it is this: to produce, in the Other, an incarnation of consciousness of the Other as the identity that exists in the desiring body. For, according to Sartre,

. . . the revelation of the Other's flesh is made through my own flesh . . . I incarnate myself in order to realize the incarnation of the Other . . . I make myself flesh in order to impel the Other to realize for-herself and for me her own flesh . . . I make her enjoy my flesh through her flesh in order to compel her to feel herself flesh. And so possession truly appears as a double reciprocal incarnation. Thus in desire there is an attempt at the incarnation of consciousness (the 'troubled' consciousness) in order to realize the incarnation of the Other. (391)

Of note, however, is Sartre's contention that "desire is not first nor primarily a relation to the world," but rather that the world is a ground for explicit relations with Others, (392) i.e., only one of the possible modes of relating to the world through the Other. But at the same time, the ideal of sexual desire (to possess the Other's transcendence as transcendence and as body) is doomed to failure. For, in throwing myself toward the Other's facticity--in throwing aside the acts and functions of the other so as to touch the Other as flesh, the 'I' of desire incarnates both itself and the Other. But as the self's incarnation involves not only the Other's incarnation (as

determined by the desiring self) but also the incarnation of the Other in the Other's own eyes, to involve the Other in desire is at one and the same time to necessarily alter the real presence of that desired Other; the Other as subject who yet, for desire's completion, must be reduced to object. If, moreover, it occurs that his 'desire' culminates in pleasure (that sexual desire lead to fulfillment in some sort of sexual activity), then it must be that this 'pleasure' is also expletive of desire's failure. For, if the "incarnation is manifested by (the) erection and the erection ceases with ejaculation," (397) it follows from this that the ejaculation also ends the incarnation.¹⁰ In addition, says Sartre

. . . pleasure closes the sluice to desire because it motivates the appearance of a reflective consciousness of pleasure, whose object becomes a reflective enjoyment; that is, it is attention to the incarnation of the For-itself which is reflected-on and by the same token is forgetful of the Other's incarnation.
(397)

¹⁰It is perhaps interesting to note that the same point is argued by Janice Moulton in "Sex and Reference." According to Moulton, our confusion having to do with the word 'intercourse' lies in our having erroneously conceived its having a symmetrical nature. She argues that an examination of the word's true meaning, demonstrates that 'intercourse' ends with male ejaculation. If, as has been a familiar feminist claim, what women want is equal access to orgasmic intercourse, then Moulton's point is that a woman--in order to claim "orgasm during intercourse"--must either orgasm before the male or at such time as he also orgasms; this, because an orgasm following the male's orgasm cannot be said to have occurred during intercourse.

This is to say that the desiring consciousness, by attending to its own incarnation, must of necessity lose sight (for either the short or long-term of it) of the Other's incarnation; the incarnation of the desiring consciousness absorbs the incarnation of the Other's consciousness to the point that this 'absorption' may become the activity's ultimate goal. At this point there occurs a "rupture of contact and desire misses its goal." (397)

It is this failure of desire that can lead to masochism, the stage described by Sartre in which consciousness "demands to be apprehended and transcended as body-for-the-Other by means of the Other's consciousness." (398) Both masochism and its opposite, sadism, want the non-reciprocity of sexual relations; enjoying, alternately, the freely given or appropriated power of the Other's given or appropriated consciousness. While masochism is an effort to incarnate the Other through submission, it is in sadism an effort to achieve the same end through violence. In either case, however, the Other is in the final analysis yet free, and the project of having obtained the Other' freely-given freedom has failed.

Sartre Summary

What now can be said of the positional importance of the Other in Sartre's scheme of sexual desire? Specifically, does the Sartrean model allow us to make sense

of the concept of sexual desire apart from those cases in which some Other is the object of that desire?

It would appear clear from those passages already noted (as well as from a number of others which, for the sake of brevity, have been omitted from a more direct scrutiny) that for Sartre, though sexual desire may in some few instances not imply the sexual act, (385) it otherwise implies the real existence of an Other as object of this desire. For though he states that desire--in and of itself-- neither thematically posits nor in outline suggests the desire for sexual activity (witness, or instance, the "desire of very young children or of adults who are ignorant of the 'technique' involved")--he nonetheless suggests that the positive goal of sexual desire is the production of such desire in some specific (i.e., desired) Other. So, if what is intended by 'sexual desire' is to 'have sexual intentions,' then for Sartre it is clear that having such intentions means to exist sexually for an Other who exists sexually for me. Given, moreover, his position that "neither the tumescence of the penis nor any other physiological phenomenon can ever explain or provoke sexual desire" (which he likens to the futility of attempting an explanation of fear by reference to the vaso-constriction or dilation of the pupils), he similarly concludes that "although the body plays an important role (in the

expression of sexual desire) we must--in order to understand it--refer to being-in-the-world and to being-for-Others."

(384) We are led to conclude, therefore, that in its more mundane and unfettered state (i.e., in those cases in which it is not merely a case of undirected, infantile fumbings or of the eunuch who cannot, or the 'old man' whose memories have outlived his effective performance) sexual desire is both the desire for "having sex" with some Other, and too, the desire that this Other share in this desire.

But, in light of the limitations on sexual desire allowed by the Sartrean analysis, a further clarification is seemingly possible; one that is intended to lend credence to my own argument for the reality of the unitary frame of sexuality. If we were to divide Sartre's 'sexual desire' into two categories--directed and nondirected--then the type of sexual desire which normally leads to its fulfillment in sexual activity with an Other is (in all but one case) directed, and that which does not so lead is nondirected. The former category would allow that even should such desire not find its fulfillment in the type of activity designated by the desiring party as 'sexual activity,' the concrete existence of some particular Other is, in fact, the source of that desire's emergence. From the latter category, it would be allowed that sexual desire also leads itself to both a premature (and so, essentially nondirected) and post

mature/de facto stage, in which such 'desire,' primarily in the form of arousal, either may or may not have as its object some specific Other--but is at any rate 'ineffectual' (i.e., inasmuch as, by virtue of the Sartrean gambit, sexual desire is the desire to enter into the 'double reciprocal incarnation' of sexual activity). Such a division would, at any rate, give explanation to infantile sexuality (arousal), in the absence of an Other-object as the source of such arousal, for what is presumably the pleasure that such arousal brings) and the arousal Sartre attributes to those who, by his criteria, are otherwise incapable of sexual performance.

We are now in a position to answer the question whether this Sartrean model allows our making sense of sexual desire apart from its direction to some Other. On this point, if indeed on no other, Sartre's position is clear. Since it is his position that the "world appears only as the ground for explicit relations with the Other" and that it is "usually . . . on the occasion of the Other's presence that the world is revealed as the world of desire," it follows for him that sexual desire can only "accessorily . . . be revealed on the occasion of the absence of a particular Other or even on occasion of the absence of all Others." (392-93) But absence is itself for Sartre a concrete existential relation; the original ground of Being-

for-Others. His apparent reticence at dismissing the Other's importance to the scheme of sexual desire is adamantly pronounced:

I can, of course, by discovering my body in solitude, abruptly realize myself as flesh, "suffocate" with desire, and experience the world as "suffocating." But this solitary desire is an appeal to either a particular Other or the presence of the indifferenced Other. I desire to be revealed as flesh by means of and for another flesh. I try to cast a spell over the Other and make him appear; and the world of desire indicates by a sort of prepared space the Other whom I am calling. (393)

If we take this particular passage as referring to masturbation, then Sartre would appear to be saying that even in this most solitary of activities, the Other--though absent--is yet present through (and by virtue of) its very absence!

But a logical consequence of this assessment, given Sartre's previous statements, would be that masturbation--in and of itself--is what emerges (given one's ability) from sexual desire, and if sexual desire implies the desire to exist sexually for an Other who exists sexually or me, then sexual activities are all and only those activities which cause me to exist sexually for some Other who similarly exists for me. Inasmuch as masturbation, as an activity, does not forge a path for the Other's existence (meaningful or otherwise), it would not qualify as an act deservedly entitled 'sexual activity.' It was perhaps in an attempt to salvage the 'sexual' character (as activity) of this

perennial 'alternative' to such activity that Sartre allows for masturbation's viability--but with the theoretical underpinnings of his own conceptual analysis. If masturbation is to retain its maverick status, then it must be the case that the masturbator imagines some real (and, we can perhaps assume, otherwise unattainable) Other as object of the masturbator's desire. To elect masturbation in lieu of relating to some Other--to, moreover, consider this activity as enabling one to "be fully in and for oneself" and thereby to escape from involvement with Others--is, by the Sartrean analysis, at best expletive of 'bad faith.'

Sartre and the Direction of Sexual Philosophy

Given Sartre's own suggestion that his "few remarks" not be taken as having exhausted either the problems of sex or the possible attitudes toward the Other, (406) it is most remarkable that the initial contributions to what would later, in Anglo-American circles, be called 'sexual philosophy' did, in act, just that. Not only do these early offerings argue the uncritical acceptance of the view of sex as binary, but each credits either Sartre--or some other commentary on the Sartrean analysis--with having laid the foundation for the view that they espouse.

Roger Taylor's "Sexual Experiences,"¹¹ preceded only by John King-Farlow's "The Sartrean Analysis of Sexuality"¹² and Joseph J. Kockelmans' "Merleau-Ponty on Sexuality,"¹³ appear to have been the forerunners in a trend toward focusing on the implications for sexuality of a specific point of view. But Taylor's essay further distinguished itself on two grounds: first, as a contemporary philosophical essay whose treatment of the issues involved was from a decidedly analytic perspective; and secondly, as an essay which took as its basis for argument some aspect of the philosophical position as subjected to its analysis, i.e., which argues with that philosophical expression in an effort to both make and substantiate some new position as stressed from the (Sartrean) original.

For Taylor, the point of departure from Sartre is a thesis he attributes to Sartre,¹⁴ namely that sexual desire (i.e., the desire to engage some Other in a project of

¹¹Roger Taylor. "Sexual Experiences." Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 68 (1968): 87-104.

¹²John King-Farlow. "The Sartrean Analysis of Sexuality." The Journal of Existential Psychiatry, 2 (1962): 290-302.

¹³Joseph J. Kockelmans. "Merleau-Ponty on Sexuality." The Journal of Existentialism, 6, (Fall, 1965): 9-30.

¹⁴This thesis is actually the product of Sartre's treatment by A. Manser in Sartre: A Philosophic Study (London: Althone Press, 1966).

desire's mutuality) solves the problem of Other persons (which would be roughly equivalent to providing philosophic solution to the "existence of other minds"). Although the position Taylor sets out to defend is actually not one which Sartre himself would have found defensible,¹⁵ it is of far greater importance that Taylor, in presenting his position, made reference to Sartre rather than to those philosophies (presumably as capable of holding implications for sexuality) detailed by Kant ("Duties toward the Body in Respect of Sexual Impulse"), Schopenhauer ("Essay on Women"; "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love"), Ortega y Gasset (On Love, 1939), Russell ("Our Sexual Ethics") or the sexual or socio-political philosophies of Plato, Rousseau, Engels, Foucault or Marcuse.

But Taylor is, by all appearances, not alone in his preference for construing a theoretical account of sexuality based on an interpretation (or, as in this case, a misinterpretation) of Sartre's position. Thomas Nagel's "Sexual Perversion"¹⁶ not only grounds its argument on an errant rendering of Sartre's conception of sexual desire's "double reciprocal incarnation," but is itself perhaps the

¹⁵Sartre. Being and Nothingness. Translator's Introduction, p. xl-xli.

¹⁶Thomas Nagel. "Sexual Perversion." The Journal of Philosophy, 66, No. 1 (1969): 5-17. Reprinted in Baker and Elliston's The Philosophy of Sex.

most frequently quoted essay of this philosophical genre.¹⁷ But this influence, this reliance on the Sartrean model of sexuality is not exhausted by the sexual philosophies of Taylor and Nagel. To be sure, evidence of this influence is rather pervasive. For instance, Robert Solomon's "Sexual Paradigms"¹⁸ gives no appearance of having questioned Nagel's basic agreement with the Sartrean explication of sexuality. Instead of raising doubts about the (Sartrean) model itself, Solomon argues that Nagel's analysis of sexual perversion is quite simply incorrect. On Solomon's view, Nagel was correct in concurring with the view of sexual relations' 'properly' involving a reciprocal recognition of intentions (to say of X that, 'X sexually desires Y' is--for Sartre--the equivalent of attributing to X the desire that Y desire X), but was incorrect in his identification of reciprocal pleasure as the principle goal of sexual activity. To Solomon, who Soble credits with having "completed the linguistic turn in sexual philosophy,"¹⁹ the

¹⁷Nagel's own statement that "the best discussion of these matters (i.e., sexual desire) . . . appears in part III of Sartre's Being and Nothingness and further, that ". . . it (Being and Nothingness) has influenced my own views" makes explicit this albeit erroneous ideological reliance on Sartre.

¹⁸Robert Solomon. "Sexual Paradigms." The Journal of Philosophy 71, No. 11 (1974) 336-345.

¹⁹Alan Soble. "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sex," in The Philosophy of Sex, pg. 9-10.

point of sexual activity is the conveyance--the communication--of a whole range of messages which the simple language of 'pleasure' fails to exhaust.

But, choose as one might between a reciprocity of pleasure and a reciprocity of communicative intentions, what remains is: 1) Solomon's agreement with Nagel on a form of sexuality that is essentially Sartrean; and 2)--as entailed by (1)--Solomon's agreement with Nagel that sexuality is essentially a relation between persons involving the reciprocal recognition of an intent to do X. What remains are the vestiges of a model whose presumed appropriateness lingers on as an unquestioned 'given.'

Of greater importance to the scheme of sexuality envisioned by this writer, is that both Nagel and Solomon find room in their respective theories for fault with autoerotic masturbation as a choice/form of sexuality, if for no other reason than that such an act does not conform to the Sartrean model as they see it. On the other hand, neither Nagel nor Solomon find homosexuality to be necessarily condemnable, just as Sartre himself did not. Sartre observes that

. . . the contingency of bodies, the structure of the original project which I am, the history which I historicize can usually determine the sexual attitude to remain implicit, inside more complex conduct. For

example, it is only seldom that one explicitly desires and Other "of the same sex."²⁰

In light of this, it would seem that the 'sexual' project is not even temporarily abandoned if the object of one's desire is a person of one's own sex. It is, however, both complicated and imbued with conceptual quagmire if the object of one's desire is not an Other, but one's own bodily pleasurings as entirely directed toward oneself. That both Nagel and Solomon should find fault with masturbation is not surprising, given both their preferences for a model whose envisioned completion requires at least two. Due to their embrace of the Sartrean view of sexuality, both the recognition of reciprocal intentions and the limitations imposed by any communicative scheme requires (at the very least) a pair of actors. Under Nagel, autoeroticism requires no special intentions, either expressed or recognized. His specific criticism would leave unanswered the question whether one can, in fact, enter into a 'reciprocal' relation with oneself. Under Solomon, the failure of masturbation is that there would not--by his stated criteria--be any possibility for communicating any range of human emotions. In fact, in having neglected reference to Sartre's ontology, both Solomon and Nagel's interpretations of his views are so thin that serious

²⁰Being and Nothingness, p. 407.

reference to either ought initially have been discouraged. Solomon's criticisms are particularly interesting in that, by deemphasizing the value and status of private communication (the diarist, for example), he fails to see that we really do send more messages to ourselves than he imagines--ones which are, at any rate, as worthy of deciphering as any others.

It is Hugh T. Wilder, in his "The Language of Sex and the Sex of Language"²¹ who points out that masturbation might just be a type of language that one speaks exclusively to oneself. Now, this way of thinking would conserve in place the point of view that sex has more or less to do with language, but would leave unanswered the question to whom--if indeed anyone--the content of one's message(s) need necessarily be conveyed. On this point, I find it noteworthy that Solomon's "Sex and Perversion"²² (which preceded his "Sexual Paradigms") had maintained that there was nothing on the whole about one's preference for 'group sex' which would necessarily imply deviancy or abnormal sexual behavior; what, after all, could be wrong with a natural ability to carry on more than one 'conversation' at

²¹paper presented at the Pacific Division (APA) meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Sex and Love, in San Diego, March 1979. Reprinted in Sobel's Philosophy of Sex: 99-118.

²²Robert Solomon. "Sex and Perversion," in Baker and Elliston's Philosophy and Sex, 1st edition: 268-287.

a time?²³ That the multiple conversant should achieve a legitimacy of status not accorded the soliloquist (or, as Wilder himself suggests, the private diarist) is a telling condemnation of a theoretical lineage which could hold such a position, or maintain its possible truth. Nathan Oaklander's impassioned defense of "Sartre on Sex"²⁴ makes an equally counter-intuitive claim when, in arguing against Roger Taylor's presumably valid concern that Sartre's position (i.e., that one who sexually desires another wishes actually to reduce that Other's consciousness to a consciousness of itself as flesh) failed at being altogether convincing, he (Oaklander) replies that

The various descriptions of sexual desire that Sartre offers do fit my experience . . . although we do not often think of desire in terms of "reducing another's consciousness to a consciousness of one-self as flesh only," we do think of and experience desire as a mutual awareness, or as a desire that the Other desire me as I desire the Other, and that is essentially what Sartre means by the enigmatic phrase. Sartre cannot be refuted by a simple appeal to our experience.²⁵

If it is truly Oaklander's point that appealing to our personal experiences with sexual desire does not suffice to refute Sartre, (and since what Sartre provides is by his admission a part of his own experience), then it is only

²³Ibid., p. 285-286.

²⁴Nathan L. Oaklander. "Sartre on Sex." In Sobel's Philosophy of Sex: pgs. 190-206.

²⁵Ibid., pg. 203.

fair to conclude that for Oaklander personal experience has the force of proving Sartre right, but not the force of proving him wrong. So zealous is Oaklander's defense of this alleged Sartrean connection, that he goes so far as to substantiate his point by reference to those contributors (Taylor, Shaffer, Nagel, Solomon, Pierce, Collins, et. al.) whose faulty interpretations had set the stage for the confusion. He at no time gives the appearance of having seriously questioned either the correctness of this view, or the possibility of any other alternative to the model of sexuality that he defends.

At any rate, the 1968 date maintained by the anthologizers as issuing in the formal beginnings of philosophical sex-talk, coincides with the ball sent rolling by Taylor, Nagel and Solomon--one whose initial position had been set by Sartre--and in whose path is reflected, not only the philosophical accounts of sexuality which have been noted, but also several which have escaped analysis in these few pages. Although Janice Moulton believes that women "left alone in the kitchen might learn to cook for themselves"²⁶ she does not, given her embrace of this particular model, consider that 'cooking' might--after all--be a solitary activity. Sara Ruddick's "Better Sex" lets

²⁶Janice Moulton. "Sex and Reference." In Baker and Elliston's Philosophy and Sex, 1st edition: 34-44.

slip that whatever there may be about sex which is better might actually reside in one's selection of a partner, i.e., that the poorer of lovers is simply that one who takes more than it gives.²⁷ But the effect of this is that one can only have control over the selection of someone whose task it will then be to artfully or sensitively provide us with what we are presumed to be incapable of providing for ourselves. Alan Goldman's rejection, in "Plan Sex"²⁸ of the form predominant to 'means-end' sexual analysis (e.g., reproduction, 'love,' 'communication' and 'interpersonal awareness') does not, in this writer's estimation, get 'plain' enough. As in the cases of those other theorists mentioned, what holds Goldman in sway is his adherence to a particular model of sexuality which seems to have dominated the philosophical conception of what it is that something called 'sex' should properly involve.

But to what extent can all or any of this be properly attributed to the Sartrean model of sexuality? Specifically, can it be argued that this model influenced the sexual philosophies emerging in its wake? Such an argument is possible, not only from the standpoint of those (albeitly misconceived) essays which served to formally

²⁷Sara Ruddick. "Better Sex." In Baker and Elliston's Philosophy and Sex, 2nd edition: 280-299.

²⁸Alan Goldman. Philosophy and Public Affairs 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1977): 267-287.

initiate this sort of philosophical reflection, but also from what Sartre himself had to say concerning the importance of sexuality to his sense of our being-in-the-world with others. By providing his conception of sexuality with an ontological backing, Sartre succeeds in creating a theory of sexuality whose refutation would require nothing less than the restructure or collapse of the system in its entirety. In this case, the troublesome 'ontological fact' which seems to have dictated a preference for Sartre's model of sexuality is his particular conception of involvement with the Other as expressing some sort of response to a person's original project of deciphering the world. It is clear that Sartre, in preparing Being and Nothingness, had in mind a critique of those earlier phenomenological accounts which had sought a description of human consciousness devoid of its sexual features. Although it is equally clear that he sought, specifically, to take issue with the sexlessness of Heidegger's subject-in-the-world (Dasein) in Being and Time, it is no less the case that, as Robert Solomon has been credited with having said, "Sartre's notion of sexuality, taken seriously, would be enough to keep us out of bed [with Others] for a month."²⁹

²⁹Robert Solomon. "Sexual Paradigms," in Soblep. 95.

Perhaps, as has been suggested by John King-Farlow in his "The Sartrean Analysis of Sexuality,"³⁰ the problem with Sartre's account of sexuality is identical to the problem with his system's re-theorization of consciousness. Whereas those previous conceptions of sexual desire that are the subject of Sartre's attack had considered only our sexual being, it was for Sartre mandatory that both erotic drives and the uses made by humans of their sexual organs be explained in terms of 'ontology' rather than physiology.³¹ But in doing so, it is King-Farlow's claim that Sartre manages to commit two³² extremely significant errors. For the first of these, even if we should (or for that matter could) overlook the gloom and doom of Sartre's prospect for human recovery from an essentially unescapable aloneness, the fact would remain that the "rationalistic, deductive nature of Sartre's enterprise" marks the pursuit of an old essentialist project later rejected in Existentialism and Humanism that simply replaces the concept of 'human nature' with that of the 'human condition' in Being and Nothingness. Given this fundamental essentialism, what Sartre promotes is

³⁰op. cit.

³¹Ibid., 291.

³²King Farlow actually mentions four criticisms of Sartre's position. For the sake of this writing, however, two of these have been collapsed into one, and one more has been omitted entirely.

an analysis of what the structures of human consciousness must be--but fails to provide any empirically assessed, arguable ground for why his particular view is or even ought be the case. Contrary to Oaklander's stalwart defense of Sartre on these matters, King-Farlow seems to be saying that not only do appeals to experience matter, but that Sartre, in his dismissal of such appeals in Being and Nothingness, fares little better than his arch-enemy Freud, whose own pessimistic determinism Sartre had openly opposed.

The second of these criticisms has to do with the conception of consciousness itself. The question could quite simply be put this way: If we accept Sartre's view of consciousness, are we compelled to accept his view of sexuality? Conversely put, does a particular view of sexuality result from a conception of consciousness in such a way that this and only this view of consciousness would entail it?

The answer to both questions, I believe, is yes. Although a model of sexuality need not necessarily be grounded in a definitive ontology, the existence of such an ontology would force a theory of sexuality within the realms of logical consistency. Whereas King-Farlow's point is that Sartre's account of consciousness and its relation to sexuality, despite his intervals of describing

empirical situations, cannot be said to follow logically from obvious premises.³³

I insist that it is not the structure of his (Sartre's) argument, but the premises themselves that are and ought properly be the subjects of inquiry. Specifically, we are justified in questioning a theory which would thrust an individual possessor of consciousness into such an intrinsically conflictual dynamic; one which would have this consciousness, as cast to an absurd drama, peering through to a corridor of Others whose progression is marked with the realization that only they (or, more precisely, their acknowledgement of him as other-than-object) can support his own consciousness in the required "reciprocal imbrication of being" (236) alleged by Sartre. All this, while at the same time these Others occasionally peer back (presumably through similarly distant vantages and with similar intent) at him. A major consequence of this view, and one which has had an unfortunate influence on a number of sexual philosophies, is that a strong dichotomy of 'peer-ers' and 'peer-ees,' makes for an equally strong dichotomy of agents and respondents to agency; of active and passive participants; of those who do, and of those to whom something is done.

This conclusion does seem to follow from Sartre's theory of consciousness, given 1) his position that the

³³Ibid., 300.

project described as getting hold "of the Other's free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me" is sexual desire; and that 2) for Sartre, the issues of human sexuality have less to do with "the prompting of a man or woman's particular organs"³⁴ than with the hopeless quest of the individual consciousness for self-coincidence. Sartre would have us accept that individual relationships with Others are actually attempts made at establishing an unconditional foundation of identity through that or those Others (Being-for-Others). But if all these confrontations with Others reduce one's Transcendent status over things (the brute factials) in-the-world to a state transcended by the existence of this or these Others, then the Sartrean explication of sexuality is essentially imbued with conflict, frustration and the burdensome continued presence of the Other in one's own fundamental (in Sartre's terms, 'original') project. In essence, every lover--given this model of what it means to exist sexually for Others--would by necessity be a selfish or destructive Other, whose primary concern is for his or her own being-as-freedom.

Indeed, it is no surprise to find in Sartre's view of sexuality that "desire is itself doomed to failure," (396) and also that "pleasure is the death and the failure of desire." (397) What, for Sartre, sexual desire entails has

³⁴Ibid., 293.

actually very little to do with what we might normally consider 'sex.' Rather, as Nagel has opined, according to Sartre all attempts made at incorporating "the Other into my world as another subject," i.e., to apprehend him at once as an object for me and as a subject for whom I am an object,³⁵ are both unstable and doomed to collapse. But this would, within the given system, be as true of the sexual as of the non-sexual attitude. So thoroughly is this the case, that were it not for assumptions like Goldman's that we "already know what sex is," its features would not be revealed in Sartre's analysis. What Nagel labels as this ongoing project of an "embodied consciousness coming to terms with the existence of Others" is really all that Sartre gives us, and this--if truly descriptive of relations-with-Others--is ultimately unhelpful in the analysis of sexuality as one of these relations.

Given this, it seems particularly odd that so many of those initial (and ongoing) contributions to sexual philosophy have either an admitted or traceable allegiance to this Sartrean model. If the question were to be asked, 'In what sense is Sartre's a philosophy of human sexuality?', one would have to admit that Sartre is primarily speaking of the attempt to inflict one's conscious interpretation of the world upon the world, and only

³⁵Thomas Nagel. "Sexual Perversion." In Sobel, p. 81.

secondarily of how it is that this is accomplishable through the existences of other persons with whom there is a sexual involvement. Its major feature, the desire/objectification of the Other, does qualify its distinctively 'human' feature. But it is unclear, given Sartre's primary focus, if the thrust of an allegedly Sartrean-based sexual philosophy can even be authentically sexual. In the classification of sexual foci provided by W. M. Alexander in "Philosophers Have Avoided Sex,"³⁶ though Sartre is not specifically mentioned, his would most closely approximate a 'mono-sexual' approach to the subject of sexuality:

. . . the major image of the contemporary age may be .
 . . the man who is independent sexually, that is,
 mono-sexual, in need of no deep or lasting relation
 with a partner of the opposite sex. He is literally a
 solipsist . . .

It is perhaps important to note here that Alexander is not speaking of solitary, masturbatory sexual activity, but of that sort of sex engaged in by persons whose actions toward the Other would otherwise indicate either that they are the only person involved, or most certainly that theirs are the only real concerns in the relationship that truly matter. Though Alexander goes on to say of the mono-sexualist that "sexually he is the only one who exists" and that for this one, "nothing else in the universe is an appropriate sexual

³⁶W.M. Alexander. "Philosophers Have Avoided Sex." Diogenes 72 (1970): 56-74.

partner," it is the conclusion on this type of sexual frame that "the other person is only an object for (the mono-sexualist's) gratification" that renders the Sartrean model of sexuality more closely analogous to the mono-sexual than to those other models given mention in the course of this writing.

To Sartre, the extreme form of the Other's utilization for personal gratification is, in fact, sadism. But in another sense, all sexual relationships can, by the Sartrean analysis of sexuality, be reduced to a sadistic impulse if what one hopes by way of this sort of relation is the utilization of the Other for the point of making one's own view of the world co-incident with conscious apprehension. In his "Sartre on Sex," Oaklander argues, given the same data, that what Sartre had intended was that all instances of 'completed' sex (i.e., sexual activity such that it constitutes a breakdown of sexual desire) were to be seen as exemplifying perversions.

. . . the result of attaining the goal of sexual desire is the breakdown of the double reciprocal incarnation into a subject-object or sadomasochistic dichotomy. In either case, as Sartre says, "there is a rupture of contact and desire misses its goal." It is this "rupture of contact" that constitutes a perversion, and since all sexual activity involves such a breakdown, it follows that all sexual activity is a perversion.³⁷

³⁷Oaklander, p. 202.

Whether or not Sartre's position is assessed as being monosexual (with primary importance being placed upon the Other's usurped consciousness as utilized to enhance one's own) seems hardly as significant as the fact that, within this scheme of being, the sexual existence qua sexual has less to do with sex, than with establishing the predominance of one's own conscious attention on the world--and hence, on Others. Given this emphasis on what sex is alleged to bring about to the desiring consciousness, it is difficult to answer the question whether for Sartre sex could itself be a matter warranting indifference. If, moreover, as Oaklander has argued, Sartre's position on sex is such that it is sexual desire and not sex per se which is responsible for bringing about that ideal state of unity with the Other's consciousness, then Soble has a point when he facetiously proposes that we ought aim in our sexual lives only at those situations in which the existential barriers presumed to separate us from Others are made forever unbroken; that we maintain ourselves in a never ending state of sexual arousal and permanently abandon 'sexual satisfaction' (thereby abandoning the 'rupture of contact') altogether.

Norman O. Brown, in his Life Against Death, talks about the Adamites, a sect that practices coitus reservatus . . . (engaging) in continuous foreplay but (not attempting) to achieve satisfaction through orgasmic release. These people . . . lived in a constant state of sexual desire and arousal without the resolution of that desire. But at the same time, the failure to terminate the desire means, according

to Sartre, that they would be living ideally with each other, in that the existential barriers would remain forever broken down. Why is it, we might ask, that in our culture we place so much emphasis upon the achievement of orgasm? (Is it because, living in a business culture, we tend to qualify experience? Only orgasms--like dollars--can be counted. The other pleasures of sexual activity cannot be qualified.) If we believe Sartre, there is much to be lost in this emphasis, and much to be gained from looking away from the orgasmic experience as the essential ingredient of sexual activity.³⁸

Perhaps one possible answer to Soble's query, is that if anything at all is to be counted, the orgasm is certainly as good a place as any to begin the process of numeral sequencing. In fact, since the issue which has really been ignored is whether there is anything about sex which would render it countable, the question is hopelessly moot. But the greater likelihood is that Sartre did in fact anticipate the drawing of such a conclusion from his analysis of sexuality, hence his own conclusion that sexual desire is an "impossible ideal," bearing "within itself the cause of its own failure" and so, is "doomed to failure."

I do not pretend that the foregoing discussion of Sartre's position on sexual desire does justice to the system in which it is seen to operate. But hopefully, enough has been said to warrant substantiation of the following: 1) that the initial contributions to the emergence of a distinctively sexual philosophy, were

³⁸Soble. "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sex," p. 24.

influenced by serious misreadings of Sartre's ontology; 2) that, of paramount importance to this conceptual scheme, is the Other as the necessary condition for the existence of sexual desire; 3) that, as such, what is ultimately argued is a conception of 'sex' as promoting something extraneous to the sex act itself; and 4) that two of the more curiously ignored consequences of Sartre's position on sexual desire are, first, that it seems reasonable to question whether all sexual activity (in involving a 'rupture of contact') would not be a 'perversion' in relation to Sartre's own ontology and, secondly, that the ideal sexual state--given the failure to equate sexual activity with satiation--would be one of sustained sexual desire without sexual satisfaction, i.e., without sexual activity and so, without the Other.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Previous chapters have provided a critique of what I contend is the unjustified omission of masturbation from serious consideration by sexual philosophy. It has been argued, further, that because most philosophers have only given limited consideration to masturbation as something which is at best an alternative to sexual activity, these philosophers have failed to grant the act's philosophical legitimacy¹ and hence have missed the opportunity to broaden the parameters of philosophical discourse on sex. Impeding an adequate consideration of masturbation is a set of theories (communitas, couple-ism, communication and reciprocity) that either singly or collectively advance a view of sex as inexorably linked to binary experience. These 'theoretical' biases, argued in tandem with a series of philosophical schemes that both provided them support and were supported by them, set the stage for the emergence of a sexual philosophy that effectively excluded the viability of unitary sex. What I have suggested instead is that sexual philosophy begin its investigation anew with its focus not

¹Soble's "Masturbation" is an example of the serious philosophical analysis that is required, and poses some of the questions addressed here. Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 61 (1980), 233-244.

on the number of participants deemed requisite for the performance of activities deemed 'sexual,' but instead on the sensations taken to count as 'sexually pleasurable' relative to that or those agents whose sensations are to be counted.

In this conclusion, I will: 1) demonstrate how the unitary model of sexuality which I have developed can be used to reformulate the concept of sexual desire and to provide a basis for addressing Soble's puzzling conclusions on the sexual status of both masturbation and mutual masturbation; 2) redefine the parameters of good and bad sex in a way that not only eliminates the necessity of vague, arbitrary references to sexual 'perversions,' but clarifies the distinction I take to exist between sexual and nonsexual activities as well; and 3) indicate how the more inclusive conception of sexual activities I have proposed would both enhance and give new direction to ongoing efforts to philosophize about sex.

The Reformulation of Sexual Desire

Let us begin with the assumption, inherent to the discussion initiated in The Unitary-Expansionist Account, that

1. At t , S experiences sexual desire
may be taken to mean

2. At t, S desires that s/he engage in the performance of some act(s) identified by S as 'sexual.'

On this view, if S experiences sexual desire, and if sexual desire is the desire to engage in an act(s) identified by S as sexual, then S desires either to perform or--with some Other's assistance--to participate in the performance of acts S takes to fulfill the stated desire. Common to both these cases (i.e., the solitary or participated performances) is S's desire to elicit sensations identified as sexually pleasurable. It follows that in both cases equally S performs the act for the purpose of eliciting sexual pleasure and the act arises from the desire for sex.

From the point of view allowed by unitary sexuality, sexual desire is precisely the desire for solitary sexual self-fulfillment; it is the individual's engagement in his/her own sexuality, and specifically denies the necessity for an Other with (or through) whom the act would need be performed.

It is for this reason that, in unitary sexuality, there can be no distinction between sexual desire and what is discussed in the alternate, binary account as sexual arousal. Since binary sexuality theoretically demands the existence of some Other--in whose absence activities deemed sexual may not occur--it is possible to speak of the desire

to engage in sexual activities from the standpoint of there either being or not being an object of that desire. The first of these,

1. At t , S experiences sexual desire

where there is no specific Other who exists as an object of that desire (but a state of sexual 'readiness' nonetheless) I take to mean sexual arousal. But the second

3. At t , S sexually desires O

allows that O is the specific object of S 's sexual desire; O is that one with whom S desires that sex occur.

This distinction, most notably problematic for Jerome Shaffer's assessment of propositional theories of sex and their general implications for what it means to sexually desire, suffices to both underscore the differences between unitary and binary frames of sexual reference, and facilitate discussions as to whom or what the desiring subject (S) takes its sexual desire to involve. It is not, as Shaffer's conclusions would have us believe, that desire must at all times have a specific object in mind, or that the desiring subject "desire that" this object be within its grasp to be comprehensible. S 's sexual desire (in the binary reference) is distinguishable from S 's sexual desire for O , only insofar as 'desiring sex' differs from desiring that sex occur with the specific Other, O . Likewise (in the unitary reference) it is not the case that sexual desire

without an object-Other, becomes desire without the possibility of satiation. Whereas in the former case S may, in fact, be said to experience a sustained form of arousal devoid of an object (and hence of a specific desire for an Other, O), in the latter case S's sexual arousal is indistinguishable from S's sexual desire; it being impossible to distinguish S's desire for sexual activity from S's desire that the sorts of activities identified as sexual take place.

Readdressing Soble's Queries

Having made the aforementioned distinction, it is now possible to readdress certain queries raised by Alan Soble in his discussion of masturbation and its paradigm case:

. . . a person, in a private place, manually applies pressure to, or rubs, the sensitive areas of the genitals and thereby produces an orgasm. (Soble, 233)

It immediately appears to Soble that this case, and its 'mutual' correlate (e.g, of "two persons manually rubbing each other's genitals simultaneously") are deficient.

Both "playing with oneself" and "playing with each other" describe masturbatory activities. But it is not easy to find a coherent account of masturbation that explains why this particular practice is a case of (mutual) masturbation. (233)

Each involves features that are "logically eliminable" because, and precisely because, neither focuses on what is essential to the assessment of an act as masturbatory.

Soble comes close to acknowledging this when, close on the

heels of the previous observations, he notes that although the particulars of his paradigm cases may not be present in actual acts of masturbation or mutual masturbation,

What does seem essential is that the person who produces the pleasurable sensations is the same person who experiences them. (233)

If we take this latter observation as presenting what is essential to the determination of an act's being masturbatory as opposed to what is merely peripheral to it, then what makes an act masturbatory is the subject's desire to produce in and for him/herself those sensations identified as sexually pleasurable. Questions of how, or where, or even (in the case of mutual masturbation) with whom this is done are at best secondary to the intended direction that the subject would have these sensations take. If what S intends--by performing some act or acts--is that those sensations reflexively produced in themselves be those identified as sexually pleasurable, then S's act is masturbatory. It must similarly be allowed that an act assessed as masturbatory, is as likely to occur in private as in public; as likely to involve an object as an appendage; as likely to be the focus of a specific area of the body as not; to culminate in orgasm as in some other (or indeed no other) form of satiation, i.e., as for its own sake.

But there is more going on in Soble's commentary than this single issue, and because of this his discussion ultimately loses its primary focus. Though Soble sets out, clearly enough, to argue the distinguishing features of masturbatory and nonmasturbatory activities, we are given a clue to the true course of his discussion when, after allowing the inclusion of masturbation into the class of reflexive activities, he insists that

A strong case . . . can be made for denying the equivalence between masturbation and auto-eroticism, although the latter will be included within the former. Acts of mutual masturbation would be conceptually impossible if the equivalence were correct . . . (233)

Now the term "autoerotic" (as originally coined by Havelock Ellis) referred to the well-documented ability of some individuals to produce/experience sexually pleasurable sensations that do not arise from any external stimulation whatsoever. Such persons are capable of merely entering a "trancelike" state--often while focusing on a single, simple object--and reaching orgasm without physically manipulating their bodies or using any other object for that purpose. But as it is standardly employed, the word has also come to mean "self-initiated activity aimed at reducing sexual excitations," or masturbation. It is certainly clear by this rendering that the autoerotic is masturbating, if by masturbation is meant anything having to do with producing for oneself those sensations taken to be sexually

pleasurable; clearer still, that the autoerotic presents a special case. But the 'specialness' of this case is precisely in that the autoerotic succeeds in his/her task without any sort of physical manipulations, while (at least technically speaking) the masturbator requires a minimum of assistance, e.g., a hand, an object, etc. If we keep the similarities of both cases in mind--that is, that the intended recipient of the pleasures produced is the one who produces them--then Soble's initial question has been answered. Those sexual acts performed for the sake of one's own sexual pleasure are masturbatory, while those performed for some other reason would be nonmasturbatory.

But his distinction becomes muddled at the point 'the Other' is introduced. As Soble moves from his initial, stated thesis (that of distinguishing masturbatory from nonmasturbatory sex acts), he finds it necessary to further mark off the distinguishing features of masturbation and mutual masturbation, and of mutual masturbation in relation to heterosexual genital intercourse.

That this tac only succeeds in leading him further from the point of presenting (if not defending) what is truly essential to masturbation, is no better borne out than by the parade of failed theses Soble construes to ignore it. Having admitted the theoretical Other into what is a scenario proposed for the analysis of masturbation, Soble

never quite manages to convince his reader that the Other does not--after all--belong just there. In fact, as Soble rushes headlong into discussions of penile insertions (into both living and living human beings) it becomes all the more evident that masturbation assumes a much more diminished position than would appear to have been appropriate; more likened to a mere 'invitee' to the discussion, than the 'honored guest.'

What Soble seems particularly reluctant to admit is that even while we tend to think of masturbation in terms of a solitary activity, there is nothing intrinsic to its essential meaning (i.e., the production of sexually pleasurable sensations for one's own sake) that would necessarily exclude as possible, the presence of an Other. He comes close to admitting this when he points to there being a difficulty in distinguishing activities that are masturbatory (mutually) from those that are not, while simultaneously preserving the intuition that autoerotic acts are also and only masturbatory. Why, in other words, it is that

. . . under certain plausible descriptions there are no essential differences between the paradigm case of mutual masturbation and the paradigm case of [binary] sexual activity itself, heterosexual genital intercourse. It could be maintained that all sexual activity is (only) masturbation, or more specifically that the mutual rubbing of sensitive areas that occurs during mutual masturbation is indistinguishable [emphasis, mine] from the mutual rubbing that occurs during heterosexual genital intercourse. (Soble, 235)

But this implication and its consequences for furthering the discussion of what he feels ought be a difference between the two, is--to Soble--so untenable as to lead him to locate a difference that has clearly evaded his own analysis. As he goes on to suppose that it is perhaps the intentions of the two persons rather than the "physical distinction between the two activities" that is--after all--to count, it becomes all the more apparent that there is less to be lost in defending the dismissed thesis, than there is in defending the alternative proposals.²

The point now is to ask whether on my view the integrity of masturbation and mutual masturbation can be salvaged, while answering the question of the latter's relation to presumably non-mutually masturbatory activities, i.e., intercourse.

Let me begin by reasserting the truth I have deemed essential to understanding masturbation--that it is a form of sexual activity in which an agent aims to produce in him/herself (and, if successful, does produce) those sensations taken by that agent to count as "sexually pleasurable." It is altogether extraneous to this understanding that the masturbator perform in private or in

²That "mutual masturbation" would not be **masturbation**, or that it would be "an insufficient sign or criterion of two persons loving one another that they are able to have good sex." See Chapt. III, "Puzzles Generated By Subjecting Masturbation to Philosophical Analysis," pgs. 124-134.

public; that s/he manually stimulate the genitals or some other part of his/her anatomy; that orgasm or some intermediate stage of satiation be the performance's goal.

The virtue of this view as opposed to Soble's proposal, is that it lays a foundation for distinguishing masturbatory from nonmasturbatory acts that neither hinges on the presence/performance of Others, nor on whether there ought be anything intrinsically sexual about a presumed set of activities. It is only necessary to recall the more disastrous consequences of Soble's own attempts at establishing a distinction between masturbatory and nonmasturbatory activities on the basis of "insertions": On the first, only those acts involving insertions would be nonmasturbatory, while those not involving insertion would be masturbatory; on the second (modified) view, masturbatory acts would be those not involving the insertion of a real (Soble's emphasis) penis into a living being; while on the third, masturbatory acts would be those wherein no (real) penis was inserted "into some hole or another of a living human being." (234)

Although this account has been given detailed analysis in a previous chapter, it bears repeating that the consequences of these "insertion" theses were (for the different cases) either trivially true, counter-intuitive or blatantly false. Autoerotic acts, masturbation, mutual

masturbation and tribadism would be masturbatory on the first of these proposals, while male/female genital, male/male anal, and male intercourse with animals (all of which involve insertions) would not. But this first proposal would similarly yield the conclusion that fellatio is nonmasturbatory, while cunnilingus and mutual masturbation utilizing one's fingers would only be nonmasturbatory at those precise moments when actual insertions occurred, while male penile insertion into a watermelon and a women's vaginal employment of a vibrator (which both involve the required insertions) would not be masturbatory despite our inclinations that they are. Based on the second of Soble's proposals, there would be no clear distinction between a male's sex with an animal and the same male's sexual "performance" with an article of feminine clothing; while on the third, the only loss to the class of nonmasturbatory acts would be male sex with animals (because such insertions would occur in a living but not a human living being).

But if we now apply the criterion I have suggested-- that acts are masturbatory when performed for purposes of eliciting, in that one who performs them, sensations identified as sexually pleasurable--and at the same time dismiss from immediate consideration the number of actual performers there might be, then we reach an entirely different (and more tenable) set of conclusions.

Autoeroticism, masturbation and fetishistic activities are all masturbatory, unless we are to presume their performance for ends other than that of sexual pleasure. Though it is not altogether inconceivable that someone might--for instance--manifest an irrational (but nonsexual) devotion to a particular item of clothing, we would consider a continued practice of this sort unusual, if compulsively performed for reasons that even the fetisher could not fathom. Likewise tribadism, mutual masturbation and (mutually performed acts of) cunnilingus would be mutual and masturbatory, unless we are given strong reasons for suspecting that their performance is owed to reasons of a more nebulous sort. The foregoing conclusions either follow on the basis of the special nature of the act itself, or because the individual performing it can arguably be said to do so for his/her own sake. But the remaining two categories, those pertaining to the class of nonmasturbatory and mutually nonmasturbatory acts, could conceivably include any of those acts requiring more than one participant for its completed performance. The intended class of acts, which would necessarily include both homosexual and heterosexual intercourse (though it would not necessarily exclude any of the other binary sexual activities) would be masturbatory only when performed by both participants for his/her own sake, and nonmasturbatory when performed for

some other reason (e.g., by force, or coercion, or solely for the Other's pleasure).

Though it might be argued that my proposal places too much emphasis on the individual's intention in performing the activity, it nevertheless avoids some of the more obvious misclassifications derived from Soble's rendering. Cunnilingus and fellatio, for example, ought properly be considered mutual activities--if not from the standpoint of reciprocal performance, then certainly from that of the physical feasibility of their being performed without an Other (though an extremely 'gifted' individual might do so, in which case the act would merely be masturbatory). Similarly, a male's penile penetration of an animal and a female's vaginal employment of a vibrator are unquestionably masturbatory, although the former--given an animal's sentience--differs significantly from the same male's penile penetration of a watermelon. But masturbation involving the "mutual rubbings" and/or digital penetrations of the Other do not, as Soble alleges, constitute 'special' cases of masturbation. All that distinguishes masturbation from its mutual correlate, is that the Other becomes an instrument with and through whom sexually pleasurable sensations are derived. Soble's observation that "under certain plausible descriptions" the paradigm cases of mutual masturbation and heterosexual genital intercourse are virtually

indistinguishable, leads him to question whether all sexual activity is (only) masturbation; whether, in fact, the mutual rubbing of sensitive areas that occurs during mutual masturbation is at all distinguishable from the mutual rubbing that occurs during heterosexual genital intercourse. (235) But what continues to evade Soble, is the fact that the appearance of similarity between the two cases is not mitigated by the fact that the one case involves penetration while the other need not. Having failed at locating an essential connection between masturbation and mutual masturbation, Soble finds it implausible that masturbation might--except by appearance--have any relation to the paradigm of binary sex, i.e., intercourse. Convinced by the "apparent failure to find some physical distinction between the two activities," Soble goes on to propose, and subsequently to dismiss, two additional proposals for locating the distinctive feature--this time based on a theory involving intentions held toward the Other. It suffices to say of these two latter proposals that their failure is in having posited--from the rationale that the Other's presence logically entails a concern for the Other's pleasure--reciprocal pleasure as the determinant of nonmasturbatory acts, while maintaining that concern for one's pleasure (that is, for one's sole pleasure) would be masturbatory. In short, this version of Soble's attempt at

distinguishing masturbatory from nonmasturbatory activities introduces an ethical (i.e., the Other "ought" be considered) and an aesthetic (i.e., sex is "better" when reciprocal) dimension that obfuscates rather than resolves the original dilemma.

On my view, intercourse is an activity merely paradigmatic of binary (homo- and heterosexual) relations. But this in itself does not prohibit the activity's assessment on the grounds that I intend. If activity designated 'sexual' has basically to do with the promotion of sexual pleasure, then it ought be possible to further assess such activities on the basis of that pleasure's intended recipient, i.e., as primarily intending the promotion of sexually pleasurable sensations for oneself or for the Other. As a 'binary' and hence a presumably mutual activity, it becomes possible to count specific acts of intercourse as either mutual and masturbatory (where the agent's intention is to promote sexual pleasure for him/herself) or mutual and nonmasturbatory (where the agents each aim to produce sexual pleasure in both him/herself and the Other). Mutually masturbatory heterosexual intercourse would be characterized along the same lines as "pre-Soblesque" binary reductionist sex; as activity in which the Other's presence is as a means to sexual pleasure's fulfillment, rather than that fulfillment's own goal. On

the other hand, acts of mutually nonmasturbatory intercourse would be characterized along those lines previously set for binary expansionist sex; as distinguished from the former sort by the latter's involvement with, rather than simple utilization of, the Other. In mutually nonmasturbatory sex, each agent takes the Other to embody that which s/he takes the emergence of sexual pleasure to mean, i.e., that one whose be-ing gives meaning to the activity, and from whom the pleasure deemed 'sexual' is derived.

Though true that in mutually nonmasturbatory sex the agent intends to ensure the Other's sexual pleasure, it is no less true that this agent's own pleasure must (if the act is to be considered mutual) be this Other's focus. Should the agent fail to consider either the Other's and/or his/her own sexual pleasure, the judgement of mutually nonmasturbatory sex would not hold; the act would either 1) cease to be 'mutual' in its failure to allow the Other access to pleasure(s) one intends for oneself; or 2) miss the mark of being "sexual," i.e., in failing to intend that the act designated as sexual, succeed in producing sensations of the same (or a similar sort) in and for oneself. Contained in (2), is the intuition that even those acts said to be performed solely for the Other's sake, must involve some level/sort of pleasure for the one whose act it is. It suffices that for the case of sexual pleasure, an

act will be judged nonmasturbatory if its primary goal is not the promotion of (sexual) self-pleasure, and masturbatory if the intended pleasure is primarily or solely self-directed. Given this distinction, it is altogether conceivable that an act of intercourse that is not mutual might be either masturbatory or nonmasturbatory; might, that is, either fail to provide at least one of its participants with those sensations corresponding to "sexual pleasure," or to successfully employ the cited activity as a means toward fulfilling some other altogether nonsexual goal, i.e., hurting or demeaning the Other, or merely utilizing the Other as a means toward promoting one's own sexual fulfillment. But from the conclusion that even intercourse may serve purpose(s) other than the promotion of sexually pleasurable sensations for both those persons involved, it follows that the discussion of sexual activities may now be advanced to allow for further analysis; specifically, of the parameters of 'good' as opposed to 'bad' sex.

The Parameters of Good and Bad Sex

In previous chapters I have argued that the distinction between sexual and nonsexual activities should be based on the actual ability of the former, as distinct from the latter, to elicit sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable. I have similarly argued that acts are not inherently sexual, and that one's prior assumptions as

to an act's nonsexual (or sexual) status are subject to change, i.e., that such acts may become imbued with (or lose) sexual significance, or may be found to promote sexual pleasure unintentionally. Further distinctions are possible on two grounds: that between unitary and binary sexuality, and that between acts that are either masturbatory or nonmasturbatory. Contained in the first of these latter distinctions is the difference between holding the Other's presence as insignificant to an activity's assignment as sexual, and taking the Other's be-ing as inextricably connected to the pleasures said to accrue from sexual experience. Contained in the second, is the distinction between sexual acts performed with the intention of eliciting the agent's own pleasurable sensations, and those performed with the intention of eliciting the same sensations in the Other (i.e., with the individual's own pleasure being secondary to this sensation's promotion).

Several implications follow from my proposal and its adjunct theses, not the least of which is that the range of sexual and nonsexual activities is both as wide and as narrow as the breadth of individual imagination; determining an act's sexual or nonsexual status is a proper function of subjective, as opposed to objective assessment. Far from being a matter warranting the support either of universal or consensus opinion, the question whether an act has been

found to be sexual can only be answered by an individual who has (or has not) found it to be so. In other words, the answer to the question whether an act is (or has been) 'sexual' ought always be put this way: "For whom?"

I further maintain that questions as to the naturalness or unnaturalness of a specific sex act or of a general set of acts are inappropriate to the scheme I propose. Although a number of authors have sought to give accounts of "unnatural" sex that characterize either sexually perverse or immoral behavior (notably Nagel, Solomon, Ketchum and Ruddick),³ it has also been maintained that such accounts accomplish little more than to mark off, on a statistical basis, acts that are rare or unpopular (e.g., Goldman, Levy, Gray). But I find that both these tactics have at best proven unhelpful, and at worst led to arbitrary, often tyrannical conclusions about the "best" form(s) that sexual pleasures and corresponding activities "ought" take. To speak of sex in terms of "naturalness," is

³Perhaps one of the more curious--if only for its consequences--views of 'perverted' sexual activity is offered by Donald Levy in "Perversion and the Unnatural as Moral Categories" (Ethics 90, No. 2 [January, 1980], pgs. 191-202. Reprinted in Soble, POS, 169-181). In it, Levy identifies 'perversion' as a sub-class of the 'unnatural' with this additional feature: Perversions are, according to Levy, acts that degrade and/or corrupt. Arguing that since ". . . all perversions degrade, but not all degrading acts or experiences are cases of perversion," Levy reaches the conclusion that an act like rape might actually be no less perverted than homosexual activity between consenting adults when it is a preferred form of sexual activity.

to speak in terms of objective goals and objective fulfillment; in terms, that is, of something whose performance and satisfaction can properly be judged from the vantage point of objective distance. But this is far from the truth of sexual experience, as one can see if considering the matter from the standpoint of sexual pleasure--or pleasure of any analogous sort. We need only recall that in the case reflecting the eating behaviors of Smith and Jones (the former preferring to eat alone, the latter in the company of Others), the question as to which had "eaten better" was not only ill-focused but could only be answered from the standpoint of one's own personal preference, i.e., how it is one might suppose that "eating activity" ought to occur. Just as the only logical query that could be put to Smith and Jones was whether both (or either) had actually gotten to consume food, the question of sexual pleasure can only be answered to the extent that the responding agent can assent to having actually experienced that pleasure. In an equivalent sexual case, though Smith and Jones might find it unsettling that either had experienced sexual pleasure from an act taken by the other to be "unnatural," this fact could hardly alter the other's experience. Given an opportunity to comment on the other's sexual pleasure, neither may see anything of any "natural" merit to the Other's experience; in fact, it would not be at

all unusual to find either agent wondering what had led the other to engage in it. If by "natural" we are to mean something having to do with inclinations (e.g., that Jones is "naturally" inclined to respond pleasurablely to the performance of X) then it seems altogether worthless, futile and dogmatic to force or politely suggest that Jones accept Smith's recommendations for Jones' own sexual life. If, instead, we take "natural" to mean something having to do with a presumed connection between sex and progenerative expectations, then we would be less than consistent were we not similarly to disavow any of a number of equally non-productive sexual activities.⁴ More often than it is admitted, the assessment of a sexual act as "unnatural" has more to do with factors such as personal preference and cultural exposure, than with anything having to do with a coherently expressed and ideologically consistent frame of sexual reference. As such it is perhaps best that such assessments be only cautiously subjected to forthright analysis, or preferably relegated to the class of emotive claims.

But not as easily dismissed, and rightly so, is the relation of sexual activity to the scheme of sexual morality. For here we have an opportunity to generate

⁴This would include sex with an infertile partner, and sexual activity involving the employment of contraceptive devices.

discourse of an entirely different sort; discourse on whose ground we may note the apparent success and/or failure of a sexual act to generate either pleasure or pain, equality or inequity, dignity or denigration. If we begin with a moral premise whose application to nonsexual situations has been relatively incontestable, then we should expect its similar success with the sorts of situations presenting sexual significance. We could then find it possible to speak coherently of sex in terms of moral rightness and wrongness, i.e., of the morality or immorality of specific sexual activities. I feel that just such a premise exists in the (negative) moral imperative that intentional harm ought not be brought upon persons.

But even if we were to presume the relevance of this premise to the realm of sexual activities, it would neither be reasonable to maintain an uncontested conflation of the "unnatural" with the immoral nor to argue that moral imperatives rightly reflect what ought be our "natural" inclinations toward behaviors of any specific sort. That it simply makes good sense to distinguish the notions of unnatural and immoral sex acts, is no better borne witness than in the case of adultery. As Wasserstrom⁵ has astutely argued, even if it should be said that adultery is immoral

⁵Richard Wasserstrom, "Is Adultery Immoral?" In Today's Moral Problems. New York: Macmillan, 1979, pgs. 288-300.

on the basis of the lies and deceptions that often accompany it, the presumption as to its actually being adultery (rather than the lies and deceptions) that is immoral, is clearly premature; we would still require some evidence that adultery itself, rather than any of its frequently attendant features, was immoral. But even were this latter point to be successfully argued (i.e., that adultery could be proven genuinely immoral from the perspective of yet another of morality's dictates) it would still be odd to find someone arguing the "unnaturalness" of sexual activities performed with a person other than one's own spouse.⁶

Foregoing the assessment of sexual acts on the grounds of their being "natural" or "unnatural," is it yet possible to wage an equivalent assessment on the grounds of good as opposed to bad sex? Can the intuition that there is something 'amiss' or even 'abhorrent' in the nature of some

⁶Disagreeable, wicked, mean-spirited perhaps, but not "unnatural." In all fairness, however, it might be argued that some agent(s)--so devoutly attached to his/her spouse--might find it "unnatural" performing sexually with someone other than that spouse; but in this case the sense of the "unnaturalness" of the act is different. For, in this case what would be implied is that the act involves features with which one might be unfamiliar, i.e., in that it does not 'feel' right precisely because it involves the unfamiliar. The better word or this kind of feeling, is 'odd.' Given a nonsexual but equivalent case, one might justifiably find it odd being the only person in line to cash a check before a bank's 2 p.m. closing time, but there would not normally be any reason (excepting an overly solicitous teller or a telepathic exchange of funds) to suppose that there were anything 'unnatural' about it.

sexual activities, be salvaged by reference to their being bad, and hence, unnatural (i.e., because they are bad)? As was true in the previous case requiring the term "unnatural" to be defined, merely counting some sex as "bad" would--in and of itself--do little to advance our discussion. Since both "unnatural" and "bad" so easily yield to ambiguity, making "bad" sex the moral equivalent of sex that is "unnatural" fails at giving us anything that can serve as a fixed point of reference; rather the equivalent of forcing the decision whether this or any other iglyboo ought really be counted farfel. But suppose now that it were argued that we really do know what "bad" means? That "bad," unlike "unnatural" conveys something disagreeable, wicked or offensive; conveys, in fact, a sense of a thing's opposition to what is "right." My response to this would be that one's adherence to such a position effectively conveys the view that what is "bad" is also ipso facto immoral, and if this is so there is no real need for substituting the one term for another. But might not an act be bad in yet another (nonmoral) way? Don't we normally mean something when we say, for instance in reference to the way that John has played a game, that he had played badly; that he played a "bad" game? In this nonmoral sense, bad means something more than that John has behaved immorally, unless we intend to convey that he has cheated, intentionally maimed his

opponent, or deceived us as to the score. What "bad" would normally convey in this context has to do with skill, with physical endurance or more precisely with John's observance of rules pertinent to a player's expected performance. This sense of badness has more to do with pragmatics--or with an assimilation to the ideal--than with morality, and it is just this sense of nonmoral badness that I adopt in discussing the parameters of bad (and good) sex. And if it makes sense to say of a game or its players that "having played well" means that the rules of the game have been observed, then it makes no less sense to speak of sex being good when it actually or successfully promotes those sensations taken to correspond to an agent's view of sexual pleasure, and bad when it fails to do so. In conjunction with the former means of assessment, my proposal may now be said to allow for sex acts to be judged on grounds that are both objective (either moral or immoral to the extent that harm is intentionally incurred) and subjective (good or bad, as the act either successfully or unsuccessfully promotes sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable). What, now, are the consequences of my view?

On the assumption that one of the more basic of the moral imperatives is to forbear intentional harm-doing (in the form of either denigrating, or physically and/or emotionally injurious treatment of persons), it will follow

that a class of 'sex' acts will present prima facie cases of moral wrongness, i.e., will, under this analysis, be immoral. Given necessary inclusion here, will be rape (even if 'sexual' by standard accounts),⁷ necrophilia and voyeurism (given the criterion of respect), sadism and masochism (if, despite our own inclinations to the contrary, non-reciprocal), bestiality (given the criterion of an animal's sentience, pedophilia,⁸ and those forms of pornography that foster the illusion of pleasure as

⁷On Solomon's terms, it appears that the worst that could be said of rape, is that it is a form of "bad communication." Noted from Mother Jones 1, No. 1 (February/March, 1976), pg. 67: ". . . Samuel Rhone, juror in the Inez Garcia trial, told reporter Nan Litman [that] a woman could not plead self-defense if she killed a man during a rape attack because 'the guy's not trying to kill her. He's just trying to give her a good time'." Perhaps what Mr. Rhone had in mind, was that the worst such a 'guy' could be accused of, was having misinterpreted what the Inez Garcias of the world take as satisfying the criteria of a "good time"; a mere error in judgement as culpable as--say--taking one's date to see a comedy, when a drama would have been preferred. On Nagel's view, "bad sex is generally better than no sex at all," and since he provides no model of the kind of sex so sufficiently bad as to preclude its being better than nothing, we are left to assume that rape would at least be preferable to his paradigm case of "bad" sex (masturbation).

⁸The question as to the feasibility of gaining a child's consent for sex is in fact raised by Robert Ehman in "Adult-Child Sex" (PAS, 431-44). Though Ehman seems correct in focusing attention to both society's general romantic notion of childhood naivete and the age at which sex becomes 'appropriate' behavior (i.e., at what age we ought cease to consider a person a child), his mid-stream shift of focus from the issue of consent to that of probable harm only serves to obfuscate the point that gaining the level of consent required is at best improbable, and in most obvious cases, clearly impossible.

emanating from displays of pain and/or denigration. On the other hand, but by the same criteria, sex acts counting as moral would include masturbation, fetishism and autoeroticism. Just as the former set would be necessarily immoral, this latter set would necessarily fulfill the stipulated condition for morality, unless an argument could be advanced for their conveying harm to that agent having chosen the activity. Since it has already been argued that there is nothing inherently amiss with the 'unitary' model of sexuality, any attempt at disputing its morality on the grounds of this proposal cannot take refuge in the mere fact of these acts' solitary performance, e.g., as though they are potentially 'harmful' because they are capable of being performed alone.

Those acts necessitating an actual Other's involvement--mutual masturbation, homosexual and heterosexual intercourse, mutually consented lesbian sex and mutually performed coprophilia and urolagnia--would be moral to the extent that the Other's cooperation is freely given and responded to in kind. The stipulation of "freely" given cooperation is essential to both the assessment and classification of the binary relations; a stipulation which demands that a wedge be driven between mutuality and reciprocity. This distinction, which I take from Sara Ann

Ketchum's "The Good, The Bad and the Perverted,"⁹ holds that

A reciprocal relation is one in which both (or all) parties have as objects of their awareness or consciousness the other person's consciousness or state of awareness. Reciprocal arousal, then, would occur when this reciprocal awareness arouses new feelings or intensifies existing feelings in each of the participants.

A mutual relation is a reciprocal relation in which the reciprocal states of awareness are symmetrical. All mutual relations are symmetrical, but not all reciprocal relations are symmetrical. (Ketchum, 147)

I accept Ketchum's distinction, even though she is a "hostile witness" to my own thesis, since the conclusions she takes to flow from the distinction differ significantly from my own. Though the specific nature of our disagreement will be revealed shortly, it suffices now to make this much of what she has said: From the point of view of my own argument, binary sexual acts (even those that one might personally find offensive) are moral to the extent that they involve states of awareness that are not only mutual, but symmetrical, e.g., that Smith's action directed toward Jones must count by both Smith and Jones as either the same or the functional equivalent of Jones' action taken toward Smith. This criterion would force the conclusion that, whereas acts of sadism would--for instance--count as immoral, those acts

⁹Sara Ann Ketchum, "The Good, the Bad and the Perverted: Sexual Paradigms Revisited." In POS (reprinted), 139-57.

of mutually entered sado-masochism where each perceives the Other's act as differing from, but essentially reflecting the nature of his own act toward that Other, would not be immoral. Again, the determining factor is not what we would personally do or allow to be done in the name of sexual activity, but rather the scheme of reciprocal relations entered into by the agent and his/her Other.

The subjective assessments of good and bad sex leave little to objective commentary. Acts sufficing to promote sexual pleasure can be as varied as allowed a particular agent's 'flexible' manipulation of the norm, and capacity for generating 'creative' responses to the desire for sexual fulfillment. Mutual masturbation, heterosexual and homosexual intercourse, and mutual sado-masochistic relations would all fulfill this criteria. But a peculiar consequence of this view--one that emerges in response to Ketchum's distinction between mutual and reciprocal relations--is that it allows for the possibility of rape's being counted as good sex, insofar as it were to produce both sexually pleasurable sensations for the rapist and--through an act of "benevolent coercion"--sensations of sexual pleasure in the rapee as well (Ketchum, 146).

Ketchum's specific argument arises in response to those theorists (like Nagel and Solomon) whose narrow, exclusive focus on the varieties of reciprocal response

neglects consideration of there being a possibility of negative response, which on their view would count as "response" nonetheless. It is, moreover, Nagel's rather curious comment that perhaps even bad sex might be better than no sex at all, that Ketchum wants to deny. Her solution to the problem of negative reciprocal response is put this way:

It is tempting, but not necessary, to fall prey to [this sort of] argument: a) rape is the act of forcing someone to engage in sexual relations; b) sex is good; therefore, c) rape is benevolent coercion. The plausibility of this argument rests on the quantificational ambiguity of premise b. The argument is only valid if we assume that b is a universal statement, but that is not a very plausible interpretation. The statement that sex is good, if not interpreted universally, may entail that good sex is good, but it does not entail that bad sex is good. (Ketchum, 146)

Since Ketchum's open disdain for the nonmoral senses of good and bad sexual activities is evident in other (uncited) portions of her essay, we are justified in interpreting the last of this quoted portion as saying that assumptions as to sex's moral goodness may

. . . if not interpreted universally, entail that morally good sex is morally good or beneficial, but it does not entail that morally bad sex is morally good or beneficial.

That is, even were we to attach to our understanding of sexual activities that such performances somehow contributed to the overall share of moral goodness, this judgement would not alter the reality of bad sex's being bad. But if this

is true it is only trivially true and we are still not privy to what it is besides the absence of coercion that makes good sex good and bad sex bad. As I see it, the problem with this sort of analysis is rooted in having presumed without argument that 'bad' sex acts are necessarily immoral. Unless we are prepared to argue an intractable relation between the good and the (morally) right, there is nothing preventing our agent's finding an act of good sex to be immoral or, contrarily, our finding a morally acceptable act to actually constitute bad sex.

Of this latter category, i.e., of the class of bad sex acts, it only warrants mention that although any sex act might conceivably fail (consistently or on occasion) to provide sensations agent-identified with sexual pleasure, given the addendum that bad sex acts are also those that employ overtly sexual behaviors for nonsexual purposes, there are some such acts that will necessarily constitute bad sex. What I am suggesting, is that we take acts of "bad" sex to be those that are either unsuccessful (failed) or maladapted attempts at producing the sensations appropriate to the sort(s) of pleasures designated as "sexual." Given this view, fetishism, in its erotic attachment to a segment of human anatomy or clothing, would be bad sex even if it is moral. Though arguably true that the fetishist neither intends harm to him/herself nor to

Others,¹⁰ what he accomplishes by way of his fetish is to have the article of clothing (or body-part) be a narrowly focused, truncated Other. This truncated Other, whose response to the fetishist's activities can only be fantasized, is incapable of responding to the fetishist and so of completing the dynamic of genuine binary relations. The fetishist's actions differ from those of a male whose penile penetrations of a watermelon may be as much a sexual release as of fantasy. What distinguishes the fetishist's case, is precisely that the clothing-item, the body-part are

¹⁰It is not inconceivable that someone's desire for sexual self-gratification might be or become self-destructive and so prove immoral rather than moral. See, for example, Dietz, P.E., Burgess, A.W., and Hazelwood, R.R., "Autoerotic Asphyxia, The Paraphilias, and Mental Disorder," pgs. 83-85, in Hazelwood, R.R., et. al. Autoerotic Fatalities. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983. According to the DSM-III-R Casebook (Washington: American Psychiatric Press, 1989): "An estimated 500 - 1,000 people die annually in the United States from autoerotic asphyxiation; almost all (96%) are male. Deaths occur among persons from adolescence through the seventies, the greatest frequency being in the twenties. A complication of Hypoxyphilia, other than death, is anoxic brain damage." (16) What is not clear in the DSM cited cases, is whether it can be shown that the agent's desire--rather than for sexual fulfillment--was not actually for the fulfillment of those self-destructive impulse/fantasies that warrant such acts' assessment as 'abnormal.' The degree of pathology evidenced in these sorts of cases, however, would tend to indicate that it is possible, on the grounds that I have allowed, to assess an act of autoerotic masturbation as immoral, if performed with the intention of deriving self-pleasure from an act that is at the same time self-threatening. But here again, it would seem that the overwhelming pathological nature of such an act would render it more capably analyzed as a mental or emotional disorder, than as a mere sex act.

directly traceable to the thing that each more totally represents; are, in fact, representations of the total dis-embodiment of the Other.

Fetishism is a special form of masturbation, likened to intercourse with a fantasized partner. It utilizes person-objects (or exclusive focus on a specific segment of the anatomy) to enhance the reality of sexual pleasure as through this object (or body-part), and as though it were an Other. It bears a striking resemblance to binary-reductionism's "use" of an actual Other-as-object, that feature which--under a different set of plausible descriptions--made distinguishing between unitary-expansionist and binary-reductionist sex so extremely difficult. It is the fetishist's disharmonious treatment of the fantasized Other (i.e., a disharmony evidenced in the singular focus on what he takes to represent the Other's sexuality) that makes his sexual activity bad. But this sense of 'badness' is nonmorally neither more nor less than that of the sexual binarist who 'substitutes' rather than truncates his fantasy-Other. In cases of this latter sort, the sex is bad because its (feigned) sexual activity is for the fantasized Other's sake, i.e., because its performance promotes the agent's sexual pleasure by manipulating the actual Other for the fantasized Other's behalf.

No less exemplary of bad sex, are bestiality, necrophilia and any other binary sexual activity distinguished by distinct power imparities (e.g., pedophilia, particularly in the form of parent-child incest); bestiality and necrophilia because they mock the mutuality of binary relations, pedophilia and adult-child incest, in those cases where the act's overall thrust is toward the gratification derived from the Other's disempowerment. In each of these cases the activity designated as 'sexual' demands a specific kind of Other--one whose cooperation is all the more ensured by the distinct unlikelihood (or, as in the case of necrophilia, the impossibility) of its failing to be obtained. Though in these cases it may not be said that the activities--as such--fail at promoting sensations corresponding to an agent's conception of sexual pleasure, they are yet bad because the sexual sensations these acts reference are both contingent upon, and secondary to the agent's more immediate desire to control the Other.

Finally, whereas (mutual) sado-masochistic relations may qualify as good (i.e., as sufficing to promote sensations identified by both agents as sexually pleasurable) the sadistic or masochistic scenario played out on either an unwilling or an unwitting participant warrants an entirely different kind of assessment. To the extent

that the binary activity envisioned by the sadist is more likely to appeal to a masochist (and, that by a masochist to a sadist) than to one who is unappraised of the situation, it is unlikely that the Other will find 'sexual pleasure' in the activity a sadist (or a masochist) has envisioned.

It now appears that the parameters of good and bad sex can be put this way: When viewed from the perspective of binary sexuality, an act of sex is good to the extent that it successfully promotes sexual pleasure in both the participants; from that of unitary sexuality, an act of sex is good to the extent that it successfully promotes the agent's own pleasure. As has been argued in previous Chapters, unitary sexuality--whose paradigm case is masturbation--represents as bona fide a class of sexual activities as do those representing its binary correlate; that, moreover, since masturbation is no less the sexual activity than intercourse, it is no less deserving the latter's status within the full range of sexual activities. But in relation to the subjective assessments of good and bad sex, it also emerges that there is far less likelihood of an act of unitary sex being 'bad,' than there is of binary sex being bad. Only the fetishist, who disembodies or 'thingifies' his fantasized and nonparticipatory Other, warrants this nonmorally negative judgement; but masturbation, particularly 'unadorned,' (solitary and

intentional) pursuits of sexual self-gratification, cannot be said to constitute cases of bad sex.

Masturbation is a sexual activity whose performance is necessarily tied to the desire to promote sexual pleasure. Although this view does not exclude the possibility of an act's being unintentionally experienced as masturbatory, it raises questions relative to the possibility that someone might fail to find sexual pleasure in masturbatory activities, yet continue masturbating for some other (albeit nonsexual) reasons. Even were we to hold the feasibility of this prospect in abeyance, i.e., that someone might deny the connection of masturbation to sexual pleasure while asserting its connection with some other sensation and purpose, we would still be left with the puzzling fact of masturbation's being a reflexive activity. The masturbator is, then, clearly doing something to him/herself. But what? Let us hear the question out just this far; let us assume for the sake of argument that masturbation is reflexive, but only in the sense of promoting (self) deception, i.e., in that masturbation amounts to little more than a deceptive practice whereby its agent intentionally confuses his masturbatory sensations with those taken to emanate from genuine sexual response. But what does the 'deception' really involve here? And, what could be its point? Either the act is masturbatory (in that it successfully promotes

those sensations agent-identified as sexually pleasurable), or it is not (in that it fails at promoting them). Is it possible that someone really deceive him/herself about the fact that s/he is masturbating or is it, again, the sensations that--being labeled as 'pleasurable'--are being denied? The problem with this distinction is that it is false; that neither we nor our agent can mean self-deception in the first of these senses, without also meaning self-deception in the second. Even were we to argue that it is conceivable that masturbation might arise from some "shadow" activity's performance (e.g., soothing oneself, massaging oneself, exploring oneself, etc.), this alone would not explain an agent's ongoing performance of an activity that has not been linked to any (positive or negative) sensation-effects. Perhaps the issue is a purely semantic one; perhaps our agent would simply prefer that the "soothing, massaging, act of bodily self-exploration" not be labeled "masturbation" or "masturbatory." My response to this is that if in fact the act is found to be pleasurable in the sense that it promotes sexual pleasure, then the act is masturbatory despite our agent's wishes or intentions to the contrary. But, if it is the fact that the activity promotes sexual pleasure which our agent wishes to deny, then we are driven back to question the motivation behind the shadow activity's performance. In fact, we might well ask why

there should be a "shadow" activity at all, unless there were some rudimentary awareness of the act's actual intent.

Given the distinction between good and bad sexual activities, solitary masturbation would only be bad when it is denied that masturbation is the activity being performed, or when persisted in for reasons having nothing to do with sexual pleasure. The first defies the logic of the intent behind (if not the meaning of) masturbation, while the latter would--if conceivable--necessitate some other (perhaps more prudently behavioral) type of analysis.

In his essay "On Masturbation," Soble alluded to the possibility of ranking all sexual activity as intrinsically masturbatory. What now appears to have been the problem with this suggestion--and in fact with Soble's own analysis of mutual masturbation--was the underlying assumption that masturbatory acts were by definition solitary (unitary). This is clearly the problem with his struggle to explain why mutual masturbation should even be considered "masturbatory." Although his stated intention is to free masturbation from its "conceptual confusions" and establish its viability as a bona fide sexual activity, Soble ultimately falls short of completely severing his own ties to the binary conception of sex that he eschews. Since on my analysis there is no guarantee that an act's being 'binary' will assure its performance for the sexual

pleasures of both those persons involved, there is nothing inherently wrong with the suggestion that what might appear 'binary' on the standard analysis, will not actually be the equivalent of an 'unitary' act on my own.

From the suggestion that masturbatory acts are those performed for the purpose of eliciting sexually pleasurable sensations in oneself, and that genuine sexual activities are those that successfully produce sensations agent-identified as 'sexual,' it follows that any sexual act would in fact be masturbatory or nonmasturbatory, mutual or nonmutual. The only challenges to this view are the same semantic considerations that would have us believe that masturbation is only (or at best, intrinsically) solitary, and that sexual activities involving Others necessarily take that Other's experiences into account and so are--ipso facto--binary and nonmasturbatory. I have previously argued that counting an activity as sexual is predicated upon the activity's potential for promoting sensations that are sexually pleasurable. But if this is true, then it seems only reasonable to question whether the intended recipient of these 'pleasures' is to be the agent (him/herself) or some Other; the former intention marking the act as masturbatory, the latter as nonmasturbatory. It might be further argued that it is not altogether inconceivable that an apparent act of masturbatory sex might actually be

nonmasturbatory (e.g., that someone intending his/her own pleasure might also hope the Other is sufficiently pleased) or that an act of nonmasturbatory sex might appear masturbatory (e.g., that an intention cannot be reasonably formed to please an Other, without at the same time being an intention that one be pleased with having promoted the Other's pleasure). My response to this, is that what is at issue here (in distinguishing masturbatory from nonmasturbatory sex) is the agent's primary intention rather than any secondary or tertiary considerations as to what the agent may also intend to follow from his/her act. The agent who intends his/her own sexual pleasure and who also intends that the Other assume responsibility for his/her own, is in fact engaged in what I shall call an act of sex that is primarily masturbatory. Likewise, the agent whose own sexual pleasure is primarily derived from having sexually pleased the Other, is engaged in nonmasturbatory sex even if it should be argued that his/her own sexual pleasure is a factor of having prompted the Other's. Since the focus of sexual pleasure is--as I envision it--located in those sensations agent-identified as 'sexual,' the actual number of participants to the act's performance is at most peripheral (to its assessment as sexual). This in no way mitigates the act's being masturbatory, if by 'masturbatory' we now mean "performed for the purpose of eliciting sexually

pleasurable sensations in oneself." Neither are we justified in assuming that an Other's involvement in an act assessed as sexual, automatically guarantees the act's being mutual.

Given Ketchum's suggestion that 'mutual' acts are reciprocal only if they are symmetrical (i.e., to the extent that they involve reciprocal states of awareness that are symmetrical), acts could fail at being 'mutual' on either logical grounds (because they are solitary) or the grounds of their being nonreciprocal (and so, asymmetric). The effect of this would be that even some acts previously considered 'binary,' would not meet the criteria imposed by 'mutuality,' and those that are mutual would not necessarily (given the criteria by which a sex is now to be assessed) be 'sexual.' What I propose in lieu of analyzing sexual activities from the standpoint of a requisite number of persons (unitary, binary) or the sorts of phenomena that either may or may not attend the sexual experience (reductionist, expansionist), is to redirect our focus on the sexual experience itself. Given the criteria I have stipulated, sexual activities would then be either

1. nonmutal - masturbatory
2. mutual - masturbatory
3. nonmutual - nonmasturbatory
4. mutual - nonmasturbatory

Although the class of nonmutually masturbatory acts (1) would, for instance, certainly include successful acts of solitary masturbation and fetishism, it would also include any of those sexual activities involving an Other, but where one's response to that Other is nonreciprocal (e.g., those that do not involve reciprocal states of awareness that are symmetric). Similarly included, would be necrophilia, pedophilia, sex with animals and sex with fantasized partners (e.g., where the specific form of the fantasy involves substituting one's actual performance with A, for the fantasized performance with B).

The class of mutually masturbatory acts (2) would include any partnered activity that successfully employs the recognition of reciprocal (and symmetric) states of awareness, but which similarly involves each agent's awareness that the sexual pleasure promoted is for each agent's own (individual, not 'collective') sake. Including and exclusive of those partnered acts which might warrant this assessment, it suffices to say that no partnered sexual activity (e.g., intercourse, tribadism, coupled masturbation, etc.) will necessarily be mutually masturbatory. Not unlike any other mutually satisfying activity entered into for the purpose of eliciting sexual pleasure, acts of mutually masturbatory sex are

distinguished only by each agent's intention that s/he be the primary recipient of whatever pleasures are to accrue.

In both nonmutual and mutual masturbation, the participating agent(s) take sexual pleasure to be an experience that is essentially his/her own. Where (unlike solitary masturbation) there is an Other whose participation counts toward the activity's performance, this Other is either that one who makes possible the promotion of sensations taken to be sexual, or that one whose participation is only tangentially related to the cited sensations' promotion. Both nonmutual and mutual masturbation are in contrast to nonmutual and mutual nonmasturbatory acts, where the primary intention is either to elicit the Other's sexual pleasure or to have one's performance with this Other satisfy the criteria of some further (and essentially nonsexual) goal or goals.

The criteria for nonmutual, nonmasturbatory acts (3) would be met by cases of unsuccessful solitary masturbation, solitary masturbation that denies its intent, or those acts involving Others that either do not aim at incorporating the Other's state of awareness and/or fail at producing sensations that are mutually sexually pleasurable, e.g., rape. Since counting an act as nonmutual can either mean that: the participants' actions are not equivalent (i.e., are asymmetric); one or both participants have failed at

incorporating the Other's intentions in the desired sensations' promotion; or, there is simply not an actual Other with whom the agent is interacting, an act of nonmutual nonmasturbatory sex is neither limited to a specific type of sexual activity, nor to a requisite number of persons for the activity's performance. It is the intentions of the agent(s) whose act it is, rather than the specific nature of an act, that justifies its assessment as nonmutual and nonmasturbatory. It suffices to say that such acts do not involve reciprocal states of awareness that are symmetrical. The activity it involves must either fail at promoting sensations counted by one or both participants as being sexually pleasurable, or simply be activity performed for the Other's behalf.

Mutually non-masturbatory acts (4) would include those that not only involve reciprocal states of awareness that are symmetrical, but that also involve each agent's attempt to promote sexually pleasurable sensations in his/her agent-Other. Because each agent forgoes the promotion of his/her own sexual pleasure and instead intends the promotion of sexual pleasure in the Other, mutually nonmasturbatory sex acts are distinguished from the former set on at least two grounds: first, because their mutuality ensures that each agent's act is the functional equivalent of the Other's and secondly, because what counts in this case as sexual

pleasure is the prospect of both giving and receiving this pleasure from an Other. These dual features add a dimension to mutually nonmasturbatory sex that effectively alters the conception of "nonmasturbatory" sex as previously conceived. For in this case the fact of the act's mutuality overrides its agent's (primary) intention to provide sexual pleasure for the Other, and instead locates sexual pleasure in the agent's response to this Other. Necessarily excluded from inclusion in this group, are any of those sexual acts that discount an actual, sentient¹¹ Other's significance to the performance of acts deemed sexual (e.g., solitary masturbation, fetishism, necrophilia, etc.). Those acts which might be included, would be any that allow for the possibility of sexually relating with an Other in ways that admit to mutual response, and where the assumption is that sexual pleasure is both the concern of the agent and the agent-Other (e.g., intercourse, tribadism).

In addition to being more descriptive of what is occurring during the 'sexual' activity being analyzed, these new labels (1-4) not only avoid the conflation of nonmoral

¹¹I maintain throughout that references to an agent or agents are references to actual, conscious possessors of an ongoing self-concept (i.e., those who would, at the very least, qualify as 2nd-order intentional systems. According to Daniel Denet, such "systems" are not only capable of forming the intention to do X, but also of possessing certain hopes, beliefs, desires and other intentions in references to the intention to do X.

with moral criteria, but also reinforce my suggestion that references to "perverse" sexual activities are best avoided. It now remains to see what--if any--necessary connection there might be between one's chosen sexual activity and its relation to the scheme of society.

Sex. Self and Society: Of Couple-ism,
Communitas et. al.

In A Woman's Journey: Experiences For Women, With Women, contributor Kitty Hutcheson makes the rather off-hand observation that society's definition and judgement of us as human beings, often reflects assumptions concerning what we do (or are presumed to do) in bed.¹² Since her comments are directed to participants in her workshop on "Gay Identity," we might well credit her with having utilized some degree of verbal restraint; there are definitely harsher things that might be said of a society's refusal to grant the most basic human rights to a segment of its population, simply on the basis of that population's preference for sex with same-sex partners. But her apparent reticence to condemn what is--given a society's rhetoric on "freedom" and personal choice-making--an undeniably condemnable situation, is not in itself remarkable. The inescapable fact of the matter is that the sorts of

¹²Kitty Hutcheson. "Gay Identity Workshop." In Louise Yolton Eberhart's A Woman's Journey: Experiences For Women, With Women. Columbia, Maryland: New Community Press, 1976.

assumptions to which Hutcheson alludes are not unusual, even if they are unfortunate; they are made, quite frequently, in other areas as well, e.g., on the assumption of essential differences in male/female behavior and expected social response, on differences in racial or ethnic background, religious beliefs and socio-economic status. But assumptions based on sexual preference differ--if not on grounds of perniciousness, then at the very least because they are granted such pervasive support through society's prevailing ideals and institutions; institutions that, for instance, either make it possible or impossible to marry, to inherit, or to be genuinely afforded one's right to fair choices in housing, employment, and freedom from undue public harassment.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the disparagement of homosexuality and lesbianism have much in common with the disparagement of a confirmed masturbatory practice. Each threatens, not only the "status quo," but the very core of society's view of acceptable sexual behavior. But whereas both homosexuals and lesbians are made to confront specific prejudices that seek to advance heterosexuality, progeny and the stabilization of presumed gender identities, the masturbator's nemeses are the same theoretical constructs (couple-ism, communitas, reciprocity and communication) that support the very idea of what is essential to the assessment

of sexual activity; that sex, no matter how it is perceived, is essentially an activity defined in terms of a paired or binary experience. As a result of these presumptions, the homosexual and the lesbian are given to think that they are doing something sexual (through with a wrong-sexed partner), while the masturbator (at least from the prevailing views espoused in sexual philosophy) is led to believe that his/her activity is not "sexual" at all.

Since my concern has been to discuss the relevance of masturbation and its inclusion into the scheme of sexual activities allowed philosophical consideration, it is not within my purview to answer allegations as to the more specific nature of the "threat" posed by either homosexuality or lesbianism. It suffices to say, however, that if current statistics are correct in having projected the gay population at 1 in 10, it seems that whatever general fears there might be concerning the undergirding of society are either erroneous or premature. But the issue of the direct "challenge" of masturbation to couple-ism, communitas and the rest, must be met head-on, for it is not as easily dismissed. Specifically, what an elected masturbatory practice would seem to challenge, is the view that--among other things--an individual's "completion" requires that s/he not only enter intimate relationships with others, but also experience a sense of incompleteness

in the absence of having done so. This raises the question whether the fact of justifying the status of masturbation as an actual sexual activity diminishes whatever theoretical worth the counterclaims of couple-ism (and its attendant theories) may be taken to convey.

Though admittedly deserving more in the way of response that the previous case (i.e., that involving same-sex, partnered sex) the question raised by the sexual status of masturbation reflects the same pattern of fallacious reasoning.¹³ For, just as the previous case would seem to demand that same-sex sexual activities be judged 'wrong' on some basis other than their simply not being 'right,' the question whether a defense of masturbation should lay challenge to any view stipulating the necessity of relating to Others, is already to presume, without argument, that the theoretical schemes taken to explain our social realities can impinge upon our private realities as well. Perhaps the problem can best be put this way: even if it should be argued that one can describe any number of human activities in terms of our relations with Others, can this in itself necessarily force the conclusion that sex is one of those relations, without at the same time presuming that sex is a relation with Others (i.e., within the range of such theoretical explanation)? To do so would seem additionally

¹³Specifically, *petitio principii*.

to presume precisely what the masturbator's own actions successfully deny.

Does this then mean that the theoretical validity of couple-ism et. al. ought be suspect, perhaps even abandoned? I do not think so. Only if we begin by weaving the Other into the necessary fabric of sexual experience, is there any need to consider what happens to the theoretical value of coupled activity schemes when what is called sex does not involve a "couple." But this would impute nothing about the worthwhileness of these schemes to the vast lot of nonsexual activities whose successful performance would actually require an Other's performance or participation. It is sufficient, rather, that we acknowledge coupled sex as a distinctive form of sexuality, but one which ought not be used as a gauge for assessing sexual activity in general.

Beginning, then, with a unitary conception of sex would not signal the death or dearth of coupled activities, or of activities that either acknowledge or emphasize the individual's relation to the "whole" of society or nonspecific Others. What beginning with a unitary conception of sex would accomplish, however, is to broadly delineate the essential features of self and Other, and of activities having private as opposed to "public" significance; would moreover, emphasize the values of autonomy and self-dependence in one's sexual (if not one's

public) life, and bring question to bear upon whether--as Hutcheson so coyly suggests--one's position in the bedroom ought have any presumed significance to the way we are thought of as human beings.

It ought be obvious at this point that a defense of masturbation has consequences that extend far beyond an individual's right to sexual self-expression, self-exploration or the mere identification with pleasures associated with activities called sexual. Understanding what the masturbator intends, and granting both philosophical and social legitimation to his/her act, are tantamount to opening a crucial window to a more inclusive perception of sexual activities; a window whose opening is--in keeping with the analogy--demanded by the closure of doors to alternative discussions of sexual experience. In having begun its discussion of sexual activities from the standpoint of binary relations, sexual philosophy has not only delimited the number and kinds of activities which might actually be counted as sexual, but severely de-emphasized the values of autonomy and self-dependence which are at the core of human experience. If, moreover, the case is thus closed on the question of what sort of "relation" sex essentially is (i.e., necessarily a matter of binary experience) then the only remaining areas of concern would involve those Others with whom "sex" ought properly be had.

In short, although a defense of masturbation would seem on the face of it to promise little more than a trite support of one's right to have sexual self-stimulation count as "sexual" activity, it appears on closer view that such a defense is demanded if we are ever to approach either a philosophical or socio-political defense of the more common, yet equally disdained, non-standard sexual practices.

It is not surprising, then, that defenses of binary sexuality more often than not take as standard, the presumed "rightness" of a heterosexual model. Where Soble found it only "natural" that we look to the socio-political and philosophical support afforded heterosexuality to explain the disparagement of masturbation, homosexuality and lesbianism, I believe that the "linchpin" he alleged (e.g., that of our vested interest in sustaining the current political economic order, capitalism) is a more sophisticated explanation than is actually warranted. Perhaps the more innocuous suggestion is that the general patriarchal unconscious, fostered by "couple-ism" and its attendant features, lead in their own "un-Soblesque" but equally natural way to conclusions regarding both binary and non-heterosexed, sexual experience. In fact, neither Soble's conclusions nor my own are mutually exclusive. But how the conclusion of what is properly (and exclusively) sexual is derived is hardly as significant as that this

conclusion forms an impediment to furthering more reasonable and more realistic discussions of sexual being; a sense of "being" that may, but need not at all be a way of relating to or with Others. For my own case I can only say that researching this topic never led me to uncover a single author who granted unreserved status to masturbation and who did not also grant similar status to homosexuality and lesbianism. Similarly, those tending toward a disparagement of masturbation, indicated the same level of disdain for same-sexed sexual activities. Why should such a correspondence between the tendency to acknowledge masturbation and same-sex activities be struck, were it not because they both directly challenge the patriarchal norm? Why should such an inordinate degree of emphasis be placed on moving from benignly (nonsexual) mature and immature couplings, i.e., 'couple-ism' per se, and to the sexually intimate couplings taken to mark the formation of genuinely mature behavior, were it not because such couplings are presumed to further the interests of society as a whole? Interests, for instance, that do come to be reflected in decisions concerning who gets to marry, to inherit, and to be afforded equal protection under the law?

Since I have already allowed that Hutcheson's assessment of the situation is probably correct (even if only unfortunately so) I will add just this much more: that

the masturbator masturbates does not--in the scheme I envision--tell us anything of any essential nature about the kind of person the masturbator will be, or necessarily give us any clue to the limits or the expanse of his/her contributions to society. The error in judging Others on the basis of what it is presumed they "do in bed" (or with whom they do it) is precisely that there is neither a logical nor a necessary connection between them. There is nothing that would necessarily preclude as possible, the masturbator's being socially gregarious or otherwise generous with time, money or attention to the "social causes" that s/he might deem relevant. Similarly, the fact that someone chooses to sexually relate to Others does not--in and of itself--indicate that s/he is "Other-centered" in nonsexual contexts. That assumptions of this sort persist is, again, unfortunate; but that they should continue to be voiced in the wake of a burgeoning sexual philosophy--particularly one whose uncontested support of binary sexuality is at the same time an errant defense of couple-ism in sex--indicates a serious lapse in philosophical judgement. To assess Others on the basis of their bedroom activities, is to be misled into presuming a direct connection between distinctly different aspects of their lives (e.g., private and public); and, even were such a

connection to be shown to exist in some cases, we are not justified in holding it to necessarily be so.

There is yet another good reason for abandoning the prospect of coming to know essential things about Others through an analysis of their sexual activities. This time the issue concerns women, and the same patriarchal agenda discussed in the previous case. Though there might otherwise be little to warrant support for Dworkin's diatribe on intercourse and its negative consequences for women, there is yet something to be said about tendencies toward viewing sexual relationships in terms of power disparities (e.g., of performative judgements distinguishing "those who do" from "those to whom something is done") and specifically, of viewing women as intrinsically passive and compliant respondents to the sexual agency of men. It could be argued in Dworkin's defense, for example, that her perception of heterosexual relations in Intercourse is actually not as far-fetched as we would prefer to believe; that, in fact, her interpretation does not significantly differ from some more common--though less likely verbalized--interpretations that hold a woman's role in intercourse to be an extension of that role she assumes (or is meant to assume) in nonsexual activities. One possible response to this view is to say that since the themes of empowerment and subjugation are read into this

interpretation of intercourse, the roles of 'doer' and 'do-ee' falsely represent the activity; more a projection of the speaker's own preconceptions, than a reflection of what it means to engage in heterosexual intercourse. But a better response, one adequately reflecting the issue at hand, is again to argue that the assignment of "gender identities" based on one's position in intercourse is not only an unreliable indicator of the role played in nonsexual activities, but also arbitrarily designates as "masculine" or "feminine" precisely those positions one takes the physical activity to convey. It is, in short, to presume the truth of one's conclusions about sexual activity in advance of argument, while using these same conclusions to advance a view of the essential nature of persons. Even Dworkin--who thrusts her argument toward the radical and impractical conclusion that women either abandon intercourse or suffer its negative social and political 'stigma'--seems oblivious to the fact that it is the underlying and assumed "meaning" of intercourse that ought be attacked; that a theory of persons based on bodily protrusions and points of entry hardly deserves the theoretical space required for rebuttal.

It is true that references to couple-ism, communitas, communication and reciprocity have a place in discussions of both our essential (and even our inessential) ways of

relating to Others. It is no less true that a significant portion of that development noted as "human" intends an ability to function in a variety of situations; situations that involve Others if for no better reason than that such contact--besides being for the most part unavoidable--is often quite desirable. The Other is that one whose existence gauges our own; that one (or ones) whose being can be our own reflective base or whose conception of reality makes impossible the exclusive reliance on what we take to be. But it is another thing entirely to insist that only those acts performed in the company of Others are significant, or that the sorts of things done alone pale in comparison. There is, for instance, much to be said for possessing an ability for effective communication, or for working with Others toward some common goal. But it is no less significant a matter to be aware of one's own goals, or to understand the features of one's own personality that determine one's pursuit of them.

On second view it appears that--of couple-ism, communitas, reciprocity and communication--the latter three are merely descriptive of criteria emphasized in interpersonal relations. It is couple-ism, in its normative stance on the necessity for forming an essential relation with an essential Other, that suggests the greatest possible challenge to unitary sex. But a fervent defense of couple-

ism would be impossible, without at the same time doing irrevocable damage to the concept and reality of individual autonomy, i.e., of self-dependence, completeness, and the presumed worthwhileness of establishing boundaries to mark off that 'space' that is one's own, as distinct from that which one would share with another. This is where I feel that the binary conception of sex (and specifically the binary approach to grasping what is essential to the understanding of persons) is most deficient. Though there would be nothing inherently misleading in the suggestion that a number--or even the majority of persons--find sexual activity more gratifying when experienced with Others, this is not the same as saying that anything deserving assessment as sexual would need be a binary experience. We are justified in interpreting the couple-ist's proposal as extending beyond that of the sexual binarist; for whereas the latter sees a necessary relation between "sex" and coupled activities, the former places a disproportionate emphasis on coupled activities of any sort. The problem with this way of seeing things is that it not only leaves the "individual" at a disadvantage in the equation of those things judged to have any real importance, but it would also have the consequence of hurtling us toward coupled activities in an effort to achieve the significance they are alleged to possess. The damage to one's sense of self-

worth, of independence, autonomy and even the prospect for honest relations with Others, is obvious. There is--after all--a vast difference between an act's being performed out of preference, and the same act's performance for the point of satisfying some other set of criteria. If what couple-ism promotes is the view that acts performed with some Other are more significant than those acts performed alone, then the Other is him/herself little more than an instrument (or means) toward this more significant act's performance. Even should we prefer to overlook the more obvious moral consequences of this interpretation, there is yet the question of settling what--if anything--the Other is to mean. Although answering this question is beyond the purview of my own dissertation--and is, as I see it, a different question than that raised by whether any act ought be "coupled"--it does seem that what is at stake here is whether any genuine respect can be afforded those activities that are either intrinsically private or that become private by an elected preference. I take the most reasonable response to this question to be the following: unless we begin by assuming an inherent value to exist in coupled activities, it seems impossible that a conclusion should be reached guaranteeing their genuine significance or enhanced satisfaction. Unless, that is, the Other's performance/participation is built into an understanding of

the specific task's successful completion, there seems to be no good reason for arguing the solitary activity's relative inadequacy.

If, as argued, 'sex acts' are those that bring about sensations identified by their agents as 'sexually pleasurable,' then even were the decision formed to communicate or transfer these sensations to an Other or Others, the very nature of sexual experience would still, simplex munditis be "unitary," i.e., as rooted in the perception of that one whose act and whose judgement of that act is to count. Rather than implying a "reverse reductionism" to unitary sex, this only points to the couple-ist's error in having pursued a normative defense of his/her position. If, on the contrary, couple-ism has primarily to do with a more commonly perceived (descriptive) aspect of general human behavior, then assumptions as to its necessary relation to sexual activity are simply not warranted.

Summary

The Introduction's employment of W. Beran Wolfe's slot-machine imagery was an attempt at discussing risk, diversity and difference as characterizing the philosophical enterprise. It was noted, moreover, that philosophical discussions of human sexuality were particularly risk-laden; that, anything purporting to be a sexual philosophy must

begin its investigation prior to general assumptions as to what might merely appear to be the case, or what the consensus view would have the case be.

What my investigation revealed, was a distinct theoretical preference for discussing sex in terms of a binary experience, the result being that acts of masturbation emerged as nonsexual (or marginally sexual) and those of mutual masturbation as cloaked in a conceptually imposed confusion. Supporting the binary conception of sex were a number of theories taken to both describe and prescribe necessary relations with Others, and which had become part of philosophy's own arsenal against the conceivability of unitary sex. It has been argued--in response to the prevalence of such theories--that although they may provide the theoretical means for enhancing our understanding the phenomena of relating with/to Others, they are not intrinsically involved in an act's assessment as sexual; that, moreover, only by beginning with assumptions that sex is an experience with Others, do such theories presume any relevance at all.

The revisions on Wolfe's "penny-in-the-slot" wisdom (Chapter I, pg. 1; 29-30), and specifically to having one's philosophical inquiry motivated by risk, diversity and difference, are therefore quite pertinent to philosophical discourse on sex as I see it. But this time, in keeping

with Wolfe's analogy, the stakes are not "chocolate quality" or minor discrepancies based on "taste," but nothing more controversial than whether there should be agreement on what the essential features of "chocolate" will be; whether, that is, there can be any gain to denying as real the "chocolate assessment" that someone else has made. Wolfe's solution to the original dilemma, is to acknowledge that not everyone will necessarily be pleased with his or her share of chocolate; that, moreover, it is the machine's diverse contents that must eventually be accepted. But in the case generated by what is to be called "sex" it is the individual, rather than the "machine," that determines what "chocolate" will be and to what use it shall be put. The contents of this machine are uniform, and it makes little sense to argue that what emerges from its use is either more or less "chocolate" on the basis of its being shared. That many who deposit their coins will find their consumption of chocolate enhanced by sharing it with others is not the issue. The issue, rather, is whether we must agree that it remains chocolate, even if consumed by the one who prefers to consume it alone.

The relevance of Wolfe's analogy to the philosophical analysis of sex is just this: utilizing a unitary framework as basic to the philosophical analysis of sexuality would not only carry the advantage of producing a more inclusive

sexual philosophy (i.e., since an account of the binary is possible from the unitary account, whereas the reverse is not), but would finally make it possible to ask and answer the questions concerning sex that are deemed redundant by binary analysis. In conceptualizing sexual activity as something that essentially occurs between two persons, the binary account eliminates the necessity of asking precisely the sorts of questions that would advance any genuine philosophical inquiry into the nature of sex. In contrast to this, to open up these questions is to give genuine worth to this sort of philosophical investigation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, W.M. "Philosophers Have Avoided Sex." Diogenes 72 (1970): 56-74.
- Atkinson, Ti Grace. "Radical Feminism and Love." in Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men, edited by Allison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl. New York: Mc-Graw Hill, 1978. pgs. 301-302.
- Baker, Robert and Frederick Elliston. Philosophy and Sex. New York: Prometheus Press, 1975 (first edition) and 1984 (second edition).
- Barbach, Lonnie Garfield. For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality. New York: Anchor Books, 1976.
- Baumrin, Bernard. "Sexual Immorality Delineated. In PAS, first edition, pgs. 116-27.
- Blum, Larry et. al. "Altruism and Women's Oppression." The Philosophical Forum 5 (1973): 222-46.
- Brockriede, Wayne. "Arguers as Lovers," Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 5, Winter, 1972.
- Dearborn, Lester W. "Masturbation." In Human Autoerotic Practices, Manfred F. De Martino, ed. New York: Human Science Press, 1979.
- Dworkin, Andrea. Intercourse. New York: Free Press, 1987.
- Eberhart, Louise Volton. A Woman's Journey: Experiences for Women, With Women. Columbia, Maryland: New Community Press, 1976.
- Edwardes, Allen. "Self-Stimulation Among Arabs and Jews." In Sexual Self-Stimulation, R.F.L. Masters, ed. Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1967: pgs. 304-14.
- Ehman, Robert, "Adult-Child Sex." In PAS, 431-444.
- Eisenstein, Zillah R., ed. Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. New York: 1979.
- Ellis, Havelock. "Varieties of Autoerotic Phenomena." In Sexual Self-Stimulation (SSS) 277-303.

- Firestone, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution. New York: William Morrow, 1970.
- Fortunata, Jacqueline. "Masturbation and Women's Sexuality." In POS, pgs. 389-408.
- Freud, Sigmund. Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex. New York: Dutton, 1962.
- Frye, Marilyn. "Critique of Ehman's 'Adult-Child Sex'." In PAS: 447-455.
- _____. "Rape and Respect." (Coauthored with Carolyn Shafer) In Vetterling-Braggin, Elliston and English: 333-346.
- Garry, Ann. "Why are Sex and Love Philosophically Interesting?" Metaphilosophy 11 (April 1980).
- Gendron, Bernard. "Sexual Alienation." In Technology and the Human Condition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977: 114-133.
- Goldman, Alan. "Plain Sex." In PAS, 119-138.
- Gray, Robert, "Sex and Sexual Perversion." In PAS, 158-168.
- Greene, Naomi. "Sartre, Sexuality and The Second Sex." Philosophy and Literature 4 (Fall 1980): 199-211.
- Gregory, Paul. "Against Couples." Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984: 263-268.
- _____. "The Two Sides of Love." Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1986: 229-233.
- Hobson, Peter. "Another Look at Paternalism." Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984: 293-304.
- Jaggar, Allison M. and Paula Rothenberg Struhl, eds. Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men. New York: Mc-Graw Hill, 1978.
- Kelley, William G. "Rhetoric As Seduction." Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 5, Spring, 1973.
- Ketchum, Sara Ann. "The Good, The Bad and The Perverted: Sexual Paradigms Revisited." In POS: 139-157.

- King-Farlow, John. "The Sartrean Analysis of Sexuality." The Journal of Existential Psychiatry 2 (1962): 290-302.
- Kockelmans, Joseph J. "Merleau-Ponty on Sexuality." The Journal of Existentialism 6 (Fall 1965): 9-30.
- Kosok, Michael. "The Phenomenology of Fucking." Telos, No. 8 (1971): 64-76.
- Lea, Eduard. "Instruments for Autoerotic Stimulation." In Sexual Self-Stimulation: 315-329.
- Litewka, Jack. "The Socialized Penis." Liberation Magazine 18 (March-April, 1974). Reprinted in Feminist Frameworks: 63-74.
- Marcuse, Herbert. Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
- MacDonald, Robert H. "The Frightful Consequences of Onanism: Notes on the History of a Delusion." Journal of the History of Ideas 28 (1967): pgs. 423-431.
- Margolis, Clorinda and Joseph Margolis. "Alternative Life-Styles and Sexual Tolerance." The Humanist 33 (1973): pgs. 19-20.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Body in Its Sexual Being." In Phenomenology of Perception. New York: Humanities Press, 1965.
- Moulton, Janice. "Sex and Reference." In PAS (1st edition), pgs. 183-193.
- _____. "Sexual Behavior: Another Position." In POS, pgs. 110-118.
- Nagel, Thomas. "Sexual Perversion." In PAS (1st edition), pgs. 247-260; PAS (2nd edition), pgs. 268-279; and POS, pgs. 76-88.
- Oaklander, L. Nathan. "Sartre on Sex." In POS, pgs. 190-206.
- Pierce, Christine and Marjory Colins. "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis." The Philosophical Forum 5 (1973): pgs. 112-127.
- Pope Paul VI. Humane Vitae. In PAS (1st edition), pgs. 131-149; and (2nd edition), pgs. 167-184.

- Proudfoot, Merrill. "How Sex Can Make Us Good." Philosophy of Education: Proceedings 36 (1980): 307-316.
- Rapaport, Elisabeth. "On the Future of Love: Rousseau and the Radical Feminists." In POS, pgs. 369-388.
- Rice, Lee C. "Homosexuality and the Social Order." In POS, pgs, 256-280.
- Ruddick, Sara. "Better Sex." In PAS (1st edition) pgs, 83-104, and (2nd edition) ogs. 280-299.
- Ruse, Michael. "The Morality of Homosexuality." In PAS (2nd edition), pgs. 370-390.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- Shaffer, Jerome. "Sexual Desire." The Journal of Philosophy 75 (1978): 175-189.
- Singer, Irving. The Goals of Human Sexuality. New York: Schocken, 1974.
- _____. "The Sensuous and the Passionate." In POS, pgs, 209-231.
- Slote, Michael. "Inapplicable Concepts and Sexual Perversion." In PAS (1st edition), pgs. 261-267.
- Soble, Alan. "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sex." In POS, pgs. 1-54.
- _____. "Masturbation." Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 61 (July 1980): 233-244.
- Solomon, Robert. "Sex and Perversion." In PAS (1st edition), pgs. 268-287.
- _____. "Sexual Paradigms." Journal of Philosophy 71 (1974): 336-345. Reprinted in POS, pgs. 89-98.
- Stack, George J. "Sexuality and Bodily Subjectivity." Dialogos 15 (April 1980): 139-159.
- Symons, Donald. The Evolution of Human Sexuality. New York: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Taylor, Roger L. "Sexual Experience." Aristotelean Society (New Series) 68 (1967): 87-104.

- Teichman, Jenny. "Intention and Sex." In Intention and Intentionality. Edited by Jenny Teichman and Cora Diamond. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1979; 147-161.
- Trebilcot, Joyce. "Taking Responsibility for Sexuality." In Philosophy and Sex, 2nd edition: 241-430.
- Vannoy, Russell. Sex Without Love: A Philosophical Exploration. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1980.
- Vetterling-Braggin, M., F. Elliston and J. English, eds. Feminism and Philosophy. Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1977.
- Wasserstrom, Richard. "Is Adultery Immoral?" In Today's Moral Problems. New York: Macmillan, 1979: 288-300.
- Wilder, Hugh T. "The Language of Sex and the Sex of Language." In POS: 99-109.
- Wilson, John. Logic and Sexual Morality. Baltimore: Penguin, 1956.
- Winick, Charles. "The De-Sexualized Society." The Humanist 29 (November-December 1969): 6-8.
- Wolfe, W. Beran. How To Be Happy Though Human. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957.
- Women Staff. "Sex in a Capitalist Society." In Feminist Frameworks: 310-313.
- Yudkin, Marcia. "Difference Be Damned." Philosophy 55 (July 1980): 392-395.