

PP233 Take Home Final Exam

A critical reflection of widely discussed course topics

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WRITTEN FOR

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Question #1: What is sexual perversion? Draw upon our readings to defend your view.

The very first reading for this course was “Plain Sex” written by Goldman, which featured a critique of the “means-end analysis” of sex. This referring to the many conceptions that suggest sex is attributed to a purpose: such as love, desire, reproduction, or communication. Therefore it would be assumed that any sexual activity falling outside of this ideology would be perverse or immoral. However Goldman deconstructed this view and expressed how branding sex outside of these “means-end” models as perverse is inconsistent with institutions that were not directly questioned. For example, viewing sex’s purpose as for love would therefore cast most sexual desire as degrading. So instead, Goldman defines perverse sex as simply being *abnormal*.

I agree with Goldman’s evaluation in regards to rejecting the “means-end analysis” of sex, and connecting perversion with an uncommon practice amongst societies. However, he makes an important note that this account of abnormality fails to achieve a consistent evaluative measure of perversion. Defining one sexual act as statistically abnormal would make it count as perverted, but if fifty years were to pass and this act became more commonly practiced, its label as “perverse” would not simply disappear. Instead, the act would most likely continue to be called perverted by a moralistic-minority that was holding on to their judgements. This is a result of the strong connotative connection that most people consider perverted sex to be highly immoral. This connotation of subnormality is: “driven by the attitudes of those likely to call certain acts perverted rather than from specifiable features of the acts themselves”, and therefore possesses no evaluative norm and is largely emotive. Goldman concludes that further psychological explanation is required to explain how truly complex the sex-perversion relationship is and to support the inconsistent connection between perversion and genuine moral evaluation.

Sara Ruddick, who wrote on “complete sex”, described sexual perversion as not serving the biological function of sexuality – reproduction. I believe that Ruddick’s account for sexual perversion is incorrect because it exemplifies the earlier discussed “means-end analysis” of sex. She believes that the concept of sexual perversion must possess the connection of sexual desire and reproduction, “the act *could* lead to reproduction in normal physiological circumstances”, and therefore must occur between the genitals of a living male and female human. Ruddick defends this view by explaining that a perverse act is not necessarily incomplete. For example, sex between two men who have respect for one another, while “perverse”, is still a complete sex act and is therefore morally superior. However I would argue that Ruddick’s defense fails to consider Goldman’s previously discussed subnormality that most people conceptualize perversion and immoral sexual acts as having a linear relationship. Therefore I would entirely reject Ruddick’s account on what sexual perversion is.

I reflect again on Goldman’s conclusion that further psychological explanation is required to explain what sexual perversion is. Thomas Nagel, who unlike Ruddick’s biological definition of perversion, Nagel has a more psychological explanation. He described sexual perversion as being “unnatural” and possessing a

psychological complexity: "It cannot be denied that sex may serve various functions, but it also has its own content as a relation between persons, and it is only by analysing that desire that we can understand the conditions of sexual perversion" (Nagel, 55). This framework of understanding perversion is congruent with Goldman's rejection of a "means-end analysis" view on sex, however what are these conditions of sexual perversion? Nagel describes a sexual perversion as having to reveal itself in conduct that expresses an unnatural sexual preference. I would argue that this definition of "unnatural" could be synonymously expressed with Goldman's account of "abnormal". Nagel denies the sexual fetish of applying contraception as perverse, because that is not the usual explanation for its application. Therefore because it is commonly practiced amongst society to apply contraception, it is not considered perverse as fetish.

While this argument of mine provides some clarity on what sexual perversion is, it also raises another concern. If patting someone on the head were a fetish of mine, it would not be considered perverse because that is a commonly practiced non-sexual activity. However what if I was patting someone on the head, an act that would be accepted by most people, and my sexual arousal was unrecognized by that individual? I argue that this would therefore result in this act as being one that is perverse. This indicates that there is a psychological connection between the desires and interactions of those involved that would allow us to define the activity as perverse. Recalling Sartre's writings on sexual desire and the importance of being aware of one another as both a subject and an object, I believe that the missing element to this definition of sexual perversion is the presence of a narcissistic sexual inclination. Still following the previous example, me patting someone on the head would make the activity an embodiment of my own sexual desires, and is therefore perverse. However, if the person who I was patting on the head recognized that they were the object of my sexual desire and also desired this interaction then it would no longer be perverse. This principle of reciprocity in sexual relations is also how Goldman defined a moral sexual relation: "an act which by its nature objectifies the other, one recognizes a partner as a subject with demands and desires by yielding to those desires, by allowing oneself to be a sexual object as well, by giving pleasure or ensuring that the pleasures of the acts are mutual".

Therefore I conclude that sexual perversion is the "abnormal" (uncommonly practiced) sexual preference that is expressed in conduct or an activity that does *not* possess reciprocity of sexual desires and intentions. While I recognize that the subabnormality of people's own moral prejudices regarding perversion is still hard to measure, this definition defends acts such as masturbation, mutually enjoyed BDSM, and homosexual sex as *not* being perverse, which otherwise would have fallen subject to the label.

Question #3: What, if anything, is the relation between sex and love? Draw upon our readings to defend your view.

Throughout the duration of this course we have learned about many different accounts for sex. Alan Goldman introduces and critiques the predominant form of analysis of sex, which attributes a necessary goal to sexual activity. One of these goals or purposes being that sex is an expression of love. Goldman weakens this argument by first explaining that there are many different types of love. I love ice cream, I love my mother, and I love my philosophy course; but neither of these examples of love have even the slightest correlation to sex. Therefore if sex were an expression of love, it would only be an expression of one type of love: romantic. While I agree that sex is one way to express romantic love, it is not the only means of expression nor is it necessary. Love could be expressed by giving gifts, compliments, providing emotional support. Goldman also explains that while sex may reach a heightened value when experienced in love, you could argue that everyday mundane activities with that person would also reach this heightened value. Therefore the expression of love has no truly unique or necessary correlation with sex. Goldman then examines these possible dependencies by flipping the elements. We understand that sex is one way of expressing romantic love, but that is not the only form of expression that sex can achieve. Sex can also express many other emotions such as anger or frustration. Thus, sex and love are two very different things. Sex as a means within itself is physical and short-term, whereas love is a more long-term emotional experience.

Sex and Love can undoubtedly synonymously exist, however is there any relation between the two if they are carried out as means within themselves? Bertocci defines sex on its own as being egotistic and short-lived, and argues that it must subserve and foster love. He relates love and sex by explaining love as a hierarchical progression of values in which sex without love is at the bottom and sex for reproduction within a marriage as being the most supreme. Bertocci makes a great leap in his relation between sex and love by arguing that it is most optimally experience when in a married union with the intent of having children. I believe that there is no reasonable ground to argue that love must happen in marriage, especially in today's day-and-age where common law marriage is becoming more and more practiced. Therefore while Bertocci was able to provide a relation between love and sex, it is made irrelevant on a universal perspective as a result of his incorrect definition of love.

Harry G. Frankfurt had a more isolated and universal view of love. "It is essential to all instances of love that: (a) the lover is devoted, in some degree non-voluntarily, to the flourishing of his beloved; and (b) he desires the well-being of his beloved for its own sake rather than only for the sake of ways in which it might support or promote other interests". When examining the relation between love and sex, I would argue that this definition of love has no relation to sex in general when completed as a means within itself. In a sexual "hookup" neither elements of love are necessary, however one of these

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elements must be common in order for the sex to be “complete”: desiring the well being of the other. Sara Ruddick wrote on the topic of “complete sex”, and described it as acts which: “consist in mutually embodied, mutual active, responsive desire”.

Therefore when viewed as separate means, I conclude that sex and love have no true relation and that sex could be equally as satisfying with or without love. However, there is a relation between sex and love when reflecting on Ruddick’s view of “complete” or “better” sex. Sex, in which the element of love where a mutual desire and consideration is experienced, is therefore complete.