

WHERE THE SEX REVOLUTION FAILS

by

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TODAY, for the first time in history and as a part of Western society's peculiar Sex Revolution, sex has become a subject to be *taught*. But such teaching cannot be purely technical: it is bound to convey an attitude. And while teaching the physical facts is simple, knowing what attitude to convey and how to convey it is far from obvious.

One attitude conceives the object of sex to be physical thrill. It is seen as the supreme pastime or sport. At the other extreme, intercourse between persons attached to each other by bonds of exclusive affinity can be considered as a rite or a sacrament. The point, here, is that it is far easier to teach the first of these attitudes than the second.

One unusual aspect of our present sexual situation is that there has been a progressive lifting of virtually all limits to the public discussion and display of what has, hitherto, always been regarded as an essentially private matter. This has happened so rapidly—over about five or 10 years?—that the effect has been disorienting. Both in the field of teaching and the arts, fashion has tended to be set by the first and loudest voice to speak, which is not necessarily the wisest.

While some of the books and films produced today on sex are of serious value, others are merely for commercial exploitation. This is sometimes done under the guise of high purpose, occasionally invoking the auspices of professors of the non-existent science of 'sexology.'

Obviously, such humbug is not the whole story. There are the honest educators, concerned to convey the harmless minimum and to avert the psychological shocks of those who grow up in families where elementary knowledge of sex is not given by simple answers to early questions. But even these high-minded educators are likely to learn that it is far easier to talk about the mechanics of sex than about what lifts it above them. This is, still, a matter of private and mainly unarticulated experience. One cannot assume a successful and enduring sexual relationship, or the capacity to communicate it, even in educators with excellent degrees. (After all, the oblique communication of such experience is, among other things, what poets are for). Indeed, many educators present the sexual intercourse of human beings so mechanistically and so simplistically as not to differentiate it from the simplified sex lives of animals.

This teaching is true as far as it goes. There is nothing false in teaching that men and women, when aroused to it, rub against one another just like dogs and caged chimpanzees. But it is also inadequate and, therefore, misleading. Not only do many animals in the wild have much more complex mating rituals. Man is unique among animals in being capable of sublimations. This particular animal has, after all, built the Parthenon, composed the B-minor Mass, and given a large meaning to the word 'love.'

The essential point is that in teaching the physical procedures of sex, we necessarily imply a mental attitude towards it. If the physical procedures are all that we teach, then our teaching is bound to imply that those procedures, like eating or excreting, are acts performed only for the physical pleasure and relief they provide. Yet, even in describing the mating behaviour of wild birds, an ornithologist will point out those aspects of their behaviour, particularly in courtship, that strengthen the psychological bond between a mated pair. He will thus give their mating behaviour a social context and an emotional significance.

Today, however, the intellectual *elite* of our society are at a loss to know what social context and emotional significance to give human sexual relations. If only by default, then, they invest those relations with less dignity than we attribute to the equivalent relations among pairing birds. Indeed, they invest them with no dignity at all.

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So we face the question that all other cultures have faced: what customs are proper to us? But our peculiar dilemma is that, because of our scientific background, we can answer only in relative terms. Whether people greet one another by shaking hands or rubbing noses, we know depends only on the customs of particular societies. Such customs have no extrinsic authority, no authority of God or nature: therefore, it is often assumed, all other social customs have no authority except what people choose to give them.

There are, however, cases in which human behaviour does have the authority of nature. If, for example, the question were raised whether the proper way for men to walk was on two legs or on all fours, it could be answered by reference to the human anatomy, which is clearly adapted to walking on two legs.

This is not as remote from the theme of this article as may seem. A feature, if only a very minor one, of the current Sex Revolution is the Gay Liberation campaign to have homosexual relations accorded the same standing as heterosexual ones, even to the instituting of homosexual 'marriages' as has been suggested in California, which would be given the same legal status as heterosexual ones. This is quite different from a demand for tolerance of a deviation from the norm; it is a claim that homosexual relations represent the norm, no less than do heterosexual ones. Yet is it not obvious that the different anatomies of the sexes are complementary, that they are designed for each other, not in some loose way, but as specifically as a sword and a scabbard? Self-evident fittingness is equally plain in the related functions of egg and sperm.

This is most certainly not an argument for persecuting or despising those who feel attracted to members of their own sex. In any case, what consenting adults do in private is no one else's business. The point is that there are solid grounds for opposing the teaching and public demonstration of homosexual relations as being entirely normal, because it is just as clear that we are designed for heterosexual rather than homosexual relations as that we are designed to walk on two limbs rather than four.

Obviously, the fact that sex may be enjoyed at a sacramental level does not mean it cannot be enjoyed at lower levels as well. Variety contributes to such enjoyment, and one element is a variety of partners. But a widespread supposition today (when the Women's Liberation movement makes it fashionable to deny the complementary nature of the psychological differences between men and women) is that a variety of partners is as satisfactory to women as to men. Yet the fact is that the emotional commitment of women in sexual relations tends to be deeper than that of men—for sound biological reasons. So the present trend towards social customs that permit a variety of partners is not an unquestionable move towards greater enjoyment for all. It will almost certainly mean increased emotional and psychological distress for women.

While the lower levels of enjoyment appeal chiefly to those at an early stage of sexual experience, I would hold that the higher levels can only be reached by those who achieve full maturity. These experiences gain immeasurably where there is a private affinity between two persons bound to each other in a permanent and exclusive association. Such an affinity is fully realised only between a man and a woman who have shared the same bed, night after night and all night, over years that grow into decades; their two bodies equally familiar to each other, reciprocally wrapped together in sleep and in waking, providing a sense of fulfilment even when, with the passage of years, the physical excitement has diminished and become commonplace in itself.

In such a relationship, it seems to me, the element of privacy is essential. The relationship is a sort of secret between the two, excluding the rest of the world; the secrecy is a part of the bond. Over the years, men and women slowly change; but in the bond I refer to they change together and in ways that complement each other, so that at last, in age, they may mean no less to each other than when, under the thrilling impact of their passionate youth, they first came together.

The subtleties of this slowly evolved relationship are impossibly hard to convey in a textbook. Indeed, they can probably only be communicated to children through an intuitive awareness of their parents' contentment (when that exists).

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Perhaps the inadequacy of society's current attitude to sex may be for the present day only. Now, the destruction of the taboos around sex has been sufficiently completed to show that it has left a certain emptiness. One must hope that this discovery will lead to a renewed curiosity about those psychological or spiritual or aesthetic (whichever word you prefer) depths of affectionate feeling that, in sex as in his general relationships, make man fully man.

After all, the difference between male and female psyches and physiques can make complete what is otherwise only partial and incomplete—physically and in terms of man's whole mental and emotional life. That seems worth a search.