Civilization and Its Contents:

Platonic Reflections on the Culture War

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary politics in America—or, perhaps more accurately, the relatively small political class in America—is wracked by an ongoing culture war.[1]

Sexual matters are at the center of this culture war. Our debates concerning abortion, gay rights, the role of women, sex education, child care and a host of other issues are shaped in no small part by different and competing, if very partial, conceptions of the nature of sexual desire and its place in human nature as a whole. There is, however, surprisingly little theoretical discussion of the conceptions of human nature and sexuality that underlie left wing or right wing views on these matters. Most of what passes for reasoned discussion of these issues consists of reports of moral conclusions that are taken to be self-evident. On the right, many people tell us what they take God to require of us in sexual matters. On the left, many people tell us that that no religious or moral dogma can legitimately influence public policy having to do with our sexual

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This is very much a rough draft. I welcome comments and criticisms. I expect to post a revised, and adequately annotated version to my web site, http://www.stier.net, by the end of November.

This paper deals with some questions I have thought about for many years. I have been fortunate to have some friends who wanted to talk with me about them during this time. That has been all to the good, since philosophical discussions about sex can rather quickly become ridiculous, in one of two ways. Some papers on the subject get bogged down in philosophical minutiae and never get to sex. Others make claims that are so startlingly distant from the human experience of sex that only a philosopher could have written them. Most of my friends who have talked with me about the issues raised in this paper find philosophy interesting. But they find sex even more interesting. And they seem to know a lot about it. So, if I have avoided the usual mistakes, thanks are due to: Janet Brooks, Janet Dougherty, Henri Gillet, Gail Holmberg, Janet Hoskins, Peter Minowitz, Julia Nace, Beth Penney,Ted Perlmutter, Kennee Switzer, and Nicholas Ziegler. My greatest help in exploring these issues—and in making it possible for me to actually write this paper—has come from Diane Gottlieb. And Katja Gottlieb-Stier has helped in her usual ways as well.

[1] In a previous paper, "Three Ends and a Beginning," I declared the culture war a phony war. I still believe that, if we are talking about the vast majority of citizens in the liberal democracies, this remains true. But in the absence of any substantive political discussion about political economy, sexuality has practically become the sole topic of political debate in the United States today. Political scientists politely call non-economic political issues the "social issues." But, except for the death penalty and racial issues, most of the so-called social issues would be better called sexual issues—or maybe the sex, drugs, and rock n roll issues. (And even our debates about the death penalty and racial concerns are heavily overlaid with sexual tones.)

Of course, in the past year, we had a long political debate about the impeachment of the President. And part of that debate involved a dispute about whether sexuality was really central to the issue or not. It seems to me that those who say the issue was perjury rather than sexuality lack any of understanding of the centrality of the sexual content of Clinton's lies to the political appeal of impeaching him. Moreover, they fail to grasp the way in which eros and deceit so often intertwine. As Plato's account of Socrates's eroticism or lack thereof in the *Symposium* demonstrates, dissimulation of one sort or another is even more central to our erotic lives than it is to our political lives.

lives, broadly understood. At first glance, there seems to be no way beyond this impasse. Yet, standing behind the seemingly revealed truths of left and right are, as I have said, the shards of deeper conceptions of the nature of our erotic desires and their place in a good human life. These views make claims about the kinds of creatures we are. Thus, it would seem that, if we could only unearth and piece together these shards of argument, we might subject them to some kind of rational evaluation. We might, even, appeal to some kind of evidence about what sorts of beings we are, what kinds of desires we all have, if any, and how best to express these desires in our political and social lives.

The central aim of this paper is to begin this process of rational debate and evaluation. I try to meet this goal, in part, by giving a brief sketch of some of the leading contemporary ideas about our erotic and sexual lives. And I do that, in part, by contrasting contemporary ideas with those presented by Plato in the *Republic* and the *Symposium.* I focus on Plato in large part because this is the best way to understand what is distinctive—and, to my mind, what is wrong—with our contemporary ways of thinking about eros and sexuality. Despite their differences, I believe that all sides in the culture war—and those who try to avoid taking sides at all—share certain modern notions about eros and sexuality, notions that profoundly called into question by a reading of Plato.

So, while I talk much about Plato in this paper, interpreting his work is not my central aim. But it might be an important by-product of pursuing the goal of this paper. Sometimes, while writing it, I have wondered whether what I have, through a long effort, come to see in Plato's understanding of eros and sexuality is not obvious to those less caught up in modern and contemporary understandings of these matters than I once was. For the main respect in which Plato differs from—and, to my current way of thinking, improves on—the dominant understanding of eros and sexuality today is fairly easy to grasp once one is able to put contemporary views aside. But it is difficult to climb out of this cave. Reading Plato aright can help us turn around from the images of eros and sexuality produced by the errant philosophies that dominate contemporary thought. Still it is, I think, excruciatingly hard to read Plato right. And that is not just due to the exquisite subtleties in Plato's thought. It is also due to the difficulties of putting modern ideas to one side. Plato can help us do this, but I am inclined to think that it is difficult to appreciate this if we have not already begun to step outside the ideas that dominate our lives. As always, it is hard to recognize that we must broaden our hermeneutic circle until we have begun to step outside it. So perhaps my attempt to reconstruct some of the more striking ideas in the *Republic* and *Symposium* will help us see Plato through the fog of modern ideas.

In the next part of this paper I discuss some preliminary definitional questions concerning eros and sexuality. Then, in the following four parts, I defend four theses.

My first thesis is that the dominant modern traditions of political and moral thought, on left, center, and right, all take more or less the same view of erotic desire. For they all hold that sexual desire, narrowly defined, is the center or essence of eros. On practically all modern views, the desire for erotic relationships builds upon—and in part transforms—our sexual desires.

My second thesis is that the Platonic view is rather different. Plato teaches us that not only our desire for erotic relationships but sexual desire itself is, in large part, the result of a

more general erotic desire, the desire, as Socrates's report of what he learned from Diotima puts it in the *Symposium*, to possess the good forever.

My third thesis is that the Platonic view is correct. The arguments Plato puts forward for it, taken together with the arguments we can develop under his guidance, give strong support to his views.

My fourth thesis is that if we accept the Platonic view, we will find both sides in the contemporary culture war sorely wanting. Neither left nor right have a plausible understanding of where things have gone wrong in our erotic lives or our political community today. And neither side has a satisfactory account of how we can change things for the better.

My four theses commit me, I suppose, to a large and difficult project, one that certainly deserves much more research than I have undertaken and much more space then can be found in even a lengthy paper. So this essay should be thought of as no more than an introduction to—or perhaps a prospectus for—that project. Thus I shall take more than a few shortcuts along the way, and draw many conclusions that are worthy of not just more evidence but substantial qualification. But all long and difficult projects must start somewhere. And before I launch into such a project, I think it might be useful to subject the broad theses I wish to defend to the scrutiny of public discussion and debate. In addition, I have a further reason for presenting my four theses at this early stage of my work, one that gets to some of the difficulties in discussing the issues raised by the culture war in a serious way.

My previous experience in talking about these theses with colleagues and students suggests that if we are to seriously grapple with the issues raised by the culture war rather than settle for a clash of ideological reactions to them, we need vigorous debate and the difficult thought and self-reflection that go with it. And we need this even more than we need research and textual exegesis. Some of my previous interlocutors found my theses obviously mistaken. Others found them obviously correct. Having thought about my theses for some years, I no longer can find anything obvious about the issues they raise. Still it is no surprise that the views on both sides in the culture war have calcified into such a hard-edged opposition. Nor is it a surprise that both sides have adopted the term "culture war" to describe a dispute that is scarcely a war. On any view, our erotic desires are very close to us. And it is especially hard to understand desires that are difficult to bring into focus precisely because they are so close.[2] As a

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[2] It is, I suppose, no accident that this metaphor suggests itself to me as I age and my eyes weaken. I can trace not only my concern with the issues raised by this paper but the way I think about them today back to my first years in college and the peculiar stresses of that time. The experience of aging—and, in particular, the physical changes and established erotic attachments that go along with having reached a fairly settled middle age—have given me new perspectives on these issues. And much reading and thought have given me a way to express ideas I could only gesture to twenty years ago. But I still can see a continuity in my thought about these matters. I don't quite know whether to be troubled by or grateful for this continuity. Does it reflect a lack of thought and insight or a too limited experience of the erotic sturm and drang that might have decisively changed my way of thinking about eros? Or should I be grateful for the temperament, upbringing, and erotic experiences that have not only made me feel enormously lucky in life but have also confirmed for me the direction I first took in thinking about eros and political and moral life?

I raise these questions not to launch into any revelations about myself but because I am acutely aware that thought and writing about the matters I discuss in this paper cannot but be deeply personal, however much we desire to keep ourselves out of our arguments about eros. The perspective on erotic desire in this paper cannot but reflect

result, our view of them is often doubly distorted, by our theoretical or ideological predispositions as well as by our own character and personality. Thus we must be prepared to do some tough and potentially disturbing work if we are to come to grips with the nature of our erotic desires and with the problematic implications of these desires for our political and social life. The intensely partisan nature of our political and academic cultures make this difficult today, as does the personal barriers that always stand in the way of honest reflection. So, while I believe that my theses are—or, with some suitable qualification, would be—correct, I offer this essay more as a stimulus to fresh thought and honest debate than as a attempt to say the last, or even first, word on my topic.

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my own character and experiences. And your reaction to that perspective cannot but be deeply personal as well. I have no wish to write about myself, although I acknowledge that a combination of theoretical reflection and personal narrative can be the best way to deal with the questions I discuss in this paper. (My friend, Isaac Balbus, has used this combination to discuss related issues in a moving and powerful way in his book *Emotional Rescue*.) But I cannot take this approach, both because I suspect that reticence in erotic matters preserve their power, and because I am too lacking in the skill of narrative writing. Still, I think it important to, however obliquely, address a question that is raised by the argument of this paper. I suggest below that we should follow Plato and agree that sexual desire understood as simply the desire for physical pleasure is both less powerful and much easier to satisfy than is commonly held. One can't make such a claim today without being thought lacking in sexual ardor. And one can't answer (or really make) such a charge without seeming to boast.

This situation is not unlike that I found myself many years ago when I lived in Fairbanks, Alaska while my fiancé lived in Philadelphia. One of my colleagues, a former Texas motorcycle cop turned criminal justice teacher already had doubts about me because I was a Harvard educated, eastern, liberal, Jew who ordered shrimp rather than steak in a restaurant. One afternoon at lunch he observed that I did not, as he said, "chase women" during the fourth months I was apart from my fiancé. He then pointedly remarked that he could not have done the same. I could not quite see how to respond given that I did not want to legitimate the entire topic of his conversation, did not want to condone chasing women as he understood it, and most certainly did not see any way to reassure him about my sensibility without giving him even more reason to have doubts about me. I didn't think he could have understood just how vital my relationship to—and four conversations a day with—my fiancé was to surviving in circumstances, both professional and personal, that were very difficult. I didn't think he would find much plausible in my observation that his own sense of what it means to be a man would make these four months so much more difficult for him than it was for me. And somehow I didn't think he would buy a story about frequent cold showers and long treks into the Alaskan wilderness.

I do not want to answer the charge that my theoretical account of sexual desire results solely from my own deficient sensibility by boasting, either about heroic restraint or equally heroic indulgence. So let me just remind the reader of a central aspect of the argument I am presenting here. To deny that the desire for physical sexual pleasure is all that powerful or difficult to satisfy *by itself*, apart from erotic desires of a special or general sort, is not to say that the desire to have sex is weak. And it is certainly not to deny that the physical pleasures of sex are splendid. To argue, as I do below, that we can get pure pleasure from sex is precisely to say that we can have a strong desire to have sex regardless of whether we find ourselves sexually aroused all the time or not. And it is to say that whether we have sex a great deal—and whether we are sexually aroused all the time—is in important ways up to us. We have some freedom to choose to make the pursuit of sexual pleasure central to our lives or not by choosing to satisfy our erotic desires in one way or another. We need not be driven by the pain that comes with a physical hunger for something we are lacking. This freedom is, for Plato, best sustained if we do not seek to satisfy our erotic desires mainly through the pursuit of sex in itself or in the context of romantic relationships. For, in this way, we can protect ourselves from the bad luck that can so often undermine these aspects of life. But, if we are lucky in life, we might find that we can live in a way that enables us to satisfy eros, in the broadest sense, in more than one way. So a good life can include the erotic pursuit of both philosophy and romantic and sexual love There are serious tensions between these kinds of goods and risks in taking such luck for granted. But that is no serious reason for being unwilling to take advantage of it.

EROS AND THE CULTURE WAR

Eros and Sexuality

How are we to understand those ideas we broadly label erotic? As we all know, a wide range of different desires can and have been labeled erotic. But what is the nerve of erotic desire? That is, what is the central aim of the desires we call erotic? And what accounts for the different ways in which this primary desire is expressed in the lives of different people? Three kinds of answers have been offered in the history of political and moral thought.

The first holds that what is primary is our desires for the physical pleasures of sexual stimulation and orgasm. This is the desire for what contemporary philosophers call, with their characteristic eloquence, plain sex. Plain sex is sex that is nothing but physical or bodily pleasure. I will call this desire sexual desire.

The second answer is that the central aspect of erotic desire is our desire for relationships of love with other people including our children, our fellow citizens and, most especially, with our lovers and spouses. I shall call this a desire for an erotic relationship or a relationship of love or, when talking about lovers, a desire for a romantic relationship. And sometimes I will talk about eros or erotic desires in the narrow sense.

The third answer is that eros is a much broader and more general aim. In the *Symposium* Socrates recounts the teaching of Diotima, who presumably taught him that eros is the desire to possess the good forever. Assuming, as I think we should, that Socrates does, in part, speak for Plato, the Platonic view is that erotic desire in the broader sense is the primary form of erotic desire. Freud, in some of his later works, develops a similar view. He tells us in his late works that eros is a a desire for union with or merger with the world around us.[3] It is also, he suggests, a desire to be passively taken care by some larger or more powerful force or person. In discussing this third conception of eros, I will talk about our erotic desires, without qualification. Or, when my sense might be confused, I will talk about eros in the broadest sense.

Each of these conceptions of the primary erotic desire must explain the nature of at least some of the others. It may not be evident that sexual desires or our desires for romantic relationships is somehow tied to a desire to posses the good forever. But it is fairly evident that

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[3] To my mind, Freud is the great curiosity in the study of eros. On the one hand he insisted, more than anyone else, before or since, that the desire for sexual pleasure is at the center of not just eros but human life. But, on the other hand, in his later works, such as *Beyond* the *Pleasure Principle*, *The Ego and* the *Id*, and *Civilization and Its Discontents* he develops an account of eros nearly as general as that of Plato. But, despite this new account of eros, he tries to maintain the primacy of sexual desire in our lives.

In a moment I shall discuss some of the intellectual influences that undoubted lead to Freud's emphasis on sexuality. Here I just want to note that, given that late Freud resembles Plato in some ways, I find it much more plausible than early Freud. Indeed, I have had a tantalizing thought about the relationship between Plato and Freud, that I hope to work out some day: it seems to me that we can understand both Eros and Thanatos, what Freud calls the life and death instincts, as different ways of attaining Plato's notion of the aim of erotic desire: the possession of the good forever.

there is some connection between sexual desire and eros in the narrow sense. So, the first conception of erotic desire holds that sexual desire is primary in that it is the fundamental aim of eros. But it also holds that sexual desire can be transformed into a desire for a relationship of love or, indeed, into an erotic relationship with a child or teacher or even with the members of our political community as a whole. This is the view that Freud takes in most of his works. And, in those works, he even concludes that sexual desire can be transformed, via sublimation, into a desire for intellectual or artistic creation.

The second conception holds that the desire for erotic relationships is at the center of eros. On this view, one, but not the only way of expressing this desire is in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Similarly, the third view holds that at the center of eros is a very broad desire that can be expressed in any number of different ways, not just in our sexual lives or in our erotic relationships.

The argument of this paper is that the third answer is the correct answer. But that answer very much cuts against the grain of contemporary ideas. For we tend, I think, to take sexual desire—the desire for pleasure in certain parts of our bodies—to be central to eros.

The Centrality of Sexuality in Contemporary Accounts of Erotic Desire

Perhaps it is obvious that in much, though not all, contemporary thought, sexuality is held to be at the center of erotic desire. Still it might be helpful if I pointed to some indications of the dominance of this view and provided some explanation of how it came to be so dominant. For, the notion that sexuality is at the center of erotic desire can not, I think, survive much critical examination. And, when we see that this is so, our tendency is to wonder about whether this idea is actually so dominant in our community at all. Indeed, it quickly becomes evident that most of us, most of the time, do not at all *act* as if sexuality is central to eros. It is just for that reason that I think it helpful to see how much our *thoughts* about eros focus on sexuality.

Perhaps the easiest way to see the centrality of sexuality to contemporary thought about erotic desire is to see just how much the contending camps in the culture war agree to this notion.

The Right

I shall call the right wing in the culture war the Augustinians, for reasons we shall come to in a moment. For now, all we need to recognize is that, on the right, the fundamental problem of contemporary political and moral life is our failure to adequately train and restrain the sexual desires of human beings and, in particular, of the male half of the species. On this view, our sexual desires are anarchic in nature. They are, in the phrase of Freud, polymorphously perverse. They aim at every kind of bodily pleasure. They do not naturally lead men and women to commit themselves to the romantic love of another person. Nor do they lead us to embrace family life. Indeed, they do not lead to a stable, monogamous relationship of any kind unless they are restrained by reason. Yet, precisely because our sexual desires are nearly overpowering in nature, it is difficult for us to restrain them. Moreover this restraint is always painful for it leaves us craving the very goods we seek to deny ourselves. Sexual restraint can only come about by an

upbringing that discourages the florid growth of our sexual desires and that gives us a long training in self-denial.

Despite the costs, it is of greatest importance that we do restrain our sexual desires. For, without such restraint, political and social life will collapse. The fundamental reason restraint is necessary is that the family cannot survive without it. Children are utterly dependent upon adult care. Thus they need a parent—and, given the difficulties of life, ideally two parents—who are devoted to them. But our sexual desires lead us to shun our commitments to our lovers and children. The Augustinian solution is to restrain and channel sexual desire so as to support rather than undermine the family. Human beings—and especially men, whose sexual desires are particularly unruly—must be denied sexual gratification outside of marriage. For the only way to keep families together is by holding our sexual satisfaction hostage to our willingness to support our spouse and children. Thus the Augustinian view is deeply critical of sexual liberation precisely because it means to liberate sex from the constraints of marriage. It is critical of birth control and legal abortion because they both offer human beings the possibility of seeking sexual pleasure without the fear of pregnancy. That possibility is dangerous, however, for two reasons. First, it encourages the very sexual freedom, both before and after marriage, that intense moral training and the constraint of marriage means to control. For the threat of pregnancy—and the difficulties of raising children by themselves—is the fundamental reason that women are more likely to restrain their sexual desires then men. And it is the sexual restraint of women that limits the access of men to sex outside of marriage.[4] End the threat of pregnancy, however, and women will seek sex no less freely than men, lifting the restraints on male sexuality. Second, it opens up the possibility of the very end of the human species, as men and women avoid procreation so as to pursue what they truly desire, sexual pleasure in all its myriad forms. The Augustinian view is also critical of homosexuality, because it too seems to open the possibility of the pursuit of sexual pleasure without a commitment to the family.[5]

There is a second reason that sexual restraint is necessary. For our sexual desires, like our desires for other bodily goods, and the money or reputation we need to acquire them, lead us into conflict with other human beings. There are simply not enough good things to go around. We can only deal with this difficulty in two ways, but both require sexual restraint. We can work hard, and dramatically increase economic growth. But while this path gives us the resources to satisfy some of our bodily desires, it forces us to give over to work the time and energy we might spend in pursuing sexual and other delights. Or we can rely on government to restrain our demands for the goods we need to satisfy our bodily desires. Most contemporary Augustinians look to economic growth to take the rough edges off our political and social life. But they claim that economic growth is not enough and must be backed up by moral and political restraints on our bodily desires. Peace and civility, then, depend, in one of two ways, upon the sacrifice of our sexual and other pleasures.

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[4] Or, given the great difficulties of controlling the sexual desires of men, extra-marital sex is limited to prostitutes. From an Augustinian view, the lives of prostitutes—and their children—are, unfortunately, sacrificed so as to preserve the family life and thus the well being of everyone else.

[5] That many—perhaps most—gays and lesbians seek committed erotic relationships families is difficult to understand from an Augustinian point of view. Why should gays and lesbians be sexually restrained when they can have sex without the threat of pregnancy?

Where does this set of ideas come from? I have called them Augustinian. But it is important to recognize that Augustine truly does not think that sexuality is at the center of erotic desire. Like Plato, Augustine thinks that love—cupiditas—in the broadest sense is the central aim of human beings. But, unlike Plato, Augustine thinks that our love is faced with a fundamental choice: love of God or ourselves; of heaven or the earth; of the spirit or the flesh; of this world, or the next. Or, more accurately, this is the choice faced by Adam and Eve. Fallen man, however, is no longer able to choose heaven without receiving the special grace of God. We are punished for the disobedience of Adam and Eve by a disruption in ours soul that expresses itself in the disobedience of our own bodies to the commands of our will. So, for Augustine, without God's grace, we are bound to sexual desire—concupiscence—avarice, and the lust for domination. These desires are for the goods to be found in a life on earth, lived apart from the pursuit of God. And, for Augustine, the pleasures of sexuality, however false in God's scheme, are real in the here and now. So, it is a sign of our fallen condition is that, most of us, most of the time, cannot help but live after the flesh. And, in so far as we talk about fallen man, sexuality cannot but be at the center our erotic lives. And thus our sexual desires, along with our desires for power and money will be incredibly powerful and difficult to control. Yet they must be tamed and restrained, not only to serve God, but to preserve life on this earth. Without these restraints, the family cannot survive and conflict between human beings cannot be controlled.

I have tried, in the last few paragraphs, to sketch the conservative position in our contemporary culture war. These arguments, I should remind you, are not all derived from Augustine, especially in the unsubtle and unqualified way in which I have presented them. But, while Augustine may not be the direct source of the arguments made by rightists today, it is clear that the Augustinian conception of the power of sexual and other bodily desires in a fallen world is very influential on the right. The path these ideas take through Luther and Calvin to contemporary secular and religious theorists is well known. It is important to note, however, that these Augustinian ideas reappear in secular thinkers who seem, at first sight, to have a rather different perspective. Just consider the great revolutionary thinkers of modern times, Freud and Darwin. Stripped of theology, the argument of the last few paragraphs can be found more or less intact in *Civilization and Its Discontents.* There are other, rather different arguments as well. But the notion that sexuality is nearly all-powerful unless restrained by reason comes back in Freud's notion that the id and super-ego are in a constant struggle for our psyche. Similarly, neo-Darwinian accounts of erotic relationships rest on the notion that men have a fundamental desire, given by their genes, to sleep with as many women as possible.[6]

The Left

I will give the name liberationists to the leftist position in the culture wars. For liberationists seek to remove those restraints that Augustinians think are vital to our survival. In that respect liberationists are, of course, enormously different from the Augustinians. But if we looks at what it is that liberationists seek to liberate, we will find that the view of human nature implicit in their work is not so different from that found in the Augustinian tradition. For

[6] I shall return to neo-Darwinian views below.

liberationists tend to argue that it is our sexual desires, above all, that need liberation from the constraints of political and social norms and mores. And that claim presupposes that human happiness turns mostly on whether we are free to satisfy our powerful sexual desires or whether we must keep them bottled up inside us. So we find that today the cultural left is ever more fond of transgressing conventional expectations and norms, so as to call into question and liberate us from the constraints that make it difficult to freely satisfy our desires.

This liberationist perspective is a species of political and moral romanticism. But, precisely because of this, there might be good reason to call into question my claim that liberationist thought shares the Augustinian notion that our sexual desires are central to our nature. There is more than one philosophical psychology, or conception of the nature of human ends, that has been adopted by romantics. But, the notion that our sexual desires are especially powerful can be call questioned from the standpoint of the most dominant romantic conception of human ends. While I cannot discuss this issue in any detail, here, it is worth exploring a little. For, in doing so, we will come to recognize something very important about the practical implications of romantic thought.

Following Charles Taylor, we can all the most common romantic philosophical psychology expressivism.[7] This is the claim each of us has some ends deep within us and that our well being requires us to give expression to those ends which, at the same time, is to give them a determinate shape and content. There are a number of varieties of expressivism. All expressivists assert that, if we are to be fulfilled, we must express these ends in a our own way, one that authentically reflects our selves. But expressivists differ about why this is so, adopting one or more of three different views. First, expressivists can argue that the ends we seek to express are quite general and are shared by everyone, although, given our own experience and circumstances, we can best express them in a particular way. Second they can hold that these deep seated ends themselves vary from one person to another. So we must express what is distinctively our own. And, expressivists can hold that the very content of our ends demand that our expression of them be original or unique. Since expressivists also disagree among themselves about the content of the deep seated ends within us, not all of them can call for us to express ourselves in a distinctive fashion for this third reason. William Blake sees in us a very general "energy" that seeks, it seems, to give determinate and unique shape to itself. Marx holds that we seek to objectify our powers in productive activity. Nietzsche claims that within all of us is a will to power. In his early years Freud found drives for sex and food. And, in his later years, he found, instead, eros and thanatos. Whatever they find deep within us, expressivists of all stripes assume that, since we must express ourselves in an individual and distinctive fashion in order to be fulfilled, we will have to struggle against the ideals and practices of our time. What divides left wing expressivists, like Blake and Marx, from right wing expressivists, like Nietzsche is their understanding of this conflict between individual and society. On the left, expressivists expect that this conflict can ultimately be overcome. They believe that the radical transformation of political and social life will create the conditions in which we are all encouraged to can express ourselves in distinctive ways precisely because, in doing so, we benefit our community as well as ourselves. The left wing model is of an intellectual or artistic community in which our individual creations stimulate others to do the same. On the right, expressivists doubt that the

[7] Charles Taylor, *Hegel*.

conflict between individual and society can ever be overcome. They may argue that, contrary to the expectations of the left, there will always be a struggle over the resources necessary for truly original self-expression. They may argue that the mediocre many will always be threatened by and envious of the genius of the few. And they may claim that the very ends human beings seek to express lead them to try to gain power over or recognition from others, whether directly, in seeking to political rule political life, or indirectly, in seeking to rule over the life of the mind... The right wing model, then, is of a world in which the creative intellectual or artist must always struggle against the indifference or malevolence of the crowd.

We can easily see how this expressivist philosophical psychology supports liberationism. If one holds that our most deep seated ends are sexual in nature, then it is plausible to think that we must find satisfactory ways to express them if we are to be fulfilled. And it is also plausible to think that the vagaries of human life will give us more or less individual or unique sexual desires that we must express in our own way, even against the mores of our culture and society. To restrain these desires will distort or deform us, while causing us pain and distress. So, expressivism can support arguments for the liberation of sexuality from marriage as well as the liberation of gay and lesbian sexuality. And, so, while I pointed to the conservative, Augustinian strand in Freud above, there is a liberationist strand as well. Freud insists that sexuality must be repressed if the family and political and social life as a whole is to survive. But he worries that we may go to far in repressing sexuality, to the detriment of human well being. Freud's left-wing followers, however, dismiss the need for sexual restraint. Political and social transformation, they argue, will make work both more productive and fulfilling in itself, giving us, for the first time, the possibility of satisfying the broadest range of our bodily desires without creating political and social discord. And they suggest that we will learn how to liberate sexuality without undermining the reproduction of human life, whether by the institution of communal forms of child rearing or by relying on the presumably natural instincts of parents,

So romanticism and expressivism can support sexual liberation. But we might wonder why it is that these doctrines are themselves so often expressed in the form of liberationism. Of all the demands of 19th century left romantics, why is that the liberation of sexuality has come to have such prominence? Why is it that the cultural left is so focused on the authentic expression of sexuality almost to the exclusion of all other concerns? What, for example, has happened to the left's demand that our productive capacities be liberated and that work become a joy?

One answer to this question is that the materialism of modernity has lead us to conclude that the only truly universal human ends are bodily in nature. So if there is anything deep within us that needs to be expressed, it must be some kind of bodily desire. This consideration is the central reason that, even as he speculated about eros and thanatos, Freud was never willing to give up the idea that one of our basic drives is fundamentally sexual in nature. The leftist thought that sought to join the materialism of Freud to the materialism of Marx certainly shared this point of view.

Another answer to our question—and one that is particularly attractive to liberationism—is that it is precisely the dead hand of Augustinianism that makes sexual liberation so pressing. On this view, if it were not that the repressive ideas of Augustinianism so dominate our culture, the left would not have to spend so much time and effort in combating these ideas.

A third answer—and one that calls liberationism into question—is that the emphasis on sexual liberation is, in fact, a vulgarization of romanticism. It is an easy romanticism, one that

enables human beings to think of themselves as rebels simply by acting on natural desire. Authenticity is so much easier to come by—and so much more fun—if all it takes is a little adultery. Writing an original poem, or a unique work of philosophy is, in comparison, such a bother. And, if we wanted to get a little sociological, I could also point out how well this vulgar romanticism serves a late capitalist economy that needs high levels of consumption to sustain demand more than it needs high levels of saving to create supply. From this perspective, it is no accident that the music of the 1960s counter-culture is now used to sell beer and cars. Nor should we be surprised if sexual liberation is most evident in the use of sexual language, music, and images to entice people to buy one product rather than another.

We shall return to these criticisms of liberationism below, in part IV. But first we must examine an alternative vision of the role of sexuality in human life, that suggested to us by a reading of Plato.

PLATO ON THE PRIMACY OF EROS

The Primacy of Eros and The Problem of Sex

That Plato rejects the centrality of sexual desire is obvious from the most cursory reading of the *Symposium.*[8] In that work, Socrates describes what has come to be called the ladder of love, the path by which our most general erotic desire moves from lower to higher kinds of expression. In that account, sexual desire is treated as an emanation of this general erotic desire. And so is our desire to form erotic relationships. As Aristophanes points out, Diotima's account of eros seems to fold in his own account of the role of sexual desire in our erotic relationships.

I do think that it is at least part of what Plato thinks about eros. But does not Plato emphasize the power of sexual desire in the *Republic?* Consider some indications of this line of thought.

> 1. More than once Socrates encourages Glaucon to testify to the power of sexual desire in his life. The virtue of moderation seems to be oriented in large part to controlling our sexual desires. Indeed, one of Socrates's prime examples of immoderation, Achilles revolt against Agamemnon, seems to be the result of his sexual desire for Breisis.
>
> 2. Sexual desires are among the desires which, Socrates claims, are let lose in our dreams but most be controlled in waking life.
>
> 3. They are the among the most important desires that are not sufficiently controlled in democratic regimes

[8] If, that is, Socrates report of Diotima's account of eros can be taken as Plato's views. For reasons I cannot discuss here, I believe that his is more or less the case.

4. In the view of many interpreters, the ideal regime—the kallipolis—is characterized by sexual restraint. Even some of those interpreters who doubt that the kallipolis is meant seriously as a political program take the *Republic* to be, among other things, a warning about the political dangers of unfettered sexual desire.

5. And there can be little doubt that Plato is concerned about the personal dangers of unfettered sexual desires. For everyone who reads the *Republic* agrees that Plato means to tell us that the life of the philosopher is happy and the life of the tyrant is unhappy. And the life of the tyrant is essentially characterized as one lived in pursuit of the satisfaction of our appetites, and most especially our bodily appetites. Such a person, Socrates tells us, is unhappy because he or she is constantly driven by strong and insistently painful desires that can only be satisfied by taking the goods of others, which is a not only a highly difficult but, also, highly uncertain path through life.

This last theme can be found right near the beginning of the *Republic*. Cephalus tells us about the power of sexual desires when he agrees with Sophocles, who as an old man said that he was glad to be of the "mad master" of those desires. This characterization of sexual desire is often pointed to by those who take the *Republic* to be claiming that the happiest life is one in which our central desire is for knowledge and in which we give up, in so far as possible, all bodily desires.

I don't think there is any question that, at the surface, the *Republic* does suggest the power of sexual desire and the problems it creates, both for our individual lives and for political life. And I shall have to return to the question of why Plato gives such prominence to such a view of sexual desire in this dialogue. But I would argue that, looked at a little more deeply, Socrates' account of erotic and sexual desires in the *Republic* entirely confirms the view found in his speech in the *Symposium*.

One indication that Socrates's view of sexual desire is more complicate than it appears on the surface is precisely that a central task of the *Republic* is to undermine the philosophical account of desire found in Cephalus's (and Sophocles's) praise of the decline of sexual desire in old age. And Socrates has good reason to challenge that account, for it is difficult not to find it severely depressing. On that view we can find ourselves in one of two situations.

When we are young and vital, we suffer from the desires whose satisfaction is the only source of pleasure. We suffer because it is painful to have an unsatisfied desire. And our bodily, and especially sexual, desires are sometimes—or if we are unlucky—often unsatisfied. Furthermore, our desires lead us to do things that we later regret doing. We might hurt ourselves, hurt others, or hurt the gods, who might punish us as a result. In addition, we find it distasteful to be driven by our desires, to feel like we lack control over ourselves.

When we are old or of declining vitality, we lack these strong and insistent desires and are more or less content. But, by the same token, we must live without the pleasure brought on by the satisfaction of our desires. Cephalus does not say life when we are old is good, only that it is “moderately burdensome.”

Socrates argues in book IX that these are not the only alternatives, for there are pure pleasures that are not preceded by the pain of unsatisfied drives. On Socrates's new account of desire[9] we can be in three states with regard to pleasure or pain:

A state in which we feel pleasure.

A state in which we feel pain.

A state of repose, in which we feel neither pleasure nor pain.

Most people—and most modern philosophers—think that there are only two states and thus that pleasure is the relief from pain. Socrates agrees that to move from pain to repose is "a kind of pleasure." But this is only an impure pleasure, since it is preceded by pain. There are, Socrates claims, also pure pleasures that are not preceded by pain. Pure pleasures result when we move from a state of repose to pleasure. To have a desire for a pure pleasure is not painful. It is a kind of pain, however, to move down from pleasure to calm. This kind of pain arises when we are doing something that gives us pure pleasure and then we are interrupted. Thus, for Socrates, there are two kinds of desires. To have a desire for a pure pleasure—I will call this a pure desire—is not, in itself, painful or distressing for it can occur when we are in a state of repose. To have such a desire is, presumably, to seek to engage in a certain activity.[10] But we will not be

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[9] And it is still a new account, as the vast majority of modern (and post-modern) philosophers still hold to the account of desire expressed by Cephalus and Sophocles. I have tried to defend, in contemporary philosophical terms, a view of human desire quite close to that found in the *Republic*, in a book manuscript entitled *Nature and Culture*. A summary of this work is contained in a paper on my web site entitled "Politics and Reason: An Overview" at http://www.stier.net/over/over.htm.

[10] A number of interesting question arise for Socrates's account of pure pleasures. Why is it that we are not in a state of pain when we have what I have called a pure desire? For reasons I have tried to elaborate in the work I mentioned in the previous footnote, it is entirely plausible to think that we have a pure desire for some activity that gives us pleasure. But, even Plato admits that to move from a state of pleasure to one of repose is a "kind of pain." Now it is not uncommon for us to be distressed when our pleasurable activities are disrupted. So why does Plato tell us that this is only a "kind of pain" and not the real thing? And why does he think it preferable for us to pursue pure desires for activities that bring us pain when they are disrupted, as opposed to activities that are spurred on by painful impure desires? One answer might be that we have some flexibility in seeking pure pleasure. That is, there are many kinds of pure pleasure and most of us can find more than one path to such pleasure. So if one path is blocked, we can easily move on to another one. For example, if for some reason we can't study insects, as we might like, we can get pure pleasure from studying the stars or playing a musical instrument. But when we have impure desires, when we are, for example, hungry or sexually aroused, we will be frustrated if we cannot satisfy this particular impure desire. This seems to be a plausible account, up to a point. But it raises three further questions. The first involves activities that we have already begun. Won't we be frustrated if we have started to engage in some activity that brings pure pleasure but then are stopped from continuing? Suppose we go to our laboratory and then the lights go out. It seems plausible to think that we can, after a time, find another source of pure pleasure. But it also seems likely that we will be pretty frustrated for a while. We are, I suppose, better off than someone who has an impure desire. And, for this reason, it is plausible to distinguish frustrations that precede and thereby stimulate an activity from those which arise when that activity is blocked. The second kind of frustrations do not always arise when we have and try to satisfy a pure desires whereas the first kind do arise when we have and try to satisfy an impure desire. And, when they do arise, we can try to change our circumstances—such as the way in which we pursue pure pleasure—so that do not arise in the future. Still while important difference remain between pure and impure desires, they are not quite as great as Socrates suggests.

distressed if we are stopped from taking part in that activity. To have a desire for an impure pleasure—to have an impure desire—on the other hand, is painful and distressing.[11]

Now, some readers of the *Republic* see this new account of pleasure and pain as central to Socrates critique of our sexual, and more broadly, bodily desires. On this view, the great advantage of a philosopher's desire for knowledge over the tyrant's desire to satisfy his bodily desires is that bodily pleasures are always impure while the pleasures of philosophy are always pure. So the tyrant suffers greatly from his bodily desires before satisfying them. And, soon after satisfying one bodily desire, another one appears. But Socrates explicitly tells us that there can be pure bodily pleasures, although he mentions only the pleasures of smell (584b). Still, a little thought will reveal that even those bodily desires that are sometimes impure, need not always be

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Second, if we suppose—as I have done here, following Socrates's account of the pleasure of philosophy—that pure pleasures often involve the pursuit of activities that challenge and simulate us, then we might wonder just how flexible we can be in the pursuit of pure pleasure. For, as Socrates reminds us, it takes along time to become a philosopher. The initial stages of learning a new activity are not always as pleasurable as that activity becomes once we have begun to master it. We cannot master all possible activities—we cannot even, today, pursue all kinds of knowledge. Thus, as we develop certain faculties, abilities, and skills we limit the ways in which we can easily pursue pure pleasure. Of course, many of us can find more than one way to use our faculties, abilities, and skills. And it is difficult, but certainly not impossible, to pursue the pleasures of intellectual life even with limited material resources or under conditions of tyranny. A scientist can find, for example, ways to pursue knowledge without using expensive equipment. And many of us have more than one path to pure pleasure. (As we shall see in moment, these paths can even involve the pursuit of bodily pleasures.) Moreover, even at an advanced age it is possible to find new ways to receive pure pleasure. Still, for this second reason, the difference between pure and impure pleasures do not seem quite as great as Socrates suggest.

Third, one might wonder what would result if all of our paths to pure pleasure were blocked. Do we have a general desire for pure pleasure? Is this not part of Socrates's general notion of erotic desire in the *Symposium*? And are we not frustrated if we find no way at all to procreate in beauty, as the aim of eros is sometimes expressed by Diotima? Or do we not find ourselves frustrated as we move from one step to another up the ladder of love? Is it not the frustrations with our ability to procreate in beauty at one step that leads on to the next? If so, then isn't general eros itself an impure desire? I am uncertain about the answer here. But we might be able to resist this conclusion in two ways. First, if we think about what might entirely block us from pursuing pure pleasure, what comes to mind is precisely the pain associated with impure desires. The political and personal catastrophes that can make us hungry, homelessness, fearful, depressed, and so forth are precisely what can totally block the pursuit of pure pleasure. In these circumstances it is these pains, not any pain from our failure to gain pure pleasure, that dominate our lives. Second, we can return to the argument I made in addressing my first question above: there is an important difference between frustrations that arise when an activity is blocked as opposed to activities that precede and stimulate us to take part in an activity. Frustrations in some activity are what lead us up the ladder of love. For example, difficulties in finding or keeping our perfect mate—in Aristophanes's, phrase, our other half—might lead us to political activity. And difficulties in realizing our ideals in political activity is one reason we might prefer to create cities in speech rather than taking part in politics. Even if we do not accept the precise ranking of activities in the ladder of love (and even if we do not accept that there is one ranking for everyone) we might acknowledge that the frustrations found in the pursuit of various pure pleasures are both inescapable and precisely what we need to find the pure pleasures that, given our own character and experiences, best suit us. These frustrations are not the same as the pains that precede activities meant to give us impure pleasures. It thus is plausible to say that eros, in its most general sense, is a pure rather than impure desire.

[11] I am calling desires "impure" and "pure" following Plato's account of two kinds of pleasures, those preceded by pain and those not preceded by pain. But this has an unhappy result due to other connotations of "pure" and "impure" in English. So let me emphasize that in calling a desire "impure" I do not mean to disparage it in moral, religious, or aesthetic terms.

so. Since this claim is central to my interpretation of Plato, we will have to consider it at some length.[12]

Pleasure, Pain, and Bodily Desires

Consider, for example, hunger. Eating when we are very hungry gives us an impure pleasure, one preceded by the pain of hunger. In such cases, we eat quickly and anything will satisfy us. But we don't have to be hungry in order to eat. Indeed, much of the time we sit down to eat not because we are hungry but because it is time to eat. And, if we eat on a regular schedule, we might find that we never get especially hungry. Of course, we generally do have to be a little hungry to eat, but good food will stimulate our appetite, unless we have recently eaten a great deal.[13] And, because our appetite is stimulated at the very same time it is satisfied, we don't suffer from the pains of hunger. Not only can we eat without being especially hungry, but it is precisely in these circumstances that we can receive pure pleasure in eating, that is, the pleasure that comes from eating particularly good food. It is more or less pointless to eat a very good meal when we are very hungry and wolf down our food. For it is only when we eat slowly and can savor our food that we can enjoy a well cooked meal..

Thus we can distinguish between impure and pure desires to eat. We usually call the impure desire to eat hunger. We might call hunger a recurrent desire since it would typically recur a few times a day if we did not eat before we became hungry. When we eat without being hungry, we are eating because of a pure desire to eat. This pure desire might simply be a desire to avoid hunger some time in the future. Or it could be a desire to partake in the pure pleasure of eating good food. The pure desire to eat is not always recurrent. We may think about eating at regular times if we usually keep to a schedule. But those of us who eat more haphazardly will not necessarily find that a pure desire to eat recurs on a regular basis. And, even when it does, a pure desire to eat does not bring us pain. Thus, if we are busy with something else, we can put this desire to one side, at least until we begin to actually get hungry. Moreover, the pure desire to eat can be stimulated by a whole host of circumstances. Talking about food, smelling good food, daydreaming about good food, traveling in a foreign country all stimulate our pure desire to eat.

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[12] In working through these arguments I will be providing a reconstruction and extension of Plato's thought that will take me away from his texts. I do not have the space here to fully justify this way of reading Plato. All I will say is this: I would be pleased if someone were to think the following analysis of pleasure, pain, and bodily desire is correct even if he or she denies that it is the view Plato held, or would have held if he had worked through the implication of his ideas. We are being truer to Plato's devotion to philosophy by following his ideas to a logical conclusion then we are by endlessly repeating his own formulation of these ideas. Of course, if we are to benefit from reading Plato, we must make an effort be sure that we are working through *his* ideas. Though I do not have the space to show this here, I am satisfied that the following reflections on pain, pleasure, and sexual desire are accurate reconstructions of Platonic notions. And even more importantly, I am absolutely sure that I could not have come to ideas that seem correct to me without attending to the text of the *Republic*.

[13] Splendidly prepared food can stimulate our appetites and make us hungry even when we think of ourselves as being full. Think of what often happens at the end of an especially good meal at a restaurant. The waiter comes over and offers us dessert and everyone at the table groans, thinking that they are too full to eat another bite. But the desserts sound so tempting that we become a little hungry again. So we decide to just order one or two for the table to share. By the time the aroma of a wonderful dessert hits us, we are hungry again and ready to dive in.

The analysis of our two desires to eat can be repeated in nearly all respects for our desire to have sex. We typically have recurrent sexual desires. That is, we can become sexually aroused for what we might think of as purely internal reasons, without any previous thought about sex or any circumstantial or environmental stimulus.[14] Recurrent sexual desires of this sort are especially powerful in our late teens and early twenties. Indeed, many of us can recall periods of time in which it seemed as if we were always horny, no matter what the circumstances.[15] This is an impure desire for sex. But we need not be sexually aroused in order to desire sex. We can have a pure desire for sexual pleasure, initiate sexual activity and then become sexually aroused.[16] Just as in the case of eating, pure and impure sexual desires are intertwined. I mentioned that impure sexual desire—sexual arousal—can arise from what we might think of as purely internal causes. But impure sexual desire also arises in a wide variety of external causes. We can be aroused by seeing, or hearing attractive human beings whether in the flesh or in pictures, on television, or in the movies. We can be aroused by reading or thinking about sexual activity. And, perhaps most importantly, we can be aroused by those people to whom we are romantically attracted or attached.[17] We typically think of these circumstances as causes of sexual desire. But this is not quite right. These circumstances do cause sexual arousal or impure sexual desire but not independently of whether we have pure sexual desires of one kind or another.[18] This is obviously true, I think, when we are in love with someone. But it is also true in the other circumstances. Think for example of looking at an attractive person in a way that arouses us. That we become aroused is, I think, in large part the result of how we look at that person. We need not look at even a very attractive person with sexual desire.[19] Moreover, looking at someone in that way is not only the result of sexual desire, it is one kind of sexual activity. This might be hard to accept if we are reluctant to admit that we interact with each other sexually all the time. But looking at someone in a desiring way—in a way that stimulates both

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[14] I am going to use the "sexual arousal" as a short hand for impure sexual desire. By that term I do not just mean the physical signs of sexual arousal but also, and more importantly, a psychological state that would become painful if it should continue without sexual satisfaction of some kind, which in most cases will be reaching orgasm. I ignore some complications in the notion of sexual desire in the text but consider them below in footnote 21.

[15] Most of us (men?) can recall becoming sexually aroused at the most inopportune times.

[16] Psychiatrists have recognized three distinct kinds of sexual dysfunction. Inhibited sexual desire or hypoactive sexual desire disorder is the condition of failing to have pure sexual desires. Female sexual arousal disorder and male erectile disorder (impotence) is the condition that arises when one has a pure desire for sex but cannot become sexually aroused. (Of course, this disorder is only diagnosed in men when physicians can find no purely physical cause of impotence.) And orgasmic disorder is the condition that arises when one has a pure desire for sex, can become sexually aroused, but can not have an orgasm.

[17] Indeed, while it is difficult when we are young to distinguish between love and lust, one good indication of being in love is that we want to have sex again and again, with one particular person.

[18] This is an important theme—and perhaps the most original aspect of—Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. As usual, however, Sartre overstates his case. It is one thing to say that we are responsible for our own sexual desires and inclinations and thus for our experiences of sexual arousal. It is another thing to say that we are entirely responsible for them. We have certain natural sexual wants that set limits on when and where we can be sexually aroused. And these wants are shaped and transformed by early life experiences that are not subject to our will. We certainly can not choose to be sexually aroused by anything. And some people find it hard to avoid being sexually aroused by certain circumstances or people or things even when they would prefer not to be.

[19] Imagine that you are fifteen and have a beautiful teacher you is very attractive and who often arouses you. Now imagine that teacher criticizing your work. You are much less likely to be sexually aroused in that circumstance. Of course, a certain kind of person might be especially aroused such a circumstance. But that supports my point. How we look at someone in large part shapes whether we are sexually aroused by them.

further sexual thoughts, sexual arousal and, perhaps further sexual activity—has an important place in what we would all recognize as sexual activity.

That we develop impure sexual desires in the circumstances I have been discussing, then, is, in part, the product of our pure sexual desires. But they are also likely to be a product of recurrent, impure sexual desires. We might be more likely to be sexually aroused—or might become sexually aroused sooner—if it has been some time since we have had sex. And, it is well known that as we age, sexual arousal generally takes longer and requires more stimulation, of both the physical and non-physical kind. Cephalus and Sophocles are right, at least in this: the strength of our recurrent impure sexual desires does decline with age. But recent evidence suggests that sexual activity does not necessarily decline with age. People in their thirties, forties and even fifties can have sex more often that they did in their teens and twenties even though the strength of impure sexual desire usually declines in the thirties.[20] And people can frequently act on pure sexual desire well into their eighties and nineties, that is, at an age at which it is physically more difficult to have impure sexual desires.

How Sexual Desires Go Awry

So, if we work through Plato's account of pleasure and pain, it becomes clear that are, indeed, pure bodily pleasures. For the desire for sex, like the desire to eat, comes in two varieties, pure and impure.[21] Now I hope that this seems to be a plausible claim and a sound application of

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[20] This conclusion has been reached in a number of studies that measure strength of what I have called impure sexual desire in a variety of ways. I think that most of these studies are questionable precisely because they tend to confuse pure and impure sexual desires. For example, frequency of so-called spontaneous erection is likely to be very much effected by not just the strength of our endogenous impure sexual desire but by many factors that influence our pure sexual desires. The same can be said about the length of time it takes a man or woman to become sexually aroused or the length of time of intercourse before orgasm.

[21] There are further complications to sexual desire that I will largely ignore here. As Freud noted, sexual desire has many components that are individually pleasurable—all kinds of touching, feeling, and looking with, in, and at various parts of our bodies—and that typically (but not always) lead to orgasm. One issue I am not entirely sure about is the aim of what I have called impure sexual desire or sexual arousal. Is it aimed purely at orgasm in which case the desire for the variety of sexual stimulation is purely a means to achieve orgasm (at least in so far as impure sexual desire is concerned)? Or do we have impure sexual desires for different kinds of touching and being touched, and so forth, for their own sake? The reason to accept the first view is that, in most cases, the pain of unsatisfied impure sexual desire is relieved by orgasm but, after a time, can be made worse by other forms of sexual stimulation that do not lead to orgasm. If we take this view, then our efforts to delay orgasm so as to prolong the pleasure of other kinds of sexual stimulation would be the result of pure sexual desire. What, then, should we make of our desire to delay orgasm so as to heighten the pleasure we receive from orgasm? I am inclined to think that this too is a product of pure sexual desire. It is the equivalent, in sex, to using exquisite foods to heighten and then satisfy our appetite. Of course, all this could be true and we still might have impure sexual desires for sexual stimulation for its own sake. This is the view I find most plausible. I am inclined to think that, at the initiation of sexual activity we always have an impure desire for sexual stimulation for its own sake and that in the course of sexual activity our impure desire for orgasm arises and strengthens. Of course the impure desire for orgasm can develop before any physical stimulation takes place. How soon the impure desire for orgasm develops varies as a result of a number of factors including: the length of time since we have last had an orgasm; our age; the extent to which have a pure desire for sex which, we have seen, makes us respond more readily to sexual stimulation of various sorts; and our capacity and efforts to delay or bring on orgasm. It seems to me that to think of us as having two different impure desires—one for sexual stimulation and the other for orgasm—can help us account for such phenomena as

Platonic ideas. But one might wonder whether it is what Plato really intended. For, as I mentioned above, much of the *Republic* does seem to be a critique of the pursuit of bodily, and especially sexual, desires. As we saw, the basis of Socrates's critique of life of the tyrant is that such a life is driven by bodily desires that are insistent, painful, and difficult to satisfy.

I find Plato's account of the difficulties of the life of a tyrant quite plausible. So, if we are to reconcile the account of bodily desire I have just presented with that account of the tyrant, we must understand how our bodily desires go awry. How, that is, do our lives come to be dominated by impure desires for food and sex and the other goods that satisfy our bodies?

It is not too difficult to work out an answer to this question. For much of the *Republic* and the *Symposium* is devoted to this problem. If I had more space at my disposal, I would explore Plato's views by working through his arguments in detail. Here, however, I will simply summarize some of the conclusions that we can reach by attending to these arguments.

The fundamental answer to our question is that bodily desires can get out of hand when they are the primary way in which we seek to satisfy eros, in the most general sense. This can occur in a variety of ways, which we can best categorize by bringing together the account of eros found in the *Symposium* with the parts of the soul outlined in the *Republic*. As Socrates suggests in Book IX of the *Republic,* the desires of each of the three parts of the soul are different expressions of eros. Socrates's report of what he learned from Diotima in the *Symposium* shows in some detail how eros is expressed in more or less these three different ways.[22] First it is expressed in pursuit of bodily pleasure and then later in what we today call romantic love. In the *Republic* the lowest part of the soul includes desires sex for and other bodily goods, along the desire for money it often takes to acquire these goods. (We shall see in a moment that what is missing in the *Republic*, but quite in evidence in the *Symposium*, is the desire for an erotic relationship with another person.) At the next step on the ladder of love, general eros can be expressed in our efforts to encourage virtue in others and in our political life as a whole. The desire for honor or recognition, which is an aspect of thymos or spiritedness, plays an important a role in these efforts. And thymos is central to the second part of the soul in the *Republic*. And finally at the height of the ladder of love, eros leads to the pursuit of knowledge, the central desires of the third part of the soul in the *Republic*. What the *Republic* makes clear, however, is that at least the first two parts of the soul can lead us to pursue bodily, and especially, sexual pleasure, in ways that can create difficulties for us.

Our bodily desires can become problematic when we seek to satisfy our general erotic desire directly in the pursuit of bodily pleasure. Doing this is likely to leave us with strong and insistent impure desires. This can occur in two different ways which, I want to briefly explore first with regard to eating and then with regard to sex.

The desire to eat can become problematic in a number of ways, most obviously when it leads to overeating. Just as there are two kinds of desires to eat, there are two broad sources of

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premature ejaculation (and premature orgasm in women, which is a relatively rare though not unknown phenomena.) It can also help us explain why psychiatrists are right to think that the inability to become sexually aroused and the inability to have an orgasm are two problems that can and frequently do occur independently of one another.

[22] I say more or less because, while the division of the soul into three parts is useful for some purposes, I don't think Plato means us to take it all that seriously. I return to this point below.

overeating. Our natural, recurrent, impure desires might make some of us are simply hungrier than is good for us. Our hunger leads us to eat more food—or the wrong kind of food, since hunger can be specifically for one kind of food or another—than we can absorb without gaining weight. In addition to our natural recurrent impure desires it might be that indulgence in eating can strengthen our impure desire for food. Given our Victorian heritage, this is a common way of both understanding overeating and Plato's account of how our bodily desires become so insistent and powerful. The model here is drug addiction, where indulgence in some substance creates or strengthens a recurring desire for it. This is account is somewhat plausible. But we can raise doubts about it as well. I do not doubt that we can be physically addicted to certain drugs such that we have withdrawal symptoms when we abstain from them. And I do not doubt that we get, so to speak, withdrawal symptoms when we do not eat on a regular basis. But I do wonder whether the direct effect of overindulgence on our appetite is the most important way in which we heighten our impure desire for food.[23] For physicians have not been very successful in treating overeating or extraordinary cravings for food by methods that attempt to manipulate our appetite directly.[24]

There is also a second source of overeating, that is not a produce of an impure desire to eat, but, rather, of a pure desire for the pleasure of eating. When we overeat in this way we do so because we seek the pure pleasure of food. Typically we feast on snack foods that do not require preparation and are especially pleasurable, such as chocolate. But if we have the time and money, we can seek greater pleasure by frequenting fine restaurants. This second kind of overeating is in large part a product of habit, but it is not, I think, *initially* the result of an impure desire for food. Rather, our habit arises because eating is the main ways in which we seek pure pleasure in our lives. And the pursuit of pure pleasure is, from a Platonic point of view, the result of eros, our desire to possess the good forever. This second source of overeating is akin to what we today call a psychological addiction to eating.

Weight gain, and the ill health that accompanies it, are not the only difficulties that arises from overeating. From a Platonic point of view, the more serious problem is that both sources of overeating eventually make us constantly crave food. That is, we suffer from strong, insistent, and dissatisfied impure desires for food. Again, this can occur in a number of different ways.

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[23] This is difficult to determine because it is hard to separate the two ways in which we come to have insistent cravings (that is, impure desires) for food. I do not think that overindulgence has heightened my own appetite. But I do not know if I am especially representative since I am not particularly susceptible to physical addiction—I smoked for a number of years without ever becoming physically addicted to nicotine. It is quite possible that, if this phenomena exists, it varies in strength from one person to another.

There is there is also some evidence that when we reduce our intake of calories, our appetite actually increases, at least for a time. For our bodies, having adjusted to a certain calorie intake, signals us to eat more. The same studies suggest that eating more than usual does reduce our appetite, again for a time. So if what we might call the indulgence theory is true, it is possible that it is only true in the long term and not in the short term.

[24] For example, about a decade ago physicians stapled the stomachs of their obese patients on the theory that they would feel full or satiated after eating less food. For there are what are called stretch receptors in our stomachs that give us a signal about how full or empty our stomachs are. Te theory was that eating a great deal gradually stretched the stomachs of obese people, leading them to require large amounts of food before they felt full. This procedure was not terribly effective and has fallen into disuse. Appetite suppressants have been more successful in treating obesity, though again, the success rates are not high. Moreover, as I will explain in the next note, appetite suppressants might work on both causes of overeating and cravings for food.

One possibility, again, is that our appetite is naturally so strong that we must restrain ourselves so as to avoid eating more than we should. Or indulgence might strengthen our natural impure desires and lead us to be hungry. There is also second way in which we come to have strong and insistent impure desires for food. Recall that, while the pure desire for food does not begin with hunger, it can create hunger. When we pursue the pure pleasure of food we typically satisfy this hunger at the very same time that we create it. But when seek to satisfy our general erotic desire through eating, we will continually be focused on or thinking about food and the pleasure it brings. As a result we will be constantly generating impure desires to eat. Now, this might not be such a problem if we could continually satisfy these impure desires and generate the pure pleasure of eating. But there are problems here. One is not as serious in our affluent political community but was more important in Athenian times: strong cravings for food require us to get the money it takes to buy the food we need. Thus our desire for food makes us more dependent on other people and on fortune. Another problem is that, once we recognize the ill effects of over eating, we will try not to satisfy our cravings for food. But, if we do not have an alternative way to satisfy our general erotic desire, we will still think and wish for food, generating those cravings we seek, at the same time, to restrain. Finally, and most importantly, while eating well can be a great pleasure, it is a relatively short lived pleasure. If we understand eros as the desire to possess the good forever, then the pursuit of good food does not seem to be an especially good way to satisfy this basic desire. We cannot sustain the pleasure of eating without eating almost continuously. More importantly, eating a good meal does not have much impact on our lives, or the life of anyone else, besides the immediate pleasure it brings. It does not connect us to anything beyond ourselves, such as our family, our students, our political community, our intellectual community, or a set of ideas that may, in one way or another, have a life of their own.

We can understand the influence of eros on sexual desire in similar ways. Indulgence in or abstinence from sexual activity probably has some influence on how quickly we become sexually aroused in different circumstances. There are, however, many complications to this relationship and I very much doubt that, as a general rule, sexual indulgence strengthens our impure desires for sex.[25] We can, however, choose to make the pursuit of pure sexual pleasure an

[25] Indeed, the most common folk wisdom is that it is sexual abstinence, not what I have called pure sexual desires and the activities they lead to, that most stimulates sexual arousal and that leads to the best orgasms. I know couples who, after living together for years, decided to abstain from sex for two weeks before their wedding in order to make their wedding night particularly memorable. As I indicated earlier in the text, I do think that sexual abstinence is, at least to some degree, likely to strengthen our impure sexual desires and make us more likely respond to stimuli around us. But it is simply wrong to think that our response to such stimuli is independent of the pure sexual desires that make particular circumstances sexual stimulating. And I very much doubt that we have to be sexually abstinent for any length of time in order to reach the heights of impure sexual desire. Moreover, there is another piece of folk wisdom that suggests that long term abstinence is likely to diminish our capacity for sexual arousal: use it or lose it. All that I have said about sexual arousal applies to orgasm as well. Perhaps for some people, some of the time, sexual abstinence leads to more powerful orgasms. But there are many other factors—among others, our relation to our sexual partners; the quantity and quality of stimulation we receive; and our capacity for having powerful orgasms, which vary with our sexual experience—that are likely to overshadow the effects of abstinence or indulgence on the character of our orgasms.

If what I have said here is true than there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a physical addiction to sex. Some people may have, by nature, abnormally strong impure sexual desires. (Given the argument of this paper, however, abnormally strong does *not* mean overwhelmingly powerful.) But there is very little reason to think that

important part of our lives. Such a choice is, in Platonic terms, to pursue the satisfaction of general eros at the lowest level of the ladder of love. As a result of doing this, we will become sexually aroused much more than we might have otherwise been. And, thus, we are more likely to suffer from difficulties similar to those that afflict people who crave food more than they should. In recent year, sexually transmitted disease is one obvious problem. But there are other difficulties that are more serious for most of us. We become more hostage to the good or bad fortune that helps or hinders us in the search for sexual pleasure. Our pursuit of sexual pleasure can interfere with our other aims. In a culture that value monogamy, it can disrupt family relations or, as we have recently seen, hinder one's political career. And, from a Platonic perspective, the greatest difficulty is that sexual pleasure, like that which we get from good food, is relatively short lived and unconnected to the world beyond ourselves.

We have seen that there are two kinds of bodily desires—pure and impure desires—and that, as a result, there are two ways in which an erotic devotion to bodily pleasure might lead us to frequently be in a state of pain, due to our dissatisfied impure desires. Before going on, I want to take this line of thought a little further, as it points to an extremely important feature of how we change our desires, and especially our bodily desires. We have seen that the strength of our impure desires can be modified in three ways.

First, there is what I will call the natural strength of what I have called our internal recurrent impure desires. I have held that, regardless of external circumstances, our impure desires for food and sex would return at various intervals. To some extent, how often these impure desires return and how strong they are is a product of nature. Some of us are born with stronger, others with weaker, impure desires. And, the natural strength of our impure desires change over time as a result of processes that are themselves wholly natural. These processes—such as the gradual lengthening of the time it takes to become sexually aroused as we age—occur regardless of what we do or think.

In saying that the strength of our impure desires change due to natural processes I am, implicitly adding, all other things being equal. For, I have insisted that the strength of our impure desires is a not just a product of natural phenomena not under our control but is also affected by two other processes, which are, in different ways, under our control.

Second, we have seen that the strength of our impure desires change as a result of our experiences of satisfying or frustrating these desires. An important feature of this way in which our desires change is that these changes, in a sense, happen to us, regardless of our intentions. We might overeat (or take heroin) and therefore develops stronger (or new) impure desires. But we might not be seeking to strengthen our impure desires in this way. Rather, the change in our impure desires they occur as a by product or unintended—though frequently predictable—consequence of our actions. This second way in which the strength of our impure desires change is a product not of our decision or choice, but, rather of the way in which experience naturally effects us. What we experience is, of course, the product of our decisions or choices. But these

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there is anything we can do that drastically strengthens our impure sexual desires, that is, our readiness to be sexually aroused. If it makes sense to talk about sexual addiction at all, then we are talking about a psychological addiction that is the product of our choice to make sexual satisfaction an important part of our lives.

decisions or choices change our desires indirectly, working through our natural response to our experiences. We can also manipulate that natural response and thus the strength of our impure desires more directly. We can, for example, take appetite suppressants so as to diminish our impure desire for food. And there are substances that are said to have a similar effect on our desire for sex. In these cases we do intend to change our desires, but we do so through essentially technical means.

There is a third way in which we can modify the strength of our impure desires, that is, by modifying our pure desires. We can resolve to live a different kind of life, one in which we pursue different ends and thus different kinds of pure pleasure. Unlike our impure pure desires, our pure desires and beliefs are, in the first instance, almost wholly under our direct control. We do not need to change our pure desires through technical means.[26] Rather, we can simply decide to change them. For they are shaped by our beliefs about what should be important in our lives. By changing those beliefs—that is, by modifying our pure desires—we will also be modifying our impure desires, for we will live in ways that are more or less likely to stimulate those impure desires. Of course, it is not always so easy to change our pure desires. That is partly because changing our pure desires is often a matter of changing our habitual ways of looking at a large part of our relationship to the world around us. But it is also difficult to change our pure desires because the first two factors that influence our impure desires can get in the way. We can, that is, find ourselves, as a result of our natural impure desires, as modified by our experiences, hungry or sexually aroused even when we would prefer not to be.[27] And, in that case, it can be difficult to act as we have resolved.

That our impure desires can be changed in these three ways is important for a number of reasons, of which one is particularly important here. If we could not change our impure desires in the third way, then we would discover ourselves in thrall to powerful desires that are, to a very large extent out of our direct control. This is precisely what Augustinians, and some liberationists, think is the case. And we would either conclude, with Augustinians, that our well

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[26] Thus there are no drugs that can change our pure desires. Drugs that suppress our appetite would not have any effect on our pure desire to eat. A drug that blocked the pleasure we got from eating might, however, be effective in curbing the overeating that comes from the pursuit of the pure pleasure of eating. (If you want to get rich, invent the food equivalent of methadone!) As we shall see in a moment, our impure desires and pure desires can come into conflict. So an appetite suppressant might well help someone who was fighting off cravings for food while trying to reduce his or her intake of calories.

[27] We do not necessarily have to act on these cravings for food and sex. But it might be very difficult for us not to do so, depending upon how capable we are of resisting temptation.

While the analysis of pure and impure desires I present in this part of the paper is meant as reconstruction of Plato's philosophical psychology, it very much draws on the philosophical psychology I have developed in *Nature and Culture*. One aim of that work, like that of the *Republic*, is to provide a theory of weakness of will, or of being overcome by what I have here called strong impure desires. On my view, to explain that, and other individual phenomena such as self-deception, we have to assume that, strictly speaking, we never act directly in response to impure desires. Rather we act on our pure desires, although our feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, pleasure and pain, as well as the frustrations of unsatisfied desire, are determined by whether our actions satisfy or fail to satisfy our impure desires.

Anyone interested in the philosophical psychology I develop in *Nature and Culture* and sketch in "Politics and Reason: An Overview" should know that, in it, what I here call pure desires are called "desires" and what I here call impure desires are called "wants."

being depends upon our exercising tremendous self-restraint to control those desires. Or, we would agree with the liberationists, and try to satisfy our impure desires as much as possible. If, on the other hand, we only change our impure desires in the third way, then we would feel that there were no constraints at all on how we can invent ourselves. This is the view of liberationists.

The view implicit in Plato's work, however, suggests that we both discover natural impure desires and invent new ways of satisfying them. To live a good life, we must respond to what is given to us by nature, and create ways of living that best allows us to satisfy our natural ends. And nothing, on this view, is more important to our living a good life than to have been properly educated.

Thus we can understand why moral education plays so prominent a role in the *Republic* and also why it involves both the second and third means of changing our impure desires. If we think, for example, about the role of the arts in Books II and III of the *Republic*, it will be evident that, for Plato, moral education must teach us to pursue certain ends, rather than others. Socrates teaches that the arts influence us, in part, by providing models we follow in our own lives. I would suggest that, by imitating good models, we learn to have the right pure desires, as in the kind of change I just sketched. Socrates also suggests, however, that the arts influence our lives in an more indirect way, one that is akin to the second kind of change in our desires, presented above. For he suggests that music, in particular, has the effect of stimulating certain desires rather than others.[28]

We have seen that sexual desire can become problematic when it is the primary way in which we directly seek to satisfy eros through the pursuit of pure sexual pleasure. Sexual desire can sometimes be problematic in a second way as well, when we express eros primarily through thymos or spiritedness. Thymos or spiritedness is a complicated desire that includes our desires for esteem (including self-esteem), honor, recognition, distinction, and prestige. It is the part of the soul in which anger is found, as anger is the characteristic emotional reaction when we are treated with disrespect or disregard

Satisfaction of the spirited part of the soul is possible only if, first, we have certain standards or ideals by which we evaluate ourselves or in terms of which we seek recognition from others and, second, we meet these standards or ideals. These standards or ideals can be for individual achievement or the collective achievement of a group of people. We can take pride in both the achievements of the group and our own one's individual contribution to the achievements of the group.

The ideals or standards which thymos leads us to uphold vary a great deal from one political community and person to another. Typically our ideals and standards are those we are inculcated to have by our family, friends, and political community. Thus thymos can lead us to

[28] I will never forget Judith Shklar illustrating this point by alluding to the effects of contemporary rock music on the sexual desires of young people during my second week in graduate school. We laughed at this, but, in retrospect, more out of embarrassment than disagreement. For it seems hard to deny. As I sometimes tell my students, if you want to go to bed with someone you are dating, are you more likely to take them to hear Puccini or P-Funk? It is, of course, possible that some day I will meet a student who is more stimulated by Puccini. The effects of music on our impure sexual desires are not unmediated by our culture and personality. But I haven't met him or her yet.

pursue a wide variety of goods. And, in particular, it can lead us both to and away from the satisfaction of our bodily desires. In the *Republic,* Socrates emphasize the way in which spiritedness leads us to restrain our appetites. This would occur when, for example, we take pride in our discipline and self-restraint and hold up moderation as our ideal. But we can also achieve recognition and esteem by indulging in our appetites to a greater degree than others. This explains such phenomena as conspicuous consumption and, I think, a great deal of promiscuity and adultery, at least on the part of men, for whom old time notions of sexual scoring still provide a standard of excellence.

Plato, then, helps provide a corrective to the neo-Darwinian view that men seek positions of high status in order to have, as they put it, sexual access to many women. The Platonic view is, I think, the more usual explanation of womanizing and the female equivalent: men (and some women) seek both high status *and* sexual access to many women (and men) to satisfy their spirited desire for honor and recognition.[29] After all, if our aim is sexual pleasure for its own sake, a series of one night stands is not likely to be the best path to take. And that is something that Plato teaches us in one of the decisive moments of Diotima's account of the ladder of love, the transition from the erotic search for physical beauty to beauty of soul. At the lowest level of the ladder, we are attracted by the physical beauty of one person and seek sexual (and other) satisfaction with them. And then we recognize that there are many people who are beautiful and we become promiscuous lovers of all physical beauty. At this point we recognize that beauty of soul is greater than beauty of body. Diotima does not explain this important transition. My suggestion is that the pursuit of sexual pleasure itself teaches us the importance of beauty of soul. For while there is a certain excitement and fascination in going to bed with a person for the first time, it is a rare first night that leads to heights of physical pleasure. Aside from the occasional awkwardness of a first time together, it takes time for two people to learn how to please each other sexually. More importantly, not everyone is good at sex. And the qualities that makes one a good lover are preeminently qualities of soul not body.[30]

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[29] I would think that recent political events should help confirm this view. Isn't it obvious by now that President Clinton's womanizing is more a product of his desire for acceptance and approval from everyone than of impure sexual desire taken by itself? (If it is not obvious, it will become so if you read the Starr Report and note that, with only one or two exceptions, the President's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky stopped short of, in the elegant phrase of the report, completion.)

[30] Two anecdotes that, in different ways, support this claim:

First: About twelve years or so after I graduated from college, I attended an informal reunion of a group of my college friends. Now, not only had most of us been fairly promiscuous in college but, as was often the case among such groups in the early 70s, most of the male members of this group had, at one time or another, slept with most of the female members. And some of us had continued, occasional, sexual relationships over a much longer period of time. At the reunion most of us were in committed, more or less monogamous relationships. So it was no surprise that conversation turned to the difference between our sexual pasts and present. Only a few of us regretted our past sexual behavior, even when we regarded some of it as having been excessive. Indeed, some of us expressed regret over missed sexual opportunities. While all of us were, at the time, seeking an enduring love with one other person, we did not think that the pursuit of sexual pleasure for its own sake, or in the context of friendship, was something to disdain. But most of us recounted a time at which we decided to put sexual promiscuity behind us. And, in most every case, the reason was the same. As one of my female friends put it, "I finally recognized that most men are not very good in bed." The rest of the women in the group quickly agreed and, of course, the men in the group expressed the same view of women, one of them gallantly adding, "present company excluded, of course."

I am, of course, not saying that Plato's point is that we choose to have erotic relationships with people with good souls so as to have good sex. Rather, I think his point is that one way we come to recognize the importance of good souls is in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. But, when we make the decisive transition from giving preference to goods of the body to goods of the soul, we come to appreciate the latter goods in all their dimensions. And, as our erotic desires come to be expressed, most of all, in pursuit of goods of the soul, sexual pleasure will become much less important to us. We will undoubtedly become willing to sacrifice sexual pleasure in order to satisfy eros in our relationships with our lovers, our children and perhaps, later, our fellow citizens. And, no doubt, we will have to make such sacrifices. We have only so much time and energy, after all. And children and political life will demand much of what we have. Even if we satisfy eros mainly in a relationship with a lover, our sexual pleasures will be constrained There are problems in promiscuity. But there are charms to sexual variety, too, and there is likely to be more than one good lover around. But once we find our other half we will be unwilling to play the field.

The dual nature of the relationship between spiritedness and bodily desire helps explain the peculiar reactions of Glaucon to the Socrates's proposals in the first few books of the *Republic*. Initially he disdains the city of pigs, because he does not like the food. This reaction seems to be the result of Glaucon's thymos: he thinks that plain and simple food is beneath him. Thus, in this case, the spirited part of his soul has reinforced the appetitive part of his soul. This same sentiment can be seen in Glaucon's boastfulness about his sexual life. Later, Glaucon enthusiastically supports Socrates proposal that the guardians eat simple and plain food. And little to complain about in the regulated sex lives of the Guardian. At this point in the *Republic*, Glaucon is imagining himself a guardian and can thus see himself taking pride in self-restraint and moderation.

Looking back now, I don't know that I would put things just in that way. I would now add "or at least bad for me in bed," since whether we are good or bad lovers depends, in part, on how we feel about the person in bed with us. I am not so quick to judge harshly some of the women I slept with in the past—and, of course, would hope not to be judged harshly by them either.

Second: I taught an entire course on the *Symposium* for a number of years. I usually did not encourage personal revelations in class but, to help make my point when we got to this part of the text, I asked my students to imagine the kind of person who would bring them the most physical pleasure in bed. That year the class consisted mainly of women and one woman quickly described a man "who is a rebel, is a little unshaven, is wearing a leather jacket, and is driving a motorcycle." Given the dominant view of the nature of sexual desire in our culture, this was not a surprising remark. For we can only imagine someone being sexually uninhibited and thus sexually pleasing if they are somewhat uncivilized. (Another year, a man expressed a similar stereotype about women when he said that the most sexually pleasing woman would be blond, have big breasts and be dumb.) What did surprise me was another woman who, evidently speaking from some experience, insisted that men like that were "crude, insensitive," and wholly concerned with, as she put it, "getting their rocks off." Laughter, and shouts of agreement followed. Then, one of the best students in the class said to the others, while looking at me with a smile, "Don't you think that men who wear glasses are really the best lovers?" There was some agreement—and more puzzlement—in response.

The Not-so-savage Desire

In the last section I tried to show how, according to Plato, our lives can come to dominated by impure desires for food and sex and the bodily goods, not because of the intrinsic power of these desires themselves but, rather, because eros can leads us, in various ways, to purse bodily pleasures. But one might accept this account of the power of eros to strengthen our bodily desires, and yet still say that this is not, in fact, the fundamental reason that our bodily desires cause problems for us. The real problem, one might argue, is that our desires for food and sex are powerful in and of themselves. That is the reason that such effort must be taken in the education of the guardians to restrain these desires. And it is also the reason that the guardians must rule, with the auxiliaries, over the craftsmen who, by nature, seek to satisfy their bodily desires. Our desire for sex is, as Sophocles is reported to have said, savage and ferocious, whatever the disposition of eros.

In this section I would like to undermine this objection by examining the ways in which sexual desire is regulated in the kallipolis among both guardians and craftsmen. My argument, in essence, is that it is largely eros, not sexuality, that is regulated among the guardians. The guardians are, of course, not free to have sex with anyone they choose during the age of child bearing, although Socrates points out that are free to do so after that age. But does this lack of freedom mean that sexual desire is restrained? Why, after all, do we care who we have sex with? Not, I would think, primarily because we seek sexual pleasure in itself, but rather because we find one person more attractive, both in body and soul, than another. As we saw above, Socrates suggests that, if our concern is with the bodies of other people, we will move from having sex with one other person to seeking sex with many people. Of course, we also saw that eros will ultimately lead to a concern with the souls of other people, if only because, by virtue of their better souls, some people are better sexual partners than others. But everything in the education of the guardians works to diminish the differences between the soul of one person and another. So it would seem that the guardians would never make the transition from an erotic concern with bodies to that with souls. Instead, they will follow a different path up the ladder of love, skipping erotic connections to particular others and developing, instead, a erotic concern with the good of all. At the same time, however, their sexual desires are likely to remain promiscuous in nature.[31] And, if so, the kallipolis might be perfectly suited to them. For the lottery that determines who sleeps with whom, is also a sexual round robin. Of course, when the guardians have sex is regulated. But I don't see any reason to assume that the guardians will have sex infrequently.[32] It

[31] Moreover, as we saw above, sexual variety is likely to appeal to lovers of knowledge, like the guardians.

[32] I once had a male student who found the sexual lives of the guardians very attractive. I initially found this difficult to understand precisely because Socrates seems to take all the charm out of our erotic lives. But this student was extremely cynical about the possibility of romantic love and clearly disillusioned by the difficulties of his romantic life. As he talked, it became evident that he had two problems. On the one hand, he was very dubious about the possibility of finding his other half. And he was distressed by what he felt was the need to dissimulate in his relationships with women. For, he felt that, in order to have a sexual relationship with a woman, he had to pretend to want something more. And, not only that, he had to go through the whole hassle of arranging dates, he had to go to dinner to talk about things he had no interest in, he had to see movies he did not want to see, and, perhaps worst of all, he had to dance. (I shall not even comment on his difficulties with the burdensome demands of seeming to be sensitive and caring.) This student was not a dullard by any means. He had a number of interests that truly engaged him and found the study of both engineering and philosophy attractive. But the only thing he really

all depends upon the needs of the kallipolis for children. Moreover, if we imagine Socrates constructing a kallipolis at a time in which birth control is reasonably reliable, and abortion safe, why would it be necessary to limit the amount of sex the guardians have at all, provided that sexual partners are regulated by a lottery, thereby preventing the guardians from making permanent connections with each other. If the guardians can have unlimited sex after the age of child bearing, why not before, provided that sex and child bearing are kept apart from one another. We can even imagine that, instead of using a lottery to determine who has sex, that a sexual round robin could actually be instituted. The role of a (presumably fixed) lottery then, would be to determine whether guardians get to have sex with or without the use of birth control.

So, I would suggest that there is much less restraint of sexuality in the kallipolis than we sometimes think. Moreover, to the extent that sexuality *is* regulated and restrained in the kallipolis, then we can more easily understand how, from a Platonic perspective this is plausible, provided we read Plato as taking the view that sexual desire, by itself, is not all that powerful or constraining. For the sexual arrangements of the kallipolis are designed to eliminate all special erotic connections between one person and another, not to mention between parents and children. Straussians, and others have long argued that these arrangements are, for various reasons impossible.[33] I agree. But we can still grasp a central point of Plato's by recognizing that, if I have read him correctly, it is the suppression of erotic relationships that makes any restraint on sexuality easy to accomplish. For, from a Platonic perspective, our impure sexual desires, apart from eros, are not all that strong. That is to say, it is precisely because the guardians do not fall in love with one another that the regulations on their sexual lives would be acceptable to them.

That Plato does not think of impure sexual desire as especially powerful apart from eros can be seen in another way by turning our attention to the craftsmen. It is frequently said that the guardians must restrain the limitless desires of the craftsmen for the satisfaction of their bodily appetites and for money. But this is *not* what Socrates tells us. Rather, he tells us that, if they become too rich, the craftsmen will become lazy. The craftsmen are not tyrannical proto-Donald Trumps who seek to amass great wealth and riches and to indulge their sexual desires with a series of beautiful women. Rather they are rather unerotic, unthymotic types, who simply want reach a minimal level of physical comfort. They must be kept from being entirely comfortable for, otherwise, they would not work. So the key to the moderation of the craftsmen is precisely what Socrates says it is, to insure that everyone enters the class appropriate to their nature. Any child who is especially erotic or thymotic must be taken from class of craftsmen, precisely to prevent members of that class from seeking sex, riches, and, ultimately, power.

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desired to do with the women he knew was to have sex. So, for him, the sexual arrangements of the kallipolis seemed pretty attractive. He was a big, self-possessed young man. When he thought about the kallipolis he saw himself not only as a guardian but as someone who would, by virtue of his strength and courage, have sex quite a lot, with a variety of women, who would have exactly the same interest in him as he had in them. And all the matchmaking would be done for him.

I resisted his arguments—in part because he was a little reluctant to spell them out in front of the class. But, to his credit he persisted. And I am inclined to think that he was on to something. If plain sex is what you want, the kallipolis does not look too bad. Perhaps this is why Glaucon and Adeimantus do not object either.

[33] There are many reasons that this is so. Among others, it is impossible to assure that parents do not know their own children, who are likely to look like them. And it is impossible to assure that differences in the souls of the guardians will not be great enough that they will be lead to try to pair up.

WHY PLATO WAS RIGHT

Some Indications That Plato Was Right

To adequately explore the issues raised by a comparison of the Platonic conception of sexual desire with most modern views, would take us far a field. While I would hope that the theoretical analysis and reconstruction I have given of Plato's views, taken together with your own experience, would support my conclusions that Plato was largely correct, I would also insist that we consider the widest range of evidence before reaching any firm conclusions. I cannot do that here. But I do want to point to some evidence that, were we to explore it further, might support a Platonic conception of sexuality and eros.

First, I think it is fairly obvious that impure sexual desire—understood as the desire for sexual stimulation and orgasm for it own sake—is much less powerful than the desire for food. This is a difficult position to maintain in our Freudian-influenced culture, but a little thought and reflection should support my claim. For, after all, no one ever died from extreme sexual frustration while people can and do die from an extreme lack of food. If that does not convince you, imagine going without food or sex for twenty four hours. Then imagine that some gives you a choice between eating a meal and having sex, on the understanding that you can do only one or the other in the next twenty four hours. I don't think most of us would find that a difficult choice to make.

Second, sexual desire—understood as a desire for sexual stimulation and orgasm alone, apart from any erotic attachments, is relatively easy to satisfy though masturbation. If only hunger could be relieved by rubbing our stomachs!

That we aren't inclined to immediately agree with this claim is the result of our thinking about sexual desire in the context of erotic relationships with others. That is precisely what most of us do when we masturbate. Practically all reports of sexual behavior indicated that most of us fantasize about having sex with others when we masturbate. We do so, in part, to become sexually aroused and, in part, because we enjoy the fantasy of having established a sexual relationships with someone we desire. In both cases, the importance of sexual fantasy in masturbation suggests that, even in masturbation, the aim of sex is much more than physical pleasure and orgasm. Most of us would prefer to have sex with a partner than by ourselves. This, too, shows us that the importance and power of sex is tied to its role in our erotic relationships, precisely what Plato teaches us.[34] If Plato were wrong, and sex were important to us mostly because of our strong desires for sexual stimulation and orgasm, we would be happy to satisfy these desires by ourselves much of the time. After all, masturbation is so much cheaper and easier to arrange than dating.

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[34] Eating is something that most of us like to do with others. And eating together is very much a part of courting rituals in most cultures. But eating is not as tied to erotic relationships as sex. Most of us don't fantasize about eating with a friend or lover when we are eating alone.

One might argue against this line of thought that the pleasures of sexual stimulation and orgasm are is greater when we have sex with another person than when we masturbate. The trouble with that claim, however, is that is not clear it is always or even usually true. There are no scientific surveys about this. But there is some evidence that many men and women find that they have more powerful orgasms by masturbating than they do by having sex with others.[35] Moreover, there is a school of feminist sexology that argues that the kinds of sexual stimulation that contemporary men often prefer, and that is usually at the center of partnered sex, that is, "intercourse, in the sense of simple thrusting without additional stimulation," does not automatically, or with any regularity, enable women to have orgasms.[36] The arguments for this view are not only plausible but are backed by a number of more or less scientific studies. I am pretty sure that the physical pleasures of sex can be greater than those of masturbation if one is in love with a sexually compatible partner and has had some practice with him or her. And I am certain that our erotic pleasures as a whole are far greater in these circumstances. But not all partnered sex is of this kind. And thus, if we limit ourselves to the physical pleasures of sex, the advantages of partnered sex, as against masturbation, are not so obvious. Again, that most of us strongly prefer sex with a partner to masturbation, suggests that we look to sex for satisfactions other than physical pleasure.

Third, the wide availability and use of pornography in our, and other cultures, suggests that our natural impure sexual desires are not all that strong or difficult to control. For the prime, —though not the only—use of pornography is to stimulate sexual arousal. If our sexual desires were, by nature, so strong as to be difficult to control, why would pornography be used in this way?

Fourth, there is much evidence pointing to a great deal of variability in the frequency with which men and women have sex from and one time and place to another.[37] Given the difficulties of studying sexual behavior, even in our own time, this evidence is controversial. But

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[35] Shere Hite, *The Hite Report* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 5-19; Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), pp. 598-599. Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), which, unlike Shere Hite's reports are based on scientifically drawn samples, does not directly consider the issue of the quality of orgasm in masturbation as opposed to partnered sex. Although the data reported in the book on orgasm in partnered sex and masturbation are not directly comparable, this work does suggest that both men and women are more likely to have orgasms during masturbation than during partnered sex. In the case of women, the difference seems to be dramatic.

[36] Shere Hite, *The Hite Report*, p. 139. On pages 134–138, Hite gives a brief survey of other studies of sexuality that reach similar conclusions. The evidence on the likelihood of orgasm in partnered sex versus masturbation discussed in footnote 35 also supports this conclusion.

This line of thought does not mean that women cannot reach orgasm in intercourse. But to do so may require contemporary men and women to adjust their view of how intercourse should be conducted. See, Hite, *The Hite Report*, pp. 169 to 199. Nor does this line of thought mean that women do not enjoy intercourse even if it does not often give them an orgasm. Given that physical pleasure is not the sole or even most important reason we have sex, it should be no surprise that there are other kinds of pleasure that both men and women can have from intercourse besides reaching orgasm. Both *The Hite Report* (pp. 284-289) and Laumann, et. al. *The Social Organization of Sexuality,* (pp. 152-153) provide evidence to support this claim. But what this line of thought does point out is that physical sexual satisfaction and orgasm for women does not require intercourse.

[37] For example, Edward Shorter, *The Making of* the *Modern Family*.

it is striking. Now if we also had evidence of widespread dissatisfaction and distress in those times and places where men and women had sex less frequently, we might conclude that there is some natural level of sexual activity necessary to satisfy our strong desires for physical sexual pleasure. But, in the absence of such evidence, it seems plausible to conclude that how much sex we have has much more to do with the influences of our culture and upbringing on our pure sexual desires and the role of those desires in stimulating sexual arousal.

Fifth, there is much evidence pointing to a great deal of variability in the frequency with which men and women have sex in any one time an place. (Of course, that time and place that has been most studied is our own.) If sexuality were such a strong desire, we would expect there to be a strong connection between the degree to which people say they are happy, and the frequency with which they have sex.[38] But that connection is rather weak. This result is, I suppose, compatible with the assumption that there are dramatic differences in the strength of our natural sexual desires. It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the strength of our impure sexual desires, while controlling for our pure sexual desires.[39] But the patterns of difference in sexual activity from one person to another suggests that most, if not all, of these differences are due to cultural factors.[40]

PLATONISM AND THE CULTURE WAR

We have see that the Platonic view of eros and sexuality is dramatically different from that which dominates the views of both left and right in the culture war. It is not obvious, however, what view a Platonist should take of the issues raised by the contemporary struggle between left and right. To address this question in the brief space remaining is difficult, both because of the subtleties of Platonism and the complicated issues that are the subject of dispute in the culture war. I do want to say a bit, however, about how a Platonic view of the culture war differs from that found on the left and right today.

Platonism Versus The Right

That Platonism, at least as I have interpreted it, calls into question the Augustinian picture of human nature is, I am sure, quite evident. Platonism does not see us as bound to struggle to control our unruly sexual desires. And, rather than condemn all sex outside of marriage, Platonism can actually look at a certain amount of sexual experimentation in a favorable light. We don't have to sleep around in order to appreciate good souls as well as good bodies. But that

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[38] See, Laumann, et. al. *The Social Organization of Sexuality,* pp. 357-353.

[39] Some people have suggested that testosterone levels are a good measure of what I have called impure sexual desire. I doubt that things could be quite so simple. And, at any rate, there is no evidence that frequency of sex varies at all with testosterone levels.

[40] See, Laumann, et. al. *The Social Organization of Sexuality.*

is certainly one path we might follow.[41] Moreover, Platonism welcomes the strong erotic desires that, in many people, are initially expressed sexually.

Despite these disagreements, there are ways in which Platonism might share some of the concerns of Augustinians today. One does not have to be a right wing zealot to think that our political community has, in some ways, gone seriously off-track and that an overemphasis on sexual liberation is one cause of our difficulties. Not that Platonism would call pre-marital sex or gay and lesbian liberation into question. Indeed, given the attractive picture Plato paints of homosexual love in the speech of Aristophanes, it is more than a little amusing to see Plato invoked as a defender of traditional family values. But Plato does teach us two important lessons that can help us grapple with our political and social difficulties.

The first is that serious difficulties arise when we try to satisfy our erotic desires in very different ways. There is a tension between the pure pleasures of sex and those of romantic love, just as there are tension between romantic love and the care of children. We cannot be wholly devoted both to our own children and to the good of political community. And the pursuit of intellectual life limits what we can do for the political community, or our children. All this is not to say that we cannot pursue more than one way of satisfying eros. But it is to say that we have to make choices. And that leads to a second lesson: some ways of satisfying eros are better than others. We saw, above, that for all the pleasures of good sex—or good food—there are other goods that contribute more to a fulfilling life. Again, that is not to say that we should never have sex when we could be writing a paper or spending time with our children. No one can spend all their time writing. And our children don't benefit from having us around all the time. But it is to say that we must strike a balance between these different goods that makes more room for the ways of satisfying our erotic desires that bring us the greatest fulfillment—and for living up to the obligations, such as to our children, we have created by choosing one way or life or another.

From a Platonic perspective, what has gone wrong in our political community is that many of us have lost our sense of balance. The pursuit of goods of the body—and, even more, of money—has come to dominate our lives. In doing so, we have sacrificed romantic relationships, our children, our political community, and our artistic and intellectual lives.

So the problems we face are, from a Platonic perspective, not that different from those that concern many Augustinians. But the Augustinian analysis of the source of and solution to these problems is badly misguided. Pre-marital sex does not undermine romantic relationships and cause men and women to ignore their children. We all know couples with perfectly wonderful marriages who were far from virgins on their wedding night. And we all know excellent parents who spent much time in their younger years exploring their sexual desires, with or without the benefits of marijuana. Acceptance of gays and lesbians does not threaten the family. We all know homosexuals who have deeply committed relationships and who are fine parents. (Just as we all know heterosexuals who cannot sustain a relationship and are miserable parents.) The Augustinian analysis is simply wrong. The pure pleasures of sex are wonderful. But men and women can enjoy them—and can even devote parts of their lives largely to the

[41] It should come as no surprise that I think Allan Bloom was wrong to argue that eros is flattened out in the young because of their early sexual experience. His argument—which derives originally from Rousseau, in *Emile*—is also similar to Marcuse's notion of repressive desublimation. I do think that Bloom is correct to say that the souls of our students are flat. But his explanation of the reason for this phenomena seems to me to be mistaken.

pursuit of them—without becoming so addicted to those pleasures that they are unable to pursue other, higher goods.

If the Augustinian solution to our difficulties is wrong, where shall we look for solution? To answer that question, we have to turn from a Platonic critique of the right to a Platonic critique of the left.

Platonism Versus The Left

If we are to right the balance in our individual and collective lives, we must not only reject the Augustinian view but the liberationist view as well. For, in three important ways, liberationist thinking is partly responsible for our difficulties.

First, as we have seen, liberationist thought, like Augustinianism, holds that our strongest desires—and the greatest pleasures we can receive—are sexual in nature. Having told us this, Augustinians insist that we then must repress those desires. Now that itself is a recipe for disaster, since making sex forbidden fruit is surely going to simulate sexual desire. But the liberationist recipe—to indulge ourselves when and where we can—is not much better. Gore Vidal has said many stupid things in his life, but none stupider than when he said we should never pass up an opportunity to have sex in any form.

A second, and related problem created by liberationist thought is that it refuses to draw distinctions between different kinds of goods beyond saying that sex is best. And, that claim is usually made by contemporary liberationists only implicitly, since they are typically unwilling to explicitly condemn any human ends, except the effort to order or evaluate our various ends themselves.[42] To shrink from such judgments, however, can only be a disaster for a political community, especially—but not only—when it comes to raising children. Liberationists often talk as if each generation, or even each individual child, should invent various ways of life for itself and make its own judgment about what to choose without any advice from, or regulation by, their elders.[43] This, however, is to throw away the inherited wisdom of our culture. Now, I would agree that we inherit not just wisdom but foolishness—after all, Augustinianism is part of that culture. But that is precisely why we must engage our past, evaluate it, and then choose as well as we can and be willing to recommend our choices to others. Unlike Augustinians, I do not think that we need to outlaw speech or action that does not infringe on the rights of others, even when that speech or action is reprehensible or offensive. And I encourage an openness to and tolerance of a wide range of views of how we ought to live our lives. But, if we are to recover from the excesses of liberationism, what we must be tolerant of is the expression of critical judgments about the various goals human beings can choose to pursue.

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[42] Part of the reason that liberationists shrink from such judgments is that historicism has become so dominant in our political community. In a longer version of this paper I would explore the ways in which historicist conceptions of the self support some of the most extreme versions of liberationist thought.

[43] So some parents today expect their children to become generous to others, without telling them to be generous or rewarding their generosity. These parents fail to recognize just how long a way it is to civilization. (And, that is such a long way is one of the reason that so many people don't make it.)

A third problem is that liberationist thought fails to recognize the value of self-discipline. One of the main barriers to moving up to higher expressions of eros is that in, in the process, doing so we become apprentices to new practices of excellence.[44] And apprenticeships are difficult. For it often takes a great deal of time and effort before we have progressed far enough in a practice to be able to truly enjoy it. To master a musical instrument, to become a good parent, to create and sustain a romantic relationship, to learn to write well, are all achievements that can give us great joy. But they do not give us joy immediately or all the time. There are painful moments to be overcome in these and all other practices of excellence. To say, as liberationists frequently do, that pain and frustration is always the result of the repression of our natural desires, is thus deeply mistaken. And it an idea that discourages us from developing the self-discipline we need to enter into practices of excellence.

And that brings us to a fourth failure of liberationist thought, one that sums up and extends the first three: Liberationism fails to appreciate the importance of creating and sustaining political and social institutions that embody practices of excellence. In large part, the failure of liberationism is really the failure of romanticism as a whole. For romanticism has always stood against the institutional network that makes up a political community. It has glorified the lone individual and the genius is are stifled and limited by institutions. Now no one can deny that the institutions that should embody practices of excellence—academic departments, law offices, newspapers, hospitals, for example—often do stifle genius. And, a central reason they do so is that, as Macintyre has pointed out, these institutions must balance the internal goods of the practices of excellence they embody with the external goods of money and honor they need to survive. In the last thirty years the balance in practically every sphere of life has shifted from internal goods to external goods. Everywhere the bottom line is dominant. Academic departments care more about grant money and articles accepted than about the quality of their research and teaching. Hospitals care more about salaries and reputation then about preserving the health of the population they serve. Newspaper care more for advertising dollars than for informing the public. The examples could be multiplied endlessly.

When Augustinians look at the problems of contemporary life, they think that the difficulties are mainly failures of individuals, who have been brought up badly and are thus unable to restrain their lower desires. There is, I have argued, some truth to this. But the deeper problem is the failure of the political and social institutions that embody the practices of excellence. People have turned against the higher forms of expression of eros not so much because they are incapable of restraining their lower desires but because there are so few opportunities to learn to satisfy eros in higher ways. Where are the communities in which men and women can find a place and to which they can contribute? Where are the academic institutions that truly value the crafts of teaching and research? Where are the hospitals that place patient care first?

Now there are a host of reasons for this distressing trend, far too many to be considered here. And liberationist thought is certainly not the main source of the difficulty. But I do want to argue that liberationist thought makes it harder to reach the solution. Or, perhaps I should say

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[44] I use the term "practices of excellence" to refer to what Alasdair Macintyre, in *After Virtue*, called social practices. Practices of excellence are activities that involve the development and use of our faculties and abilities in living up to—and then improving—the standards of excellence that define these activities.

that liberationist thought is one of a series of modern ideas that put the solution out of reach.[45] For, like liberalism, romanticism, particularly in its liberationist form, leads us to take a wholly instrumental view of political and social institutions. It sees them as either facilitators of or external barriers to the satisfaction of our internal desires. It does not see political and social institutions as things that embody a set of ideals definitive of a certain way of life that, in turn, makes certain goods available to us. This instrumental conception of political and social institutions is exacerbated in liberationist thought, which holds that the central human good is found in the expression of our desires and, especially, our bodily desires. For these desires seem, at least on first view, to be most distant from political and social institutions of any kind.[46] Given its heritage in romanticism, liberationist thought cannot help but see institutions as, a best, a means to our ends and, more commonly, as a hindrance to the expression of our desires.

One result of looking at political and social institutions in instrumental terms is that is precisely what they become. And then the external goods we receive from political and social institutions come to be far more important than the internal goods we receive by taking part in them. Another result is that we tend not to appreciate the importance of the goods that, for Plato, are higher expressions of eros. For political and social institutions and the practices of excellence they embody are central to these higher ends. A third result is that, when problems in our lives arise, we too often look in the wrong place for solutions. We look first at our lack of external resources that enable us to satisfy our desires. Then we look at the barriers inside ourselves to the expression of our desires. We never look to the failures of the political and social institutions that embody practices of excellence. But that, I suggest, is precisely where we should look.[47]

CONCLUSION

One can only hope that someday—undoubtedly not soon—we will look back at the culture war and laugh at the spectacle of serious men and women arguing about important difficulties in our political and social life, but missing the nerve of them by so wide a mark. Anyone who thinks that our individual lives or political and social condition is going to improve if fewer teenagers have sex is not getting at our deeper problems. Nor is anyone who thinks that our individual lives and political and social condition is going to improve if more teenagers have sex. The central claim of this paper is that the most important contents of our civilization is not to be found in our sex lives. That we think they are to be found there is, I have argued, the result of deep, but misguided ideas that, in different ways, are accepted by left and right. If we are ever to be more content with our political and social life, we will have to make it possible for men and women to express their erotic nature in higher ways. To do that, however, we will first have to

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[45] It is not the only form of political and moral thought that contributes to the problem. Liberalism itself—or at least the standard liberalisms of Locke, Bentham, Mill, and Rawls—bear much of the responsibility. Indeed, most of the difficulties with liberationist thought I point to in the text are the shared by liberalism.

[46] Of course, that isn't true at all. The meals we eat, after all, are created by and through a social practice of cooking which, in turn, is sustained by a set of institutions including restaurants, cooking schools, the writers and publishers of cookbooks and so forth. And, even our sexual desires are shaped by institutional factors.

[47] I have tried to give an account of political and social institutions that would better allow us to satisfy eros in higher ways in "How Much of Communitarianism is Left (and Right)?" in Peter Lawler and Dale McConkey, eds. *Community and Political Theory Today* (Praeger, 1999).

find the center of gravity of our erotic lives. I have suggested that Plato, more than anyone else, can be our guide in this search.