

August 1970

Sexual Freedom and the New Morality

Max Levin

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Levin, Max (1970) "Sexual Freedom and the New Morality," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 37 : No. 3 , Article 10.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol37/iss3/10>

SEXUAL FREEDOM AND the NEW MORALITY

Max Levin, M.D.

Address given at the annual meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians in Denver, Colorado, November 29, 1969.

People today are inclined to question the teachings of the past. They question the traditional beliefs and values that our forefathers have handed down to us. In the field of sex, morality has become a dirty word. We are told that the Judeo-Christian moral code is no longer suited to the needs of the day, and that we must replace it with a "new morality." Now it's a good thing that people exercise their critical faculties, but where sex is concerned, people will make judgments and decisions on an *emotional* basis, often in a way that is irrational. Many sex educators today have joined the parade: they bow down before the demands of the campus rebels. They

reject premarital chastity as a guideline for our youth.

I propose to present a case for the "old morality." For the physician who believes in it, but hesitates to buck the trend of the day, I shall try to show that he need not hesitate to stand up for his beliefs. For the physician who has already climbed up on the bandwagon of the new morality, I shall urge that he can serve his patients best by climbing right down again.

In speaking of premarital chastity as a guideline, I refer primarily to the girl rather than the boy. This does not mean I support the double standard. It concerns rather the illusion of the equality of the sexes. To be sure, the sexes are equal in their political and economic rights, but they differ in their biological and psychological nature. Sex freedom is a more critical

issue for the girl because *she has more to lose*. I say this not because of the risk of pregnancy, but because the risk of emotional damage is greater for her than for the boy. The girl's emotional investment in love and marriage is greater than the boy's. When a love affair breaks up, they may both suffer a broken heart, but *her* fracture will be more severe than his. Where *he* may have no more than a simple fracture, *she* will have a compound fracture. In her case healing will take longer, and the residual deformity will be more crippling.

The timidity of our sex educators was evident at a symposium conducted in 1966 by the National Association of Independent Schools¹. The meeting was attended by headmasters and teachers. One of the panelists, an eminent physician, reported that he had been invited to speak to the students at a women's college, but he had declined the invitation. He gave the reason: "I said, 'You've come to the wrong person. I can't do it.' They said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Because I can't tell these girls whether it's right or wrong to have premarital intercourse. I don't know.' And they said, 'We don't know either.'" The panelist spoke of "the uncertainty I have in my own mind as to whether premarital sex is constructive or destructive."

The ability to confess ignorance is commendable. It takes courage to come forth with the candid admission, "I don't know." But a member of the audience voiced his dissatisfaction and frustration. He said, "We deal with adolescents at a time when they are terribly concerned about themselves, their relationships to one another and society, and we say, 'Let's give them five different views and let them sift it out.' I am not sure that this is good enough."

The man was right. It certainly is "not good enough." Premarital sex is a crucial issue, and to take an equivocal stand is to deny our youngsters the help they are looking for — and this includes even those who don't openly ask for help.

The Preacher said:

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; . . .

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; . . .

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing . . ."

I submit that this is a time to *give* guidance to our youth. This is no time to refrain from giving guidance.

Our youngsters are confused by what they see and hear and read. A bright college coed told me, "I really don't know myself. I want to establish my identity. People say I can do this best with drugs and sex." She was a virgin and she was puzzled and anxious about her sexual nature. An attractive lass, she was besieged by boy friends who volunteered to act as therapists and cure her anxieties. Their pitch was that in this day and age to remain a virgin is a sign of "frigidity." This increased her anxiety.

Now it's true that sex is a path to self-realization. It's good that we have freed ourselves of the inhibitions of our Puritanical past. We no longer think that sex is a dirty and sinful function, that a woman is not supposed to enjoy it and that she must "submit" to it as a "wifely duty," to cater to the base instincts of her husband. But freedom from inhibitions does not mean *all* inhibitions. There are *healthy* as well as unhealthy inhibitions.

Some educators have coined the phrase "fun morality" as an expression of their sexual philosophy. They teach that sex is a way to have fun, a way to satisfy a normal and healthy appetite, a purely personal matter which each person can decide for himself and in which society has no legitimate interest and no right to interfere. But this conception is much too narrow. Sex involves more than the satisfaction of an appetite; it has psychological and sociological implications. It is an instrument in the growth of character, in the attainment of emotional maturity and of a sense of personal and social responsibility. The sex act is the supreme expression of an interpersonal relationship.

A great difference between the immature infant and the mature adult is in degree of egocentricity. The infant is highly egocentric. He is self-centered. He can receive but cannot give. As he grows up and becomes mature, he acquires the capacity to give. The most dramatic test of the capacity to give is in behavior during the sex act. A husband and wife must be as eager to *give* sexual satisfaction as to receive it. Physicians are familiar with the complaint of a wife that her husband is "inconsiderate." He goes to bed with her with the primary aim of satisfying his own sex needs. He is bored by the measures that are needed to arouse her and build up her erotic tension so that she too will reach orgasm. He has his own orgasm and then rolls over and falls asleep, while she lies awake in frustration and resentment. A man who is devoted to his wife would never be satisfied with this kind of behavior. The sexual foreplay, far from boring him, would thrill him, and his wife, knowing this, would appreciate and respond to his love and would be so much less likely to be blocked on her way to the orgasm. A man and wife reach the peak of their

potentialities as human beings in the sex act, when, in their quest of the orgasm, each one's deepest concern is not the satisfaction he hopes to get for himself, but that which he hopes to *give* to his partner. This is the ultimate expression of a mature interpersonal relationship.

A young man and woman are not yet fully mature when they stand on the threshold of maturity. They reach full maturity when they have made their marriage into an enduring bond, with a harmonious sexual relationship centered on the *giving* of satisfaction. When they have reached this point, they can appreciate, as never before, the meaning and the wisdom of the precept, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is now that they really "know" each other (and themselves), or, if you will, it is now that they have learned their "identity."

It is not true, as so many youngsters believe, that their sexual behavior is none of their parents' business, to say nothing of society as a whole. To be sure, it would be an injustice for the state to enact legislation making it a crime for the coed and her boyfriend to agree to "an arrangement" to shack up together, but it doesn't follow that their behavior is of no legitimate interest to society. Society is concerned with factors that advance or retard social progress, and one of these factors is the sexual philosophy of its members.

The Talmud records that the ancient Rabbis held a debate on the question, What could have motivated the Lord to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt? Why did they come to? If you and I were to guess the answer, we might suppose that the Rabbis, as men of religion, came up with a solution based on theological doctrine, such as that the Israelites refused to bow down before

heaven idols. But no: the conclusion was that the Lord must have decided to deliver the Israelites because they *did not go to prostitutes*. The ancient Rabbis, whom our modern sophisticates might be inclined to regard with a smile of condescension, have given us an insight into the nature of man and society.

The passage of the Israelites from bondage to freedom was a cultural advance, a step forward in the evolution of their society. The Rabbis saw a connection between marital fidelity and the advancement of a society. Young people grow up and take over their society from their elders. The progress of a society depends on its ability to raise successive crops of healthy children, fit to assume their responsibilities when their time comes. Marital fidelity is favorable to the healthy development of the child. Children need a home founded on a strong bond between the parents. A father must give time and love to his children. A man can't be a good father if he chases after other women. Instead of giving time and thought to his children, his mind is elsewhere: he is thinking what alibi he can cook up for the weekend he hopes to spend with the blonde he met at the cocktail lounge. And so his children will be deprived of the love and attention they need. But where there is sound family life, the children will prosper. They will have a decent chance to grow up and become mature and stable adults. To put the matter in today's terms, what the Rabbis were saying is that marital fidelity and sound family life serve the national interest. Here we see how shortsighted it would be to dismiss the Judeo-Christian code as arbitrary theological dogma unrelated to the needs of modern society. On the contrary, the code is an attempt to realize the

conditions that promote social growth and human values.

But so many of our sex educators don't see this. They reject "moral indoctrination." One writer, a sociologist, rejects the moral approach as repulsive to the ideal of education. Referring to those teachers who "are morally indoctrinating children in the name of education," he writes: "Education is aimed at teaching people *how* to think and not *what* to think. Education is not propaganda or indoctrination." He specifically criticizes those who teach youngsters "the value of chastity" and who give "reasons why one should avoid premarital intercourse." He deplores this "moral indoctrination" and would prefer that youngsters make their own decisions.

Youngsters, of course, *are* going to make their own decisions. But it would be naive to exaggerate the capacity of adolescent children to work out for themselves a healthy set of values, without the aid of "moral indoctrination." No individual works out a set of values all by himself. He lives in a society and its values seep into him and become part of him, just as its language becomes part of him. We believe that honesty is the best policy, not because we have each arrived at this conclusion through the application of logic, but because it is a foundation stone of our society and we learn it from our parents and teachers in our earliest years. It's the result of "indoctrination."

Even if some critics will denounce it as "indoctrination," we must give our youth a conception of sex as something that goes beyond the instant gratification of an immediate craving. Sex is a path to the attainment of the highest goals in life. It provides the ultimate in interpersonal commitment. A commitment to shack up together falls short of the ultimate. The ultimate

commitment is made when a man and woman stand up in solemn ceremony before family and friends, a ceremony with legal sanction, and openly pledge their future to each other.

It's a mistake to overestimate the capacity of adolescent youngsters to judge for themselves what is in their best interest. The proponents of the new morality are prone to make this mistake. Kirkendall, a man who has devoted a lifetime to the study of adolescent behavior, writes²:

"When it comes to sex in a relationship, the girl has several pressing questions: If I have intercourse, will it make my relationship with the boy stronger? What will he think of me? Will I please him, or will I lose his respect?"

A high school teacher spoke of her gratitude to Kirkendall. Like other high school — and college — teachers, she had been perplexed by the insistent questions of her students. But, she said, after reading Kirkendall she was no longer uncertain: "Now I have an answer; I just tell the girls and boys that they have to consider both sides of the question: Will sexual intercourse strengthen or weaken their relationship?"

This, mind you, was not a college teacher; it was a high school teacher. We can imagine the turmoil in the mind of a high school girl: in the afternoon she heard from her teacher that there are two sides to the question, and now in the evening she is being propositioned by her boy friend who assures her that intercourse will strengthen, not weaken, the relationship.

Kirkendall's guideline is an absurdity — a *dangerous* absurdity. What girl, however bright, can foretell whether intercourse will strengthen the relationship? Kirkendall doesn't say what the girl should do if the forecast of bright sunny weather is

followed by rain. We have seen cases where a girl went to a boy in the fond hope and their friendship would prosper. She had dreams of a good husband and beautiful children. Then, when the boy had enjoyed her favor for a few months and had transferred his attentions to someone else, her beautiful dreams collapsed. She now knew what we mean when we speak of sex as exploitation. She now knew the difference between foresight and hindsight, and she can sympathize with people who say, "If I had known *then* what I know *now*." She has learned the meaning of disillusion and disenchantment.

A big question today is premarital intercourse for the engaged couple. A young man and his fiancée in love, wonder if they must wait until the wedding. Aren't we always being told that the smart way to live is to "buy now, pay later"? But this is risky, for the girl might be troubled by doubt and anxiety. Is her boy friend on the level? Is he possibly playing a game? Does he perhaps want to hold on to his options, the right to change girlfriends? And even if she has faith in his integrity, she might still be afraid. She might think, "My sweetheart is only human. If I *do* go ahead with him, is there any chance that he will lose his respect for me?" Now a man with any sense will know — without being told — that these anxieties might arise to trouble his girl. And if, in his eagerness to protect her from anxiety, he restrains himself, she will know why. She will be grateful for this demonstration of his paramount concern for her welfare and peace of mind, and this cannot but strengthen her love for him. To put the matter in terms of economics, what better investment can a man make than a policy of restraint that will strengthen

his girl's love for him and make her a more devoted wife in years to come? The cost of the investment, in terms of self-denial, will be high, but it will one day return him dividends beyond measure.

A marriage ought to start out under the most favorable auspices. The most favorable condition is when both parties share the conviction that they need each other, and only each other, never mind the options.

It's no argument to say that there are couples who started before the wedding, yet their marriage turned out a success. If a man drives his car at 95 mph without breaking his neck, this does not prove that there is no risk in the action.

Sex educators mislead our youngsters when they sanction permissiveness in the name of "fun morality." The sex act *does* provide sensuous gratification of maximum degree. But we degrade sex when we teach a philosophy that does not put primary emphasis on the highest human values.

When a devoted husband and wife engage in the sex act, they are deeply moved by the opportunity to express once again their profound love for each other. There are other experiences in life that stir our deepest feelings. It is a moving experience to watch an infant take his first steps, or to witness the parade of cadets at West Point, or to attend a performance of Handel's Messiah — but no man in his right mind would define these experiences in terms of "fun." Would a Catholic teacher tell his pupils that a good way to have fun is to attend Mass?

Of all those who have a hand in programs of sex education, the physician enjoys an advantage. He is the least vulnerable to the scornful glance

of those who reject morality, for even they respect him as one whose concern is health (which includes emotional health). The physician can honestly say, "If I take a moral position, I do so not as a priest or rabbi, but as a doctor." We need not hesitate to "indoctrinate" our youth with a healthy conception of sex that goes beyond the immediate satisfaction of an appetite, a function that helps one to appreciate the highest human values.

The moral decay of our society is evident in the mad scramble to a false kind of sophistication. Gael Greene tells the story of the coed who got into some kind of trouble with her boy friend, a graduate student. He found out that she was spreading unkind rumors about him, and he retaliated in a way that was diabolically clever. He threatened to go to all their friends on the campus and tell them that she was not the *femme fatale* that she pretended to be, but was in fact a virgin. Faced with this threat of scandalous exposure, the girl had no choice. She caved in. In the words of the author, she "shut up."

"The truth shall make you free." Let us help our people to know the truth about sex, and thereby we will help them to become free, *really* free, free of the sexual degradation that is contaminating the atmosphere in which we live today.

REFERENCES

1. Hilu, V. (ed.): *Sex Education and the Schools*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
2. Rubin, I., and Kirkendall, L.A. (editors): *Sex in the Adolescent Years: New Directions in Guiding and Teaching Youth*. New York: Association Press, 1968.