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Dietrich von Hildebrand's Criticism of Amoral Sex Education

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Abstract. This article analyzes Dietrich von Hildebrand's criticism of amoral sex education, which he regards as misleading and anti-educational in many crucial respects. Its content is misleading, because it separates human sexuality from its inherent connection with married love and thereby fails to do justice to the personal and intimate nature of sexuality. Its reductive and neutralizing approach not only fails to develop young people's capacity for the transcendence implicit in moral agency, it also fails to provide the preconditions for the development of their authentic subjectivity. Instead of fostering objectivity, critical thinking and autonomy, amoral sex education promotes a normatively closed educational environment that fails to unfold young people's potential for value-response and to contribute to the fulfilling of their human potential in general.

Keywords: Amoral sex education, morality intrinsic to sexuality, moral agency, moral transcendence

Ditricho fon Hildebrando moraliai neutralaus lytinio švietimo kritika

Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojama Ditricho fon Hildebrando moraliai neutralaus lytinio švietimo kritika. Atsižvelgdamas į daugybę svarbių aspektų, autorius tokį švietimą mano esant klaidinantį ir netgi antišvietimu. Jo turinys yra klaidinantis todėl, kad čia atskiriamas žmogaus seksualumas nuo jo prigimtinio ryšio su santuokine meile. Dėl to asmeninė ir intymi seksualumo prigimtis nėra patvirtinama. Toks supaprastinantis ir neutralizuojantis požiūris ne tik neleidžia ugdyti jaunų žmonių gebėjimo transcendencijai, kurią numano moralinis institutas, bet ir nesudaro prielaidų jų autentiškam subjektyvumui vystytis. Užuoat skatinęs objektyvumą, kritinį mąstymą ir savarankiškumą moralės atžvilgiu, moraliai neutralus lytinis švietimas nesugeba ugdyti jaunimo potencialo vertybiniam atsakui ir todėl nepripisdeda prie jų žmogiškojo potencialo realizavimo apskritai.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: moraliai neutralus lytinis švietimas, moralumas, būdingas seksualumui, moralinė institucija, moralinė transcendencija.

Introduction

The foundational presupposition of amoral sex education (ASE) is that sex does not raise any particular moral issues intrinsic to the nature of sexuality itself (Mark, 2018, p. 107), since there is “nothing special per se about the norms which govern sexual ethics” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 15). ASE may involve considerations of honesty, concern for others, prudence, and so on, “but there is nothing special about sex in this respect, for the same could be said of decisions about driving a car” (Singer, 1993, p. 2). Sex is not morally

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special and there is no specifically sexual morality. Since sex has no particular aim or goal that grounds a moral evaluation, sex does not have a natural teleology and there is no “natural path of adult intra-species heterosexual intercourse” (Webber, 2009, p. 12). Since “no sexual acts which yield mutual pleasure to consenting individuals can be condemned as perverse or unnatural” (Adler, 1970, p. 327), the notion of sexual perversion can be “assigned to the scrap-heap” (Priest, 1997, p. 371). ‘Thick’ concepts like chastity do not feature in ASE, but the relevant discourse is restricted to ‘thin’ concepts like rightness, goodness and obligatoriness, that are minimally “world-guided” (McCarthy, 2016, pp. 12–13).

Since ASE denies any specific natural teleology to sex, one cannot judge its merits without taking a stand on the moral question concerning the meaning and purpose of human sexuality (Mark, 2018, p. 25). The moral discourse about sex education cannot avoid this issue, since in the meaning of sex “we find a framework by which we make sense of our sexuality as human beings” (Hollinger, 2009, p. 13). At stake “are different fundamental evaluations of the meaning and purpose not only of sexuality in human life but of human life itself” (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 229). Is there any objective meaning to sex, or does it reduce to the various meanings ascribed to sex by individual preferences? The current liberal metanarrative, as expressed by its key contributors like Alan Soble (2006a; 2006b) and Igor Primoratz (1997; 1999; 2001; 2006), assumes that sex has no intrinsic moral significance: individual preferences have a foundational role and participant consent is sufficient to render a sexual act morally acceptable. “Sex affords us a paradigm of pleasure, but not a cornerstone of value” (Goldman, 1977, p. 283). The liberal metanarrative relies on the naturalistic understanding of sexuality, which reduces the nature and end of sex to the individual pursuit of pleasure (Hollinger 2009, p. 29). No sexual practice is inherently objectionable or preferable, since there is nothing inherently moral about sex (Grayling, 2011, p. 8).

Insofar as there is nothing inherently immoral in any sexual act and the amount and intensity of pleasure becomes the only criterion for judging their acceptability, acts such as rape, pedophilia and incest can be regarded as immoral on account of the measure of harm done to the victim, outweighing the pleasure experienced by the perpetrator (Odell, 2006, p. 197). However, if a liberal applies the same calculus to practices such as incest, bestiality, and necrophilia, she may reach different moral conclusions (Mark, 2018, p. 111), as the liberal approach misses the inherent moral worth of sexual behavior (Haidt, 2012, p. 174). Moreover, even with regard to pedophilia, the judgment may change, if research shows that sexual relationships are harmless and pleasurable for children (Rind & Welter, 2014; Rind, 2017a; Rind, 2017b).

Proponents of sexology, of whom Alfred Kinsey was a leading pioneer, have been especially influential in promoting the paradigm of pleasure. Kinsey’s sexological work “is first of all a report on what people do, which raises no questions of what they should do, or what kinds of people do it” (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948, p. 7). The importance of such an empirical approach continues to be appreciated (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2013, p. 258) and there has been a recent revival of interest in

Kinsey's work. For example, the study by Rind and Welter (2014) utilizes empirical material collected by Kinsey.

Kinsey founded the Institute for Sex Research (later named the Kinsey Institute) at Indiana University (Bloomington), which later came under the leadership of sexologists such as Paul Gebhard, Wardell Pomeroy, June Rheinisch, Stephanie Sanders and John Bancroft. Kinsey's vision for a morally neutral sex education was realized when Mary Calderone and Lester Kirkendall founded the Sex (later Sexuality) Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). Its early board members included Kinsey co-author Wardell Pomeroy and Harriet Pilpel who worked on a sex-law-reform project for Kinsey. SIECUS has become the major sex education organization in the United States, and its publications are recognized in *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* issued by WHO Regional Office for Europe and Germany's Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA).

The only adequate defense against the negative implications of ASE, according to Dietrich von Hildebrand, is the view that sexuality has an inherent connection with married love. As an adherent of realist phenomenology, he believed that sex education ought to cultivate students' capacity to perceive values and to respond to them in love, as this is the way to strengthen their individuality and sense of what is objectively beneficial to themselves. The cultivation of value-responses (love, faithfulness, admiration, veneration, reverence, thanksgiving, adoration, and indignation) is central for sex education: all of human life ought to be organized around value-response (Crosby, 2017, p. 688). Separated from moral values, sex education narrows and cramps the human personality (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 210).

Von Hildebrand regards ASE as "a distortion of sex, a falsification of its true and deep character", and "misinformation to which the children are exposed" (von Hildebrand, 2001). It is "pseudo-scientific teaching" based on "the latest and the worst example of this scientific superstition" that "the lower something ranks metaphysically, the more certain is its existence, and the more ascertained is it in its reality". Thus, he continues, ASE "constitutes an *authoritative* misrepresentation of sex, thanks to its making of sex a mere biological instinct, and thanks to its neutralizing sex and placing it in a laboratory atmosphere". ASE undermines students' moral agency, their capacity to evaluate desires, consider reasons, form intentions, make and implement decisions based on their value experience. It fails to support the development of morally conscious persons capable of forming mature moral judgments based on their perception of values, who exemplify "a reflection of a genuine personality" as moral agents that can make evaluative judgments without succumbing to relativism (von Hildebrand, 1973, pp. 54–62).

The epistemological basis of ASE

ASE builds on a naturalistic understanding of children's sexuality, which was foundational for the research Kinsey conducted within the framework of positivist epistemology and materialistic ontology. Kinsey assumed that one can acquire adequate know-

ledge of sexuality only by observing and experimenting with the whole variety of its empirical manifestations, by engaging in “a thoroughly objective, fact-finding investigation of sex” (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 4). Kinsey supported sex education that emphasizes biological information and undermines inhibitions that prevent the satisfaction of sexual urges.

Kinsey claims to achieve objectivity and neutrality by steering clear of any moral commitments with regard to various expressions of sexuality. He assumes that “nearly all of the so-called sexual perversions fall within the range of biologic normality” (Kinsey; quoted by Jones, 2004, p. 333). Only those sexual relations that involve clear violence are excluded. Instead of moral categories, Kinsey proposed the biological concept of individual variation, which views behavior on a continuum and thereby erodes concepts of morally right and wrong, since every point on the continuum had equal value in nature.

Kinsey thought that objective knowledge about human sexuality is dependent on close observation, completely free of any value commitment, of various kinds of sexual behavior, “an accumulation of scientific fact completely divorced from questions of moral value and social custom” (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 3). Kinsey tried to get as close to observation reports as possible by collecting information through a questionnaire on sexual history (Kinsey et al., 1948, pp. 63–70) and by observing and filming various kinds of sex acts in a studio (Jones, 2004, pp. 4, 605–609).

Kinsey's preference for observation reports guided his research on children's sexuality as well. He regarded it as legitimate and necessary to rely on “records supplied by some older subjects who have had sexual contacts with younger boys” (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 160). He described children's sexuality based on “data supplied by adult observers for 196 pre-adolescent boys” (p. 160). They recorded their observations meticulously and measured the “orgasms” of the children they abused with stopwatches (Jones, 2004, pp. 507–513). According to Kinsey's empiricist epistemology, this was the only reliable way of acquiring adequate knowledge about children's sexuality.

While the canonical Kinsey “carefully cultivated the image of a simple empiricist, a compiler of data who reported the facts with scientific disinterest”, as his biographer James Jones (2004: xii–xiii) pointed out, in reality he was not completely disinterested: “he approached his work with missionary fervor” with the aim to “undermine traditional morality”. In his zeal to produce the desired results while maintaining the image of scientific objectivity, he carefully concealed the fact that “his methodology and data were flawed” (Jones, 2004, p. xiii).

As a materialist, Kinsey regarded sexuality as a mere biological appetite, not to be curbed beyond what is strictly needed by social order. As pointed out by Jones, “Privately, Kinsey had long believed that human beings in a state of nature were basically pansexual. Absent social constraints, he conjectured, ‘natural man’ would commence sexual activity early in life, enjoy intercourse with both sexes, eschew fidelity, indulge in a variety of behaviors, and be much more sexually active in general for life” (Jones, 2004, p. 512). Sex education can liberate children from inhibitions to satisfy themselves sexually by conveying the message that there are no absolute sexual norms: all forms of sexual be-

havior based on mutual consent are normal and acceptable. Important is the easy availability of orgasms irrespective of whether acquired with a person of the same or opposite sex, with family members, or even with an animal, as Kinsey's close associate Wardell Pomeroy (1968, pp. 134–135) points out. In a sense, young people are left to decide for themselves. However, insofar as there are no adequate normative criteria to choose among competing lifestyles, the choices will not be free in any meaningful sense of the term, but arbitrary according to the whim of the moment (Alexander, 2015, p. 93). When teaching represents all sexual alternatives as of equal value without an appraisal from a moral or even from a health perspective, young people will find it difficult to perceive the moral implications and social consequences of various lifestyles.

Von Hildebrand's realist phenomenology

Von Hildebrand's realist phenomenology implies that we have intuitive and experiential knowledge about the essential connection between sexuality and love: only the sensitivity implied in love uncovers the nature of sexuality (2011). This excludes experimenting with sexuality, in particular, the use of pedophiles as informants to acquire knowledge about children's sexuality. While acquiring their information within the context of sexual acts that are contrary to love, pedophiles necessarily have a distorted conception of sexuality. Sexual experimentation fails to produce knowledge, as it numbs the sensitivity needed for perceiving the true nature of love inherent in human sexuality: one acts against those values while engaging in sexual experiments.

Hildebrand's epistemology is based on an "empiricism of the a priori" or, one of "essences". The investigation of essences involves a rational penetration into universal and intelligible value structures given in experience so that "our knowledge is totally independent of empirical verification in the sense of perceptions and of all other forms of cognition which have to rely on the reality and facticity of things in the real world" (Seifert, 1991, p. xii). It is possible to acquire direct and immediate knowledge of the necessary and highly intelligible essence of goodness, justice and other central moral values by intellectual intuition, which "grants us an intimate union analogous to that granted by perception". Essences "enjoy a kind of self-presence analogous to the givenness of a concrete individual being" (von Hildebrand, 1973, pp. 183–184). This kind of contemplative having of an intelligible essence of the nature of love "looks to the unfolding of the value of the object, beginning with the initial stage wherein the value radiates from the object and enters my consciousness, passing through the stage wherein I am touched or affected by the value, and ending with affective responses" (von Hildebrand, pp. 180–181).

While Kinsey assumed, that his supposedly value-neutral approach gave him an objective view on human sexuality, von Hildebrand argues that such a supposedly neutral perspective distorts one's view of sexuality as it leads one to observe sexuality as a mere biological fact without any necessary connection to love and its inherent values. To offer sexual information in a neutral scientific context reduces sexuality to its biological basis,

which makes one blind to the personal, individual and intimate nature of sexuality and its inherent connection to love. “As long as one sees sex as a mere instinct – as long as it is placed on the same level with hunger or thirst – one remains necessarily blind to its true nature. One may study the Kinsey report, one may read treatises about the physiology of sex, but they will not help a bit in detecting the true nature and meaning of sex” (von Hildebrand, 1966, p. 8). One who regards sexual intercourse as mere satisfaction of a healthy instinct on the same level with hunger and thirst is incapable of understanding the meaning of sexuality as the fulfillment of deep marital love. Such a perspective “distorts the role which sex should play in man’s life, and it renders impossible the great happiness which sex can bestow on the married couple as expression of their love and as a fulfillment of their union, their mutual self-donation” (von Hildebrand 2001).

Love is a value-response, which opens the eyes of the lover to see the values that characterize the person loved, her unique potential as an individual created in the image of God. Love opens our eyes to the objective value of each person that a neutral scientific approach fails to perceive. Sex education “in which sex is presented as a merely biological instinct, and in which anatomical and physiological processes are emphasized at the expense of a spiritual interpretation is in reality a distortion of sex, a falsification of its true and deep character” (von Hildebrand 2001).

The dulling of moral sensitivity

Von Hildebrand regards ASE as methodically misguided because it fails to respect the uniqueness and specialness of sex. The problem is not merely its reductive and neutralizing nature, but the distortion of the personal, individual and intimate nature of sexuality. ASE obscures the fact that sexuality receives its genuine significance in the unique life-long love relationship between married spouses based on total and irrevocable self-donation: “The very soul of the sexual act is the personal union which it effects with the beloved” (von Hildebrand, 2001).

Because of its “objective” and biologically reductive approach, ASE tends to use explicit sexual material, which violates young people’s moral sensitivity and natural modesty and undermines their capacity for moral agency. It deprives children of their natural innocence, which includes freedom from sexual thoughts, sexual images, desires and behaviors, and the capacity to “noble shame” or modesty, “which conceals something because it is particularly intimate” (von Hildebrand, 1945, pp. 14–15). The latter is grounded in the privacy and intimacy of sex and “in the intrinsic awe it inspires, awe of its extraordinary and mysterious quality”, as well as in “an instinctive dislike of the impudent, the irreverent, the defiling and the sinister” (von Hildebrand, p. 15).

The undermining of the “noble shame” or “holy bashfulness”, of the natural awareness that sexuality is personal, individual and intimate by nature, may mislead young people into a promiscuous lifestyle, make it more difficult to resist sexual abuse, and generally weaken their ability to resist their own primitive impulses. Separated from love, sexuality becomes “an intoxicating charm which draws man down to the animal level,

a desecration of the great gift of sex – in short, a mystery of iniquity” (von Hildebrand, 2001). The “objective” representation of sex, devoid of moral values, “offends our sense of modesty because it takes no account of this shyness” (von Hildebrand, 1945, p. 95). Protecting children’s natural innocence is justified by pedagogical considerations: sexualized children slip from their parents’ guidance, which threatens good parent–child relationships. In this respect, von Hildebrand agrees with Sigmund Freud, who argues that the sexualization of children hampers their education: “We have seen from experience that seductive external influences can cause premature breach of the latent stage or its extinction ... and that any such premature sexual activity impairs the educability of the child.” (Freud, 1968, p. 136.)

Cultural radicals like Wilhelm Reich, who defend sexual liberation as a way of combating “mysticism”, implicitly acknowledge that illicit sexual practices and the loss of moral purity hamper an intimate relationship with God. “We do not discuss the existence or nonexistence of God,” Reich writes, “we merely eliminate the sexual repressions and dissolve the infantile ties to the parents” (Reich, 1970, p. 182). Since young people are naturally inclined to act on sexual impulses, the vindication of illicit sexuality undermines their belief in God, as “natural sexuality is the arch-enemy of mystical religion” (Reich, 1970, p. 178). Thus, Reich wants to combat belief in God by the mass dissemination of sexual imagery. In this way, Reich provides indirect support for von Hildebrand’s thesis that the dissemination of such imagery through classroom sex education undermines the pupils’ spiritual development. Insofar as ASE leads young people to act contrary to the Church’s teaching on sexual morality, it hampers the development of what McLaughlin (1984) calls “autonomy via faith”.

In von Hildebrand’s view, ASE undermines autonomous moral agency by substituting the epistemic authority of natural science for the epistemic authority of moral obligation. The Kinseyan school allows only scientific authorities as genuine epistemic authorities in the field of human sexuality: people should learn the facts of human sexuality from science and then decide for themselves which behavior to embrace or eschew (Jones, 2004, p. 328). This view implicitly endorses a relativistic sexual morality based on the assumption that people lack knowledge of objective moral principles. Without a moral framework, young people lack adequate criteria to choose between competing lifestyles, so that their choices become arbitrary and their capacity for moral agency is undermined.

To use the epistemic authority of science to undermine the inherent authority of moral principles will lead young people to inner conflicts, because they cannot ultimately escape the witness of their own conscience, in which they encounter “something demanding, something unconditionally binding, something authoritative, something calling for a kind of obedience” (Crosby, 2012, p. 102). Using science to undermine the inherent authority of moral principles, their obligatory nature will further enslave them in the pangs of guilty conscience by the dynamics of repression.

Undermining of moral agency

Von Hildebrand argues that amorality misrepresents the nature of human sexuality even more radically than immorality, which only implies a false categorization of those norms or their violation. ASE neglects the morality intrinsic to sexuality and thereby fails to foster the basic preconditions of moral agency. The positivist approach “more and more corrodes the life of man, making him more and more blind to the real cosmos, in all its plenitude, depth, and mystery” (von Hildebrand, 1973, p. 7). This is not a merely intellectual problem, but an existential one. It imprisons human beings in a view of sexuality deprived of its natural moral core and thereby impoverishes sexual experience.

Teaching the amoral view of sexuality with the authority of school is “incomparably more harmful than picking up information on the street” (von Hildebrand, 2001). Information received on the street is immoral and produces guilt, while the neutralizing sex education at school produces a morally indifferent attitude, which dulls the moral sense and the capacity to make moral distinctions. Street instruction deprives sexuality “of its deep and noble character”, “appeals to a brutal sexual instinct” and thereby creates a guilty conscience, but “amorality is still more destructive for the entire person than immorality”. “Street instruction may be coarse and dirty but, as horrible as it is, it does not deprive sex of its character as does the neutralizing classroom information.”

A morally impure person is not just superficial; he fails in his principal task, in his basic human vocation. “To be morally good pertains essentially to the end of human existence and to man’s destiny” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 174). Being endowed with moral values is “decisive for man’s eternal fate, for they hint at eternity and the fact that man’s existence is not exhausted by his earthly life” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 176).

That is why the amorality of materialistically reductive sex education is worse than immorality. An immoral person may repent of his moral failure and return to the deep sources of love, but an amoral person has strayed to life’s grey border area devoid of moral signs showing the way back to love. The laboratory view of ASE undermines young people’s ability to comprehend the deep moral implications of sexual behavior. It makes them insensitive to moral distinctions by conveying the impression that there are no absolute sexual norms: all forms of sexual behavior based on mutual consent count as normal and acceptable. Thus, ASE deprives young people of the richest source of value within sexual experience.

Failure to develop moral transcendence and authentic subjectivity

By reducing sexuality into a biological instinct, ASE produces superficial sexuality guided by the subjectively satisfying and dominated by drives, appetites, and desires, rather than by the intrinsically valuable. It fails to help young people to achieve moral transcendence and develop as persons guided by value-response and locks them in their immanence in a way that distorts their relationship to themselves, other people and God. “In desiring the merely subjectively satisfying, there is no transcending of the frame of self-centeredness, no conforming to that which is objectively important, no self-aban-

donment, no reverent submission to something greater than ourselves, on the contrary, there is only imprisonment in the frame of our self-centeredness” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 215).

A person transcends herself in giving a value-response, and the real “signature” of the human person lies in this self-transcendence. A value-responsive person steps beyond her own needs and views the other person according to his value, because she does not let her interest in the subjectively satisfying curtail her reverence for values. The immanently oriented person lives primarily for the subjectively satisfying: his moral horizons become increasingly limited so that he eventually ceases to care about what is “precious of itself”. The capacity to choose between these two orientations constitutes the fundamental moral freedom of persons, “for here we choose between radically opposed forms of moral existence” (Crosby, 2009, p. xvi).

ASE not only fails to develop young people’s capacity for the transcendence implicit in a value-responding attitude, it also fails to provide the preconditions for the development of their authentic subjectivity. Instead of becoming more alive, they become alienated from themselves, since by ignoring moral obligation they lose its “power of opening the depths of personal subjectivity” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 77). Moral obligations do not limit human freedom but make it possible: “In being morally bound we come alive as persons, we ‘quicken’ as persons, we become present to ourselves in a unique way” as “we undergo the profound actualization of our personal being that occurs in being bound in conscience” (ibid. 88).

Only when objective values have priority does one’s subjectivity have the inner order proper to it: “the more right order is preserved, the more intense and the more genuine is subjectivity” (von Hildebrand, 2009, p. 217). As objective values ultimately reflect God’s will and character, human subjectivity develops properly when God’s honor has priority over the whole of one’s subjectivity. “In this act of reaching entirely beyond my subjectivity my transcendence is not only actualized to the fullest, but my subjectivity receives its authentic character, and this even in a qualitative respect” (von Hildebrand, 2009, p. 212).

The awareness of moral obligation constitutes an objective call and a “high-point of transcendence” that at the same time is “my most intimate and personal concern, in which I experience the uniqueness of my self. Supreme objectivity and supreme subjectivity interpenetrate here” (von Hildebrand, 2009, p. 206–207). The call of moral obligation is both demanding and liberating. An awakened moral conscience “represents the most authentic, awakened personal existence” (Crosby, 2012, p. 112).

A person’s attitude towards sex is a fundamental characteristic of her personality, because of “the peculiar intimacy of sex” and because “here body and soul meet in a unique fashion” (von Hildebrand 2001). Bodily feelings have a special “depth” in the sexual sphere, which conjugal love can then form. “To isolate these bodily feelings from the total reality of the human person means to misunderstand them, not only from the moral point of view, but also from the point of view of their very meaning and their intrinsic character. Only when seen in the light of the specific *intentio unionis* of conjugal

love and the sanction of God in marriage do they reveal their authentic character” (von Hildebrand, 2007, p. 23).

ASE does not merely impoverish a young person's sexual experience and make it superficial, it also weakens his ability to perceive the beauty, depth and poetic nature of reality in general and “condemns him to an endless boredom.” It impoverishes young people's inner life and makes it one-dimensional. Without a sense for the special nature of intimacy, human beings “are coarse, superficial, and boring personalities” (von Hildebrand, 2001).

The distress of moral guilt and the loss of the divine presence

Moral values have a unique seriousness, which sets them apart from all other personal values, so that “it is a greater good for the person to be endowed with them than with any other values” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 175). To go astray morally is “the greater evil for the person, far worse than any kind of suffering”. That is why “the awareness of a moral failure affects our conscience” so that the voice of conscience “which speaks to us implacably destroys the peace of our soul and burdens us with an incomparable weight” (p. 172). Bad conscience brings a disharmony, Hildebrand argues, “which no distraction can abate and no pleasures can disperse, which from the very depths of our soul seeps into our life, which in vain we try to dissipate, which at last we try to camouflage with other things” (p. 173).

What makes moral failure especially painful is that “we cannot separate our knowledge of our own moral guilt from the consciousness that it deserves punishment, that it demands atonement” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 174). This sense of the coming punishment implies a sense of the existence of God. Time and age do not erase the sense of moral guilt with its accompanying sense of the threatening punishment, but only makes it more painful and perceivable. “It is almost impossible to experience conscience in all its imperativity and yet not to experience a religious depth in it; it is almost impossible not to be aware of encountering God in conscience” (Crosby, 2012, p. 110). To slacken or diminish the sense of central moral values thereby distances young people from God.

The natural knowledge of God is inescapable even for a person who does not believe in the immortality of the soul: “he could not deny (granted he is really morally awake and amenable to moral values) that moral values involve a mysteriously intimate relation to eternity and a share in determining our eternal fate. He might believe this character of moral values a delusion, but he could not deny the fact of this character as such ...” (von Hildebrand, 1953, p. 176).

ASE strengthens the secular tendency to repress the natural knowledge of God, which even agnostics or atheists find difficult to escape, since “even for the committed atheist, the voice of God is still annoyingly there, though perhaps reduced to no more than a whisper,” as acknowledged by the atheist Jesse Bering (2011, p. 47). Even convinced atheists may at times experience a “mysterious sense that someone or something is keeping watch over us” (Bering, 2011, p. 159). Bering therefore regards it as unlikely that mere scientific knowledge could ever free human beings from their awareness of the

divine. “As a way of thinking, God is an inherent part of our natural cognitive systems, and ridding ourselves of Him – really, thoroughly, permanently removing Him from our heads – would require a neurosurgeon, not a science teacher” (p. 200). Even atheists cannot escape the guilt accompanying moral misbehavior and the accompanying sense of God’s judgment.

Kinsey wanted to alleviate the guilt people experience as a result of breaking moral norms in their sexual behavior, as Jones (2004, p. xii) points out: “He was determined to use science to strip human sexuality of its guilt and repression ... Kinsey honestly believed that if people knew the facts, they would rid themselves of guilt and shame.” Kinsey thought to eliminate guilt by adopting a neutral scientific attitude and by reducing sexuality to its biological basis. What he did not envisage was that such an attempt to repress moral guilt would make the problem of guilt worse and further disintegrate human personality. As Crosby (2012, p. 77) points out, insofar as we break moral commands “we are haunted with remorse and shame and dread; we are unsettled and perturbed in the deepest depths of our being”. People may repress this distress and try to alleviate the pain through immersing themselves in activity or pleasure, but they cannot remove it.

Kinsey’s project of sex education involved an attempt to escape the guilt and “tremendous emotional conflict” in relation to sexuality with which he struggled from his youth, as the sense of moral guilt “tapped into something in his unconscious” (Jones, 2004, p. 83). The ultimate seriousness of moral obligation implies “the consciousness of directly encountering God in responding to obligation” (Crosby, 2012, p. 92). People encounter “the mysterious ultimacy and unconditionness” of moral obligation, Crosby suggests, even if they refuse to acknowledge God’s reality.

Von Hildebrand’s solution was very different from that of Kinsey. Instead of the amoral denial of moral norms, von Hildebrand found the solution in Christ’s forgiveness. He resolved the tension between high moral ideals and the painful reality of moral guilt by relying on Christ’s mercy.

Conclusion

We can summarize von Hildebrand’s criticism of ASE as follows:

- (1) Human beings have intuitive knowledge about the morality intrinsic to sexuality. The knowledge about the intelligible essence of the moral core of sexuality is more certain than the knowledge based on empirical observations.
- (2) Once teaching presents human sexuality in separation from its central moral core, it misrepresents its true nature.
- (3) When ASE conveys such a reductive picture of human sexuality, it indoctrinates young people into a false view of human sexuality that is further removed from reality than immorality.
- (4) By conveying a view of sexuality deprived of its intrinsic morality, ASE undermines the development of the student’s capacity for moral agency and thereby undermines her autonomy.

- (5) The use of explicit sexual material in classroom sex education involves a misuse of the teacher's deontic authority by forcing the student to get involved in activities that offend against her moral sensibilities and thereby violate the development of her capacity for autonomy within a faith tradition.
- (6) The destruction of the natural bashfulness and sense of shame undermines the experience of the uniqueness of the intimate marriage relationship. This makes it more difficult to realize the unique potential inherent in the most intimate and rewarding human relationship of marriage.
- (7) As the amoral laboratory approach to sex education narrows students' perspective on reality, their personality tends to become more superficial and their life less interesting: they find it more difficult to unfold the whole potential of their personality as their awareness of the moral core of sexuality remains inadequate.
- (8) The amoral perspective of modern sex education hampers the development of students' moral sense and of higher values in general. Insofar as they become involved in an immoral lifestyle, they cannot escape the burden of moral guilt and its accompanying sense of God's judgment.
- (9) Insofar as they fail to achieve the transcendence inherent in moral agency, they repress the intimations of God inherent in moral obligation that would help them to become conscious of the perspective of eternity. Such a repression violates their integrity as persons created in the image of God.

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