Editorial

Many entangled matters concerning the body and society fall under the rubric sexualities. It is easy to assume a common lexicon here but inevitably this leads to grave errors as the shifting scholarly opinion about homosexuality in ancient Greece has clearly shown (Cohen 1987[1]). Anyone who has read Augustine or other ancient authors will know that the meaning given to sexuality as it is experienced varies enormously in different periods and cultures. Nevertheless, although there are many languages of sexuality, requiring the student to exercise considerable caution and take nothing for granted, certain central concerns can be identified.

Although of the same species, men and women are different. Yet it can be hard to pin down precisely what that difference is. Female is not the opposite of male; not its antithesis in the way wet is of dry. Women are unlike men but not in as fundamental a way as cats are. On the other hand, being male seems more essential than say being fat or living in Scotland - things about me that if they changed would not change me. The word change is important here. It introduces the notion of time as all change involves continuity and discontinuity over time. During the course of our lives we undergo many changes while remaining the same. Or, to put it another way, questions about sex quickly become ontological questions. Critical to how we make sense of subjectivity. In other words, questions about what it is to be a human being.

We might think of the opposite sex itself somewhat like a foreign language. A splendid example of the incomprehensible. A world one can only dimly glimpse from the outside, though some may have more sensibility towards it than others. After all, one can learn a foreign language. Indeed, some know another language well; others only slightly. But a German would rarely be mistaken for an Englishmen even were he to know English, wear tweed and find a sense of humour. Philip Larkin thought one can never know a foreign language well enough to make reading poems in it worthwhile. Heidegger thought all translations were necessarily interpretations. And that they were all, always, bad. If Larkin was right and if Heidegger was right that in poetry language is somehow at its most fundamental this may be significant. But poetry is not simply a matter of metaphors. Indeed, Heidegger rejected the metaphorical altogether; a rejection that led him to express the seemingly paradoxical idea that poetic utterance is language at its most literal (Malpas 2006). In thinking about sexuality this may remind us that the word intercourse was commonly used in the past of conversation. This was not an analogy. Indeed, conversation and sexual intercourse can be said to share something essential. They are close cousins as it were; and this tells us something important. Both can vary in intensity, truthfulness and degree of understanding. Both can bring us very close to another person and both be used to keep intimacy at bay. Perhaps in doggedly insisting on the nigh impossibility of intercourse (not mere penetration) Lacan was saying something similar to Larkin; expressing an essential falling short in any meeting between the sexes. And yet psychoanalysis, like spiritual direction in pagan antiquity, in Judaism and in its Christian iteration is founded on the idea that talking to another person can be deeply meaningful, nay crucial; at least when it is characterised by a certain freedom or lack of restraint and honesty (Hadot 1981). In antiquity such frankness was known as *parrhēsia*. Though rarely available from one's peers, it could be found with a philosopher and interestingly, according to Galen, with one's wife (Galen, *de cog. an. mor.* 1, 3). For the nuclear family in which bonds of affection and friendship existed between husband and wife was already well-established in Roman society (Veyne 1978). From quite early on Christianity placed much emphasis on

[1] Cohen's is an immensely learned article, one of many which act as a corrective to the arguments of Michel Foucault in *L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris, 1984) and elsewhere, particularly in his notoriously flawed reading of Kenneth Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (New York, 1985).

sexual discipline and renunciation. The latter, which was long thought an example of Hellenisation we now know may have come from its Jewish origins rather than from the Greek philosophical tradition. It was destined to mark Western attitudes to sexual intercourse (Brown 1988)[2].

Language is important in ordering ideas, clarifying through definitions and in making logical distinctions in order that notions hold water. For example, in distinguishing between nature and culture; instinct and drive; need and desire; penis and phallus etc. It was in terms of language that Aristotle in the *Categories* introduced the notions of substance (οὐσία) and accident; specifically in relation to the subject and predicates in sentences in an attempt to classify what kind of thing a thing is (Arist. *cat*.3. 24). The predicates fall into different kinds or categories. Predications in the category of substance tell us what kind of thing it is – a human being, an elephant, a stone, an apple and so on. If one of these substantial predications ceases to be true of a substance, it ceases to exist. On the other hand, when predications in the category of accidents change, the substance continues to exist but changes. For example, when the leaves of an oak tree fall in autumn, we still call it a tree. But if it is felled and used for firewood, nobody would call the ashes a tree. On the Thomistic view sex is an accident, that is to say not a substance (Aquinas E vii; QA a12 ad 7). But unlike being wise or unemployed (which are also accidents), being a man or a woman is for Aquinas an inseparable or permanent accident (Kenny 1980). Of course, sexual intercourse and other sexual acts have as much to do with enjoyment as reproduction. But it is only in relation to reproduction that the opposite sex becomes essential: without someone of the opposite sex neither can reproduce; even when this does not involve sexual intercourse (as in the case of in vitro fertilisation). That is to say, men and women need each other precisely because they are different, dissimilar, unlike one another. This may tell us something about what sex is at its most fundamental and thus give us a foundation upon which to make coherent ethical judgments[3].

Though he revised his view a number of times Freud largely thought in terms of biology and assumed that the anatomical differences between the sexes are mirrored in different mental characteristics. With a focus on the way these develop – how the child becomes sexed - he saw bodily, psychical and social elements interacting in complex ways. It is a development worked through in relation to the fear of castration and in the Oedipus complex during which process the infant comes to identify either with its father or mother. In this Freud insisted that there is no real dichotomy between anatomy and convention (1933a SE XXII). Lacan came to see that the sex adopted was foundational to subjectivity and based not so much on an identification with the actual father or mother but in relation to something more abstract. Namely the thing that fatherhood or motherhood represent (Lacan S3; S20). However, at the centre of his conception of man Lacan sees a void, an emptiness, a lack, an absence, something cancelled, unattainable, inaccessible, hollow. This deeply pessimistic point of view comes to the fore time and again in relation to Being and desire (*manque-à-être*), potentiality (the Thing), the other (a 'semblance' of Being) and to analysis itself in which the patient experiences an existential diminution (*désêtre*). Consequently, in some places he describes love as something selfish, a

[2] Though the ascetic strain among the Essenes shared many common elements with Pythagoreanism and are similar to Cynic and Stoic practices, Philo and Josephus both saying as much, the original motivation for celibacy seems to have differed significantly, see: Marx, A. (1970). Les racines du célibat essénien *Revue de Qumrân* 7.3 (27) : 323-42 ; Thiering, B. (1974). The Biblical Source of Qumran Asceticism *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (3): 429-44; and Faraade, S. D. (1986). Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism *Jewish Spirituality. From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (ed) A. Green. New York: Crossroad.

[3] See Newton, W. (2020). Why Aquinas's Metaphysics of Gender is Fundamentally Correct: A Response to John Finley *The Linacre Quarterly* 87(2):198-205.

pretence, a fantasy; and the things we love as deceptive, masks which conceal the nothingness of existence. The word love is, of course, used for many very different things: some undoubtedly ego-centric and narcissistic; others unquestionably noble and selfless.

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Abbreviations

Aquinas E	*S. Thomae Aquinatis. Sermo seu Tractatus. De Ente et Essentia* (ed) L. Baur. Munster: Aschendorff, 1933.
Aquinas QD	*Quaestiones disputatae* (ed) R. M. Spiazzi. Turin, 1949.
Arist. *cat*.	*Aristotle. Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics* (trans) H. P. Cooke and H. Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library 325. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938.
Galen *de cog. an. mor*.	*Claudii Galeni. De cognoscendis animi morbis. Opera Omnia* Vol 5: 1-57 (ed) K. G. Kühn. Cambridge: CUP, 2012.

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