

## SEX IN THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

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FOR all the talk about the "permissive society" one rarely finds it defined: possibly because it is assumed that we all know what it is. I take it that we are here speaking of a society which sets fewer restraints than previous societies did on the private and public conduct, especially sexual conduct, of its members. It is a society in which a significant number of persons openly rejects previously accepted standards of conduct, availing themselves of a new social freedom to base their behaviour on a sexual ethic quite different to that of their predecessors. A popular shorthand description of this change in standards and behaviour is the "sexual revolution".

My approach to the subject is primarily that of a sociologist; but I am aware that the influence of other intellectual disciplines, of my personal value-system, my biases, and my pastoral experience will probably enter into some of my judgments.

Four questions suggest themselves when one looks at this subject. What are the indications that ours is a permissive society? How does our society compare with previous societies? If standards and behaviour have, in fact, become more permissive, what factors have caused the change? Where might we expect this new trend to take us?

The most dramatic appearance of the "new permissiveness" is in the area of entertainment: the theatre, films, television, and paperback fiction. A Broadway theatre is currently offering "Oh! Calcutta!", which one of the co-playwrights, Kenneth Tynan, describes as "elegant erotica". Its theme is the sexual fantasies of the several authors of the play. The cast appears naked for most of the play, as they act out sketches of rape, mass auto-eroticism, and wife-exchanging. It is so popular that the theatre is booked out for the next nine months. "Che!" entertained off-Broadway audiences with one hundred minutes of obscenity, sodomy, and all manner of intercourse, before New York police banned it. In Sydney theatre-goers crowd each night to the

presentation of "Hair", which one reviewer described as a play of "near-nudity throughout, joyous shouting of four-letter words, bare-breasted dancing, and the mass strip". In Melbourne and Sydney there are two plays whose theme is homosexuality.

Films with nude scenes are no longer uncommon. Besides nudity, a wide range of sexual deviation is presented in films, with varying degrees of explicitness. Fetishism, voyeurism, lesbianism, transvestism, and auto-eroticism are all featured in a variety of films currently available to the public in New York. In Sydney at the moment there is a film whose theme is a three-sided lesbian relationship, while another portrays the French sado-masochist, the Marquis de Sade.

The "revolution" has touched television. During two hours of the prime viewing time you could have seen on Sydney television recently consecutive programmes with scenes of overt sexual encounters run parallel with scenes of savage violence.

In bookshops and on almost every newspaper stall you can choose from at least fifteen different magazines that specialize in nude studies of varying degrees of eroticism, and that lay little claim to be art. Some of these publications are crudely presented; some try pathetically to imitate their "big brother", the lavishly produced *Playboy*, which each month sells five and a half million copies around the world. Australia has not yet seen the several illustrated magazines for homosexuals which are openly available in the United States. Publishers of paperback fiction seem to have discovered the formula for commercial success: the theme must be centred on sex; there must be frequent detailed narratives of the characters' sexual encounters, so often tediously repetitious and stereotyped; and the cover of the book must be illustrated by a naked girl posed provocatively, with a title containing that much misused word "love". As if the number of books sold is an index of literary quality, publishers proudly announce that ten million people have bought *Valley of the Dolls*, a "sex epic" about the Hollywood film colony. *Portnoy's Complaint* is said to have had "the speediest sale of a hardback novel in history": the story is set mainly in a bathroom, and nearly the whole range of perversion is described in detail. Then there is the great flow of popular manuals on sexual techniques; a few genuinely scientific, most pseudo-scientific; all so desperately trying to show people how to make marriage "work" that one is left wondering how our poor benighted parents who lived in the dark ages before our present enlightenment could possibly

have known the meaning of successful married love. One such book is the illustrated *ABZ of Love*, which has already delivered sexual salvation to twelve million happy customers, and which Danish parents find an apt present for their teenage children when they are confirmed in the Lutheran Church.

Perhaps a sign of the times is the recent action of the Government of Denmark in lifting all legal prohibitions on the sale of pornographic books and magazines. Britain is said to be moving in the same direction.

Art has not escaped the new influence. New York now boasts an art gallery called "The United States of Erotica, Incorporated".

Observers of society might well believe that the counsels of the entertainment media are being translated into practice. At the Isle of Wight Pop Music Festival recently thousands of visitors had their boredom relieved by the entrepreneurs who provided them with public exhibitions of naked dancers and of a couple engaged in intercourse. At a similar festival in Texas, holidaying motorists jammed the roads for miles around a reservoir to enjoy the voyeuristic treat of watching naked youths swimming together. Some social observers would see the changing modes reflected particularly in the overt sexual expression of modern dress, as designers of high fashion compete with one another to expose more and more of the female body, or to develop the new "unisex" style of clothes.

For the social analyst there are signs that the "new sexual ethic" is having a decided effect on the lives of individual members of society. An official Government report claims that legal abortions are being carried out at the rate of 1,000 a week in Britain. In Australia the Professor of Demography at the Australian National University reports that an estimated 30 per cent of all first births are conceived outside or before marriage; he observes that, "The increase probably reflected the spread of pre-marital intercourse in an increasingly permissive society". The Federal Minister for Health announced three weeks ago that each year eighty out of every thousand persons in Australia contract gonorrhoea. One report claims that every year 15,000 marriages in this country end in divorce. Judges and other community leaders remark the increase in mass rapes. And for those who see the increasing use of contraceptive pills as a sign of growing promiscuity, there is little comfort in the report of the Advisory Committee on Obstetrics and Gynaecology (U.S.) that the world

monthly consumption of oral contraceptives is 18.5 million, with Australian consumption placing this country at the very top of world consumers.

Pervading all areas of society now is the influence of the advertising media. From the way many advertisers frankly exploit sex to market their wares one would think they suffer from a massive inferiority complex about their products; they appear to have little confidence in the merits of the goods themselves to persuade the buying public: instead they latch on to sex like a security blanket to reassure them in the most diverse kinds of advertising enterprises.

What does all this mean? Does it mean we have created a sex-saturated society? Have we entered a new cultural era in which sex is to be the focal point of society living; in which endless sexual stimulation is to be a way of life; in which sexual prowess is to become almost a status symbol? Would we agree with that acerbic and acute social critic, Malcolm Muggeridge, who says:

The simple answer is that sex has been overplayed. It has become an obsession, a mania, a sickness . . . In America particularly, but to a greater or lesser extent throughout the western world, we have all got sex on the brain, which, apart from any other considerations, is a most unseemly place to have it.

Is our society really more permissive than earlier societies? Or are we in fact merely being more honest publicly about what goes on privately, and has always gone on privately, than our predecessors have been?

## II

The task of trying to measure the degree of permissiveness in today's society, by contrast with earlier societies, is beset by three difficulties. First, we face the hazard of making unbalanced judgments about the present state of things, because of the newspapers' obsessive reporting of the latest "outrages", true and false, of previously accepted norms of sexual behaviour. The many people who live as conventionally as in earlier days do not make good copy for newspaper headlines: we can be misled by this press emphasis on the novel and the "shocking" into believing that the whole world is going "permissive". Second, there are extremely few adequate and reliable scientific studies of sexual behaviour: there is any number of pseudo-scientific surveys.

Third, data about the permissiveness of earlier societies are sparse and for the most part unscientifically gathered.

A common assumption is that today's youth is far more promiscuous than the youth of other days. The lower levels of the press foster this impression, and in doing so appear to be doing youth a grave disservice. Of the very few reputable scientific studies of sexual behaviour in young people the best is one conducted by Michael Schofield. He surveyed the conduct of nearly 2,000 boys and girls aged between fifteen and nineteen, drawn from the seven main regions around London. He reports, in *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* (1965), that "only 16 per cent of the whole sample (20 per cent boys and 12 per cent girls) had experience of sexual intercourse". This led him to conclude: "These results suggest that promiscuity, although it exists, is not a prominent feature of teenage sexual behaviour".

In every society there has probably been the kind of behaviour which we would now call "permissive". Ancient Greek writers celebrated eroticism, both heterosexual and homosexual; some of it "legitimated" by religious ritual. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* suggests that the Roman leisure class, and not a few of the emperors, indulged in a wide range of sexual perversions. Some of the Roman poets wrote love poetry which by our standards would be classified as pornography. The Renaissance return to classical Greek and Roman literature, art, and philosophy brought with it the adoption by some of the European upper classes of the ancient pagan standards of sexual behaviour. It is mainly the libertinism of the aristocracy that is recorded in the literature of the time, with little indication of the sexual standards and conduct of the lower classes. With some this sexual "licence" was a conscious revolt against the manichean strains enduring in certain parts of christianity; with others, notably some artists, it was a revolt against the total christian sexual ethic, and was accompanied by the adoption of the ancient pagan ethic of the so-called "golden age".

Elizabethan England had a reputation for bawdiness, reflected, for example, in some of Shakespeare's plays. Post-Revolution France experienced something of a breakdown in traditional sexual morality not unlike what we are witnessing in western society at present. It was in the frenetic days just after the Revolution that the Paris crowds crowned a well-known Parisian courtesan the goddess of love on the altar of Notre Dame Cathedral. Re-

gency England, as the English social historian, Arthur Bryant, observes in the *Age of Elegance*, achieved a notoriety throughout Europe for what contemporaries regarded as decadence. There is an interesting account in David Cecil's life of Lord Melbourne, the British Prime Minister, of the semi-public feud between two well known Whig aristocratic families of the period over one family's refusal to allow their daughter to be the mistress of the son of the other family: the refusal was not on any moral grounds: the offending family did not consider the other family sufficiently aristocratic for such a liaison to be established. Even Victorian England, for all its outward show of moral rectitude, was not entirely without blemish. Some evidence is coming to light that certain sections of the middle and upper classes, including a few highly respected Prime Ministers, covertly behaved in ways which today would be applauded as sexual liberation. Some of the stately homes of Victorian England housed libraries containing some of the world's most comprehensive collections of erotica. And if one reads Cyril Pearl's *Wild Men of Sydney*, one can see that late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Australia was not without its permissive behaviour and semi-pornographic publications.

When one attempts a judgement on the sexual standards and behaviour of a society one faces the very great difficulty of striking a balance, of keeping everything in perspective. We are apt to concentrate on present deviations from social and ethical norms, and to conclude, often with exaggeration, that things have never been worse.

The history of past societies offers some evidence of "permissiveness". Much of this evidence, however, relates only to select areas of society: the upper-middle and aristocratic classes, and even here the evidence is relatively slender. We have to rely mainly on the contemporary literature; there are virtually no statistical or comprehensive surveys of a whole society. Often one cannot be sure how much the writers of the time are accurately reporting facts, or how much they are projecting their own fantasies. We know little of the behaviour of the middle and working classes of most earlier societies. But there are some discernible strains in this history. Sexual licence appears to become prevalent when a people has a great deal of prosperity and leisure, or when it is under severe stress, such as during wartime. Sometimes, of course, the licence of one age is a positive reaction to the very stringent

and detailed norms of sexual behaviour of the immediately preceding age.

It is difficult to compare the relative permissiveness of societies of different ages, given the sparse scientifically studied information. However, I think we can make some attempted judgements about the difference between the "new permissiveness" and the permissiveness of preceding societies.

In the first place, the communications media are an all-pervasive influence and they provide a ready access to information about opinions, standards and behaviour of a wide range of people and societies.

The media have been able to focus universal attention on sex and sexual behaviour, conventional and deviant, in a way which no other social agency in any previous age has been able to do. Second, there is now a widespread and direct public challenge to conventional norms of behaviour. Third, there is a systematic, quasi-philosophical justification made of what Kenneth Tynan, a co-author of the play "Oh! Calcutta!", calls "erotic stimulation for its own sake". Fourth, and largely as a result of these three factors, deviation from conventional norms is no longer regarded as exceptional: it can even be respectable.

Why has the "sexual revolution" come about at this time? I suggest that an adequate answer to this question demands a study of the new technological culture which industrialization has produced.

### III

In his important book, *The New Industrial Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith argues that a highly industrialized society, such as ours is, has four imperatives: meticulous planning, relentless organization, specialization, and uniformity. The result of these urgent demands of technology is that the system "increasingly accommodates man to its needs". Consider for a moment the characteristics of the new technological society. The accent is on minute rationalization of means and ends, precise and sophisticated scientific method, production of tangible material results, and remorseless working to time-tables. Besides routinizing man and conditioning him to choose the pragmatic way of achieving material progress, it has given him greater control over nature and his material environment and increased his capacity for accurate prediction in the affairs of his life. But it has also created enor-

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mous gaps in his own personality development and in his relations in social living.

Industrialization shapes society still further. It creates a predominantly consumer society and fashions needs in the consumer so as to sustain the impulse of its own growth. If the economy of such a society remains buoyant it produces the affluence that makes it possible for the consumer to go on buying more and more of the goods he is told he needs. And to ensure that he will go on believing he has these endless needs a prodigious advertising industry lures and harries him daily. In his reflective moments man can recognize how much he is being organized and exploited even in his needs.

The ever-developing profitable industrial society demands great clusters of people working and living close to the industrial complexes, and thus arises the mass, urbanized society with which we are so familiar today. One of the striking characteristics of urban living is its anonymity; and the traumatic effect this anonymity has on large numbers of urban dwellers has already been treated at length in David Riesman's sociological study, *The Lonely Crowd*. With anonymity comes the feeling of being isolated and threatened by the huge impersonal forces of society that seem to determine so much of a man's existence. With anonymity, too, comes a crisis of identity, and, for some, an almost neurotic quest for one's own identity. Anonymity prompts, and affluence makes possible, an increasing geographical and social mobility: it has been estimated that in the United States nearly thirty million people change their locality every year. This mobility in its turn adds to the feeling of rootlessness and compounds the problem of finding one's identity. Threading such a man's life is the ethos of competitiveness: the fragile security of one's job, one's social status, one's personal worth appears to depend on one's capacity to master and implement the rules of the competition. And one of the first rules is conformity and a certain identification with the system. If one is involved in the large private or public corporation then almost total identification is often the price of survival, as William Whyte has indicated in his study of *The Organisation Man*.

Modern industrial man, then, lives in a social system which causes him daily stress and great personal conflict. To survive he must accommodate himself to the routinized, rationalized, uniform way of the system. In advertising appeals to him, in public opinion polls, in taxation demands, in social service benefits, in



politicians' jockeying for his vote, he is treated less as a person than as a statistic—to be analysed and manipulated for someone else's profit. In some way, at least, he feels his independence is being steadily eroded, and senses almost hopelessly that his originality, his creativeness, and his very individuality are being gradually suppressed. I suggest that it is essential that any discussion of the "sexual revolution" must take place within this social context.

For many people the way out of the all-embracing conformity and over-organized life which the social system imposes on them is by an assertion of their individuality through their sexual behaviour. It is here that they can claim to be something of their own masters. Their defiance of accepted norms of sexual behaviour is part of a much wider revolt against the system which they feel de-personalizes and de-humanizes them. For many young people especially this appears to be the underlying rationale of their more "shocking" sexual behaviour: it is their way of showing the system's establishment—generally controlled by an older generation—that they are independent persons. One perceptive analyst of the hippie generation argues, convincingly I think, that their revolt expresses their feeling of total alienation from the culture and ethos of the community they live in; and that what they are in fact aiming at is the establishment of a "counter-culture". It is noteworthy that the leaders of this "counter-culture" are the sons and daughters of the more affluent members of society. They are using the education and material benefits with which the affluent society has provided them to attack the system and the culture which their parents accept and have helped to create. The technological society has not yet shown itself capable of containing this revolt. The most it can offer the rebels is more and more material benefits: but, if anything, the affluent rebels suffer from a surfeit of such benefits: they are rebelling against the gross materialization of life. And those very institutions and values which the technological society might seek as allies in meeting the rebels' challenge have themselves been undermined by the industrialization process.

With its rationalization of methods and its prodigious material achievements the new technological culture has been steadily eroding traditional social and religious values. In a word it has *secularized* social living. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues in his *Secularization and Moral Change*, it has first secularized morality and fashioned it to suit itself. This has further influenced the

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secularization of religious belief, leading in many cases to the loss of religious faith. The breakdown of religious belief and practice has to be seen in connection with the other effects of the industrial and affluent society: social mobility, rootlessness, uniformity, the impersonalism of mass organized society, and the anonymity of urban living. It has become a world of shifting values and relentless stress, in which man finds it hard to know what he is and who he is.

Some other associated factors can be indicated only briefly. The industrial society has been largely instrumental in the social emancipation of women: large numbers of them have left their homes to meet industry's demands for labour. Today thirty-eight per cent of Australia's work-force is female. Wage-earning women have achieved for themselves and the wider female community an independence of men that enables them to make their own choices freely about questions like, whether they will marry or whether they will pursue careers; whether they will have children and how many; whether and when a marriage should end. Much of this independence has carried over into their standards of sexual behaviour. The right to greater sexual freedom is seen as part of their heritage from their general social emancipation.

The industrial affluent society has provided easy access to education and information. Its great by-product, the mass media, is now capable of carrying a variety of messages about standards and conduct right into the heart of the family. The most powerful medium, television, enters the family living room and there competes directly with the parents in the work of instructing the children in values and in shaping their ideals. And it would appear that in this contest the family as the traditional unit of control over conduct is declining in influence.

In short, industrial society has developed a culture that threatens the person in his inmost self. Its ethos of pragmatism is evacuating politics and the social culture of ideology. Its utilitarianism appears uninspiring and oppressive to young people who meet it at precisely the age and stage of personality development when they are seeking to establish themselves as persons with a coherent system of ideas and ideals. It might not be an exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that much of the revolt against previously accepted norms of sexual behaviour, and the deliberate attempt to create a sex-centred counter-culture, are part of a deeper and wider reaction to the stress of the industrial system

and its all-embracing culture, and a rather desperate attempt to assert individuality.

#### IV

Where is the sexual revolution taking us? To answer that question accurately we need to look at what is happening with balance and coolness. That means avoiding extremes. Balance lies neither in Victorian-type repression nor in latter-day hedonism. In sexual matters the puritan and the hedonist are remarkably alike: they both ignore reality. The puritan acts and speaks as though sex was the one thing that does not exist; the hedonist as though sex is the only thing that does exist.

In itself the open discussion of sex, as distinct from the obsessive preoccupation with it that characterizes some of the childish contributions by the press, films, and advertising agencies, is a healthy trend. It can dispel much of the ignorance that the Victorian ethos cultivated about this important part of each person's life. Genuine information and instruction accommodated to the age and emotional development of the recipient can be expected to help develop integrated mature persons capable of taking a realistically balanced view of sex in their own lives and in society; persons, too, capable of establishing an emotionally mature and satisfying relationship of love, and of accepting the personal responsibility entailed in such love.

These advantages can be destroyed by some of the evils in the present trend, and possibly the greatest evil is the commercialization of sex. If one analyses the frequent public references to sex one finds so very often that they are prompted by the commercializers, always, of course, veneered with specious cover-phrases like "facing reality", "being honest", "it's art", or "we are just reporting the news". Yet, in fact, sex for them is merely a thing to be exploited for money. It is notable that some of the entrepreneurs sponsoring today's "daring" plays and films always speak of their productions as art: that is supposed to absolve them of any suspicion of baser motives. But when caught off guard their commercial exploitation of sex appears. The man who brought "Hair" to Sydney admitted that, "We will make a half million dollars by Christmas"; and the man who hopes to bring "Oh! Calcutta!" to Australia says that it will be the highest-priced play put on in Sydney, observing: "The only thing that counted was the little four-by-four box called the box-office".

Commercialization of sex, by the advertisers and entertain-

ment entrepreneurs who exploit sex, will do the exact opposite of that which the leaders of the sexual revolution hope to achieve. As Harvey Cox remarks in *The Secular City*, commercialization is the most frustrating force in the attempt to personalize sex. Commercialization debases sex by trivializing it: it removes sex from its highly personalized context, frustrating its integral function in building personality as a basis for a relationship of love. The greatest hazard for us all lies in the commercializers of sex setting society standards: in so personal a matter they, with their own poverty-stricken appreciation of sex, are the very worst possible guides, because they have distorted the inner reality of sex entirely.

The over-emphasis on sex in the arts can lead to the imbalance, and even dishonesty about artistic standards, that could cripple real creativeness. It can lead to the kind of cant that seeks to justify as art and realism every tenth-rate book and play that uses a four-letter word or presents a nude scene. The theatre of the nude and the so-called "realistic" novel can well make us prisoners of the mediocre.

It is questionable how much the new revolution is really emancipating woman. It is just possible that instead of genuinely liberating her the "new sexual deal" for woman is further reducing her to the level of a satisfaction-object for the self-centred male, as the pin-up "playmates" of the *Playboy* cult have already been reduced. If the play "Oh! Calcutta!" is the high tide of the sexual revolution, it is significant that a none-too-puritan reviewer wrote of it that he had the feeling that he had seen "and been party to the ultimate degradation of the female".

It is fair to ask how much the incessant emphasis on sex in the press is endangering the chances of young people achieving personal maturity. There is a risk that they will be brainwashed into believing that sex is the only important thing in a relationship of love. One is left uneasy with Michael Schofield's conclusion in his *Sexual Behaviour of Young People* that the influence of the press is making teenagers feel that they are not normal if they have not had intercourse. If such a view were to become universal it could result in other important qualities in personal relationships being submerged and devalued, and lead to personality disorders and much personal unhappiness.

It is too early to know what will be the psychological effects on the individual of a life lived according to the new sexual ethic. Will it make for a healthily integrated person, or will it produce

an imbalance that leaves a person psychically stunted? These are important questions that need carefully researched answers, if we have a care for individuals and for the society they make.

What might all this mean for society as a whole? Are we headed for collapse, as the evangelist Dr Billy Graham predicts when he describes the current emphasis on sex in western society as "the sickness of Sodom". He prophesied that, "No nation in history has ever been able to go in this direction and survive very long. I think that the greatest threat to our democracy is moral decadence". I do not know that any historian has actually examined in depth the suggested causal link here between sexual permissiveness and socio-political decline. There has always been the problem of determining whether sexual permissiveness was the cause of decline, or whether it was merely a symptom of a decline already well advanced and rooted in other causes. The opposite view has been argued: that where there is a disciplined sexual morality among a people their society has been strong, creative and productive, as the German sociologist, Max Weber, has argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. One could at least suspect that, given the demands of the sexual instinct, where a society permits such untrammelled expression of the instinct that it becomes the focus of social living, the more serious things of the individual's and society's life are thrown out of balance and energies are directed away from creative and developmental enterprises. This suspicion is heightened if this permissiveness is found to be a collective escape from reality, a denial of personal responsibility; if it results from a failure and an unwillingness to meet the challenges of the maturing process; if it is in fact infantilism, the flight from the vicissitudes of the real world to a fantasy world where one seeks ultimate happiness in something which of itself does not have this ultimacy.

Perhaps for society the more subtle threats from the new permissiveness lie in its attack on rationality and humour. Even if it is part of a wider revolt against the over-rationalized way of life that industrialized society has imposed on us, there is a hazard that the new trend will go to extremes, substituting instinct for reason and destroying the chance modern man has of blending reason and emotion in a harmonious whole. If rationality is so abandoned there appears little hope of man finding his way out of the problems that the technological culture has created for him. Almost as important is the threat to humour in society. The advocates of the new permissiveness appear a

desperately serious, humourless lot who with melancholy compulsiveness keep repeating, possibly to convince themselves, that they have found the contentment and joy of the golden age. Looking at pictures of the founding father of the new cult, Hugh Hefner the multi-millionaire creator of *Playboy*, one wonders if a smile has ever brightened that sorrowful face.

Where is it all leading? Perhaps there are some indications in the assessment made by the director of the most permissive play, "Oh! Calcutta!", who frankly admitted he agreed with what the new sexual ethic is intended by many to achieve:

I feel that the "sex explosion" and pornography are destructive to civilization . . . When a society gets to the point where it is eating its own entrails and its civilization is about to crumble, it immediately turns to the expression of sexuality as the only thing left to somehow titillate and excite. What we're seeing now is a kind of decay and destruction of the Judaeo-Christian society with its ethics and values . . . What we're seeing now . . . is a new set of values that allows people to have rather simple and direct pleasures that do not require such enormous responsibilities and don't require the enormous debt you pay in giving love. I think that people are learning to play with one another. Now, one of the things that happens is that love becomes cheap. I think that what we're seeing now is a time when in fact we will have fewer deep, stable relationships among people. The civilization that we're moving into is one that cannot sustain two people in a bedroom all by themselves for forty years. It's impossible anyway in this new civilization, because people have too much time on their hands. . . .

Perhaps, like many of his colleagues engaged in their high purpose of demolishing our present civilization, the author of that prediction is taking himself too seriously. On the other hand he might well have delineated the likely course of the present "revolution". Even allowing for the likelihood of a reaction to the present permissiveness, as the cyclic pattern of earlier societies suggests will happen, we are left with some disturbing impressions of our situation. The most fearsome prospect is that a new dictatorship might be imposed on us by the commercial exploiters of sex and the entertainment entrepreneurs who have such enormous communications forces at their command to shape the standards and patterns of behaviour for society. And with their

narrow vision of life which subordinates everything to the quick dollar, they are the least qualified to lead us to personal and social salvation, even if they were concerned to do so.

The problems of the new permissiveness touch each one of us closely: we are all involved in, and affected by, the society we are shaping. We have to decide whether the new sexual life-style really helps us to meet the problems of our technological society, or whether it is introduced as a mere childish distraction to run away from them. We need to know whether it guarantees or frustrates our development and fulfilment as persons; whether it truly liberates us or simply imposes a new tyranny on us in which sex masters us instead of serving us. We should study what it is doing to the arts: is it fulfilling the promise of a new age of honesty and creative realism, or is it introducing a new era of dishonesty and mediocrity into the arts where disaffected and incompetent "artists" can take their revenge on society and their entrepreneurial sponsors can increase their fortunes? Wherever it is leading us, let us examine the trend and the forces behind it with blended reason and feeling, with honesty and balance, and with not a little humour—that necessary ingredient that makes the human condition tolerable.

#### *Discussion*

DR. PETER JONES: The story of mankind has many lurid chapters of promiscuity and sexual licence, in cities with names that have become synonyms of dubious morals and practices. Since the dawn of written history there have been accounts of Dionysian revels, Saturnalia and Bacchanalia. Father Duffy's point concerning the decline of morals and the fall of the relevant societies is well taken.

The advent of the Judaeo-Christian ethic brought with it ideals which have been extended as higher standards of morality and behaviour—but one wonders if they have not always been just that—ideals to be fully achieved by relatively few, and for a goodly number, half of a double standard imposed by the necessity to conform, at least externally, with so called civilization. Bertrand Russell wrote in his *History of Western Philosophy*:

To the man or woman who by compulsion is more civilized in behaviour than in feeling, rationality is irksome and virtue is felt as a burden and a slavery. This leads to reaction in thought, in feeling and in conduct.

In a civilized society, and I beg the question of the definition,

there are said to be three checks on the impulses of the individual: the law, custom and religion.

It is an understatement to say that the law has never been very successful in detecting and punishing, let alone preventing, normal sexual activities between consenting parties.

Custom, that is to say the sanctions of society, has probably been weakened by what many would welcome as a fresh wind which has blown away a good deal of hypocrisy, and by a realization that restrictions are likely to be ineffectual and merely push the practices underground or in less desirable directions. Today, the pressures to conform might be more likely to be in the direction of sexual adventures to be worn as a badge of maturity. Perhaps one of the most important but least discussed factors in the problem of teenage morality is the ten year gap between actual physiological and supposedly social maturity. In evolutionary terms the perpetuation of the species may have required procreation early, before the very limited life span was completed. With longevity came deferment of these functions, to a much greater extent in the western world than in the east, where maturation and matrimony are closer in time. This nevertheless remains a basic element in any society, and particularly in a permissive one. The second part of "custom" I take to include the family, and there seems little doubt that its influence is less effective now than in the past. It has also been suggested that the greater permissiveness of parents today may be to some extent an over-reaction to their own authoritarian upbringing.

Finally, religion; I think that Father Duffy would regretfully agree that the proportion of the population committed to a true religious way of life, or even attending a church regularly, is far smaller than in previous generations.

Valid social and sexual research is still small in volume, as opposed to pseudo-scientific popularizations. Both have been a formative influence in the mores of today, and as Father Duffy has said, they may be for many a surrogate for proper parental instruction.

The reputable studies have been welcomed by the medical profession and sociologists as valuable basic information, and I suppose Kinsey's reports have been the most significant, if only because they were the first text books to become popular best sellers. In one of his few lighter asides, a comment on his findings, he noted that a 16 to 18 year-old high school student receiving sex education from a teacher, had already had an experi-



ence more extensive and varied than the teacher would ever have had; and that was in 1948!

This was followed by Masters' and Johnson's work, a valuable and objective study in this field, and constructed on a proper basis of scientific enquiry. That this sort of investigation had not been undertaken before the 1960s reflects the fact that earlier community attitudes would have made it unacceptable or would have unfairly biased the sample available.

The emancipation of women in commerce and their contribution to the work force today has also been mentioned. It began with the vote and is still in progress if not yet complete, at least as far as equal pay and equal opportunities in positions regarded as male prerogatives. Women have nevertheless experienced a legal, economic, and particularly an emotional emancipation long denied them. "The Pill" has probably been responsible as much as any other factor in their sexual emancipation, both within and outside matrimony.

It is not only the young whose behaviour has been affected by this factor in the creation of a permissive society. Recently it has become apparent to general practitioners, gynaecologists and marriage counsellors that in married women two trends are emerging. The first is that removal of the fear of unwanted pregnancy from married women who have a sufficient number of children has led to greater enjoyment and a greater appetite which have reached the point where middle-aged husbands are experiencing some difficulty in keeping up with the situation. The second is that when a marriage has not provided this satisfaction, there appears to be some willingness to seek it in extra-marital affairs conducted under the same protective influence.

It is very possible that the young have been much maligned, and the assumed incidence of promiscuity is contradicted by the figures in the studies Father Duffy has quoted.

Psychologists see a lack of chastity as a symptom of rebellion against authoritarianism, as a protest against the many pressures exerted by modern society, and nudity as symbolic liberation. No doubt the young people of today have rejected many if not most traditional views which they see as imposed by their elders. Is it not as it has always been, part of growing up, a necessary phase of searching for values and beliefs they consider worthwhile? They are certainly better informed, in general, on a wider range of subjects, including sex, than ever before, and less

parochial or narrowly nationalistic than their elders were at the same age.

They are also understandably derisive of a society which prosecutes adult actors for using words they learnt at school when they were eight years old.