



Is There Sex in Heaven?

We cannot know what X-in-Heaven is unless we know what X is. We cannot know what sex in Heaven is unless we know what sex is. We cannot know what in Heaven's name sex is unless we know what on earth sex is.

But don't we know? Haven't we been thinking about almost nothing else for years and years? What else dominates our fantasies, waking and sleeping, twenty-four nose-to-the-grindstone hours a day? What else fills our TV shows, novels, plays, gossip columns, self-help books, and psychologies *but* sex?

No, we do not think too much about sex; we think hardly at all about sex. Dreaming, fantasizing, feeling, experimenting—yes. But honest, look-it-in-the-face *thinking*?—hardly ever. There is no subject in the world about which there is more heat and less light.

Therefore I want to begin with four abstract philosophical principles about the nature of sex. They are absolutely necessary not only for sanity about sex in Heaven but also for sanity about sex on earth, a goal at least as distant as Heaven to our sexually suicidal society. The fact that sex is public does not mean it is mature and healthy. The fact that there are thousands of "how to do it" books on the subject does not mean that we know how; in fact, it means the opposite. It is when everybody's pipes are leaking that people buy books on plumbing.

My four philosophical principles will seem strange or even shocking to many people today. Yet they are far from radical, or even original; they are simply the primeval platitudes known to all premodern societies; the sane, sunny country of sexual common sense by the vote of "the democracy of the dead". Yet in another way they are "radical", in the etymological sense of the word: they are our sexual roots, and our uprooted society is rooting around looking for sexual substitute *roots* like a pig rooting for truffles. It has not found them. That fact should at least make us pause and look back at our "wise blood", our roots. Here are four of them.

First Principle: Sex Is Something You Are, Not Something You Do

Suppose you saw a book with the title "The Sexual Life of a Nun". You would probably assume it was a scurrilous, gossipy sort of story about tunnels connecting convents and monasteries, clandestine rendezvous behind the high altar, and masking a pregnancy as a tumor. But it is a perfectly proper title: all nuns have a sexual life. They are women, not men. When a nun prays or acts charitably, *she* prays or acts, not he. Her celibacy forbids intercourse, but it cannot forbid her to be a woman. In everything she does her essence plays a part, and her sex is as much a part of her essence as her age, her race, and her sense of humor.

The counterfeit phrase "having sex" (meaning "inter- course") was minted only recently. Of course a nun "has sex" she is female. Draftees often fill in the box on their induction forms labeled "sex" not with the word "male" but "occasionally" or "please!" The joke would have been unintelligible to previous generations. The significance of the linguistic change is that we have trivialized sex into a thing to do rather than a quality of our inner being. It has become a thing of surfaces and external feeling rather than of personality and internal feeling. Thus even masturbation is called "having sex", though it is exactly the opposite: a denial of real relationship with the other sex.

The words "masculinity" and "femininity", meaning something more than merely biological maleness and femaleness, have been reduced from archetypes to stereotypes. Traditional expectations that men be men and women be women are confused because we no longer know what to expect men and women to be. Yet, though confused, the expectations remain. Our hearts desire, even while our minds reject, the old "stereotypes". The reason is that the old stereotypes were closer to our innate sexual instincts than are the new stereotypes. We have sexist hearts even while we have unisex heads. Evidence for this claim? More people are attracted to the old stereotypes than to the new ones. Romeo still wants to marry Juliet.

The main fault in the old stereotypes was their too-tight connection between sexual being and social doing, their tying of sexual identity to social roles, especially for women: the feeling that it was somehow unfeminine to be a doctor, lawyer, or politician. But the antidote to this illness is not confusing sexual identities but locating them in our being rather than in our doing. Thus we can soften up social roles without softening up sexual identities. In fact, a man who is confident of his inner masculinity is much more likely to share in traditionally female activities like housework and baby care than one who ties his sexuality to his social roles.

If our first principle is accepted, if sexuality is part of our inner essence, then it follows that there is sexuality in Heaven, whether or not we "have sex" and whether or not we have sexually distinct social roles in Heaven.

Second Principle: The Alternative to Chauvinism Is Not Egalitarianism

The two most popular philosophies of sexuality today seem totally opposed to each other; yet at a most basic level they are in agreement and are equally mistaken. The two philosophies are the old chauvinism and the new egalitarianism; and they seem totally opposed. For chauvinism (a) sees one sex as superior to the other, "second", sex. This is usually the male, but there are increasingly many strident female chauvinist voices in the current cacophony. This presupposes (b) that the sexes are intrinsically different, different by nature not social convention. Egalitarianism tries to disagree with (a) totally; it thinks that to do so it has to disagree with (b) as well. But this means that it agrees with chauvinism on (c), the unstated but assumed premise *that all differences must be differences in value*, or, correlatively, that the only way for two things to be equal in value is for them to be equal in nature. Both philosophies see sameness or superiority as the only options. It is from this assumption (that differences are differences in value) that the chauvinist argues that the sexes are different in nature, therefore they are different in value. And it is from the same assumption that the egalitarian argues that the sexes are not different in value, therefore they are not different in nature.

Chauvinism:

(c)
and (b)
therefore (a)

Egalitarianism:

(c)
and not (a)
therefore not (b)

Once this premise is smoked out, it is easy to see how foolish both arguments are. Of course not all differences are differences in value. Are dogs better than cats, or cats than dogs? Or are they different only by convention, not by nature? Chauvinist and egalitarian should both read the poets, songwriters, and mythmakers to find a third philosophy of sexuality that is both more sane and infinitely more interesting. It denies neither the obvious rational truth that the sexes are equal

in value (as the chauvinist does) nor the equally obvious instinctive truth that they are innately different (as the egalitarian does). It revels in both, and in their difference: *vive la difference!*

If sexual differences are natural, they are preserved in Heaven, for "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" If sexual differences are only humanly and socially conventional, Heaven will remove them as it will remove economics and penology and politics. (Not many of us have job security after death. That is one advantage of being a philosopher.) All these things came after and because of the Fall, but sexuality came as part of God's original package: "be fruitful and multiply". God may unmake what *we* make, but He does not unmake what *He* makes. God made sex, and God makes no mistakes.

Saint Paul's frequently quoted statement that "in Christ. there is neither male nor female" does not mean there is no sex in Heaven. For it refers not just to Heaven but also to earth: we are "in Christ" *now*. (In fact, if we are not "in Christ" now there is no hope of Heaven for us!) But we are male or female now. His point is that our sex does not determine our "in-Christness"; God is an equal opportunity employer. But He employs the men and women He created, not the neuters of our imagination.

Third Principle: Sex Is Spiritual

That does not mean "vaguely pious, ethereal, and idealistic". "Spiritual" means "a matter of the spirit", or soul, or psyche, not just the body. Sex is between the ears before it's between the legs. We have sexual *souls*.

For some strange reason people are shocked at the notion of sexual souls. They not only disagree; the idea seems utterly crude, superstitious, repugnant, and incredible to them. Why? We can answer this question only by first answering the opposite one: why is the idea reasonable, enlightened, and even necessary?

The idea is the only alternative to either materialism or dualism. If you are a materialist, there is simply no soul for sex to be a quality of If you are a dualist, if you split body and soul completely, if you see a person as a ghost in a machine, then one half of the person can be totally different from the other: the body can be sexual without the soul being sexual. The machine is sexed, the ghost is not. (This is almost the exact opposite of the truth: ghosts, having once been persons, have sexual identity from their personalities, their souls. Machines do not.)

No empirical psychologist can be a dualist; the evidence for psychosomatic unity is overwhelming. No pervasive feature of either body or soul is insulated from the other; every sound in the soul echoes in the body, and every sound in the body echoes in the soul. Let the rejection of dualism be Premise One of our argument.

Premise Two is the even more obvious fact that biological sexuality is innate, natural, and in fact pervasive to every cell in the body. It is not socially conditioned, or conventional, or environmental; it is hereditary.

The inevitable conclusion from these two premises is that sexuality is innate, natural, and pervasive to the whole person, soul as well as body. The only way to avoid the conclusion is to deny one of the two premises that logically necessitate it-to deny psychosomatic unity or to deny innate somatic sexuality.

In the light of this simple and overwhelming argument, why is the conclusion not only unfamiliar but shocking to so many people in our society? I can think of only two reasons. The first is a mere misunderstanding, the second a serious and substantial mistake.

The first reason would be a reaction against what is wrongly seen as monosexual soul-stereotyping. A wholly male soul, whatever maleness means, or a wholly female soul, sounds unreal and oversimplified. But that is not what sexual souls implies. Rather, in every soul there is—to use Jungian terms—*anima* and *animus*, femaleness and maleness; just as in the body, one predominates but the other is also present. If the dominant sex of soul is not the same as that of the body, we have a sexual misfit, a candidate for a sex change operation of body or of soul, earthly or Heavenly. Perhaps Heaven supplies such changes just as it supplies all other needed forms of healing. In any case, the resurrection body perfectly expresses its soul, and since souls are innately sexual, that body will perfectly express its soul's true sexual identity.

A second reason why the notion of sexual souls sounds strange to many people may be that they really hold a pantheistic rather than a theistic view of spirit as undifferentiated, or even infinite. They think of spirit as simply overwhelming, or leaving behind, all the distinctions known to the body and the senses. But this is not the Christian notion of spirit, nor of infinity. Infinity itself is not undifferentiated in God. To call God infinite is not to say He is everything in general and nothing in particular: that is confusing God with The Blob! God's infinity means that each of His positive and definite attributes, such as love, wisdom, power, justice, and fidelity, is unlimited.

Spirit is no less differentiated, articulated, structured, or formed than matter. The fact that our own spirit can suffer and rejoice far more, more delicately and exquisitely, and in a far greater variety of ways, than can the body—this fact should be evidence of spirit's complexity. So should the fact that psychology is nowhere near an exact science, as anatomy

Differences in general, and sexual differences in particular, increase rather than decrease as you move up the cosmic hierarchy. (Yes, there is a cosmic hierarchy, unless you can honestly believe that oysters have as much right to eat you as you have to eat them.) Angels are as superior to us in differentiation as we are to animals. God is infinitely differentiated, for He is the Author of all differences, all forms.

Each act of creation in Genesis is an act of differentiation—light from darkness, land from sea, animals from plants, and so on. Creating is forming, and forming is differentiating. Materialism believes differences in form are ultimately illusory appearance; the only root reality is matter. Pantheism also believes differences in form are ultimately illusory; the only root reality is one universal Spirit. But theism believes form is real because God created it. And whatever positive reality is in the creation must have its model in the Creator. We shall ultimately have to predicate sexuality of God Himself, as we shall see next.

Fourth Principle: Sex Is Cosmic

Have you ever wondered why almost all languages except English attribute sexuality to things? Trees, rocks, ships, stars, horns, kettles, circles, accidents, trips, ideas, feelings—these, and not just men and women, are masculine or feminine. Did you always assume unthinkingly that this was *of course* a mere projection and personification, a reading of our sexuality into nature rather than reading nature's own sexuality out of it (or rather, out of her)? Did it ever occur to you that it just might be the other way round, that human sexuality is derived from cosmic sexuality rather than vice versa, that we are a local application of a universal principle? If not, please seriously

consider the idea now, for it is one of the oldest and most widely held ideas in our history, and one of the happiest.

It is a happy idea because it puts humanity into a more human universe. We fit; we are not freaks. What we are, everything else also is, though in different ways and different degrees. We are, to use the medieval image, a microcosm, a little cosmos; the universe is the macrocosm, the same pattern written large. We are more like little fish inside bigger fish than like sardines in a can. It is the machine-universe that is our projection, not the human universe.

We do not have time here to apply this idea, so pregnant with consequences, to other aspects of our being, to talk about the cosmic extension of consciousness and volition, but many philosophers have argued for this conclusion, and a deeper eye than reason's seems to insist on it. But we can apply it to sexuality here. It means that sexuality goes all the way up and all the way down the cosmic ladder.

At the "down" end there is "love among the particles": gravitational and electromagnetic attraction. That little electron just "knows" the difference between the proton, which she "loves", and another electron, which is her rival. If she did not know the difference, she would not behave so knowingly, orbiting around her proton and repelling other electrons, never vice versa.

But, you say, I thought that was because of the balanced resultant of the two merely physical forces of angular momentum, which tends to zoom her straight out of orbit, and bipolar electromagnetic attraction, which tends to zap her down into her proton: too much zoom for a zap and too much zap for a zoom. Quite right. But what right do you have to call physical forces "mere"? And how do you account for the second of those two forces? *Why* is there attraction between positive and negative charges? It is exactly as mysterious as love. In fact, it is love. The scientist can tell you *how* it works, but only the lover knows *why*.

Sex at the Top

Sex "goes all the way up" as well as "all the way down" Spirit is no less sexual than matter; on the contrary, all qualities and all contrasts are richer, sharper, more real as we rise closer and closer to the archetype of realness, God. The God of the Bible is not a monistic pudding in which differences are reduced to lumps, or a light that out-dazzles all finite lights and colors. God is a sexual being, the most sexual of all beings.

This sounds shocking to people only if they see sex only as physical and not spiritual, or if they are Unitarians rather than Trinitarians. The love relationship between the Father and the Son within the Trinity, the relationship from which the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds, is a sexual relationship. It is like the human sexual relationship from which a child proceeds in time; or rather, that relationship is like the divine one. Sexuality is "the image of God" according to Scripture (see Genesis 1:27), and for B to be an image of A, A must in some way have all the qualities imaged by B. God therefore is a sexual being. There is therefore sex in Heaven because in Heaven we are close to the source of all sex. As we climb Jacob's ladder the angels look less like neutered, greeting-card cherubs and more like Mars and Venus.

Another reason we are more, not less, sexual in Heaven is that all earthly perversions of true sexuality are overcome, especially the master perversion, selfishness. To make self God, to desire selfish pleasure as the *summum bonum*, is not only to miss God but to miss pleasure and self as well, and to miss the glory and joy of sex. Jesus did not merely say, "Seek ye first the kingdom of

God", but also added that "all these things shall be added" when we put first things first. Each story fits better when the foundation is put first.

C. S. Lewis calls this the principle of "first and second things". In any area of life, putting second things first loses not only the first things but also the second things, and putting first things first gains not only the first things but the second things as well. So to treat sexual pleasure as God is to miss not only God but sexual pleasure too.

The highest pleasure always comes in self-forgetfulness. Self always spoils its own pleasure. Pleasure is like light; if you grab at it, you miss it; if you try to bottle it, you get only darkness; if you let it pass, you catch the glory. The self has a built-in, God-imaging design of self-fulfillment by self-forgetfulness, pleasure through unselfishness, ecstasy by *ekstasis*, "standing-outside-the-self". This is not the self-conscious self-sacrifice of the do-gooder but the spontaneous, unconscious generosity of the lover.

This principle, that the greatest pleasure is self-giving, is graphically illustrated by sexual intercourse and by the very structure of the sexual organs, which must give themselves to each other in order to be fulfilled. In Heaven, when egotistic perversions are totally eliminated, all pleasure is increased, including sexual pleasure. Whether this includes *physical* sexual pleasure or not, remains to be seen.

Application of the Principles: Sex in Heaven

In the most important and obvious sense there is certainly sex in Heaven simply because there are human beings in Heaven. As we have seen, sexuality, like race and unlike clothes, is an essential aspect of our identity, spiritual as well as physical. Even if sex were *not* spiritual, there would be sex in Heaven because of the resurrection of the body. The body is not a mistake to be unmade or a prison cell to be freed from, but a divine work of art designed to show forth the soul as the soul is to show forth God, in splendor and glory and overflow of generous superfluity.

But is there sexual intercourse in Heaven? If we have bodily sex organs, what do we use them for there?

Not baby-making. Earth is the breeding colony; Heaven is the homeland.

Not marriage. Christ's words to the Sadducees are quite clear about that. It is in regard to marriage that we are "like the angels". (Note that it is *not* said that we are like the angels in any other ways, such as lacking physical bodies.)

Might there be another function in which baby-making and marriage are swallowed up and transformed, *aufgehoben*? Everything on earth is analogous to something in Heaven. Heaven neither simply removes nor simply continues earthly things. If we apply this principle to sexual intercourse, we get the conclusion that intercourse on earth is a shadow or symbol of intercourse in Heaven. Could we speculate about what that could be?

It could certainly be spiritual intercourse—and, remember, that includes sexual intercourse because sex is spiritual. This spiritual intercourse would mean something more specific than universal charity. It would be special communion with the sexually complementary; something a man can have only with a woman and a woman only with a man. We are made complete by such union: "It is not good that the man should be alone." And God does not simply rip up His design

for human fulfillment. The relationship need not be confined to one in Heaven. Monogamy is for earth. On earth, our bodies are private. In Heaven, we share each other's secrets without shame, and voluntarily. In the Communion of Saints, promiscuity of spirit is a virtue.

The relationship may not extend to *all* persons of the opposite sex, at least not in the same way or degree. If it did extend to all, it would treat each differently simply because each is different—sexually as well as in other ways. I think there must be some special "kindred souls" in Heaven that we are designed to feel a special sexual love for. That would be the Heavenly solution to the earthly riddle of why in the world John falls for Mary, of all people, and not for Jane, and why romantic lovers feel their love is fated, "in the stars", "made in Heaven".

But this would differ from romantic love on earth in that it would be free, not driven; from soul to body, not from body to soul. Nor would it feel apart from or opposed to the God-relationship, but a part of it or a consequence of it: His design, the wave of His baton. It would also be totally unselfconscious and unselfish: the ethical goodness of *agape* joined to the passion of *eros*; *agape* without external, abstract law and duty, and *eros* without selfishness or animal drives.

But would it ever take the form of physical sexual intercourse? We should explore this question, not to kowtow to modernity's sexual monomania but because it is an honest question about something of great significance to us now, and because we simply want to know all we can about Heaven.

Since there are bodies in Heaven, able to eat and be touched, like Christ's resurrection body, there is the *possibility* of physical intercourse. But why might the possibility be actualized? What are its possible purposes and meanings?

We know Heaven by earthly clues. Let us try to read all the clues in earthly intercourse. It has three levels of meaning: the subhuman, or animal; the superhuman, or divine; and the specifically human. (All three levels exist *in* us humans.)

Animal reasons for intercourse include (i) the conscious drive for pleasure and (2) the unconscious drive to perpetuate the species. Both would be absent in Heaven. For although there are unimaginably great pleasures in Heaven, we are not *driven* by them. And the species is complete in eternity: no need for breeding.

Transhuman reasons for intercourse include (i) idolatrous love of the beloved as a substitute for God and (2) the Dante-Beatrice love of the beloved as an image of God. As to the first, there is, of course, no idolatry in Heaven. No substitutes for God are even tempting when God Himself is present. As to the second, the earthly beloved was a window to God, a mirror reflecting the divine beauty. That is why the lover was so smitten. Now that the reality is present, why stare at the mirror? The impulse to adore has found its perfect object. Furthermore, even on earth this love leads not to intercourse but to infatuation. Dante neither desired nor enacted intercourse with Beatrice.

Specifically human reasons for intercourse include (1) consummating a monogamous marriage and (2) the desire to express personal love. As to the first, there is no marriage in Heaven. But what of the second?

I think there will probably be millions of more adequate ways to express love than the clumsy ecstasy of fitting two bodies together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Even the most satisfying

earthly intercourse between spouses cannot perfectly express *all* their love. If the possibility of intercourse in Heaven is not actualized, it is only for the same reason earthly lovers do not eat candy during intercourse: there is something much better to do. The question of intercourse in Heaven is like the child's question whether you can eat candy during intercourse: a funny question only from the adult's point of view. Candy is one of children's greatest pleasures; how can they conceive a pleasure so intense that it renders candy irrelevant? Only if you know both can you compare two things, and all those who have tasted both the delights of physical intercourse with the earthly beloved and the delights of spiritual intercourse with God testify that there is simply no comparison.

A Heavenly Reading of the Earthly Riddle of Sex

This spiritual intercourse with God is the ecstasy hinted at in all earthly intercourse, physical or spiritual. It is the ultimate reason why sexual passion is so strong, so different from other passions, so heavy with suggestions of profound meanings that just elude our grasp. No mere practical needs account for it. No mere animal drive explains it. No animal falls in love, writes profound romantic poetry, or sees sex as a symbol of the ultimate meaning of life because no animal is made in the image of God. *Human* sexuality is that image, and human sexuality is a foretaste of that self-giving, that losing and finding the self, that oneness-in-manyness that is the heart of the life and joy of the Trinity. That is what we long for; that is why we tremble to stand outside ourselves in the other, to give our whole selves, body and soul: because we are images of God the sexual being. We love the other sex because God loves God.

And this earthly love is so passionate because Heaven is full of passion, of energy and dynamism. We correctly deny that God has passions in the passive sense, being moved, driven, or conditioned by them, as we are. But to think of the love that made the worlds, the love that became human, suffered alienation from itself and died to save us rebels, the love that gleams through the fanatic joy of Jesus' obedience to the will of His Father and that shines in the eyes and lives of the saints—to think of this love as any less passionate than our temporary and conditioned passions "is a most disastrous fantasy". And that consuming fire of love is our destined Husband, according to His own promise. Sex in Heaven? Indeed, and no pale, abstract, merely mental shadow of it either. Earthly sex is the shadow, and our lives are a process of thickening so that we can share in the substance, becoming Heavenly fire so that we can endure and rejoice in the Heavenly fire.