

National University of Singapore

A story of ethics: how sex creates order

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by

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A story of ethics: how sex creates order.

1. Fatal Attraction

Last summer I was walking down the street with a friend in Heidelberg, when she suddenly stopped in front of a big electoral advertisement showing the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer. "Oh my god", she exclaimed, "Isn't he cute? He looks like a big Teddy Bear!" Never before, it came to my mind that a young woman could consider a dwarfish, crumpled and old politician as cute. But indeed! The picture was perfectly photographed, showing the politician leaning his face in both of his hands, his wrinkles expressing all the sorrows of this world, his eyes promising you only one thing: "I care!" A public relation-tailored "dream come true" for every woman's heart. With this man *SHE* would like to get old. Likewise, in a later poll by a newspaper, asking German women with whom they'd like to spend a night with, Fischer hit the incredible third place behind singer Robbie Williams and actor Brad Pitt. Similar stories about their sexual attraction are also known of Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and not to forget, John F. Kennedy.

The idea hidden behind this media campaign perfectly anticipates a well experienced, but seldom uncovered mystery underlying to human behavior. There's a relation between sex appeal and the willingness to obey, a certain kind of charisma surrounding the *Attractive*, which isn't shared by the *Attracted*. While sex appeal is a pretty evident explanation for a male politician's popularity under women, one must ask, if it also attracts man. If so, do men just see them as idols? Is it thus easy? Why then, are so many men attracted to politicians promoting conservative ideas of sexual relations? Because they fear to lose their women's respect, while not being the same amiable? Can religious ideas about sexuality therefore be seen as a mean to safeguard traditional values? Asking these questions, one quickly returns to the roots of human psychology, mankind's struggle for survival, identity, order and society. And all of this, just because *everybody loves somebody sometimes*¹? Is it really all about love?

¹ Dean Martin (Int.): "Everybody loves somebody sometimes", written by Irving Taylor, Ken Lane (Diamond Records 1946)

² Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan, Chapter 13/17

In this essay I will try to draw an analogy to the State of Nature as it is mentioned by Hobbes, stating that the driving forces of sexuality lead to a dilemma situation similar to the one Hobbes describes. I will also argue that the emerging anarchic order calls for a different mode to legitimate authority. Finally an examination of different cultural and ideological approaches towards gender and family should help to answer the question: who rules why? It's a snapshot of interfaces between psychological, sub-cultural and cultural premises, available to be exploited for political reason.

2. Women as the cream of the crop of the State of Nature

Hobbes defines his State of Nature as an anarchic condition of everlasting competition between individuals who fear and mistrust themselves. So it's mainly a competition for survival. But he also asserts that envy leads them to compete for honour². While it's evident that more honor leads to more power and therefore to more security, it can be very useful to extent the notion of the State of Nature.

Why not bring the need for reproduction into the arena? At least there are two good reasons doing so. First, "survival" would transform from an individual connotation towards one that embraces a whole pedigree. Second, this approach could provide the link between survival and envy. If men wanted to reproduce, they'd have to compete for the women's grace. The strongest would not only survive because the others fear them, but also because they'd be the ones allowed to have sexual intercourse with the women. Women's power in the State of Nature exists, because they're the ones to select. But where does the need for reproduction come from? Why do human beings strive for progeny?

3. Women and their "good nose" for the right partner

A different approach towards the nature of human beings is taken by Aristotle. In contrast to Hobbes, who defines the human being as asocial, Aristotle draws an analogy towards animals, which live together in a quasi-socialized way. Therefore he defines the human being as a *zoon politikon*³ - a social and thus political animal - in his first assumption on the nature of mankind.

³ Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1, 1097b

In a way, contemporary sciences support this thesis. Biologists e.g. revealed that the need for sexual intercourse is regulated by hormones, providing the body with alert signs, similar to hunger and thirst. In other words: people get "horny" if the frequency of their sexual intercourse falls below a certain level⁴. In empirical researches they also discovered that men in leadership positions produce a significantly higher amount of testosterone, the hormone that is responsible for sexual appetite and aggression. Behaviorists - fairly Darwinist - ascribe this phenomenon to the superior heritable information these men might have to offer, which seduces them to have intercourse with as many women as possible to spread their "healthy" genes⁵. So are the privileged in our society selected by evolution? Do our societies reflect the survival of the fittest?

While it is possible to regard the above mentioned phenomenon as a stimulus nature gave mankind to safeguard her reproduction, its generalization somehow seems to be insufficient. Sometimes beautiful women choose men who don't fit in this scheme. Either they're not attractive enough, not intelligent enough or simply not aggressive enough. The reason for this lays in women's ability to smell their right partner. They can smell a man's immune system. And they choose the partner who has the supplementary anti-genes to her own, what provides the baby with the best possible protection against diseases. Some scientists even argue that the extensive use of the anti-baby pill is responsible for the rising divorce rates in western societies. The pill changes the women's set of anti-genes, which makes them choosing the wrong partner. When they depose the pill after marriage, most couples split up, because *she* isn't attracted to *him* anymore. Does this mean that love doesn't exist, since it's only guided by natural desire?

More important here is the fact that this ability of women breaks the logic of the Darwinists. Not only the strong and powerful have the chance to reproduce, but also the weaker, less powerful ones. This imposes a serious question. If evolution reaches less for the elite than for a maximum of diversity, why are men competing about women? There's no need for competition, since everyone got the same chances to have sex.

⁴ All the references made to biology are taken out of the amazingly insightful book: Barbara Pease, *Alien Pease: Why Men Don't Listen & Women Can't Read Maps: How We're Different and What to Do About It*, (Welcome Rain Publishers, June 2000)

⁵ Deborah Blum: *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women*, (Viking Press, August, 1997)

4. The first natural law: every man got the same right to compete for women

Once again the answer to this question is given by Aristotle who, in his second assumption on the nature of mankind, separates human beings from animals by defining them as a "zoon logon echon", a creature which has the ability to speak and therefore to think⁶. It's his human "ratio" that makes man recognize that he has competitors who also desperately want to make love to the same woman he has chosen. So he starts trying to impress the woman, starts competing with the others about things, which normally have nothing to do with sexuality. Who's the best hunter, the best singer, the best warrior?

And how suspicious he is... He fears his competitor, he's envious if the others try to impress the woman, he's jealous if she's impressed and his jealousy stages into rage if the competitor wins her grace. The urge to have sexual intercourse transfers into pure greed to possess her. And sometimes he's even out for killing his competitor just to have him out of the way.

5. The second natural law: every woman got the same right to seduce man

As already mentioned, women have an unfair advantage in the State of Nature. Contrary to the "dumb" men who are not bestowed with the gift of smelling the right partner and thus stumble into the trap of women's beauty, they are the ones who can choose. But it's not this easy at all. Women also are victims of their hormones. So until they found the right partner, they may also sleep with others whose immune-system fits by maybe seventy or eighty percent. What, if a woman finds the right partner and he is already engaged with one of these women? What, if several women are attracted to the same man? It's not a rocket-science to suggest that they also start competing like their male equivalents. Additionally, since they don't even know about their ability⁷.

⁶ Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1, 1097b

⁷ While it's possible that these fairly new discovery leads to a change in women's sexual behavior in the next years, I want to emphasize that the State of Nature is always perceived as a constructed situation, used as a model for the beginning of mankind.

But the State of Nature also imposes a great threat on a woman. She may be the one to choose, but what is, if the man simply decides to take what he wants to have? What, if he's going to rape her? As she's very aware that she's weaker than the man, she has to get hold of strategies protecting her from getting raped. In the absence of the right partner who has a natural interest in her inviolacy, a good protection is an admirer who can save her from aggressors. At last, the best protection surely is to have manifold admirers who can save her from each other. Smart seducing, isn't it?

6. Anarchy ≠ Anarchy

Because of the fact that women give birth to babies, the anarchic situation of Hobbes' State of Nature is different to the one supposed here. Babies need care. They're not able to speak up for themselves, nor do they have the rationality to anticipate the moves of their competitors. So the parents have to take care of it. Is this finally the beginning of family, of love? I guess not yet. First a crucial question has to be answered: why don't the parents just kill the baby? The parents don't know that their joy of sex derives from the necessity for reproduction. But they definitely know that the baby weakens their capabilities in the struggle against their competitors. Thus, it would be rational to kill it!

Once again nature provides a solution for this problem. Human babies, as well as animal babies, own a scheme of childlike characteristics: a big head, big eyes and a small round body, signals which evoke their mothers' natural instinct for shelter. She will protect the baby. An act that forces the man to measure his preferences. Since it normally should be in his interest to maintain sexual intercourse with the woman, he's expected to accept the baby and to protect them both. This doesn't necessary mean that he isn't out for other adventures with other women and stays monogamous. To call it back to mind! Men are inclined to disperse their heritable information, whilst women tend to be more selective. Therefore, as well as she is subject to jealousy in a similar way like the man, she will take any effort to hold him back in doing so.

So anarchy in this assumed State of Nature is different to the anarchic situation given by Hobbes. Although still in a complete lack of institutionalization, this anarchic society can be perceived as a pre-tribal condition, since it's not an unflawed competition between individuals, but is restricted in the sense that men don't compete with women, respectively their children and vice versa. A system that doesn't aim, but already

propositions the basis, for the survival of the progeny. And, similar to Hobbes' State of Nature, it can endure as a permanent fight between these groups.

7. The construction of the civil society

Hobbes' proposal for the transition from anarchy to civil society is relatively simple. The individuals realize that the fight of each against each other is the worst thinkable society. Therefore they decide to draw a treaty and to subordinate to a single and absolute authority. Other theorists might have come to other possible outcomes, but this shouldn't bother in the meanwhile. Important is, that unlike in the State of Nature, the individuals in the pre-tribal society on the one hand already have different interests and therefore different initial positions when facing the transition, on the other hand they know the reason causing disorder: sexual desire. Thus they less strive for overall political order than for a regulatory system capable to reduce sexual competition. What does this mean?

This means that a generalized, one-dimensional model of transition like in Hobbes' theory isn't possible, because the notion of order here, to a certain degree, is patchy and extensible. To sum it up, one can say that different people will have different profits out of different models of transition. It's therefore necessary to categorize the people at the very starting point of transition and then to consider which implications different models of transition could have on these people. The highest possible degree of abstraction can be achieved by assigning them four possible attributes, deriving from the two variables Attractiveness and Success. Attractiveness in this sense alludes to the basic intensity of their attraction, whereas success describes how well they've done in making use, respectively in surmounting the lack, of attraction. A cluster of this categorization could look like the following:

woman / men / children	Successful	unsuccessful
attractive	+	-
unattractive	+	-

Women & men: + = sex. intercourse / - = no sex. intercourse
 Children: + = care

Children are assumed to be always able to attract care, because of their mothers' natural instinct for shelter. As visible from the chart, each of the four resulting clusters has something to gain, but also to lose from a transition. As a result my first hypothesis is that the paradigms subject to the measures taken for a transformation depend on the people's stratification in respect to this chart. Second, I assume that the successful tend to prefer measures able to conserve their situation, while the unsuccessful definitely strive to improve their situation. Third it's possible to argue that the attractive will be more tolerant towards a free competition and solely aim to avoid open clashes, while the unattractive will prefer a more restrictive system, which keeps the attractive off from "hunting in their patch".

8. Different models of regulating sexual competition

Both, history and philosophy provide us with manifold ideas of how to bring order into the relation between woman and man. Roughly, one can separate between revolutionary Utopian, structural models, based on practical purpose and ideas, and models of institutionalization, based on already existing structures able to spawn values by the time. What all these models have in common is that their first step is the establishing of work sharing between women and men. What sexuality has to do with work sharing? Well, a lot. In a society unaware of possibilities to prevent pregnancy, babies are the immediate aftermath of sexual intercourse. A pregnant woman, as well as a woman busy with growing up children, neither has the time, nor the power to care for her security and her basic need of food in an autarkic way. A system anticipating this difference between man and woman, will strive to establish work sharing between men and women. Men take care for safety and food-supply, while women grow up the children. But that's what already characterized the State of Nature. So, what's new?

The new aspect is the consolidation of work sharing as a norm of society. It's less coincidental; it's less a matter of individual rational decisions than a custom based on common sense.

8.1 Sex and Totalitarianism

The most famous under the revolutionary Utopian models, indisputable is Plato's concept of the community of women and children⁸, who live separated from the men. Women take care for the education of the children and are protected by the guards. This concept is influenced by Plato's idea of justice, which states that everyone in the society should take the place he belongs to. It's highly radical by downrightly putting an end to the competition for sexual intercourse. Women and men only come together for having sex. Attraction, jealousy and greed, all the characteristics of the State of Nature are overridden. In a way Plato's idea of the community of women and children as a solution for sexual competition is the equivalent to Hobbes' solution for the State of Nature. People just cede their natural rights to gain their civil rights.

It's pretty obvious, which order derives from this idea: totalitarian order. No one's free to choose anymore. The people are forced to suppress their sexual desires and to obey to one single rule. But whom are they going to obey? For Plato the answer is clear. The philosophers have to become kings or vice versa. So the rulers of this constructed society are the ones who have seen the idea. The "truth" they discover, is that sexual desire leads to disorder. So in Plato's ideal state, these men guard over the society and teach it to be aware of the "evils" sexual desire can cause. And the people obey to these men, because they respect their knowledge, as well as their idol way of living. Sexual asceticism becomes one of the major values of this society, while hedonism shifts from an everyday habit towards a state of mind and therefore expresses itself in fine arts, music and finally love.

Understandably this coercion of sexual desire together with the new sense of aesthetics creates more disaffection under the people than it was common in the State of Nature. Plato anticipates that this can lead to social unrest and upheavals and suggests canalizing the establishing of fine arts and music on military and heroic arts. This strategy comes very near towards Marcuse's definition of repressive tolerance⁹, which was adopted by various pro-western Russian writers to describe the USSR's actions against the spread of liberal thought¹⁰.

⁸Plato: „Politeia“, Book 5

While Plato's approach is highly Utopian¹¹, his ideas are reflected in history. The harems of Arabic sheiks, to a certain extent, comply with his community of women and children. The Hindu caste system shares components of his idea of work sharing through adopting one's place in society. And not a long time ago, we still could see the devastations a repressive regime could do. Just to keep it in mind: religious reasons aside, the Taliban completely rampaged over fine arts and music for one single goal. They wanted to establish stability through sexual purity, in this light these "scholars"¹² of Koran can be seen as philosophers of purity, taking their authority out of their elitist status in the Afghan society.

8.2 Sex, Patriarchies and Religion

I want to discuss patriarchal societies combined with the topic of religion, as both of them are nearly unthinkable without each other. As Patriarchies can be defined as a form of political leadership based on the protection of the progeny and its lineage, religion legitimizes patriarchal leadership by giving a reason that makes sense of the progeny. It's simply god's will. In return, religion wouldn't make much sense without the progeny. Why should we believe in something, if there's no mission to fulfill? Second, religion itself creates political order by steering the legitimacy of leadership away from practical necessity towards the obedience to god. The plot of the holy Bible e.g. can be seen as a strategy, following exactly these two purposes. While Genesis provides the people with a sense for the progeny, the following stories of Abraham, Moses and David aim to legitimate the leaders' authority by asserting them to be chosen by god for the guard and protection of the emerging "natio".

The main difference between patriarchal and totalitarian systems is the institutionalization of the family to escape the troubles of the State of Nature and to establish work sharing between men and women in the patriarchal system. It's less radical than the totalitarian approach, since it doesn't disrupt the competition for sexual intercourse but limits it by putting value to the monogamous relation between man and woman.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse: Repressive Tolerance (London 1965)

¹⁰ see: Boris Kagarlitsky: Repressive Tolerance, The Moscov Times, 15 Oct. 2002, also in the Internet:

<http://www.tni.org/archives/kagarlitsky/repressive.htm>

¹¹ etym.: Utopia = non-place

¹² etym.: taliban = scholar

So, until marriage, the youth is more or less free to compete for sexual relations. Hence, as history gives evidence, most of the patriarchal systems also tend to restrict this competition either by demonizing sexuality in children's education or by early contracted marriages between the families.

8.3 Sex and Democracies

Trying to imagine a democracy deriving immediately out of the State of Nature, free of religious, traditional and social values, one can argue that democracies tend to establish order by legal authorities based on the rule of law and the acceptance of their actions by the people. The only restriction to sexual competition is the prospect of punishment in the case one should use violence against the competitor, in this sense, defining the first two natural laws as the biggest possible state of individual liberty, democracy can be regarded as the form of social order most open to competition and therefore best conserving the original individual liberties. Here political leadership mainly derives out of people's belief in the elected politician's ability to maintain social order.

As shown under point four, competitors anticipate their opponents' capabilities to compete, so attraction here indeed is an advantage in getting people convinced to be the right man for the right job. Hitherto, jealousy heats the competition. While democracy therefore can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy of elitism, its elitism is less preserving power to a certain group of people than it's empowering the capabilities of the aspirants.

But democracy is blind towards the need of reproduction. So there's also no need for religion and less obligations for the father. As democracy is based on legal values and the fact that the mothers are going to protect the babies, democratic systems will also protect the babies, because they cannot tolerate violence. Democracies therefore also aim for empowering women to live alone by adjusting their disadvantage of pregnancy and education through social aid or other means.

9. Gender matters!

Regarding the above drawn chart: is it possible to categorize totalitarian, patriarchal and democratic systems? In a way it is. But as always in politics it's less a matter of real capabilities than a matter of perception. People in democracies e.g. don't need to be empowered to feel empowered. So they feel able to compete, to have success, to be attractive. No wonder they prefer measures to maintain the competitive character of the State of Nature and only want to reduce the clashes. People ruled by totalitarian or patriarchal regimes don't feel empowered, not even the ruling elite, because they know they would lose their front position if they untie repressive structures. They don't have the possibilities to compete to the same extents like people in democracies. Thus they prefer to restrict the overall opportunities for competition to save their own small opportunities for sexual intercourse, what in a way is paradox, since they help to harden the structures, which keep them oppressed. What patriarchal and totalitarian systems have in common is that the emerging order is achieved on the women's cost. They get completely oppressed by the men, in the one case simply reduced to be whores serving men's pleasure, in the other case treated like private property, since men fear to lose them to their competitors. This means that gender matters in the transformation from the State of Nature to a civil society. Women have to pay a high price for their natural advantage they possess in the State of Nature. Men's pure greed, not love is the reason for the institutionalization of marriage.

10. The construction of love and arts

But where does love come from, while it's so obvious in our society that people love each other? I think that Plato's radical construction of the "ideal state" can give the best picture of how the notional admiration of beauty triggers not only arts, but also love. If the people are not able to live out their sexual desires, they start to use their imagination of how it could be. So I argue that the sense of aesthetics - of the people who should be loved, of the things that should be admired - is a social construction. As history gives evidence that from time to time the common sense of what to take pleasure in changes, it can be argued, that the sense for a special kind of beauty is neither granted by nature, nor by god. It's a construction exposed to change. As people start to anticipate the emerging mainstream aesthetics and apply them

to individual persons who, by chance, have similar characteristics, they start to admire them and feel attracted. And they start to desire to possess them, hope that their admiration is responded, feel joy if accepted and bitter grieve when rejected. It's the imagination people have of sexual pleasure, relation and beauty, which creates feelings and finally love as the prospect of happiness grasping their fancy, when they desire a woman, in other words, human's passion towards special persons, things or activities is not only natural, but also subject to the individual forming of identity, influenced by the environment.

11. Conclusion

While it's obvious that none single society ever emerged out of a State of Nature, the approach taken over this construct, was able to uncover specific differences civilizations have in dealing with sexuality and leadership. Maybe Islam, as the only religion based on a specific ideology how to restructure a malfunctioning society, comes closest to this construct. In this sense it seems quite logic that it bears plenty of totalitarian structures, aiming foremost for political stability than for the needs of the people. The relationship between men and women therefore is less based on love than on the survival of the progeny.

It's also important to have a look on how the different forms of religion influence, and are influenced by, sexuality. Monotheistic religions, offering a creative god, tend to produce patriarchal and sometimes totalitarian societies, where justice is perceived as the obedience to god. Polytheistic religions like Hinduism or the Gods of old Greece, tend to produce not necessarily patriarchal, but plural societies, where justice is regarded either as the fair distribution of capabilities or as the adequate position in society. It has been shown, that love, arts and aesthetics emerge out of the battlefield of the two antagonists sexuality and order, by stimulating the senses and minds of competitors, who therefore rationally anticipate and romanticize their desires.

Finally the legitimacy of authority not only derives from legality or obedience. Charismatic leadership primarily is connected with sexuality. Either that the leader is seen as admirable attractive like Kennedy, was able to resist sexual attraction in an idol way like Cyrus or was radically changing his life from being a "dandy"

towards being abstinent at “virtuous” like Augustine¹⁴ or Bin Laden¹⁵: the driving force behind this admiration is always sexuality.



¹⁴ The founder of the Roman Catholic Church, who has been known to torture himself for his former relationship to a woman and his sexual desires.

¹⁵ Many different sources claim that he spent more time in Monaco's and Stockholm's nightclubs than with the study of Koran in his younger years.

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