Three Contributions to Understanding Human Sexuality*

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ABSTRACT: A critical review of three recent studies of sexuality is placed against the background of four groups that have, for the past decade, attempted to discern the most important facts—known or still to be discovered—about human sexuality. The books reviewed are: The Pleasure Bond by William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson; Christian, Celebrate Your Sexuality by Dwight Hervey Small; and Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations by Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams.

What are the most important facts—known or still to be discovered—about human sexuality? Less than ten years ago there were at least four serious groups that, although usually conceding some significance to the facts offered by the others, nevertheless tended to regard the kind of facts in which they specialized as being the most important. Sectarianism was probably greater than ecumenicity.

Historically first came the obstetricians, gynecologists, and urologists and later the researchers into the physiological and chemical and genetic anomalies of sexuality. Next came psychiatrists, originally under the influence of Freud’s breakthrough, which showed much of human sexuality to be a learned response and not automatic unfolding. Associated with psychiatrists were many others in various professions dedicated to helping persons with problems that included sexuality and generally inclined to see the crucial facts in terms of psychosexuality or sexual attitudes. Third were the social scientists, especial-


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ly sociologists and cultural anthropologists, who saw the great variety of ways in which sexuality could be understood and used not only in different cultures but also among different groups and individuals in the same culture. Ironically, their leader, Alfred C. Kinsey, a zoologist, set out to make biological contributions and wound up with important sociological data. The fourth group are what I shall call, for lack of a better word, the “right or wrongers.” They may perhaps also be called the “basic purpose” people. Whatever the content of their position, the facts they used were intended as guides to what is wrong or right, unnatural or natural, unhealthy or healthy, out of line or in line with God’s will, etc. They ranged all the way from Karl Barth to Albert Ellis, assuming that we are eliminating both the frivolous and the exploitation-for-money opinions.

The Pleasure Bond

In 1966 appeared the first book by Masters and Johnson, a gynecologist and a psychologist, respectively. Replete with technical medical terminology, and leaning toward Germanic sentences, its findings in detail were decipherable only by a few readers. But some of those readers belonged to the serious students mentioned above, many of whom saw that the Masters and Johnson findings, far from being inimical to their own special concerns, were invaluable additions. Some other readers, with mixed motives, began to produce alleged popularizations of the Masters and Johnson materials. Although some were less inaccurate than others, all represented some degree of distortion. This spate of popular works continued after the second major Masters and Johnson volume in 1970. The one authorized and accurate summary is Masters and Johnson Explained, edited by Nat Lehrman (Playboy Press, 1970). The Lehrman volume consists mostly of edited transcripts of interviews given by Masters and Johnson. For the reader today who does not wish to plough through the important intricacies of Human Sexual Response (1966) and Human Sexual Inadequacy (1970), Lehrman’s is the best substitute and ought to be read before the book reviewed here, The Pleasure Bond. The present book does not repeat the basic data about sexual therapy, female sexual response, and other basic matters contained in earlier books and summarized by Lehrman’s volume.

After the heavy book of 1966 appeared, it was widely assumed that Masters and Johnson had deliberately chosen a difficult style and language to prevent exploitation of their findings. They have not denied a measure of truth in such statements. But the fact is that