4

Pornographic Fiction and Personal Integrity

4.1 Introduction and chapter conspectus

Near the end of the previous chapter, I claimed that in order for pornographic representation to appear, there must be morally proscribed behaviors, there must be the motivation to simulate these behaviors covertly in imagination, there must be representational vehicles capable of serving the imagination in this way, and there must be the capacity to feel guilt about these imaginings. I also claimed that there might be good reason to expect the behaviors in question to include those involving sex and violence. The aim of the present chapter is to elaborate and justify these claims.

Section 4.2 offers an evolutionary account that attempts to explain why it is that sex and violence constitute the central topoi of pornography. An evolutionary approach to explaining the promiscuous and violent tendencies of the human male, tendencies that fuel the male appetite for pornography, has, it hardly needs saying, been taken before, but not in conjunction with the important idea of the extended phenotype deriving from Richard Dawkins and not with much emphasis (if any) on the importance of the development of human affine (in-law) kinship relations for the evolution of Homo sapiens. Section 4.3 constructs a genealogy for the pornographic violent fiction, and Section 4.4 discusses the problem of male homoerotic pornography, which poses a challenge to the feminist analysis of pornography as material that, by definition, degrades women, but also, as I shall explain, poses a challenge to my own analysis. Section 4.5 discusses the problem of the sexually explicit romance novel, another challenge to the feminist analysis of pornography as well as to my own. Section 4.6 takes up the moral psychology or moral emotional dynamics of pornographic fiction, invoking the notion
of cognitive dissonance driving from Leon Festinger (1957), as well as the distinction between persons and wantons developed by Harry Frankfurt (1988), but now fortified with findings from neuroscience relevant to the maintenance of personhood, an important, perhaps the central, component of the human extended phenotype. Section 4.7 concludes both the chapter and the book.

4.2 The prehistory of pornography: sex, violence, and primal kinship

To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle to which even the apes might subscribe; for it has been said that in devising bizarre cruelties they anticipate man and are, as it were, his “prelude”. [Nietzsche 1887/1967, II/6, 67]

The expression “extended phenotype,” first coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in his book of that name (1982), includes within phenotypic expression external structures that a species is designed by natural selection to produce as part of its adaptive strategy. Standard examples include spider webs, beaver dams, bird nests, and beehives. Dawkins’ notion of the extended phenotype is a component of a theoretical package that includes the controversial position of gene selectionism. This is the view, contrary to Darwinian orthodoxy, that the unit of natural selection, the entity that may be said to “benefit” from adaptive mutations, is the gene and not the organism, despite the fact that natural selection operates directly on phenotypic traits and not genotypic ones. It may then seem that acceptance of the notion of the extended phenotype mandates commitment to gene selectionism. But this is not so, for Dawkins contends that application of the concept of the extended phenotype is not a factual issue, but an interpretive one: it concerns not facts but two ways of “seeing facts” (1982, vi, 1). An organism selectionist who accepts principles of inclusive fitness, the view that the principal “interest” of the individual organism is to maximize the proliferation of its genotype and those of its genetic relatives, and a gene selectionist will agree that the genes are the replicators, but disagree on how best to interpret the question of evolutionary cui bono, what entity is properly said to benefit from adaptive mutations. For the gene selectionist, the organism, along with its phenotypic traits, are mere vehicles housing “selfish” genes; for the organism selectionist, the organism is an interactor whose fitness is measured by its contribution to the composition