

Chapter 4: A Critical Examination of The Theoretical Basis of The Proposed New Sexual Freedom

In the preceding chapter, the salient features of the proposed new sexual morality have been discussed. Now, it is intended to evaluate its basic principles. These are restated below:

- Personal liberty of every individual should be invariably respected and protected, provided it does not conflict with that of others. In other words, an individual's liberty is limited by no other consideration than the liberty of another individual.
- Human wellbeing lies in their individual nurturing and fulfilment of their inborn aptitudes and desires. If these natural inclinations are interfered with, it will lead to egotism and personality disturbances arising from sexual frustration in particular. And, the natural instincts and desires are bound to go awry, if these are not fulfilled or satisfied.
- Limitations and restraints on the natural instincts and desires of human beings tend to intensify the cravings and inflame the passions. Their uninhibited fulfilment signifies contentment, enabling a person to overcome any excessive preoccupation with a natural urge, such as the sexual one.

The three principles above respectively concern human philosophy, training and psychology. They are put forward as justification for what the new moralists consider it to be the correct way, i.e. dispensing with the conventional morals, restraints and limitations, in order to ensure individual liberty, to promote, and not to frustrate, sexual gratification.

First, let us examine the above principles on the basis of statements and views of the supporters of the

proposed new moral system. For, none of them seem to have fully identified the principles underlying their contributions to the proposed new morality.

The principle of individual liberty is actually basic to the sociological realization of human rights. However, those who seek to promote the new concepts of morality evidently—and wrongly – assume that personalized sexual freedom has no social implications. This is because of their obvious assumption that when individuals are free to pursue their sexual interests, they are expected to observe no more than privacy, so as not to adversely affect the rights of other persons.

At the same time, they recommend safeguards in the interest of society, even to the limited extent of assuring paternity and care of children. According to their proposed new safeguards, a wife is to bear her husband's child only. Otherwise, she is free to pursue her sexual motivations, using contraceptives, which not only avoid pregnancy, but enable her to ignore the time– honoured moral restraints of chastity and faithfulness, if she so desires.

In the above context, two implications concerning individual freedom require detailed examination. The *first* one arises from the modernistic contention that personal liberty cannot be limited, except by that of other individuals and the need to respect theirs. The *second* implication refers to the claim that sexual relations requiring the assurance of paternity and filial affinity of a possible child do not involve any further connection with society, public life and social prerogatives.

With regard to individual liberty, let us consider the philosophy behind the same. The essential thing in any individual management of personal freedom, and in one's entitlement to its protection, is his or her qualitative need for gradually evolving a harmonious and respectable manner of progressing one's individual life, towards enhancing the higher faculties.

Due emphasis on the aforesaid need is noticeably missing in several Western interpretations or applications of the concept of personal freedom. In any case, individual freedom should not lead to any sexual permissiveness, enabling one to pander to lusty impulses and self–centered desires. For, any misconception of personal freedom cannot be encouraged, or respected, by those who can (or ought to) realize its dire consequences.

That personal liberty of any individual, born free with the innate desires and self will, should be cherished as long as he or she respects the entitlements of other persons, can be rather very misleading. For, aside from the need to avoid any self expository interpersonal conflicts, it is necessary for any society to recognize that the larger and higher interests of a person himself or herself ought to conscientiously limit his or her individual freedom.

Any continuing neglect of the aforementioned moral requirement can further aggravate the harm already done to the very basic concept of morality and the wrong done to the understanding of personal freedom

in its own name!

Bertrand Russell was once asked as to whether or not he would consider himself bound to any particular system of morality. He replied in the affirmative and proceeded to explain his answer by giving a hypothetical example of how individual morality can be viewed in the social context. The scenario he mentioned was more or less as follows:

"Supposing Mr. X wants to do something which is useful to himself, but harmful to his neighbours. Then he carries out his intention, inconveniencing his neighbours. The latter decide among themselves to the effect: 'We cannot do something that he cannot take undue advantage of. A situation like this is rather suggestive of a criminal implication ...'"

Bertrand Russell emphasized reasoning and intellectual judgment in the above case. Then he pointed out that morality did signify the need to harmonize the private and public aspects of individual behaviour.

From a practical viewpoint, the aforesaid case of new morality hardly suggests any Platonic utopia. Russell's interpretation of morality evidences no precedence of any inexorable values of life over the intrinsically or potentially baneful things. There is no trace in his suggestions of anything that makes human beings subject themselves and their material interests to any higher intellectual or spiritual considerations.

On the contrary, morals indicative of comprehensive meaning and significance are termed by him as 'taboos'. The only thing he considers to be sacred or inviolable is accomplishing one's personal inclinations and desires without inhibition. The only restraint on any particular manifestation of individual freewill approved by him is its compatibility with that of other persons.

Even so, he leaves unanswered the question as to what congenial power or faculty should be instrumental in keeping personal freedom within limits of reason, sanity and decency, and to render it harmonious with that of others.

Nevertheless, Bertrand Russell's scenario mentioned above is useful in attempting a possible reply to the question of individuals limiting each other's personal liberty. Accordingly, the scenario can be adapted as follows:

"Mr. X's neighbours can restrain or stop him from harming their interest, while serving his own. He is convinced that his neighbours in their own interest will mutually agree to prevent him. Accordingly, he is reconciled to the fact of his helplessness to do anything without coordinating his own interest with that of his neighbours."

The foregoing is illustrative of the sterility of Bertrand Russell's moral philosophy, based --as it is on the

crucial stipulation that an individual can (or ought to) serve his own interest and, at the same time, safeguard the rights and interests of the general public. This is so, considering that no norms of individual and group behaviour can be identical.

Evidently, certain hypothetical assumptions underlie the new morality proposed by Russell. For one thing, he implies that individuals and groups in a society can always manage to employ their benign powers envisaged under the proposed new morality. Secondly, he assumes that interpersonal and group unity and consensus are always readily forthcoming against individual transgressors. Then, he takes it for granted that an individual, who stands alone and weak, can nevertheless always decide to initiate any action against something of interest to a majority.

However, individual and collective powers of thinking and action can vary. People adversely affected by an individual transgression are seldom prepared to achieve unanimity and unity. Furthermore, one does not always decide to act against any majority interest, especially without confidence in one's own strength.

The ethics proposed by Bertrand Russell may be cogent enough to be recommended to any weak members of a society. For, the weak may be readily cowed down by sheer force of the strong and influential whose rights they may dutifully respect. However, when it comes to, actually preventing any transgression by the strong and powerful—, against the weak, the proposed ethics will probably fail to take effect.

For, the strong may well gang up against the weak. They may stifle any rare protest, or overwhelm any sign of resistance, from among the weak. What is worse, the strong can always say that their behavioural philosophy is not against the new ethics as recommended! In actual practice, they can even deem it unnecessary to harmonize their personal interests with those of the others.

Accordingly, Russell's moral philosophy may be construed as one of the most effective means of perpetuating the dictatorial concept of *might is right*. No doubt, Bertrand Russell devoted his active life towards advocating the cause of freedom, while defending the rights of the weak.

Yet, ironically enough, his moral philosophy tended to consolidate vested interests and dictatorial tendencies in a society. This type of contradiction is often discernible in Western philosophizing, so that it would appear that what is preached is intended to be different from what is practised.

The second implication concerns marriage and family living, in that their private and public (or social) aspects are to be determined. No doubt, individual happiness and mutual enjoyment of life are sought by persons intending to marry.

Now, two questions arise as to how best to serve and enhance a couple's interest towards achieving and

maintaining a happily married life. Firstly, one may ask as to whether or not any enjoyment of life is best accomplished within the privacy of a family itself? Alternatively, should any pursuit of sex oriented happiness be extended beyond the privacy of family living to public gatherings, including places of work, social encounters, downtown entertainment areas and the milieu outside a family, where people usually seek to accomplish sensuous or sensual pleasures?

Islam has recommended that a couple's mutual enjoyment be confined to the privacy of their family living, so that they remain fully oriented towards each other. Islam has determined that any sexoriented pursuit of happiness and enjoyment in public is to be avoided. Accordingly, any vicarious satisfactions derived from a sexually permissive society, including female exhibitionism in public are not allowed in Islam.

Western societies, which seem to fascinate some among us in more or less a blind manner, evidently favour the alternative proposition in the second question above. They have shifted the focus of attention to sex from the privacy of family living to its vicarious satisfaction in public. They do pay dearly for this moral lapse. Some of their thinkers express concern about deteriorating individual and societal morality in a sex- obsessed milieu. They are also stunned when they find how some communist societies have successfully taken sex off the public arena, saving the youth in the process.

Life's enjoyment cannot be equated with lustful or sensual living.

Individual happiness does not lie in maximizing the pleasures of eating, sleeping and sex. On the other hand, one may suppose that human propensity to enjoy sex- like pleasures, and conversely suffer dissatisfaction, can be as instinctively limited as that of animals.

However, this assumption can be wrong, since human seeking of physiological contentment is susceptible to be carried beyond married life and family living to the society at large.

However, persons of opposite sex whose souls, rather than bodies, have attracted each other can indeed be sincere in their mutual affection, after they agree to become husband and wife. Their marital happiness can extend beyond' the passionate youth to mutually cherished companionship towards even ripe old age.

Likewise, it is conceivable that a man used to the most intimate and satisfying relationship with his legitimate and faithful wife can indeed discriminate against any animal- like pleasures of the body, such as obtainable from a prostitute: Accordingly, one would not like to deflect in the least from what is most desirable and wholesome to what is sensuously pleasurable and conveniently transient.

Clearly, it is very essential that activities involving human sexuality are limited to couples, who are

married, and to the privacy of their family living. For this purpose, it is necessary to safeguard the functional integrity and mutual compatibility of a family and its social milieu.

Marriage and family living are very significant functional aspects of a society. They are responsible institutional aspects for the benefit of the posterity. Family upbringing of children determines the quality of successive generations. In this context, individual and mutual capabilities of husbands and wives, towards appropriately raising children, are crucial factors. At the same time, a father's concern for his offspring is bound to be conducive to a positive upbringing of the latter.

Human congeniality, in both individual and social contexts, is best developed in a harmonious family atmosphere. A child's exuberant spirit and natural temperament is substantially conditioned and trained by the parents.

When appealing to the good sense and common interest of two persons, we invoke their affinity with the community they may belong to, or the possibility of their regarding each other like two brothers. For that matter, we may even emphasize the brotherhood of mankind. The mutual devotion and faithfulness of pious *mumineen* (believers) is compared in the Holy Qur'an with the sincere regards that brothers have for each other.

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

“Indeed the Believers are but a single Brotherhood:” (Sura al-Hujarat, 49: 10)

Brotherhood among human beings does not come merely from any blood relationship or racial affinity. When we speak of brotherhood of man, what we signify is that the congeniality of two brothers in a family can well be reflected among individuals in a society. If brotherliness and affection which can be imbibed in a family are eliminated, it is doubtful if people can really show genuine consideration for each other.

They say that in Europe there is considerable sense of justice, but fellow-feeling is very limited. Even real brothers, as well as fathers and sons, evidence very little affection for each other. This is quite in contrast to the general run of people and families in the East.

Why, it is so? The answer revolves around the fact that human love and sympathy are qualities which are attributable to a wholesome upbringing of children by really affectionate and united families.

Evidently, families in Europe no longer are able effectively to cherish these qualities. The solidarity

between husbands and wives, often noticeable in the East, is frequently missing in the West. A significant reason can be the fact that Westerners have come to believe in sex without love or inhibition. Sexual experimentation and diversification do not allow any specific interpersonal love to develop. They tend to be indiscriminate in seeking sexual enjoyment

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