IDEALS OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE AND THE QUESTION OF SEXUALITY: A MORAL INQUIRY

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Abstract
The humanistic turn of philosophy that is linked to the secular cultural and intellectual movement of the renaissance witnessed in the modern era utterly changed the world's perception about humans, and accrues to them some excellence by virtue of their being and existence. Humanism, hence, concerns squarely with the needs, well-being, and interests of the people. The global civilization has made it possible for human and material resources to be committed towards dignifying human beings in recent times. This, perhaps, is traceable to the modern existential aura that pays attention on the uniqueness of each human individual as distinguished from other abstract universal quality. Nonetheless, humanistic philosophy is not short of a system of thought based on the values, characteristics, or behaviour that are adjudged to be best about human beings, rather than on any perceived supernatural authority that merely describe human situations. Consequently, the recent outburst of debates that gives more credence to human autonomy which accrues some unrestricted rights takes a turn from the traditional law of nature, and ostensibly, morals; which paves for sexual revolution the entire world witness in recent times. The article seeks to investigate the extent and veracity of the enormous rights accruing to individuals as autonomous beings, through the humanistic struggles for human decency, which permits some seeming obnoxious tenets of sexuality and other related orientations that flout the existing traditional moral and natural principles.

Key Words: Choice, Law, Morality, Pleasure, Rights, Sexuality

Introduction
The current discourses on human existence in the contemporary world accrue some reverence on human beings generally. This evinces the kind of excellence that men are uniquely endowed by nature over other primates. By virtue of large and complex brain which man possesses positioned him a prior member in the order of mammals. Apart from the features and attributes he shares with other beings, he possesses other faculties that are exclusive to him, which include that of reasoning, conscience and memory. Perhaps, this divulges him as an excellent being in the hierarchy of finite beings. Thought or reason, consciences and memory make him uniquely or outstandingly a hyperconscious being; this posits the fact that man is not only intelligent but a moral being as well.

The moral superiority that characterized man brings to bear the full weight of certain affairs that are intrinsically valuable, which requires him to conduct himself uniquely in relevant ways. This moral standing opens ways for so many cogent choices that helps in building a habitable society for him and others; and, should he feel morally indifferent, such casualness potent harm – which puts him at odd with the entire society he lives in. Of course, man's thought, choices or actions are not confined (that is, they are not deterministic), he is opened to so many choices as a free moral agent.¹ As an excellent or outstanding being reason and conscience places him at the threshold of choosing between 'good' and 'evil,' and the exigence of choosing what is objectively good helps him in building moral ideals.

With the current analytical turn in philosophy, man expands his traditional scope of objective thought on moralism to include apparent subjective relevant issues to form part of the existing moral ideals. Some of these old-age-long subjective debates include the rights
for surrogacy, prochoice, sexual orientations, suicides, euthanasia, etc. The contemporary human society witness important debates on the question of human sexuality and other related orientations, which sought to redefine or reposition man as a distinctive being by expanding the bounds or limits of rights accrued to him generally. The clamour for these rights is traceable to the human autonomy that manifests with the advent of humanism that spread throughout the continent of Europe at the wake of contemporary analytical discourses. Sequel to this, the work seeks to retrace the objective moral path as against the dual obnoxious trends of sexual behaviour and sexual orientations which contravene the existing traditional morality that safeguards human excellence, with the aid of moral principles and logical tool.

**Morality and Sexuality**

The concept of morality signifies standards of conduct that are generally acceptable as right, good or proper. In other words, it demonstrates a conduct that is in accord with accepted moral standards. And, as a field of study, it is considered a normative science which aims at procuring the human person's absolute good and happiness. Nonetheless, it studies human act insofar as they are ordered among themselves and towards an end. Undeniably, morality could also imply some sorts of social regulations that are embedded in cultural and historical traditions governing people's character and behaviour. It has been demonstrated vigorously that the overriding purpose of all moralities is to preserve social harmony; and as a philosophy, it is primarily concerned with providing the general outlines of a normative theory to help us give answers to problems about right or wrong to be done. By and large, the concept morality deals with responsible actions that are volitional – that is, those acts that proceed from the subjects' conscious acts or freewill as a moral agent. As a mechanism for human society, morality serves as a moral-action-guide for an individual or group, which is derived from the universally sanctioned moral standards of the society. Irrespective of the size of any given society, small or large, it must work out distinct guides for its people's conduct or what may be termed *value systems*, which must conform to the universal moral principle. These value systems or guides for conducts of the communities of human are referred to as moral codes or moralities.

On the other hand, sexuality implies the state of being sexual, simply put. It is construed to be the involvement or interest in sexual activity. However, human sexuality refers to the various social custom, attitude or behaviour that pertain to an individual's sense of gender, and all physical and psychological developments; including the relationships, sexual activities and reproduction, etc. Human sexuality, and all its forms, is validated or justified squarely by either tripartite means of social, moral or psychological disposition of an individual or the society. Sexuality is indeed a manifold manifestation; it could play out either as a relation, feeling, intercourse or orientation, etc., depending on the subject's disposition. Such disposition is determined by the social, moral and psychological influence or conviction of the individual. Of course, the trio means manifest a sexualized life, but the only points of their disagreement are the nature, the subjects and the manner of sexuality. Socially and morally, most traditional human societies accept all forms of sexual expressions provided the subjects are not related by blood, and some cultures express concern over persons' sexual orientations. But it is within the purview of moral principle that sexual relation is only permissible if its aim is not narrowed to mere psychological satisfactions, but for the purpose of procreation. The psychological aura on sexuality posits the fact that sex in its entire ramifications is good for man, and does not signify or limited to procreation, so long it provides sensual fulfilment to the subject. Unlike the moral purview – and in some sense, socio-cultural orientation –; hence, psychological disposition of the subject on sexuality is opened to all forms of sexual orientations provided it promotes self-interest. This, to some extent, expresses egoism.
When psychological, social and moral circumstances are introduced to the idea of sexuality, it makes the judgement so complex and cumbersome, since the presumptive background of each of this is at variance with the others. But it could be meaningful if such moral and psychological suppositions are applied in an ancillary manner, that is, using the psychological disposition of human to understand moral situations in sexuality generally. Of course, to be able to determine the rightness/wrongness or goodness/badness of an act, the subject's behavioural pattern which often comes to play must be considered for the sake of objectivity. Away from the exclusive psychological supposition, the moral standing undoubtedly witnessed various debates on sexuality through the centuries. Nonetheless, almost everyone recognizes that sex is basically a morally significant issue. Indisputably, people often talk of sex as if it were the only moral issue. Perhaps, they often import that the most important moral issue is "with whom shall I sleep, and when?" While another school of thought views having sex as asking someone to go for a dinner. If the subjects agree, there is nothing morally wrong in sharing bodies as it is to a mere sharing of a meal at a dinner. Punzo expressed moral discomfort on this view, he disagreed with Goldman who claim that sex is just the desire for certain kind of physical contact with another's body; this implies that, "sex is concerned with giving and receiving certain kinds of pleasure, nothing more. Perhaps sex is better between two people who love one another." Punzo describes Goldman's view as a perverted conception of sexuality. Sex to him is more than just physical contact; it is a unique physical union that involves intimate expression of a party or individuals' desire. Moral determinants surrounding sexuality is not reducible to mere object, consent, timing and the place for the act, it goes beyond that. Such moral purview is understood to be unacceptably narrow by moral absolutists; the scope of morality is much broader.

Apart from the important moral related questions about the subject, object, consent, timing etc. of human sexuality, there are other areas of consideration that are familiar moral fare, such as, "Should people have sex only if they love one another?" and "Is homosexuality moral?" Here we see the nub of a raging argument within moral reasoning. Of course, this protuberance opens a complex and onerous debate on homosexuality. This debate raises fascinating theoretical moral questions on homophobic disposition. While moral absolutists contend that all inclinations towards homosexuality are morally evil, other liberals do not think such an orientation is evil, as it is not a moral problem. This school (homosexual) too is divided into two camps. While the first group described homosexuality as biologically unnatural, the second group posits that it is not unnatural. The only thing is that, it does explain the "almost universal revulsion" toward the practice. Hirschfield Magnus, notably one of the first sex researchers, who prolifically wrote about homophobic attraction amplified an idea that is attributed to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs that “homosexuality is biologically determined for some members of the population. Arguing that same-sex love is thus natural, he campaigned for the repeal of anti-sodomy laws in Germany”.

Rights, Sexual Orientations and the Human Subject
A lot of questions come to mind when the concept of excellence is attributed to human in related normative discourses. Literary, human excellence implies human superiority or outstanding; but in a moral related sense it acknowledges the moral importance of all human beings, endowed with the power of reasoning and conscience, which has been aroused to give full weight of their welfare, rights and recognition that ontologically dignify them as human. The moral excellence accord to human originates from the appeal to certain religious beliefs or suppositions – such suppositions as, God created man in his image and likeness. The current analytical debates on the concept of right contained within them some social, political and legal undertone. Enthrallingly, the modern legal discourses characterized the contemporary right theory as having an implicit historical progression built-in, beginning with the individual's excellence that is guaranteed by human autonomy, to the civil law that
protects and ensures such rights. This expresses the private autonomy of the citizens that triumphed with the recent liberal constitutionalism. This, indeed, is what Hart described as political liberalism or political conception of law. Perhaps, it builds in a vibrant principle typical of a welfarists' state, which began with the 20th century humanistic aura, and as well, the constitutional provisions that spells out the nature of the individuals' rights, and their limits (as advanced in Rawls' A Theory of Justice).

The modern usage of the concept of right is complex and convoluted, for it is stretched beyond mere social and legal connotations to include moral and political undertones. This enables us, however, to express implicitly and explicitly the normative elaboration of the principles of individual liberty. Arguably, the contemporary analytical usage of the language of right plays a distinctive role only if it is deployed within the context of a moral code that ensures a proper distribution of spheres of individuals' liberty, such that each man possesses a sort of sovereignty, within which he/she is understood to be free from all morally unjustified interferences from others. Undoubtedly, the central justificatory ground for claiming rights is the capacity for freedom.

The current trend of secularism which is over burdened with various agitations for the needs for humanist philosophy and human autonomy – with the respective rights of individuals that delineate each person as independent being – threatens the existing traditional perception on sexuality (heterosexuality). It is glaringly clear that with the emergence of the homophiles uncluttered expressions in the global scene there seems to be a broad variation in the perception of sexuality. Indeed, people are however, deeply divided base on their sexual orientations in recent times. The right to choose any form of sexuality is hinged or guaranteed by the enormous claim of human autonomy that were advanced by the humanistic movement of the early twentieth century, which, to some extent, gained credulity in some modern liberal constitutions. People who have preference on homophile and other related sexual orientations in liberal cultures are not only conscious of themselves having such inclinations but openly express it due to the constitutional protections that express their individual rights.

Admittedly, autonomy simply manifests the personal independence and the capacity to make moral decisions and act on them. It is a philosophical concept about existence of an independent or self-determined moral agent. Although, a term traced to Machiavelli, who construed it as both free from dependence and self-legislation; it has grown in an incredible magnitude and gained credence in Kantian tradition. Kant extends the notion to moral domain and perhaps makes it the fulcrum of his moral doctrine. In Kantian tradition, moral agents can be said to be autonomous only if their wills are free of any external determinants and the agents apply laws to themselves in accordance with reason alone. It is important, however, to note that the legal or social connotation of autonomy implies logical or conceptual independence, but the main trust of the modern analytical debates which has its root lies on the Kantian tradition posits that, the concept of autonomy is linked to the idea of freedom and is a necessary condition for ascribing responsibility to an agent as a moral being. Somehow, since the individual lives in the human society, there are inevitably some moral constraints that seemingly limit human autonomy. This reveals that, to some extent, moral beings cannot be completely autonomous, due to the ascribed responsibility, which from the social and legal perspectives individuals could be said to be liable for their actions and inactions. There is no doubt that the individual autonomy that has become the hallmark of the contemporary analytic discourse has indeed assumed a normative dimension; since respect for a person as a self-determined or an autonomous being is a common moral norm.

As stated earlier, the inalienable right or autonomy that is accrued to individuals, which has its roots traceable to humanistic philosophy, ushered in a new orientation about human sexuality. The stalwart of the new form of philosophy re-echoed the need for overemphasizing the individual rights and autonomy, by using the humanistic devise in order
that their new orientation would gain popularity. The agitation saw the advent of various movements in the western world, such as, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), the West Coast Homophile Movement, the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), etc. While some were confrontational on their advocacy, others devoted their time organizing awareness campaigns which wooed so many recruits as members.

Intriguingly, the advocates of the homophile (which includes Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual – the LGBTs) and those of the pro-choice became apologetic that homosexuals should have equal rights like their heterosexuals counterparts. The movement became more tensed when the pro-abortionists advocated that the essence of sex is not limited to procreation, but could also be for pleasure sake. Such were the opinions of the pro-choice group who were advocating for the legal right of an individual to the use of contraception or to have access to induced abortion voluntarily.

**Sexual Convictions and Human Ideals: An Evaluation**

The contemporary liberal constitutionalism, especially those of the western civilizations, ostensibly gives credence to the individual rights that specify other privileges which include the preference of a person's optimal sexuality. The individuals' sexual orientations or preferences are hinged on the basic assumptions that they possess inalienable rights that are natural, by virtue of being human – and, such rights must be recognized and respected. Since the advent of the debate on human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, there are obtrusive questions as to whether sexual intercourse (of any kind) is a sort of activity that is similar to a fun-fare of choosing a dinner from a menu. Thus, sexual liberalism posits that, the debate on human sexuality is of utmost significance in that one's view of the morality of premarital intercourse or other preferences seem to depend on the significance that one gives to the sexual encounter in human life. The logic behind such an argument might be sound but not valid, for there are other moral or social determinants that might perhaps pose a challenge on the motive behind the assumption that there is nothing immoral about premarital character of sexual intercourse and the sexual choice, which portray human sexuality as no different from myriad of other purely aesthetic matters. Of course, such an understanding is not different from the standpoint that sexual behaviours and orientations are indeed non-moral issues. The motive behind this is to make people believe that morality plays no role on sexual activity, it is the partner's consent that is of utmost importance; which must be respected because of the inalienable rights they possess as moral beings.

Sexual choice is not limited squarely to premarital sex, there are agitations for the recognition of incest globally. The progenitors of the movement in the contemporary era not only debated for its recognition but also argued for the rights of the adherents to be spelled out or entrenched in the liberal constitutionalism. The basis for the early form of incest's debate was merely for some reasons of affection or attraction relatives could develop for themselves; it was argued to keep the circle of offspring that were believed to possess some exceptional qualities, such as beauty, intelligence, etc. The debate was hinged largely on procreation, due to some genetic or other purposes, with the aim of preserving certain shared traits that characterized a family. The contemporary aura on incest posits beyond genetic purposes, it expresses a permissible attraction between people that are considered, for moral and genetic reasons, too closely related to have such a relationship. Such an affection is not only restricted to a mere procreation, as it was the view of the early progenitors, but the contemporary movement extend it to include a permissive sexual attraction of a family members whose indulgences are based on some usual psychic sensitivity of pleasure seeking. The argument here is built on the basic assumption that it is the individual's psychological disposition that guides people's sexual activities other than their social or moral circumstances. Homophiles too have the same disposition. As indicated from the onset, the
promoters of homosexuality believe that no analysis of sex can show that same sex attraction is immoral, the basic thing is the fulfilment one derived from the act.

The linguistic functionality in moral discourse is very paramount to the contemporary analytical school. This school dwells heavily on the 'is-ought' controversy of ethical issues with the aim of resolving them. It gives more credence on the basic difference between "is" and "ought" on one hand, and tracing the connectivity between them (the "is" and the "ought") on the other; this is because not all social issues are settled by fiat, some non-litigious issues require normative commitments for the purpose of objectivity. It is important hence to make it plain that, the guiding principle of moralism is not dependable on the optimum number that indulge in an act; and, indeed, an overwhelming indulgence is not a determinant to absolve an act as being right or otherwise. Undeniably, moralism, at all time, evinces some sorts of normative assumptions, which moral relativists and sceptics generally hold sway against.

The definition of sexuality in most current discourses appear to settle moral issues by fiat, which merely answers the question of "is" without considering the "oughtness" of human sexuality. The physical interaction between individuals who are committed to a long-time relationship, or having a casual sex is not sufficient to define sex. Indeed, sex in its casual sense is not integral to human sexuality, and is not meaningful to a pair of individuals who deeply love one another. To really conceptualize the meaning of human sexuality, we should not settle by definition, we must understand what it is, only then, can we morally evaluate it. Sex so described as mere convenience (sensual or genetic purposes) is reductionistic, for its social and moral connotation is glaringly more comprehensive than the non-moral outlook.

The socio-cultural aspect of human sexuality has its roots lie in the universal moral principles that guide human conducts generally. Hence, sexual behaviour is characteristically swayed by cultural norms, which provide both implicit and explicit rules governing sexual expression. Traditionally, most of world's cultures provide preparatory principles that marked the norm defining what culturally permissible sex is. This is noticeable even in the most simple or unsophisticated cultures where extramarital sexuality and other pervasive sexual orientations are prohibited; which sexual liberalists are hell-bent against. The liberalists posit that such antediluvian norms of the old-age long moral absolutists should be replaced by the age of consent, for moral or cultural absolutism neither recognize human autonomy nor understand what the rights of men are – as moral beings. They seemingly argued this to reduce sexual perception to mere consensual and non-consensual argument, with the aim of making it a legal discourse rather than moral.16 It is only this then, the individual sexual choice or orientation could be guaranteed by law – in their assumption.

Once the rhetoric on sexuality is taken out of psychological and genetical context, the type of question regarding human sexuality will be moral base. Moral reasoning hence is the guiding principle that suggests what is right or wrong, bad or good, rather than on what rules or the law says should be done. One basic truth about the nature of moralism is that it places some sense of responsibility over freewill that characterized the supposed autonomy human being lay claim. The sense of responsibility posited by morals on individuals is in guise a limitation or a sort of moral constraint that seeks to place people's conduct on proper or ethical spectrum. This however, checks the possibilities of some obtrusive moral pervasion that often come to be as a result of human frailty. Of course, this undoubtedly breeds social regulations in the human society in general. Nonetheless, if human sexuality is defined by the subjects' orientations or settled by fiat, it would give credence to its approbation and disapprobation merely on psychological disposition and other convenience (of sensual or genetic/physiological purposes).

Advocacy for human autonomy and rights is something good, and is recognized in moral discourses. But, when such a venture is not viewed through moral spectra, which will trail and guide human thought on sexuality, there bound to be obtrude sexual choices, often with awkward effects. The existential aura that seeks to place man on his proper place by
dignifying him brought about several liberals' current; this is noticeably during the sexual revolution that burst on the American scene in the second half of the twentieth century that promoted an alternative sexual ethic. For some reason, this group advocated that recreational sex is a healthy activity. They rejected the habitual practices of the established customs that limit sexual activities to marriage bed, which they labelled as restraining personal freedom of the individual, “and asserted that sex between consenting partners is a positive value for promoting intimacy and affection.” Discourses on human sexuality have indeed passed through a rigorous historical progression, which assumed a dialectical procedure. The sexual revolution which is basically fun-fare, as popularized by Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine, orientates people's sexual attitude to the life of bachelor pleasure, as against the philosophy of responsible and unselfish partnerships with women. This gained credulity among the teaming adolescent males of his days. Morally, philosophies such as a the *Playboy* is demeaning, because it has shaped the worldview of the adolescent boys on sexuality as mere bachelor pleasures where women are ordinary sex objects to be enjoyed by them. Of course, the female orientation too changed with the rise of Simone de Beauvoir, who decried women subservience to men. They too sought for women's freedom to seek for sexual pleasure as their male counterparts, with the aim of attacking the long-standing misogynist tradition that regarded women as properties; hence, they declared that women should be able to have sex on equal terms with men. “From this point of view, a woman's efforts in the sexual sphere could be an expression of a liberated consciousness.” It is due to this new found philosophy that we often see women struggling on equal basis with men on such sexual orientations that are considered pervasive, such as lesbianism, bisexuality and transgender, etc. Perhaps, these are glaring offensive multiple effects of the unrestricted rights and autonomy that are accrued to man.

Admittedly, if human sexuality is reduced to mere derivation of sexual satisfaction, priority would be given to other sexual activities that are considered morally obnoxious, such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, paedophilia, incest, and other sexual choices such as transgender, bisexuality, autoeroticism, etc. Apart from the legal requirements, human sexual activity indeed, require moral precepts that guide people's sense of responsibility for sake of dignifying the human person.

**Conclusion**

The question of the morality of human sexuality can glaringly come to play only if the nature of the problem is conceptualized. The discourse sought to conform to the general conducts in the society, and, to make it relational to other orientations; else, the global attitude towards sexuality would remain fun-fare of choosing to have a dinner with someone, with no moral implication. The nature of human sexuality bears little or no relation to those values identified by the liberals, to which some analyses falsely suggest a conceptual connection. Morally, pleasure remains a by-product of sexuality rather than being its essence. The companionship and procreation that are the hallmarks of marriage are, principally among other things, the desires for pleasure the physical contact brings which results in mutual affection and shared interests. It is, therefore, logically inconsequential to conclude that human sexuality can be squarely defined by one's psychological, physiological or genetic situation. Human sexual activities must be guided and be given a normative interpretation. In spite that is often argued that sexual drive is natural in men, but such natural inclinations should not be made to conflict with the societal ideals.

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