

A FUNDAMENTAL NOTION IN THE PROBLEM OF SEX MORALITY¹

GERALD KELLY, S.J.

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE
St. Mary's, Kansas

A CERTAIN footnote in Father Cappello's excellent treatise on Marriage is of special interest and importance to the moral theologian. I refer to the author's discussion of the definition of venereal pleasure.² Theologians, he asserts, are not of one mind in their concept of this pleasure. The author himself, if one may judge from his references and his definitions of sensual and venereal pleasures, apparently sponsors, at least partially, the theory of a two-fold genital pleasure, proposed almost thirty years ago by Alberti, and since taken over *in toto* by Antonelli. This theory, as explained by Alberti, divides the genital processes into two distinct phases: the erectile processes, and the glandular processes. The appetitive motion proper to the first phase is called *sensual*; while only in the second

¹An article such as this entails references to many authors. To conserve space, I am giving references in the following manner: Older and somewhat unusual works consulted are cited in full the first time they are mentioned. In subsequent references to them and in all references to standard theological works, only such details are given as will be necessary for the reader to verify the statement.

²*Veneræ* (delectatio) etiam carnalis vel libidinosa dicta, ea est quæ oritur ex commotione organorum et humorum generationi inservientium, et conjungitur cum pollutione aut distillatione nec non cum actibus utriusque *proxime* præviis. Non omnes theologi idem sentiunt."

"Delectatio *sensualis* (quam alii vocant *sensibilem carnalem*) ea est, quæ oritur ex objecto, quod ex se aptum est ad excitandum sensum venerum, et percipitur in verendis ex eorum commotione seu erectione. Licet *veneræ* non sit, cum ex se *proxime* prævia non sit pollutioni vel distillationi, tamen commotionem carnalem facile excitat; et ideo quam maxime periculosa est, merito a theologis ut *radicaliter mala* habetur."

These definitions are taken from Cappello, *De Matrimonio* (1939), n. 140, footnote. This footnote, especially in the definitions quoted here, contains a strange mixture of the Alberti theory referred to in this essay and the teaching of theologians who strongly oppose this theory. For this reason, I say in my text that Father Cappello sponsors the Alberti theory "at least partially."

phase can the motions be termed *venereal*.³

It is hardly necessary to call attention to the fact that we are here dealing with a fundamental notion of no slight importance. The accepted moral principles pertaining to venereal pleasure are not sterile speculations; they are practical principles applicable to commonplace situations. They should be simple and lucid; but they must necessarily be as complex and vague as is the concept of their subject matter. For this reason, it seems opportune to examine the issues raised by Father Cappello in the light of traditional definitions and distinctions of pleasures. The examination is not made with a purpose of controversy, but only with a strong desire to contribute in some positive way towards keeping the notion of venereal pleasure on an unequivocal basis.

THE "SPIRITS"

The only pleasures to be considered in this essay are those of the sensitive order, such, namely, as involve corporeal phenomena, either because they pertain properly to the sensitive appetite, or because they "flow over" from the purely spiritual into the sensitive sphere. The corporeal phenomena attending

³Alberti, Joseph: *De Sexto et Nono Decalogi Praecepto* (Romae, 1914), nn. 13-16; Antonelli: *Medicina Pastoralis* (1932), II, 343b c. Alberti defines venereal pleasure, as usual, as the pleasure proper to a carnal motion. He explains his theory of carnal motions thus: "Ut mentem meam hac in re melius explicem, animadvertendum est ad habendam pollutionem vel distillationem *ordinarie* requiri in antecessum verendorum commotionem seu erectionem sive sponte aut indirecte abortam, sive *tactibus directe procuratam* (italics mine); erectione vero complete subsecuta, esse insuper necessarios (praesertim in iis qui sunt naturae frigidae, vel castam vitam ducunt, aut sunt senes) impulsus, tactus, vel contractationes ut semen et humores seu mucii e respectivis vesiculis et glandulis egrediantur. Jamvero hi actus vel motus, et non illi, intelligendi sunt actus proxime *praevis* pollutioni vel distillationi, ideoque motus carnales ad hosce tantum, utpote solos intime connexos cum pollutione ac distillatione, et qui virtualiter haberi debent ceu inchoata pollutio, extendendi sunt. Ex quibus sequitur actus vel motus *remote* praevis, qui nempe consistunt in sola gradata verendorum commotione seu erectione, motus carnales proprie dici non posse, quia talis verendorum commotio seu erectio non a carnis vel humorum fluxu, sed ex affluxu sanguinis ea permeantis ac replentis causatur: qui sanguis ad verenda revocari aut confluere potest ob causas sive internas, sive externas, sive naturales. sive voluntarias, puta *per tactus, etc.* (italics mine)." Alberti, l.c. n. 14.

such appetitive motions were usually explained by scholastic philosophers and theologians in terms of the humors and especially the "spirits"; hence it appears useful to preface here a résumé of the salient ideas concerning these latter somewhat mysterious entities.

The spirits may be termed a postulate of the ancient philosophers to explain the operation of the vital principle in the matter that it informs. Their substance was conceived as a very refined type of blood, mixed in some way with air. As to their number, the ancients themselves disagreed. But upon their properties and their functions, there was substantial agreement. Subtle, swift-moving and warming, they were the medium through which the power of the vital principle was exercised in all operations of the vegetative and sensitive order; and thus, at least partially in terms of spirit-activity, were explained the phenomena of sensation, local motion and appetition. In all these operations, the spirits were the first things to act, producing the heat that excited the nerves and the various humors. Their activity was not only general and perceptible throughout the body, but also localized according to the diverse motions of the sense faculties. Hence, distinctions of sensation or passion could often be best indicated by this localized spirit activity. From this it appears that the function of the spirits is best translated into modern psychology as primarily neural, and that the phenomena once expressed in terms of spirits and humors are today described in such terms as motor, vascular, muscular.⁴

The generative spirits in particular were considered to be implanted in, or mixed with, the seminal fluids;⁵ and their very name, *spiritus generationi inservientes*, seems to have been

⁴For this general resumé of scholastic doctrine concerning the spirits, confer: Alfredus Anglicus: *De Motu Cordis*, critical edition by Clemens Baeumker (Munster, 1923), cc. 10-12; Alger of Clairvaux: *De Spiritu et Anima*, (inter spuria S. Aug.), PL. 40, 794-5; Suarez: *De Potentiis Animæ*, and *De Passionibus*, passim.

⁵Suarez: *De Potentiis Animæ*, c. 10, n. 1; Eschbach: *Disputationes Physiologico-Theologicæ* (Romæ, 1901), pp. 24-25.

derived from the fact that their presence in the united male and female cells was deemed necessary for disposing the matter for the new vital principle.⁶ Being extremely volatile and heat-producing, these spirits responded to the first motion of concupiscence, helped in the release of the more material seminal fluids, and were instrumental in bringing about the distension, or tumescence, typical of the genital organs.⁷

DISTINCTIONS OF PLEASURES

The explicit distinctions of pleasures that are found in our modern treatises on chastity are the offspring of theological subtlety. Saint Thomas, for instance, kept his treatment of *Impudicitia* to very broad, general lines. According to the *Summa Theologica*, kissing and caressing without lustful desire and according to the custom of one's country, or on account of some obligation or reasonable cause, are not sinful; but if these same actions proceed from lustful desire, they are mortally sinful.⁸

Such a broad distinction was not sufficient for the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It left a loophole; and loopholes, in those days of controversy, sold at a premium. Theologians commonly interpreted the phrase, *ex libidine*, to mean "for venereal pleasure," which is only one kind of sensitive pleasure. Hence, the questions that harrowed many were: What if these same acts are performed for some non-venereal sensitive or quasi-sensitive pleasure? What would be the corporeal distinguishing marks of the venereal and these other pleasures of the sensitive order?

Among the first to attempt to lay down a clear, easily-recognized distinction between the venereal and the non-venereal was Thomas Sanchez, whose distinction might be expressed in

⁶Alfredus Anglicus: o.c., c. 10, n. 3, and c. 12; St. Thomas: 3a, q. 32, a. 1, ad 1; and 1a, q. 118, a. 1, ad 4.

⁷Saint Albertus Magnus: *Tractatus de Homine*, as cited by Eschbach, o.c., pp. 61-62.

⁸2a, 2ae, q. 154, a. 4.

the following words: Venereal pleasure includes a commotion of the generative spirits; none of the other pleasures have this effect. He thus assigned to the non-venereal pleasures one mark, a negative one; and without further distinction he grouped them all together under the concept, *connatural* or *proportionate*, because he had in mind principally the pleasures proper to the various operations of seeing, hearing, touching, and so forth.⁹

Following Sanchez, many eminent moralists spoke of only one class of non-venereal pleasures, which they called by a rather wide variety of names, but which they distinguished by the same negative characteristic, absence of commotion of the generative spirits.¹⁰ To clarify this concept further, the Salmanticenses insisted on the fact that the pleasure of touch which is common to the whole body (warmth, coolness, softness) could likewise be experienced in the genital organs. But such a pleasure, they said, could easily be distinguished from the venereal by the fact that the corporeal change would be just the same as that which accompanies the pleasure of touch localized in other parts of the body, and therefore quite different from the "commotion of the generative spirits."¹¹

Thus it seems that when these authors spoke of a non-venereal sensitive pleasure, they generally had in mind a pleasure proper to one of the external senses, and they always excluded a typical genital commotion as one of the marks of the pleasure. Nevertheless, their distinction of pleasures into *venereal* and *merely sensitive* tended to confusion. Very often their discussions of

⁹Sanchez, Thomas: *De Sancti Matrimonii Sacramento* (Lugduni, 1621), L. 9, disp. 46, n. 5.

¹⁰Confer, for example: Amort, Eusebius: *Theologia Eclectica Moralis et Scholastica* (Wirceburgi, 1752), Vol. 4, tr. 1, d. 4, q. 2; Mendo, Andreas: *Statuta Opinionum Benignarum* (Lugduni, 1666), Dissertatio 5a, Quaestio 1a, "An in Rebus Venereis Detur Parvitas Materiae"; Salmanticenses: *Cursus Theologiae Moralis* (Venetiis, 1750), tr. 26, c. 3, n. 34; Salmanticenses: *Cursus Theologicus Scholasticus* (Parisiis-Bruxellis, 1877), Vol. 8, "De Vitii et Peccatis," nn. 259, 261, 262; Scavini, Petrus: *Theologia Moralis* (Mediolani, 1869), I, n. 788; Viva, Dominicus: *Damnatae Theses* (Patavii, 1717), Tom. 1, "In Prop. 40," n. 4.

¹¹Salmanticenses, Moralists and Scholastics, ut supra.

the morality of such external acts as touching and kissing had to do with a sort of mid-pleasure, a thrill with bodily manifestations, but quite different from the merely sensible pleasure attached to "touching a soft object," "smelling a rose," and so forth.¹²

Many authors attempted to catalog this mid-pleasure. Tamburini carefully distinguished from both the *merely sensitive* and the *venereal* a thrill that was characteristic of certain associations with the other sex, *as such*; and this he described as a non-libidinous sexual pleasure.¹³ Sporer approved of Tamburini's "subtle distinction."¹⁴ Lacroix made a somewhat similar qualification in describing a *delectatio sensibilis-carnalis*, a pleasure "*sine ulla commotione circa partes genitales, quam tamen commotionem est saltem remote apta causare; et delectatio illa sentitur communiter circa pectus cum aliquo calore, vel quasi cum emotione sanguinis, aut spirituum animalium circa cor, v. gr. dum quis osculatur mulierem.*"¹⁵ Struggl accepted Lacroix's distinction.¹⁶ Later, Palmieri divided this mid-pleasure into *spiritualis-sensibilis* and *carnalis-sensibilis*, pleasures which are distinguished from one another rather by the type of love from which they spring than by any corporeal manifestation, which in both cases is "*cum quadam commotione sanguinis vel spirituum circa cor.*"¹⁷

Palmieri's division has been substantially adopted by a large number of present-day authors.¹⁸ Some describe the *delectatio carnalis-sensibilis* under the term, *sensualis*.¹⁹ They do not refer this pleasure to the genitals.

¹²Cf. Lehmkühl (1914), I, n. 1027; Gury-Ballerini (1898), I, n. 414, footnote by Ballerini.

¹³Tamburini, Thomas: *Theologia Moralis* (Venetiis, 1755), Vol. I, De Praeceptis Decalogi, L. 7, c. 8, nn. 2-5.

¹⁴Sporer, Patricius: *Theologia Moralis* (Venetiis, 1726), Vol. III, P. 4, c. 3, sec. 4, n. 683.

¹⁵Lacroix, Claudius: *Theologia Moralis* (Parisiis, 1874), L. 5, nn. 93-94.

¹⁶Struggl, Marcus: *Theologia Moralis* (Ferrariae, 1758), tr. 7, q. 4, quaeres 4.

¹⁷Ballerini-Palmieri (1899-1901), II, n. 961.

¹⁸Confer Cornelisse, Eugenius: *Compendium Theologiae Moralis* (Ad Claras Aquas, 1908-1910), I, n. 413; Ferreres (1932), I, n. 515; Marc-Gestermann-Rauss (1933), I,

VENEREAL PLEASURE

This brief discussion of the corporeal element proper to non-venereal sensitive pleasures indicates that typical genital excitation is, and always has been, commonly considered as distinctive of and exclusive to venereal motions. From this point of view, the Alberti theory of sensual pleasure is a departure from the common teaching. However, before an adequate judgment can be made, there is need of more positive details concerning the traditional concept of venereal pleasure.

Here is a definition of venereal pleasure which may be termed typical of the definitions given by representative authors from the early part of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the present century: *Delectatio venerea est illa quae sentitur in ipsa carne cum commotione spirituum subservientium generationi circa partes libidinosas.*²⁰

The definition, given by Thomas Sanchez, is found substantially unaltered in such authors as Saint Alphonsus, Amort, Ballerini, Billuart, Busenbaum, Castropalao, Diana, Gury, Laymann, Mendo, Palmieri, Roncaglia, Sabetti, Scavini, Sporer, Tamburini, and Viva.²¹ Quite a number of other authors (for

n 767; Merkelbach: *Quaestiones de Castitate et Luxuria* (Liège, 1936); pp. 18-20; Noldin (1909-10), *De Sexto*, n. 7.

¹⁹Confer Ubach (1935), I, n. 557; Genicot-Salsmans (1936), I, n. 389; Arregui (1937), n. 247. Ferreres, Merkelbach, and Noldin (in the older editions) use both terms, *sensibilis-carnalis* and *sensualis*. In the more recent editions of Noldin-Schmitt, the editor describes a *delectatio sensualis* vel *sensibilis carnalis*, which is in reality a mixture of sensual and venereal. In this he seems to be following a suggestion made by Vermeersch. See Vermeersch, T.M. (1933), IV, n. 32.

²⁰Sanchez, o.c., L. 9, disp. 46, n. 5. Sanchez made no claim to originality but gave credit to Cajetan, Fumus, and Tabiena, for the various parts of his definition.

²¹St. Alphonsus: *Theologia Moralis* (Romae, 1907), L. 3, n. 415; Amort, o.c., Tom. 2, tr. 1, d. 4, q. 2; Ballerini, in B-P, I, n. 577; Billuart, Carolus: *Cursus Theologicus* (Parisiis-Lugduni, 1878), Vol. 8, De Temperantia, diss. 5, a. 1; Busenbaum: *Medulla* (Tornaci, 1848), L. 3, tr. 4, cap. 2; Castropalao, Ferdinandus: *Opera Moralia* (Lugduni, 1656), Tom. 3, tr. 16, disp. 5, q. 9, n. 9; Diana, Antonius: *Opera Omnia* (Lugduni, 1667), Vol. 8, tr. 6, de Luxuria, resol. 9; Gury, o.c. I, n. 411; Laymann, Paulus: *Theologia Moralis* (Wirceburgi, 1748), L. 3, de Temperantia, n. 10; Mendo, o.c., "An in Rebus Venereis"; Palmieri, in B-P, II, n. 960; Roncaglia, Constantinus: *Universa Theologia Moralis* (Lucae, 1730), "De Sexto," c. 1, qq. 3, 8; Sabetti-Barrett (1939), n. 279; Scavini, o.c., I, n. 788; Sporer, o.c., Tom. 3, P. 4, c. 3, sec. 4, n. 683; Tamburini, o.c., Tom. 1, L. 7, c. 8, n. 4; Viva, o.c., "In Prop. 40," n. 4.

example, D'Annibale, Bucceroni, Filliucius, Lacroix, Platel, the Salmanticenses, Struggl and Voit speak of a commotion, not only of spirits, but also of *semen*.²² Since, as already explained, the spirits were considered as implanted in the seminal fluids, there seems to be no real change of concept. The commotion of one naturally implied some activity on the part of the other. Thus, the Salmanticenses give both types of definitions;²³ and Lacroix states that venereal pleasure arises *ex commotione seminis vel spirituum illud commoventium*.²⁴

The most distinctive element of this first typical definition is, of course, the phrase, *cum commotione spirituum generationi subservientium*. By this was indicated the localized external phenomena proper to venereal passion, as well as the specific nature of the operation to which this passion is attached. The phrase also indicated something of the physiology of the operation, for the *commotio spirituum* was looked upon as the beginning of the organic processes leading to *seminatio* (orgasm).²⁵

The precise nature of the physiological operation, as described by the older theologians, is not easily comprehended. For example, Ferdinand Rebellus, a Portuguese Jesuit whose influence in the parvity-of-matter controversy can scarcely be over-estimated, appealed with great emphasis to the fact that '*Delectatio venerea, juxta Galenum (L. 14, de usu partium, cap. 9 et 10) a medicis communiter receptum, fit ex motu humoris serosi, qui est substantia et materia seminis; cum per venas et*

²²D'Annibale (1908), II, n. 66; Bucceroni: *Commentarii de Sexto et Nono Praecepto* (Romae, 1910), n. 2; Filliucius, Vincentius: *Quaestiones Morales* (Lugduni, 1622-1625), Tom. 2, tr. 30, c. 9, n. 180; Lacroix, o.c., L. 5, n. 93; Platel, Jacobus: *Synopsis Universi Cursus Theologiae* (Coloniae Agrippini, 1694), P. 2, n. 250; Salmanticenses, o.c. *De Vitiis et Peccatis*, n. 258; Struggl, o.c., tr. 7, q. 4, quaeres 4; Voit, Edmundus: *Theologia Moralis* (Lovanii, 1761), I, n. 724.

²³Salmanticenses, l.c.

²⁴Lacroix, o.c., L. 3, n. 891.

²⁵"Haec autem commotio (spirituum genitalium) est mortalis in homine soluto, quia secundum Galenum est *inchoatio profusionis seminis* (italics mine)." Lacroix, o.c., L. 5, n. 96.

arterias spermaticas, per modum hederae sive capreolorum protensas, a renibus ad vasa pudenda descendere incipit, et per commotionem spirituum genitivorum incalescit, tanquam per causam efficientem instrumentariam."²⁶ This same Galenic physiology, as explained by Rebellus, is repeated substantially by many early authors, and it seems to have been the accepted way of explaining genital activity.²⁷

NATURAL UNITY

I confess that I am unable to give an exact modern equivalent for this *motus humoris serosi*, or for the other ancient term signifying the same process, *decisio seminis*.²⁸ However, underlying this ancient physiological language, one fundamental point is quite certain. The theologians were speaking of *venereal* activity, which means "naturally and proximately related to generation." They were describing, in their own language, the *generative* operation, not indeed in its full activity but in an *incipient* stage. And they looked upon this entire operation as a naturally constituted unit. Hence, Rebellus, in the same demonstration that brought Galenic physiology into theological prominence, insisted that light genital motions are matter for mortal sin because they are a part of the naturally unified generative process.²⁹ He therefore styled such motions an *inchoata pollutio*; this phrase became a by-word among subsequent theologians and expresses accurately the root meaning

²⁶Rebellus: *De Obligationibus Justitiae* (Venetiis, 1610), P. 2, L. 3, q. 19, sec. 3.

²⁷Confer: Elbel-Bierbaum: *Theologia Moralis* (Paderbornae, 1891-1892), II, n. 648; Filliucius, l.c., note 22; Mendo, o.c., "An in Rebus"; Platel, o.c., II, n. 250; Salmanticenses Moralists, de Impudicitia, n. 87; Sporer, o.c., Vol. I, n. 18.

²⁸I do not believe that the *decisio seminis*, at least in its initial stage, was intended to signify a movement of the seminal fluids, as we understand them today. I am inclined to the opinion that the old physicians and philosophers were attempting thus to describe the passage of nerve impulses from the nerve centers to the genital organs themselves. Videant sapientiores! This opinion has no influence on the facts or conclusions presented in this essay.

²⁹"At in aliis praeceptis in quibus datur Minimum, ratione materiae, non cernitur talis successio, et unitas unius totalis motus." Rebellus, o.c., l.c., cf. Note 26.

of their concept of venereal pleasure and the organic activity associated with it.³⁰ We of today, using our own physiological language, can preserve the concept of these older theologians only by styling as *venereal* all those processes (whether neural, muscular, or glandular) which by intrinsic finality lead to the sexual orgasm.

In the present century, the general tendency of theologians is to define venereal pleasure in terms of a *commotio organorum et humorum generationi inservientium*, or more simply of a *commotio organorum generationi inservientium*. These definitions in themselves are somewhat vague; but authors generally clarify them by dividing venereal activity into *complete* and *incomplete*, and by assigning semination or quasi-semination (distillation) as a sign of complete activity, and a state of pleasurable organic tumescence as a mark of the incomplete.³¹ These newer definitions seem to differ but little from the older typical definition. Like it, they are intended primarily to emphasize a certain material and externally perceptible aspect of even the initial phases of venereal excitement; and like it, they imply that the organic processes thus set in motion are strictly generative functions that make a specifically natural unit with the sexual orgasm.

³⁰The following are among the many authors who use the expression *inchoata pollutio*, or its equivalent to designate an incipient genital motion: Elbel-Bierbaum, o.c., II, n. 648; St. Alphonsus, o.c., L. 3, n. 415; Mendo, o.c., "An in Rebus"; Lacroix, l.c., L. 3, n. 910; Platel, o.c., II, n. 250; Salmanticenses Scholastics, "De Vitiis et Peccatis," n. 258ff.; Salmanticenses Moralists, De Impudicitia, nn. 87-88; Scavini, o.c., I, n. 788; Sporer, o.c., I, n. 18. The same idea may be found in many modern works, and it is very neatly expressed by Wouters (*De Virtute Castitatis et de Vitiis Oppositis*, Brugis, 1932, n. 62): "Dein actus non consummatus luxuriae est actus venereus incompletus, qui nec efformat nec natus est efformare unum totum cum actu completo legitimo, sed potius efformat vel saltem natus est efformare unum totum cum actu completo illegitimo; unum totum inquam, quod per commotionem levem inchoatur, per vehementiores continuatur, et per extremam, i.e. per resolutionem seminis, terminatur."

³¹Some of the modern authors who speak of a *delectabilis erectio* or an *erectio cum voluptate*, as a carnal motion or a sign of venereal pleasure, are: Aertnys-Damen (1932), I, n. 630; Arregui (1937), n. 263; Genicot-Salsmans (1936), I, n. 388; Jone: *Précis de Théologie Morale* (1934), n. 232; Marc-Gestermann-Rauss (1933), I, n. 763; Merkelbach: *De Castitate* (1936), p. 20; Noldin-Schmitt: *De Sexto* (1935), n. 48; Piscetta-Gennaro (1934), VII, n. 93; Vermeersch: *Theol. Moral.* (1933), IV, n. 34; Wouters, o.c., n. 10.

One last word about these traditional definitions. The emphasis laid on natural unity should not convey the impression that there is question here of something merely physiological or corporeal. We are treating of a *passion*, something not merely physical, but psychic. The concept of natural unity embraces all these elements, organic and psychic. All of them, from the initial reception of the exciting cause to orgasm and satisfaction, make a natural psycho-physiological totality, and everything intrinsic to the process has generative finality and is styled *venereal*.³²

CONCLUSIONS

In the light of this survey of traditional concepts, we can now establish some brief conclusions concerning the issues raised by Father Cappello.

1. It is hardly accurate to say that theologians are not of one mind as to the nature of venereal pleasure. They have commonly looked upon venereal pleasure as a passion pertaining exclusively to the specifically generative function of the genital organs; and they have commonly considered this particular operation to begin with the first typical excitation of the genitals, that is, with the function of the erectile nerves and the turgescence of the organs. Hence, the coexistence of this typical organic change with any of the psychic elements of passion is a sure sign of the presence of what theologians commonly term *venereal pleasure*.

That this concept, clear in itself, is often clouded by confusing discussions and obscure explanations, no one who is conversant with theological literature on chastity and the Sixth Commandment will deny. Much of this confusion has to do

³²Confer Vermeersch: *De Castitate* (1921), nn. 429, 430.

with the positive characteristics of the *non-venereal* pleasures and with the relation of these pleasures to acts which are apt to excite venereal passion. Some of the confusion pertains to the parvity-of-matter controversy, and it is found especially in the writings of the older theologians who, it seems, did not always indicate whether they were discussing *luxuria directe voluntaria* or *indirecte voluntaria*. This point, however, concerns the *sinfulness* of lust and has no immediate bearing on our present subject, which is limited to the *nature* of venereal passion.

But there is also obscurity, or a certain inadequacy, in the treatment of venereal activity. Some of this naturally lies in the fact that the literature of the past is couched in a terminology not easily comprehended by the mind of today, for example, spirits and humors; but even the modern *commotio organorum et humorum* has something of the vague about it. Furthermore, the fact that authors in general treat the subject of chastity without giving any preliminary explanation of sexual psychology tends to increase the difficulty of clearly comprehending their definitions, principles and solutions. Finally, it is true that theologians, who are generally precise in their use of words, are frequently inexact when speaking of sexual phenomena. For instance, venereal desire (concupiscence), venereal sensations, venereal pleasure, and carnal motions differ from one another at least in concept. But this distinction is not respected with any kind of consistency. In various authors, each of these elements is sometimes called venereal pleasure. Such a terminology can be justified because of the natural unity of the elements and because, from the point of view of moral guilt, what is said of one may be said of another. Nevertheless, it tends to create cloudiness in a mind that is straining for accuracy.

2. As to the theory of the two-fold genital pleasure, I think it is evident from the facts presented in this essay that it is a departure from the common teaching. And I consider this departure scientifically unsound. For, though it is true that

genital erection is often the accidental result of causes which are not to be termed sexual stimuli, in which case it simply does not pertain to the sphere of passion and is ordinarily styled a merely mechanical erection, it is also true that erection is, *per se*, a phenomenon of obvious generative finality. Scientific manuals ordinarily list it as the first of the organic processes leading to the sexual orgasm.³⁸ It has no other natural purpose save copulation, for which it is an absolute requisite on the part of the male and a requisite for well-being on the part of the female. In view of this natural purpose of the erectile processes, the common opinion of theologians correctly styles the passion proper to them as venereal.

All theologians take as their specifying norm of venereal operation, *id quod proxime pertinet ad generationem*. By *proxime*, the theologians of the past, who crystallized our principles, and the common body of theologians today mean a proximity of nature. They therefore consider as venereal, *all* the processes which combine by natural finality to produce the sexual orgasm. This is scientific. It takes into account the entire generative operation; it places the distinction between venereal and non-venereal passion on a qualitative basis; and it indicates an easily perceptible external manifestation of this difference. The Alberti theory, keeping the general norm, *id quod proxime pertinet ad generationem*, limits the meaning of *proxime* to glandular activity. This is an arbitrary limitation. It ignores the intrinsic finality of the erectile processes; it distinguishes venereal from sensual pleasure by mere quantity, namely, degree of excitation; and it makes it practically impossible to assign a satisfactory external criterion even for that quantitative difference. Hence, my conclusion is that the Alberti theory departs from the common teaching without scientific justification and with the possibility of dangerous practical consequences.

³⁸For example, confer: Dickinson, Robert L.: *Human Sex Anatomy* (London, 1933), p. 78; Acton, William: *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (London, 1875), pp. 4, 78, and passim; Ellis, Havelock: *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia, 1908), Vol. 3, p. 45.



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