Peripatetic Perversions: A Neo-Aristotelian Account of the Nature of Sexual Perversion[1]

The idea that there is a coherent and morally relevant concept of sexual perversions has been increasingly called into question. In what follows, I will be concerned with two recent attacks on the notion of sexual perversion: those of Graham Priest and Igor Primoratz.[2] Priest's paper is the deeper of the two. Primoratz goes methodically through various accounts of sexual perversion and finds difficulties in them. This is no small task, of course, but unlike Priest he does not attempt to provide any diagnosis of why any attempt to analyse the concept of sexual perversion must fail. Priest argues that sexual perversion is an "inapplicable concept": the presuppositions that would allow us to make sense of the notion have been rightly rejected. Without the theoretical backdrop of an Aristotelian moral teleology, we cannot provide a satisfactory account of sexual perversion, for only such a teleological world-view allows us to give some sense to the idea that a sexual practice might be morally wrong because it is unnatural. Priest surveys accounts of perversion that don't appeal to any idea of unnaturalness and rejects them—rightly I believe. But, Priest argues, Aristotle's own moral teleology is part and parcel of his wider views about purpose in nature. This natural teleology has been shown to be explanatorily superfluous. Though some sciences still talk of functions, this can be understood in terms of contributions to evolutionary survival. Though there is considerable disagreement about the details of the right account of function, all versions of this scientifically respectable teleology are morally neutral: it would not follow from the fact (if indeed it were a fact) that homosexual intercourse does nothing to propagate the agents' genetic material to future generations that it is therefore morally wrong. Here too I think Priest is right. He also considers what he calls "Aristotelian revivalism" in Roger Scruton's account of sexual perversion.[3] I think Priest sells Aristotelianism short. I have no interest in

"Peripatetic Perversions: A Neo-Aristotelian Account of the Nature of Sexual Perversion" by Dirk Baltzly, *The Monist*, vol. 85, no. 1, pp. 3–29.

defending Scruton's own understanding of the Aristotelian moral framework nor his particular account of sexual perversion. I shall, however, argue that Aristotelian moral philosophy provides a more useful framework for thinking about these issues than Priest implies, and attempt to defend an account of sexual perversion within the context of this framework.

It will be objected that no account could elucidate our ordinary concept of sexual perversion, since there is no coherent concept at work in people's use of 'perversion.'[4] Just look at the way they disagree about the extension! Where we don't have widely shared views about the extension of a concept, the method of analysis and counter-example is hopeless.

I agree that this presents a problem: where we don't have a high degree of unanimity about particular cases, it is hard to say what counts as a counter-example to a proposed analysis. I try to skirt this problem by providing an account of *why* people disagree about the extension of 'sexual perversion'. I provide an account of perversion that explains how people move from certain psychological and ethical assumptions to conclusions about whether some disposition is a perversion or not. I think that my account elucidates our everyday concept because it provides a rational reconstruction of *how people argue* about whether some practice falls in the extension or not. Or perhaps I should say that it provides a reconstruction of how people argue about whether something is a perversion when they really argue and do not merely use 'perverted' to express a visceral reaction to sexual practices that they find distasteful. Of course, we do this in some contexts: 'sexual perversion' carries both expressive and descriptive content. Anyone who denies the former is hopelessly out of touch with ordinary usage of the term. Anyone who denies the latter is, I think, needlessly pessimistic. In conversational contexts where the descriptive content of 'sexual perversion' is to the fore, there emerge patterns of agreement and disagreement about what is required for something to be a perversion. I think my account gets the logic of the concept right. The nature of our decision procedure about whether something counts as a perversion or not makes it unsurprising that we disagree about particular cases. Indeed, on my analysis it turns out to be an interesting empirical question whether there really are any sexual perversions.

1. The eudaimonist *ethical framework*

Priest argues that a successful account of sexual perversion presupposes a notion of naturalness that is morally significant. I think he is right

about this. Let us work our way into such a notion by looking at a concept of morally significant naturalness that we can no longer believe in.

In *Summa Theologiae* ii. q. 154, art. 11–12 Aquinas considers "the unnatural vice." This, like the other species of lust, is contrary to right reason for "the lustful man intends not human generation but venereal pleasure" (art 11). But, in addition to this, it is "contrary to the natural order of the venereal act as becoming to the human race" since unnatural vices involve activities in which reproduction is not even a possibility. Even if we set aside the familiar difficulties about plain vanilla sex between married but infertile people, there are seemingly insuperable difficulties about the notion of naturalness that is being appealed to here. Doubtless Aquinas would not be satisfied with a nicely naturalised notion of statistical normalcy: in a world of wankers, masturbation would still be something that he would regard as unnatural. Nor does it seem that any suitably naturalised notion of reproductive fitness would serve his needs. After all, we can certainly imagine biologists finding out that homosexuality enhances the propagation of one's genes by means of kin selection. Such a finding would hardly change Aquinas's mind about the unnaturalness of homosexuality. In short, for his account of unnatural vice to have the extension that he intends for it, Aquinas must appeal to a notion of the purpose of sexual contact that can only be vindicated by his particular version of the Artificer of Nature. Any modern-day Thomist faces a serious dilemma: to the extent that the natural teleology is plausible, it doesn't yield the desired moral conclusions.

Aquinas's moral philosophy is a form of Aristotelianism that makes much use of a notion of natural teleology. Is this inevitable? There is this much teleology in any form of Aristotelian revivalism: human beings have a *telos* which is both natural and morally significant. This *telos* is *eudaimonia* or human flourishing. The primary locus of moral evaluation within the *eudaimonist* framework is on dispositions or states of character which serve to promote or inhibit human flourishing. The morally correct action is the one that the person with these states of character would perform in the specified circumstances. Those states of character that promote a creature's capacity to perform its function or *ergon* well are, by definition, virtues or excellences (*aretai*). With respect to particular *erga* we can identify particular excellences. So, if a knife's function is to cut, then (other things being equal) being made of a metal that keeps a good edge is one of the virtues of a knife. Being a forensic pathologist is a specific

ergon. If the task of the pathologist is to determine how the person died, and if being methodical in the application of various tests promotes this end, then the character trait of being methodical is a virtue in a pathologist. As this second example shows, the neo-Aristotelian notion of an *ergon* need not imply that the thing with the *ergon* was made for that purpose. It is just to say that there is a pattern of activity that is constitutive of being that kind of thing.[5] So to talk about the human function is just to talk about those patterns of behaviour that make someone a human person.

Does the *eudaimonist* approach require a hopelessly outdated teleological picture of nature and human beings? It does require that there be such a thing as the human function—a pattern of activity that is constitutive of being a human person—and a corresponding objective notion of happiness or flourishing which is the result of performing the human function well. Aristotle's own argument that there is a human function and an objective condition of happiness (*EN* 1097b22–1098a20) has been discussed extensively and it is far from clear that it is compelling.[6] So far as the existence of the human function goes, Aristotle thinks it would be absurd if each part of our bodies had a function or characteristic activity and yet we as human beings lacked one. Since we are all the same kind of creature—rational but mortal—it is reasonable to believe that this function is common and therefore so is happiness.

In addition to finding Aristotle's arguments uncompelling, some philosophers find the notion of an objective condition of happiness clearly mistaken. They think it is *just obvious* that people differ considerably in their judgements about what things are pleasant and thus about what happiness consists in. I'll concede this, but claim that it misses the point. Aristotle notes that '*eudaimonia*' is widely regarded as synonymous with 'living well' (*eu zên*) or 'doing well' (*eu prattein*). Though we sometimes use the English word 'happiness' for a pleasant, untroubled, and potentially transitory state of mind, we also sometimes use it for a long-term state of well-being. In this context we often *talk as if* there is an objective fact of the matter about what well-being consists in.

Imagine that your friends have their first baby and they are talking about what kind of life they want her to have.[7] Will she grow up to be a doctor or a scientist or a concert pianist? You say, very sensibly, "I just hope she'll be happy." I take it that it is inconsistent with your wish for

her that she be a drug addict or mass murderer who has a pleasant and untroubled state of mind. What you wish for her is a long-term state of proper functioning—that she will develop the particular talents she possesses and successfully integrate the exercise of these natural gifts into a life that includes love, intellectual investigation, self-discovery, economic means sufficient to her needs, and so on. Happiness in this sense is "a good life," and not merely in the narrowly moral sense that she doesn't do morally wicked things. What you want for her is that she is able to "live well." To the extent that we go in for this kind of talk and regard it as sensible, we also seem committed to the idea that there is a good life for an agent and that the character of this good life is not simply to be determined by reference to that particular agent's conception of the good.

Suppose that this little thought example is enough to establish that we, in fact, often *talk as if* there is such a thing as *eudaimonia*. You might still think that this talk is mistaken. The hard question is "What then could determine the content of this objective notion of human flourishing?" This hard question is also doubtless beyond the scope of this paper. Unfortunately, I don't think I'll persuade many people unless I at least say *something* about it, so here is a tentative suggestion. Suppose we consider ourselves in the counterfactual situation in which we are very fully informed about the nature of the actual world and fully rational.[8] In this situation we may not know the exact course that the lives of our actual selves will take—our information may not be so full that we know the truth value of every future contingent proposition about our actual selves. But we are in possession of a great deal of information about, say, how it feels to be the victim of racial discrimination, what it is like to be good at maths, what will happen to the earth if we continue to produce greenhouse gases, what unrequited love is like. Under such conditions, we might not be in a position to give our actual selves much advice about what *specific actions* to take. Remember that there is much that we do not know. Nonetheless, such fully rational and better-informed selves will be in a position to say *what sort of persons* they think it would be in our interest to try to become and what sorts of goals and values we ought to have. Suppose further that one had the rather optimistic view that the sorts of persons our respective ideal selves would counsel our actual selves to become would be importantly similar. This, in effect, is the place at which teleology enters in.

Why should we expect convergence? Because human beings share a common human nature whose fullest articulation would push them toward shared conceptions of what it is to live that kind of life well.

Doubtless, they would also be different in many important ways. But we would have enough convergence for Aristotle's picture of human flourishing in the *Ethics* if our ideal selves supposed that our actual selves would be better off if we were all to become even-tempered, self-controlled, courageous, just in our dealings with one another, the sort of persons who cultivated interests in philosophy and science—in short, people who possessed and exercised Aristotle's practical and theoretical virtues. If the reason for the convergence were supposed to lie in our common nature as human beings, then there would be some justification for Aristotle's view that our common human nature determines a common concept of the good life.

These remarks are certainly no proof of the existence of such an objective and universal human good. The conditions of the counterfactual situation we are supposed to imagine would need to be stated in much more detail. Moreover, the optimistic assumption that in such a situation judgements about how we would want ourselves to be would converge is just that: an optimistic assumption. The only point I want to make here is that this concept of a *telos* of human life which is both natural and morally significant does not presuppose anything like the sense of purpose in nature that Priest claims we can no longer believe in. It is a moral teleology that seems metaphysically innocuous.

2. *Virtues and Vices*

What happens if we accept for the moment that there is such a state as objective human flourishing? Character traits which enable one to perform the distinctively human function well are called by neo-Aristotelians *moral* virtues. Those that detract from our capacity for human flourishing are called vices. Of course this is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for a character trait to be a moral virtue or vice. If philosophical contemplation is part of the good for human beings, then being highly intelligent is an excellence or *aretê*, but it hardly seems right to say that stupidity is a vice.[9] For Aristotle, an excellence of practical wisdom or a moral virtue is a state of character *concerned with choice—a hexis proairetikê*—which lies in a mean between excess and defect.

Aristotle is generous in his notion of what "concerned with choice" amounts to, since he thinks that there are virtues and vices that involve emotions like anger. Though we may not at the moment choose whether to become angry or not, we choose to become the kind of persons who are, say, too quick-tempered by dint of repeatedly allowing our tempers to get the better of us. The same can be said for desires. Reflective and determined agents can, through their actions, become the kind of people who *like* their five kilometre run on the beach every morning. Neo-Aristotelians give a similarly broad role to reason and choice in moral psychology. It remains to be seen whether sexual perversions can be analysed in terms of moral vices—some kind of impairment of our capacity for leading and human (and thus rational) life.

3. An initial approach to the nature of perversion

a. What sort of dispositions?

One way to approach the question of sexual perversion from an Aristotelian point of view would be to treat them as moral vices. Thus, rather than providing an account of what it is for an *act* to be sexually perverted, the Aristotelian will ask whether a standing disposition to some form of sexual behaviour is a vice, a sexual perversion.[10] It is a vice just in case it is a disposition that is somehow a matter of choice and in some way inhibits human flourishing. Particular acts are perverted just in case they are the kind of acts that agents who have sexual perversions regularly desire in virtue of being perverted. But to what particular kind of disposition do sexual perversions belong? This needs to be spelled out with some care, though I think that there is no entirely satisfactory answer.

Suppose that I regularly choose to eat vanilla slice. Because of some strange interaction between my rather idiosyncratic body chemistry and vanilla slice, I then become such that if I were confronted with a sheep I would be strongly motivated to have sex with it and would enjoy this. But, as it stands, I am unaware of the effect that vanilla slice has on the counter-factuals that are true of me. In some sense, it is true that I am disposed to enjoy having sex with sheep. That is, I would enjoy this form of bestiality if I ever tried it. But, as it happens, there aren't any sheep in my neighbourhood and I go through the whole of my life blissfully unaware of this unactualised disposition. My disposition is something to

do with sex and something to do with choice—after all, I choose to eat vanilla slice—but it hardly seems to count as a perversion.

One initial thought is that it is my ignorance of the fact of this untapped source of sexual gratification that makes a difference. But suppose I am informed by my GP that I have this condition, so I know that I am disposed to strongly desire sex with sheep under the influence of certain sweets. This hardly seems to make a difference, even if I recklessly decide to continue my consumption of vanilla slice, trusting to luck that my city environs will keep my woolly friends safe from any sexual predation on my part. If this is right, then simply being disposed to be attracted to and enjoy certain kinds of sexual behaviour is not the relevant kind of disposition to count as a perversion.

Does it matter that I never actually have sex with an animal? The disposition can't be a perversion unless it is actualised? Here I think our intuitions may be divided. Imagine the agent who is sexually attracted to children but whose fear of arrest and prison means that he never acts on his feelings. Is this agent suffering from a perversion?

One line of thought would be that he is. This line of thought emphasises the idea that perversions are *patterns of desire* that are morally wrong. When we think about sexual perversion in this way, we think of it as something wrong with the agent. Some people find this line of thought too harsh: they suppose that it makes all the difference whether an agent acts on these desires. I think this cannot be entirely right. Suppose our agent thinks to himself, "I'm a wicked person. There is something wrong with me." If perversion is simply a matter of what one *does*, then the agent is mistaken in this judgement: he is not a bad person. This seems to me to be the wrong thing to say about this case.

Another line of thought would say no: the person who has sexual desires toward children but does not act on those desires is not a pervert. When we think about sexual perversion in this way, we think of it as a kind of action that some agent may choose to perform.

Which way of thinking about perversion is right? I think our intuitions are pulled in both ways and that we have different words which convey both these intuitions. Contrast 'paedophile' with 'child molester'. I think it may be sufficient for being a paedophile that one has a regular pattern of strongly desiring sexual contact with children. Child molesters, by contrast, are people who actually act on these desires. This duality in

the notion of perversion—between being a property of an agent or of an agent's actions—is part of what makes it hard to analyse.

The difficulty crops up in other ways too. Does it make a difference what an agent's attitude is toward his feelings of desire—whether he approves of these feelings or not? Suppose a person finds that he derives a sexual thrill at the thought of exposing himself to women, though he finds this revelation about himself deeply disturbing and wishes he did not derive sexual gratification from such fantasies. We might hesitate to call this person an exhibitionist. 'Exhibitionist', in contrast to 'paedophile', connotes a pattern of behaviour rather than a pattern of desire. We say that people like this have "exhibitionist tendencies." But this distinction seems little to do with the agent's attitudes toward his feelings except in as much as those attitudes inhibit him from acting on them.

Yet another complication is that a person may simply be wrong about what they are disposed to find sexually gratifying. So, suppose Ellen has all manner of sexual fantasies about making love with a woman.[11] She finds these fantasies are a ready source of sexual gratification. She also believes that she would find intense sexual pleasure in having a lesbian relationship. As it happens, she is wrong: repeated attempts with a great variety of different sorts of women under all sorts of circumstances leave her utterly sexually unfulfilled. Is Ellen a lesbian? Does Ellen even have lesbian tendencies? I myself am inclined to think that Ellen is simply confused.

These sorts of considerations suggest that there may not be only one kind of disposition that we ought to identify perversions with. I will, however, offer a paradigm case of the sort of disposition that I have in mind. It will, I believe, cover a fairly wide range of the interesting cases and it may be that it can be amended so as to take account of the kinds of differences noted above. (But even so, the previous paragraphs should alert us to the fact that no analysis may give us a very exact fit.) So my initial, rather crude, attempt at definition is that sexual perversions are to be identified with standing dispositions to derive sexual gratification in the prospect of a kind of sexual behaviour because one correctly believes that one would take pleasure in performing that kind of activity. Of course, this is only to identify the kind of disposition—Smith is presumably not a pervert if he has a standing disposition to derive sexual gratification in the prospect of intercourse with his wife with the lights off for the purpose of

having children. This section of the paper has only identified the sort of disposition we might call a sexual proclivity. It remains to be seen what *kinds* of sexual proclivities perversions are.

But even at this stage we can perhaps identify one small advantage in taking this path. It is proposed to identify sexual perversions with *standing dispositions* to find the prospect of some activity sexually gratifying. This means that they are dispositions that the agent has—and perhaps acts upon—over a significant period of time. Here we may invoke the wisdom of Voltaire. It is said that, having attended an orgy the previous evening, he was invited by his host to return for another night's entertainment. He allegedly replied, "To do these things once is to be a philosopher, but twice a pervert." I think common sense endorses a similar distinction between sexual curiosity and perversion. Not everyone who performs an act of the kind that perverts regularly perform is perverted. For this reason, it makes more sense to try to analyse perversion as a disposition to take sexual gratification in a kind of action, rather than as a class of actions.

b. Two platitudes about perversion

I have just noted one small point where common sense seems to fit nicely with the neo-Aristotelian approach. I now want to point out two much more substantive considerations abut the way that we ordinarily talk about perversion. Following recent usage, we might coin these two "platitudes" about perversion. Condemnation of sexual perversion typically has two strands. On the one hand, perverts are said to be sick: they have some sort of maladjustment that prevents them from being "normal"—that is, healthy and happy. So having perverted desires is thought to be *a bad thing for the person who has them*. But in addition, perversion is condemned from what a narrower Kantian approach would identify as "the moral point of view." Regardless of their effects on the well-being of perverted agents, *the having of these desires*—or if not the having the desires, at least the action based upon them—*is somehow just wrong*. Perversion is the kind of thing one ought to avoid not merely for prudential reasons.

The *eudaimonistic* approach holds out some promise of unifying these two strands of thought in ordinary discourse. According to the neo-Aristotelians, the notion of moral wrongness is related to an objective

conception of well-being: wrong acts are the kinds of things typically done by people who have character traits that stand in the way of living a genuinely happy life. Moral imperatives are not reduced to hypothetical imperatives of *simple* self-interest. Rather, the admonition to be virtuous is one that directs me to become the sort of person that *I ought to want to become*. Of course, I might actually have such a misguided notion of what happiness consists in that I have no desire whatsoever to become that kind of person. Thus the *eudaimonistic* approach to ethics honours both the intuition that *moral* imperatives are not contingent on the agent's actual desires for their normative force and the intuition that we all (somehow) have a reason to do what we morally ought to do. Thus such an approach stands a good chance of being able to explain the common intuition that perversions are both bad for the pervert and just plain bad.

c. An initial failure

Though this is a promising start, it seems to me that there is a significant obstacle to treating sexual perversions as themselves moral vices. It simply seems to beg the question at issue. A vice should be a state of character that is either widely agreed to be an impediment to our general and shared understanding of proper human functioning or can be shown to be inimical to proper human functioning once one is provided with a compelling and a clearer specification of what that is. So, cowardice is widely agreed to be a vice (though of course we may have disagreements about whether particular acts are cowardly). The claim that cowardice is a vice is one that is likely to be accepted even in advance of a clearer specification of what the good life consists in. This reflects the fact that we are pretty confident that *whatever* it consists in, it doesn't include failing to face danger for what one regards as important. Alternatively, if we are provided with a compelling argument that the full realisation of human nature is a life that includes friends and friendship, then we can argue back from this to the claim that states of character like buffoonery or boorishness—the excess and defect corresponding to Aristotle's social virtue of being ready-witted—are genuinely vices.

In the case of sexual perversion, those who are sceptical about this as a moral category are likely to say that it has all too frequently been treated like the case of cowardice—something that the good life *obviously* precludes.

But they will say, it is not at all clear that, say, the good life obviously precludes having a partner of the same sex or masturbating. And it is just an age-old prejudice that it does. Anyone who holds this view will regard the claim that sexual perversions are vices as facile and an appeal to outmoded ways of thinking. Nor do I think that the second strategy will work. In effect, I think that this is what Roger Scruton tries to accomplish in his treatment of sexual perversion. He argues that sexual perversions are inimical to the formation of the kind of sexual relations that are constitutive of happiness.

4. Scruton and Perversion

Like much in *Sexual Desire*, Scruton's account of the nature of sexual perversion is diffuse. On the one hand, it has a *kind of* Aristotelian thread to it, since Scruton believes that standing dispositions to perform some sexual acts are perversions because they divert our sexual impulses away from certain kinds of interpersonal relationships. These relationships (specifically heterosexual erotic love) are an important component of *eudaimonia*. On the other hand, it has something of a Kantian ring to it: at least *some* perversions involve a failure to treat another as a person rather than an object. Scruton writes:

> In sexual desire the companion is also the *object* of what is felt, and what is done is done *to* him. The complete or partial failure to recognise, in and through desire, the personal existence of the other is therefore an affront, both to him and to oneself. Moreover, in so divorcing sexual conduct from the impulse of accountability and care, we remove from the sphere of personal relations the major force which compels us to unite with others, to accept them and to compromise our lives on their account. In other words, we remove what is deepest in ourselves—our life—from our moral commerce, and set it apart, in a realm that is free from the sovereignty of a moral law, a realm of curious pleasure, in which the body is sovereign and obscene. (p. 289)

Just what does all this mean? It becomes somewhat clearer through Scruton's discussion of various forms of perversion. Bestiality, necrophilia and paedophilia are perversions because they do not involve a relationship in which the act can have the same significance for the other as it does for the pervert. This Scruton calls "the loss of interpersonal intentionality" (p. 293). What about cases where we have acts deemed to be

perverted between consenting agents for whom the act does hold the same significance? Here it seems to me that Scruton appeals to the idea of obscenity. For Scruton, obscenity is a property that attaches to ways of seeing objects, not to the objects themselves. A picture or an action is obscene just in case it demands or invites us to see it in an obscene way. "Obscenity involves a 'depersonalised' perception of human sexuality in which the body and it sexual function are uppermost in our thoughts and all-obliterating." (p. 138). It is this second aspect of perversion that comes to the fore when Scruton tries to explain how sexual activity between consenting persons might count as perverted. Clearly there can be as much "interpersonal intentionality" between two men as there can be between a man and a woman. Since Scruton wants to argue that homosexuality really is a form of perversion, he needs to show that it is obscene. He tries to do this by painting it as a kind of moral cowardice: homosexual relationships are narcissistic and avoid confrontation with a genuine *Other* (p. 310).

Primoratz's criticisms of Scruton pursue the Kantian thread in this. He points out that casual and mercenary sex are depersonalised in a sense that seems relevant to Scruton's analysis of perversion.[12] In such relations, the person is not treated as the particular and unique person that he or she is. Yet it seems doubtful that a standing disposition to regard sex with prostitutes or nearly anonymous one-night stands as desirable counts as a perversion. Scruton *may* succeed in giving an account of sexual behaviour that most people would regard as less than ideal, but it is not an account of what we ordinarily mean by "perversion." This seems fair enough.

I am more interested in Graham Priest's criticisms since these pursue the Aristotelian thread in Scruton's account. This thread is aptly illustrated in the following passage from Scruton:

> [Perversion] can be simply described as the habit of finding a sexual release that avoids or abolishes the *other*, obliterating his embodiment with the obscene perception of his body. Perversion is narcissistic, often solipsistic, involving strategies of replacement which are intrinsically destructive of personal feeling. Perversion therefore prepares us for a life without personal fulfilment, in which no human relation achieves foundation in the acceptance of the other, as this acceptance is provided by desire. (p. 343)

In short, perversions are dispositions to sexual behaviour that are incompatible with personal fulfillment. Since the latter is an important constituent of happiness, perversions are incompatible with living the good life.

Priest raises two sorts of doubt about Scruton's picture.

> Are there any kinds of human relationship that are necessary for a person to be happy, fulfilled, etc? Bearing in mind the multitude of things that people find fulfilling (which include a life of celibacy—or even of a hermit) one might well doubt this. But even if there are, it is doubtful that the sexual actions traditionally accounted as perverted must hinder them. (p. 369)

With respect to the first point, it is important to remember the distance between the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* and some—though, importantly, not *all*—of our uses of 'happiness'. An agent can surely be mistaken in her belief that she is living a flourishing human life. Thus, it need not automatically follow from the fact that hermits and celibate people regard their lives as fulfilling that they aren't lacking an important component of *eudaimonia*. They may simply be wrong about what happiness or flourishing consists in. So Scruton, or neo-Aristotelians in general, need not regard this as a devastating criticism.

This brings us to Priest's second doubt: do the sexual activities that are traditionally regarded as perversions really inhibit the formation and maintenance of relations of erotic love? Priest observes that *any* sexual activity in which one over-indulges can cause trouble for close interpersonal relationships, even if it is the kind of sex that no one would regard as perverted. On the other hand, any kind of consensual kink practised in moderation would seem to be compatible with the formation and maintenance of relations of erotic love. This becomes pretty clear when we turn to some of Scruton's examples of perversion. In his discussion of masturbation, Scruton distinguishes a form of masturbation in which the agent fantasises in such a way as to depersonalise the object of the fantasy. Such objectification will clearly render it a perversion by his lights. But he then argues that even masturbation which does not involve such fantasies is obscene. Recall that "obscenity involves a 'depersonalised' perception of human sexuality in which the body and its sexual function are uppermost in our thoughts and all-obliterating." (p. 138). He provides the following example of the obscenity of masturbation:

> Consider the woman who plays with her clitoris during the act of coition. Such a person affronts her lover with the obscene display of her body, and, in perceiving her thus, the lover perceives his own irrelevance. She becomes disgusting to him, and his desire may be extinguished. The woman's desire

> is satisfied at the expense of her lover's, and no real union can be achieved between them. The incipient obscenity of masturbation threatens the intentionality of desire, and brings us constantly to the verge of perversion. Hence it is wholly natural to us to perceive our own flesh as "forbidden territory." (p. 319)

You may decide for yourself whether you think that a standing disposition to engage in this kind of sexual activity constitutes a "strategy of replacement which [is] intrinsically destructive of personal feeling" (Scruton, p. 343). I myself don't. Indeed, I think that there is a case to be made for the view that such activity might be conducive to erotic love. We can well imagine that it took a fair bit of trust and sharing between partners before they could both enjoy this sexual act. Perhaps her male partner had to learn enough about her sexuality to come to the recognition that the failure of mere penetration to stimulate her to orgasm was no reflection on his masculinity. Perhaps she had to read enough about human sexuality to set aside certain notions of female sexuality, so that both partners could now relish the "awful wantonness" that one or both might have previously thought indecent. In general, it seems to me that Scruton's remarks say a great deal about what Roger Scruton thinks is inimical to a relation of erotic love (indeed, rather more than I wanted to know!) but I suspect that most people regard it as less than obvious that such behaviour closes the agent off from the good life.

Generally speaking, the problem with Scruton's approach is that it is a very simple approach: the things that are traditionally alleged to be sexual perversions prohibit the formation of a kind of relationship which is itself a valuable element of happiness. As Priest points out, it is doubtful whether this is true, even if we grant that there are human relationships which are essential to a happy life. We shall now consider an approach to defining sexual perversions which makes their relationship to happiness much more complex.

5. Sexual perversion and the fabric of character

We have noted some disadvantages that attach to the suggestion that perversions are themselves moral vices. We have also seen some reason to reject Scruton's account that makes perversions incompatible with what he deems to be a particular element of the good life—heterosexual erotic

love. But this need not rule out an analysis that says that they are *inextricably linked* with moral vices. My suggestion is this: Some standing dispositions to regard a kind of sexual activity as desirable are regarded as sexual perversions because they are manifestations in the sphere of the sexual of other more far-reaching moral vices. Others are called sexual perversions because possession of these dispositions is thought to be psychologically incompatible with the possession of some recognised moral virtue. At least this is what I claim guides many of our common-sense judgements about whether a sexual practice is perverted or not. So the proposed analysis is disjunctive:

> A standing disposition, P, to take sexual gratification in a particular kind of activity, or at the prospect of it, is a sexual perversion if and only if *either*
>
> (a) there is some moral virtue, A (for *aretê*), such that as a matter of at least nomological necessity, no one who has P can have A; *or*
> (b) there is some moral vice, K (for *kakia*), such that as a matter of at least nomological necessity, anyone who has P must also have K.

There are several points to make about the proposed analysis.

First, the standing disposition can be one to take sexual gratification either in an activity or at the prospect of the activity. The latter disjunct is there because I'm inclined to think that the agent who fantasises about, say, having sex with children but who never works up the courage to do so is sexually perverted (cf. Section 3a above). If you don't share this intuition, you might still be able to accept the analysis with this disjunct deleted.

Next, the idea behind the two conditions (a) and (b) is that some perversions preclude virtues and some necessitate vices. Naturally any perversion that necessitates a vice precludes the corresponding virtue. So any time condition (b) is satisfied, so is (a). If you hold a view about virtues and vices according to which lacking a virtue entails possessing some corresponding vice, then you will think that any time condition (a) is satisfied, so is (b). I myself don't hold such a view about virtues and vices and so have included both conditions.

Third, the analysis makes the connection between perversion and vice (or the absence of virtue) *at least* nomological. Some perversions

might be such that, though they are a *different condition* from the vice in question, nonetheless human beings are such that one couldn't have a disposition to regard that kind of behaviour as desirable unless one also had a particular moral vice. In other cases, it might be that the sexual behaviour is itself a *manifestation* of the vice. So, one might claim that the disposition to regard forcible rape as desirable is itself a manifestation in sexual terms of the more broad-ranging vice of brutality (or whatever we might call the character trait of those who enjoy inflicting harm on others). Alternatively, one might regard it as a particularly sexual vice but nonetheless the kind of disposition one couldn't have without also being brutal. (I suppose in some sense these two ways of looking at rapists roughly correspond to the competing views that rape is about violence and that it is about sex.) Condition (b) allows for either kind of connection between the perversion and the vice.

Finally, I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not think that all the things that have been thought traditionally to be perversions are such that they meet these conditions. Rather, I want to claim that this is the framework within which people argue about whether something really is a perversion or not. Our (relatively) enlightened attitudes toward many sexual practices have come about as a result of the realisation that these practices do not actually meet these conditions, though they were once widely thought to meet them.

6. Applications

Let us see how the analysis works with some cases that were or are widely thought to be cases of sexual perversion.

a. homosexuality

I think it is plausible that male homosexuality was thought to be a perversion because it was thought to be incompatible with the possession of a particular virtue—and perhaps even to necessitate a kind of vice. It would require a detailed study of representations of male homosexuality to fully vindicate this claim, but I can assemble a few illustrations that at least motivate its *prima facie* plausibility. Let's start with an ancient example. It is a commonplace of Classical scholarship that the Greeks lacked our concept of homosexuality.[13] At different times in a man's life, it was not unusual for him to enter into same-sex relations in different

ways. The institution of pederasty had quite rigid roles in which the older male *erastes* was the active partner whose sexual desire for the adolescent *eroumenos* was not meant to be reciprocated. While the latter might have *philia* or respect or affection for the man in his life, he was not supposed to be sexually aroused by him. What was regarded as scandalous was to be the passive recipient of homosexual contact at an age beyond that of the normal *eroumenos* or even to be enthusiastic about being anally—or especially orally—penetrated at any age. To be blunt, to be keen on being fucked was to be a *kinaidos*, a pathic. On the whole, Greek representations of pederasty maintain what was doubtless in many cases a fiction that the youth was not actually anally penetrated. Thus there is a certain sense in which it is misleading to talk about "Greek homosexuality." If all one means is that males in this period had sexual relations with other males, then there is nothing misleading in the label 'homosexuality'. But if we transpose more of our understanding of homosexuality onto the ancient context, so that we imagine the existence of same-sex relations of reciprocal desire and sexual satisfaction, then we invite serious misconceptions. But even where we do not have a sexual practice that can be rightly called "homosexuality" in the latter sense of the term, we can see a similar pattern of reasoning in the condemnation of the role of sexual pathic.

In the trial of Timarchos, Aeschines alleges that Timarchos took payment for sex. Prostitution was sufficient to disqualify one from public speaking, perhaps because it was assumed that since money changed hands, the lover could do anything that he wanted with the prostitute including "unmanning" him by fucking him. Aeschines accuses Timarchos of *kinaidia* as a boy by playing on his nickname, *Batalos* (bum boy?) and subsequently characterises him as effete, womanly and cowardly. Dover remarks on this episode

> . . . the passages quoted above are significant for popular opinion in their exploitation for the purpose of practical politics, of an association of effeminacy and passivity with homosexuality[14]

The alleged connection between passive homosexuality and the lack of courage is explicit in Plato's *Laws*:

> Come then, suppose we assume this [sc. pederasty] is now legalised, and that it is noble and in no way shameful. To what extent will this promote virtue? Will it produce in the soul of the one who is seduced a courageous character? Or in the soul of the seducer the quality of temperance? Nobody would ever

> believe this. On the contrary, on the one hand, everyone will censure the cowardice or effeminacy (*malakia*) of the one who always yields to pleasures and is never able to hold out against them. On the other hand, will they not also blame the likeness to his model when he imitates the woman? (836d–e)[15]

I think that this association between cowardice, effeminacy and the *kinaidos* has survived the death of the Greeks' sexual categories. Prior to our own century, it was common to talk of "sexual inversion." David Halperin credits Havelock Ellis for trying to pry apart sexual object choice from role categories like masculine ("manly") and feminine ("womanly").[16] The legacy of this long association is an epithet like "Nancy boy" and depictions of the fighting prowess of "pansies" like the following from Raymond Chandler:

> 'All right,' I [Marlowe] said. 'You have a key. Let's go on it.'
> 'Who said I had a key?'
> 'Don't kid me, son. The fag gave you one. You've got a nice clean manly little room in there. He shooed you out and locked it up when he had lady visitors. He was like Caesar, a husband to women and a wife to men. Think I can't figure people like him and you out?'
>
> I still held the automatic more or less pointed at him, but he swung on me just the same. It caught me flush on the chin. I backstepped fast enough to keep from falling, but I took plenty of the punch. It was meant to be a hard one, but a pansy has no iron in his bones, whatever he looks like.[17]

The suggestion, then, is that male homosexuality—and before that, the distinct condition of *kinaidia*—was once thought to be a perversion because it was incompatible with a distinctively male kind of courage. Of course, this is probably not the full story. More visceral attitudes toward sexual practices that people imagine they themselves would not enjoy doubtless figure into it as well. Because of this element of revulsion, the perversion label can linger even when nearly everyone has ceased to believe that gay men are sissies. (Though one wonders what it means when the armed forces in the United States still regard homosexuality as inimical to "good order and discipline.")

If this is a proper diagnosis of why male homosexuality was once regarded as a perversion, a similar story about "sexual inversion" can be told for female homosexuality. To return to the Greeks, there is some suggestion that at Sparta there was an institution among women parallel to that between the older male *erastes* and the younger *eroumenos* (Plutarch,

Lyc. 18.9), but we hear far less about sexual relations between women. Dover speculates that it may have been a taboo subject, at least in Attic art and literature (p. 183). However, Roman depictions of female same-sex relations paint just the picture of role reversal that we might expect from the treatment of male sexual pathics. Perhaps the most explicit is Martial. He assumes that *tribads*[18] are sufficiently masculine as to be capable of penetrating men. Their real objective is to become manly and so in some sense to become *men*:

> Philaenis the tribad butt-fucks (*pedicat*) boys
> and fiercer than a husband's prick
> cleaves eleven girls every day. (VII.67, 1–3)

Martial then tells us that she engages in masculine activities like weight-training, wrestling, guzzling wine until she vomits, and consuming vast quantities of the kinds of chops favoured by athletes. But Martial implies that her efforts at manliness are all undermined by her willingness to have oral sex with women.

> After these things, when she's randy,
> she doesn't suck (*fellat*)—she thinks this is unmanly (*parum virile*)—
> but simply devours the middles of girls.
> The gods send you back your mind, Philaenis,
> you who think that licking cunt is manly! (VII.67, 13–17)

In the Romans' ranking of sexual power in terms of penile penetration, cunnilingus is an absolute abomination. It is bad enough for a passive man to have a penis inserted into his mouth. But the Romans seem to have thought that in the act of cunnilingus one was symbolically fucked by a woman. And if it is bad to be fucked by another man, it is *unthinkable* to be fucked by one who is by nature passive and submissive! No *man* would think about doing this. So Philaenis' attempts at being manly by refusing to fellate men are utterly undermined by her desire to "lick cunt." Martial thinks that lesbians are out of their minds—they lack a kind of practical wisdom about who they are. Indeed, Philaenis is so out of her mind that she can't even effectively play the role she mistakenly wants to occupy!

Compton Mackenzie's satire of lesbians in *Extraordinary Women* appeared shortly after Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928. Mackenzie is not nearly so mean-spirited as Martial. Indeed, one might

argue that all the lovers in *Extraordinary Women*, whether lesbian or not, are sent up. But the central figure of Rory Freemantle is treated in a fashion that evokes Martial in many ways. She is mannish, affecting a tie, a monocle and a cigar. She imagines that she is very different from ordinary (i.e., heterosexual) women and is far more "manly":

> And she owed an apology to Rosalba. She owed it to her. Rosalba had been right all the time. There would be no feebleness in apologising and begging her forgiveness. Thank heaven, women of her temperament had a sense of justice denied to the cowardly slaves of men's desires. They knew when they were in the wrong and could admit it. The contemptible instinct to protect themselves against the male prevented ordinary women from ever doing that, prevented from every rising above the mentality of the criminal in the dock. (p. 150)

But, of course, her brave talk comes to nothing, and in the space of a few pages she is literally crying her monocle into her grenadine. Kinder and less vulgar, to be sure, but the point seems to be the same that Martial is making: lesbians are self-deluded and inept. They are trying to be manly (or to be men) and making a very bad job of it.

There has been thought to be a kind of specifically feminine realisation of the flourishing life and a kind of feminine virtue is deemed to be essential to the realisation of this "womanly flourishing." Lesbian desire is thought to be at least psychologically incompatible with this virtue. Moreover, to the extent that lesbians aim at the inappropriate gendered good—the good for *men*—they must inevitably fall short and be self-deluded. These illustrations lend some support to the idea that lesbians are perverted because their sexual proclivities are inevitably connected with the absence of some trait thought to be a moral virtue.

b. Sexual perversions and other-regarding values

If we accept Aristotle's idea that vices are connected with mistaken views of the good, we can make further progress in diagnosing why some dispositions to sexual behaviour are called perversions. Some of these values will be other-regarding. One might reasonably doubt that paedophiles and people who regularly have sex with animals or corpses hold autonomy as an important value. This is pretty clear in the first case: there are serious questions about whether children have sufficient understand-

ing to enter into consensual sexual relations. In the case of necrophilia, there is no question of consent at the time of the act. But one might well suspect that the person who has sex with a corpse—typically the corpse of someone who, when living, would not have wanted such sexual activity to take place with their remains—will be disinclined to respect the autonomy of others. Zoöphilia is typically (and perhaps mistakenly?) thought always to involve cruelty to the animal. If it does, then this seems incompatible with the virtue of kindness. We may doubt whether sexual sadists, voyeurs and exhibitionists are able to exercise proper sensitivity to the feelings and desires of others in non-sexual contexts. What I am suggesting is that we have a virtue, or perhaps a handful of virtues, that we gesture toward by saying things like "he is respectful of others" or "he is properly sensitive to people's feelings," In regarding necrophilia, paedophilia and zoöphilia as perversions, we implicitly indicate that we think these sexual dispositions are incompatible with the possession of this virtue or virtues. We may, of course, be wrong about this, and in that case we ought to cease to regard these standing sexual preferences as perverted.

c. Sexual perversion and self-regarding virtues

Some of the values that we suppose are connected with perversions will be bound up with the agent's own good rather than that of others. Will the conception of the good manifested in masochism, fetishism or coprophilia not spill over into the agent's assignment of values in other areas of life in a way that disrupts his capacity for deliberation? Will the agent who regards pain, patent-leather pumps and faeces as important goods be able to integrate these axiological oddities into his internal economy of value in a coherent way? If I am right, then the fact that these are sometimes labelled as perversions at least partly reflects our scepticism about the agent's ability to manage this trick. This may be for at least two reasons. First, there is the sheer oddness of some of the things that are desired. Second, even if the non-perverted can be brought to admit that some of the things that the fetishist focuses on give rise to a certain *frisson*, we may suppose that the risks that he takes in order to secure these things bespeaks an unbalanced set of priorities. Perhaps most men may derive a bit of a flutter from seeing the sexy neighbour's knickers on the line, but few would risk the consequences of actually stealing them. If the

pervert can neither detect the things that are genuinely good nor give various goods their proper weight, then he cannot have the virtue of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). If this is a constituent of *eudaimonia*, then his perversion dooms the agent to an unhappy life.

As with all the other examples that I have discussed in this section, I am not endorsing the alleged analytical or nomological links between these sexual proclivities and various moral vices. My point is simply to provide an illustration of the way in which certain psychological claims, taken in conjunction with what I claim is our ordinary conception of what a perversion is, yield as output a list of things sometimes thought to be perversions.

5. Two final objections

In this penultimate section, I want to address two potential objections. The first comes from Graham Priest's reply to the revised Aristotelianism he discerns in Scruton and concerns the difference between prudence and morality. Priest claims that it could be no part of the *moral* condemnation of a perversion that it prevents the agent from flourishing. The perversion would be foolish—rather like smoking—but it would not be immoral.

There is a sense in which this is right and a sense in which it is wrong. The inclusivist interpretation of Aristotle's ethics claims that the exercise of the moral virtues is a final good. A good is final (*teleion*) just in case it is sought for its own sake and not merely for the sake of something other than it (*EN* 1097a26–30). Virtuous actions are therefore to be chosen and vicious actions avoided in themselves. Now, if voyeurism were a perversion, one couldn't be virtuous and yet be a voyeur. Since the exercise of the virtues is a good to be sought for it sown sake, the reason to avoid voyeurism is not *simply* prudential. Dispositions to such activities would be (or would be inextricable from) dispositions to activities that were bad in themselves. But the inclusivist interpretation also insists that the exercise of the moral virtues is to be chosen for the sake of something beyond it. This something is happiness which the inclusivist identifies with the set of all final goods. The members of this set are final goods while the set itself is the *most final* (*teleiōtaton*) good—sought for its own sake and not also sought for the sake of anything further. So there is also

a sense in which we ought to choose virtue for the sake of something further. The end result is a view according to which moral imperatives are neither purely categorical nor merely hypothetical. So the right response to make to Priest's analogy with smoking is to grant that perversions are to be avoided partly for prudential reasons, but not entirely so. The blurring of the boundaries between "pure self-interest" and "the distinctively moral" is just an inescapable feature of the *eudaimonist* approach to ethics.

The second objection is one that I owe to Barry Taylor. He notes that in my analysis, a disposition of the proper sort may count as a sexual perversion if it is nomologically connected to some vice or the absence of some virtue. Thus it could turn out that things that we don't think of as perversions should actually be so. Worse, things that we think *couldn't possibly* be perversions because of the very meaning of that term, could actually turn out to be perversions. So someone might argue that it is just an analytic truth that sex with one's spouse for the express purpose of procreation performed in the missionary position with the lights turned out is not perverted. Now, suppose that being boring is a vice. (And this in itself is perhaps not so silly: Aristotle regards being witty as a virtue, while being unable to take or make a joke is a vice, cf. *EN* IV.8.) Moreover, suppose that a standing disposition to take sexual gratification at the prospect of monogamous sex in the missionary position is found to be inextricably linked with being boring. Will it not follow on my account that this sexual proclivity—something, which as a matter of analytic truth, could not possibly be a perversion—will be counted as one?

I think I must respond by denying that any particular sexual taste is paradigmatically perverted or not perverted. Naturally, we might be quite reluctant to suppose that such statistically normal sexual activities might be perverted. But, as we noted above, the sense of normalcy opposed to perversion is not a statistical one. We do tend to assume that we as a species are not too far out of touch with the good for us. Thus if the sexual practice that is allegedly discovered to be perverted were very widespread, we would doubtless want plenty of evidence that it was linked with some vice or plenty of reasons for supposing that the trait it was linked to was really a vice. But Taylor is right to point out that this is a consequence of my view. Having said a few things about why it only seems to be an absurd consequence, in the final analysis, I think I must just out-Smart the objection.

6. Conclusion

I have provided a brief account of what a sexual perversion is. I think it is fruitful to evaluate the account by more than whether it maps the extension of our everyday concept of sexual perversion. It would appear that there is substantive disagreement about what kinds of sexual activities are perverted. We can now see some of the sources of that disagreement:

— We may disagree about whether a disposition to regard a particular kind of sexual activity as desirable really is inextricably linked to some form of moral shortcoming.

— We may be so epistemologically cautious about the content of the good life that we decline to describe any character trait that does not involve dispositions to harm others as a vice. Thus we have a significantly reduced conception of moral virtues and vices and a commensurately reduced notion of what sexual inclinations might be inextricably connected with vice or the absence of virtue.

My account attempts to explain what the disagreement is about and gives us an interesting moral question to try to answer. I think that perversions, if there are any such things, are either sexual manifestations of various aspects of bad moral character or states that are psychologically inextricable from bad moral character. I am myself unsure whether there are any sexual perversions. Unlike Scruton, I am very confident that the psychological generalisations that have underwritten the claim that homosexuality is a perversion are false. One might well wonder, however, whether paedophiles or exhibitionists don't have dispositions which are inextricably tied to recognised moral vices. In this paper, though, I have simply been concerned to argue that ordinary moral discourse has sufficient implicit teleology to allow talk of sexual perversions to be meaningful. It might yet turn out that there are none.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Richard Hanley, Jeannette Kennett, Roger Lamb, Elaine Miller, Graham Oppy, Graham Priest, as well as audiences at Edinburgh, Monash University,

Melbourne University and the Research School of the ANU for comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am still not confident that what I have to say here is correct. I can say, however, that audiences have found it interesting and it has generated discussions that I've both enjoyed and found illuminating.

2. Graham Priest, "Sexual Perversion," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997), 360–72; Igor Primoratz, "Sexual Perversion," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997), 245–58.

3. *Sexual Desire* (London, 1986).

4. Primoratz thinks that the disagreement about what behaviours are perverted bodes ill for any attempt at definition. He writes: "Ordinary discourse is thus quite unhelpful, and there is not much point nor, indeed, much chance of success in attempts to formulate a definition of sexual perversion that would capture the meaning of the term in ordinary discourse." (*art. cit.* p. 246).

5. Some readers of Aristotle will object that there is more to an *ergon* than this. *Ergon* is related to form or *eidos* and form is not simply *the pattern* of activity that allows something to count as a thing of kind K, but rather the *causal source* of such behaviour. The issue has been given a sharp focus in recent discussions of Aristotle's philosophy of mind. Is sensitive soul—the form of a kind of body potentially having a particular kind of life—a capacity that supervenes on changes in the organs of vision or hearing or some (non-physical?) causal source of the capacity to register changes in the organs in a way that involves awareness? Myles Burnyeat has argued for the latter. If he is right, it is not plausible to read Aristotle's philosophy of mind as an early form of functionalism ("Is Aristotle's Philosophy of Mind Still Credible?" in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty [eds.], Oxford, 1992).

Whatever we say about the relation of form to matter in Aristotle's writings, we neo-Aristotelians need not be bound in our theorising by the Stagarite's original views. We think that the lesson to be learned from reflection on Aristotle's writings is that many things are what they are because of the pattern of activity that they exhibit. Thus we neo-Aristotelians say that an organism has the property of being in pain just in case it is in a state typically caused by certain inputs, typically giving rise to certain outputs and other internal-state changes. Similarly, we now say that to talk about a human function is to talk about a pattern of activity that makes an organism a human person. Human persons are to be distinguished from things that *look* like human persons, like brain-dead accident victims, but which do not exhibit over a suitable period of time any signs of the human *ergon*.

6. Some of the best papers on the topic are included in A. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1908), but see also Jennifer Whiting, "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defence," *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988), 33–48.

7. I develop this point from Richard Kraut's "Two Conceptions of Happiness," *The Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 167–97.

8. This suggestion is essentially Michael Smith's account of normative reasons transposed into the key of virtue ethics (*The Moral Problem* [Oxford, 1994], 130 sq.). Very roughly, Smith thinks that an agent has a normative reason to ϕ in C if the agent's fully informed and fully rational self would advise the agent to ϕ in C. The fully informed and fully rational version of me thus becomes the measure of what I ought to do and hold to be valuable.

9. The view that treats traits that promote flourishing as virtues and their opposites as vices *regardless of whether such traits are up to us* is very much like the Homeric con-

ception of virtue. Achilles' physical prowess is part of what makes him a good man. Cf. William Prior, *Virtue and Knowledge* (London, 1991), ch. 1.

10. My strategy will therefore be exactly opposite to Priest's. He approaches the question of perversion by focusing on actions rather than dispositions (p. 360, n.1).

11. Suppose for the sake of argument that we take homosexuality to be a perversion. I think that was at one time widely regarded as such. In fact, I think it is not, and in Section 6a I provide a diagnosis of reasons why it was mistakenly thought to be.

12. Primoratz does not delve deeply into Scruton's book to prove this point, and I can sympathise with his reluctance to do so. *Sexual Desire* is long on assertion and short on argument. But Scruton's remarks on the perverted form of sado-masochism suggest that Primoratz is right to suppose that casual sex would meet Scruton's criteria for perversion. Scruton writes: "Sadism is perverted, in that it seeks to abolish the personal object of desire from the sexual act and replace him with a compliant dummy." (p. 302).

13. Dover sums the point up very nicely: "So long as we think of the world as divided into homosexuals and heterosexuals and regard the commission of a homosexual act, or even the entertaining of a homosexual desire, as an irrevocable step across a frontier which divides the normal, healthy, sane, natural and good from the abnormal, morbid, insane, unnatural and evil, we shall not get very far in understanding Greek attitudes to homosexuality." (*Greek Homosexuality* [London, 1978], p. 183).

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

15. It is hard to know whether Plato here accuses the seducer and penetrator with being effeminate or whether this is a second charge against the one who is seduced. Plato's grammar certainly suggests the former. If this is so, then the usual remarks about the Greek's sexual categories being different from ours, and the idea that stigma attaches only to the one who is penetrated needs to be taken with a grain of salt.

16. *One Hundred Years of Greek Homosexuality* [New York, 1990), p. 21.

17. *The Big Sleep* (Harmondsworth, 1939), p. 99.

18. From the verb for 'to rub'. 'Lesbian' is not used in antiquity uniquely to denote women who regularly prefer to have sex with women. The island is associated with sexual excess of all sorts, but particularly with the act of fellatio. Thus in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, 1345, a drunken party-goer says to the pretty flute girls, "I got you out of there pretty quickly when you were about to *lesbiazein* the other guests."