

Sexual Perversion, Thomas Nagel

“perversion”: According to what criteria is it used: moral or descriptive (non-moral)?

(A) If X is a sexual perversion (SP) (psychological concept), then X is in some sense an (a) unnatural, (b) sexual inclination, and (c) practice.

(B) 1.If deviation from reproductive practices were sufficient for sexual perversion, then *wherever* there would be deviant reproductive practices, they would be labeled “SP”.

2.We don’t apply “SP” to all deviant reproductive practices of animals, plants (e.g., seedless grapes, oranges), insects, and humans (e.g., sterility, miscarriage, contraception, abortion).

3. So, deviant reproductive practices is not sufficient for sexual perversion.

(C) Social disapproval of sexual practices is not sufficient for SP, for where adultery or fornication are socially disapproved, they are not considered SP.

Opposing view (best?):

1.Sexual desire is an appetite (like hunger, thirst).

2.[No appetite is a perversion.]

3.So, no sexual desire is a perversion. *Problem:* Premise 2 is false.

Appetite for non-nourishing stuff (paper, sand, wood, cotton) is not a SP, for there is no *psychological complexity* [necessary condition? 204.2.3] Perverted hunger: appetite for cookbooks, pictures of food, napkins from favorite restaurants; eating only by being force fed. They undermine (a) the “natural” expression of hunger, (b) the direct relation between man and food.

What is the object of sexual desire?

(a) Persons A, B, C, D sexually desire person E for the different qualities of E (e.g., hair, height, etc.). They all have sexual different sexual goals about E. *The object of all their desires is the same person.* (b) Persons A, B, C, D desire omelet O for the different qualities of O (e.g., its mushrooms, aroma, fluffiness, etc.). They have different goals (end hunger, savor aroma, etc.). *We would not say:* the object of all their desires is the same omelet. [True?] [This is assumed to apply to all non-human objects. True?] So, the object of *sexual* desire is an individual who “transcends” his/her qualities.

Sexual desire involves a complex system of overlapping mutual perceptions. (206.1.3)

Given persons A, B.

1st level: (a) A is sexually attracted to B because of certain qualities of B; B is not aware of this attraction; and so is not sexually attracted to A.

2nd level: (a) A is sexually attracted to B because of certain qualities of B; (b) A notices B’s sexual desire for A. The attraction is no longer solitary. A experiences a sense of “embodiment” through A and B’s reactions: interpersonal sexual awareness.

3rd level: (a) A is sexually attracted to B because of certain qualities of B; (b) A notices B’s sexual desire for A. (c) A is further aroused by B’s desire for A. (207.2.2?)

Some version of this schematic overlapping system of sexual perceptions and interactions is the basic framework of any full-fledged sexual relation(206.2.3), the basic psychological content of sexual interaction (208.1.3). [Why? Evidence?

Are all these levels necessary (e.g., having sex just to reproduce)?

Can there be other criteria of a “full-fledged” sexual relation?

What are the positive potentials of sexual intimacy – aside from the above system?

What blocks the actualization of those potentials?]

Not every deviation of this system is a SP, e.g., indulge in private fantasies and avoids truly recognizing the other (207.2.3)

If humans will tend to develop some version of reciprocal interpersonal sexual awareness unless prevented, then cases of blockage are “unnatural” or perverted (208.1.1).

Stuck at the 1st level: narcissistic practices, intercourse with animal, children, inanimate objects, voyeurism, exhibitionism.

Stuck at the 2nd level: Sadism and masochism fall short of interpersonal reciprocity (208.2.3) [???

Sadism evokes passive [??] self-awareness in the other.

Any bodily contact that gives sexual pleasure can conform to the system of multi-level interpersonal awareness, so any (??) sexual activity between consenting adults is morally acceptable.

Homosexuals can desire on all three levels, gay sex is not necessarily perverted.

Unperverted sex is not necessarily preferable to perverted sex. If sexual enjoyment is very important, in some cases it can outweigh multi-level interpersonal awareness. So, judgments of perversion (non-moral) constitute only one aspect of the evaluation of sex.

Describe genuine cases of sexual perversion.

Describe genuine cases of sexual non-perversion.

Describe marginal cases of sexual perversion.