

PHL606 Philosophy of Love and Sex

Sexual Ethics Essay

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Topic 1: Critically discuss Elliston's position on promiscuity and how Stewart would assess it.

The objective of this paper is to investigate and analyses Fredericks Elliston's position on promiscuity described in his paper *In Defense of Promiscuity*. Then contrasting his views with Robert M. Stewart's stance and how he would assess them. Presenting both Merits and faults of the Philosophers arguments. To conclude I will present a personal opinion and position on the subject matter.

To understand what Elliston's position is on promiscuity one first must understand how he defines promiscuity and why he came to accept that particular definition. After concluding that no proper definition existed he constructed his own. This definition is used develop an unbiased view. He asserts that promiscuity is sex with a series of other adults, not directly related through marriage with no commitments. The first challenge was to build a definition that was unbiased. Using no language that has positive or negative connotation. Using phrase like just for fun or immoral acts have connotations and not necessarily even true. Using only what is required to define promiscuity and nothing additional is required for an accurate analysis. The characteristics are the act of sex, repetition of the act with multiple people, no commitment between these people and these people being adults not related (directly) by marriage. The last part is meant to exclude act such as pedophile and incest these being separate from promiscuity and will not be addressed any further in this paper or this one. Removing any of the other components would clearly allow acts that are obviously not promiscuous.

Elliston replies to several objections to sex with no commitment, these objections being it leads to lying, deceiving, and exploiting; it places an unfair disadvantage on women because of the double standard; it threatens one's personal emotional security and growth. After Elliston's analyses of each of these objections he concludes that they are not valid or sound. Looking at each in turn, according to cultural stereotypes those who are promiscuous are morally loose and will resort to lying, deceiving and exploitation to fulfil their sexual desires with no or little regard for others. Looking at Elliston's unbiased definition of promiscuity there seem to be nothing inherently in the definition that requires such immoral acts. It appears to be the case that because promiscuity has the negative social connotations it pushes people to immoral acts because they don't want to be ridiculed and judged by society. If the negative connotations did not exist there would be no need for lying, deceiving, or exploiting. Clearly the objections are with the acts of lying, deceiving, and exploiting not the act of promiscuity. The next objection involves the double standard that exists between men and women when promiscuity is involved. Society seems to be far more accepting of men who are promiscuous. Sometime even celebrating their sexual prowess. While a woman would be shunned for their loose morals. This shows that promiscuity is unfair and disadvantages women. Again there is nothing in the definition of promiscuity that disadvantages women. It is the double standard itself that is morally wrong not promiscuity. Finally Elliston argues against that commitment-less sex threatens personal emotional security and growth. The argument against promiscuity would say that the lack of self-discipline leads to promiscuity. Elliston believes one can have just as much self-discipline and be promiscuous the only difference is the discipline being directed at a different end goal. One could extend a large amount of such discipline and effort in acts of courting and sexual encounters. Furthermore someone who is never promiscuous could lack self-discipline in other disciplines. To conclude Elliston believes all the immoral and harmful acts associated with noncommittal sex have nothing directly to do with promiscuity and only exist because of the arbitrary social stigma that is present in modern western culture.

It has been shown that Elliston believes that the current mainstream objections to promiscuity have very little substance. He continues to present his own counter arguments that promotes promiscuity. Sex is more than the simple physical act that results in pleasures. It is also a complex body language capable of communicating many complex messages. The same as with any kind of language constant practice is needed to maintain and improve skill and accuracy of communicating. Promiscuity is a way to improves ones vocabulary in the art of the sexual body language. Improvement and proper uses of a language is instrumentally good in nature. Western norm restrict the language on what can be said, to who and how it can be said. This being it can be said to one person at a time (possible only a spouse) and only I love you can be communicated. Spoken languages clearly should not be restricted in this fashion so it follows that the sexual body language should also not be restricted. Another important tool Elliston uses to promote promiscuity is the Kant`s categorical imperative which states that you should never treat any one as merely an object to be used as means to an end. An opponent to promiscuity would say that that act clearly breaks this rule by using people as sex objects. This is not necessarily true promiscuity gives one the opportunity to treat others as more then sex objects and with respect making it instrumentally good in nature. Elliston uses a lengthy analogy between sex and dinning where he describes a situation where we restrict eating in the same way we do for sex. That is how, what and who we can dine with is strictly restricted by society. This would make dinning much less enjoyable. The prospect of eating the same thing, with the same person and in the same way for a life time seems unimaginably dull. It is commonly accepting that there is more to eating then just fulfilling the basic needs for nutrition. It follows that it is the same for sex and if sex become less socially restricted and allowing for unjudged promiscuity this would make peoples sex lives more enjoyable, fulfilling and satisfying. His Existential Defense uses the idea of a social matrix that we all exist in and the links between people define their socially relations and interactions with one another. Sexuality is key way people can interact. Promiscuity provides openness to these sexual interactions by allowing them to form

authentically in the social matrix. This is important because knowing accurately how one fits in the social matrix and the relations they have with others communicates to them what roles people should play in their lives, whether they should be friends or lovers. Elliston believes sex should come before love. This will make it more likely for one to have a life of satisfying sex. Deciding on a lifelong lover without performing the act of lovemaking first presents the possibility of there being no sexual chemistry. This could in turn end in an unhappy life and even deterioration of the love.

The philosopher Robert M. Stewart has his own views on the current state of the sexual culture present in society. Focusing on college students and the hook up culture that appears to be present and growing, Stewart brings forward the concept of junk sex. This is the kind of sex that serves no further meaning or purpose than the act of sex itself. He contrasts this with meaningful sex that can serve many important purposes that are instrumentally good. Purposes such as strengthening the connection of lovers, procreation and self-discovery are all examples of meaningful sex. Junk sex lacks these meaningful purposes, sex just for the pleasure, to improve one's social status or just for practice could all potentially be junk sex. Junk sex is meant to parallel junk food, they can both give fast momentary pleasure but are void of any deeper nurturance or purpose. Indulging only in junk leads to deterioration of health. Stewart would agree with Elliston that it is possible that non-committal sex can show respect to one's partner from the point of view of Kantian considerations of autonomy and rights. It is not the non-committal sex that is disrespectful but the sex being junk sex that could lead to disrespect. Promiscuity that involves meaningful sex can show respect. Stewart does believe there is nothing morally wrong with the occasional junk sex, just like food it can be pleasurable and on occasion it has no adverse effects on overall health. It only becomes problematic when junk sex becomes one's only goal and type of sex pursued. Stewart uses Kant's categorical imperative to help him argue that if one does abandon meaningful sex in favour of only having junk sex, it is instrumentally bad. The categorical imperative forbids acts that disrespect anyone involved. This includes respecting

one's self, even when consent is obtained with no use of deception or misleading. Meaningless low level sex even when it not done in any kind of immoral way can still be disrespectful because it disregards the value of the meaningfulness that sex can have. Not utilizing intellectual and spiritual opportunities it presents fundamentally shows a lack of self-respect. Not fulfilling these higher level functions leads to a belief that one is not worthy of them. Stewart would agree partly with Elliston's thesis that for some people some of the time promiscuity is good thing. Stewart would add to it that it must be the right kind of promiscuity. It cannot consist of only junk sex, this low quality kind of promiscuity would not be good because by definition it lacks meaning. Even worse than the lack of usefulness it can dull those involved intellectually and spiritually and can impeded the ability to achieve the higher forms of the sexual experience. I do not believe that Elliston thinks junk sex is more valuable than Stewart does. His opinion of in what context promiscuity would consist of junk sex would be different. Meaning can be highly subjective and can be created by the individuals involved. Stewart would believe that if promiscuity improves one fluency in the sexual body language, used to treat other with respect or simply leads to better future love would constitute it being non-junk sex.

Elliston's position and views are strong because of their general nature. Promiscuity is good for some people, some of the Time. Sexuality being a complex subject demands such a general stance. He has strong arguments that show it is possible for promiscuity to exist without committing immoral acts like deception, lying and exploitation. It also need not disadvantage anyone involved such as females. This shows it is at least not inherently immoral making his hypothesis at least possibly true. He suggests a reason that promiscuity is better at certain stage of life is it increases likely hood of finding a suitable life companion by increase the number of people you engage in sexual acts. Elliston's argument being finding someone your more sexually compatible with will improve happiness of a long term relationship. There are deeper parts of love then sexual compatibility that are potentially more important for long term vitality of relationships such as respect and companionship. Promiscuity could skew

the focus away from them and more towards sexual pleasure in the end resulting in non-optimal choice. Elliston showed that if the negative connotation of promiscuity did not exist then the immoral acts associated with would become unnecessary. The causal relationship of the immoral act is still unclear. If it is as Elliston believes that the negative causes the immoral acts. It is possible that the immoral acts are inherently connected to promiscuity and therefore promiscuity caused the immoral acts which in turn caused society to develop the negative connotations. Perhaps his definition of promiscuity was flawed and did not capture its true nature.

Stewart's position is successful in showing that sex that is void of meaning is a lower form of sex that does not give the same benefits as the higher forms. The failings of argument are present in his next hypotheses that constant junk sex would lead to an addiction to it and the abandonment of the pursuit of higher level meaningful sex. This is clearly a possibility that could happen but I do not believe that Stewart presents enough evidence that it needs to be the case or even that it is a likely result. Another possibility could be that a person who only indulges in higher level sex. If this person grows board and loses interest in higher-level sex and so abandons all interest in it. Using the same logic as Stewart you could conclude that higher-level sex is instrumentally bad because it results in the abandonment of higher-level sex, the exact same as Stewart's argument with low level sex being the cause.

Elliston's views are more reasonable. I do accept his position that promiscuity is good for some people some of time. My views on what people and at what time they should promiscuous are in some ways different. His position that sex should come before marriage I would alter to for some people sex should come before marriage and for others it should not. I agree that promiscuity can exist without immoral acts so at least it is not fundamentally bad. This does not answer whether or if it is the best choice or even good one. I believe the only requirement is if it leads to more satisfying life. An individual who is more satisfied with their life being morally promiscuous then they would be being morally monogamous should be

promiscuous for as long as this is the case and vice versa. To what satisfaction in life is I believe there is no universal definition and must be answered on an individual basis, If ones believes their life to be more satisfying then it is in truest sense of its meaning. A change in only opinion is enough to change it truly. My views rely on two parts the lack of immoral act, these acts are instrumentally bad for the self or others and must be avoided. The next part is to maximize individual satisfaction by choosing promiscuity or monogamy (or anything between the two). Maximising every ones individual happiness and satisfaction is the best way to guarantee overall happiness of the world. This is the best ethical choice following utilitarian ethics. The second part of my view that sex before love being the best choice is dependent on the individuals involved. I agree that sexual attraction is a necessary component of romantic love but to some the resulting acts of this attraction has varying degrees of importance. To some quality sexual compatibility could have no significance to fulfilment they feel in the relationship. Aspects such as friendship and emotional (non-sexual) connections playing a more significant role. Forming connections with many people has benefits that in reveals information to one's self and can help in pickling an optimal romantic partner. Promiscuity is not the only way to do this. Someone who does not find sex as important could potentially gain more by going on many coffee date with a series of adults with no commitments then they would by sleeping with them. So to some people coffee dates before love is more accurate then sex before love.