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Philosophy; Tuesday Nights

Writing Essay #2

# Moral Acceptability of Prostitution

Nussbaum and Shrage analyze American prostitution through the conceptual lenses of objectification and oppression, respectively. On one hand, Nussbaum asserts prostitution (and by extension, pornography), “dehumanizes [woman as] sexual objects, things or commodities”; Shrage posits the social construct & “cultural convictions” of contemporary American commercial sex (i.e. prostitution) is oppressive to woman.

Shrage clearly evades the moral connotations of prostitution, explaining she is “not interested in exploring the nature and extension of our moral concept to prostitute oneself” but undoubtedly Shrage is on the side of personal-choice; for prostitution is neither wrong nor right in the proper social environment. To force Shrage in choosing-sides, in the boundaries of Modern American Society, Shrage would positively claim prostitution is immoral and should not exist as long as society continues to use it as a means of oppression.

Nussbaum argues prostitution — even more so than other forms of sex — objectifies woman via means of instrumentality, ownership and fungibility, at the least. Nussbaum continues to define the morality of prostitution by examining what other philosophers thought of the institution, that “the eroticization of forms of sexual conduct dehumanize and brutalize”; thus, the morality of prostitution is cast in a negative light.

The distinction between the moral acceptability of prostitution between Nussbaum and Shrage are really *shades-of-grey*: Shrage proclaims prostitution in Modern American society is immoral, but ***only***because of Modern American Society’s need to use prostitution as a means to “marginalize women socially and politically”, while this “oppression” is not inherent to “rostitution”itself; while Nussbaum states prostitution is immoral because it objectifies woman, “[cutting] women off from full self-expression and self-determination”— and since objectification is “always immorally problematic”, and all sex has a dimension of objectification, prostitution is immoral.

# Objectification & Oppression

Objectification, as defined by Nussbaum, is treating a human being as a means to an end; “as a thing”; “as an object”. Objectification is a pie with seven distinct slices, neither slice relying on another for plausibility: Instrumentality; Denial of autonomy; inertness; fungibility; violability; ownership; denial of subjectivity. Together, these seven ideas embody & personifies Objectification.

Oppression, as defined by Shrage through examples of prostitution’s oppressive dimension, is that which subverts ones’ humanity through “deeply ingrained attitudes and values”, marginalizes you socially and/or politically, or in some form or another morally damaging.

# Plausibility

While both Nussbaum and Shrage present plausible propositions, Shrage more succinctly persuades me to coalesce around her thesis. Through the lens of culture, social constructs and the status quo mentality — prostitution in Modern American Society is oppressive to both men and women, with the latter carrying the heaviest load. A study of alternative societies reveals both acceptable and unacceptable environments where the consequences of prostitution can be moral, or immoral.