

Anthony Giddens
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INTIMACY AS DEMOCRACY

A democratisation of the private sphere is today not only on the agenda, but is an implicit quality of all personal life that comes under the aegis of the pure relationship. The fostering of democracy in the public domain was at first largely a male project – in which women eventually managed, mostly by dint of their own struggle, to participate. The democratisation of personal life is a less visible process, in part precisely because it does not occur in the public arena, but its implications are just as profound. It is a process in which women have thus far played the prime role, even if in the end the benefits achieved, as in the public sphere, are open to everyone.

The meaning of democracy

First of all it might be worth considering what democracy means, or can mean, in its orthodox sense. There is much debate about the specifics of democratic representation and so forth, but I shall not concern myself with these issues here. If the various approaches to political democracy be compared, as David Held has shown, most have certain elements in common.¹ They are concerned to secure 'free

and equal relations' between individuals in such a way as to promote certain outcomes:

1. The creation of circumstances in which people can develop their potentialities and express their diverse qualities. A key objective here is that each individual should respect others' capabilities as well as their ability to learn and enhance their aptitudes.

2. Protection from the arbitrary use of political authority and coercive power. This presumes that decisions can in some sense be negotiated by those they affect, even if they are taken on behalf of a majority by a minority.

3. The involvement of individuals in determining the conditions of their association. The presumption in this case is that individuals accept the authentic and reasoned character of others' judgements.

4. Expansion of the economic opportunity to develop available resources – including here the assumption that when individuals are relieved of the burdens of physical need they are best able to achieve their aims.

The idea of autonomy links these various aspirations. Autonomy means the capacity of individuals to be self-reflective and self-determining: 'to deliberate, judge, choose and act upon different possible courses of action.'² Clearly autonomy in this sense could not be developed while political rights and obligations were closely tied to tradition and fixed prerogatives of property. Once these were dissolved, however, a movement towards autonomy became both possible and seen to be necessary. An overwhelming concern with how individuals might best determine and regulate the conditions of their association is characteristic of virtually all interpretations of modern democracy. The aspirations that compose the tendency towards autonomy can be summarised as a general principle, the 'principle of autonomy':

individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives; that is, they should enjoy

equal rights (and, accordingly, equal obligations) in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others.³

Democracy hence implies not just the right to free and equal self-development, but also the constitutional limitation of (distributive) power. The 'liberty of the strong' must be restrained, but this is not a denial of all authority – or it only becomes so in the case of anarchism. Authority is justifiable to the degree that it recognises the principle of autonomy; in other words, to the extent to which defensible reasons can be given as to why compliance enhances autonomy, either now or in the future. Constitutional authority can be understood as an implicit contract which has the same form as conditions of association explicitly negotiated between equals.

It is no good proposing a principle of autonomy without saying something about the conditions of its realisation. What are those conditions? One is that there must be equality in influencing outcomes in decision-making – in the political sphere this is usually sought after by the 'one person one vote' rule. The expressed preferences of each individual must have equal ranking, subject in certain instances to qualifications made necessary by the existence of justified authority. There must also be effective participation; the means must be provided for individuals to make their voices heard.

A forum for open debate has to be provided. Democracy means discussion, the chance for the 'force of the better argument' to count as against other means of determining decisions (of which the most important are policy decisions). A democratic order provides institutional arrangements for mediation, negotiation and the reaching of compromises where necessary. The conduct of open discussion is itself a means of democratic education: participation in debate with

others can lead to the emergence of a more enlightened citizenry. In some part such a consequence stems from a broadening of the individual's cognitive horizons. But it also derives from an acknowledgement of legitimate diversity – that is, pluralism – and from emotional education. A politically educated contributor to dialogue is able to channel her or his emotions in a positive way: to reason from conviction rather than engage in ill thought through polemics or emotional diatribes.

Public accountability is a further basic characteristic of a democratic polity. In any political system decisions must often be taken on behalf of others. Public debate is normally only possible in relation to certain issues or at particular junctures. Decisions taken, or policies forged, however, must be open to public scrutiny should the need arise. Accountability can never be continuous and therefore stands in tandem with trust. Trust, which comes from accountability and openness, and also protects them, is a thread running through the whole of democratic political order. It is a crucial component of political legitimacy.

Institutionalising the principle of autonomy means specifying rights and obligations, which have to be substantive, not just formal. Rights specify the privileges which come with membership of the polity but they also indicate the duties which individuals have *vis-à-vis* each other and the political order itself. Rights are essentially forms of empowerment; they are enabling devices. Duties specify the price that has to be paid for the rights accorded. In a democratic polity, rights and duties are negotiated and can never be simply assumed – in this respect they differ decisively from, for example, the medieval *droit de seigneur* or other rights established simply by virtue of an individual's social position. Rights and duties thus have to be made a focus of continual reflexive attention.

Democracy, it should be emphasised, does not necessitate sameness, as its critics have often asserted. It is not the

enemy of pluralism. Rather, as suggested above, the principle of autonomy encourages difference – although it insists that difference should not be penalised. Democracy is an enemy of privilege, where privilege is defined as the holding of rights or possessions to which access is not fair and equal for all members of the community. A democratic order does not imply a generic process of ‘levelling down’, but instead provides for the elaboration of individuality.

Ideals are not reality. How far any concrete political order could develop such a framework in full is problematic. In this sense there are utopian elements in these ideas. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the characteristic trend of development of modern societies is towards their realisation. The quality of utopianism, in other words, is balanced by a clear component of realism.⁴

The democratising of personal life

The possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy: this is the theme I have suggested in earlier chapters. (The reader might like at this point to refer back to the discussion on pp. 94–6.) The structural source of this promise is the emergence of the pure relationship, not only in the area of sexuality but also in those of parent–child relations, and other forms of kinship and friendship. We can envisage the development of an ethical framework for a democratic personal order, which in sexual relationships and other personal domains conforms to a model of confluent love.

As in the public sphere, the distance between ideals and reality is considerable. In the arena of heterosexual relations in particular, as indicated in earlier chapters, there are profound sources of strain. Deep psychological, as well as economic, differences between the sexes stand in the way. Yet utopianism here can again readily be offset by realism.

The changes that have helped transform personal environments of action are already well advanced, and they tend towards the realisation of democratic qualities.

The principle of autonomy provides the guiding thread and the most important substantive component of these processes. In the arena of personal life, autonomy means the successful realisation of the reflexive project of self – the condition of relating to others in an egalitarian way. The reflexive project of self must be developed in such a fashion as to permit autonomy in relation to the past, this in turn facilitating a colonising of the future. Thus conceived, self-autonomy permits that respect for others’ capabilities which is intrinsic to a democratic order. The autonomous individual is able to treat others as such and to recognise that the development of their separate potentialities is not a threat. Autonomy also helps to provide the personal boundaries needed for the successful management of relationships. Such boundaries are transgressed whenever one person uses another as a means of playing out old psychological dispositions, or where a reciprocal compulsiveness, as in the case of codependence, is built up.

The second and third conditions of democracy in the public sphere noted above bear very directly upon the democratisation of personal life. Violent and abusive relationships are common in the sexual domain and between adults and children. Most such violence comes from men and is directed towards beings weaker than themselves. As an emancipatory ideal of democracy, the prohibition of violence is of basic importance. Coercive influences in relationships, however, obviously can take forms other than physical violence. Individuals may be prone, for example, to engage in emotional or verbal abuse of one another; marriage, so the saying goes, is a poor substitute for respect. Avoidance of emotional abuse is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the equalising of power in relationship; but the guiding principle is clearly respect for the independent

views and personal traits of the other. 'Without respect', as one guide to intimacy puts it, 'ears turn deaf, attitudes sour, and eventually you can't figure out what you're doing living with someone so incompetent, stupid, unreliable, insensitive, ugly, smelly, untidy . . . It makes you wonder why you chose your partner in the first place. "I must have been out of my mind."'⁵

'The involvement of individuals in determining the conditions of their association' – this statement exemplifies the ideals of the pure relationship. It expresses a prime difference between traditional and present-day marriage and gets to the heart of the democratising possibilities of the transformation of intimacy. It applies, of course, not just to the initiation of a relationship, but to the reflexivity inherent in its continuance – or its dissolution. Not just respect for the other, but an opening out to that person, are needed for this criterion to be met. An individual whose real intentions are hidden from a partner cannot offer the qualities needed for a cooperative determination of the conditions of the relationship. Any and every therapeutic text on the subject of relationships will demonstrate why revelation to the other – as a means of communication rather than emotional dumping – is a binding aspiration of democratically ordered interaction.

Rights and obligations: as I have tried to make clear, in some part these define what intimacy actually is. Intimacy should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity. The importance of rights as means for the achievement of intimacy can easily be seen from the struggle of women to achieve equal status in marriage. The right of women to initiate divorce, to take one instance, which seems only a negative sanction, actually has a major equilibrating effect. Its balancing consequences do more than empower escape from an oppressive relationship, important though this is. They limit the capability of the husband to impose his dominion and thereby contribute to

the translation of coercive power into egalitarian communication.

No rights without obligations – this elementary precept of political democracy applies also to the realm of the pure relationship. Rights help dissolve arbitrary power only in so far as they carry responsibilities towards the other which draw privileges into an equilibrium with obligations. In relationships as elsewhere, obligations have to be treated as revisable in the light of negotiations carried on within them.

What of accountability and its connection to authority? Both accountability and authority – where it exists – in pure relationships are deeply bound up with trust. Trust without accountability is likely to become one-sided, that is, to slide into dependence; accountability without trust is impossible because it would mean the continual scrutiny of the motives and actions of the other. Trust entails the trustworthiness of the other – according 'credit' that does not require continual auditing, but which can be made open to inspection periodically if necessary. Being regarded as trustworthy by a partner is a recognition of personal integrity, but in an egalitarian setting such integrity means also revealing reasons for actions if called upon to do so – and in fact having good reasons for any actions which affect the life of the other.

Authority in pure relationships between adults exists as 'specialisation' – where one person has specially developed capabilities which the other lacks. Here one cannot speak of authority over the other in the same sense as in parent-child relations, particularly where very young children are involved. Can a relationship between a parent and young child be democratic? It can, and should be, in exactly the same sense as is true of a democratic political order.⁶ It is a right of the child, in other words, to be treated as a putative equal of the adult. Actions which cannot be negotiated directly with a child, because he or she is too young to grasp what is entailed, should be capable of counterfactual justifi-

cation. The presumption is that agreement could be reached, and trust sustained, if the child were sufficiently autonomous to be able to deploy arguments on an equal basis to the adult.

Mechanisms

In the political sphere democracy involves the creation of a constitution and, normally, a forum for the public debate of policy issues. What are the equivalent mechanisms in the context of the pure relationship? So far as heterosexual relationships go, the marriage contract used to be a bill of rights, which essentially formalised the 'separate but unequal' nature of the tie. The translation of marriage into a signifier of commitment, rather than a determinant of it, radically alters this situation. All relationships which approximate to the pure form maintain an implicit 'rolling contract' to which appeal may be made by either partner when situations arise felt to be unfair or oppressive. The rolling contract is a constitutional device which underlies, but is also open to negotiation through, open discussion by partners about the nature of the relationship.

Here is a 'rule book', drawn up in a self-help manual aimed at helping women to develop more satisfying heterosexual relationships. The individual, the author suggests, should first of all catalogue the problems that have arisen for her in previous relationships – those she sees mainly as her own doing and those perpetrated by her previous lovers. She should share the rule book with her partner, who should develop a convergent set of rules:

Rule 1: When I find myself trying to impress a man I like by talking so much about myself that I'm not asking him any

questions, I'll stop performing and focus on whether he is right for me.

Rule 2: I'll express my negative feelings as soon as I become aware of them, rather than waiting until they build up – even if it means upsetting my partner.

Rule 3: I'll work on healing my relationship with my ex-husband by looking at how I set myself up to be hurt, and I won't talk about him as if I'm the victim and he's the villain.

Rule 4: When my feelings are hurt, I'll tell my partner how I'm feeling rather than pouting, getting even, pretending I don't care or acting like a little girl.

Rule 5: When I find myself filling in the blanks ['dead' areas in the relationship], I'll stop and ask myself if my partner has given back much to me lately. If he hasn't, I'll ask him for what I need rather than making things better myself.

Rule 6: When I find myself giving unsolicited advice or treating my partner like a little boy, I'll stop, take a deep breath, and let him figure it out on his own, unless he asks for help.⁷

Such a list appears at first blush, not only embarrassingly naive, but also likely to be quite counter-productive. For stating rules as rules, as Wittgenstein impressed upon us, alters their nature. The making explicit of such prescriptions, it can be argued, might rob them of all chance of having a positive effect, since only if they are taken for granted could a relationship proceed harmoniously. Yet such a view, I think, would miss the point. Differential power, which is sedimented in social life, is likely to stay unchanged if individuals refuse reflexively to examine their own conduct and its implicit justifications. Such rules, however unsophisticated they might seem, if successfully applied help prise the individual's actions away from an unconsciously organised power game. In principle, they

serve to generate increased autonomy at the same time as they demand respect from the other.

A rolling contract does not deal in ethical absolutes. This one derives from a specific 'relationship problem list' where there were previously 'negatives'. The individual in question felt that she had been overly concerned to impress men in whom she was interested, was afraid to upset her partner by revealing her fears and needs, tended to mother him and so forth. A 'constitution' of this sort, of course, is only democratic if it is integrated with the other elements mentioned above; it has to reflect a meeting of autonomous and equal persons.

The imperative of free and open communication is the *sine qua non* of the pure relationship; the relationship is its own forum. On this point we come round full circle. Self-autonomy, the break with compulsiveness, is the condition of open dialogue with the other. Such dialogue, in turn, is the medium of the expression of individual needs, as well as the means whereby the relationship is reflexively organised.

Democracy is dull, sex is exciting – although perhaps a few might argue the opposite way. How do democratic norms bear upon sexual experience itself? This is the essence of the question of sexual emancipation. Essentially, such norms sever sexuality from distributive power, above all from the power of the phallus. The democratisation implied in the transformation of intimacy includes, but also transcends, 'radical pluralism'. No limits are set upon sexual activity, save for those entailed by the generalising of the principle of autonomy and by the negotiated norms of the pure relationship. Sexual emancipation consists in integrating plastic sexuality with the reflexive project of self. Thus, for example, no prohibition is necessarily placed on episodic sexuality so long as the principle of autonomy, and other associated democratic norms, are sustained on all sides. On the other hand, where such sexuality is used as a mode of

exploitative domination, covertly or otherwise, or where it expresses a compulsiveness, it falls short of the emancipatory ideal.

Political democracy implies that individuals have sufficient resources to participate in an autonomous way in the democratic process. The same applies in the domain of the pure relationship, although as in the political order it is important to avoid economic reductionism. Democratic aspirations do not necessarily mean equality of resources, but they clearly tend in that direction. They do involve including resources within the charter of rights reflexively negotiated as a defining part of the relationship. The importance of this precept within heterosexual relationships is very plain, given the imbalance in economic resources available to men and women and in responsibilities for child care and domestic work. The democratic model presumes equality in these areas; the aim, however, would not necessarily be complete parity so much as an equitable arrangement negotiated according to the principle of autonomy. A certain balance of tasks and rewards would be negotiated which each finds acceptable. A division of labour might be established, but not one simply inherited on the basis of pre-established criteria or imposed by unequal economic resources brought to the relationship.

There are structural conditions in the wider society which penetrate to the heart of the pure relationships; conversely, how such relationships are ordered has consequences for the wider social order. Democratisation in the public domain, not only at the level of the nation-state, supplies essential conditions for the democratising of personal relationships. But the reverse applies also. The advancement of self-autonomy in the context of pure relationships is rich with implications for democratic practice in the larger community.

A symmetry exists between the democratising of personal life and democratic possibilities in the global political order

at the most extensive level. Consider the distinction between positional bargaining and principled negotiation prominent in the analysis of global strategies and conflicts today. In positional bargaining – which can be equated with a personal relationship in which intimacy is lacking – each side approaches negotiation by taking up an extreme stance. Through mutual threats and attrition, one side or other is worn down and an outcome achieved – if the process of negotiation has not by then broken down completely. Global relations ordered in a more democratic manner would move towards principled negotiation. Here the interaction of the parties begins from an attempt to discover each other's underlying concerns and interests, identifying a range of possible options before narrowing down upon a few of them. The problem to be resolved is separated from antagonism towards the other, so that it is possible to be firm about the substance of the negotiation while being supportive of and respectful towards the other party. In sum, as in the personal sphere, difference can become a means of communication.

Sexuality, emancipation, life politics

No one knows whether at the global level a framework of democratic institutions will develop, or whether alternatively world politics will slide into a destructiveness that might threaten the entire planet. Nobody knows if sexual relationships will become a wasteland of impermanent liaisons, marked by emotional antipathy as much as by love, and scarred by violence. There are good grounds for optimism in each case, but in a culture that has given up providentialism futures have to be worked for against a background of acknowledged risk. The open-ended nature of the global project of modernity has a real correlate in the

uncertain outcome of the everyday social experiments that are the subject-matter of this book.

What can be said with some certainty is that democracy is not enough. Emancipatory politics is a politics of the internally referential systems of modernity; it is oriented to control of distributive power and cannot confront power in its generative aspect. It leaves aside most questions posed by the sequestration of experience. Sexuality has the enormous importance it does in modern civilisation because it is a point of contact with all that has been forgone for the technical security that day-to-day life has to offer. Its association with death has become for us as bizarre and almost unthinkable as its involvement with life seems obvious. Sexuality has become imprisoned within a search for self-identity which sexual activity itself can only momentarily fulfil. 'Lay your sleeping head, my love/Human on my faithless arm': so much of sexuality is frustrated love, doomed endlessly to seek out difference in the sameness of anatomy and of physical response.

In the tension between the privatising of passion and the saturation of the public domain by sexuality, as well as in some of the conflicts which today divide men and women, we can see new political agendas. Particularly in its connections with gender, sexuality gave rise to the politics of the personal, a phrase that is misunderstood if tied only to emancipation. What we should rather term life politics⁶ is a politics of life-style, operating in the context of institutional reflexivity. It is concerned, not to 'politicise', in a narrow sense of that term, life-style decisions but to remoralise them – more accurately put, to bring to the surface those moral and existential issues pushed away from everyday life by the sequestration of experience. They are issues which fuse abstract philosophy, ethical ideas and very practical concerns.

The province of life politics covers a number of partially distinct sets of issues. One is that of self-identity as such. In

so far as it is focused upon the life-span, considered as an internally referential system, the reflexive project of self is oriented only to control. It has no morality other than authenticity, a modern version of the old maxim 'to thine own self be true'. Today, however, given the lapse of tradition, the question 'Who shall I be?' is inextricably bound up with 'How shall I live?' A host of questions present themselves here, but so far as sexuality is concerned that of sexual identity is the most obvious.

The greater the level of equality achieved between the sexes, one might think, the more pre-existing forms of masculinity and femininity are likely to converge upon an androgynous model of some sort. This may or may not be so, given the revival of difference in current sexual politics; but it is in any case devoid of meaning unless we try to specify the content of androgyny, which is a matter of deciding about values. The dilemmas thus raised were hidden as long as sexual identity appeared to be structured in terms of sexual difference. A binary code of male and female, which admits of virtually no mediating instances, attached gender to sex as though they were the same. Gender attributions were then made in the following way:

1. Every individual was assumed to be male or female, with no one 'in between'.
2. The physical characteristics and traits of behaviour of individuals were interpreted as masculine or feminine according to a dominant gender scheme.
3. Gender cues were routinely weighed and assessed, within the confines of permissible gender status behaviour patterns.
4. Gender differences thus constituted and reconstituted were applied back to concretise sexual identities, with 'cross-gender' elements filtered out.
5. Actors monitored their own appearance and behaviour in accordance with 'naturally given' sexual identity.⁹

The force with which these influences are still felt is

indicated by the fact that male transvestism is very commonly stigmatised, even though it is no longer seen in the psychiatric literature as a perversion. More interesting, because it has rather more ambiguity, is the case of women who have or who cultivate the appearance of maleness. Current norms of appearance, demeanour and dress in modern societies permit women a closer similarity to men in these respects than is normally tolerated the other way around. Yet dualism tends to be enforced: if a person is not 'really' a man then she must be a woman. Women who refuse to look 'feminine' find themselves constantly harassed:

I won't wear dresses and I won't wear makeup, or carry a purse and act more feminine. My boyfriend told me that's the reason I'm being bugged by people, and I know that it is, but I refuse to do that. I wouldn't feel comfortable wearing a dress. I couldn't sit like I'm sitting now. Like you've got to walk a certain way. And makeup's such a bloody nuisance.¹⁰

A combination of imbalanced gender power and engrained psychological dispositions keeps dualistic sex divisions quite firmly in place; but in principle matters could be organised quite differently. As anatomy stops being destiny, sexual identity more and more becomes a life-style issue. Sex differences will continue for at least the near future to be linked to the mechanics of the reproduction of the species; but there is no longer good reason for them to conform to a clear break in behaviour and attitudes. Sexual identity could become formed through diverse configurations of traits connecting appearance, demeanour and behaviour. The question of androgyny would be settled in terms of what could be justified as desirable conduct – and nothing else.

The issue of sexual identity is a question which demands prolonged debate. It seems very likely, however, that one element might be what John Stoltenberg has called 'refusing

to be a man'.¹¹ Refusing maleness is not the same as embracing femininity. It is again a task of ethical construction, which relates, not only sexual identity, but self-identity more broadly, to the moral concern of care for others. The penis exists; the male sex is only the phallus, the centre of selfhood in masculinity. The idea that there are beliefs and actions that are right for a man and wrong for a woman, or vice versa, is likely to perish with the progressive shrinking of the phallus into the penis.

With the development of modern societies, control of the social and natural worlds, the male domain, became focused through 'reason'. Just as reason, guided by disciplined investigation, was set off from tradition and dogma, so it was also from emotion. As I have said, this presumed not so much a massive psychological process of repression as an institutional division between reason and emotion, a division that closely followed gender lines. The identifying of women with unreason, whether in serious vein (madness), or in seemingly less consequential fashion (women as the creatures of caprice), turned them into the emotional under-labourers of modernity. Along the way emotion, and forms of social relation inspired by it – hate as well as love – became seen as refractory to ethical considerations. Reason cuts away at ethics because of the difficulty of finding empirical arguments to justify moral convictions; it does so also, however, because moral judgements and emotional sentiments come to be regarded as antithetical. Madness and caprice – it needs little effort to see how alien these are to moral imperatives.

Freud rediscovered emotion – through his interpretations of female psychology – but in his thought it remained tied to the dictates of reason, however much cognition was shown to be swayed by the subterranean forces of the unconscious. 'Nothing disturbs feeling . . . so much as thinking': emotion remains the other side of reason, with its causal power increased. No connection is made between

emotion and ethics; perhaps they are pushed even further apart, for the theme 'where id was there ego shall be' suggests that the sphere of the rational can be substantially expanded. If ethical imperatives exist, therefore, they are to be found in the public domain; but there it proves difficult to demonstrate their validity and they stand vulnerable to power.

Passionate love was originally one among other passions, the interpretation of which tended to be influenced by religion. Most emotional dispositions can be passions, but in modern society passion is narrowed down to the sexual realm and once there becomes more and more muted in its expression. A passion is today something admitted to only reluctantly or embarrassedly, even in respect of sexual behaviour itself, partly because its place as a 'compelling force' has been usurped by addiction.

There is no room for passion in the routinised settings which provide us with security in modern social life. Yet who can live without passion, if we see it as the motive-power of conviction? Emotion and motivation are inherently connected. Today we think of motivation as 'rational' – the driving pursuit of profit on the part of the entrepreneur, for example – but if emotion is wholly resistant to rational assessment and ethical judgement, motives can never be appraised except as means to ends, or in terms of their consequences. This is what Weber saw in interpreting the motives of the early industrialists as energised by religious conviction. However, in so doing Weber took for granted, and even elevated to the status of an epistemology, what is distinctly problematic about modernity: the impossibility of evaluating emotion.

Seen as a life-political issue, the problem of the emotions is not one of retrieving passion, but of developing ethical guidelines for the appraisal or justification of conviction. The therapist says, 'Get in touch with your feelings.' Yet in this regard therapy connives with modernity. The precept

which lies beyond is 'Evaluate your feelings', and such a demand cannot be a matter of psychological rapport alone. Emotions are not judgements, but dispositional behaviour stimulated by emotional responses is; to evaluate feelings is to ask for the criteria in terms of which such judgements are made.

Emotion becomes a life-political issue in numerous ways with the latter-day development of modernity. In the realm of sexuality, emotion as a means of communication, as commitment to and cooperation with others, is especially important. The model of confluent love suggests an ethical framework for the fostering of non-destructive emotion in the conduct of individual and communal life. It provides for the possibility of a revitalising of the erotic – not as a specialist skill of impure women, but as a generic quality of sexuality in social relations formed through mutuality rather than through unequal power. Eroticism is the cultivation of feeling, expressed through bodily sensation, in a communicative context; an art of giving and receiving pleasure. Shorn of differential power, it can revive those aesthetic qualities of which Marcuse speaks.

Defined in such a fashion, the erotic stands opposed to all forms of emotional instrumentality in sexual relations. Eroticism is sexuality reintegrated within a wider range of emotional purposes, paramount among which is communication. From the point of view of utopian realism, eroticism is rescued from that triumph of the will which, from de Sade to Bataille, seems to mark out its distinctiveness. Interpreted not as diagnosis but as critique, as was noted earlier, the Sadean universe is an anti-utopia which discloses the possibility of its opposite.

Sexuality and reproduction in the past structured one another. Until it became thoroughly socialised, reproduction was external to social activity as a biological phenomenon; it organised kinship as well as being organised by it, and it connected the life of the individual to the succession of the

generations. When directly bound up with reproduction, sexuality was a medium of transcendence. Sexual activity forged a tie with the finitude of the individual, and at the same time carried the promise of its irrelevance; for seen in relation to a cycle of generations the individual life was part of a more embracing symbolic order. Sexuality for us still carries an echo of the transcendent. Yet given that such is the case, it is bound to be surrounded with an aura of nostalgia and disillusion. A sexually addicted civilisation is one where death has become stripped of meaning; life politics at this point implies a renewal of spirituality. From this point of view, sexuality is not the antithesis of a civilisation dedicated to economic growth and technical control, but the embodiment of its failure.

NOTES

- 1 I follow closely Held's thought in the first part of this chapter. See David Held: *Models of Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity, 1986.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 270.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- 4 Anthony Giddens: *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 1990, pp. 154–8.
- 5 C. Edward Crowther: *Intimacy. Strategies for Successful Relationships*, New York: Dell, 1988, p. 45.
- 6 Allison James and Alan Prout: *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, Basingstoke: Falmer, 1990. The 'new paradigm' James and Prout suggest for studying childhood relates closely to the ideas developed here.
- 7 Barbara De Angelis: *Secrets About Men Every Woman Should Know*, London: Thorsons, 1990, p. 274.
- 8 Anthony Giddens: *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity, 1991, ch. 7.
- 9 Holly Devor: *Gender Bending. Confronting the Limits of Duality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 147–9.