19. SEXUAL PERVERSION AND HUMAN NATURE

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ABSTRACT. In this essay I examine seven of the best-known attempts to define 'sexual perversion'. I argue that if these definitions are meant to prescribe our use of 'sexual perversion', the definitions are really theoretical definitions, and none can be accepted because the arguments offered in support of the definitions are either incomplete or misdirected. Next, I argue that it is not possible to formulate a definition of 'sexual perversion' which captures our ordinary use of the term because common usage indicates that 'sexual perversion' is a cluster term. Finally, I consider whether it is possible to develop and defend a theoretical definition of 'sexual perversion'. I argue that to succeed in this task one must first demonstrate that a particular theory of human nature is true, and that this cannot be done because human nature is an essentially contested concept.

There are numerous definitions of 'sexual perversion' available in the literature; however, it is not clear in all cases whether the authors of those definitions intend to describe or to prescribe our use of 'sexual perversion'. In what follows I am going to examine seven of the best-known attempts to define 'sexual perversion', considering them first as prescriptive and then as descriptive analyses. I will argue that if these definitions are meant to prescribe our use of 'sexual perversion', the definitions are really theoretical definitions, and none can be accepted because the arguments offered in support of the definitions are either incomplete or misdirected. Next, I will argue that it is not possible to formulate a definition of 'sexual perversion' which captures our ordinary use of the term because common usage indicates that 'sexual perversion' is a "cluster term". Finally, I will indicate the direction in which I think future research on the concept of sexual perversion must proceed, and voice some doubts concerning the value of the results to be obtained from such research.

I

Typically, those who try to define 'sexual perversion' proceed in the following way. First, they assert that in ordinary discourse sexual perversions are taken to be unnatural sexual desires or practices. Next, they formulate norms or standards specifying "natural" sex, and then define sexual perversions as sexual desires or practices which deviate from those norms. The following represent some of the best-known attempts to define 'natural sex' and 'sexual perversion':
(a) Natural sex is sex in which the male deposits his semen in the vas of the female. Sexual actions which do not end in this fashion, and hence do not remain open to reproduction, are perverted.

(b) Natural sex is an expression of love or affection between partners. Thus, sexual activities which occur apart from a loving relationship are perverted.

(c) Sexual interest and arousal naturally occur in humans by means of a multileveled awareness of one's own and another's desire, e.g., A is aroused by B, then B by A, then A by his/her awareness of having aroused B, then B by his/her awareness of having aroused A, etc. If a process of this sort does not occur prior to sexual fulfillment, or if the process is rendered incomplete, the attendant sexual activity is perverted.

(d) It is natural for humans to use sex to communicate. Because sex is a communicative art, perversion occurs whenever there is a breach in comprehension.

(e) Natural sex is normal sex, and normal sex is a statistical concept. Statistically normal sexual desire is desire for contact with another person's body and the pleasure which that contact provides. Hence, an act is perverted if it satisfies a desire, not for contact with another, but rather merely for looking, harming, etc., and this desire is attended with typical sexual effects, e.g., erection in males.

(f) Society formulates standards for morally acceptable sexual practices, and then sensitizes the tastes and feelings of its citizens so that they will feel abhorrence, disgust, or distaste when they contemplate extreme departures from those standards. Those sexual activities which deviate from society's standards to such a degree that they elicit feelings of abhorrence, disgust, or distaste, are perverted or unnatural.

(g) All sexual activities which occur in nature are natural. Therefore, an unnatural or perverted sexual act is one which occurs outside of nature. No sexual act occurs outside of nature; hence, no sexual activity is perverted, and 'perversion' has no application in our world.

The authors of the above definitions may be attempting either to prescribe or to describe our use of 'sexual perversion'. If the authors' intent is prescriptive we can assess the adequacy of their definitions only by evaluating the arguments which they offer in support of their views. In an essay of this length it is impossible to reproduce each argument in its entirety; nevertheless, the positions may be summarized in detail sufficient to allow for evaluation.
Definition (a) captures the traditional Catholic understanding of perversion. Defenders of this view contend that sexual activities that do not remain open to reproduction are a perversion of the natural, divinely instituted order. Basically, proponents of this position argue in the following way: God created all nature, and a study of nature can give us knowledge of at least some of God's purposes. When we study nature we find that reproduction is the primary end of sexuality, and that animals reproduce by the male depositing semen in the vas of the female. We also discover that all animals (humans included) experience pleasure when they engage in sexual acts. However, humans are distinguished from all other animals in that only humans have a highly developed reasoning capacity. Because humans are rational creatures, they and they alone have the capacity to discern God's purposes in the world and then freely to choose to seek or to oppose those ends. Because nonhuman animals do not possess man's well-developed intellectual capacities, animals cannot understand that reproduction is the purpose of sex, and they engage in sexual activity only for the sake of the pleasure which such contact provides. This is natural behavior for nonhuman animals, but it is not natural behavior for human beings. If a human being does not remain open to reproduction in his or her sexual activity, this either must be because: (i) he or she has not used reason to discover sex's divinely instituted purpose, or (ii) the person has chosen to engage in sex merely for the sake of the pleasure which is derived from such activity. In either case the human does not operate as a human being, but rather as a mere animal. And whenever a human acts solely as an animal, his/her actions are unnatural, or a perversion of the natural order.

Many contemporary Catholics reject definition (a) and opt instead for (b). Advocates of (b) claim that modern science shows clearly that it is not rationality which distinguishes humans from all other animals, but rather the capacity to feel and express love. Because only humans truly have the capacity to feel and express love, human beings who engage in sex apart from any feeling of love or affection act more as animals than as humans. Hence, perverted or unnatural sex is sexual activity undertaken in the absence of love.

In defending definition (e), Alan Goldman rejects every belief accepted by (a) and (b). For Goldman, human sexual activity has no divinely instituted purpose; indeed, it has no external purpose at all (Goldman, PS, 268). Because we cannot define human sexuality in terms of an external goal, we can determine what sex is only by looking at the way human sexual desires usually manifest themselves. When we look at these manifestations we find that normal (where 'normal' is defined statistically) sexual desire is desire for contact with another's body and the pleasure that this contact provides. But this also is the way sexual desires of nonhuman animals usually manifest themselves. Thus, humans and nonhuman animals are essentially alike, at least insofar as their sexuality is concerned. But if humans and nonhuman animals are alike in respect to their sexuality, we cannot define perverted or unnatural sexual behavior in terms of that behavior being more animal-like than human-like. Rather, perverted sex must be nothing other than statistically abnormal sex, or sex which satisfies a desire for something other than physical contact with another.

At this point it might be useful to pause and reflect upon the above three arguments. Despite the fact that definitions (a), (b), and (e)
differ radically, proponents of each definition argue in essentially the same way. The first step in each argument is always that of presenting a conception of the role of sex in human life. Next, the author supports his conception of human sexuality by appealing (either overtly or tacitly) to what he takes to be certain "facts" about human nature, e.g., humans and nonhuman animals are essentially alike insofar as their sexuality is concerned. Finally, once the author believes that he has shown that his conception of the role of sex in human life is correct, he then defines unnatural or perverted sex as sexual behavior which deviates from that role. In each case, however, it is the author's beliefs concerning human nature which ultimately serve as the justification for his definition of 'sexual perversion', and if those beliefs are rejected the definition is called into doubt. Furthermore, what is true of definitions (a), (b), and (e), also can be shown to be true of (c), (d), (f), and (g).

Definition (d) tells us that sex is a form of body language, and that perversion is a breakdown in communication. Definition (c) is similar, but on this view sexual activity is used only to communicate sexual desire throughout a multileveled process of interpersonal awareness. Now so far as we know, non-human animals cannot be false or mistaken in their sexual communications (if indeed they consciously intend to communicate anything in their sexual activity). Furthermore, only humans appear to have the ability to achieve the numerous levels of interpersonal awarenesses which definition (c) takes to be the hallmark of "natural" human sexual behavior. Thus, definitions (c) and (d), like (a) and (b), assume that human sexuality has a necessary external goal or purpose (viz., communication of some sort), and that this goal serves to distinguish humans from other animals. If we reject this conception of humanity and human sexuality, i.e., if we reject the view that humans are constituted in such a way that they use sex principally as a means of communication, definitions (c) and (d) become dubious.

Definition (f) states that an act is sexually perverted if it both: (1) deviates from a socially accepted norm, and (2) elicits in us a feeling of disgust or abhorrence. Further, if we feel abhorrence or disgust, this is because society has "sensitized" our tastes and feelings. People in different societies accept different norms for appropriate sexual behavior, and hence are "sensitized" to feel abhorrence and disgust when contemplating different sorts of sexual acts. On this view, then, human nature is an amorphous potential--shaped and molded, ultimately, by social forces. Clearly, however, one need not accept this view. For example, Hume contends that all humans share a common passionate nature, and that they must experience similar emotions when contemplating similar acts. Again, it is possible to argue that a person's emotional responses are fixed at birth by his or her personal genetic makeup. Either view requires rejection of the cultural relativism inherent in definition (f).

Finally, definition (g) tells us that 'perverted' means 'without existence in reality', or 'outside of nature'. Supposedly, we ascribe this meaning to 'sexual perversion' because it helps us to repress unconscious impulses which we all have towards sexual behavior which threaten our self-image (Slote, PS, 263). Of course, this view makes sense only if we are willing to accept the sort of view of human nature which is assumed in depth psychology. That is to say, we must believe (at least) in the unconscious, the force of repression, and the fact that we all have unconscious impulses towards "threatening" sexual behavior.
If our analysis thus far is correct, all the definitions which we 
have examined rest upon different beliefs concerning human nature. In 
effect, then, definitions (a) through (g) are not so much prescriptive as 
theoretical definitions, for in each case it is an author's commitments 
concerning human nature which ultimately serve to support his defini­
tion of 'sexual perversion'. If this is so, however, an author must do at 
least two things if he is to show that his definition of 'sexual perver­
sion' is correct. Specifically, he must offer support for the theory of 
human nature which serves as the foundation for his own definition of 
'sexual perversion', and he must show that his theory of human nature 
is more adequate than those underpinning competing definitions. But 
these tasks are rarely undertaken, and when they are, the arguments 
which are offered are either incomplete or misdirected. For example, 
proponents of definitions (c), (d), (f), and (g) provide no arguments for 
the views of human nature which serve as the foundations for their 
definitions. Rather, they simply presuppose certain "truths" about hu­
man nature, and then use those presuppositions to argue for the pro­
priety of their definitions. But it is not at all obvious that any of the 
assumptions which serve as bases for definitions (c), (d), (f), and (g) 
ought to be accepted. As against (c) and (d), for instance, one could 
claim that recent experiments with apes indicate that humans and non­ 
human animals cannot be distinguished in terms of the ability to com­
mu­nicate.12 One then could argue: (1) that humans and nonhuman animals 
are alike insofar as their sexuality is concerned, (2) that nonhuman ani­ 
mals do not use sex primarily for communication, and hence (3) that hu­ 
mans do not use sex primarily for communication. Similarly, there are a 
variety of competing theories regarding the unconscious, and it is not 
at all clear that all humans have unconscious impulses towards sexual 
behavior which they find "threatening". Thus we are not forced to ac­
tep the assumptions which serve to support definition (g). Finally, as 
noted above (p. 4,pa2), there are several grounds for questioning the 
belief that human nature is little more than an amorphous potential.

Unlike the authors of definitions (c), (d), (f), and (g), Catholics 
who defend definitions (a) and (b) appeal to well worked out theories of 
human nature to support their views. Still, proponents of (a) and (b) do 
not provide complete defenses of their definitions. Typically, proponents of 
these two views begin by accepting certain common beliefs, e.g., that 
God's purposes are evidenced in nature, that humans are made by God 
to be essentially different from all other animals so that there must be 
some characteristic distinguishing humans from nonhuman animals, etc. 
Once this "common ground" has been staked out, proponents of (a) and 
(b) then proceed to argue between themselves concerning the proper 
distinguishing characteristic of humanity and the correct definition of 
'sexual perversion'. But even if this sort of "in house" bickering were 
able to show the superiority of one definition over the other, it would 
not show that either definition was correct. To succeed in this task a 
proponent of (a) and (b) must demonstrate that the theory of human na­
ture which serves as the basis for his definition of 'sexual perversion' 
is more adequate than any competing theory of human nature. (For ex­
ample, a proponent of (a) and (b) must show that his theory of human 
nature explains a wider variety of phenomena concerning human behav­
ior than the naturalistic theory which supports definition (e).) But when 
(a) and (b) are proposed and defended, no such arguments are offered. 
Hence, support for (a) and (b) is incomplete, and we cannot say that 
either definition has been shown to be correct.
In defending definition (e) Alan Goldman sees two things clearly: (1) that a person's conception of sex helps determine his/her definition of 'sexual perversion', and (2) that to adequately defend one's definition of 'sexual perversion', a person must show that his/her own conception of sex is superior to those conceptions which underlie competing definitions. Despite this, however, Goldman does not realize that a person's conception of the role of sex in human life is determined by his or her theoretical beliefs concerning human nature. As a consequence, Goldman's argument is both incomplete and misdirected. It is incomplete because Goldman never defends the assumptions concerning human nature which underlie his conception of sex and definition of 'sexual perversion'. Indeed, he never really argues for his conception of sex, choosing rather to defend his position by appealing to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. When he attempts to discredit opposing views, however, his arguments are misdirected. For example, when Goldman attacks the view that sex's primary purpose is reproduction (the conception of sex underlying definition (a)), he says, "while this may be 'nature's' purpose, it certainly need not be ours", and "it is obvious that the desire for sex is not necessarily a desire to reproduce . . .." (Goldman, *PS* 271-72). Both of these statements are true, but neither gets at the heart of the matter. All proponents of definition (a) would admit that humans can and do have sexual relationships for purposes other than reproduction. They only would insist that when humans act in this way they behave merely as animals, and that this is unnatural (perverted). Similarly, those who defend (a) would allow that desire for sex is not necessarily a desire to reproduce, for humans are animals and, like all animals, desire the pleasure which attends sexual contact. Again, however, defenders of (a) would insist that humans who engage in sex in the absence of any desire to reproduce, act in an animalistic, nonhuman, and hence perverted fashion. To discredit arguments such as these Goldman must attack the theory of human nature which serves as the foundation for definition (a). But Goldman never pursues the battle on this level.

It is not only Goldman's arguments against definition (a) which are misdirected. Goldman claims that definitions (a), (b), (c), and (d) ought to be rejected because they all give rise to judgments of perversions which are at odds with ordinary usage (Goldman, *PS* 277-8, 284). Now if definitions (a) through (d) are meant to be reportive definitions, Goldman's point is well taken. (We might note at this point, however, that Goldman's definition also leads to judgments of perversion which differ from those made in everyday discourse (see below p. 7). On the other hand, if definitions (a) through (d) are not descriptive accounts of our ordinary use of 'sexual perversion', the argument has no force at all. Proponents of definitions (a) - (d) merely would claim that if the common use of 'sexual perversion' differs from their own, so much the worse of ordinary usage. After all, the author of each definition believes his definition is correct because it follows from certain beliefs about human nature which he takes to be true. Thus, if ordinary judgments of perversions are at odds with those made by any author, the author simply would say that users of ordinary language appeal to incorrect theories of human nature when they make their judgments of perversion. Once again the message seems clear: If Goldman is to discredit definitions of 'sexual perversion' and conceptions of sex which differ from his own, he must give us some reason to doubt the views of human nature which underlie those views.
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If definitions (a) through (g) are not reportive, but rather theoretical definitions, none has been shown to be correct because the arguments offered in support of those definitions are: (i) assumptive, (ii) incomplete, or (iii) misdirected. Still, these definitions may be intended by their authors to be descriptive accounts of our use of 'sexual perversion'. As we shall see, however, if we interpret (a) through (g) in this manner, they all fail.

II

If we assume that definitions (a) through (g) are descriptive, we can develop counterexamples for each, and all become suspect. For example, definition (a) leads to the conclusion that kissing without sexual intercourse is perverted, and this judgment does not accord with common opinion. Definition (b) rules out most sexual desire, and many sexual acts not ordinarily classified as perverted, e.g., prostitution, "one night stands", etc. Sexual fantasizing and "in heat" sex must be perverted for those who accept (c), and all misunderstood sexual advances must be classified as perverted by those who advocate (d). Definition (e) leads to the conclusion that it is perverted for a celibate male to want merely to look at, and become sexually excited by, a beautiful woman. In addition, acceptance of (e) forces one to judge that some sexual acts which commonly are thought to be perverted are not. For example, if a person, P, finds ingesting human feces to be sexually stimulating (but not as stimulating as, say, copulation), and then P ingests feces, using that act as an "imaginative substitute" for actual sexual contact, the act (coprophilia) cannot be called perverted.\(^\dagger\) Definition (f) fares little better. Most husbands of adulterous wives probably feel not only anger, but also disgust, distaste, and abhorrence when they imagine their wives' copulating with their lovers. Still, few, if any, would call their wives' actions sexually perverted. Also, some perverted sexual activities do not commonly elicit the feelings of abhorrence or distaste. (My students unanimously agree that necrophilia is disgusting, but they use such terms as 'comical', 'pitiful', 'baffling', and 'sad' to characterize shoe fetishism.) Finally, if we accept definition (g) we would expect that as soon as a person consciously recognizes that he or she has an impulse to perform some "threatening" sexual act, he/she would cease calling the impulse perverted.\(^\dagger\) But this need not happen. Rather, a person can recognize that he or she has impulses to, say, incest or sadism, and consciously do all in her or his power to overcome these impulses because he/she believes the desires are perverted. And if this is true, it is obvious to that the person is not using 'perverted' or 'unnatural' to mean 'without existence in reality'.

Interpreting definitions (a) through (g) descriptively leaves them open to difficulties other than those noted above. Although we find a great deal of agreement concerning the character of some sexual activities, this is not true in all cases. For example, there does not seem to be a clear consensus of opinion concerning whether or not homosexuality and masturbation are perverted. However, many of the definitions (a) through (g) are framed in such a way that they either clearly include or exclude practices such as these (e.g., homosexuality is not perverted on definition (e)). If (a) through (g) are meant to describe our ordinary use of 'sexual perversion', it is hard to see how the authors of those definitions could justify imposing such clear-cut distinctions.
Finally, all commentators agree that 'sexual perversion' usually carries negative connotations for the average speaker. Thus, doubt is cast upon any descriptive analysis which holds that sexual perversion is purely a statistical concept, totally devoid of all evaluative force. On the other hand, those who believe that sexual perversion has an evaluative dimension differ radically in their views concerning the kind of evaluation which we make when we call a sexual practice perverted. The truth of the matter seems to be that we make no single kind of evaluation in all our judgments of perversion, and although most judgments of perversion carry negative connotations, all need not do so. For instance, I quite legitimately may say that it is not morally wrong for a coprophiliac to "do his/her own thing" in private, and yet insist that such action is perverted and disgusting. On the other hand, if I call pedophilic perverted, my judgment may be intended to embody both full-blown moral condemnations as well as a feeling of disgust. Then again, I can call transvestitism perverted, and at the same time insist that I do not find the activity disgusting or immoral, but merely odd, and somewhat baffling. And if all of this is true, it seems wrong to define 'sexual perversion' in such a way that it must be viewed as an evaluative concept, or as a concept which necessarily carries one specific kind of evaluation.

We have seen that none of the definitions (a) through (g) can serve as a rule of substitution in ordinary discourse, and that there are several difficulties facing anyone who attempts to formulate such a definition. Now if there were no single use of 'sexual perversion' employed in everyday speech this is exactly what we would expect to find. Furthermore, the analysis in Part I of this essay provides a ready means for explaining how various uses of 'sexual perversion' could arise. Specifically, we have seen that definitions (a) through (g) rest upon varying assumptions concerning human nature. Thus, all the evidence at our disposal indicates that there is some connection between one's understanding of 'sexual perversion' and his or her beliefs regarding human nature. Once this is granted, however, one must allow that different individuals could: (1) accept different beliefs about human nature, (2) use those beliefs to formulate different, "personal" definitions of 'sexual perversion', and then (3) employ those definitions to make quite different judgments of perversion. Of course, if this were the way in which judgments of perversion were made, no single formula could capture our ordinary use of 'sexual perversion'.

Although the above theory may have some initial plausibility, it cannot be correct. The view assumes that each individual makes judgments of perversion by appealing to a single, determinate definition of 'sexual perversion', and there are at least three reasons why this view must be rejected. First, the theory cannot explain how a person can judge a sexual activity to be perverted in one context, and then immediately modify his or her judgment when the activity occurs in another context. Second, the theory cannot explain the wide variety of reactions that an individual experiences when considering different sexual perversion. And finally, the theory cannot explain why persons sometimes knowingly make judgments of perversion which violate their own, formally stated definitions of 'sexual perversion'. Let us consider each point in turn.

When I ask my students whether voyeurism and exhibitionism are perverted, most unhesitatingly answer in the affirmative. However,
most of these same students change their minds when asked to consider
the following specific case. Assume that voyeuristic man and an exhibi-
tionist woman are happily married. These people have children, and
never participate in voyeuristic or exhibitionist activities outside the
home. On the other hand, they never engage in traditional sexual fore-
play. Rather, the woman always undresses seductively, pretending her
spouse is not present, while he peeps at her from behind doors, in mir-
rors, etc. After this ritual, the couple engage in ordinary sexual inter-
course. When I ask my students whether the voyeuristic and exhibition-
istic behavior of this couple is perverted, their replies vary. A few stu-
dents insist that the behavior is perverted. Others express indecision
concerning the behavior's proper classification, and the vast majority
modify their original position by claiming that although voyeurism and
exhibitionism are usually perverted, these actions are not perverted
when performed by my hypothesized couple. But if each of my students
operated with a single definition of sexual perversion which reflected
his/her own view of human nature, we would not expect to find such
reversals in judgment. That is to say, if student, S, judged exhibition-
ism and voyeurism to be perverted because these activities conformed to
S's definition of 'sexual perversion', S should judge any instance of
voyeurism and exhibitionism to be perverted. However, the majority of
my students do not operate in this fashion. Rather, their judgments of
perversion—or at least some of their judgments of perversion—appear
to be context sensitive in the sense that the conditions surrounding the
sexual activities in question influence their judgments. If this is true,
however, it indicates that judgments of perversion are complex affairs,
and that we do not make such judgments merely by asking whether sex-
ual activities deviate from some simple norm or standard which we be-
lieves specifies "natural" human sexual behavior.

Second, I have had the very same group of students tell me: (a)
that shoe fetishism is perverted, comical, and not morally wrong, (b)
that necrophilia is perverted, disgusting, and morally wrong, and (c)
that it is perverted (but merely odd, and perhaps dangerous or painful)
to masturbate while inserting bottles, cans, or similar objects into one's
rectum. Now if these students operated with a single definition of 'sex-
ual perversion', their definition would have to be either evaluative or
nonevaluative. If the former, we would expect evaluations to be present
in all of the students' judgments of perversion. We also would expect all
their judgments of perversion to carry the kind of evaluation or evalua-
tions entailed by their definitions (e.g., if the students accepted defini-
tion (f), above, they would have to hold that all perversions were moral-
ly wrong and disgusting). But neither of these expectations is fulfilled.
That is, the students do evaluate necrophilia and shoe fetishism, but in
completely different ways. Furthermore, these same students refuse to
evaluate the activity described in (c), claiming only that it is dan-
gerous/painful. On the other hand, if we assume that my students ac-
cept nonevaluative definitions of 'sexual perversion', then the problem
becomes that of explaining why they should have any tendency at all to
evaluate sexual practices that they regard as perverted.20

Finally, if anyone employed a single definition of 'sexual perver-
sion' to make all his/her judgments of perversion, we would expect
those individuals who formulated definitions (a) through (g) to do so.
But proponents of definition (a) refuse to call kissing and hugging per-
verted in all contexts, even though they recognize that they should do
so given their understanding of 'sexual perversion'.21 Also, Nagel admits
that his account of sexual perversion (definition (c)), leads to the conclusion that sexual fantasizing is perverted; yet Nagel refuses to acquiesce in this judgment (Nagel, PS, 258). Given cases such as this, it is very difficult to believe that any individual standardly makes judgments of perversion by appealing to a single formula which captures his/her understanding of 'sexual perversion'.

One possibility remains to be considered. It may be that 'sexual perversion' is employed in a variety of different ways in our language, and that individual speakers do not consistently appeal to a single definition when they make judgments of perversions, but rather adopt one definition at time T, another at time T₁, etc. One difficulty with this view is that apart from our inability to construct an adequate reportive definition of 'sexual perversion', we have no evidence that it is true. Furthermore, the theory raises more questions than it answers. Ordinarily, when a term is employed in more than one way in our language we can delineate its various uses, and explain why the term is used as it is any given context. But if any individual uses 'sexual perversion' in one way at time T and in other ways at times T₁, T₂, etc., what are those uses? The major (if not only) candidates would appear to be definitions (a) through (g). But not all of these definitions can be employed properly in ordinary discourse, for definition (g) tells us that no acts are perverted, while all of the remaining definitions lead to the conclusion that at least some acts are perverted. Further, we have seen that definitions (a) through (g) assert different things because they rest upon conflicting beliefs concerning human nature. In effect, then, any person who employed one definition at time T and another definition at T₁ would endorse one view of human nature at T and a conflicting view at T₁. Now we must allow, I think, that individuals may, over time, alter many of their beliefs concerning human nature. However, it seems obvious that these beliefs do not vary from moment to moment; yet this is precisely the view we must accept if we are to have any hope of explaining how a person can judge an act to be perverted in one context, and then immediately modify his/her view when the act occurs in another context. In addition, because an individual's reactions to perverted activities can vary from moment to moment with each new judgment of perversion which that person makes, the view that an individual employs different definitions of 'sexual perversion' at different times, (thereby adopting different theories of human nature) is no better equipped to explain this phenomenon than it is to explain context sensitivity. Finally, it should be clear that when Nagel and traditional Catholics make judgments of perversion which are at odds with their own definitions of 'sexual perversion' they cannot claim to be appealing to any other definition of the term. This is so because both Nagel and traditional Catholics reject all other definitions, and claim that their definitions capture the meaning of 'sexual perversion'.

III

In part II we were unable to find any definition of 'sexual perversion' which succeeded as a reportive definition. We also found that we had to reject views of sexual perversion which held that different definitions of the concept are employed in everyday discourse. Still, in part I we saw that all of the major definitions of 'sexual perversion' rest upon beliefs about human nature; thus it seems clear that some sort of relationship exists between one's view of human nature and
his/her use of 'sexual perversion'. In what follows I intend to clarify the nature of this relationship, and in the process clarify our ordinary use of 'sexual perversion'. To do this, however, requires prior acceptance of certain assumptions regarding theories of human nature and ordinary judgments of perversion. In what follows I list these assumptions, and then show how they can be used to explain all the important phenomena relevant to our use of 'sexual perversion'. I make no attempt to argue directly for the truth of any of these presuppositions. Rather, my contention is that they must be accepted because they have initial plausibility, and a great deal of explanatory power. The assumptions are as follows:

(i) Very few people possess a clear, well thought-out theory of man; rather, they operate with a vague set of assumptions concerning human nature, and these assumptions come from a wide variety of sources, such as education, personal experience, religious training, etc.

(ii) Because our beliefs about human nature come from different sources, they often are confused, and of different sorts. That is, some of a person's beliefs concerning human nature are meant to be descriptive generalizations; others are based on the notion of an "ideal" human, and more often than not, both sorts of beliefs are confusedly blended in what might be called a theory of human nature.

(iii) A person's beliefs concerning human nature give rise to expectations concerning human behavior, e.g., a person who believes human beings are basically selfish will not expect to find humans acting in truly altruistic ways.

(iv) An individual may be unwilling to renounce some of his/her beliefs concerning human nature, and yet willing to modify others. For example, a person may believe that humans are motivated principally by sexual desire, and then go to great lengths to explain all actions which do not appear to be motivated by sexual desire as sublimations of libidinal drives. On the other hand, the same person may believe that humans are at base dishonest, and then change this opinion after experiencing a number of instances in which humans appear to act honestly. For the sake of simplicity, let us say that beliefs of the first sort are central or fundamental to a person's theory of human nature, and that beliefs of the second sort are peripheral.

(v) People make judgments of perversion by appealing to a cluster of expectations concerning human behavior rather than by referring to any definition or definitions of 'sexual perversion'.

If we accept assumptions (i) through (v) we can explain why judgments of perversion have the various characteristics they do. For example, we have seen that judgments of perversion often appear to be
context sensitive, and that this cannot be accounted for on any of the analyses of 'sexual perversion' which we examined earlier in part II of this essay. On the other hand, if we accept assumptions (i) - (v) we easily can explain why judgments of perversion are context sensitive. For example, my students tell me that when they call voyeurism and exhibitionism perverted, they are thinking of "classic" cases. e.g., the woman who purposely undresses before an open window, the peeping Tom, etc. In cases such as these, very few of the students' expectations concerning human behavior are met. On the other hand, in my example of the voyeuristic/exhibitionistic couple (above, 9) unexpected sexual behavior is combined with behavior which my students do expect. That is, the students do not expect the couple's voyeuristic/exhibitionistic behavior; but at the same time, these activities are conducted in private, by mutual consent, in a loving context, and as a prelude to ordinary sexual intercourse. To judge perversion in this case, then, students must balance met expectations against those which are not met. And with this sort of subjective "balancing act" going on, the results are predictable: some students call the couple's sexual activity perverted, others disagree, and a few remain undecided as regards the activity's proper classification.

Although the number of expectations met and not met clearly is important in determining one's final judgment of perversion, this cannot be the only factor at work. My students call coprophilia a perversion, and continue to do so even when they assume that this activity is conducted by a married couple, in private, and as a prelude to intercourse. This suggests that fundamental beliefs about human nature give rise to expectations concerning human behavior which are stronger, or more important, than expectations founded on more peripheral beliefs, and that expectations of the former sort "carry more weight", as it were, in determining final judgments of perversion. In the cases now being discussed, for instance, it appears that my students' expectation that coprophilia will not occur in humans is stronger than corresponding expectations regarding voyeurism and exhibitionism. This being so, they continue to call coprophilia a perversion, even when it occurs in a context in which most are unwilling to claim that voyeurism and exhibitionism are perverted.

Second, we have seen that a single individual may react quite differently to different actions which he/she calls perverted. Here again we have a phenomenon which cannot be explained by any of the analyses of 'sexual perversion' which we have examined in part II. However, if we accept assumptions (i) - (v) we can explain how it is possible for a single individual to react differently to different actions which he/she views as perverted. Let us say, for instance, that person P believes God has given humans a nature such that they are meant to experience sexual desire only for members of the opposite sex. Thus P will expect humans to engage in heterosexual activity. If P considers that homosexuality occurs with great frequency in virtually all cultures, P's expectation concerning heterosexual activity may be counterbalanced, or even reversed. On the other hand, P may reason that homosexuals utilize their free will to distort "natural" sexual desire, judge homosexuality a perversion, and morally condemn the activity. But if P does condemn homosexuality, this condemnation need not extend to all other sexual activities that P considers perverted. For example, P may find the thought of ingesting human feces revolting, taken his or her feelings to be representative of the species, and so not expect humans to engage in such
action. When P encounters a case in which this expectation is not fulfilled, P will call the activity perverted, and feel disgust or revulsion. However, if P believes that everyone has a right to treat themselves as they wish, P need not condemn coprophilia. Or to take another example, P may never have heard that some men enjoy dressing up in their wives' clothes. When P discovers that some men do enjoy this kind of sexual activity, P might call the action perverted because he/she believes it is odd, or statistically abnormal. In this case, then, P might not claim that the activity is wrong or disgusting, but merely surprising.

The above description of P's reasonings about, and reactions to, various sexual activities is doubtlessly oversimplified. In real life it is probably the case that people appeal to numerous, and sometimes competing expectations concerning human behavior when they make their judgments of perversion. Nevertheless, the above examples do illustrate my point. That is, because an individual does not employ a single standard or definition to judge all instances of perversion, that individual can react quite differently to different actions which he/she views as perverted. If person P judges an action to be perverted because that action does not conform to an expectation for behavior which is founded on a descriptive element in P's theory of human nature, P may react in manner M. If P judges another action perverted because it does not conform to an expectation for behavior which is based on a normative element in P's theory of human nature, P may not react in manner M but rather in manner N. Thus it should come as no surprise that no individual reacts in exactly the same way to all those sexual actions which he or she considers to be perverted.

Third, given the view of sexual perversion we now are defending we can see how it is possible for individuals to make judgments of perversion which are at odds with their own, formally stated definitions of 'sexual perversion'. For example, we have seen that Nagel refuses to call sexual fantasizing perverted, even though this activity conforms to his own definition of 'sexual perversion' (definition (c)). Now although Nagel recognizes the problem, he refuses either to reject his definition or to modify his judgment regarding sexual fantasizing, thereby leaving himself open to the charge of inconsistency. Nagel's way out of the difficulty is to claim that "a simple dichotomy between perverted and unperverted sex is too crude to organize the phenomena adequately" (Nagel, PS, 258). In effect, Nagel is telling us that no definition of 'sexual perversion' can be devised to properly categorize all forms of sexual behavior, but that his definition ought to be accepted because it works better than any other. Now if we assume that Nagel makes his judgments of perversion by appealing to his own definition of 'sexual perversion', we must claim that Nagel's reply to the charge of inconsistency simply misses the point. On the other hand, given our present view of how judgments of perversion are formed we can make sense of Nagel's position: First, Nagel formulates his judgments of perversion by appealing to expectations which he has concerning behavior. Next, he attempts to "organize these phenomena" by finding some element lacking in all and only those actions which he calls perverted. Ultimately Nagel accepts definition (c) because this definition organizes the phenomena regarding his own judgments of perversion better than any other. Still, Nagel's definition is only an after-the-fact generalization, and Nagel does not appeal to this definition when he makes his judgments of perversion. Consequently, some of Nagel's judgments may turn out to be inconsistent with his definition. Such, for example, is the case with sexual fantasiz-
ing. Furthermore, it is not at all surprising that Nagel does not want to call sexual fantasizing perverted. After all, all humans fantasize and daydream. Then too, our fantasies often are sparked by some activity in which we find ourselves engaged, e.g., looking at a paper clip may lead one to think of a fishing hook, an upcoming fishing trip, etc. This being the case, we would expect humans who are engaged in sexual activity to have sexual fantasies. Insofar as this expectation is fulfilled, then, sexual fantasizing is "natural", and not at all perverted.

Thus far I have shown that my account of our use of 'sexual perversion' is able to explain all of the phenomena which could not be accounted for on any of the alternative analyses of 'sexual perversion' examined in part II of this essay. But there are a number of other characteristics possessed by judgments of perversion that also ought to be explained by any adequate analysis of 'sexual perversion'. For example, all commentators agree that if there are perverted sexual activities they must be, in some sense, "unnatural" sex acts. My analysis explain why this is so. Just as we believe that it is natural for squirrels to gather nuts because squirrels have the nature they do, so too we believe that our expectations concerning human behavior describe natural human conduct. Simply put, we reason as follows: humans have nature x; nature x disposes one to act in way a, . . . , n; therefore, it is natural for humans to act in ways a, . . . , n. When humans do not act in ways a, . . . , n, their behavior deviates from our expectations, and such action either may be described as perverted (deviant), or as unnatural.

Second, calling perverted actions unnatural implies that judgments of perversion are not purely subjective, but rather refer to some fact or set of objective facts. My analysis also explains this implication, for on my view judgments of perversion refer, ultimately, to theories of human nature—theories which we rather naively assume truthfully represent some cluster of facts regarding human nature. Furthermore, the "facts" referred to are precisely the kind necessary to explain: (A) the general agreement we find concerning the character of many sexual acts, and (B) the widespread disagreement evidenced concerning other sexual acts (e.g., homosexuality, masturbation). That is, we would expect the vast majority of people in any given society to share a number of common beliefs concerning human nature. These common beliefs produce similar expectations concerning human behavior, and hence, in many cases, similar judgments of perversion. Still, people can and do accept quite different theories, and when this happens, different judgments of perversion may result.

Third, given my analysis of 'sexual perversion' we can see why people often say that perverts are "sick" or "subhuman". If human beings have nature x, and nature x causes behavior a, . . . , n, then it seems plausible to assume that persons who do not act in ways a, . . . , n either: (1) lack some property present in x (so that they are "subhuman"), or (2) have some additional property interfering with x's operation (so that they are "sick" or "deranged").

Finally, my analysis explains why the authors of definitions (a) through (g) all fail to define 'sexual perversion' successfully, and why all of these authors attempt to support their definitions by appealing to beliefs concerning human nature. Given my view, a person must refer to beliefs concerning human nature to defend any definition of 'sexual perversion', because what one sees as perverted and unperverted is deter-
mined, ultimately, by his or her theory of human nature. Further, all attempts to formulate a reportive definition of 'perversion' by appealing to a single, simple standard specifying "natural" human sexual behavior are doomed to failure. Judgments of perversion are complex affairs. When we make such judgments we refer to a number of different expectations concerning human behavior. We may refer to certain expectations to judge one form of sexual behavior, and to completely different expectations to judge another. Furthermore, expectations based on the notion of an "ideal" human may differ radically from expectations based on purely descriptive considerations. Then too, our expectations for behavior may vary from time to time as we slowly change or modify our beliefs concerning human nature. Given such circumstances it is not at all surprising that the authors of definitions (a) through (g) all fail to formulate a definition of 'sexual perversion' which can act as a rule of substitution in ordinary discourse.

IV

If the analysis given in part III of this essay is correct we can say that 'sexual perversion' is a cluster term. That is to say, ordinary usage indicates that 'sexual perversion' has an associated cluster of properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_n \) such that various subsets of \( P_1, \ldots, P_n \) are sufficient for application of the term, but no \( P_i \) is necessary. However, when we say that 'sexual perversion' is a cluster term in this sense we do not fully describe the complex character of this term's use in ordinary language. Indeed, to fully describe our use of the term, we must stress at least two further points.

First, we have seen that it is a person's expectations concerning human behavior which determine his or her use of 'sexual perversion'. Thus it is expectations of this sort which delineate the cluster of properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_n \) associated with anyone's use of 'sexual perversion'. But we also have seen that one's expectations for human behavior are determined by his/her beliefs concerning human nature. In principle, then, two or more people could accept totally different views of human nature, and so appeal to completely different expectations when they made their judgments of perversion. Or to put it another way, one cluster of properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_{10} \) could be associated with person X's use of 'sexual perversion', while a totally different cluster, \( P_{11}, \ldots, P_{20} \), could be associated with person Y's use. Now it is obvious that people in our society do accept different beliefs concerning human nature. Thus 'sexual perversion' probably has numerous different uses in our language, each use being relative to the theory of human nature which a given person accepts.

Second, if my analysis of our ordinary use of 'sexual perversion' is correct, two or more people could accept the same theory of human nature and still disagree in their use of 'sexual perversion'. Say, for example, that person X and person Y accept the same theory of human nature, and that both persons associate the cluster of properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_{10} \) with their use of 'sexual perversion'. In addition, let us assume that properties \( P_{11}, \ldots, P_{20} \) are associated with both X's and Y's use of 'unperverted sex', and that both X and Y agree that a particular sexual activity \( S \) possesses properties \( P_1, P_2, \) and \( P_{11} \). In this case, then, X could be impressed by the fact that the number of \( S \)'s properties counting for use of 'perversion' outnumber those counting against
use of the term, and so called (S) perverted. On the other hand, \( P_u \)
may represent an expectation for human behavior which is central to \( X \)'s
and \( Y \)'s theory of human nature, while \( P_t \) and \( P_2 \) represent "peripheral"
expectations. If so, \( Y \) might well conclude that possession of \( P_u \)
"outweighs" possession of \( P_t \) and \( P_2 \), and so insist that (S) is unper-
verted.

If the concept of sexual perversion is as complex as I have ar-
gued, it is a sheer waste of time to try to describe the use or uses
which 'sexual perversion' has in ordinary language, and philosophers
would be well advised to give up this enterprise. If this is so, however,
it appears that philosophers who continue to remain interested in the
concept of sexual perversion have but one avenue of study left open to
them, namely, that of developing and defending a theoretical definition
of 'sexual perversion'. To succeed in this undertaking, a philosopher
would have to do at least the following: (1) recognize the intimate con-
nection which exists between one's theory of human nature and his/her
concept of sexual perversion, (2) develop a theory of human nature (T),
(3) show that (T) requires acceptance of a particular definition of 'sex-
ual perversion', and then (4) demonstrate that (T) is more adequate than
all theories of human nature which give rise to different definitions of
'sexual perversion'. If a philosopher were to proceed in this fashion, he
or she might succeed in discovering what we ought to mean by 'sexual
perversion'. Indeed, the philosopher might even hope to have his/her
definition of 'sexual perversion' become the dominate use in everyday
discourse. If any philosopher were to have such aspirations, however, I
fear that he/she would be frustrated; for I believe the concept of
human nature, like the concepts of nature, democracy, science, and
other such notions, is an essentially contested concept (ECC).27 Un-
fortunately, I cannot now defend this view in detail; for commentators
disagree regarding the characteristics which define ECC's,28 and it
would take a full-length essay for me to defend my position. On the
other hand, I can and will take note of two characteristics which com-
mentators agree are possessed by ECC's, and so at least indicate why it
is plausible to assume that human nature is an ECC.

First, when W.B. Gallie describes the disputes which surround the
concepts of democracy and art (concepts which he considers to be
ECC's), he says the following:

When we examine the different uses of these terms and the
characteristic arguments in which they figure we soon see
that there is no one clearly definable general use of any of
them which can be set up as the correct or standard use . .
. Now once this variety of functions is disclosed it might
well be expected that the disputes in which the above men-
tioned concepts figure would at once come to an end. But in
fact this does not happen. Each party continues to maintain
that the special functions which the term . . . 'work of art'
or 'democracy' . . . fulfills on its behalf or on its inter-
pretation, is the correct or proper or primary, or the only im-
portant, function which the term in question can plainly be
said to fulfill. Moreover, each party continues to defend its
case with what it claims to be convincing arguments, evi-
dence and other forms of justification. (Gallie, 168).
It should be clear that this description applies, not only to the concepts of democracy and art, but also to differences of opinion concerning the proper understanding of 'human nature'.

Second, Gallie makes clear that although a dispute concerning the proper use of an ECC bears an affinity to the "competition" we find between rival scientific hypotheses, the two cases are quite different:

Competition between scientific hypotheses works successfully largely because there are acknowledged general methods or principles for deciding between rival hypotheses . . . . But nothing remotely like this is true in the case of essentially contested concepts; none of these, in the nature of the case, ever succumbs--as most scientific theories eventually do--to a definite or judicial knockout. (Gallie, 179)

Despite thousands of years of argument concerning the "correct" understanding of 'human nature', the conflict remains unresolved. This is not to deny, of course, that an individual may reject all theories of human nature save one because he/she believes his/her theory is better supported than any other. But this is always the case with ECC’s. Furthermore, no theory of human nature has been subjected to "a definite or judicial knockout", for each of the various theories of human nature can be accepted and defended by someone. Once again, then, the evidence indicates that it is not absurd to think of the concept of human nature as an ECC.

Disputes about ECC’s go on endlessly. Thus if, as I suspect, human nature is an ECC, no philosopher can demonstrate that his/her theoretical definition of 'sexual perversion' captures the one correct meaning of the term, because no one can prove that the concept of human nature which supports his/her definition is true. Still, this does not mean that attempts to formulate and defend theoretical definitions of 'sexual perversion' should not go forward. Just because philosophical debates are endless does not mean that any answer is as good as any other. By clarifying and evaluating the concepts of human nature which underlie different theoretical definitions of 'sexual perversion', philosophers can put us in a position to make an informed and knowledgeable choice as regards our own use of 'perversion'. Surely any advance along these lines would be a contribution to the common good.

ENDNOTES

* Comments by Robert Almeder, Robert Arrington, Edward Madden, and Milton Snoeyenbos were extremely helpful to me in the formulation of my ideas.

2 Everyone agrees that cluster terms cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Unfortunately, however, various interpretations of 'cluster terms' are present in the literature (compare, for example, Steven Boer's definition in "Cluster-Concepts and Sufficiency Definitions" Philosophical Studies, 25 (1974), 119, with Peter Achinstein's lengthy analysis in Concepts of Science (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 1-46. For my use of 'cluster term' see 345-6 of this essay.
3 This is the traditional Catholic view. See Charles E. Curran, Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 165-72.

4 This view is accepted by some contemporary Catholics. See Ibid., 172-90.

5 Thomas Nagel, "Sexual Perversion", in Philosophy and Sex. Eds. Baker and Elliston, (Prometheus Books, 1975), 247-59. Hereafter I will refer to Philosophy and Sex as PS.


8 Joseph Margolis, "The Question of Homosexuality" PS, 268-87.


16 When Alan Goldman characterizes the concept of sex implicit in his definition of 'sexual perversion', he repeatedly states that his view emphasizes the "purely physical or animal" aspect of sex. For example, after criticizing a number of analyses of sex which differ from his own, Goldman says: "What all these analyses share . . . is accordance with . . . the Platonic-Christian moral tradition, according to which the animal or purely physical element of humans is the source of immorality, and plain sex in the sense I defined it is an expression of this element. . . ." (Goldman, PS, 279. See also PS, 271)


13 Apparently, Goldman never argues directly for his conception of sex because he believes "we all know what sex is, at least in obvious cases, and do not need philosophers to tell us". (Goldman, PS, 270).

14 Goldman criticizes only definitions (a) through (d). He accepts (e) himself, and does not consider either (f) or (g).

15 Goldman tells us that if voyeurism and/or masturbation are used as imaginative substitutes for actual physical contact with another, the acts are not perverted because they still satisfy normal sexual desire. On the other hand, if voyeurism and masturbation do not satisfy a desire for physical contact, but rather a desire merely for looking or self-titillation, then the acts are perverted (Goldman, PS, 270). This way of looking at things may appear plausible so long as one's concern is with voyeurism and masturbation; however, it hardly seems plausible in the case of coprophilia. Also, we should note that Goldman's definition of 'sexual perversion' is stated in such a way that it classifies necrophilia
and pediphilia as normal sex, and these judgments clearly do not accord with ordinary usage.

16 This is expressly admitted by the author of definition (g): "It is one of the chief merits of our 'inapplicability' theory of unnaturalness that it enables us to explain why psychologically educated people are less willing to speak of unnatural behavior than most people are. Such people are ... usually willing to concede the existence of impulses toward incest, homosexuality, [etc.] ... in themselves. So they have less fear of those impulses ... and thus have less need for the ... mechanism of keeping those impulses ... repressed by thinking of them ... as not within their (natural) world". (Slote, PS, 264)

17 For example, proponents of definitions (a) and (b) believe that judgments of perversion involve moral condemnation (Curran, 165-90). The author of definition (f) agrees, but insists that an element of disgust or abhorrence also must be associated with judgments of perversion (Margolis, PS, 300). The author of definition (g) distinguishes between moral censure and moral condemnation, and then claims that 'sexual perversion' carries only a connotation of moral censure (Solomon, PS, 269). Finally, although the author of definition (c) believes that 'sexual perversion' has an evaluative dimension, he does not seem to feel that the evaluation is moral (Nagel, PS, 258-9).

18 The data regarding judgments of perversion which are referred to throughout this paper were gathered from approximately 70 of my graduate and undergraduate students. Critics may charge that this sample is too small and/or unrepresentative, and I acknowledge that both criticisms may be true. However, some data is better than no data at all, and it is precisely this lack of data which we find present in all other attempts to analyze 'sexual perversion'.

19 Context sensitivity does not seem to extend to all sexual practices ordinarily called perverted by my students. For example, all of my students insist that necrophilia and coprophilia are perverted regardless of the contexts in which these activities occur.

20 Alan Goldman, who defends the nonevaluative definition of 'sexual perversion' (definition (e)), recognizes this problem, and admits that he does not provide a completely adequate solution (Goldman, PS, 286).

21 For an excellent history of the traditional Catholic's struggle with this problem see Curran, 170-80.

22 For example, if a car runs out of gasoline and comes to a halt, I may say: (i) the cause of the car's stopping was that it ran out of gasoline, or (ii) the car came to a halt because of the friction of the tires on the road and the air around the car. If I assert (i) I take the only change introduced into the given set of conditions to be the cause of the car's stopping; if I assert (ii) my claim is that the forceful, powerful elements active in the environment caused the car to come to a halt. Both definitions of 'cause' (as well as many others) are properly employed in ordinary discourse, and we can explain why a person appeals to one definition rather than to another by referring to the speaker's purposes together with the context in which the term is employed. For a more detailed explanation of this point see James Humber
This tendency has been noted by a number of commentators, yet it has not been adequately explained. See Goldman, PS, 279; Nagel, PS, 251; Solomon, PS, 269.

I do not mean to imply by this that 'sexual perversion' is applied only to human behavior. As some commentators have observed (e.g., Nagel, PS, 248; Sara Ruddick, "Better Sex" PS, 92), we sometimes do describe animal behavior as sexually perverted. When this happens we may be anthropomorphizing, i.e., applying our concept of sexually perverted human behavior to animals, or we may be asserting that animals are engaging in sexual behavior which is unnatural for members of their own species. Of the two alternatives, the former would seem to be the most plausible, for we apply the concept of sexual perversion only to those animals for whom we feel some affinity, e.g., pets, animals with human form, etc., and not to bugs, worms, fish, and similar beings.

We might also note that in addition to the above, properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_{20} \) could be associated with \( X \)'s use of 'unperverted sex' while, at the same time, properties \( P_1, \ldots, P_{10} \) were associated with \( Y \)'s use of the term. In this case, then, \( X \) and \( Y \) would never agree in their judgments of perversion, for their uses of 'sexual perversion' would be totally inconsistent.

This is not the only way in which the meaning of 'sexual perversion' is relative. A person's beliefs concerning human nature could change slowly over time. If this were to happen, the cluster of properties associated with that person's use of 'sexual perversion' could change, in which case the individual might call an activity perverted at one time and unperverted at a later time.


Gallie's defining characteristics are given Ibid., 171-80; Kekes' are found scattered throughout his article.

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