

6-2001

Moral Reflections on Prostitution

Yolanda Estes
Mississippi State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Estes, Yolanda (2001) "Moral Reflections on Prostitution," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Essays in Philosophy

A Biannual Journal

Vol. 2 No. 2

Moral Reflections on Prostitution

Introduction

Many “liberal,” or libertarian, accounts of prostitution assert that prostitution is no more intrinsically wrong or harmful than any other type of service work.¹ I believe that prostitution violates the Kantian “principle of humanity,” because it reflects a disrespectful attitude, which is expressed in the nonchalant use of the human body as a mere means to achieve some goal.² I hope to convince my readers, who may not share my moral presuppositions, that prostitution defies the limits of respectful sexual relations, because it proffers a monetary substitute for mutual desire and concern and, hence, that it is a morally questionable and harmful activity.³ In support of these claims, I offer: 1) a discussion of Kantian morality and sexual ethics, 2) an explanation of the minimum criteria for respectful sexual relations, 3) a description of the general dynamic of prostitution, 4) an analysis of the client’s objective, and 5) a phenomenology of prostituted sex.

I. Kantian Morality and Sexual Ethics

Kantian moral theory identifies subjectivity and dignity with a self-determining will located within the limited willing activity of embodied individuals. The individual knows itself as a subject only by means of the recognition of another subject within a particular social context.⁴ Sexuality is one way in which individuals express their subjectivity. Each empirical subject is partly determined by its choices with regard to sexual expression and its mode of integrating sex, gender, and sexuality within its life as a whole.

All sexual activities express subjectivity, but not all sexual activities involve mutual respect. Some sexual activities reflect a person’s attempt to determine another subject, by receiving the other’s recognition of the person’s will, without yielding to the other’s influence, recognizing the other’s will, and thus without incurring an obligation to them. The wrongfulness of actions, sexual or not, resides in this affront to another person’s human dignity. This account of sexual morality may not satisfy every moral theory, but most moral theories would allow that sexual relations should involve some type of mutual respect, so I shall outline some minimum criteria for mutually respectful sexual relations that do not bind the reader to an explicitly Kantian position.

II. Mutually Respectful Sex

Mutually respectful sex occurs within a context of mutual consent, desire, and concern. Mutual respect requires that potential sexual partners give an explicit, or at least an implicit, expression of their willing participation in the sexual act. Verbal consent is the most obvious expression of a person’s free decision to participate in an activity, but consent alone provides no immunity to moral

reproach. Insofar as one shows a respectful regard for a potential sexual partner, one cannot ignore her desires.⁵ While one need not accommodate others' desires, one ought to take their desires and aversions into account.⁶ Moreover, one should exhibit concern for the other's interests, needs, and general well being.⁷

Without mutual consent, desire, and concern, potentially pleasing, bodily acts become sexual intrusions that obscure the distinction between a human body and a thing.⁸ Other standards might be necessary to determine that a sexual encounter is morally right, personally satisfying, or prudent, but respect for persons in the sexual context requires these minimum criteria. If the motivations for sexual activity preclude treating either sexual partner with respect, sexual activity objectifies the participants and violates their human dignity. Although such acts can damage or destroy the human body, the relevant issue is that they appropriate it without concern for its subjectivity.⁹ The following description shows that the general dynamic of prostitution presumes the absence of mutual desire and concern and thus, that prostitution fails to meet minimum criteria of mutually respectful sexual relations.

III. The General Dynamic of Prostitution

The prostitute uses her body as a means for monetary gain. Money is her primary objective and not merely a deciding factor.¹⁰ This factor would be secondary only if the prostitute were willing to engage in the act without it. She engages in the act for reasons other than her own sexual desire and hence, her toleration of sex in the prostitution encounter occurs without expressing a desire to relate to her client sexually. Do these conditions imply anything significant about prostitution? I believe so, but in order to expose those implications, I must first consider the client, his objective, and certain arguments for prostitution.

The client uses the prostitute's body as a means for sexual gratification. Sexual pleasure is his primary motivation. The client understands that something other than sexual desire motivates her actions. Regardless of attempts to convince himself otherwise, only a very stupid man believes a woman desires him when she rejects his sexual advances without monetary compensation. The client's lack of concern for her is equally obvious insofar as he accepts her terms. Nonetheless, many outlets for sexual expression exist, so what motivates a man to buy the services of a prostitute rather than to seek the company of unpaid lovers or his own right hand? The general dynamic of prostitution fails to answer this question. The client's secret objective hides between the cracks in a common liberal account of prostitution. Exposing this objective will show that not only does prostitution fail to meet minimum criteria of respectful sexual relations but that it also raises profound concerns for almost any moral theory.

IV. The Client's Objective

Many liberal accounts of prostitution compare sexual desires to physical needs, like hunger, and sexual work to service work, like the restaurant industry. If this comparison were strong then an analogy of buying sex and dining out would illuminate the client's objectives. A man buys a meal in a restaurant because he is hungry and does not like, know how, or have time to cook. Presumably, a man uses a prostitute to sate his sexual appetite. At this point, however, the analogy

between the motivations of the client and the diner weakens. After all, masturbation offers a form of immediate sexual relief that most people readily enjoy and grasp.

Lest I be accused of oversimplifying the liberal account, I shall consider a more refined version of the analogy by comparing the prostitute's client and the gourmet diner. A full stomach fails to satisfy the gourmet who craves a meal prepared by an expert chef. Perhaps the client seeks sexual expertise. This seems most unlikely. If men sought prostitutes because they wanted sexual skill, prostitutes would possess some type of unique sexual training or talent. Very few, if any, prostitutes undergo any sort of unique sexual training, and although prostitutes accumulate a certain level of experience; experience, as disappointed diners and lovers know, does not necessarily produce good cooks or lovers.¹¹ The prostitute's client is no more like a gourmet diner than he is like a hungry man.

The liberal analogy fails because it reflects the misconception that prostitution exists to relieve sexual needs. The prostitute's client wants something other than a mere orgasm or even an especially good orgasm. He wants sexual relations with a woman. This, however, does not explain why he buys the sexual services of a woman. Perhaps, he is homely, loathsome, shy, or in some way unappealing to most women and therefore unable to find willing sexual partners. Although few people are that repugnant, most people meet obstacles in their pursuit of sexual satisfaction.¹² It is, however, usually possible to overcome these difficulties by altering one's expectations, improving oneself, and in general, trying harder. Furthermore, most men who seek prostitutes have, or could obtain, willing, unpaid sexual partners.¹³ In other words, finding a sexual partner is not the issue; perhaps, he wants a particular sort of woman.

What sort of woman does the client want? He might want a more comely, obliging, or sexually adventurous woman. Why not seek relationships with beautiful, accommodating, or innovative women with whom he can share his desires? I reply, in a word: expedience. Initiating, building, and working for the type of sexual relationships that he desires involve an inconvenient, time-consuming, and arduous endeavor. Sexual activity offers potential delight but also potential rebuff, chagrin, and feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, even so-called "casual" relationships require some work, time, and obligations. Sexual partners may fulfill our desires, but they usually have desires that they want obliged too. Maintaining sexual relationships burdens the client with responsibilities and demands, which he would prefer to avoid.¹⁴

The prostitute does not satisfy the need for a woman or even the demand for a particular sort of woman. She accommodates the client's desires for a woman who ceases to exist when she is no longer wanted.¹⁵ A man seeks a prostitute in order to avoid the inconvenience of sexual relations with another subject. Indeed, he pays her to disguise the subjectivity expressed through her individual needs, interests, and desires.¹⁶ With a prostitute, a man can have sex when and how he wants it. The client can choose a woman on the basis of almost any criteria without exerting himself to attract her attention and arouse her desire. The consequences she bears for their sexual encounter need not concern him.

The prostitute's client wants to be like a restaurant patron or a gourmet diner. He *wants* to "taste" a woman with the same casual sensuality displayed in consuming a well-prepared rump-roast.¹⁷ But

what he wants in addition to this, the most demanding gourmet never asked from any piece of meat. Good manners, sexual skill, and convenience will not suffice. The prostitute must attend to her client as would a desiring lover. Her sexual performance must exhibit recognition of his individuality, his person.¹⁸ As noted by John Start Mill and Immanuel Kant and more recently seconded by Carol Pateman:

Their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favorite.¹⁹

Here, the liberal account of prostitution as a mutually beneficial, morally neutral, rational agreement between consenting equals disintegrates. The client stands in the absurd position of desiring a contradiction. Moreover, his desire expresses morally suspect objectives; for what 'more than actual service' could one rightfully demand from a professional, an employee, a servant, or, even, a "forced" slave? If the reader would imagine how these objectives influence the participants' sexual interplay, he or she might see that prostitution is scarcely beneficial for the prostitute or her client.

V. A Phenomenology of Prostitution

In prostitution, as in slavery, the "master's" desires remain unfulfilled, for obedience is bought rather than given.²⁰ The prostitute's consent to engage in sexual relations need not express her sentiments and indeed; her client has every reason to suspect that it does not. Her sexual identity and desires are entangled in a web of familial and social ties, personal interests and activities that constitute her life beyond prostitution. He cannot tap her passions without enmeshing himself therein.

The prostitute's role as "willing" slave demands that she exclude her sexual individuality from the encounter. She wants to preserve the integrity of her subjectivity and personal life without jeopardizing her agreement with the client. An indifferent attitude might insulate her individual subjectivity, but he expects more than a skilled automaton. Passionate reference to the richness of her personal life or solicitations for recognition of her desires and interests might force him to view her as a subject. Nonetheless, these modes of disclosing her subjectivity jeopardize her privacy and exceed the scope of her agreement with the client. A compromise more aptly preserves both her professional role and her sense of self and, thus, she might present an image of sexual desire by means of small talk, flirtation, and other theatrical devices.

Their sexual activity evokes feelings, emotions, and autonomic reactions that threaten the illusion. Every visible reaction evinced by the handling of her body must address the client's desires rather than her own. Her repugnance must not appear to him as disgust. Submitting to any pleasurable sensation threatens the integrity of her bonds with others, her sense of control, and the pretended irrelevance of her own bodily needs. In order to attend to her client's pleasure, without succumbing to her own responses, she must detach herself from the bodily event without separating herself from her body.

The repeated desensitization required by prostitution nullifies every emotion or sensible reaction threatening to engage the prostitute in the bodily event. The prostitute attempts to annihilate her

very presence within sexual activity by extinguishing her reaction to it. Mindful of the threat posed by potentially intense sensations and emotions, she alienates herself from her prostituted flesh, presenting the specter of a subject with a sensibility that she cannot permit herself to possess. A profound fragmentation of self allows her to believe that her body, which feels the corporeal presence of the client within itself, is not her "real" self. She creates a living mirage, simulating sexual involvement, but when the illusion dissolves, she expects to reintegrate her "real" untouchable self and her body. However, this is impossible, because her alienation is not a separation from her body, so it is not difficult to imagine that she might become conditioned to respond similarly to all sexual stimulation.

The client's conflicting demands mirror the prostitute's self-fragmentation. The client expects the hidden subject to recognize his subjectivity, but that would require acknowledging her subjectivity as well. A genuine interest in her individual needs and desires compromises the bargain and hence, the contradictory nature of his demands precludes a happy coincidence of his desires. His attempt to obtain her recognition without incurring any obligation perpetuates her self-dissolution. He must reunite the fragments in order to obtain her recognition, but his endeavor to do so embroils him in mimicry of seduction or rape.

Attempts to seduce the prostitute, by coaxing her into dropping her defenses, produce an illusion of trust, understanding, and mutual recognition, which the mercenary nature of their encounter renders impossible. In order to see the prostitute as someone with whom he identifies, the client might "normalize" their encounter by making disarming compliments with regard to her appearance, but even more so, to her intelligence, charm, and qualities of character. Concerned sounding questions about her personal life or attempts to perform the sex act in a diligent, gentle manner, as would a "good lover," might create the appearance of a connection based on mutual desire, concern, and respect. Indeed, the need to maintain this illusion might inspire the client to manifest his courtesy by frequently asking what pleases her, showing great interest to avoid causing distress, or making the most determined efforts to bring her to climax. From outward appearance, his seduction of the reluctant mistress appears to be the model for considerate lovemaking.

Seduction is only one of many possibilities. He might instead attempt to provoke a genuine response by degrading her. He might demonstrate his disregard for her needs and desires by making a show of doing exactly what seems to revolt or injure her. Stressing the mercenary nature of their encounter, he might insist on "getting his money's worth." After making it clear that her entire worth rests on her sexual performance, he might denigrate her services by claiming she is not worth the price he paid. In short, he might present a model for brutal sexual intercourse that resembles rape in every respect other than her pre-consent.

Of course, the client might do something else to reach her, but unless he is willing to forgo his original objectives, everything he does is destined to fail. Although savageness denies the prostitute's subjectivity in a more cruel way, tenderness might interfere with her endeavor to extricate herself from the situation in a more disconcerting manner. On the one hand, brutality undermines her sense of self-respect and composure. As his intrusions become more persistent, her effort to separate herself from the encounter becomes more desperate. On the other hand, kindly gestures compel her to view him as a person. Her task might be easier if the client left her the option of viewing him as nothing more than a vicious animal that relieves itself in her body. By avoiding feelings of compassion or respect for the client, she denies his capacity to touch her.

One can easily imagine that she resents any attempt to engage her. In other contexts, those to whom the prostitute is bound by more complex patterns of emotions, loyalties, and responsibilities touch her body. How dare this man, who merely paid for a service, attempt to arouse her, as would a lover, as if he expected a genuine response? By what right does he pretend to recognize her humanity, thereby seeking to integrate himself within the context of a life she has so carefully abstracted from this encounter? How dare this other man, who bought her obedience, attempt to hurt, anger, or shame her in order to steal the sentiment he could not buy? It is plausible that she might re-integrate herself, but she has solid grounds to doubt the veracity of her self-perception, since she has disowned its reports and ignored its advice.

One can imagine that the client also feels somewhat cheated. While expecting to buy sex, he expects to buy sex with a woman, albeit one over whom he has temporary control. She, however, denies him what he most desires: recognition of his subjectivity through an authentic surrender of body and soul. The client seeks to control the prostitute's sexual expression without stifling the candid spontaneity of her responses. He wants for her to get caught up in the moment despite herself, to elicit from her a genuine, but predictable, response. It is conceivable that he might penetrate her defense, but if so, he has good reason to suspect the authenticity of her response, for while predictable responses can be genuine, one cannot require that genuine responses be predictable.

Conclusion

Both the client and the prostitute attempt to use the other as a mere means to an end, but neither achieves his or her original objective, because their ends are self-contradictory. Each intends to leave with something gained, but each loses more than was counted in the bargain. Sex in such a context may be consenting, but it demonstrates a callous insensitivity to the interests of the participants. This disdain for persons makes prostitution wrong from a Kantian moral perspective. Moreover, prostitution ensnares the participants in a web of deception and contradiction from which neither is likely to emerge unharmed, which should raise serious questions about its moral permissibility regardless of one's moral presuppositions.

While neither the client nor the prostitute is innocent, I do not call for the vilification or legal censure of those who bear an immediate and commensurate penalty for their mistakes. The relationship between prostitutes and their clients reflects a form of destructive interaction present in many other sexual and non-sexual human relationships. As an extreme example of this general form of injurious behavior, it highlights wrongful features of other sexual or labor relationships. Consequently, prostitution points to the need for amending a social vision that reduces morality to consent, contract, and fair market price and for revising human interactions that resemble prostitution.²¹

Yolanda Estes
Mississippi State University

1. Common usage defines prostitution as selling oneself for sexual hire or an unworthy cause. According to this definition, many forms of prostitution are legal, condoned, or even encouraged. In order to narrow the scope of this critique, I focus on the most overt form of sexual prostitution: the explicit, verbally consensual, voluntary exchange of a sexual act involving direct physical contact for money. I consider only the sexual relations between female prostitutes and male clients. I address the experience of prostitution in contemporary western society rather than presenting “origin stories,” cross-cultural comparisons, socio-economic analyses, or theories of prostitution. I do not discuss the present legal status of prostitution, because I deny that the essential problematic aspect of prostitution depend on its illegality. I am well aware of the division among feminists on this issue and do not wish to deny that some harmful aspects of prostitution stem from its illegality. Strong argument could be offered in defense of decriminalizing prostitution, but this argument will not be offered within the context of this paper. On the origins of prostitution and the need for a theory of prostitution see, Alison M. Jaggar, “Prostitution,” in *Philosophy of Sex*, ed. Alan Soble (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 348-368. For a comparison of prostitution in different societies see, Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994). For a discussion on the role of prostitution and marriage in patriarchal, capitalist society see, Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). For a discussion of the need for prostitutes to assume a subject position in philosophical discourse on prostitution see, Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

2. I appeal to Kant’s “principle of humanity,” which states: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” See, Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1964), 96.

In appealing to the principle of humanity, I assert that my argument presupposes basic Kantian principles, but I make no claims about Kant’s views of prostitution. Consequently this essay represents a “Kantian” reflection on prostitution rather than Kant’s reflections on prostitution. My argument depends on several features of Kant’s philosophy that tend to be minimized by contemporary critics. First, despite accusations to the contrary, Kant showed a remarkable understanding of our carnal, finite nature. Consequently, many of his claims about sexual relations are based on his cognizance that sexuality is inseparable from empirical subjectivity. Sexual relations involve the human subject in its entirety. Second, according to Kant’s interpretation of the Categorical Imperative, actions should not merely maintain humanity as an end in itself but should actively promote this end. Consequently, one has a meritorious duty to adopt the ends of others, with regard to their greater moral perfection, general human development, and their self-determined projects. For a discussion of this meritorious duty to others, see *Ibid.* 96-7.

3. This essay is based on an earlier essay, “The Myth of the Happy Hooker,” in *Violence Against Women*, edit. Stanley French, Laura Purdy, and Wanda Teays (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). In the earlier essay, my co-writer, Clelia Smyth Anderson and I argued that prostitution is also inherently violent, but I think that the wrongful nature of prostitution can be established independent of that claim.

4. This concept of human subjectivity originates with Kant and exerts profound influence on the tradition of German Idealism and on Continental Philosophy in general. Fichte assumes Kant’s

notion of an intelligible subject or “moral will” and argues that the intelligible I only appears in consciousness through the empirically determined, limited, embodied individual members of a social whole. According to both the Kantian and Fichtean theories of morality, human beings possess dignity because they are “ends in themselves,” i.e., willing beings capable of determining their own goals and projects. We show deference to the dignity of others by respecting their individual concerns, desires, and projects. The notion of “recognition” was introduced by Fichte through the doctrine of *Aufforderung*, the summons, but the reader is probably more familiar with the Hegelian and Sartrean concepts of recognition.

5. We might imagine a society in which a specifically sexual desire plays little or no role in intercourse, but in contemporary western society, sexual desire is a very relevant feature of sexual relations. To say, “I do not care if my sexual partner desires me,” is equivalent to saying “Her needs and wishes for pleasure, comfort, and contentment do not concern me.” How could one say this if one held one’s partner in high regard and possessed even a slight concern for her general well-being?

6. It should be self-explanatory that we violate a person’s freedom when we involve them in activities without their obvious agreement to engage in those activities. For this reason, consent is a necessary condition of sexual relations according to the implications of most moral theories. Nonetheless, to assume that consent is a sufficient condition for morally acceptable sexual relations seems a reckless moral attitude. People often consent to have sexual relations without desire. For instance, some people are afraid of hurting their potential partner’s feelings, of appearing “frigid,” or of failing some imaginary obligation. Although I am inviting a good deal of criticism by saying so, I suspect the feelings of uneasiness, bad faith, and guilt aroused by such “altruistic” sexual acts probably indicates something problematic. Moreover, when one imagines the complex and often tragic consequences of even so-called “casual” sexual encounters, requiring no more than consent seems unconscionably lenient. Human beings suffer when they engage in undesired activities just as they suffer when our desires are unfulfilled. Sometimes, suffering is unavoidable or morally necessary, such as when our desires are unreasonable or morally objectionable, but inflicting unnecessary suffering on another or on oneself is morally questionable at best.

7. In this context, “concern” does not denote a type of emotional sympathy but simply a moral regard for others’ interests, which include their needs, desires, and projects as well as their psychological and moral well-being. This claim might seem paternalistic, but demonstrating concern for others’ interests and acting in a paternalistic manner are not the same. Most moral theories acknowledge that one should consider others’ interests as well as one’s own. It is paternalistic to force or coerce a person into promoting her own interests, but it is only morally proper to refrain from actions that undermine another person’s interests. With regard to the case at hand, it is paternalistic to force or coerce a prostitute to give up her trade on the grounds that doing so is in her best interest. On the other hand, it is not paternalistic to refrain from purchasing her services because it is not in her best interest even if she consents to sell her services.

8. Many sexual abusers attempt to justify their actions by claiming that their victims “really” wanted, needed, or enjoyed the sexual encounter. Some sexual abusers claim to feel genuine concern and affection for their victims. This does not show that desire or concern justify sexual abuse, but it reveals that even the sexual abuser recognizes the significance of concern and desire within sexual relations. People who have been disillusioned by their sexual partner’s lack of

concern or desire often report feeling dirtied or violated. This does not show that mutual concern and desire provides sufficient basis for a sexual relationship, but it does reveal that these factors affect our interpretation of our sexual relationships.

9. This attitude makes blatant physical violence possible, because it cultivates an image of others that permits more obvious forms of assault, such as rape, battery, and murder. Assuming an attitude of callous insensitivity towards human beings and viewing them as if they were mere means makes it easier to treat them like things that one can buy, waste, or break.

10. A woman considers this way of earning a living for a variety of reasons. I can imagine some very practical considerations that might make prostitution appealing to some women. Women often experience difficulty earning a living wage and prostitution offers rather significant returns for the investment of time and money. Because many women are often family care-givers, they need flexible working schedules. Prostitution generally allows for a more flexible schedule than other jobs. Nonetheless, each particular act of prostitution occurs on condition that the prostitute receives money for the sexual services she provides. This exchange defines the sexual interaction as prostitution.

11. The myth of the sexual expertise does not wash when we remember that many clients will pay extra for a “new girl” or a supposed virgin. Furthermore, if experience were the relevant issue, it seems to be a fact of common knowledge that experienced lovers do not usually become so by playing hard to get. It is true that many prostitutes receive a type of “training” at the hands of pimps, proprietors of “escort” agencies, or “massage” parlors, but this type of “education” mainly focuses on etiquette, appearance, and overcoming aversions to particular sexual acts. This may indeed make a prostitute more successful, but it does not endow her with any special sexual skills. Furthermore, it does not distinguish prostitutes from other polite, attractive, uninhibited women. For an indication of the training through exposure to pornography, etc. that many prostitutes receive see, Evelina Giobbe, “Confronting the Liberal Lies about Prostitution,” in *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 125. See also, Sunny Carter, “A Most Useful Tool,” in *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*, p. 114 for a discussion of the extent of unique skills and sexual education of one former prostitute: “I went shopping for what I imagined to be proper “hooker clothes”: a long, flowing dressing gown, garter belts and stockings, ridiculously high heels. I practiced walking the length of my apartment until I felt confident that I could wear the damn things without falling down. I felt I had to call attention to my only good feature---my legs. The rest of me was twenty pounds overweight, I had no waist at all, my breasts were big, but droopy. My face was passing, but nothing to write home about. Still, nobody had ever kicked me out of bed, so, as I waited for my very first client, a fellow named Harold, I walked back and forth to make sure I had the shoes down pat, smoked one cigarette after another and made several trips to the john to check my make-up and hair.”

12. It was recently suggested to me that a plausible and morally acceptable reason for having sexual relations with a prostitute would be that one’s “beloved” but infirm wife could not participate in conjugal relations. Presumably, seeking a prostitute would spare the “beloved” sexual advances that she could not reciprocate and emotional infidelity that an extramarital lover could present. While there are surely situations in which performing the sexual act might be painful, repugnant, or

dangerous, one might ask oneself if a devoted spouse ought not concern himself with something other than his own sexual needs in such a case. One might ask as well, if the “beloved” wife ought to be overcome by gratitude for his “consideration.”

13. A recent talk-show interview with a man who claimed he was unable to find willing sexual partners sheds some light on this issue. After “confessing” to thousands of television viewers and the live audience that he was “forced” to pay for sex, the rather ordinary, but by no means physically repugnant individual revealed that his problem had developed during middle age. He was no longer able to attract the sort of woman who attracted him. Indeed, he said he was unwilling to have sex with a woman whose “sexual standards were low enough to be attracted to me.”

14. In this respect, the prostitute’s client differs from the pedophile, the zoophile, and the necrophile only in degree. The fact that he attempts to accomplish his end by means of a live, adult, homo sapien provides him with a socially acceptable varnish that belies his perverse avoidance of human contact.

15. A recent article in *Playboy* concurs with this analysis. In “The Rules of the Game,” *Playboy*, 42 (10), p. 52, October 1995, James R. Peterson cites Al Goldstein’s explanation of why men seek the services of prostitutes. “Of all the commentators, Screw publisher Al Goldstein was most honest, reporting a story about the night he spent \$1000 on an escort. ‘It was splendid, rollicking sex. When it was over I felt like willing my body to science. And then she left. She left. As the supreme final act in our opera of fucking, her leaving was like a cherry on a sundae, a sumptuous dessert after a seven course meal, a plunge into cool water after running a marathon. That’s when I had my glistening realization. I realized I wasn’t paying this woman for sex. I was paying her for the luxury of her leaving after sex.’”

16. Every individual’s sexual “personality” is a unique, complex combination of physical and emotional needs and responses. The same basic sexual acts may arouse feelings or pleasure, discomfort, or repugnance depending on the particular context, the participant's bodily states, and the manner in which the acts are performed. The prostitute cannot yield to her particular sexual personality, because she must exhibit the personality that he desires. Mature sexual partners understand that sex is that it is an exploration in which one is permitted to fail. Prostitution forbids her this luxury. Moreover, even if she feels pleasure, she must express her pleasure in a manner that is pleasurable for him.

17. He wants to make of her “a thing on which another satisfies his appetite, just as he satisfies his hunger on a steak.” (Immanuel Kant, *The Philosophy of Law*, trans. W. Hastie, in *Morality and Moral Controversies*, ed. John Arthur, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993, p. 254.)

18. See Carole Pateman, “What's Wrong with Prostitution,” in *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 131. Pateman points out that the complaints of most clients of prostitutes concern the prostitutes’ cold, disinterested, and mercenary attitudes. In other words, a pretty appearance, sexual expertise, and good manners are not the only issues. Men who seek prostitutes expect a degree of warmth and personal interest. They expect to be treated as something more than a party to a mercenary arrangement. To be sure, a restaurant patron expects a little more than tasty food, but if the food is good, the establishment is clean, and the service is polite and efficient, he would have no grounds

to complain that the waiter was mechanical and impersonal or that the chef did not “really care.”

19. John Stuart Mill, “The Subjection of Women,” in *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. A. S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 141. Compare this passage to Immanuel Kant: “For love out of inclination cannot be commanded.” See *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 67.

20. Of course, we do not mean to suggest that slavery, prostitution, and marriage are identical. Generally speaking, women do not choose to be sold as slaves, but they do often choose to become wives or prostitutes. Nonetheless, the attitudes of some husbands and all clients towards wives and prostitutes resemble the attitudes of masters towards slaves in many respects. See also on the relations between contract laborers and employers versus slaves and masters, Immanuel Kant: “It may however appear that one man may bind himself to another by a contract of hire, to discharge a certain service that is permissible in its kind, but is left entirely undetermined as regards its measure or amount; and that as receiving wages or board or protection in return, he thus becomes only a servant subject to the will of a master (subditus) and not a slave (servus). But this is an illusion. . . . [T]his would imply that they had actually given themselves away to their masters as property; which, in the case of persons, is impossible. A person can, therefore, only contract to perform work that is defined both in quality and quantity, either as a day-labourer or as a domiciled subject.” The relationship between sexual partners is something quite different for Kant, sexual partners give themselves over wholly in an exchange of like for like, which is not at all the same as a contract of money for service. See Immanuel Kant, *The Science of Right*, trans. W. Hastie, in *Great Books of the Western World*, V. 42, (Chicago: IL, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 419-45.

21. I would like to thank the following people for valuable advice and support in preparing the final version of this essay: Michael Clifford, Melanie Eckford-Prosser Clifford, Michael Goodman, Clelia Smyth Anderson, and the anonymous reviewer of *Essays in Philosophy*.