

## **Aldous Huxley on Dr J.D. Unwin's "Sex and Culture", within his book "Ends and Means"**

We must now consider very briefly the relation of sexual activity to mental activity in individuals and to the cultural condition of society. This subject was discussed by the late Dr. J.D. Unwin, whose monumental *Sex and Culture* is a work of the highest importance. Unwin's conclusions, which are based upon an enormous wealth of carefully sifted evidence, may be summed up as follows. All human societies are in one or another of four cultural conditions: zoistic, manistic, deistic, rationalistic. Of these societies the zoistic displays the least amount of mental and social energy, the rationalistic the most. Investigation shows that the societies exhibiting the least amount of energy are those where prenuptial continence is not imposed and where the opportunities for sexual indulgence after marriage are greatest. The cultural condition of a society rises in exact proportion as it imposes prenuptial and postnuptial restraints upon sexual opportunity.

All the deistic societies insisted on prenuptial chastity; conversely all the societies which insisted on prenuptial chastity were in the deistic condition.

Is there any causal relationship between the compulsory continence and the thought, reflection and energy which produced the change from one cultural condition to another?

One thing is certain: if a causal relation exists, the continence must have caused the thought, not the thought the continence.

Again, 'the power of thought is inherent; similarly the power to display social energy is inherent; but neither mental nor social energy can be manifested except under certain conditions.' These conditions arise when sexual opportunity is reduced to a minimum. Civilized societies may be divided into different strata, representing every type of cultural condition from zoistic to rationalistic. 'The group within the society which suffers the greatest continence displays the greatest energy and dominates the society.' The dominating group determines the behaviour of the society as a whole. So long as at least one stratum of a society imposes prenuptial continence upon its members and limits post-nuptial sexual opportunity by means of strict monogamy, the society as a whole will behave as a civilized society.

The energy produced by sexual continence starts as 'expansive energy' and results in the society becoming aggressive, conquering its less energetic neighbours, sending out

colonies, developing its commerce and the like. But 'when the rigorous tradition (of sexual restraint) is inherited by a number of generations, the energy becomes productive.' Productive energy does not spend itself exclusively in expansion; it also goes into science, speculation, and social reform. Where productive energy persists for some time, a factor which Dr. Unwin calls 'human entropy' comes into play. Human entropy is the inherent tendency, manifested as soon as the suitable social conditions are created, towards increased refinement and accuracy. 'No society can display productive social energy unless a new generation inherits a social system under which sexual opportunity is reduced to a minimum. If such a system be preserved a richer and yet richer tradition will be created, refined by human entropy.

As a matter of brute historical fact, no civilized society has tolerated for very long the limitation to a minimum of its sexual opportunities. Within a few generations, the rules imposing absolute prenuptial continence upon females and absolutely monogamous forms of marriage are relaxed. When this happens, the society or the class loses its energy and is replaced by another society, or another class, whose members have made themselves energetic by practising sexual continence. Sometimes, writes Dr. Unwin, 'a man has been heard to declare that he wishes both to enjoy the advantages of high culture and to abolish compulsory continence. The inherent nature of the human organism, however, seems to be such that these desires are incompatible, even contradictory. . . . Any human society is free to choose, either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual freedom; the evidence is that it cannot do both for more than one generation.'

We have seen that, as a matter of historical fact, no society has consented to retain the tradition of prenuptial continence and absolute monogamy for very long. But it is also a matter of historical fact that these traditions have always hitherto been associated with the oppression of women and children. In deistic societies, wives have been regarded as slaves or mere chattels, having no legal entity. Custom and law have placed them at the mercy of their husbands. Discussing this fact, Dr. Unwin hazards the opinion 'that it was the unequal fate of women, not the compulsory continence, that caused the downfall of absolute monogamy. No society has yet succeeded in regulating the relations between the sexes in such a way as to enable sexual opportunity to remain at a minimum for an extended period. The inference I draw from the historical evidence is that, if ever such a result should be desired, the sexes must first be placed on a footing of complete legal equality.'

In this very brief summary I have certainly done much less than justice to Dr. Unwin's very remarkable book; but though doing it less than justice, I do not think that I have misrepresented its main conclusions. The evidence for these conclusions is so full, that it

is difficult to see how they can be rejected. They are conclusions which will certainly seem unpalatable to the middle-aged relics of a liberal generation. Such liberals are liberals, not only politically, but also in the sense in which Shakespeare's 'liberal shepherds' (the ones who called wild arums by a grosser name than dead-men's fingers) were liberal. They have been 'heard to declare,' very frequently and loudly, that they 'wish to enjoy the advantages of high culture and to abolish compulsory continence.' Living as they do upon the capital of energy accumulated by a previous generation of monogamists, whose wives came to them as virgines intactae, they can make the best of both worlds during their own lifetime. Dr. Unwin's researches have made it certain, however, that it will be impossible for their children to go on making the best of both worlds.

If Dr. Unwin's conclusions are well founded—and it is difficult to believe that they are not—how do they fit into our general ethical scheme? The first significant fact to be noticed is that 'the continence caused the thought, not the thought the continence.' Zoistic societies live in a condition of animal solidarity. In Dr. Unwin's words, 'we begin with a society in which all the individuals are locked together by forces we do not understand; such a society displays no energy. Now, this animal solidarity has certain merits; it is preferable, for example, to the animal individualism of unrestricted intra-specific competition. But these merits are sub-ethical; in other words, animal solidarity is below good and evil. People on the zoistic level are too much preoccupied with, and too completely de-energized by, unrestricted sexual indulgence to be able to pay attention to 'their actual relations with God and with one another.' Awareness is the condition of any moral behaviour superior to that of animals. The individual cannot transcend himself unless he first learns to be conscious of himself and of his relations with other selves and with the world. A measure of sexual continence is the precondition of awareness and of other forms of mental energy, conative and emotional as well as cognitive. But the precondition of moral behaviour need not itself be moral. As a matter of historical fact, the energy released by sexual continence has frequently been directed towards thoroughly immoral ends. Mental and social energy is comparable to the energy of falling water; it can be used for any purpose that men choose to put it to—for bullying the weak and exploiting the poor just as well as for exploring the secrets of nature, for creating masterpieces of art or for establishing union with ultimate reality.

Chastity is one of the major virtues inasmuch as, without chastity, societies lack energy and individuals are condemned to perpetual unawareness, attachment and animality. In another sense, however, chastity can rank only as a minor virtue; for, along with such other minor virtues as courage, prudence, temperance and the like, it can be used solely as a means for increasing the efficiency of evil-doing. Unless they are directed by the major virtues of love and intelligence, the minor virtues are not virtues at all, but aids to

wickedness. Historically, puritanism has been associated with militarism and capitalism, with war and persecution and economic exploitation, with every form of power-seeking and cruelty. Chastity is not necessarily correlated with charity; on the contrary, the human organism is so constituted that there would seem to be a natural correlation between compulsory continence and energy that is malevolent at least as often as it is well-intentioned. (On the political results of this correlation Dr. Vergin's *Subconscious Europe* may be consulted; the book contains an over-emphatic and therefore somewhat distorted statement of a good case.) This natural and, I might almost say, physiological tendency for chastity to be associated with uncharitableness is manifested not only during the period when the energy created by sexual restraint is 'expansive' but also, though perhaps with diminished intensity, when it is 'productive.'

Chastity, then, is the necessary precondition to any kind of moral life superior to that of the animal. At the same time, the energy created by chastity has a natural tendency to be, on the whole, more evil than good. By fulfilling the conditions upon which, and upon which alone, the higher moral life is possible, we transform our nature in such a way that it becomes easier for us to behave immorally than to behave morally. Our human nature is such that, if we are to realize the highest ethical ideals, we must do something which automatically makes the realization of those ideals more difficult. Historically, progressiveness has always been associated with aggressiveness—the potentiality of greater good with the actuality of greater evil. This association comes naturally to beings constituted as we are, and can be broken only as the result of deliberate choice, directed by the highest ideals and the fullest knowledge of facts. As usual, the remedy is to be sought in awareness and good will. Only by consistently applying the major virtues of charity and intelligence can we prevent the minor, but indispensable, virtue of chastity from filling the world with actual evil as well as potential good. Dr. Unwin suggests that the modern world is confronted by only two alternatives: it may choose to be continent and energetic; or it may prefer sexual indulgence to mental and social energy. It would be truer to say that there are three choices. First of all, we can increase pre-nuptial and post-nuptial sexual opportunity, in which case our mental and social energy will decline. Alternatively, we can tighten up the system of sexual restraint, with a view to increasing the amount, without improving the ethical quality, of available social energy. This is the policy which is at present being pursued by the dictators of all the totalitarian states. Empirically and by a kind of rule of thumb, these men know very clearly that there is a correlation between puritanism and energy—just as they know (as was pointed out in the chapter on Education) that there is a correlation between authoritarian discipline in youth and a militaristic psychology in later life. By combining a system of increased sexual restraint with a system of authoritarian education, the present rulers of totalitarian societies are providing themselves and their successors with a new

generation of highly energetic militarists. Significantly enough, in Germany and Italy the tightening up of sexual restraints has been accompanied by a lowering of the status of women. In the past, as Dr. Unwin has pointed out, absolute prenuptial chastity and absolute monogamy have always been associated with the subjection of women. Hitler and Mussolini are merely employing the old means to produce the old end—an increase of energy. This energy, as we have seen, has a natural tendency to take undesirable forms; but, not content with this spontaneous evil, the dictators are using all the means at their disposal to direct their subjects' energy along the channels of aggressive imperialism.

Finally, there is a third alternative—an alternative which has never been tried before. We can retain prenuptial chastity and absolute monogamy, at any rate for the ruling classes of our societies; but instead of associating these practices with the subjection of women, we can make women the legal equals of men. In this way, as Dr. Unwin suggests, and in this way only, will it be possible to avoid that revolt against chastity which, in the past, has resulted in the decline of once energetic societies. By making compulsory chastity tolerable, such measures will prolong the period during which a society produces energy—will prolong it, perhaps, indefinitely. But they will do little or nothing to improve the ethical quality of the energy produced. Even the process which Dr. Unwin calls 'human entropy' promises no ethical improvement—only increasing refinement and accuracy of thought and its expression. Hitherto, as history shows, sexual restraint has had the following results. The moral life has been made possible and some at least of this potential good has been actualized. Meanwhile, however, in the process of creating the potentiality for good, much evil has invariably been produced. Our problem is to discover a way to eliminate that evil, a way to direct all the energy produced by sexual restraint along desirable channels.

In the preceding chapters I have described the kind of political, economic, educational, religious and philosophical devices that must be used if we are ever to achieve the good ends that we all profess to desire. The energy created by sexual restraint is the motive power which makes it possible for us to conceive those desirable ends and to think out the means for realizing them. We see, then, that the particular problem of moralizing the energy produced by continence is the same as the general problem of realizing ideal ends. This being so, it is unnecessary for me to discuss it any further. The matter can be summed up in a couple of sentences. The third and only satisfactory solution of the problem of sex is that which combines the acceptance, at least by the ruling classes, of prenuptial chastity and absolute monogamy with complete legal equality between women and men and with the adoption of a political, economic, educational, religious, philosophical and ethical system of the kind described in this book.