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An Ethic of Queer Sex: Principles and Improvisations

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only looks at "official religious positions" as this only "a small part of the overall picture of religion as it is actually lived" (292).

This collection provides some thoughtful provocations, only some of which I have been able to explore in the space afforded by this review. I recommend the text to those wanting to learn more about how religion and sexuality intersect, across diverse spaces and places. It is written in an accessible fashion and should appeal to generalist audiences who do not have specific expertise in studies of sexuality or religion. It is great to see scholarship focused on the intersections between religion and sexuality being brought together to inform ongoing contestations that traverse these fields.

Reference

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An Ethic of Queer Sex: Principles and Improvisations. By Theodore W. Jennings (Chicago: Explorations Press, 2013), pp. 203, $35 pbk, ISBN 978-0-913552-72-8.

This book couples a surprisingly conservative form — a systematic theological consideration of key questions in sexual ethics — with radical content — taking Augustine's injunction to "Love, and do as you will" to include everything from sex work to polyamory to pederasty. It relies heavily on appeals to the authority of Scripture and to an authentic Christian sexual ethics to be discerned under the later accretions and distortions of Christian tradition, guided throughout by virtue ethics. It concludes that there is no form of sexual relationship which Christians cannot practice ethically — with the possible exception of marriage and heterosexuality. It is lucid, careful, and uncompromising, and it deserves to be read and taught widely.

This book begins with the proposal that "if any arrangement of sexual relations is in need of justification today on an ethical basis it is not 'homosexuality' but 'heterosexuality' that requires such a justification" (4). Heterosexuality is, Jennings points out, deeply implicated in social and economic structures that are founded on the treatment of women as property, and which continue to imperil the safety and wellbeing of many, women and children especially. *An Ethic of Queer Sex* seeks instead to develop a sexual ethic which begins with sexual practices which reject or remake marriage, guided by a queer virtue ethics. Over and again, Jennings argues that Christian sexual ethics goes astray when it treats sexuality as a singular and singularly dangerous terrain, rather than an aspect of life and love that is fundamentally in continuity with the rest of our lives and ethical reasoning.

Part One sets out the key principles of Jennings' Queer Sexual Ethic. Not only does Jennings reject the centrality of (heterosexual) marriage to the question of Christian sexual ethics, he seeks to resist the approach sometimes taken by LGBTQ advocates which seeks to assimilate marginal sexualities into mainstream society. Only by focusing on "boundary" questions, Jennings argues, can we truly escape heteronormativity. The basic assumptions of this sexual ethic are that sex is good, that sexual variation is to be celebrated (different sexual lifestyles understood as so many vocations), that care for one another is fundamental, and that any truly Christian ethics functions by improvising upon the central theme of justice and mercy. Jennings tells the history of Christianity the loss of an originary affirmation of the body and pleasure to an emergent erotophobia which owes more to the culture surrounding early Christians (and, of course, to Augustine) than to Christianity itself. Over time, sexuality

came to be understood as the privileged site of sin, and "marriage and family values" to substitute for the practice of justice in society as a whole. A properly Christian sexual ethic, Jennings argues, would affirm the pleasure that God created us for and the sexuality which is part of what it means for human beings to be constituted by our relationships with one another.

Part Two, "Marriage and Beyond," begins by arguing that same-sex unions have already transformed marriage for the better. Insofar as marriage can exist at all as a union of equals who love one another, it is only insofar as it has been re-formed by same-sex love. We can glimpse the properly Christian understanding of marriage as "not a property relationship but a partnership relationship" (49) in Jesus' erotic (though not necessarily sexual) relationship with his beloved disciple. "The Trouble with Marriage" is that it distributes social and financial benefits unjustly, and limits the number of relational forms in which we are able to recognise goodness. Instead, Jennings suggests, Christians should advocate for civil recognition of all kinds of familial relationships. Jennings discusses open relationships and polyamory as possible forms for Christian partnerships, suggesting that fidelity might take other forms than monogamy whilst recognising that, for many, it will be difficult to escape the confusion of love with private property.

Part Three deals with sex work, noting that it is one of the themes most central to biblical sexual ethics. Focusing on Jesus' claim that prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of chief priests and elders, Jennings argues that the Bible encourages Christians to advocate for sex workers' cause and dignity. Setting out contemporary debates around sex work, Jennings notes that, although it takes place under conditions of patriarchy and capitalist exploitation and patriarchy, the same is true of marriage. Jennings advocates for the total decriminalisation of sex work, encouraging Christians to recognise the church's complicity in the degradation and dehumanisation of sex workers. He also begins to articulate a Christian ethic of sex work, celebrating the hospitality offered by sex workers and — via a discussion of Rahab — the possibility that the marginalisation sex workers experience might unsettle their ties to the city, and to the bounds of the "patria" which joins together patriarchy and patriotism. "Sex Work: Contemporary Questions" recognises the variability of sex work over time and across cultures, arguing that the key to forming Christian approaches to sex work is a focus on the voices of sex workers themselves. Here Jennings also discusses the complexities of male sex work in both the Western and the developing world, and "Trafficking and Tourism," emphasising again the importance of considering the broader context of migrant labour and the complexity of questions of coercion. Like other forms of tourism, sex tourism can be abusive, Jennings argues, but is not necessarily so if we travel as guests rather than conquerors.

Part Four addresses "Alternative Sexual Styles." Jennings starts with promiscuity which, he recognises, can be damaging, but which can also enable the creation of bonds of solidarity across cultural, economic and racial divides, offering an antidote to possessiveness and competition. But the long history of the domination of women by men makes it more difficult for heterosexual people to practice promiscuity ethically. Similar principles apply to public sex. "Kinky Sex and Queer Ethics" explores complex questions about the nature of sexual fantasies, especially those that involve domination, bondage and punishment. Consent is key here, Jennings argues, but it is possible to dominate whilst also caring for the other. Chapter Fifteen focuses on pederasty, which Jennings seeks to disentangle from child molestation, arguing that we must recognise both the sexuality of the young and the crucial distinction between prepubescent and pubescent children. Suggesting that this issue is so fraught because of our inability as a society to confront the very real and widespread problem of incestuous sexual abuse, Jennings argues that what is lost in these social anxieties is our ability to take seriously young people's right to develop their own sexuality.

The book emerges from Jennings' own teaching and would make an excellent core text for a class on theological sexual ethics, although unfortunately the book is difficult to buy outside of the US. Key terms and debates are carefully introduced, and occasionally illustrated by "testimonies" from individuals with experience of the practices under discussion.

The book focuses on sexual practices rather than engaging with broader debates about the relationship between queer theory and Christian doctrine, and the question of the relationship between sexual desire and desire for God in particular. It is not a comprehensive account of queer sexual ethics, then; but a strong starting point from which to improvise.

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Theology after Lacan: The Passion for the Real. By CLAYTON CROCKETT, CRESTON DAVIS, and MARCUS POUND (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015), pp. 286, $45/£21 pbk. ISBN 978-0-227-17470-8.

Jacques Lacan, that famous mid-twentieth-century French theoretical psychoanalyst, has proven in many ways to be Sigmund Freud's St. Paul. As happened with St. Paul, an international school of thought — a mansion with many rooms, we might say — has arisen in Lacan's wake. The edited volume *Theology after Lacan* is part of an addition to this school that is currently under construction. This volume squarely belongs to this school since the essays take Lacan and his ideas as foundational. Indeed, taken as a whole, I am tempted to say that Lacan serves as the Big Other (or the subject who ought to know) for the various contributors (a discursive position Lacan himself abjured, at least nominally).

This volume, featuring 12 essays and an introduction, is not well suited for people new to Lacan or psychoanalytic thought. Nor will it likely convert people otherwise disinclined to Lacan's approach to psychoanalysis. And like many edited volumes, the quality of the individual essays fluctuates noticeably. But for those who find productive insights in Lacan's writings, this volume should have much to offer. In what follows I will try to highlight some of the most notable strengths and weaknesses of this book.

The essays in *Theology after Lacan* draw upon a wide range of Lacan's corpus, a feature that helps set this edited volume apart from similar past works, as the editors rightly note in their introduction (7–8). In so doing, this volume adds to our understanding of Lacan and demonstrates that Lacan can be a productive resource for theological reflection.

Adrian Johnston, in his interesting essay "Life Terminable and Interminable," explores the implications of the Lacanian conception of the unconscious for the possibility of being an atheist in a deep, radical sense. Johnston argues persuasively that the Lacanian unconscious does not recognize standard binary logic and thus desires in paradoxical, theologically suggestive ways. This means that, according to Johnston, people easily can ascribe to atheism at the conscious level, but will have a much harder time being atheists all the way down. Johnston makes this claim while being a supporter of the general goals of the radical atheism advocated for by thinkers such as Martin Hägglund.

Two intriguing chapters help us come to know the "Catholic" Lacan. Marcus Pound teaches us about the importance of the concept of grace for Lacan. Grace matters for psychoanalysis, per Lacan, as a form of revelation "to the extent it concerns not knowledge as such, but non-knowledge; i.e., an encounter with the real" (240). Lacan's work also features a "pervasive Thomism," as Tina Beattie demonstrates (35). Beattie sees in this Lacanian Thomism a way for theologians to develop a "bohemian theology … among the disciplines" in order to return theology to a place of primacy in the university (35). While this latter proposition is interesting, it remains unclear exactly how Lacanian Thomism will improve knowledge in other fields or how philosophy and science in the wake of the scientific revolution are vulnerable to her critique of Aristotelian thought.

Slavoj Žižek, in chapter 1, takes the reader through an interesting meditation on the place of madness in the nature of thought (*cogito*) and philosophy by way of an engagement with