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Bedroom politics

Free love hasn't delivered freedom, but a political party remains unabashed

"GET THE GOVERNMENT out of the bedroom," was the battle cry of the gay-rights crowd. No wait, it was the feminist crowd. No wait, it was the pro-abortion crowd. Ironically though, the main examples of bedroom legislation up to that time (contraception and sodomy laws) could not be enforced if those practices stayed private. But politicians ever since have gone to great lengths to drag the bedroom into public policy.

Legalized abortion was the first step: a state-sanctioned remedy for the unintended consequences of a private act.

Same-sex marriage: an attempt to overturn all of human domestic experience and give official recognition to a private act.

Contraception: an issue settled long ago but now reignited in the heat of a presidential campaign. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that any obstacle to easy and free contraception constitutes a "war on women."

Multiple choice: Which political party actually invades the bedroom? (a) Republicans; (b) Democrats; (c) Libertarians.

Essay question: Why?

The cause of sexual freedom, meaning the legalization of same-sex marriage, abortion on demand, and unlimited access to contraceptives, is advanced under a single overriding principle, that individuals should be free to do whatever they want with whomever they want so long as all participants are consenting adults. If that's not freedom, what is?

It might be the opposite of freedom, actually.

For hundreds of years, "free love" advocates have told us that all the complications of sex—the jealousy, rivalry, heartbreak, miserable marriages, murderous rages, and actual murders—were due to repression. Something so powerful shouldn't be bottled up into monogamy. Something so beautiful should be free to flower at will. But free love was always considered a crackpot idea until the early '60s, when the Pill (majestic in its lack of modifiers) removed the practical obstacle to full enjoyment. Social upheaval removed the stigma. And 50 flowering years later, what do we find? Jealousy, rivalry, heartbreak, miserable (though much shorter)

marriages, murderous rages, and actual murder. Still crazy, after all these years.

Pascal Bruckner, a recovering French progressive, is wondering why. His latest book, *The Paradox of Love*, ponders how the sexual revolution didn't turn out as planned, teasing out what may be the heart of the matter: "How can love, which attaches, be compatible with freedom, which separates?" Small caveat: Freedom does attach, principally to the source of truth that makes us free (John 8:32). But a generation accustomed to throwing off restraint in the name of freedom isn't likely to catch that distinction. Being answerable to none but self is considered liberation, in the conventional wisdom of the day. Love, which attaches, is the first casualty. But not the last.

We think something that feels so good can't possibly be dangerous. We laugh at simple prudence (All-girl dorms? How quaint!) and brush away health concerns with condoms. We treat sex simultaneously as no big deal and Life's Ultimate Expression that no one should be denied. We wave it around like a revolver in a corny melodrama and forget it's loaded.

It's loaded. That's what we should tell our kids. Handle with care. Learn how to use it and when. It generates life, and it can kill you—if not in body, then in soul. "The sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (I Corinthians 6:18)—trading away its integrity and value in every trivial encounter.

So why, after decades of empirical evidence that free love can't deliver freedom, does a political party keep doing everything possible to make it easy and common and cheap?

Because it's powerful. To acquire power by politicizing a private act seems a bit reprehensible. But it works, at least to a point. Indulgence in sex undermines precisely the kind of discipline needed to think ahead, delay gratification, and create relationships that are mutually dependent instead of government-dependent. And once the door to the bedroom is thrown open, there can be no bar to the bathroom, dining room, kitchen, and all that dwell therein. Thus the body politic makes every body political. ®