



The Gift



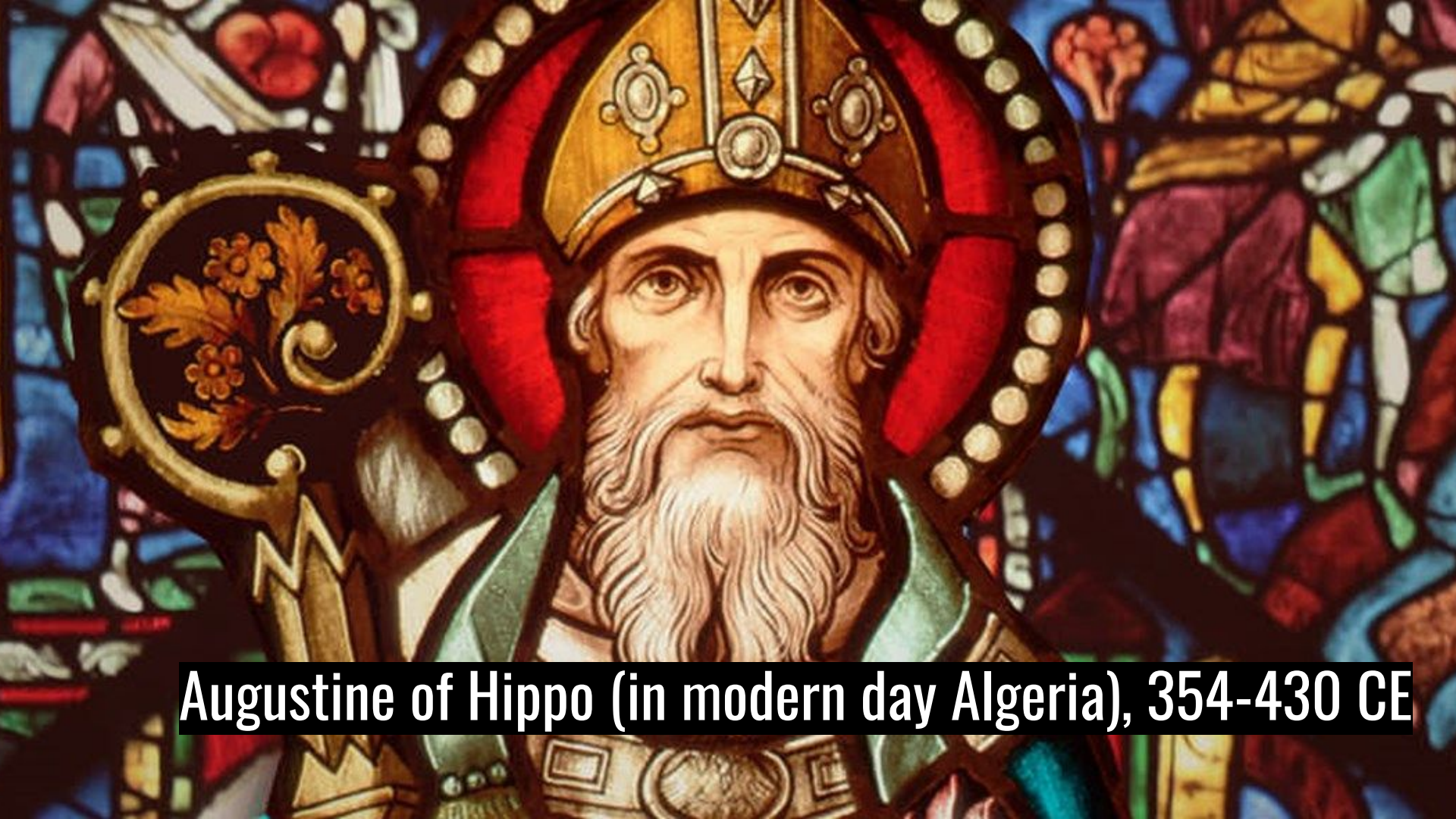
Sexual Morality: Important Concepts

Metaphysical Sexual Pessimism (MSP)

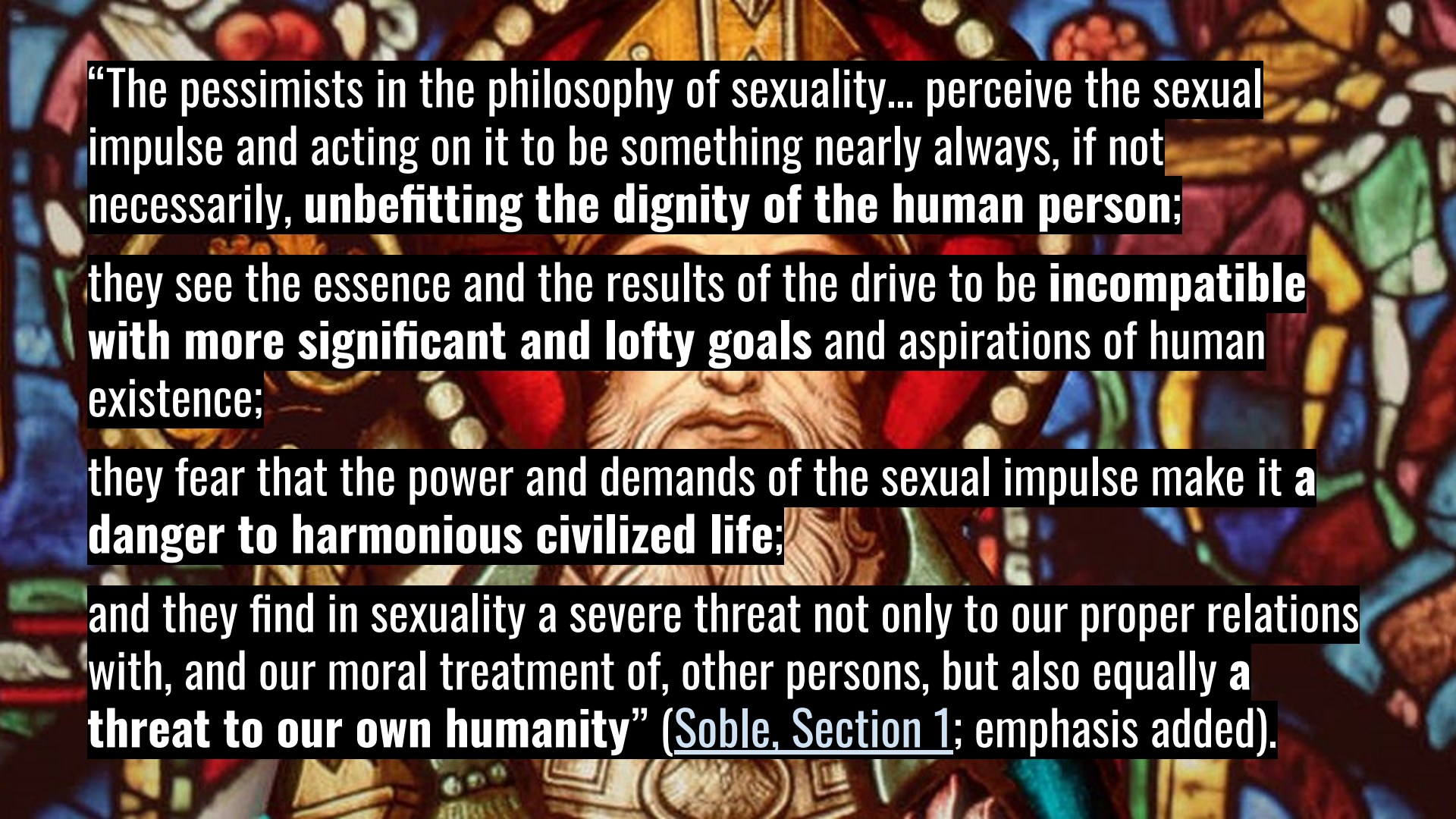
Metaphysical Sexual Pessimism (MSP) is the view that sexual impulses, for the most part, are an inhibition to the greater functions of human existence.

Metaphysical Sexual Optimism (MSO)

Metaphysical Sexual Optimism (MSO) is the view that sexual acts are a normal part of human existence and merit no particular moral condemnation.



Augustine of Hippo (in modern day Algeria), 354-430 CE

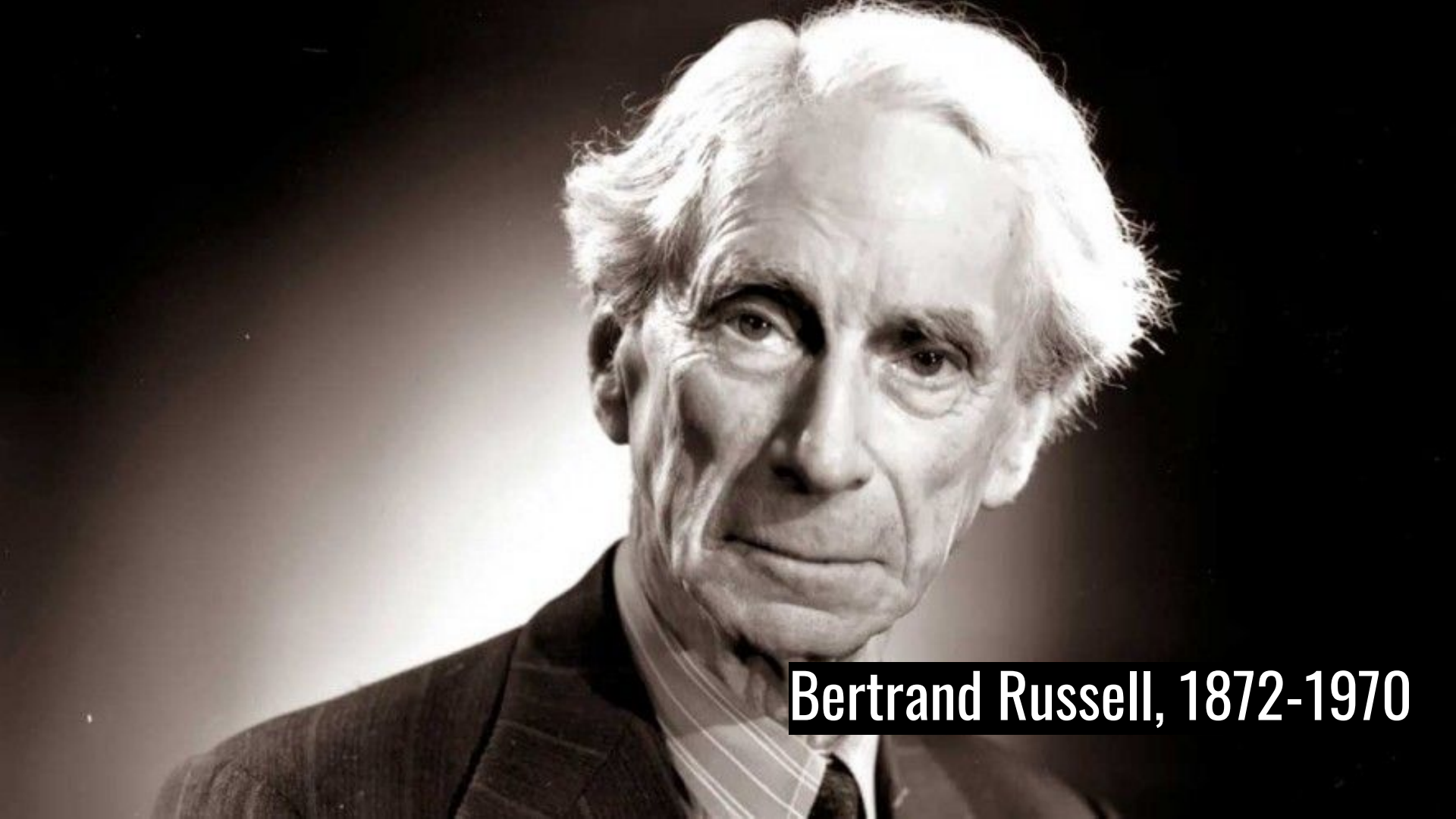


“The pessimists in the philosophy of sexuality... perceive the sexual impulse and acting on it to be something nearly always, if not necessarily, **unbefitting the dignity of the human person;**

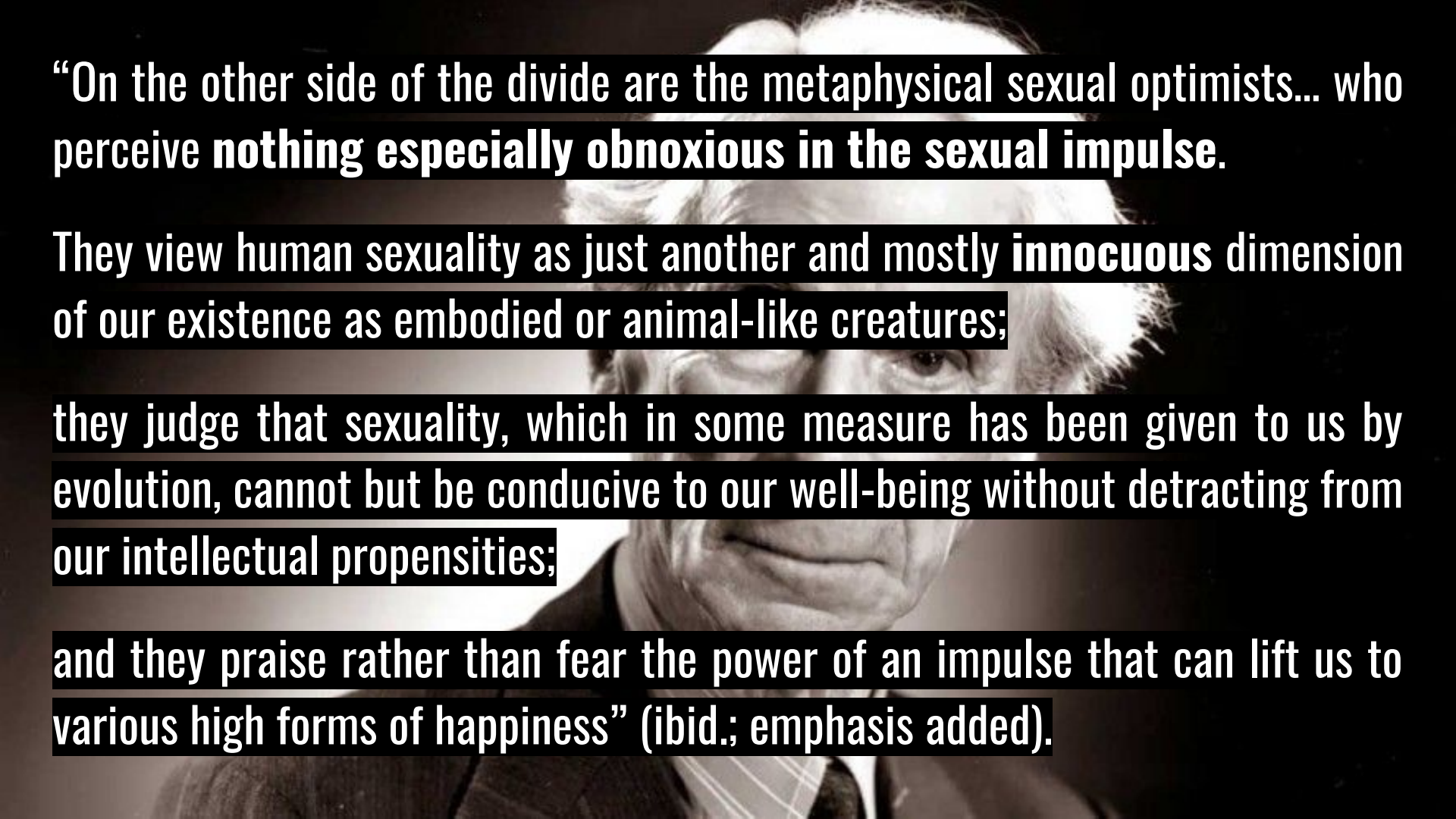
they see the essence and the results of the drive to be **incompatible with more significant and lofty goals and aspirations of human existence;**

they fear that the power and demands of the sexual impulse make it a **danger to harmonious civilized life;**

and they find in sexuality a severe threat not only to our proper relations with, and our moral treatment of, other persons, but also equally a **threat to our own humanity” (Soble, Section 1; emphasis added).**



Bertrand Russell, 1872-1970



“On the other side of the divide are the metaphysical sexual optimists... who perceive nothing especially obnoxious in the sexual impulse.

They view human sexuality as just another and mostly innocuous dimension of our existence as embodied or animal-like creatures;

they judge that sexuality, which in some measure has been given to us by evolution, cannot but be conducive to our well-being without detracting from our intellectual propensities;

and they praise rather than fear the power of an impulse that can lift us to various high forms of happiness” (ibid.; emphasis added).

“The particular sort of metaphysics of sex one believes will influence one’s subsequent judgments about the value and role of sexuality in the good or virtuous life and about what sexual activities are morally wrong and which ones are morally permissible” (ibid).

S | D E B A R

Here's an issue where the distinction between those who endorse MSO and those who endorse MSP doesn't really make a difference...

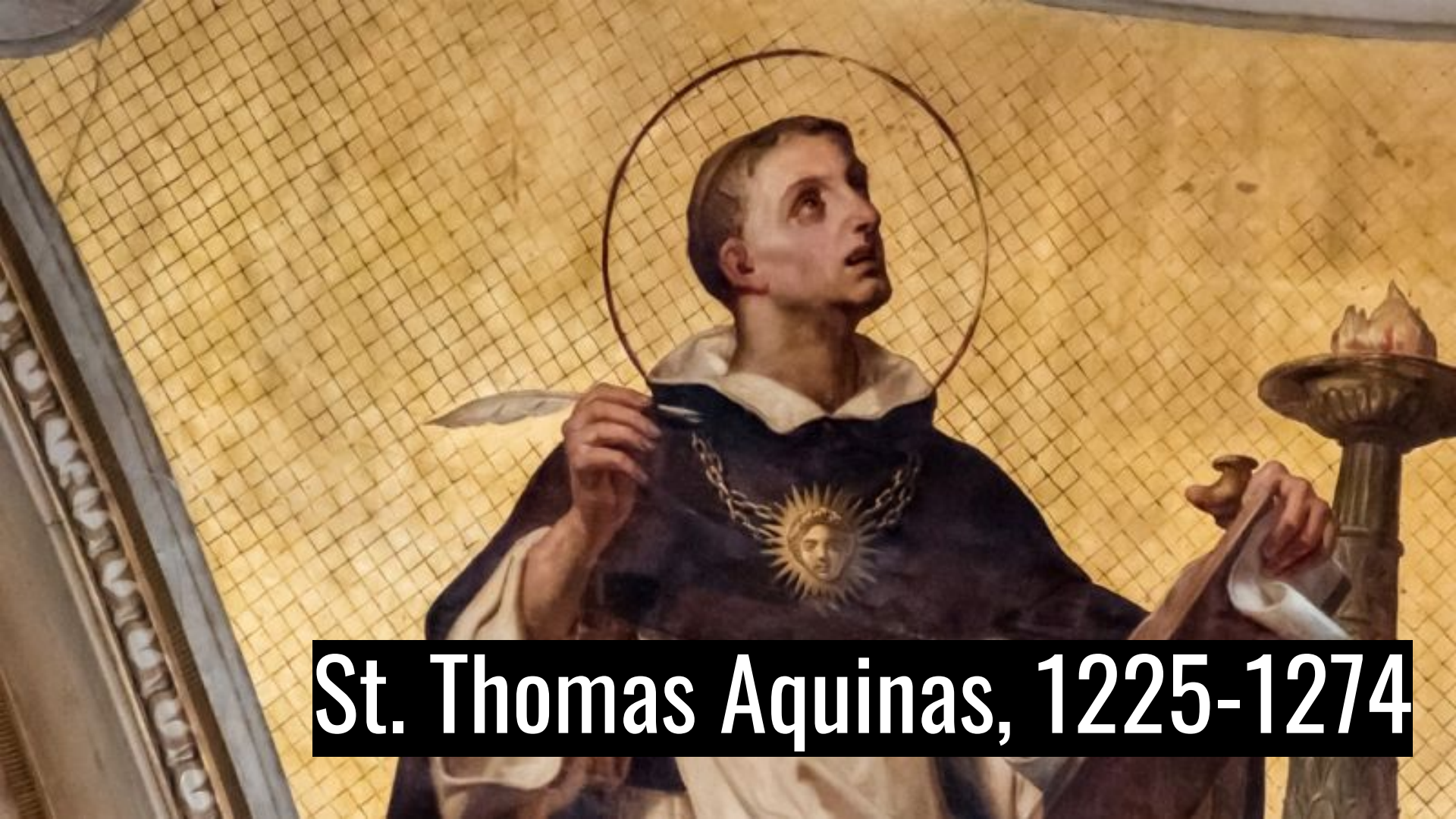
Consent



**To see the differences between MSO and MSP,
let's look at some issues...**

Sexual Behavior	Moral Status
Being Married with Children	
Same-sex Relationships	
Casual Sex	
Masturbation	
Prostitution	
S&M	
Bestiality	

Arguments for MSP










St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274

Aquinas' Natural Law Argument

“Heterosexual coitus is the mechanism designed by the Christian God to insure the preservation of animal species, including humans, and hence engaging in this activity is the primary natural expression of human sexual nature.

Further, this God designed each of the parts of the human body to carry out specific functions, and on Aquinas's view God designed the male penis to implant sperm into the female's vagina for the purpose of effecting procreation.

It follows, for Aquinas, that depositing the sperm elsewhere than inside a human female's vagina is unnatural: it is a violation of God's design” (Soble, Section 9).

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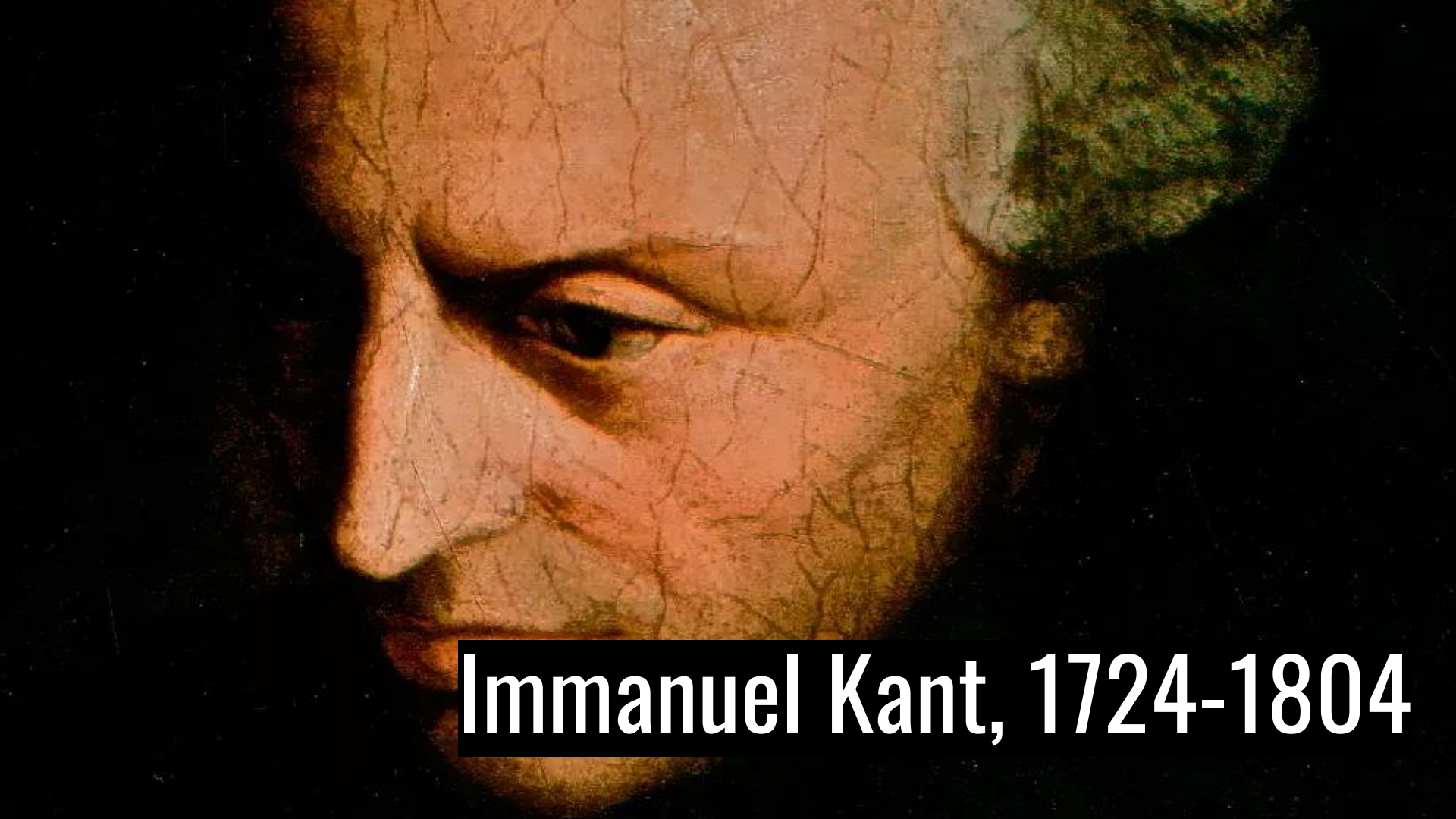
Objections

Thomas Nagel objects that procreation is one of the functions of sex.

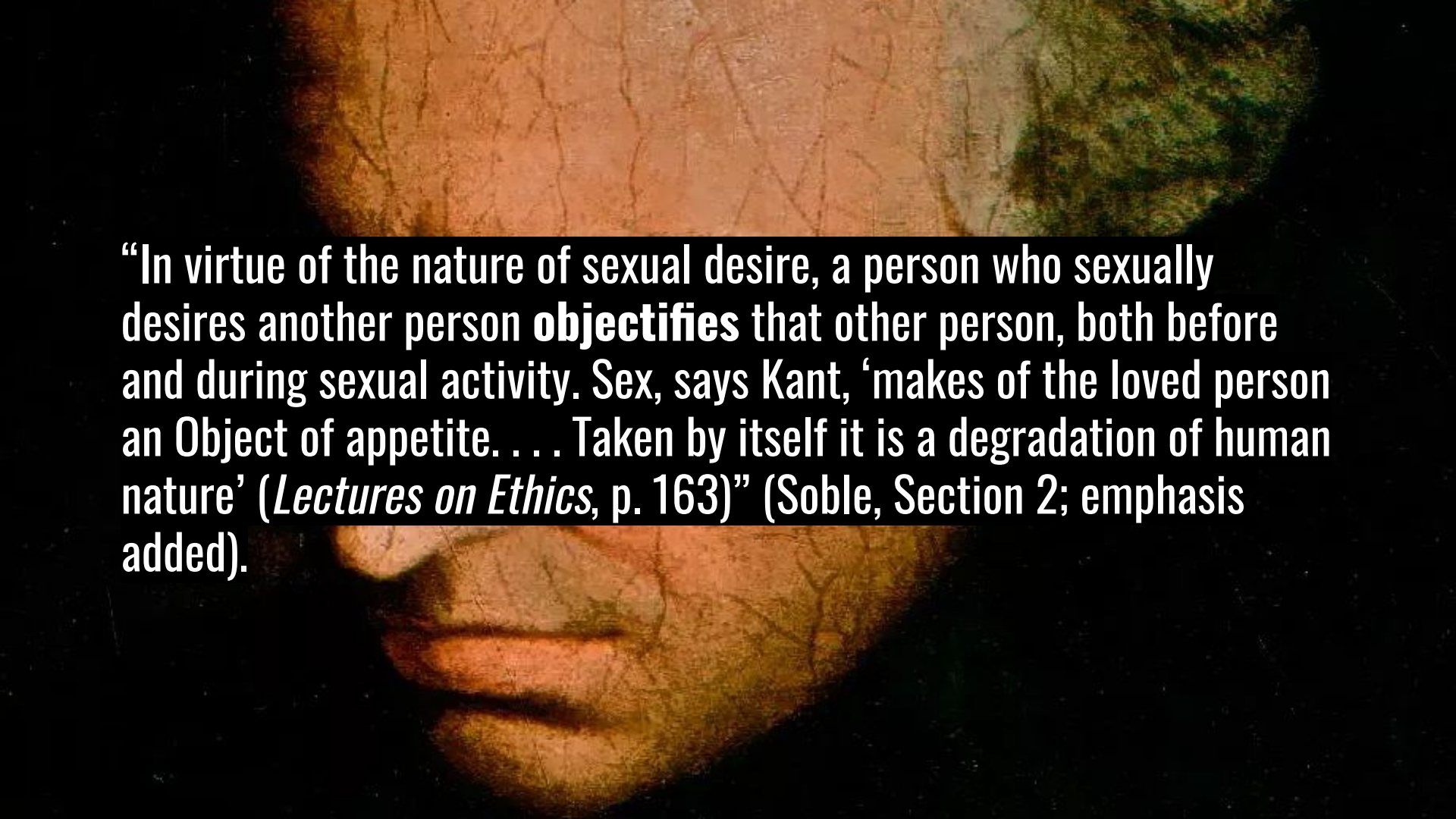
Humans also use it as a psychological bonding mechanism between lovers.

Since this is natural, it is morally permissible.

**One can also argue for MSP without a
divinely-inspired natural law argument...**



Immanuel Kant, 1724-1804

A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on the forehead, nose, and mouth. The skin has a warm, brownish-orange tone. A dark, horizontal bar is superimposed over the person's eyes, creating a sense of mystery or anonymity. The background is dark and out of focus.

“In virtue of the nature of sexual desire, a person who sexually desires another person **objectifies** that other person, both before and during sexual activity. Sex, says Kant, ‘makes of the loved person an Object of appetite. . . . Taken by itself it is a degradation of human nature’ (*Lectures on Ethics*, p. 163)” (Soble, Section 2; emphasis added).



“Bernard Baumrim makes the point, ‘sexual interaction is essentially manipulative—physically, psychologically, emotionally, and even intellectually’ (“Sexual Immorality Delineated,” p. 300).

We go out of our way, for example, to make ourselves look more attractive and desirable to the other person than we really are, and we go to great lengths to conceal our defects” (ibid).

A close-up, artistic photograph of a person's face, focusing on the eye and cheek area. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and warm, golden-brown highlights. The skin has a textured, almost painterly quality. The background is dark and indistinct.

“Further, the sexual act itself is peculiar, with its uncontrollable arousal, involuntary jerkings, and its yearning to master and consume the other person’s body.








During the act, a person both loses control of himself and loses regard for the humanity of the other.

Our sexuality is a threat to the other’s personhood; but the one who is in the grip of desire is also on the verge of losing his or her personhood” (ibid).

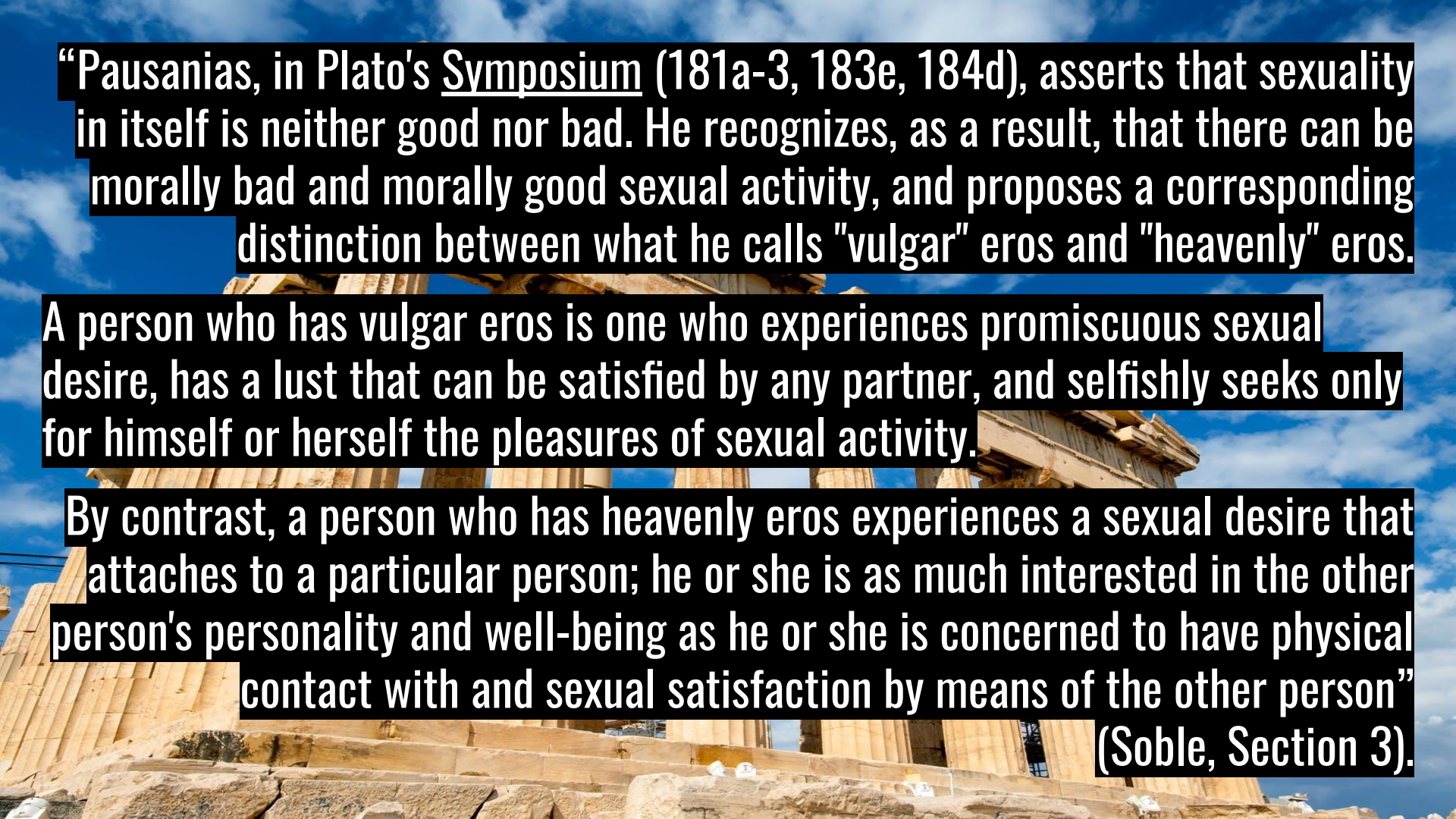
A close-up, artistic photograph of a person's face, focusing on the eyes and nose. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a textured, almost painterly effect. The background is dark and indistinct.

“Moreover, a person who gives in to another’s sexual desire makes a tool of himself or herself.

‘For the natural use that one sex makes of the other’s sexual organs is *enjoyment*, for which one gives oneself up to the other. In this act a human being makes himself into a thing, which conflicts with the right of humanity in his own person’ (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 62)”
(*ibid*).

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Response to Kant



“Pausanias, in Plato’s Symposium (181a-3, 183e, 184d), asserts that sexuality in itself is neither good nor bad. He recognizes, as a result, that there can be morally bad and morally good sexual activity, and proposes a corresponding distinction between what he calls “vulgar” eros and “heavenly” eros.

A person who has vulgar eros is one who experiences promiscuous sexual desire, has a lust that can be satisfied by any partner, and selfishly seeks only for himself or herself the pleasures of sexual activity.

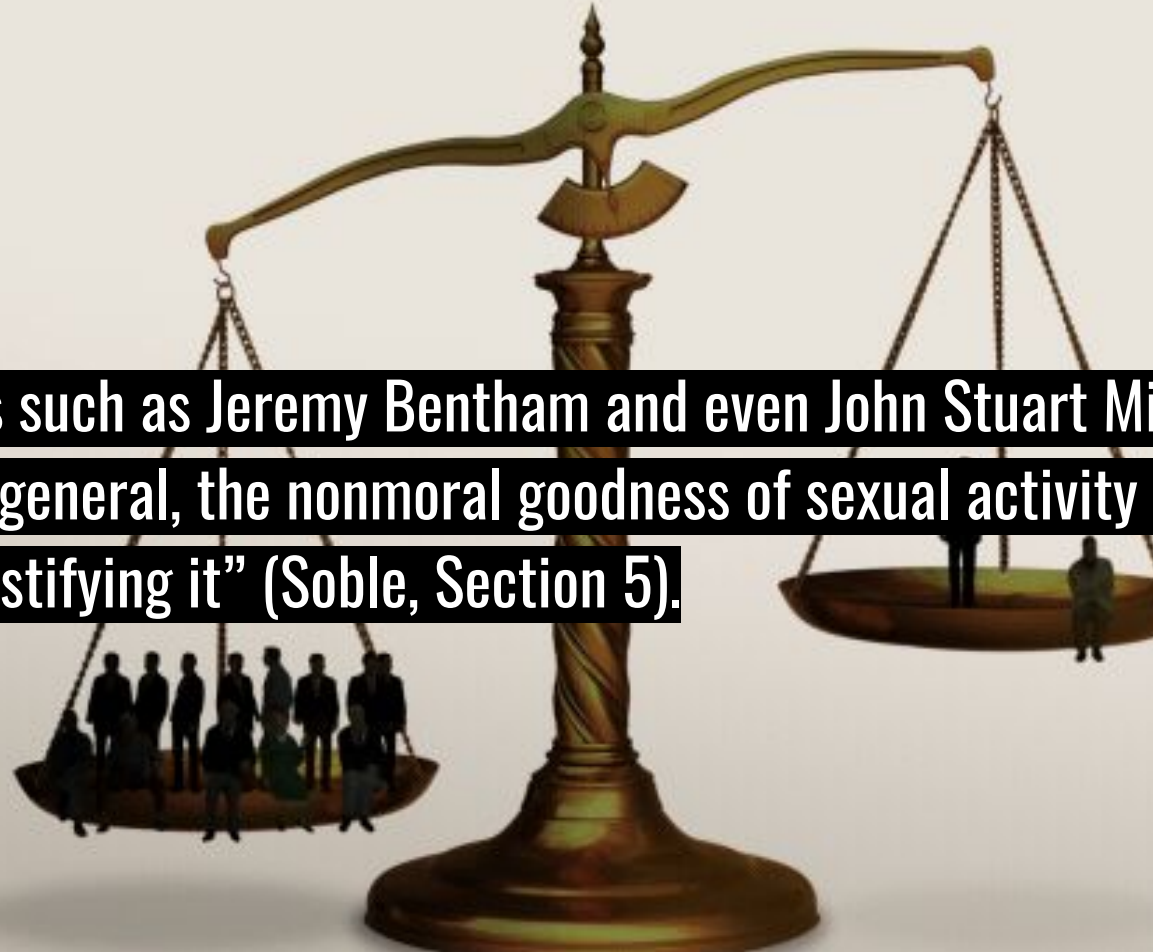
By contrast, a person who has heavenly eros experiences a sexual desire that attaches to a particular person; he or she is as much interested in the other person’s personality and well-being as he or she is concerned to have physical contact with and sexual satisfaction by means of the other person” (Soble, Section 3).

**Arguing for MSO takes various routes...
One can, for example, make a distinction
between the moral evaluation of sex and the
non-moral evaluation of sex.**

Non-morally Good Sex

Non-morally "good" sex is sexual activity that provides pleasure to the participants or is physically or emotionally satisfying;

non-morally "bad" sex is unexciting, tedious, boring, unenjoyable, or even unpleasant.

A golden scale of justice is shown against a white background. The scale is tilted, with the right pan (higher) containing two small silhouettes of people, and the left pan (lower) containing a larger group of about ten silhouettes of people. The scale is made of polished brass or gold, with a central column and a curved beam. The pans are suspended by chains. The overall image is a conceptual representation of weighing the pros and cons of an action.

“[U]tilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and even John Stuart Mill might claim that, in general, the nonmoral goodness of sexual activity goes a long way toward justifying it” (Soble, Section 5).

Utilitarian Principles for Sex(?)

A sexual act is morally permissible if it is consensual, and either serves as a bonding mechanism or at least produces no negative consequences.

A sexual act is non-morally good if it maximizes happiness/pleasure.

A sexual act is maximally good if it is a. morally permissible and b. it is non-morally good sex.

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Food for thought...

Issues in the Philosophy of Sex are decidedly more complex than just the debate between Kantians and Utilitarians...

Let's take a closer look at two issues.

**Issue #1:
Prostitution**



Debra Satz ([1992](#)) argues for the **decriminalization** of prostitution despite arguing that, in our cultural context, prostitution is morally wrong since it perpetuates inequality between men and women...



She first argues that prostitution is not monolithic.

That is to say that not all prostitutes are in the same social conditions, nor are they vulnerable to the same dangers; there are varying degrees of coercion, and in some cases there's no coercion at all.

"A wonderfully lucid tour of the thinking on markets over the years by economists and philosophers, from Adam Smith through Ronald Dworkin." —*HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW*

WHY SOME THINGS SHOULD NOT BE FOR SALE

THE MORAL LIMITS OF MARKETS

DEBRA SATZ

She then deals with alternative ways of thinking of prostitution.

Her own view is that “prostitution [in our society] represents women as the sexual servants of men. It supports and embodies the widely held belief that men have strong sex drives which must be satisfied—largely through gaining access to some woman’s body” (78).

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WHY SOME THINGS SHOULD NOT BE FOR SALE

THE MORAL LIMITS OF MARKETS

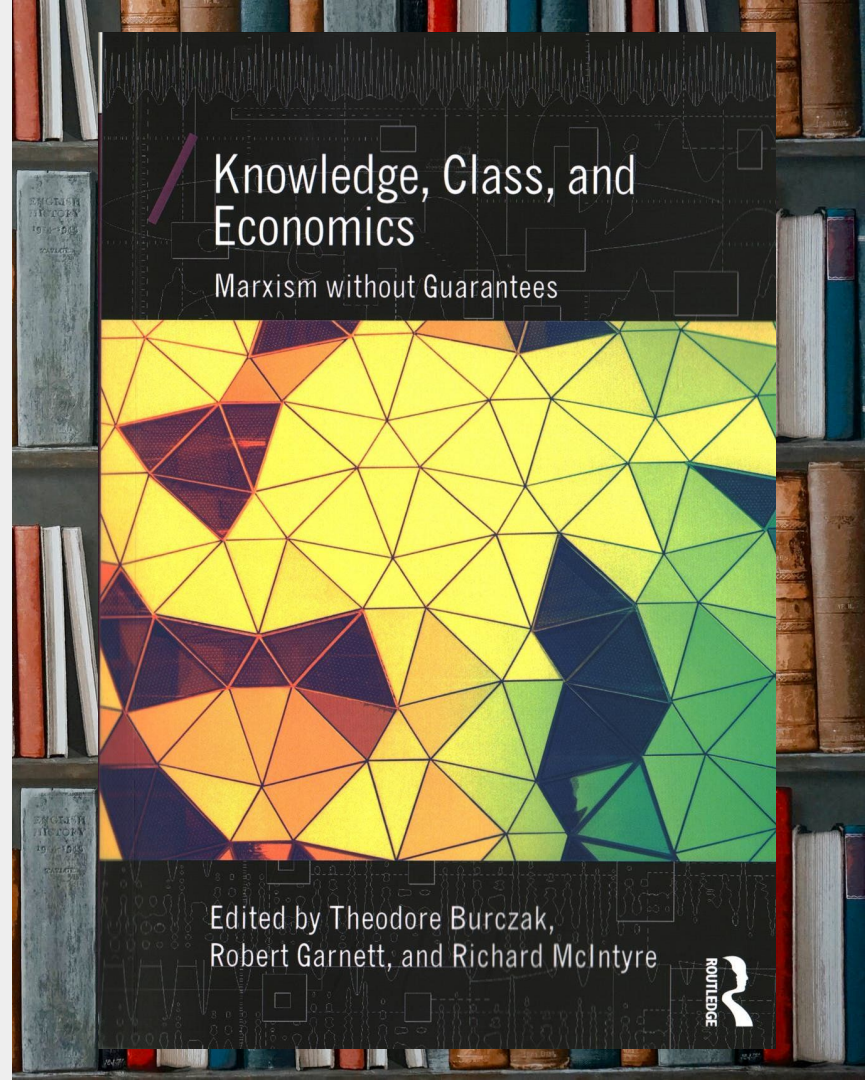
DEBRA SATZ

But she concludes that despite it being morally wrong, prostitution should be decriminalized because the current policy exacerbates gender inequity.

In other words, decriminalization would at least allow the state to regulate the practice, thereby providing greater protections for sex workers, and not eliminate a possible means of income for those who need it the most.

To take this argument further, Marxist feminist Harriet Fraad (2017) argues that **exploitation is inherently wrong** but sex acts are not.

As such, there are conceivable arrangements in which a union of sex workers, organize a means by which to safely practice their sexual and emotional labors in a worker-owned collective enterprise.



Issue #2:

**Raising children out of wedlock,
i.e., single-parents**

Melissa Kearney, [in a recent interview](#), voiced concerns about deteriorating family structures and family poverty.

So she makes the normative (moral) claim that it is better that children be born into a two-parent household, as opposed to a single parent household.



“[R]esearch consistently shows that kids who live with two married parents have lower rates of poverty, have higher cognitive test scores in childhood, have fewer behavioral problems. They seem to have better health outcomes. They’re less likely to live in poverty when they’re 25. They’re more likely to complete college and they’re less likely to become young, unmarried parents themselves.”



Ann Coulter puts the blame completely on women (although critics of Coulter argue that she makes outrageous claims for ratings).



Kearney, on the other hand, acknowledges that this is an extremely complicated issue with many contributing factors including institutionalized racism, dwindling economic opportunities, generational dynamics, etc.



Taking stock...

Aquinas was a Divine Command Theorist.

Kant himself argued for MSP.

The Utilitarians responded to Kant.

Taking stock...

Debra Satz's arguments are complicated, but one thing worth mentioning is that she stressed the role of a particular society's set of values, i.e., under other social circumstances, maybe prostitution wouldn't be morally wrong.

Melissa Kearney used consequentialist reasoning.

Round

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2

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