

Sex

It is far from clear that sex *is* a concept, as opposed to a passion, a drive, a male and crazy frenzy, a factual and biological necessity, a social dance, or the all-pervading, all-causing presence underlying any human action. Insofar as it is a concept, that is (as we persistently say) an idea picking out certain features (and not others) in life, then teachers certainly have to recognise that sex is an idea preoccupying large amounts of cognitive and emotional space in the identities of all their pupils from, at the latest, the age of 13 onwards.

Those teachers will also have need of a coherent view of what has happened to sex in their culture over the past half-century. For no-one can doubt that, for better and worse, the sexual revolution began, as a famous poem by Philip Larkin put it, 'in 1963',

Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles first LP ...

Since that time, the moral prohibitions on non-marital sex have pretty well vanished, and the strict patrolling of sexual relations between adolescents has been abandoned. A brutal teenage tee-shirt announces, 'I fuck on the first date', and this horrible little symptom indicates something of what has changed. Perhaps above all, what has become apparent is the commercialisation of sexual awareness among all school-age pupils, even as early as ten, and this is a move on the part of our latest version of capitalism which the teacher, bound by duty and vocation to teach how those pupils should think and act according to 'the best which has been known and thought', is also bound to consider and judge.

For that same repulsive commercialism, visible as much in Barbie dolls as in the celebrity magazines, is part of the wider sexual revolution which has nonetheless also brought freedom and happiness once excluded from a dark realm of unmentionables which wrecked many a marriage. It was indeed D H Lawrence's great novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which first brought light and air into those unlit bedrooms, and it is one of Lawrence's remarks about his book which could serve as our teachers' touchstone in this difficult matter.

He wrote, 'I labour always to make the sex relation between men and women *valid and precious*', and we commend those adjectives to all teachers wondering how to advise their charges, whether in PSE, English literature, biology or any other segment of curricular life

concerning the right balance between modesty and boldness, prudence and bodily confidence, impropriety and candour, reticence and forthrightness.

Terms like these are simply not in the vocabulary of contemporary sexuality. For a while, as is understandable after such a huge change in social-sexual relations, everybody goes for the big hit. No doubt this will change. Until then, every teacher who has to touch upon sexual matters with the pupils (and every teacher will) should keep in mind that sex matters so much because intimacy matters so much; that the key criterion of value is the old bromide – treat the other person decently – and that, after all, one's sexuality isn't everything whatever the advertisements say, and that in school as in life one's *mind* is what counts above all