THE MATHEMATICS OF SEX
By Gabriel Moran

Rather than try to sort out all the fleeting images of today's discussion of sexuality, I would like to present a schematic history of sexual relations. The images here might suggest a few principles worth remembering in the midst of conflicting ideas of progress. I start by stripping the possibilities to what are seemingly the only logical possibilities. In Western history (at least), the sexual combinations have usually fitted into one of two frameworks, although the second framework has a variation within its history. Simple arithmetic seemed to dictate that in the relations between men and women:

\[
1 + 1 = 2
\]

or
\[
2 + 2 = 1
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The first case is easy to comprehend. For many reformers, women and men of past and present, the case is so obvious that there is nothing to argue. What is needed is politics and other power to get rid of the enemy. \(1 + 1 = 2\) means that men and women are the same; together all these individuals make up "society." Obvious objections that men and women are not exactly the same are met by a twofold response: in all the important aspects they are equal; and beyond the few appendages where they differ, all inequality is the result of oppression. For people committed to this position, there can be no disconfirming evidence. That is, any evidence of inequality becomes evidence of oppression and the need for a more passionate commitment to equality.

The classic statement of this position is Plato's Republic; at least the women in the guardian class of Plato's ideal state are just like men. Women and men are exactly the same, says Plato, except for "birth and begetting." Women and men are to have the same job opportunities in the Republic. To maintain this ideal, Plato has to assign mothering to the underclass and the rearing of the children to the state. It is debated among Plato scholars whether equality for women resulted in the dissolution of the family or vice versa; in either case, family and equality were not compatible.

Plato's principle of equality - not only equal pay for equal work but equal work for men and women - has exerted influence throughout western history. In this country, Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1790 was arguing for equality much the same as a major part of feminism does today. What could be more obvious than the fact that society should be made up of individuals who are to be treated equally: \(1 + 1 = 2\). One of Plato's main tests
was the military. Many people were surprised in 1990 to discover how far the U.S. military had gone in fulfilling Plato's ideal. And the success of women in the Gulf war has continued to remove the remaining barriers to full equality between men and women. Men and women are ruled to be the same; some people consider that progress.

The other main choice to imagine the relation between men and women has been $2 + 2 = 1$. In this formula, men and women are thought to be essentially incomplete but together they form a whole. The focus is on inner life, romantic love and social complementarity. Work is divided mainly along sex or gender lines. There is women's work and there is men's work; seldom do the two overlap. Although this position is in stark contrast to the first, the term "equality" often shows up here. The sphere of women is said to be equal to the world of men.

Plato is again the classical expression of this position which is found in the Symposium. There Plato recounts the myth of the androgyne. In the beginning everyone was two sexed, but because of their rebelliousness, the human beings were split down the middle "like apples halved for pickling or an egg cut by a string." Henceforth, the humans go in search of their other half. If they find this completion, all will be well; if they continue rebelling, God will cut them in half again and then they will be bas relief.

The formula of $2 + 2 = 1$ has always been attractive to romantics. The woman's movement in the early nineteenth century was strongly influenced by this idea of the complementarity of differences. This nineteenth century view is perhaps best expressed by Catherine Beecher in A Treatise on Domestic Economy. Men and women are thoroughly different but their differences join to form a human unity. This assumption is not absent in today's discussions. In 1991 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the principle in sexual harassment cases is not a person's reasonable judgment but a woman's. Men and women are ruled to be different; some people consider that progress.

I said above that there was a variation on this second formula. When $2 + 2 = 1$ is brought from romantic ideal to political order, the symmetry of men and women is usually lost. The half that the man looks for is an "eternal feminine" which gives a sense of completeness to the man. There has been very little talk throughout history of an "eternal masculine" which would have the same effect for women. The "1" that results from the complementarity turns out to be skewed in the direction of male advantage. The woman plays the part of a shadow self, a private necessity for a public self; the public self remains male.
The seeming wholeness of the man in public exists because of the woman in the shadows. In private, the man may be overwhelmed by the shadow. Concerning matters of birth, nourishment, sickness and death, the man is often helplessly dependent on the woman. This relation is a variation on $2 + 2 = 1$ because both the man and the woman are incomplete; the man's public half and the woman's private half make up a whole. However, since neither man nor woman becomes a whole private/public self, the relation is always at the edge of pathology.

Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* in the eighteenth century is probably the best example of this convolution. Although Rousseau's book is still the platform for much of contemporary educational reform, Rousseau himself admitted that his project was a failure. He sets out to produce the autonomous man, a true citizen and a full human being. In the end, Emile is neither. After hundreds of pages on the perfect education for Emile, his partner Sophie is introduced. But Rousseau in giving Sophie preparation for women's work does not provide an intellectual partner for Emile. The obvious inadequacy in Sophie's education also reveals a defect in Emile's education. He is prepared to be a loner, distanced from everything. Sophie remains mere shadow.

What I wish to introduce at this point is another arithmetic that has not yet emerged in history, although elements of it have at time been visible. Reforms that merely tamper with $1 + 1 = 2$ or $2 + 2 = 1$ will never produce an adequate basis for rethinking sexual relations. As every one of the world's major religions knows, the logic of sexuality is much more mysterious. I would maintain that in the strange arithmetic needed:

$$2 + 2 = 1 \text{ (inclusive of 3)}$$

By the "2" here I refer to the duality present in each person. The self-dividedness that all philosophies and religions acknowledge is related to sexual duality, even though we are not sure exactly how. Sometimes sexual differences should be disregarded (as in equal pay for equal work); but one must regard the differences before disregarding them. And we do know for the first time in history that there are definite genetic differences between men and women. Each of the previous two formulas had its truth, but the truth was a limited case without sufficient context.

By the resulting "1" inclusive of "3," I refer to the communal nature of human life. The ambiguous pairing of twofolds produces a sense of wholeness.
for each person - and more.

\[1 \text{ (of 2) } + 1 \text{ (of 2) } = 2 + \text{ offspring}.
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Sexual love generates the energy of new birth. Men and women giving birth to children is the obvious form of communal reality. Human life could not endure without persons not only completing themselves but generating other life. What the twentieth century is being forced to realize is that husband/wife and parent/child are relations that need a richer, pluralistic context than they have had.

Plato, once more, provides at least an echo of the kind of diversity we need. In the myth of the androgyne that I referred to above, the original constitution of the human race was male/male, female/female, male/female. The complementary partner who is sought may be of the same sex or the opposite sex. In contrast, the two other images discussed previously are oblivious to (and thereby negative toward) same sex love. The Greeks did value homosexual love, at least among males. But in its quest for order in sexual relations, western history with the Christian church as a central arbiter has been fearful of same sex love. The preferred arrangement has been \(2 + 2 = 1\) (with the man in charge); the minority view of \(1 + 1 = 2\), given its inability to deal with family matters, has never offered an ultimate challenge of reform.

The family is in need of radical reform in the direction of a mutuality of power. Women tend to be better at some things, men at others. Whether the reason is genes or conditioning will probably never be finally decided. Although equality as sameness is not what the family needs, a sharing of some tasks is indispensable to a mutuality of power. Men need more of a share in the care of children and the care of household than they have generally had. Women need a bigger share in the power of public affairs. The typical pattern that renders the woman powerless in public and the man powerless in private needs correcting.

Surrounding the family should be a rich matrix of human relations. Political and religious institutions need these personal relations of care and love lest politics and religion become the names of distant bureaucracies. Friendships of every kind can strengthen both the family and the religious institution if we are willing to let go of an ideal of isolated parents \((2 + 2 = 1)\) within an impersonal system. Friendship is one of the great neglected themes of western philosophy and religion. Aristotle says that without friends life would not be worth living. Unfortunately, he says that in Book 7 of Ethics instead of Book I. Friendship is the context within which the whole of ethics, including sexual ethics should be
developed.

One of the central principles of medieval Christian theology was the "plenitude of being." Once God had decided to create, then what followed was the creation of every kind. There could be no missing links; the joy of creation entails the overflow of goodness to every next of kin. Everything and everyone gives birth to new life. Among plants and animals we can recognize a particular variation of beings reproducing individuals of their own kind. The human kind participates in this animal mode with its own human twist, namely, the possibility and now the necessity to choose to restrain its process of reproduction. Everyone is called to give birth but not necessarily in a biological way; the life giving can be political, artistic, social, moral or religious.

Here is where we have to recognize homoerotic relations as a "given." Some scientists may wish to pursue the search for the "cause" of homosexuality, either in genetic make-up or child rearing practices. The more important fact is that homoerotic love is a major variation within the human community. It is here today and it is there as far as we can trace. The question in this era is not just tolerating such love but celebrating it as sacramental expression.

References