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Theories About Sex and Sexuality in Utopian Socialism

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SUMMARY. It was the utopian socialists of the period 1800-50 (Fourier, Saint-Simon, and the Saint-Simonians in France, as well as the Owenites in Great Britain) who not only challenged the imperialism of reason but sought to rehabilitate the flesh by valuing its pleasure and incentives. Sex and sexuality were central issues for the first socialists, who were scorned as “utopian” by Marx and Engels for seeking to improve the status of all members of society through peaceful means. Because Marxism has played a greater role in the history of socialism, the utopian socialist discussions have been largely disregarded. This essay analyzes the works of the utopian socialists Fourier, Saint-Simon, and the Saint-Simonians, arguing that resurgences of the utopian socialist tradition can be discerned around 1900 and again circa 1970.

It is one of the greatest defeats of civilization... that all men and women are similar in their sexual needs. This “erotic Jacobinism” is closely related to the claim that the “natural” form of sexuality is the monogamous couple, comprising...
woman and man. . . . Forcing all sexual needs into the one harness of monogamy . . . results only in pain and frustration.

Fourier, Le Nouveau Monde amoureux (1818)

I

The “utopian” socialists, Marx and Engels scoffed, “want to improve the condition of every member of society. . . . They reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means . . . and . . . by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure.”¹ Precisely because violent class struggle was rejected by the first socialists (Henri Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, and Charles Fourier in France as well as Robert Owen in England), the new social science they developed was dismissed as “utopian.” Their theories were derided by Engels as mere “germs of thought” issuing in “phantasies, which today only make us smile.”²

In this essay I aim to take seriously the allegedly amusing phantasies of the utopian socialists, analyzing how their theories gave equal weight to economic relationships and changes in private life. If one removes Marxist-tinted lenses when studying the history of socialism, it becomes apparent that sexuality and the problematic of femininity/masculinity were disowned as legitimate issues as Marxism came to dominate. Utopian socialism’s methods—changing the relationships of production as well as relations between the sexes by problematizing sexuality, the family, and the public/private distinction—were narrowed by Marxism to class struggle; utopian socialism’s goal—new social relationships between people—was restricted to a new economic order and redistribution of material goods.

It was the Owenites and Saint-Simonians who, around 1830, coined the terms “socialism” and “social science,” notions that were largely synonymous until 1850.³ These concepts were developed to challenge “individualism,” which they understood as an orientation toward financial profit and a perpetuation of differences in status and privilege. Yet they did not attach a negative value to “the individual” per se; on the contrary, they emphasized a social and creative concept that presupposed a mutual influence between
the individual and society rather than seeing them in opposition. These early socialists advanced their theories as an alternative to the ideology that had prevailed during the Enlightenment. It is also worth noting that all of the early socialists explicitly rejected what they defined as “utopianism.”

These early socialists will nonetheless be characterized as “utopians” here, for I use the term without implying any negative connotations. It should be understood in the sense not that they were designing rigid blueprints for the future, but instead that they were living out ideals formulated on the basis of the present, with a non-deterministic view of history. The utopian socialists regarded social critique and the development of alternatives as a social science, presupposing the future as contingent and incapable of being mapped out in advance. They assumed that the alternatives they proposed would undergo change over the course of the historical process; in this way they differed from Marx and Engels, who saw history as guided by inexorable laws. Their strategy was likewise quite different: the utopian socialists were looking for common values, and tried to live up to them; they aimed at an enjoyable life in the here and now. Marxism entirely repudiated putting ideals directly into practice, holding instead that the entire capitalist system had to be utterly vanquished before future ideals could be lived. In view of this disparity, utopian socialism ought not to be seen as a predecessor of Marxism; in my opinion, it suggested (and perhaps still suggests) a very different way of thinking and living.

A second reason for terming the early socialists “utopians” is that they belong to a specific tradition. This utopian strain has figured prominently during certain eras of Western history, enabling us to speak of various “utopian periods.” The first, at about the beginning of our era in Palestine, was initiated by the Essenes and Jesus. These utopians envisioned a society which placed a priority on communal life as opposed to egoistic and individual living. The next period can be dated to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which witnessed the emergence of groups that sought to realize the Christian utopia of solidarity and equality by sharing all goods communally. Attacking the hypocrisy of the often debauched life of the clergy, these heretical groups abolished the family structure; and arguing that no one was to be the property of another, many of them
practiced celibacy or free sexual relations between “brothers and sisters.” The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought forth not just utopian movements but also utopian designs, propounded by Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, Gabriel Foigny. Although the movements and the designs had little to do with each other, their ideals were more or less the same: they aspired to a community in which all was honestly divided, housework carried out collectively (by the women), and private property abolished. Throughout this tradition, a harmonious community was always predicated on the notion that family arrangements could not be placed outside the political realm.

The first utopian socialists differed from the movements and designs of preceding centuries by developing theories which posited the ideal outcome as a distinct possibility within the historical process rather than proposing static designs for some remote future. They shared with the Western utopian tradition an attack on private property and prevailing family arrangements as well as a similarity in historical context: utopianism tends to emerge in times of “uncertainty,” when many groups criticize their society. Typical for the utopian socialist period (1800-50) is their attack on “the” Enlightenment and the (violence of the) French Revolution. However, conservatives (e.g., Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre) and romantics (e.g., August Wilhelm Schlegel and Percy Shelley) preceded the utopian socialists in this attack. All three critiques rejected the sterile rationality of French Enlightenment thought and the philosophe’s concept of “the autonomous individual,” the emphasis on “rights,” and the public/private dichotomy. Whereas the ideas of the conservatives and romantics were opposed to the rational thinking of the philosophe, the utopian socialists tried to advance beyond this dualism. In this sense the utopian socialists marked a real innovation. They tried to combine reason with a rehabilitation of feelings and the flesh. Because the dualistic oppositions which have structured mainstream Western thought are closely allied with sexual polarity and hierarchy, it follows that sexual equality necessarily involves a challenge to all related antitheses.

In the following I will comment first on the works of the utopian socialists Fourier and Saint-Simon, then on the Saint-Simonians
and the women’s journal that was connected with this movement. The Owenites will not be treated in this essay, as I have not yet studied them in depth. In the conclusion, I will relate utopian socialist ideas about sex and sexuality to the critique of science and propose that one can speak of a utopian socialist period around 1900 (and another around 1970).

II

Charles Fourier (1772-1837) was a contemporary of Saint-Simon, but they were unacquainted with each other’s work. Nonetheless, Fourier’s formulation of a new paradigm, called by him “the theory of the passions,” shows many similarities with the “moral science” developed simultaneously by Saint-Simon. Seeking harmony between unique individuals, Fourier aimed at a theory based not upon what he called “chimeras,” such as freedom and equality, but instead upon observations. Labor and love took a central position in this theory, which was directed against the philosophes. Rejecting the self-imposed asceticism of these rationalist philosophers, he proposed a new vision of humankind, arguing that the Enlightenment principle of self-regulation had blocked any insight into the working of the passions and had led only “to highfalutin pronouncements, with the hypocritical authors never putting their moral stands into practice.” To overcome all forms of suppression, Fourier argued, it was necessary to see the interconnectedness of economic and emotional-sexual suppression and also to grasp the restrictiveness and hypocrisy of marriage.

Throughout his publications, Fourier fulminated against “civilization” and the philosophes, countering the unmovable sciences (“les sciences fixes”) of the Enlightenment with the uncertainty of sciences (“les sciences incertaines”). His view of knowledge replaced absolute truth and the primacy of rationality with “absolute doubt” and “absolute distantiation.” In light of social reality, Fourier charged, the vaunted concepts of freedom and equality meant nothing; freedom was illusory if unavailable to common people. They would be truly free only if they could live without masters, without the ethos of work, and without suppressing passions. Disgust at uniformity made Fourier emphatically reject
equality between individuals, and he characterized the notion of utopia most often advanced up until then—"the virtuous republic of cabbage and gruel." He constantly emphasized the inherent variety and pluriformity of ways of living, which would finally find expression in Harmony—his ideal society.

Fourier’s theory posited that suppression of the passions was immediately harmful to the individual and in the long run destructive for society. He distinguished among twelve basic passions, each of which had to be satisfied (one person attaching more importance to certain passions than another, depending on their personalities). These were divided into three categories: sensual passions (five in all), affective passions (friendship, ambition, love, parenthood), and distributive passions (the cabalist passion for intrigue and rivalry, the butterfly passion for variety and contrasts, and the composition passion for a mixture of physical and spiritual pleasure). With this final category of passions, Fourier explicitly acknowledged the role of conflict and rivalry, recognizing that people have a need to be continuously challenged.

In the Phalanx (the name for Fourier’s community of the future), people would be divided into groups of seven to nine who shared a particular passion. The members of each group would cooperate and compete with other harmonic groups. Because people, according to Fourier, wanted to have all their passions addressed, individuals would repeatedly join in ever-changing coalitions, in which distinctions in age, wealth, sex, character, and intelligence would be forgotten. As every individual would be a member of various groups and people would continuously change their labor, they would in the course of a single day assume different roles in shifting groups of associates. By turns boss and subordinate, whether male or female, they would discover that a rival in one group could be an ally in another. Antagonisms would thus obtain between rival groups, not between individuals. Although the theory of passions was concerned with the development of individual needs and Fourier emphasized that all kinds of differences among people (including wealth) would continue in Harmony, his overriding goal was social integration. Alongside the social and sexual minimum (discussed below), he attached importance first and foremost to the unifying
education, which—like the mingling of the “serie passionelle”—would replace class rivalry with intrigue and group competition. With this system Fourier felt he had found the solution to the conflict of individual versus society.

We can discern in this theory of passions a notion about “the unconsciousness,” which Fourier termed “l’engorgement” (blocking).\(^{15}\) Like water held back by a dike, passions suppressed at a certain point would always reappear at another time.\(^{16}\) Dammed-up passion would make its demands felt more urgently, thereby becoming more destructive. In his \textit{Le Nouveau Monde amoureux}, Fourier illustrated through a number of examples just how destructive the suppression of passions could be. An oft-cited instance was provided by Ms. Stroganoff, a princess from Moscow, who was in love with her slave girl. Due to prevailing sexual prejudice, Stroganoff knew nothing about the existence of lesbian love (termed “sapphism” by Fourier) and thus suppressed her own passion.\(^{17}\) As her desire pressed for consummation, she tortured and humiliated the girl instead of enjoying her love.

Applying his theory of passions to two issues that he considered of central importance for every human being, labor and love, Fourier worked out two minima.

\textit{The social minimum.} According to Fourier, labor was not a duty but a need. People could realize themselves totally in labor, provided that this labor was chosen of their own free will. And that would be possible only if labor were made attractive. Fourier’s theory of labor aimed to organize work in such a way that every socially necessary task (and he emphatically included domestic chores and caretaking) could be carried out enthusiastically by at least some members of the Phalanx. Tasks therefore needed to be continuously exchanged, along with the composition of groups executing those tasks. Furthermore, it was necessary for the circumstances of labor to be aesthetically satisfying, and the right to work had to be assured for every man, woman, and child. But the single most important precondition, according to Fourier, was a guaranteed income for all people: the social minimum. Only when men and women were freed from the necessity to work would it be “psychologically” possible for them to see their work as an attractive activity.\(^{18}\)
The sexual minimum. From his first publications on, Fourier made it clear that he was solely interested in developing a society in which not only material restrictions would be removed, but people would no longer have to repress their passions. To this end, social relations would have to be completely altered, and this required abandoning the prevailing restrictions on emotional and erotic life. Because private mutual relationships undermined social solidarity, love had to become not a private affair but an essential part of collective life. His Le Nouveau Monde amoureux in particular is one extended paean to the importance of love, both spiritual and physical. “Precisely in the intoxication of love, man feels that he is ascending to heaven and sharing God’s happiness.”19 “Nowadays man laughs about these follies (‘les manies’) but forgets that love is the domain of unwisdom and that the less rational something is, the more compatible it is with love,”20 “It is love that helps the individual to change inwardly.”21 Like Saint-Simon, Fourier drew a connection between love and art: “Eroticism and the creation of art . . . spring forth from the same vitality. . . . Desire’s movement finds its fulfillment in works of art.”22

Fourier worked out in this book how the most varied erotic passions could be satisfied while at the same time enhancing social integration. For this he proposed the Court of Love (“Court de l’amour”), presided over by an older woman well versed in amorous intrigue.23 The task of this court was to organize parties and orgies for all members of the Phalanx and to bring together people with specific erotic preferences.

A first prerequisite for the birth of the new amorous world was, according to Fourier, acceptance of the fact that sexual needs differed enormously. Most people were not monogamous, and furthermore their sexual desires were both various and changing. During different stages of their lives, individuals had very different urges. Nor did a uniform need prevail within specific age-groups: while some people tended to sensualism, others were primarily sentimentalists; some loved the “sexe opposite,” others “la monosexualité.”24 Fourier mentioned “sapphisme,” “pédéristie” (homosexuality between men), “flagellantisme,” “l’amour céladonique” (purely spiritual love—hitherto overly neglected, according to Fourier, including by de Sade), “l’androgénité,” “bissexué,” and
“trissexuété.” In Fourier’s utopia, all sexual expressions would be permitted so long as people were not abused. Precisely the repudiation of taboos would enhance the social integration and at the same time strengthen individuality (“l’individualisation”). Fourier talked about “affirming one’s difference.”

Sexual integrity brings the sexes closer to each other; if nothing is forbidden or suppressed anymore, there would be a bridging of sexual identities, of sapphic and pederastic loves, and this bridging of less common sexual preferences is necessary for Harmony.

Fourier notably excluded children up to the age of fifteen-and-a-half years, claiming that children had no sexual desire at all, only the passions for friendship and ambition. Incest between adults was not rejected by Fourier, who held that it was more widespread in civilization than people were ready to admit. Because the social taboo against it was so strong, incest between adults would remain forbidden during the transitional phases toward the final Harmony—a period estimated by Fourier to require three generations.

A second prerequisite for the new amorous world was a radical change in the position of women. It was necessary to recognize that women had the same sexual needs as men: “Woman is not a subject of lust, but an active participant.” Only when this was acknowledged could both sexes enter a new amorous world. Fourier described lesbian love with special warmth: “Sapphism is an exalted virtue, because it creates ties that did not exist until now. It is a precious amalgam of love and friendship.”

The third prerequisite formulated by Fourier was the sexual minimum. Much as the social minimum was a condition for self-expression and freedom of being, so would the sexual minimum transform amorous relationships by ridding them of any sort of constraint or need. Only after the fear of sexual deprivation had disappeared would men and women be free to develop their full sexual potential. Referring to his “composition passion,” Fourier considered love as more than a physical act: it did not end with orgasms. By assuring each individual a sexual minimum of orgasmic fulfillment (regulated by the Court of Love), Fourier wanted to free people from their fixation on coitus and genitals. He was ultimately concerned
with the more subtle and complicated relationships between people that would become possible once sexual hunger was satisfied.

The ideal community would thus emphasize the enjoyment of both labor and love and an enjoyable public life. Repeatedly castigated for his advocacy of overt sexual gratification, Fourier shifted his emphasis from sexuality to the pleasure of a good meal. This, too, he saw as a public event. Next to attractive labor and amorous relationships, fine and abundant food figured as one of the three most pleasurable features in Fourier’s Phalanxes. To cultivate forms of life “between public/private,” Fourier envisioned specially arranged salons as meeting places for a special “passion series” as well as a number of smaller salons where subgroups could indulge their cabalistic inclinations. The Court of Love would see to it that no one was excluded. News bulletins in the reception hall of the splendid central building would continuously announce upcoming festivities. The playful element of public life would be encouraged on all sides, and the boundary between the public and the private would be moved to the individual bedroom. Fourier took it for granted that after such lively daytimes and evenings, any individual above fifteen-and-a-half years of age would want to spend the remaining short nights alone, in his/her own room.

Following a schism within the Saint-Simonian movement in late 1831 (described below), key adherents defected to the small group of Fourier disciples, leading to the birth of a new Fourierist movement. In the many lectures given by various leaders of this movement, however, Fourier’s ideas about the abolition of the family and the range of possible sexual relationships were increasingly forsaken. Many people were won over as the “social sentiment” was increasingly limited to economic relationships alone, and the Fourierist movement gained a considerable following. Followers began to put Fourier’s proposals into practice, and Phalanxes were founded throughout Europe from the mid-1830s on; Fourierism also spread to North America between 1840 and 1850. But the movement’s exclusive emphasis on economic issues and its replacement of Fourier’s phantasies with bourgeois “decency” had effectively removed the sting of sexual and feminist liberation.
III

Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825) wrote little about sex and nothing about sexuality. His theories nonetheless prepared the ground for the sexual and feminist critique advanced by his pupils. Saint-Simon’s views, like those of Fourier, were directed against the Enlightenment *philosophes*. The new, positive science he envisioned would no longer be based upon metaphysical concepts, such as equality and freedom, but instead upon observations and their relationships. Moral and historicizing, Saint-Simon’s science aimed not at attaining universal equality, but at improving the position of “the most numerous and poorest class,” whom he spoke of in 1824-25 as “les prolétaires.”

In opposition to the Enlightenment concept of equality, Saint-Simon asserted that people were by nature unequal, because each individual was unique and had different capacities. All humans should have the chance to develop their own personalities, be it in the area of science, art, or in any form of industry (“l’industrie”). Precisely these differences formed the basis of his utopia, which envisioned a maximal application of uniquely individual capacities. By abolishing the right of inheritance, guaranteeing a good upbringing and education, and reserving the executive functions of professional groups for those best qualified, a real but nonidentical equality between people would come into existence.

Saint-Simon criticized the public/private distinction and aimed to integrate the state into society. He rejected the notion that public and private spheres could coexist, with the public sphere restricted by law from impinging on the private sphere and leaving the individual to live in liberty. Saint-Simon countered the atomistic, egalitarian society of the *philosophes* with an organic society in which relationships would be emotionalized to prevent social disintegration. He, too, saw the individual as a social, unique, and creative being, one in continuous interaction with society. In the future, people would not shirk their social tasks, for they would realize that to do so would violate their own interests.

According to Saint-Simon, scientists never worked autonomously, independent of society. Moreover, scientists were never purely rational, for their sentiments always played a part. As there was no
certainty about anything, no abstract truths could exist. The proper role of the scientist was not to produce truth, but to work in cooperation with the artist and “l’industriel” for the progress of society. This would only be possible if all people were addressed not only as rational and active beings, but also as religious, sensitive, and caring. Exactly these qualities of sensitivity and care were the most important human attributes for social betterment.

The year of Saint-Simon’s death fell in the post-Napoleonic Restoration, an era characterized not just by a restrictive system of public moral behavior but also by the flowering of the French Romantic movement. A number of young intellectuals felt drawn to the teachings of Saint-Simon because they were rebelling against the hypocritical codes of their contemporaries, who glorified monogamy while closing one eye toward prostitution and adultery and being entirely blind toward the poverty endured by a large part of the French population. Among the most important disciples of Saint-Simon were Benjamin Rodrigues, Saint-Armand Bazard, and Barthémy Enfantin. Apart from publishing a monthly journal, the Saint-Simonians gathered to discuss such issues as love, property, and the law of inheritance. Because these issues were intertwined with the family, they also debated more and more heatedly related subjects, e.g., sexuality and male-female relationships. Given the division of society into families, domestic love ranked above love for one’s fellow beings and property was passed on within the family, leading to the perpetuation of inequality by birth. From 1827 up unto about 1832, weekly meetings organized by Saint-Simonians drew hundreds of interested young men (women would only join in large numbers beginning around 1829), constituting a highly significant social movement. As one historian has commented: “In an era when individualism imagined it had achieved complete triumph, when liberalism assumed it had assured social progress, . . . the Saint-Simonians invoked social ideas.”37 Guided by Saint-Simon’s final work, Le Nouveau Christianisme, his disciples followed the example of early Christian communities by living their ideals while at the same time expanding and concretizing Saint-Simon’s theories. “Saint-Simonism remained one of the most potent emotional and intellectual influences in nineteenth-century society, inchoate, diffuse, but always there, penetrating the most
improbable places. . . . Piercing insights into the nature of love and sexuality . . . now have a greater appeal than [their] economic doctrines which have become rather commonplace.”

In their first lecture series from 1828 through the summer of 1829, the Saint-Simonians rejected the notions of “laissez-faire,” abstract equality, and privilege. “The mass of workers is exploited by those whose property they serve. . . . The workers are being exploited materially, intellectually, and morally, . . . but our political theorists still speak of liberty, the love of man, and equality.”

In addition, they adamantly criticized the current methods of political economics: “The economists believe that they can isolate homogeneous facts from other facts. But we know that it is impossible to separate knowledge from economic facts, knowledge from political and legal institutions. Therefore we know that no eternal laws exist, as Adam Smith and his disciples believed. They believed in an ‘order natural des sociétés,’ but social facts and especially economic facts are variable.”

Faced by the rise of philosophical positivism, they defended their own version of positivist science: “The pragmatists of our time state that a very large distance must exist between the methods of science and those of religion. But does not every science presuppose a belief? . . . Is not sentiment a source of deep inspiration even in scientific explication?”

“The positive method can be known by means other than rationality alone; because all sciences presuppose axioms, elements of belief and conviction also belong to scientific argumentation.”

Beginning with their sixth lecture, they discussed the oppression of women, critiquing paternalism and misogyny. From this lecture on, women and discussions about “the feminine” would play an ever larger role in their theories and their movement.

A second lecture series from late 1829 to late 1830 thematized the “rehabilitation of the flesh”: “Christianity has presupposed a separation between the spirit and the flesh, attributing men’s weakness to the flesh. And the Church still condemns all that is of the flesh and all that is material. Poverty is portrayed as the highest good, while luxury and beauty are considered evil. But the condemnation and cursing of the material and the physical has no real foundation, not even in the pronouncements of early Christianity. Both the spirit and the flesh are an expression of God’s love. The
desire to be happy here below and to enjoy is justified." All Saint-Simonians initially seemed to agree with this rehabilitation, but when Enfantin elaborated it one year later by presenting "the erotic challenge" as a positive quality, a schism in the movement ensued.

The Saint-Simonians presupposed that "love," not reason, was singularly capable of providing a strong and stable bond needed for a peaceful society, and that the future direction of the new era could be entrusted only to especially gifted individuals—women, priests, artists. They also ultimately agreed that the inequality of women was expressed in two ways: exclusion from public life, and oppression by men in private life. Because they wanted to live the good example themselves so as to realize their ideals for the future here and now, all Saint-Simonian associations were headed from mid-1829 till the end of 1831 by a man and a woman. But as evidenced in his many letters, Enfantin increasingly struggled with the question whether or not women in this way were not simply adapting to a male world. In November 1831, he launched his new theory of morals, proposing a utopia of sexual equality necessitating a new sexual morality. Enfantin subverted the Christian theory of morality by ascribing a positive value to "the sin of the flesh." "Until now coquettishness, frivolity, fickleness, beauty, and gracefulness have given rise only to guile, trickery, hypocrisy, wantonness, adultery, etc., for society has been incapable of regulating, or satisfying, or using [these] human qualities. They therefore have become sources of disorder rather than sources of joy and happiness, as they should be. People who are inconstant, fickle, volatile are therefore damned by the law of Christ (and note well that woman, more so than man, possesses these qualities) and must use their power . . . to corrupt rather than construct. This explains very well the anathema pronounced against physical pleasures and against woman." Enfantin thus related femininity to a kind of sexual challenge, called for this feminine quality to be more highly valued, and argued that woman possessed this quality more then men. But he did not interpret masculinity and femininity as opposites, nor did he link femininity to women, firstly because he considered man capa-
ble of acquiring this quality and secondly because exactly what constituted a woman was unknown.

Because he thought that no man could grasp what it was to be a woman, Enfantin proclaimed an *Appel à la Femme* as a second part of his new moral law. It would take a particular woman, a priestess, to relate what women wanted, and the Saint-Simonian women were called upon to organize themselves until the coming of the Female Messiah. In the upshot, these women did organize themselves in a separate way, but this step also led to a schism among Saint-Simonian men, with the departure of those who regarded Enfantin’s new theory as immoral.

Yet most men stayed. In their public lectures (in Paris and elsewhere in France), the Saint-Simonians recognized that being caring and sensitive were qualities that every individual should strive for, and the importance of domestic chores was also discussed. While they had mainly discussed what constituted “femininity” prior to the schism, they now set out to discuss their own behavior in a larger way, thus questioning masculinity itself. Men who attended these meetings were enjoined to scrutinize and modify their own intimate lives so that they could learn to acquire “feminine” qualities; there was crying, and an intimate feeling of belonging developed.48

These public “consciousness-raising sessions” frequently turned on the subject of love, because—according to Enfantin—society had heretofore emphasized only the spiritual. “Why can one not speak openly, with dignity, about love; why can one never talk about it, though everyone thinks about it?”49 The frankness of these meetings became too much for the government, which was coming to regard the movement as an assault on public morality. In early 1831, the Saint-Simonian center was closed by law, with the intervention of the police and the army.50 Other houses and associations were likewise banned, and the Saint-Simonian daily *Le Globe* was forced into financial liquidation. Together with about forty male disciples, Enfantin withdrew to an inherited house in Ménilmontant near Paris, where they awaited the caring but unknown Female Messiah and prepared themselves for a new life.

The Saint-Simonian men wanted primarily to deepen their insight into “what it is to be a woman” by practicing celibacy, open-
ing up their personal feelings by means of continuous introspection and discussions, and handling all domestic chores themselves.\textsuperscript{51} They wanted to prove that they took seriously their claim that all forms of work were equally important.\textsuperscript{52} For French public opinion, the execution of household chores by men was perhaps even more “contrary to nature” than their celibacy. Cartoons and satirical songs ridiculing the Saint-Simonians were distributed on a large scale throughout France. The cartoons showed men washing dishes and kitchen utensils, scraping carrots, and doing the laundry.\textsuperscript{53} The best-known cartoon shows them fastening each other’s waistcoats, the buttons being at the back side. This image referred to the suit designed by Enfantin in accordance with the Saint-Simonian principle that honest socialists should “associate,” even when they dressed or undressed.\textsuperscript{54} On weekends the Saint-Simonians adhered to an open-door policy, performing symbolic ceremonies that attracted thousands of Parisians. But once again the police, supported by the army, intervened. In August of 1832, Enfantin and Michel Chevalier, another Saint-Simonian leader, were sentenced to a one-year prison term in a widely publicized trial.\textsuperscript{55}

Communal life under Enfantin’s leadership had lasted nine months. During his imprisonment, the other men left one after the other, and the Ménilmontant commune ceased to exist. This signalled the end of the effort of the Saint-Simonian men to live “femininity.”\textsuperscript{56}

In response to Enfantin’s call for women to organize themselves, the Saint-Simonian women had in the meanwhile founded their own publication, \textit{La Femme Libre} (August 1832-spring 1834). Because this title was subjected to ridicule, the editors changed it to \textit{La Femme Nouvelle} and later to \textit{Tribune des Femmes}. This paper never mentioned homosexuality, but it did provide a platform for an impassioned discussion about the importance of sexuality and avoided assigning a fixed meaning to femininity. Recognizing and embracing differences among women, the editors did not pretend to speak for all women and avoided giving prescriptions. The status of the housewife and the dominance of the family were criticized vehemently in the paper. “Society should at long last stop distorting the finest work of God, that is, pluriformity . . . by forcing us women to
adapt ourselves to a universally similar, compulsory image, to a uniform model.”

The paper carried an extensive discussion about how to live “the rehabilitation of the flesh.” One contributor asserted: “I have never believed in ‘Christian’ morality. Yearning for pleasure as I do, this morality means only suffering.” Another: “We shall love without hypocrisy and laugh about prejudices.” Finally: “For us the body is as holy as the spirit. Christian abstinence to us is completely ridiculous, even godless, because we cannot believe that the goal of God is to destroy His own work.” On the other hand, hesitance was expressed, particularly by the editors Susanne and Jeanne-Désirée: “Will not women in a society based purely on physical attraction be losers again?” Yet the latter also called out: “Women, discover your potentiality for pleasure!” And Susanne pleaded for variety, declaring her disbelief in lifelong happiness with one man. “Such happiness seems to me merely to lead to boredom and monotony. For God’s sake, a bit of uncertainty in life!”

When in February 1834 the government passed a bill forbidding all organizations of an oppositional nature, the sole remaining editor (others having joined the Fourierist movement) was compelled to shut down the paper.

IV

In examining utopian socialist theories and movements, this essay has scarcely had occasion to mention male homosexuality explicitly. I nonetheless hope to have indicated four elements important for a critique of the apparently unquestionable status of heterosexuality:

1. Recognition of the importance of sexuality.
2. Abandonment of fixed, “natural” ideas concerning masculinity and femininity—in current terminology: the acceptance that masculinity and femininity are constructions.
3. Recognition that love, sexuality, and sexual relations fall within the domain of social science, causing this discipline to be, in the words of Fourier, necessarily an “uncertain science”—in Saint-Simonian terminology: recognition that
feeling always plays a part in science, and that no social “laws” can be constructed.

4. Endeavoring to live the formulated ideals in order to counter hypocrisy. It is characteristic of the utopian socialists that they put into practice a slogan of far more recent vintage: “The personal is the political.”

Taken in isolation, however, none of these factors is sufficient to put into question the self-evident status of heterosexuality:

1. Thus Wilhelm Reich pleaded on the one hand for recognition of the importance of sexuality, but his theory (and therapy) maintained the goal of reaching a “better, more natural family organization” and the ideal of “natural relationships between husband and wife.” Tellingly, he declared his “sex economy” to be a “rational revolution” based upon “the functional laws of biological energy.”

2. Nor is criticism of the traditional male-female relationship sufficient, as shown by the history of the prevailing feminist traditions. With Olive Banks I presuppose that it is possible to distinguish three such lines of thought. There is first a feminist theory of differentiation, placing “female” values above the effort to be equal with men. This tradition has its roots in evangelical thought and in Romanticism. Whether these values are biologically, psychologically, or culturally determined remains a point of contention within this tradition. A second theoretical tradition emphasizes the potentiality of equality between the sexes and attributes differences solely to external factors. Rooted in the rationality of the Enlightenment, this tradition has been continued in the political liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A third, socialist-feminist tradition is founded in utopian socialism. It differs from both preceding ones because it values feeling as much as rationality, without attributing sentiment to women and reason to men.

In my view a kinship between feminism and the gay movement can exist only when the issues of masculinity and femininity are decoupled from gender and sexuality is recognized as a political issue, implying the rejection of such dichotomies as female/male, sentiment/rationality, private/public, housewife/breadwinner, difference/equality. The seeming self-evidence of heterosexuality has
been thematized more explicitly in utopian socialist feminism than in other feminist traditions. Traditional Marxist feminism has taken sex as a given fact, disregarding the ramifications of femininity, masculinity, sexual preference, etc.

3. There is always a connection between prevailing scientific opinion and contemporaneous discussions about femininity/masculinity and heterosexuality. Thus Kolakowski discerns a clear relationship between the decline of utopian socialism around 1850 and the rise of the positivist philosophy of science. With its notions of objectivity, cause-and-effect, and knowledge equalling prediction, positivism would remain a dominating force up to about 1880-90. The decades from 1890 to 1920, on the other hand, have been described as a “utopian period” marked by a “revolt against positivism.” It was a time when the subjectivity of the researcher was rediscovered and renewed emphasis was placed on passion and inspiration as part of the scientific terrain. This did not, however, mean that everyone involved with this revolt was prepared to engage in a discussion of heterosexuality and femininity. Yet self-described socialist groups that differentiated themselves from Marxism did advance a range of views strongly resembling those of the first socialists. (One can likewise observe that in the 1960s, criticism of so-called bourgeois society with its rationality, neopositivism, and “freedom of values” initially led to an openness to other options and ideas.)

4. The utopian socialist effort to live according to formulated ideals led to an appreciation of sexuality, love, and the distribution of domestic chores as political issues. Although only Fourier explicitly mentioned homosexuality, the utopian attitude to life appears to render people more open to all possible forms of love and sexuality. Of and by itself, however, insight into the relationship between the personal and the political does not automatically lead to a discussion of heterosexuality and masculinity/femininity, as shown by the commune movement of the 1960s, for example.

Yet it is no coincidence that homosexuality was discussed and/or openly put into practice by many groups of the period 1890-1920 that called themselves socialist and sought to live according to their ideals. As examples I would cite: The Fellowship of the New Life (ca. 1885-95): included among
others Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Olive Schreiner, and Karl Pearson. Carpenter played a key role in this Fellowship, which emphasized the formation of new personal relationships and developed schemes for communities that would divide household chores equally between classes and sexes. With its ideas about “New Life Socialism,” the Fellowship aimed to liberate men as well as women from the stunting effects of sex-based hierarchies and contested the rigid enforcement of heterosexual self-identification.73

The League of Progressive Women’s Associations (Verband Fortschrittlicher Frauenvereine, 1891-1919): founded by Lily Braun among others. This League challenged the moral double standard for men and women, called for both a boycott of marriage and the enjoyment of sexuality, and aimed to organize “unprotected” working-class women—female homeworkers, shop assistants, domestic servants, and prostitutes. It also supported the right to abortion and the abolition of criminal penalties against homosexuality.74

The Feminism of Greenwich Village (1910-1920): comprising a large number of women and a smaller number of men who—equipped with higher education, a sense of humor, and self-confidence—tried to live their ideals in a pleasurable way. Their demands regarding women’s rights were tied to the expectation that socialism was inevitable in America and also to the right to decide for themselves what was feminine and what was masculine. Then as today, the Village had a reputation as a “safe haven” for lesbians and homosexual men. It was too early for lesbian and gay political activism; no formal or even informal organizational structure had yet evolved in America for lesbians or gay men. But as part of this Village feminism, female couples in the Heterodoxy women’s club were accorded the same status as male-female couples, and lesbian couples received strong emotional support from other Heterodoxy members.75

Although utopian socialism seemed to disappear after 1850, its ideas of course continued to exist. In these conclusions I have tried to point out that the utopian socialist intellectual tradition is still alive, that it tends to be open toward all expressions of and experiments with sexual preference, and that it has maintained a critical attitude vis-à-vis the self-evidence of heterosexual monogamy. This
persistence becomes more comprehensible if, following Paul Ricoeur, one views it as a function of utopianism to provide direct or indirect criticism of society through an exploration of ideas and desires. Or, according to Oscar Wilde: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.”

AUTHOR NOTE

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NOTES

4. Utopians were considered by them to be “dreamers,” designers of a static image of society, while they on the contrary were concerned with scientific processes. See, among others, Vincent Geoghegan, Utopianism and Marxism (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 8.
6. One example of the groups with free sexual relations was the “Brethren and Sistern of the Free Spirit.” On these heretical groups and their ideas about sexuality, see (among others) Georges Duby, Le Chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: Le mariage dans la France féodale (Paris: Hachette, 1981); Kenneth Rexroth, Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century (London: Peter Owen,
7. On these utopian periods and their distinguishing features, see (among others) Zablocki. Socialists and anarcho-communists regarded the early utopian movements and designs as their heritage and termed them socialist, communist, or libertarian, as well as utopian. Zablocki argues that because Marxism was a revolutionary theory and movement rather than communitarian, it does not belong to this utopian tradition. Anarchism was mostly revolutionary but occasionally (especially as advocated by the Christian anarchists around 1900) communitarian. Whereas the ideas of the utopian socialists may be seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment as well as the puritanism and violence of the revolution, Marx and especially Engels glorified the materialist philosophes and the French Revolution.


11. Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales was published in 1808; Traité de l’association domestique-agricole, afterwards known as Théorie de l’unité universelle, in 1822; and Le Nouveau Monde industriel in 1829. During the years 1816-18, Fourier wrote Le Nouveau Monde amoureux, but neither he nor his pupils ever dared to publish it. Some 150 years later Simone Debout published it together with a very comprehensive analysis (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1967). But in his first published works as well, Fourier expounded his ideas about love life of the future, and this is what the critics attacked: his work would incite to lust and promiscuity. As primary sources I studied Théorie des quatre mouvements and Le Nouveau Monde amoureux.


18. To find the right person for each task, all people belonging to a Phalanx would plan their activities for the next day during the sessions of the “Bourse of Exchange.” Unattractive work had to be avoided, remunerated at a higher rate, or carried out by a special group of children.

20. Ibid., p. 388.
23. For another elaboration of the “Court de l’amour,” see Beecher, p. 307. See also J. Beecher, “Parody and Liberation in The New Amorous World of Charles Fourier,” in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 20 (Autumn 1985): 125-33, arguing that this Court of Love was a magnificent parody of the Catholic Church.
25. Fourier introduces these terms on pp. 389, 391, 429, 458, 459, 462, and 463, respectively.
27. Ibid., p. lix.
28. Ibid., p. cxi.
29. Ibid., p. li. Debout quotes Fourier’s *Théorie des unité universelle*, p. 135. It is not clear why Fourier does not mention here male homosexuality. It is Beecher’s conclusion that Fourier maintained many more intimate friendships with women than with men.
30. Fourier had constructed an elaborate system for the Court of Love to take care of this. Every Phalanx would include one or more ideal, beautiful, and respected bisexual “couples” (Narcisse and Psyché), who, apart from their love for each other, would see it as part of their calling to give others their physical love. By experimenting with love and sexuality, all people would be able to formulate their needs and make them known to the Court of Love, which consequently would select one or more appropriate persons or call for Narcisse or Psyché. By organizing love in this way, ugly, handicapped, and old people would no longer have to fear sexual deprivation.
32. Children up to fifteen years of age slept in the children’s home, where their parents, biological or not, could always visit them. Both men and women could adopt them, and biological mothers who did not want them did not need to care for them; men were encouraged to have a strong relationship with the children. This passion for parenthood was not connected to biological parenthood by Fourier.
33. Apart from the moral doctrine of Enfantin, this was one of the reasons why the Saint-Simonians “deserted” to the Fourierist movement. They wanted to act rather than waiting for “La Mère,” or, as the “deserter” Transon formulated it: “Fourier delivered the means to put into practice the goal of Saint-Simonism.” See Beecher, pp. 424-26.
34. Phalanxes were founded in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Rumania, and especially in Russia, where Aleksandr Herzen and Fyodor Dostoyevski (among others) connected for a while. For Fourierism in North America, see Mark Hollo-


36. By “l’industrie” and “l’industriel,” Saint-Simon meant everyone engaged in a profession or enterprise, including farmers. He drew a distinction between the former and scientists and artists.


40. Ibid., Præface, p. 40.


42. Ibid., pp. 341-42.

43. Ibid., pp. 242-43.


46. Among these associations were “family houses,” production cooperatives, and the Saint-Simonian “clubs.” A communal life was led in the “family houses,” which were visited by many well-known artists, including Thomas Carlyle, Franz Liszt, George Sand, Victor Hugo, and Heinrich Heine. The “clubs” were organized in the quarters of Paris, where they provided free education as well as medical care for the workers. Some 2,000 people were active there in the years 1829-31.

48. Quack, vol. 3, pp. 73-81; Carlisle, pp. 107-16.
51. Carlisle, p. 189; Grepon, p. 83. Consider also the similarity with the late 1960s, when young intellectuals took factory jobs in an attempt to become “workers”—the class destined (in their view) to change the world.
52. Fehlbaum, p. 131.
53. For these cartoons, see Grubitzsch and Lagpacan, pp. 140-41.
55. On this much-discussed trial, see among others Charléty, pp. 176-83. Enfantin defended himself with the words: “God will put an end to the misery of this world by woman—men lack the ability for it. That is why the Saint-Simonians declared openly the freedom of women and called for their revelation, because God will lead them step by step nearer to happiness, peacefully, without any violence or meanness.”
56. After his release from prison, Enfantin along with other Saint-Simonist men and some women went to Egypt, aiming to execute the plan for international “industrial” politics designed by Chevalier. They felt that by organizing large public works, one could form a “peace corps” founded upon financial means rather than being absorbed by ministries of war, and this “army” would produce wealth and peace for nations. But the Saint-Simonian plan for digging the Suez canal resulted in failure. Most Saint-Simonians returned to France, often achieving fame—and wealth—by activities in the area of public works. Quack, vol. 2, p. 109: “In doing so they aimed to put into practice at least one aspect of Saint-Simonian theory, as it had turned out to be so difficult to found a new religion that aimed at the emancipation of women and ‘brotherhood’ and love among men.”
59. Isabelle, in *La Femme Nouvelle*, p. 91; see also pp. 115-16.
62. Ibid. She added: “I don’t say vary much, but vary in the right way. This is the condition of happiness and by consequence of progress.” (“Je ne dira pas beaucoup varier, mais bien varier. C’est la condition du bonheur et par conséquent du progrès.”)
63. Yet some former *Tribune* women regrouped after the February revolution of 1848 around the daily *Voix des Femmes* (March-June 1848). This paper was banned by the French government after the Paris June uprising. The *Tribune* was
widely read, as shown by letters and contributions of women not only from the whole of France, but also from England and even from the United States.

64. It is not insignificant that Marx and Engels left these social elements out of their theory: in their era, when positivism was a dominant force, laws had to be formulated if one wanted to be taken seriously. See also The Left and the Erotic, ed. Eileen Phillips (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), p. 26: “The problem remains of how to develop a continuum from the rational ordering of a socialist economy, which overcomes the excesses and chaos of the market and provides democratic control, to rationalist sexual politics when sex and the erotic appear to thrive on irrationalism, on excess and chaos and lack of control.”

65. This slogan has been used by feminists against (Marxist) socialism. Briefly, this entails that the way one wants to live should be related to one’s dealing with people and the struggle for social change. See also: Saskia Poldervaart, “Feminisme, romantiek, socialisme. Romantiek als bemiddelende factor?” Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies, no. 37 (1989): 37-51.


67. Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981). Although her classification of feminist intellectual traditions was an “eye-opener” for me, she hardly dealt with the utopian socialist tradition. She does indicate that this tradition is recognizable again around 1900 and 1970.


69. For the “Revolt against Positivism,” see H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930 (New York: Random House, 1964). For a classification into utopian (also communitarian) periods, see Zablocki (note 5), Introduction. See also Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Lasch calls this era “the progressive period” and thereby draws a distinction between the progressive movement and the new radicals. According to Lasch, the radicals influenced the progressive movement but at the same time this movement was purely political, while the new radicals were more interested in the reform of education, culture, and sexual relationships than raising political issues in the strict sense of the term.


71. Influenced by Fourier, Marcuse (among others) searched for socialist manifestations in a society not yet socialist and emphasized the role of the human psyche—especially its erotic side. He viewed work as a game, recognized the revolutionary character of sexuality, and was convinced that the dealings of individuals on a sexual and interpersonal level are fundamentally tied to
their behavior on other, also political, levels. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1953), and also Vincent Geoghegan, *Reason and Eros: The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse* (London: Pluto, 1981). In this way Marcuse expanded the concept of politics that would play a large role in many of the movements of the 1960s up to the “proletarian shift,” when a large number of students restricted themselves to an analysis of class. An analysis of the utopian character of the sixties is regrettably beyond the scope of this essay.

72. On this, see Saskia Poldervaart, “Woongroepen en de communautaire traditie,” in *Woongroepen: Individualiteit in groepsverband*, ed. Tony Weggemans, Saskia Poldervaart, and Harrie Jansen (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1985), pp. 20-53. In “living groups” (as communes are nowadays termed in the Netherlands), compulsory heterosexuality remained undiscussed until the pretense was abandoned that communal living was the best way for everybody to live. Members came to realize that people are different in their desires and that the point is that everyone must have a choice how to live. Only after this was grasped did the heterosexual norm become an important discussion topic in “living groups.”


74. On the history of this League, see Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört: Die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), especially pp. 216-68. These socialist feminists focused upon “unprotected” working women because they did not work under “proletarian” conditions and had therefore been disregarded by the Marxist socialist movement.

