



Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

From a Lecture by *Oberstudiendirektor* Kurt Hahn at a Sex Education Workshop for Young People at *Jugendburg* Bilstein/Sauerland (September 14, 1950)

The erosion of familial and social structures during the war and the postwar period, as well as the direct contact with occupying soldiers, refugees, and so on, meant that many young Germans were confronted with sexuality much earlier than before and in an unfamiliarly open form. In 1950, to do justice to this new reality, educator Kurt Hahn advocated sex education for young people beginning at puberty. At the same time, he wanted to see sex education emphasize the psychological dimension of sexuality alongside the physical one.

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State authority has largely vanished. The postwar school, with teachers who are frequently disciplined and occasionally also dismissed, has only a fraction of its former authority. To these dangers, which are exacerbated by the chaotic postwar conditions, are added the [normal] natural, developmentally-driven tensions – independent of the special circumstances of the times – of our 15- to 18-year-old school youth. The earlier onset of puberty, which already started appearing decades ago on account of urbanization, has progressed even further since. Because of the great influx of refugees, school classes are partially made up of a jumble of students whose ages vary far more greatly than before. Younger students have always been imperiled by older students, usually those repeating a grade who like to act as class “educators,” but this is even more the case today. We can say without exaggeration that when it comes to sexuality, our fifteen year-olds today are in the know, with very few exceptions.

Already in quiet times, the heightened sexual drive in a state of awakening meets with an insufficient force of emotional resistance. The sad postwar years, when discipline and order, propriety and integrity had shockingly low currency, bear some responsibility for the fact that so many young people, after the first great upheavals associated with the discovery of the mysterious, guilt-inducing experiences of the body, more and more seldom feel the desire, in moments of calm reflection, to come out of their dark prison of guilt-entangled physicality into the bright light, in order to rebuild with faithful confidence the world they have destroyed. So many feel quite well in their dull and unbridled devotion to the sexual urge, with the satisfaction of desire being attainable at any time, and they suppress any feelings of inferiority that might arise. What a few decades ago was truer of the working youth, whose developmental years unfolded more coarsely and unsentimentally, on account of their harsher life conditions, than those of the bourgeois youth, now largely applies to the rest of today’s youth as well, because of

the brutalizing influence of the war: *eros* as an emotional component of puberty that appeals to humans' better self plays a much weaker role today than it used to.

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What kind of help can be offered? After all, the great difficulty is and will be to truly connect with young people at this age. The prerequisite for this, that young people open up to the teacher, is an absolute imperative that is grounded in natural authority, love, and attachment.

In my experience, biology class is especially well suited for sex education.

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After all, young people have already been educated by the streets; they only act naively, as though they were entering novel territory, when the teacher fails to make some inner connection with them. The question is not at all whether or not to educate them about sexuality. Rather, the issue is to show the young person in all biology classes, piece by piece, that God has entrusted him with a miracle in the form of his body, a miracle whose disgraceful dishonoring is as much within our power as the happy fulfillment of the lifelong task of ennobling it and guarding it with awe and confidence as a temple of the spirit.

Next to biology classes, German and religion classes are especially well suited to the sexual-pedagogical education of our youth. In this regard, the ethnical subjects can give much to our mature youth, in particular, since sexuality and eroticism slowly approach a conciliatory harmony toward the end of puberty. Here, sexual life is looked at from the order of the entire soul, while its regulation from the body alone is recognized as impossible. In German class in the upper grades, Goethe's *Faust* offers the opportunity, more so than probably any other work of literature, not only to bring out the Apollonian light sides and Dionysian shadowy sides of our humanity (which is bound up with sexuality by the creator's intent through the tragic figure of Dr. Faust, who is unable to find his way to true love), but also to penetrate into the personal sphere of the students.

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During a class outing to a zoo, the sexuality educator will make special note of the monkey cages. As everyone knows, the openly displayed and, by human standards, ugly genitalia of the monkeys always attracts the special attention of visitors. The individual students know they are under less scrutiny than in the classroom and therefore act more naturally. Their behavior upon seeing the monkeys is, to a certain extent, indicative of their ethical maturity. A cynical smile, wink, an elbow nudge, and the like, which one encounters not infrequently even among adults, immediately suggests the student's level of maturity.

The situation is similar during a class trip to an art museum. This leads us to the problem of human nudity. Every young person must find it thought-provoking that while human nudity is

strictly avoided in life, it is glorified in art. The fact is that only a very mature person is able to behold the naked, living human body with purity. Likewise, contemplating a nude sculpture or a nude painting as a pure work of art, without entertaining ulterior thoughts of a sensual nature, presupposes a disciplined soul. In his chapter "The Nuptials of the Flowers," Carl Linnaeus aptly summarizes the antipodes briefly sketched above with these words: "The genitalia of the plants we behold with pleasure, those of animals with disgust, and our own with wondrous thoughts." The more mature students must be able, as a result of sexual education, to see the human body as something that is more than merely corporeal; he must sense the soul through the body. And this ability leads him out of the lower sensual desire into a transfiguring light.

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(Hahn was director of the boarding school in Salem [Baden-Württemberg] from 1920 to 1933.)

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