

Last week, the New York Times ran Emily Bazelon's piece, "[Should Prostitution be a Crime?](#)" Like most articles in support of the sex trade, it was light on actual analysis but heavy on slogans and smears. In the midst of the cliches, what stood out to me most was one particularly bizarre line:

Because abolitionists see these women as victims, they generally oppose arresting them. But they want to continue using the criminal law as a weapon of moral disapproval by prosecuting male customers, alongside pimps and traffickers — though this approach still tends to entangle sex workers in a legal net.

Apparently, to Emily Bazelon, a law that recognizes an activity as harmful and seeks to curtail it is no more than "a weapon of moral disapproval." Why such a dismissive title doesn't apply to every law, I'm not exactly sure — can anyone point me towards the governments forbidding things they consider morally upstanding and commendable?

I dropped out halfway through my civics class in high school, but I seem to remember that "This shouldn't be done" tends to be a necessary prerequisite for a law. Maybe I'm missing something that will be clarified in Bazelon's upcoming op-ed, where she denounces laws banning unlicensed dentistry as "weapons of moral disapproval" against black-market root canals.

What is it with liberals and accusations of "moralizing?" Right before reading Bazelon's piece, I was scrolling through the comments on a subreddit where someone had shared [my last post on prostitution](#). There too, the most common response by far was a curt dismissal on the grounds that I just have a "moral problem" with prostitution.

Well, here's my confession: They're right! I do have a moral problem with prostitution. I think buying sex is wrong. It's bad. It's not okay. It's unacceptable, reprehensible, indefensible, shameful, disgraceful, appalling, and every other word the Left has banned for fear of "moralizing." But buying sex should be moralized, because buying sex is immoral. It's something a person ought not do. That's not all, though. I don't just want to call it immoral — I want the government to enforce that morality! I want the police and courts to punish men who purchase sex. I want them fined, or even thrown in jail, and I want that done solely because what they are doing is immoral. I have no idea why anyone would think I pretend otherwise.

On the subject, I have moral problems with some other things: Police brutality, domestic violence, religion, capitalism, and the entire global system of industrial civilization, to name a few. I think it's objectively immoral to assault your partner or appropriate the means of production for private profit. A white cop murdering an African civilian is impermissible to me. And destroying the entire planet in an orgy of white supremacist, patriarchal settler colonialism for the profit of shareholders and CEOs is certainly something I think a person ought not do. These things are wrong, like buying sex is wrong, and that is reason enough to abolish them.

I don't say they're wrong because God told me so — I'm an atheist — or because I find them distasteful; there are perfectly ethical things I personally despise, and plenty of immoral things I desire. Ethics isn't just a grand tally of what we like or

dislike. It's the study of the Right and the Good, an inquest into how we ought to act. It's an attempt to create universal prescriptions, rules that are valuable precisely because they don't hinge on the ties of culture, tradition, and personal desire.

That doesn't make morality a frumpy set of arbitrary rules, handed down without a second thought for how they affect real human beings. I had a man tweet to me last week, "We need to stop focusing on morality and start looking at the actual impact these things have on people's lives." What a meaningless sentence! Ethics just is a discussion of human welfare, of what we can do to maximize the good in people's lives. If prostitution is wrong, it's wrong for the same reason anything is wrong: Because it isn't the best way the world can be.

Some people might scoff at the use of certainties like right, good, and best when discussing sex. Yet the Left has no problem making those difficult judgments when it comes to other issues. They're happy to state in unequivocal terms that plenty of things are wrong, unfair or unacceptable, that other things would be better – so much better, in fact, that serious struggle is justified to gain them. Capitalism, colonialism, racism, and poverty earn words like evil, and the fight against them is framed in terms of justice. Meanwhile, women's concerns are reduced to petty personal squabbles, to "moralizing" – as if we aren't also "moralizing" when we demand Israel stop bombing Palestinian hospitals, or that monks in Myanmar stop organizing pogroms against Rohingya Muslims.

Women who oppose prostitution are shamed for "using the state to enforce morality." But the same could be said for black people who organize civilian review boards to regulate the police in their neighborhoods, or environmentalists who lobby for expanded protections in wetlands and forests. In each case, a group is demanding the government make a ruling on how things ought to be, how people ought to behave in regards to one another. This kind of agitation is commendable and brave, until it begins to encroach on men's ability to achieve orgasm.

Left-wing men have cordoned off sex from ethics because ethics is, at its heart, a search for rules that transcend desire. Most of them don't desire to run a Fortune 500 company, or dig an oil well, or invade another country, so they don't mind prescriptions on behavior that restrict those things. But many, many men on the Left want to fuck female strangers, or want the power that comes from knowing those fucks are an option. No wonder, then, so many oppose "moralizing" around sex.

But of course they don't actually escape a moral system – they just construct a remarkably shitty one. Don't tell women what they can and can't do with their own bodies. If it's consensual, you have no right to judge. Don't be a prude. What are all of these things except universal prescriptions on behavior, which is all that morality ever was? Someone needs to remind these men that Thou Shall Not Slut Shame and Thou Shall Not Lie With Mankind as With Womankind are equally commandments.

Just yesterday, some proud punter tweeted me out of the blue to denounce my "moralistic view of sexuality." But he clearly had a view of sex just as "moralizing" as my own – and I, having violated his decrees, was condemned to face an emoticon-filled inquisition. He can only pretend to appear detached from moral

concerns because his moral concerns are specifically constructed to never conflict with the quest to get off. It's easy to forget you have a moral system, when its boundaries are comfortably fit a few inches from every single thing you'd ever want to do.

I can't even begin to unpack the depths to which Leftists have sunk, where the very idea of morality is looked at with suspicion. Leftism is, at its heart, a profoundly moral venture. It's a belief that what the powerful are doing is wrong. Not icky. Not mean. Not a real bummer. Wrong. And that's exactly the word for what men do when they treat the bodies of female strangers like objects to be purchased and tossed out.

Men who intentionally strip their sex lives of any political, social, and ethical implications haven't transcended morality. They've just sunk beneath it.