

'We are all indebted to David West for this timely and remarkable study and reflection concerning reason and sexuality. His closely textured and nuanced treatments of the ideas of reason and rationality, and their complex relationships to the emotions and passions, especially but not exclusively those that are elicited and suffused by the many aspects of sexuality, illuminate not only the lengthy philosophical history of these fraught connections but much of what is felt, said and thought in our own time. Erudite, elegantly written and strongly felt, West's book is a major contribution to the understanding of issues that are at the centre of both philosophical and lived experience.'

Richard Flathman, Johns Hopkins University

'Reason and Sexuality in Western Thought is an intriguing, masterful and perceptive presentation of issues that are of intense interest to us all. It is an original and clear-sighted response to the pressing need to reassess how conceptions of reason, sexuality and the self have helped to define who we are. It also makes some tantalizing suggestions about alternative ways of expressing our capacities in relation to self and others. This work contributes as much to the areas of normative ethics and personal identity as it does to studies of sexuality. What is more, the scholarship in this book is extensive and impressive, and it is beautifully written – clear, concise and jargon-free. On all major issues West's argument is clearly, skilfully and convincingly put, never losing sight of the major themes or of their rich interconnections.'

Moira Gatens, University of Sydney

This book traces the genealogy of ideas of reason, self and sexuality in the West, opening the way to a richer and more diverse understanding of sexual experience.

Western philosophy and religion have distorted and continue to distort our experience of sex and love through three far-reaching constellations of reason, self and sexuality. Thinkers like Plato, Aquinas and Kant helped to fashion an ascetic ideal of reason hostile to bodily pleasures and sexual diversity. By contrast, philosophical hedonism advocates a less demanding conception of rationality and defends sexual pleasure. But this approach of thinkers like Hume, Bentham, La Mettrie and Sade is still one-sided and limiting. A third constellation, Romanticism, avoids the limitations of both forms of rationalism, but in the name of a religion of love and passion that ultimately threatens the integrity of the self.

In *Reason and Sexuality in Western Thought*, a richer understanding of sexual experience is traced to a dissident philosophical tradition. In their different ways, Montaigne, Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marcuse and Foucault contribute to a more holistic, multi-layered and open conception of reason, sexuality and the self. This book will be essential reading for all students of philosophy and gender studies.

DAVID WEST is Reader in Political Theory at the Australian National University

polity

www.polity.co.uk

ISBN 0-7456-2421-9



9 780745 624211 >

Cover illustration: Adam by Albrecht Durer
©Archivo Iconografico, S.A./CORBIS
Cover design by Hart McLeod
Printed in Great Britain

WEST
Reason & Sexuality in Western Thought

Reason & Sexuality in Western Thought

DAVID WEST

polity

