



What are Perversions?

By Sergio Benvenuto

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This book explores what we mean when we use the term "perversion." Are we dealing with a sexological classification, a mental disturbance, an ethical deviation, a hedonistic style, or an historical-cultural artifact? The book retraces some of the fundamental stages in the field of psychoanalytic thought—from Freud to Masud Khan, Stoller, and Lacan—and proposes an original approach: that "paraphilias" today are taken as an ethical failure of the sexual relationship with the other. The perversions signal a specific relationship with the other, who is treated not simply as a sexual object, but someone whose subjectivity is ably exploited precisely in order to get a perverse pleasure. Acts, if considered perverse, are understood as a metaphorical re-edition of a trauma, above all sexual, in which the subject (as a child) suffered the bitter experience of exclusion or jealousy. The book articulates an heterodox hypothesis by drawing on clinical cases, from both the author's own analytic practice and those of others; but it also draws on cinema, historical episodes, social psychology experiments (for example, Stanley Milgram's experiment), stories and novels, and philosophical works. The final appendix delves more deeply into Freud's theory of masochism.

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What are Perversions? By Sergio Benvenuto Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1900226 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-02-12
- Released on: 2016-02-12
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

'With the emergence of the paraphilias and the paraphilic disorders, perversions have become on the verge of extinction and the pervert has become a rarefied breed, only appearing to subsist in tabloid headlines and in the language of the street corner. For contemporary mental health care professionals, the term "perversion" is oversaturated with pejorative moral connotations, yet in this compelling volume Sergio Benvenuto argues that "perversions" constitute a necessary modality of dystonic psycho-social functioning, not despite, but precisely because of the ethical values that are being activated. The future of perversion may be secure...'- Professor Dany Nobus, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Brunel University London, and Chair of the Freud Museum London

'This is an excellent clinical and historical work, readable and intelligent, in which Sergio Benvenuto examines all the facets of perversion, from sexual perversion to the perverse structure proper to humanity. The author works from clinical cases as well as literary texts, and analyses with finesse the diverse psychoanalytic conceptions of perversion.'- Elisabeth Roudinesco, Historian, Universite Paris VII Diderot

'This fascinating and thought-provoking study will stimulate renewed interest in the field of perversion. Going beyond cliches and platitudes about sexual behaviour, Benvenuto encourages a critical reflection on what constitutes perversion and on how psychoanalysis not only has conceptualised it but could rethink its current conceptualisations. A lucid, original and compelling book.'- Darian Leader, Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research

'Perversions are considered a deviation from the norm, but as far as sexuality is concerned, there is no clear norm and deviation is everywhere. When Sigmund Freud declared that our "normal" neuroses are "the negative of perversions" he thought of photography: negatives are images in which the illumination is reversed - lighter areas appear darker, and vice versa. When negatives are developed into positive prints, a second reversal restores light and darkness in their proper order. Challenging our assumptions about what darkness and light mean for sexuality, and without moralisation but tackling important ethical issues, drawing from Freud, Masud Khan, Robert Stoller, and Jacques Lacan, Benvenuto turns perversion inside out. The result is startling, original, and provocative.'- Patricia Gherovici, psychoanalyst and author

About the Author

Sergio Benvenuto is a psychoanalyst in Rome, president of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Psychoanalysis (ISAP), and a scientific researcher in the Institute of Sciences and Technologies of Cognition at the Italian Council for Scientific Research (CNR) in Rome. He is professor meritis in Psychoanalysis at the International Institute of Psychology of Depth/University of Nice in Kiev. He is also the founder and editor of the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, published both online and in print.

Users Review

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