

**Below are some extracts from Joseph Fletcher’s Situation Ethics. Try reading each paragraph for the gist – the essential point, and then summarise the essential point in one sentence underneath each paragraph. Then try applying it to polyamory.**

“Look also at a passage in Nash’s play *The Rainmaker*. On the stage and as a movie it was a great success. But the key to it, ethically, lies in a scene where the morally outraged brother of a lonely spinster girl threatens to shoot the sympathetic but not “serious” Rainmaker because he makes love to her in the barn at midnight. The Rainmaker’s intention is to restore her sense of womanliness and her hopes for marriage and children. Her father, a “wise old rancher, grabs the pistol away from his son, saying, “Noah, you’re so full of what’s right you can’t see what’s good”. (Situation Ethics page 23)

Gist:

“What can be worse, no case by case approach at all may reveal a punishing and sadistic use of law to hurt people instead of helping them. How else explain burning at the stake in the Middle Ages for homosexuals (death, in the Old Testament)? Even today imprisonment up to sixty years is the penalty in one US state for those who were actually consenting adults, without seduction or public disorder! This is really unavoidable whenever law instead of love is put first. The “puritan” type is a well-known example of it. But even if the legalist is truly **sorry** that the law requires unloving or disastrous decisions, he still cries, ‘Do the “right” even if the sky falls down’. He is the man Mark Twain called “a good man in the worst sense of the word.” (Situation Ethics page 32)

Gist:

“As we know, for many people, sex is so much a moral problem, largely due to the repressive effects of legalism, that in newspapers and popular parlance the term “morals charge” always means a sex complaint! “Her morals are not very high” means her sex life is rather looser than the mores allow. Yet we find nothing in the teachings of Jesus about the ethics of sex, except adultery and an absolute condemnation of divorce—a correlative matter. He said nothing about birth control, large or small families, childlessness, homosexuality, masturbation, fornication or premarital intercourse, sterilization, artificial insemination, abortion, sex play, petting, and courtship. Whether any form of sex (hetero, homo, or auto) is good or evil depends on whether love is fully served”.

(Situation Ethics page 47)

Gist:

“The Christian ethic is not interested in reluctant virgins and technical chastity. What sex probably needs more than anything is a good airing, demythologizing it and getting rid of its mystique-laden and occult accretions, which come from romanticism on the one hand and puritanism on the other. People are learning that we can have sex without love, and love without sex; that baby-making can be (and often ought to be) separated from love-making. It is, indeed, for re-creation as well as for procreation. But if people do not believe it is wrong to have sex relations outside marriage, it isn't, unless they hurt themselves, their partners, or others. This is, of course, a very big “unless” and gives reason to many to abstain altogether except within the full mutual commitment of marriage. The civil lawmakers are rapidly ridding their books of statutes making unmarried sex a crime between consenting adults. All situationists would agree with Mrs. Patrick Campbell's remark that they can do what they want “as long as they don't do it in the street and frighten the horses”. (Situation Ethics page 149-150)

Gist:

“What are we to say now of the girl in our first chapter who was offered so much money to sleep with a rich man? Now that we have covered the ground in between, how shall we respond to the question whether extramarital sex is always wrong? Or even paid sex? Women have done it to feed their families, to pay debts, to serve their countries in counterespionage, to honour a man whom they could not marry. Are we not entitled to say that, depending on the situation, those who break the Seventh Commandment of the old law, even whores, could be doing a good thing—if it is for love’s sake, for the neighbour’s sake? In short, is there any real “law” of universal weight? The situationist thinks not.” (Situation Ethics page 151)

Gist:

### *Exercise: Polyamorous Relations*

Using the gist of Fletcher’s teaching on sexual relations identified above, assess the morality of polyamorous relations. (Polyamorous – loving more than one partner at a time).