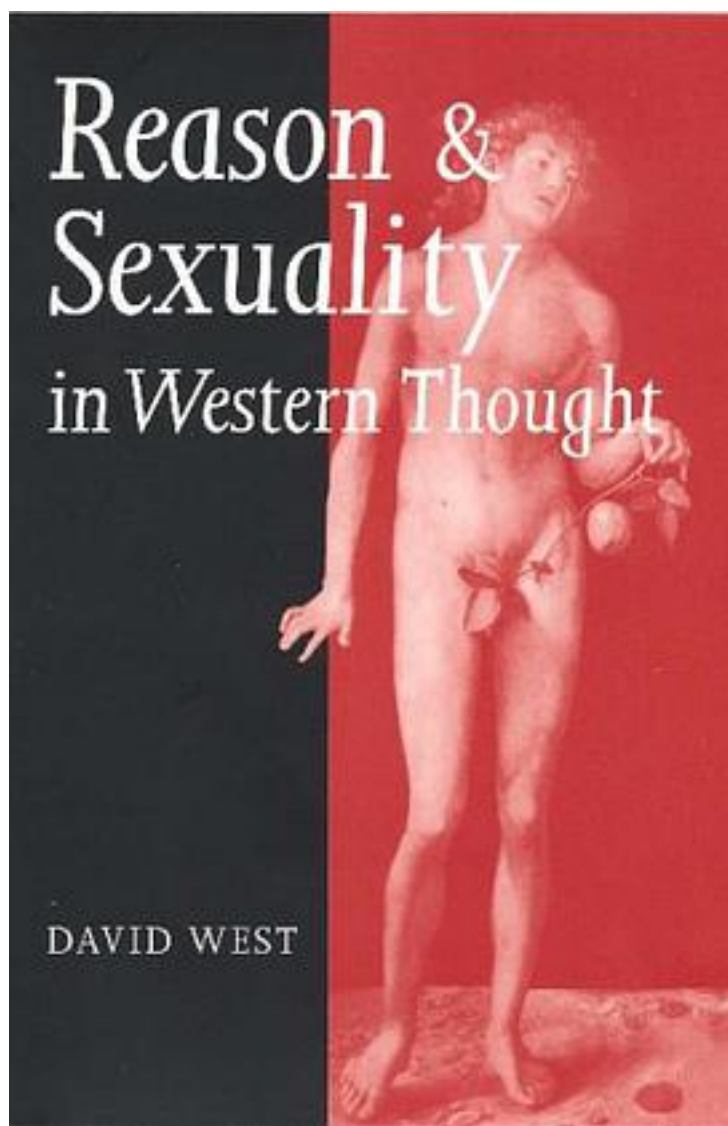


Reason and Sexuality in Western Thought



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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 de 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 and 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.

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