John Boswell,

Christianity, Social Tolerance,

and Homosexuality

1 Introduction

"All those whose lives are spent searching for truth are well aware that the glimpses they catch of it are necessarily fleeting, glittering for an instant only to make way for new and still more dazzling insights. The scholar's work, in marked contrast to that of the artist, is inevitably provisional. He knows this and rejoices in it, for the rapid obsolescence of his books is the very proof of the progress of scholarship."[1]

Between the beginning of the Christian Era and the end of the Middle Ages, European attitudes toward a number of minorities underwent profound transformations. Many groups of people passed from constituting undistinguished parts of the mainstream of society to comprising segregated, despised, and sometimes severely oppressed fringe groups. Indeed the Middle Ages are often imagined to have been a time of almost universal intolerance of nonconformity, and the adjective "medieval" is not infrequently used as a synonym for "narrow-minded," "oppressive," or "intolerant" in the context of behavior or attitudes. It is not, however, accurate or useful to picture medieval Europe and its institutions as singularly and characteristically intolerant. Many other periods have been equally if not more prone to social intolerance:[2] most European minorities fared worse during the "Renaissance"

1. "Tous ceux dont la vie se passe à chercher la vérité savent bien que les images qu'ils en saisissent sont nécessairement fugitives. Elles brillent un instant pour faire place à des clartés nouvelles et toujours plus éblouissantes. Bien différente de celle de l'artiste, l'oeuvre du savant est fatalement provisoire. Il le sait et s'en réjouit, puisque la rapide vieillesse de ses livres est la preuve même du progrès de la science": Henri Pirenne, cited in Georges Gérardy, *Henri Pirenne, 1862–1935*, Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la culture, Administration des services educatifs (Brussels, 1962), p. 4.

2. "Social" tolerance or intolerance is used in this study to refer to public acceptance of personal variation or idiosyncrasy in matters of appearance, life-style, personality, or belief. "Social" is implicit even when, to avoid repetition, it is not used to modify "tolerance" or "intolerance." "Social tolerance" is thus distinguished from "approval." A society may well "tolerate" diversity of life-style or belief even when a majority of its members do not personally approve of the variant beliefs or behavior; this is indeed the essence of "social tolerance," since no "tolerance" is involved in accepting approved behavior or belief. Nonacceptance of disapproved behavior or traits does not of course necessarily constitute

than during the "Dark Ages," and no other century has witnessed anti-Semitism of such destructive virulence as that of the twentieth. Moreover, treating these two subjects—intolerance and medieval Europe—as if each were in some sense a historical explanation of the other almost wholly precludes understanding of either one. The social history of medieval Europe and, perhaps even more, the historical origins and operations of intolerance as a social phenomenon require far subtler analysis.

This study is offered as a contribution to better understanding of both the social history of Europe in the Middle Ages and intolerance as a historical force, in the form of an investigation of their interaction in a single case.[3] It would obviously be foolhardy to attempt any broader approach to the first; it may be slightly less obvious why there is no general treatment of the second in the study which follows.

In the first place, it would be extremely difficult to define the boundaries of such a general study. Although intolerance has weighed heavily on

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intolerance: it could be a defensive response to persons whose variation from the norm threatens social well-being, or a response to religious imperatives which explicitly transcend the value of "tolerance." Both of these issues are taken up below in relation to gay people in the Middle Ages.

3. In a previous study (*The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century* [New Haven, 1977]) I have addressed this issue from the perspective of Muslim communities in Christian Spain in the later Middle Ages. So little scholarly work on the subject of gay people in history is presently extant that it would be premature to attempt anything in the way of a bibliographical essay. With few exceptions, no modern studies have been useful for the present investigation. Almost all modern historical research on gay people in the Christian West has been dependent on the pioneering study of Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London, 1955). This work suffers from an emphasis on negative sanctions which gives a wholly misleading picture of medieval practice, ignores almost all positive evidence on the subject, is limited primarily to data regarding France and Britain, and has been superseded even in its major focus, biblical analysis. Nonetheless, it remains the best single work on the subject in print, and it is for this reason that I have been at pains throughout the following chapters to expand on or disagree with those portions of it related to this study. No other studies of homosexuality in general can be recommended without severe reservation. The first well-known overview of the subject was a sketch by Richard Burton, appended as the "Terminal Essay: D. Pederasty" in his 1885 translation of the *Arabian Nights* (reprinted in *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature, 1850–1900*, ed. Brian Reade [New York, 1970], pp. 158–93). Raymond de Becker's *L'érotisme d'en face* (Paris, 1964; trans. M. Crosland and A. Daventry as *The Other Face of Love* [New York, 1969]) is pleasant and readable and contains many entertaining illustrations (some of dubious relation to the text). Although the scientific speculation which composes pt. 1 is now completely outdated and pt. 2 (on the Middle Ages) should be ignored, pt. 3—on modern Europe—is still useful. Thorkil Vanggaard's *Phallos: A Symbol and Its History in the Male World* (London, 1972) has been probably deservedly largely ignored by scholars, as have Arno Karlen's *Sexuality and Homosexuality* (New York, 1971) and Vern Bullough's *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York, 1976), which superseded it with substantial but not sufficient improvement. For the sake of completeness alone I mention A. L. Rowse's *Homosexuals in History* (New York, 1977).

the conscience of the twentieth century, so little is known about its nature, extent, origins, and effects in a historical context that merely delineating the outlines and proportions of the problem would require a study of considerably greater length than the present one. The writer would need not only to be familiar with the techniques and findings of a host of specialized fields—anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.—but also to have some means of adjudicating the validity of their competing claims and assessing their relative importance. Arbitrarily pursuing some and excluding others would be perilous in so understudied a field.[4]

Moreover, even if the problem could be defined, it would not be possible to write about a subject as comprehensive and far-reaching as intolerance with the degree of historical detail provided in this study except in a work of encyclopedic proportions. From the historian's point of view, however, general theories are of little value unless rooted in and supported by specific studies of particular cases, and since there are so few of these at present to substantiate ideas regarding intolerance, it has seemed more useful to provide data for eventual synthetic analysis by others than to embark prematurely on the analysis itself. This appoach has the egregious disadvantage of producing, in effect, an elaborate description of a single piece of an unassembled puzzle, but given the extreme difficulty of even identifying, much less assembling, all the other pieces, it appears to be the most constructive effort possible at present. It has, moreover, the compensating advantage of allowing the data assembled to be employed within any larger theoretical framework, historical or scientific, current or subsequent, since there is little built-in theoretical bias.

Of the various groups which became the objects of intolerance in Europe during the Middle Ages, gay people[5] are the most useful for this study for a number of reasons. Some of these are relatively obvious. Unlike Jews and Muslims, they were dispersed throughout the general population everywhere in Europe; they constituted a substantial minority in every age[6]—rather than in a few periods, like heretics or witches—but they were never (unlike the poor, for instance) more than a minority of the population. Intolerance of gay people cannot for the most part be confused with medical treatment, as in the case of lepers or the insane, or with protective surveillance, as in the case of the deaf or, in some societies, women. Moreover, hostility to gay people provides

4. This study is thus "social history" not in its most modern sense—i.e., application of the findings and conventions of social sciences to history—but only in an older and more prosaic sense: the history of social phenomena rather than of politics or ideas.

5. The word "gay" is consciously employed in this text with connotations somewhat different from "homosexual." The distinction and the reasons for employing a word which has not yet become a part of most scholars' vocabulary are discussed at length in chap. 2.

6. For estimates of the numbers of gay people in the past (and the present) see below, pp. 53–58.

singularly revealing examples of the confusion of religious beliefs with popular prejudice. Apprehension of this confusion is fundamental to understanding many kinds of intolerance, but it is not usually possible until either the prejudice or the religious beliefs have become so attenuated that it is difficult to imagine there was ever any integral connection between them. As long as the religious beliefs which support a particular prejudice are generally held by a population, it is virtually impossible to separate the two; once the beliefs are abandoned, the separation may be so complete that the original connection becomes all but incomprehensible. For example, it is now as much an article of faith in most European countries that Jews should not be oppressed because of their religious beliefs as it was in the fourteenth century that they should be; what seemed to many Christians of premodern Europe a cardinal religious duty—the conversion of Jews—would seem to most adherents of the same religious tradition today an unconscionable invasion of the privacy of their countrymen. The intermingling of religious principles and prejudice against the Jews in the fourteenth century was so thorough that very few Christians could distinguish them at all; in the twentieth century the separation effected on the issue has become so pronounced that most modern Christians question the sincerity of medieval oppression based on religious conviction. Only during a period in which the confusion of religion and bigotry persisted but was not ubiquitous or unchallenged would it be easy to analyze the organic relation of the two in a convincing and accessible way.

The modern West appears to be in just such a period of transition regarding various groups distinguished sexually, and gay people provide a particularly useful focus for the study of the history of such attitudes.[7] Since they are still the objects of severe proscriptive legislation, widespread public hostility, and various civil restraints, all with ostensibly religious justification, it is far easier to elucidate the confusion of religion and intolerance in their case than in that of blacks, moneylenders, Jews, divorced persons, or others whose status in society has so completely ceased to be associated with religious conviction that the correlation—even if demonstrated at length—now seems limited, tenuous, or accidental.

Much of the present volume, on the other hand, is specifically intended to rebut the common idea that religious belief—Christian or other—has been the *cause* of intolerance in regard to gay people. Religious beliefs may cloak or incorporate intolerance, especially among adherents of revealed religions

7. The order in which societies come to grips with categories of invidious discrimination may reveal much about their social structure. It is interesting that in the modern West public attention has been focused on intolerance related to sexuality only long after comparable issues involving race or religious belief have been addressed, whereas in most ancient cities gay people achieved toleration long before religious nonconformists, and race (in its modern sense) was never an issue.

which specifically reject rationality as an ultimate criterion of judgment or tolerance as a major goal in human relations. But careful analysis can almost always differentiate between conscientious application of religious ethics and the use of religious precepts as justification for personal animosity or prejudice. If religious strictures are used to justify oppression by people who regularly disregard precepts of equal gravity from the same moral code, or if prohibitions which restrain a disliked minority are upheld in their most literal sense as absolutely inviolable while comparable precepts affecting the majority are relaxed or reinterpreted, one must suspect something other than religious belief as the motivating cause of the oppression.

In the particular case at issue, the belief that the hostility of the Christian Scriptures to homosexuality caused Western society to turn against it should not require any elaborate refutation. The very same books which are thought to condemn homosexual acts condemn hypocrisy in the most strident terms, and on greater authority: and yet Western society did not create any social taboos against hypocrisy, did not claim that hypocrites were "unnatural," did not segregate them into an oppressed minority, did not enact laws punishing their sin with castration or death. No Christian state, in fact, has passed laws against hypocrisy per se, despite its continual and explicit condemnation by Jesus and the church. In the very same list which has been claimed to exclude from the kingdom of heaven those guilty of homosexual practices, the greedy are also excluded. And yet no medieval states burned the greedy at the stake. Obviously some factors beyond biblical precedent were at work in late medieval states which licensed prostitutes[8] but burned gay people: by any objective standard, there is far more objurgation of prostitution in the New Testament than of homosexuality. Biblical strictures have been employed with great selectivity by all Christian states, and in a historical context what determines the selection is clearly the crucial issue.

Another advantage in employing gay people as the focus of this study is the continued vitality of ideas about the "danger" they pose to society. Almost all prejudice purports to be a rational response to some threat or danger: every despised group is claimed to threaten those who despise it; but it is usually easy to show that even if some danger exists, it is not the origin of the prejudice. The "threat" posed by most groups previously oppressed by Christian society (e.g., "witches," moneylenders), however, now seems so illusory that it is difficult for modern readers to imagine that intelligent people of the past could actually have been troubled by such anxieties. In fact one is apt to dismiss such imagined dangers out of hand as willful misrepresentations

8. Many European monarchies of the later Middle Ages licensed prostitutes: for England, see John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1973) p. 60; for Spain, see Boswell, *The Royal Treasure*, pp. 70–71, 348ff.; see also chap. 2 below.

flagrantly employed to justify oppression. Not only is this untrue; it obscures the more important realities of the relationship between intolerance and fear.

No such skepticism obscures this relationship in the case of gay people. The belief that they constitute some sort of threat is still so widespread that an assumption to the contrary may appear partisan in some circles, and those who subscribe to the notion that gay people are in some way dangerous may argue that for this very reason they are not typical victims of intolerance.

It should be noted that whether a group actually threatens society or not is not directly relevant to the issue of intolerance unless the hostility the group experiences can be shown to stem from a rational apprehension of that threat. Traveling gypsies may actually have been at some point a hazard to isolated communities if they carried infections and diseases to which local residents had no immunity, but it would be injudicious to assume that it was this threat which resulted in antipathy toward them, particularly when it can be shown that such hostility antedates by centuries any realization of the communicability of most infections and when the content of antigypsy rhetoric bears no relation to disease at all.

The claims about the precise nature of the threat posed by gay people have varied extravagantly over time, sometimes contradicting each other directly and almost invariably entailing striking internal inconsistencies. Many of these are considered in detail below, but it may be worth alluding here to two of the most persistent.

The first is the ancient claim that societies tolerating or approving homosexual behavior do so to their own manifest detriment, since if all their members engaged in such behavior, these societies would die out. This argument assumes—curiously—that all humans would become exclusively homosexual if given the chance. There seems to be no reason to make such an assumption: a great deal of evidence contradicts it. It is possible that the abandonment of social sanctions against homosexuality occasions some increase in overt homosexual behavior, even among persons who would not otherwise try it; it is even conceivable (though not at all certain) that more people will adopt exclusively homosexual life-styles in societies with tolerant attitudes. But the fact that a characteristic increases does not demonstrate its danger to the society; many characteristics which, if adopted universally, would presumably redound to the disadvantage of society (e.g., voluntary celibacy, self-sacrifice) may nonetheless increase over periods of time without causing harm and are often highly valued by a culture precisely because of their statistical rarity. To assume that any characteristic which increases under favorable conditions will in the course of time eliminate all competing characteristics is bad biology and bad history. No current scientific theories regarding the etiology of homosexuality suggest that social tolerance determines

its incidence. Even purely biological theories uniformly assume that it would be a minority preference under any conditions, no matter how favorable.[9]

Moreover, there is no compelling reason to assume that homosexual desire induces nonreproductivity in individuals or population groups.[10] No evidence supports the common idea that homosexual and heterosexual behavior are incompatible; much data suggests the contrary.[11] The fact that

9. In the late nineteenth century, when the issue of homosexuality first began to exercise the minds of scientists, most authorities assumed that homosexual inclinations were congenital, and differed only on whether they were a defect (Krafft-Ebing) or a part of the normal range of human variation (Hirschfeld). The triumph of psychoanalytical approaches to human sexual phenomena resulted in general abandonment of this approach in favor of psychological explanations, but in 1959 G. E. Hutchinson published a paper speculating on the possible genetic significance of "nonreproductive" sexuality (which he labeled "paraphilia"), including homosexuality ("A Speculative Consideration of Certain Possible Forms of Sexual Selection in Man," *American Naturalist* 93 [1959]: 81–91). In the 1970s a great deal of speculation has followed on the issue of the evolutionary significance of homosexuality, much of it agreeing on the essential likelihood of genetic viability for homosexual feelings through one selection mechanism or another. A theory based on parent-offspring conflict as a mechanism for producing homosexuality was published in 1974 by R. L. Trivers ("Parent-Offspring Conflict," *American Zoologist* 14 [1974]: 249–64). In 1975 E. O. Wilson (*Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* [Cambridge, Mass., 1975]) suggested that homosexuality might involve a form of genetic altruism, through which gay people benefit those closely related to them and offset their own lowered reproductivity (see pp. 22, 229–31, 281, 311, 343–44, and esp. 555). This argument was expanded and simplified in "Human Decency Is Animal," *New York Times Magazine* (October 12, 1975), pp. 38ff. and in *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 142–47. The most detailed and comprehensive study of this subject to date, examining nearly all modern theories for the etiology of homosexuality, is that of James D. Weinrich, "Human Reproductive Strategy: The Importance of Income Unpredictability and the Evolution of Non-Reproduction," pt. 2, "Homosexuality and Non-Reproduction: Some Evolutionary Models" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1976). An extraordinarily lucid and readable summary of previous biological approaches, with provocative original speculations, appeared in John Kirsch and James Rodman, "The Natural History of Homosexuality," *Yale Scientific Magazine* 51, no. 3 (1977): 7–13.

10. This is certainly not to suggest that there may not be groups of persons whose sexual inclinations are essentially nonreproductive or that some of these persons might not qualify as "gay." As noted below, the homosexual/heterosexual distinction is a crude one and may obscure more significant sexual differences. Men who primarily desire to be passive, for instance, would probably leave fewer offspring than men whose principal erotic pleasure is derived from penetration of others. The former would necessarily be chiefly aroused by other men, and persons of this sort may in fact comprise the nonreproductive "caste" theorized by Wilson and Weinrich, along with women who chiefly desire to arouse women (or men) with parts of their anatomy other than those involved in reproduction. The extent to which a person's "sexuality" is composed of such desires for specific behavior, and the biological input involved, are almost wholly unknown.

11. The phobic theory of the origin of homosexuality (i.e., the idea that gay people prefer sexual contact with their own gender because they are frightened of such contact with the opposite sex) has been largely discredited (at least for males) by modern research. For a particularly interesting example of such disproof, see Kurt Freund, Ron Langevin, et al., "The Phobic Theory of Male Homosexuality," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 134 (1974): 495–99; see also Freund's earlier article, using the same clinical method (penile plethysmography), "The Female Child as Surrogate Object," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2 (1972): 119–33.

gay people (definitionally) prefer erotic contact with their own gender would imply a lower overall rate of reproductive success for them only if it could be shown that in human populations sexual desire is a major factor in such success. Intuition notwithstanding, this does not appear to be the case.

Only in societies like modern industrial nations which insist that erotic energy be focused exclusively on one's permanent legal spouse would most gay people be expected to marry and produce offspring less often than their nongay counterparts, and it appears that even in these cultures a significant proportion of gay people—possibly a majority—do marry and have children. In other societies (probably most literate premodern cultures), where procreation is separable from erotic commitment and rewarded by enhanced status or economic advantages (or is simply a common personal ambition), there would be no reason for gay people not to reproduce.[12] With the exception of the clergy, most of the gay people discussed in the present study were married and had children. The persistence of the belief in the nonreproductivity of gay people must be ascribed to a tendency to notice and remember what is unusual about individuals rather than what is expected. Far fewer people are aware that Oscar Wilde was a husband and father than that he was gay and had a male lover. Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades attracts more attention than his relationship with his wife and children. The love of Edward II of England for his four children is scarcely mentioned in texts which dwell at length on his passion for Piers Gaveston. To a certain extent such emphasis is accurate: the persons in question obviously devoted the bulk (if not the entirety) of their erotic interest to persons of their own gender. But the fact remains that they married and had children, and fascination with their statistically less common characteristics should not give rise to fanciful explanations of these traits—or of popular hostility to them—which overlook or contradict the more ordinary aspects of their lives.[13]

12. The sexual investment required for a male to produce offspring can hardly be imagined to be so great as to preclude other outlets; the much greater parental investment required of females has been offset reproductively in most such societies by the fact that women had less choice about their marital status and suffered a much greater loss of prestige and freedom if they did not marry and reproduce.

13. Viewed in this light, homosexual behavior cannot be presumed to entail significant social disadvantages. On the contrary, since pair-bonding of various sorts, erotic and nonerotic, is manifestly advantageous to most human societies (providing as it does mechanisms for social organization, mutual assistance, care of offspring in the event of a parent's death, etc.), homosexual attachments and relations are no more peculiar biologically than friendships. If one took the extreme view that only sexual or emotional activities directly conducive to reproduction would be favored in human evolution, one would be constrained to reject the majority of human erotic behavior as "unnatural." Homosexuality cannot be shown to diminish reproductive success any more than friendship, which is assumed to be ubiquitous in human societies, or masturbation, which some 90 percent of American males practice.

The second threat which might be adduced as explanation of intolerance of homosexuality relates to its "naturalness." May it not be that human society reacts with hostility to gay people because their preferences are inherently "unnatural"? So much space in this volume is devoted to assessing the precise meaning of "natural" and "unnatural" in various philosophical and historical contexts that it may be worth devoting several pages here to some preliminary observations on this subject. It should be noted, in the first place, that the meanings of "natural" and "unnatural" will vary according to the concept of "nature" to which they are related.

1. Some ideas of "nature" are primarily "realistic," i.e., related to the physical world and observations of it. For example, (i) one may speak of "nature" as the character or essence of something (the "nature" of love, "human nature"). "Unnatural," as opposed to this concept, means "uncharacteristic," as "to do otherwise would be 'unnatural' to him." (ii) In a broader sense, "nature" may be used for all of the "natures" (properties and principles) of all things, or the observable universe ("death is part of 'nature'"; the laws of "nature").[14] As the negation of this sense, "unnatural" refers to what is not part of the scientifically observable world, e.g., ghosts or miracles.[15] (iii) In a less consistent way,[16] "nature" is opposed to humans and their efforts, to designate what does or would occur without human intervention (man-made elements not found in "nature"). Here "unnatural" either means characteristic only of humans, as "hunting for sport rather than food is 'unnatural,'" or simply artificial, like "unnatural" (or "nonnatural") fibers, foodstuffs, etc.[17]

14. The "laws of nature" under this schematization refer only to this sense (ii). "Natural law"—an entirely different concept—has some relation to the "nature" of humans (i) and to "nature" minus humans (iii) but is chiefly a moral concept (2), as discussed below.

15. No philosophical systems make cogent distinctions among "nonnatural," "supernatural," and "unnatural." These words appear to be used chiefly in response to emotional nuances: "supernatural" referring to what is not "natural" but is therefore admired; "unnatural" to what is not "natural" and therefore feared or disdained; "nonnatural" to what is not "natural" but evokes no emotional response. It is striking, for instance, that synthetic fibers, which do not occur in "nature" (sense iii) are "nonnatural," while homosexuality, which is (erroneously) supposed not to occur in the same sense of "nature," is "unnatural."

16. Originally the exclusion of human ingenuity and artifice from the "natural" may have been the result of a belief in the "supernatural" or divine attributes of intelligence as a function of the soul, but in a modern frame of reference there seems very little justification for considering what is uniquely human any less "natural" than what is uniquely canine or uniquely bovine. This categorization raises enormous conceptual difficulties.

17. This popular concept of "nature," which had a profound impact on Western thought, is hereafter discussed as either "nature minus human intervention" or as "animal nature," since (nonhuman) animal behavior has been the most common "control" for assessing the operations of "nature" without the interference of humans. It need scarcely be pointed out that this procedure rests on the most perplexing notion of what constitutes an "animal" and leaves ambiguous such questions as whether plants cultivated by animals, or animals in

Although "realistic" categories of "natural" and "unnatural" are used with great imprecision,[18] two major assumptions may be mentioned as underlying the belief that homosexuality is "unnatural" in comparatively "realistic" conceptions of "nature." The most recent of these, the idea that behavior which is inherently nonreproductive is "unnatural" in an evolutionary sense, is probably applied to gay people inaccurately. Nonreproductivity can in any case hardly be imagined to have induced intolerance of gay people in ancient societies which idealized celibacy or in modern ones which consider masturbation perfectly "natural," since both of these practices have reproductive consequences identical with those of homosexual activity. This objection is clearly a justification rather than a cause of prejudice.

The second assumption is that homosexuality does not occur among animals other than humans. In the first place, this is demonstrably false: homosexual behavior, sometimes involving pair-bonding, has been observed among many animal species in the wild as well as in captivity.[19] This has been recognized since the time of Aristotle and, incredible as it seems, has been accepted by people who *still* objected to homosexual behavior as unknown to other animals. In the second place, it is predicated on another assumption—that uniquely human behavior is not "natural"—which is fundamentally unsupportable in almost any context, biological or philosophical. Many animals in fact engage in behavior which is unique to their species, but no one imagines that such behavior is "unnatural"; on the contrary, it is regarded as part of the "nature" of the species in question and is useful to taxonomists in distinguishing the species from other types of organisms. If man were the

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captivity to other animals (both common among ants, e.g.), are "natural." Are humans the only species whose intervention in the lives of other animals disrupts "nature," or are all symbiotic relations which alter the life patterns of one of the species "unnatural"?

18. Two people may agree that the dyed hair of a third looks "unnatural," when one person means only that it does not suit the person in question (i) and the other means that artificial hair color is inherently unaesthetic or undesirable (iii). Laboratory conditions are "unnatural" situations for animals under observation both because they are not the "characteristic" environments of the creatures (i) and because they involve human intervention (iii). Extremes of evil or good are sometimes thought of as "unnatural" in senses (i): not characteristic of the individuals in question or of humans in general and (ii): so unusual as to require supernatural explanation. The "nature" which "abhors a vacuum" touches all bases, being predicated on the conflated notions that (i) a vacuum is uncharacteristic of or uncommon in the material world, (ii) an absolute vacuum—i.e., a space with absolutely nothing in it—cannot exist (except perhaps through miraculous intervention), and (iii) the most familiar approximations to a vacuum are created by human intervention.

19. Much material has come to light since Wainwright Churchill published his *Homosexual Behavior among Males: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-Species Investigation* (New York, 1967). References are collected in Weinrich, pp. 145–56 and passim; and in Kirsch and Rodman. For more recent material, see George Hunt and Molly Hunt, "Female-Female Pairing in Western Gulls (*Larus occidentalis*) in Southern California," *Science* 196 (1977): 81–83.

only species to demonstrate homosexual desires and behavior, this would hardly be grounds for categorizing them as "unnatural." Most of the behavior which human societies most admire is unique to humans: this is indeed the main reason it is respected. No one imagines that human society "naturally" resists literacy because it is unknown among other animals.

2. An entirely separate category of "natural/unnatural" opposition depends on what might be termed "ideal nature."[20] Although concepts of "ideal nature" resemble and are strongly influenced by meanings of "real nature," they differ significantly from the latter in explicitly presupposing that "nature" is "good."[21] Whether "ideal nature" is understood to include all physical things or simply the nonhuman, it is always believed to operate to the "good." Some "natural" things may be sad or distressing, may even give the appearance of evil, but all can be shown to result in something which is desirable or worthwhile in the long run or on a grand scale. Anything which is truly vicious or evil must be "unnatural," since "nature" could not produce evil on its own. Concepts of "ideal nature" are strongly conditioned by observation of the real world, but they are ultimately determined by cultural values. This is particularly notable in the case of "unnatural," which becomes in such a system a vehement circumlocution for "bad" or "unacceptable." Behavior which is ideologically so alien or personally so disgusting to those affected by "ideal nature" that it appears to have no redeeming qualities whatever will be labeled "unnatural," regardless of whether it occurs in ("real") nature never or often, or among humans or lower animals, because it will be assumed that a "good" nature could not under any circumstances have produced it.

Not surprisingly, adherents of "ideal" concepts of nature frequently characterize as "unnatural" sexual behavior to which they object on religious or personal grounds. What is surprising is the extent to which those who consciously reject "ideal" nature are nonetheless affected by such derogation. This confusion, like that of religious conviction and personal antipathy, is particularly well illustrated in the case of attitudes toward gay people.

The idea that homosexuality is "unnatural" (perhaps introduced by a chance remark of Plato)[22] became widespread in the ancient world due to

20. The Latin "Natura" is used by some scholars to designate idealized concepts of nature, especially in imperial Roman or medieval literature, but this usage begs the question of the precise meaning of "nature" in such writings, whose attitudes varied widely on the issue of "real" vs. "ideal" attributes of *Natura*.

21. Those employing "real" concepts of "nature" also probably imagine that "nature" is "good" but do not make it an article of faith. The distinction is not overly subtle: if confronted with overt cruelty in animals, a "realist" about "nature" would conclude that "nature is cruel." An "idealist" would insist that cruelty is "unnatural."

22. In his last work, the *Laws* (636B–C; 825E–842), Plato characterizes homosexual

the triumph of "ideal" concepts of nature over "realistic" ones.[23] Especially during the centuries immediately following the rise of Christianity, philosophical schools of thought using idealized "nature" as the touchstone of human ethics exercised a profound influence on Western thought and popularized the notion that all nonprocreative sexuality was "unnatural." Although this argument subsequently fell into disfavor, it was revived by Scholastics in the thirteenth century and came to be a decisive, even con-

relations as "*παρὰ φύσιν*," a phrase traditionally rendered "against nature." This is extremely perplexing, since sexual desire as discussed in all Plato's earlier works is "almost exclusively homosexual" (K. J. Dover, ed., Aristophanes' *Clouds* [Oxford, 1968], p. lxiv) and entirely "natural." The *Laws* are atypical of Plato's thought in a great many ways, and this may simply be part of a general change in his thinking, but his comment should in any case be interpreted as accurately as possible. Probably all he meant by "*παρὰ φύσιν*" was "unrelated to birth" or "nonprocreative," not "unnatural" in the sense of contravention of some overriding moral or physical law. "Physis" was probably originally derived from "*φύω*," "to grow" or "to be born," and Plato himself had distinguished in an earlier work (*Republic* 381A) between the "man-made" ("*τέχνῃ*") and the "natural" ("*φύσει*"), the latter in the sense of "what is born" as opposed to what is "constructed." This paronomastic relation of "physis" as "birth" to a broader concept of "nature" survived among later Platonists in the tautology "*Τὸ δὲ μὴ εἰς παίδων γονὴν συνιέναι ἀνυβρίζειν ἐστι τῇ φύσει*" ("to have sex for any purpose other than to have children is to injure birth," i.e., nature), and is obviously responsible in part for the intuitive appeal of the dictum. (It is impossible to convey in English the various subtleties involved; "*ἀνυβρίζειν*" is also paronomastic.) It would certainly not have been missed by Greek-speaking Christians of later centuries, since the same ambiguity underlies many NT uses of "physis" (e.g., Gal. 2:15). Many different meanings of "physis" are implied by the Athenian stranger's remarks on this and other issues in the *Laws*, and I do not suggest that "birth" is the only meaning present even in the specific passages cited. Plato delighted in paranomastic and multifaceted uses of "physis," as his exasperated interlocutor in the *Gorgias* (482D) points out. What I do mean to emphasize is that the most direct and immediate associations for Athenian contemporaries would have been different from those present in the minds of later readers. Plato describes as "completely unconvincing" the argument that since animals do not engage in homosexual relations, humans should not (836C), and very strongly suggests that human behavior is inherently superior to that of animals, even when he idealizes ornithological chastity (840D–E). At the outset of the discussion in question he states that, far from being a response to "nature," the prohibitions of homosexual activity he recommends are efforts to make "reason" (*logos*) into law (*nomos*) (835E). Moreover, the subject of the passage is the damage occasioned by sexual pleasure in general; homosexual acts are introduced as subsidiary to heterosexual promiscuity, which is derogated throughout, and the discussion is predicated on the ubiquity of homosexual attraction and desire. (Indeed one of the advantages the lawgiver hopes would accrue from his plan to limit sexual pleasure to procreation, where pleasure is unavoidable, would be men's learning to love their wives, 839B.) In his first mention of the subject (636C) Plato even introduces the idea of the "unnaturalness" of homosexual acts as something of a joke ("*καὶ εἴτε παίζοντα εἴτε σπουδάζοντα*").

23. The transition from Platonic-Aristotelian concepts of the "naturalness" of homosexuality to the ideas of its "unnaturalness" evinced by middle Platonists like Philo and the Alexandrian school has not been studied, although there is a wealth of material available. See, e.g., Robert Bloch, *De Pseudo-Luciani amoribus*, in *Dissertationes philologicae Argentoratenses*, 12.3 (Strasbourg, 1907), esp. pp. 13–19, 23–42; see also Gustav Gerhard, *Phoinix von Kolophon* (Leipzig, 1909), esp. pp. 51ff., 140–55.

trolling concept in all branches of learning, from the technical sciences to dogmatic theology. The scientific, philosophical, and even moral considerations which underlay this approach have since been almost wholly discredited and are consciously rejected by most educated persons, but the emotional impact of terms like "unnatural" and "against nature" persists. Although the idea that gay people are "violating nature" predates by as much as two millennia the rise of modern science and is based on concepts wholly alien to it, many people unthinkingly transfer the ancient prejudice to an imagined scientific frame of reference, without recognizing the extreme contradictions involved, and conclude that homosexual behavior violates the "nature" described by modern scientists rather than the "nature" idealized by ancient philosophers.

Even at the level of personal morality, the persistence of the concept of "unnatural" in this context, when it has been abandoned in nearly all others, is a significant index of the prejudice which actually inspires it. Historical ethical systems based on "nature" opposed shaving, growing flowers indoors, dyeing garments, regular bathing, birth control, and scores of other activities performed daily by the same people who use the term "unnatural" to justify their antipathy toward gay people. The objection that homosexuality is "unnatural" appears, in short, to be neither scientifically nor morally cogent and probably represents nothing more than a derogatory epithet of unusual emotional impact due to a confluence of historically sanctioned prejudices and ill-informed ideas about "nature." Like "illiberal," "unenlightened," "un-American," and various other imprecise negations, it may provide a rallying point for hostility but can hardly be imagined to constitute the origin of the emotions involved.

In addition to casting a clearer light on the relationship of intolerance and religious beliefs and imaginary dangers to society, the study of prejudice against gay people affords, as the final advantage to be discussed here, revealing insights into the similarities and differences of intolerance toward many different groups and characteristics. In a number of ways the separate histories of Europe's minorities are the same story, and many parallels have been drawn in this study with groups whose histories relate to or reflect the history of gay people. Most societies, for instance, which freely tolerate religious diversity also accept sexual variation, and the fate of Jews and gay people has been almost identical throughout European history, from early Christian hostility to extermination in concentration camps. The same laws which oppressed Jews oppressed gay people; the same groups bent on eliminating Jews tried to wipe out homosexuality; the same periods of European history which could not make room for Jewish distinctiveness reacted violently against sexual nonconformity; the same countries which

insisted on religious uniformity imposed majority standards of sexual conduct; and even the same methods of propaganda were used against Jews and gay people—picturing them as animals bent on the destruction of the children of the majority.[24]

But there are significant differences, and these bear heavily on the present analysis. Judaism, for example, is consciously passed from parents to children, and it has been able to transmit, along with its ethical precepts, political wisdom gleaned from centuries of oppression and harassment: advice about how to placate, reason with, or avoid hostile majorities; how and when to maintain a low profile; when to make public gestures; how to conduct business with potential enemies. Moreover, it has been able to offer its adherents at least the solace of solidarity in the face of oppression. Although European ghettos kept the Jews in, they also kept the Gentiles out; and Jewish family life flourished as the main social outlet for a group cut off from the majority at many points in its history, imparting to individual Jews a sense not only of community in the present but of belonging to the long and hallowed traditions of those who went before.

Gay people are for the most part not born into gay families. They suffer oppression individually and alone, without benefit of advice or frequently even emotional support from relatives or friends. This makes their case more comparable in some ways to that of the blind or left-handed, who are also dispersed in the general population rather than segregated by heritage and who also are in many cultures the victims of intolerance. Gay people are even more revealing than most such dispersed minorities, however, because they are usually socialized through adulthood as ordinary members of society, since parents rarely realize that children are gay until they are fully grown. Their reactions and the reactions of those hostile to them thus illustrate intolerance in a relatively uncomplicated form, with no extraneous variable such as atypical socialization, inability to contribute to society, or even visible abnormality. In every way but one, most gay people are just like those around them, and antipathy toward them is for this reason an unusually illuminating instance of intolerance.

Only when social attitudes are favorable do gay people tend to form visible subcultures. In hostile societies they become invisible, a luxury afforded them by the essentially private nature of their variation from the norm, but one which greatly increases their isolation and drastically reduces their lobbying effectiveness. When good times return, there is no mechanism to encourage

24. For a bibliography on medieval anti-Semitism in general, see chaps. 7, 10 below. For imagery in particular, see Isaiah Schachar, *The "Judensau": A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History* (London, 1974); and Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1966).

steps to prevent a recurrence of oppression: no gay grandparents who remember the pogroms, no gay exile literature to remind the living of the fate of the dead, no liturgical commemorations of times of crisis and suffering. Relatively few gay people today are aware of the great variety of positions in which time has placed their kind, and in previous societies almost none seem to have had such awareness.

Because of this, except in cases where they happen to wield considerable authority, gay people have been all but totally dependent on popular attitudes toward them for freedom, a sense of identity, and in many cases survival. The history of public reactions to homosexuality is thus in some measure a history of social tolerance generally.

It is only fair to point out that in addition to the advantages of using gay people to study intolerance, there are several salient disadvantages. The most fundamental of these is the fact that the longevity of prejudice against gay people and their sexuality has resulted in the deliberate falsification of historical records concerning them well into the present century, rendering accurate reconstruction of their history particularly difficult. Distortion on this issue was little known in the ancient world[25] but became more widespread with the dramatic shift in public morality following the fall of the

25. In contrast to the meager offerings on the history of gay people in general, homosexuality in ancient Greece has been thoroughly and at times very well examined by many researchers, making it especially useful as a point of comparison for later, less documented periods. Only a sampling of the material available can be considered here. The earliest (and still fundamental) work in this area is the article by M. H. E. Meier, "Paederastia," in *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künsten*, ed. J. S. Ersch and J. J. Gruber (Leipzig, 1837), 3.9.149–88. This was translated into French and considerably expanded almost a century later by L.-R. de Pogey-Castries as *Histoire de l'amour grec dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1930; hereafter cited as Meier/de Pogey-Castries) and is better consulted in this version. In the meantime John Addington Symonds had written, independently of Meier but with similar results, the first thorough account of the subject in English, "A Problem in Greek Ethics," which he printed privately in 1873 and then included as app. A to *Sexual Inversion* (1897; reprint ed., New York, 1975), coauthored with Havelock Ellis as vol. 1 of Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. In 1925–28 the renowned classicist Paul Brandt published, under the pseudonym Hans Licht, his *Sittengeschichte Griechenlands*, containing an excellent discussion of homosexuality (and most other aspects of Greek life) as portrayed in Attic and Hellenistic literature. It was translated into English by J. H. Freese as *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (London, 1932). David Robinson and Edward Fluck used nonliterary materials for their *Study of Greek Love-Names, Including a Discussion of Paederasty and a Prosopographia* (Baltimore, 1937), a work brimming with sound judgment, erudition, and good sense and sadly neglected by scholars. During the last two decades a good deal of less substantial writing has appeared, some of it regrettable (e.g., Robert Flacelière, *L'amour en Grèce* [Paris, 1960]; and G. Devereux, "Greek Pseudo-Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle,'" *Symbolae Osloenses* 42 [1967]: 69–92); some worthwhile, especially the writings of K. J. Dover: e.g., "Eros and Nomos," *Bulletin of Classical Studies* 11 (1964): 31–42; *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford, 1975); and "Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behavior," *Arethusa* 6 (1973): 69–73. Even Dover's scattered comments in editions (e.g., of *Clouds*) are helpful,

Roman Empire in the West. Ignorance was the major force behind the loss of information on this subject in medieval Europe—with Alcibiades occasionally appearing in medieval literature as a female companion to Socrates[26]—but the heavy hand of the censor was also evident. In a manuscript of Ovid's *Art of Love*, for example, a phrase which originally read, "A boy's love appealed to me less" was emended by a medieval moralist to read, "A boy's love appealed to me not at all," and a marginal note informed the reader, "Thus you may be sure that Ovid was not a sodomite."[27]

Crudities of this sort are of course easily detected, and more modern ages devised subtler means of disguising gay sentiments and sexuality. Changing the gender of pronouns has been popular at least since Michelangelo's grandnephew employed this means to render his uncle's sonnets more acceptable to the public;[28] and scholars have continued the ruse even where no one's reputation was involved: when the Persian moral fables of Sa'di were translated into English in the early nineteenth century, Francis Gladwin conscientiously transformed each story about gay love into a heterosexual romance by altering the offending pronouns.[29] As late as the mid-twentieth century, the *ghazels* of Hafiz were still being falsified in this way.[30]

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honest, and much to be preferred to the reticent and misleading approaches of other modern scholars, although his tendency to contradict himself from one work to another makes it necessary to compare his more recent works carefully with earlier writings (e.g., compare his comments on vase depiction of homosexual coitus in *Greek Popular Morality*, p. 214, with those of "Classical Greek Attitudes," p. 67). *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), his major work on this subject, appeared as this study was going to press, and it was not possible to take account of its findings.

26. E.g., in Rémi of Auxelle's commentary on the *Consolatio philosophiae* of Boethius, where Alcibiades is identified as "a woman famous for her beauty, said to have been the mother of Hercules" (see Pierre Courcelle, *La consolation de philosophie* [Paris, 1967], p. 280; cf. p. 258, n. 4, where the same [?] quotation occurs in different form). Odo of Cluny, adopting this error, then glosses *Consolatio* 3, prose 8, as referring to women ("sicut lyncei in Boetia [*sic*] cernere interiora feruntur, mulieres videre nauseerent," Courcelle, p. 258). Courcelle regards this feminine Alcibiades as the real identity of the mysterious Archipiada in most texts of Villon's "Ballade des dames du temps jadis." Iolaus, Hercules' beloved, also appears in medieval poetry as a female: see "Olim sudor Herculis," in George Whicher, *The Goliard Poets* (New York, 1949), pp. 36–41.

27. Originally "Hoc est quod pueri tangar amore minus" (*Ars amatoria* 2.684), altered to read, "Hoc est quod pueri tangar amore nihil" and accompanied in the margin by "Ex hoc nota quod Ovidius non fuerit Sodomita." See Domenico Comparetti, *Vergilio nel medio evo* (Leghorn, 1872), 1: 115, n. 1.

28. Almost all modern editions restore the original genders. Symonds was one of the first to translate them into English.

29. Francis Gladwin, trans., *The Gulistan* (London, 1822). An accurate translation by Edward Rehatsek is now available (*The Gulistan or Rose Garden* [London, 1964]). Note esp. nos. 14, 17, 18, 20. The earlier translation by Richard Burton, *Tales from the Gulistán, or Rose Garden of Sheikh Sa'di of Shiráz* (London, 1928), is reasonably frank.

30. E.g., in *Fifty Poems of Hafiz*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cambridge, Mass., 1947). Arberry does print the Persian texts, but this is of little help to most English readers and only heightens

A more honest though hardly more edifying approach is deletion. This may range from the omission of a single word which indicates gender (as is common where the original would reveal that the love object in the *Rubaiyat* is in fact male)[31] to an entire work, like the *Amores* (*Affairs of the Heart*) of Pseudo-Lucian, which Thomas Francklin excised from his translation because it contained a dispute about which sex was preferable as erotic focus for males: "But as this is a point which, at least in this nation, has been long since determined in favour of the ladies, it stands in need of no farther discussion: the Dialogue is therefore, for this, as well as some other still more material reasons, which will occur to those who are acquainted with the original, entirely omitted."[32] (The more material reasons may now be consulted in a reasonably frank translation by M. D. MacLeod in vol. 8 of the LC edition of the works of Lucian.)

Even hostile accounts of gay sexuality are often expurgated in English translations,[33] and the suppression of details related to homosexuality affects historical accounts which can hardly be considered lurid or titillating, as when the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* observes that the Attic lovers Harmodius and Aristogiton were "provoked by private differences" to kill the tyrant Hippias.[34]

Probably the most entertaining efforts to conceal homosexuality from the public have been undertaken by the editors of the Loeb Classics, the standard collection of Greek and Latin classical texts with English translation. Until

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the absurdity for those familiar with Persian. (The contrast between the text and translation of no. 3 is esp. remarkable.) Earlier editions in English (e.g., *Ghazels from the Divan of Hafiz*, trans. J. H. McCarthy [New York, 1893]) were even worse. Twentieth-century French scholars have provided the most reliable renderings (e.g., Arthur Guy, *Les poèmes érotiques ou ghazels de Chems Ed Dîn Mohammed Hâfiz* [Paris, 1927], with helpful analysis of the ambiguous relationship between the "beloved" and the "Divine" in the poems [esp. pp. xxii–xxiv]; cf. Vincent Monteuil, "Neuf qazal de Hâfiz," *Revue des études islamiques* [1954], pp. 21–57, with facing transliteration of the Persian). There is of course no substitute for the original.

31. E.g., 49.29 and 102.156, ambiguously rendered in many English versions. The French translation by Guy, *Les robat* (Paris, 1935), includes helpful comments on this issue (pp. 26–27). As recently as 1969 the noted orientalist Charles Pellat explained that "decency forbids us to translate" an influential work of Jâḥiẓ because of its frankness about homosexuality (*The Life and Works of Jâḥiẓ*, trans. D. M. Hawke [London, 1969], p. 270). Fortunately "decency" did not prevent Pellat from editing the Arabic original (a debate on the relative merits of male and female slaves as sex objects). Even in the Arabic, however, he felt constrained to apologise for publishing a work on this subject: see al-Jâḥiẓ, *Kitâb mufâkharât al-jawâri wa'l-ghilmân*, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut, 1957), pp. 5–7.

32. *The Works of Lucian* (London, 1781), 1:xxxvii–xxxviii. This work is no longer attributed to Lucian.

33. E.g., in H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland's translation of the dialogues of Caesar of Heisterbach, *The Dialogues on Miracles* (London, 1929), various details of the punishment inflicted on a dead priest for homosexual acts are suppressed (pp. 157–59); cf. the original cited in chap. 7, n. 46 below.

34. OCD, s.v. "Aristogiton"; for a franker discussion, see Plato's comments, chap. 2 below.