

animal homosexuality.) Once again, such cultural activities as religion and medicine are not practiced by animals, but this lack does not compel us to condemn them as abnormal. Because of the negative freight that has accumulated over the years, augmented by numerous courses in "abnormal psychology," it is best that the term be used very sparingly—if at all—in connection with sexual behavior.

The history of the word itself reveals an interesting, if obscure interchange between linguistic development and judgmentalism. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* noted (with unconscious irony) in 1884, "few words show such a series of pseudo-etymological perversions." The process that occasioned this unusual lexicographical outburst is as follows. Greek *anomalos* ("not even or level") produced Latin *anomalus*—and eventually our word anomalous. Then, through confusion with *norma*, "rule," the Latin word was corrupted to *anormalis*, hence French and Middle English *anormal*. The parasitic "b" crept in as the second letter of the modern word through scribal intervention rather than the natural evolution of speech. (Compare the intrusive "d" and "h" in "adventure" and "author" respectively.)

It is true that classical Latin had *abnormis*, "departing from the rule," but it did not possess *abnormalis*. The presence of the "b" in our word abnormal serves to create an unconscious association with "aberrant," "abreaction," etc. To summarize, the pejorative connotations are enhanced by the intrusion of two consonants, "b" and "r," which—the etymology shows—do not belong there.

Two rare anticipations of modern usage may be noted as curiosities. In a harangue against sodomites, the French thirteenth-century *Roman de la rose* (lines 19619–20) refers to those who practice "exceptions anormales." In 1869 the homosexual theorist Károly Mária Kertbeny coined a word, *normalsexual* (= heterosexual), in contrast with *homosex-*

ual (which by inference is not normal). Although Kertbeny's first word, in striking contrast to the second, gained no currency, it did anticipate the twentieth-century contrast of normal and abnormal sexuality.

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ABOMINATION

In contemporary usage the terms abomination and abominable refer in a generic way to something that is detestable or loathsome. Because of Old Testament usage, however—Leviticus 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination" (cf. Leviticus 20:13; Deuteronomy 22:5 and 23:19; and I Kings 14:24)—the words retain a special association as part of the religious condemnation of male homosexual behavior. In Elizabethan English they were normally written "abhominatio(n)," "abhominable" as if they derived from Latin *ab-* and *homo*—hence "departing from the human, inhuman." In fact, the core of the Latin word is the religious term *omen*.

In any event the notion of abominatio(n) owes its force to its appearance in Jerome's Vulgate translation of the Bible, where it corresponds to Greek *bdelygma* and Hebrew *tō'ēbāh*. The latter term denotes behavior that violates the covenant between God and Israel, and is applied to Canaanite trade practices, idolatry, and polytheism. The aversion of the religious leaders of the Jewish community after the return from the Babylonian captivity to the "abominable customs" of their heathen neighbors, combined with the Zoroastrian prohibition of homosexual behavior, inspired the legal provisions added to the Holiness Code of Leviticus in the fifth century before the Christian era that were to be normative for Hellenistic

Judaism and then for **Pauline Christianity**. The designation of homosexual relations as an "abomination" or "abominable crime" in medieval and modern sacral and legal texts echoes the wording of the Old Testament.

The complex web of prohibitions recorded in the Book of Leviticus has defied full explanation from the standpoint of comparative religion. Recently influential among social scientists (though not among Biblical scholars) has been the interpretation of the anthropologist Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger*, London, 1967), who views the abominations as part of a concern with the boundaries of classification categories, strict adherence to which attests one's purity in relation to divinity.

ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

According to the French Catholic Orientalist Louis Massignon (1883–1962), the Abrahamic religions are the three major faiths—**Judaism, Christianity, Islam**—that look to the patriarch Abraham as their spiritual father. In their belief systems, Abraham ranks as the first monotheist who rejected the pagan divinities and their idols and worshipped the true God who revealed himself to him. (Modern scholars have concluded that the book of Genesis is a historical novel written only after the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity, and that monotheism in fact began with Akhenaten, the heretical pharaoh of Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. But completely eradicated in Egypt itself after his death, Akhenaten's innovations left no resonance except for their possible survival in the neighboring Israelite monarchy, which began its rule under Egyptian cultural hegemony.)

All the Abrahamic religions proscribe homosexual behavior, a taboo that derives from the Holiness Code of the book of Leviticus and the legend of Sodom as these were received in Palestinian and then Hellenistic Judaism between the fifth

century B.C. and the first century, when the writings of such Jewish apologists as **Philo Judaeus** and **Flavius Josephus** show it in a fully developed form. Thus the negative attitude of all three faiths has a single **Old Testament** source; its reception in Christianity is secondary and in Islam tertiary, the Islamic tradition having mainly been shaped by Nestorian Christianity of the early seventh century. All three contrast in the most striking manner with the role that homosexual behavior and the art and literature inspired by homoerotic feeling played in Greco-Roman paganism—a legacy that the medieval and modern world has never been able fully to suppress or disavow, but which has driven scholars and translators to acts of censorship and artful silence when confronted with texts and artifacts bequeathed by the ancient civilizations.

The claim of homophobic propagandists that the prohibition of homosexuality is universal rests essentially upon its proscription in the Abrahamic religions, which have primarily condemned male homosexuality. Lesbianism is nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament, the **New Testament**, or the Koran. The passage in Romans 1:26 that has often been interpreted as referring to lesbian sexuality actually concerns another Old Testament myth, the sexual union of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" in Genesis 6:1–4. The association of Sodom's twin city of Gomorrah with lesbianism is an accretion of the later Middle Ages and confined to Latin Christianity.

As for the texts in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, modern critical scholarship has identified them as part of a legal novella from the Persian period, and the entire Mosaic Law as a document compiled by Ezra and the "men of the Great Assembly" in the years 458–444 B.C., hence long after the return of the exiles from the Babylonian Captivity. The account of the destruction of Sodom is a geographical legend inspired by the salinization and aridity of the shores of the Dead Sea, a result of the