

of the righteousness and innocence of former times.

Homosexuality and conservatism would therefore seem totally antithetical. Stereotypically, conservatives are viewed as the chief reservoir of antihomosexual bigotry and the most determined opponents of gay rights. However, antihomosexual attitudes have been common—and even fostered by the regime—in such Marxist, state-socialist societies as the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and Cuba. Moreover, as a result of centuries of virtually unchecked virulence, antigay views are widely diffused in many industrial countries; they have been documented, for example, among liberal writers in North America. Nor are antihomosexual motifs necessarily to be traced ultimately to conservative ideologies; the religious circles in ancient Iran and Israel that developed the most potent early forms of homophobia might justly have been regarded as progressive in their day.

Historically, conservatism has even favored some forms of homosexual expression. In ancient Greece the institution of initiatory pederasty was an instrument of the aristocracy in training neophytes to uphold its values. Adolf Brand's German gay periodical *Der Eigene* (1896–1930) printed articles with an idealized vision of the erotic relationship between knight and page in medieval European society. Tokugawa Japan shows a similar phenomenon among the samurai—the feudal warrior class. And in some traditional Third World countries, like Afghanistan, tribal leaders have clung to pederastic customs, while fiercely resisting the incursions of Western liberalism and Soviet Communism alike.

In the United States and similar countries conservatives tend to fall into two main groups. The first is a traditional command conservatism which favors the deployment of state power, including the military establishment, to achieve policy aims. The second adheres to laissez-faire or libertarian ideas, and proposes a reduc-

tion in the role of government and greater reliance on the working of private initiative and the free market. Conservative parties are aware of the tension that divides the traditionalists and the libertarians in their ranks. It is the second group, which has shown some receptivity to the idea of excluding the state from the bedroom, that has had some affinity for homosexuals. Gay Republicans are generally of this second stripe.

In Britain the Conservative Group for Gay Equality argues that legislation is needed to end the second-class citizenship of homosexuals. As ordinary citizens and taxpayers—the group's chair Peter Campbell notes—"they contribute to society by work and voluntary efforts in the same ways as heterosexuals, and are no more likely than heterosexuals to commit crimes against persons, property, and the public interest."

The far right has had little attraction for homosexuals. In France a few gay men have indicated qualified support for the neo-fascist party of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the National Front. Other French homosexuals have formed a conservative group of their own, Gaie France, which favors the cultivation of "Indo-European" values. Such ideas seem to enjoy little international currency.

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Wayne R. Dynes

## CONSTITUTIONAL HOMOSEXUALITY

The question of whether homosexual conduct is the result of inborn or constitutional factors, on the one hand, or is the product of environmental influences, on the other, is part of the larger nature-nurture debate. While animal behavior is essentially the result of genetic and hereditary mechanisms, human beings are subject to a vast amount of cultural

conditioning, representing a layer standing over and above the biological substratum, though not necessarily in conflict with it. Regardless of which solution one chooses, the constitutional-biological or the environmental, the etiology of homosexual behavior remains a conundrum. Adopting the first perspective (the constitutional), one has to explain how nature would continue to replicate, generation after generation, a trait that does not contribute to procreative fitness and, to the extent that an individual is exclusively homosexual, is not genetically transmitted at all. Yet if environment, through cultural conditioning, is king, one may still ask why homosexuals exist, since the glorification of heterosexuality and love of offspring is an ever present drumbeat in all societies. To be sure, human psychosexual development is probably the result of the interaction of innate and environmental factors, but the problem of explaining their deployment, separately and conjointly, remains.

The prestige of Darwinian evolution in the later nineteenth century, together with growing understanding of the actual mechanisms of heredity, gave constitutional ("congenital") theories great appeal during this period. Magnus Hirschfeld, whose conclusions were based on the study of thousands of individuals, was a firm believer in the idea that sexual orientation is innate. In support of this view he pointed out that many individuals manifest marked homosexual tendencies before puberty (when they are unaware of any peers), that they maintain them with the greatest tenacity against all internal and external pressures for change, and that they insist that their sexual interests bond with the inmost core of their being. He also held that homosexuals are found in families in greater numbers than chance would suggest, and that same-sex behavior occurs in an astonishing range of human societies, past and present. Nonetheless, Hirschfeld and his colleagues were unable to suggest any transcendent biological

reason for the recurrence of this trait in one generation after another. The belief that homosexuality is in some sense innate nonetheless provided a political argument for toleration and decriminalization: individuals whose behavior is not the result of choice should not be subjected to coercive procedures aimed at changing that which cannot be changed.

Sigmund Freud's theory of psychodynamic development postulates a common origin for both sexual orientations in the **polymorphous perverse** stage, though heterosexual development represents the outcome of full maturity, homosexuality being an arrested or retarded pattern. This theory, which was widely diffused after World War I, has sometimes been misunderstood as one of "universal bisexuality." While it has the seeming advantage of combining constitutional and environmental factors, it still leaves unexplained why there should be a homosexual component at any stage, or why homosexual subjects exhibit such a range of adult personality types.

The rise of Nazism, which preached racial determinism in theory and embraced a coercive form of population control in practice, served to discredit all theories of constitutional-biological conditioning. In the case of homosexuality, the dominance of environmentalism led to a search for all sorts of putative factors, from the "close-binding mother" to a notion that society itself is somehow antiheterosexual. A study produced by the Kinsey Institute of Indiana University (*Sexual Preference*, Bloomington, 1971) examined the various environmental theories and found them all wanting, opting for an (unspecified) biological solution through a process of elimination.

In the 1950s evidence became available that identical **twins** raised apart showed a remarkable correlation for sexual orientation, though these data have been largely ignored. Only the controversial discipline of **sociobiology** has produced a tentative reconstruction of a biological

rationale for homosexuality. The sociobiologists hypothesize that homosexuality contributes to the "inclusive fitness" of a gene pool, by permitting a childless, but energetic individual to devote efforts to the advancement of his or her nieces and nephews. While sociobiology has achieved considerable success in animal studies, its applicability to human beings is hotly contested, and the future of such explanations remains in doubt.

As a final element of caution, it should be recognized that the possible isolation of a body of individuals whose homosexual behavior, exclusive or not, is essentially conditioned by biological-constitutional factors, does not preclude the existence of another body of individuals capable of homosexual response whose modalities are not so determined. That is to say, the range of behavior and character types among individuals of a predominantly homosexual orientation is extremely varied, and one of the elements of variation may be the fact that the larger pool subsumed under the rubric of homosexual represents a confluence of "innate" and environmentally produced streams.

Ward Houser

## CONTAGION

The notion of contagion as applied to disease originated only in the Middle Ages, when it was associated with plague and leprosy—both objects of intense dread. Almost from the beginning, however, the notion of moral contamination became attached to the word in the modern languages, so that it could be applied to deviant practices or heretical beliefs that threatened to "infect" society.

Hence the emergence of the medical concept of sexual inversion or homosexuality led to the belief that same-sex conduct could manifest an "infectious disease" and that the "innate homosexual" was a source of contagion who could "spread his perversion" to previously healthy heterosexuals. The term "moral

leprosy" (from medieval Latin *lepra moralis*) applied to homosexuality appears at the beginning of the twentieth century, signaling the rise in homophobic circles of a new mythology that to some extent counteracted the pleas then beginning to be heard for toleration of the "born invert."

Underlying the notion of the contagiousness of homosexuality is the macroevolutionary capacity of human beings for sexual response to members of their own sex—as distinct from an exclusive homosexual orientation which occurs in a small minority at most. Hence the peculiar fear that homosexual activity can "spread like wildfire" if the criminal and social sanctions against it are relaxed "for even a moment." This apprehension figures in much of the twentieth-century polemic (such as that in Nazi Germany) which calls for increased penalties for homosexual conduct in order to forestall so rapid a spread of non-procreative sexuality as to raise the specter of race suicide. The widespread if transient homosexuality of adolescence also contributes to this delusion, usually fortified by the claim that unsuspecting adolescents are seduced by the adult homosexual and then "fixated in a lifelong pattern" of exclusive orientation to their own sex. There is also the accusation that homosexuals, since they cannot reproduce, must ceaselessly proselytize for their aberrant lifestyle.

Obviously there is no virus or germ that can account for homosexual response, and a pattern of exclusive homosexual activity that is inborn or acquired in early childhood could hardly be spread to other adults by mere contact, yet the belief that homosexuality is a contagious disease serves to reinforce patterns of legal discrimination and ostracism, all the more as it cannot be proven that the average member of the population is incapable of homosexual activity, even if the preference for such gratification remains confined to a demonstrable minority. The alliance of moral condemnation with the