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 anomalous—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, normosexual [= heterosexual], in contrast with homosexual.

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.


Wayne R. Dynes

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 “abomination,” “abominable” 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 abomination owes its force to its appearance in Jerome’s Vulgate translation of the Bible, where it corresponds to Greek bdelygma and Hebrew tō’ebah. 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