

(1642–1727), himself possibly homophile, argued that the perfect mechanism of the universe required a clockmaker—a “prime mover” as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas had supposed. The things of the world manifest such order, so it was claimed, that they could only have reached their present state through the purposeful guidance of a creator who endowed each thing with its own specific character, which man should not seek to alter. Hence the penis is suited only for placement in a vagina, not in an anus or mouth. The argument oddly neglects the point that the penis has a dual function: it serves to urinate (presumably not in the vagina) as well as emit semen. If it can have two distinct types of emissions, why must it have only one proper vessel? Conversely, if God had been opposed to putting the penis in the mouth or anus, could he not have shaped these latter organs in such a way as to make penetration difficult? Voltaire ridiculed the argument from design because by it one could demonstrate that God had foreseen ships, since he provided harbors for them, and eyeglasses, since he gave noses a bridge.

Of course modern biologists recognize purpose in the world, in the limited sense that birds build nests in which to hatch and raise their young and spiders weave webs to trap insects. What they generally do not hold, however, is that some cosmic mind has predetermined the purposes of all living things.

Even today, however, Aristotle’s discarded model of a grand teleology ruling nature inspires Roman Catholic and much other Christian doctrine. In spite of all subsequent criticism and the repudiation by the physical and biological sciences of the concept of “Nature” as a personified feminine principle whose intentions are somehow frustrated by non-procreative sexual activity, these religious thinkers persist in their antiquated views. Though scarcely metaphysicians and unwilling to discuss how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, Hitler

and Stalin were as convinced as any Roman pope or Southern Baptist that homosexuality is unnatural. The most recent pronouncements of the Roman Catholic church still teach that homosexual acts are “intrinsically disordered because they lack finality,” which is to say that they are immoral because they cannot lead to procreation—as if any good would result if every sexual act did have procreative consequences. The prospects for world population densities would be horrifying. In the twentieth century the increasing longevity of the population and the need to maintain the proper equilibrium with available resources has forced heterosexuals to adopt birth control techniques ranging from periods of abstinence and the use of the condom to abortion to keep the procreative consequences of their own sexual activity within bounds. Yet even most of those branches of Protestantism which do not completely reject birth control and other forms of non-procreative sex (as the Catholics and Orthodox do), still tend to condemn homosexuality as against the law of God and nature. It is incumbent on thinkers not beholden to a revealed religion to expose such positions as inconsistent, and above all to affirm that they embody no inherent logic sufficient to compel a secular, pluralistic society to adopt them.

*William A. Percy*

## TELEPHONE

*See Phone and Computer Sex.*

## TELEVISION

Although the technology on which it is based came into existence as early as 1923, it was only in the early 1950s that television became a fixture of American domestic life, gradually elbowing the Hollywood film out of its primacy in the entertainment field. Establishing itself in Europe at the same time, television eventually spread throughout the globe, even to the poorest Third World countries. While in America most television stations are

commercially owned, in many countries the medium (like radio) is a government monopoly. It is uncertain, however, whether the exigencies of censorship in state systems are more restrictive than the "tyranny of the ratings" in the United States. The spread of cable TV and increased use of satellite transmissions in the 1970s reduced the stranglehold of the major networks. In a few cities gay people were even able to secure their own programs, thanks to public access legislation. In the 1980s the widespread use of VCRs (recording equipment operating through television sets) further promoted diversity, and users could, if they wished, rent a wide variety of porno films to be shown through their home sets. The new field of video emerged as a means for minority artists to create individualized works which could be shown on television screens.

*Gay Men and Lesbians in Television.* From the beginning children formed a large portion of the TV audience. Commercial advertisers were sensitive to campaigns by pressure groups. These factors excluded sex of any kind from the small screen, and reduced controversy to a minimum. Only in the news services, which were to some extent insulated from the rest of programming, was some discussion of issues possible. In the view of many, the early decades of television justified the claim of Federal Communications Commission commissioner Newton Minnow that television was a "vast wasteland."

The fledgling industry inherited many practices and trends from Hollywood—among them self-censorship. However, Hollywood had created a genre of "sissy" character, a figure with veiled gay traits. This type occasionally appeared, in even more disguised form, in such early situation comedy series as "Mr. Peepers," with Wally Cox. When motion pictures that contained references to homosexuality were shown, even on late-night television, the offending sections were ruth-

lessly edited out, a practice that continues to this day. For this reason many now prefer to buy or rent uncensored versions to play on home VCR equipment.

In the 1960s the civil rights movement, and increasingly the women's movement, were big news. This opened the way for some rare excursions into the realm of homosexuality. Mike Wallace's CBS Report, "The Homosexuals," aired nationwide on March 7, 1967, was something of a landmark, but it had been preceded in England by BBC-TV's "One in Twenty" (1966), based on more thorough research by Brian McGee. Occasional discussions on local stations were generally dominated by the judgmental views of psychiatrists.

After the **Stonewall Rebellion** in 1969 coverage increased somewhat, and gay activists appeared on "The Dick Cavett Show," "Jack Paar Tonight," and "The David Susskind Show." In 1972 ABC's "Movie of the Week" aired a sensitive portrayal of a gay-male couple in the San Francisco Bay Area, "That Certain Summer," featuring Hal Holbrook and Martin Sheen. Situation comedy series produced by Norman Lear ("All in the Family" and "Maude") occasionally showed nonstereotypical homosexuals. In the 1980s, prime-time series such as "Cagney & Lacey," "Designing Women," and "L.A. Law" treated the subject. Such popular series as "Brothers" (a cable series), "Dynasty" (with its "sensitive son," Steven Carrington), "Hooperman," "Love, Sidney," and "Soap" have included gay and lesbian characters. A few long and lavish British series based on literary classics have provided portraits of gay people in the round (e.g., "Brideshead Revisited," 1980; "The Jewel in the Crown," 1984), but these have reached only elite audiences. When all is said and done, however, after forty years of the hegemony of network television, gay people have had good reason to feel that they are woefully underrepresented.

*Gay Influence over Television.* It was to be expected that from the first,

television, recruiting much of its talent from Hollywood and Broadway, had many gay and lesbian participants, especially in such behind-the-scenes work as makeup and costuming. Yet an unwritten law (itself inherited from Hollywood) held that the actors who appeared on the screen must be heavily closeted. The revelation of Rock Hudson's homosexuality, after he had appeared in several television dramas, sent shock waves through the industry. Symptomatic of the prejudice that exists is the fact that open membership organizations to defend the rights of gay people in television have never really gotten off the ground, and homosexuals have had to rely on informal groups of friends. Fear of loss of work—even blacklisting—continues to be a powerful deterrent to speaking out.

Following the pattern of Jewish and black organizations fighting **stereotyping** in the media, gay "pressure groups" have had some success in reducing blatant expressions of prejudice on television screens. A 1974 episode of "Police Woman" called "Flowers of Evil," about three lesbians who murder patients in an old-age home, provoked justified outrage. Soon afterward, the National Gay Task Force induced the Television Review Board of the National Association of Broadcasters to issue a directive stating that the Television Code's injunction that "material with sexual connotations shall not be treated exploitatively or irresponsibly" applied to homosexuals. In Los Angeles Newton Deiter, a gay psychologist and activist, successfully ran the Gay Media Task Force (GMTF). He and his associates were able to monitor scripts for the networks, and to obtain frank meetings with producers. GMTF was particularly alert for lispings, limp-wristed mannerisms for gay men and truck-driver characterizations of lesbians. Such offensive words as **faggot** and **queer** were taken out.

In the 1980s these lobbying efforts seemed to falter. However, gay newspapers publicized writing campaigns

against offensive programs, and new civil rights groups, such as New York's Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) organized their own efforts.

*AIDS and Television.* When the AIDS crisis appeared in 1981 mainstream newspapers were the main vehicle of information for the general public. Eventually, through news programs and specials, television made a contribution, though its insensitivity sometimes fueled a climate of panic that could have been avoided or at least reduced. In 1983 the hospital series "St. Elsewhere" introduced an AIDS story line, while the made-for-TV film "An Early Frost," about the effect of knowledge of the disease on a middle-class homosexual's family, garnered an Emmy (American television's highest award) in 1985.

Although Hollywood stars lent their support to campaigns to raise money in the fight against AIDS, many felt that a silent backlash was taking place. In the late 1970s several major performers seemed on the verge of "coming out," but the atmosphere shifted radically. Even heterosexual actors who had portrayed gays found that it was hard to get work. If kissing scenes were involved, actresses demanded to be able to veto leading men who were gay. Those in the industry who did contract the disease felt the need to conceal it in order to retain benefits, and to avoid "incriminating" friends.

All in all, the AIDS crisis revealed the inadequacy of television's feeble efforts to mend its ways. Much work remains to be done by activists, but even so it is unlikely that mass-market television will ever be a true friend of gay men and lesbians. Rather, hope lies in the spread of new technologies which will cut the commercial networks down to size by making communications accessible to a full range of viewpoints, not just those that a few opportunistic and amoral TV executives judge appropriate.

*See also Communications.*

*Ward Houser*