

THOMAS STORCK

Is Opposition to Homosexual Activity “IRRATIONAL”?

If there is one thing our cultural elite seems to agree on, it is that there cannot possibly be any rational reason for opposing the legitimization of homosexual conduct. Let me bring forward a few choice samples of their pronouncements. Writing in the *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Winter 1996) at the University of Maryland, David Luban says,

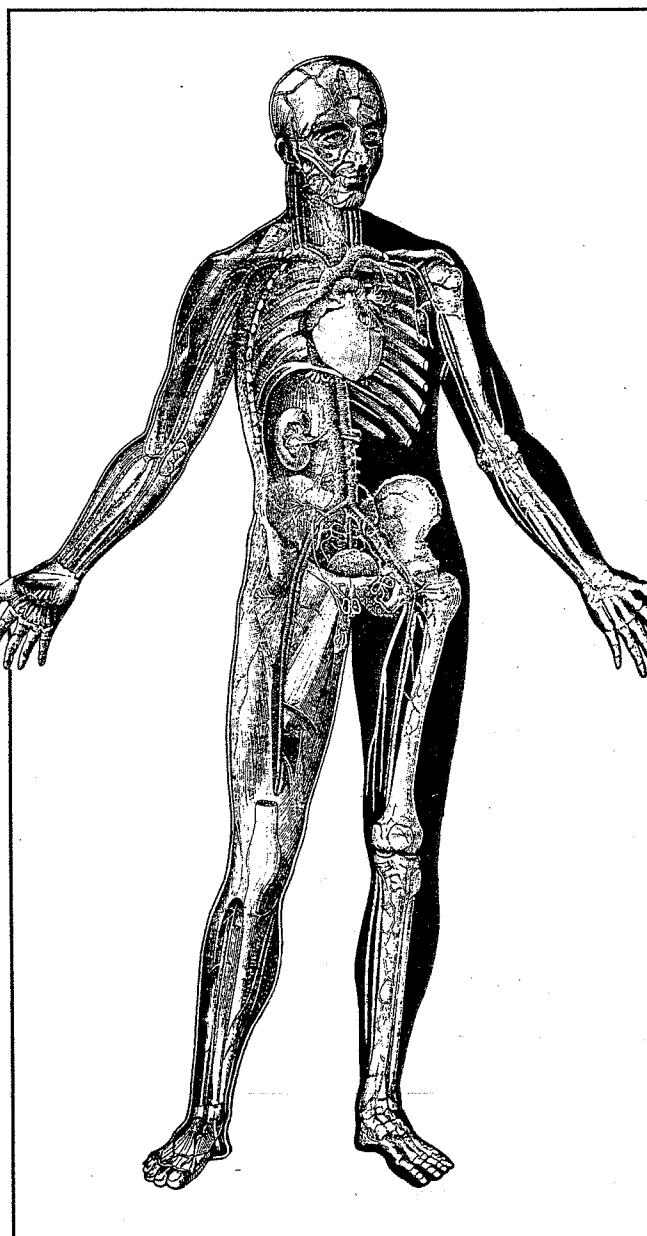
The problem is that many of their [i.e., orthodox Christians'] favorite policies simply don't have a plausible secular basis. Opposition to gay marriages offers an illuminating example. The Christian Right opposes gay marriage because it finds homosexuality sinful, basing this judgment on Scriptural authority.

And he goes on to say,

Of course, some nonreligious people also oppose legalizing gay marriage, because they find homosexuality revolting. But mere public prejudice is never an adequate reason for discrimination, any more than the fact that some people find interracial marriage revolting is an adequate reason for anti-miscegenation statutes. Apart from public prejudice against gay marriage, there are no secular reasons to forbid it, only religious reasons.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in its recent decision in *Romer v. Evans* (May 20, 1996), said much the same

thing: The amendment to the Colorado Constitution which it struck down “seems inexplicable by



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anything but animus toward the class that it affects; it lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests.” And in a discussion of this case by a group of lawyers (*Legal Times*, May 27, 1996), one of the participants said,

Unless some specific harm from [homosexual] conduct is demonstrable, the widespread social aversion to those who practice it is no more than a matter of religious faith, and hence not supportable except by appeal to the authority of the sacred text.

When one of the participants in the exchange pointed out that the term *homophobia* is a “pejorative term coined by homosexuals in a transparent attempt to dismiss contrary views as irrational,” another of the speakers disagreed. It doesn’t mean that at all, he said, but rather the term “is meant to describe those actions and statements based on no actual or factual grounds but on mere bias.”

In these comments we have a representative sample of the beliefs held by most people in academia, government, the media, large corporations, private foundations, and similar organizations, in the U.S., Europe, and perhaps in Latin America also. Other views are simply assumed to reflect bias, ignorance, or irrational adherence to outmoded biblical texts.

What I want to do in this article is explore whether things are so far gone that it is no longer possible to point out some obvious truths about homosexual conduct in such a way as might appeal — or at least make sense — to our secularist brethren. But before I do that, I must acknowledge that some of the arguments put forward by defenders of sexual morality do sometimes invite the kind of disdain exhibited in the above quotes. Too often I have seen critics of same-sex “marriages” or other legal acceptance of homosexual conduct justify their position either simply by appeal to the Bible or by stating that our legal, moral, and social order has been based on heterosexual marriage for a long time, 1500 years, or 2,000 years, or whatever. The most imbecilic reasons I have seen were those put forward by Congressman Sonny Bono, in his comments on same-sex “marriage,” as reported in the *Washington Post* June 13, 1996:

“We’ve hit feelings, we’ve hit what people can handle, what they can’t handle,” he said. “I’m

not homophobic. I’m not a bigot. I’m not pandering to hatred. I simply can’t handle it.... I wish I was ready, but I can’t tell my son it’s okay.”

Then Bono is reported addressing some remarks toward openly-homosexual Congressman Barney Frank. “Turning toward Frank on the other side of the dais, Bono added: ‘I honestly can’t go as far as you deserve — and I’m sorry.’” The problem with all this is twofold. First, it hides the very real and compelling reasons to regard homosexual conduct as unnatural and wrong, and secondly, it makes us look irrational.

Although I give great weight to the traditions of our civilization, nonetheless not everything that is old is venerable. At the time of Christ and his apostles, slavery was an institution with a long history, but this was no reason to support it, and in fact slavery soon began to wither away with the coming of a Catholic social order. But there are very weighty reasons for opposing the efforts by homosexuals to legitimize their conduct, and we ought to understand them and state them openly whenever the subject is mentioned. Otherwise we may be reduced to the state of inarticulate mental confusion possessed by Congressman Bono.

Most of our opponents in this battle do everything they can to hide the fact that reasonable arguments can be made against their position. But some of those on the other side — and some on our side too — really are unaware of the reasoned case we can make. If this is so, then this article might be useful both as a reminder to ourselves and a bit of information to the others.

Naturally I accept the authority of Scripture in condemning homosexual conduct, but the Bible’s condemnation does not in itself make it wrong; rather Scripture condemns it because it *is* wrong. God does not make it wrong by an arbitrary act of will; it is wrong because it is a deformation of that created order which God declared in Genesis to be good. Quite obviously God created man as male and female; not merely the biblical text but the very structure of our bodies shows that male and female are made for each other. And the *bodies* of homosexuals are no different in this respect. They too proclaim the truth of Genesis, that the male and the female are for each other.

But unfortunately very many of our contemporaries, especially our cultured contemporaries, seem to miss these simple truths. But whenever I start to be astounded by this blindness toward the obvious, I have to remind myself that it has a very simple explanation. The reason why so many people refuse to recognize the evident fact that homosexual acts are an unnatural perversion of sexuality — in fact, homosexual acts are not even sex, strictly speaking — is artificial contraception. The almost universal acceptance of contraception has led most of our contemporaries into thinking that sexuality is whatever produces an orgasm. The obvious connection of intercourse with procreation, the complex physical connection between the sexual act and human reproduction, the obvious intent on the part of nature to link the two, is simply ignored because we find it inconvenient. So all orgasms become equal. The clear design of nature that links sexuality to procreation is ignored. Sophistic arguments, such as that nature does not maintain a one to one correspondence between coitus and conception, are brought out to support the notion that *we* have as much right over our natural cycles as nature does. So any effort to restore sexuality to its natural setting has much going against it today, because people do not want to submit to the demands that their own nature, as created by God, makes upon them. Although adherence to the moral law is not adherence to an arbitrary law imposed from the *outside*, but is instead obedience to what our own being or nature demands, nevertheless most people are in rebellion against their own nature because they imagine that their *wills* can reshape everything to their own liking. Despite all this, I am going to attempt to construct an argument in a way that might still reach those who have perverted their own sexuality via contraception, and who see nothing wrong in homosexual conduct.

It is clear that the human body is structured in a certain way. It is more than a shapeless mass. Both externally and internally, the parts indicate what they are meant to do. The heart and arteries and veins, for example, are for pumping blood throughout the body and thus nourishing it. Teeth are for chewing. I fail to see how anyone could regard these functions as somehow arbitrarily or culturally assigned. Rather they arise out of the very nature or whatness of the organ or system in question and its resulting

place in the whole system of the body. And it seems equally clear that this is true of the functions of the entire body. They are all naturally, not culturally, assigned.

If this is the case, suppose that we heard about someone who insisted on putting dirt into his mouth and swallowing it. Most of us would recognize that there was something psychologically wrong with this person. But suppose this person explained that *for him* putting dirt into his mouth fulfilled some deep-seated desires which he felt in connection with his mouth. His need for nourishment he could provide for by means of intravenous feeding. Despite our current tendency to accept and respect any desire of the human will, no matter how irrational, I think most of us would still judge that this person was alienated from his body in an unhealthy way. The fact that intravenous feeding can lead to infections and other problems would simply be a further indication that this entire process is not natural.

One question that might be asked with respect to our dirt eater is whether his act of putting dirt into his mouth is an act that is *for* his body or not. That is, although obviously it is unhealthy and contrary to the internal structure of the digestive organs to swallow dirt, might he be able to claim that *for him* to do otherwise would be to deny his own body, to accept a rule for his body that originated in

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some abstract command? After all, his salivary glands, in response to his appetite, react favorably to consuming dirt.

This is an important question, and one that goes to the heart of what it is to be a human being. For if we say that it is natural *for him* to eat dirt because he likes it, then we are saying that his body is an incoherent mass, able to be manipulated any way he desires. For it is not his body that desires dirt; it is his subjective feelings and desires. Despite what he might claim, he is not a friend of his own body, for that body still reacts negatively to the damage that eating dirt produces. The body has its own *objective* reality and integrity, regardless of his *subjective* desires to abuse it. What he is doing is an act of aggression against his body. He has no respect for its own integrity and considers its interrelated parts and functions as unimportant because they are in conflict with his subjective feelings. This seems to me the ultimate alienation from one's body, namely, to ride roughshod over its very whatness. The body becomes merely an extended mass that means nothing in itself. It has become entirely irrelevant except as a captive of the mind, available for unlimited abuse.

But if we would condemn this person's act of eating dirt, how can we avoid doing the same for homosexual acts? For in the latter case we find the same insistence that it is up to me to decide what to do with parts of my body, that the body's own internal and external structure or logic has absolutely no normative role in telling me what these members are *for*. My own *will* is now supreme. Whatever I want, whatever subjectively I desire, that I must have, regardless of my bodily nature.

It will be clear from what I have just said that I reject the notion that it can be natural to an individual to engage in homosexual acts even though he has homosexual inclinations. These inclinations are neither here nor there, since the human body *in itself* is such that the male and the female are oriented toward each other. It is not the objective human body that orients someone toward homosexual acts, but the subjective human psyche.

Some apologists for homosexual conduct have argued that although the nature of most men may orient them toward women, in the case of someone homosexual his nature is different, and thus for him homosexual acts are not unnatural. Related to this is the assertion that homosexual inclinations are

innate in certain individuals, and as such, necessarily natural for them. As Stephen Macedo wrote in a pro-homosexual article in *The Georgetown Law Journal* (December 1995), "what do we make of the fact that nature has made...many people attracted to members of their own sex?" In the first place this argument shows little acquaintance with the concept of nature, as originally formulated by Aristotle. If nature means simply whatever a single individual wants, then obviously nothing could ever be unnatural. Whatever I want, however grotesque, would be natural for me. But if this were the case, we could never speak of anything being natural to man as a whole either. For example, we could not say that it is natural for mankind to use language or tools or live in communities. The most we could say is that statistically most people have used language and tools and lived in communities, but that this is no more natural or congruent to what it means to be a human being than to do the opposite. The only way we can say that anything at all is natural for man is to say that the opposite of that is unnatural for man.

If this is true, then it really makes no difference whether a homosexual inclination is the result of genetics or an early developmental difficulty or deliberate choice. It is not natural to mankind. Our subjective desire for something does not in itself make that behavior natural. In the case of sexuality, the structure of the sexual organs of homosexuals is the same as the structure of the rest of the human race's. We cannot simply write the objective fact of the human body off as irrelevant. Those who loathe the thought of eating with their mouths still must face up to the objective fact of the structure and functioning of their own bodies. To the extent that they do not do so they are alienated from their bodies. If a human being is a unity, if our bodies are important parts of us as well as our minds, then to be alienated from that body cannot be a healthy state of being. It is to be alienated from what is human.

It may help to consider what seems to me the clearest analogy to a homosexual condition, namely, that of a human physical handicap. Those individuals who at adolescence find themselves attracted to members of the same sex, whether this is something innate or the result of an early developmental disorder, are similar to persons born with a handicap or who have acquired one by means of an injury or disease. Let us consider the case of someone born blind.

If those who say that it can be natural for some individuals to be homosexuals are correct, then it would seem that it is also correct to say that for some individuals it is natural to be blind. But if this is so, then we cannot say that it is natural for the human race to be able to see. All we can say is that, statistically speaking, more men can see than not, but as far as its naturalness is concerned, we can speak only of individuals. So for this person it is natural to see, but for that person it is natural to be blind. Because if we asserted that it was natural for men in general to see, then we would have to admit that blindness was unnatural to human persons, in fact, an unfortunate disability. In book two of his *Physics*, Aristotle explains that nature can fail to reach the end at which it aims, just as a human being exercising an art can fail:

If then in art there are cases in which what is rightly produced serves a purpose, and if where mistakes occur there was a purpose in what was attempted, only it was not attained, so must it be also in natural products, and monstrosities will be failures in the purposive effort (II, 8).

But nature never aims at such defects and is not responsible for them. What is by nature occurs "always or for the most part." Aristotle explains that a failure of this sort might be caused by a defect in the material factor of reproduction. And we know now that this is true, as, for example, a birth defect might be caused by some medicine or drug that the mother took while pregnant or even by exposure of the human ovum to x-rays; natural processes do not cause the defect, rather something interferes with the natural course of events to cause a deviation from what nature aims at.

I think that I have sufficiently explained why homosexual conduct, why indeed a homosexual orientation, is not natural and can never be natural. But I realize that it does not necessarily follow that such conduct is morally wrong or should be socially or legally discouraged. After all, it is doubtless unnatural to walk on one's hands, yet no one favors sanctions against that behavior. Why is homosexual conduct different?

One thing must be made clear: The bad results of homosexual conduct, such as promiscuity or disease, do not make such conduct wrong. If we said that, then we would be guilty of the error of

consequentialism, as if homosexual conduct were wrong only if and to the extent that it caused some other evil. And it would follow from this that if some homosexual were not promiscuous then we could not condemn his sexual actions. We may, however, look at the consequences of homosexual behavior as *evidence* that it is wrong. That is, just as the ill effects on children are not what makes divorce wrong (otherwise childless couples could licitly divorce), still these ill effects are an important indication for us that divorce is wrong.

In the case of homosexual conduct, surely the reason that it is wrong lies in the fact of its unnaturalness *coupled with its importance and centrality to the human person*. It is trivial whether or not one walks on one's hands, but human sexuality is obviously not so trivial. Half the tragedies of life are connected with it, and almost every day we read or hear of some monstrous deed caused by some sexual pathology. Sex is not some incidental part of human life; whether we are male or female goes to the root of our selves, and thus how we relate sexually comes from our innermost selves.

Thus the extremely disordered conduct that characterizes many homosexuals — for example, extreme promiscuity or grotesque sexual practices — is simply evidence that they have turned an extremely important and central aspect of human life away from its natural purpose. To do so certainly cannot remain as amoral as walking on one's hands.

If what I just said about homosexual behavior and its effects is true, then clearly a healthy society should have strong social sanctions against such behavior. It will never be possible to eliminate it entirely, but it should not be something that is in the public realm or even ordinarily discussed. What about laws forbidding and punishing homosexual acts? Generally it is good to have laws against them, though perhaps there may be times and places in which the social sanctions are so great that legal sanctions are not needed. But in our times, if we were to repeal any laws against homosexual behavior, that would signal even greater social acceptance of such conduct, which would be a disaster. Besides, in our society if something is legal it is unwilling to accept social sanctions against it or to remain quietly in the "closet," but must proclaim itself to all the world as good and right.

In this article I have dismissed the subjective

desires of the human psyche as irrelevant to the objective status of the human body. Nevertheless for us humans, whatever our sexual inclinations, such desires are very strong. I am not unsympathetic to the plight of homosexuals for whom a desire for their own sex *seems* natural and good. Doubtless to them my arguments seem cold comfort, for syllogisms have never been very powerful at restraining men from vice or leading them to virtue. Still,

it is necessary to reason about what is right and wrong, and afterwards call upon the other aids that God provides, so that we can live up to what we know is right. In any case, I hope that I have made a case against the legitimacy of homosexual conduct that at least might make our secularist fellow countrymen think twice before condemning our position as “based on no actual or factual grounds but on mere bias.” ■

CATHOLICS & CONTRACEPTION

GEORGE D. WIGNALL

A BELATED Apology TO POPE PAUL VI

Recent petitions by German, Austrian, and French Catholics have demanded that the Church reconsider her ban on artificial contraception. Closer to home, a coalition of some 20 organizations called We Are Church launched a similar petition drive last year demanding, among other things, “primacy of conscience” in moral decision making, including “birth control.” Despite the fact that the Church has consistently taught that “each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life” and continues to reiterate this instruction (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2366), this issue seems to provoke massive disobedience among Catholics, even otherwise loyal Catholics. It has been a strange experience to read the dissenting voices, along with those upholding the Church’s Magisterium, knowing that I could have supported either position at different stages of my life.

When I met my wife just over 25 years ago, I was eagerly awaiting Pope Paul VI’s pronouncement

on the issue, knowing full well that just about every “eminent” theologian (e.g., Curran, Häring, Schillebeeckx) was encouraging a change of direction. There may have been other, orthodox theologians, but the media had no interest in anybody who supported the traditional teaching, so one never heard about them. I remember being very disappointed when Pope Paul’s *Humanae Vitae* appeared in 1968, reiterating that artificial birth regulation is not permissible. It was easy to feel that the input of married people was being ignored, and similar sentiments continue to be expressed by many Catholics.

Fortunately, my wife could tell the difference between the credibility of Peter’s Successor and that of media theologians, even if I couldn’t, and she made it quite clear that she wanted us to do our best to follow the Church’s guidance. There were no Natural Family Planning (NFP) classes available where we lived, but even then there were people like Evelyn Billings who asserted that it was possible to control fertility without resort to drugs or devices. Thus, we bought ourselves a thermometer, read up on NFP, and hoped that Billings and the Pope knew what they were talking about.

All fertility control methods have their “accidents,” including the Pill, IUDs, and even sterilization. However, the difference with NFP is that the

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