Homosexuality, the Bible, and us—a Jewish perspective

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Of all the issues that tear at our society, few provoke as much emotion, or seem as complex, as the question of homosexuality.

Most homosexuals and their heterosexual supporters argue that homosexuality is an inborn condition, and one, moreover, that is no less valid than heterosexuality. They maintain that to discriminate in any way against a person because of his or her sexual orientation is the moral equivalent of discrimination against a person on the basis of color or religion; that is to say, bigotry plain and simple.

On the other hand there are those who feel, no less passionately, that homosexuality is wrong, that society must cultivate the heterosexual marital ideal, or society's very foundations will be threatened.

In the middle are many who are torn between these two claims. I have been one of them. Generally speaking, I do not concern myself with the actions of consenting adults in the privacy of their homes, and I certainly oppose government involve-
ment with what consenting adults do in private. In addition, both lesbians and homosexual men have been part of my life as friends and relatives.

At the same time, I am a Jew who reveres Judaism. And my religion not only prohibits homosexuality, it unequivocally, unambiguously, and in the strongest language at its disposal, condemns it. Judaism—and Christianity—hold that marital sex must be the ideal to which society aspires. Thus my instinct to tolerate all non-coercive behavior runs counter to the deepest moral claims of my source of values.

This is not all. Adding to the seeming complexity are the questions of choice and psychopathology. Current homosexual doctrine holds that homosexuals are born homosexual, and that homosexuality is in no way a psychological or emotional deviation. Are these claims true? And if they are, what are we to do with Western society’s (i.e., Judaism’s and Christianity’s) opposition to homosexuality? What are we to do with our gut instinct that men and women should make love and marry each other, not their own sex? Have Judaism and Christianity been wrong? Is our instinctive reaction no more than a heterosexual bias? And what about those of us who have two gut instincts—one that favors heterosexual love, and one that believes “live and let live”? These two feelings seem irreconcilable, and they have caused me and millions of others anguish and confusion.

After prolonged immersion in the subject, I continue to have anguish about the subject of homosexuality, but, to my great surprise, much less confusion. I hope that the reader will undergo a similar process, and it is to this end that I devote this article.

The nature of sex

Man’s nature, undisciplined by values, will allow sex to dominate his life and the life of society. When Judaism first demanded that all sexual activity be channeled into marriage, it changed the world. It is not overstated to say that the Hebrew Bible’s prohibition of non-marital sex made the creation of Western civilization possible. Societies that did not place boundaries around sexuality were stymied in their development. The subsequent dominance of the Western world can, to a significant extent, be
attributed to the sexual revolution, initiated by Judaism and later carried forward by Christianity.

This revolution consisted of forcing the sexual genie into the marital bottle. It ensured that sex no longer dominated society, it heightened male-female love and sexuality (and thereby almost alone created the possibility of love and eroticism within marriage), and it began the arduous task of elevating the status of women.

It is probably impossible for us who live thousands of years after Judaism began this process to perceive the extent to which sex can dominate, and has dominated, life. Throughout the ancient world, and up to the recent past in many parts of the world, sexuality infused virtually all of society.

Human sexuality, especially male sexuality, is polymorphous, or utterly wild (far more so than animal sexuality). Men have had sex with women and with men; with little girls and young boys; with a single partner and in large groups; with immediate family members; and with a variety of domesticated animals. They have achieved orgasm with inanimate objects such as leather, shoes, and other pieces of clothing; through urinating and defecating on each other (interested readers can see a photograph of the former at select art museums in America exhibiting the works of the gay photographer Robert Mapplethorpe); by dressing in women's garments; by watching other human beings being tortured; by fondling children of either sex; by listening to a man or woman's disembodied voice (e.g., phone sex); and, of course, by looking at pictures of bodies, or parts of bodies. There is little, animate or inanimate, that has not excited some men to orgasm.

Of course, not all of these practices have been condoned by societies—parent-child incest and seducing another man's wife have rarely been countenanced—but many have, and all illustrate what the unchanneled, or in Freudian terms, the "unsublimated," sex drive can lead to.

Desexualizing God and religion

Among the consequences of the unchanneled sex drive is the sexualization of everything—including religion. Unless the sex drive is appropriately harnessed (not squelched, which leads to its own consequences), higher religion cannot develop.
Thus, the first thing the Hebrew Bible did was to desexualize God: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”—by His will, not through any sexual behavior. This was an utterly radical break with all religion, and it alone changed human history. The gods of virtually all civilizations engaged in sexual relations. The gods of Babylon, Canaan, Egypt, Greece, and Rome were, in fact, extremely promiscuous, both with other gods and with mortals.

Given the sexual activity of the gods, it is not surprising that the religions themselves were replete with all forms of sexual activity. In the ancient Near East and elsewhere, virgins were deflowered by priests before marriage, and sacred or ritual prostitution was almost universal.

The Hebrew Bible was the first to place controls on sexual activity. It could no longer dominate religion and social life. It was to be sanctified—which in Hebrew means “separated”—from the world and placed in the home, in the bed of husband and wife. The restriction of sexual behavior by Judaism (and later Christianity) was one of the essential elements that enabled society to progress.

The ubiquity of homosexuality

The new restrictions were nowhere more radical, more challenging to the prevailing assumptions of mankind, than with regard to homosexuality. Indeed, for all intents and purposes, Judaism may be said to have invented the notion of homosexuality, for in the ancient world sexuality was not divided between heterosexuality and homosexuality. That division was the Bible’s doing. Before the Bible, the world divided sexuality between penetrator (active partner) and penetrated (passive partner).

As Martha Nussbaum, professor of philosophy at Brown University, has written, the ancients were no more concerned with people’s gender preference than people today are with others’ eating preferences:

Ancient categories of sexual experience differed considerably from our own.... The central distinction in sexual morality was the distinction between active and passive roles. The gender of the object... is not in itself morally problematic. Boys and women are very often treated interchangeably as objects of [male] desire. What is socially important is to penetrate rather than to be penetrated. Sex
is understood fundamentally not as an interaction, but as a doing of something to someone...."1 [emphasis added]

Judaism changed this. It rendered the “gender of the object” very “morally problematic”; it declared that no one is “interchangeable” sexually; and, as a result, it ensured that sex would in fact be “fundamentally interaction” and not simply “a doing of something to someone.” The Hebrew Bible condemned homosexuality in the most powerful and unambiguous language it could: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is an abomination.”

To appreciate the extent of the revolution wrought by this prohibition of homosexuality, and the demand that all sexual interaction be male-female, it is first necessary to appreciate just how universally accepted and practiced homosexuality has been throughout the world.

It is biblical sexual values, not homosexuality, that have been deviant. In order to make this point clear, I will cite but a handful of historical examples. Without these examples, this claim would seem unbelievable.

_Ancient Near East_

Egyptian culture believed that “homosexual intercourse with a god was auspicious,” writes New York University sociology professor David Greenberg in _The Construction of Homosexuality_. Having anal intercourse with a god was the sign of a man’s mastery over fear of the god. Thus one Egyptian coffin text reads, “Atum [a god] has no power over me, for I copulate between his buttocks.”2 In another coffin text, the deceased person vows, “I will swallow for myself the phallus of [the god] Re.”3 In Mesopotamia, Hammurabi, the author of the famous legal code bearing his name, had male lovers.4

_Greece_

Homosexuality was not only a conspicuous feature of life in ancient Greece, it was exalted. The seduction of young boys by older men was expected and honored. Those who could afford, in time and money, to seduce young boys, did so. Graphic depictions of man-boy sex adorn countless Greek vases.

“Sexual intimacy between men was widespread throughout ancient Greek civilization.... What was accepted and practiced
among the leading citizens was bisexuality; a man was expected to sire a large number of offspring and to head a family while engaging a male lover."

As Greenberg writes, "The Greeks assumed that ordinarily sexual choices were not mutually exclusive, but rather that people were generally capable of responding erotically to beauty in both sexes. Often they could and did."

"Sparta, too, institutionalized homosexual relations between mature men and adolescent boys." In Sparta, homosexuality "seems to have been universal among male citizens."

Rome
Homosexuality was so common in Rome that Edward Gibbon, in his History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, wrote that "of the first fifteen emperors Claudius was the only one whose taste in love was entirely correct" (i.e., not homosexual).

According to psychiatrist and social historian Norman Sussman, "In contrast to the self-conscious and elaborate efforts of the Greeks to glorify and idealize homosexuality, the Romans simply accepted it as a matter of fact and as an inevitable part of human sexual life. Pederasty was just another sexual activity. Many of the most prominent men in Roman society were bisexual if not homosexual. Julius Caesar was called by his contemporaries every woman's man and every man's woman."

The Arab World
Greenberg notes that "a de facto acceptance of male homosexuality has prevailed in Arab lands down to the modern era." As early as the tenth century, German historians depicted Christian men as preferring martyrdom to submitting to Arab sexual demands.

In the words of one of the world's great scholars of Islam, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "The sexual relations of a mature man with a subordinate youth were so readily accepted in upper-class circles that there was often little or no effort to conceal their existence."

Edward Westermak observed that "it is a common belief among the Arabic-speaking mountaineers of Northern Morocco
that a boy cannot learn the Koran well unless a scribe commits pederasty with him. So also an apprentice is supposed to learn his trade by having intercourse with his master.\footnote{9}

Greenberg writes: “In Morocco ... pederasty has been an ‘established custom,’ with boys readily available in the towns....

“In nineteenth-century Algeria, ‘the streets and public places swarmed with boys of remarkable beauty who more than shared with the women the favor of the wealthier natives.’\footnote{10}

As for non-Arab Islam, “the situation,” Greenberg concludes, “has been little different.”

And this is only a cursory review. Homosexuality was also prevalent among pre-Columbian Americans; the Celts, Gauls, and pre-Norman English; the Chinese, Japanese, and Thai; and dozens of other nationalities and cultures. Greenberg summarizes the ubiquitous nature of homosexuality in these words: “With only a few exceptions, male homosexuality was not stigmatized or repressed so long as it conformed to norms regarding gender and the relative ages and statuses of the partners.... The major exceptions to this acceptance seem to have arisen in two circumstances.”

Both of these circumstances were Jewish.

**Judaism and homosexuality**

The Hebrew Bible, in particular the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), has done more to civilize the world than any other book or idea in history. It is the Hebrew Bible that gave humanity such ideas as a universal, moral, loving God; ethical obligations to this God; the need for history to move forward to moral and spiritual redemption; the belief that history has meaning; and the notion that human freedom and social justice are the divinely desired states for all people. It gave the world the Ten Commandments and ethical monotheism.

Therefore, when this Bible makes strong moral proclamations, I listen with great respect. And regarding male homosexuality—female homosexuality is not mentioned—this Bible speaks in such clear and direct language that one does not have to be a religious fundamentalist in order to be influenced by its views. All that is necessary is to consider oneself a serious Jew or Christian.

Jews or Christians who take the Bible’s views on homosexuality seriously are not obligated to prove that they are not fundamentalists or literalists, let alone bigots (though people have
used the Bible to defend bigotry). The onus is on those who view homosexuality as compatible with Judaism or Christianity to reconcile this view with their Bible.

Given the unambiguous nature of the biblical attitude toward homosexuality, however, such a reconciliation is not possible. All that is possible is to declare: “I am aware that the Bible condemns homosexuality, and I consider the Bible wrong.” That would be an intellectually honest approach.

But this approach leads to another problem. If one chooses which of the Bible’s moral values to take seriously (and the Bible states its prohibition of homosexuality not only as a law, but as a value—“it is an abomination”), of what moral use is the Bible?

Advocates of religious acceptance of homosexuality respond that while the Bible is morally advanced in some areas, it is morally regressive in others. Its condemnation of homosexuality is cited as one example, and the Torah’s acceptance of slavery as another.

Far from being immoral, however, the Torah’s prohibition of homosexuality was a major part of its liberation of the human being from the bonds of unrestrained sexuality and of women from being peripheral to men’s lives.

As for slavery, while the Bible declares homosexuality wrong, it never declares slavery good. If it did, I would have to reject the Bible as a document with moral relevance to our times. With its notion of every human being created in God’s image and with its central event being liberation from slavery, it was the Torah which first taught humanity that slavery is wrong. The Torah’s laws regarding slavery exist not to perpetuate it, but to humanize it. And within Jewish life, these laws worked. Furthermore, the slavery that is discussed in the Torah bears no resemblance to black slavery or other instances with which we are familiar. Such slavery, which includes the kidnapping of utterly innocent people, was prohibited by the Torah.

Another argument advanced by advocates of religious acceptance of homosexuality is that the Bible prescribes the death penalty for a multitude of sins, including seemingly inconsequential acts as gathering wood on the Sabbath. Since we no longer condemn people who violate the Sabbath, why continue to condemn people who engage in homosexual acts?

The answer is that we do not derive our approach toward homosexuality only from the fact that the Torah made it a capi-
We learn it from the fact that the Bible makes a moral statement about homosexuality. It makes no such statement about gathering wood on the Sabbath. The Torah uses its strongest term of disapprobation, “abomination,” to describe homosexuality. It is the Bible’s moral evaluation of homosexuality that distinguishes homosexuality from other offenses, capital or otherwise. As Professor Greenberg, who betrays no inclination toward religious belief, writes, “When the word toevah ("abomination") does appear in the Hebrew Bible, it is sometimes applied to idolatry, cult prostitution, magic, or divination, and is sometimes used more generally. It always conveys great repugnance” [emphasis added].

Moreover, it lists homosexuality together with child sacrifice among the “abominations” practiced by the peoples living in the land about to be conquered by the Jews. The two are certainly not morally equatable, but they both characterized the morally primitive world that Judaism opposed. They both characterized a way of life opposite to the one that God demanded of Jews (and even of non-Jews—homosexuality is among the sexual offenses that is covered by one of the “seven laws of the children of Noah” which Judaism holds all people must observe).

Finally, the Bible adds a unique threat to the Jews if they engage in homosexuality and the other offenses of the Canaanites: “You will be vomited out of the land” just as the non-Jews who practice these things were vomited out of the land. Again, as Greenberg notes, this threat “suggests that the offenses were considered serious indeed.”

Why Judaism opposes homosexuality

It is impossible for Judaism to make peace with homosexuality, because homosexuality denies many of Judaism’s most fundamental values. It denies life; it denies God’s expressed desire that men and women cohabit; and it denies the root structure that the Bible prescribes for all mankind, the family.

“Choose life”

If one can speak of Judaism’s essence, it is contained in the Torah statement, “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, and you shall choose life.” Judaism af-
firms whatever enhances life, and it opposes or separates whatever represents death. Thus, meat (death) is separated from milk (life); menstruation (death) is separated from sexual intercourse (life); carnivorous animals (death) are separated from vegetarian, kosher animals (life). This is probably why the Torah juxtaposes child sacrifice with male homosexuality. Though they are not morally analogous, both represent death: One deprives children of life, the other prevents their having life.

**Men need women**

God's first declaration about man (the human being generally, and the male specifically) is, "It is not good for man to be alone." Now, presumably, in order to solve the problem of man's aloneness, God could have made another man, or even a community of men. However, God solved man's aloneness by creating one other person, a woman—not a man, not a few women, not a community of men and women. Man's solitude was not a function of his not being with other people; it was a function of his being without a woman.

Of course, Judaism also holds that women need men. But both the Torah statement and Jewish law have been more adamant about men marrying than about women marrying. Judaism is worried about what happens to men and to society when men do not channel their drives into marriage. In this regard, the Torah and Judaism were highly prescient: The overwhelming majority of violent crimes are committed by unmarried men.

In order to become fully human, male and female must join. In the words of Genesis, "God created the human ... male and female He created them." The union of male and female is not merely some lovely ideal; it is the essence of the biblical outlook on becoming human. To deny it is tantamount to denying a primary purpose of life.

**The family**

Throughout their history, one of the Jews' most distinguishing characteristics has been their commitment to family life. To Judaism, the family—not the nation, and not the individual—is to be the fundamental unit, the building block of society. Thus, when God blesses Abraham, He says, "Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed."
**Homosexuality's effect on women**

Yet another reason for Judaism's opposition to homosexuality is homosexuality's negative effect on women. There appears to be a direct correlation between the prevalence of male homosexuality and the relegation of women to a low societal role. At the same time, the emancipation of women has been a function of Western civilization, the civilization least tolerant of homosexuality.

In societies where men sought out men for love and sex, women were relegated to society's periphery. Thus, for example, ancient Greece, which elevated homosexuality to an ideal, was characterized, in Sussman's words, by "a misogynistic attitude." Homosexuality in ancient Greece, he writes, "was closely linked to an idealized concept of the man as the focus of intellectual and physical activities."

Classicist Eva Keuls describes Athens at its height of philosophical and artistic greatness as "a society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to the male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers...."

In medieval France, when men stressed male-male love, it "implied a corresponding lack of interest in women. In the Song of Roland, a French mini-epic given its final form in the late eleventh or twelfth century, women appear only as shadowy, marginal figures: 'The deepest signs of affection in the poem, as well as in similar ones, appear in the love of man for man....'"11

The women of Arab society, wherein male homosexuality has been widespread, have a notably low status. In traditional Chinese culture, as well, the low state of women has been linked to widespread homosexuality. 12

While traditional Judaism is not as egalitarian as many late twentieth century Jews would like, it was Judaism, very much through its insistence on marriage and family and its rejection of infidelity and homosexuality, that initiated the process of elevating the status of women. While other cultures were writing homoerotic poetry, the Jews wrote the Song of Songs, one of the most beautiful poems depicting male-female sensual love ever written.

**The male homosexual lifestyle**

A final reason for opposition to homosexuality is the homosexual lifestyle. While it is possible for male homosexuals to live
lives of fidelity comparable to those of heterosexual males, it is usually not the case. While the typical lesbian has had fewer than ten sexual partners, the typical male homosexual in America has had over 500. In general, neither homosexuals nor heterosexuals confront the fact that it is this male homosexual lifestyle, more than the specific homosexual act, that disturbs most people.

This is probably why less attention is paid to female homosexuality. When male sexuality is not controlled, the consequences are considerably more destructive than when female sexuality is not controlled. Men rape. Women do not. Men, not women, engage in fetishes. Men are more frequently consumed by their sex drive, and wander from sex partner to sex partner. Men, not women, are sexually sadistic.

The indiscriminate sex that characterizes much of male homosexual life represents the antithesis of Judaism's goal of elevating human life from the animal-like to the God-like.

**The Jewish sexual ideal**

Judaism has a sexual ideal—marital sex. All other forms of sexual behavior, though not equally wrong, deviate from that ideal. The further they deviate, the stronger Judaism's antipathy. Thus there are varying degrees of sexual wrongs. There is, one could say, a continuum of wrong which goes from premarital sex, to adultery, and on to homosexuality, incest, and bestiality.

We can better understand why Judaism rejects homosexuality by understanding its attitudes toward these other unacceptable practices. For example, if a Jew were to argue that never marrying is as equally valid a lifestyle as marrying, normative Judaism would forcefully reject this claim. Judaism states that a life without marrying is a less holy, less complete, and a less Jewish life. Thus, only married men were allowed to be high priests, and only men who had children could sit as judges on the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin.

To put it in modern terms, while an unmarried rabbi can be the spiritual leader of a congregation, he would be dismissed by almost any congregation if he publicly argued that remaining single is as Jewishly valid a way of life as married life.

Despite all this, no Jew could argue that single Jews must be ostracized from Jewish communal life. Single Jews are to be loved and included in Jewish family, social, and religious life.
These attitudes toward not marrying should help clarify Judaism's attitude toward homosexuality. First, it contradicts the Jewish ideal. Second, it cannot be held to be equally valid. Third, those publicly committed to it may not serve as public Jewish role models. But fourth, homosexuals must be included in Jewish communal life and loved as fellow human beings and as Jews.

We cannot open the Jewish door to non-marital sex. For once one argues that any non-marital form of sexual behavior is as valid as marital sex, the door is opened to all other forms of sexual expression. If consensual homosexual activity is valid, why not consensual incest between adults? Why is sex between an adult brother and sister more objectionable than sex between two adult men? If a couple agrees, why not allow consensual adultery? Once non-marital sex is validated, how can we draw any line? Why shouldn't gay liberation be followed by incest liberation?

Accepting homosexuality as the social, moral, or religious equivalent of heterosexuality would constitute the first modern assault on the extremely hard-won, millenia-old battle for a family-based, sexually monogamous society. While it is labeled as progress, the acceptance of homosexuality would not be new at all.

**Is homosexuality wrong (even if homosexuals have no choice)?**

To all the previous arguments offered against homosexuality, the most frequent response is: But homosexuals have no choice. To many people this claim is so emotionally powerful that no further reflection seems necessary. How can we oppose actions that people have not chosen?

But upon a moment's reflection, the answer becomes very clear: "Homosexuals have no choice," when true, is a defense of the homosexual, not of his conduct.

It may be necessary to oppose actions even if they are not performed voluntarily. We do it all the time, and in all spheres of life. It is what keeps psychiatrists and the courts so busy.

The issue of whether homosexuals have any choice may be terribly important, but even if we were to conclude that they do not, that conclusion would in no way invalidate any of the objec-
tions Judaism raises against homosexuality. Whether or not homosexuals choose homosexuality is entirely unrelated to the question of whether society ought to regard it as an equally valid way of life.

If Judaism's arguments against homosexuality are valid, then even if we hold that homosexuals have no choice, we will have to conclude that nature or early nurture has foisted upon some people a tragic burden. But how to deal with a tragic burden is a very different question from whether Judaism, Christianity, and Western civilization should drop their heterosexual marital ideal.

In fact, to society at large, gays do not generally argue that a homosexual life is entirely as valid as a heterosexual life. Even if they believe this, few heterosexuals would agree with it. So, gays offer the argument that garners the most heterosexual sympathy—that homosexuals have no choice.

And to those homosexuals who truly have no choice, we do owe sympathy. But sympathy is one thing, and the denial of our value system is quite another. Chosen or not, homosexuality remains opposable. If chosen, we argue against the choice; if not chosen, we offer compassion while retaining our heterosexual marital ideals.

Is homosexuality chosen?

The question of choice, then, is unrelated to the question of homosexuality's rightness or wrongness. But we must still try to resolve the question of whether homosexuality is chosen.

The question is always posed as, "Do homosexuals choose homosexuality?" When phrased this way, the answer usually seems obvious. One hardly imagines an adult sitting down and debating whether to become a homosexual or a heterosexual. But the question is much more instructive when posed in a more specific way: Is homosexuality biologically programmed from birth, or is it socially and psychologically induced?

There is clearly no one answer that accounts for all homosexuals. What can be said for certain is that some homosexuals were started along that path in early childhood, and that most homosexuals, having had sex with both sexes, prefer homosexual sex to heterosexual sex.

We can say "prefer" because the vast majority of gay men have had intercourse with women. As a four-year study of 128
gay men by a UCLA professor of psychology revealed, “More than 92 percent of the gay men had dated a woman at some time, two-thirds had sexual intercourse with a woman.”

Moreover, if homosexuality is biologically determined, how are we to account for the vastly differing numbers of homosexuals in different societies? As far as we know, most upper-class men practiced homosexuality in ancient Greece, yet we know that there has been very little homosexuality, for example, among Orthodox Jews.

Wherever homosexuality has been encouraged, far more people have engaged in it. And wherever heterosexuality has been discouraged, homosexuality has similarly flourished, as, for example, in prisons and elsewhere: As Greenberg has written, “High levels of homoeroticism develop in boarding schools, monasteries, isolated rural regions, and on ships with all-male crews.”

As for female homosexuality, many lesbian spokeswomen argue passionately that lesbianism is indeed a choice to be made, not a biological inevitability. To cite but two of many such examples, Charlotte Bunch, an editor of *Lesbians and the Women’s Movement* (1975), wrote: “Lesbianism is the key to liberation and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance.” And Jill Johnson, in her book, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (1973), wrote: “The continued collusion of any woman with any man is an event that retards the progress of women’s supremacy.”

Of course, one could argue that homosexuality is biologically determined, but that society, if it suppresses it enough, causes most homosexuals to suppress their homosexuality. Yet, if this argument is true, if society can successfully repress homosexual inclinations, it can lead to either of two conclusions—that society should do so (socially, not legally) for its own sake, or that society should not do so for the individual’s sake. Once again we come back to the question of values.

Or, one could argue that people are naturally (i.e., biologically) bisexual (and given the data on human sexuality, this may be true). Ironically, however, if this is true, the argument that homosexuality is chosen is strengthened, not weakened. For if we all have bisexual tendencies, and most of us successfully suppress our homosexual impulses, then obviously homosexuality
is frequently both surmountable and chosen. And once again we are brought back to our original question of what sexual ideal society ought to foster—heterosexual marital or homosexual sex.

To sum up:

1) Homosexuality may be biologically induced, but is certainly psychologically ingrained (perhaps indelibly) at a very early age in some cases. Presumably, these individuals always have had sexual desires only for their own sex. Historically, they appear to constitute a minority among homosexuals.

2) In some cases, homosexuality appears not to be indelibly ingrained. These individuals have gravitated toward homosexuality from heterosexual experiences, or have always been bisexual, or live in a society that encourages homosexuality. As Greenberg, who is very sympathetic to gay liberation, writes, “Biologists who view most traits as inherited, and psychologists who think sexual preferences are largely determined in early childhood, may pay little attention to the finding that many gay people have had extensive heterosexual experience.”

3) Therefore, the evidence overwhelmingly leads to this conclusion: By and large, it is society, not the individual, that chooses whether homosexuality will be widely practiced. A society’s values, much more than individuals’ tendencies, determine the extent of homosexuality in that society.

Thus we can have great sympathy for the exclusively homosexual individual while strongly opposing social acceptance of homosexuality. In this way we retain both our hearts and our values.

**What are we to do?**

We could conceivably hold that while heterosexual sex ought to be society’s ideal, society should not discriminate against homosexuals. This solution, however, while tempting, is not as tidy as it sounds. For the moment one holds that homosexuality is less socially or morally desirable than heterosexuality, discrimination, in some form, becomes inevitable. For example, it is very difficult to hold that marriage and family must be society’s ideal and at the same time advocate homosexual marriage.

More than other issues, homosexuality seems to force one into an extreme position. Either you accept homosexuality completely or you end up supporting some form of discrimination.
The moment you hesitate to sanction homosexual marriage, or homosexual men as Big Brothers to young boys, or the ordaining of avowed homosexuals, you have agreed to discrimination against homosexuals. And then the ACLU, gay activists, and others will lump you with the religious right wing.

This is why many liberals find it difficult not to side with all the demands of gay activists. They terribly fear being lumped with right-wingers. And they loathe the thought of discriminating against minorities. Gay activists have been quite successful at depicting themselves as another persecuted minority, and this label tugs at the conscience of moral individuals, both liberal and conservative. Of course, in some ways this label is deserved, since gays are a minority, and they certainly have been persecuted. But they are not a persecuted minority in the same way that, let us say, blacks have been. Sexual lifestyle is qualitatively different from skin color.

Since blacks have been discriminated against for what they are and homosexuals have been discriminated against for what they do, a moral distinction between the two types of discrimination can be made in a handful of areas. This in no way exonerates gay-bashing or gay-baiting, let alone such evils as the Nazi or communist incarcerations of gays. But it does mean that a moral distinction between discrimination against behavior and discrimination against color is possible. For example, there is no moral basis to objecting to blacks marrying whites, but there is a moral basis for objecting to homosexual marriage.

That is why gay activists fight against every single vestige of discrimination against homosexuality. They intuit that even one form of discrimination—prohibiting homosexual marriages, for example—means that society differs only in degree from those who declare homosexuality "an abomination."

This is a problem with which I continue to wrestle. I want gays to have the rights that I have. But not everything I am allowed to do is a right. Marriage, for example, is not a universal right (see below), nor, even more so, is religious ordination.

Decriminalizing homosexuality

Before dealing with areas where discriminating on behalf of marital heterosexuality may be proper, let us deal with the areas where discrimination is not morally defensible.
Twenty-three states in the United States continue to have laws against private homosexual relations. I am opposed to these laws. Whatever my misgivings about homosexuality may be, they do not undo my opposition to the state’s interference in private consensual relations between adults. Those who wish to retain such laws need to explain where, if ever, they will draw their line. Should we criminalize adultery? After all, adultery is prohibited by the Ten Commandments.

What should be permitted in private, however, does not have to be permitted in all areas of society. Thus, for example, while I am for decriminalizing prostitution, I would not allow the transactions to take place in public or permit prostitutes to advertise on billboards, radio, or television.

To decriminalize an act is not to deem it as socially acceptable as any other act. But social acceptance is precisely what gay liberation aims for—and also where the majority of society disagrees with gay liberation.

I suspect that in this regard most people feel as I do—antipathy to gay-baiting, gay-bashing, and to the criminalizing of private gay behavior, while simultaneously holding that homosexuality is not an equally viable alternative. Given these admittedly somewhat contradictory positions, what are we to do?

I believe that we ought to conduct public policy along two guidelines:

1) We may distinguish between that which grants homosexuals basic rights and that which honors homosexuality as a societally desirable way to live.

2) Therefore, we may discriminate on behalf of the heterosexual marital ideal, but not against the individual homosexual in the private arena—for example, where and how a homosexual lives.

**Homosexual ordination**

The most obvious area wherein the distinction between civil rights and public acceptance of homosexuality manifests itself is religion. It is, after all, Western religion that most fought for confining sexual activity to marriage.

It is therefore not surprising that few Christian or Jewish mainstream denominations, even liberal ones, ordain individuals who publicly declare themselves homosexual.
The issue is only secondarily the individual’s sex life. It is primarily one of values. If a candidate for ordination at any of the Jewish seminaries engaged in cross-dressing, a clear violation of a Torah law, or took a personal vow of celibacy, another violation of Jewish law (at least for men), but in neither instance announced it, it would not be the admissions committee’s task to inquire about such things. But if a rabbinic student were to announce that he is a transvestite or that remaining single is as desirable to Judaism as being married, he should not be ordained.

In sexual matters, the issue is what is advocated and what is lived publicly far more than what is privately practiced. An organization should be able to choose spokesmen who publicly support its ideals; that sort of “discrimination” is perfectly legitimate.

**Homosexual marriage**

Gay activists and some liberal groups such as the ACLU argue for the right of homosexuals to marry. Generally, two arguments are advanced—that society should not deny anyone the right to marry, and that if male homosexuals were given the right to marry, they would be considerably less likely to cruise.

The first argument is specious because there is no “right to marry.” There is no right to marry more than one partner at a time, or to marry an immediate member of one’s family. Society does not allow either practice. Though the ACLU and others believe that society has no rights, only individuals do, most Americans feel otherwise. Whether this will continue to be so, as Judaism and Christianity lose their influence, remains to be seen.

The second argument may have some merit, and insofar as homosexual marriages would decrease promiscuity among gay men, it would be a very positive development for both gays and society. But homosexual marriage would be unlikely to have such an effect. The male propensity to promiscuity would simply overwhelm most homosexual males’ marriage vows. It is women who keep most heterosexual men monogamous, or at least far less likely to cruise, but gay men have no such brake on their cruising natures. Male nature, not the inability to marry, compels gay men to wander from man to man. This is proven by the behavior of lesbians, who, though also prevented from marrying each other, are not promiscuous.
Homosexual employment

In general, not hiring a person because he or she is gay is morally indefensible. There are, however, at least two exceptions which necessitate the use of the qualifier, "in general."

In some rare cases in which sexual attraction, or non-attraction, is an absolutely relevant aspect of a job, a case can be made for discrimination against gays in hiring. The armed forces are one possible example. One reason for not admitting gays into combat units is the same reason for not allowing women and men to share army barracks. The sexual tension caused by individuals who may be sexually interested in one another could undermine effectiveness.

Big Brothers provides a second example. Just as heterosexual men are not allowed to serve as Big Brothers to girls, gay men should not be allowed to serve as Big Brothers to boys. The reason is not anti-homosexual any more than not allowing heterosexual men to be Big Brothers to girls is anti-heterosexual; it is common sense. We do not want Big Brothers to be potentially sexually attracted to the young people with whom they are entrusted. It is not because we trust homosexual men less; it is because we do not trust male sexual nature with any minor to whom a male may be sexually attracted.

My own view is that, in general, if employees work responsibly, their off-duty hours are their own business. This is not the view of many liberals and conservatives today, however. Off-hours "womanizing" ended the career of the leading contender for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination of 1988. And it was a major reason for not approving a secretary of defense-designate. Ironically, the voting public often seems far more tolerant of "manizing" than of womanizing. Rep. Barney Frank's male lover ran a male prostitution ring from the congressman's apartment, yet Frank seems to be as popular with his constituency as ever. Such behavior on the part of a heterosexual would doubtless have led to his resignation from Congress.

Behavior toward homosexuals

Violence against homosexuals has claimed numerous lives over the past decade, and too often the law seems to regard it as less of a crime than the murder of heterosexuals. In 1976, when a gay college student was beaten to death by teenagers
in front of a Tucson bar, the judge imposed no penalty. In 1984, a Bangor, Maine, judge released to custody of their parents three teenage boys who had beaten and thrown a young gay man into a stream. In 1988, a Texas judge eased the sentence of a man who murdered two homosexuals because, in the judge's words, "I put prostitutes and gays at about the same level, and I'd be hard put to give somebody life for killing a prostitute."\(^{16}\)

According to a National Gay Task Force study, one-fourth to one-third of gay men have been assaulted or threatened with violence. Even if the figures are exaggerated by a factor of two, they are terrible. And they may actually be understated, since many homosexuals do not wish to report such crimes for fear of embarrassment.

Unfortunately, religious opponents of homosexuality can abet this type of behavior. It should go without saying, but, unfortunately, it needs to be said that the homosexual is created in God's image as much as every other person, and that a homosexual can be as decent a human being as anyone else.

It should also go without saying but, again, it needs to be said that to hurt a homosexual, to be insensitive to a homosexual because of the person's homosexuality, is despicable. Likewise, I believe that when a parent severs relations with a child because of the child's homosexuality, it is a terrible and mutually destructive act.

Gay-bashing, gay-baiting, and jokes that mock (as opposed to poking good-natured fun at) homosexuals have no place in a decent society.

I can confirm from personal experience the truth of the gay activist claim that nearly all of us know or come into regular contact with gay people. From childhood, I was aware that a member of our family circle, one of my mother's cousins, was a gay man; my closest friend during my college year in England was a homosexual; and a proofreader of my journal for two years, one of my closest co-workers, was a lesbian.

I have regarded these people as no less worthy of friendship than my priest friends whose celibacy I do not agree with, or my bachelor friends whose decisions not to marry I disagree with.
"Homophobia"

Just as we owe homosexuals humane, decent, and respectful conduct, homosexuals owe the same to the rest of us. Homosexuals' use of the term "homophobic," however, violates this rule as much as heterosexuals' use of the term "faggot" does.

When the term "homophobic" is used to describe anyone who believes that heterosexuality should remain Western society's ideal, it is quite simply a contemporary form of McCarthyism. In fact, it is more insidious than the late senator's use of "communist." For one thing, there was and is such a thing as a communist. But "homophobia" masquerades as a scientific description of a phobia that does not exist in any medical list of phobias.

Yet the insidiousness of the term really lies elsewhere. It abuses psychology in order to dismiss a human being whose values the name-caller does not like. It dismisses a person's views as being the product of unconscious pathological fears. It is not only demeaning, it is unanswerable. Indeed, the more one denies it, the more the label sticks.

Whenever I hear the term, unless it is used to describe thugs who beat innocent homosexuals, I know that the user of the term has no argument, only McCarthy-like demagoguery, with which to rebut others. To hold that heterosexual marital sex is preferable to all other expressions of sexuality is no more "homophobic" than it is "incest-phobic" to oppose incest, or "beast-phobic" to want humans to make love only to their own species.

Finally, those who throw around the term "homophobic" ought to recognize the principle of "that which goes around comes around." We can easily descend into name-calling. Shall we start by labeling male homosexuals "women-phobic" and "vagina-phobic," and lesbians "men-phobic" and "penis-phobic"? It makes as much sense, and it is just as filthy a tactic.

Good people can differ about the desirability of alternate modes of sexual expression. There are many good people who care for homosexuals, and yet fear the chiseling away of the West's family-centered sex-in-marriage ideal. They merit debate, not the label "homophobic." And there are good homosexuals who argue otherwise. They, too, merit debate, not the label "faggot."
What is at stake

The creation of Western civilization has been a terribly difficult and unique thing. It took a constant delaying of gratification, and a rechanneling of natural instincts; and these disciplines have not always been well received. There have been numerous attempts to undo Judeo-Christian civilization, not infrequently by Jews (through radical politics) and Christians (through antisemitism).

And the bedrock of this civilization, and of Jewish life, of course, has been the centrality and purity of family life. But the family is not a natural unit so much as it is a value that must be cultivated and protected. The Greeks assaulted the family in the name of beauty and Eros. The Marxists assaulted the family in the name of progress. And, today, gay liberation assaults it in the name of compassion and equality. I understand why gays would do this. Life has been miserable for many of them. What I have not understood is why Jews and Christians would join the assault.

I do now. They do not know what is at stake. At stake is our civilization. It is very easy to forget what Judaism has wrought and what Christians have created in the West. But those who loathe this civilization never forget. The radical Stanford University faculty and students who chanted, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civ has got to go," were referring to much more than their university's syllabus.

And no one is chanting that song more forcefully than those who believe and advocate that sexual behavior doesn't play a role in building or eroding a civilization.

Notes


Sussman.


Greenberg.


Greenberg.