

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

late-nineteenth-century notion of homosexuality as disease has given the ambiguous notion of contagion a new lease on life and contributed to the persistence of homophobic attitudes which the gay movement has had to work patiently to dispel—thus far not with entire success. The recent association of homosexual activity with the spread of a pathological and usually fatal condition such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has the side-effect of reviving the paranoid aspect of this belief system in the unconscious depths of the mass mind.

Warren Johansson

CONTEST LITERATURE

In Greek literature a subgenre—sometimes known under the rhetorical term *syncretis*—developed in which two characters debate opposing points of view. Thus in *Aristophanes' Frogs* the characters Aeschylus and Euripides argue the merits of their poetry, while his *Clouds* verbally pits Just Reasoning against Unjust Reasoning. In later Greek writing several pieces of contest literature appeared debating the relative merits of boys and women as love objects. Such a debate is featured in the novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius (perhaps second century A.D.). An anonymous specimen is the so-called *Affairs of the Heart* by pseudo-Lucian.

Together with much else in the Greek heritage, this tradition of arguing the merits of pederasty vs. the love of women passed to Islam, where the first known example seems to be by al-Jāhiz of the ninth century. A more accessible instance occurs in the *Arabian Nights* (419th night and following in the Burton translation). In the mid-seventeenth century a specimen appeared in Japan, the *Dembu monogatari* (Story of a Boor), perhaps derived ultimately from an Islamic source.

In the medieval literature of Western Europe the boy-woman contest flourished, the most salient instance being

the twelfth-century "Ganymede and Helen." In this medieval Latin poem, Helen offers herself to Ganymede only to find that he would rather assume the passive role with another man. A violent quarrel breaks out, to settle which they appoint Nature and Reason as arbiters. Traveling to "the world's eastern edge, the house of Nature," they argue their respective positions before their judges, who are not exactly impartial. Ganymede praises love between man and boy, Helen champions the passion of man and woman. Although Ganymede makes several telling points, in the end he is vanquished by the argument that intercourse between males is sterile, that it wastes potential human lives. "The old heresy is abandoned by the gods," and the teaching of the church is vindicated. Parallels to this literary genre of debate were the public controversies between Jewish and Christian theologians that typically ended in a decision in favor of the church, and often in woe for the Jewish communities in the cities where the debates were staged.

After the church had imposed obligatory heterosexuality upon the population of Western Europe, all debate on the issue ceased, and it became impossible to defend male love publicly. But in cultures where a significant part of the male population is actively bisexual and intercourse with a boy is a viable social option, the choice is posed in life quite as much as in literature—and not always to Ganymede's disadvantage. With the gradual rehabilitation of the homosexual option in today's pluralistic world, the notion of victory in such a contest has become moot.

Wayne R. Dynes

CONTRARY SEXUAL FEELING

This expression is the English rendering of the overarching term adopted by the German physician Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal (1833–1890) for the condition that he had abstracted from two case