

century (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) and more recently in the Third World (Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria). Inspired by such examples, some gay liberation leaders have suggested that homosexuals may be undergoing such a process of crystallization into a new nationality. Yet the mere mention of such a project shows how chimerical it is. Homosexuals do not possess a territory of their own on which to erect a state; were they to seek to create such a haven, as in the abortive Alpine County project in California in the 1970s, it would immediately become a target for homophobes of all stripes. Moreover, the vast majority of homosexuals, as patriotic citizens of their own countries, have no wish to transfer their political loyalties. Spread thinly across the territory of the democracies, they have difficulty electing an avowed gay representative to a state legislature, Elaine Noble in Massachusetts being the first of a handful of exceptions, or to a city council except in a few districts where they form a significant plurality. Still, the quicksilver appeal of the political fantasies of gay nationalism attests the continuing refulgence of the nationalist model.

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## NATIVE AMERICANS

See Indians, North American.

## NATURE AND THE UNNATURAL

As Raymond Williams has observed in *Keywords* (New York, 1976), the term "nature" is one of the most complex in the language; it is also one of the most dangerous. An adequate study of the problem must also focus on the emotionally charged antonym: the "unnatural," which

needs to be distinguished from the supernatural and the praeternatural, from second (and for the Greeks, third, fourth, and fifth) nature, and from the peculiarly Thomistic concept of the "connatural" (which, as the personal and habitual, stands in a kind of intermediate zone between the natural and the unnatural).

*Historical Semantics of the Concept.* The ancient Greek word for nature, *physis*, was unique to that language and to Hellenic thought; no equivalent can be found in the Semitic and Oriental languages, or in other intellectual traditions. The term *physis* derives from a verb meaning "to grow," and hence retains strong connotations of organic completeness and development toward a goal. The primary notion of *physis* is a magical, autonomous life force manifesting itself not only in the creation and preservation of the universe, but even in the properties and character traits of species and individuals. Thus in medical usage it even leads into the sphere of the pharmacopoeia and of constitutional biology.

Its use among the Greeks can be further understood in the light of three contrasting pairs of terms: *physis/nomos* (law or custom); *physis/techne* (art); *kata physin/para physin* (against nature). The last of these antinomies, which is of particular significance for our enquiry, received a decisively influential formulation from the aged Plato (ca. 427–347 B.C.) in his *Laws*. In this book the philosopher condemns same-sex relations because, unlike those in which animals naturally engage, they cannot lead to procreation. In the so-called intertestamental period this Hellenic idea found its way into the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and into the apologetic writings of Philo Judaeus, who equated the Mosaic Law with the "law of nature," and thence into the New Testament with the fateful formulation of Romans 1:26–27, which speaks of changing "the natural use to that which is unnatural." This language—which in the Pauline text cited sets the stage for a con-

demnation of male homosexuality—made its way into other contexts, including that of jurisprudence.

The path for this development was smoothed by the earlier Roman acceptance of the concept of “natural law,” defined by Cicero as “right reason in agreement with nature.” Cicero ascribed this law to God, hence giving legal standing to Biblical injunctions in the eyes of Christian interpreters, and went on to insist that “it is a sin to try to alter this law.” On the other hand, the Christians tended to overlook Cicero’s statement that in practice God is also the enforcing judge of natural law; that role they took on themselves. The twelfth-century groundswell of interpretation of Roman law and canon law had a major emphasis on natural law perspectives, both classical and Christian. Natural law underpinned arguments justifying antihomosexual legislation throughout the Middle Ages and into early modern times, when its legacy passed from church to secular penology, retaining much of its influence. This secularization notwithstanding, natural-law arguments play a major role today in the continuing Roman Catholic condemnation of homosexual behavior.

It is curious that the notion of “crime against nature,” so familiar to us from the penal codes of the American states, did not figure in Henry VIII’s English statute of 1533 or its successors. Sir Edward Coke, however, did affirm it in his seventeenth-century *Institutes and Reports*, whence it became part of the not-fully-investigated Anglo-American legal tradition down to the present time.

In medieval Europe the semantically iridescent concept of *natura* was perpetuated and even given some new twists and images by moralists (Peter Damian), literary figures (Bernard Silvestre, Alan of Lille, and Jean de Meun), and philosophers (Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas). Later French usage coined the adjective *antiphysique* (taken into English

in the rare “antiphysical”) for unnatural sexual behavior.

Eighteenth-century aesthetics saw a broad shift from a view of nature as rule obeying and rule enforcing to one in which the awesome complexity and sovereign fecundity of nature was emphasized—the source of the admiration which naturalists of today profess for the unspoiled wilderness, untrodden by man and unaltered by human hands. This shift is part of the change from neo-Classicism to Romanticism. By providing a more flexible definition of nature the new approach gave it new life as a normative (though more diffuse) principle.

The contemporary scene offers a curious paradox in that conservative thinkers continue to denounce homosexuality as “unnatural” (Ezra Pound), while some homophile apologists have revived the ancient Hippocratic definition to claim that homosexuality is inborn and thus “natural” (K. H. Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld). For its part, the counterculture has glorified natural foods and the environmental protection of nature (which are in themselves valuable) without addressing the contradiction that the sexual freedom and tolerance that it cherishes have been historically denounced as “unnatural.”

*Inadequacy of the Traditional Arguments.* The arguments thus far discussed may be briefly refuted as follows. If nature is truly all-embracing, it is impossible to depart from it. Only things that do not exist at all, such as centaurs and phlogiston, would be unnatural. In this perspective, the supposed criterion of naturalness provides no means for separating existing acts that are judged licit from those regarded as illicit; some yardstick other than “naturalness”—since all acts possess that attribute—must be supplied. If, however, one chooses the other path, regarding some things within the world as natural and others not, the dichotomy becomes culture-bound and subjective. Thus clothing,

cosmetics, and airplanes have been sometimes stigmatized as unnatural. Perhaps they are. But then it is hard to see how, say, life-saving heart surgery can be regarded as anything other than an unnatural intervention in otherwise inevitable processes. How many proponents of "naturalness" would be willing to revert to a Stone Age economy and Stone Age medicine? In short, opponents of "unnatural" sex need to demonstrate that they have at their disposal a comprehensive and even-handed theory of the natural and its opposite. What usually happens in practice is that some other assumption, or assumptions, are imported to provide a basis of decision. Thus the natural-unnatural contrast becomes essentially a rhetorical device to provide a pseudo-confirmation of moral presuppositions reached on quite other grounds.

Another critique is that the image of Natura is a survival of the mother goddess figures of pagan antiquity, in which God is the male principle of creation and "Nature" the female counterpart. Discarding such relics of polytheism, modern scientific thought does not concern itself with the supposed "purposes" or "aims" of nature, and in general rejects teleological concepts as empirically undemonstrable. The standard claim is that nature has intended sexuality solely for the purpose of procreation and that any sexual pleasure obtained from non-procreative activity is therefore "unnatural" and wrongful. To this assertion it can be rejoined that only a tiny fraction of all human sexual activity has reproductive consequences, and that to restrict it to such a narrow goal would doom most of the population to virtually lifelong abstinence—though the ascetic ideal would regard such a state of affairs as a desirable end.

From a scientific perspective, the debate over the "naturalness" of homosexuality has been joined by the eminent sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey who, holding that norms of naturalness are in the

last analysis historically contingent and arbitrary, concluded that anything sexual which can be done is natural. The older arguments deployed by theologians and moralists were, in his view, accompanied by a considerable charge of emotionality. "This has been effected, in part, by synonymizing the terms clean, natural, normal, moral, and right, and the terms unclean, unnatural, abnormal, immoral, and wrong."

Anthropologists have reported homosexuality in many tribal societies (presumed "close to nature"); a wide range of ethologists have described homosexuality among other species (presumed more "natural"); and theorists in sociobiology have sought to provide an evolutionary rationale for human homosexuality. Perhaps as a reflection of these efforts as well as of other scientific embarrassments involving earlier cultural assumptions about "naturalness," it is no longer scientifically respectable to maintain the argument against homosexuality as "unnatural." This development has not yet had a major impact on Judeo-Christian homophobes or popular demagogic rhetoric, nor on public opinion among the less educated, but over time it can be expected to undermine the credibility of the position that "homosexuality is unnatural."

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