

## Sexual Orientations and Morality

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**Abstract:** Sexual orientation is the persistent desire of a person for affiliation with one sex rather than the other. The fact that man is a sexual being is something indubitable. Indubitable also is the fact that sex is lovely and great, for without it the whole of human race will face extinction. Unlike several other beings, it is through sexual intercourse that the human person can reproduce itself. It is through this natural gift, therefore, that the flourishing of humanity can be assured, under the loving union of a man and a woman. Nowadays, however, this beautiful gift of nature has witnessed untold pervasion. Man out of his freewill, has chosen to express his sexual behavior with himself (masturbation), with brute animals (bestiality), and with some other persons of his or her own sex (homosexuality and lesbianism). The person or the society itself may feel alright with this development, but what moral implications do such sexual actions pose on the human society? Is it rational and moral for a man to have sex with a fellow man? Is it morally permissible for our female young-stars to give up sexual relationship with men and resort to sleeping with fellow women? What are the moral implications of gay marriage? These and related questions are the central focus of this paper. Thus is a critical examination of the moral implications of different abnormal sexual orientations in our society, using the philosophical method of critical analysis.

**Key Terms:** Sexual orientation, morality, sexual preferences, homosexuality.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

That human sexuality is wonderful and formidable is an existential fact, but the expression of sexual behaviors must take their proper and natural process. Sexual behavior is something human persons do to express their God-given sexuality. Unfortunately, the modern sexual orientations have become so pervasive that they pose critical questions to human rationality and freedom. Today, homosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation, pedophilia and bestiality have become prominent in the worlds sexual menu, all seeking legal and societal approvals. To get into discuss of this paper, we shall start by offering short definitions of some operational terms in order to enhance the proper understanding of this work. We should note that the term ‘homosexuality’ or gay is used throughout this work to denote both males and females whose sexual orientation is directed towards people of their own sex (same sex). Again, in looking at this moral problems associated with this, we will rely mainly on the Biblical/religious views as well as the philosophical views of some moral philosophers.

**Sexual Orientation:** Sexual orientation is an enduring pattern of sexual attraction to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender or to both sexes or genders (O’Neill, 1989, p. 54). These attractions are generally subsumed under the following categories: heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, while asexuality (the lack of sexual attraction to others) is sometimes equally identified. These categories are aspects of the more nuance nature of sexual identity and terminology. According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation “also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). *Androphilia* and *gynephilia* are terms used in behavioral science to describe sexual orientations as an attraction to a gender binary conceptualization. *Androphilia* describes sexual attraction to masculinity; *gynephilia* describes sexual attraction to femininity (Field, 2003). Sexual orientation is, therefore, the direction of one’s sexual interest toward members of the same, opposite, or both sexes, especially a direction seen to be dictated by physiologic rather than sociologic forces.

**Sexual Preference:** The term sexual preference largely overlaps with sexual orientation, but is generally distinguished in psychological research. A person who identifies as bisexual, for instance, may sexually prefer one sex over the other. Sexual preference may also suggest a degree of voluntary choice, whereas the scientific consensus is that sexual orientation is not a choice (Field, 2003). It is the clear, persistent desire of a person for affiliation with one sex rather than the other.

**Homosexuality:** The term, homosexuality, is from Greek *homos*, meaning “same”, and Latin *sexus*, meaning “sex”. It is a romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behavior between members of the same sex

or gender (Knight, 1979). As a sexual orientation, homosexuality is an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people of the same sex. It also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex (CCC. 2357).

### **Causes of Sexual Orientation**

There is no consensus among scientists about why a person develops a particular sexual orientation. Many scientists think that nature and nurture – a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences – factors into the cause of sexual orientation. They favor biologically-based theories, which suggests that parenting or early childhood experiences play a role when it comes to sexual orientation. With regard to same-sex sexual behavior, shared or familial environment plays no role for men and women (Night, 1979, p. 196). It is, however, a popular opinion that our sexual orientations are simply a matter of choice and our choices are largely determined by influences.

### **Homosexuality and Morality**

Homosexual relationships and acts have been admired by some, as well as condemned, throughout recorded history. Since the end of the 19th century, there has been a global movement towards increased visibility, recognition, and legal rights for homosexual people, including the rights to marriage and civil unions, adoption and parenting, employment, military service, equal access to health care, and the introduction of anti-bullying legislation to protect gay minors.

Marmor (1980), observed that although negative attitudes and behaviors toward gay individuals have been assumed to be associated with rigid moralistic beliefs, sexual ignorance, and fear of homosexuality, the etiology of these attitudes and behaviors remain a puzzle (Marmor, 1980, p. 22). These attitudes and behaviors was later labeled *homophobia* which Weinberg (1972) defined as the dread of being in close quarters with homosexual men and women as well as irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance by heterosexual individuals of homosexual men and women. Homosexuals and lesbians have gained considerable political and social momentum in America and other parts of the world. Through the television, radio, newspaper, and magazines, they are preaching their doctrine of tolerance, equity, justice, and love. They do not want to be perceived as abnormal or dangerous. They want acceptance, and they want to be welcomed with open, loving arms, and especially approval of what they do. They want homosexuality to be seen as just another alternative lifestyle. In the mist of all these there is still a question begging for answer: does legalization and/or acceptance of an action make it moral?

### **Legality versus Morality**

Law, according to Thomas Aquinas, is generally a command ordained for the common good of the society (Aquinas, ST. q.91, a.1). But law is different from ethics or morality. There are things which may be legal but morally wrong. Hence, legalizing homosexuality (an intrinsic evil act) does not and cannot remove its culpability. Although laws (Divine, nature and Societal) do not always connote or concern with that which is right (what is legal may not be moral) – the principle of “do good and avoid evil” is characteristically natural to us. The problem, however, lies on what is meant by to do good and to avoid evil. Morality, on the other hand, has to do with what is wrong and what is right. It has to do with the theory of conduct. Morality deals with how we ought to conduct and apply ethical values. Morality, therefore, is the principle of conduct that governs or ought to govern our moral lives or how we ought to behave; reason being the ultimate court of appeal for judging actions as right or wrong actions (Mohler, 1998). It studies rightness and wrongness of these conducts or behavior, and it is normative as it prescribes action as right or wrong.

In several nations around the world especially in America, several bills have been introduced by the pro-homosexuals to ensure that the practice of homosexuality is a right protected by law. That is, the homosexual community wants legal protection for having intercourse with people of the same sex. They have also taking a step further by demanding that their views be taught in schools, promoted over the media, and codified in law and literature. But does that make it moral?

Of course, seeking protection of a sexual practice is ridiculous because sex is a natural gift and the author of nature has defined its process. Even if we pass laws stating that homosexuals have ‘rights’ to have sex with one another and then redefine *marriage* to include their views, what about pedophilia or bestiality? These are also sexual practices. Should they, too, be protected by law? If homosexuality is protected legally, why not those as well?

### **Biblical Doctrines and Same Sex Orientation**

We are making reference to the biblical precepts in this grave moral problem because the Bible is one of the major sources of morality since it contains teachings accepted to be Divine, on matters of morality. The act of homosexuality and lesbianism recorded in the Scripture took place in Sodom (Genesis 19: 1-25). The sin of Sodom that brought about the destruction of the city was among other things homosexuality (Mohler, 1998, p. 103). From what is recorded in Genesis 19:1-25 about the inhabitants of the city of Sodom, it is clear that homosexuality is immoral. It is an offense not only against the human race but against God. Lot (in that same Gen. 19) described it as a wicked act, and obviously it is a sin intolerable by God. Hence, God exterminated the adults, youths, children, infants, and newborns in the city of Sodom because of homosexual act. If God, who is all wisdom and merciful could go to the extent of whipping away a nation because of homosexual acts; it then suggests that such act is totally bad and immoral. As a matter of fact, engaging oneself in it is by implication bringing destruction upon oneself as did the city of Sodom who are the prototype of the act.

According to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church:

Homosexuality has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of great depravity (Gen. 19:1-29; Rm. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:10), tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstance can they be approved. (CCC 2357)

The church thus sees the homosexual act itself as something intrinsically evil. Intrinsic evil acts, according to St Thomas Aquinas, are actions that are in themselves ordered to be evil, actions that are naturally evil. Intrinsic evil act defies a relation to what is believed to be the goal of human fulfillment (happiness – beatific vision). They are actions that directly oppose or contradict the attainment of human fulfillment.

The Bible, as the indubitable word of God, reveals God’s moral character, and it shapes the morality of the Christians. In several places in the Bible homosexual acts were presented as something absurd and abominable:

*You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination (Lev. 18:22).*

*If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them (Lev. 20:13).*

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexual, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).*

*For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchange the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the women and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do these things which are not proper (Rm. 1:26-28).*

From the foregoing it is categorical that homosexuality is not something natural – it is not intended by God. It is more of an intentional deviation from reason (*contra rationis*) and from divine ordination through the human will, and from this point of view, homosexuality is a sin. But unlike other sins, this sexual sin has a judgment administered by God Himself (upon those who freely choose to indulge in it): He gives them over to their passions (Rm. 1:26-28). This, according to Mohler (1998, p. 115), means that their hearts are allowed to be hardened by their sins. As a result, they can no longer see the error of what they are doing. Without an awareness of their sinfulness, there will be no repentance. Without repentance, there will be no forgiveness. Without forgiveness, there is no salvation. This view is emphasized by Ejikeme (2007) when he observes that in as much as forgiveness is unconditional, people ought to make effort to create an enabling environment that fosters forgiveness (Ejikeme, 2007, p. 17).

Our present generation relinquishes morality to the relativistic whims of society, therefore, stating that homosexuals should not marry is becoming unpopular. Should a woman be allowed to marry another woman? Should a man be allowed to marry another man? The Bible, of course, condemns homosexuality (as we have seen). It takes no leap of logic to discern that homosexual marriage is also condemned. For God created us in His image “male and female” (Gen. 1:21), and He instituted marriage, declaring that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It is unfortunate that the world does not rely on the Bible for its moral truth. Instead, it relies on humanistic and relativistic morals upon which it builds its ethical structure. Nevertheless, the truth of the first principles of the natural law remains. It does not depend on acceptance or rejection of any society.

### **Homosexual Marriage and the Natural Law**

The American Psychological Association and National Association of Social Workers stated in an *amicus* brief presented to the Supreme Court of the state of California that:

Gay men and lesbians form stable, committed relationships that are equivalent to heterosexual relationships in essential respects. The institution of marriage offers social, psychological, and health benefits that are denied to same-sex couples. By denying same-sex couples the right to marry, the state reinforces and perpetuates the stigma historically associated with homosexuality. Homosexuality remains stigmatized, and this stigma has negative consequences. California's prohibition on marriage for same-sex couples reflects and reinforces this stigma. (cited in Taylor, 1999, pp. 67-68)

This, no doubt is a determined call for gay marriage. It compares the gay unions with heterosexual couples and maintains that they must be offered equal legal rights. Thus, they concluded, "There is no scientific basis for distinguishing between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples with respect to the legal rights, obligations, benefits, and burdens conferred by civil marriage." (Taylor, 1999, p. 71). Indeed our world may put up logical arguments to back up their passion but they cannot do away with the first principles of natural law. Aquinas maintains that the first principle of natural law is "do good, avoid evil". According to him, that is a self-evident principle and obvious to all; if we want to be moral we should do good and avoid evil. The question is, of course, what is good and what is evil and how do we come to know which is which? For Aquinas, reason should be our guide to morality. Men may act against these precepts out of passion or because ignorance of some fact operative in a situation, but all would agree that such principles are moral truths. Drawing from the Aquinas that "one should act rationally" it follows that any advocacy for marriage between two people of the same sex is irrational in the first place. Indeed, one could formulate the first principle of natural law not only in the most basic formula "do good, avoid evil". In Thomistic terms, several formulae serve to express the same truth: for Aquinas, the following phrases are synonymous: "act in accord with nature"; "act in accord with reason" or "act rationally"; "act in accord with virtue"; "act in accord with the dignity of the human person"; "act in accord with a well formed conscience"; indeed, "act in a loving way", properly understood, serves as well (Taylor, 1999, p. 37).

First we must try to get as clear as we can what it means to say "act in accord with reason" or "act rationally". The etymology of the word "rational" is rooted in the Latin word "*ratio*" which means "measure" or "proportion". One is being rational when one's thought and action are measured to, are proportionate with, or when one's thought and action *correspond* with reality. The thought that leads to acting in accord with reality is thus called rational (Smith, 2002, p. 13). Indeed, natural law holds that the natural instincts of natural things are good; they lead them to do what helps those things function well and helps them survive. Since natural things have an order there is said to be a *ratio* or order to them; not one of which they are conscious but one that is written into their functioning. Natural laws are laws natural to man - whereby each one knows, and is conscious of, what is good and what is evil (Aquinas, q.91, a2). Man differs from other creatures in that he has will; that is, he can either cooperate with his nature or act against his nature, whereas other natural things have no such freedom. What enables man to be free is his reason, his rationality; he is able to weigh and measure different courses of action and to determine which actions are good or bad. According to natural law, *those actions are good which accord with his nature and with the nature of other things*. Since man is by nature a rational animal, it is good for him to act in accord with his reason. By acting rationally he is acting in accord with his own nature and with a reality that is also ordered.

So, as regards to homosexual behavior, what qualifies as acting in accord with nature or with reason? How do we determine what it is? Now, for Aquinas, these are not difficult questions, though, apparently, they are extremely difficult questions for modern times. We are terribly confused about what proper sexual behavior is. For, it is no longer a hidden phenomenon that in our female hostels, our female students pair up to defile nature itself in their urge to express their sexual feelings through lesbianism. This too is more rampant in our male hostels in the campuses. Most of the codes in our Universities today, simply try to prohibit students from proceeding to the next level of sexual activity, whether homosexual or otherwise, without obtaining the permission of the other individual or partner. These codes reflect what has been the principle governing sexual behavior in modern times — whatever one feels comfortable with and whatever one agrees to, is morally acceptable. As long as it feels good, and they have consented to it, there is no reason for them not to do it. That itself is the height of irrationality. Today our students suffer AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea and other sexual diseases with reckless abandon.

Is this working; is this principle leading to moral health or moral sickness? What can we say about the moral sexual well-being of our society? Are there any hints here that we are violating nature, acting irrationally,

failing to live in accord with reality? Natural law ethics acknowledges that living in accord with reality and nature limits our choices and our actions, but it holds that it limits them in a way that promotes our human good. Meanwhile, **Homosexuals** argue that homosexuality is natural, since it occurs in the animal world. It is true that this behavior occurs occasionally in the animal kingdom, but it is certainly not the norm (Smith, 2002, p. 29). It is also true that we see animals eating their prey alive and even their own young. We see savagery, cruelty, and extreme brutality in animals. Yet we do not condone such behavior in human society. We are not animals. Animals are not endowed with reason – they have not participated in intelligence from God, their creator, since God has not created them in His own image and likeness. To argue, therefore, for the support of homosexual practice by reference to animal behavior, is to reduce the human person to brute animals, and this is unacceptable. And not even legal promulgation will make it right. According to Boswell (1980, p. 17) the political research for promoting the homosexual agenda is to take *tolerance* to its most extreme limit. This excess of tolerance that even admits what is opposite to Natural law will, according to her, leave democracy itself open to its own destruction. For her, liberty for homosexuality and the admission of ‘rights’ for it is a violent offense against Natural Law and against anyone who follows this law. In the end, tolerance for homosexuality leaves the human society seriously vulnerable. She concludes:

We believe that the real reason for promoting homosexuality is to accomplish the revolutionary aim of establishing anti-natural order. An order that attacks Natural law indirectly attacks God whose will is expressed in nature. One sees that the assault against God...ultimately can only please the greatest adversary of God, Satan. (1980, p. 24)

According to Pope John Paul II (cited in Taylor, J. 1999, p. 39) marriage is a faithful, exclusive and lifelong *union* between one man and one woman, joined as husband and wife in an intimate partnership of life and love. In his view, homosexual unions, because they do not express full human complementarity, and because they are inherently none procreative, cannot be given the status of marriage. So, there seems to be a contradiction in term in the conception of gay marriage because it misses the point of essential role of marriage, paramount among which are procreation and raising of children. Therefore, the denial of the social and legal status of marriage to forms of cohabitation that are not and cannot be marital is not opposed to justice; on the contrary, justice requires it (Taylor, J. 1999, p. 44). John Paul II reaffirms that marriage between a man and a woman is a fundamental part of human reality and the basic unit of society. According to him, no other form of relationship between persons can be considered as an equivalent to this natural relationship between a man and a woman out of whose love children are born.

### **Homosexual Practice and Kant’s Categorical Imperative**

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that moral requirements are based on a standard of rationality he termed categorical imperative. Immorality thus involves a violation of the categorical imperative and is thereby irrational. This fundamental principle of morality, the categorical imperative, is none other than the law of an autonomous will. Thus at the heart of Kant’s moral philosophy is a conception of reason whose reach in practical affairs goes well beyond that of a David Hume’s ‘slave’ to the passions (Feldman, 2003, pp. 17-19). It is an imperative because it is a command. It is categorical in virtue of applying to us unconditionally. More precisely, it commands us to exercise our wills in a particular way, not to perform some actions or others. In formulating the formula of the universal law of nature, Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative states that *you are to act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law* (O’Neill, 1989, p. 119).

We can take this effect to summarize a decision procedure for moral reasoning:

- First, formulate a maxim that enshrines your reason for acting as you propose.
- Second, recast that maxim as a universal law of nature governing all rational agents, and so as holding that all must, by natural law, act as you yourself propose to act in these circumstances.
- Third, consider whether your maxim is even conceivable in a world governed by this law of nature. If it is, then, proceed to the next procedure.
- Fourth, ask yourself whether you would, or could, rationally *will* to act on your maxim in such a world. If you could, then your action is morally permissible, otherwise, you have a perfect duty to refrain from acting on it because such an act is immoral.

In the face of this fundamental moral principle, it is clear that homosexual practice is NOT a morally permissible act. This is because a decision to indulge in it ultimately fails the second, the third, and the fourth tests. More precisely, the decision to have homosexual intercourse cannot be universalized. No man could *will* that all human beings should become homosexuals because if all were to be homosexuals, then, humanity is doomed to extinction. This again is against the will of the creator of humanity who have said: increase and multiply. Strictly speaking drawing from Kant’s moral principles homosexual acts are immoral and irrational acts that debases humanity.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Homosexuality, as we have observed, is the erotic response to, and the sexual desire of members of one's own sex. Homosexual was considered a mental disorder, and listed as such in psychology journals, until it was removed in 1973 (Field, 2003, p. 88). Nevertheless, it is still believed till date that homosexuality is not only a mental disorder, but a tool of Satan. It is a tool of Satan because it is in opposition to the divine injunction to increase and multiply as much as it is a reversal of the natural order of things (Seligman & Rosenhan, 1998, p. 11).

Humanity cannot go against Natural order without paying dearly for it, hence gays are victims of discrimination, images of brutality, tales of job loss and family separation. Homosexuals might claim the moral right to have sex with anyone they want or have the 'right' to marry a person of the same-sex, but on what are their morals and rights based? If they reply that society and personal preferences determine morality, as they often claim (Boswell, 1980), their logic is not sound enough. First, what would they do if society said that homosexuality is morally wrong and homosexuals should be isolated from everyone else? Logically, it would mean that homosexuals would have to agree with such isolation. Secondly, if a society determines what is right morally, then why did the homosexuals work against society to get the moral standards changed to agree with their moral preference? Thirdly, if a society determines what is right and wrong, then can they legitimately complain against the Nazi society (Boswell, 1980) that murdered Jews in World War II? Finally, if morality is based on personal preference, then, what do you do when the preferences of one person contradicts the preferences of another in moral issues? And in this case, whose morality is right?

These questions and others like them are largely ignored by the homosexual crowd. Instead, they focus on other things. The homosexuals do not have much to stand on when it comes to promoting their practice based on moral issues. Their argument on the right to exercise their God-given freedom is very deceptive and poor. Freedom or freewill is not absolute and it must be directed by reason. Reason itself is what marks the difference between man and animal. If we act without reason, we reduce humanity to mere animal. On the issue of gay marriage, should homosexuals be granted the Holy Matrimony as heterosexual couples are? In his protest against what he considers unjust treatment to the homosexuals and lesbians, Taylor (1999) alleged:

Denying the marriage of two people in love by the standard of our society, is wrong. It is denying one the right to the pursuit of happiness. It is denying them the stability of married life, the benefit of being able to oversee the illness of the partner, the benefit of simply loving someone that much, that you are willing to make a life-long commitment such as marriage. (p. 92)

Now it should be clear that the primary purpose of *sexuality* is procreation – resulting from a deep and intimate expression of love. Meanwhile, homosexuality ultimately is not ordered to this end. It can neither achieve nor even intend procreation. For this reason, gay must be conceived as something unnatural since the end does not produce children as it can in heterosexual relationship. The homosexual person wants the legal right for adoption of children. But what if everyone else will to be a homosexual, from whom are we going to adopt? This mere fact suggests that the end of homosexuality is the extinction of the human race as it does not encourage human flourishing in the least, contrary to the principles of Natural law. This is why we said that the act fails the Kantian *universality* principle, meaning that the arrival to that decision is irrational in the first place and it is immoral. Finally, as free agents our freedom should lead us to act in accord with our nature and not the contrary. Human or societal approval of an act does not make that same act morally right and as moral agents created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) we have the primary responsibility to act in accordance with our nature.

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