

Possible Echoes and Reverberations

Paul's Disapproval of Homoeroticism in Context: Romans 1:26-27

by

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Abstract:

A heated contemporary debate interminably swirls around two verses (1:26-27) in Paul's letter to the Romans. This debate is about whether or not Paul is condemning what we understand today as homosexuality. In order to enter into this debate, one must first endeavour to understand Paul's words within their original context.

By using the historical-critical method, this study attempts to capture the (plain) sense of the verses in question within their original context. First, the paper explores and critically analyzes a wide range of sources that reveal the attitudes toward same-sex relations in both the ancient Greco-Roman tradition and the Jewish tradition. Both these cultures had a strong influence and Paul's choice of words and thought patterns. Next, the investigation moves forward to analyze aspects of Romans 1:26-27 and the larger context in which this passage is contained.

The following thesis is put forth: although Romans 1:26-27 appropriates the conventional language of the Greco-Roman tradition, especially in its reference to "nature" (*physis*), Paul's opposition to homoeroticism is informed by a Hellenistic-Jewish worldview that is influenced by the priestly texts of the Torah and Greco-Roman philosophy. Together, these influences propel Paul to condemn all homoerotic acts because they run counter to God's intended order for humankind.

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Introduction

The Issue:

Nearly two thousand years ago Paul of Tarsus wrote, in his letter to the Romans, the following verses that have become the source of a heated contemporary debate:

As a result (of refusing to honor God) God has given them (the Gentiles) up to shameful passions. Among them women have exchanged natural intercourse (*ten physiken khresin*) for unnatural (*para physin*), and men too, giving up natural relations (*ten physiken khresin*) with women, burn with lust for one another; males behave indecently with males, and are paid in their own persons the fitting wage of such perversion (Romans 1:26-27).¹

This debate is about whether or not Paul is condemning what we understand today as homosexuality. In order to enter into this debate, one is first obligated to attempt to understand Paul's words within their original context. What is Paul saying? Why is he saying it? How is he saying it? To whom is he saying it? It is only after the difficult process of placing Paul's words and ideas within their original context that one can cautiously suggest what Paul means and how the passage might apply to contemporary Christian ethics and morality.

Survey of Literature on the Topic²:

In contemporary times, the topic of homosexuality in the Christian tradition first becomes an issue with Derrick Sherwin Bailey and his book, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*.³ First, in his introduction, Bailey is astute in recognizing

¹ The translation of the Bible cited here and elsewhere is that of M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller (eds.), *The Oxford Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

² This is not an exhaustive list, but it does give a reasonable sampling of a range of arguments on the topic.

³ Cf. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955).

the problem of terminology. He correctly asserts that the Bible and the Christian tradition know nothing of homosexuality; rather both are concerned with the *act* of same-sex relations.⁴ As a result, Bailey uses the term “homosexual practices” to distinguish between “condition” (homosexuality) and “conduct” (homosexual practices).⁵ This is a helpful distinction. However, despite his point that the contemporary notion of homosexuality is unknown to the ancients, he insists on using the term (“homosexual”) anyway. This is a mistake, as it does not make a clear enough distinction between same-sex acts and same-sex orientation. The use of the contemporary term homosexuality implies an orientation toward the same sex, and its use is therefore anachronistic.

Second, another problem with Bailey’s work is that he literally ignores the influence of Greco-Roman moralists on Paul’s view toward same-sex relations. He believes that Paul’s Jewish background is his primary influence, namely the prohibitions in Leviticus. Bailey’s lack of attention to same-sex relations in the Greco-Roman world and the influence of this background on Paul is a major deficiency in his study.

The next significant study to emerge on the topic is John Boswell’s book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*.⁶ Boswell’s influential interpretation of Rom 1:26-27 is flawed in many respects. First he suggests that the real purpose of Paul’s reference to same-sex relations “is not to stigmatize sexual behavior of any sort but to condemn the Gentiles for their general infidelity.”⁷ He believes that “the reference to homosexuality is simply a mundane analogy to this theological sin; it is patently not the crux of this argument. Once the point has been made, the subject of homosexuality is quickly dropped and the major argument resumed.”⁸ This is not a revelation. Most modern commentators agree that the general purpose of the larger

⁴ Ibid. p. x.

⁵ Ibid. p. x.

⁶ Cf. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 107-113.

⁷ Ibid. p. 108.

passage is to illustrate that the wrath of God is being manifested against all humanity who do not acknowledge and honor God.⁹ Though Romans 1 is not a general discussion about sexual morality, this does not mean that all ethical standards are disregarded (cf. Rom 6:1-23) as Boswell implies. Rom 1:26-27 is a *vivid image* of the disorder and immorality that occurs when humanity turns away from God. It is not merely a fortuitous image.

Second, Boswell makes the provocative claim that “the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual: what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.”¹⁰ In other words, Paul says nothing in Romans 1:26-27 about people who are “naturally” oriented toward the same-sex. First, if Paul understands what a heterosexual is, as Boswell implies, why would he not be able to comprehend what it meant to be homosexual? The discussion of sexual orientation in regard to this passage is anachronistic. The idea that some people are innately oriented toward the same-sex is a modern idea of which there is little trace in the ancient world.

Lastly, Boswell argues that there is “no clear condemnation of homosexual acts in the verses in question.”¹¹ First, he argues that the concept of “natural law” was not fully developed during Paul’s day. For Paul, “nature” was not a “universal law or truth”, but rather, “the *personal* nature of the pagans in question.”¹² Moreover, Boswell argues that *para physin* normally means not “contrary to nature” but “more than” or “in excess of.”¹³ For Boswell, then, Paul’s reference to sexual relations as *para physin* describes not immoral behavior, but more accurately behavior that is “unexpected, unusual, or different from what would occur in the normal order of things.”¹⁴ Here, Boswell underestimates the importance of the Greco-Roman, specifically Stoic, background of Paul’s use of “nature” (*physis*). In his interpretation of *physis*, Boswell makes no reference to its

⁸ Ibid. pp. 108-109.

⁹ For example, cf. Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980) pp. 36-52.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 109.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 110.

¹² Ibid. pp. 110-111.

¹³ Ibid. p. 111.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 112.

typical Stoic connotations, as modified by Jewish monotheism, where the term is often associated with a universal norm.

Robin Scroggs' book, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, is a solid resource on the issue of same-sex relations in the New Testament.¹⁵ In particular, Scroggs does a good job of exploring both the Greco-Roman and Jewish attitudes toward same-sex love.¹⁶ For this reason, Scroggs is able to acknowledge that Paul condemns same-sex relations in Romans 1:26-27.¹⁷ Furthermore, he recognizes the clear echoes of Greco-Roman and Jewish ideas in the verses under examination. However, his analysis is misguided in certain respects. He argues that the use of the argument from "nature" is a common phrase used to attack *only* pederasty. Also, he proceeds to say that this argument "has nothing to do with any theories of natural law or with interpretation of the Genesis stories of creation."¹⁸ These statements do not do justice to the context of Romans 1:18-32. First, there is no direct indication in the text that Paul is talking only about pederasty.¹⁹ In Paul's condemnation, there are no distinctions made for status, age, or anything else (cf. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). In any event, ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish moralists oftentimes use the argument from nature to condemn *both* pederasty and same-sex relations in general. Second, Scroggs, somewhat surprisingly, fails to see the subtle allusions in Romans to the creation story in Genesis 1-2. Same-sex relations are a vivid image of human beings' rebellion against the Creator and His creative design.

Next, Richard B. Hays' essay, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1", must be mentioned as it provides an effective refutation of Boswell's main points.²⁰ Notwithstanding his learned response to Boswell,

¹⁵ Cf. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 17-98.

¹⁷ Cf. ibid. p. 109f.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 114-115.

¹⁹ Cf. ibid. p. 116, where Scroggs quite surprisingly says, "Paul is thinking only about pederasty, just as was Philo. There was no other form of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world which could come to mind." Scroggs needs to re-evaluate the Greco-Roman background.

²⁰ Cf. Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1" in *Religious Ethics* (1986), pp. 184-215.

there are some subtle problems with Hays' work. First, he mistakenly equates "homosexual" with *para physin*: "the opposition between 'natural' and 'unnatural' is very frequently used (in the absence of convenient Greek words for "heterosexual" and "homosexual") as a way of distinguishing between homosexual and heterosexual behavior."²¹ This is not a helpful distinction. To think of homosexuality when approaching the ancient texts is an anachronism. Moreover, when *para physin* is used in the ancient sources it does not always refer to same-sex relations in general (for example, there is a distinct difference between pederasty and other forms of same-sex love). Also, Hays says nothing of Greco-Roman or Hellenistic-Jewish thinkers' concept of nature as gendered or of their call for sexual distinctions based on male superiority. Therefore, Hays' categories confuse the issue of arriving at an accurate interpretation.

Second, Hays is correct when he points out that Paul ultimately identifies "nature" with the created order. However, his statement that "the understanding of 'nature' ... does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exists"²² seems to be slightly off the mark and downplays the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy on Paul. Though Paul's use of *physin* does "[appeal] to an intuitive conception of what ought to be, of the world as designed by God",²³ Paul suggests that God's creative design is "*visible* to the eye of reason, *in the things he has made*" (Rom 1:20, emphasis added). Hays appears to miss the subtle synthesis of Greek and Jewish ideas working together in Romans 1. Like other Hellenistic Jewish thinkers, Paul does integrate the philosophical category of "nature" into his thinking by identifying it with the Jewish Law and God's creative design. However, this does not mean that the original Greco-Roman connotations become completely lost, as Hays seems to imply.

Bernadette Brooten's book, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, provides a detailed and thorough look at Romans 1:18-32.²⁴ She

²¹ Ibid. p. 192.

²² Ibid. p. 194.

²³ Ibid. p. 194.

²⁴ Cf. Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

argues that "Paul condemns sexual relations between women as 'unnatural' because he shares the widely-held cultural view that women are passive by nature and therefore should remain passive in sexual relations."²⁵ This is a valid interpretation of Romans 1:26 and can be supported by a plethora of evidence in both Greco-Roman and Jewish sources. On the other hand, though it may certainly be an underlying concern, there is no strong sense from the passage nor the larger context of Rom 1:18-32 that a transgression of gender roles is Paul's *primary* concern. The primary concern, I believe, is the disordering of God's creative design, which aligns the male and female genders as complementary to one another.

In his book, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, Martti Nissinen puts forth a similar argument to Brooten's in regard to gender roles.²⁶ And, although in general he makes good points about Rom 1:26-27²⁷, his argument that Paul "considers homoeroticism to involve lustful sexual acts and unchaste sexual behavior, in which men's and women's natural roles are confused"²⁸ is limiting. Again, given his cultural context, Paul is likely concerned with gender roles. Moreover, like Greco-Roman moralists, he does associate same-sex relations with excessive lust. This leads Nissinen to assert that Paul does not speak of gender identity, nor does he refer to same-sex relationships based on a genuine desire and mutual love. Nissinen implies that Paul's condemnation is specific to certain types of homoerotic relationships. Nevertheless, the context of Rom 1:18-32 suggests that Paul is more concerned with the disordering of God's intended order, namely the coupling of male and female. This is illustrated in males and females moving away from complementary relationships with one another and lusting after the same-sex (Rom 1:26-27). In other words, Paul's condemnation of same-sex relations is more absolute than Nissinen is willing to believe. The transgression of gender roles in this context is a secondary consideration.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 216.

²⁶ Cf. Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

²⁷ Cf. ibid. p. 112-113. The first three points of Nissinen's summary of Paul's criticism of homoeroticism in Romans 1 are solid.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 113.

Lastly, Robert Gagnon's book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, offers a very thorough analysis of the biblical texts relating to same-sex relations.²⁹ His solid and clear argument establishes that the Bible contains a unanimous view condemning same-sex intercourse as a sin. According to Gagnon, "Scripture rejects homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation."³⁰ He goes on to assert that "God intended the very act of sexual intercourse to be an act of pluralism, embracing a sexual 'other' rather than a sexual 'same.' The biblical proscription of same-sex intercourse...is absolute, pervasive, and severe."³¹ Moreover, Gagnon concludes, "same-sex intercourse represents a suppression of the visible evidence in nature regarding male-female anatomical and procreative complementarity."³²

I agree with Gagnon's main argument. Paul rejects all forms of same-sex relationships. Such relationships disorder God's creative design, which shows males and females to be complementary to one another, and therefore they are unnatural or contrary to God's intended order. This is Paul's *primary* reason for condemning same-sex relations. The larger context of Romans 1:18-32 and Paul's ideas elsewhere in his letters support this interpretation of Rom 1:26-27. Where I depart with Gagnon is in his disregard for other arguments. I do not believe that Paul is condemning same-sex relations for only one reason, no matter how primary that reason may be for Paul. In other words, Paul was a product of his cultural milieu, and, therefore, he opposes same-sex love for a variety of different reasons that echo both Greco-Roman and Jewish sources. Romans 1:18-32 presents a complex synthesis of ideas and attitudes toward same-sex relations that cannot be simply reduced to one interpretation. Moreover, though I agree with his analysis of Paul's main argument, I take issue with Gagnon's unwillingness to question the relevance of Paul's underlying assumption about "nature," especially in light of contemporary conceptions of homosexuality and "nature."

²⁹ Cf. Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

³⁰ Ibid. p. 487.

³¹ Ibid. p. 487-488.

Terminology:

(a) Homoeroticism versus homosexuality

“Homosexuality” is a modern term.³³ Today, homosexuality is generally understood to mean an orientation or particular disposition toward the same sex. In direct contrast, heterosexuality is an orientation toward the opposite sex. Furthermore, it is assumed that homosexual relationships are comprised of the same sort of mutuality and constancy that characterize the average heterosexual relationship. Nonetheless, as I hope will become clear, the ancients’ attitudes are based on a different set of assumptions and ideas about sexuality and gender.

In order to avoid anachronisms and to be as objective as possible, I shall refrain from using the modern terms of homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality that describe contemporary sexual relations between individuals. Instead, I shall use the terms homoeroticism³⁴ and heteroeroticism. Homoeroticism will refer to the active or passive participation of males or females in same-sex acts. Heteroeroticism will refer to sexual acts between a male and a female. I shall use these terms to characterize a sexual *act*, but *not* to label a particular individual’s orientation or disposition. In other words, these terms do not presuppose that the ancients understood sexual relations as an orientation toward either the same-sex or the opposite sex.³⁵ In fact, as I hope will become clear in the following pages, there is little trace in the ancient sources below of a clear awareness of the modern notion of sexual orientation.

³² Ibid. p. 488.

³³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Charles Gilbert Chaddock with having introduced “homosexuality” into the English language in 1892. The term “heterosexuality” came into being eight years later. Cf. David M. Halperin, “One Hundred Years of Homosexuality” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 15-18.

³⁴ I am indebted to Martti Nissinen for this particular term and its definition, cf. *Homoeroticism* pp. 16-17.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 24, 29. David Halperin is correct in his observation that “no category of homosexuality, defined in such a way as to contain men and women alike, is indigenous to the ancient world.” As a result, he suggests that “instead of attempting to trace the history of ‘homosexuality’ as if it were a thing...we

(b) *Physis* ("nature")

John J. Winkler in his essay, "Unnatural Acts: Erotic Protocols in Artemidoros' *Dream Analysis*",³⁶ highlights some important points about the meaning of "nature" (*physis*) or "natural" in the ancient world. Winkler argues that conceptions of what is "natural" are socially produced:

Indeed what "natural" means in many such contexts is precisely "conventional and proper." The word "unnatural" in contexts of human behavior quite regularly means "seriously unconventional" and is used like a Thin Ice sign to mark off territory where it is dangerous to venture. Such warnings may be couched in absolute terms, but all such claims have been eroded by time: like the geological changes over millennia in the earth's surface the moral land-masses and "natural" boundaries can be shown to have undergone radical shifts.³⁷

Through various examples, Winkler is able to show that the notion of nature is contingent in the ancient world and one must be careful not to always view "according to nature" (*Kata physin*) as equivalent to a universal norm or as an absolute. This is an important point to keep in mind. Nevertheless, Winkler overstates his case and therefore he is misleading, as one of the uses of "nature" in the ancient world is the regular (or natural) order of things. In this case, *para physin* can be taken to refer to outside the order of the cosmos or as I will argue in Paul's case, outside the order of God's creative design. In the case of Scripture, Winkler's argument that nature is an "absolute" boundary that will erode over time is a daring and arguable claim. The bottom line here is that one must be careful not to impose an agenda on the term "nature" and try to discover the plain sense of its various meanings within their original context.

might more profitably analyze how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts has been variously constructed over time by members of human living-groups..."

³⁶ John J. Winkler, "Unnatural Act: Erotic Protocols in Artemidoros' *Dream Analysis*," in *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 17-44.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 17.

Methodology:

This study will employ the historical-critical method. A *complete* treatment of the topic using the historical critical method is still lacking, especially in regard to its Greco-Roman background. I realize that other methods would also prove fruitful, especially for such a contentious and controversial topic. However, I am using this more conventional method because I do not feel that it has been utilized to its full potential. Using this method, I hope to produce a result that does justice to the (plain) sense of the text in question.

To begin the process, this paper will explore and critically investigate a wide range of sources that reveal the attitudes toward same-sex relations in both the ancient Greco-Roman tradition and the Jewish tradition. Both these cultures had a strong influence on Paul's words and thought patterns. Next, the investigation will move forward to analyze aspects of Romans 1:26-27 and the larger context in which this passage is situated.

Proposal:

I shall argue the following thesis: although Romans 1:26-27 appropriates the conventional language of the Greco-Roman tradition, especially in its reference to "nature" (*physis*), Paul's opposition to homoeroticism is informed by a Hellenistic-Jewish world view that is influenced by the priestly texts of the Torah and Greco-Roman philosophy. Together, these influences propel Paul to condemn *all* homoerotic acts because they run counter to God's creative design.

Male Homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman Tradition¹

To begin, it is important to understand that upper-class males are responsible for most of the sources. So what we learn about homoeroticism, women and the lower classes comes from the perspectives and prejudices of this privileged group. The fact that we do not usually hear directly from women tells us something about Greco-Roman society. Greco-Roman society was, in most respects, a male-oriented and male-dominated society. The men who were responsible for constructing cultural perceptions viewed the male as physically and mentally superior to the female. Men occupied the public realm and women tended the private or domestic realm. As a result, there was very little interaction between males and females on a day-to-day basis. Men went to school together, worked together, and socialized together, while women looked after families and the home front. It is not surprising that this social arrangement spilled over to the sphere of sexual relationships.² Since males were thought to be superior beings, some men held that a relationship between two males was the most sublime. This idea manifested itself in the institution of pederasty.

The origins of pederasty are not entirely clear. The rationale for this institution appears to lie in its educational function for aristocratic boys making the transition to adulthood.³ In order to make a smooth transition to manhood, a boy submitted to an intellectual and oftentimes erotic relationship with a mature man. This was a hierarchical relationship where the boy or the beloved played the passive mental and/or sexual role (*eromenos*) and the man played the role of active educator and lover of the boy (*erastes*). After submitting to such a relationship and upon reaching a certain age, a young man was

¹ The following section looks mainly at sources that deal with the concept *physis* or contribute to that notion in relation to homoeroticism. Moreover, most of the primary sources are written by philosophers and upper class folk. Consequently, this section is not making a claim to completeness. Nevertheless, it will provide the information necessary to better understand Paul's words in Rom. 1:26-27.

² Cf. Halperin, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality," p. 29f.; Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, pp. 22-24.

³ Cf. Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 1-8.

expected to move from the passive to the active role, which included the role of husband with a woman and that of the active lover of boys.⁴

The Greek institution of pederasty was regarded by some Greeks as not only socially acceptable, but also highly noble. Nevertheless, certain expectations surrounded the institution and many Greeks were concerned about any deviation from these expectations. Realizing that it was often impossible to live up to the ideal, some observers feared the social consequences of an institutionalized form of homoeroticism. Some even went so far as to argue that homoeroticism in general was “unnatural” (*para physin*). Such a sexual relationship involved an excess of passion and desire, inevitably led to a man taking on the socially unacceptable passive role, was unable to produce children, and deviated from the anatomically complementary pairing of male and female. Notwithstanding these detractors, in general a number of Greeks appear to have accepted, or at least acknowledged homoerotic relationships, as long as these relationships did not disrupt conventional gender roles and the social hierarchy. As we shall see, however, the evidence suggests that the ideal was rarely attained and the conventional gender roles and the social hierarchy were inevitably disordered. As a result, the majority of our sources attack pederasty and homoeroticism, as they see it as a social blight.

A Citizen's Voice: Ancient Athenian Views on Homoeroticism:

In around 345 BCE, Demosthenes, supported by Timarchus, both prominent Athenian politicians, brought a formal charge of treason against Aeschines for his part in a peace process with Philip of Macedon. As a counter measure, intended to delay the upcoming trial, to prejudice the case of the prosecution, and to rid himself of one of his prosecutors, Aeschines brought a charge against Timarchus, declaring that he had lived an “immoral” life, which by law should forever exclude him from the Athenian Assembly. Aeschines won his case.

⁴ Cf. Ibid. pp. 6-8; Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, pp. 17-43.

Against Timarchus (345 BCE) is the written manifestation of Aeschines' main argument against Timarchus. Its value to the discussion of homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman world is significant. It is entirely devoted to the subject of homoerotic practices and relationships and it enables one to view the sentiments about homoeroticism that some Athenians, namely male citizens, were willing to discuss publicly at this time.

What kind of "immoral" life had Timarchus lived? According to Aeschines, Timarchus' crime is that he "addresses the people, a man who made himself a prostitute and has consumed his patrimony."⁵ Although prostitution is accepted and recognized in ancient Athens⁶, it is a dubious profession reserved for non-Athenian citizens, slaves, and women. If an Athenian does not wish to be ostracized from the Athenian Assembly and lose his right to speak publicly, he is wise not to be caught in the act of prostitution. By allegedly making himself a prostitute, Timarchus is flouting his conventional gender and social role, which implies that a man of a certain age and social status ought to assume the active role in any sexual relationship and ought *not* to sell his body for a price.

The law harshly penalizes any citizen who, upon reaching the "years of discretion, when he was already a youth, and knew the laws of the state,"⁷ gives over his body for a price.⁸ This type of man should not be permitted to speak publicly.⁹ Timarchus not only sells his body at an age when he should have known better, but also he continues to play the passive role in a homoerotic relationship. That Athenian citizens frowned upon this practice is implied in Aeschines' judgmental characterization of Timarchus' relationship with a man named Misgolas:

Misgolas, perceiving Timarchus' motive in staying at the house of the physician, paid him a sum of money in advance and caused him to change his lodgings, and got him into his own home; for Timarchus was well developed, young, and lewd, just the person for the thing that Misgolas *wanted to do*, and Timarchus *wanted to have done*. Timarchus

⁵ Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 154. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of C.D. Adams, *Speeches of Aeschines*, LCL (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁶ Cf. Ibid. 74, 119, 188.

⁷ Ibid. 39.

⁸ Ibid. 21.

⁹ Ibid. 21; 28-32; 40.

did not hesitate, but *submitted* to it all, though he had enough income to satisfy all reasonable desires.¹⁰ (Emphasis added)

Timarchus' primary offenses are that, as a free, male citizen, he sells his body and plays the passive sexual role in a relationship with another man beyond the suitable age, despite the fact that "he had enough income to satisfy all reasonable desires."¹¹ He has not only broken the law by publicly speaking as "a man who made himself a prostitute", but also he has transgressed social convention that reserves the passive sexual role for females, slaves, non-Athenian prostitutes and boys of an appropriate age.

Furthermore, Aeschines accuses Timarchus of possessing a lack of self-control. He has squandered the healthy inheritance his father had given him because of his inability to control his shameful passions:

He behaved as he did because he was a slave to the most shameful lusts, to gluttony and extravagance at (the) table, to flute-girls and harlots, to dice, and to all those other things no one of which ought to have mastery over a man who is well born and free.¹²

Existing near the upper echelon of the Athenian social hierarchy, a free, male citizen like Timarchus is expected to control his thirst for immorality.

Misgolas, the active lover "who had taken possession of him (Timarchus),"¹³ is also reproached by Aeschines for his lack of self-control:

And this wretch (Timarchus) was not ashamed to abandon his father's house and live with Misgolas, a man who was not a friend of his father's, nor a person of his own age, but a stranger,

¹⁰ Ibid. 41. Cf. also 109-111. Here Aeschines comments on Timarchus' relationship with Hegesandrus. It is once more suggested that Timarchus plays the inappropriate passive role in this relationship when a man at "a meeting of the assembly arose" and stated scornfully that Timarchus was "the woman" of Hegesandrus, "a man now, though he used to be a woman, Laodamas's woman."

¹¹ This could very well mean that, at least, he had the financial means to engage in an active sexual relationship with a "legitimate" prostitute, i.e., either a slave, female, or non-Athenian citizen. The implication is that, considering his financial situation, he certainly did not have to use his body for money.

¹² Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 42. Cf. also 75-76; 154.

¹³ Ibid. 43.

and older than himself, *a man who knew no restraint in such matters, while Timarchus himself was in the bloom of youth.*¹⁴ (Emphasis added)

Importantly, Aeschines is not admonishing Misgolas for *using* a prostitute or for playing the active role in a pederastic relationship, but rather for breaching the pederastic boundaries between “honourable” and “disreputable” love – a distinction that an upstanding male citizen ought to have been aware of.

Aeschines draws an important line between honourable love, the kind of love he¹⁵ and other virtuous men¹⁶ practice, and a more shameful love, the brand of love Timarchus and Misgolas practice.¹⁷ Honourable love includes a lover’s ability to choose “those who are beautiful and chaste.”¹⁸ Aeschines argues that a free man has the right to love a boy, as it actually helps to highlight a boy’s virtue:

The free man was not forbidden to love a boy, and associate with him, nor did the lawgiver think that harm came to the boy thereby, but rather that such a thing was a testimony to his chastity.¹⁹

Importantly, however, because young boys are still naïve as to what constitutes “a genuine friend”²⁰, the law limits the lover and “teaches the lover self-control, and makes him defer the words of friendship till the other is older and has reached the years of discretion.”²¹ Notwithstanding this qualification, Aeschines reinforces the idea that “to follow after the boy and to watch over him the lawgiver regarded as the best possible safeguard and protection for chastity.”²² This type of honourable love results in virtuous men and mutually satisfying relationships that the public could uphold as a positive model.²³

¹⁴ Ibid. 42-43.

¹⁵ Ibid. 135-136.

¹⁶ Ibid. 132-133; 155-157.

¹⁷ Ibid. 137.

¹⁸ Ibid. 137.

¹⁹ Ibid. 139.

²⁰ Ibid. 139.

²¹ Ibid. 139-140.

²² Ibid. 140.

²³ Cf., Ibid. 132-133; 140; 155-157.

In contrast, shameful love includes a man's willingness "to hire for money and to indulge in licentiousness."²⁴ As Aeschines argues, "he who has played the prostitute by inducement of wages is disgraced."²⁵ Also, a lover, like Misgolas, who fails to exhibit the self-control and chastity that "the law teaches"²⁶ while pursuing his beloved, is equally subject to punishment and scorn.²⁷ Both Misgolas, a free man who has hired a fellow Athenian as a prostitute, and Timarchus, an Athenian who has let himself out for hire, have allegedly gone beyond the parameters that encompass a citizen's right to express himself homoerotically. As a result, they are both "liable to the most severe penalties, and the same penalties for both offences."²⁸

In Athens at this time, citizens like Aeschines appear to have considered homoerotic relationships "legitimate" or "natural" if they adhered to specific guidelines outlined by law²⁹ and to conventional cultural expectations regarding appropriate gender roles. Any homoerotic relationship that contravened the law and societal convention was considered "immoral" and "unnatural" (*para physin*) and deserving of severe punishment.

Anticipating Paul's language in Romans 1:26-27, Aeschines labels Timarchus' sexual activities as "unnatural" (*para physin*). In contrast, a woman's lust for a man outside of her marriage is considered natural (*kata physin*):

Such, then, was the judgment (the judgment is on a woman committing adultery) of your fathers concerning things shameful and things honorable; and shall their sons let Timarchus go free, a man chargeable with the most shameful practices, a creature with the body of a man defiled with the sins of a woman? In that case, who of you will punish a woman if he finds her in wrong doing? Or what man will not be regarded as lacking intelligence who is angry with

²⁴ Ibid. 137.

²⁵ Ibid. 137.

²⁶ Ibid. 139.

²⁷ Ibid. 139-140. Cf. 42-43.

²⁸ Ibid. 72.

²⁹ That Athenians were concerned about the limits of homoerotic love and pederasty is seen in the laws Aeschines cites that limit a man's association with boys in the public and private realm. Cf. 11-12; 16; 21; 187. Also, cf. Plato, *The Laws* 7:823b-d.

her who errs by an impulse of nature (*kata physin*), while he treats as adviser the man who in despite of nature (*para physin*) has sinned against his own body?³⁰

Is Aeschines suggesting that homoeroticism is unnatural? Aeschines's comments about homoeroticism elsewhere and his willingness to discuss his, and others', homoerotic practices and experiences,³¹ suggest that what he deems unnatural is not pederasty, but rather the passive prostitute role that Timarchus assumes during his alleged homoerotic relations -- "a creature with the body of a man defiled with the sins of a woman."

Whereas, a woman who commits adultery, though deserving extreme censure, is acting "by an impulse of nature" (*kata physin*), as the assumption is that she is naturally and passively *submitting* herself to a man's will -- "for the woman who is *taken* in the act of adultery."³² More specifically, a woman is acting according to nature, if she assumes her gender role, the passive role, in a sexual relationship. On the other hand, a man, like Timarchus, is acting against nature, if, at a certain age, he is not assuming his gender role, the active role, in a sexual relationship. In this case, Aeschines does not appear to be speaking out against homoeroticism in general, but rather against the transgression, manifested in Timarchus's alleged willingness to assume the passive role of a woman during sex, of clearly defined gender roles for men.

In Aeschines's Athens men and women live within strict gender boundaries. If an individual dares to cross these boundaries, sexually or otherwise, he or she risks being publicly humiliated and condemned. For example (and again anticipating Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), during the trial, Aeschines rebukes Demosthenes for being effeminate and soft (*malakos*). Why? His clothing does not conform to what is considered socially appropriate for a man:

In the case of Demosthenes, too, it was common report, and not his nurse, that gave him his nickname; and well did common report name him Batalus, for his effeminacy and lewdness! For, Demosthenes, if anyone should strip off those exquisite mantles of yours, and the soft (*malakos*),

³⁰ *Against Timarchus*, 185-186.

³¹ Cf., *Ibid.* 138-139; 135-136; 132-133; 155-157. Interestingly, in section 138 Aeschines implies that the love of boys "flows from human nature (*physeos*)."

³² Cf., *Ibid.* 183.

pretty shirts that you wear while you are writing your speeches against your friends, and should pass them around among the jurors, I think, unless they were informed beforehand, they would be quite at a loss to say whether they had in their hands the clothing of a man or of a woman!³³

Demosthenes's clothing indicates that he is effeminate or soft and by implication that he is a man who inappropriately assumes female ways. In Aeschines's Athens there are distinct expectations for males and females regarding suitable appearance and sexual behavior. Before we move on, it is important to point out that the strictly defined social hierarchy and gender roles of Aeschines's Athens rest on a foundation of male superiority. It is within this context of male dominance that citizens, like Aeschines, share their viewpoints about same-sex relations.

A Philosopher's Voice: Platonic Views on Homoeroticism

The character of Pausanias, in Plato's *Symposium*, upholds a form of pederasty and distinguishes between a higher and lower kind of love.³⁴ Pausanias argues that the first type of Love is "Popular Love." This type of Love is an opportunist, striking whenever he has a chance. The vulgar man feels this Love:

(Men) who, in the first place, love women as well as boys; secondly, where they love, they are set on the body more than the soul; and thirdly, they choose the most witless people they can find, since they look merely to the accomplishment and care not if the manner be noble or not.³⁵

This mundane Love that moves the baser sort of men belongs to a much younger goddess (Popular Aphrodite), "who in her origin partakes of both female and male."³⁶

³³ Ibid. 131. Interestingly, Paul also, in a list of vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, uses the word *malakos* in a highly pejorative sense. In this passage it seems that Paul is referring to the "effeminate" passive male who consciously assumes feminine ways or roles and who wavers between passive homoeroticism for pleasure and that for pay. Cf., Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* p. 106 (cf., pp. 101-109 for the full discussion on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

³⁴ Plato, *Symposium* 180c forward. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of W. R. M. Lamb, *Symposium*, LCL (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1975).

³⁵ Ibid. 181b.

³⁶ Ibid. 181b-c.

In contrast, “Heavenly Love” belongs to a much older and more virtuous goddess (Heavenly Aphrodite). First, this goddess “partakes not of the female but only of the male”; and second, “is the elder, untinged with wantonness: wherefore those who are inspired by this Love betake them to the male, in fondness for what has the robuster nature and a larger share of mind.”³⁷ Those who are affected by this Love “love boys only when they begin to acquire some mind – a growth associated with that of down on their chins.”³⁸ By choosing a boy of this age, the lover illustrates his noble intention of forming a loving and lasting relationship, as the lover affected by Heavenly Love “will not take advantage of a boy’s green thoughtlessness to deceive him and make a mock of him by running straight off to another.”³⁹

The character of Pausanias goes on to tell us that although there is no law forbidding affairs with young boys, good men are willing to restrain themselves voluntarily.⁴⁰ Conversely, the “popular” lovers need outside restraint. As Pausanias suggests, it is for this reason “we force them, so far as we can, to refrain from loving our freeborn women.”⁴¹ It is these popular lovers who “are the persons responsible for the scandal which prompts some to say it is a shame to gratify one’s lover.”⁴² Nevertheless, he argues, “whatsoever is done in an orderly and lawful manner can never justly bring reproach.”⁴³

According to Pausanias, if a pederastic relationship is to be honourable, there has to exist both the proper attitude toward the lover of boys and the love of wisdom and virtue:

It is our settled tradition that when a man freely devotes his service to another in the belief that his friend will make him better in point of wisdom, it may be, or in any of the other parts of virtue, this willing bondage also is no sort of baseness or flattery. Let us compare the two rules – one

³⁷ Ibid. 181c.

³⁸ Ibid. 181d.

³⁹ Ibid. 181d.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 181e.

⁴¹ Ibid. 181e-182a.

⁴² Ibid. 182a.

⁴³ Ibid. 182a.

dealing with the passion for boys, and the other with the love of wisdom and all virtuous ways: by this we shall see if we are to conclude it a good thing that a favourite should gratify his lover. For when lover and favourite come together, each guided by his own rule –on the one side, of being justified in doing any service to the favourite who has obliged him, and on the other, of being justified in showing any attentions to the friend who makes him wise and good; the elder of his plenty contributing to intellectual and all other excellence, the younger in his paucity acquiring education and all learned arts: only then, at the meeting of these two principles in one place, only then and there, and in no other case, can it befall that a favourite may honourably indulge his lover.⁴⁴

Plato's character, Pausanias, supports a form of homoerotic union between an older and a younger man. However, in order for it to be considered noble and productive, such a relationship has to follow very particular principles. Presumably these guidelines helped protect the respective parties from themselves and each other and the scorn of others who frowned upon such relationships.

That there was some public and philosophical concern in Athens over these relationships between older men and youths is illustrated in the great lengths to which both Aeschines and Pausanias go, in order to try to explain the difference between acceptable and unacceptable homoerotic behavior. Nonetheless, both characters feel strongly that love between men is superior to anything else. Plato's character, Aristophanes, supports this outlook as well.

According to Aristophanes, originally there were three sexes.⁴⁵ Each human was a rounded whole, with a back and sides forming a complete circle; each had four hands and four legs, and two identical faces that were set upon a circular neck. One head was common to both faces, which faced opposite directions. It had four ears and two sets of organs and everything else to match. Depending upon the two sexes that each human being possessed, humankind was divided into three distinct species: man, composed of two male organs; woman, composed of two female organs; and hermaphrodite, who had one male and one female organ. Because of their surprising strength and vitality and

⁴⁴ Ibid. 184c-e.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 189d forward.

their hubris, Zeus decided to punish and weaken them by separating the two composite parts. As a result, Plato's Aristophanes states,

Each of us, then, is but a tally of a man, since every one shows like a flat-fish the traces of having been sliced in two; and each is ever searching for the tally that will fit him. All the men who are sections of that composite sex that at first was called man-woman are woman-courtiers; our adulterers are mostly descended from that sex, whence likewise are derived our man-courting women and adulteresses. All the women who are sections of the woman have no great fancy for men: they are inclined rather to women, and of this stock are the she-minions. Men who are sections of the male pursue the masculine, and so long as their boyhood lasts they show themselves to be slices of the male by making friends with men and delighting to lie with them and to be clasped in men's embraces; these are the finest boys and striplings, for they have the most manly nature (*physei*). Some say they are shameless creatures but falsely: for their behaviour is due not to shamelessness but to daring, manliness, and virility, since they are quick to welcome their like. Sure evidence of this is the fact that on reaching maturity these alone prove in a public career to be men. So when they come to man's estate they are boy-lovers, and have no natural (*physei*) interest in wiving and getting children, but only do these things under stress of custom; they are quite contented to live together unwedded all their days. A man of this sort is at any rate born to be a lover of boys or the willing mate of a man, eagerly greeting his own kind.⁴⁶

Plato's character, Aristophanes, is explicit here. Humans who are split from a male are superior because they are the "most manly" in their "nature" (or biological make-up) and they are bold, brave and masculine. These are the only kind of boys who grow up to be successful in politics. The passage not only offers a rationalization of why the love between males is superior to heteroerotic love, but also it suggests that this type of love is natural; these males are not naturally oriented toward women.⁴⁷ Marriage for these men is simply a case of following tradition. Interestingly, Plato's Aristophanes has nothing to say about female homoeroticism. Both the view that men are superior to women and the

⁴⁶ Ibid. 191d-192b.

⁴⁷ Cf. David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 18-21. At first glance this passage appears to offer a rationalization for the origin of what we understand as homosexuality, sexual orientation toward the same sex. However, as Halperin points out, this is not necessarily the case, if one observes the passage more closely. First, the males who desire males and the females who desire females seem to originate from different "sexualities." And, males and females who are attracted to one another form a third distinct "sexuality." Moreover, those descended from an original male are not simply attracted to any male. Rather, they desire boys when they are men and they take a certain pleasure in physical (non-sexual) contact with men when they are boys.

relative lack of attention paid to female homoeroticism are consistent in the Greco-Roman world through Paul's time.

Notwithstanding what he puts into the mouths of Pausanias and Aristophanes, Plato appears to clarify what he believes to be the ideal pederastic relationship through his character Alcibiades. Pausanias implies that as long as certain principles and rules are acknowledged and followed, a pederastic relationship could become physical. Conversely, for Plato himself, Socrates's actions illustrate the characteristics of an ideal male love. This love connects itself to wisdom and beauty and abstains from sexual pleasure. Alcibiades' speech in *Symposium* demonstrates this point when he describes his futile attempts to seduce Socrates.⁴⁸ He goes on to say that although he has tricked Socrates into spending the evening with him in the same bed, frustratingly nothing happens.⁴⁹ Although in his *Symposium* Plato (or, at least his mouthpieces/characters) seems to believe in the superiority of males and male relationships, curiously elsewhere his characters do not support pederastic or homoerotic relationships in either a physical or an intellectual sense.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato's characters criticize the pederastic institution. Pederasty is characterized by inconstancy, disrespect and a lack of mutuality. Lysias reports to Phaedrus that after a lover's desire dissipates, his compassion and kindness cease.⁵⁰ Inevitably, Lysias points out, whenever a lover falls in love with a new beloved, "[he] will care for the new love more than for the old and will certainly injure the old love, if that pleases the new."⁵¹ Also, Plato's Socrates tells us that the active lover is always working to make the boys he loves "weaker and inferior" to himself.⁵² What is more, Socrates goes on to suggest that the age discrepancy between the lover and beloved is a serious issue. First, the pederastic relationship is a demeaning one for an older man:

⁴⁸ Ibid. 216c forward.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 219c-e.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus* 231a. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of H. N. Fowler, *Phaedrus*, LCL (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1982).

⁵¹ Ibid. 231c.

⁵² Ibid. 239a.

For he is old while his love is young, and he does not leave him day or night, if he can help it, but is driven by the sting of necessity, which urges him on, always giving him pleasure in seeing, hearing, touching, and by all his senses perceiving his beloved, so that he is glad to serve him constantly.⁵³

Moreover, because of the age difference, a lover is simply disgusting to look at and to spend time with:

What consolation or what pleasure can he give the beloved? Must not this protracted intercourse bring him to the uttermost disgust, as he looks at the old, unlovely face, and other things to match, which it is not pleasant even to hear about, to say nothing of being constantly compelled to come into contact with them? And he is suspiciously guarded in all ways against everybody, and has to listen to untimely and exaggerated praises and to reproaches which are unendurable when the man is sober, and when he is in his cups and indulges in wearisome and unrestrained freedom of speech become not only unendurable but disgusting.⁵⁴

Xenophon, a contemporary of Plato's, makes a similar point about the relationship between a man and a boy:

For a youth (*pais*) does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love's intoxication. Consequently, it need not excite any surprise if contempt for the lover is engendered in him.⁵⁵

In both examples, the lover feels pleasure while the beloved feels shame, disgust, and anger. It is subtly implied here that the pederastic relationship is *para physin* in the sense that it is contrary to a "regular" heteroerotic relationship. It lacks the mutuality and complementarity of a male/female relationship: "for a youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does." According to these voices, pederasty promotes a power relationship that is sadly lacking any kind of mutual love and respect.

⁵³ Ibid. 240c-d.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 240d-e.

⁵⁵ Xenophon, *Symposium* VIII, 21-22. The translation cited here is that of O. J. Todd, *Symposium* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1961).

In addition, pederasty results in effeminacy, especially in the case of the beloved, or the male who assumes the passive role. Plato voices this judgment through Socrates:

We must next consider how he who is forced to follow pleasure and not good will keep the body of him whose master he is, and what care he will give to it. He will plainly court a love who is effeminate (*malthakon*), not virile, not brought up in the pure sunshine, but in mingled shade, unused to manly toils and the sweat of exertion, but accustomed to a delicate and unmanly way of life, adorned with a bright complexion of artificial origin, since he has none by nature, and in general living a life such as all this indicates, which it is certainly not worth while to describe further.⁵⁶

Quite clearly, pederastic relationships result in unnaturally effeminate men, who deny their innate maleness in favour of an “artificial” (womanly) lifestyle. It is difficult to tell whether this is Plato’s judgment, as *Symposium* suggests that at least a homosocial⁵⁷ relationship between two men is more sublime than anything else.

On the topic of homoeroticism, Plato’s ideas can seem confusing and oftentimes contradictory. On the one hand, he appears to hold a relationship between two men in the highest regard, yet he condemns same-sex relations, on the other. In *Laws*, the “later Plato” is clearer about his stance on the topic. He describes relations between a man and a woman as *kata physin*, “according to nature”, and homoerotic relations as *para physin*, “contrary to nature”. In a discussion on the topic of how different political systems should legislate on self-control, an Athenian gives his opinion to the characters Clinias (from Crete) and Megillus (a Spartan):

In truth, Strangers, it seems a difficult thing for State institutions to be equally beyond criticism both in theory and in practice. Their case resembles that of the human body, where it seems impossible to prescribe any given treatment for each case without finding that this same prescription is partly beneficial and partly injurious to the body. So these common meals, for example, and these gymnasia, while they are at present beneficial to the States in many other respects, yet in the event of civil strife they prove dangerous (as is shown by the case of the youth

⁵⁶ *Phaedrus* 239c-d.

⁵⁷ In contrast to a homoerotic relationship, which implies a physical experience, by homosocial I mean an intellectual or non-sexual relationship between two males.

of Miletus, Boeotia and Thuri); and, moreover, this institution, when of old standing, is thought to have corrupted the pleasures of love which are natural (*kata physin*) not to men only but also natural to beasts. For this your states are held primarily responsible, and along with them all others that especially encourage the use of gymnasia. And whether one makes the observation in earnest or in jest, one certainly should not fail to observe that when male unites with female for procreation the pleasure experienced is held to be due to nature (*kata physin*), but contrary to nature (*para physin*) when male mates with male or female with female, and that those first guilty of such enormities were impelled by their slavery to pleasure.⁵⁸

The only kind of sexual relationship that Plato seems to endorse is that between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation. The pleasure that arises from this purposeful union is “natural” seemingly because it has a practical purpose, the continuation of the human race. Plato condemns homoerotic relationships because they do not result in procreation. Furthermore, same-sex relationships are the result of men and women not being able to control their thirst for pleasure (men and women “impelled by their slavery to pleasure”). Lastly, Plato suggests that one should be able to intuit or “to observe” that heteroeroticism is *kata physin*. It is difficult to speculate about what exactly Plato is appealing to, whether it’s simply the animal kingdom, cultural convention, or universal norm, hence we one should resist the temptation to force an interpretation on this particular passage. It is enough to say that he deems same-sex relations *para physin*.

Importantly, heteroerotic relationships do not escape Plato’s condemnation either, as they can be equally dangerous to human well-being. Unless they are for the purpose of procreation, they, too, are relationships that he considers indulgent and excessive:⁵⁹

But when we come to amorous passions of children of both sexes and of men for women and women for men, -- passions which have been the cause of countless woes both to individuals and to whole States, -- how is one to guard against these, or what remedy can one apply so as to find a way of escape in all such cases from a danger such as this?⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Plato, *Laws* 1:636a-c. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of R.G. Bury, *The Laws* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1967)

⁵⁹ Significantly, however, Plato never explicitly states that heteroerotic relations, other than for procreation, are “unnatural.”

⁶⁰ *Laws* 8:836a-b.

It is clear that Plato is not fond of *any* sexual relationship that does not exhibit control over desire and passion. Notwithstanding this point, Plato is especially concerned about the lack of self-control homoerotic encounters encourage.

Judging by the conversation in *Laws*, at least the “later Plato” is uneasy about homoeroticism. To illustrate how homoeroticism ultimately leads to a lack of self-discipline and virtue, the Athenian makes the following points to Clinias and Megillus:

For whereas, in regard to other matters not a few, Crete generally and Lacedaemon furnish us (and rightly) with no little assistance in the framing of laws which differ from those in common use, -- in regard to the passions of sex (for we are alone by ourselves) they contradict us absolutely. If we were to follow in nature's (*physe*) steps and enact that law which held good before the days of Laius, declaring that it is right to refrain from indulging in the same kind of intercourse with men and boys as with women, and adducing as evidence thereof the nature (*physe*) of wild beasts, and pointing out how male does not touch male for this purpose, since it is unnatural, -- in all this we would probably be using an argument neither convincing nor in anyway constant with your States. Moreover, that object which, as we affirm, the lawgiver ought always to have in view does not agree with these practices. For the enquiry we always make is this -- which of the proposed laws tends toward virtue and which not. Come then, suppose we grant that this practice is now legalized, and that it is noble and in no way ignoble, how far would it promote virtue? Will it engender in the soul of him who is seduced a courageous character, or in the soul of the seducer the quality of temperance? Nobody would ever believe this; on the contrary, as all men will blame the cowardice of the man who always yields to pleasures and is never able to hold out against them, will they not likewise reproach that man who plays the woman's part with the resemblance he bears to his model? Is there any man, then, who will ordain by laws a practice like that? Not one, I should say, if he has a notion of what true law is.⁶¹

Again, pointing to the natural world and the animal kingdom as proof of what is natural, Plato's Athenian views male homoeroticism (specifically same-sex intercourse) as “unnatural.” By following in “nature steps,” we are able to see that male same-sex intercourse is contrary to the regular order of things. That there was some debate over this is seen in the Athenian's recognition that “in Crete and Sparta your argument would

⁶¹ Ibid. 8:836b-e.

not go down at all well” and nobody would be persuaded. But, the Athenian turns to the argument that ultimately a homoerotic relationship did not encourage, or contribute to, virtue. Why? Homoerotic relationships inevitably result in a man yielding to his desires, or assuming the inappropriate “woman’s part” (the passive role). Altogether, such a relationship would result in an effeminate (*malakos*) and morally weak male population.

The “later Plato” vehemently frowns upon homoerotic relationships that disorder male and female gender roles, disregard male and female’s inherent obligation to procreate, and indulge the passions. Ultimately, he does not uphold pederastic or homoerotic relationships, even if they adhere to strictly defined guidelines. In the end, he appears not to have had much faith in an ideal homoerotic relationship, especially one that included any sort of physical relationship.

As a result, then, in order for Plato’s ideal relationship to be realized, all passion has to be suppressed, and only sex for the purpose of procreation is acceptable. In regard to a method for controlling passion and desire, the Athenian expresses his ideas to Megillus and Clinias:

I know of a device for making a natural use (*kata physin*) of reproductive intercourse, -- on the one hand, by abstaining from the male and not sowing of set purpose the human stock, nor sowing seed on rocks and stones where it can never take root and have fruitful increase; and, on the other hand, by abstaining from every female field in which you would not desire the seed to spring up. This law, when it becomes permanent and prevails --- if it has rightly become dominant in other cases, just as it prevails now regarding intercourse with parents, --is the cause of countless blessings. For, in the first place, it follows the dictates of nature (*kata physin*), and it serves to keep men from sexual rage and frenzy and all kinds of fornication, and from all excess in meats and drinks, and it ensures in husbands fondness for their own wives: other blessings also would ensue, in infinite number, if one could make sure of this law.⁶²

Again, Plato looks to the natural world for guidance. The law forbidding same-sex relations “follows the dictates of nature,” which shows us that same sex relations are unable to perpetuate the human race. For Plato, homoerotic relationships are unnatural

⁶² Ibid. 8:838e-839b.

because the human race cannot gain immortality through them; through such sexual relationships, it is deliberately murdered. Furthermore, *all* other types of sexual acts -- adultery, prostitution, masturbation, etc. -- are condemned as well. Along with homoeroticism, these kinds of sexual acts are examples of indulging the passions, "sexual rage and frenzy", that inevitably lead to a disordered society.

In summation, both the citizen and the philosopher discuss the pros and cons of pederasty and homoeroticism. In some important respects their attitudes differ. Aeschines suggests that as long as certain guidelines and principles are followed, an ideal pederastic relationship is attainable. For example, Aeschines argues that a relationship between two males is more than acceptable if a lover exhibits self-control and is in love with someone who is chaste. Moreover, the beloved must not prostitute himself and must be chaste and humble. At what point, if ever, a physical relationship can take place is not entirely clear. Plato's Pausanias puts forth similar requirements for an acceptable pederastic relationship and even implies that it is not shameful to gratify one's lover if it "is done in an orderly and lawful manner."⁶³ Conversely, in *Laws* at least, Plato does not share their faith. His ideal same-sex relationship is one that abstains from sexual pleasure altogether. The only sexual act he considers "natural" (*kata physin*) and functional is the one between a man and a woman for the sole purpose of procreation. A sexual act for any other purpose he considers "unnatural" (*para physin*). Furthermore, in *Phaedrus*, Plato's characters explicitly criticize pederasty. Pederasty is destructive and degrading for the lover, the beloved, and society in general. Only through the character of Alcibiades, in *Symposium*, does Plato uphold a form of same-sex love. This love, however, is clearly non-physical and is meant to manifest itself in the world of ideas.

Significantly for this study, regardless of their differences, both writers share similar attitudes, which, as we shall see, remain consistent through Paul's time. Together, Aeschines and Plato denounce the mature soft or effeminate (*malakos*) homoerotic partner who sells his body, tries to look feminine, and assumes the sexual role of a woman (the passive role). In addition, they frown upon the active lover who displays

⁶³ Cf., Plato, *Symposium* 182a.

a lack of self-control in his pursuit of his beloved. Also, although both writers suggest at different points that a relationship between two males is superior to any other type of relationship, if it follows the appropriate guidelines and principles they respectively put forth, both voice a general attitude of concern regarding the more destructive elements inherent in the institution of pederasty. Lastly, neither voice denounces or even explicitly recognizes what we understand today as homosexual orientation. In fact, both voices suggest that it was natural for some men to feel an attraction toward one another and to admire one another's physical appearance.

In addition, anticipating Paul's argument in Romans 1:26-27, both voices make arguments about sexual relations using the concept of "nature" (*physin*). First, Aeschines labels Timarchus's sexual activity as *para physin* because he assumes the passive prostitute role in a homoerotic relationship. As a male citizen of Athens, Timarchus was expected to assume an active lovemaking role in *any* sexual relationship. By assuming the passive role, he is transcending his conventional gender role in a sexual relationship. It is important to make clear that it is the passive sexual role Timarchus assumes during an illicit homoerotic affair that is considered *para physin* here, not his particular sexual orientation.

Next, Plato argues that sexual pleasure is only *kata physin* when a male has intercourse with a female *for procreation*. On the other hand, the pleasure experienced is *para physin* when a male has intercourse with another male, or a female with other female. He argues that those who engage in these homoerotic affairs are impelled to do so by their slavery to pleasure; they cannot control their desire for pleasure. Plato does not suggest that homoerotic intercourse is committed because men and women are abnormally oriented toward the same-sex. Rather, same-sex relations occur because people cannot control their desire for pleasure. Getting more to the point, however, what is *para physin* about same sex relations for Plato is not so much the inability to control one's desire for pleasure⁶⁴, but rather the inability for human beings to reproduce through

⁶⁴ As it is important to remember that Plato also frowns upon excessive sexual urges in heterosexual relationships, but does not refer to these heterosexual urges as *para physin*.

such relationships. Here, Plato suggests that one need only to look to nature, understood as the regular order of things, in order to see that male and female are meant to unite.

A Dramatist's Voice: Aristophanes's Attitude toward Homoeroticism

Plato's contemporary, the dramatist Aristophanes, consistently exploits any kind of effeminacy for the purpose of slandering passive homoeroticism. On the other hand, he -- and no other comedian for that matter -- does not censure or ridicule any man for desiring homoerotic copulation with attractive young males or for preferring them to women.⁶⁵ Aristophanes's apparent acceptance of at least male homoerotic desire is consistent with the other sources above.

Notwithstanding Aristophanes' willingness to grant immunity to active homoeroticism, his comedies vehemently attack effeminacy. For example, Aristophanes sarcastically portrays Agathon as a soft voiced, cross-dresser who merrily "assumes a woman's garb, and dons a woman's habits."⁶⁶ As Euripides mockingly assumes will be the case, Agathon is quickly able to provide a razor, a dress and sash, a hair-net, a mantle, and a pair of woman's shoes in order to help disguise Mnesilochus as a woman.⁶⁷ These are items Agathon regularly uses to assume the female role.

Aristophanes consistently and ferociously chides the effeminate, soft male, like Agathon, who allegedly assumes the role of a woman. In *Clouds* and elsewhere sexually passive males are given an exceedingly offensive epithet, *euryproktoi*,⁶⁸ which essentially means people whose arses (*proktoi*) have been enlarged due to excessive use.⁶⁹ In

⁶⁵ K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (MJF Books: New York, 1978), p. 137. For a more detailed analysis of comic exploitation of homoeroticism cf., Dover pp. 135-153. Cf. also Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, pp. 44-48.

⁶⁶ Aristophanes, *The Thesmophoriazusae* 130-152, 204. The translation used here and elsewhere is that of Benjamin Bickley Rogers, Aristophanes vols. 1, 2, and 3 LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1950, 1950 1955)

⁶⁷ Ibid. 213-262.

⁶⁸ Cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1084, 1090-9; *Acharnians* 716; *Thesmophoriazusae* 200; *Knights* 721; *Wasps* 1070.

⁶⁹ Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, p. 47. Cf. also Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 140.

addition, in *Clouds*, the immoralist, Wrong, actually compels Right, a traditional moralist, to admit that *euryproktoi* are in a majority at Athens – the advocates, poets, politicians, and even the audience – and, for this reason, there is no sense in trying to hide behind a veneer of modesty.⁷⁰ Amidst the sarcasm and humor, it is not hard to sense Aristophanes's bitterness and disgust toward these effeminate *euryproktoi*.

Lastly, it is important to note the irony in Aristophanes's assault on homoeroticism. While the passive males are assailed for their soft and effeminate ways, the active ones are "granted immunity from satire and sometimes even considered examples of true manliness."⁷¹ Like Aristophanes, Plato and Aeschines vehemently attack the passive, "call boy" too. Nevertheless, they also condemn and ridicule the active male, especially for showing a lack of self-control. Notwithstanding this distinction and the difference in tone between Plato and Aeschines on the one hand and Aristophanes on the other, the alleged effeminate, passive male is consistently assailed during this period.

Views on Homoeroticism during Paul's Era and Beyond:

As we move forward into Paul's time, the attitudes toward male homoeroticism are similar to those found in the Greek classical period above. The sources attack pederasty, especially the participant who assumes the passive role in such a relationship. Moreover, the sources ferociously attack any man, even if it is beyond his control, who is perceived to be effeminate or soft for one reason or another.

To begin with, Plutarch's *The Dialogue on Love* (ca. 100 CE) is a spirited discussion about love. It originates from a journey made by Plutarch and his wife to Thespieae, to sacrifice to Eros, the god of Love. The dialogue is punctuated and sometimes motivated by a romantic upheaval in the town of Thespieae. A rich young widow, Ismendra, is seeking to marry a handsome young man, Bacchon. However,

⁷⁰ Aristophanes, *Clouds* 961-1103. Cf. Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, pp. 45-46.

⁷¹ Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, p. 48.

there is a problem: Bacchon is the beloved (*eromenos*) of Pisias, and Pisias is unhappy about the marriage. As Bacchon's friends begin to argue about the wisdom of this marriage, the supporters and opponents of pederasty square off.

First, Protogenes, in defense of his friend Pisias, responds to Daphnaeus' comment that marriage is the most sacred of institutions:

Why of course...since it's necessary for producing children, there's no harm in legislators talking it up and singing its praises to the masses. But genuine Love has no connexion whatsoever with the women's quarters. I deny that it is love that you have felt for women and girls – any more than flies feel love for milk or bees for honey or than caterers and cooks have tender emotions for the calves and fowls they fatten in the dark.⁷²

For Protogenes, women are simply a means to an end, the end being procreation. The love a man feels for a woman is a *practical* love, a necessary relationship that is required to continue the human race.

Protogenes moves on to suggest what constitutes *genuine* Love:

Love, in fact, it is that (which) attaches himself to a young and talented soul and through friendship brings it to a state of virtue; but the appetite for women we are speaking of, however well it turns out, has for net gain only an accrual of pleasure in the enjoyment of a ripe physical beauty. To this Aristippus bore witness when he replied to the man who denounced Lais to him for not loving him: He didn't imagine, he said, that wine or fish love him either, yet he partook of both with pleasure. The object of desire is, in fact, pleasure and enjoyment; while Love, if he loses the hope of inspiring friendship, has no wish to remain cultivating a deficient plant which has come to its prime, if the plant cannot yield the proper fruit of character to produce friendship and virtue.⁷³

According to Protogenes, "there is only one genuine Love, the love of boys."⁷⁴ It is not a love based on desire and a thirst for pleasure, like the love for women. It is a "simple and

⁷² Plutarch, *The Dialogue on Love* 750c. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of W.C. Helmbold *The Dialogue on Love* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1969).

⁷³ Ibid. 750d-e.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 751a.

unspoiled” love, which cheers young men on “to the pursuit of virtue when they are found worthy of its attention.”⁷⁵ The love of women, on the other hand, is “that other lax and housebound love, that spends its time in the bosoms and bed of women, ever pursuing a soft (*malthaka*) life, enervated amid pleasure devoid of manliness and friendship and inspiration.”⁷⁶ To put it rather crudely, the love of women is like mere copulation.⁷⁷

Having heard enough, Daphnaeus cuts Protogenes’ tirade against women short, and proceeds to take the opposite stance, defending the love of women against that of boys:

If union contrary to nature (*para physin*) with males does not destroy or curtail a lover’s tenderness, it stands to reason that the love between men and women, being normal and natural (*physe*), will be conducive to friendship developing in due course from favor... But to consort with males (whether without consent, in which case it involves violence and brigandage; or if with consent, there is still weakness and effeminacy (*malakia*) on the part of those who, contrary to nature [*para physin*], allow themselves in Plato’s⁷⁸ words “to be covered and mounted like cattle”) – this is a completely ill-favoured favour, indecent, an unlovely affront to Aphrodite.⁷⁹

First, through Daphnaeus, Plutarch suggests that homoeroticism is “unnatural” because a *man* assumes the passive sexual role and allows himself, in Plato’s words, “to be covered and mounted like cattle.” The passive sexual role is reserved for women. This role not only represents their conventional position on the gender hierarchy, but also signifies their innate sexual role as receivers of sperm.⁸⁰ The love between men and women is “normal and natural” because there is no blurring of societal and anatomical gender roles.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 751a.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 751a-b.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 751b. Interestingly, Protogenes employs an argument similar to that used by the opponents of pederasty in order to attack heteroerotic love, namely that it creates *soft* men who lack virtue.

⁷⁸ A paraphrase of *Phaedrus*, 250e; cf. *Laws*, 636c.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 751c-e.

⁸⁰ Plutarch’s Daphnaeus does not distinguish between men and boys here, so it is hard to tell whether this is a condemnation of the passive sexual role for males in general, or simply for males who have reached an age where they ought to be active lovers only. If Plutarch is modeling his argument on Plato’s ideas, it is likely the former.

Daphnaeus proceeds to elaborate on his position that defends the love of women:

If, then, Protogenes, we have regard for the truth, excitement about boys and women is one and the same thing: Love. But if, for the sake of argument, you choose to make distinctions, you will see that this boy-love of yours is not playing fair: like a late-born son, an aged man's bastard, a child of darkness, he tries to disinherit the Love that is his legitimate and elder brother. It was only yesterday, my friend, or the day before, in consequence of young men's stripping their bodies naked, that he crept furtively into the gymnasia. At first he merely caressed and embraced; then gradually he grew wings in the palaestra and can no longer be restrained. He rails and vilifies that great conjugal Love which co-operates to win immortality for the human race by kindling afresh through new generations our being, prone as it is to extinction.⁸¹

Interestingly, Plutarch's Daphnaeus subtly recognizes the reality of homoerotic desire: "If...we have regard for the truth, excitement about boys and women is one of the same thing: Love." Nevertheless, ultimately, in relation to heteroerotic love, he opposes pederasty for a couple of familiar reasons. First, boy love inevitably exhibits a lack of self-control; it "can no longer be restrained." Daphnaeus implies that boys are being exploited in the gymnasia. Second, boy love cannot reproduce children, like "that great conjugal Love", which helps perpetuate the human race. Daphnaeus supports heteroerotic unions because they result in procreation. Here, the focus is less on the issue of gender hierarchy. It is as if Plutarch is saying, it should be obvious to all that homoeroticism is unnatural, as it denies a human being's inherent mandate to procreate.

Daphnaeus goes on to attack the genuineness of the institution of pederasty and the principles of friendship and virtue it purports to uphold:

[Boy-love] needs a fair pretext for approaching the young and beautiful, so it pretends friendship and virtue...it plays the highbrow and publicly proclaims that it is a philosopher and disciplined on the outside – because of the law. But when night comes and all is quiet, "Sweet is the harvest when the guard's away."⁸²

⁸¹ Plutarch, *The Dialogue on Love* 751e-752a.

⁸² Ibid. 752a. Cf. also Pseudo-Lucian, *Erotes* 24 where a comic pederast bluntly declares: "But may the airy talkers and those who raise their philosophic brows temple-high and even higher, beguile the ignorant with the speciousness of their solemn phrases. For Socrates was as devoted to love as anyone and

Through Daphnaeus, Plutarch suggests that pederasty simply operates on the pretense of friendship, virtue, and discipline. In other words, it is a scam and a facade for debauchery and exploitation.

Where does Plutarch, himself, stand regarding the debate above? Plutarch attacks both the passive and active participants in a pederastic relationship and male same sex relationships in general: “it is rather not a union (the union of male with male) but a lascivious assault.”⁸³ First, he explicitly condemns males who play the passive sexual role. He categorizes “those who enjoy the passive part as belonging to the lowest depth of vice”, and one should “allow them not the least degree of confidence or respect or friendship.”⁸⁴ Next, he goes on to express his contempt for lovers who mistreat “young men not naturally vicious, who have been lured or forced into yielding and letting themselves be abused,” suggesting that the beloved inherited a murderous instinct toward his lover as a result of this union.⁸⁵

Moreover, Plutarch condones the marital union between husband and wife:

In the case of lawful wives, physical union is the beginning of friendship, a sharing, as it were, in great mysteries. Pleasure is short; but the respect and kindness and mutual affection and loyalty that daily spring from it convicts neither the Delphians of raving when they call Aphrodite “Harmony” nor Homer when he designates such a union as friendship. It also proves that Solon was a very experienced legislator of marriage laws. He prescribed that a man should consort with his wife not less than three times per month – not for pleasure surely, but as cities renew their mutual agreements from time to time, just so he must have wished this to be a renewal of marriage and with such an act of tenderness to wipe out the complaints that accumulate from everyday living.⁸⁶

Alcibiades, once he had lain down beneath the same mantle with him, did not rise unassailed (reference in Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, p.53).

⁸³ Ibid. 768e.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 768e.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 768f.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 769a-b.

Heteroerotic relationships result in lifelong companionship and mutual affection. They are clearly superior to pederastic affairs. Despite what some may say, women are well equipped for companionship with men.⁸⁷ What is more, pederastic relationships are generally fleeting, impermanent and destructive, whereas “countless numbers of successful unions with women may be enumerated, distinguished from beginning to end by every sort of fidelity and zealous loyalty.”⁸⁸ For Plutarch, then, the male and female genders naturally complement one another.

Plutarch clearly upholds heterosexual relationships, in relation to pederasty, and condemns male same sex relations in general, which often, he felt, lacked the integrity of the marital union. Significantly, however, as the following passage suggests, Plutarch is *not* condemning homosexual desire or orientation, understood as an attraction or pre-disposition toward the same sex:

And those beautiful and sacred passions which we call recollections of the divine, the true, the Olympian beauty of the other world, by which the soul is made winged – why should they not spring from maidens and women, as well as from boys and striplings (youths), whenever a pure and disciplined character shines through from within a beautiful and charming outward shape.⁸⁹

In this curious passage, Plutarch suggests that one should not stop himself from feeling passionate or attracted to someone, regardless of the individual’s sex, as long as he or she is a virtuous human being. Plutarch is not contradicting himself here, but rather suggesting that we can have an appreciation of beauty in both sexes, as long as a good character, springing from within a person, accompanies the attractive exterior.

Notwithstanding this, Plutarch unmistakably condemns both the active and passive male participants in a homoerotic relationship. The union of male with male is not only a “lascivious assault” but also “the work of Hybris (insolence), not of Cypris (love).”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid. 769b forward.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 770b-c.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 766e-f. Cf. 766a forward, 770b-c.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 768e.

Many similarities can be drawn between Plato and Plutarch. First, both criticize pederasty. They regard it as a destructive, demeaning relationship that promotes cowardice and soft, effeminate men. Moreover, both consider male same sex relations to be *para physin*. For Plato a homoerotic union is *para physin* because it is the result of excessive pleasure and, more importantly, two men are unable to procreate. Significantly, nature, for example the animal world, shows us this is so. Accordingly, he deems a heteroerotic relationship for the purpose of procreation *kata physin*. Similarly, Plutarch, speaking through Daphnaeus, considers a male uniting with a male to be *para physin*. It requires a man to assume unnaturally the woman's passive sexual role and, echoing Plato, such a relationship cannot produce children. Lastly, both writers recognize and condone an appreciation for beauty and wisdom. In other words, it is not wrong for a man to be attracted to and to appreciate the beautiful body and the sound mind of another man.

One area in which Plato and Plutarch part ways is regarding the relationship between husband and wife. Plutarch praises the marital union and its potential for life companionship and mutual affection, while Plato seems to see it as simply a functional relationship for perpetuating the human race.

Seneca (4-64 C.E.), the famous Stoic philosopher, moralist and statesman, also comments on homoeroticism. He was serving as a political strategist for Emperor Nero when he became disillusioned with the emperor's policies and retired from public life. During this period he wrote the *Moral Epistles*, which reflect his concern about immorality in society. Seneca abhors feminine male slaves and their sleazy masters:

Another (slave), who serves the wine, must dress like a woman and wrestle with his advancing years; he cannot get away from his boyhood; he is dragged back to it; and though he has already acquired a soldier's figure, he is kept beardless by having his hair smoothed away or plucked out

by the roots, and he must remain awake throughout the night, dividing his time between his master's drunkenness and his lust; in the chamber he must be a man, at the feast a boy.⁹¹

Seneca is describing here, in disgust, a homoerotic practice that is characterized by lust and exploitation, where a slave is forced to assume both the role of a woman or beloved (boy) at parties, well after maturing into a man, and the role of a man in the bedroom. Seneca is implying here that master and slave are transcending gender boundaries and assuming both the male (active) and female (passive) role. This is certainly not an attack on the homosexuality that we are familiar with, but rather a judgment directed toward the decadence of the Roman elite. Then again, Seneca is clear: for a man to play the role of a woman or a boy, beyond a suitable age, is unnatural and socially unacceptable regardless of the circumstances.

Seneca believes that men and women have to live up to particular gender expectations that he considers to be in accordance with nature:

Do you not believe that men live contrary to Nature (*contra naturam*) who exchange the fashion of their attire with women (By wearing silk gowns of transparent material)? Do not men live contrary to Nature (*contra naturam*) who endeavour to look fresh and boyish at an age unsuitable for such an attempt? What could be more cruel or more wretched? Cannot time and man's estate ever carry such a person beyond an artificial boyhood?⁹²

What Seneca seems to mean by "Nature" here is what ought to be according to reason. There are certain ways to act and present one's self based on what one observes in the natural world:

Do not men live contrary to Nature (*contra naturam*) who crave roses in winter, or seek to raise a spring flower like the lily by means of hot-water heaters and artificial changes of temperature? Do not men live contrary to Nature who grow fruit-trees on the top of a wall?... When men have begun to desire all things in opposition to the way of Nature, they end by entirely abandoning the ways of Nature. They cry: "It is daytime: let us go to sleep! It is the time when men rest: now for

⁹¹ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 47:7. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of Richard M. Gummere, *Epistulae Morales* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1925).

⁹² Ibid. 122:7-8. Cf. also Juvenal 2, 6:40-138.

exercise, now for our drive, now for our lunch! Lo, the dawn approaches: it is dinner time! We should not do as mankind do. It is low and mean to live in the usual and conventional way. Let us abandon the ordinary sort of day...such men are, in my opinion, as good as dead.⁹³

Seneca argues that the world operates in a perceptibly rational way. Fruit trees do not grow on top of walls, just like the human beings do not form *in* the male body. Seneca is noticeably upset by the lack of respect for the “usual and conventional way” of life, as men around him are abandoning a more traditional lifestyle (“the ordinary sort of day”) for unusual and unconventional ways of living. When we combine the two above passages, Seneca is condemning homoerotic expression within the context of debauchery and decadence. By partaking in this lifestyle, certain men are breaching natural law that is evident all around them. Through our senses we can perceive the natural way of things. Presumably, given his logic, same sex relations are *contra naturam* due to the lack anatomic complementarity between two males. Reason through nature tells us that male and female are naturally complementary to one another. Seneca is not censuring homosexual orientation. Nevertheless, he is saying that, at least anatomically speaking, same sex intercourse is unnatural.

More references, specifically regarding homoeroticism and the baser aspects of Roman urban life, are found in the work of the first century Stoic thinker and writer Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40-112 CE). Dio was banished from Rome early on in the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE) and wandered for years championing the basic virtues characteristic of the Stoics and Cynics.

Dio is dismayed with certain aspects of city life, like brothel keepers and their trade. The men who run these establishments “bring individuals together in union without love and intercourse without affection, and all for the sake of the filthy lucre.”⁹⁴ The brothels exploit “hapless women or children,” and they are an eye sore and an

⁹³ Ibid. 122:8-10.

⁹⁴ Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 7:133. The translation cited here and below is that of J.W. Cohoon, *Discourses* vol. I LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1949).

embarrassment to the city.⁹⁵ Dio suggests that these brothels are home to “unnatural” sexual activity:

Yes, and they (the “brothel-keepers and their trade”) respect no man or god – not Zeus, the god of family life, nor Hera, the goddess of marriage, not the Fates, who bring fulfillment, not Artemis, protectress of the child-bed, not mother Rhea, not the Eileithyiae, who preside over human birth, not Aphrodite, whose name stands for the normal (*kata physin*) intercourse and the union of the male and the female.⁹⁶

Dio is clear here: intercourse between a male and a female is *kata physin*. This strongly suggests that Dio would consider a homoerotic union to be *para physin*. *Physin*, here, appears to refer to the natural order of things.

He goes on to argue that in a city where women are thus corrupted, the dishonoring of men is likely to follow. Dio doubts whether this “lecherous class” would abstain from “dishonouring and corrupting males, making their clear and sufficient limit that set by nature (*physeos*).”⁹⁷ He contends that men will become bored with how easily they can access women and lasciviously turn to young males for their sexual pleasure:

The man whose appetite is insatiate in such things, when he finds there is no scarcity, no resistance, in this field, will have contempt for the easy conquest and scorn for a woman’s love, as a thing too readily given – in fact, too utterly feminine – and will turn his assault against the male quarters, eager to befoul the youth who will very soon be magistrates and judges and generals, believing that in them he will find a pleasure difficult and hard to procure.⁹⁸

The homoerotic assault on “the male quarters” is due to an unnaturally excessive thirst for pleasure. Dio compares these men to wine addicts who, after extended drinking binges, often lose their craving for it and have to “create an artificial thirst by the stimulus of sweatings, salted foods, and condiments.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ibid. 7:133.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 7:135-137.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 7:149.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 7:151-152.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 7:152.

His concerns appear to be warranted, as Dio goes on to attack those “dissolute” men who allegedly participate in objectionable sexual activities that result in degenerate homoerotic experiences:

Although there are women in abundance, through wantonness and lawlessness (these men) wish to have females produced for them from males, and so they take boys and emasculate them. And thus a far worse and more unfortunate breed is created, weaker than the female and more effeminate.¹⁰⁰

This is an attack on the active lover and his abhorrent desire to castrate boys. Moreover, the passive beloved is assailed once again, despite the unequal balance of power, for his weakness and effeminacy. It is significant to note that this assault on homoeroticism falls within the context of an attack on opportunistic “foolish human beings, who (have) been corrupted by luxury and idleness.”¹⁰¹

Dio assails pederasty and homoeroticism within the context of debauchery and decadence, a context that includes perverse forms of heteroerotic activity. In this context, *boys/youth* are *forced* to assume a woman’s sexual role, which creates weak and effeminate men. This form of homoeroticism and pederasty is “unnatural” and destructive for society. Even so, Dio is unable to hide his disgust for the passive male, “the unfortunate breed”, who is “weaker than the female and more effeminate.” In addition, he seems to imply that male/female unions are “normal” or *kata physin* and, therefore, male/male unions are “unnatural”. He does not imply that homosexual orientation is unnatural.

Another Stoic philosopher who comments on sexuality is Epictetus (d. ca. 125/130). He has distinct ideas about what qualities characterize a man and a woman:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 77/78:36. The translation cited here and below is that of H. Lamar Crosby, *Discourses* vol. 5 LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1951).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 77/78:34. Also cf. 21:6-10 where Dio relates a gruesome story about the emperor, Nero. In 67 CE, after the death of Nero’s second wife, Sabina, he mutilated his male lover, Sporus. Sporus was renamed Sabina and a public marriage ceremony took place. Also, cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8:26.

Are you a man or a woman? – A man. – Very well then, adorn a man, not a woman. Woman is born smooth and dainty by nature (*physe*), and if she is very hairy she is a prodigy, and is exhibited at Rome among the prodigies. But for a man *not* to be hairy is the same thing, and if by nature (*physe*) he has no hair he is a prodigy, but if he cuts it out and plucks it out of himself, what shall we make of him? Where shall we exhibit him and what notice shall we post? “I will show you,” we say to the audience, “a man who wishes to be a woman rather than a man.” What a dreadful spectacle!¹⁰²

Epictetus is clearly sickened by effeminate men who *choose* to assume a woman’s gender role. Willingly trying to become feminine simply goes against the natural order of things. These men are turning their backs against their traditional gender roles and their inherent nature. Nature shows us, among other things, that men are innately sexually active and “hairy,” whereas women are sexually passive and “smooth and dainty.”

Epictetus is especially disgusted with males who willingly assume the effeminate passive role, which is the exclusive domain of women. As he suggests in the following passage, Socrates understood what it truly meant to be beautiful:

But observe what Socrates says to Alcibiades, the most handsome and youthfully beautiful of men: “try, then, to be beautiful.” What does he tell him? “Dress your locks and pluck the hairs out of your legs?” God forbid! No, he says, “Make beautiful your moral purpose, eradicate your worthless opinions.”¹⁰³

Being beautiful does not require a man to assume a woman’s role. On the contrary, a beautiful man is a moral man who knows right from wrong, a man who knows his appropriate gender role. Epictetus is not commenting on homosexual orientation.¹⁰⁴ More exactly, he is condemning the morally weak, effeminate male who is *willing* to blur gender distinctions and play the passive (woman’s) role, presumably in a homoerotic relationship.

¹⁰² Epictetus, *Discourses* 3:1:27-28. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of W.A. Oldfather *Discourses* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1952).

¹⁰³ Ibid. 3:1:42-43.

¹⁰⁴ He actually implies that some men are effeminate, or at least hairless, by nature, which might mean he would accept that some men are homosexual by nature.

Although prone to harsh exaggeration at times, Martial (b. 40 CE) bluntly sheds more light on Roman attitudes toward homoeroticism. In a number of his epigrams, Martial mercilessly attacks and exposes passive male participants in same sex relationships. For Martial, it is simply wrong for a *man* to *submit* to another male, especially to an inferior!

You sleep with well-endowed boys, Phoebus, and what stands for them doesn't stand for you. Phoebus, I ask you, what do you wish me to suspect? I wanted to believe you an effeminate, but rumor says you are no queen.¹⁰⁵

Martial's condemnation extends to the cultic realm as well, as he shows little respect for Cybele's priests, the *Galli*, who castrate themselves as a sign of devotion to the goddess. Martial associates these men with promiscuous homoerotic activity:

What concern have you, eunuch (*galle*) Baeticus, with the feminine abyss? This tongue of yours should be licking male middles. Why was your cock cut off with a Samian shard if you were so fond of a cunt, Baeticus? Your head should be castrated. You may be a eunuch loin wise, but you cheat Cybele's rites. With your mouth you are a man.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Martial's comments suggest that it was not unusual for a married man to have a beloved boy (*puero*), which could cause marital tension:

Catching me with a boy, wife, you upbraid me harshly and point out that you too have an arse. How often did Juno say the same to her wanton Thunderer! Nonetheless, he lies with strapping Ganymede. The Tiryinthian used to lay aside his bow and bend Hylas over: do you think Megara had no buttocks? Fugitive Daphne tormented Phoebus: but the Oebalian boy bade those flames vanish. Though Briseis often lay with her back to Aeacus' son, his smooth friend was closer to him. So kindly don't give masculine names to your belongings wife, and think of yourself as having two cunts.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Martial, *Epigrams*. Cf. also 1:24, 2:28, 2:51, 3:74, 6:37. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of D.R. Shackleton Bailey *Epigrams* LCL (Harvard University Press: London, 1993).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 3:81.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 11:43. Cf. also Juvenal, *Satire* 6:268-272.

This passage suggests that, notwithstanding the tension that an ongoing pederastic relationship might create between a man and his wife, certain men were more fulfilled by such a relationship and were reluctant to give it up.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in spite of the double life some men are able to live, Martial appears to attack this type of infidelity:

Your wife is a girl such as a husband would hardly ask for in his most extravagant prayers, rich, noble, cultivated, virtuous. You burst your loins, Bassus, but you do it with long-haired boys whom you have procured for yourself with your wife's dowry. And your cock, which she bought for many thousands, returns to your lady so languid that, whether excited by coaxing words or requested with a soft thumb, it won't rise. Have some shame, for a change; or let us go to law. It's not yours, Bassus. You sold it.¹⁰⁹

These pederastic relationships are excessive, unfair, and ultimately destructive to the marital union.¹¹⁰

For example, Catullus suggests that once a man is married, pederastic relationships become unsavory:

You are said to find it hard,
Perfumed bridegroom, to give up
Smooth-skinned boys, but give them up...
We realize you've only known
Permitted pleasures: husbands, though
Have no right to the same pleasures.¹¹¹

What this quote suggests is that some men reluctantly gave up their beloved boy/slave, in order to get married. What is more, it implies that at least in some quarters of society a *form* of pederasty was alive and well and it was acknowledged. Nevertheless, husbands were required to give up this type of pleasure, in order to make their marriages work smoothly.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 14:205.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 12:97.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Juvenal, *Satire* 6:268f.

¹¹¹ Catullus 61:134-141 in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 71.

Martial suggests that the change of partners means a change in sex life in the sense that the active male has to get used to a woman's body parts. This does not appear to have been an easy task. In fact, during the early stages of a man's married life, a woman is described as being like a foreign object:

Practise feminine embraces, Victor, do, and let your cock learn a trade unknown to it. The veils are a-weaving for your fiancée, the girl is already being dressed, soon the newly-wed will be cropping your boys. She will let her eager spouse sodomize her once, while she fears the first wound of the new lance, but her nurse and her mother will forbid its happening often and say: "She's your wife, not your boy." Ah what embarrassments, what ordeals you will suffer if a cunt is something foreign to you!¹¹²

As a result of some men's unwillingness to give up their relationships with young males and their distant social relationship with women, the sexual relationship of a newly married husband and wife could be tenuous and foreign. This relationship was unable to satisfy completely some men, and no doubt some women. Nonetheless men were strongly encouraged to move away from relationships with boys.

Before we move on, we will look at a couple more sources that come after Paul's era. They are significant sources, however, because they show a continuity of thought toward homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman world before and after Paul's time.

Pseudo-Lucian's *Affairs of the Heart* (early fourth century CE) argues about the relative virtues of the love of boys versus the love of women. Although the author of this work seems to favour pederasty, in contrast to Plutarch, like Plutarch he gives both sides of the debate.

To begin, Charicles starts the debate off by arguing that men and women are naturally meant to come together, in order to perpetuate the human race:

¹¹² Martial, *Epigrams* 11:78.

Knowing that we are something created from perishable matter and that the life-time assigned each of us by fate is but short, she (Aphrodite, “the first mother and earliest root of every creature”) contrived that the death of one thing should be the birth of another and meted out fresh births to compensate for what dies, so that by replacing one another we live for ever. But, since it was impossible for anything to be born but from a single source, she devised in each species two types. For she allowed males as their peculiar privilege to ejaculate semen, and made females to be a vessel as it were for the reception of seed, and, imbuing both sexes with a common desire, she linked them to each other, ordaining as a sacred law of necessity that each should retain its own nature and that neither should the female grow unnaturally (*para physin*) masculine nor the male be unbecomingly soft (*malaki*). For this reason the intercourse of men with women has till this day preserved the life of men by an undying succession, and no man can boast he is the son only of man; no, people pay equal homage to their mother and to their father, and all honours are still retained equally by these two revered names.¹¹³

Male and female are not only anatomically suited to be complementary to one another, but also they possess a “common desire” for one another. Each must retain its biological nature, in order to procreate. For these reasons, same sex relations defy nature’s intent. Unfortunately, Charicles laments, human life has gradually moved away from “the laws made by nature” (*physis*) that linked men to women and created excellent children.¹¹⁴ It “degenerated from such nobility to the lowest depths of hedonism and cut out strange and extraordinary paths to enjoyment. Then luxury, daring all, transgressed the laws of nature (*physin*) herself.”¹¹⁵ As a result, men began unashamedly sleeping with other men, “sowing their seed...on barren rocks they bought a little pleasure at the cost of disgrace.”¹¹⁶ Due to their intemperance and unquenchable thirst for pleasure, men unnaturally stoop to have homoerotic relations.

Charicles goes on to express his frustration with the kind of men these same sex relationships create:

¹¹³ Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 19. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of M.D. Macleod, *Affairs of the Heart*, vol. VII LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1967).

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 20.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 20.

The daring of some men has advanced so far in tyrannical violence as even to wreak sacrilege upon nature (*physin*) with a knife. By depriving males of their masculinity they have found wider ranges of pleasure. But those who become wretched and luckless in order to be boys for longer remain male no longer, being a perplexing riddle of dual gender, neither being kept for the functions to which they have been born nor yet having the thing into which they have been changed.¹¹⁷

First, the active lover is chided for his excessive and violent treatment of the passive male. In order to find new pleasures, he subjugates a slave-boy/man by castrating him, thus depriving the boy/man of his sexual organ, a sign of his masculinity. Notwithstanding the unequal nature of this relationship, again it is the male who assumes a woman's role, who gains most of the scorn, not the active, virile lover. Men who continue to play the passive role beyond a suitable age, "in order to be boys for longer" lose their gender identity and all respect; they become social outcasts.

Moreover, Theomnestus declares that the proponents of purely Platonic love ought not to be trusted:

But may the airy talkers and those who raise their philosophic brows temple-high and even higher, beguile the ignorant with the speciousness of their solemn phrases. For Socrates was as devoted to love as anyone and Alcibiades, once he had lain down beneath the same mantle with him, did not rise unassailed.¹¹⁸

This is a clear rejection of the account of Plato in *Symposium*¹¹⁹, and below, as we shall see, of the pederast Callicratidas' comments.¹²⁰ Also, Charicles argues that pederasty lacks mutuality. A boy or youth, he declares, cannot possibly be attracted to a weathered, hairy, and hard middle-aged man. In contrast, a woman has beautiful, hairless skin and

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 21.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 54. Cf. also 24 where Charicles asks: "How is it then that through you courses no love for wisdom or for justice and the other virtues which have in their allotted station the company of full grown men, while beauty in boys excites the most ardent fires of passion in you... That it is lovers of youth rather than of wisdom who give honourable names to dishonourable passions and call physical beauty virtue of the soul." Cf. also Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* XIII 605d where Athenaeus accuses philosophers of indulging in passion *para physin*: "So beware, you philosophers who indulge in passion contrary to nature (*para physin*), who sin against the goddess of love." Cf. also 565d-f.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 219c.

¹²⁰ Cf. Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 49.

“her luxuriant ringlets of hair, hanging down from her head, bloom with a dusky beauty that rivals the hyacinths.”¹²¹ For Charicles, the pleasure a man shares with a woman is mutual and evenly balanced:

But why do we not pursue those pleasures that are mutual and bring equal delight to the passive and to the active partners?...Now men’s intercourse with women involves giving like enjoyment in return. For the two sexes part with pleasure only if they have had an equal effect on each other – unless we ought rather to heed the verdict of Tiresias that the woman’s enjoyment is twice as great as the man’s.. And I think it honourable for men not to wish for a selfish pleasure or to seek to gain some private benefit by receiving from anyone the sum total of enjoyment, but to share what they obtain and to requite like with like. But no one could be so mad as to say this in the case of boys. No, the active lover, according to his view of the matter, departs after having obtained an exquisite pleasure, but the one outraged suffers pain and tears at first...but of pleasure he has none at all.¹²²

Pseudo-Lucian’s Charicles believes that pederasty promotes an inequality between the active and passive lovers. In contrast to a relationship between a man and a woman, in a pederastic relationship the active lover receives *all* the enjoyment, while the passive male, humiliated and disgusted, receives none at all. Once again, a male and a female are biologically complementary to one another, and, therefore, heteroerotic relationships are comprised of a mutuality that same sex relationships cannot duplicate.

In turn, Callicratidas gives his speech on behalf of pederasty. He begins by suggesting that the “love of males...is the only activity combining both pleasure and virtue.”¹²³ Like Plutarch’s Protogenes, he views marriage as simply a means to an end: “For marriage is a remedy invented to ensure man’s necessary perpetuity, but only love for males is a noble duty enjoined by a philosophic spirit.”¹²⁴ This stance is no surprise, as his negative attitude toward women is glaring throughout his speech:

¹²¹ Ibid. 26.

¹²² Ibid. 27.

¹²³ Ibid. 31.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 33.

Let women be ciphers and be retained merely for child-bearing; but in all else away with them, and may I be rid of them. For what man of sense could endure from dawn onwards women who beautify themselves with artificial devices, women whose true form is unshapely, but who have extraneous adornments to beguile the unsightliness of nature?¹²⁵

It is interesting that he attacks the unnatural appearance that women attempt to create for themselves. This is a favourite argument of those who attack the passive male in a homoerotic relationship. The attack against women does not stop here, as he goes on with a ferocious assault against their ugliness, need for artificial adornments and make-up, excessive materialism and extravagance, esoteric religious activities, and gluttony.¹²⁶ Quite the opposite, boys live a “manly life.”¹²⁷ Boys are pure, wholesome, modest, cultured, hard working, educated, athletic, and temperate.¹²⁸ He has a more ideal and pure of type pederasty in mind than those who attack pederasty and see it as simply a degrading and self-destructive institution.

He goes on to describe the high level of loyalty and love he would have for the boys who deserve his love and how this type of dedication is in line with the “divine wisdom of the heroes, who till their dying day breathed love of friendship.”¹²⁹ Interestingly, Callicratidas suggests that pederasty is not only part of tradition, but also divinely ordained: pederasty is, “inbred into us from childhood” and “it is an ordinance enacted by divine laws (*theiois nomois*) and a heritage that has come down to us.”¹³⁰ In short, Callicratidas suggests that pederasty is not only traditional, but also part of the regular order of things.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 38.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 39-43. Cf. also Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* I. 8.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 44.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 44-46.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 46-47.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 48. Cf. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 138 and Plutarch, *The Dialogue on Love* 767a. Also, Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* II. 38, where the pederast in the novel implies this view by contrasting the honesty of boys with the unnaturalness of women. He says that boys' kisses are natural (*tes physeos*), rather than artistic or artificial.

Furthermore, in opposition to his opponent Charicles, Callicratidas sees Socrates's actions as the ideal model: "One should love youths as Alcibiades was loved by Socrates who slept like a father with him under the same cloak."¹³¹ He encourages young men to "be temperate when (they) approach virtuous boys", not to seek "brief pleasure" at the expense of "lasting affection", and to show consistent emotions "from boyhood to old age."¹³² If they love thus, Callicratidas argues, "having nothing disgraceful on their conscience, [they] find their lifetime sweetest and after their death their glorious report goes out to all men."¹³³ Again, like Aeschines, Plato's Pausanias, and Plutarch's Protogenes before him, Lucian's Callicratidas is on the defensive here. His need to defend pederasty against its detractors and to clarify its appropriate form suggest that this institution was not only questioned, but also oftentimes did not live up to its virtuous rhetoric.

Although the narrator, Lycinus, does not completely take the side of Callicratidas, he does uphold the superiority of men, and therefore ideal male relationships. According to him, all men should get married and only "the wise" should be permitted to enter relationships with boys, "for perfect virtue grows least of all among women."¹³⁴ As for Charicles, the narrator says, "I consoled him quietly by repeatedly expressing my great admiration for his eloquence and his able defence of the more awkward cause."¹³⁵

At the end of the dialogue, Lycinus asks the pederast Theomnestus for his response to the retelling of the debate between Charicles and Callicratidas. Interestingly, he shamelessly admits to thirsting after boys and loving them physically. He argues that Socrates and Alcibiades, and even Achilles and Patroclus, had a physical aspect to their relationship. His response suggests that pederasty rarely lived up to the platonic ideal.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Ibid. 49.

¹³² Ibid. 49.

¹³³ Ibid. 49.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 51.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 52.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 53-54.

Summary:

The sources presented above share many common views toward male homoeroticism. First, the passive partner in a homoerotic relationship is consistently ridiculed and despised for assuming a woman's role. In general, any man who distorts his gender role, whether it is by assuming a woman's role in a sexual relationship, wearing women's clothes, or shaving his body, becomes unnaturally effeminate and soft, which are the natural (inherent) character traits of a woman. Next, the sources do not attack the active partner with as much ferocity. On the other hand, he does not escape unscathed. Oftentimes the active lover is chided for his hedonism and lack of self-control. As a result of his unwillingness to subdue his desires, he violently abuses his passive partner and contributes to his slide into effeminacy. Third, though some of the sources attempt to describe the difference between a good and a destructive pederastic relationship, in general, they consistently criticize and ultimately oppose such a relationship. Pederastic relationships are destructive, as they are often characterized by disrespect, inconstancy, and a lack of mutuality. Most importantly, boy-love cannot reproduce children and perpetuate the human race. Lastly, the sources are willing to recognize that men may feel a natural attraction to one another. This is simply seen as an appreciation for what is beautiful. It is important to note, then, that the sources do not attack homosexual orientation, as we understand it.

Next, what do the findings show about *para physin* and the concept's relationship to male homoeroticism? Is there a unified perspective about what is *para physin*? In general, according to nature (*kata physin*) refers to any sexual relationship between a man and a woman where the man assumes the active lovemaking role and the woman the passive role. Plato is more specific. He argues that when a man and a woman have sexual intercourse for the purpose of procreation, the pleasure experienced is "due to nature" (*kata physin*).

On the other hand, the notion of what is contrary to nature (*para physin*) is a little more complex. First, when a *man* assumes the passive position in a homoerotic

encounter, it is considered *para physin*. It is unnatural for a man to assume the female gender role in a sexual relationship. Likewise, it is *para physin* for a female to assume the active male role, thus all male and female homoerotic relationships that disorder socially defined gender roles are considered *para physin*. "Nature" in this case refers to socially produced gender roles. Notwithstanding the importance of socially constructed gender roles in understanding the concept of *para physin*, the sources also suggest that homoeroticism is *para physin* because males are not complementary sexual partners. Here "nature," refers to the natural order of things. The natural world shows us that male and female are complementary genders; they are anatomically compatible. As a result, heteroerotic relationships nurture mutuality and are consummated by way of an appropriate level of pleasure. Moreover, they enable the human race to reproduce itself, and attain immortality.

Female Homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman Tradition

The lack of references to female homoeroticism in the Greek world necessarily limits what one can say on the topic, especially given the lack of references written by women. Nonetheless, this section will attempt to shed some light on this topic with what few sources there are available.

Some of what we do know, and the only source written by a woman, come from the Greek poet, Sappho (ca. 7th/6th century BCE). Despite the fact that Sappho lived a long time before the start of Christianity, she is significant for understanding female homoeroticism in the Roman period. The people in the Roman world were intrigued by Sappho and her poetry and reacted to it in both positive and negative ways; these reactions illustrate Roman attitudes toward female homoeroticism:

The treatment of Sappho and of her life provides a good barometer of sensibilities concerning female homoeroticism in the Roman period. This period saw great appreciation for her poetry and

an increasing preoccupation with her love for women, usually expressed in terms of disapproval of that love.¹³⁷

As an artist, Sappho was respected. Yet, as someone who loved women, she was ridiculed and condemned.

Unfortunately, Sappho's poems come down to us in poor condition. They are known only from papyrus fragments and quotations in the texts of writers who lived subsequent to her.¹³⁸ Even so, the fragments and quotations are informative. First, educated people, including Christian writers, from Classical Greece to the Roman period respected and recognized Sappho's artistic and intellectual abilities.¹³⁹ Second, many of these same people were unimpressed with her sexual preference for women.¹⁴⁰

In the few remaining fragments of her poetry, Sappho appears to have written vivid verses containing explicit references to her love for women:

To me it seems
That man has the fortune of gods,
Whoever sits beside you, and close
Who listens to you sweetly speaking
And laughing temptingly;
My heart flutters in my breast,
Whenever I look quickly, for a moment –
I say nothing, my tongue broken,
A delicate fire runs under my skin,
My eyes see nothing, my ears roar,
Cold sweat rushes down me,
Trembling seizes me,
I am greener than grass,
To myself I seem
Needing but little to die.

¹³⁷ Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women* p.31.

¹³⁸ Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* p.74.

¹³⁹ Brooten, *Love Between Women* pp. 31-33.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 34f.

But all must be endured, since...¹⁴¹

There is no evidence that during Sappho's own lifetime that her erotic inclinations were condemned, nor debated, but in subsequent centuries, writers, especially in the Roman period, show an increasing fixation with Sappho's love for women, often combined with a rejection of this type of love.¹⁴² This negative attitude toward Sappho's alleged homoerotic inclinations is consistent with the way early Christians and their pagan counterparts discredited women accused of homoerotic tendencies.

To begin with, we shall briefly return to Plato's *Symposium*, and his myth on the origin of the sexes. As mentioned above, men and women are two halves of an original being. They are either halves of a double man, a double woman, or of a woman and a man. Each half searches for its other half; thus, those who originate from the hermaphrodite are heteroerotic, while the other two beings (double man and double woman) are homoerotic. Plato's Aristophanes makes an important distinction between the latter two beings: those who are halves of a male and pursued other males "are the finest boys and striplings, for they have the most manly nature", but those who were halves of a female and pursued other females "have no great fancy for men: they are inclined rather to women, and of this stock are the she-minions."¹⁴³ Although nothing is really said here against female homoeroticism, the silence is telling, especially set against the superior male gender.

A Hellenistic Epigram that comes to us from Asklepiades from Samos (b. ca. 320 BCE) builds on this negative attitude toward female homoeroticism in the ancient world. He comments on the activities of two Samian women, Bitto and Nannion. These women "do not desire to come to Aphrodite conventionally but take themselves off another way, not nice. Hate these swervers from your bed, Kypris."¹⁴⁴ Curiously, Asklepiades declares his hostility toward female homoeroticism, and yet, elsewhere he shamelessly displays his own homoerotic inclinations: "but when the doors swing open and he

¹⁴¹ Sappho, Fragm. 31 in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*. Cf also Fragments 1, 16, 94.

¹⁴² Broten, *Love Between Women* pp. 34-36.

¹⁴³ Plato, *Symposium* 188e forward.

¹⁴⁴ Asklepiades, *Greek Anthology* 5.207.

appears, rain me upon his head, that my tears may be drunk by at least his yellow hair.”¹⁴⁵ What appears unconventional, then, about a same sex relationship between two women is the fact that one woman would have to shed her conventional gender role (the passive role) and feign a man’s part (active lover), which men in the ancient world quite simply found unacceptable. This negative portrayal of female homoeroticism by men remains constant over time.

Like Asklepiades, Ovid (43 BCE-17 CE) considers female homoeroticism odd, to say the least. His *Metamorphoses* includes a story of the “unnatural passion” between two women, Iphis and Ianthe.¹⁴⁶ When Iphis is born, her mother, Telethusa, through the encouragement of the goddess Isis, disguises her gender, in order to protect her from the wrath of her father, Ligdus, who would only accept a boy, as “girls are more trouble, and fortune had denied them strength.”¹⁴⁷ Thirteen years later and still believing she is a boy, Ligdus finds her a beautiful bride named Ianthe with whom she falls passionately in love. Although “love came to both their hearts all unsuspected and filled them both with equal longing...Iphis loved without hope of her love’s fulfillment...a girl madly in love with another girl.”¹⁴⁸ She lacks hope because she realizes that her love is contrary to nature:

‘Oh, what will be the end of me,’ she said, ‘whom a love possesses that no one ever heard of, a strange and monstrous love? If the gods wished to save me they should have saved me; if not, and they wished to ruin me, they should at least have given me some natural woe (*naturale malum*), within the bounds of experience. Cows do not love cows, nor mares, mares; but the ram desires the sheep, and his own doe follows the stag. So also birds mate, and in the whole animal world there is no female smitten with love for female. I would I were no female!’¹⁴⁹

Iphis is frustrated with the gods. She views her same sex desires as an ill-fated sickness. Her affliction, loving another woman, is strange, unnatural, and distasteful. In fact, Iphis considers her unnatural love even more monstrous than Pasiphae’s love for a bull: “my

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 5.145.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9:666f. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of Frank Justus Miller, *Metamorphoses* LCL (William Heinemann, London, 1968).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 9:676-677.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 9:715-727.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 9:727-735.

passion is more mad than that, if the truth be told.”¹⁵⁰ After all, Pasiphae was a female and the bull clearly a male. Iphis’ concern is a result of her unequivocal realization that, unless by a miracle she turns into a male, her love for another woman is unnatural. Nature, “the bounds of experience,” shows us that male and female are complementary genders, regardless of sexual orientation: “in the whole animal world there is no female smitten with love for female.”

Consequently, Iphis pleads with herself to “banish from (her) heart this hopeless, foolish love,” and to “seek what is lawful, and love as a woman ought to love!”¹⁵¹ Though her love seems so right and both her family and the gods give her their blessing, “nature (*natura*) will not have it so, nature, more mighty than they all, who alone is working my distress.”¹⁵²

Fortunately, Iphis’ prayers are answered, and the story has a happy ending. Isis transforms Iphis into a man and “he” was able to gain his Ianthe.¹⁵³ Notwithstanding this happy ending, Ovid is clear on his position regarding female homoeroticism. Simply put, it is unnatural and lies outside the bounds of experience. This form of love cannot be consummated unless a miraculous event, namely a woman being transformed into a man, is to take place. Nature tells us that females are not anatomically suited for one another, even though a woman’s desires might suggest otherwise.

Lucian of Samosata (ca. 115-181 CE) sheds more light on the issue of female homoeroticism in his *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, where two courtesans, Clonarium and Leaena, exchange secrets. Clonarium hears that Leaena has been in a sexual relationship with a wealthy woman from Lesbos named Megilla, who loved her “just like a man.”¹⁵⁴ Although Leaena confesses to this, she is deeply ashamed of her relationship because it

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 9:737-738.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 9:745-748.

¹⁵² Ibid. 9:758f.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 9:785f.

¹⁵⁴ Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5.1:289. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of M.D. Macleod, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1969).

was “unnatural.”¹⁵⁵ Clonarium is eager to know more about Megilla and Leaena proceeds to describe her as “terribly like a man.”¹⁵⁶ How so? First, Leaena shares how Megilla and her female partner, Demonassa, “kissed me like men, not simply bringing their lips to mine, but opening their mouths a little, embracing me, and squeezing my breasts.”¹⁵⁷ Also, Megilla “pulled off her wig...and revealed the skin of her head which was shaved close, just as on the most energetic of athletes.”¹⁵⁸ Next, although she admits to not having “everything that a man has”, Megilla implies that she is still able to “play the part of a man” by way of “a much pleasanter method of (her) own.”¹⁵⁹ She then proceeds to describe herself as “born a woman like the rest of you, but I have the mind and the desires and everything else of a man.”¹⁶⁰ After Leaena implies that she and Megilla had sexual relations, where Megilla allegedly takes the active/male role, she ceases to narrate the details of what happens for “they’re not very nice; so, by Aphrodite in heaven, I won’t tell you!”¹⁶¹ Even Leaena, a female prostitute, is aware that female homoeroticism is unmentionable and something to be ashamed of. Why? By transcending the conventional gender roles of active/aggressive male and passive/submissive female, women who have sex with women are acting against “nature”, understood here as social convention, notwithstanding what their inner feelings are. In addition, again Lucian’s account vividly displays that women are not anatomically suited to have sexual relationships with one another. Megilla has to work at being male. More specifically, she has to adopt an artificial or unnatural “method” of penetration, in order to complete the sexual act.

Next, Seneca is not only concerned about the decadence and unnaturalness of Roman men and their lifestyle, but also that women were inflicted with the same disease:

The illustrious founder of the guild and profession of medicine remarked that women never lost their hair or suffered from pain in the feet; and yet nowadays they run short of hair and are

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 5.1:289.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 5.1:289.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 5.3:290.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 5.3:290.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 5.3:291.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 5.4:291.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 5.4:292.

afflicted with gout. This does not mean that woman's physique has changed, but that it has been conquered; in rivaling male indulgences they have also rivaled the ills to which men are heirs. They keep just as late hours, and drink just as much liquor; they challenge men in wrestling and carousing; they are no less given to vomiting from distended stomachs and to thus discharging all their wine again; nor are they behind the men in gnawing ice, as relief to their fevered digestions.¹⁶²

Women are not only matching men by living decadently and unconventionally, but also they are matching men in their active loving making, which Seneca finds especially repulsive:

And they even match men in their passions, although they were created to feel passively (may the gods and goddesses confound them!). They devise the most impossible varieties of unchastity, and in the company of men they play the part of men. What wonder, then, that we can trip up the statement of the greatest and most skilled physician, when so many women are gaudy and bald! Because of their vices, women have ceased to deserve the privileges of their sex; they have put off their womanly nature and are therefore condemned to suffer the diseases of men.¹⁶³

Seneca believes that women are, by their "womanly nature", meant to feel love passively. By playing "the part of men", the role of active, aggressive initiator of the sexual act, women are acting unnaturally; they are disordering conventional gender roles. He believes that this is why they are suffering "the diseases of men." What he finds objectionable and unnatural is the disordering of gender roles. These women are both disordering a culturally defined gender hierarchy and ignoring their inborn sexual role as receptors of male sperm. Again, male and female, note female and female, are anatomically complementary to one another.

Like Seneca, Martial was not impressed with female homoeroticism, and did not hesitate to make snide comments toward women who confounded gender roles:

I never saw you close to men, Bassa, and no rumor gave you a lover. You were always surrounded by a crowd of your own sex, performing every office, with no man coming near you.

¹⁶² Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 95:20-21.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 95:21.

So I confess I thought you a Lucretia; but Bassa, for shame, you were a fornicator. You dare to join two cunts and your monstrous organ feigns masculinity. You have invented a portent worthy of the Theban riddle: where no man is, there is adultery.¹⁶⁴

Lesbian Philaenis sodomizes boys and, more cruel than a husband's lust, penetrates eleven girls per diem. She also plays with the harpastum high girt, gets yellow with sand, and with effortless arm rotates weights that would tax an athlete. Muddy from the crumbling wrestling floor, she takes a beating from the blows of an oiled trainer. She does not dine or lie down for dinner before she has vomited six pints of neat wine, to which she thinks she can decently return when she has eaten sixteen collops. When after all this she gets down to sex, she does not suck men (she thinks that not virile enough), but absolutely devours girls' middles. May the god give you your present mind, Philaenis, who think it virile to lick a cunt.¹⁶⁵

Although he is rude and vulgar, Martial is consistent with other philosophers and commentators above in regard to female homoeroticism. First, female homoeroticism falls within a pleasure-seeking context. In addition, female homoeroticism is unnatural because it requires one partner to simulate the active, male role. By assuming the active role, a woman moves outside of the boundaries of her conventional gender role (a role that mirrors her place in society) as the passive recipient of a man's love. This attitude is consistent with a later text (post-Paul) that mentions sex between women.

In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Artemidorus of Daldis (second century CE) creates a distinction between three classes of sexual acts that may arise in dreams: sexual intercourse that is natural, legal, and customary; sexual intercourse that is illegal; and sexual intercourse that is unnatural.¹⁶⁶ According to Artemidorus, legal sexual intercourse includes sexual relations of a man with almost anybody.¹⁶⁷ This list includes a wife, prostitute, an unknown woman, a slave (male or female), an older or younger

¹⁶⁴ Martial, *Epigrams* 1:90. Cf. also The Elder Seneca, *Controversiae* 1:2.223, who says that a man who sees his wife and another woman in bed deserves sympathy, even if he kills both of them, as "a husband ought not to be asked to carry out so shameful an examination." The shame for the man partly lies in a female usurping his role as active lover.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 7:67.

¹⁶⁶ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams* 1:78. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of Robert J White, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Noyes Press: New Jersey, 1975).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* p. 166 n.173. As Nissinen points out, this includes "not only penetrating a social inferior such as a wife, another man's wife, a prostitute, an unknown streetwalker, a slave (male or female), but also being penetrated by another man and masturbating."

man, and masturbation.¹⁶⁸ Illegal sexual intercourse includes incest.¹⁶⁹ Lastly, “unnatural sexual intercourse” includes a man having sexual intercourse with himself, self-fellatio, “a woman possessing another woman”, sexual intercourse with a god or a goddess, or a dead body, and sexual relations with an animal. Whatever is implied by “legal” and “nature” here, it is clear that Artemidorus believes relations between women are something out of the ordinary, unlike relations between men that are listed mostly as acts that are legal. Why the distinction here? A woman cannot perform the act of penetration, which Artemidorus refers to as “the secrets of the woman” by any “natural” measures and therefore is unable to play an active sexual role.¹⁷⁰ As was suggested throughout this section, “artificial emulation of penetration breaks the balance of social status and gender hierarchy, and this is what makes sexual contact between women ‘unnatural.’”¹⁷¹

All these examples above suggest that “nature” must be interpreted two ways. First, it is equivalent to a woman’s conventional gender role. If two women engage in a sexual relationship, one participant will inevitably have to play the active/aggressive lover, a role culturally defined for a man. Men in the ancient world believed that active role was neither a natural nor an acceptable role for any woman to play, as they were not physically or mentally equipped to play this part. The active role represented superior intelligence, strength and power, whereas the passive role embodied ignorance, submissiveness and effeminateness. In short, active lovemaking was the exclusive and *natural* domain of a man.

Notwithstanding this important point, underlying the negative attitude toward women and the culturally constructed gender hierarchy, there is the notion that male and female are complementary genders; this complementarity is visible in the natural world. Good sense tells us that heteroeroticism is *kata physin* and homoeroticism is *para physin*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 1:78.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 1:78-79.

¹⁷⁰ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* p. 77.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 77.

Male Homoeroticism in the Jewish Tradition

The Biblical Voice: The Hebrew Bible's View on Homoeroticism

The Hebrew Scriptures provide us with only a small number of references to homoeroticism. Only in the Holiness Code¹ (Leviticus 17-26) is the *act* of male same-sex relations explicitly condemned. Elsewhere, it is not entirely clear that mutual male homoeroticism is being attacked.

First, Leviticus 18 lists a variety of prohibited sexual relations. It begins by urging Israel to separate itself from the improper practices of the cultures surrounding it both past and present:

The Lord told Moses to say to the Israelites: I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt where once you dwelt, nor may you do as they do in Canaan to which I am bringing you; you must not conform to their customs. You must keep my laws and conform faithfully to my statutes: I am the lord your God (Lev.18: 1-4)

The ancient Israelites believed that pagans, especially the Egyptians² and the Canaanites³, had a history of practicing incest and other indecent sexual acts.⁴ In Leviticus, these

¹ Cf. Saul M. Olyan, " 'And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman': On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (1994) note 1, which gives a brief, but informative, overview of the origins of the Holiness Code.

² Cf. Ezek 16:26; cf. 23:3, 20-21

³ Cf. Genesis 9:18-29; 19:5-8.

⁴ Cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22* (New York: The Anchor Bible – Doubleday, 2000), 1518f. Milgrom argues that there is no extrabiblical evidence to suggest that the Canaanites were excessively immoral. He suggests that sexual depravity was a way of both stigmatizing the enemy Canaanites and sending a serious warning to Israel that it would also be expelled from the land, if it followed the same path. Or, alternatively, the author of Leviticus may have exaggerated the sexual sins of the Egyptians and the Canaanites so that Israel would break off all ties with them (cf. 1520). Cf. also Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 42 and Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, pp. 30-37 who both argue that the nations surrounding Israel actually shared similar sexual ethics, prohibitions, and gender roles as the Israelites themselves.

condemnable sex acts are prohibited for all Israelites and aliens who wish to reside in Holy Land.

In particular, the Code prohibits a man from having sexual intercourse with another man as he would with a woman: "You must not lie with a man as with a woman: that is an abomination." (Lev.18: 22). In this case, it is only the active male participant in the sexual act that is censured.⁵ Leviticus 20:13 expands on this prohibition to include *both* the active and passive male participants⁶ and invokes the death penalty: "If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, both commit an abomination. They must be put to death; their blood be on their own heads!" (Lev. 20:13). Together, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 support a general prohibition of male same sex relations, no status, age, or other distinctions are made. Notably, female homoeroticism is not mentioned.

Significantly, the prohibition implies that, as in the Greco-Roman world, men and women have specific gender roles. If a man penetrates another man "as with a woman,"⁷ both are participating in the transgression of a man's specific gender role during sex.⁸

⁵ Cf. Olyan, "You Shall Not Lie", p. 186f.

⁶ Cf. Ibid. p.186f. Olyan argues that the change to both parties being guilty is awkward; "it suggests redactorial activity intended to widen the scope of the law to include both parties."

⁷ Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus* p. 1569. According to Milgrom "as with a woman" refers to vaginal penetration; hence, in this case it must refer to anal penetration. Cf. also the linguistic analysis of Olyan, "You Shall Not Lie," p.183-185.

⁸ Olyan, "You Shall Not Lie," p. 188 argues that "notions of gendered sexual roles were apparently crucial in shaping H's boundary constructions defining licit and illicit sex acts at both the penultimate and final stages in the development of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. Anal receptivity is compared by implication to vaginal receptivity through the use of the idiom *miskebe issa*, but the laws make clear that vaginal receptivity has no acceptable analogue among men: Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 imply that a male must experience ('lie') 'the lying down of a woman' with women only. Receptivity is bounded on the basis of biological sex; it is constructed as appropriate exclusively to females; it is gendered as feminine. Neither the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 nor the framing materials give reasons why this is so; there is no allusion in them to the 'structure of creation,' the expectation that human males and females will couple and procreate." Also, according to Martii Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* p. 42, the ancient Israelites frowned upon a transgression of gender boundaries as they believed it threatened their very existence: "Things that shook the internal peace of the community and the coherence of its structures, interfered with the vital growth of population, or caused problems in family relationships were hazardous to a society that had to struggle constantly for its very existence. Sexual activities had to be regulated so as to strengthen the identity of society, its integrity and growth. This necessitated taboo-protected gender roles and, accordingly, rules for sexual customs, the

Gender related commandments in Deuteronomy help support the claim that ancient Israelites had specific gender expectations for men and women. For example, eunuchs are excluded from “the assembly of the Lord” (Deut. 23:1-2). Also, cross-dressing is prohibited: “No woman may wear an article of man’s clothing, nor may a man put on a woman’s dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God.” (Deut. 22:5)⁹ Gender roles and their transgression is a plausible foundation for understanding Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

This view is supported by Ancient Near Eastern sources, which in general are concerned with gender roles and appropriate sexual practices.¹⁰ Mesopotamian sources touch on male homoeroticism whenever a man becomes or is falsely accused of becoming effeminate. For example, there are two references to homoeroticism in the *Middle Assyrian Laws* (ca. Twelfth century BCE)¹¹:

TABLET A, 19: ‘If a seignior (*arvelum*) started a rumour against his neighbor (*tappau*) in private saying, “People have lain repeatedly with him”, or he said to him in a brawl in the presence of (other) people, “People have lain repeatedly with you; I will prosecute you”, since he is not able to prosecute (him) (and) did not prosecute (him), they shall flog that seignior fifty (times) with staves (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month; they shall castrate him and he shall also pay one talent of lead.’

TABLET A, 20: ‘If a seignior lay with his neighbor, when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him, they shall lie with him (and) turn him into a eunuch.’

transgression of which was perceived as fatal. It was not just procreation, important in itself, that was protected...but the entire gendered structure of the community, in which each and every one was expected to conform to his or her gender role and social class.

⁹ Cf. Deut. 9-11 and Lev. 19:19, which prohibit mixtures in general. Cf. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, pp. 42-43. Nissinen suggests that, in the case of cross-dressing, “the motivation of prohibiting the mixture had clear socioreligious aspects (42).” By the time of the post-exilic period, one of the distinctive features of the Ancient Israelites was that they did not wish to compromise gender identification: “A ‘third gender’ role comparable to that of the Mesopotamian or Syrian devotees of the goddesses was an impossible option for an Israelite. Both castration and cross-dressing were signs of devotion to an alien deity, special traits of gender identification and gender roles that were associated with cultures forbidden to the Israelites. Mixing gender roles was not a matter of personal preference or orientation but a cultural signifier (43).”

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 43.

¹¹ In Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, p. 33.

These laws give us some information about the Assyrian attitude toward homoeroticism. First, if a male of seignior rank participates in homoerotic acts, either actively or passively, he has committed a serious crime. The penalty includes castration and the guilty man himself has to *submit* to the act he has committed on others. Here it seems quite likely that the Assyrians sought to degrade and humiliate the guilty party by having intercourse with him as if he were a woman.¹² Also, the first passage suggests that passive homoeroticism is especially appalling and condemnable, as a false accusation of consistently assuming the passive part is considered to be scurrilous and worthy of severe punishment.

Lastly, the use of the term abomination (*to eba*) also suggests that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 see sexual contact between two men as a disordering of gender roles. Male homoeroticism constitutes an abomination (*to eba*), which more precisely refers to a transgression of "natural" (or conventional) gender boundaries, viewed as established by God.¹³

Jacob Milgrom poses another plausible argument as to why male homoeroticism is being singled out. He argues that the common denominator of all the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 is that they involve the releasing of semen for the purpose of sexual intercourse, resulting in either incest and prohibited offspring or, as in the case of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, a lack of offspring. In short, "the theme is procreation,"¹⁴ and specifically the purposeful waste of seed. This helps to explain lack of references to female homoeroticism too. Female same-sex relations are nowhere

¹² Cf. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, pp. 30-34, where Bailey cites the story of Horus and Seth and suggests there is evidence that among both the Egyptians and other peoples homoeroticism was regarded as a way to inflict humiliation upon a defeated enemy.

¹³ Cf. Olyan, "You shall not Lie," n. 3, p.180 who says that in general *to eba* "suggests the violation of a socially constructed boundary, the undermining or reversal of what is conventional, the order of things as the ancient might see it." He argues that "the conventional translation 'abomination' suggests only what is abhorrent; it does not get across the sense of the violation of a socially constructed boundary, the reversal or undermining of what is conventional, but viewed as established by the deity." Cf. also Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, pp. 59-60.

prohibited in the Hebrew Scriptures “because in the act no bodily fluids are lost.”¹⁵ Whereas, “the *legal* reason” for forbidding male homoeroticism is the “waste, the non-productive spilling, of seed” during coitus, which, in the case of lesbianism, does not occur.¹⁶

In addition, although there is no allusion to the structure of creation, it is quite plausible that the Israelites saw male same sex relations as confusing the divine order of creation. Male homoeroticism ignores God’s creative design in Genesis, according to which male and female are anatomically complementary genders. This complementarity between male and female enables humans to fulfill God’s command to “be fruitful and increase.” (Gen 1:27-28; Gen 2:18-24). Moreover, male same-sex relations undermine God’s promise to Israel that Israel’s population would multiply (Lev 26:9; Gen 17:6-7).

A few significant points emerge from our brief look at Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. First, male homoeroticism is included in a list of indecent sexual acts that the ancient Israelites were to avoid, in order to separate themselves from depraved pagans and to warrant their place in the Holy Land. Next, together, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 endorse a general prohibition of sexual relations between *all* males, regardless of what role (active or passive) one might play. In contrast to some of the Greco-Roman sources, there are no distinctions made for age, social class, or anything else. Lastly, within Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 there is an implicit notion about what is considered normal or natural. Together, the prohibitions imply that, like in the Greco-Roman world, it is “unnatural” for men to participate in same-sex relations. Male homoeroticism not only blurs gender roles, which necessitate that males must assume the active role in a sexual relationship, but also it denies the inherent complementarity of male and female. “Nature,” in this case, refers to both social convention *and* to the natural order of things based on God’s creative design.

¹⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p. 1567.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1568.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1568.

The next reference to male homoeroticism arises in Genesis 19, which gives a theological explanation for the ancient destruction of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, on the south shore of the Dead Sea. In this chapter, God sends two men (angels) into Sodom. Lot, an alien resident sitting at the city gate as they arrive, perceives them to be travelers in need of a rest, so he hospitably invites the two strangers to spend the night at his home. However, before the strangers lie down to rest, *all* the men of Sodom surround Lot's house. These men order Lot to send the strangers out into the street so that they can sexually assault them: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may have intercourse¹⁷ with them" (Gen. 19:5). As the traditional guest-host relationship dictates, Lot places the well being of his guests above all else and offers his two virgin daughters to suffer the abuse instead. Nevertheless, the men of Sodom take offense to being judged by Lot, an alien resident, reject the offer of his daughters, and threaten him with a more severe violent assault (Gen. 19:7-9).

The threat of sexual violence against the strangers and Lot by the Sodomite men confirms Sodom and Gomorrah's reputation; the cities are filled with wicked people. As a result, both cities receive the well-known punishment: God destroys them (Gen. 19:24-25). Only Lot, who is directed out of the city by the angels, and his two daughters survive the destruction.¹⁸

What does this story contribute to our understanding of homoeroticism in the ancient Jewish tradition? To begin with, it is clear from the story that the Sodomite men are intent on sexually assaulting the strangers. This is appalling for two reasons. First, it ignores the traditional Near Eastern hospitality code, where hosts are obligated to guarantee the safety of their guests. Second, the Sodomite men are intent on committing homoerotic *rape*.¹⁹

¹⁷ Or more precisely, "that we may know them." Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 140.

¹⁸ God transforms Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, after she disobeyed the angels and turned around to look upon the destruction of the two cities (Gen. 19:26).

¹⁹ As we shall see, the latter reason is the focus of post-biblical writers, like Philo of Alexandria.

The Sodomite's intent to rape the men (angels) seems clear. Nonetheless, some scholars tend to ignore the homoerotic rape element of their wickedness. These scholars believe that the Sodomites' actions simply represent a general depravity and therefore de-emphasize the homoerotic aspect of the Sodomites' evil ways. As a result, they argue that the Sodomites' most serious sin was the violation of the guest-host relationship.²⁰ In support of this argument one scholar argues that the passages dealing with Sodom and its evil ways (E.g., Deut. 29:23, 32:32; Isa. 3:9, 13:19; Jer. 23:14, 49:18, 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek. 16:46-48; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; Matt. 10:15; Luke 17:29; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7) do not specify homoeroticism as the sin of the Sodomites.²¹ On the other hand, other sins are mentioned.²² Furthermore, scholars who support this line of thinking point out that when the men of Sodom demand the strangers to be brought outside so they may literally get to "know" them, they only want to "know" who they are socially, not sexually. Sodom is destroyed not for the intent of homoerotic rape, but rather for the sin of being inhospitable to strangers.²³ The verb *yadha* ("to know") is very rarely used in a sexual sense in the Bible. In only 10 of its 943 occurrences in the Hebrew Scriptures does it have a sexual connotation.²⁴ The passage on Sodom is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures where it is often believed that "to know" refers to male same sex relations.²⁵

The argument above is not compelling. It is difficult to assert that the kind of "knowledge" that the Sodomites wish to attain from the strangers is social in nature. If this is the case, it seems strange that Lot would anxiously offer up his daughters to be sexually assaulted by the men of Sodom. That the Sodomites meant sexual intercourse in verse 5 is strengthened by Lot's reply in verse 8 in which he characterizes his daughters

²⁰ Cf. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* pp. 92-95; D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, pp. 1-28.

²¹ Boswell, *Christianity and Social Tolerance*, p. 94.

²² Cf. Eccles. 16:8; Wisd. 19:13-14; Ezek. 16:48-49. It is interesting to note that although later biblical authors had no apparent interest in the homoerotic element of this story, post-biblical commentators, like Philo, focus on this aspect of the story. As we shall see, this conveniently enables later commentators to associate same sex relations with degenerate immoral paganism.

²³ Boswell, *Christianity and Social Tolerance*, pp. 93-94.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 94.

as virgins who literally "have not known [or have not had sexual intercourse with] a man."²⁶ This strongly suggests that the men of Sodom were intent on raping the strangers.

Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, the passage does not tell us much about ancient Jewish attitudes toward homoeroticism. The intent of homoerotic rape (*if* this is the intent of the Sodomite men) is condemnable, but heterosexual rape is also condemnable according to Jewish law. Also, the intent of homoerotic rape does not imply that the Sodomites are oriented toward the same sex or that homoeroticism, in general, is being condemned. Rather, it is a lack of hospitality and the attempt at sexual violence that is being condemned. Judging from the passage, one might argue that these men are likely trying to humiliate and subjugate unwanted aliens in their community, much like the treatment prisoners of war faced in the Greco-Roman tradition and some Middle Eastern societies like Assyria. Sexual assault is a way of symbolically showing one's power over an enemy; it is a way of humiliating one's opponent. Although the passage is ambiguous regarding same sex relations, one could argue that the ancient Israelites saw homoerotic rape as worse and more perverse than regular rape and the pagan Sodomites were guilty of this more depraved form of behavior. Judges 19 lends tacit support to this view.

Judges 19 presents a strikingly similar story to the one above. A Levite from the heart of the hill country of Ephraim has a concubine who has left him to return to her

²⁵ Ibid. p. 94. Cf., Bailey, *Homosexuality and the West*, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ Cf. Westermann's translation in *Genesis*, p. 140. Boswell and Bailey recognize this argument and put forth a rebuttal. Bailey comments, "Its [Lot's offering his daughters to the men] connection with the purpose (whatever it was) for which the citizens demanded the production of his guests is purely imaginary. No doubt the surrender of his daughters was simply the most tempting bribe Lot could offer on the spur of the moment to appease the angry crowd." Boswell suggests, "This action (Lot's offer of his daughters), almost unthinkable in modern Western society, was consonant with the very low status of female children at the time and was not without its parallels even in the more "civilized" Roman world: Ammianus Marcellinus recounts (19.10) a similar instance where the Roman consul Tertullus offers his children to an angry crowd to save himself. There is no sexual interest of any sort in the incident." Cf., Bailey, *Homosexuality and the West*, p. 6; Boswell, *Christianity and Social Tolerance*, p. 95 (In addition

father in Bethlehem. The Levite pursues her in hope of reconciliation. He goes to Bethlehem where his father-in-law hands him back his wife and they eventually begin their journey home. Since the road is long, and night is falling, they stop at Gibeah, where an old man, an alien resident of Gibeah, hospitably takes them in. While they rest, a licentious group of men (this time Israelites!) surround the old man's home and demand that the Levite be given up to them (Judges 19:22): "Bring out the man who has come to your house, for us to have intercourse with him." In an attempt to subdue the attackers, the old man offers up his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine (vv. 23-24). The Levite is happy to comply and, in order to appease the angry men, he pushes his concubine out the door (v. 25). The tragic story concludes with the Levite's discovery the next morning that the men of Gibeah have brutally raped and killed his wife. He takes her home and proceeds to cut up her body into twelve pieces, which he dispatches throughout Israel. Angered, the rest of the Israelites decide to avenge the Levite. Four hundred thousand men travel to Gibeah and destroy the Benjaminite town.

If homoerotic violence is a theme basic to Genesis 19, it appears secondary in Judges 19, as the men of Gibeah are content to rape the woman (v. 25) and leave the Levite alone. In contrast to Genesis 19, the Levite men accept the offer of the woman and proceed to get "to know" her. As a result, it appears more obvious in this case that the kind of "knowledge" that the men seek from the Levite is sexual in nature.²⁷

There are close similarities between the two stories. As in Gen. 19, arguably the initial and primary offense is a violation of the law of hospitality.²⁸ Both stories result in the destruction of a town due to the inhospitable actions of the residents. In Genesis 19, Sodom, a Canaanite town, is destroyed as a result of the Sodomites' inhospitable treatment of the strangers (angels), manifested in their attempt to sexually assault them. In Judges 19, Gibeah, an Israelite town, is destroyed due to the town's lack of hospitality to a countryman, manifested in the hell raisers' brutal rape of their countryman's wife. A

see note 8, where Boswell shares that the *Bible de Jerusalem* observes that "the honor of a woman was at the time of less value than the sacred duty of hospitality.").

²⁷ Robert G. Boling; *Judges* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 276.

lack of hospitality, expressed through sexual violence, results in the destruction of both towns.

Significantly, however, Judges 19 de-emphasizes the homoerotic element. If there is a parallel to Gen. 19 here, in contrast to their pagan counterparts, the men of Gibeah are not as intent on homoerotic rape. This behavior is consistent with the ancient Israelites' general view that lascivious sexual activities, including same sex relations, reside in pagan culture. We shall expand on this theme in our discussion of Hellenistic Judaism below.

Before moving on, Deuteronomy 23:17-18 should be briefly considered, though there is not much that can be concretely said about this passage. It reads, "There shall be no cult prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination of the Lord your God."²⁹ A question to be asked about this passage is whether or not the type of male prostitution being condemned is homoerotic or heteroerotic. Scroggs argues that it seems more plausible that the prostitution being condemned is heterosexual.³⁰ And, even if male prostitutes are performing homoerotic acts, the passage in Deuteronomy is clearly determined to get rid of a specific *cultic* act; the law is in no way a general censure of homoeroticism.³¹ At this point not much can be said about this passage, but it is important nonetheless, as most post-biblical traditions will interpret it as referring to *secular* male prostitution. We shall revisit this passage below.

²⁸ Cf., *Ibid.*, p. 276. The violation is even more pronounced, as the men of Gibeah are Israelites.

²⁹ This passage is taken from Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* pp. 70-71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71. Cf. also., Boswell, *Christianity and Social Tolerance*, p. 99; Bailey, *Homosexuality and the West*, pp. 52f.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71. Scroggs suggests that if the passage is taken as a general indictment of homoeroticism, then we would have to take the prohibition of the female prostitute as a general indictment of heteroeroticism.

Post-Biblical Rabbinical Literature

The Palestinian Targums translate the laws in Leviticus literally using the verb *shamash*, which often translates, “to have intercourse with.”³² Interestingly, however, the Targums translation of Deuteronomy 23:18 ignores the cultic dimension of the biblical text. Neofiti translates: “Let there be no woman from the daughters of Israel who is a prostitute, nor a male prostitute from the sons of Israel.”³³ The prohibition likely refers to *secular* male and female prostitution then, rather than cultic prostitution.³⁴

Also, the Palestinian Targums translate the story of Sodom and Gomorrah literally. Where the Hebrew word “to know” is used, Neofiti selects the verb, *hacham*, literally “to be wise,” which has a metaphorical denotation, “to have sexual intercourse.”³⁵ In other words, the Aramaic is as ambiguous as the original Hebrew. Interestingly, Pseudo-Jonathan is clearer. This text uses the same verb that it and Neofiti use in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13.³⁶ Consequently, at least for Pseudo-Jonathan, the intended act by the Sodomites is homoerotic assault. Nevertheless, Pseudo-Jonathan is not consistent. In the story in Judges, the Aramaic verb “to know” is chosen.³⁷ This ambiguity may have something to do with the fact that the attackers in Judges are Israelite men, rather than Canaanites.

Rabbinical legal discussions include the topic of homoeroticism, albeit rarely. In the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE) the Torah’s death penalty (Lev. 20:13) is explained. Male homoeroticism is to be punished by stoning: “These are they that are to be stoned: ...He

³² Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, p. 76.

³³ Ibid. p. 76.

³⁴ As a result, Scroggs, *Homosexuality* p. 76, suggests that the passage is more likely referring to male homoerotic prostitution.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 77.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 77.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 77.

that has connexion with a male.”³⁸ The Babylonian Talmud provides a more detailed interpretation. The Rabbis draw a distinction between the active and the passive sexual roles and they pay attention to the age of the guilty parties.³⁹ The active partner is guilty only if he is an adult (as the passage begins: “If a man”); the passive partner is guilty at any age (as the passage moves a long to say: “lies with a male”). But, a dilemma occurs because the rabbis see the prohibition, “Do not lie with a man as you lie with a woman,” (Lev. 18:22) to apply only to the active partner, whereas the penalty is prescribed for both. Interestingly, a solution is sought from Deut. 23:18. The Rabbis assume that this verse deals with *secular* prostitution – “Scripture saith: *There shall be no sodomite of the sons of Israel*”⁴⁰ – and that a secular male prostitute would assume the passive role with other men.

As did Greco-Roman commentators, the rabbis frown upon males who blur gender roles. If a man assumes a woman’s role and is penetrated by another male, he is not only disgraced,⁴¹ but also transcending his natural mode of intimacy: “as the lyings of a woman... teaches that there are two modes of intimacy [natural and unnatural], both of which are punished when committed incestuously.”⁴² Here, again, homoeroticism is unnatural because it blurs culturally defined gender roles and ignores male/female complementarity.

The rabbinical attitude toward the active male differs from the Greco-Roman view. As we saw in the Greco-Roman tradition above, the active partner is not often condemned to the extent of the passive male. Taking their lead from the Torah, the rabbis reinforce that a man is forbidden to penetrate another male. Both the active and

³⁸ *Sanhedrin* 7.4. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of Philip Blackman, *Mishnah* (New York: Judaica Press, 1983, 1990).

³⁹ b. *Sanhedrin* 54ab. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: The Soncino Press, 1935).

⁴⁰ b. *Sanhedrin* 54b.

⁴¹ y. *Kiddushin* 1:7.61a

⁴² b. *Sanhedrin* 54a.

passive partners are *equally* guilty of transgressing clearly defined and divinely composed gender boundaries.⁴³

Laws in the *Mishnah* suggest that some rabbis believed that Jewish men might be tempted by homoerotic affairs. For example, one law states that "a bachelor (or an unmarried man) may not teach young children."⁴⁴ Also, "R. Eliezer says, Even one whose wife is not with him (i.e. who lives away from him) may not teach young children."⁴⁵ Moreover, "R. Judah says, A bachelor may not herd cattle, and two bachelors may not sleep together under the same cloak. But the Sages permit it."⁴⁶ These laws suggest that the rabbis were interested in eliminating tempting situations for Jewish males to engage in unnatural sexual activity, namely bestiality and same sex relations. Nonetheless, that the Sages (the Sages are usually taken as speaking for the majority) permit the above situations implies that Jewish men are not suspected of immoral relationships with animals or other males.⁴⁷ Ultimately, the ancient Israelites saw homoerotic behavior, like other sexual transgressions, as a manifestation of pagan immorality. For instance, the Rabbis warn Jewish boys not to associate with gentiles, in order to avoid becoming objects of their homoerotic tendencies.⁴⁸ This theme will be developed further in the next section.

Finally, female homoeroticism is never mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, so it is not surprising that the legal discussions essentially ignore it. The *one* mention of it in the rabbinical literature leaves us little, if anything, to go on. The issue arises about whether or not a woman who has had same sex relations still qualifies to marry a priest. According to the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev. 21:7, 13-14), a woman must be a virgin to marry a priest. Obviously premarital sex with a *man* disqualifies such a marriage. On the other hand, is a woman disqualified for such a marriage, if she has sexual relations with

⁴³ Cf. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 99.

⁴⁴ *Kiddushin* 4.13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 4.13.

⁴⁶ *Kiddushin* 4.14.

⁴⁷ A similar section in the Talmud confirms this outlook that Israelite men "are not suspected" of partaking in same sex relations (or bestiality). Cf. t. *Kiddushin* 5.10; *Kiddushin* 82a.

another woman? The houses of Hillel and Shammai debate the question and take opposing views: "Two women who have sex with each other: the house of Shammai disqualifies, but the house of Hillel permits [the women to marry a priest]."⁴⁹ This suggests that, at least for the Hillel house, female homoeroticism was far from a serious concern. Furthermore, that this is the only known reference to the issue of female homoeroticism indicates that in general there was little interest in the subject.

Hellenistic Jewish Literature:

What we know of Hellenistic Judaism and its outlook toward same sex relations is limited to a few authors. For instance, Philo, an Alexandrian philosopher (b. ca. 20 BCE) comments on homoeroticism. First, he accuses the Sodomites of being extremely hedonistic due in large part to their excessive wealth. As a result, the land of the Sodomites was saturated with countless evils, including male same sex relationships:

Incapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature (*ton tes physeos nomon*) and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse. Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbors, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature (*physin*) which the active partner shares with the passive; and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. Yet the discovery availed them not, so much stronger was the force of lust which mastered them. Then, as little by little they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women, they saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease. For not only did they emasculate their bodies by luxury and voluptuousness but they worked a further degeneration in their souls and, as far as in them lay, were corrupting the whole of mankind. Certainly had Greeks and barbarians joined together in affecting such unions, city after city would have become a desert, as though depopulated by a pestilential sickness.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ b. *Shabbath* 17b.

⁴⁹ *pGit.* 49c, 70 in Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, p. 80.

⁵⁰ Philo, *On Abraham* 135-136. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of F.H. Colson LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1950, 1954).

Philo is attacking male homoeroticism for a few familiar reasons. First, it is associated with an overpowering "lust," which masters men. Also, it violates conventional gender roles, "the sex nature", which dictates that a man assumes the active role and a woman assumes the role of passive receiver. Lastly, male homoeroticism is a threat to procreation. Same sex relations not only discourage contact between men and women, but also they result in sterility and cause "women's" diseases.

Philo goes on to describe the punishment that the Sodomites received for their "unnatural" sexual practices:

God, moved by pity for mankind whose Saviour and Lover He was, gave increase in the greatest possible degree to the unions which men and women naturally (*kata physin*) make for begetting children, but abominated and extinguished this unnatural and forbidden intercourse, and those who lusted for such He cast forth and chastised with punishments not of the usual kind but startling and extraordinary, newly created for this purpose.⁵¹

According to Philo, then, Sodom was destroyed for its unwillingness to suppress its unnatural sexual practices, namely male homoeroticism. In this case, heteroeroticism is deemed natural (*kata physin*) because it results in procreation, God's divine mandate for the human race.

Philo makes a distinction between the active and passive participant in the heteroerotic act. He is especially incensed with the passive partners, "who habituate themselves to endure the disease of effemination."⁵² These men distort their gender, which is illustrated by the way they style their hair and use cosmetics and perfume.⁵³ Those persons representing the "man-woman" (*androgynon*) are "rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey the law."⁵⁴ Philo is disgusted that these boys (*androgynous*),

⁵¹ Ibid. 137-138. Interestingly, in contrast to Romans 1:18-32, God's wrath is the result of "unnatural and forbidden intercourse." In Romans 1, unnatural sexual relations are the result of God's wrath, rather than the cause of it.

⁵² *Laws* 3:37.

⁵³ Ibid. 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 38.

some of whom are even castrated, have been able to attain a high status in Greek society.⁵⁵

In spite of Philo's specific distaste for the passive partner, "the lover (*paiderastes*) of such may be assured that he is subject to the same penalty."⁵⁶ The active lover is just as culpable:

He pursues an unnatural (*para physin*) pleasure and does his best to render cities desolate and uninhabited by destroying the means of procreation. Furthermore he sees no harm in becoming a tutor and instructor in the grievous vices of unmanliness and effeminacy by prolonging the bloom of the young and emasculating the flower of their prime, which should rightly be trained to strength and robustness. Finally...he lets the deep-soiled and fruitful fields lie sterile, by taking steps to keep them from bearing, while he spends his labour night and day on soil from which no growth at all can be expected.⁵⁷

In contrast to many sources from the Greco-Roman tradition, the active lover is equally attacked. He partakes in "unnatural" sexual relations, contributes to de-population and sterility by destroying his seed and avoiding women ("the fruitful fields"), and he cultivates effeminacy.

Not surprisingly, Philo assails Plato's symposia as typifying pederastic debauchery.⁵⁸ Pederasty is a shameful institution. Sexual relations between men and boys "sets up the disease of effeminacy" and "turns into a hybrid of man and woman (*androgynous*) those who should have been disciplined in all the practices which make

⁵⁵ Ibid. 40-41. Cf. also *Laws* 1:325 where Philo states that the law precludes "all the unworthy from entering the holy congregation." The law begins "with the men who belie their sex and are effected with effemination (*androgynon*), who debase the currency of nature (*physeos*) and violate it by assuming the passions and the outward form of licentious women. For it expels those whose generative organs are fractured or mutilated, who husband the flower of their youthful bloom, lest it should quickly wither, and restamp the masculine cast into a feminine form."

⁵⁶ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 39-40.

⁵⁸ *The Contemplative Life* 59-62. The translation cited here is that of F.H. Colson, *Philo* vol. 9 LCL (London: William Heinemann, 1954).

for valour.”⁵⁹ Pederasty also wreaks havoc on the lover as well. The lover becomes fixated on his beloved. As a result, “his body wastes away through desire, particularly if his suit is unsuccessful, while his property is diminished by two causes, neglect and expenditure on his beloved.”⁶⁰ Lastly, pederasty leads to sterility and to the destruction of semen.⁶¹

Philo’s disgust for pederasty has two sides which Philo deems “unnatural.” First, the *androgynous* distorts his “sex nature” by assuming a woman’s part, while the lover indulges in an “unnatural” pleasure. In this case “nature” refers to socially produced gender roles. Second and more importantly, the waste of semen sickens him.⁶² Pederasty cannot result in procreation, thus rendering “cities desolate and uninhabited.” In this case, “nature” refers to the regular order of things as outlined in God’s creation

A notable Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, also comments on male same sex relations during the first century of the Common Era. First, he writes that the Sodomites’ insolence, impiety, and xenophobia were the reasons God destroyed their city.⁶³ In addition, he believes that Lot’s handsome guests aroused a violent homoerotic desire in the Sodomite men:

But the Sodomites on seeing these young men of remarkably fair appearance whom Lot had taken under his roof, were bent only on violence and outrage to their youthful beauty.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid. 60.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 61-62.

⁶¹ Ibid. 62.

⁶² Philo is fond of attacking the misuse of semen for anything other than its divinely intended purpose of procreation. Cf. for example, the passage (*Laws* 3:36) directly before the attack on pederasty, where Philo denounces men who mate with barren women: “those who sue for marriage with women whose sterility has already been proved with other husbands, do but copulate like pigs or goats, and their names should be inscribed in the lists of the impious as adversaries of God.”

⁶³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:194-195. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of H. St. J. Thackeray, *Jewish Antiquities* LCL (William Heinemann: London, 1930).

⁶⁴ Ibid. 1:200.

Josephus condemns the Sodomites for not only their lack of hospitality, but also their sexual violence. The Sodomite men wanted to demean the handsome young strangers by violently forcing them to assume a passive sexual position.

Interestingly, when commenting on Judges 19:22, Josephus speaks of the Gibeahites's lust and desire to violate the Levite's wife. Yet, he does not allude to the Gibeahites's desire to assault the Levite.⁶⁵ It is quite possible here, that Josephus, following the Biblical authors, did not want to ruin the reputation of the Benjaminites, who were a tribe of Israel.⁶⁶

In support of this, Josephus often refers to homoeroticism as a *Gentile* vice,⁶⁷ which does not plague Israel. In fact, he makes it clear what happens to people who partake in "unnatural" same sex encounters:

What are our marriage laws? The law recognizes no sexual connexions, except the natural (*kata physin*) union of man and wife, and that only for the procreation of children. Sodomy it abhors, and punishes any guilty of such assault with death.⁶⁸

According to Josephus, the union between a man and his wife for the purpose of procreation is a natural coupling, whereas, male homoeroticism ("sodomy")⁶⁹, is unnatural and punishable by death.

⁶⁵ *Antiquities* 5:143-148.

⁶⁶ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 94.

⁶⁷ For example cf. *Against Apion* 2:273-275 where Josephus writes that the Greeks found an excuse for their unnatural (*para physin*) pleasures through the example of their gods' homoerotic exploits. Also cf. *Jewish Antiquities* 15:28-29 where Josephus tells a story of how Herod was wary of sending a sixteen year old boy, Aristobulos, to Marc Antony. Herod felt that the boy would be in danger of becoming sexually abused by the powerful Antony, who was well known for having a fondness for boys – Cf. Cicero, *Philippicae* 2:44-45, who also criticizes Antony for the same tendency.

⁶⁸ *Against Apion* 2:199.

⁶⁹ It is not entirely clear whether "sodomy" refers to homoerotic assault and rape (the crime the Sodomites intended to commit), or whether it refers to all same sex relationships, including mutual ones (which are never commented on in the literature of this time).

Like Philo, Josephus also assails men who confuse their sex-nature. He describes men who,

from mere satiety unscrupulously indulge in effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and attiring themselves in women's apparel, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to enhance their beauty.⁷⁰

Also, these men, according to Josephus, imitate "the passions of women, devising in their excess of lasciviousness unlawful pleasures and wallowing as in a brothel in the city."⁷¹ Yet, while they assume the part of a woman, "their hands (are) murderous...they would suddenly become warriors and whipping out their swords from under their dyed mantles transfix whomsoever they met."⁷² For Josephus, this willingness on the part of some males to overstep gender boundaries was puzzling and intolerable.

In contrast to the ambiguity surrounding the Sodomites' homoerotic inclinations in the Hebrew Scriptures, both Philo and Josephus underscore the Sodomites' homoerotic tendencies. In this case, Philo assails the Sodomites for habitually practicing unnatural male same sex relations, while Josephus appears to focus specifically on the homoerotic assault on Lot's guests. Nonetheless, both writers emphasize and condemn the homoerotic element of the Sodomites' evil ways.

Like in the Rabbinical literature and the Hebrew Scriptures, both Philo and Josephus see homoeroticism as primarily a Gentile vice. Nevertheless, both writers use common Greco-Roman arguments and terminology, when they attack same sex relations and the tradition of pederasty. For example, Philo assails pederasty because it requires a man to assume the passive (woman's) role, which creates soft, effeminate (*androgynous*) men. These effeminate men are "unnaturally" transcending conventional gender boundaries, which dictate that a man assume an active and aggressive role during the act of lovemaking. Similarly, both writers attack the effeminate callboy who indulged in

⁷⁰ *Jewish War* 4:561-562.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 4:562-563.

⁷² *Ibid.* 4:563.

womanish practices, such as shaving body hair and wearing make-up. Lastly, both Philo and Josephus adopt the Greco-Roman argument that only a sexual union between a man and a woman is *kata physin*, or “according to nature.” Ultimately, male homoeroticism is “unnatural” (*para physin*) because such a relationship is unable to generate posterity.

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are Jewish writings that did not become part of the Hebrew Scriptures. Ranging from approximately 200 BCE – 100 CE, these writings depict different aspects of Judaism in the Hellenistic era as well as the Jewish background of early Christianity. These sources include a number of passages that comment on homoeroticism. Frequently, these texts warn the Jews about the Gentiles’ licentious behavior. This illicit conduct is often said to manifest itself in the form of same-sex relations.

First, the sentences of *Pseudo-Phocylides* (First Century BCE – First Century CE) show a familiarity with both Septuagint and Stoic ethics. Though there is no scholarly consensus, this collection of maxims was most likely written to demonstrate to the Jews that there was no crucial difference between Jewish and Greek moral principles.⁷³ Important for this study, these sentences comment on sexual matters, forbidding both male and female same sex relations.

Pseudo-Phocylides forbids infidelity, male homoeroticism (twice), and counsels how to protect boys from older male lovers intent on sexual abuse:

Neither commit adultery nor rouse homosexual passion.⁷⁴

Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature.

For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male.⁷⁵

⁷³ For a general overview see P.W. Van Der Horst in James H. Charlesworth (ed.) *Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2 (Doubleday: New York, 1983), pp. 565-573.

⁷⁴ *Pseudo-Phocylides*. 3. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of P.W. Van Der Horst.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 190-191. Cf. Philo, *Abraham* 135 and *Laws* 2:50.

Guard the youthful prime of life of a comely boy,
Because many rage for intercourse with a man.⁷⁶

First, there is a concern, here, for naive boys and their ability to repel the homoerotic tendencies of older males. Also, we see the argument that we can learn from nature that even animals have the *sense* to avoid male same-sex unions; male homoeroticism transcends "the limits [on sexual activity] set by nature" and therefore constitutes "unlawful sex."

Pseudo-Phocylides is concerned about male homoeroticism in part because it interferes with the natural process of procreation:

Do not cut a youth's masculine procreative faculty.⁷⁷

Do not remain unmarried, lest you die nameless.

Give nature her due, you also, beget in your turn as you were begotten.⁷⁸

By castrating young males and ignoring the female domain, men turn their backs against nature and quench their ability to produce posterity, which is one's natural duty.⁷⁹

Furthermore, *Pseudo-Phocylides* is concerned about gender roles: "And let women not imitate the sexual role of men."⁸⁰ This suggests that at least some Jews visualized female homoerotic relationships as the Greeks and Romans did. One female partner would assume the active (male) role, which was strictly taboo. Boys becoming effeminate, and looking like females also troubles pseudo-Phocylides:

If a child is a boy do not let locks grow on (his) head.

Do not braid (his) crown nor the cross knots at the top of his head.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 213-214.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 187. Cf. In the OT castration is not explicitly condemned, but cf. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:270f.; also *Sanhedrin* 56b; *Shabbath* 110b, etc.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 175-176.

⁷⁹ Cf. Gen 1-2.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 192.

Long hair is not fit for boys, but for voluptuous women.⁸¹

Again, as we saw in the Greco-Roman section, there are certain gender expectations for men and women, both in terms of sexual activity and appearance. It was simply considered wrong to cross these boundaries that followed the dictates of “nature” or more clearly social convention.

Next, Hellenistic Jewish authors make a habit of claiming that pederasty and male homoeroticism in general is specifically a Gentile vice. This idea is brought forth in *The Letter of Aristeas* (Third century BCE – First Century CE), which purports to describe the origins of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. According to this source, the majority of non-Jews practice homoeroticism and incest:

We are distinct from all other men. The majority of other men defile themselves in their relationships, thereby committing a serious offense, and lands and whole cities take pride in it: they not only procure the males, they also defile mothers and daughters. We are quite separated from these practices.⁸²

Sodom is often held up as the ultimate example of pagan depravity. For instance, in the *Book of Jubilees* (second century BCE), Sodom is singled out for practicing idolatry and illicit sexual intercourse.⁸³ Although it is clear that Sodom is condemned for a variety of heteroerotic sins, the references to homoeroticism are ambiguous and open to interpretation.

Furthermore, the *Testament of Naphtali* (first century BCE) urges the Jews to avoid following the Gentile’s example of forsaking the Lord and changing the order of things:

⁸¹ Ibid. 210-212. Cf. Philo, *Laws* 3:37; also Paul *I Corinthians* 11:14.

⁸² *Letter of Aristeas* 152. The translation cited here is that of R.J.H. Shutt in James H. Charlesworth (ed.) *Pseudepigrapha*.

⁸³ *Book of Jubilees* 16:5-6; 22:22; 36:10. For an introduction to the *Book of Jubilees* cf. O.S. Wintermute in James H. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* p. 35f. Cf. also *Testament of Levi* 14:6-7; *Testament of Benjamin* 9:1.

Sun, moon, and stars do not alter their order; thus you should not alter the Law of God by the disorder of your actions. The gentiles, because they wandered astray and forsook the Lord, have changed the order (*elloiosan ten taxin auton*), and have devoted themselves to stones and sticks, patterning themselves after wandering spirits. But you, my children, shall not be like that: in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, in all the products of his workmanship discern the Lord who made all things, so that you do not become like Sodom, which departed from the order of nature (*enellaxe taxin physeos autes*). Likewise the Watchers departed from nature's order (*enellaxan taxin physeos auton*); the Lord pronounced a curse on them at the Flood.⁸⁴

A few significant points arise from this passage. First, again, the Gentiles are held up as an example of how not to behave. As a direct result of forsaking God, they change the natural order of things, and practice idolatry. Also, the Israelites are urged to behold the Lord in everything around them, as He is the creator of all things, and not to follow Sodom, which went against nature. Here, it is very possible that the Sodomite's departure from the order of nature in part refers to their attempted homoerotic assault on the angels (Lot's guests) in Gen. 19:1-11. This interpretation is strengthened by the curious comparison of the Sodomites to "the Watchers," who also "departed from nature's order." The Watchers were angelic creatures who had intercourse with daughters of the human race.⁸⁵ Ancient commentators often condemn the sexual relationship between the sons of god and the human daughters. Intercourse between angelic creatures and humans goes against the natural order of things as established by God;⁸⁶ it oversteps the established border between the divine and human realms.⁸⁷

In *Enoch 1* (Second Century BCE – First Century CE) the angels actions are considered to be a transgression against "the law of heaven."⁸⁸ They "commit sin and transgress the commandment (the custom); they have united themselves with women and

⁸⁴ *Testament of Naphtali* 3:1-5. The translation cited here is that of H.C. Kee in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha*.

⁸⁵ Genesis 6:1-8.

⁸⁶ Cf. Gen 1:27-28; Gen 2:18-24.

⁸⁷ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 91.

⁸⁸ *Enoch 1* 106:14. The translation cited here is that of E. Issac in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha*.

commit sin together with them.”⁸⁹ As a result, together they will give birth to “giants”, beings who are “not of the spirit but of the flesh.” Intercourse between the angels and humans is like a man and a woman having intercourse during woman’s menstruation; it’s unnatural.⁹⁰ The Lord commands the angel Gabriel to “expel the children of the Watchers (the Giants) from among the people” and “send them against one another (so that) they may be destroyed in the fight.”⁹¹ Whereas, he tells Michael to bind the fallen angels, “who fornicated with the women”, until the day of their judgment.⁹²

Other interpreters also make a strong connection between the Sodomites and the Watchers. For instance, in *Jubilees*, the angels’ descendants, the giants, are included with the Sodomites among the condemned:

And he told them the judgement of the giants and the judgement of the Sodomites just as they had been judged on the account of their evil. And on the account of their fornication and impurity and the corruption among themselves with fornication they died.⁹³

Later parts of the New Testament also link the Watchers to Sodom and Gomorrah. For example, 2 Peter 2:4-6 couples the destructive and ungodly ways of the Watchers with those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Both groups serve as examples of what happens when one disowns God and brings the way of truth into disrepute:

God did not spare the angels who sinned, but consigned them to the dark pits of hell, where they are held for judgement. Nor did he spare the world in ancient time...but brought the flood upon the world with its godless people. God reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, condemning them to total ruin as an object-lesson for the ungodly in future days.

Likewise, Jude 6-7 links the Watchers to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah:

⁸⁹ Ibid. 106:14.

⁹⁰ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 91.

⁹¹ Enoch 1 10:9.

⁹² Ibid. 10:11-12.

⁹³ *Jubilees* 20:5. The translation cited here is that of O.S. Wintermute in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha*. Cf. also Sirach 16:7-8; 3 Maccabees 2:5.

Remember too those angels who were not content to maintain the dominion assigned to them, but abandoned their proper dwelling-place; God is holding them, bound in darkness with everlasting chains, for judgement on the great day. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring towns; like the angels, they committed fornication and indulged in unnatural lusts (*opiso sarkos heteras*); and in eternal fire they paid the penalty, a warning for all.

It appears that the reason for paralleling the Sodomites and the Watchers is they both transgress sexual boundaries, and ignore God's divine intention of male and female as sexually complementary to another. The Watchers and the human daughters are an example of unnatural sexual contact between humans and angelic creatures. Similarly, the Sodomites' attempt to rape Lot's guests is an attempt to have "unnatural" sexual intercourse with angels or creatures of non-human origin (Gen. 19:1) as well. Or, alternatively, it is an attempt to have "unnatural" sex with males, which ignores God's divine intention to have male and female come together and become one (Gen 2:24).

Although homoeroticism is not a focus in the texts dealing with the Gentiles, Sodomites and Watchers, it seems to be lingering ambiguously in the background. Based on the evidence it is possible to understand homoeroticism as one means of "changing" the natural to the unnatural, changing godly based life forms to illegitimate ones.⁹⁴ In the end, all this is a part of the Gentile world and an expression and result of turning one's back on God and worshipping idols.⁹⁵

Passages in *Wisdom of Solomon* confirm that the sexual depravity of Gentiles is often considered a result of idolatry. For example, the creation of idols is the root cause of licentiousness: "The devising of idols is the beginning of immorality; they are an invention which has blighted human life" (Wis. 14:12). Next, *Wisdom* presents a list of vices that are the wicked results of idolatry. Here, sexual transgressions are mentioned in a specific fashion and, again, the word "changing" (*enallage*) is used:

⁹⁴ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 93.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 93.

Then, not content with crass error in their knowledge of God, people live in the constant warfare of ignorance and call this monstrous evil peace. They perform ritual killing of children and secret ceremonies and the frenzied orgies of unnatural cults; the purity of life and marriage is abandoned; and a man treacherously murders a neighbor or by corrupting his wife breaks his heart. All is chaos – bloody murder, theft and fraud, corruption, treachery, riot, perjury, honest folk driven to distraction; ingratitude, depravity, sexual perversion (*geneseos enallage*), breakdown of marriage, adultery, debauchery. For the worship of idols, whose names it is wrong even to mention, is the beginning, the cause, and the end of every evil (Wis. 14:22-27)

The writer of this list appears to be familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, as a number of these sexual offenses are also mentioned in the Holiness Code. The words “sexual perversion” (*geneseos enallage*) literally mean changing one’s origin of birth or breed.⁹⁶ This can refer to any change in the natural order of things, such as male and female complementarity. This phrase does not contain a direct reference to homoeroticism, but the ensuing components of the list suggest that sexual issues are a focus here.⁹⁷

Like Philo and Josephus, the extra canonical literature condemns same sex relations and pederasty. Homoeroticism is “unnatural.” It not only interferes with the natural process of procreation, but also it requires that men and women overstep their socially produced gender roles, which requires men to be active love-makers and women to be passive recipients. Moreover, like Philo, Josephus, and the rabbinical writings, the extra canonical sources argue that pederasty is specifically a pagan iniquity. Importantly, the extra-canonical sources make it clear that the Gentile’s depravity is the direct result of worshipping idols. Homoeroticism is the effect of the pagans’ willingness to change the natural order of things by forsaking God and worshipping idols. Lastly, there is a strong sense here that homoeroticism is unnatural because it affronts God’s creative design, namely the coupling of male and female for the purpose of procreation. Male and female are anatomically and sexually compatible and together they are responsible for the human race’s immortality. As we shall see in the next section, this Hellenistic Jewish outlook influences Paul’s language and ideas in Romans 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 90.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 90.

Paul's Outlook on Homoeroticism: Romans 1:26-27

The Context: Romans 1:18-32

Paul writes his letter to the Romans somewhere between 48 and 58 C.E.. In order to introduce himself to the Roman congregation, a church he has yet to visit, Paul shares his insights on past events and he presents his theology.

Paul opens his letter with a salutation, affirming his apostolic assignment (Rom. 1:5): "Through him (the raised Jesus Christ) I received the privilege of an apostolic commission to bring people of all nations to faith and obedience in his name." He proceeds to greet the Roman congregation, saying that they are "loved by God and called to be his people" (Rom. 1:7). Paul thanks God on behalf of the Romans, alludes to the importance of faith in God through Jesus Christ, and makes known his "eagerness to declare the Gospel to [believers] in Rome" (Rom. 1:8-15). Lastly, before moving into the body of his letter, Paul declares his thesis (Rom. 1:16-17):

It (the Gospel) is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith – the Jew first, but the Greek also – because in it the righteousness of God is seen at work, beginning in faith and ending in faith; as scripture says, 'Whoever is justified through faith shall gain life.'

According to Paul, the grace of God gives unearned acceptance to the believer on the basis of his or her trust in God.

Next, Paul explains his theme negatively (1:18-3:20): without the Gospel and faith in God, God's wrath is unveiled against all human beings. First, Paul explains God's judgement against idolatrous Gentiles (1:18-32) and then he proceeds to state that Jews will be judged for their immorality as well (2:1-3:20). It is within the specific context of his portrayal of God's wrath revealed against the Gentiles that Paul refers to homoeroticism.

The topic of Rom. 1:18-32 is the ungodliness and depravity of the Gentiles and God's corresponding judgment. Though Paul speaks of men and women (*anthropoi* – v. 18) and never specifically mentions "Gentiles" or "Pagans," it is clear from vv. 2:1 onward that he is thinking in this section about non-Jewish humanity.¹ It is not entirely surprising, then, given what we have learned about ancient Jewish attitudes toward homoeroticism, that Paul denounces same sex relations within the context of God's judgment on idolatrous Gentiles.

Paul begins by stating that God is disclosing his anger (v.18) "on all impiety and wickedness of men and women who in their wickedness suppress the truth (about God)." This behavior is reprehensible, as "all that can be known of God lies plain before their eyes; indeed God himself has disclosed it to them" (v. 19). Since the beginning of the world "his invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and deity, have been visible to eye of reason, in the things he has made" (v. 20). Although men and women know God, "they have refused to honor him as God, or to render him thanks" (v. 21). Consequently, their wisdom is fruitless, and their minds reside in darkness. Due to their futility, these people set about "exchanging (*ellaxan*) the glory of the immortal God for an image shaped like mortal man, even for images like birds, beasts, and reptiles" (v. 23).² These pagans turn their backs on God and give their allegiance to false idols.

As a result of their idolatry, "God has given them up to their own vile desires, and the consequent degradation of their bodies" (v. 24).³ Paul proceeds to repeat what he

¹ Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) p. 269f; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996) p. 66.

² For Jewish contempt for idols see Isa. 44: 13-20; Wisd. chs. 13-15. Also, Paul echoes Psalm 106: 20: "they exchanged their God for the image of a bull that feeds on grass." This alludes to the golden calf incident at Sinai, cf. Exod. ch. 32. Also cf. Jer 2:11. Byrne, *Romans* pp. 67-68, notes the subtle irony in verse 23: "While the Jewish implied reader would presumably consider idolatry to be something characteristic of the Gentile world, the language here evokes biblical allusions to *Israel's* fall into idolatry.

³ Interestingly, immorality and sexual depravity are the effect of God's wrath, not the cause of it, cf. Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980) p. 47. Cf. Byrne, *Romans*, p. 68, who rightly states that the sudden introduction of sexual failing is consistent with the tendency in contemporary Jewish discourses to draw a connection between the idolatry and the sexual depravity of the Gentile world.

wrote in 1:18, 23, albeit more firmly: "They have exchanged (*metellaxan*) the truth of God for a lie, and have offered reverence and worship to created things instead of to the Creator" (v. 25). Idolatry becomes the origin of immorality.⁴

Again, as a consequence for their idolatry, Paul states,

God has given them up to shameful passions. Among them women have exchanged (*metellaxan*) natural intercourse (*ten physiken chresin*) for unnatural (*para physin*), and men too, giving up natural relations (*ten physiken chresin*) with women, burn with lust for one another; males behave indecently with males, and are paid in their own persons the fitting wage of such perversion (vv. 26-27).

Paul is referring to *both* male and female homoerotic activity. This meaning is indicated by the word *homoios*, "likewise," with which Paul introduces the analogous male iniquity in v 27.⁵ The depravity involved in such conduct is the deserved outcome of pagan irreverence and idolatry.⁶ Because pagans have "exchanged" (*metellaxan*) "the truth of God" for false idols, God has handed them over to shameful sexual practices, where ultimately "natural sexual relations" (*ten physiken khresin*) are exchanged for those "contrary to nature" (*para physin*).⁷ Males "are paid in their own persons the fitting wage of such perversion (*planes*)."⁸ With the use of *plane*, Paul regards at least male homoerotic behavior "as a perversion, a deviation, a wandering astray from what is right (*planan*, 'to err, wander astray')."⁹

⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 284.

⁵ Ibid. p. 285, 287.

⁶ Ibid. p. 285.

⁷ Cf. Byrne, *Romans*, p. 69. Again, set against the background of contemporary Jewish diatribes against the immorality of the pagan world, the sudden mention of homoeroticism is not strange. As we shall discuss below, it is present here because the text is based on a tradition which saw a strong connection between pagan idolatry and sexual immorality.

⁸ Here, Paul repeats the judgment in Wisd. 11:16, "the instruments of someone's sin are the instruments of his punishment." Cf. Wisd. 12:27.

⁹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 288.

Finally, in verses 28-32, Paul goes on to cite the pagan failure to recognize and celebrate God as the origin also of transgressions against other human beings and societies:

Thus, because they have not seen fit to acknowledge God, he has given them up to their own depraved way of thinking, and this leads them to break all rules of conduct. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, villainy, greed, and malice; they are one mass of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and malevolence; gossips and scandalmongers; and blasphemers, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent new kinds of vice, they show no respect to parents, they are without sense or fidelity, without natural affection or pity. They know well enough the just decree of God, that those who behave like this deserve to die; yet they not only do these things themselves but approve such conduct in others.

From here Paul moves forward to confirm that the Jews will be judged also (2:1f.). However, Romans 1:26-27, amidst an attack on pagan idolatry, is Paul's only reference to homoeroticism in his Letter to the Romans.

What shall become clear is that Paul's opposition to homoeroticism is informed by a Hellenistic-Jewish worldview. The Hebrew Scriptures *and* Greco-Roman morality appear to influence his outlook.

Romans 1:18-32: A Familiar Hellenistic Jewish Attack on Pagan Idolatry

Paul's description of the deplorable, idolatrous state of pagan humanity in Romans 1:18-32 must be understood against the background of pre-Christian Jewish thinking.¹⁰ The passage is indebted to pre-existing models. This is supported by how closely it resembles Hellenistic Jewish literature that assails pagan idolatry. In particular, Romans 1:18-32 closely resembles passages in Wisdom of Solomon (ca. First century B.C.E.) in regard to style and content.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 272. Also, cf. Byrne, *Romans* p. 64.

¹¹ Cf. Byrne, *Romans* pp. 64-65.

Like Romans, Wisdom argues that human beings can attain knowledge about God based on the things that He has created. Though they are able to observe the natural world around them, human beings have refused to recognize the Creator's handiwork (Wisd 13:1-5; cf. Rom 1:20-21).¹² The human failure to recognize God in the created world is simply inexcusable (Wisd 13:6-9; cf. Rom 1:20). In addition, Wisdom connects immoral behavior in general with the fall into idolatry; depraved behavior is the well-deserved result of worshipping idols (Wisd 14:12, 27; cf. Rom 1:24-31). Significant to this study, Wisdom includes a form of "unnatural" sexual behavior as part of the manifestation of immorality (Wisd 14:26; cf. Rom 1:26-27). Moreover, Wisdom lists a series of *specific* vices that, again, are due to the sin of idolatry (Wisd 14:23-27; Rom 1:29-31). In both cases, those who partake in these vices clearly deserve God's divine vengeance (Wisd 14:30; Rom 1:32). Lastly, Wisdom believes that, as a result of their idolatry, people's thoughts are hollow and empty; their minds are left in the darkness of ignorance (Wisd 11:15; cf. Rom 1:21). If Paul is not indebted to Wisdom, he certainly seems to be writing within the same tradition.¹³

In a similar sense to Paul, Philo also suggests pagans do not recognize God as the Creator of all things, but instead attribute "the causation of all events" to lesser gods (*Laws* 1: 13-20):

Those who do not descry the Charioteer mounted above attribute the causation of all events in the universe to the team that draw the chariot as though they were sole agents. From this ignorance our most holy lawgiver would convert them to knowledge with these words: "Do not when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars and all the ordered host of heaven go astray and worship them." Well indeed and aptly does he call the acceptance of the heavenly bodies as gods a going astray or wandering...If they had been at pains to walk in that road where there is no straying, they would at once have perceived that just as sense is the servitor of mind, so too all the beings perceived by sense are the ministers of Him who is perceived by the mind...And if anyone renders the worship due to the Eternal, the Creator, to a created being and one later in time, he must stand recorded as infatuated and guilty of impiety in the highest degree.

¹² The argument that one can intuit God through the natural world was popular among the Stoics.

¹³ Cf. also *Sibylline Oracles* 3:8-45; *Letter of Aristeas* 132-138.

Echoing Philo, Paul too reprimands the Gentiles for not recognizing God's "invisible attributes...in the things he has made." Rather, they worship the created beings and things they see. As result of this ignorance, idolaters are guilty of "impiety in the highest degree."¹⁴

Other Jewish sources also assail pagans for their idolatry and connect this ungodly behavior to perverse sex acts. For instance, in *Against Apion*, Josephus criticizes the religion of the Greeks (2:236-238). He is appalled by their intolerable ideas about their gods. In particular, he is disgusted by Greek stories about the gods' depraved sexual behavior (2:239-249):

But – and here outrageousness reaches its climax – is it not monstrous to attribute those licentious unions and amours to well-nigh all deities of both sexes? ...What man in his senses would not be stirred to reprimand the inventors of such fables and to condemn the consummate folly of those who believed them?

He then proceeds to suggest what the causes of such "irregular and erroneous conceptions of the deity" are (2:250-254):

For my part I trace it to the ignorance of the true nature of God with which their legislators entered on their task, and to their failure to formulate even such correct knowledge of it as they were able to attain and to make the rest of their constitution conform to it.

Josephus portrays the pagans as being ignorant of the "true nature of God" because they are unable correctly to perceive or intuit the Creator's divinity in the things he has made (i.e., in the created world around them).

According to Josephus, the Greeks found an excuse for their unnatural (*para physin*) sexual behavior in their belief that their gods modeled such behavior (*Against Apion* 2:273-275):

¹⁴ Cf. Rom 1:24f.

And why should we envy other nations their laws when we see that even their authors do not observe them? The Lacedaemonians were, of course, bound in the end to condemn their unsociable constitution and their contempt for marriage, and the people of Elis and Thebes the unnatural (*para physin*) vice so rampant among them. At any rate, if they have not in fact altogether abandoned them, they no longer openly avow practices that once they considered very excellent and expedient. But they go further than this, and repudiate their laws on the subject of these unions – laws which at one time carried such weight with the Greeks that they actually attributed to the gods the practice of sodomy and, on the same principle, the marriage of brother and sister, thus inventing an excuse for the monstrous and unnatural (*para physin*) pleasures in which they themselves indulged.

These “unnatural pleasures in which [pagans] indulged” were a consequence of failing to understand the “true nature of God.”

In addition, Paul’s words in Romans 1 also resemble a passage we have looked at in the *Testament of Naphtali*.¹⁵ Here, too, the author complains that the gentiles “have wandered astray and forsook the Lord, [they] have changed the order (*elloiosan ten taxin auton*), and have devoted themselves to stones and sticks, patterning themselves after wandering spirits” (*T. Naph* 3:3-4).¹⁶ Moreover, the author argues that human beings can discern God in nature: “In the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, in all the products of his workmanship discern the Lord who made all things” (*T. Naph* 3:4).¹⁷ Lastly, in the context of a diatribe against idolatry, the passage mentions two peoples who, due to their ungodliness, exchanged “natural” sexual practices for “unnatural” ones (*T Naph* 3:4-5):

Discern the Lord who made all things, so that you do not become like Sodom, which departed from the order of nature (*enellaxe taxin physeos autes*). Likewise the Watchers departed from nature’s order (*enellaxan taxin physeos auton*); The Lord pronounced a curse on them at the Flood.¹⁸

¹⁵ The *Testament of Naphtali* (ca. first century B.C.E.) is part of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a Hellenistic Jewish source with later interpolations by Christians. For this reason, it is not necessarily a source prior to Paul. Cf. Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, p. 775f.

¹⁶ Cf. Wisd 14:21; Rom 1:23.

¹⁷ Cf. Wisd 13:1-5; Rom 1:20.

¹⁸ Cf. Wisd 14:26; Rom 1:23, 25, 26-27. See the previous section for a more detailed discussion on the perverse sexual activities of the Sodomites and the Watchers.

Those who practice idolatry and sexual immorality will inevitably face divine retribution: "On their [the Watcher's] account he [God] ordered that the earth be without dweller or produce (Gen 6:1f.).¹⁹

A section from the *Sibylline Oracles*²⁰ lends further support to the argument that Romans 1:18-32 closely resembles pre-existing Jewish diatribes that denounce pagan idolatry. First, the author(s) asks Greece why she relies on "mortal leaders who are not able to flee the end of death? To what purpose do you give vain gifts to the dead and sacrifice to idols?" (3:547-548).²¹ The author(s) goes on to argue that on account of the "overbearing kings of the Greeks" of long ago, "who began the first evils for mortals, setting up many idols of dead gods,"²² the Greek people "have been taught vain thinking" (3:551-555).²³ God's divine vengeance will inevitably come upon those who persist in idolatry, "the race of impious men" (3:556-572; 3:601f.).²⁴

Following this "Exhortation to the Greeks" is a "Eulogy of the Jews." The author(s) argues that "there will again be a sacred race of pious men," who (3:573f.),

Will not honor with empty deceits works of men, either gold or bronze, or silver or ivory, or wooden, stone, or clay idols of dead gods, red-painted likenesses of beasts, such as mortals honor with empty-minded counsel.²⁵

Also, these "pious men" are monogamous and do not partake in "impious intercourse," in contrast to their licentious pagan counterparts (3:594-600):

¹⁹ Cf. Wisd 14:30; Rom 1:32.

²⁰ The *Sibylline Oracles*, which predict future sufferings and disasters, are composed of early Jewish and later Christian writings. For the approximate date of Book 3 (ca. 163-45 B.C.E.) see Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, pp. 354-355.

²¹ Cf. Wisd 14:12-20. The translation cited here and elsewhere is that of J.J. Collins, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

²² Cf. Wisd. 13:10; 14:12-14.

²³ Cf. Wisd. 11:15; Rom 1:21.

²⁴ Cf. Wisd. 14:30; Rom 1:32.

²⁵ Cf. Wisd 13-15; Isa 44:8-20.

Greatly, surpassing all men, they are mindful of holy wedlock, and they do not engage in impious intercourse with male children, as do Phoenicians, Egyptians, Romans, spacious Greece and many nations of others, Persians and Galatians and all Asia, transgressing the holy law of immortal God, which they transgressed.

Amidst an attack on idolatry is another reference to homoeroticism, or, in this case, more specifically, pederasty. The author clearly sees pederasty as not only closely linked to idolatry, but also as a transgression of what "the holy law of immortal God" considers natural sexual activity. In its reference to "holy wedlock" and the "holy law of the immortal God" the passage would seem to be drawing an allusion to Genesis 1-2, where God's creative design sets up male and female as sexually complementary to one another. Pederasty flies in the face of God's divine intention for human sexual relations.

Later on, in a "Moral Exhortation" the author(s) urges people to give up both idolatry and male same sex relations (3:762-766):

But urge on your minds in your breasts and shun unlawful worship. Worship the Living One.
Avoid adultery and indiscriminate intercourse with males. Rear your own offspring and do not kill it, for the Immortal is angry at whoever commits these sins.

Again, idolatry and male homoeroticism are linked together. Interestingly, this time male same-sex-relations in general are being condemned, not just pederasty. Also, there is a concern here for procreation. Males who have "intercourse with males" are unable to rear offspring and instead they murder the human race, just as those who kill their offspring do.

As these sources show, Paul's attack on pagan idolatry reflects a Hellenistic Jewish tradition that attributes the pagans' alleged depravity to the worship of idols and their inability to intuit and properly worship God. By foolishly worshipping idols, human beings are *exchanging* the glory and the truth of the immortal Creator for something ephemeral and worthless. They are misrepresenting God, the divine creator. As a result, they become delusional and can no longer distinguish between right and wrong living.

This is vividly illustrated in their willingness to exchange “natural” sexual relations between males and females for “unnatural” same-sex relations. Here again they are misrepresenting God, who created male and female as complementary to one another. Though these parallels show that Paul’s attack on idolatry and homoeroticism echo a defined tradition in Hellenistic Judaism, we must take a closer look at the specific reference to homoeroticism in Rom 1:26-27. Its use of *physis* is problematic and suggests a Greco-Roman influence on Paul’s ideas. What does Paul mean by *physe* and *para physin* in Rom 1:26-27?

Romans 1:26-27: Paul’s use of “Nature”

Though the larger context of Romans 1:18-32 must be understood against the background of Hellenistic Jewish thinking, Paul’s use and conception of “nature” in Rom 1:26-27 suggest a Greco-Roman influence, which seems to be glossed over by scholars.

As we alluded to in section one above, fundamental to conventional societal order in ancient Greco-Roman society was the dominance of male over female, slave, and non-citizen. This dominance often manifested itself in sexual relations, where the male citizen was expected to assume the active/aggressive role and the female, boy, or slave the passive/recipient role. Therefore, homoerotic *acts*, in particular the act of assuming the passive role in the case of a man and the active role in the case of a woman, are referred to as “contrary to nature” (*para physin*), due to their interference with the conventional gender hierarchy. “Nature,” in this sense, refers to social convention or socially produced gender roles. The ancients believed that men and women were born to assume different roles in life based on their perceived physical and mental make up.

Moreover, Greco-Roman moralists, especially the “later Plato”, Plutarch, and the Cynics and Stoics, ultimately endorse heteroerotic relationships as natural (*kata physin*) because they result in procreation. Reproduction is a human’s inherent sexual obligation, in order to reproduce into perpetuity. On the other hand, homoerotic relationships are unnatural (*para physin*), as they stifle the human race’s ability to perpetuate itself. Here,

“nature” refers to what one *perceives* to be the natural order of things in regard to a human being’s innate or biological sexual function.

Lastly, notwithstanding gender politics or procreation concerns, there is an implicit sense from many of the sources that heteroeroticism is ultimately *kata physin* because reason or perception suggest that male and female are sexually complementary to one another. Male and female relationships are characterized by mutuality and moderate levels of passion, whereas homoerotic relationships lack mutuality, constancy, and respect and are a result of an excessive sexual desire.

Paul’s use of “nature” possibly echoes, in part, Greco-Roman usage. First, Paul links excessive desire with “unnatural” homoerotic acts²⁶ (emphasis added):

As a result God has given them up to *shameful* [unnatural] *passions*. Among them women have exchanged natural intercourse [where the passion experienced is natural, moderate, and not shameful] for unnatural (*para physin*), and men too, giving up natural relations with women, *burn with lust for one another*. (Rom 1:26-27)

There is no condemnation of what we understand as sexual orientation in this passage. One (presumably one who normally practices “natural” heteroerotic acts) is unnaturally driven to same-sex relations due to exorbitant desire.

Similarly, Stoic and Cynic philosophers see unnatural homoerotic acts as the result of an inability to quell one’s thirst for pleasure. For example, Dio Chrysostom, commenting on the baser aspects of Roman urban life, argues that men will seek young males in order to satisfy their voracious appetite for sexual pleasure (*Discourses* 7:151-152):

The man whose appetite is insatiate in such things...will have contempt for the easy conquest and scorn for a woman’s love, as a thing to readily given...and will turn his assault against the male quarters...believing that in them he will find a pleasure difficult and hard to procure.²⁷

²⁶ Cf. Plato, *Laws* 1:636a-c.

Philo also associates homoeroticism with dishonorable and unnatural passion. Characterizing the discussions at "Plato's banquet," Philo says (*The Contemplative Life* 59),

The talk is almost entirely concerned with love, not merely with the love-sickness for men and women, or women for men, passions recognized by the laws of nature (*nomos physeos*), but of men for other males differing from them only in age.

In contrast to the passions that lead one to heteroerotic acts, "passions recognized by the laws of nature," passions that plunge one toward same-sex relations are excessive, and therefore "unnatural." There is an implied sense in these sources that homoeroticism is the consequence of an inordinate heteroerotic lust. However, even if this is the case, this must not move one to argue that the ancients' condemnation of same-sex love should not apply to the modern day concept of homosexuality, understood as a mutual orientation toward the same-sex.²⁸ Though the ancients, and in particular Paul, may have understood homoeroticism as resulting from unnaturally over-sexed heterosexuals, excessive heteroerotic desire is *not* the only reason why Paul condemns same-sex relations.

Like the "later Plato", and more clearly the Stoics, Paul implies that human beings (more specifically, in Paul's case, non-Jewish humanity) should be able to *perceive* that heteroeroticism is natural and homoeroticism is not by *observing* the created world (Rom 1:19-20)

²⁷ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 47:7; Philo, *Abraham* 135; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:200-201.

²⁸ Cf. Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," in *Biblical Interpretation* (1995), pp. 339-349. Dale Martin, along with others (Cf. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, pp. 109, 112-113), argues that since the ancients regarded homoeroticism as an effect of an excessive heteroerotic lust and contemporary society does not, their condemnation of same-sex relations (including Paul's) should be ignored in our own society. Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and homosexual Practice*, p. 380f. for a refutation of this position.

For all that can be known of God lies plain before their eyes; indeed God himself has disclosed in to them. Ever since the world began his invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and deity, have been visible to the eye of reason, in the things he has made.²⁹

These lines, paired with Rom 1:26-27, strongly suggest that “nature” is serving as a moral teacher for Paul,³⁰ as it does for the first-century Stoic philosopher, Epictetus. In a passage we partially looked at above, Epictetus criticizes a young student of rhetoric for plucking the hairs out of his legs, as he is denying his maleness given to him by “nature” (*Diatr.* 3.1:27-45)³¹:

Woman is born smooth and dainty by nature (*physe*), and if she is very hairy she is a prodigy, and is exhibited at Rome...But for a man *not* to be hairy is the same thing, and if by nature (*physe*) he has no hair he is a prodigy, but if he...plucks it out of himself, what shall we make of him?... “I will show you,” we say to the audience, “a man who wishes to be a woman rather than a man.” What a dreadful spectacle!...Man, what reason have you to complain against your nature? Because it brought you into the world as a man?...Make a clean sweep of the whole matter; eradicate...the cause of your hairiness; make yourself a woman all over, so as not to deceive us, not half-man and half woman. Whom do you wish to please? Frail womankind? Please them as a man. “Yes, but they like smooth men.” Oh, go hang! And if they like sexual perverts, would you have become such a pervert?...Leave the man a man...How treat your paltry body, then? As its nature is...What then? Does the body have to be left unclean? – God forbid! But the man that you are and were born to be, keep that man clean, a man to be clean as a man, a woman as a woman....No, but let’s pluck out also the lion’s mane...and the cock’s comb, for he too ought to be “cleaned up”! Clean? Yes, but clean as a cock, and the other clean as a lion...!

Here, what Epictetus means “by nature” is the *perceived* regular order of things. Men are innately hairy, while women are usually born with less hair on their bodies. Epictetus argues that we must not deny our inherent gender: “the man that you are and were born to be, keep that man clean, a man to be clean as a man, a woman as a woman.” The same

²⁹ Cf. *Laws* 8:836; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 122:7-8; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9:727-735. As Chrysippus (*SVF* III) asserts, one should “live by following (by keeping close to) nature.”

³⁰ Cf. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, pp. 222f. for an interesting discussion on Paul’s use of natural theology.

³¹ The passage is from Oldfather’s translation in Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 365-366.

notion of “nature” ultimately lies behind the condemnation of homoeroticism in Romans 1; this point is well expressed by Robert Gagnon:

[Homoeroticism] denies the sexual, bodily gender differences of male and female and attempts a merger that nature never intended, that is, for which complementary sex organs were not provided. It amounts to a complaint against the “gendered body” that God/nature gave.³²

Paul’s other uses of “nature” in Romans appear to support the interpretation of *physis* in Rom 1:26-27 as the *perceived* natural order of things. Outside of Rom 1:26, Paul uses *physis* three other times in Romans. In all three occurrences, *physis* corresponds to what either Paul takes to be the natural order of things or a state of being or circumstance determined by birth or origin.³³ Importantly, in all these cases Paul perceives nature as an absolute.

First, in Rom 2:14-15 Paul states that:

When Gentiles who do not possess the law carry out its precepts by the light of nature (*physei*), then, although they have no law, they are their own law; they show that what the law requires is inscribed on their hearts, and to this their conscience gives supporting witness.

Here, Paul is suggesting that though the Gentiles are not privy to the law, they are still able to follow the principles God sets forth and to be godly by observing the natural world, God’s creation. Paul is suggesting that despite the absence of divine instruction in the form of “the law” (the Torah), human beings can intuit, through reason, a “natural law.”³⁴

Second, in Rom 2:27 Paul suggests that “[Gentiles] may be physically (literally, *physei*, so more exactly “by nature”) uncircumcised, but by fulfilling the law he will pass judgement on you (Jews) who break it, for all your written code and your circumcision.”

³² Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 367.

³³ Cf. also passages outside of Romans, Gal 4:7-9; Gal 2:14-16; and 1 Cor 11:14-15.

³⁴ Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 371.

Here, *physei* has a slightly different sense than above. "Nature" here refers to a condition or circumstance as determined by birth or natural origin. In contrast to characteristics or a status attained after birth, the Gentiles inherit their uncircumcised condition from their ancestors.³⁵ In other words, Gentiles are uncircumcised as a result of being "biologically descended from people groups other than Jews."³⁶

Third, in Rom 11:21, 23-24 Paul warns the Gentiles,

If God did not spare the natural (*kata physin*) branches, no more will he spare you. Observe the kindness and the severity of God – severity to those who fell away, divine kindness to you provided that you remain within its scope; otherwise you too will be cut off, whereas they, if they do not continue faithless, will be grafted in...For if you were cut from your native wild olive and against nature (*para physin*) grafted into the cultivated olive, how much more readily will they, the natural (*kata physin*) olive branches, be grafted into their native stock!

In this passage about Israel as God's olive tree, the branches that are organically part of the tree (the Jews) are *kata physin*, whereas the wild olive branches (the Gentiles) come from a foreign tree and, therefore, they are artificially or unnaturally (*para physin*) attached to God's olive tree. The Gentile branches are *para physin* because they sidestep the natural process of growth through artificial human intervention.³⁷ In contrast to Romans 1:26-27, this circumvention of nature is not seen as a negative act "because olive trees do grow branches; while supplementing or aiding nature, one is not trying to fit together two discordant entities."³⁸ Notwithstanding this observation, the artificial grafting of branches is still unnatural because it goes against the natural growth process of the tree in question. In all three cases where Paul uses "nature" above it refers to either what Paul takes to be the regular or established order of things or a condition or circumstance determined by birth, origin, or nature in general. In all three cases, Paul

³⁵ Cf. Frederick William Danker (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* third edition (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1069.

³⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 371.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 372.

³⁸ Ibid. p.372.

understands nature in an unmitigated sense. As a result, it is legitimate to understand Paul's use of "nature" in Rom 1:26-27 in the same way.

For Paul, homoeroticism goes against the regular order of nature, which *shows* us that heteroerotic relations are "natural." The use of "nature" in Rom 1:26-27 suggests that Paul is adopting a Greco-Roman notion of moral law founded in nature.³⁹ However, as did Hellenistic Judaism before him, Paul appropriates this typically Stoic notion and applies it to the Torah and his own theology. What emerges is *Paul's* Hellenistic Jewish notion of "nature." As it does for Philo before him, the Greco-Roman conception of nature ultimately becomes subordinate to God, the creator, and his divinely ordained natural order.

The word *physis* is extremely common in Philo.⁴⁰ As we saw in the previous section, Philo, like Paul, draws on Greco-Roman philosophy, and appeals to the way things are composed in nature and creation as a foundation for moral teaching regarding God's intention for human sexuality.⁴¹ Very typical in Philo is the emphasis on sexual deviations as a violation of natural law.⁴² For Philo, the "law of nature" is the principle from nature that teaches us that males must mate with females. Why? First, same-sex unions go against the "sex nature" which dictates that men assume the active sexual role and women the passive role. Philo clearly echoes Greco-Roman sources here, which often emphasize that homoerotic acts disorder the gender hierarchy. Same-sex relations require males to assume the passive, submissive (female) sexual role. Though Philo

³⁹ Cf. G. Harder, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Colin Brown (ed.) vol. 2 (Michigan: Zondervan, 1976), p. 660.

⁴⁰ Cf. Koster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 267f.

⁴¹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 379-380. Cf. Koster, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 267, who suggests that "*physis* in Philo unites for the first time in Greek literature the elements in OT and Greek thinking which were to be of decisive significance for the thought of the West: God and *natura creatrix*, creation and the natural world, natural law and divine demand." Furthermore, he argues that his concept of natural law, which is the combination of the Stoic legacy and the OT understanding of the Law, "is at the heart of the attempt to combine the Jewish understanding of God with the [Greek] concept of nature, and it is thus a product of Jewish apologetic." (p. 269)

⁴² Cf. On Abraham 135-136

perceives “nature” here an absolute, “nature” clearly refers to socially produced gender roles.⁴³

Furthermore, same-sex unions do not result in procreation – the Creator’s divine mandate for humans – because males are by nature not meant to be penetrated. It should be obvious through the way things are constituted in nature and creation that homoerotic acts go against the regular order of nature. Sexual intercourse between two men violates the gender distinctions instituted in nature by God (*Laws* 2:50):

He [the pederast] misuses them [sex organs] for abominable lusts and forms of intercourse forbidden by all laws. He not only attacks in his fury the marriage-beds of others, but even plays the pederast and forces the male type of nature (*physeos*) to debase and convert itself into the feminine form, just to indulge a polluted accursed passion.

Only a female is anatomically suited for a man and vice versa. Males are not anatomically suited for sexual penetration, nor are females anatomically suited to penetrate for both societal and inherent biological reasons. Philo perceives nature as an absolute. Though Philo is largely influenced by Greco-Roman philosophy in his emphasis on gender hierarchy and his use of *physis*, he ultimately adapts this philosophy to a Jewish understanding of God.⁴⁴ A similar adaptation of Greco-Roman philosophy occurs in Paul’s treatment of Romans 1:26-27.

Romans 1:26-27: Paul’s Hellenistic Jewish Notion of “Nature”

Like Philo, Paul ultimately applies the Greco-Roman notion of “nature” to the Torah and God the creator. This interpretation is supported by implicit references to Genesis 1-2 in Rom 1:18-32.⁴⁵ Paul does not mention Adam and Eve explicitly or refer directly to creation in Genesis 1-2. However, his references to the beginning of the world

⁴³ The emphasis on gender hierarchy is not explicit in Romans 1:26-27 and therefore appears to be a secondary concern for Paul. However, based on what Paul writes elsewhere and his possible echoes to Greco-Roman philosophy, it does appear to lie under the surface (for example, cf. 1 Cor 11: 2-16).

⁴⁴ Cf. *Laws* 1:13f.

(Rom 1:20) and God as "Creator" (1:25) strongly suggest that he has these narratives in mind. The use of homoerotic acts as an example of what happens when humans turn their back on the Creator is not surprising then. Same-sex relations are *para physin* because they reverse the perceived order of creation. First, they do not enable humans to meet the demand to procreate (Gen 1:27-28):

God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth.'

This passage makes it clear that humans are meant to *worship* God, in whose image they are created, but they are to *rule over* other creatures in the created world. Paul's account in Rom 1:18-32 illustrates that a disordering of God's created hierarchical structure has occurred: humans now worship their own kind and the very creatures they are to have dominion over (Rom 1:23). As a result, they also blur divinely ordained gender distinctions. Human beings mate with the same-sex, rather than with the anatomically complementary opposite sex.

For Paul, same-sex relations deny that the male and female genders are complementary to one another. Their inherent interconnectedness is integral to God's creative design (Gen 2:18-24):

Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I shall make a partner suited to him.' So from the earth he formed all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. The man gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every wild animal; but for the man himself no suitable partner was found. The Lord God then put the man into a deep sleep and, while he slept, he took one of man's ribs and closed up the flesh over the place. The rib he had taken out of the man the Lord God built up into a woman, and he brought her to the man. The man said: 'This one at last is bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She

⁴⁵ Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 289f.

shall be called woman, for from man was she taken.' That is why man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife, and the two become one.

The fittedness of the male and female genders is given a theological rationale in God's creative action: God has made male and female to become one flesh.⁴⁶ Therefore, Paul's use of homoeroticism in Rom 1:26-27 as an example of human depravity is not random. Rather, it is an observable sign of the spiritual condition of those humans who have "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom 1:25). It provides a graphic representation of human beings' primal rejection of the preeminence of God the creator.⁴⁷

That Paul has creation in mind in Rom 1:18f is also supported by his mention of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve elsewhere in Romans (Rom 3:23; 5:12-21; 7:7-13; 8:19-21).⁴⁸ Moreover, Paul refers back to the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 elsewhere in his letters. For example, writing about public worship to the church in Corinth, Paul states (1 Cor 11:7-12):

A man must not cover his head, because man is the image of god, and the mirror of his glory, whereas a woman reflects the glory of man. For man did not originally spring from woman, but woman was made out of man; and man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the sake of man...in the Lord's fellowship woman is as essential to man as man to woman. If a woman was made out of man, it is through woman that man now comes to be; and god is the source of all.⁴⁹

These passages suggest that Paul uses the creation stories as a foundation for his own cosmic hierarchy. *For Paul*, there is no place in this hierarchy for homoerotic relations

⁴⁶ Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1" in *Religious Ethics* (1986), p. 191.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 191.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 292. Given the evidence, Gagnon is justified in seriously questioning Nissinen and others (including Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 274) for not recognizing the allusion to the Genesis account of the creation of male and female humans.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gen 1:26, 2:18, 21-24. Also cf. 1 Cor 6:16 where Paul cites Gen 2:24: "You surely know that anyone who joins himself to a prostitute becomes physically one with her, for scripture says, 'The two shall become one flesh.'"

of any kind. Male and female genders are complementary to one another and they are meant to exist together.⁵⁰

Conclusion:

Paul's attack on pagan idolatry in Romans 1:18-32 echoes pre-Christian Jewish thinking. The passage is indebted to previous Hellenistic Jewish diatribes that harshly condemn the Gentiles' fall into idolatry. These attacks focus on the Gentiles' inability to attain knowledge of God through the things he has created (i.e., the natural world). A direct consequence of their ignorance and subsequent fall into idol-worship is immoral sexual behavior, namely homoeroticism. In the same way that idolatry is seen as a transgression against God, the creator, homoeroticism is perceived as a transgression of "natural" sexual relations between male and female. Idolatry and same-sex intercourse change or depart from God's creative design for humanity. Although Rom 1:18-32 is indebted to a pre-existing model described above, Paul's reference and conception of "nature" (*physis*) in vv. 26-27 suggest that he is also indebted to Greco-Roman philosophy.

First, like Greco-Roman philosophers, Paul connects excessive desire to homoerotic acts. Individuals are unable to satisfy their lust for pleasure so they turn to unnatural sexual encounters with the same-sex. Moreover, also like Greco-Roman moralists, Paul suggests that human beings should be able to *perceive* that these same-sex liaisons are unnatural by observing the natural world or "the things [God] has made." Like the Stoics, Paul sees nature as a moral teacher in Romans 1. Homoeroticism goes against what Paul understands to be the natural order of things. Paul's use of "nature" initially suggests that he is adopting a Greco-Roman conception of moral law established in nature. And, for a brief moment in Romans 1, he is doing just this. However, like Hellenistic Jewish writers, Paul applies a Greco-Roman conception of "nature" to the

⁵⁰ Paul's tendency to pair up male and female (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 7:2-4, 10-11, 12-13, 16, 27-28, 32-34, 11:4-5, 7-10, 11-12, 14-15) lends further support to this notion. This tendency may also account for the relatively rare reference to female same-sex relationships in Rom 1:26.

Torah and his own theology. What emerges from this synthesis is a Hellenistic Jewish notion of "nature." The Greco-Roman concept of nature ultimately becomes secondary to God, the creator.

Though Paul does not explicitly refer to Adam and Eve or to the creation stories, references to the beginning of the world and the Creator strongly suggest that he has the early chapters of Genesis in mind. If this is the case, which I believe it is, homoeroticism is condemned primarily because it ignores God's creative design for males and females. More specifically, homoerotic acts attempt a merger where the sexual organs are not complementary. It denies the uniquely gendered body that God gave males and females. "Nature," perceived as the regular order of things, shows us that males and females are anatomically complementary to one another. Same sex relations are *para physin* ("against nature") because they reverse the perceived order of creation. First, homoerotic relationships do not enable humans to meet God's command to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27-28). Second, homoerotic relationships ignore that male and female bodies are anatomically complementary to one other. The compatibility between the male and a female bodies is part of God's creative design. "Since the world began," God has intended for man and woman to become partners in one flesh (Gen 2:18-24). That Paul takes the male and female partnership to be indicative of the natural order of things is seen in his tendency to pair up male and female throughout his letters (for example, cf. 1 Cor 7:2-4). In response to a statement promoting asceticism and a withdrawal from heteroerotic relations, Paul's response to the Corinthians is clear – a man and a woman are fitted to one another (1 Cor 7:2-4):

In the face of so much immorality, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband must give a wife what is due to her, and equally the wife must give the husband his due. The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's.

The complementary relationship between a male and female is in line with God's creative design. In Rom 1:26-27 and in his other uses of *physis* in Romans, Paul perceives "nature" as an absolute. It represents God's creative design.

Notwithstanding this interpretation, it is important to note that one cannot be sure that Paul has the creation stories in mind. If he does not, like Philo and the Greco-Roman philosophers, he might be as equally (or even more) concerned with the disruption of conventional gender roles. One can support this argument by pointing to Paul's references to women being subordinate to men (for example, 1 Cor 11:2-16). Regardless of Paul's exact intention, it is clear that he does not approve of same sex relations; they are contrary to what he perceives to be the natural order of things. In other words, if Genesis 1-2 does not apply in Rom 1:26-27, it remains clear that Paul is condemning homoeroticism.

Conclusion:

In the Greco-Roman world there are voices that undeniably speak out in support of homoeroticism. These voices are male and generally negative toward women. They do not put much value in a woman's mental or physical capacity, therefore, in order to have a fulfilling companionship, they argue a man must seek another male. Notwithstanding the pro-homoerotic voices, the majority of the Greco-Roman sources condemn both pederasty and male same sex relations in general.

First, homoeroticism requires a male to assume the passive, receptive role, which is the domain of a woman, rather than the active, penetrative role. Adult males who are perceived to assume the passive sexual position are distorting their natural gender role. The transgression of conventional gender roles is considered to be *para physin* ("against nature"), as it goes against the regular order of things. Though the gender hierarchy is obviously socially produced "nature" here is generally perceived as an absolute by the ancient Greco-Romans.

Males who assume the active role in a homoerotic relationship are also attacked, though not as vehemently. In particular, the active lover is chided for his lack of self-control and his inability to control his lust. One often gets the sense from our sources that the males turn to homoeroticism not because they are inherently oriented toward other males, but rather they are in search of new experiences to satisfy their desire for pleasure.

Though some sources attempt to defend the institution of pederasty, in general boy love is condemned. Pederastic relationships are thought to lack mutuality and constancy, and, therefore, they are damaging for both the younger and older male. Our sources imply that these relationships are "unnatural" because males are not physically complementary to one another, especially in the case of boys and older men. In contrast, the sources tend to imply that the male and female genders are complementary to one another.

In general, the Greco-Roman commentators regard any relationship between a male and a female to be “according to nature” (*kata physin*). It is assumed that in a heteroerotic relationship that a man assumes the active lovemaking role and the woman the passive role. Heteroerotic relationships are considered *kata physin* not only because they maintain conventional gender roles, but also because they enable the human race to perpetuate itself.

On the other hand, Greco-Roman philosophers often refer to homoerotic acts as *para physin* (“against nature”). First, as mentioned above, homoerotic acts disorder what the ancients perceived to be inherent gender roles. Women are born to be passive, soft, receptors of sperm, whereas men are made to be active, hard, givers of sperm. These passive/aggressive roles are played out in society as well. In regard to sexual roles, the ancients tend to perceive “nature” as absolute and unequivocal here.

Despite the importance of gender roles in understanding the concept of *para physin*, Greco-Roman sources imply that male and female are complementary genders, hence homoeroticism is against what nature intended. Here, again, “nature” refers to the perceived natural order of things. Nature shows us that male and female are compatible genders. Accordingly, heteroerotic relationships nurture mutuality and are consummated by way of a natural level of pleasure. Moreover, nature shows us that heteroerotic relationships result in succeeding generations. Again, it is important to point out that the ancients perceive “nature” as an absolute.

References to homoeroticism are rare in the Jewish tradition. Only in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is the act of male same-sex relations explicitly condemned. Together, these two passages support a general prohibition of male same sex relations where no status, age, or other distinctions are made. Female homoeroticism is not mentioned.

Nevertheless, like the Greco-Roman world, the prohibition in Leviticus implies that men and women assume specific gender roles. A man must not have intercourse with a man “as [he has intercourse] with a woman, both commit an abomination.” This

suggests that when a man assumes a woman's (passive/receptor) gender role during sex with another man, both participants are contributing to a transgression of the regular order of things as the ancient Israelites saw it.

Although gender roles appear to be a real concern here, it is likely that the ancient Israelites also saw male same-sex relations as a disordering of the divine order of creation. Male homoeroticism turns its back on God's creative design in Genesis, according to which male and female are created as complementary genders. Male and female complementarity enables humans to fulfill God's divine command to "be fruitful and increase." Though there is no allusion to the structure of creation in Leviticus 18:22 or 20:13, it is unlikely that an ancient Jew would not have this formative narrative in mind when presented with the image of male same-sex relations.

Within Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 there is an implicit notion about what the Jews perceived as the natural order of things. Male homoeroticism not only blurs conventional gender roles, but also it ignores the fact that male and female bodies are complementary to one another. "Nature," in this case, refers to the perceived natural order of things based on God's creation. In contrast to the Greco-Roman conception of the natural order of things where nature is atop the cosmic hierarchy, God, and his creative design, stand as the ultimate authority and exemplar. Outside of Leviticus, the other *possible* references to homoeroticism in Genesis 19, Judges 19, and Deuteronomy 23:17-18 do not tell us much about ancient Jewish attitudes toward same sex relations.

Like the Hebrew Scriptures, rabbinical legal discussions rarely include the issue of homoeroticism. Where they do discuss it, a few points arise. First, male same sex relations are unacceptable. *Any* man found committing such an act is to be put to death. Second, like the Hebrew Scriptures and Greco-Roman philosophers, the rabbis distinguish between the active and passive sexual roles. There are two modes of intimacy: the natural heteroerotic relationship, where a male assumes an active sexual role and a female a passive position, and the "unnatural" homoerotic relationship, where a male must assume the passive female role and be penetrated like a woman. As in

Leviticus, “nature” appears to refer to the perceived regular order of things. “Nature” is an absolute based on societal convention and God’s creative design. Lastly, although some rabbis seem to believe that Jewish men might be tempted by homoerotic affairs, the majority imply that Jewish males are not suspected of committing homosexual acts. Ultimately, the rabbis see homoerotic behavior, like other sexual transgressions, as a manifestation of pagan immorality. This sentiment is also prevalent in the Hellenistic Jewish sources.

The rabbis essentially ignore female homoeroticism. In the one discussion where it is mentioned, we are not told much. Essentially what it does suggest is that the male commentators had little interest in the subject.

In contrast to the ambiguity encompassing the Sodomites’ homoerotic inclinations in Genesis 19, Philo and Josephus underscore the Sodomites’ homoerotic acts. As in the Rabbinical literature, both writers view homoeroticism as a Gentile problem. Furthermore, both Philo and Josephus use conventional Greco-Roman arguments and terminology when they attack male same-sex relations and the institution of pederasty. Philo denounces pederasty because it requires a male to assume the passive woman’s sexual role, which blurs conventional gender boundaries. Both writers assail the effeminate (*androgynos*) man who indulges in female ways, such as shaving body hair and wearing make-up. Lastly, both commentators adopt the Greco-Roman argument that only a sexual union between a man and a wife is *kata physin* (“according to nature”). Male homoeroticism is contrary to “nature” for primarily three reasons. First, it blurs conventional gender boundaries, which dictate that a man must penetrate and a woman must *be* penetrated. Second, homoerotic relationships are unable to produce posterity. Third, Philo and Josephus use the preceding two Greco-Roman arguments in order to help arrive at what is possibly their primary complaint against homoeroticism: same-sex relationships overturn God’s intended order for sexual relationships; they ignore that male and female are complementary genders.

Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal writings also often view same-sex relations and pederasty as a Gentile vice. Moreover, they echo Greco-Roman arguments against homoeroticism. First, same-sex love blurs conventional gender roles, which dictate that a man must assume the active sexual role and a woman the passive. Also, homoerotic acts interfere with natural process of procreation, which enables the human race to reproduce itself. As *Pseudo-Phocylides* urges (175-176), "Give nature her due, you also, beget in your turn as you were begotten." Also, in Greco-Roman fashion, the sources suggest that one ought to be able to perceive from the natural world that homoeroticism is "unlawful sex" (*Pseudo-Phocylides* 190-191). By observing the natural world, one ought to be able to "discern the Lord who made all things" and recognize that homoeroticism is a "[departure] from the order of nature"; it "[alters] the Law of God" (*Test of Napht* 3:1-5). Here, there are clear allusions to the Torah and Genesis 1-2, where God's creative design is explicated. Same-sex intercourse goes against the natural order of things as established by God. In His creative design, men and women are complementary to one another and, as a result, God commands them to come together as one and procreate (cf. Gen 1:27-28; Gen 2:18-24).

Like Philo, Josephus, and the extra canonical literature, Paul seems to bring together both Greco-Roman and Jewish attitudes toward same-sex relations in Rom 1:26-27. Although he is undeniably Jewish in his outlook toward God as creator of all things, Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy *both* influence his attitude toward homoeroticism. It is the *direct* Greco-Roman influence on Rom 1:26-27 that seems to be often overlooked by scholars.

The larger context (Rom 1:18-32) of Rom 1:26-27 echoes pre-Christian Jewish thinking, which harshly condemns pagan idolatry. Immoral sexual behavior, namely homoeroticism, is often connected with the pagan's fall into idol-worship.

Although Rom 1:18-32 is indebted to Hellenistic Jewish diatribes against idol-worship, Paul's reference and conception of *physis* ("nature") in Rom 1:26-27 suggest that his outlook toward homoeroticism is also indebted to Greco-Roman philosophy.

Like Greco-Roman moralists, Paul connects excessive lust and desire to homoeroticism. Furthermore, again like Greco-Roman moralists, he suggests that one should be able to perceive that same-sex relations are against the regular order of nature by observing nature or “the things God has made” (Rom 1:20). In a similar fashion to the Stoics, Paul sees nature as a moral teacher in Romans 1 and, for Paul, nature shows homoeroticism to be “unnatural” (*para physin*).

Notwithstanding these echoes to Greco-Roman morality, like Hellenistic Jewish writers, Paul ultimately adapts the Greco-Roman conception of nature to the Torah and his own theology. What emerges is a Hellenistic-Jewish notion of “nature,” where the Greco-Roman notion of nature becomes ancillary to God.

References to the beginning of the world (Rom 1:20) and to God as “the Creator” strongly suggest that Paul has the creation narratives in mind. If this is the case, For Paul, the primary reason for condemning homoeroticism and using it within the larger context of Rom 1:18-32 is that same-sex relations disorder God’s creative design as outlined in Genesis 1-2. Homoerotic acts attempt a merger between genders, which are not complementary to one another. They disregard the uniquely gendered bodies that God gave males and females when the world began (Gen 2:18-24). Moreover, homoerotic relationships do not enable the human race to meet God’s command to reproduce itself (Gen 1:27-28).

In Rom 1:26-27, and elsewhere in Romans, Paul perceives “nature” to be the regular order of things. For Paul “nature” is an absolute, as it reveals God’s creative design and represents “his everlasting power and deity” (Rom 1:20). As a result, even if Paul does not have Genesis 1 and 2 in mind, it is clear that, homoerotic acts of any kind go against what he perceives to be the regular order of things. How do Paul’s words in Romans 1:26-27 apply to contemporary Christian ethics and morality?

Within its original context, Paul’s condemnation of same-sex acts is clear and unmitigated. For Paul, nature is an absolute. Homoeroticism reflects a vivid, temporal

infraction of “nature’s”, and ultimately God’s, guidelines for human relationships. Nonetheless, today we must question Paul’s underlying assumptions about “nature.” For example, Paul’s conception of “nature” as absolute is arguably a social construction based on a model of creation and a perception of “nature” that many human beings (including some Christians) do not accept. If one does not accept the Scriptures’ creation story, or if one does not take it literally, Paul’s condemnation of homoeroticism as “unnatural” loses its force. Moreover, very few people today would accept the ancients’ conception of “natural” gender roles. Again, in this case nature as an absolute becomes a moot point. Finally, Paul’s condemnation of homoeroticism is based on a different understanding about human sexuality. For instance, Paul and the ancients appear to display little awareness of the contemporary notion of sexual orientation. Adherents of Christianity and its message *must* not only here Paul’s words with their original context, but also question his underlying assumptions about “nature” and sexuality before even contemplating moral and ethical decisions about “other” human beings.

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