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### *Fear, Ignorance, or Prejudice Never Settles a Question*

Days ago, a friend invited me to come along to walk her dogs at Congressional Cemetery, a rather bucolic tract of land with a bit of history of its own, about two miles away from the US Capitol. I was surprised to learn that the cemetery—resting home to hundreds of politicians from various states, war veterans, prominent madams, and other illustrious figures the likes of John Phillip Sousa, Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill, and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover—had been purchased by an association of pet owners and designated as a dog park.

I came to a corner that I’m told is called the gay area, and noticed a modern tombstone that belonged to a soldier. The inscription read: ‘When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men, and a discharge for loving one.’ I read it over and over again. To me, it spoke volumes. I said to myself, *it must be tough being gay*.

Being attracted to the opposite sex, it’s a bit hard for me to understand gayness, and how gays interrelate; how they hold hands; how they kiss each other; or how they have sex. What I do understand is that willingly putting your life at risk for defending a social and political system that would reject you must be difficult. The incident at the cemetery prompted me to confront the issue.

I started to think about my options if I were gay; I presume that I could hide in the gay subculture, never showing my face anywhere else. Or, I could decide to *come out*, defy traditional conventions, and assert myself as a human being at the price of being perceived as an arrogant queer, for is there another way of being gay in an environment that doesn’t like you? I also could choose to stay in the closet and live in a perennial state of social hibernation. That’s right. I could go on pretending for the rest of my life, helping heterosexuals believe that they live in Fantasyland; but, at what emotional and psychological price to me? The more I thought about it, the more I thought that this would make

an interesting topic for discussion during the seminar.

“Good evening,” I said entering the classroom. “I trust that you all had a nice weekend and that you’ve cleared your minds to make room for tonight’s topic. As we may have already noticed, the issues we’re dealing with are anything but simple and impersonal. And, tonight we’ll be confronted with another touchy subject: homosexuality and gay marriage.

“Two of you are to make presentations about gay marriage, and remember, the rest of you are to contribute in accordance with our class guidelines about thorny issues. And this topic is one of the thorniest, and it’s one that won’t go away simply by ignoring it.”

“You’re not going to ask us to think like . . . you know, *them*, are you?” asked Mr. Edson.

“Would that be so hard, Mr. Edson?” I asked.

“Well, it’s just that . . .”

“Well, actually, yes, Mr. Edson; you’ll have to invert your thinking from time to time as well as your feelings. Don’t forget feelings. To really grasp the essence of an issue, you have to be able to plunge into the depths of your feelings. Otherwise, you’ll acquire a rather superficial notion of the issue, and that’s not why we are here tonight.”

He smiled and shrugged his assent.

I turned to the white board and wrote what I once read upon opening a Chinese fortune cookie: *Fear, ignorance or prejudice never settles a question.*

“Does this help, Mr. Edson?” I asked pointing at the white board. “I realize that discussing this issue may be uncomfortable for us, but can anyone think of a better way to settle the question?”

“Oh, one more thing,” I said. “Regardless of whether there are gays or lesbians in this class, and I’m not seeking to find out, we’re going to conduct ourselves with the utmost respect, and that means no name-calling.

“Very well, why don’t we start by defining the terms that we’ll be using? When we talk about gay marriage, what do we mean by it? Ms. Vanhurst.”

“I think that if we’re going to concern ourselves with how others perceive this issue politically,” she began, “then we have to narrow down the definition to something concrete; like gay marriage refers to the intent and willingness of two individuals of the same gender to become legally married, and I may add, regardless of whether or not they have sexual relations.”

“What about being *gay* or *lesbian*. How would you define the terms?” I inquired.

“Hmm, I would say that the terms gay and lesbian refer to persons who are attracted to and enjoy sex with same-gender partners.”

“What about if a person fantasizes about gay or lesbian sex but has never engaged in that type of behavior? Would he or she be regarded as

homosexual?” inquired Mr. Dickerson.

“Not necessarily, although I’m sure many people would admit to that,” Ms. Vanhurst replied. “Fantasies can be deceiving. Could someone who fantasizes about killing another person be considered a murderer? Would struggling with fantasies about having sex with someone other than your spouse—setting aside the Bible for a moment—make you an adulterer?”

“Let’s not belabor the issue any further,” I suggested. “I think the point is well taken that we can’t argue about intangibles. Let’s focus on what actually is. Next point, Ms. Vanhurst. Why don’t you try to frame the issue in terms of today’s political reality? Why is gay marriage such a controversial issue?”

“Well, the first thing I noticed as I researched this issue was that criticism of gay marriage seems to be, first and foremost, criticism of the gay lifestyle; criticism of homosexual civil marriages is a distant second.

“Homosexuality, for those of us who don’t yet know it, is regarded as immoral by many politicians and by quite a few mainstream religious and social institutions. With the exception of homophobes, many of these religious and social institutions, however, make a distinction between the homosexual orientation, which they say they don’t condemn, and homosexual behavior or gay sex, which they regard as morally wrong.

“There’s another distinction that’s important to bear in mind too, and that’s the one made within the mental health community, whereby quite a few practitioners and researchers strongly believe that homosexual orientation itself, while not immoral, is an illness and a mental disorder. These practitioners, however, almost invariably sustain that the behavior itself, engaging in the sexual act, is immoral, namely because they believe that the homosexual person is opting to act out his behavior without attempting to seek medical treatment to reverse the symptom. On the other hand, as you all know, the major mental health organizations in the country and throughout the world don’t regard homosexual orientation or behavior as an illness or a mental disorder.

“In addition to other mainstream organizations that morally approve and/or tolerate gay sex, we have the law of the land that, by virtue of no longer banning gay and lesbian sex, makes homosexual behavior and cohabitation *legally moral*.

“Now, what’s interesting about this issue,” she continued, “is that, despite the legal and social tolerance that exists for homosexuality, gay marriage is still mostly not legally recognized. As a society, we have, in effect, crossed the first bridge, the gay bridge, but we’re unwilling to build, much less cross, the second one, the gay marriage bridge.”

“Ms. Vanhurst, I don’t understand why you bring out the issue of homosexuality being or not being an illness,” said Mr. Dickerson. “If this is an ethical issue, or so you have indicated, why would it matter whether homosexuality is an illness or not?”

“Oh, it’s a very important consideration! You see,” she continued, “quite a

few organizations combine the medical diagnosis with the religious belief into moral opposition. If you think about it, there's some logic to it. If these entities believe that the illness is curable or if there is freedom of choice in gay sex, and they regard gay sex as being wrong, why should they not oppose it on ethical grounds? It does make some sense.

"The opposite view—held by the major mental health organizations, among others—is that homosexuality is normal behavior. Those individuals and organizations representing this view, not only deem homosexuality as being normal, regardless of whether it is or not, they strongly believe that it's an irreversible condition. If the condition can't be reversed, they would argue, why subject homosexuals to higher social and moral standards than heterosexuals? Why suppress a behavior that comes natural to them?"

"Are you suggesting that this is not only an ethical but also a medical issue as well?" asked Ms. Williamson.

"I'm afraid that it's far more complicated. First, we don't know if this is necessarily an ethical issue. What if it could be scientifically proven that homosexuality is genetically caused? Since there's no individual free will involved the question of ethics would have less significance. The problem is that, when we come to the question of how homosexuality occurs, the verdict and the evidence are not in yet."

"Frankly, from what I have heard and read, I thought that, at least from a scientific standpoint, this issue already had been settled," Mr. Wasserman said, sounding somewhat confused.

"I know," Ms. Vanhurst replied. "I, too, was a bit surprised. But, perhaps, I might be able to explain why. It's been three decades since the American Psychiatric Association (APA) made the decision to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Two years later, the American Psychological Association (ApsA), pretty much following APA's footsteps, also stopped regarding homosexuality as an illness. The National Institute of Mental Health and the American Medical Association also proceeded in similar fashion.

"Now, ask yourself, what do these organizations have in common? Science, that's what. The credibility of these institutions is high because they make their pronouncements under the mantra of being scientific. If these had been political organizations, their statements wouldn't have carried as much weight. But because they have spoken over the years with the aura of science standing over them, it's not surprising that we would hear prominent personalities assert, without reservations or qualifications, that human sexuality is somehow pre-ordained or pre-determined; in other words, that it is not a matter of choice.

"The political confrontation, however, is different; it's mostly between religion and science. Lord Science speaks with an authoritative voice, no doubt. We are told that things are pretty much the way science says it is, because the scientific method is rigorous, objective, detached from values, and

based only on empirical evidence. Science indicates that reality is not how things ought to be, but how things actually are. So, what would be the logical reaction to pronouncements made by Lord Science? To bow our heads; if science says it, it must be true. That's a very common reaction.

"Ahh, but Lord Science has its rival, the Lord God. And, those speaking on behalf of Lord God say pretty much the opposite; they say that homosexuality is evil and morally wrong."

"You're pitting science against religion!" Mr. Wasserman exclaimed.

"I'm not, believe me; I'm not. They are fighting each other; I have nothing to do with this."

"Well, c'mon, science trumps religion on scientific matters, any ways," he concluded.

"You would think, and I would, too. The problem is that we're not talking about trumping religion but trumping the Lord God—faith—and that's more powerful than religion. Add a bit of political salt to faith, and you have a formidable opponent.

"But let me get back to your point. Those who don't believe in God, who are they going to believe? Well science, of course. Nonetheless, there are quite a few believers who side with science. arguing that the opposition between science and God is irrelevant. You know, 'give Caesar what's Caesar's,' and if Caesar has done his job right, well, you go with Caesar.

"What I'm driving at is that both groups, the Pro-gay marriage and the Opposition have stakes in the scientific evidence, if and when all the evidence comes in."

"So, it's not a done deal!" he said.

"Based on the information I dug, no, it isn't."

"Ms. Vanhurst, is religious opposition to gay marriage that much of a significant force on this debate?" I asked.

"Sir, religion is a major element driving the opposition. Even when many opponents of gay marriage are not religiously inclined, the religious rhetoric becomes the basis of the political Opposition. Religious institutions carry a lot of weight on social issues because they represent moral values and because it can do what science cannot: it can prescribe moral behavior. This is why the debate is so conflicting; it's one between two social gods!"

"Very well, then let us get acquainted with the Opposition," I said. "Please describe to us what the mainstream religious position is on gay marriage and homosexuality and the problems that you think make this a volatile political issue."

"Sure. Let's take a look at mainstream opposition to gay marriage first. The Catholic Church's stand on this issue, I can safely say, embodies the views of the Opposition, meaning that its views are shared, whether officially or *de facto*, by other mainstream religious faiths, including those on the far right end

of the political spectrum.

“Two years before he became Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a document on homosexuality that, in politics, may be likened to a *policy paper*. It was not an edict. It did not have the weight of being an *ex cathedra* papal statement on matters of faith and morals; that would've been the equivalent within the Church to a constitutional amendment or a judicial review decision by the Supreme Court. But, still, Pope John Paul II approved the document, so we're not talking college term paper here.

“I selected what I thought were some of the most prominent declarations in the document,<sup>1</sup> and I'll pass them along to everyone so we all can read it at the same time.

“Let's see, on marriage, this is what the document says:

- *Marriage is not just any relationship between human beings... It was established by the Creator, with its own nature, essential properties, and purpose...*
- *Marriage exists solely between a man and a woman...*

Regarding homosexuality, please notice the distinction made between tendency or orientation and behavior:

- *[Those] with homosexual tendencies must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity ... [and] every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided...*
- *Homosexual acts ... under no circumstances can they be approved.*
- *-Homosexuality is a troubling moral and social phenomenon;*
- *[Homosexuals] are called, like other Christians, to live the virtue of chastity.*

On the causes of homosexuality:

- *Sacred Scripture condemns homosexual acts as a serious depravity, [but] this judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.*

On gay marriage:

- *Christians in government have a duty to state clearly the immoral nature of these unions; reminding government of the need to contain the phenomenon ... so as to safeguard morality, and ... avoid exposing young people to erroneous ideas about sexuality and marriage that would deprive them of their necessary defences and contribute to the spread of the*

*phenomenon.”*

- The Church reminds Christians that *the approval or legalization of evil is something far different from the toleration of evil.*

**On the social and political impact of gay marriage:**

- *Civil laws are structuring principles of man’s life in society, for good or for ill. They play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behavior. Lifestyles and the underlying presuppositions these express not only externally shape the life of society but also tend to modify the younger generation’s perception and evaluation of forms of behavior. Legal recognition of homosexual unions would obscure certain basic moral values and cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage.*
- *The absence of sexual complementarity in these unions creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons ... Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development.*
- *[Homosexual] unions are harmful to the proper development of human society, especially if their impact on society were to increase.*

“Now, as value judgments, we may agree or not with these statements; they are, indeed, quite controversial, particularly because, while accepting the homosexual tendency, the Church rejects both the sexual act and the legal union. And, despite that the Church accords no personal responsibility for the tendency, it calls for all homosexuals to live in chastity, which in effect means celibacy or abstention from sexual activity. We may notice, too, that the Church’s position is not only a matter of religious ethics; it’s also extrapolated from the way humans have evolved over millions of years.

“What I see as the document’s most difficult proposition is its call to treat gays with compassion and sensitivity and to *avoid unjust discrimination*. Does this mean that *just discrimination*, may be allowed; that it’s okay for civic, religious and political institutions, including the state, to prevent the legalization of gay rights and unions?

“What’s even more difficult is for religious believers to heed the Church’s call to treat homosexuals with respect, compassion, and sensitivity and not engage in unjust discrimination. For example, suppose we substitute the term *homosexual* that appears in the various quotations I just read from the Church’s document, with the phrase *those with Down Syndrome*.”

“Oh, come on now!” someone said.

“That’s pretty insensitive!” someone else said as others shook their heads.

I intervened. “Okay, enough, please! I don’t care how outlandish the statement is, Ms. Vanhurst must be able to air her views for purposes of this

discussion, no matter how unpleasant it may be for some of you. Besides, you don't even know where she's trying to go with this. Open up your minds and reserve your judgment, and at the end, if need be, refute her ideas with ideas of your own. I'm sure she can take it. But now, she deserves the respect of your complete attention. Ms. Vanhurst, go on, please."

"Thank you," she said meekly, although there was no gentleness in her voice, and I recognized her sardonic demeanor.

"Believe me, it's not my intention to offend or to be insensitive. A novelist once called children with Down Syndrome *clowns of God*, because of their innocence and because in their goodness they would make God laugh. But I do thank you all, because your reactions proved my point.

"Imagine religious leaders affirming that the sexual activities of persons with Down Syndrome are sinful; that Christians have a duty to state clearly the immoral nature of these unions; that allowing children to be adopted by persons with Down Syndrome would actually mean doing violence to these children; that marital unions of persons with Down Syndrome do not represent a significant or positive contribution to the development of the human person in society and are harmful to the proper development of human society; and that, although those who suffer from this anomaly are not personally responsible for it, their behavior attests to the fact that they are intrinsically disordered.

"Now, wouldn't these statements call for your previous reactions? Wouldn't it be morally correct to express revulsion at what I just read? We all know that, unfortunately, there is a social stigma attached to this ailment. So, can you even begin to grasp how much more profound and devastating this stigma would be on people with Down Syndrome following these pronouncements by a religious institution?"

"Melanie, for Pete's sake, can't you see that you have contradicted yourself!" said her friend, Claire Bynum.

"How so?"

"Their behavior is a product of what they are, and what they are is intrinsic to them! How, then, can they be held to be personally responsible?!"

"That's exactly my point, Claire: it's the way they are. And you know what else? If they have children, and people with Down Syndrome can and do have children, there's a fifty-fifty chance that their children would end up having the same intrinsic disorder. Now, let's go ahead and replace the term *Down Syndrome* with the term *homosexual*. How is it different? Would there be less of a stigma? Would there be less personal suffering after being told, publicly, that you're morally depraved?"

"Hold on," said Mr. Wasserman. "You said a minute ago that religious organizations distinguish between the homosexual tendency and its behavior, right? So, what's being proscribed is the behavior, not the person."

"Your argument seems to suggest that we can separate sexual orientation from sexual activity and re-channel it differently," argued Ms. Vanhurst. "Interesting. If that's the case, I'd like to see you try *doing it* with uh . . . who do you like of all the fellows in class?"



“Funny, Ms. Vanhurst,” responded Mr. Wasserman, definitely not amused by her suggestion.

“Sorry. But according to the Church, homosexuals are intrinsically disordered,” repeated Ms. Vanhurst, “and if you go to the dictionary, you’ll see that the term *intrinsic* means *basic, built-in, central, fundamental, essential*. In other words, that’s the way, somehow, that you end up being.

“Well, if gays and lesbians were to have much less of a sexual drive than heterosexuals, perhaps, you could ask them to exercise their will power and refrain from having sex in the name of morality.

“But the fundamental question remains: if homosexuals are not responsible for their sexual orientation and their sexual drive is about the same as heterosexuals—or even more according to some—and knowing that 98.9999 percent of all human beings engage in sexual activity, I think it would be reasonable to ask why homosexuals are the only ones on this planet who are asked to practice chastity, meaning celibacy?

“According to Christian ethics, an action is sinful if the act itself is serious, and if the person commits the act *with full knowledge and deliberate consent*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the individual must be fully aware that his behavior is sinful, and he must possess enough freedom of choice to be able to abstain from the act. This is pretty reasonable, even in civil law. In a murder case involving a mentally impaired individual, if the absence of personal freedom can be proven in court, a not guilty verdict could be returned. And even if the guilty person were to end up in jail or in a mental hospital, according to Christian criteria, he would not have sinned.

“So, I ask you, if the homosexual orientation is an intrinsic part of the person, but other than that, he or she can think, speak, hear, see, feel, taste, dance, jump, run, love, even defend his country, like anyone else, how can he or she be asked not to satisfy or fulfill an otherwise essential and fundamental part of what he or she is?

“More to the point, no religious, social, or legal institution in the world makes celibacy a moral requirement. Even within the Church, celibacy is not a moral requirement; it’s an option. No one forces the priest to enter the seminary or the nun to go into a convent. Each one abstains from sex as a personal sacrifice to God; guys, it’s optional! So, gays and lesbians must wonder why would many religious institutions require them to abstain from sexual activity under the threat of eternal damnation?”

Mr. Brandon interrupted. “Melanie, let me ask you, if gays and lesbians don’t get to choose their sexual orientation, anymore than heterosexuals do, why is the Church so concerned about its propagation?”

“The reason, I think, is that while homosexuals are not personally responsible for their own sexual orientation, that doesn’t preclude the possibility that homosexual orientation be, somehow, transmissible.”

“You mean, as in *contagious*?” asked Mr. Brandon.

“Yes, sort of. Take a look at the document’s citations in that sheet I passed around, and focus on the parts I underlined. Read them as if they were bullets on a paper, and tell me what they tell you.” Everyone began reading

from her notes.

“So, the Church is concerned about the spread of homosexuality throughout society, but why should that surprise us?” asked Mr. Wasserman.

“Because, according to the prevailing scientific notion in our society, homosexuality cannot generate, instigate, give rise to, or lead to changes in sexual orientation among heterosexuals,” she replied.

“But if we take a look at what the Church is saying, well, let’s see: *The need to contain the phenomenon and avoid exposing young people to erroneous ideas about sexuality and marriage that could contribute to the spread of the phenomenon; legalized gay marriage could influence patterns of thought and behavior; homosexual lifestyles and the underlying presuppositions these express, shape the life of society and tend to modify the younger generation’s perception and evaluation of forms of behavior; placing children in a homosexual environment is not conducive to their full human development; homosexual unions are harmful to human society, especially if their impact on society were to increase. We’re talking pandemic flu here!*”

“I understand what the document says,” replied Mr. Wasserman. “But unless I’m mistaken, religion is going out of the normative sphere and making scientific predictions.”

“You’re correct, Mr. Wasserman, so now we have two problems to deal with,” answered Ms. Vanhurst. “From the religious viewpoint, the most serious one, of course, is that if these statements can be empirically proven and people acquire a homosexual orientation through no fault of their own, it doesn’t matter if they are virtuous, thrifty, hard workers, intelligent, religious to the point of supporting prayer at school, good citizens who pay their taxes, protect the homeland, respect the flag, defend domestic jobs, oppose pornography and sex on TV, and even vote Republican. If loneliness, desire for companionship, and a different sexual instinct drives them into the arms of a person of the same gender, they would go to Hell.”

“That’s what I’m thinking,” he replied, “but, what kind of alternative does religion offer gays then? It’s either chastity, or as you say, celibacy—for those who believe and who can do it—or eternal damnation.”

“Actually, for some there’s a third alternative, suicide. Let me see,” she said as she pulled some notes from her desk. “A study of 194 lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth from 14 community centers in 1993, indicated that 42% had reported prior suicide attempts. More recent studies indicate that rejection and public ostracism to their gender orientation leads to increased numbers of teens attempting suicide.<sup>3</sup> The worst part is that, since religion opposes suicide, those who can’t bear their personal situations and commit suicide, from a religious standpoint are automatically condemned to go to Hell. This is how serious this type of stigma can be!”

“Thank you, Ms. Vanhurst,” I said. “Now, you have said that religious Opposition to homosexuality, at least viewed through this document by then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, has incorporated its view on the issue without much scientific evidence. Is that a correct assessment?”

“Well, the document doesn’t mention any scientific studies to support its contentions.”

“Does it make you wonder if the Church could be setting itself up for another Galileo-type affair by rejecting science?” I asked.

“Interesting question, sir, but the reason for this ambivalence is that the issue is not at all clear from a scientific standpoint either. It may look kind of cruel to judge someone so harshly without conclusive evidence, but then, if you think you have God telling you that homosexuality is wrong, well, unless God tells you something different or you re-interpret what He has said, or you come up with new evidence or reach some sort of consensus, this view is not going to change.”

“I agree,” I replied. “Now, tell me why the Opposition wants to contain gay marriage.”

“The Opposition’s view is that homosexual behavior can be propagated if it were to be validated socially, politically, and legally through gay marriage.”

Ms. Williamson raised her hand and spoke. “To be fair, if by any chance these premises are found to be empirically valid, one could not blame religion for wanting to contain something that is wrong, correct? Suppose tomorrow we were to legalize theft or murder. Wouldn’t we expect stealing and killing to increase considerably? So, what’s wrong with opposing the legalization of gay marriage if we assume that it could lead to an increase in homosexuality, something the Church finds as immoral as killing or stealing?”

“There are differences, I’m afraid,” replied Ms. Vanhurst. “The proper comparison we have to make is with a major disorder leading to aberrant conduct, say, psychotic behavior that results in killing. Although the Church considers killing as evil, it wouldn’t consider someone being sinful if he were to kill as a result of his disorder. The Church would understand that the illness impairs the individual’s ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

“In the case of homosexuality, however, it gets complicated. Gays and lesbians believe that there is nothing they can do to change their sexual orientations. At the same time, the Opposition tells them that it would be morally wrong for them to act in accordance with their orientation while recognizing that it is something intrinsic, whether the result of a genetic malfunction, psychological trauma, what have you. So they end up asking themselves how they can see something wrong in behaving in accordance with what they are through no fault of their own? How can they see anything immoral in their behavior?

“The answer the Church and the Opposition provide them offers little if any consolation, leaving them bewildered: ‘we realize,’ the Church would say, ‘that you feel like doing that which comes natural to you through no fault of your own. Still, the behavior is morally wrong and we have no other choice but to ask you to abstain from doing it.’”

“Are you suggesting there is certain arbitrariness in the Opposition’s stance?” asked Mr. Hunt.

“If we follow the logic of what’s been said, Yes, I would have to say there is,” replied Ms. Vanhurst. “Moreover, this standpoint is also somewhat

paradoxical, if not ironic, in that the Church regards homosexual behavior as immoral because it consists of sex outside of marriage. Well, since gays and lesbians are not allowed to marry, their sexual behavior could only take place outside of marriage, which is what makes it sinful.”

“You’ve given me a headache just trying to follow the logic,” said Ms. Bynum. “It’s as if you’re trying to square the circle!”

“Welcome to the club,” answered Ms. Vanhurst.

“Then, let’s do something about it; let’s summarize,” I said. “According to the Opposition, homosexual orientation is not immoral. This is an ethical statement based upon an unproven scientific supposition that homosexuality emerges within the individual through no fault of his or her own. Okay so far?”

“Next proposition, homosexual behavior is immoral because it can be prevented through abstinence. This is an ethical call, but the basis of this call, I think, is rather weak, at least until there is a consensus among experts that abstinence is possible without bringing about emotional, physiological, and psychological impairment.

“Next one, homosexual behavior and its lifestyle are transmissible. Well, without scientific evidence, this statement is purely speculative, but worthy of consideration.

“What else, homosexual behavior and legalization of gay civil unions need to be socially and politically opposed, otherwise immorality would be given free rein in society. This call to political action is ethically valid insofar as the initial statement that homosexuality is immoral is sustained.”

“And, finally, inability to contain homosexual behavior and gay civil unions will negatively affect the institutions of marriage and the family, including the healthy development of children. This is, definitely, a testable proposition that can be subjected to sociological and psychological scientific studies as, indeed, has been done at least in the case of child development.

“How’s that? Does it clear the issue?”

Silence once again ensued in the classroom as everyone looked at each other. They seemed to be attempting to validate their own bewilderment.

“Judging from the look in your faces, the answer is, No,” I remarked.

“Hmm, I don’t know that’s necessarily so, sir,” expressed Mr. Hunt. “I, for one, understood what you and Ms. Vanhurst have said. I think we all have. But what exactly have we gotten out of this is something else. If your purpose was to get across the complexity of the Opposition’s view, I think you’ve been successful. It’s grasping the overall complexity itself that’s not easy.”

“Accepted,” I replied. “That’s what makes this such a sensitively human and hotly debated political issue. I think that as we proceed, a much clearer picture might emerge, so let’s go on. Yes, Mr. Brandon.”

“Sir, according to what Ms. Vanhurst has stated, much of the complexity surrounding this issue stems from the lack of conclusive evidence, the result of which, as someone said, has pitted science and religion against each other.

“I’ve always accepted what I thought were scientific conclusions

regarding homosexuality. And, while Ms. Vanhurst has indicated that the Opposition movement has questioned these conclusions, I don't see anything new here; this same Opposition is also questioning evolution theory. So, what I'd like to know is if there are reasons—evidence—to question the scientific community's pronouncements on this issue."

"I think we have to go to Captain Francis for the answer. He was assigned to do this part of the research. Captain Francis," I called to the back of the room, "It's your turn. That is, if you don't have any strong opposition this time."

"Not at all. Let me begin by pointing out that to say that the Opposition and the Pro-gay movements are at odds is to understate the problem. There's been a great deal of animosity between the two groups during the last four decades. These relations have worsened lately, as the issue gay marriage has become more politically prominent.

"From the perspective of the Opposition, the homosexual/gay marriage issue revolves around five major questions: 1) Is homosexuality a mental disorder? 2) What are the causes of homosexuality? 3) Is there freedom of choice in homosexual behavior? 4) Is homosexual orientation reversible? 5) Is homosexual orientation and/or behavior socially transmissible?

"There seems to be little doubt that irrefutable evidence on each of these questions would go a long way toward an eventual resolution of this conflict. In the absence of such evidence, obstinacy, ideology, acrimony—and what was referred to in our first meeting as the Scalia syndrome—has instead prevailed. Have studies been undertaken on these questions? Yes. Is the evidence conclusive? No. As a result, each side continues to do battle against the other.

"Although details of the initial dispute were publicized three decades ago, the general public's knowledge of past events has remained rather superficial. And, since things haven't changed much over the years, reviewing what transpired some time ago may add perspective to the issue. The information I was able to gather comes mostly from a voice of the Opposition.<sup>4</sup> Its veracity, however, hasn't really been disputed by the Pro gay movement's most important scientific voices, the APA and the APsA. In addition, as we will see, the major events are confirmed by individuals within the Pro-gay movement.

"During the initial process of systematically attempting to conceptualize the various diagnoses known then, the APA defined homosexuality as a mental disorder; as an illness. Its symptoms were said to be anywhere from the inability to establish satisfying sexual relations with opposite gender members to internal conflict, distress, and agony that homosexuals were said to feel. Since throughout thousands of years, heterosexuality had been, and continues to be, the predominant sexual orientation, considering homosexuality an illness seemed, perhaps, a logical conclusion at the time.

"In December 1973, however, the APA approved the motion to eliminate homosexuality from its list of diagnoses of mental disorders. The background of this decision is important to our understanding of the conflict.

Throughout the 1960s, a very vocal gay movement was blossoming in the United States, angry at society's treatment of gays and lesbians. Studies on the etiology of homosexuality, under the guiding medical principle that science could cure an illness once it learns what causes it, had been taking place all along.

"Gays and lesbians themselves guided some of the studies, seeking a better understanding of the issue, and some had come to occupy key positions within the APA. In short, an initial surge of activism to remove homosexuality from the APA's list of mental disorders was now in full motion. I'll highlight the sequence of events in bullet form so that you may all get an idea of what transpired at the time.

- In 1964, the NY Academy of Medicine concluded, *the homosexual person is an emotionally disturbed individual who has not acquired the normal capacity to develop satisfying heterosexual relations*. At the same time, the organization noticed that some homosexuals had begun to argue that homosexuality was a normal, alternative way of life.
- Around that time, the Opposition requested the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to establish a national program for the prevention and treatment of homosexuality. Denying the request, NIMH instead created a task force to make recommendations for *the establishment of a center for the study of sexual behavior*. The task force was composed of numerous persons, including its chairperson, who espoused the view that homosexuality was normal.
- Many others who held the view that homosexuality was an illness were left out of the task force because, they were told, they were *professionally biased* because of their Freudian approach. The task force's report, nonetheless, failed to conclude that homosexuality constituted any form of pathology, in effect lending tacit approval to the normality of homosexual orientation.
- During the late 1960s, gay and lesbian activists disrupted meetings at the national and local levels in which the issue of homosexuality as an illness was going to be discussed. Psychiatrists who continued to view homosexuality as an illness began to receive hate-filled letters while being publicly discredited by their counterparts holding the opposite view.
- Sometime later, Dr. Charles Socarides, APA member and one of the leaders of the Opposition, persuaded the New York County District Branch of the APA to set up a task force to study the issue of homosexuality. Following two years of study by a dozen experts affiliated with the major medical centers of NYC, a report was submitted to the Executive Council of the district branch, but it was found to be not acceptable because, although it called for civil rights for homosexuals, it maintained that homosexuality was a *disorder of psychosexual development*.
- In mid 1973, the president and vice-president of the APA, both of whom

regarded homosexuality as normal behavior, met with several gay and lesbian groups to discuss deletion of homosexuality from the Nomenclature Task Force that formed the basis of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)—the bible of mental illness—published by the APA.

- Robert Spitzer, an up-and-coming psychiatrist at Columbia University who had been named chairman of the task force, suggested a definition that led to the exclusion of homosexuality as an illness. Spitzer's presentation reasserted the Alfred Kinsey declaration from his famous study in the 1940s that concluded that homosexuality was simply a normal variation of sexual behavior. A new definition of homosexuality emerged. Homosexuality now referred to individuals 'whose sexual interests are directed primarily toward people of the same sex and who are neither disturbed by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation.' As a result, homosexuality was no longer identified as a psychiatric disorder and no longer listed in the DSM nomenclature"<sup>5</sup>
- The majority of the APA's Board of Trustees approved the new definition; the entire membership, however, didn't vote, so opponents of the new definition successfully petitioned the APA to submit the issue to a vote by the entire membership. Only twenty-five percent of those eligible to vote sent in their ballots. Nonetheless, the new definition was approved with about sixty percent voting to delete homosexuality from the DSM and forty percent to retain."

"Captain, before you go any further, I need to ask you a couple of questions," said Mr. Edson. "You say that the APA, under pressure from gay and lesbian activists, changed the definition of mental illness to one that fitted its view of homosexuality and then called for a vote to approve the new definition. But, since when is scientific evidence the result of majority rule? Am I missing something?"

"No, you're not; let me explain. That the whole process was hijacked, not even finessed, is well known. Ronald Bayer, a Pro gay psychiatrist and a participant at the meeting, wrote a detailed account of these incidents, including the role that gay activists played at the time.<sup>6</sup> He observed that, *The Council on Research and Development of the APA did not officially investigate or study the issue thoroughly before it gave formal approval to the deletion of homosexuality from the DSM II.*<sup>7</sup> What's more, another Pro gay author, psychologist Gregory Herek, acknowledged not only the role of gay activism, but of *changing social norms* as among the factors that prompted the APA's decision.<sup>8</sup> This means that the definition was, indeed, changed in part to accommodate newly emerging social norms. So, you're right; the change came about not on account of any rigorous scientific evidence being presented or on the basis of the appropriate use of scientific methodology.

"Let me also quote from others who collaborated with Dr. Spitzer in the editing of the DSM back then. A very informative article on Spitzer and the inner working of the DSM sheds some light on this. Theodore Million, a former

DSM Task Force member said, *I think the majority of us recognized that the amount of good, solid science upon which we were making our decisions was pretty modest.* Another, member, Allen Frances, said, *It would usually be some combination of the accepted wisdom of the group, as interpreted by Bob [Spitzer], with a little added weight to the people he respected the most.* David Shaffer, still another member, went even further and said, *There would be these meetings of the so-called experts or advisers, and people would be standing and sitting and moving around. People would talk on top of each other.* Both Frances and Shaffer pointed out that those whose voices were the loudest tended to prevail, but that, overall, the process was *pretty reasonable.*” And from Spitzer himself, regarding his criteria for inserting a new disease into the DSM, he said, *The main thing was that it had to make sense. It had to be logical. It was the best thinking of people who seemed to have expertise in the area.*”

“Well, from what you’re telling us, *best thinking*, as Spitzer has observed, is not a substitute for scientific methodology; it’s only the next best thing to it. Right?” asked Mr. Edson.

“Yes, that is a fair assessment,” answered Captain Francis. “However, we have to take into account that, at the time, coming up with scientific diagnoses of mental disorders was not a very scientific enterprise, and still is not an easy task.”

“Fine, even so, we’re not talking science here. Moreover, what about the voting process, the pressure from activists?” again, inquired Mr. Edson.

“Michael, I indicated that the whole affair wasn’t pretty, and that’s what divided the two groups. Even the final tally of the APA membership tells us a great deal. Who knows why seventy-five percent of the membership chose not to participate in the voting! I don’t think it could have been indifference; it was a very important social issue then. And, a vote of sixty to forty percent, even if it had gone the other way, tells us that the mental health community was, and likely still is divided on this issue today.”

“But again, my whole point is that insofar as there is no conclusive scientific answer on the question of whether homosexuality is a mental disorder or not, we can’t truly say that the mental health community’s pronouncements are scientific,” asserted Mr. Edson.

“I realize that,” Captain Francis turned to him, “but remember that Ms. Vanhurst had indicated that the statement was issued and supported by organizations that were committed to science, so the general public tended to believe that this was a scientific conclusion, when in fact it was not.”

“Captain,” called out Mr. Hunt. “You indicate that the APA adopted a definition indicating that homosexuality was not a disorder, which, I presume would automatically make homosexuality normal behavior. Have there been more recent studies that would either support or reject this conclusion?”

“Well, the problem with that question is coming up with a definition of what



normal or abnormal sexual behavior is. What dictates abnormality, one, five, ten, twenty percent variation from the norm? There are social and medical scientists today who hold that normality in sexual behavior is culturally defined. In the 1950s, social norms dictated that homosexuality was abnormal. And as we have heard, since the norms have changed, all of a sudden, homosexuality became a variation of normal sexual behavior.

“And, just so that you may get a glimpse at what’s being discussed among psychiatrists today; some of you may not be aware that at a symposium hosted by the APA in May 2003 in San Francisco, there was discussion of removing gender-identity disorder and the so-called paraphilias from the manual of mental disorders, which in effect would have granted normality to these types of behavior.”

“What’s that?” asked Mr. Edson

“Paraphilias is a category of disordered sexual behavior that includes pedophilia, exhibitionism, fetishism, sadomasochism, transvestism, and voyeurism.”

“You’re kidding!” exclaimed Mr. Edson.

“No, I’m not. Anyhow, during the symposium, one of the participants argued that people with atypical or culturally different sexual desires should not be regarded as mentally ill. Others pointed out that psychiatry is not in a position to declare what is normal since it doesn’t have a *theoretical model of what in fact constitutes normal and healthy sexuality*.<sup>10</sup>

“The absence of a definition of normality in sexual behavior, of course, throws the possibility of consensus out the window, leaving its decision up to ethics and, inevitably, to politics. You can imagine how people today would react, amidst the pedophilia scandals, if they heard scientists declare that there’s no evidence that sex between minors and adults is necessarily harmful, since, as one participant noted, *any sexual interest can be healthy and life-enhancing*.”<sup>11</sup>

A seemingly irritated Ms. Williamson suddenly interrupted the presentation. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but it’s very difficult for me to remain cool and collected when professional mental health practitioners make these remarks that seem so detached from everyday life. Do they even consider that a minor may not be mature enough to consent to have sex with an adult? And, whose children are these going to be? Their neighbors? Their own patients? Even in heterosexual relations, this is punishable! What are the limits? Do these individuals recognize any limits?”

“Well?” I asked. “Are there limits? Or shall I gather from your silence that some people, indeed, will recognize no boundaries when it comes to sexual behavior?”

A silent room answered.

“Very well, silence accepted. Yes, Mr. Hunt”

“I’d like to go back to the re-definition of homosexuality. Captain Francis indicated that the decision was arbitrary, but was such action morally indefensible? I understand that these individuals may have been biased and were activists seeking their own self-interests; but in the final analysis, was it wrong what they did?”

Captain Francis paused for a few, long seconds. I knew he realized that he was not being asked for his personal viewpoint but to balance the outcome against the opposing views.

“Ted,” replied the captain, “from the standpoint of the Opposition movement, what the APA did was disastrous for two reasons: first, and most important, by declaring homosexual behavior normal without conclusive scientific evidence, the APA conveyed to the general public the impression that the behavior cannot be immoral. The APA declaration was also troublesome because, once a supposedly respectable medical organization gave the scientific stamp of approval to its statement, it may have led many gays and lesbians to choose to bypass treatment, opting instead for adaptation, which in the eyes of the Opposition may have contributed to the supposed spread of the phenomenon.

“One has to bear in mind that when any of the major mental health organizations tells you that there is no choice in homosexual behavior or that the orientation itself is not a disorder, they won’t tell you that this view constituted their best non-scientific assessment. Instead, they would say that they had not been able to find scientific evidence that disproved what they now hold to be true. Hear out what the APA has said about this issue:”

*No one knows what causes heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality. Homosexuality was once thought to be the result of troubled family dynamics or faulty psychological development. Those assumptions are now understood (notice they say understood, not proven) to have been based on misinformation and prejudice. Currently, there is a renewed interest in searching for biological etiologies for homosexuality. However, to date, there are no replicated scientific studies supporting any specific biological etiology for homosexuality. Similarly, no specific psychosocial or family dynamic cause for homosexuality has been identified, including histories of childhood sexual abuse<sup>12</sup>.*

“By the way, this statement rejects, at least for the time being, the existence of a *gay gene* that would confirm that homosexuality is biologically-caused,” said the captain.

“Why then the modification?” Mr. Hunt persisted. “I can’t believe that this was simply a case of people pushing their own agendas in the name of altruistic ideals!”

“I would have to say that they were looking after themselves,” replied Captain Francis. “The question is whether we can blame them for doing so. One

day, gay psychiatrists and psychologists started to look at themselves to study how else they were different from heterosexuals, other than in their sexual orientation. Heterosexuals were doing the same thing. And, their observations were expressed in one of the APA resolutions: *homosexuality implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities.*<sup>13</sup>

“In other words, gays and lesbians were saying, ‘we’re no different than heterosexuals, except on one aspect, and this aspect doesn’t make us mentally ill; it simply makes us different.’ So, what these individuals did was to shift their investigation away from the difference in sexual orientation and its cause, to focus, instead, on the negative consequences of being labeled abnormal or mentally disordered; in other words, on the effects of social stigma.

“This shift led them to conclude that the turmoil homosexuals felt within them was the product of this stigma—of being rejected as socially dysfunctional individuals. Now, if you are unhappy with your sexual orientation, those in the Pro gay movement will acknowledge that the new point of view is far more helpful; indeed, perhaps there is an internal emotional problem, but one that can be resolved through counseling that in turn will help you to . . . basically come out of the closet.

“I debated myself the question you ask,” continued Captain Francis. “To the extent the Pro gay movement masqueraded and strong-armed the process, I believe they acted a bit non-professionally; and certainly, their approach was not very scientific. Then, I asked myself, what would I’ve done, how would I’ve reacted if I were a role model of citizenship only to find myself being ostracized because of my sexual behavior? Would I’ve acted any different than African Americans and women did after decades of discrimination and bigotry?”

“In my view,” said Mr. Hunt, “gays and lesbians banded together and protested with the same intensity as other groups that have been marginalized. What the APA did in 1973 for gays and lesbians may be regarded as the social equivalence of what the Supreme Court’s did for blacks in *Brown v Board of Education*.”

“In a way, yes,” replied the captain. “*Brown* turned society upside up, and the decision didn’t adulterate the Constitution. It’s interesting that you make this observation because the court at the time didn’t rely on much scientific evidence to issue its ruling. I believe the Court’s decision signified the rediscovery of moral values that had been buried within the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and that years later were being reinterpreted in light of our process of moral evolution.

“Here, we’re facing a whole different issue, precisely on account of ethics and religious values, except that we’re divided, in part, because science hasn’t provided us with the answers we need.”

“Captain, I see other important considerations in what Mr. Hunt and you have

said," interrupted Ms. Bynum.

"I'm sure you do, ma'am, so go right ahead."

"Racism, in my mind, is a stance held by extreme fringe groups. At the time of *Brown v Board of Education*, the nation was not prepared to take the big step, so the Court had to do it for us. Today, they call it judicial activism, but I, for one, am glad someone exercised leadership, because if we had to wait for our elected leaders, where would we be today? Once the Court handed down its decision, mainstream religious, social, cultural, and political leaders came around and supported the end to racial discrimination.

"When we look at the gay marriage issue, however, those opposing it are not only bigoted, violent, fringe groups. The problem today is that among those who oppose gay marriage are highly respected and educated religious, social, cultural, medical, and political leaders, alongside a sizable portion of the population. That makes a lot of difference, don't you think?"

"That is true," said Captain Francis. "You have pointed to a very significant difference that is going to influence how this issue will be resolved. Again, we cannot underestimate how much the absence of scientific evidence contributes to this problem."

"Captain, may I ask something?" asked Mr. Edson."

"Sure."

"Okay, we all know that stealing is immoral, but would we make the same judgment in the case of a kleptomaniac? I wonder how easy it would be to ask a kleptomaniac to abstain from stealing; probably not very easy. Hence, how can a homosexual person reasonably be expected to abstain from something that comes natural to him or her?"

"I don't know that inconsistency is the right word, Mr. Edson," I said. "This is more of a case in which religious and social institutions are placing an unrealistically heavy burden on some people and then asking them to follow through. Moral virtues need to be humanly attainable, even if we fail at times; otherwise, they can't guide human conduct.

"For example, if given our physical constitution as human beings someone were to ask us to lift two thousand pounds under the penalty of eternal damnation, we might as well prepare our luggage now, for no amount of exercising and steroids will help us to attain this goal. So, it's not that the religious Christian Right or the Opposition is contradicting itself; it's just that they are establishing a benchmark that gays and lesbians might not be able to meet, leaving the Opposition open to criticism that its sense of humanity is not the same one that Jesus preached.

"Jesus never said that what he proclaimed for humanity was unattainable. And, I could be wrong, but what the Religious Right and the Opposition are asking of homosexuals seems pretty much unattainable to me."

“Let me follow up on a point Ms. Vanhurst raised,” said the Captain. “If both religion and science accept that sex is not only a biological drive, but the natural means given to human beings to fulfill other basic drives and needs including, emotional and spiritual bonding, reproduction, and of course, love, we need to find out how feasible it is from a physiological, spiritual, and psychological standpoints to ask any healthy individual to sever, to inhibit himself, or to abstain from such a powerful drive. This argument goes back to what Dr. Planas just said: moral commandments need to be attainable, otherwise, they are socially, politically, and ethically worthless.

“So, what’s needed is for science to tell religious and social leaders whether an individual who is predisposed toward unethical sexual behavior because of a sexual orientation that supposedly cannot be reversed, or whose reversal may become too traumatic, can abstain from sex throughout his or her entire life without being psychologically, physiologically, or spiritually impaired.”

After a much needed break, the class began with Ms. Bynum’s comment: “I was just thinking that the mental health community changed the definition of *mental disorder* under the premise that if the stigma arising from the definition were removed, a great deal of the anxiety and conflict that gays and lesbians experience would be lessened.

“But if we were to conclude one day that neither their orientation nor their behavior is harmful to others or to themselves, as conditions improve for their acceptance in society, adaptation and integration would follow. And yet, the opposite seems to be happening. The greater the social acceptance of gays and lesbians, and the more open they become, the stronger the political reaction against them. Why is that, Captain?”

“There is the perception out there, brought about in part by the AIDS epidemic, that being gay is harmful to homosexuals themselves, and that gays have increased the risk of AIDS even among heterosexuals. And, of course, the gay marriage issue came to the political forefront following the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision. This decision rekindled a very basic moral belief that homosexuality is wrong. Remember, soon thereafter, many states have placed anti-gay marriage referendums on the ballot, and I think that most have won approval. On the other hand a few states have passed legislation approving gay marriage. How much of a push President Obama’s personal, although public statement will have on the issue of gay marriage, I think time will tell.”

“Got a question,” said Mr. Dickerson. “Does the Catholic Church or any of the mainstream Protestant denominations opposed to gay marriage hold homosexuals responsible for the spread of AIDS?”

“Interesting that you ask,” interjected Ms. Vanhurst. “I think this view is held mostly by the very extreme Religious Right groups. Some even see it as the

wrath of God punishing those who engage in depravity. It should be noted that this view makes it seem as if God only punishes homosexuals for their depravity and promiscuity, when, in fact, homosexuals don't have a monopoly on this type of behavior. I do wonder, nonetheless, if homosexuals were to start practicing safe sex—as they are increasingly doing now—and the AIDS epidemic would begin to subside, as I believe it's happening now in the United States, would that be a sign to these groups that God all of a sudden is becoming more accepting of homosexuals?"

"I doubt it," answered Mr. Hunt. "Prejudice and ignorance have their own theology. We do know that AIDS had its roots in Africa, and nothing credible I have read indicates that the disease originated among homosexuals. We *do* know that anyone, homosexual or heterosexual, who doesn't practice safe sex can get the disease. What we *don't* seem to realize is that prejudice and ignorance beget the hatred that we project upon others.

"Okay let me go on to another point. The Opposition believes that the only ethical alternative opened to gays and lesbians is to seek therapy in order to reverse their condition. It would seem that we need science to give us an answer here, too, don't we? Captain, is there any information you can provide us?"

"Science is pretty much divided on this question, as we might have expected. On one corner we have the APA stating that, as a scientific organization, it rejects claims, that homosexuality is a curable illness, and therefore opposes attempts, whether coercively or through subtle influence, to repair or change one's sexual orientation. The official position of the NIMH is very similar. The position of APsA, however, is quite interesting. Its governing council advised that practitioners should abstain from recommending gay clients who *choose their faith over their sexuality* to undergo therapy or other treatments to become straight. Instead, it counseled various alternatives, including celibacy or switching churches, in order to help clients overcome emotional distress as well as depression and suicidal attempts that could be induced by efforts to produce change.<sup>14</sup>

"And, on the opposite corner, there are psychiatrists, psychological researchers, and practitioners who hold, steadfastly, to the belief that homosexual orientation can be changed and that they can prove it, too. In the end, what we have is a mess, each side providing its own witnesses; ex-gays swearing that they have changed, and enemies of ex-gays attacking the former group and giving testimony—often just as credible—that they tried their best to ~~change~~ their orientation, and failed.

"There was this article in *The Washington Post*, featured in its health section, on *Reparative Therapy*,<sup>15</sup> as the Opposition refers to the conversion process. Robert Spitzer, by the way, points out that the term should be called *Reorientation Therapy* or *Conversion Therapy*, since gays and lesbians find the

term *Reparative* offensive. Anyhow, the subtitle on the inside page reads, *Resurgence of Discredited Therapy Alarms Experts*. The article quotes Jack Drescher, chair of the APA's committee on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues, who said that *Reparative therapy is the laetrile of mental health*, making reference to the phony medication that was said to cure cancer and was banned in this country.

"According to the Post, Drescher compared reparative theory to *Intelligent Design*, the neo-creationist counterpart to scientific evolution. At the same time, to balance coverage of the topic, but seemingly suggesting the possibility that Conversion Therapy does work, the Post also carried an article, in the same section, reporting on the personal experiences of an expert on this type of therapy.

"So, there you have it. Who do we believe, the official positions of the major medical and mental health organizations, all of which oppose Reorientation Therapy or the active Opposition? Please note that I'm referring to the official positions of these organizations, not the entities themselves, since there is no information on how divided the bodies of these organizations are."

"Captain, you mentioned that practitioners of Reorientation Therapy say they have evidence that the process works," said Mr. Hunt. "Have you examined the evidence?"

"I have read accounts from both sides," replied Captain Francis. "The Ex-Gay organization does exist. It is similar to Alcoholic Anonymous. This and other groups like it are support units for people who are either active gay and lesbians or are aware of their homosexual orientation and wish to change it. Believing that sexual behavior is a matter of choice, these groups base their efforts on a combination of psychotherapy and religious beliefs to effect change.

"However, and without seeking to impress upon anyone the validity of their claims, what surprises me the most is the array of credible witnesses the Opposition cites among homosexuals and Pro-gay activists and researchers.

"Ted, I realize that you are concerned about how objective or biased both sides may be in what they say and what they do. My review of the topic leads me to think that there isn't much detached objectivity on either side; but then, this should not come as a surprise. We're talking about partisan politics and a great deal of animosity; feelings based on deeply-held religious values on one side, and equally strong opposing beliefs on the other, and, yes, vested interests too, all of which have radicalized both sides.

"For example, I mentioned the criticism that psychiatrist Jack Drescher, head of the APA's committee on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues, leveled against Reorientation Therapy. Well, according to the information I gathered, Dr. Drescher is also a gay activist. This piece of information was not included in the *Post's* article. Would we have grounds to believe that Dr. Drescher was less than objective and that he was promoting an agenda that affected him personally? Sure! But, do we find anything wrong when the head of the

NAACP supports issues that favor Black causes or when the Catholic Bishops actively advance issues that pertain to their core of beliefs?"

"Hold on! Captain, there's a difference," shouted Mr. Hunt. "Are you telling me that the American Psychiatric Association is a gay organization? I didn't know that!" he said sarcastically.

"You interrupted me. I was going to say that there are instances, like this one, in which we can't tell—at least I can't—if there are hidden agendas. In principle, the APA serves both the heterosexual and homosexual population. But when you take a non-scientific/political stand in favor of homosexuality, well, that's kind of what a political party does when it organizes itself around a core of values. This party is going to oppose all other political parties seeking to promote values that are in opposition to its own.

"The major issue arises when both groups, in their attempt to denigrate each other—and remember, both camps rely on science as a potential arbiter—distort whatever valid arguments or views each formulates. This poisonous atmosphere is what makes their findings kind of unreliable. It makes you want to question each one.

"What you have is a polarizing situation in which each side spends much of its time putting the other down. For example, there's this gay person who was an activist in the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and who left the organization, saying, *to work there, we had to kind of dehumanize the people we were working against—that happens all too often in identity politics. I was filled with so much hatred for people working against my cause that I couldn't even see people as human.*<sup>16</sup>

"Then, you read a piece in the *New York Times* attacking anti-gay extremists, including former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore, for his position favoring *confinement and execution* of homosexuals, and The American Family Association (AFA), for *whipping up homophobia* and for asserting, *that 17 percent of gay men report eating and or rubbing themselves with the feces of their partners' and 15 percent report sex with animals.*<sup>17</sup>

"Frankly, I don't adhere to the belief that anyone should be confined or executed for whatever it is they do behind closed doors, as long as only adults are involved, if only because I don't know how in the world we would police these activities. But, there is little doubt that Judge Moore's views seem to generate the type of hatred that is not conducive to resolution of the issue or one that offers a true example of Christian behavior.

"On the other hand, the author of the *Times* article didn't say whether he was critical of the AFA for placing its statement on its website or because the statement is erroneous. Tell you what, it wouldn't surprise me if the AFA statement were correct. Nonetheless, what the AFA failed to mention is the likelihood that an even larger percentage of heterosexuals are involved in bestiality, too. This means that the AFA could rightfully be accused of being biased.



But then, you go to the AFA website, where the section on homosexuality directs you to a criticism of conservative Bill O'Reilly."

"Whaat?" someone yelled.

"Yes, Bill O'Reilly from Fox, who was taken to task for expressing public support among moderate viewers toward special rights for homosexuals. But that's not the point. You start reading the criticism and you reach a hyperlink that reads FISTGATE. Clicking it takes you to a copy of an article that appeared sometime in 2000 in *The Massachusetts News*, a conservative newspaper, about a workshop sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Education for high school students on homosexual sex techniques (techniques, by the way, that heterosexuals indulge in, too). After reading the article, I leaned back on the chair, visualized my children attending the workshop, how it was handled, the things that were shown, and almost reflectively wondered if the ones that should have been imprisoned should have been personnel from the state's Department of Education!"

After a long pause, Mr. Hunt spoke up, again. "You said that the Opposition enjoys more credibility on account of its witnesses. Is that correct?"

"No," said the captain, "what I said was that the Opposition is able to point to, what I think, are credible witnesses from the Pro-gay movement that lend support to some of the Opposition's views. Whether there's scientific validity or not in these views is something else. Let me explain.

"The major mental health organizations are strongly opposed to Reorientation Therapy; it's wrong, it doesn't work, it shouldn't be allowed, these organizations claim. Also, it's in the interest of these organizations if a biological or genetic cause for homosexuality could be found, for it would discredit the Opposition's view that homosexuality likely is caused by psychological issues during childhood, the old Freudian approach. The issue would then enjoy closure.

"Nonetheless, let's hear what these researches say: Simon LeVay, a well-known homosexual researcher summarizing the conclusions of his study: *it's important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.*

"Gay activist-researcher Dean Hamer: *Homosexuality is an issue of ethics and morality. Individuals who experience unwanted homosexual attractions have a right to treatment aimed at reducing those attractions. Whether or not others agree with that choice is not as important as respecting their right to make the choice.*

"Lesbian activist Camille Paglia: *Homosexuality is not normal. On the contrary, it is a challenge to the norm. In nature, procreation is the single relentless rule. That is the norm. Our sexual bodies were designed for reproduction. No*

*one is born gay. The idea is ridiculous. Homosexuality is an adaptation, not an inborn trait. Helping gays to learn to function heterosexually, if they wish, is a perfectly worthy aim.*

*“Gay activist Doug Haldemann: However we may view this choice or the psychological underpinnings thereof, do we have the right to deny such an individual treatment that may help him to adapt in the way he has decided is right for him? I would say that we do not.*

*“Lesbian activist and biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, referring to the born-that-way argument, says that, It provides a legal argument that is, at the moment actually having some sway in court. For me, it’s a very shaky place. It’s bad science and bad politics. It seems to me that the way to consider homosexuality in our culture is an ethical and a moral question.<sup>18</sup>*

*“Finally, we come to none other than Robert Spitzer, the one individual who almost single-handedly normalized homosexuality in 1973 while putting together the DSM. Spitzer, neither a homosexual nor an activist in the Pro-gay movement, reviewed data provided by Opposition, the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), regarding individuals who claimed they had successfully changed their sexual orientation in order to assess the validity of the results. He summarized his observations as follows:*

*Position statements of the major mental health organizations in the United States state that there is no scientific evidence that a homosexual orientation can be changed by psychotherapy, often referred to as “reparative therapy. Participants] were interviewed by telephone, using a structured interview that assessed same sex attraction, fantasy, yearning, and overt homosexual behavior. The majority of participants gave reports of change from a predominantly or exclusively homosexual orientation before therapy to a predominantly or exclusively heterosexual orientation in the past year. Reports of complete change were uncommon. Either some gay men and lesbians, following reparative therapy, actually changed their predominantly homosexual orientation to a predominantly heterosexual orientation or some gay men and women construct elaborate self-deceptive narratives (or even lie) in which they claim to have changed their sexual orientation, or both. For many reasons, it is concluded that the participants’ self-reports were, by and-large, credible and that few elaborated self-deceptive narrative or lied. Thus, there is evidence that change in sexual orientation following some form of reparative therapy does occur in gay men and lesbians.<sup>19</sup>*

*“A separate interview indicated that 66 percent of 143 men and 44 percent of 57 women, all of whom Spitzer described as highly motivated and almost all of whom were extraordinarily religious had achieved ‘good heterosexual function lasting at least five years. Spitzer, however, indicated that change in sexual orientation is rare, suggesting that the changes he observed*

were likely due to the religious attitude of those involved.<sup>20</sup>

“What’s interesting, I think, is the reason Spitzer gave in the interview for undertaking the study. While indicating that he is in complete disagreement with the Christian Right, he calls himself a Jewish atheist, he said, *I like to challenge conventional notions.*

“In my view, this is *the* correct scientific approach; it’s a study by someone who’s not tied to preconceived notions and who’s willing to put his own credibility on the line for the sake of pursuing scientific truth. The other point I want to bring out as an indication of the level of animosity that exists between the two groups is that Spitzer paid dearly for what he did. While he held his initial views about homosexuality for three decades, he had been well respected within the APA and the Pro-gay community. Upon completion of his study, he was vilified by his peers. Said Spitzer, *a dean of admissions at Columbia wrote me that it was just a disgrace that a Columbia professor should do such a thing. Within the gay community, there was initially tremendous anger and feeling that I had betrayed them.*<sup>21</sup>

“An issue of *The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, put out by the APA and edited by Dr. Jack Drescher, published a series of critical reviews by peers in the profession indicating that the author’s conclusions *are not warranted.*<sup>22</sup> Wayne Besen, gay activist, author, and columnist, called Spitzer, [a] *real loser, an over-the-hill stage horse, and a court jester hood-winked by a scheming religious right.*<sup>23</sup> A former APA president said that Spitzer’s study was *too flawed to publish.*<sup>24</sup> And I could go on and on.”

“Captain,” called out Mr. Dickerson, “You’ve already indicated that the bitterness that exists between the two groups has *tainted* the scientific evidence.”

“No, I wouldn’t be able to say that the evidence is tainted. I don’t have any expertise at conducting the kind of empirical studies we’re talking about. What I said was that when you have two groups of renowned and knowledgeable individuals discrediting each other’s works, I, for one, would have to conclude that neither one has been able to come even remotely close to Newtonian-type evidence in demonstrating their views. Imagine if you have two physicians giving you completely different diagnoses on your heart and you see them bickering and calling each other names. Are you going to trust either one to open you up?”

“I think you’re telling us that neither side offers much credibility. Still, I’m bothered by the mixture of religion and science. So, I’ll ask you, how scientifically oriented is the Opposition?”

“Good question. From what I’ve seen, the Opposition is religiously inspired. Its members are a mixture of your hearty fire and brimstone, pulpit-style condemnations to more moderate and respectful personalities who are willing to listen and exchange views. As to how scientific are the Religious Right’s studies, from what I was able to gather, the Opposition movement

really doesn't undertake scientific studies of homosexuality or gay marriage. In this sense, I would have to side with Spitzer when he says that the Opposition is not scientific.

"However, it's not as if the entire movement rejects scientific inquiry, although part of the Opposition could care less about whatever science has to say in this regard. Those on the more moderate side of the spectrum are very much interested in the scientific study of these issues. The difference lies in how they approach scientific inquiry. Take, for example, the literature put out by NARTH or by the Family Research Council. What these organizations do is to review scientific studies done by others and use them to validate their own views, and/or to comment on the other side's findings and invalidate them in the public's eyes if findings run contrary to their values.

"That is, the Opposition approaches homosexuality and gay marriage by systematically reviewing the scientific literature with a very critical eye. These organizations, for the most part, seem to act as apologists for their views. I will concede that their credibility lies in allowing scientific studies to speak for themselves, and NARTH, frankly, has an impressive group of members and others who share NARTH's views and who possess strong academic credentials.

"Initially, I thought they were reactionary, close-minded activists, but that is not necessarily the case. Many of them are distinguished professors, others have held or hold chairmanships in prestigious schools of medicine and/or psychology; some have been presidents of the American Psychological Association or executive members of the American Psychiatric Association.

"Since the two groups barely talk to each other, they communicate indirectly through the scientific literature. Whenever someone puts out a study, NARTH and associates go to work, scrutinizing every word, every statistic, seeking to find holes, mistakes, bias, and limitations. And the thing about is that that they do find flaws and limitations. Then, after NARTH conducts its review, it puts everything together and presents the evidence. This is the extent of the Opposition's scientific approach.

"I think I need to emphasize that this approach is also common to researchers within the Pro-gay movement. For example, I just mentioned the APA's critique of Spitzer's study, which looked for limitations here and there; some of which, by the way, Spitzer himself acknowledged in his study."

"Is critiquing a study in this fashion scientific?" asked Mr. Wasserman.

"Let me reply to that," I said. "As long as you are quite knowledgeable about the subject matter, you have the necessary credentials, and you abide by the rules of scientific inquiry, then, Yes. After all, you don't have to be a ball player to be able to critique the game. An umpire, a manager, heck, George Will can most definitely provide us with a very serious insight about the game of baseball!"

"That's true," said Captain Francis, "However, you also have other organiza-

tions that are more religious and political in nature who fight their fights in a less scientific manner. This means that it would be prudent to examine rather carefully any literature that comes out of activists groups, whether from the Opposition or the Pro-gay movement.

“For example, after Spitzer published his study indicating the possibility of success of Reorientation Therapy, a Pro-gay licensed marriage and family therapist issued a rebuttal that appeared on the APA website. The rebuttal relied on some of Spitzer’s comments while it ignored others—including the results of the study—to suggest that Spitzer’s own conclusions were unwarranted! Then, in an attempt to buttress his position, he listed the official stance of every single mental health organization affirming the 1973 decision declaring that homosexuality was not a disorder.<sup>25</sup> As an indication of further bias, if you visit the APA’s section on gays, lesbians, and bisexual issues, online, you won’t see any part of Spitzer’s study; at least I didn’t at the time.”

“Does the other side behave in a similar manner?” continued asking Mr. Wasserman.

“Unfortunately, this is the ideological game that both sides play, so Yes, the other side does it as well. Let me bring out an example.

“I was particularly interested in a booklet put out by the Family Research Council. The book is titled *Getting It Straight*,<sup>26</sup> as opposed to *getting it gay*, as the authors themselves chose to make the point. Already, the title put me on an alert mode. The book, according to its authors, is about *facts, science, and scholarship*. The authors, however, are not social or medical scientists; they are both men of the cloth, ordained ministers with graduate degrees in divinity and religion. These authors seem to know their stuff, or at least, they seem to quote properly. Granted, it isn’t everyday that you see someone with a background in Religious Studies talking about *the splenium of the corpus callosum [being] (P=.08) larger and more bulbous in women than in men* or about inflammation of the rectum or the correct application of random sampling procedures while discussing the causes of homosexuality.<sup>27</sup> Also, I never would’ve expected a serious scientific study to begin by blatantly telling the reader that the propositions that a certain study seeks to disprove are false and nothing but myths.”

“You’re telling us that the information is not necessarily credible?” I asked.

This type of language tells me that there’s more activism than scholarship involved,” replied Captain Francis. “Not that the authors provide false information; it’s just that the information they provide is . . . well, kind of rigged. A couple of examples will do:

“In one instance, the authors stress the importance and validity of results obtained by Irving Bieber, a renowned researcher they favor, who has consistently espoused the ‘overly domineering mother/weak or absent father’ theory of homosexuality. Well, here you have the authors, in 2004, attempting to validate Bieber’s views by relying on supportive testimony: *In summary, then, it would*

*seem that the family pattern involving a combination of a dominating, overly intimate mother plus a detached, hostile or weak father is beyond doubt related to the development of male homosexuality.*<sup>28</sup>

“The problem I found was that this assertion is not based on any recent study. The statement, you see, was issued forty years before, which, I think, anyone would regard as outdated, given the number of recent studies on this issue.”

“But, why is it that important for the authors to validate Bieber’s theory?” asked Mr. Wasserman.

“Because the theory is one of the Family Research Council’s central approaches to parenting,” answered the captain. “It was self-serving.”

“In another instance, the authors quote Daryl Bem, professor of Psychology at Cornell University, seeking to support the organization’s view that if children are properly parented, psychologically speaking, they will grow to be heterosexual, but if improperly raised, they become homosexual. But somehow, the authors omitted a passage that appears in Bem’s study citing the 1981 research on which he bases his theory, that essentially contradicts Bieber. According to Bem:

*our findings indicate that boys who grow up with dominant mothers and weak fathers have nearly the same chance of becoming homosexual as they would if they grew up in “ideal” family settings Our data indicate that the connection between boys’ relationships with their mothers and whether they become homosexual or heterosexual is hardly worth mentioning.*<sup>29</sup>

“Further on, in an effort to gain support toward their views, the authors cite Bem’s criticism of the media for distorting the scientific evidence, but, once again, omit Bem’s views regarding writings dealing with the causes of homosexuality, such as the one the Family Research Council put out in which he stated that these writings are *politically suspect because [the intent] is so frequently motivated by an agenda of prevention and cure*. And, for reasons unbeknownst to me, the authors even censored Bem’s use of the word *penis*, which last I heard was still a properly medical term, and replaced it with the word *sexual*.

“As I said before, I don’t know much about psychology to be able to interpret all the data, and that’s why we all rely on scientific studies to tell us what the scientific truth is. For all I know, Bieber and the Family Research Council may be right. But that’s not the point. The point has to do with what is being omitted purposefully. One-sided arguments are characteristic of activism, and, activism usually affects the quality of scientific explanations. So, there you have it, for what it’s worth.”

“Very good, Captain,” I said. “I liked your presentation, yours, too, Ms. Vanhurst. Now, I realize that there is more, but given the fact that we’ve gone a

**bit over our time this evening, let's call it a night. We'll continue next week with the same topic. Everyone, have a good evening."**

**Endnotes**

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<sup>22</sup> Theodorus G. M. Sandfort, PhD, Studying Sexual Orientation Change: A Methodological Review of the Spitzer Study, "Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation?" *Journal of Gay and Lesbians Psychotherapy*, Vol. 7. No.3, 2003.

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<sup>24</sup> *Vowing ...*

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<sup>29</sup> Bell, A.P., Weinberg, M. S., & Hammersmith, S.K., *Sexual preference: Its development in men and women*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), in Bem, Daryl J., Exotic Becomes Erotic: A Developmental Theory of Sexual Orientation, *Psychological Review*, Vol. 103, No.2, 1996.