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# ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

DAVID M. HALPERIN

**Harald Patzer.** DIE GRIECHISCHE KNABENLIEBE. *Sitzungsberichte der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 19.1.* Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982.

1

In 1992, when many of us will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, a few cultural historians may wish to devise a suitable way of commemorating the centenary of an intellectual landfall of almost equal importance for the conceptual geography of the human sciences: the invention of homosexuality by C. G. Chaddock. Though he may never rank with Columbus in the annals of individual achievement, Chaddock would hardly seem to merit the obscurity under which he has labored throughout the past hundred years. An early translator of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis*, Chaddock is credited – wrongly, no doubt – by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with having introduced “homo-sexuality” into the English language in 1892, in order to render a German cognate twenty years its senior. Homosexuality, for better or for worse, has been with us ever since.

Before 1892 there was no homosexuality, only sexual inversion. But, as George Chauncey, Jr., who has made a thorough study of the medical literature on the subject, persuasively argues, “Sexual inversion, the term used most commonly in the nineteenth century, did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. ‘Sexual inversion’ referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect, while ‘homosexuality’ focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice. The differentiation of homosexual desire from ‘deviant’ gender behavior at the turn of the century reflects a major reconceptualization of the nature of human sexuality, its relation to gender, and its role in one’s social definition” [Chauncey 116]. Throughout the nineteenth century, in other words, sexual preference for a person of one’s own gender was not clearly distinguished from other sorts of non-conformity to one’s culturally defined sex-role: deviant object-choice was viewed as merely one of a number of pathological symptoms exhibited by those who reversed, or “inverted,” their proper sex-roles by adopting a masculine or feminine style at variance with what was deemed natural and appropriate to their gender. Aggressiveness in women and (at least according to one expert writing as late as 1920) a fondness for cats in men were manifestations of a pathological condition, a kind of psychological hermaphroditism tellingly but not essentially expressed by the preference for a “normal” member of one’s own gender as a sexual partner [Chauncey 117–22].

This outlook on the matter seems to have been shared by the scientists and by their unfortunate subjects alike: inversion was not merely a medical rubric, then, but a category of lived experience. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, for example, an outspoken advocate for the freedom of sexual choice and the founder, as early



as 1862, of the cult of Uranism (based on Pausanias's praise of Uranian, or "heavenly," pederasty in Plato's *Symposium*), described his own condition as that of an *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa* – a woman's soul confined by a man's body. That sexual object-choice might be wholly independent of such "secondary" characteristics as masculinity or femininity never seems to have entered anyone's head until Havelock Ellis waged a campaign to isolate object-choice from role-playing and Freud, in his classic analysis of a drive in the *Three Essays* [1905], clearly distinguished in the case of the libido between the sexual "object" and the sexual "aim" [Chauncey 122–25].

The conceptual isolation of sexuality *per se* from questions of masculinity and femininity made possible a new taxonomy of sexual behaviors and psychologies based entirely on the gender-relation of the persons engaged in a sexual act (same gender vs. different gender); it thereby obliterated a number of distinctions that had traditionally operated within earlier discourses pertaining to same-gender sexual contacts and that had radically differentiated active from passive sexual partners, normal from abnormal (or conventional from unconventional) sexual roles, masculine from feminine styles, and pederasty from lesbianism: all such behaviors were now to be classed alike and placed under the same heading. Sexual identity was thus polarized around a central opposition defined by the binary play of sameness and difference in the gender-relation of the sexual partners; people belonged henceforward to one or the other of two exclusive categories, and much ingenuity was lavished upon the multiplication of techniques for deciphering what a person's sexual orientation "really" was – independent, that is, of beguiling appearances. Founded on positive, ascertainable, and objective behavioral phenomena – on the facts of who had sex with whom – the new sexual taxonomy could lay claim to a descriptive, trans-historical validity. And so it was enshrined as a working concept in the social sciences.

A scientific advance of such magnitude naturally demanded to be crowned by the creation of a new technical vocabulary, but no objective, value-free words readily lent themselves to the purpose. "The accomplished languages of Europe in the nineteenth century supply no terms for this persistent feature of human psychology," John Addington Symonds complained in 1891, "without importing some implication of disgust, disgrace, vituperation" [Symonds, quoted in Weeks, 1]. A number of linguistic candidates were put forward to make good this lack, and "homosexuality," despite scattered protests over the years, gradually managed to fix its social-scientific signature upon the new conceptual dispensation. The word itself, of course, is a barbarous neologism sprung from a monstrous mingling of Greek and Latin stock; as such, it belongs to a rapidly growing lexical breed most prominently represented by the hybrid names given to other recent inventions – names whose mere enumeration suffices to conjure up the precise historical era responsible for producing them: e.g., "automobile," "television." The new terminology for describing sexual behavior, however, was slow to take root in the culture at large. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, originally published in 1933, is ignorant of (or, perhaps, willfully blind to) "homosexuality"; the word appears for the first time in the *OED*'s 1976 three-volume Supplement. The earliest literary occurrence of "homosexualist," of which the *OED* is also ignorant, took place only in 1925, to the best of my knowledge, and it illustrates the novelty that evidently still attached to the term: in Aldous Huxley's *Those Barren Leaves* we find the following exchange between a thoroughly modern aunt and her up-to-date niece, who are discussing a mutual acquaintance.

– "I sometimes doubt," [Aunt Lilian] said, "whether he takes any interest in women at all. Fundamentally, unconsciously, I believe he's a homosexualist."  
– "Perhaps," said Irene gravely. [276]

And the narrator drily comments, "she knew her Havelock Ellis."

It is not exactly my intention to argue that homosexuality, as we commonly understand it today, didn't exist before 1892. How, indeed, could it have failed to exist? The very word displays a most workmanlike and scientific indifference to cultural and environmental factors, looking only to the gender of the persons engaged in the sexual act. Moreover, if homosexuality didn't exist before 1892, heterosexuality couldn't have existed either (it came

into being, in fact, like Eve from Adam's rib, eight years later), and without heterosexuality, where would all of us be right now?

The comparatively recent genesis of heterosexuality—strictly speaking, a twentieth-century affair—should provide a clue to the profundity of the cultural issues over which, hitherto, I have been so lightly skating. How is it possible that until the year 1900 there was not a precise, value-free, scientific term available to speakers of the English language for designating what we would now regard, in retrospect, as the mode of sexual behavior favored by the vast majority of people in our culture? Any answer to that question—which, in its broadest dimensions, I shall leave for the intellectual heirs of Michel Foucault to settle—must direct our attention to the inescapable historicity of even the most innocent, unassuming, and seemingly objective of cultural representations. Although a blandly descriptive, rigorously clinical term like “homosexuality” would appear to be unobjectionable as a taxonomic device, it carries with it a heavy complement of ideological baggage and has, in fact, proved a significant obstacle to understanding the distinctive features of sexual life in the ancient world. It may well be that homosexuality properly speaking has no history of its own much before the beginning of our century.

## 2

Of course, if we are to believe Foucault, there are basic cultural and historical factors that prohibit the easy application of the concept of homosexuality to persons living in pre-modern societies. For homosexuality presupposes sexuality, as we have seen: that is, it implies the existence of a separate, sexual domain, distinct from mere carnality, within the larger field of man's psychophysical nature—a locus of energies that determine, at least in part, the character and personality of each one of us [see Foucault, I, 68–69; II, 43–62]. The invention of homosexuality therefore had to await the scientific construction of “sexuality” as a distinct system within the physiological and psychological economy of the human organism; before sexuality was constituted as such during the nineteenth century, a person's sexual acts could be individually evaluated and categorized, but there was no conceptual apparatus available for identifying a person's fixed and determine sexual *orientation*, much less for assessing and classifying it. That human beings differ, often markedly, from one another in their sexual tastes in a great variety of ways (of which the liking for a sexual partner of a specific gender is only one, and not necessarily the most significant one) is an unexceptionable and, indeed, an ancient observation; but it is not immediately evident that differences in sexual preference are by their very nature more revealing about the temperament of individual human beings, more significant determinants of personal identity, than—for example—differences in dietary preference. And yet, it would never occur to us to refer a person's dietary object-choice to some innate, characterological disposition or to see in his strongly expressed and even unvarying preference for the white meat of chicken the symptom of a profound psychophysical orientation, leading us to identify him in contexts quite removed from that of the eating of food as, say, a pectoriphage or stethovore (to continue the practice of combining Greek and Latin roots); in the same way, it never occurred to pre-modern cultures to ascribe a person's sexual tastes to some positive, structural, or constitutive feature of his personality. It would be interesting to determine, Foucault remarks, exactly when in the evolving course of Western cultural history sex became more morally problematic than eating; he seems to think that sex won out only at the turn of the eighteenth century, after a long period of relative equilibrium during the middle ages (the evidence newly assembled by Caroline Walker Bynum, however, in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, suggests that moral evolution may not have been quite such a continuously linear affair as Foucault imagines).

Not everyone will find such a neo-historicist deconstruction of “sexuality” wholly congenial. John Boswell, for example, argues reasonably enough that any debate over the existence of universals in human culture must distinguish between the respective modes of being proper to words, concepts, and experiences: the ancients experienced gravity even though they lacked both the term (*gravitas* means “heaviness” in Latin, according to Boswell) and the concept; similarly, the “manifest and stated purpose” of Aristophanes's famous myth

in Plato's *Symposium* "is to explain why humans are divided into groups of predominantly homosexual or heterosexual interest," and so this text, along with a number of others, vouches for the existence of homosexuality as an ancient (if not a universal) category of experience [Boswell 98–101]. The speech of Plato's Aristophanes would seem indeed to offer sufficient warrant for positing an ancient concept, as well as an ancient experience, of homosexuality. But closer examination reveals that Aristophanes stops short of deriving a distinction between homo- and heterosexuality from his own myth just when the logic of his analysis would seem to have driven him ineluctably to it. This omission is telling, I believe, and worth considering in greater detail.

According to Aristophanes, human beings were originally round, eight-limbed creatures, with two faces and two sets of genitals—both front and back—and three sexes (male, female, and androgyne). These ancestors of ours were powerful and ambitious; to put them in their place, Zeus had them cut in two, their skin stretched over the exposed flesh and tied at the navel and their heads rotated so as to keep that physical reminder of their daring and its consequences constantly before their eyes. The severed halves of each former individual, once reunited, clung to one another so desperately and concerned themselves so little with their survival as separate entities that they began to perish for lack of sustenance; those who outlived their mates sought out persons belonging to the same gender as their lost complements and repeated their embraces in a foredoomed attempt to recover their original unity. Zeus at length took pity on them, moved their genitals to the side their bodies now faced, and invented sex, so that the bereaved creatures might at least put a terminus to their longing and devote their attention to other, more important matters. Aristophanes extracts from this story a genetic explanation of observable differences among human beings with respect to sexual object-choice and preferred style of life: males who desire females are descended from an original androgyne (adulterers come from this species), whereas males descended from an original male "pursue their own kind and would prefer to spend all their lives with one another, since by nature they have no interest in marriage and procreation but are compelled to engage in them by social custom" [191e–192b, quoted selectively]. Boswell, understandably, interprets this to mean that according to Plato's Aristophanes homosexual and heterosexual interests are "both exclusive and innate" [Boswell 99; Patzer, oddly enough, does not discuss this passage].

But that, significantly, is not quite the way Aristophanes sees it. The conclusions that he draws from his own myth help to illustrate the lengths to which classical Athenians were willing to go in order to avoid conceptualizing sexual behaviors according to a binary opposition between same-gender and different-gender sexual contacts. First of all, Aristophanes's myth generates not two but at least three distinct "sexualities" (males attracted to males, females attracted to females, and—consigned alike to a single classification, evidently—males attracted to females as well as females attracted to males). Moreover, there is not the slightest suggestion in anything Aristophanes says that the sexual acts or preferences of persons descended from an original female are in any way similar to, let alone congruent or isomorphic with, the sexual acts or preferences of those descended from an original male; hence, nothing in the text allows us to suspect the existence of even an implicit category to which males who desire males and females who desire females both belong in contradistinction to some other category containing males and females who desire one another. On the contrary: one consequence of the myth is to make the sexual desire of every human being *formally identical* to that of every other: we are all looking for the same thing in a sexual partner, according to Plato's Aristophanes—namely, a symbolic substitute for an originary object once loved and subsequently lost in an archaic trauma. In that respect we all share the same "sexuality."

Second, and equally important, Aristophanes's account features a crucial distinction *within* the category of males who are attracted to males, an infra-structural detail absent from his description of each of the other two categories: "while they are still boys [i.e., pre-adult], they are fond of men and enjoy lying down together with them and twining their limbs about them . . . but when they become men they are lovers of boys. . . . Such a man is a pederast and philerast [i.e., fond of his adult male lover]" at *different stages of his life* [loc. cit.]. Contrary to the clear implications of the myth, in other words, and unlike the people comprehended by the first two categories, those descended from an original male are not attracted to one another without qualification; rather, they desire boys when they are men and

they take pleasure in physical contact with men when they are boys. Now since the classical Athenians sharply distinguished the roles of pederast and philerast, relegating them not only to different age-classes but virtually to different “sexualities,” what Aristophanes is describing in this passage is not a single, homogeneous sexual orientation common to all those who descend from an original male but rather a set of distinct and incommensurable behaviors which such persons exhibit in different periods of their lives; although his genetic explanation of the diversity of sexual object-choice among human beings would seem to require that there be some adult males who are attracted to other adult males, Aristophanes appears to be wholly unaware of such a possibility, and in any case he has left no room for it in his taxonomic scheme. Those who descend from an original male are not defined as male homosexuals but as willing boys when they are young and as lovers of youths when they are old. Pace Boswell, then, neither the concept nor the experience of “homosexuality” is known to Plato’s Aristophanes.

No scruple need prevent us, to be sure, from qualifying as “homosexual” any male who seeks sexual contact with a person of the same gender, whether that person be a man or a boy: as K. J. Dover remarks in his own review of Patzer’s book, “the fact that the object of homosexual desire in the Greek world was almost always, like Ganymede, adolescent does not justify . . . [the] denial that [pederasty] is homosexuality. Homosexuality is a genus definable by the sex of the person participating (in reality or in fantasy) in action leading towards genital orgasm, and the predilections of a given society at a given time constitute one or more species of the genus” [Dover 240]. Fair enough. But the issue before us isn’t whether or not we can accurately apply our concept of homosexuality to the Greeks—whether or not, that is, we can discover in the historical record of classical antiquity evidence of behaviors or psychologies that are amenable to classification in our own terms (obviously, we can, given the nature of those terms); the issue isn’t even whether or not the Greeks were able to express within the terms provided by their own conceptual schemes an experience of something approximating to homosexuality as we understand it today. The real issue confronting any cultural historian of the ancient world, and any critic of contemporary culture, is, first of all, how to recover the terms in which the experiences of individuals belonging to past societies were actually constituted and, second, how to measure and assess the differences between those terms and the ones we currently employ. For, as this very controversy over the scope and applicability of sexual categories illustrates, concepts in the human sciences differ from those in the natural sciences (such as gravity) in that they are not merely descriptive of reality but are, at least partly, constitutive of it. Instead of attempting to trace the history of “homosexuality” as if it were a *thing*, therefore, we might



more profitably analyze how the significance of same-gender sexual contacts has been constructed over time by members of various human living-groups. Such an analysis may well lead us (and we must be prepared for this) into a plurality of only partly overlapping social and conceptual territories, a series of cultural formations that vary as their discursive constituents change, combine in different sequences, or compose new patterns. Jean-Pierre Vernant has given us several exemplary studies of the shifting social constructions of the marriage-relation in archaic and classical Greece (“Hestia-Hermès. Sur l’expression religieuse de l’espace chez les grecs,” *Mythe et pensée chez les grecs* [4th ed.]; “Le mariage” and “Entre bêtes et dieux. Des jardins d’Adonis à la mythologie des aromates,” *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne*). We must now inquire into the various terms in which sexual meanings were constituted in those periods. In the following paragraph I shall attempt to draw a very crude outline of the ideological structure informing the classical Athenian institution of pederasty, an outline whose details will have to be filled in at some later point if this aspect of ancient Greek social relations is ever to be understood historically.

Let me begin by observing that the attitudes and behaviors publicly displayed by the citizens of classical Athens (to whom the surviving evidence effectively restricts our access) tend to portray sex not as a collective enterprise in which two or more persons jointly engage but rather as an action performed by one person upon another. I hasten to emphasize that this formulation does not purport to describe positively what the experience of sex was “really” like for all members of Athenian society but to indicate how sex is *represented* by those utterances and actions of free males that were intended to be overheard and witnessed by other free males. The sexual act, as it is constituted by this public, masculine discourse, is a deeply polarizing experience: it serves to divide, to classify, and to distribute its participants into distinct and radically dissimilar categories. Sex possesses this valence, apparently, because it is conceived to center essentially on, and to define itself around, an asymmetrical gesture, that of the penetration of the body of one person by the body – and, specifically, by the phallus – of another. Phallic penetration, moreover, is construed as sexual “activity”; even if a sexual act does not involve physical penetration, it remains polarized by the distribution of phallic pleasure: the partner whose pleasure is promoted is “active,” while the partner who puts his body at *the service* of another’s pleasure is deemed “passive” – read “penetrated,” in the culture’s unselfconscious ideological shorthand. Sexual “activity,” in other words, is thematized as domination: the relation between the “active” and the “passive” sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior, between master and servant [Foucault, II, 237]. “Active” and “passive” sexual roles are therefore necessarily isomorphic with superordinate and subordinate social status; hence, an adult, male citizen of Athens can only have legitimate sexual relations with statutory minors (his inferiors not in age but in social and political status): the proper targets of his sexual desire include, specifically, women, boys, foreigners, and slaves – all of them persons who do not enjoy the same legal and political rights and privileges that he does. Furthermore, what a citizen does in bed reflects the differential in status that distinguishes him from his sexual partner: the citizen’s superior prestige and authority express themselves by his sexual precedence – by his power to initiate a sexual act, his right to obtain pleasure from it, and his assumption of an “active” sexual role. What Paul Veyne has said about the Romans can apply equally well to the classical Athenians: they were indeed puritans when it came to sex, but (unlike modern bourgeois Westerners) they were not puritans about conjugality and reproduction; rather, like many Mediterranean peoples, they were puritans about virility [Veyne 55].

In classical Athens, then, sexual objects came in two different kinds – not male and female but active and passive, aggressive and submissive. The relevant features of a sexual object were not so much determined by a physiological typology of genders as by the social articulation of power. That is why the currently fashionable distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality had no meaning for the classical Athenians: there were not, so far as they knew, two different kinds of “sexuality,” two differently structured psychosexual states or modes of affective orientation, but a single form of sexual experience which all free, adult males shared – making due allowance for variations in individual tastes, as one might make for individual palates. Scholars sometimes describe this cultural formation as a bisexuality of penetration or as a heterosexuality indifferent to its object, but I think it would be

more accurate to describe it as a single, undifferentiated phallic sexuality of penetration and domination, a socio-sexual discourse whose basic terms are phallus and non-phallus.

Perhaps the most important lesson that historians should draw from this picture of ancient sexual attitudes and behaviors has to do with the need to de-center sexuality from the focus of the interpretation of sexual experience in antiquity. Just because we are so concerned to trace the history of sexuality does not mean that everyone has always considered sexuality a basic and irreducible element in, or a central feature of, human life. On the contrary, if the sketch I have offered is accurate, it seems that many ancients conceived “sexuality” in *non-sexual* terms: what was fundamental to their experience of sex, in other words, was not anything we would regard as essentially sexual; it was rather the modality of power-relations that informed and structured the act. Instead of viewing public and political life as a dramatization of individual sexual psychology, as we often tend to do, they saw sexual behavior as a reflection of the dominant themes in contemporary social relations. When Artemidorus, a master dream-analyst who lived and wrote in the second century of our era, came to address the meaning of sexual dreams, for example, he almost never presumed that such dreams were *really* about sex: they were about the rise and fall of the dreamer’s public fortunes, the vicissitudes of his domestic economy [Foucault, III, 39–48]. If a man dreams of having sex with his mother, according to Artemidorus, his dream signifies nothing in particular about his own sexual psychology, his fantasy life, or the history of his relations with his parents; it may signify – depending on the family’s circumstances at the time, the postures of the partners in the dream, and the mode of penetration – that the dreamer’s father will die, that the dreamer will be successful in politics, that he will go into exile or return from exile, that he will win his law-suit, obtain a rich harvest from his lands, or change professions, among many other things [1.79]. In short, the very enterprise of inquiring into ancient sexual attitudes and behaviors, by isolating sexual from other forms of social relations, serves to introduce its own kind of distortion into historical analysis. The effective displacement of sexuality from a position of centrality to one on the ideological periphery of ancient culture is therefore a welcome by-product of the new interpretation of Greek pederasty undertaken by Harald Patzer.

### 3

The earliest scholarly studies of “Greek love” proceeded from the assumption that classical Greek society and sentiment were virtually unique in their acceptance – indeed, in their occasional celebration – of pederasty and that it was therefore the job of the ancient historian to provide a cogent causal explanation of the phenomenon. Recent work, by contrast, has tended to interpret Greek sexual conventions in a wider (comparative, anthropological, or ethological) context and to emphasize instead the uniqueness of modern European attitudes: we are the ones, it seems, whose sexual norms and institutions require historical explanation. “In recent years,” writes Barry D. Adam, a modern sociologist, “there has been a growing realization that the contemporary social organization of homosexuality into lesbian and gay worlds is a socially and historically unique development and that the traditional academic construction of ‘the homosexual’ has participated in this reifying process” [Adam 658]. It is the chief virtue of Patzer’s *Die griechische Knabenliebe* that it refuses to collaborate in the reification of modern sexual categories. The central task of Patzer’s monograph is to distinguish, once and for all, Greek *Knabenliebe* (i.e., pederasty) from homosexuality as we currently understand it; Patzer argues that Greek pederasty was, at the very least, such a peculiar (if not entirely idiosyncratic) variety of homosexual expression that the application of the modern concept of homosexuality to it can only lead to misunderstanding. Patzer seeks instead to give an account of Greek pederasty that will effectively remove it from the context of modern sexual typologies and insert it into an entirely different conceptual universe. His monograph is a work of interpretation: it is not an original reconsideration of Greek pederasty based on a fresh reading of the sources nor is it an attempt to assemble all the ancient evidence into one place: those in search of such comprehensive studies will have to turn elsewhere. Rather, Patzer appropriates for his own purposes the picture of Athenian pederasty drawn by K. J. Dover in *Greek Homosexuality*, a landmark work,

although he devotes considerable space to a series of skirmishes with Dover over the implications of the title; his own strategy is to bring to bear on the Greek material a perspective derived from the research of scholars in other branches of the human sciences and to harmonize that perspective with Dover's reading of the ancient evidence.

Classical Greek pederasty differs from "homosexuality," according to Patzer, in the following respects: (1) Pederasty, as the word implies, refers only to sexual relations between adult males, on the one hand, and boys or youths between the ages of twelve and eighteen, on the other. (2) Pederastic relationships never last beyond the youth of the junior partner. (3) Pederastic love-affairs are not motivated by a peculiar, individual sexual inclination on the part of either person for a partner of the male gender – an inclination of the sort that would displace or exclude sexual relations with women: on the contrary, the senior lover is usually married or, at least, is accustomed to regular, heterosexual contacts with adult women. (4) In order for a pederastic relationship to be wholly honorable and dignified in the eyes of classical Greek society, its sexual expression is restricted to one, quite specific, mode of copulation – namely, the intercrural – which spares the junior partner (and future citizen) the effeminizing humiliation of bodily penetration and thereby ensures that his eventual authority as an adult male will not be compromised before the fact. (5) In a proper pederastic relationship, the younger partner does not share in his older lover's sexual desire but, like a good Victorian wife, surrenders out of a mingled feeling of gratitude, esteem, and affection; he is supposed to suffer and be still.

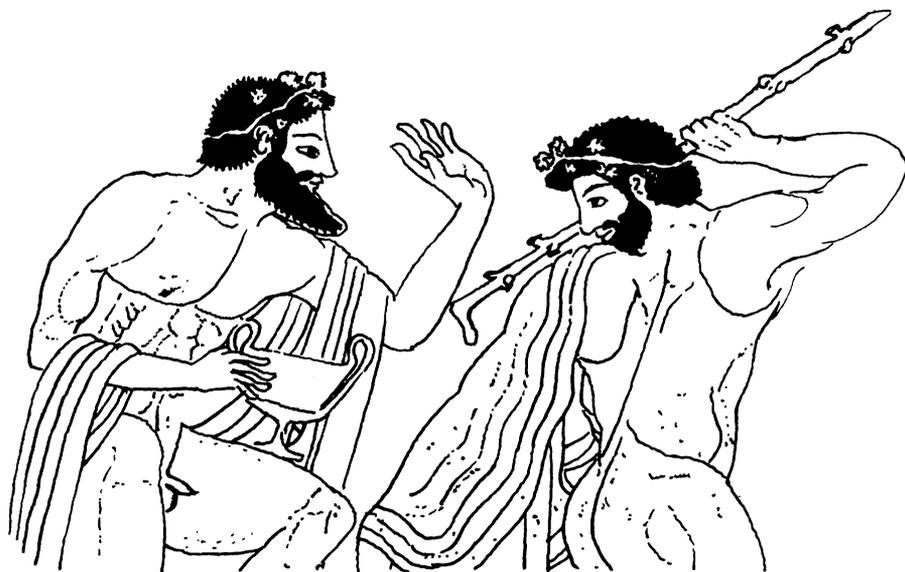
It is possible, of course, to quibble with some details in Patzer's analysis. Against (1), it may be recalled that there is extensive debate among the ancient authors over the proper upper limit on the age of the junior partner (though most agree that the arrival of the beard marks the terminus of his legitimate desirability) and that the ready availability of male prostitutes and slaves provided Athenian men who were so inclined with an alternate mode of homosexual expression unconstrained by the moral conventions governing their relations with citizen youths. Against (3), it may be objected that the older lover was often a young man between the ages of twenty and thirty who was therefore quite probably *unmarried* (or married to someone considerably younger than himself) and that Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, together with a number of other passages, testifies quite explicitly to the strength of individual preferences for a sexual partner of one gender rather than another. Nonetheless, Patzer's criteria for distinguishing between pederasty and homosexuality are generally sound enough to sustain his central thesis that what the Greeks exhibit is not homosexuality at all but rather pederastic behavior without (categorical and unqualified) homosexual desire. How is such a paradox to be explained?

Enter the ritual hypothesis of ancient Greek pederasty. Eighty years ago E. Bethe published a pathbreaking article on "Dorian pederasty" in which he maintained, by comparing the customs of Crete and Sparta (both Dorian states) with those of various "primitive" peoples, that the classical Greeks inherited from their Dorian invaders and conquerors – and ultimately perverted to their own unnatural purposes – a ritual practice of initiation in which older males passed on numinous powers (chiefly military and moral vitality) to the younger generation of males by injecting them, through homosexual copulation, with the magical potency thought to reside in their semen. [Bethe's work was based on an earlier study by C. O. Müller, *Die Dorier*.] Bethe's thesis was indignantly repudiated by contemporary classicists – often, as Patzer rightly observes, on the shabbiest of grounds – but it has resurfaced from time to time in subsequent scholarship, and it seems currently to be enjoying something of a renaissance, largely because Bethe's comparative data have since been confirmed by a wealth of new anthropological evidence for the wide distribution of ritualized homosexual behaviors among "primitive" peoples. It is Patzer's aim to resuscitate, correct, modify, and ultimately to vindicate a version of Bethe's thesis, for therein lies the key, he believes, to understanding the paradox of pederastic behavior without homosexual desire: in the context of an institutionalized ritual of initiation, copulation ceases to be an expression of individual sexual inclination, of personal habitus, and becomes instead the fulfillment of a universally binding social obligation. (Nice work if you can get it.)

Because the classical Greek practice of pederasty, as Dover explicated it, is entirely "alien to our modern Western culture," according to Patzer, it is necessary to look beyond the horizons of our culture, and beyond the borders of philological scholarship, for parallels

that illuminate the Greek experience. To refuse to do so is to succumb to “ethnocentrism.” An examination of initiation rites in New Guinea and Melanesia helps Patzer to bring into better focus the Cretan institution described by the fourth-century B.C. historian Ephorus, whose report is transmitted to us by Strabo [10.4.21]. When a boy comes of age in Crete, according to this account, an older male who desires him informs his family and friends a few days in advance and then carries him off, overcoming their perfunctory show of resistance (if the lover is unworthy, however, the boy’s relations intervene in earnest); pursued by them, the lover brings the boy to the men’s quarters of his own house, gives him various gifts, and then spends two months hunting and feasting with him in the countryside. The episode concludes with a mutual exchange of gifts and with the admission of the boy to the highest social status. Patzer has a fairly easy time demonstrating, by reference to the comparative ethnographic material, that the Cretan institution is indeed an initiation rite – one in which, moreover, sexual intercourse between man and boy seems to play a role. The more difficult task Patzer now faces is to relate such rites (for which he finds traces in various parts of Greece, distributed equally among Dorian and non-Dorian races) to the classical Athenian institution of pederasty.

Classical pederasty, Patzer maintains, is a logical (though not in every case a temporal) development from the kind of initiation ritual attested for the Cretans. It differs from its ancestor in that (1) it aims at inculcating not military but civic virtue; (2) as a social obligation it is less universal and less binding and is not overseen by the state; (3) the relationship between lover and beloved is more private and unconstrained, though still socially regulated; (4) it flourishes most conspicuously among non-Dorians. (Moreover, although Patzer declines to mention this, the classical version of pederasty he appeals to does away, supposedly, with phallic penetration of the junior partner and therefore implicitly abandons any pretense of bestowing benefits through *sexual*, as opposed to *social*, contact.) Interpreting classical pederasty as a modified initiation ritual helps to make sense, according to Patzer, of its highly codified and (to his mind) peculiarly institutional features: it explains (1) why homosexual expression is restricted to temporally circumscribed relations between an adult male and a youth in the formative period of his development; (2) why hierarchical relations obtain only between persons of the same gender; (3) why pederasty does not exclude heterosexuality; (4) why pederasty is not sexually or erotically reciprocal; and (5) why pederasty is supposed to involve care for the junior partner’s physical and moral welfare. Whereas in the earlier type of pederasty the quality that marked out a youth as worthy of a lover was bravery, in the later type the quality that makes a youth desirable (*erōs* now intrudes upon the psychological scene for the first time) is beauty – though, Patzer hastens to add, by “beauty” (*kalon*) the Athenians understood not mere physical comeliness but rather



a constellation of prized physical and moral endowments; in the absence of the latter, corporeal beauty effectively lost its power to attract an honorable Athenian pederast (an erotic experience that is not unknown, I believe, even in “our modern Western culture”). In this transition from a socially enforced and rigidly institutionalized ritual of pederasty to a much more informal one, the experience of immanent magical or numinous power gives way to an experience of erotic and aesthetic ecstasy (on the lover’s part, at least), but such eroticism remains, in Patzer’s view, essentially non-sexual in character.

A number of objections to this thesis immediately spring to mind. While Patzer is undoubtedly right to suppose that the rustic holiday prescribed for the happy couple by Cretan custom included sexual intercourse, nothing in Strabo’s version of Ephorus leads us to attach any particular importance to the sexual element or to regard it in particular – rather than say, the two months’ worth of hunting – as the focal point of the initiatory experience. Patzer’s emphasis on the centrality in this ritual of a magical transfer of potency and military valor from man to boy through sexual contact receives no support from the text and seems to have been imported directly from New Guinea. The great significance which Patzer, like Bethe before him, attaches to Strabo’s remark that in Crete lovers desire boys who are exceptionally brave and well-behaved, instead of those who are exceptionally good-looking, is misplaced: the remark is plainly apologetic in intent and is framed as a tacit rebuke to the writer’s own society; a different picture emerges a few sentences later when Strabo says that it is regarded as a judgment on the characters of those who are handsome and well-born if they fail to obtain lovers in their youth – thereby implying that good looks and nobility in a lad were considered, other things being equal, erotic stimuli in archaic Crete no less than in classical Athens. Finally, Patzer acknowledges that the Cretan institution is unusual in that it operates through elective affinities and pair-bonding rather than through rituals that involve entire age-classes: but isn’t such an admission tantamount to conceding an important function to “personal inclination” in this pederastic system? Strabo speaks of the senior partner as an *erastēs*, or lover, after all: this would seem to be a textbook example of the interdependence in culture of social practices and subjective experiences.

It is when we come to Patzer’s discussion of classical Athens that his contrast between pederasty as personal inclination and pederasty as social obligation forfeits all plausibility. That pederasty was indeed a social institution in classical Athens – an institution often thought, moreover, to serve a variety of beneficial purposes – no one, I believe, seriously doubts; that its motives were primarily social rather than sexual few specialists will accept. In approaching this topic we have inevitably to deal with what Henry James once called “a traditional difference between that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter literature” [James 405]. It is a great virtue of Dover’s study of the moral and social conventions governing pederastic relations in classical Athens that in distinguishing a public ideal of “right *erōs*” from its reprehensible opposite he never loses sight of “the gulf between reality and . . . convention” [Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* 125n.]. Patzer unfortunately interprets Dover’s sketch of the public ideal as a description of the social norm. The ideal of legitimate *erōs* does indeed require that a lover neither do to a boy nor demand from him anything shameful, that he not attempt to bribe or constrain him, and that he sincerely wish to promote his beloved’s well-being. Patzer is right to take this ideal seriously but he is wrong to think that it regulates all “decent” behavior. Are we then to interpret as scandalous the affectionate and charming story told about Sophocles by Ion of Chios – how the fifty-five year old tragic poet, while dining at the home of a friend during his tour of duty as general in the Samian War, managed to snatch a kiss from the handsome lad who was pouring the wine and thereupon remarked to the assembled company that he didn’t turn out to be nearly so bad a strategist as Pericles had feared? Or are we to suppose that Sophocles’s ulterior aim was to groom the slave for a civic role that the latter was destined never to assume? Sophocles’s behavior on this occasion, “decent” though it seems to have been, does not look like that of someone who is motivated principally by social duty. Just as it would be wrong for a future historian of twentieth-century America to deduce from the pervasive ideal of marital fidelity among the American middle classes that the marriages of respectable people were unfailingly monogamous in practice or were universally thought to be so (and equally wrong to infer from a reading of the novels of John

Updike that married couples routinely pursued extra-marital affairs), so it is wrong for Patzer virtually to imply that Greek men made love to their boys with a copy of Plato's *Phaedrus* firmly tucked under one arm for easy consultation.

Patzer has nonetheless, I believe, a powerful claim on our sympathy. He finds himself in the wholly unenviable position of having to account for certain socially validated homosexual behaviors in the absence of a contemporary social construction of homosexual desire. He has already been criticized, as we have seen, for his laudable attempt to repudiate "homosexuality" as an instrument of historical analysis; now I, in turn, am about to criticize him for appealing to some equally dubious conceptions of "ritual" and "social duty" as substitutes for sexual categories. My aim throughout has not been to make fun of Patzer but to illustrate, as forcefully as I know how, the connection between his interpretative lapses and some aspects of traditional scholarly method in the human sciences. For, despite his insistence on the need to look beyond the boundaries of Western high culture for parallels with which to illuminate classical Greek institutions, Patzer's own intellectual horizons remain thoroughly circumscribed by assumptions implicit in the traditional practice of his discipline. In particular, Patzer remains very much in thrall to the principles of nineteenth-century hermeneutics which require, as a necessary (if not a sufficient) condition of the success of any interpretative venture, that the researcher confront and carefully set aside all his own prejudices and preconceptions. Those principles were memorably articulated, with reference to the topic presently under discussion, by Wilamowitz; Plato's erotic theory, he wrote, "is rooted in pederastic feelings that remain alien to us because they are contrary to nature; nonetheless, we must not only grasp them historically but must enter into them sympathetically, for otherwise Socrates will remain simply incomprehensible to us, and of Plato we shall retain only a faded and distorted image" [Wilamowitz, I, 44]. But, despite these noble words, Wilamowitz's inquiries into the subject, as Patzer himself acknowledges, produced negligible results. Patzer's own strategy resembles Wilamowitz's, however, insofar as it involves insisting on the utter foreignness of Greek pederasty and therefore on the necessity of purifying our conception of it of anything that seems to be bound up with our own cultural experience—including the modern conceptualization of homosexuality.

But it is not enough to refuse to predicate "homosexuality" of ancient attitudes and behaviors. The large discontinuities between the discursive formations responsible, respectively, for pederasty and for homosexuality remain to be specified. Patzer continues to assume that Athenian pederasty is primarily a matter for philological investigation, that it can be isolated from other aspects of ancient social relations (such as the position of women), and that its conflation with homosexuality can be undone by an enlightened practice of *Kulturgeschichte*; he is unwilling to undertake, in short, the kind of investigation into the very conditions of sexual meaning that might enable the historian to situate Athenian pederasty in its wider cultural, sociological, or discursive context. More than half of his book is taken up with a critical survey of half a dozen items in the scholarly literature, while the most interesting anthropological and philosophical work that has recently been done on sexuality receives no mention (Foucault's *Histoire* is the most notable instance). Hence, his hermeneutic procedure, far from escaping "ethnocentrism," as it is intended to do, merely leads to a kind of ethnocentrism in reverse, an insistence on the absolute otherness of the Greeks, and thus to an ethnographic narcissism as old as Herodotus—a tendency to dwell only on those features of alien cultures that impress us as diverging in interesting ways from "our own." In Patzer's case, the conviction that homosexuality-as-sexual-inclination is a distinctively Western phenomenon leads him to impose on the Greeks, by way of hermeneutic rigor, a pederasty-without-homoeroticism for which there is equally no trace in either the historical or the anthropological record.

For even the most thoroughly ritualized instances of pederasty known to us—including those to which Patzer appeals for parallels—are hardly so duty-bound, so grimly Kantian in their outlook, as he makes them out to be (here Patzer seems to have been misled by one of his sources who described a community in which males tend to lose their enthusiasm for ceremonial homosexual copulation after they get married, and who therefore have to be shamed into it); far from excluding any element of sexual desire, such rites afford their participants a considerable degree of erotic pleasure and excitement, as more than one anthropologist has noted. But it should not in any case have been necessary to go so far afield

in search of cultural analogues to the ancient Greeks. Sexual conventions alien to “our modern Western culture,” and more closely approximating to those of the classical Athenians, can still be found in abundance in sectors of our own societies as well as in the sex-segregated societies of the Mediterranean basin. More than fifty years ago A. E. Housman observed that what seemed to baffle his learned colleagues in Germany about the pederastic ethos inscribed in the obscene wit of certain Roman epigrams would be immediately perspicuous to any modern inhabitant of Sicily or Naples [Housman 408n.]. Contemporary Mediterranean sexual practices continue to afford us a promising avenue of inquiry into the conventions of classical Athenian pederasty; let us explore it, at least, before we go whoring after strange cultures in the futile hope of transcending our historical situation and so escaping from the supposedly crippling constraints of our ethnocentrism. If there is indeed a way to free ourselves from the conceptual tyranny of current sexual categories, it lies not in an attempt simply to do away with those categories by means of a philological sleight of hand but in an effort to understand them better as instances of ideology – or, rather, as historically conditioned cultural representations.\*

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