4. How does Corvino reply to the charge that homosexual sex is harmful to children and a threat to society?
5. Why doesn't Corvino accept biblical injunctions against homosexuality?
6. What is the slippery slope argument against homosexuality? Why does Corvino reject it?

Discussion Questions

1. Is homosexual sex in some sense unnatural? If so, does it follow that it is immoral? Explain your answers.
2. Do the biblical injunctions against homosexuality apply today? Why or why not?
3. Does homosexuality harm the institution of marriage? Why or why not?

A Reply to Corvino

DAVID BRADSHAW

David Bradshaw is assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Kentucky. Bradshaw replies to Corvino. He claims that Corvino is confused because he fails to distinguish between three levels of opposition to homosexuality. There is opposition to the gay rights movement, opposition to the homosexual lifestyle, and opposition to homosexual practice. Bradshaw is mainly concerned with the third sort of opposition. He argues that homosexual practice is morally wrong because it is prohibited in the Bible and because it violates the body's moral space.

After reading John Corvino's essay "Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jim Have Sex? A Defense of Homosexuality," one is left with the impression that the conservative position on homosexuality is nothing but a tissue of confusions. Surely it is a marvel that so many otherwise reasonable people have for so long persisted in such an erroneous view. Perhaps, as Corvino suggests, the explanation is mere prejudice. Or perhaps it is not. I believe that much of the confusion that Corvino finds is of his own making, caused by his insistence on treating arguments that really have quite distinct purposes as if they were all trying to show the same thing: that homosexual intercourse is always wrong. Now this is certainly a position that many conservatives (myself included) do hold, but it does not follow that every conservative argument is aimed at defending it. Many have more modest aims, and to treat them all as if they were intended to show that homosexuality in every case is immoral can only lead to confusion. (I will use the term "homosexuality" throughout to indicate the practice of same-sex intercourse and not merely homosexual orientation.)

In what follows, I will first attempt to clarify how the various elements of the conservative position fit together. I will distinguish three levels of opposition to homosexuality, only the third of which is concerned to maintain that homosexual intercourse is always wrong. Although I will not attempt to defend every conservative argument in detail, placing the arguments within their proper context will make it apparent that most of Corvino's objections are misguided. Following this preliminary survey, the bulk of the essay will be devoted to elaborating the single argument which I think best illuminates the deeper issues involved.

A TAXONOMY OF CONSERVATISM

Most public debate over homosexuality tends to focus, not on the morality of homosexual intercourse as such, but on the various changes to public policy advocated by the gay rights movement. It is important to recognize that one need not hold a moral belief against homosexuality in order to oppose the gay rights movement. Consider the analogy of smoking. Many Americans would deny that it is immoral to smoke, but would also resist any concerted effort to increase public acceptance of smoking. (Imagine, for example, an attempt by the tobacco companies to infiltrate pro-smoking material into the public schools.) Such a position is perfectly consistent, for not every decision about public policy need be based on strictly moral considerations. Other factors that rightly carry weight include public health and safety, demands on the public treasury, the well-being of institutions that are essential to society, and respect for established custom and the wishes of the majority, even when one personally believes those wishes to be ill-founded.

Much of the opposition to the gay rights movement is grounded on considerations such as these. We must therefore distinguish the first level of opposition from one that goes further. The second level lodges a specifically moral objection to homosexuality. It is limited, however, in that it objects to what may be called the "homosexual lifestyle"—that is, to the persistent practice of homosexuality as that practice typically exists in our society. As Corvino rightly observes, many of the points most frequently made in this connection really apply only to the practices of male homosexuals: they include that sex among male homosexuals is wildly promiscuous, that it spreads disease, and that it is highly correlated with other evils both sexual (sadism, masochism, child molestation) and non-sexual (suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse). What makes all of this a bit confusing is that an argument based on such premises may belong to either of the two levels. The distinction is one of purpose. If the aim is to show that, as a matter of public policy, homosexuality ought not to be conceded the same legitimacy as heterosexuality, then the argument belongs to the first level; if the aim is to show that it is wrong for an individual to follow a homosexual lifestyle, then the argument belongs to the second.

There is another type of objection to the homosexual lifestyle, one that applies equally to males and females. This one deserves special mention because only a garbled version of it appears in Corvino's essay. Properly stated, the argument is that the mutual attraction of male and female is so important to the foundations of society that to adopt a way of life that publicly and persistently repudiates it is a moral evil. Note that religious celibates do not repudiate the heterosexual norm in the relevant way; they confirm it, for their celibacy is recognized by both themselves and others as a sacrifice made in pursuit of a higher good. Nor is there any repudiation in the attitude of those who, for whatever reason, simply do not feel or act upon an attraction to the opposite sex. The source of offense is the proffering of homosexuality as an alternative to heterosexuality—an "alternative lifestyle," one capable of providing the same sort of companionship and sexual pleasure as heterosexual marriage. This is felt by opponents to be a sort of counterfeit of a basic human good. Like any counterfeit, it is bogus, but it is...
also sufficiently plausible to have the potential for doing serious harm.

Just as with the arguments directed against male homosexuality, an argument against the public acceptance of homosexuality as an equal alternative to heterosexual marriage can work at two levels. The first level argues that to give homosexuality the same sort of legitimacy as heterosexuality tends to destroy the delicate web of sanctions and incentives through which society channels the sexual impulse in a constructive direction. The second level argues that anyone who lives publicly as a homosexual by that very action endorses and helps propagate a sort of counterfeit good, a false alternative to the heterosexual norm.

All of these arguments are interesting and important. In the interests of space, however, I will not pursue them further here. There is yet a third level of opposition to homosexuality, and it is the one that goes deepest. In describing the second level, I emphasized the word “typically,” for of course there are many varieties of homosexual practice. Let us imagine a homosexual act performed in such a way that it does not damage bodily tissues (as does anal sex, for example), does not spread disease, is not part of a promiscuous lifestyle, has no harmful public repercussions, and, in general, shares none of the characteristics that have so far been mentioned as objectionable. Is such an act wrong? Is it wrong simply in virtue of being a sexual act between two persons of the same sex, without regard to its further characteristics? That is the question that is at the heart of the moral issues surrounding homosexuality, and it is the one on which I wish to focus.

At least two sorts of arguments can be brought to bear at this point. One is based on religious authority. Although in this essay my main interest does not lie in that direction, I must say a word about such arguments because of what seems to me the misleading treatment of them by Corvino. Like Corvino, I will take the biblical injunctions as representative. It should be noted, however, that opposition to homosexuality is the dominant tradition in most of the world’s major religions, including not only Judaism and Christianity, but also Hinduism and Islam.

Corvino writes that “[v]irtually all scholars agree that homosexual relations during biblical times were vastly different from relationships like Tommy and Jim’s.” This is true as far as it goes; monogamous and committed homosexuality did not exist in antiquity, particularly among males. But why should that affect the meaning of the biblical commandments? They are not stated in a way that would restrict them to acts occurring in a particular context. The passages in Leviticus refer simply to a man lying with a man as with a woman (18:22, 20:13). Even more to the point, St. Paul explicitly bases his position on the deviation of same-sex intercourse from “natural” intercourse—that between man and woman (Rom. 1:26–27). This makes it clear that his objection is to same-sex intercourse as such, and not solely to its associations in the culture of his time.

1 See Jeffrey Satinover, Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker books, 1995). Much of this work could be read as a point-by-point rebuttal of the section of Corvino’s essay dealing with harm. To take only a single example, Corvino cites the University of Chicago study as evidence that promiscuity among homosexuals is not as great as widely believed (note 11). But, as Satinover observes, this study was meant to be a representative sampling of the entire population and therefore included only a relatively small number of homosexuals. Other studies involving larger numbers of homosexuals have continued to show high rates of promiscuity.


4 See the exchange between Daniel A. Helminik and Thomas E. Schmidt in chapters 7 and 8 of Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997).
Corvino also appeals to religious pluralism. He claims that, whatever one thinks of the biblical teachings, they do not “provide grounds for moral or legal sanctions.” The question of what are the appropriate grounds for legal sanctions is a large one that raises tricky issues of constitutional interpretation. Since Corvino does not address those issues, he can scarcely be said to have argued for his view, and I shall simply register my disagreement without pursuing the issue further. The main point at issue between us is that of the appropriate grounds for moral judgment. Here, Corvino’s examples blur an important distinction. Many biblical commandments, such as the dietary laws and prohibition of working on Saturday, are clearly intended as binding only on Jews; others, like the commandment against murder given to Noah (Gen. 9:6), are clearly meant to be universally applicable. The reason they are conceived as universally applicable is that they purport to make explicit a standard that, in some sense, is already given in the nature of things; thus Cain, for example, was at fault for his murder of Abel, although there was at that time no explicit commandment against murder.

To which of these two classes do the commandments against homosexuality belong? One important clue is the fact that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were held accountable for their homosexual acts, despite the fact that they were non-Jews and lived long before the time of Leviticus. More generally, a strong case can be made—although I will not attempt to make it here—that the commandments against homosexuality are simply one aspect of a broader sexual ethic rooted in the creation account in Genesis. As such, they are binding upon the entire human race.

What all this means is that, if one takes the Bible as authoritative, one is bound to regard homosexuality as wrong. That may seem an elementary point, but it is so widely denied (or ignored) today that it bears emphasizing. Of course, we can hardly stop with this conclusion. Many people do not accept the authority of the Bible, and even those who accept it recognize that there is a need to do more than simply repeat the traditional teaching. In the remainder of this essay, I will provide an argument against same-sex intercourse that does not rely on religious authority. The argument will proceed in two stages. In the first, I will attempt to make plausible the idea that the very form of the body carries with it certain moral restrictions. In the second, I will apply this general insight to the particular case of homosexuality.

THE BODY AND ITS MORAL SPACE

One of the more decadent Roman emperors, Domitian, is said to have enjoyed pulling the wings off flies and watching them suffer. I will assume that the reader agrees with me that such a practice is not only disgusting, but also has about it at least a faint whiff of evil. How are we to understand its moral dimension? One way would be to say that what Domitian does is wrong because it contributes to the total amount of suffering in the world. The problem with this approach is that the act also contributes to the total amount of happiness—namely, by giving pleasure to Domitian. To arrive at a proper assessment of it, therefore, we presumably would have to weigh these two factors against one another. In the first place, of course, there is no plausible way of doing so; even more to the point, part of what seems wrong about the act is precisely that Domitian does take pleasure in it. There is something about the pleasure itself that seems debased and degrading. The suffering of flies, on the other hand, is something that we

5 I am aware, of course, that revisionists claim that the sin of the Sodomites was inhospitality. See Thomas Schmidt, Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 86–89 for a decisive refutation.
6 See Schmidt, Straight and Narrow?, chapter 3.
7 Michael Grant, The Twelve Caesars (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 244.
generally do not feel obligated to take account of at all. Surely a better way to understand the moral dimension of Domitian’s act would be to say that what is wrong is Domitian’s taking pleasure in the sufferings of his fellow creatures. This attitude and the pleasure deriving from it are wrong, even if the sufferings themselves happen to be morally inconsequential.

I would now like to examine a case where the cruelty of Domitian is written large. It is an episode from C. S. Lewis’s novel *Perelandra*. In the novel, an adventurer named Ransom is transported to Venus (called “Perelandra” by its inhabitants). He discovers there a world of stunning natural beauty that has not experienced—not yet—its own equivalent of the Fall. But soon Ransom sees a sign that something is wrong. Ransom finds on the ground a frog-like creature, still living, but with its back ripped open in a V-shaped gash. The discovery leaves him stunned.

On earth it would have been merely a nasty sight, but up to this moment Ransom had seen nothing dead or spoiled in Perelandra, and it was like a blow in the face . . . The milk-warm wind blowing over the golden sea, the blues and silvers and greens of the floating garden, the sky itself—all these had become, in one instant, merely the illuminated margin of a book whose text was the struggling little horror at his feet, and he himself, in that same instant, had passed into a state of emotion which he could neither control nor understand. He told himself that a creature of that kind probably had very little sensation. But it did not much mend matters. It was not merely pity that had suddenly changed the rhythm of his heartbeats. The thing was an intolerable obscenity which afflicted him with shame.

Ransom soon discovers that there is a whole string of mutilated frogs, twenty-one in all, leading downward to the water’s edge. He forces himself to follow the trail. At its end he finds Weston, another man who has made the journey from Earth to Perelandra. Weston has devoted his life to interplanetary exploration in service to what he calls “the great, inscrutable Force” driving all cosmic progress. In a previous scene, Ransom had warned him that his so-called Force might very well be the devil. Ransom now observes Weston quietly and methodically ripping open the twenty-second frog. As Weston tosses it to the ground their eyes meet.

If Ransom said nothing, it was because he could not speak . . . He saw a man who was certainly Weston, to judge from his height and build and colouring and features. In that sense he was quite recognisable. But the terror was that he was also unrecognisable. He did not look like a sick man: but he looked very like a dead one. The face which he raised from torturing the frog had that terrible power which the face of a corpse sometimes has of simply refusing every conceivable human attitude one can adopt towards it. The expressionless mouth, the unwinking stare of the eyes, something heavy and inorganic in the very folds of the cheek, said clearly: “I have features as you have, but there is nothing in common between you and me.” . . . And now, forcing its way into consciousness, thrusting aside every mental habit and every longing not to believe, came the conviction that this, in fact, was not a man: that Weston’s body was kept, walking and undecaying, in Perelandra by some wholly different kind of life, and that Weston himself was gone.

It soon becomes all too clear that Ransom’s earlier hunch was correct. What Weston had called the “Force” is in reality the devil. The man who was Weston is gone; in his place is a demonically possessed corpse whom Ransom comes to call “the Un-man.”

This tale nicely illustrates what I was getting at in my remarks about Domitian and the flies. Clearly, what makes the mutilation wrought by the Un-man evil is not just the harm done to the

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10 Lewis, *Perelandra*, 100.
frogs; nor is it the harm done to Ransom and other observers, for the act would be just as evil even if it were observed by no one. What makes it evil is its gratuitous cruelty.

Yet there is something else going on here as well. Notice that Ransom reacts to what he has seen as an obscenity before he is aware that it is due to a (partly) human agent. There is something about the thing itself—the way the body of the frog has been warped and defiled—that stands out as an offense against nature, even apart from the malicious intent that has produced it. True, the incident strikes Ransom in this way only because of the idyllic conditions of Perelandra. But that does not negate the point, for it is at least possible (and Lewis certainly means to suggest) that these idyllic conditions have merely heightened Ransom’s sensitivity to a kind of moral reality that in some degree is always present.

Another point to notice is the way that Weston’s act of mutilation effectively places him beyond the bounds of the human race. “I have features as you have, but there is nothing in common between you and me.” In the novel, of course, this dehumanization is entirely literal: the Un-man is no longer a human being, but a corpse moved by the devil. Even apart from demonic possession, however, there is a clear sense in which to take pleasure in the sufferings of others renders one inhuman. We frequently refer to torturers and those who run death camps in precisely that way. Cruelty of this kind is more than the violation of a moral rule, for it affects the very being of the agent, extinguishing whatever there is in the agent that is distinctively human. It is thus, to repeat a phrase I have already used, an offense against nature—this time, specifically against human nature, a violation of what it is to be human.

Admittedly, this is something of a paradox. Surely, to take pleasure in the sufferings of others is distinctively human, for it is done by no animal other than man. Why, then, do we call it inhuman? The reason is that man alone, unlike the other animals, has a certain control over his own nature. Any human being has the capacity to give up his humanity; that is part of the glory and curse of what it is to be human.

I now wish to focus on the connection between the evil that we find so repellent in the Un-man and the elementary fact that we possess bodies. First, I must bring forward another example. A few years ago, it was widely reported that the flesh of fetouses aborted in China was being sold there as a health food. It turns out that such flesh contains nutrients that inhibit the formation of wrinkles and other aspects of the aging process. Those in America who in any degree oppose abortion were swift and unanimous in denouncing this practice. More surprisingly, even those who find nothing wrong with abortion for the most part shied away from defending it and in some cases even joined in its denunciation. The parallel to cannibalism was apparently too close for comfort, despite their official position that the fetus is not a human being.

In light of this history, I feel reasonably safe in assuming that the reader will share my own reaction to this practice: that it is obscene and inhuman. I choose these words advisedly, for they are of course the same words that appeared in our discussion of the Un-man. But notice that in this case there is no gratuitous cruelty. If cruelty figures at all, it is much earlier, at the point of the abortion; by the time that the flesh is sold and consumed, the fetus is already dead. Indeed, one could argue that the entire process involves a net gain to humanity, for it puts a substance that would otherwise be wasted to good use. From a utilitarian standpoint, it is actually laudable.

Why, then, do we feel toward it a kind of visceral abhorrence? Are we simply being irrational? I think not. What is at work here is the same deeply rooted form of understanding that determines our reaction to Domitian and the Un-man. Our existence as bodily creatures carries with it what I shall call a moral “space,” a sort of overlay that assigns to the field of possible actions and attitudes varying kinds of moral significance. I conceive this space as much like the space surrounding an airplane in flight. Movement in certain directions is permitted but
carries no special significance; movement in other directions is not only permitted, but is positively enjoined, in that it is necessary if the airplane is to reach its destination; and movement in yet other directions is strictly forbidden and can lead to disaster.

Similarly, in some cases, the significance that the body attaches to a given type of action is purely negative. That is true in the case of cannibalism: to eat human flesh, such as that of the fetuses, is wrong because it is an offense against the dignity of the human body. It treats human flesh like any other flesh, whereas what is important is precisely that this is human flesh and demands to be respected as such. To deny this truth is implicitly to degrade one’s own flesh as well; it is, in some degree, to relinquish one’s humanity.

A similar explanation applies in the case of the Un-man. Here, the circle widens to include not only human life, but animal life as well. We share with animals certain fundamental capacities, such as those for movement and perception. That is why the wanton infliction of pain on small animals is not only wrong, but degrading and somehow an insult to one’s own nature. It betrays human nature by betraying the bond that ties us to the animal world.

Although my main focus here must be on the negative aspect of the body’s moral space, I wish to emphasize that there is a positive aspect as well. An example is the virtue of compassion. It is an interesting fact that what we call “compassion” plays scarcely any role in ancient Greek philosophical ethics. Aristotle recognizes the virtue of giving pleasure in social intercourse, and he has a great deal to say about friendship, but there is nothing in his system corresponding specifically to compassion. The Stoics went so far as to deny outright that the wise man feels pity or indulges in forgiveness. The reason for this is that ancient Greek ethics saw moral obligation as arising primarily from two sources, the needs of the soul and the needs of society. The body remained for the most part an afterthought.

Few today would question that compassion is a virtue; nonetheless, there is much to be learned by considering how one might argue that it is. The argument I would offer runs as follows. Because one’s own body is subject to the same ailments and passions as the body of one’s neighbor, it is right that one should ache with him and feel with him. The point is not merely that what happens to him might happen to you as well; it is that your embodiment binds you to him in a kind of fellowship of suffering, one that cannot be broken by any divergence in character or belief. This is simultaneously a bond that the body imposes and an opportunity that it offers. In accepting the bond as an opportunity, accepting it freely and willingly, one moves appropriately within the moral space created by the body. One turns away from the brutish and toward the full richness of humanity.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Now we must ask whether the moral framework that I have described provides any help in thinking about homosexuality. Homosexuality is one of a number of sexual practices that traditionally have been regarded as perversions. Others include bestiality, necrophilia, coprophilia, fetishism, and pederasty. To classify all of these as perversions does not mean that they are all wrong to the same degree or for the same reasons, but it does suggest that they share a certain inner kinship. I wish to explore that traditional view by examining bestiality and homosexuality in parallel with each other. I will argue that, despite their manifest differences, both practices involve a similar violation of the body’s moral space.

Although there is an enormous variety of sexual mores and customs, virtually all societies regard at least one kind of sex as morally unproblematic: that of a married man and woman who engage in intercourse with the willingness


12 Cf. Eph. 4:25, “we are members [κοινονία, literally ‘limbs’] one of another.”
(and often the positive hope) that their union will be blessed with children. Since a union of this sort directly contributes to the perpetuation of society, it is not surprising that it should escape moral censure. The first point I wish to argue is that there is also a deeper reason at work—namely, that this sort of intercourse fits the body’s moral space uniquely well. I do not wish to argue (here, at any rate) that only such intercourse is morally acceptable. My claim is, rather, that it provides a paradigmatic case through which we can begin to understand the relationship between sexual intercourse and the body’s moral space.

What is it about intercourse of this particular type that makes it morally appealing? Part of the answer is surely that in such a case the sexual act is the consummation of a joint commitment of the persons involved to share their lives together and to enter together the great enterprise of bearing and rearing children. The word “consummation” is worth pausing to weigh carefully. It comes from consummare, “to sum up, complete, finish.” Implicit in the word is the assumption that the commitment is incomplete and unfinished without the corresponding physical act. The act expresses and realizes the commitment, making it tangibly present and giving it a place in the bodily order. When it does so, the act attains special significance, for it manifests in the body the decision made by the two persons to entrust to each other their past achievements and future hopes. They grant to their union a certain causal autonomy; they pledge with their bodies, as it were, that they are willing to accept whatever consequences their union produces, up to and including the possibility of new life.

This is not yet the whole answer. It is also important that in such cases the sexual act typically evinces (and is partly motivated by) a delight in the kind of being that the other is. “O brave new world that has such people in’t!”—that is what Miranda in The Tempest exclaims upon encountering men.\(^\text{13}\) Much though we may smile at her naïveté, she speaks for the whole human race. Every lover knows that love is more than simply a delight in the other qua individual; man also delights in the femininity of woman, and woman delights in the masculinity of man. Part of what makes erotic love such a powerful experience is the surprise and gratitude one feels in finding that what one has admired from afar even in strangers is now available as a kind of gift in the beloved. What had seemed foreign and unapproachable becomes as close as one’s own flesh.

Now it is precisely the masculinity or femininity of the beloved, in its physical dimension, that is engaged in the sexual act. This means that there is possible in the type of intercourse that I have described a certain integration among the physical act, the attitude of commitment it consummates, and the larger dimensions of human society. The act is a reenactment at a personal level of the drama of the mutual need, attraction, and union of man and woman that has been repeated in countless times and countless ways throughout human history. As such, it is a way of personally participating in one of the deepest roots of human society. I do not mean to suggest that an explicit awareness of this dimension is always present. What is present is the participation itself, the fact that this private and particular act recapitulates in a small way the universal bonding of man and woman.

Here, then, are at least two important reasons why intercourse in a committed, monogamous, heterosexual relationship, with an openness to the possibility of children, is a paradigmatic case of a “fit” between the sexual act and the body’s moral space. First, such an act consummates the mutual commitment of the two persons involved. It unites body and spirit in a single harmonious endeavor; it raises the body to the level of the spirit and focuses the spirit within the body. Second, the act engages the body in a profoundly human way. It integrates the body within a drama that is and always has been the primary means by which the two halves of the human race come to value one another.

Let us now see whether this discussion can shed any light on bestiality. I shall simply assume

that the reader shares with me the intuition that bestiality is wrong. Discussing sexual morality with one who does not share such a basic intuition would be a bit like discussing music with one who is tone-deaf. Perhaps something could be said to get through in the end, but the discussion would have to begin much further back than is possible here.

The question I would ask is not whether bestiality is wrong, but why it is wrong. Corvino remarks that a bestial relationship is not a "relationship" at all. That is true as far as it goes, but it scarcely scratches the surface of the problem. Why, after all, should we require that sex must take place within a "relationship"? What is so special about that? Furthermore, merely to remark that a man and an animal cannot share a "relationship" seems far too weak. Bestiality is not only wrong, but abhorrent and perverse—more like, say, cannibalism or wanton cruelty to small animals than like fraud or drunken driving.

Nothing in the requirement that sex take place within a "relationship" seems to answer to the deep-seated feeling of disgust that bestiality arouses within us.

I submit that the reason why bestiality is wrong is that it is an abuse of the body. It is a paradigmatic case of a sexual violation of the body's moral space. And, if we ask why that is so, we have only to compare it to the opposite paradigm, that of intercourse within a heterosexual, monogamous relationship. Intercourse with an animal allows the possibility neither of commitment nor of procreation. It consumes nothing. It also fails to engage the body in a uniquely human way, a way that would resonate with the larger dimensions of human existence. For these reasons, there is an important sense in which it disengages the body both from the individual psyche and from society at large.

The net result is a sort of fragmentation of the person. The body is left isolated from the other dimensions of personhood, having no other role than that of providing a coarse kind of pleasure.

Consider now a somewhat different case. Suppose that the act were with a talking animal, one as fully rational as a human being and fully engaged in human society. In such a case, an attitude of commitment could be present. But how much else could not! First, because of the biological mismatch of the two bodies, there could be no procreation. This means that the attitude of commitment would remain permanently unfulfilled; there could be no consummation, no "drawing down" of the commitment to the level of physical and tangible reality. Second, the sexual act would not resonate with the larger dimensions of human existence; it would remain isolated from the mutual fascination of man and woman, together with all the structures of society to which that fascination has given shape. Indeed, it would actually be a repudiation of that fascination, for it would be an attempt to find the solaces that men and women traditionally have found in one another in an entirely different source.

For these reasons, regardless of how tenderly or affectionately such an act might be performed, it would fail to achieve anything like the integration among body, soul, and society that is present in the paradigmatic case. Like "normal" bestiality, though to a lesser degree, it would contribute to the fragmentation, rather than the integration, of the person. And for that reason, like "normal" bestiality, though to a lesser degree, it would be a violation of the body's moral space.

This case seems to me identical in its morally relevant characteristics to same-sex intercourse among human beings. In saying this, I do not wish to invoke whatever feelings of disgust may attach to the thought of intercourse with even an intelligent animal. Readers who have such feelings are asked to lay them aside for the moment. The morally relevant characteristics I have in mind are the two that I have emphasized: the inability of the sexual act, due to the permanent structure of the bodies involved, to

serve as a consumption in the sense that I have described; and its inability, for the same reason, to connect in any significant way with the larger dimensions of human existence.

I conclude that same-sex intercourse is a violation of the body's moral space, in the same way and for the same reasons as would be intercourse with an intelligent animal. Again, in saying this, I do not wish to transfer to homosexuality precisely the same feelings of disgust that (rightly) attach to bestiality. I readily concede that intercourse with an animal is worse than that with a human being of the same sex. The only likeness I wish to assert between same-sex intercourse and bestiality is that both are perversion, in that both involve a very fundamental abuse of the body.

Before closing, I should attempt to head off an important objection. There are various reasons that may result in even a heterosexual couple being permanently unable to bear children. Does my argument imply that sex would be illegitimate in their case as well? Not at all. One important difference is that, even in such a case, the second of the characteristics I have mentioned—the participation of the act within the larger human drama—is fully present. In addition, there is a fundamental difference between the bar that prevents such a couple from bearing children and that which similarly prevents two persons of the same sex from doing so. In the heterosexual case, the inability is due to some special circumstance, such as sterility or dismemberment, whereas in the homosexual case, it is due to the given form of the body. If our aim is to respect the moral space created by the body, then it is entirely reasonable that the latter sort of bar should have important moral consequences, whereas the former should and does not.

**CONCLUSION**

The argument that I have presented regarding the body's moral space does not rely on those discussed in the first section of this chapter. However, once this argument is grasped the others gain considerably in force and coherence. We can now understand why homosexuality is so widely viewed as a kind of counterfeit of married, heterosexual love. We can also understand why so many religions forbid same-sex intercourse and why the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, in particular, treat it as a serious offense before God. Finally—though I think too much can be made of this point—it becomes a bit more intelligible why homosexuality is regularly correlated with promiscuity and a variety of other unseemly and reckless kinds of behavior. Lacking the capacity of heterosexuality to integrate body, spirit, and society, it leaves those who partake in it isolated both from society at large and from their own bodily existence. This is not the fault of prejudice against homosexuals; it is an intrinsic limitation of the act itself.

There is a cliché—a wholly true cliché—that one must hate the sin and love the sinner. I would add that part of loving the sinner is to hate the sin. Only when the sin is seen as what it is, as wrong and destructive, can the truly important work of repentance and healing begin.

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**Review Questions**

1. Why does Bradshaw think that Corvino is confused?
2. According to Bradshaw, what is the first level of opposition to homosexuality. How is it analogous to opposition to smoking?
3. What is the second level of opposition, according to Bradshaw? What arguments are used to support it?
4. Explain Bradshaw's third level of opposition to homosexuality.
5. How does Bradshaw defend the biblical injunctions against homosexuality?