

THE REPUGNANCE FACTOR IN GENITO-SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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This Thinksheet studies the human phenomenon of repugnance (lit., a "fighting" revulsion, antagonism, hostility against some thing or some behavior --a strong dislike, distaste, aversion, loathing of what's so alien to one's feelings, ideas, principles, tastes as to be intolerable in one's own behavior [whether or not, & to what extent, one is willing to tolerate it in others' behavior]). esp. vis-a-vis the issue stated on the Thinksheet's first line.

1 The first subquestion is this: Is repugnance **natural**? In primitive societies, the question cannot arise: the populace is so domesticated to the community ethos, including dis/likes, that will/choice/decision for "unnatural" behaviors does not exist. The modern concept of "the social construction of reality/morality" is literally inconceivable, unthinkable. Or at least, imaginal dissension is repressed & behavioral deviance smoothly-effectively-severely depressed. The social water remains calm.

2 A parallel in social calm is the sophisticated (sub)culture in which the un/natural question is irrelevant. When my Episcopal grandmother Elliott said "It isn't done," there was (in her mind) nothing more to be said. This control calls to mind such words as manners, etiquette, civility. In his recent CIVILITY, Yale Law School's Stephen Carter defines the value-virtue he's expounding as a society's funded capital from the personal sacrificial investments of its members in repressing self-desires in the interest of the common good (in sum, the effects of living "Love thy neighbor"). America's present moral-ethical-social crisis can be stated as the severe depletion of the civility fund--without which, the barbarism in which the distinction between **rights** & **desires** collapses: whatever I want I deserve (ie, have a right to). The psychopath (anomic in personal behavior) = the sociopath (insensitive to the feelings/desires/rights of others). My further extension of his thought: Personal repugnance is reduced to hostility against what/who-ever resists what I want to do/have/be; & so everybody becomes repugnant to everybody else (so, chaos-anarchy-tyranny).

3 Strong societies' members have strongly internalized, as **taboos**, the social controls whose primary internal negative sanction is the feeling-experience of repugnance. "Thou shalt not murder" makes its innerlife appearance as repugnance against (& therefore horror of) murder. All societies have sex-taboos specifying what crosses the line ("trans-gresses") from permissible to impermissible--the implicit aims being (1) societal order-&-peace & (2) a cool clearing for spirit (mind, soul) in the forest fire of flesh (sex being the human individual's most powerful transsurvival urge: water, food, clothing, shelter--but not sex--being necessary to the individual's survival--in which sense, sex is not a need but only a wanting, a desire; & elevating it into the category of need is the readiest excuse for sexual immorality).

4 Societies differ (to stay with my momentary analogy) in the size of the clearing for spirit & the intensity of repugnance against flesh's threats to reduce the size of the clearing. Upanishadic repugnance is very high indeed; in various religions, monastic traditions differ in their "sarcophobic" (flesh-fearing) tendency. (The word is, I believe, the coinage of Jn. Dominic Crossan, who for 19 years was a Roman Catholic monk--as he details in his idiosyncratic THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY [HarperSanFrancisco/97].) The monk's most immediate battle against "the flesh" being the battle against sexual self-satisfaction, cultures presently or formerly under monastic influence tend to taboo masturbation, which in other cultures is accepted as self-exploration & self-enjoyment. In our culture, till recent times autoeroticism was tabooed as "self-abuse" & "self-pollution" & even "unnatural," "against nature" (in spite of its being, in today's light, utterly natural).

5 I'm safe to say that you, my readers, feel, as I do, repugnance against all sexual **violence**--rape, coerced female "circumcision" (perhaps even male circumcision?), castration (by others or self)....

6which brings us to a range or spectrum of behaviors toward which "we" feel no, little, or much repugnance (not to mention no, little, or much approval--which is not the subject of this Thinksheet). On each of these, what do you feel/think?

A (Heterosexual) **marriage**. Repugnant (as personal practice) to homosexuals, not to most bisexuals. The Supreme Court action, $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago, against Mormon polygamists reminds us that our society traditionally has legally buttressed monogamy against all other sexmate choices. The current sexmate Court issue is whether same-sex unions, whether or not called "marriage," should be elevated into the legal "marriage" category, with all the supports, rights, & privileges pertaining thereto. No, say I: that decision would dilute & debase "marriage" as both word & legal preferential category. Also called *wed lock*, the genitals of both being locked into the relationship.

B Genital play, whether or not sexual intercourse, with animals: **bestiality**. This sexual crossing from our species to another is a near-universal taboo internally supported by utter revulsion.

C Heterosexual oral/anal sex: **sodomy** (RHD 2, 1st def.).

D "Copulation with a member of the same sex": **sodomy** (RHD2, 2nd def.). Anti-same-sex-unions laws are still widely on the books in the USA & would be invalidated by the Court's siding with the plaintiffs in the upcoming cases.

E Intercourse with others' children: **pederasty**. The incidence is increasing at the very time when evidence of the horrendous damage to children is piling up.

F Intercourse with one's own child or parent: **incest**. Long ago I was taught that this was a universal, "always & everywhere," taboo. But it's increasingly common in our present culture, every case a human tragedy of lasting banes. How increase healthful repugnance when in a culture it's been weakened?

G Copulation between heterosexual unmarrieds: **fornication**. As outfall from the '60s it became extremely common but is now on the check: teen pregnancy is declining, teen abstinence is gaining respectability, the message of faithful marriage as providing (among other goodies) the best sex is getting through to the general public.

H Extramarital copulation, at least one sexmate being married: **adultery**.

I Multiple sexmates (not including polygamy): **promiscuity** (proved of JFK & MLKing Jr, but not of Bill Clinton). Much more common among homosexuals, though I've known some longterm faithful homosexual unions.

7 Attraction builds community, repugnance builds walls around it. Both are factors in the interactions, vis-a-vis sex, of the **interested parties**. God is the ultimate i.p. At the other extreme is the individual, whose attractions/repugnances are somewhat malleable. The family in being & in prospect, of course. And the wider society, with which the family is in polymorphous reciprocity. The law, with all its in/stabilities, its twisting & turnings, its strict/loose constructions. And nature, in proximate definition an orphan but in ultimate definition the master. And how about the church? It has the biblical power & duty to bless/curse & to make the sometimes tough calls on what & how to bless/curse. As a force for stability, it better not bless what it's Great Tradition has cursed, including homosexuality. But as a force for change ("Thy kingdom come"), it better exercise its obligation to let "new occasions teach new duties."....My morning paper today shows a Catholic cleric throwing holy water on a parade of motorcycles, one bike at a time. Makes me smile, not frown. But I do frown at the liberal Protestant present tendency to bless whatever sexmate arrangements the individual chooses, the choice of sexmate now having come loose from (heterosexual) marriage & (traditional) family, the only criteria being "love" & "commitment." This, I believe, overrates, among the interested parties, the individual, the Enlightenment's autonomous unit of desires & rights & thus independent definer of values & virtues, & thus (Jn. Rawls) "self-originating source of valid claims."

8 Notice how "**sexual preference**" plays into this picture. The individual's value & dignity rests on society's respect for personal preference, but society's health & stability rest on effective controls on sexmate choices. Stephen Carter's "civil" society requires that individuals subordinate their desires to others' needs & the needs of society. The church should curse some sexual preferences, eg pederasty. The church should not bless problematic sexual preferences, eg homosexuality.