

Left-handed Homosexuals

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Introduction

I want to discuss left-handedness first, then homosexuality. After I have discussed both of those topics, I hope you will see that I have really been discussing only one topic: discrimination.

Left-handedness

About 10% of people are left-handed. They are born that way. It's a nice percentage to discriminate against: enough to make a satisfying target, but not enough to fight back effectively. There is almost no discrimination against left-handers today, but 2000 years ago things were different. Left-handers were thought to be unnatural, degenerate, and evil. It was dangerous to be left-handed. At the very least, you would be ridiculed and insulted; at worst, you could be stoned to death. In more recent times, educators tried to correct this deviation from the norm by forcing left-handers to behave as right-handers. And when that effort failed, psychologists theorized that left-handedness was a result of brain damage. A 19th century Italian criminologist named Cesare Lombroso said left-handedness is "a stigma of degeneracy".

Religion provides support for discrimination against left-handers. In the Jewish scriptures, Ecclesiastes 10:2, "a wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left". In the Christian bible, Jesus sits at the right hand of God. In the medieval drama *Jeu d'Adam*, hell-mouth is located to the left of God. In Matthew 25:31-45 Jesus blesses and praises those on his right, and damns and curses those on his left. And so on. As so often happens when our knowledge and behavior improve, religious people reinterpret their sacred books, saying that their scriptures don't really mean what they previously thought.

Left-handed bigotry still infests our language. The Latin word for left is "sinister", which is used in English to mean evil. The French word for left is "gauche", which is used in English to mean bad-mannered and clumsy, and from the French word for "right" we say "adroit" for clever. The word "right" in English means not only a direction, but also the opposite of wrong; this is not a coincidence; it is the legacy of the association between "right" and "good" and between "left" and "bad". We use the word "right" to mean morally good, to mean a legal or moral entitlement, and to mean true and correct. Even the word "correct" has the Latin root "rect" which means "right", as in "rectangle" (right-angled), and "rectify" (put right, the way it should be). The English language, and other languages, contain a lot of evidence that left-handers were badly treated in the past.

Homosexuality

About 10% of people are homosexual. They are born that way. Discrimination against homosexuals is rampant. Many people, perhaps the majority of the world's people, think homosexuals are unnatural, degenerate, and evil. Homosexuals are ridiculed and insulted. In some parts of the world, they are stoned to death. In western countries, even as recently as 41 years ago, they were given drugs and hormones to try to correct their deviation. (In 1973

homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental illnesses.)

Religion provides support for discrimination against homosexuals. In the Jewish scriptures, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 calls it an "abomination". Jewish writers Philo and Josephus have asserted that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were due to homosexuality. In the Christian bible, Romans 1:26-28, it is called "shameful", "unnatural", and "depraved". In Corinthians 6:9-10, homosexuals are included in the list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Leviticus 20:13 says "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.". And so on. The current pope, Pope Francis, may be the first pope who declined to condemn homosexuals, but homosexuality remains a sin in Catholic doctrine. The Muslim Qur'an is unequivocal: it is an "abomination" (7:81). And Sharia teaches that homosexuality is a vile form of fornication, punishable by death. One of many Hadith says "Kill the one that is doing it and also kill the one that it is being done to.".

Comparison

Obviously, left-handedness and homosexuality are different issues. But there are some similarities between the way left-handers were treated in the past and the way homosexuals are treated even today. Both are 10% minorities: unusual, but not negligible. The majority can imagine being forced to act like the minority, and that's not a pleasant thought. So the majority treats the minority as a threatening example, an aberration that should be eliminated. And the discrimination finds support in religion. Both left-handedness and homosexuality are conditions that one is born into. Since no real complaint can be made against left-handers or homosexuals, they have been tarred with the vague charge of being evil, and persecuted.

Conclusion

Many people in the past believed that left-handedness was a perversion and an evil, and they felt that it was their moral duty to rid the world of it. With the support of religion, they knew they were "right". But they were wrong, and almost everyone alive today knows that left-handedness is not evil, not a result of brain damage, and not harmful to anyone. Left-handers are fully accepted as perfectly good people. Discrimination against left-handers was the evil that had to be eradicated.

Our attitude to homosexuality is about 800 years behind our attitude to left-handedness. Very many people – in the Muslim world, in Russia, in Africa, in Christian America – believe that homosexuality is a perversion and an evil. They know they are right but they are wrong. Homosexuality is harmless. Discrimination against homosexuality is the evil that we need to eradicate.

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