

# Is Homosexuality Sexuality?<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The debate about sexual conduct

Christians worry about what they take to be the erosion of the Church's traditional code of sexual conduct and, in particular, the emerging consensus that prohibitions on homosexual activity are unwarranted. Their concerns are two-fold. First, they worry that according homosexual relationships a status comparable to heterosexual marriage will undermine the prohibitions, practices and social arrangements that support the institution of marriage. Secondly, and more generally, they worry that the Church's changing stance on these issues represents a rejection of a specifically Christian code of moral conduct in favor of a secular ethic that is fundamentally incompatible with Christian morality.

I argue on utilitarian grounds that while traditional constraints on heterosexual activity, including the prohibition of pre-marital sex and divorce may be justified by appeal to purely secular principles, no comparable prohibitions are justified as regards homosexual activity. Homosexuality is in this respect "outside the law": to the extent that restrictions on sexual activity are warranted, homosexuality is not sexuality. I argue further that although homosexual activity is morally innocuous, the Church should not at this time ordain openly active homosexuals or bless same-sex unions.

Making these utilitarian considerations explicit is crucial in the current debate about church policy and sexual conduct. Utilitarianism has a good claim to be the common sense secular ethic assumed in most moral deliberation. While many people disavow utilitarianism, and very few are consistent utilitarians, when they ask whether an action will benefit others or do harm weighing, costs and risks, or whether the adoption of a policy, given conflicts of interests, will be overall beneficial, they are operating as utilitarians.

Moreover, while many theologians and reflective Christians claim to repudiate utilitarianism, utilitarian considerations figure heavily in the current controversy about sexual conduct within the Church. When advocates of changes in policy cite empirical evidence from the social sciences purporting to show that homosexual activity is harmless in arguing that it is morally acceptable, they are making a utilitarian argument. When they point out the material and psychological harm done to homosexuals by social disapproval and exclusionary policies, and predict that changes in Church policy would ameliorate these harms and provide benefits, they are arguing on utilitarian grounds.

Conservatives typically counter such arguments by appeal to Scripture and Tradition. I suggest that they need not invoke specifically religious considerations to support their case against the ordination of openly active homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions: the case against these practices can be made on utilitarian grounds.

To make the case, it is important to distinguish a number of questions that have figured in the current debate on homosexual practice, which have often been conflated. It

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Joseph Colombo, Michael Connolly, and the anonymous referee for this journal for their extremely useful comments.

is controversial whether homosexual activity is in and of itself morally wrong. This is, however, a separate issue from the question of whether Christians have a special obligation to abstain from homosexual activity. Moreover ethical questions about the behavior of individuals need to be distinguished from ethical questions about the establishment and enforcement of Church regulations and secular laws.

The question of state regulations and policies is yet another distinct issue. Mill argued against legal moralism, the doctrine that restrictions on individual liberty are justified in the interest of preventing “harmless immoralities,” and for over a century, within Western, pluralistic democracies, laws against “victimless crimes” have been ignored or rescinded. Civil libertarians hold that some practices they regard as immoral ought nevertheless not to be legally prohibited. Even those Christians who believe that homosexual activity is contrary to the Christian moral code may consistently hold, on civil libertarian grounds, that the state should nevertheless protect homosexuals from all forms of discrimination and make provision for legal contracts between same-sex partners comparable to heterosexual marriage.

I shall argue that homosexual activity is morally innocuous and that the state should make provision for same-sex partnership contracts, but that the Church as an institution should not bless same-sex unions or ordain openly active homosexuals

## **2. A utilitarian perspective on homosexual practice**

Utilitarianism has three essential features: (1) consequentialism, (2) welfarism and (3) sum-ranking. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory: on utilitarian accounts the normative status of an action or practice is determined wholly by its consequences. Utilitarianism is a welfarist theory: what makes the consequences of an action good is the extent to which they contribute to welfare, understood variously as pleasure, preference-satisfaction or “happiness.”<sup>2</sup> Finally, on the utilitarian account what makes an action right is the sum of goodness it generates for all persons (or perhaps more broadly, all sentient beings) over all time.

Each of these doctrines is deeply problematic and putative counterexamples are readily available. Nevertheless, even if the details are debated, many of us believe that utilitarianism in some form is the correct moral theory. For simplicity, I shall assume act utilitarianism, the view that we assess the normative status of individual actions directly rather than by reference to moral rules. For the act utilitarian moral rules, while

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<sup>2</sup> Not all consequentialist theories are welfarist. Writers influenced by the Aristotelian natural law tradition may hold that what is good for a person is the realization or perfecting of his nature or distinctively human potential. So, e.g., Martha Nussbaum in *Women and Human Development* and elsewhere rejects “subjective welfarism” in favor of an Aristotelian-inspired ethic identifying ten “Central Human Capabilities” which, she suggests, are essential to human flourishing. Some religious believers appear to find such views more appealing than utilitarianism, perceiving them as “less legalistic...less mechanical than act-utilitarianism, and more able to bridge the gap between religious and secular,” as suggested by the anonymous referee for this journal. It is beyond the scope of this essay to argue the merits of utilitarianism or to make the case that it is compatible with religious commitments. Suffice it to say that both liberals and conservatives can appeal to human nature in support of their views about sexual conduct. The notion of human nature or human potential that figures in such views is ill defined and it is contentious which states of affairs constitute its fulfillment or realization.

indispensable for practical purposes, are rules of thumb. While it is desirable to promulgate and enforce rules of conduct including, arguably, conventional prohibitions on lying, cheating, stealing, promise-breaking and the like as guides to action, actions in violation of the rules are morally permissible when the benefits they yield outweighs the cost of undermining adherence to the relevant rule.

Any utilitarian argument invokes empirical facts, or assumptions, since the normative status of an action depends upon its consequences and the extent to which they contribute to overall welfare. So, in considering questions of sexual conduct, empirical questions arise: is homosexual activity harmful to those who engage in it or others? Is homosexual orientation innate? Can sexual preference be changed and, if so, what if any are the costs of changing it?

Answers to these questions and others, which are important for the current discussion, are controversial, and even speculative. The purpose of this discussion however is to argue that *even granting the empirical assumptions of those who argue for a change in Church policy, their argument fails*. To this end we assume, controversially, for the sake of the argument that homosexual activity is harmless, that sexual orientation is innate and unalterable, and that attempts to change sexual preferences are costly, psychologically damaging and doomed to failure.

Given these assumptions, how would a utilitarian address the questions we have put about homosexual practice?

*Is homosexual activity per se morally wrong?*

No. On the act utilitarian account there is no action *in virtue of being* a homosexual activity is either right or wrong. Sexual activities are to be assessed in the same way as actions that figure in any other department of life: homosexual acts are right if they maximize utility, regardless of whether they occur within the context of committed, long-term monogamous relationships or a casual sexual encounter. For the utilitarian all that matters in assessing an action from the moral point of view is the extent to which it contributes to overall utility.

*Do Christians have a special obligation to abstain from homosexual activity?*

Maybe. It depends on whether the consequences of imposing a prohibition on homosexual activity on Christians are beneficial. Granting that homosexual activity is not morally wrong per se, a prohibition on homosexual activity for Christians might be desirable in the interests of promoting solidarity and religious commitment.

Social groups of various sorts impose rules and taboos on their members that contribute to group cohesiveness. When taboos are jettisoned and rules are relaxed, group cohesion suffers as when, in the wake of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church relaxed its regulations regarding meatless Fridays and mass attendance.

People benefit from the sense of identity and security that comes from belonging to cohesive groups. The church as an institution benefits from the commitment of its members who, in turn, benefit from the goods and services it provides. Therefore, all other things being equal, practices and policies that promote solidarity and religious

commitment among Christians are desirable: if a prohibition on homosexual activity has this effect then there is some reason for the Church to maintain the taboo.

It is unlikely that conservatives will be happy with this rationale for a prohibition on homosexual activity since the assumption is that such a restriction is essentially trivial and only a moral prescription at one remove. The suggestion is that, all other things being equal, Christians are morally obliged to do whatever effectively promotes cohesiveness and religious commitment—whether that be observing sexual taboos or dietary restrictions, participating in secret initiation rites or other ceremonies, wearing distinctive clothing, or any of the other practices which, while morally insignificant in themselves, promote the persistence of religious subcultures.

By this standard it is doubtful that religious prohibitions on sexual activity are warranted: when it comes to assessing the desirability of retaining the rules, taboos and special obligations characteristic of a religious group cost-benefit analysis is in order. Restrictions on sexual activity impose substantial burdens on individuals who undertake to regulate their activities accordingly, and it is not clear that they are any more effective in promoting group identity and cohesion than less burdensome obligations. It is unlikely that imposing any special obligation to abstain from homosexual activity would significantly contribute to group cohesiveness within the Anglican Church or to members' sense of religious identity.<sup>3</sup>

If this is correct then utilitarian considerations support liberals' contention that homosexual activity is morally permissible and that there is no reason why Christians should abstain from it.

*Should the Church bless or otherwise provide ceremonies for the recognition of same-sex unions?*

Again, in answering this question the utilitarian will appeal to his characteristic mode of moral reasoning: cost-benefit analysis. Here however the utilitarian argument goes against those who advocate changing the Church's traditional practice.

Figures for the frequency of homosexuality in the population vary widely—estimates range from less than 2% to 10%. Of these however few have any interest in getting their partnerships blessed by the Church so, even given the high figure, very few individuals would benefit directly from instituting the practice of blessing same-sex unions.

Perhaps more importantly, the benefits of having one's sexual relationship ecclesiastically recognized or blessed are minimal. An increasing number of heterosexual couples are happy to forgo it. While all other things being equal it is good to have as many options as possible, some options typically contribute more to well-being than others. These include the option of getting a good education and meaningful work, the availability of adequate health care, the chance to travel, the leisure to pursue hobbies, the opportunity to enjoy the arts and the right to participate in the political process.

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<sup>3</sup> Most Anglicans' sense of religious identity is, indeed, minimal. If however the Church were seriously interested in building a sense of group identity and commitment it might do better to promote less costly ritual practices comparable to those observed by Jews and practicing Catholics prior to Vatican II.

Compared to these and other options for obtaining the goods and services conducive to leading a pleasant, financially secure, healthy, intellectually vital life, the option of having ones sexual relationship blessed by ecclesiastical authority is negligible. Few people care, and most who care do not care very much. To this extent, the establishment of a policy of blessing such relationships has little benefit.

It may be argued that establishing such a policy has symbolic value, which may be beneficial to individuals who would not benefit directly from having their relationships blessed by the Church. Within an historical context in which homosexuality has been condemned and homosexuals have suffered various forms of discrimination, blessing same-sex unions would send the message that the Church, as a moral authority, retracts its earlier views of homosexuality as sinful, affirms homosexuals as persons and condemns all forms of discrimination against gay and lesbian people.

The utilitarian however will ask once again how beneficial such symbolic gestures are likely to be and whether the benefits outweigh the costs. Are members of the general public who have hitherto looked askance at homosexual activity or discriminated against homosexuals likely to change their minds as a consequence of the Church's change of policy? Will the attitudes of churchgoers change? Will young toughs who might otherwise beat up gays or lesbians be less likely to do so because the Church has spoken?

Here, it may be hard, and humbling, for many clergy to face the facts: most people have little contact with the Church, no understanding of its doctrines or policies and no interest in finding out. Clergy seriously overestimate the extent to which the ethical teaching and policies of the Church affect the attitudes and practices of the laity. Even in the US, with its high rate of religious participation, professing Christians are more likely to choose a church that affirms their pre-existing beliefs and moral commitments than to change their beliefs or practices to meet their church's requirements. If this is correct then adopting the policy of blessing same-sex unions is unlikely to have a significant effect on the public's views about homosexuality or attitudes toward gay and lesbian people.

Adopting this policy is also likely to have costs. It may undermine the credibility of the Church and will most likely cause significant dissension that will harm the institution. To determine whether adopting such a policy is desirable, the Church needs to take a realistic look at the empirical facts of the matter and weight the costs and benefits.

Such considerations may seem to sacrifice the interests of individuals for the good of an institution. This is not the case. The Church is not a bloodless abstraction but an organization on which a significant number of individuals depend for comfort, encouragement, fellowship, and most importantly for corporate worship and the sacraments. Counting the costs to the institution of adopting a policy of blessing same-sex unions is not a matter of weighing the interests of individuals who may benefit from the policy against the interests of an impersonal institution but one of weighing the interests of some individuals against the interests of others, whose well-being depends upon the flourishing of the institution.

If this is correct, the benefits of blessing same-sex unions, which are minimal, do not outweigh the costs, which would likely be substantial. Adopting such a policy would

not, therefore, be cost-effective at this time and thus should be rejected on utilitarian grounds.

Attitudes toward sexuality are changing rapidly and, among the educated classes, homosexual activity has become acceptable and, indeed, fashionable. In all likelihood, this attitude will trickle down and, within our lifetimes, same-sex partnerships will be generally accepted. When that happens, it will be reasonable for the Church to adopt the practice of blessing them—given the assumption that they are, indeed harmless. The Church however is not in a position to act as an agent of change and will likely do significant harm by attempting to do so.

*Should the Church ordain openly active homosexuals?*

The same considerations apply here: would such a policy be cost-effective?

The Church has always ordained closeted homosexuals. However, don't-ask-don't-tell policies have severe drawbacks. They promote covert discrimination and witch-hunts. Once again in deliberating about this policy the Church needs to weigh the costs of leaving homosexual priests open to discrimination and blackmail against the costs of creating disruption in the institution. Here the Church would do well to look to its extensive past experience.

*Should the state make provision to enable same-sex partners to enter into contractual arrangements comparable to heterosexual marriage?*

Here it seems likely that the benefits outweigh the costs. Marriage provides significant benefits when it comes to a variety of legal and financial matters concerning, for example, citizenship and immigration status, insurance, inheritance, and hospital visitation policies. Same-sex partners would gain significantly from the option of regularizing their status in order to take advantage of these benefits and it is hard to see how extending this option to same-sex partners would undermine the advantages of marriage to heterosexual couples.

It is also in the state interest to promote family-like arrangements that provide participants with financial and social safety nets. Marriage provides financial and social security. Extending the option of locking in relationships that imposing obligations of mutual support on partners to homosexual couples extends that benefit.

Without secure, legally enforced relationships amongst family members, the state may be obliged to supply costly surrogates. Where family members are unwilling or unable to provide financial support, housing, companionship and help with daily living to individuals who, for one reason or another, cannot obtain these goods by alternative means, the state may have to provide welfare payments, social services and residential facilities which are more costly. It pays the state to promote private support networks, marriage and comparable relationships, and to impose legally binding obligations of mutual support on individuals who enter into such relationships.

The more of these contractual relationships there are, the better. It is however especially crucial to maintain heterosexual marriage as a contractual relationship, to adopt policies and promote social practices that encourage heterosexuals to marry, to impose legal obligations of mutual support on marriage partners, and to discourage

divorce. I shall argue that the Church's traditional view of marriage and constraints on heterosexual activity are justified on secular grounds, that the availability of civil partnership contracts for same-sex couples while desirable is less important, and that constraints on homosexual activity are not justified. The Church should affirm its traditional code of sexual conduct for heterosexuals holding that it does not apply to homosexual activity.

### **3. Homosexual and heterosexual relationships are different**

Marriage is a contractual arrangement: in this respect it differs from most other social relationships. Currently, for example, there are no formal friendship contracts because friendship contracts are not needed. Friends are peers: there is no need to enter into a contract to prevent one friendship partner from exercising power to disadvantage the other. Individuals enter into friendship relationships for companionship: there is no need to enter into a contract to negotiate between conflicting interests. Finally, friendships are private to the extent that third parties are almost never significantly affected by the quality or duration of friendships.

In these respects, friendship differs from those relationships that are legally regulated. We should ask then what benefits the legal regulation of relationships provides, whether heterosexual relationships are significantly similar to relationships where legal regulation is beneficial, and whether homosexual relationships are.

#### *When contractual relationships are desirable*

There is a prima facie case for liberty: in the absence of compelling reason to impose restrictions on individual freedom, legal constraints and regulations are unwarranted. Marriage, like other contractual arrangements, is restrictive and, prima facie one might question whether there is any compelling reason to retain this social institution. To see why, we should compare it to other arrangements where social and legal constraints are beneficial and to consider which features of these arrangements make regulation desirable. These features are as follows:

#### (i) Differences in power

When one party in a relationship is in a position to exercise power over another, legal constraints and regulations prevent the abuse of power. The state protects consumers from the exercise of power by firms that may sell defective products or suppress information consumers need to make informed decisions. It protects workers from the excessive exercise of power by employers by enforcing workplace safety regulations and minimum wage. It enforces criminal laws to protect members of the society against others who, because they are bigger, stronger or in possession of weapons, can beat, rob or kill them.

#### (ii) Conflicts of interest

The state enforces contracts where parties have conflicting interests, particular when the stakes are high. Selling a house it is in my interest to present it in the best possible light to attract buyers and get the best price, and see to ensure that buyers do not waste my time. Buying a house it is in your interest to get as much accurate information as you can about the property, keep my options open and pay as little as possible. The

state sees to it that I, as a seller, make full disclosure about the condition of my property. It requires termite inspections and other safeguards to guarantee that it is structurally sound and habitable. It requires you, the buyer, to put money into escrow so that you cannot back out of the deal without a hefty penalty and makes sure that you pay up.

(iii) Involuntary involvement of third parties

The state also imposes restrictions on activities where there is likely to be involuntary involvement of third parties. We may enjoy noisy parties but if the noise bothers the neighbors, the police come. The state intervenes when ostensibly private practices harm third parties.

(iv) Contribution to socially undesirable practices

Actions of some kinds that do not immediately affect third parties are seriously harmful when they become widespread social practices. Bribery, for example, is a voluntary transaction for the parties involved and, typically, does not directly harm third parties. When bribery becomes the common practice however the economy suffers: where it is institutionalized everyone very much is worse off.<sup>4</sup>

*Contractual relationships are crucial for heterosexual couples because men and women are different*

(i) Men are currently on average advantaged relative to women. Though women are gaining access to jobs previously reserved for men and the wage gap is narrowing, women as a group are not economically equal to men and not likely to become so in the foreseeable future.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, marriage remains a financial benefit for women, and a burden for men. Within marriage, most women have few bargaining chips and strong incentives to comply with their husband's demands in order to keep their positions—like low-skilled, non-unionized employees who can easily be replaced and therefore must comply with employers' demands to keep theirs.

The state imposes a variety of regulations on employers to prevent them exercising inordinate power over their employees, requiring them to pay minimum wage, contribute to social security and maintain safe, minimally decent working conditions. Undocumented migrant farm laborers and other workers whose employment is not

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<sup>4</sup> Notoriously, government corruption and the institutionalization of bribery seriously damage the economies of developing countries. See, for example, Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W.Norton, 2002) and William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001)

<sup>5</sup> A few highly educated women—including readers of this essay and most women they know, or notice—can get jobs comparable to those of their male counterparts. The majority of women however compete in a segment of the labor market that is highly sex segregated and are locked out of most better paid jobs. In the US, college graduates on the average earn more than non-graduates, but the wage gap between women with college degrees and those who have not completed college is significantly greater than the gap for men. Working class women are seriously disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts. Vide e.g. Robert Cherry. *Who Gets the Good Jobs*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

regulated are very often exploited. Without comparable safeguards many women would likely suffer comparable harm

To the extent that it is legitimate for the state to institute and enforce policies intended to protect parties in unequal relationships, the state ought to regulate heterosexual relationships where women are, typically, at a serious disadvantage.

(ii) Men and women on average have different interests in sexual relationships, which are likely biologically based.

Men prefer younger partners and on the average die younger than women so older women find it much more difficult to establish heterosexual relationships than men of the same age. Consequently, serial monogamy is a viable option for men but not for women: it is in the interests of women to lock in heterosexual relationships; it is in the interests of men to avoid commitment. Like parties to a real estate transaction, heterosexual partners have a serious conflict of interests.

This provides a secular rationale for conservative Christian prohibitions on both divorce and sex outside of marriage. The traditional code of sexual conduct puts men and women in a more equitable position to negotiate for mutual advantage. In the crudest terms, men compete for young, attractive women and pay for sexual favors by entering into marriage, a long-term social and financial commitment enforced by the state, which benefits women.

One would hope that men and women did not view their relationships in these terms. Nevertheless, the prevalence of serial monogamy and the phenomenon of “trophy wives” suggest that a significant number do.

(iii) Third parties are often involved in long-term heterosexual relationships. Heterosexual couples typically have children, whose interests are tied to the quality and duration of their parents’ relationship. Moreover, in many communities, the interests of other members of the extended family are involved. The state protects the interests of third parties, particularly those who, like children, are powerless.

(iv) The currency of marriage as a social institution is beneficial

If heterosexual marriage or some comparable secure contractual arrangement were not widespread, the majority of sexually active individuals would be forced to buy and sell themselves continually in an open market where women would be at a significant disadvantage over time. Both men and women would be forced to spend valuable time and effort in stressful, expensive courtship routines. Without the security of contractual relationships, they would be in the position of individuals in hunting and gathering societies scraping continually for daily sustenance, without bank accounts, refrigerators, or any of the institutions that enable people to buy security and leisure.

In addition to the direct cost to individuals, this arrangement would likely be economically inefficient. Instead of devoting time and energy to productive work, adults throughout their sexually active lives would invest in sexual display: workplaces would become like high schools.

However frivolous and cynical these considerations may seem, they provide some reason for holding that heterosexual marriage is a good thing. It prevents women from

being exploited, protects children, and provides a social safety net for all concerned. Committed homosexual relationships, while desirable, are simply not so important in the interests of promoting social welfare as heterosexual relationships are.

*Homosexual relationships do not meet these conditions because they involve same-sex partners and are relatively uncommon.*

(i) Same-sex partners, like partners in asexual friendships, are typically equal in power.

(ii) Same-sex partners have the same interests. Homosexual males are attractive to other homosexual males while they are young but become less attractive as they age. Without any cost to their partners they can engage in promiscuous casual sex while young and, if they choose, settle in with age mates when they are older. Homosexual females are always relatively attractive to other homosexual females. They have no reason either to lock in sexual relationships early in their lives, like heterosexual women, who will find it difficult to establish new sexual relationships later in life, or to resist commitment, as heterosexual men do, in order to keep their options open.

(iii) Homosexual couples do not typically have children and their relationships rarely involve other members of extended families in the way that heterosexual relationships do.

(iv) Finally, even if casual sex were the norm for homosexuals, it would not have the detrimental social impact of the same norm for heterosexuals. There are fewer homosexuals in the population and, while the stress of continual barhopping and seduction may be unpleasant for individuals, it is unlikely to have the social costs of more widespread promiscuity.

If this is correct then there are secular reasons for distinguishing between homosexual activity and heterosexual activity. In the interests of overall welfare and, in particular, for the welfare of women, it is crucial to maintain the institution of heterosexual marriage even at the cost of restrictions on divorce and sexual activity outside of marriage. The availability of contractual relationships for same-sex partners, while desirable, is less important and the costs of comparable restrictions on sexual activity for homosexuals may be outweigh the benefits.

Consequently, on secular, utilitarian grounds there are serious reasons for maintaining the Church's traditional code of sexual conduct for heterosexual men and women while treating homosexual practices as "outside the law."

### *Law, Policy and Social Change*

Laws, policies and codes of conduct are intended to deal with statistically normal cases and to protect the interests of the "standard person." Their implementation can be modified in individual cases. To the extent that the Church is in the business of adopting policies and regulations it paints with a broad brush because that is the nature of policies and regulations. It deals with individual cases pastorally.

An increasing number of individuals do not fit the model suggested here. Not all differences in power and conflicts of interest are gender-based: indeed, overall, wealth, class and race may play more significant roles than gender. Many heterosexual couples

are childless and an increasing number of homosexual partners are raising children. While sex segregation and wage gaps remain, some women earn wages comparable to their male counterparts' and occupy similar positions. As social conditions change, policy changes accordingly.

Currently, however, men and women in the aggregate play very different roles in the home, in the labor force and in society at large. As a consequence, heterosexual and homosexual relationships are different in character.

Sexual partnerships whether heterosexual or homosexual are not merely individual affiliations isolated from their social and economic context: the roles partners play in such relationships, in particular their bargaining position within partnerships, are set by the positions they occupy within the larger society. So long as men and women occupy significantly different social roles, heterosexual and homosexual relationships will remain radically different in character and, as I have argued, require different treatment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

I have argued that homosexual activity is morally permissible and, moreover, that restrictions on homosexual activity comparable to those which apply to heterosexual activity are not warranted. There is, I have suggested, reason to hold that heterosexual activity should be confined to the context of permanent contractual relationships but no reason to hold that homosexual activity should be.

As regards ecclesiastical policy, however, I argued that the church should not bless same-sex unions or ordain openly active homosexuals.

Even if homosexual activities are morally innocuous it does not follow that the Church ought to bless same-sex unions. There are a lot of things the Church does not do: it does not issue passports, grant academic degrees or award prizes for athletic accomplishments, and it does not conduct ceremonies for the blessing of asexual friendships or business partnerships. By adopting a policy of blessing same-sex unions the Church would commit itself to the view that homosexual activity is morally permissible; by retaining the current policy it leaves the question open. I suggest that the Church should leave it an open question whether homosexual activity is morally permissible—not because it is unimportant or because the lives of gay and lesbian people are of no moral significance but because it is a disputed question about which sincere, informed, devout Christians may legitimately disagree.

For the same reason, I suggest, the Church should not formally declare that openly active homosexuals may be ordained. *Prima facie* this is a much more significant issue: relatively little hangs on whether couples are eligible to have their relationships blessed by the Church, but a good deal hangs upon whether individuals are eligible for ordination, both for those individuals who are called to ordained ministry and for the Church. The Church, however, does not exclude homosexuals from the priesthood. It does not *de jure* exclude individuals on the basis of homosexual orientation and it does *de facto* exclude them because of homosexual activity. There is no evidence that homosexuals are underrepresented among clergy of the Anglican Church.

The intent of the current proposal to affirm the eligibility of openly active homosexuals for ordination is not to give gay and lesbian people who would otherwise be excluded, the opportunity to pursue their vocations, but to formally repudiate the doctrine that homosexual activity is morally wrong. This would, indeed, put the Church's position in line with the views of the secular elite, but the secular elite is unlikely to be impressed.

Ironically, the same utilitarian considerations that suggest homosexual activity is morally permissible militate against changing Church policy to permit the blessing same-sex unions and ordination of openly active homosexuals. Such changes in Church policy are unlikely to make many people significantly better off and highly likely to damage the Church and, as a consequence, to make a good many people significantly worse off. This is a very good reason why, even if homosexual activity is morally permissible, it would be morally wrong to institute these changes in policy.