

Jelena ČVOROVIĆ
Ethnographical Institute SASA, Belgrade

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THE ANCIENT GREEK PROMISCUITY

Non-reproductive sex, including homosexuality, is a by-product: such behavior would be a consequence of selection for male sexual eagerness due to the significantly less parental investment in the past. Here we argue that the key element in restraining such behavior is ancestral: traditions that discourage promiscuity. The ancient Greece is selected to illustrate this thesis.

Key words: male homosexual behavior, Ancient Greece, restraint.

Introduction

The heart of the argument presented here is founded on sociobiology and the assumption that, in addition to genetic selection, there has been a selection in humans for traditions that have encouraged parenting behavior. What distinguishes humans from other animals is not their appetites for mating and survival but the suppression of those appetites. Restraint of appetites is everywhere encouraged by ancestors through the transmission of learned behavior—traditions. As a learned phenotype copied from ancestors, the expression of a tradition depends both on particular genes and a particular environment.

In every society, parents are the main transmitters of traditions, which thereby directly influences their own descendant-leaving potential. Sociobiologists have long recognized that parental care, or K behavior, is at the expense of reproductive, or r behavior: the more parental care given to each offspring, the fewer offspring one can have. Likewise, the more sexual, or reproductive behavior, the less parental care, and by extension, the less altruism, or social behavior in general. The more r, the less K, and vice versa.

Parental behavior is a sacrifice not only of the parent's reproduction but also the parent's resources important for survival. So too is a child's acceptance of his parent's influence: he does what his parents encourage at the expense of his own r appetites.

The relationship between human spouses may be characterized fundamentally as females giving r to their husbands in order to get K for their children, whereas males give K to their wives and children in order to get r. We assume male sexual behavior is a result of selection for male sexual eagerness, resulting from low parental investment from the past. This eagerness has led to many non-reproductive activities, including pornography, child molesting, bestiality, masturbation and homosexuality.

Sexual competition between males is the greatest threat to cooperation and social behavior. Sex is an antisocial force (Wilson 1975). We argued that everywhere, ancestors through traditions promote K, or social behavior, the basis of human societies, and discourage r behavior, including sexual promiscuity, which threatens cooperation (Čvorović 2002). Therefore, wherever traditions are more or less intact, where both ancestors and kinsmen are highly respected and traditions followed, we predict that significant ancestral restraint on promiscuous sexual behavior will be found.

Discussion

To illustrate this proposition, we examine ancient Greece, for ancient Greece is often cited as an example of great sexual freedom, especially for male homosexuality. For example, the anthropologist Gilbert Herdt has written:

Virtually all of the famous figures in Greek philosophy — the teachers such as Socrates and his students Plato and Xenophon — engaged in homosexual intercourse. It was part of the educational process. The teacher transmitted knowledge, morality, and the concept of masculine honor to his pupils, which were believed to be facilitated by experiencing love and sex with them.

Herdt (1981:203) also wrote that the Thebans and Spartans were said to have taken their male lovers with them as comrades and sex partners on their military expeditions. Another famous anthropologist, Marvin Harris (1981:104), on the same subject, argues: “Everybody practiced it; nobody was ashamed of it.” Dover has put the matter this way:

Homosexual relationships are not exhaustively divisible, in Greek society or in any other, into those which perform an educational function and those which provoke and relieve genital tension. Most relationships of any kind are complex, and the need for bodily contact and orgasm was one ingredient of the complex needs met by homosexual eros (1978:2023).

But were the Greeks in fact so sexually promiscuous? An examination of the literature does not support such unalloyed enthusiasm for homosexuality. What we find is that, while there was indeed instances of so called “boy love”, it was of great concern to the philosophers who generally attempted to restrain it, along with promiscuity in general. Particularly powerful was the encouragement of K behavior and discouragement of r behavior.

The ancient Greeks left very little in texts and comments concerning their understanding of love in general, especially concerning the subject of “boy-love.” A very limited number of texts were saved, so any image and judgment about the subject must be recognized as vague and unreliable. All texts are from, or are connected to the Socrates-Plato tradition, and what is missing are the apparently important works many others (Foucault 1980: 189). No ordinary Athenian left a word about himself. What we have are many details, but they call for cautious conclusions.

From the known texts, it is clear that the Greek “elite”, the educated people and the philosophers were against homosexuality, indeed, against any excessive sexual behavior. The Greek philosophers supported and argued for the idea of restraint in sexual behavior. Many of them asked married men to restrain themselves from any

extramarital adventures, with men or women. The Greek ideal was *Aurea Mediocrita*, or the Golden Mean.

It is not well known that ancient Greeks generally demanded complete abstinence in homosexual relationships (Plato and Xenophon, for example). However, some modern writers (for example, Herdt 1981, Greenberg 1988) mention Homer as depicting homosexual love between Achilles and Patrocles. Excerpts taken from the *Iliad* (*Iliad*, XVIII 76–116) show a different picture. Homer does not talk about Achilles and Patrocles any different than about the others. Socrates, according to Xenophon (*The Symposium* VIII, 31) points out: “And Homer described Achilles as he specially mourned over Patrocles not as a lover but as over a deceased friend ... and many of them which were the best, were glorified not because they had slept together, but because they had admired each other and together done the most glorious and greatest deeds.”

Also, it is not known if Athens itself, the center of Greek culture, ever fully accepted “boy-love.” Boy-love, although allowed, was met with various opinions, ranging from praise to condemnation, so it is hard to judge the morality that surrounded it. For example, from Pausania’s speech, it is not clear that Athens was gracious toward homosexuality (Plato, *The Symposium*, 182 a-d). On the other hand, from the same speech, it is clear that fathers tried to protect their sons from such relationships, demanding that pedagogists suppress it; also, the oration goes, students reproached one another for accepting homosexual relationships.

Most philosophers and educated people did not accept homosexual love as correct; it was considered “unnatural”. Plato, for example, in his *Laws*, demanded homosexual love be forbidden among men (VIII, 841 c). Xenophon presented Socrates as a man who condemns “love for the body” and praises only “love for the soul” (*Xenophon, The Symposium*, VIII 12 and 25). Socrates taught that all touches and kisses should be avoided at any cost; relationship between two males should be founded on friendship and mutual benefit. No *Eros* (erotic passion) should exist between two males, only the relationship of *philia* (friendship) (*Xenophon, The Symposium*, VIII 26). According to Xenophon, this kind of “ideal” *philia*, or true friendship, can be found in *Likurg’s* Sparta: men who would fall in love with boys’ (bodies) were called dishonest, while men who loved only “the soul” of young boys were praised as honorable. In this manner, in *Lacedemonia*, “...lovers were restrained in the same way in their love, as were fathers towards their sons, or brothers towards one another” (*Xenophon, Republic of Lacedemoniens*, II, 12–15). *Isocrates* also supported the idea that an honorable man should have the power over all his sexual pleasures and desires (*Isocrates, Nicocles*, 31–35). *Nicocles*, the main character in this text, was praised because “...from the day he took his political function, people were assured that he did not have a physical relationship with anybody but his legal wife” (*Isocrate, Nicocles*, 36). *Aristotele*, also, argued against extramarital affairs (*Foucault* 1980). In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, first orations have the same subject: what happens with homosexual love and relationships, how a boy might end up in a shameful position, how such a relationship can create a shame for the boy himself and his family, how such man-love can turn a boy away from creating his own family, and how a young boy can come to hate an older man who is using him like a woman, with all shameful consequences that this kind of relationship can bring to a young person (Plato, *Phaedrus* 231–233 a, 239–240 a, 240 d, 239c-d). Plato actually sees homosexual love as a form of unrestrained sexuality.

The Greek ideal was temperance, in every form of everyday life; a well respected man should have temperance as his main characteristic. A well-known and respected

man, with a lot of political power, should make his life honorable, and the first restraint concerns his sexual behavior. Even if he has sexual desire toward boys, he should restrain himself from acting on it: that is the message Socrates is preaching, according to Plato (Republic, IX, 571 b). Socrates was always successful in refusing advances, including from the handsome Alcibiad, not because he did not like the man, but for the purpose of restraining his appetite. Temperance, as a virtue, in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Antiphon, Diogenes and Aristote, is to be understood as “having power over one’s passions and pleasures, ...and governing them” (Foucault 1980:71). Xenophon argued against unrestrained behavior in general; unrestrained behavior in eating, drinking and sexual habits is to be seen as “unnatural”, since such pleasures cannot be found in Nature itself: “...for enjoyment in meals, it (indulgent behavior) needs cooks, for enjoyment in drinks it needs expensive wines, and in the summertime, snow; to find new pleasures, it uses men like they are women” (Xenophon, Memories of Socrates, II, 1, 30). Plato, in the beginning of his Laws, confronts the ‘correct’ relationship between man and woman, whose purpose is to leave descendants, and “unnatural”, the relationship between two males. According to Plato, (Plato, Laws, I, 636c) the behavior which is against “the laws of Nature” and against the principle of leaving descendants, is not to be understood as a result of a deviant personality or a special kind of passion; homosexual behavior is just the consequence of unrestrained behavior, and its root is immoderate pleasure (*akrateia hedones*). Foucault (1980:46) cites Dioscurus, who explained boy-love as a consequence of too much unbridled behavior. Socrates even advised the ones who are not “armed” well enough (with self-temperance and restraint) to stay away from beautiful young boys, or, to leave the city for a year (Xenophon, Memories, I, 3, 13). For Socrates, a man should be “sophron and enktates, to be the master of his own passions and pleasures” (Plato, Gorgias, 491 d).

The Ancient Greeks glorified heroes who had power over their sexual pleasures and behavior; total abstinence was praised, as a way to achieve wisdom and higher states of being. Foucault compares early Christian sources with pagan Greek texts, and finds many similarities:

...the ancient pagan era knows about the supporters of temperance, who control and master themselves, as to give up all sexual pleasures. Long before the miracle-creator Apolonius from Tiana, who once and for all, denied himself sexual relationships, and later lived all his life in chastity, Greece knew and glorified a similar ideal. For some, this highest virtue was the sign of self-control and power over oneself, and because of this, the sign of a power they deserved to have over others (Foucault 1980: 22).

For others, this kind of abstinence was closely connected with wisdom; through self-control, they achieved higher elements, above human nature, which allowed them to find the truth. This is how Socrates is presented by Plato (The Symposium, 217–219e): the one who draws everyone’s attention, with whom everyone was in love, whose wisdom everyone wanted for himself, but the wisdom which made Socrates strong enough to refuse the advances of the beautiful Alcibiad.

Others, less strong than Socrates was depicted, had to fall back on rules. The fact that homosexual love was not against the law in ancient Greece has been taken by some modern writers as proof of a casual attitude toward homosexual behavior. But the Greeks themselves emphasized the demand for strictness concerning homosexual love, and rules that should be followed. In their thinking about boy-love, the Greeks emphasized the ideal of restraint, whose model was Socrates. There were certain rules

for homosexual relationships. Much attention was paid to a boy's behavior and his honor; the whole society discussed and judged this. It was necessary for a boy to make sure that he stayed "honorable" if engaged in homosexual love, that he, as a young man, should watch his behavior, and when grown up, should respect the honor of his younger male friends. Very few details are given on this subject, and it is not known which acts a boy should refuse in order to behave properly. Temperance, *sophrosune*, is again emphasized as the highest quality, according to Plato (*The Symposium*, 183 d). It looks like a boy should not accept any position or status which would cause him to be humiliated. It was not right for a boy to behave passively, or to become a servile partner for another man's desires; boys who would offer themselves to anybody, going from one lover to another, were considered shameless and without honor (Demosthenes, *Eroticos*, 39–43). It seems that the advice which philosophers gave, tried to limit the number of partners a boy might have, and to shape his behavior, as well as the whole relationship, into something other than just sex. If engaged in "honorable" homosexual love — a boy should be restrained and should refuse many times the advances of his older partner, and older men should give gifts, advice and take care of the boy's honor — partners should behave with restraint and finally get to the last stage of homosexual love, which is deep "platonic" friendship, lasting a lifetime. The emphasis is on a different kind of relationship than sexual, where the sexual act will no longer be important. Again, the accent is on temperance, for both partners. For a younger partner, it is even more emphasized: he should take care, because of his background and status, that even the slightest wrong behavior in this instance could cause him to lose his honor. He will be judged and condemned by public opinion if he gives up to advances too soon, or if he is promiscuous, or an easy target (Demosthenes, *Eroticos*, 53–55). If so, he won't be able to take his position in a society and won't be respected. On the contrary, if he behaves well in love relations, a young man will celebrate the name of his parents by being strong, and above his friends and suitors with his resistance and temperance.

Not all relationships had an age difference, although it is impossible from the literature to determine the real age and status difference most of the time. It looks like relations between two young boys were tolerated, while the same relationships between two adult men were met with criticism most of the time. Certain rules and advice should be obeyed, in order to shape the relationship into an "honorable" one. First, after a certain age, it was not considered good and honorable for a man to be in a position of a younger partner; although not clear, it looks like the first beard marked that boundary: the first razor should cut the beard and all ties of love (Plato, *The Symposium*, 181 d-e). Boys who accepted advances and affairs after that age were severely criticized, the same as older men who pursued them in spite of their "growing up". A common subject in the literature was how to make such relationships less temporary, due to the fleeting nature of partnerships, or a fading boy's beauty. At the same time, it was not good to love a boy who had grown up. On the one hand, a boy was acknowledged to be "an object of desire", but on the other, many men's relationships were surrounded by silence, and the ones who broke it were criticized (Foucault 1980). There was a constant encouragement to make/turn homosexual relationships into a deep friendship, which would last through a lifetime. An entire speech of Socrates was dedicated to this subject, showing his deepest concern because of the fleeting nature of homosexual love between males (Xenophon, *The Symposium*, VIII, 18). Also, any pleasure that a boy might feel in homosexual love was denied, and criticized. Between a boy and an older adult male there could not be any common pleasure. Socrates argued "A boy, after all, does not

enjoy like a woman does, in love pleasures with a man; he stays like a sober observer of man's love drunkenness" (Xenophon, *The Symposium*, VIII, 21). The ones who enjoyed such activity, along with their easy acceptance of many relationships — dressing up, using make up, decoration and perfumes — were severely condemned. A boy may give in, staying completely cold at the same time, but only if he feels admiration and gratefulness for his male friend.

And although homosexual love was not forbidden, there were laws that restricted sexual behavior generally. For example, there was a law against rape of slaves and children; in Athens, there was a law which protected free (citizens') children against adult males, who were not allowed to go into their schools, and a law that protected children from their teachers and fathers, and from slaves who would be put to death if caught seducing children (Dover 1978). The one who committed "debauchery", who is promiscuous, should be excluded from every public and honorable function. Male sexual promiscuity was considered "atimia", which means to publicly acknowledge that a man has no honor. It was tolerated for young boys to be passive partners in homosexual relationships, since they were young, without status and experience; but for adult males passive roles were condemned.

Apart from relationships with men, the Greeks placed great value on marriage with women. Almost all philosophers were married, and many had not only a legal wife, but also a concubine or mistress (*hetera*) (de Crescenzo 1986). Socrates, for example, had two wives, with whom he had 3 sons; according to some reports, Socrates loved to love certain *hetera* (de Crescenzo 1986:9–14). Pericleus was called a womanizer, while Aristipus and Demosthenes both were married with children, and in love with the same *hetera* (*ibid.*: 57). Aristotle, also, had a legal wife, and a concubine with whom he bore one son (*ibid.*: 108).

While marriages and having offspring were encouraged, young unmarried boys and males generally did not get many chances to meet girls and women, married or not. Women in Athens lived in a sort of seclusion, separated from public life and males. The data, of course, come from literature. In Plato's dialogues, almost all orators are males; ancient comedies are depicting also mostly males. From Xenophon's and Plato's *Symposiums*, it is clearly seen that in all-male gatherings only women who could not lose their reputation were present. In one court case (against Neera) a testimony that one woman sat, ate and drank with the guests is taken that she was a prostitute (Kitto 1963). The house in Athens was divided into separate parts for males and females, and the women's part had bars and latches (Xenophon, *Economy*). It is said that women left their houses only when escorted, except when they gathered for a women's ceremony. In tragedies, young girls are ordered to be in their houses. Sophocles (*Antigone*, 579) wrote: "Nor did he [a father] allow her to show herself out of the house before she was married." Even married women, according to did not go out very much. For example, all shopping was done by a husband: what he bought, a slave carried home (Kitto 1963:268). In many comedies, a young man falls in love with a girl whom he meets at a religious ceremony — which means that he could not fall in love with a female in everyday social life, since females were not available.

Actually, almost all romantic relationships that we hear about are with young boys and men, and they are mentioned often. Perhaps this is no surprise, where women were guarded and separated from public life. Foucault argues that ancient Greece had a shortage of women (Foucault 1980:218). But, given the number of *hetera* of the elite, there may have been significant competition for women. Also, because only females

who were citizens could reproduce citizens, there must have been competition among male citizens for such wives. Marriages were arranged at an early age for females: around 14 or 15, with older men, sometimes twice their age, around 30, or 35 (Kitto 1963, Foucault 1980). It was expected from women to have sexual relationships only with their husbands; women should bear children who would inherit their fathers' citizenship; punishment for female adultery was severe. Female children did not receive education; women did not have the right to vote or to be in the assembly, nor to have any public position. Every female, from birth onwards, was said to be a "protégé" of her father, husband or closest male relative (Kitto 1963:269). On the other hand, marriage was encouraged for everybody, and even taken as a duty. Plato (Plato, *Laws*, VI, 783, e) emphasized that both spouses must care for each other and watch their own behavior, and have a certain right moral attitude, in order to have "the best and the most beautiful children" for the polis. Also, having offspring was the first reason and the duty of marriage, so, that when a man died, he wouldn't be left without "the glory" and "the name" (Plato, *Laws*, IV, 721, b-c). Marriage in Athens was considered to be the only legal, special and authorized relationship to bear children and future citizens. Aristote, for example, discouraged any kind of sexual relationship outside the house, that is, any extramarital affairs that a man might have. Actually, we find a morality that requires that both spouses remain faithful to one another. Such ideas can be found in Plato, Xenophon, Pseudo-Aristote and Isocrates. Although rare, these ideas were part of the famous Greek temperance in men. Because of the fact that he is married, a man should reduce and restrain his sexual activity outside of marriage.

In all thinking about boy-love, the principle of total abstinence is emphasized, whose model was Socrates, with his consistent resistance to temptations. Because "honorable" boy-love was tolerated in Greece, it is assumed today that this was a sign of freedom in this area. However, the Greeks accentuated the demand for the highest discipline regarding homosexual love, much more than for health or marriage, and to whose adherence they watched closely. Sexual behavior in Greek thought demanded respect for temperance and discipline. It is clear that classical Greek arguments focused on the social relationship between males, not the satisfaction of passion. Their concern shows the most elaborated forms of restraint. The famous Greek temperance carries with it an ideal of restraint in all physical contact with boys.

The subject of temperance/moderation is continued in Roman philosophical thought. Marriage contracts from Roman time do not allow a man to have any extramarital affairs, a female or a male lover (Vatin 1970 203–206). Although present in Rome and practiced especially by some Emperors, boy-love had even more restrictions for ordinary people than in ancient Greece. The famous law Scantinia did not forbid homosexuality, but it protected young males who were not slaves from any possible abuse; boys from rich and respected Roman families were protected well by family and state laws (Boswell 1980: 61). However, there are indications that pederasty was practiced mainly with young slaves, who, because of their low status, were not legally protected. On the other hand, in Roman philosophy, boy-love was never defined as sexual pleasure, and the emphasis was on avoidance of sexual contact. For example, Cicero and Seneca, both Stoics, condemned homosexual activity. Cicero described homosexual activity as shameful, when practiced openly. Even when kept within bonds of modesty, such love causes unrestrained anxiety, passion and longing (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.32–34., Greenberg 1988). Also, Musonius Rufus, another philosopher from the first century AD, argued that heterosexual marriage, based on

perfect companionship and mutual love of husband and wife, is the foundation of social life, necessary for the perpetuation of the species; homosexual love, on the other hand, is an outrage against nature, and all adulterous relations should be condemned (Rufus, Pabrics, XIV, 71.). In the third century, other Greek and Roman writers, not necessarily Stoics, held that procreation was the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse (Boswell 1980:129–130). However, homosexuality was not illegal. Jurists of the early third century extended earlier moral legislations to prohibit the seduction of a male minor. One of the most eminent, Julius Paulus, praetorian prefect under Alexander Severus, wrote that someone who forced a slave to submit to a homosexual act was to be considered guilty of corrupting him. Sextus Empiricus, a Greek physician in the early third century, proclaimed that homosexuality was illegal (Greenberg 1988:228). However, first real legislation came in the fourth century.

Conclusion

It would be wrong to think that Christianity brought about moral strictness in sexual behavior, and that pagan thought allowed many forms of sexual freedom. The principle of strict and carefully maintained sexual restraint does not originate in the Christian era, the classical period, nor from philosophical perspectives like Stoicism in the Hellenistic and Roman π poque. From the philosophical writings of Plato, Isocrates and Aristote, we see that marriage demanded restraint of sexual activity outside marriage from both spouses; and that men were encouraged, in order to have an honorable homosexual relationship, to restrain themselves from sexual contact with boys. The Aurea Mediocrita, or Golden Mean advises restraint from all passions. Homosexual love was allowed, and poetry and literary works maybe gave it the highest value, but it was demanded that pederasts be restrained from sexual contact, so that such love could keep the spiritual value it was supposed to have.

Nevertheless, in less than a century after the “flash of Athenian questioning” — the Golden Age of Ancient Greece, skepticism and science — Classical Greek civilization based on their city state—polis, had effectively ended. At that time, Athens was facing deep moral disintegration, with its institutions and social life falling apart. Long wars with Persia and Sparta contributed to this disintegration; also, the IV century B.C. was marked with rising individualism, a perspective clearly seen in arts, philosophy and drama. Sculpturing, for example, becomes introspective, dealing with individual features and present moods, instead of presenting the ideal or general (Kitto 1963). In everyday life, ordinary citizens became less and less interested in polis and its management. In the whole Greek land, polis was dying, but in Athens it was falling apart. As a consequence, traditional thinking lost its ground to individualism.

At the end of the Golden Age, Socrates was put to death for undermining the ancestor worship of Athens, through his encouragement of skepticism among its youth. While Athenian youths and outsiders greatly admired Socrates, some Athenians apparently did not. He threatened their traditions. After the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian War against Sparta, Athenians began to question whether the abandonment of tradition and traditional customs had contributed to the loss. Suspicion fell particularly on the Sophists, whose teaching of cultural relativism seemed to encourage the adoption of new ways of thinking. In contrast to Socrates and Sophists,

Sophocle's plays tried to preserve traditional Greek values. Sophocles was awarded the highest Athenian honor, "general".

Thus, it is wrong to think that the Greeks, because they did not forbid this kind of relationship, did not worry about homosexual love. They spent considerable time philosophizing about it, and how to make it morally honorable. The Greek writers show a powerful interest in promoting K—love/phillia—and reducing appetite driven r—hedonism. Homosexual behavior challenged this ideal and therefore was the focus of much concern. Homosexual love was considered to be "honorable" only if it could be transformed into a relationship based on true friendship and without sex – that is, K without r.

Because of the great importance of reproduction for males, the greatest competition among them in human societies is sexual. Yet humans have been most successful in leaving descendants, for a long time apparently, by influencing their male descendants to curb their sexual appetite and be responsive to others, especially their ancestors, and eventually to take a responsibility of being a parent themselves.

In conclusion, the Greeks, twenty-five hundred years ago, promoted this strategy eloquently, and for that we admire them still.

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Јелена ЧВОРОВИЋ

ПРОМИСКУИТЕТ КОД АНТИЧКИХ ГРКА

У антрополошкој литератури, Стара Грчка је много пута наведена као пример сексуалне слободе, нарочито у односу на мушко хомосексуално понашање. Анализа литературе и података који се односе на сексуално понашање у Старој Грчкој не подржава такав закључак.