

**Book Review:**  
***Homosexuality and American Public Life***

Edited by Christopher Wolfe  
Spence Publishing Company, Dallas, TX, 1999

*Reviewer: William L. Dreikorn, D. Min., Ph.D.*

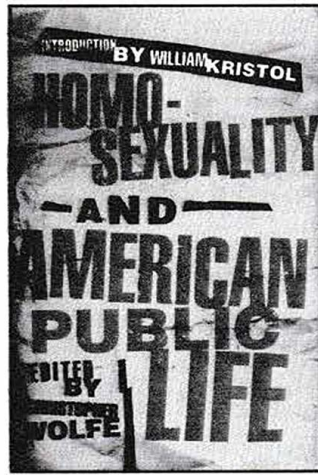
This book is based upon presentations given at the June 1997 American Public Philosophy Conference, an historic conference held in Washington, D.C. which assembled leading national scholars to discuss the profound impact of homosexuality on our nation's public philosophy.

This volume is offered as a contribution to reasonable discussion of the issues, and as an effort to provide a sound intellectual framework for the debate.

In the introduction, William Kristol notes why such books are needed. "America today," observes Kristol, "is perilously close to being two nations, in the sense of two cultures, each of whose adherents barely understand the concerns and beliefs of the other's." Kristol believes there is no longer any way to avoid debating this difficult and divisive question.

Part I of the book is a discussion of medical and scientific issues related to homosexuality. Jeffrey Satinover reviews the biological explanations of the etiology of homosexuality. He points to the results of an exhaustive review of virtually all the existing literature on the biological foundations for homosexuality conducted by Byne and Parsons, and notes how their analysis revealed "that not only is there little convincing evidence for a biological explanation of homosexuality, but there is little high-quality, scientific research for any explanation."

George Rekers next gives a survey of the common developmental influences associated with homosexual attractions. Then Robert Fitzgibbons describes measures used to prevent and treat homosexual attractions. Joseph Nicolosi contributed a chapter on the influence of self-deception in a homosexual identity. Of interest is Nicolosi's conception of a three-step, psycho-social model—that is, gender distortion in childhood; eventual assimilation into the gay counterculture, and "the expansion of the gay community's successful self-deception into the further deception of a large portion of society." Concluding Part I is a discussion by Patrick Derr on how the present attitude of "AIDS exceptionalism" has impacted our national response to this disease.



*A Modern Classic on  
Homosexuality*

Part II looks at the natural-law arguments about homosexuality. Drawing on the work of Thomas Aquinas, Janet E. Smith argues that homosexual intercourse is fundamentally flawed, because it is not compatible with what Aquinas saw as the naturally inherent good of heterosexual intercourse. Additionally, Robert George reasons that marital sexual acts have an essentially different moral component, because sexual morality must hold the potential for what is known as the "one-flesh communion of marriage."

Part III considers why homosexuality needs to be a topic of public concern. Based on an analysis of several constitutional arguments, Hadley Arkes explains why the law cannot maintain a neutral stance on sexual orientation. Michael Pakaluk then endeavors to show the negative impact on the family and society in general that would result from acceptance of same-sex marriage. Next, the current efforts to legitimize same-sex marriage are reviewed by Gerard Bradley. The section concludes with David Coolidge pointing out the essence of the debate on same-sex marriage—namely, the question as to the nature and meaning of marriage.

Father Richard John Neuhaus concludes the book with a discussion of what he expects the future may hold. Father Neuhaus contends that America may well tolerate homosexuality, but Americans are not of a mind to affirm it. Referring to the gay community's repeated question, "Can't we talk about it?" he raises an important point about what the tenor of the discussion needs to be: "We will talk about it, God willing, in a manner that is informed by the classical virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice," and "in a manner that is graced by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Love above all. Love, no matter what."

For anyone wishing to gain greater insight into the complex issues involved in the debate over homosexuality in American life, this volume will provide sound information and much food for thought. The tone of the book is not argumentative, but informational.

Indeed, more such top-quality, scholarly resources are needed to frame the arguments of this debate on the role of homosexuality in our communal life.