

THE MEANING OF "NATURE" IN ROMANS 1 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL PROSCRIPTIONS OF HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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In recent years various attempts have been made to give approval to homosexual nature or behavior on the basis of the Bible. Various passages of Scripture, including Romans 1, have been reinterpreted so that the traditional interpretation has been found incorrect or at least irrelevant for the modern age.

Part of this new approach to Romans 1 focuses on new ways of understanding the meaning of "nature" (*physis*) in vv 26-27. For some it is limited to "what is natural to me."¹ It is argued that Paul does not refer to those whose own nature or primary orientation is homosexual. Hence Paul condemns heterosexuals acting as homosexuals (perverts) in a context of idolatry and lust; he does not condemn true homosexuals, homosexuals born such (inverts), for practicing homosexuality. Boswell adds that it has nothing to do with natural law since this concept did not exist until many centuries after Paul.

Others believe that the foregoing distinction made between inversion and perversion regarding "nature" is legitimate for modern times but that Paul was unaware of it in his day. The Bible "knows nothing of inversion as an inherited trait, or inherent condition due to psychological or glandular causes, and consequently regards all homosexual practice as evidence of perversion."² Therefore Paul could hardly have made distinctions regarding perversion and inversion when these were unintelligible to him. Hence Paul is simply irrelevant or incomplete on the question of homosexuality.

Still another view holds that "nature" has nothing to do with Jewish views of the creation or with theories of natural law. It is a concept ultimately derived from Greek, not Jewish, sources.³ The only model of homosexuality that Paul condemns is the current Greek one—namely, pederasty.⁴ Hence Romans 1 has little or no relevance to the modern model of mutual adult-adult

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¹J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1980) 107-117; L. Scanzoni and V. R. Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (1978) 61-66.

²D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955) 38.

³R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 116-117.

⁴*Ibid.* 116-117, 122.

homosexuality.⁵ There is no way of knowing whether Paul would oppose "the caring adult relationship of mutuality."⁶

The purpose of this article is to make a grammatical, historical and contextual study of "nature." Its findings will then be related to the views expressed above to evaluate their merits.

I. THE LINGUISTIC SETTING OF *PHYSIS*

It is necessary to consider first the possible meanings that *physis* may have in Rom 1:26-27.

1. *Greek usage.* The word *physis* is used profusely in secular Greek. Any citation of uses must necessarily be selective, but I believe that they are representative. The word has these meanings:⁷ (1) origin, including birth and growth;⁸ (2) the natural form⁹ or constitution of a person, animal or thing, including nature or character of a person; (3) the regular order of nature; (4) philosophically, nature as an originating power (parallel to *theos* among the stoics¹⁰), Nature personified, elementary substance (fire, water, air, earth¹¹), the concrete idea of the creation; (5) creature or mankind; (6) kind, sort, species; (7) sex;¹² and (8) approximately equal to law (*nomos*).

In all these uses there is no suggestion that it has the meaning "what is natural to me" or "orientation." The closest approximation is category (2) above: "character, natural disposition, propensity."¹³ Yet this usage is never associated with homosexuality. It points to what results from origin or growth and includes the instinct of animals.

In the third category occur examples of *kata physin* ("according to nature") and *para physin* ("contrary to nature"; cf. Rom 1:26-27). Here is placed the well-known statement by Aristotle (*Politica* 1253): "Man is a political animal by nature" (*physei*).¹⁴

⁵Ibid. 122, 127-128.

⁶Ibid. 128-129.

⁷LSJ; E. A. Barber, *A Supplement* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1968) 149. Translations are either mine or are those of LCL.

⁸As in "the father by birth" (*kata physin*; Polybius *Histories* 3.9.6).

⁹As in "larger than man in appearance" (*kata physin*; Herodotus 8.38).

¹⁰So Marcus Aurelius: "All that is in tune with you, O Universe, is in tune with me . . . O Nature. . . All things come from you, subsist in you, go back to you" (4.23). Cf. Rom 11:36.

¹¹Plato *Laws* 891c.

¹²Ibid. 770d; 944d; Sophocles *Trachiniae* 1062 ("a woman, being a female and not a male by nature"); cf. Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 445.

¹³See Polybius *Histories* 31.25.10 ("Scipio had good natural impulses toward the right").

¹⁴Aristotle goes on to discuss whether all slavery is against nature (*para physin*; *Politica* 1254).

Gunther Harder basically follows the outline of LSJ in discussing the classical usage of *physis*.¹⁵ He points out that early in Greek thought law and nature were distinguished as two different entities that determined one's life. Finally nature was "distinguished from the field of morals and ethics."¹⁶

Helmut Koester seeks to show how the concept of *physis* developed in two directions—one emphasizing origin, the other emphasizing being or substance.¹⁷ Although he follows the general outline of the sources above he makes important clarifications and additions. For example, one's tendency, quality or character is called *physis* because this nature is a given and "not dependent on conscious direction or education."¹⁸ Also he notes that Aristotle and Plato developed the two aspects of the idea of nature along the lines of either the true nature of things or the like origin of all being (universal nature).¹⁹ It is this universal nature that was variously equated with deity, and the adjective *physikos* has the sense of "natural law."

In regard to the category of nature and ethics the Greeks, particularly the sophists, often viewed law and nature in antithesis.²⁰ Natural law was considered as consisting of two opposing spheres (nature and law) to which man is subject. "According to nature" means "normal," while "against nature" means "abnormal." These phrases in particular are used in ethical judgments, especially regarding sexual abnormality. Plato condemns pederasty and marriage between men as *para physin*.²¹

Koester's last category concerns nature as a cosmic and vital principle among the stoics. They sought to bridge the antithesis that had been growing in Greek thought. *Physis* becomes a universal divine principle. Man has received the *logos*, his own being, by nature. The goal of life is to attain in living to what corresponds to man's nature or essence. Common sense or reason enables man to know what is *kata physin* and what is *para physin*.²²

Koester clearly shows the shortcoming of Greek thinking, for man is himself nature and in bondage. Man had to turn either inward (so stoicism) or outward away from the natural world (so gnosticism). Only in the Jewish and

¹⁵G. Harder, "Nature," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2. 656-658.

¹⁶Ibid. 658.

¹⁷H. Koester, "*Physis, physikos, physikōs*," *TDNT* 9 (1974) 251-266.

¹⁸Ibid. 253.

¹⁹Ibid. 256.

²⁰Ibid. 261.

²¹Plato *Laws* 636a-b: "The gymnasia and common meals corrupt the pleasures of love which are natural not to man only but also natural to beasts"; 636c: "Pleasure in mating is due to nature (*kata physin*) when male unites with female, but contrary to nature (*para physin*) when male unites with male (*arrenōn*) or female with female (*thēleion*)."²² See also 836a-c; 838; 841d-e.

²²Koester, "*Physis*" 263-266.

Christian belief in nature as the creation of God "did the concept of natural law become significant, since man could relate himself to the Creator and Lawgiver as the ultimate critical court."²³

In the usage of the secular papyri at the time of the NT there occur only two senses of the word. These are (1) birth or physical origin and (2) innate properties or powers—what is derived from origin. *Physikos* means "natural, inward."²⁴

2. *Jewish and Christian usage.* It is very significant that there is no Hebrew equivalent in the OT for *physis*. The Jews did not have the Greek conception of nature due to two facts:²⁵ The Jews referred all existing things to creation or to the Creator God, and the OT is primarily concerned with history, not philosophy and speculation.

In the noncanonical intertestamental literature the term occurs only in the LXX of the Wisdom of Solomon and in pseudepigraphical 3 and 4 Maccabees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. The uses generally correspond to those found in classical Greek.²⁶ The adjective *physikos* does not occur at all in the LXX.

The term is used in the sense of endowment, character and quality (4 Macc 13:27; 16:3; Wis 19:20). In Wis 13:1 men are described as "foolish by nature" (*mataioi physei*); they had no perception of God from his works of creation (13:2-5). Instead they worshiped God's works as their gods.²⁷

Physis also occurs in the sense of human nature to which the law has been adapted ("we know that the Creator of the world, in giving us the law, conforms it to our nature," 4 Macc 5:25). This (*kata physin*) is classical usage.²⁸

Finally *physis*, it is claimed, is used of the regular order of nature, the creation. Here Harder apparently places two similar passages (4 Macc 15:13, 25) where "nature" is linked with "parental love, filial affection, nurture, maternal affections" and with "parenthood, maternal love and the torment of

²³Ibid. 266.

²⁴MM 679.

²⁵Harder, "Nature" 658.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷This is obviously similar to Paul's words in Rom 1:19-23, esp. v 21: Those who turned from honoring God as revealed in creation "became futile in their speculations" (*emataiōthēsan en tois dialogismois autōn*). Paul does not use *physis* in 1:19-23. In a parallel passage (Eph 2:3) he describes lost mankind as we who "were by nature children of wrath." Interestingly, Wisdom refers to homosexuality in 14:26 ("confusion, change, of sex"), and the destruction of Sodom in 10:6-9; 19:13-17.

²⁸Koester, "Physis" 266, reads 4 Macc 5:25, "according to (his) nature," as a reference to God. Yet the placement of *hēmin* tends to support the reading of H. Anderson, which Harder also supports when he translates: "that the Creator of the world, as a Lawgiver, feels for us according to our nature" ("Nature" 658). It is a reference to human, not divine, nature. But by either view "nature" in the sense of the "constitution, essence" of someone is in view. See Anderson, "4 Maccabees," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2. 560.

children." Yet it seems that these passages belong to the above category where "love for children" occurs (4 Macc 16:3).²⁹

Also in the last category belong references to "every mortal creature" (3 Macc 3:29), "natures of animals" (Wis 7:20), and "kinds" of human passions (4 Macc 1:20). Again, however, this last reference may more appropriately be placed in the earlier category. Two references personify *physis* (4 Macc 5:8-9) as the giver of good gifts.³⁰

Another use from pseudepigraphical literature (*T. Naph.* 3:4-5) is especially important for the meaning of Rom 1:26-27, yet it is omitted by Harder. After affirming that God has "made all things good in their order" (2:7), the author notes that Gentiles "have forsaken the Lord and changed their order" (3:3). Then he writes (3:4-5):

But ye shall not be so, my children, recognizing in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord who made all things, that ye become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. In like manner the Watchers also changed the order of their nature, whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account he made the earth without inhabitants and fruitless.

Here the two uses of "the order of nature" (*taxis physis*) fit the first two categories above (character and human nature). The context includes references to creation made by God and asserts that the Lord is recognized there (cf. Rom 1:18-23).

Physis occurs in other places in the Testaments in the sense of the "physical nature" of man (*T. Reub.* 3:1, 3) or "natural power" (*T. Dan* 3:4-5). Anger "blinds one's eyes literally" (2:4).³¹

In summary, the literature of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha supports concepts of *physis* quite similar to those of classical Greek. Two passages (Wis 13:1 with homosexuality and Sodom in its contexts, and *T. Naph.* 3:4-5) have concepts very similar to those in Rom 1:19-27: "men being foolish by nature," and the sin of Sodom described as changing "the order of nature." Yet a clear identification of the physical creation as "nature" is lacking, in line with the OT and contrary to Greek thinking. Harder seems inappropriately to suggest

²⁹Harder, like Koester ("Physis" 267), puts these passages in the third category as referring to "the regular order of nature" evidently because of the presence of *genesis*, "creation" (translated as "filial affection" and "parenthood"), in both passages. Yet in the former passage (15:13) this represents a variant reading with few MSS supporting it; if *genesis*, it would be rendered "love of parents for offspring." Anderson, "4 Maccabees," prefers the reading *genesi*, dative plural of *genos*, "offspring," and renders it "filial affection" (hence practically identical to *genesis*). Other readings are *gennemasi* (practically the same as *genesi*) and *goneusi*, "love for parents." But the close proximity to 16:3 and the use of the same term in 16:3 (*philoteknias*) as 15:25 argue that these two passages belong to the first category above. The only place where nature is personified as a giver of good gifts is the speech of the pagan Antiochus IV (4 Macc 5:8-9), following Greek usage.

³⁰Most of the translations of these passages derive from Anderson, "4 Maccabees," or (for Wisdom) from E. J. Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1938).

³¹The translation of H. C. Kee, "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Pseudepigrapha* (ed. Charlesworth), 1. 808.

such usage by employing the final category above, and Koester fails to note this absence.

The writings of Philo and Josephus also provide additional insight into Jewish thinking about *physis*. Philo in particular makes a significant contribution in his extensive use of the word. Koester writes:

As a central concept in his philosophy and his exposition of the Law, *physis* in Philo unites for the first time in Greek literature the elements in OT and Greek thinking which were to be of decisive significance for the thought of the West: God and *natura creatrix*, creation and the natural world, natural law and divine demand.³²

Philo adopts virtually all of the earlier Greek usages of *physis*, even using it of the creation.³³ Philo's special contribution is to combine the Greek (stoic) concept of nature with the Jewish (OT) understanding of God and the law. The *nomos physeōs* is always the Torah to which even God seems subject. The law follows nature, and nature ratifies law.

The phrases "contrary to nature" and "according to nature" occur frequently. For Philo sexual aberrations are a violation of natural law (*On Abraham* 135-136).³⁴ Philo also writes of the seven natural capacities of man as *kata physin chresis* (cf. *Mut. Nom.* 11-12): sexual potency, speech and the five senses.

Josephus uses *physis* very frequently and reflects all of the common usage of the first century A.D. Like Philo he speaks of the "law of nature" and divine law.³⁵ Marital intercourse and childbirth correspond to the order of nature (*kata physin*), but sexual deviation is *para physin*.³⁶ In *Ant.* 1.200-201 he speaks of the "violence and outrage" of the Sodomites, and in *Ag. Ap.* 2.199 homosexuality deserves the death penalty. "No sexual connections" are lawful except the natural union of man and wife.

As in the NT *physis* occurs rarely (three times), and *physikos* does not occur at all in the apostolic fathers.³⁷ No doubt this is for the same reason as for the NT. The phrase "law of nature" is also very rare.

³²Koester, "Physis" 267.

³³Ibid. 267-269; Harder, "Nature" 658-659.

³⁴The men of Sodom, Philo says, "threw off from their necks the law of nature and applied themselves to . . . forbidden forms of intercourse. Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbors, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive. . . . Then as little by little they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women, they saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease" (*On Abraham* 135-136; see also 137 for *kata physin*).

³⁵Harder, "Nature" 659. See Josephus *Ant.* 1.54; 2.292; 3.88; 4.8, 48; *J. W.* 1.544.

³⁶See Josephus *Ant.* 1.322; 3.261, 275; *Ag. Ap.* 2.199 ("sodomy" = *pros arrenas arrenōn*); 2.273, 275.

³⁷It is used of the sex of the hyena (corresponding to *genos*) in *Barn.* 10:7. In Ignatius it is used of the "true and proper nature" of Christians (*Ign. Eph.* 1:1; *Ign. Trall.* 1:1). The latter reference describes conscience as unstained "not according to use but according to nature" (*ou kata chrēsin alla kata physin*; cf. *Rom* 1:26-27).

In certain apocryphal Acts and in the apologists frequency increases. The succeeding Church fathers use the term profusely.³⁸ Although all usages occur, those used for the creation or world are limited to a dozen or so.

II. THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF *PHYSIS*

Here it is necessary to consider the use of *physis* in its historical setting, especially as it pertains to homosexuality. We must also examine whether the term is limited to pederasty and whether that is virtually the only form known and practiced in Paul's day.

1. *Non-Biblical sources.* Homosexuality seems to have existed more widely among the ancient Greeks than among any other people. The predominant form was pederasty.³⁹

Plato, in the last work written before his death, implicitly and explicitly witnesses to the pervasiveness of homosexuality and advocates legislation to regulate it (*Laws* 636a-c; 835c; 836a-e; 838b-839b; 840de; 841de). There were laws against homosexuality in fifth-to-fourth-century Greece. In certain instances the death penalty was prescribed.⁴⁰ Plato treated homosexual love philosophically, and this seems to point to the existence of homosexual orientation.⁴¹ Examples of lesbianism⁴² as well as male adult-adult homosexuality are found.⁴³ The Greeks recognized the difference between what is natural and

³⁸LPGL 1494-1503. About eighteen columns are needed to cover the noun, adjective and adverb. The Church fathers are virtually united in their condemnation of homosexuality. See D. F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes?", VC 38 (1984) 125-153, who effectively refutes Boswell and others who have raised doubts about this witness of the fathers, especially as based upon the word *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10).

³⁹According to P. E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) 11, homosexuality was widespread and generally accepted among Greeks even though restricted by law. It rested on narcissism and took the forms of pederasty and male prostitution (pp. 34, 56-60, 74). It was intrinsically related to religion; the gods practiced pederasty (p. 61). It probably receded in popularity after the fifth century B.C. (p. 71).

⁴⁰K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1978) 13-27. Aeschines *Timarchus* 12 refers to three laws regulating pederasty and homosexual prostitution in Athens, even calling for the death penalty and prohibition from holding office. Plato *Symposium* 182a-184c records how pederasty is legally restricted in certain regions. See Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 49-52.

⁴¹As Dover, *Greek* 12, seems to admit. Note "inclination" in Plato (*Laws* 840d-e). See D. J. Atkinson, *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship*, 92-95. Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 52-53, dismisses Platonic love, the philosophical ideal, as a cover-up, yet he admits that inversion and perversion (if a valid distinction today) must have existed in the past as well (pp. 28, 32-34). See also Boswell, *Christianity* 81-87.

⁴²Dover, *Greek* 171-173. See Plato *Laws* 636c; 839d. Scroggs admits some examples during Paul's time (*Homosexuality* 140-144), as does Boswell, *Christianity* 82-84.

⁴³Dover, *Greek* 19-31, 37, 99. See Plato *Laws* 636a-c; 836a-c ("with men and boys as with women"). Even Scroggs (*Homosexuality* 32-34, 130) has difficulty trying to find only pederasty involved. See examples of adult mutuality and permanency in Boswell, *Christianity* 82-87.

unnatural (cf. Plato *Laws* 636a-c; 836a-c; 838; 841de).⁴⁴ Greek religion gave significant support to homosexuality.⁴⁵

What was the situation in Rome or Corinth at the time of Paul? The lexical research above shows that Philo and Josephus condemned homosexuality in general, not only pederasty, in the strongest of terms.⁴⁶

In addition moral philosophers were questioning the merits of homosexuality in Paul's day.⁴⁷ Seneca condemns homosexual exploitation (*Moral Epistles* 47.7-8) that forces an adult slave to dress, be beardless, and behave as a woman. Plutarch speaks of homosexuality as "contrary to nature" (*Dialogue on Love* 751c-e; 752b-c). Finally Dio Chrysostom exposes the exploitative and lustful nature of homosexuality (*Discourse* 7.133, 135, 151-152; 21.6-10; 77/78.36).

Other evidence of the prevalence and form of homosexuality during Paul's day comes from Roman legislation. As early as 226 B.C. the *Lex Scantinia* penalized homosexual practices.⁴⁸ Cicero refers to subsequent application of it in 50 B.C., and other references are made to it by Suetonius (applied under Domitian), Juvenal and others (including Tertullian). The *Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* (about 17 B.C.), initially concerned with sexual offenses against a virgin or widow (*stuprum*), came to be applied to sexual acts committed with boys (third century) and then to homosexual acts between adults (fourth century). Justinian's *Codex* (sixth century) applied *Lex Julia* to homosexuality further⁴⁹ and set the legal tradition in western civilization.

Another evidence of homosexuality comes from the poets, satirists and historians of the day. Juvenal and Martial wrote of formal marriage unions of homosexuals. Historians and others viewed the second century B.C. as the turning point in Roman history. With military conquests achieved, Rome

⁴⁴Dover, *Greek* 67-68, believes that the active partner is acting naturally and the passive one unnaturally. This is questionable and contradicted by Paul's use of "nature" and "natural" (Rom 1:26-27).

⁴⁵Even Dover acknowledges the critical role of religion in Greek homosexuality. Greek gods (e.g. Eros) were involved in homosexual relations. Plato (*Laws* 838e-839b) called for religious sanctions to sexual legislation. Finally Dover says that homosexuality developed more extensively among the Greeks than other peoples because the "Greeks neither inherited nor developed a belief that a divine power had revealed to mankind a code of laws for the regulation of sexual behavior; they had no religious institutions possessed of the authority to enforce sexual prohibitions" (*Greek* 63, 166, 203).

⁴⁶Philo (*On Abraham* 26.133-136) cites homosexuality as unnatural and associated with the "curse of a female disease" at Sodom. He cannot be limited to pederasty, it seems (contra Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 88-91). Josephus refers to Sodom (*Ant.* 1.200-201; cf. 1.194-195) and reflects on the danger of homosexuality in his day (15.28-29). See also *Ag. Ap.* 2.199.

⁴⁷See V. P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) 60-63.

⁴⁸According to Bailey, *Homosexuality* 65-67. Also see V. L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (New York: Meridian, 1979) 31-32. Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 52, sides with Boswell's negative assessment of this and other early legislation (pp. 65-71), but Bailey argues well for its application to homosexuality.

⁴⁹Other legislation came under the emperors Constantius and Constans (A.D. 342) against the passive sodomist, and the Theodosian Code (A.D. 390) called for the death of the active sodomite. See Bailey, *Homosexuality* 70-81.

underwent "a moral crisis from which she never recovered."⁵⁰ It came about from the direct influx into Rome of "Asiatic luxury and Greek manners" that included homosexuality and other debauchery.⁵¹

2. *Sacred sources.* Throughout Scripture, adult homosexuality is assumed. This is apparent in the record of Sodom (Genesis 19; "men" of the city desired "men"), Gibeah (Judges 19), and other condemnations of sodomy (Deut 23:17-18; Lev 18:22; 20:13). This is the case with the intertestamental literature also. Only in *T. Levi* 17:11 is pederasty specifically cited.

Throughout Scripture the condemnation is universal and absolute. It is never contemplated that one specific form of homosexuality is condemned while others are tolerated or accepted, whether this be homosexual rape (claimed for Genesis 19; Judges 19), male prostitution (claimed for Deuteronomy 23; 2 Kgs 23:7; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; Leviticus 18; 20; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:8-10), pederasty (claimed for the NT, esp. Rom 1:26-27), or perversion—that is, abandoning one's "natural" orientation for another (claimed for Romans 1). In Paul the passive (*malakoi*) and active (*arsenokoitai*) partners are outside the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9).

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXTUAL SETTING OF *PHYSIS*

In the NT the noun *physis* occurs fourteen times (eleven in Paul), the adjective three times (Rom 1:26-27; 2 Pet 2:12), the adverb once (Jude 10).

The non-Pauline uses are very few (five). The noun has the common Greek sense of "kind of beast" and "human nature" (Jas 3:7 twice) and "divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). In two places both the adverb (Jude 10) and the adjective (2 Pet 2:12) refer to natural, irrational understanding comparable to that of beasts.

The setting of the word outside Romans offers few (four) instances (all involve the noun). It refers to the general order of nature—that is, what is fitting in regard to hairstyles (1 Cor 11:14; there is no idea here of a divine Creator or creation). In Gal 2:15 *physei Ioudaioi* refers to those being Jews in essence, in their true nature, by descent, just as Rom 2:27 refers to the "uncircumcision by nature," Gentiles essentially or in their true nature. In Gal 4:8 the term means that those "not gods by nature" were not essentially deity; they had no divine quality or essence. In Eph 2:3 the word refers to the fallen nature of Jews (vv 1-3). This usage has some bearing on the meaning in Romans 2, it seems.

⁵⁰D. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) 17. See Bailey, *Homosexuality* 82-86, for examples of the homosexual literature of the era.

⁵¹Ibid. 18, 36. Livy *History of Rome* 39.6.7 placed the turning point at 187 B.C.; Polybius *Histories* 31.25.3-5 (cf. 6.57.5; Diodorus 31.26) placed it at 168; L. Calpurnius Piso put it at 154. The historian Sallust concurred in these assessments, as did the senators Cato the Censor and Scipio Aemilianus, who made strong speeches against the decline. At the same time (168) Antiochus IV was seeking to Hellenize Palestine, sparking the Maccabean revolt that cleansed the temple of idolatry in 165. What the Romans were not able to accomplish the Jews were able to do because of their faith in a transcendent God and his revealing a code of laws regulating sexual behavior, among other things.

In Romans outside of chap. 1 the noun refers to the Hellenistic-Jewish idea (as in Philo) of natural law (2:14), with the latter identifiable with the Mosaic law of the OT.⁵² The Gentiles possess a natural law that they obey naturally.

In Rom 2:27 Gentiles "by nature" refers to what Gentiles are essentially (see above on Gal 2:15). Finally *physis* occurs in Rom 11:21, 24 in reference to the olive tree grown naturally (*kata physin*), with no artificial intervention (i.e. Israel). The Gentiles are a wild olive tree by nature (*kata physin*) and were grafted contrary to nature (*para physin*) into a cultivated olive tree (Israel).

With regard to Rom 1:26-27 the following considerations are necessary: the meaning of the words *physis* and *physikos*, the nature of the homosexuality involved, and the significance of the passage for the contemporary expression of homosexuality.

In light of the foregoing study of the Greek terms, for both the noun (which occurs in an adverbial prepositional phrase, "changed the natural use into the [use] contrary to nature") and the adjective (used twice) the meaning is the same. Koester remarks: "The stress on sexual faults corresponds to the so-called Noahic commandments of rabbinic Judaism but in both tenor and formulation it is in every way Greek in Paul, the idea being that of a violation of the natural order."⁵³

Harder basically concurs. By way of Hellenistic Judaism this Greek (especially stoic) concept found a limited place in Christian thought. Paul's use points in two opposing directions: "It emphasizes the gap between Jews and non-Jews," and "it indicates what they have in common."⁵⁴

If these observations are correct, then the view of those who see *physis* as meaning "what is natural to me" and thus try to justify inversion or orientation is wrong. Never does the term have such a meaning in Greek literature or Biblical contexts.⁵⁵ If Plato could earlier write about Platonic homosexuality and orientation, his last work (*Laws*) gives no hint of this meaning. Even if it did, his *Laws* make it clear that homosexuality is something to be legislated as harmful to society and unnatural.

It is significant, however, that Paul avoids Greek formulations in the preceding verses. In 1:18-25 Paul avoids total use of *physis* to refer to the works of creation (as also in Acts 17), as is the pattern in the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha and the OT (the latter never uses the term). The rest of the NT follows this pattern also.⁵⁶

⁵²Koester, "Physis" 274. See also 1 Tim 1:8-11, where the Mosaic law gives way to (natural?) law in general, and then this all is said to accord with the gospel.

⁵³Ibid. 273. He has here in mind the Greek usage, especially in Plato, of *kata physin* and *para physin* for "normal, natural" and "abnormal, unnatural" (contra Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 114).

⁵⁴Harder, "Nature" 661.

⁵⁵One searches in vain for a commentator who gives *physis* this meaning. Even Scroggs doubts the validity of such a distinction or its presence here. See also Paul's use in Rom 11:21, 24.

⁵⁶Harder, "Nature" 660-661. Note that the term never occurs in the more "Semitic" gospels (and never in John's and Luke's usage).

Now since Philo and Josephus use the term profusely in accord with Greek usage it is clear that Paul is more a Hebraist or Biblicist than a Hellenist, even in Rom 1:26-27. Paul follows linguistically and theologically the OT (Lev 18:22; 20:13)⁵⁷ and the Jewish intertestamental literature. This is not accidental but "at least in part it is also a deliberate theological decision which rests on the fact that there is no place for 'natural theology' in the thinking of the N.T."⁵⁸ Paul may also be following the lead of *T. Naph.* 3:4-5; *T. Asher* 7:1; *T. Benj.* 9:1; *T. Levi* 14:6; or 2 *Enoch* 10:4-5; 34:1-3; or Wisdom of Solomon.

This means that *physis* refers to what is the constitution of man, his being, as derived from the Creator (Genesis 1-2). Note how the Creator and creation immediately precede in the context (Rom 1:19-23). Plato and the Greeks, having no transcendent Creator and deifying nature itself, saw "natural" differently. But their terminology parallels Jewish-Christian thinking.

In regard to the nature of homosexuality, for Scroggs to claim that Paul "must have had, *could only have had*, pederasty in mind"⁵⁹ is untenable.

First, this assumes "that Greco-Roman culture decisively influenced New Testament statements about homosexuality" and that "Paul is dependent for his judgment that it is against nature ultimately on Greek, not Jewish sources . . . not on some doctrine of creation."⁶⁰ This overlooks the context and Paul's dependency on OT concepts, as shown above.

Second, Paul's words themselves contradict this view and support a much more general idea of homosexuality, which would include adult-adult mutuality. Several terms bear this out.

Paul writes literally "males with males committing indecent acts"; he does not say "men with boys" (as Plato is capable of saying: *Laws* 836a-c). This phrase appears to be unique with Paul.

He compares ("likewise") lesbianism with male perversion. As lesbianism was usually between adults in mutuality, so the force of the comparative argues for male adult-adult mutuality.

The phrase "natural use" or "function" argues for activity or "relations" (NIV) of adults, not adult-child behavior, and not an orientation alone nor a Platonic relationship.

⁵⁷Note how Paul coins *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10) from Lev 18:22; 20:13.

⁵⁸Koester, "Physis" 271.

⁵⁹Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 122 (italics his). His exclusive model of pederasty seems to be a myth. He himself admits some texts have examples of permanency (pp. 30-31, 57-58), older adults (pp. 32-33), near equals in age (p. 34). Indeed some younger men played the active partners over older men (pp. 33-34). His claim that today's culture emphasizes "the importance of equality and mutuality in all relationships" (p. 36) is hardly believable. It is a myth for today's homosexual community where only 1% of homosexuals have had fewer than 8 lifetime partners, 75% of homosexual men report more than 30 partners, and the average homosexual has had 59 to 500 different sexual contacts, depending on the study used. Most AIDS victims have had more than 1000 sexual contacts. See R. Magnuson, *Are "Gay Rights" Right?* (St. Paul: Berean League Fund, 1985) 68, 77-78.

⁶⁰Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 16, 116-117. To say that no Greco-Roman text, nor Paul, seeks to explain why homosexuality is against nature (p. 116) is to overlook the fact that both Biblical (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and non-Biblical (Plato *Laws* 636c) authors compare it to sex with women or with animals (*Laws* 836a-c). This implies a common point of comparison: the given nature of the creature involved. It could not be as subjective as each personal disposition, propensity or orientation.

"Degrading passions" (v 26) and "burned in their desire" argue that this is not Platonic nor morally neutral, whether referring to propensity or orientation or activity.

The terms "toward one another," "men with men," "in themselves" and "their error" all argue for adult reciprocal mutuality and mutual culpability, which would not characterize pederasty. As the error is mutual, so is the recompense.

The idea of "exchanged . . . abandoned the natural function" suggests that adult sexual relations are intended.

If the "model" of homosexuality makes a difference regarding acceptability or culpability, why is Scripture silent on the matter? Why is there no explicit debate over the matter in Philo or Josephus or among the Greeks? Even if one would grant that Philo and Josephus use the Biblical accounts of adult homosexuality (Genesis 19) to condemn contemporary pederasty, does this not argue that they would view both as abhorrent? If the model here is pederasty, then Paul has no comment on bisexuality or male prostitution (both were common).

Scroggs' position suggests that the model of adult mutuality was unknown or little known in ancient times. Yet if it exists now, it certainly existed then. Man's nature has not changed, nor has the power of the gospel. Scroggs has no evidence that mutuality is more common today than it was then.

In regard to the matter of the relevance of the passage to contemporary society, the net effect of all the revisionist interpreters of Rom 1:26-27 is to make the passage irrelevant. Those who argue that homosexual inversion was unknown by Paul cannot escape the question: Was it then nonexistent? Since proponents must hold inversion to be universal for their view to be valid, it must either be included in Paul's terminology (and be condemned) or one rejects Paul as authoritative for contemporary man.⁶¹ This must follow, for elsewhere he allows for no sexual expression except within a heterosexual, monogamous, permanent marriage (cf. Rom 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 5-7; 2 Corinthians 6; Ephesians 5; Colossians 3; 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Timothy 3, 5; Titus 2; cf. Heb 13:4).

For Scroggs to make the model of mutuality unknown to Paul, or not addressed by him, flies in the face of the examples Scroggs and others allow and other evidences above. To assert that one cannot know what Paul would have felt about this model is to totally reject his clear teaching elsewhere as to what constitutes acceptable sexual behavior. One could just as legitimately argue for such a model within incest, fornication or adultery—as long as permanency, mutuality, etc., characterized it. This approach sets the end as adult mutuality and justifies any means to that end.

IV. CONCLUSION

The only model of sexual expression contemplated in Scripture is that which is patterned after the creation model of Genesis 1-2. This is the pattern that our Lord (Matthew 5; 19) and his disciples taught or commanded.

⁶¹As Scroggs, *Homosexuality* 124-125, acknowledges.

If it has been at least reasonably demonstrated that Paul opposes all forms of sexual expression between the same sex in Romans 1, then his judgments are, as Scroggs admits, "eternally valid."⁶² Revisionist interpretations would do well to come under the authority of Scripture.

⁶²Ibid. 125.