

Letters to the Editor  
The St. Catherines Standard

April 5, 2001

Dear Sir,

A persistent example of confused thinking popped up in your newspaper recently in a letter by Stephanie Sykes. Namely, the seductive - but grossly false - idea that "love" excuses any kind of behaviour ("A couple's gender shouldn't matter as long as both of them are in love," Letters, Feb. 24).

I suppose she is not to blame. Unthinking people now - most people, it seems - probably agree with her. A lofty pronouncement that typifies this widespread and morally somnolent attitude was recently dropped on the nation by no less than the editors of the *Globe and Mail*, who confidently declared that "most Canadians accept the fundamental goodness of love between adults, whatever its sexual expression."

Sounds good. But is it true?

I suggest not. Rather, it would seem that the central moral burden of any civilization is to teach precise distinctions between the various kinds and degrees of love, categorically rejecting the bad forms as dangerous to self and society, and encouraging the good forms. In the West, the dominant metaphor for a human being, expressed so powerfully in our art, philosophy, and religion is the image of a soul tormented and blinded by forms of love that threaten to enslave and destroy. Ready examples are self-love, love of money, wantonness and adultery, gluttony, and literally hundreds of sexual perversions, such as pedophilia. The higher forms of love, in ascending order, are love of nature and animals, of children, of dear friends, of one's people, of a spouse, and finally, of God, the highest possible form.

Homosexual love has always been understood as a form of love, it is true, but of the bad and dangerous kind because it suggests a disorder of the soul and is so obviously sexually - and therefore socially - sterile (I leave aside for the moment the compelling argument that it is also extremely dangerous to health. Health Canada reports that about 83% of those who have died of AIDS over the past two decades were homosexuals). So until very recently, society has quite reasonably discouraged homosexuality. But now Sykes and her allies want not only to put this form of bad love in the good love camp, but to multiply its attractions with legal matrimony. We should listen to her reasoning, but reject it firmly if we think it does not stand up, simply because reluctantly tolerating this form of bad love - something we have always done to a degree - is very different from reclassifying it as good and encouraging it with equal status, legal protection, public promotion, marital status, and tax subsidies.

The first important step in this debate, then, is for both sides to agree that it does not follow that a behaviour is good or ought to be accepted as valuable by society just because a person loves it.

Sincerely,

William Gairdner