

ABOUT THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

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A SZEXUALITÁS TÖRTÉNETÉRŐL

A szintézis idejét éljük: két nagy munka történt a 19. században, a marxizmus és a pszichoanalízis áll egymással szemben. Darwin teóriája az evolúcióról bizonyult a leginkább időtállóknak.

A magyar agykutatás nagy egyénisége, Knoll József professzor minden idők legmaradandóbb összegzésében „neuroenhancers” mechanizmusában találta meg az emberi lét lényegét, az emberiség sok-sok évezredes történetében a veleszületett és szerzett hajtóerő jelentőségét.

KULCSSZAVAK: szexualitás, enhancer mechanizmus, veleszületett és szerzett hajtóerő, szintetikus mesencefalikus enhancer anyagok

SUMMARY

About 50 years of demolition work, it's time now for a return to the grand syntheses. Two of the great syntheses of the 19th century have now been shattered. Marxism lies in fragments. And psychoanalysis has largely drifted outside of psychiatry to find a new and doubtless temporary

home in departments of literary studies. To be sure, the third of the great syntheses, Darwin's theory of evolution, remains intact. But otherwise, as far as the eye can see, there is rubble.

The time for new attempts at synthesis is now nigh. After decades of pioneering work in the neurosciences, the fundamental importance of brain biology in the human condition has now become evident. Surely one of the new syntheses will draw upon neurochemistry and neurophysiology, and it is to the great credit of the Hungarian neurosciences that pharmacologist Joseph Knoll has now ventured a first attempt. This attempt will be widely discussed and will form the platform for other work that may end up building firm bridges between „neuroenhancers” and behavior – and, what's more, to show how this relationship has shaped the evolution of thousands of years of human destiny, a great synthesis indeed.

KEYWORDS: sexuality, enhancer mechanism, synthetic mesencephalic enhancer substances, innate and acquired drives

Joseph Knoll's book *The Brain and Its Self: A Neurochemical Concept of the Innate and Acquired Drives* (2005) represents one of the great syntheses of our own time. It is an attempt comparable to the Marxist and Freudian syntheses to explain human behavior, but this time in neurobiological terms, and not in terms of social class or intrapsychic conflict. The book opens up many areas of inquiry, but in particular it helps us to come to grips with the history of sexuality. Knoll's work gives us some insight into the stability of the three big sexual orientations across the years: they are inborn and unlikely to change. It also prompts us to raise the question: What is the evolutionary logic of homosexuality, essentially nonreproductive behavior? Finally, it suggests challenging questions about the future of sexuality.

The ideas of Joseph Knoll may be summarized as follow (Knoll 2005).

1. The brain learns from the environment what behavior maximizes survival. These are acquired drives, and in the course of time, acquired drives become innate drives. Called “inextinguishable conditioned reflexes” (ICRs), these become inherited in the genetic material.
2. It is mainly good drives that are acquired and made innate. “...Nothing exists in the brain without a rational origin.”
3. The whole course of evolution is towards the perfectibility of the species. We will at some point end up with a “rationally organized human society.”

How do these ideas apply to the history of sexuality? (Shorter 2005)

In the history of sexuality there are three main sexual orientations. These have presumably always existed, or became ICRs very early in human

history. Our basic sexual orientations – straight, gay, and lesbian – are driven by biology and not by culture. We are born with them.

Each of the sexual orientations has roughly the same history, consisting of the following phases: liberation in the Ancient world; repression in a thousand years of Christian Europe; then a great breakout at the end of the 19th century.

Thus, the ancient Greeks had more or less the same sexuality that we do. We have the same ICRs. Yet after the Ancients, this sensualization is driven underground. In Christian Europe, each of the three great sexual orientations is reduced to a minimal expression of passion.

For heterosexuals, this means an exclusive sexual focus on the face and the genitals. Other parts of a woman's body were obscured by clothing. Bodies were covered when people had sex. Even the pornography of Christian Europe was vagina-centred.

What did the other sexual orientations do? Gay male sex before our own time meant anal penetration: buggery. Anal sex was pretty much deeply tabued for any non-gay person. For gay men it represented the most elemental form of sexual expression, comparable to the missionary position for heterosexuals. Lesbians seem to have limited themselves to passionate kisses and intracural sex. So in the long night of Christian Europe, the sensual ICRs of the Greeks fall silent. The sexuality of the three major sexual orientations is reduced to its most primitive forms, namely to the missionary position for heterosexuals, to buggery for gay males, and to intracural sex for gay females.

Why such an elemental sexual repertoire for all three sexual orientations? One bears in mind that the conditions of life during the long centuries of Christian Europe were massively antisensual. The teachings of the Church were antierotic: Sex was for reproduction not pleasure. The surrounding community discouraged privacy and intense sexual experiences. As well, people lived in dirt, in the countryside often with their livestock, and were subject to such antierotic diseases as scabies. Finally, cultural attitudes were antisensual. A common teaching was, "Remember that you must die" (*Memento mori*). Is supersex conceivable under these conditions? Scarcely.

Then history turns a page. Late in the 19th century, the ICRs of the Ancients start to come back to life. It is the beginning of a new sensu-

alization of sexuality, comparable to the Ancients. The Church loses control of behavior. People migrate massively from countryside to city. The great metropolises of the 19th century arise. Now individuals start to enjoy private bed rooms, better nutrition, and better public health. With improvements in diet, people have more energy, and the privacy to rediscover sensuality. So the re-sensualizing of sexuality begins, a return to the behavior of the Ancients.

Is this a neurobiological process involving the reactivation of ICRs? Or a cultural change of fashion? The evidence of the last hundred years favors the former interpretation.

As the great breakout from the sexual restrictiveness of Christian Europe occurs late in the 19th century, new areas of the body become activated. Deep kissing, as opposed to loud lip smacking, begins.

There is evidence that men begin to discover their nipples as an erogenous zone. Heterosexuals discover the anus, homosexuals discover the rest of the body.

For the three sexual orientations, a process of convergence begins. Gay men did not discover anal sex, of course. Yet for gay men today, oral sex is commoner than anal. So gay men expand their repertoire to other areas of the body, just as heterosexuals do. The same opening up of the zones of the body happens to the other sexual orientations as well. In pornography, zoneology replaces positionology.

We have been describing the advent of total body sex, as the Ancients experienced it. The entire body becomes a source of sexual pleasure – all the orifices, the muscular long limbs, everything. The body has pleasure receptors everywhere. By the late 19th century, the external constraints on sensuality have been sufficiently removed that the brain, as with the Ancients, can direct the mind to act.

All three sexual orientations begin at very different starting points: lesbians at intracural sex, gays at buggery, heterosexuals at the missionary position. With the discovery of total body sex, all converge to the same practices: deep kissing, nipple play, oral, anal, and admiration of muscle tone.

Now the big question: Are some recent changes going to become permanent? Going to become ICRs? The last century has seen an efflorescence of interest in fetish, for example. Fetishes histori-

cally are virtually a non-theme. Then fur fetishism surfaces at the end of the nineteenth century, rapidly to be replaced by leather. Today, the main fetish involves latex.

Fetish represents rather marginal sexual behavior, so why is it of interest? Fetish is important in sexual history because it brings the whole body together. Fetish becomes the symbol of total body sex, the sexualizing of the entire body.

All three sexual orientations now have a significant interest in fetish, and it is interesting that they have tended to converge in this behavior. This is historically very new. Will it become permanent? Will it become an ICR, or is it just a passing fad?

The work of Joseph Knoll casts an interesting light on these issues: Knoll gives us some insight into the stability of the three big sexual orientations across the years: They are inborn and unlikely to change. Knoll's hypotheses would predict convergence, given the fundamental similarity of brain chemistry among the three sexual orientations.

Knoll might well raise the question: What is the evolutionary logic of homosexuality, of essentially nonreproductive behavior?

One possible answer is that Nature wants to widen diversity in the gene pool, and just happened to throw in a few genes for homosexuality in addition to all the other sexual variants in the genetic pool. Thus, homosexuality would be an epiphenomenon of the survival need for genetic diversity. A second possible answer is that possibly homosexuality may represent a backup mechanism in case something happens to the heterosex-

ual parents. Gays and lesbians can be just as loving as heterosexuals, the biological parents. Why shouldn't they make good caregivers, if all the other surviving heterosexuals are busy with their own offspring?

Knoll's work also gives rise to the question, what is the evolutionary function, if any, of fetish? Only in the last century has fetish appeared in sexuality. Is it a passing fancy, a bubble upon the foam of history's sexual tide, or will it pass from acquired drive to innate? Its link to total body sex suggests the following answer.

Total body sex goes back to the Ancient Greeks, so total body sex must somehow be incorporated by now into the innate drives. And fetish is a representation of total body sex. The fact that total body sex was driven underground for a thousand years by Christian Europe means that this particular phenotype was not strongly expressed. Yet now we see the re-emergence of total body sex, this time with a fetish overlay. If one assumes that fetish is a "good" drive, bringing happiness to its minoritarian band of followers, then fetish is presumably working on an ICR of its own.

A final question: It would be interesting to know what impact, if any, Joseph Knoll thinks the drugs he has discovered, deprenyl or BPAP, might have on sexuality?

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