

# The Significance of Youth-Love for Our Time

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Therefore the flame, which nourished itself inwardly, obtained freer pleasure for itself through publicly praised goals and institutions; but it also came thereby under the limiting control of the laws, which need it as a real driving force for the state.

Herder in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*.

## INTRODUCTION

The above statement of our poet and inspired philosopher of history, expressed about Hellenic youth-love, which he viewed with affectionate understanding, should be proclaimed today not only in the widest circles of politicians and statesmen, no, in the widest circles of the people, who, still caught under the spell of a centuries-old prejudice, at best keep totally silent in disdain about a natural phenomenon that, through a wise politics, they could use as a driving force of a beautiful cultural development. As is known, there is a movement, which is spreading yearly, whose goal is to remove §175 from our penal code; almost more important than the removal of this long outlived paragraph appears to us, however, the enlightenment of the masses of the people about the existence and extent to which the noblest manifestation of homosexuality, youth-love, i.e., the ideal love union of a mature man with a growing adolescent, can be of the greatest social value, if only, as once in the best times of ancient Hellas, one is willing to give that phenomenon the necessary light and the necessary air for its free development, if one finally stops looking askance at such unions and takes them as what they could be and, if one allows them freedom, what they could become, namely equally valid parallels to “normal” love relationships. In our opinion, the already rather rich literature on homosexuality has still said little about precisely this side of the question. . . .

**I**  
**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTH-LOVE**  
**FOR EDUCATION**

The great scholar Johann von Müller, whose sacrificing heart beat for the youth, reported in his autobiography that “his skill with regard to the education of immature male youth was never great.” And still today it will appear to most professional pedagogues as something monstrous, when E. v. Kupffer says in the introduction to his splendid book *Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur*: “Whoever views the boys only as school objects, yes, whoever cannot love them, will almost never be a stimulating teacher.” And the pedantic fathers, whose love for their boys can be measured by the number of blows of a stick given them, will cross themselves before teachers who love boys, since they suspect only born sexual molesters among them! And the learned gentlemen will prove to us that not seldom does a “perverse” boy-love tend to be bound up with an irresistible drive to corporally punish the beloved youth, which in its blindness inflicts unjustly degrading punishments on the alleged “beloved” boy! And if all this does not fit one or the other case, it will be further objected that the preference and passion for a certain pupil will rob the educator of an impartial view, he will see only good in his favorites, will spoil them, whereas he prevents the rise of the others, who are perhaps more gifted, and the partiality, which is now so complained about – whether justly or unjustly is all the same here – will gain ground in a way expressing scorn for all justice. Now, granted that all these dark sides – which, for that matter, are already present today – could appear, and even would appear in individual bad subjects, one still must not leave unnoticed the tremendous advantage produced by an education based on genuine love over one that rests on the educator’s rigid feeling of duty – as happens so many times today. Let us take a look at history! Who have been the great educators of the young? Orbilius of the abundant blows, whom Horace ridiculed, or the mild, youth-loving Socrates; the fanatic Benedictine monk of the Middle Ages, who in pathological eagerness swings his rod over the poor unclothed boy, the orthodox Protestant Häberlin, who brought into his school practice 36,000 well-counted blows of a rod, or that unique friend of children, who, with the words “It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones” [Luke 17:2] has given for all time an illuminating ideal of thoroughly human education; the dry pedant of today, who beats wisdom into his trembling

kids with the surly face of sour fulfillment of duty, or the enthusiastic genuine teacher, for whom it is daily a new delight to observe and promote the intellectual development of the young human souls entrusted to him, who revere and love him above all, him who finds his deepest satisfaction precisely through awakening and promoting the better self of the apparently most sullen and most badly-behaved boy through untiring, constant, distinct mildness? I think the answer is not difficult. Admittedly, whoever does not see with us the goal of every education in making the best possible out of the given characteristics of every young human soul and bringing to the best possible development that kernel that is present in the single individual, he will contradict us from the beginning, seek his ideal in the most boring “discipline,” which kills individuality in favor of allegedly objective “laws,” and will later be very astonished when the boys who have had “fear and discipline” beaten into them do not become ideal human beings, but rather at best empty duty-machines like their teachers! If that already holds for the classroom teacher, it holds in a still higher degree for the director of boarding-schools and the tutor of individual boys! Precisely under the two last named categories, even more often than in the educational circles more open to the light of publicity, are found those pedantic tyrants who perhaps only from the necessity of earning a living have dedicated themselves to the profession that they inwardly hate, since their unsatisfying, always grumbling pedantry is felt as inimical by the youth with a healthy instinct; they pay back the mistrust brought to them and the direct, but very understandable rejection of their dismal “laws” with a regimen of brute force of the stronger or, what is still worse, find the only dull satisfaction of their profession in the sensually exciting beating of their pupils! Whoever has undertaken the difficult position of an educator from enthusiasm and love of youth as such can perhaps in a weak hour have battles to fight out with his overflowing heart — genuine love will preserve him from being lost in filth — but there goes out from his whole being a life, a fire, which is involuntarily transferred to the pupil and is able to carry him along, so that he too takes in the apparently most boring material and takes his revered teacher, whom he finds more like an older brother than a dignified “educator,” as a model of accomplishment to strive after. Whoever has had the rare luck in his youth to be the pupil of such a teacher will still recall his teaching with joy in later times, he will have saved much more out of it than from the bleak or dreaded hours of cold people of duty!

So much for the influence of youth-love on the relationship of the edu-

cator to his pupil. But youth-love led in the right paths can also have a favorable influence on the relationship of the pupils among themselves and thus have an educational effect. As things stand now, certainly, through prohibition of all-too-tender friendships among boys, a phenomenon that is in itself neither moral nor immoral, but simply natural, is driven into the dark, where it tends to develop into a vice, like every drive forced into darkness. If, then, it becomes too glaring in this or that institute, in this or that school, then a court of terror is held with cane and rod for a pair of poor misguided souls — and the matter remains otherwise just as it was. And they call that moral-religious upbringing of youth! If on the contrary, as was done by the unaffected Hellenes, they did not look askance at the alliances of boys and youths, which is in itself ideal, even if ever so ardent, but rather saw in it something beautiful, splendid, and which gives them, through inciting mutual self-sacrificing and offering, through sincere admiration of the pure fire that flames here, a firm meaning that becomes ever clearer, which entirely by itself pushes the sensual into the background, if it is already awakened — then the poisonous growth, growing in darkness, into which such a relationship not rarely degenerates today, would have no room at all to develop. And finally, E. v. Kupffer was not so incorrect when he frankly states that even a sensual relationship of that kind does not have as bad a consequence as the nerve-shattering self-depletion and the abominable purchased gratification — “love” it just cannot be called! “Instead of allowing the demands of the senses and the emotions to be met in a measured way, we let them grow in the dark, so as to allow our lazy narrowness to run its usual course.” And the often named fear of the “infection” of genuine homosexuality in a so-called “normal” person finally is a standpoint now scientifically surely overcome forever! In this regard, in the intimate friendships of boys and youths, which so often have an unconscious homosexual base, be it from one side only or from both, there likewise lies no “danger” for the public. It is exquisite, what is said by the anonymous author of a splendid little work only just published,<sup>1</sup> which illustrates in a pertinent case the tragedy of homosexuality, in a passage on such a deeply poetic relationship: “On later reflection I have often found that there must be a time for boys in which they all have feelings for their own sex. It is in the first transition into puberty. A still unconscious sexuality begins to swell up and is directed toward the people whose characteristics seem to us most worthy of love, whose interest we ourselves court, toward our friends. Observe the youth, how they associate with their intimates, how they open up their

souls in sweet reverie, how, wandering aside in close embrace, they take delight in everything beautiful and sweet. Precisely the most gifted and most developed are touched most intensely." Certainly the eternally incurable Philistine, who cannot now or ever grasp man's noblest and highest—"rapture"—will always raise his discordant croaking about danger and immorality, by which he understands everything that cannot be measured by the only measure familiar to him, that of the mediocrity of the "eternal yesterday," and just seeing the not infrequent fact of a friendship that is prepared for self-sacrifice without any "reason" awakens in him a quiet shudder. If already now in our material, egoistical time boys and youths who let themselves be beaten bloody for the beloved friend, as Schiller reports of Don Carlos, are becoming rare, then it would be all the more indicated, precisely from the standpoint of those who still see the foundation of practical morality in an unexaggerated altruism—and that is indeed the majority of official pedagogues!—to promote and support relationships that let the boy from early on see gratitude and offering to another, of the same age or older, whom they have "bewitched," as something quite natural and beautiful! Instead of that, one youth is supposed to see in another at most a comrade, in the teacher and educator, in contrast, a cold, unapproachable "person held in respect," for whose physical or moral thrashing he has to be thankful with dog-like mendacious humility! If the heavens opened and finally once again let a ray of Homer's sun illuminate us, how different it could be then for teacher and pupil!

## II THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTH-LOVE FROM A SOCIAL VIEW

Here too E. v. Kupffer has already anticipated the main point with gifted sight and in striking words that touch on the matter: "Crude man-to-man intercourse chokes off the kernel of a finer culture and lets that tone of a subordinate arise that brings little to the ennoblement of the nation with it." This non-culture could, as Kupffer rightly thinks, be thoroughly changed, if only the youth were accustomed to see in man his natural model friend, and if, in the cases where the man could be even more for his beloved youth—if it were not seen as morally objectionable—his contemporaries were willing not to condemn, but rather to understand! There would by no means set in something like a universal lack of marriage of young men, a universal disdain of the female sex—for that

there are just much too few homosexuals; but those born with this condition would not, as now, have to spend their lives at best in tortured struggles, which often rob their work of all joy, in the destructive clutches of vile blackmailers, with the constant prospect of prison or of coming forever under “degrading” investigations, but rather in noble courtship of the beloved display their best, open up the whole depths of their often golden souls, carry the beloved away to splendid deeds, draw him up into the not seldom very pure upper atmosphere of their world-view, and thus exercise the best influence on his intellect and character. Even in the probably few cases where the lover may meet with a youth who rejects his love—such is much more rare than is generally assumed—this kind of relationship would still ripen to an intimate friendship of a superior kind, in which the beloved would look with quiet admiration on the many offerings of his lover, which let an idea of the nobility of the human soul dawn on him; and he himself would, if he is not precisely subject to a complete lack of gratitude, enter into a noble contest in mutual accommodation with the heartily loved friend, whose soul he sees rise aloft to greater and greater deeds of love in a kind of painfully sweet longing. In *such* relationships sensuality would in truth be pushed far into the background entirely on its own. The lover, perhaps at first storming for embraces and demanding kisses, would more and more try to be satisfied and be content, precisely out of love for him, whom he sees only suffer under his sensual demands, with the much more intimate, much deeper and lasting spiritual association with his beloved, if he only hears the beloved lips speak, sees the beloved eyes light up with joy! Such an intimate friendship could also last if the beloved married, to the extent that the lover’s love possesses that supreme strength that is capable of the final offering, of renunciation. Over these unions, on which always—people being what they are—a breath of tragedy will rest, there would be, however, that rare, unique kind of relationship in which love is returned with love and not only with friendship; and precisely they are threatened the most by the views of contemporary society, although they would perhaps develop, if only given their freedom, more splendidly than most of today’s average marriages, in which that ideal vitality is missing, as is well known. That the general public could only gain, if it could bring itself to meet such phenomena with an unprejudiced view, is really obvious: through relationships in which love is returned with friendship the lover at least finds a partial satisfaction, a partial complement of his heart, which is consuming itself in longing, but where his love is returned with love, he finds the complete

complement, which he needs as much as his differently disposed fellow citizens, so as to fulfill his tasks in life from that basis. In both cases, therefore, the general public has gained a force fresh with life, of which it is robbed through its current inimical position. And that not seldom do the first rank geniuses of humanity walk through the world furnished precisely with this disposition is taught by a glance at men like Socrates, Plato, Epaminondas, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Friedrich the Great, Winckelmann, just to name a few of the best known. Through the current moral views is attained, regarding all those so inclined, nothing other than that they either turn their backs on the fatherland and emigrate to other lands, where they can live their lives fully in the way necessary to them, or that in spite of all enmities they seek out their satisfaction in secret and thereby, to be sure, not seldom draw themselves and others into ruin; never have today's views made a born homosexual someone who feels differently, a "normal," on the contrary, precisely through the obtuse resistance of the environment the better and more courageous homosexuals learned to unite and fight together, as is always the case when a certain class of people have to suffer under the unjust pressure of the surroundings. And this is certain, the less today's society meets the justified wishes of the homosexuals, all the more energetically will they emphasize their right to exist and not rest until they have carried through a change of opinion. Yet a further point is to be touched on here: it is often said, if we again had the universally recognized youth-love, as in Hellas, then the female sex would have the most disadvantage, since a much greater number than today would just be left "sitting," then too the general position of woman would again sink to the level that it had in ancient Hellas. Against this is to be replied: it has long since been scientifically disproved that homosexuality is transferable, as was already touched on above, in the sense that a homosexual lover could ever make his heterosexual favorite — his best friend — homosexual; there will thus be — as experience in other lands also teaches — even if the views on homosexuality were to change, no more and no fewer girls neglected by men from *that* cause. Further, if through the general tolerance of youth-love the position of woman would be changed to the extent that she would no longer be, as so often today, the nearly pathologically worshiped ideal even of the best men and consequently not seldom the cruel, wanton gambler with men's fortunes, if the *fausse position* of today's "ladies," already — and not without right — contested by Schopenhauer,<sup>2</sup> were again to change a bit in favor of *genuine* femininity, would that be such a great harm? Today's

woman knows only too well that she will see the majority of the world of men at her feet, if only she is beautiful and coquettish, and therefore in the course of time has been forced up into the unnatural position of the “better” sex. If she knew that she had to share her husband with the younger men, as in ancient Hellas, how salutary an effect would this insight not seldom have on the arrogance of many an empty-headed, but pretty woman! How much effort they would all have to make to become, also in a spiritual regard, what once only male friends could be for him! And finally woman would have a direct gain, if she received her “intended” from the loving arms of his friend instead of from the enervating ones of a prostitute, as is almost always the case today. For certainly no one will contest the fact that there is a difference between a young man faithfully cherished and educated to all things good and beautiful by his loving friend and the person become blasé in selling lewdness. And then one should finally not underestimate what tremendous significance youth-love can gain not at all rarely for the whole life’s happiness of a talented, but much lower standing, poor youth. Already today there are not a few homosexuals who, in selfless love, take in poor but talented maturing boys, share with them everything that fortune has given them, bestow on them a good education and rearing, and finally help to secure them a position corresponding to their talent, whereas they demand nothing for themselves from their beloved than the grateful look of their eyes and a sincere friendship of the heart. How beautifully such unions could develop, if only they were not viewed so askance by the public as today! How they could help to bridge the social gap between rich and poor, high and low! Where then are the social harms that are supposed to grow from the release of youth-love? Does there not perhaps remain this, that a vile class of subjects, well fed, certainly, through the current views and legal clauses, the so-called “fleecers,” the male prostitutes, through a change of views would all at once have taken out from under them the basis on which they are able, unfortunately, to carry out their so profitable and generally harmful activity?

Allow this section to be closed with a word from Goethe, who certainly cannot be generally designated as homosexual, but indeed was far-thinking enough to understand this phenomenon too; in his biography of Winckelmann he says about the homosexual love-unions of the ancients: “The passionate fulfillment of loving duties, the bliss of inseparability, the offering of one for the other, the expressed decision for the whole of life, the necessary accompaniment to death set us in astonishment at the union of two youths, yes, we feel excelled when poets, historians, philos-

ophers, speakers overwhelm us with legends, events, feelings, convictions of such content and merit.”

### III THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTH-LOVE IN ART

The art of each time is always a kind of reflection of the social conditions prevailing in the epoch concerned and of the ideas that move that epoch. In the best times of the Hellenes, that is, approximately in the epoch of Pericles and shortly thereafter, youth-love occupied poets such as Sophocles, philosopher-artists such as Plato, sculptors such as Praxiteles, and found in numerous works, which today are still admired as eternally perfect models, a splendid and until today never again attained immortality. The early Middle Ages, under the pressure of a gloomy ideology inimical to the world and the senses, created in its art, for us today, curiously touching pictures of saints and scenes of martyrs, and would have held the representation of the purely human to be a damnable work of the devil. Only in the period of the so-called Renaissance did human nature, slumbering until then, slowly begin to recall its splendid heritage from the once beautiful bygone spring days of pure humanity, the bonds of a *weltanschauung* that killed culture were very gradually shattered, and precisely the great artists such as Michelangelo again represented the human without any disturbing ulterior motive, purely from joy in the beautiful form, and thereby necessarily had to turn a lively interest again to—viewed objectively, see Schopenhauer!—the most beautiful embodiment of the human, the body of a youth: besides Michelangelo’s Madonnas there are, in the first place, his John, a tender figure of a youth, his David, his drunken Bacchus, his sleeping Amor, his Hercules and Cacus, his uniquely beautiful “Slaves,” intended for the tomb of Julius, which have made his name so great. In addition, Michelangelo was a poet, and his sonnets, which are as perfect in form as they are rich in content, are devoted almost exclusively to his love for a beautiful youth. . . . In the eighteenth century it was Winckelmann’s homosexual feelings which gave us his immortal works on the art of antiquity and thereby created a not insignificant cornerstone in the edifice of modern art. . . . It is, of course, far from us to wish to attribute all sculptural representations of youth-love to the homosexuality of the artists concerned, but it must certainly be assumed that an artist whose eye is not capable of resting with a certain pleasure also on the charms of the blossoming age of youth, will dedicate the principal part of his artistic strength to the glorification of that

part of humanity for which his eye is made, that is, woman. Among the German poets of his time Platen possessed the courage to express his homosexual inclination in more than one poem perfect in form. . . .

Another poet of those days, the unhappy Hölderlin, in his novel *Hyperion*, a masterpiece also with regard to form, glorified a love-friendship, just as he had celebrated it in several of his poems in longing for the days of ancient Hellas. . . . Among the modern and most modern artists there are, to my knowledge, none among the sculptors who has expressly glorified the beauty of youths. . . . In general there prevails today just precisely in the plastic arts the representation of woman in all imaginable poses, now purely artistic, now also more with the intention of awakening sensuality, so that one could often be of the opinion that a Praxiteles had never lived and that it had been forgotten in the circles of the sculptors that the youthful male body is at least the equal in beauty to that of woman! This is only yet another proof for today's unnaturally lofty position of woman. To be greeted with pleasure, therefore, is the fact that sun, air, and sport baths are more and more coming in use, also from the side of the homosexuals; it is to be hoped that precisely also among the "normals" more understanding for the beauty of the youthful body will again be awakened, so that the artists can unhindered at least dare again to cultivate this direction, something that indeed at present in many heads is supposed to already appear as "immoral" in itself! And what is the situation with modern poetry? Here too, as is known, the real "leaders" — whether they will still be seen as such in fifty years is all the same to us — are occupied exclusively with woman, so that one often thinks that there are no more problems in the world that are not connected with the sexual relations of man and woman. Beside this, to be sure, there is today — we may be glad — a whole series of independent artists, pushed less into the foreground by drummed up publicity and cliques, who, in spite of all the enmity of the artistic rabble, do not let be taken away from them nor leave the unique problems, the still scarcely suspected beauties, which the homosexual love-union brings with it. . . . If one often hears today that homosexual literature is mostly unartistic, to the extent that it strives to represent the homosexual love drive as noble and the "normal" as ignoble, the only reply is that such an unartistic tendency, which is not to be denied in individual works, is to be seen as only the natural opposition to the mostly still prevailing damnation of homosexuality by today's society. Only when the morally equal right of homosexual love with "normal" love has been recognized generally will this unpleasant, but necessarily accompanying appearance of a time of battle, as today, disappear; finally,

as far as the artistic right in general to the appreciation of homosexuality is concerned, it has been emphasized precisely by the modern artists — and in this they are right — that there is *no area* of the human that the poet is not allowed to treat! And precisely in the matter in question as in no other, in my opinion, is such a rich output to be expected from genuine artists. The still unsolved problems here are so many and so unique that, for him who has once received only a presentiment, it is as if he has come into sight of a still unknown land after a long sea voyage!

We will consequently not go amiss if we expect precisely for art the most beautiful gain from a universal change of views on youth-love.

### CONCLUSION

Our investigation, which, as becomes a brochure that only wishes to stimulate, has only briefly and rather sketchily touched on the many problems in question, will be grumbled at by opponents of progress of all kinds, will be condemned. I would almost like to view it as a gain, if it is really grumbled at and condemned, for it will then at least have been read. And if it finds only one reader who is prompted by reading it to occupy himself more closely with the problem of homosexuality and thereby perhaps his previous prejudices vanish, then it will have completely attained its goal.

Original: *Die Bedeutung der Jünglingsliebe für unsere Zeit*, (Leipzig: Spohr, 1902).

### NOTES

1. *Der neue Werther, eine hellenische Passionsgeschichte* by Narkissos. Leipzig: Max Spohrs Verlag.
2. See *Parerga* II, p. 656ff. (Reclam edition.)