A HERMENEUTICS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY: A CHALLENGE TO CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE
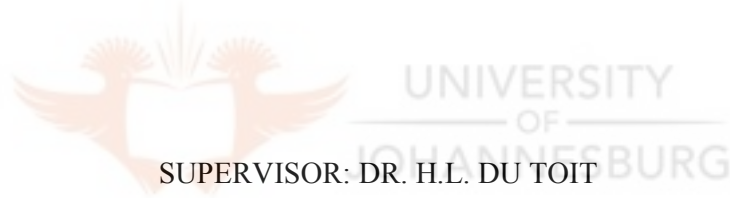
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the use of the bible as a normative text with regard to sexuality (especially homosexuality). I start off by focusing on the Genesis creation myth (Genesis chapters one and two), using Robert Gagnon's gender complementarity argument against homosexuality. I then argue, that essential to understanding how to interpret the creation myth, a person can use a theory developed by Martin Noth, called Deuteronomistic History. This theory helps us to understand that the scriptures (particularly the books from Deuteronomy through to II Kings) were compiled by a group of Jewish priestly redactors (employing retrospective theology) to form part of a continuous narrative that can be said to include the book of Genesis. As such, using the Gadamerian concepts of finitude and effective history, I assert that the creation myth is historically situated, and thus cannot be uncritically applied to contemporary issues, such as homosexuality. Nevertheless it played a central role against the background of a politics of survival in the formation of a Jewish national and sexual identity. It did this through functioning as a national grand narrative. How the biblical text played this formative role, as a national grand narrative, in creating and maintaining Jewish identity, will become evident as we explore, through Richard Kearney, the function that productive imagination can fulfil in the development of sexual identity. I will further highlight this function of the productive imagination through use of Judith Butler's concepts performativity and interpellation. It will then become evident that using the biblical text (as though it reflected the reality of sexuality as it is), in the way that Gagnon does, to establish gender essences, constitutes a naturalistic fallacy. And so we will see that the creation myth cannot be used to establish normative principles with regard to notions of strict gender essences. Thus, in concluding the thesis, I will revisit the creation myth using the insights of Judith Butler's queer theory to demonstrate how the biblical text itself, not only does not support notions of strict gender essences, but also *undermines* notions of strict gender roles or essences.

Key concepts are: Gender Complementarity, Naturalistic Fallacy, Jewish National Grand Narrative, Deuteronomistic History, Finitude, Openness, The game, Effective History, Queer Theory, Performativity, Interpellation and Politics of Survival.

INTRODUCTION

Some mainstream uses of biblical[1] normativity condemn homosexuality. Consequently there is a conflict with regard to sexuality in Christian circles, creating a dilemma for people who understand themselves as being gay, but who also wish to express their sexuality within a Christian context. I critically address this problem in this thesis by offering both a critique of, and proposing an alternative to, these mainstream positions. I use for the purposes of my argument, Robert Gagnon as the main representative of this Christian condemnation of homosexuality. In responding to his position, I draw on two main bodies of theory, namely the philosophic hermeneutics of Gadamer, and theories of sexuality understood as performativity and interpellation, as represented by Judith Butler, to formulate my own integrated position on the topic.

The rather common Christian condemnation of homosexuality is based on, not only Christians' understanding of the bible, but also their understanding of human sexuality. Both these themes will be addressed in this thesis. The assumption of many conservative Christians is that sexuality is a 'given', static and 'neutral' fact of biology, and thus the way that God has immutably created our bodies. Such an understanding of sexuality is claimed to have been derived from the biblical text itself, specifically the creation myth of Genesis chapters one and two (Schmidt, 1996: 293; Wink, 2002: 32; Gagnon, 2002: 40). This view of sexuality will be questioned.

Furthermore, much of Christian life, especially as regards sexuality, is predicated on the bible. Thus it can be said that the bible for many Christians has become the sole normative text for a meaningful existence in general, and for a sense of *sexual* identity in particular (Schmidt, 1996: 294). It is my contention that Christians who derive their sexual identity from their reading of the bible, often do so in ways that are too simplistic. I argue that the bible, like human sexual identity, is made up of many stories or 'narrative structures' (Schuegraf, 2006: 32). These stories however are not merely 'neutral' descriptions of the world around us (Punt, 2006: 423), but have a

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[1] Throughout this thesis, with regard to not using a capital letter for the *bible*, I follow the convention used in Finkelstein and Silberman's book *The Bible Unearthed. Archeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (2001).

molding potential as they affect normative practice through the prescription of normative ideals with regard to the way we should exist in this world. As we will come to see in this thesis, bible interpretation is more complicated than just 'reading' the text at a superficial level. Instead, bible interpretation arises out of a dialectical relationship between the text and the reader as a self, and a self moreover that exists against the background of a particular culture and time.

It is at this junction that philosophy, especially philosophic hermeneutics, has a key role to play, in that it can help us to become more aware of our own *role that we play in reading*, i.e., in the interpretive processes that we engage in when we read the bible. This leads me to the burning question that is the research problem of this thesis, namely: is it valid for Robert Gagnon to read the text of the biblical narrative (which as we will come to see was compiled between the seventh century and the time of the second temple Judaism) superficially, to take its meaning at face value, and to use it to establish normative rules with regard to sexual conduct in our contemporary twenty first century world? Moreover, if his reading of the bible for the condemnation of homosexuality is invalid, why is it invalid, and what alternative reading strategies might be provided by the philosophical insights of authors such as Gadamer, Rorty and Butler?

Rationale for study: the following are reasons why this study has been done:

1. Religion continues to play a central role in the lives of people, that is, 'spiritual and metaphysical dimensions seem to be an integral part of human existence' (du Toit, 2005: 37-38). Consequently, there is an urgent need to create a dialectic between religious and secular discourse with regard to furthering our understanding of sexuality. The urgency lies in the fact that both gay and heterosexual people are being harmed by certain current positions on sexuality within religious discourse, as I will show.

2. While not addressing directly issues with regard to the South African legislative discourse concerning same sex marriages, nevertheless theories addressed in this thesis do have insights that can create a deeper understanding of the relationship between normative principles derived from the bible with regard to sexuality, and the role that sexuality plays in relationships.

3. By exploring alternative understandings of the interplay between sexuality, symbolic or meaning-giving systems, and power relations, the thesis promises to contribute to an emancipatory discourse which enhances the agency of persons with regard to the definition of their sexuality and its meaning.

The gap in the literature concerning sexuality, which this thesis aims to address, exists between two theoretical extremes. On the one hand there is the social constructivist approach, which would assert that sexuality is only a social invention and not a biological given (Muller & Pienaar, 2003: 137). The problem with this approach is that it is too relativistic and does not account for why people feel more comfortable expressing themselves through one type of sexual identity rather than another. On the other hand there is biological essentialism (Bateman & Bennet, 2006: 245), which asserts that one is naturally born a man or a woman, with a predetermined essence, and that anything else is a genetic mutation. The problem with this approach is that it is too deterministic and doesn't fully account for environmental factors, social-cultural influences and the role that language plays in our understanding of sexuality. A central aspect of my argument here is that we need to follow a hermeneutical approach to the meaning and formation of human sexuality, if we wish to avoid the problems associated with both extremes. A hermeneutical approach such as the one I develop here, is neither essentialist nor strictly anti-essentialist.

Thus what I do is to take a middle road in asserting with Gadamer that on an objective level we are born into a pre-established linguistic and cultural system, which determines the type of questions we ask, and the answers we will find (Gadamer, 1975: 276). Nevertheless, while being objective, this system is simultaneously subjective in that it is circumscribed by finitude (Dostal, 2002: 56).. As such, the linguistic system produces cultural horizons that need to be taken into consideration as we strive to achieve hermeneutical agreement or understanding (Gadamer, 1975: 447). What this means with regard to the phenomenon of homosexuality, is that the concept or idea of sexuality, forming a narrative part of the pre-established linguistic system of language, becomes a story we 'choose' to tell because it helps us to *give meaning* to our individual embodied experiences (Nortjé-Meyer, 2006: 4-5). And because it is a story that we tell about ourselves, philosophic hermeneutics (the

science of interpreting language and stories) represents the best way to approach sexuality.

In terms of methodology, in this thesis I follow the methodology proper to a hermeneutic study in philosophy. At the same time however it is also a meta-hermeneutical, more deeply critical discussion of hermeneutical approaches as such, in as far as power relations are also touched upon, and the interrelatedness of identity, meaning and domination is explored. Key methodologies regarding a hermeneutical study, which I have employed in this thesis, include the following;

1. Determining the meaning of central concepts by comparison with other texts by the same author. Central concepts that will be critically discussed, problematized and compared in these ways include: mythology, Jewish[2] national grand narrative, imagination, performativity, interpellation and queer commentary. In each case various texts will be compared in order to construct a sophisticated understanding of the central concepts concerned.

2. Reconstructing the logic of references and connotations contained in key concepts and seminal passages; this is a kind of close reading which at one and the same time tries to clarify in detail what an author's understanding of their concepts is, as discussed in seminal passages, and also tries to critically and creatively engage with these understandings in order to develop my own overall argument.

3. Rewriting the meanings of key concepts and seminal passages in more traditional forms of argument: this is precisely what I will be doing when I critique traditional, conservative understandings of sexual identity through the construction of a deeper understanding of sexuality and interpretation with the help of Gadamer and Butler.

4. Assessing the validity and justifiability of an argument; this common philosophical method will be used a lot in my discussion of the main argument concerning homosexuality and biblical normativity as unfolded through

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[2] In using the term 'Jewish' I am focusing mainly on the ethnic aspect of such ascription. I note Steve Mason's argument that a 'Jewish' identity in the Persian and Hellenistic times focused not so much on religion as it did on ethnic attributes (Mason, 2007: 491).

discussing various concepts that the main authors, namely Gagnon, Gadamer, Rorty and Butler develop.

5. Specifically, I take the approach of a 'postmodern queer theorist'. I mean by 'postmodern' that I treat the biblical text as a meta or grand narrative (Hobson, 2006: 12), and as such problematize attempts by conservative Christians to use the bible's grand narrative as a *universal* normative text (Goheen, 2008: 479; Taylor & Winquist, 2001: 165). I focus in my discussion in particular on the creation myth of Genesis. Such postmodern problematization focuses on the linguistic understanding (Hobson, 2006: 13) of the world as expressed in the particular, contextualized, narrative text of the Genesis creation myth. With the term 'queer' I indicate that I use queer theory as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the creation myth. Such a tool primarily entails scrutinizing the text for binary oppositions, (such as male versus female, or dominant versus submissive), in order to see how the text itself tends not to strictly adhere to clear cut distinctions (Stone, 2001: 117), thus undermining the very distinctions themselves. Thus for example, the 'queering of gender' (Thiem, 2007: 468) implies that the distinction between male and female, or between heterosexual and homosexual, is taken to be not nearly so clear-cut, or 'natural' (Dreyer, 2006: 162), as it would seem to appear.

6. In the process of doing all of the above, I will have employed many of the central research methods used over many centuries in philosophy. The main emphasis in all of the above is a critical-constructive engagement with the chosen texts, in which I will be defining and clarifying concepts, developing, constructing and defending arguments, analyzing and evaluating theories and testing them for coherence and applicability, detecting and criticizing assumptions, and re-interpreting relevant intellectual contributions to the research area of sexuality and religion through an in depth literature study.

Chapter Outline

In **chapter one** I focus on Robert Gagnon's use of the creation myth to argue for a model of heterosexual normativity with regard to sexual relationships. The model he espouses is that of gender complementarity (Gagnon, 2001: 266). In other words, the only right (in the sense of morally acceptable) kind of sexual relationship for Gagnon is that between a man and a woman, in part because the body parts 'fit' each other

naturally. Heterosexual normativity is for Gagnon backed up, or even prescribed, by the creation myth. This is the case because the myth only mentions Adam and Eve, a man and a woman, and it relates their discovery of their sexual desire as aimed towards each other, i.e. heterosexual desire. Furthermore, the 'structuring' of sexual relationships, in terms of conforming to a set hetero-normative pattern is reinforced by the overall structural flow of the creation myth (Gagnon, 2001: 56), in which God creates order out of disorder, as we will see.

As my first chapter unfolds, I begin to question Gagnon's simplistic reading of the creation myth to establish normative principles with regard to sexual conduct. This questioning will expose or bring to the fore the dialectical relationship that exists between the biblical, sexually normative text and the reader as a sexuate self. It will show that Gagnon expects of the reader to play the role of an acquiescent subject who is entirely compliant with the demands of a dominant, even dominating, text. In critiquing Gagnon's understanding, the theory of Deuteronomistic history as developed by Martin Noth (Person, 2002: 2) will be introduced. Using this theory, I demonstrate that Jewish priests, with the purpose of establishing and maintaining a Jewish identity, reformulated and reworked the biblical text. Such preserving and establishing of identity took place in a context of what can be called a 'politics of survival'[3]. In other words, the biblical narrative served the role of a national grand narrative, or *a story* (Platzner & Harris, 1998: 8) through which the Jewish people preserved their ethnic sense of identity (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 289). I also argue that a central part of establishing such an identity involved *regulating sexual conduct*. This regulation of sexual conduct served the purposes of preserving a 'pure' Jewish people as well as promoting their procreative numbers. I thus argue in chapter one against Gagnon, that his view of the relation between the authoritative or normative biblical text and the sexuate self of the Christian reader, is untenable, especially if one takes the biblical narrative seriously as a grand narrative in the service of ancient Jewish identity preservation.

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[3] The term 'politics of survival' is used by Frederic Homer (Homer, 2003: 158), in his commentary on Primo Levi. I use this term here with the specific meaning pertaining to the Jewish people's emphasis on sexual conduct (as elaborated in the biblical narrative) that is informed by an urgent need for the survival of the Jewish people amidst deportation and exile.

The use of a story to regulate a sense of one's identity, national and sexual, is not only a phenomenon of the past, but will also be seen to be operating in more recent times, as I will demonstrate in the example of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. One last strategy that I take in chapter one is to use the concept of a naturalistic fallacy to question the use of the ancient creation myth of Genesis (both by Gagnon and the Jewish priests) to establish normative principles with regard to sexual conduct. I thus begin to demonstrate that there is a logical limitation with regard to using the creation myth as a narrative for the contemporary issue of homosexuality, if we wish to avoid the naturalistic fallacy of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is'.

In **chapter two**, to develop further my argument about the limitations inherent in using the creation myth as a narrative for establishing normative rules with regard to sexuality, I will use the insights of two philosophers, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Rorty. I will look at Gadamer's concept of finitude, which is an important concept with regard to our understanding of the redactorship or compilation of the biblical narrative. As the term itself implies, finitude has to do with *limitations*, particularly as regards our historical situatedness (Gadamer, 1975: 225). Being aware of our historical situatedness means in essence that when we are confronted with a text like the biblical narrative, which originates in another culture and in another time period, in our hermeneutic (interpretative) moment we must be 'sensitive to the text's alterity' (Gadamer, 1975: 271). A consequence of finitude for Gadamer is that the encounter with the text must be based on openness (Dostal, 2002: 93). Therefore it is precisely a keen *self-awareness* about one's own finitude and historical situatedness that leads to an *openness* toward other perspectives, and thus openness and finitude really belong together.

To understand the role that finitude plays in our understanding of the meaning of human sexuality, we will use Gadamer's analogy of the game. It can be said that we enter into a game with national grand narratives when we read or recite them or appeal to them in an attempt to answer questions in our lives. In other words, using the insights of Gadamer on the game-nature of interpretation, we will notice a shift in the dialectical relationship between the text and the reader. Instead of Gagnon's model of the biblical text as a dominating presence before the reader as a sexuate self, one may conceive of the relationship between text and reader as much more

egalitarian, i.e., as a relationship in which text and reader question *each other*. We will in the process come to see that national grand narratives become in a Gadamerian frame a type of *linguistic game* that we participate in whenever we attempt to articulate a sense of our own identity (national and sexual) in the world.

Next I turn to Rorty, whose insights in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980), problematize the role of national grand narratives in our understanding of reality further, in that he questions the 'notion of knowledge as accurate representation of reality' (Rorty, 1980: 6). It is here where he asserts that the idea that knowledge can be represented as a one-to-one isomorphic relationship between an external 'reality' and an internal awareness is misleading. Thus that one could argue, that even if we were to assume that the mind acts as an internal mirror reflecting the events of the external world, this in itself is not a guarantee for what is 'knowledge' (Rorty, 1980: 170). Furthermore, tying in with Gadamer's notion of the game, Rorty argues that much of the history of knowledge creation can be reduced to 'attempts to externalize a certain contemporary language-game' (Rorty, 1980: 10). That is to say, what we consider to be the criteria for what constitutes knowledge, especially with regard to sexuality, is really the role of a particular language game that we happen to subscribe to at the time. This dominant, contingent language game is exalted to the status of 'normal discourse' and any assertion that contradicts this 'established practice' becomes labeled as 'abnormal discourse' (Rorty, 1980: 365).

Concerning this above contrast between normal (dominant) and abnormal discourse, Rorty wants us to shift our emphasis from a scientific paradigm for epistemology, or the study of knowledge, towards an alternative standard for justification, i.e. hermeneutics (Rorty, 1980: 389). What this entails for Rorty, is the acknowledgement that through hermeneutics there can be the recognition that there are grey areas in life, in which it is difficult to ascertain absolute and definite objective knowledge (Rorty, 1980: 317); morality, or normative assertions concerning sexual conduct, being a clear case in point. Once again to link in with Gadamer, dialogue becomes an essential means towards establishing truth or matters of normativity with regard to 'reality', including human sexuality. But with Rorty the focus of the dialogue shifts from the relation between text and reader (as in Gadamer) to the relation between the reader and their contemporary community. In other words, in Rorty, the traditional

notion that a text may somehow 'contain' a truth that the reader may uncover or come to 'know' is severely problematized. Rorty shifts the focus in matters about truth to an endless edifying conversation – truth is for him always contextual and dynamic.

In **chapter three** we will see that there is more to our understanding of sexual reality, than what a dialogue restricted to reader and community can produce. What I argue is that 'objective' or 'absolute' reality would not be apprehensible or make sense, without first having been assimilated (and thus in some way altered) through the *imaginative* filter. Indeed one could say that the imaginative filter is an intrinsic part of our overall interpretive grids. The form of imagination that I will focus on is one that is elaborated on by Richard Kearney in his book *The Wake of the Imagination* (1988), and is known as the productive imagination (Kearney, 1988: 16). According to Kearney, the imaginative subject[4] (Kearney, 1988: 243) or reader, through the productive imagination, has the capacity to create *new combinations* or configurations of objects or things already existing in the world. This powerful role that imagination typically plays in shaping and controlling our sense of identity, and in particular our sexual identity, is aptly demonstrated in the use of the biblical Jewish national grand narrative. The role that the productive imagination plays in our sense of sexual identity will be better understood once we have considered Judith Butler's development of the concepts of performativity and interpellation in the same chapter.

In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler problematizes the notion of 'naturally' existing sexuality, and asserts that identity is 'performatively constituted' (Butler, 1990: 24-25). 'Performativity' is Butler's central notion that gender is not something that one is born with, but is really something that one grows into through enforced 'role' playing. However, this is not to say that gender is something 'merely' enacted (Butler, 1990: 146), that gender is simply something that one 'chooses' like one does clothes from a wardrobe. Sexuality can be seen as an ongoing, dynamic process open to resignification (Butler, 1990: 30-31, 33, 137). And because gender is a process of becoming, it is not something that

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[4] The phrase 'imaginative subject' does not mean that the reader is somehow unreal or imaginary. Kearney and I use this phrase in the sense of a reader who reads a text obviously using their imagination to understand and interpret what they are reading.

one 'is', as though it were a static, 'naturally' existing category, but rather something that one 'does' or performs. (Butler, 1990: 112).

This raises the question of what it is that sustains the separate categories of male and female (at least on a linguistic level). To answer this, Butler develops the concept of interpellation. Originally developed and used by Louis Althusser (Macey, 2000: 9), interpellation can be said to be the process through which an official, such as a policeman (or in our case a Jewish priest) brings a subject into 'being' by directly and verbally addressing them (Salih, 2002: 78). Butler uses interpellation as an example of performative language, in that the *naming act* itself, or the verbal articulation that is directed at a subject, is the very vehicle that brings that subject as that subject into existence (Salih, 2004: 138). The above insights of Kearney (with regard to the imaginative subject's use of their productive imagination), and of Butler (with regard to interpellation and performativity), will introduce a further shift of emphasis with regard to the dialectical relationship discussed earlier. If in Gagnon the emphasis is on a unidirectional relationship between authoritative text and the sexuate self of the reader, and if that relationship shifts in Gadamer towards a more egalitarian dialogue between text and reader where they interrogate one another, and in Rorty there is more emphasis on the dialogue between different readers of the same text, then in chapter three, the emphasis is a dialectical process taking place between the reader and themselves, in that the reader now must become aware of the linguistic forces that shape their understanding of themselves as sexual beings. Here the emphasis is on the heightened self-understanding of the Christian sexuate self, as well as the opening up of more possibilities for being a sexuate self than was previously thought possible.

In **chapter four,** to answer the burning question of the problem statement, I will conclude with the argument that already beginning with the early days of Christianity, the Jewish national grand narrative started to be rejected as being authoritative for a Christian sense of identity, and as such becomes a shaky basis for constructing normative principles for sexual conduct in our present day context.

We will have come to see that Gagnon's reliance on the creation myth as narrative to establish normative principles with regard to sexuality and sexual conduct suffers from a confusion (naturalistic fallacy) of taking a narrative to be an exact

representation of reality, as though the narrative somehow presents a 'neutral', factual or descriptive stance. We will have seen, through Gadamer and Rorty, that in fact this narrative is not neutral but represents the finite and subjective attempt of the Jewish people to consolidate a sense of national identity in a time of revival and crisis. As such, underlying the linguistic game of the Jewish national grand narrative is a politics of survival. This politics of survival in turn became the dominant discourse of Jewish and Christian attitudes towards sexuality and sexual conduct. In addition, we will have come to see, using Butler's insights, that as part of contemporary heterosexual performativity (normatively derived from the biblical narrative) the homosexual and heterosexual subject are both interpellated into existence.

What does this mean for the gay Christian who wishes to express their sexuality in a Christian context? One possible answer, is that using the hermeneutical insight gained from this thesis we will use queer commentary to preserve the value of the biblical narrative, while at the same time re-interpret this narrative in an attempt to articulate our sexual existence in a postmodern contemporary context. As noted above, such commentary questions, from a postmodernist perspective of doubting grand narratives (Taylor & Winqust, 2001: 164; Dreyer, 2007:2), notions concerning rigid distinctions that are encapsulated in binarisms such as male and female, homosexual and heterosexual (Tate, 2007: 293). A person using queer commentary acknowledges that 'reality [with regard to sexual identity] itself is a social construct' (Dreyer, 2006: 157) and as such strives to be inclusive of various sexual identities (West, 1999: 36) as they engage different texts. Queer commentary acknowledges that when it comes to the Jewish national grand narrative of the bible, that 'in times of social crises, when national borders and identities are threatened, there is likely to be a concern with the maintenance of existing bodily boundaries and the purity of bodies' (Standing, 2004: 68). And so throughout this thesis, a shift of emphasis will be seen in terms of a dialectical relationship from the text being used to dominate the reader, to a hermeneutical moment in which the reader, as imaginative subject, takes responsibility for how the text is being used.

So while it can be asserted that the bible does not directly address 'homosexuality' *per se*, (Nortjé-Meyer, 2005: 175), it does address issues of identity formation. Therefore, as a central text in the development of a Christian identity, the bible

nevertheless can still continue to play a profoundly influential role in the development of such an identity in our contemporary society, without it necessarily being used in the normative way that Gagnon would want us to. In conclude my thesis through revisiting the creation myth of Genesis, and I give my reader an idea of what a queer reading of that formative myth in the tradition of western conceptions of human sexuality may look like. In that reading, I return to the main themes addressed in my thesis, and apply them to the text, thereby opening up what I hope may become a way towards an alternative hermeneutics of sexuality.

CHAPTER ONE

ROBERT GAGNON'S ARGUMENT AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY

Introduction

In this chapter I address the following themes:

1. First, I look at Robert Gagnon's use in his *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (2001) of the creation myth in Genesis chapters one and two, to condemn homosexuality from a Christian perspective. I chose this work because it is, in my opinion, the most thoroughly written piece of work, by a conservative academic author, concerning the subject of homosexuality and the bible. In my presentation of Gagnon's position I will look critically at the way in which he bases his understanding of sexual conduct on his interpretation of the creation myth. Gagnon, in reading the creation myth, elicits an understanding of reality in which there is a sense of *cosmic order,* and of which 'gender complementarity' is a specific example or manifestation. A definition of 'gender complementarity' is: 'a conception of men and women as (a) essentially different and (b) "complete" only in relation to each other' (Jung & Coray, 1989: 40). In other words, through the use of the concept of cosmic order, Gagnon asserts that 'right' sexual conduct is seen to be that type of conduct that fits in *harmoniously* with 'nature' or with the mechanical structure of the world or cosmos as God created it. What this implies for Gagnon with regard to sexual conduct is that only that type of sexual intercourse is legitimate which engages body parts that 'naturally' fit together. Thus heterosexual intercourse between a man and a woman is the only legitimate expression of sex, as this type of sexual intercourse is a 'natural fit' as created by God, of opposite and complementary body parts.

2. After presenting Gagnon's argument against homosexuality I will then address the hermeneutic question of *whether or not* one can simply take the text of the creation myth at *face value*, or read it superficially, as does Gagnon. In response to this question, we look at how the biblical text (specifically the Deuteronomistic history) was put together by a group of redactors (or editors), whose selection and compilation

of the text was informed by the then current, seventh century B.C.E. Jewish theological and political interests of the time. Thus, we will come to see that the biblical narrative serves not the purpose of 'merely' presenting historical 'facts' or data (like a modern day history text book may attempt to do), but rather, the *purpose of the biblical narrative serves the function of a particular type of narrative, namely the national grand narrative.* In other words, I argue that the creation myth's meaning must be interpreted against its historical background, and its sexual prescriptions cannot be regarded as simplistically applicable in today's very different context.

3. However, even if we should guard against a simplistic application of the creation myth to our contemporary questions regarding human sexuality, in particular regarding homosexuality, I believe that as Christians we can also not escape the influence of the creation myth upon our identities, and therefore in this third section of the chapter I will look at the role that the creation myth in fact plays as a narrative in the formation of Christian identity, including sexual identity. In this section I look specifically at myth as a form of narrative which is tightly interwoven both with aspirations or ideals for human conduct, expressed by the myth as a hidden structure of, or deep fact about the world, as well as with the working of the imagination. I also argue in this section that the creation myth provided an ideal of heterosexuality within a historical context in which Jewish identity was being forged and asserted against hostile indigenous tribes. The ideal of hetero-normativity supported by the creation myth was thus used to clearly separate Jewish from surrounding and threatening other ethnicities.

4. I will then look at the relationship between narrative, the imagination and identity, where I will analyse the Voortrekker Monument as an interesting example of the expression of a group's historical self-image in which narrative, imagination and identity are clearly interrelated. I show that the creators of the Afrikaner myth as expressed in that monument, have creatively combined Old Testament mythic elements with aspects of Afrikaner history, to weave together a coherent narrative about the meaning and justification of Afrikaner existence in South Africa.

5. In the fifth and final section of the chapter, I will focus specifically on what I call the national grand narrative, which is *a foundational story that a nation looks to in*

times of crisis, as a source of inspiration and identity (Rosenstand, 2000: 521). The concept of the national grand narrative (a concept that Gagnon does not himself use) helps to show how narrative (i.e. the creation myth as narrative) functions in Gagnon and elsewhere as a source of *identity*, not only for a nation as a whole but also for individuals within the nation. By applying the concept of national grand narrative to the creation myth, I hope to demonstrate how we will be able to better understand why that story or narrative figures as such a pivotal text with regard to the traditional 'biblical viewpoint' on sexual conduct in general, and of homosexuality in particular.

1. The Creation Myth and Homosexuality – An Argument by Robert Gagnon

Before I begin a detailed criticism of Gagnon's stance toward homosexuality, I would like to first provide the reader with a brief survey of his overall argument. In presenting his arguments against homosexuality, Robert Gagnon employs a detailed arsenal of reasons why homosexuality is bad, and why it is condemned by the bible (Gagnon, 2001: 37). Amongst the weapons to be found in his arsenal are arguments that revolve around such issues as health (for example that homosexual acts are conducive to sexually transmittable diseases, [Gagnon, 2001: 475-476]), the destabilizing effects of homosexual behavior on the moral fibre of society, in that homosexual behavior can lead to the breakdown of families, (Gagnon, 2001: 37), and the unstable nature of homosexual relationships themselves (Gagnon, 2001: 37), by which Gagnon asserts that few gay men are able to maintain long-term relationships. In addition to the above subjects that Gagnon rallies to his aid, he also investigates, using scholars involved in the historical-critical method of studying the bible, the attitudes of the nations surrounding the land of Israel, towards homogenital acts (Gagnon, 2001: 44-62). Gagnon argues that some ancient Near Eastern nations found in Mesopotamia (Gagnon, 2001: 44), Egypt (Gagnon, 2001: 51), and the Hittite Empire (Gagnon, 2001: 54) while being a little more tolerant of homosexual behavior, nevertheless ultimately looked down on such behavior (Gagnon, 2001: 56).

Another line that Gagnon takes is that of the attitudes of earlier Judaism towards homogenital acts (Gagnon, 2001: 159), which are discussed under the topics of procreation (Gagnon, 2001: 164), gender discomplementarity (Gagnon, 2001: 169), and 'excess passion' (Gagnon, 2001: 176) and unnaturalness (Gagnon, 2001: 179).

The aspect of 'excess passion' refers to this being considered by the Jews of the time to be a cause of homogenitality. According to Gagnon, men who 'indulged' in homogenital activity were seen as suffering from a lack of proper sexual self-control and an excess of passion. With regard to the last point above, the ancient Jews argued from observation of nature that homogenitality was not found amongst the animals, and was therefore by extension of argument, not 'natural'. Furthermore, Gagnon argues, that Jesus as a devout Jew would not have condoned homogenital acts (Gagnon, 2001: 185, 193), simply because devout Jews of the day did condemn homogenital acts. In addition, Gagnon focuses on the attitude of another devout Jew, Paul, towards homogenital acts (Gagnon, 2001: 229), in which he furnishes us with a detailed exegetical scrutiny of Romans chapter one (Gagnon, 2001: 235). Finally, Gagnon's argument is a comprehensive look at the bible's overall 'condemnation' of homogenitality, as he touches on many chapters and verses, such as Genesis 1-2; 19: 4-11; Leviticus 18, 20; Judges 19; I Samuel 18-23; Romans 1; I Corinthians 6 and II Timothy 1. Relying on these, Gagnon argues that to say that the bible in anyway does not condemn homogenital acts, or even to say that it may condone such acts, would require of us to come up with an 'alternate creation myth' (Gagnon, 2001: 194). Whether or not this is possible, will become more evident as this thesis unfolds.

As a result of Gagnon's comprehensive treatment of the subject, he does not spend much time in developing his initial focus on the creation myth, and as a result tends to use the creation myth on a superficial level, even though this myth forms a cornerstone of his argument. This is not a criticism of Gagnon's argument, but an observation, in that it is understandable in terms of his overall purpose in writing his book, which is to address the debate about homosexuality and the bible over the past few decades (Gagnon, 2001: 37). Such a task obviously would involve the compilation of many volumes of books. However, Gagnon has restricted himself to one book, and therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that he had to be selective in the amount of detail that he employed in elaborating his argument. Furthermore, Gagnon, as far as I know, is not a philosopher, and from what I have read and gotten from his book, is that his focus is not so much on presenting a *philosophical argument*, as it is on what he probably would call the theological fight against the 'scourge of homosexuality'. That being said, Gagnon is nevertheless an acknowledged academic author, and as such still presents a strong case in defence of his position, and is

therefore, in my opinion, a worthwhile, influential and representative author to engage on the subject of homosexuality and the bible.

Bearing in mind my above assertion that Gagnon's book is not a philosophical treatise with regard to the subject of homosexuality and the bible, it is interesting to note that the last section of his book is an attempt to address this subject on a hermeneutical basis, in the chapter that he entitles *The Hermeneutical Relevance of the Biblical Witness* (Gagnon, 2001: 341). While it is refreshing to find a conservative Christian author acknowledging that 'no interpreter of the Bible (sic) can pretend to be completely unbiased' (Gagnon, 2001: 344), we will come to observe that Gagnon's own interpretation and treatment of the subject belies his assertion. In other words, he seems to be finally uncritical of his own biases or 'hermeneutical (interpretative) moment' when he interprets various biblical verses. This is evident in development of this chapter of his, in two ways. Firstly, it can be said that his treatment of the subject in this chapter is on an exegetical level. By that I mean, that he does employ some accepted exegetical principles (such as interpreting a text against its relevant context or background, or focusing on grammatical rules in interpreting a text), but he does not develop his argument in terms of a hermeneutical focus (Gagnon, 2001: 449-450). By this I mean that he does not question why certain exegetical methods are acceptable for his interpretation of the bible, and why some others are not. Which brings me to the second way in which Gagnon is unaware of his own biases. He is unaware of his own biases because he does not focus on the subject of hermeneutics as such, a subject which is crucial if we are to have a clearer understanding of the topic of homosexuality and the bible. This is of course where I step into the debate, in that I bring to the debate a clearer focus of the role that hermeneutics can play in achieving a better understanding of this subject.

Gagnon fails to develop the hermeneutical foundation with regard to this subject, and he ignores modern insights of modern hermeneutical theorists like Gadamer for example, in that he simply does not mention them at all. Thus for example, Gagnon does not develop the idea of the influence that his own finitude has on his interpretation of the bible. He simply takes it for granted that his interpretation of the bible is an accurate reflection of reality as it is, in that for example he assumes that the way he understands the bible, is the way that the original authors and compilers of the

bible would have understood it. So while he does acknowledge that 'it is inappropriate to simply assert the Bible's authority at face value' (Gagnon, 2001: 485), this is unwittingly what he lands up doing, in that he simply reads the bible as condemning homosexuality, and thus argues from his reading that homosexuality is wrong. Having given a brief survey of Gagnon's work, I will now focus on the particular areas of his work that I address in this thesis.

Robert Gagnon's argument against homosexuality can be said to be focused, using the creation myth as its basis (Gagnon, 2001: 43), on the fundamental concept of cosmic order (Gagnon, 2001: 37), of which gender complementarity is a specific example (Gagnon, 2001: 40). For Gagnon, the creation myth underlies his reading of all the other relevant biblical passages, and this can clearly be seen in the way in which he so often refers to the creation when the issues of procreation and male-female relationships are mentioned in the rest of the scriptures, an example being Matthew 19: 1-10. Furthermore, it can be said that the creation myth is also implicit in Paul's argument against homogenital acts (Gagnon, 2001: 121, 162, 337) in Romans chapter one. Ultimately, then, Gagnon's argument against homosexuality is rooted most fundamentally in his interpretation of the creation myth and this reading underlies all his other arguments and textual readings.

And so in elaborating his argument against homosexuality, Robert Gagnon focuses our attention on the story of the creation myth (Gagnon, 2001: 43, 56), in which God creates *order out of disorder* (Gagnon, 2001: 57). Not only is the physical world portrayed in this myth as being split and ordered into the *separate* spheres of existence of land, sea and air (Genesis 1: 4-27), but so are also all living creatures, including humanity, who are *separated* into their own categories of male and female (Genesis 1:27). This creation myth or story can be understood on at least two levels, i.e. on a descriptive level and on a prescriptive level. On the *descriptive level* the story can be *superficially* read to merely 'recount' the events of the creation of the world as they occurred in a chronological order. However, on a *prescriptive level*, the narrative account of the creation can be said to provide a *normative template* with regard to what constitutes 'correct' human behaviour, based on what could be understood to be our 'place within the created order', and this on Gagnon's reading of the myth would include prescriptions about our sexual behaviour.

Correct sexual behavior according to this prescriptive view should be understood against the background of the whole cosmic order or structure of the world as established during the act of creation as such. In other words, in terms of Gagnon's understanding of how the creation myth is elaborated, it can be said that through creation, God provided us with a natural universe or cosmos that is structured through *fixed underlying 'intrinsic' principles* in such a way that it is able to function harmoniously. An example of Gagnon's understanding of the nature of this cosmic order, is his understanding of human sexuality as being governed by 'instinct' (Gagnon, 2001: 25, 33). This however, is an assumption that Gagnon makes, because, while Gagnon may feel that having heterosexual intercourse for himself is driven by instinctual (natural, cosmic) impulses, I am sure that any gay man would testify that there simply is no 'instinctual' impulse in themselves driving them towards having sexual relations with a woman. Of course, by referring to instinct in sexual relations, Gagnon implies that gay men act against their instincts and thus unnaturally or artificially.

Tying in with this idea, is Gagnon's understanding that this supposedly inherent, created harmony is constantly threatened only by human choices that fail to adhere to these natural principles and that thus fail to respect this order. And so for Gagnon, based on the creation myth, nature itself, as ordained, or intended by God, becomes a *regulative principle* for sexual relationships (Gagnon, 2001: 56). Consequently, when nature is violated, e.g. by sexual activity that does not 'comply', or fit in with the functioning of the created harmonious world, as with the ostensibly seminal example of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 1-38), cosmic disaster and social confusion automatically ensues. He cannot explain such 'counter-natural' acts, except as an act of rebellion against God. Fear of such cosmic disaster and social confusion ensuing becomes a motivation for the people of Israel (and by extension of argument as well as for Christians today in terms of Gagnon's reasoning) to conform to the 'natural' categories that God initially preordained for humanity and the world (Gagnon, 2001: 121).

To focus on what could be understood to be a particular example or manifestation of the concept of cosmic order, Gagnon uses the concept of so-called 'gender

complementarity' (Gagnon, 2001: 266). This concept fits in with the idea of cosmic order, in that it can be said, that as part of the created world, Adam and Eve were created with bodies that conformed to the overall cosmic order of the world. Such conforming may be evidenced in the creation myth in two ways, one, in that Adam and Eve were created (like the other organisms) to procreate (Genesis 1:28), and two, they were created after their own kind (or more specifically a particular 'kind', i.e. in the image of God, Genesis 1: 27). As a part of the pattern of cosmic order, such complementarity can also be said to focus on the *mechanical* interaction between body parts. In terms of this logic, according to Gagnon, the moral regulation of sexual conduct should focus on *sexual acts* as such, namely those acts that violate the 'natural - created and thus divinely intended - fit' between female and male sexual body parts (Gagnon, 2001: 37). The fact that the body parts fit neatly and thus supposedly 'naturally' into each other is for Gagnon *physical evidence* that sex was intended by God to take place between a woman and a man, rather than between either two women or two men, who would not possess divinely-ordained, 'complementary' sexual organs (Gagnon, 2001: 58). Thus Gagnon argues that with regard to same-sex intercourse, 'the Bible is primarily condemning an activity or form of behaviour, not a state of being [or sexual orientation – SH]' (Gagnon, 2001: 38, 462)[5]. In other words, the 'unnatural' or 'sinful' status of homosexuality lies in its concrete expression, which entails a counter-natural usage of the genitalia, and the artificiality (and thus rebelliousness) of the act can for Gagnon clearly be seen in the way in which male and female, but not male and male or female and female genitalia 'fit' into each other during copulation. Homosexual acts are thus the counter-natural usage or abuse of the 'natural function' of the sex organs.

Thus in line with what can be called the 'mechanical interaction' of sexual body parts, that Gagnon focuses on, as explained above, it can be said that *gender complementarity*, as opposed to *same sex dis-complementarity,* (Gagnon, 2001: 135, 266), focuses on the primary importance of the penis being inserted into the vagina, since this is what fits 'naturally' and is also what leads to procreation. From the physical or mechanical 'fit' between female and male sex organs, Gagnon thus derives a larger normative concept of gender complementarity, which he uncritically

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[5] It is for this reason that I primarily refer to 'sexual conduct' throughout most of this thesis, and avoid the more modern term of 'sexual orientation'.

transposes to the socio-cultural and ethical domains of human existence. Moreover, the possibility of procreation in the heterosexual couple and his too close association of sexual desire and procreation, signify for Gagnon that heterosexual sexual acts are divinely ordained, as if the possibility (not necessarily actuality) of procreation in itself sanctifies sexual desire. The complete absence of the possibility of procreation in the case of homosexual sexual acts, and therefore the lack of a sanctifying element in them, renders the latter perverse or unnatural. Taken together, the supposed complementarity and the possibility of *procreation* characterizing heterosexual acts means for Gagnon, that God intends sexual acts between women and men through created nature, and that any other form of sexual activity is not so intended. From this it follows for Gagnon, that anal intercourse or sexual activity between persons of the same gender is considered to be a *confusion* of anatomical functions (Gagnon, 2001: 139), so that all extra-vaginal sex, even fellatio for example, in Gagnon's books would be considered unnatural (Gagnon, 2001: 181), and thus against the order of God, as expressed in created nature.

To sum up, Gagnon uses the creation myth to argue for what can be called a gender complementarity or heterosexual norm with regard to human sexual conduct. This norm is predicated on the notion that intrinsic to nature is an underlying normative structure. My almost exclusive focus in my thesis on the creation myth of the Genesis text can be justified because that founding myth sets the tone and determines the rationale concerning the proscription of homosexuality, not only within the Pentateuch itself (i.e. Genesis 18 and Leviticus 19 and 20), but also within the New Testament texts (i.e. Romans 1, I Corinthians 6 and I Timothy I), and thus within the Christian tradition as a whole. This 'traditional' reliance on the creation myth in establishing a hetero-normative framework for sexual conduct is evidenced in Augustine (Rogers, 2002: 72), through to Pope John Paul II (Rogers, 2002: 171).

2. Can we take the Text at Face Value? – Biblical Redactorship and Deuteronomistic History

Significant in Gagnon's elaboration of his argument against homosexuality is his acknowledgement of priestly redactors (such as the Yahwist, Gagnon, 2001: 70, 155) in the compilation of the Old Testament biblical narrative (Gagnon, 2001: 44).

Gagnon notes that these very redactor's themselves had a bias against homogenital activity (Gagnon, 2001: 155). Such priestly redactors are also said to have been involved in the compilation of what is known as Deuteronomistic history (Gagnon, 2001: 44, 55, 95, 108), a theory that I will now focus on.

In attempting to elaborate a hermeneutics of sexual identity[6], looking at Gagnon's use of the creation myth to condemn homosexuality, the first question that we need to ask ourselves is, can we take the Genesis text at face value, to the extent that Gagnon does, i.e. can we infer rules for our sexual morality (prescriptive) simplistically from the creation story (descriptive)? An obvious answer from a hermeneutical perspective is *no*. One reason (as shall be explored later on under the section dealing with Gadamer) is simply that every text arises out of a *context*, an historical and cultural situation in which the author of a text originally penned the text. And if a text arises out of a particular context, then the issue of *applicability across contexts*, or cultural circumstances, arises. And if the issue of applicability across cultural contexts arises, then the first step that we need to take in looking at a hermeneutics of sexual identity is to try to establish what meaning a text had in its original *Sitz im Leben* context, so as to try to determine what are the similarities and dissimilarities between our current cultural and historical context and that of the text we are trying to 'apply'. Similarities and differences between the two contexts are important, for they determine the *degree* to which we can apply a text across contexts. To get a better understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* context of the biblical text, we will now focus on Deuteronomistic history.

In looking at the Old Testament books (Genesis – II Kings)[7] that form what is known as 'Deuteronomistic history', biblical scholars have noticed certain inconsistencies within the text. So for example, there is some dissonance between the historical 'facts' as presented in the biblical narrative, such as *anachronisms* (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 171) and also some apparent *contrived syntheses* evident in certain places within the text. Examples of anachronism are as follows:

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[6] By a 'hermeneutics of sexual identity' I am referring to an interpretive process that takes place in using a text (for example the bible) to construct an understanding (as well as normative principles) with regard to what sexuality *is* or *ought* to be.

[7] While a distinction can be made between the *Pentateuch* and *Deuteronomistic history*, for purposes of the argument of this thesis I treat the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic history as forming a c*ontinuous narrative*.

1) The dedication of Solomon's temple in the book of I Kings betrays that it is written from a perspective of post exile Israel, a few hundred years after the life of Solomon. Thus surprisingly (and tellingly) no mention is made of sacrifices, as one would expect, seeing as sacrifice was an integral aspect of temple worship and service. Instead, emphasis is placed on a defeated Israel (so betraying a post exilic perspective) in which the people of Israel are encouraged to pray in the *direction* of the temple in their times of crisis (Rogerson, 1999: 89). In other words the lack of mention of sacrifices, and reference to a defeated Israel indicate that at the time of the *actual compilation* of the book of I Kings, the temple was *not in active use* by the nation of Israel (due to the fact that the Jews were now in captivity in Babylonia).

2) Emphasis on the permanence of the Davidic dynasty paradoxically evolves in the exilic and postexilic period (Rogerson, 1999: 123), long after the Davidic dynasty had disappeared.

3) Finkelstein and Silberman (2001: 11) assert that the 'biblical text was filled with literary asides, explaining the ancient names of certain places and frequently noting that the evidences of famous biblical events were still visible "to this day"', 'to this day' indicating a *retrospective stance* with regard to the narrated events, rather than the view of a *writer elaborating a contemporary moment by moment account of events as they unfold during the writer's own lifetime* (an impression that one gets if one reads the text superficially).

With regard to the *contrived synthesis* of the text itself, an example that John Rogerson furnishes us with is to be found in the book of Judges, where the characters, for example Othniel, are simply inserted into the narrative record, more to supply a numerically balanced structure to the narrative, or to 'fill in gaps', than to present a *descriptive* and chronically accurate record of what 'actually' happened (Rogerson, 1999: 45). In other words, both the biblical redactors and authors and their readership must have known that the main purpose of the texts were not literal, factual and accurate description, but an exercise in meaning-making which lies on a different plain altogether.

In addition, biblical scholars studying the contents of the Pentateuch have for a long time now, noticed certain 'telling' clues in the text itself that give rise to the idea that the final form of the text that we have today was actually put together by redactors or editors *at a later stage* than the original composition of the individual fragmentary parts, and definitely long after the narrated events are supposed to have taken place. So for example if we look at the creation story as laid out in Genesis chapters one and two, at face value, we would assume that what we have in chapter one is a descriptive, chronological account of the creation, and in chapter two, a closer detailed account of what took place on the sixth day of the creation described in chapter one. However, with the development of source criticism, in which an attempt is made to identify what are the original source texts used to compile the scriptures in the format that we have them in today, it has been established that what we have in Genesis chapters one and two are really *two* rather conflicting versions of the creation myth (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 11).

Furthermore, in investigating the rest of the Pentateuch, scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Gerhard von Rad (Prickett, 2000: 112) have established that there are at least four editors or compilers (Prickett, 2000: 113) that were responsible for putting together the Pentateuchal text in the format that we have it in today (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 12). They have been identified, using four different letters, J, E, P, D, and are as follows: 'J', stands for the Yahwist who can be identified in those texts that use the word äåäé (Yahweh), and whose primary concern centers around issues related to Judah (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 12; Vawter, 1977: 17); 'E', stands for the Elohist, who can be identified in those texts that use the Hebrew word íéäìà for 'God'; 'P', stands for the priestly redactor whose main concerns center around the issues of sacrifice and temple service; and finally 'D' stands for 'document' or the 'Deuteronomist', representing the redactor behind the text of Deuteronomy (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 12).

In addition to the above insight that we have with regard to the compilation of the Pentateuch, in terms of redactorship that took place during the time of Josiah (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 23; Gagnon, 2001: 106), we also have what can be identified as the 'Deuteronomistic history' of the biblical narrative, and which includes the seven books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I

kings and II Kings (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 13). The theory of Deuteronomistic history was formulated by Martin Noth in 1943 (Person, 2002: 2), and is based on the idea that a guild of scribes belonging to the royal court of king Josiah (Person, 2002: 7) was instrumental in compiling the scriptures (particularly Genesis through to II Kings) in the format that we have them today. They are thought to have *selectively* compiled these scriptures with emphasis on particular themes that suited their political and religious agenda[8]. The development of Deuteronomistic history can be said to have taken place over the duration of two significant periods (Person, 2002 83), the one being the reign of king Josiah, and the other being the post-exilic period when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity.

Josiah reigned as king of Judah between 640 and 609 B.C.E. (Rogerson, 1999: 122), and was responsible for tremendous social and religious reforms in Judah (II Kings 23). Such reforms were enabled and heavily influenced by the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel approximately a century or more before, as there was a resultant major immigration of people, as refugees fled from the north and settled in and around Judah and specifically Jerusalem (Rogerson, 1999: 139, 147). This migration brought people with it who had skills and wealth that would enable a 'religious development and literary expression of national identity' (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 289). Previously, literary skills were not wide spread, as writing tools and materials were very expensive, and there simply was not enough manpower to sustain the demands of a large reading public. However, as noted, with the large southward migration of skilled and wealthy peoples this poverty of literacy dissipated.

And so under contemporary prosperity and the reforms of Josiah, Jerusalem became the *dominant center* of Jewish religion and politics (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 243; Person, 2002: 27; Theodore Mullen, 1993: 4). As a result of Josiah's reforms, the so-called 'Yahweh alone' cult (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 273) took center stage in a Jewish notion of the divine (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 247), as priests began to consolidate a monotheistic understanding of Yahweh, and to consolidate the relevant religious texts that were to become authoritative in the worship of Yahweh.

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[8] Such themes included '1. The struggle against idolatry, 2. The centralization of the cult, 3. Exodus, covenant and election, 4. The monotheistic creed, 5. Observance of the law and loyalty to the covenant, 6. Inheritance of the land, 7. Retribution and material motivation, 8. Fulfillment of prophecy, 9. The election of the Davidic dynasty' (Person, 2002: 20).

And because the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel was still fresh in the minds of these priests (in fact some of them probably found themselves living in Jerusalem because they themselves were refugees of those tragic events [Rogerson, 1999: 139, 147]), there was intrinsic to the construction of the text the driving need to establish an identity for purposes of survival.

With such a need and the consolidation of a textual canon, the phenomenon of 'retrospective theology' (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 249) arose, in which already existing fragments of texts were fused together to form a continuous narrative, with contemporary concerns permeating the narrative structure and contents of biblical books. Such 'fusion' obviously involved a degree of *selectivity* in which some fragments were included in the biblical narrative, and others were excluded (Theodore Mullen, 1993: 9). In turn what guided this selectivity were the contemporary seventh century theological and political orientations of the priests or redactors who compiled or collated the biblical text. Thus the compilation of the biblical text involved the *retelling of past events*, in which those past events were *framed* in terms of the *current ideological priorities*. In other words, issues of the day were retrojected onto the past (Theodore Mullen, 1993: 14), in the sense that stories of the past as they were recounted in the biblical narrative, were *infused with the priestly redactor's own seventh century political and theological agenda*. Of significance to this phenomenon of retrospective theology, is that at this time of the compilation of the biblical narrative a mysterious book was 'discovered' in the temple. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001: 276) describe the significance of this discovery as follows:

> That book, identified by most scholars as an original form of the book of Deuteronomy, sparked a revolution in ritual and a complete reformulation of Israelite identity. It contained the central feature of biblical monotheism: the exclusive worship of one God in one place; centralized, national observance of the main festivals of the Jewish year (Passover, Tabernacles); and a range of legislation dealing with social welfare, justice, and personal morality.

And so we can see from this example of the book of Deuteronomy, that the retrospective theology of the priestly redactors placed great emphasis in the collated texts on centrality of worship and the *uniqueness of the Jewish identity* as played out

in the observance of special holy days, food laws and rules regarding social and personal conduct. Such rules invariably included issues of sexual conduct and the *regulation of procreative activity*.

As with the reforms of Josiah, another crucial period in the development of the format of the text as we have it today is the exile and post exile period of Jewish history, that also overlaps with what is known as the 'second temple' Judaism (Rogerson, 1999: 157). It was the time when the southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians, circa 586 B.C.E. It was mainly the upper echelons of Jewish society that were deported to live in Babylon. The loss of land and living in a foreign country stimulated a focus on what it was to be a Jew. Sabbath observance, circumcision and dietary laws, as well as endogamous marriage laws became means by which to define oneself as a Jew (Rogerson, 1999: 155) and to distinguish oneself from the inhabitants of the land of exile. Once again, related to this event in Jewish history, the 'historical' books of I and II Chronicles are understood to be collated in the post exile period of second Temple Judaism (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 14). As a result, the books of Chronicles, having been collated by Jewish priests, emphasize the southern kingdom or Judaistic viewpoint. With the return of some of the Jews to Jerusalem, and under the influence and rulings of Ezra and Nehemiah, a Jewish identity was consolidated (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 361). And so 'a rewritten history of Israel was the best way for the exiles to reassert their identity' (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 303). With such a consolidation came a text that was to have a far reaching and profound influence on how later users of these texts, for example Christians, were to understand and formulate their own sense of identity (including sexual identity) in the world.

From the above discussion, what is significant about the form and contents of the biblical narrative that we have today, is not so much the historical 'facts' that are recorded in its pages, but what we can learn about the *interests and pressing concerns* of the redactors who collated these scriptures (Rogerson, 1999: 20). As noted, such interests reflect the concerns of the seventh century B.C.E. 'Judahite' focus on the southern kingdom of Judah (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 45). Thus for example the redactors are at pains to emphasize the apparent righteousness of the southern kingdom of Judah, and the evil of the northern Kingdom of Israel (Finkelstein &

Silberman, 2001: 121). And so 'history' as recorded or collated by the biblical redactors forms more of a *foil* for what is really the main concerns of the redactors, i.e. the presentation of theological and political ideals in an attempt to establish a 'defining and motivating text' that lies at the very heart of what it means to be a Jew in the world (Rogerson, 1999: 149; Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 229, 283). Of significance is that such meaning of what it means to be a Jew influenced the presentation of ideals and meaning in the text as we have it today, whether theological or political (Rogerson, 1999: 75).

Thus, as an attempt to establish meaning and consolidate identity, these stories invariably include in them ideals in one form or another, including ideals around sexual conduct (Rogerson, 1999: 22). Amongst the examples of different kinds of ideals that can be found in the biblical narrative are those in the form of *numbers* (representing the ideal of perfection), such as 7 (the weekly cycle already established within the creation myth), 10 (ten commandments) or 12, as in the twelve tribes of Israel (Rogerson, 1999: 29). Another type of ideal represented in the text is that of *personality ideals*. For example the personality of king David is presented as an ideal that other kings of Israel are measured by (Rogerson, 1999: 76).

Seeing that the whole of the Deuteronomistic history constitutes such a retelling of supposedly historical events with the purpose of creating and sustaining a Jewish identity in the midst of adversity, the same must be assumed about the creation myth, which forms the focus of my attention in this thesis. The way in which human sexuality is treated within that myth, and the normative or prescriptive dimension gained from a simplistic reading of the myth such as Gagnon's, must therefore also have served the interests of the biblical redactors and priestly classes of the seventh century B.C.E. In what follows I look at the way in which mythic ideals such as those found in the creation myth, function in the establishment of national identity. In the next section I focus on the role of the creation myth as narrative and the function of the imagination in the day-to-day use of narratives.

3. The Role of the Creation Myth with regard to Identity

One could say that Gagnon's argument against homosexuality is dependent on a certain use or understanding of myth that elucidates an otherwise *unapparent moral order* in the universe. This *understanding of myth* entails on a superficial level the use of myth as narrative and thus as a descriptive medium which literally conveys historical facts. In reality, of course, the myth is being used prescriptively, so that the myth as narrative *descriptively as well as prescriptively* lays before us the 'true', but otherwise non-obvious, or hidden nature of the world. In this sense myth used as narrative becomes a strategy not only for understanding the nature or structure of the world, but also for determining the role we as humans ought to play in this world. In his book, *The Strategy of Culture* (1974: 13), C.A. van Peursen describes the evolution (or the strategy) of culture in terms of three grand options, or strategies that are used to navigate (understand) the world and manipulate the environment. One of the chief strategies used by pre-technical societies such as the ancient kingdom of Judah is that of myth. And because myth *functions as a strategy* for understanding the world based on various experiences presented in stories or narratives, it can also be said as a rule to be transmitted as a strategy or coping (interpretive) mechanism from one generation to another in *narrative* form. A specific example of such a narrative form is the one that we encounter in the Deuteronomistic history. In other words, the creation myth as a part of that history, functioned as a strategy for making sense of the world in ancient Jewish thinking and practice, through its illumination of a hidden structure of the world. In particular, it seems to have functioned, not only within the Jewish nation but later also within the Christian world, as a guiding myth for personal sexual conduct.

Bearing the above in mind, with regard to the concept of myth, there are many definitions of the term 'myth', but one that I find useful for my discussion here is that 'myth is the embodiment [in narrative form – SH] of human aspiration and its appropriate imaginative form' (Righter, 1975: 3). Two key components of myths which emerge from this definition are (1) that they give expression to aspirations or *ideals*, i.e. the way we would like the world to be, and (2) that they are derivative of and function as stimulants for the *imagination*. Furthermore, as a function of giving expression to ideals, it can be said, as noted above, that 'myths are attempts to explain

things' (Rogerson, 1974: 175). The attempt to explain things is accomplished through the process of the *ideal function* of myths: a certain order or structure is imposed through the use of myth on the world, a structure through which (a) people are able to articulate their position and thus their sense of meaning and purpose in the universe. In mythic structure, then, the moral or other ideal or aspiration is thoroughly intertwined with the apparently factual or historical (narrative) aspect of the story. Fact and fiction, (deep or hidden) reality and ideal, are presented simultaneously, so that myth actually seems to imagine an ideal world into existence. The ordering of the world offered by myth is therefore never presented by the myth as simply an ideal, but is presented in the mythic structure as existing *intrinsically* within the universe (i.e. not imposed or 'read into'), and to form a backdrop or meaning-giving frame to the events that take place in everyday existence. Clearly, then, such a structure or order is not immediately apparent simply from observing lived reality as such, but becomes apprehended in the everyday only by 'reading' the everyday events through the lenses of the *narrative* unfolding of the mythic story. In other words, it can be said that myths 'convey realities that cannot be verified empirically … they typically articulate a culture's worldview, including its understanding of life's goals and the dangers attending them' (Harris & Platzner, 1998: 8). In the words of Righter (1975: 5, emphasis added):

> Myth [as] narrative … comes to mean any *anonymously* composed story telling of origins and destinies, the explanation a society offers its young of why the world is and why we do as we do, its pedagogic images of the nature and destiny of man.

And since myth as narrative is about making sense of the world through its ideal function, it can be asserted that our mythic world views or narrative cosmologies affect 'the quality of life' we experience as they tend to *shape our expectations* and affect our values and standards, our sense of meaning and purpose (Boersema, 2001: 21).[9] Thus, through the creation of myths as narratives, we are not merely describing things, we are also projecting structure onto the universe and life because it is through

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[9] Boersema (2001: 26) provides us with his own definition of cosmology as follows: 'Cosmologies are then to be understood as cognitive and mental constructs by means of which individual human beings (and societies) manage, to varying degree, both to survive and to give their lives purpose and significance'.

this anthropocentrically imposed structure that we find meaning and hence comfort or security in our existence (Falck, 1994: 113; Righter, 1975: 101). One interesting example of the idea that mythic structure is imposed onto lived reality is the notion self-reflectively contained in the creation myth of the Hebrew Bible that God *creates order* out of chaos. In terms of the myth, God is the One who creates order out of disorder, or who imposes order onto the unformed world. This is ironic, because, from the perspective analysed here, it is rather the creation myth itself, rather than the mythic character of God, which imposes order on the world.

To briefly recap, so far in this thesis I have looked at the argument presented by Gagnon against homosexuality using the creation myth of Genesis chapters one and two. We saw that Gagnon elicited the concept of cosmic order from the text to establish that there are certain categories of right and wrong with regard to sexual conduct. We also saw that he is relying on a text that was composed or rather re-composed at a certain period of time in Jewish history, by a group of priestly redactors, whose collective concern was to establish categories of existence that enabled the Jewish people to achieve a strong sense of their separate or clearly distinguishable identity in the world. We saw that such categories of existence included rules of conduct around observing special holy days, dietary laws, sexual conduct, and most importantly of all, centralized worship around the Jerusalem temple (during Josiah's time) and the personal God, Yahweh Elohim. In turn, these important 'pillars' of Judaism became the guiding principles determining which materials were included in the final form of the biblical narrative, and which were excluded from that narrative. Thus what we have come to see is that Gagnon is relying on a text that is really the national grand narrative of a particular people forged under particular circumstances and addressing particular concerns of a particular historical period. Gagnon does not acknowledge this in his reading of the sexual ideal of the creation myth, but rather reads that myth as simplistically descriptive and prescriptive of human sexuality in a universal and timeless or a-historical way.

Of significance in the above use of the creation myth as narrative, is Gagnon's reliance on the *primacy* of the text that creates a dialectical relationship with the reader, but in which the text is used as having the final say, and the relationship is

regarded as monological and unidirectional. It would seem that for Gagnon, the text must dictate reality – including the reality of our sexuality - for us. We as readers are to be merely like compliant materials that are unilaterally formed and shaped by the demands of the text. This is problematic, because as we have seen, the text itself arises out of a dialectical context, in which the original readers or compilers of the text played the dominating role in forming and shaping the text. Originally it would seem there was a more egalitarian and dynamic dialectical relationship between text and user (or reader) of the text, in that the redactors openly shaped the text to suit their meaning-giving purpose. Thus Gagnon's contemporary use of the text does not reflect its original use in its *Sitz im Leben* context, and he implicitly denies that the text has had a history of being written and rewritten. Rather, Gagnon artificially imposes on the text a unilateral authority over the reader, with the result of limiting the *reader's responsibility* for the interpretation and application of the text in their lives. The importance of taking responsibility for one's use of the text will become plainer as this thesis unfolds.

But, to continue looking at the role that national grand narratives play in the establishment of a sense of identity, I will now focus on what is called the *naturalistic fallacy*. What I am referring to by this term is the fallacy that we commit when we start to confuse the stories of our national grand narratives with 'objective' reality. When we do this, the story for us comes to represent reality as it is, so that no matter where we go in the world, we expect to find the *same reality* as that which we uncover in the narration of our own national grand narratives. In other words, there is implicit in the use of national grand narratives a *universalistic assumption*. This is an assumption that we make, when using the stories of our national grand narrative to describe reality as it is, not only for us who adhere to these stories, but also to describe a reality that *ought to be* true for everybody else across the world. Such a universalistic assumption is intimately connected with the ideal function of myth[10].

So connecting the concept of a *naturalistic fallacy* with the above concept of the ideal function of myth, or the human imposition of structure onto the world, it can be argued that implicit in the use of myth as narrative there is a *slippage of registers* or

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[10] This concept of the naturalistic fallacy I will further address in chapter two under the hermeneutics of Richard Rorty.

areas of meaning with regard to our 'awareness' or interpretive reading of myth. What may at first seem to be merely a 'neutral' or 'objective' story or narrative attempting to describe the world is not only a cultural *imposition* of order onto the world, but also becomes a normative narrative that is sometimes *used,* or which sometimes functions (even subconsciously) to reinforce an assumed objective social identity and to contain individual activity.

Using this concept of a slippage of registers, one can see that Gagnon's argument leads to the assertion that through the creation myth we (should) understand *as an objective, neutral fact* that we are created as heterosexual, male and female beings. From this we can see that underlying this particular conservative Christian argument against homosexuality is the universalistic assumption (through a slippage of registers), of created categories, which neatly and simplistically compartmentalize nature or the world so as to make it manageable and understandable. Thus, it can be said that myth as used by Gagnon 'abolishes the complexity of human action, gives it an elemental simplicity; it suppresses all dialectic or anything which takes us beyond the immediately visible; it organizes a world without contradictions … myth creates a happy clarity' (Righter, 1975: 10). However, looking at the above discussion on the priestly redactors, we see that it is not only Gagnon who is guilty of a slippage of registers, *but also the Jewish priests of the seventh century B.C.E.* For it is they who include the acts of God as separating the natural world into specific categories of existence. It is they who include the myth of the creation of Adam and Eve (as part of the greater biblical narrative), as male and female beings. And it is they who include the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Levitical prohibitions against homosexual conduct. So in a sense, Gagnon remains true to the original intention of the redactors who put together the text that we now know and revere as 'the Bible', but at the same time he commits exactly the same naturalistic fallacy as they in that he uncritically reinforces their mythic worldview in order to regulate sexual conduct in our (altogether different) era with its very different demands and concerns. It seems even plausible to say that they were more honest and less delusional about their textual intentions and practices than Gagnon is.

And so through the regulative principle of cosmic order, as made apparent in the form of the creation myth as narrative, we can see that myth can be used as narrative not

only to reinforce categories of 'reality', but also to convey aspired destinies, through its idealising function, resulting from a slippage of registers. The creation myth tells a story about divine origins that is supposed to guide us into the future, to regulate our conduct even as it gives us a sense of who we are in the bigger scheme of things. Thus the creation myth can play a *formative role* in the understanding of oneself, one's identity and of one's world, both as an individual and as part of a nation, it can colour the way we perceive our origins and it shapes the action we take in terms of a future ideal towards which we aspire.

In an attempt to elaborate a hermeneutics of sexual identity, the assertion that one's sexual identity can be intimately tied up with one's national grand narrative may at first seem strange, especially when we are addressing the issue of homosexuality and the bible. But if one were to take a closer look at the key texts in the book of Leviticus that condemn homogenital[11] activity, one would soon notice that these prohibitions are part of a longer list of prohibitions, *prohibitions* that are actually linked up with the project of taking *possession* of a particular *geo-political* area, and which are also functional in separating the Jewish people as a *national* unit, from the inhabitants that dwell (or used to dwell) on the same piece of land. In other words, these prohibitions are supposed to create a national and distinctive separate Jewish identity as part of the project of taking possession of the land and excluding from themselves 'foreign' or 'other' cultural and religious influences coming from the original inhabitants of the land, with arguably a stronger moral claim to the same land.   In the process of separating themselves off from the original inhabitants, the Jewish religious leadership identify practices such as homogenital sexual practices that henceforth mark the 'others' as other and sinful, and the 'same' or the insiders as 'chosen' by Yahweh. Thus it is written in Leviticus 20: 23-24 (New King James version, emphasis added):

> And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nations, which I am casting out
> before you; for they committed all these things [including homogenital acts –

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[11] I prefer to use the word 'homogenital' rather than homosexual as to use the conceptual term 'homosexual' is clearly to commit an anachronistic fallacy with regard to the *modern day* concept of homosexual (Weeks, 2000: 24-25; Stone, 2001: 24), as such a concept cannot be said to occur in the bible (Nortje-Meyer, 2005: 175). Therefore, what I argue, using hermeneutical insights, is that while the bible does condemn *homogenital acts*, it does not condemn homosexuality.

SH] … But I have said to you, 'you shall inherit their *land*, a *land* flowing with milk and honey'. I am the Lord your God who has *separated* you from the peoples (of the land).

From the argument that I have presented thus far, one is now able to see how the prohibition of homogenital acts in the biblical narrative is really intimately tied up with issues surrounding the need to forge a particular national identity, both during a time of national reformation (as under the reign of Josiah), and also during a time of national crisis (as in the exile and post exile period of second temple Judaism).

Thus it is now becoming evident how myth as narrative can play a formative role in helping people to develop a unique sense of their own identity in the world. One way, as we have seen in the above discussion, in which myths play this formative role, is through their ideal function, or through the use of them to create implicit and explicit ideals, which can then 'create' and inspire and motivate a people. But here a critical question can be asked, namely how is it that the ideal function of myth can be so effective in inspiring people along a certain course of action (in terms of sexual behavior), or towards a certain sense of identity? To answer this question, I propose that it is by means of the imagination, that a people is enabled, to translate into everyday activities the narrated ideals of their national grand narratives.

4. Myths, Imagination, and Identity

Imagination is an essential ingredient to both grand narrative and myth making (Lyotard, 1984: 60). Why this would be the case is that the *imagination works with mental images*, so that one can say that (Righter, 1975:3):

[t]he images [of myth for example - SH] have a power; the image making capacity takes its place among the forms of significant discourse (such as myth) – makes a comment on the human situation that is in some way *sui generis*, yet which parallels and is equal to the other languages through which speculation and experience are conveyed.

It is as though there is an almost *invisible connection* between images and language, in which there is a reciprocal influence to be experienced. Language can inspire mental images, and mental images in turn can inspire language, or more specifically, narratives. What makes narrative function possible is the use of the imagination, or more specifically, the imagination's capacity to *recombine existing elements into new conglomerations of meaningful relationships*, and its capacity to create powerful images or pictures about the world and our place within it. As was noted above, what is significant in the use of myth as narrative is the way in which various elements are combined, so that myths are able to speak to, or address, *contemporary* concerns and questions. Thus, it can be said, that 'the meaning of myth lies not in the elements but the way in which they are combined' (Righter, 1975: 108), which is reminiscent of an earlier point that was made above, that is, that the biblical narrative, being a recombination of mythic elements, serves not so much the function of a 'neutral' historical observation of past invents, as a prescriptive role in the development of a specific Jewish national identity. Indeed what we have seen taking place in biblical redactorship, is that the previous elements of records or old stories were essentially recombined into a new format for purposes of establishing a definite sense of identity in the world and for forging a new nation with a distinct religious identity. Recombining elements of old stories and records for purposes of establishing a sense of identity through myth creation is not something that only the ancients did. A modern day contemporary example of such an activity can be found in Pretoria, in the presence of the Voortrekker Monument.

From the example of the Voortrekker Monument, one can discern a combination or fusion of elements, as the Afrikaners of the time attempted to articulate their identities and experiences in terms of being a 'chosen' people of God (on the analogy of ancient Israel), a people destined for greatness, destined to inherit the 'Promised' land (Canaan) of South Africa. In the monument we see the identity of a people (the Afrikaner) evolving as the events of South African history unfold. However, the Monument doesn't just record the 'bare facts' in a descriptive manner as they happened, but through the use of various media (sculptures, tapestries, written explanations and historical artifacts), it can be said that the story of the Afrikaner is *reconstructed* in terms of a narrative or national grand narrative.

What is significant in the development of the Afrikaner identity (at least as portrayed by the Monument) is how many of the mythic themes of the biblical narrative or the Pentateuch are imaginatively incorporated into this national grand narrative. So for example looking at the tapestries on display at the Voortrekker Monument, one can discern the mythic theme of the exodus from oppression, in that the Afrikaner moves away from the oppressive presence of the British (Egyptians?), as it unfolds in the history of the Great Trek (Exodus?). Furthermore, there is the discovery of the mythic 'Promised Land' as the Afrikaner moves deeper into the Transvaal and further on. There is also the mythic and contemporary making of 'covenants' with God, and the portrayal of a profound piety that is reminiscent of the Old Testament Patriarchs. Clearly, certain elements of the history of Afrikanerdom and of myths from the Old Testament are selected, highlighted and creatively recombined, so that they start to tell a coherent story about the meaning of the Afrikaner's existence in South Africa. And so from a visit to the Voortrekker Monument, and a close inspection of its tapestries, one can see what a profound influence the biblical narrative and the Pentateuch continues to exert today, *even in the contemporary development* of national identities, such as that of the Afrikaner as portrayed by the Voortrekker Monument.

Thus it can be said that the stories that unfold in the Pentateuch would no longer be considered by the conservative religious Afrikaner to be 'just' stories about an ancient people (the Israelites). Instead, language and vocabulary and themes (as noted above) are adopted from the Pentateuchal text, and certain elements are selected from Afrikaner history and given a new prominence in the light of that text. The result is that the experience of the Afrikaner could be said to come to have a *resonance* with, or is echoed by (for example the exodus theme resonating in the events of the Great Trek) the narrative of the Pentateuchal text. Certain events of Afrikaner history are selected and reinterpreted in light of the biblical text – a text which has historically served for the Afrikaners to clearly set them apart from the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa. Such an accumulative association is also evident in Gagnon's argument, in that the ancient text of the creation myth is adapted to, or made to resonate with, *current issues* concerning gender and sexuality, specifically homosexuality.

Looking at the above example of the Voortrekker Monument, one could say that without the imagination, the capacity to combine and recombine images and motifs, adapting ancient myths to contemporary concerns would be impossible. The myth presented by the arrangement of elements within that monument is a creative and imaginative reinterpretation of disparate elements with the aim to construct a coherent and inspiring framework for Afrikaner existence in Africa. I will further elaborate on the role of the imagination in chapter three of this thesis, when I look at a specific type of imagination as discussed by Richard Kearney, namely the productive imagination, and how the use of the productive imagination influences our understanding of narrative. Let us now turn to the biblical narrative itself as a form of a national grand narrative.

5. National Grand Narratives

Deuteronomistic history is not only a narrative but can also be understood as a grand narrative, the 'grand narrative' of scripture (Goheen, 2008: 475; House, 2005: 231; Larkin, 2000: 405). The term 'grand narrative' is a phrase used by Jean-François Lyotard (Hammer, 1998: 137) to describe the type 'of story that underlies, gives legitimacy, and explains the particular choices a culture prescribes as possible courses of action' (Taylor & Winquist, 2001: 164). Deuteronomistic history presents us (on a narrative level) with a 'unique *interpretation* of universal history' (Goheen, 2008: 472, emphasis added). Thus Deuteronomistic history (scripture) provided the Jew with an 'interpretive grid' (Weeks, 2000: 100), or grand narrative, that enabled the Jew to have a firm and definite sense of self and nation amidst the chaos of Babylonian exile. Thus Deuteronomistic history is really a *Jewish national grand narrative*.

The way in which I use the concept here, the term 'grand narratives' refers to stories that act as a people's / nation's ideal reference point with regard to their identity as a people, their sense of purpose in the world, and their understanding of the basic structure of the universe (cf. Harris & Platzner, 1998: 8). As has already been argued above, such narratives are not merely *descriptive* stories about the world and humanity, but are also *prescriptive* stories, in that they advocate an ideal of how things *ought to* be in the world, by providing their readers or listeners with a supposed

deep structure underlying reality. This is the way that grand narratives can be said to function.

Grand narratives can also be described as 'master narratives' (Lyotard, 1984: x), that societies develop in an attempt to give structure, or form and content, to the identity of themselves as a people. In the form of grand narratives, 'the function of myths is to bind a society, [and to] create a structure governed by rules and habits' (Righter, 1975: 9). In other words, it can be said that through the use of an ideal story, and thus through a slippage of registers (evidenced in the ideal function of myths) from x to y (fill in), a nation shapes the actions and cognitive orientations of its future generations with regard to their experiences of 'reality'. In this thesis I assert that the creation myth forms part of a larger grand narrative, i.e., that of the *ancient Israelites*. I also refer to this story as the Jewish national grand narrative.

Through the story of Adam and Eve, as well as the rest of the Pentateuch, the nation of Israel developed a sense of its own unique identity in the world. For the stories and laws of the Torah are not merely descriptive rehearsals of the origins of the nation of Israel. They are also normative, in that not only do they contain actual laws for the regulation of the civil society of Israel, but also they are formative of the national identity of Israel in that they provide a narrative structure in which *individuals can situate themselves*, and make sense of their own life stories. In turn, through the use of the structure that these stories provide in form and content, it can be said that personal identity develops through *emotional and cognitive connections* between the family and personal stories on the one hand and the national narrative on the other, that are created and re-enforced every time the stories are rehearsed, whether it be in terms of a mother telling her children 'bedtime' stories to help them fall asleep, or in terms of the stories being formally narrated in the liturgical context of the temple service. It is thus clear that national grand narratives do not only provide a meaningful structure to the life of a national unit such as the Jews or the Afrikaners on a level remote from the individual life. Rather, they also have a profound influence on the way in which the individual situates him- or herself in the world, and they help to shape the possibilities for a meaningful existence that are available to that individual. This theme will be explored further below.

Conclusion

Up to this point in the thesis I have dealt with Robert Gagnon's argument against homosexuality, focusing on his normative use of the creation myth in Genesis to forbid homogenital acts by twenty-first century Christians. Specifically he elicited the concept of cosmic order, in an attempt to establish universal and timeless normative guidelines for correct sexual conduct. Such guidelines favor heterosexual intercourse, and condemn any other form of sexual activity, including homosexual activity. What is significant in the use of the concept of cosmic order is that the very notion of *order* itself is an intrinsic component to establishing a *sense of identity* in the world. By separating out categories of existence, one is able to make choices about which elements should ideally form part of one's own identity, and which elements should not. The use of separate categories of existence was evidenced in the Jewish priestly redactors' compilation of the biblical narrative, for example in the emphasis placed on circumcision, Sabbath observance and dietary laws in the Pentateuch as elements which aimed to separate Jewish existence from the other surrounding ethnicities. We saw that such a compilation took place against the background of two significant periods of history in the development of a Jewish identity, namely the great social and religious reforms under the reign of Josiah, and the tragic events of the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem during the second temple period. What had been a national grand narrative, in terms of the biblical narrative, also became a religious or spiritual document for future worshippers of Yahweh.

As such, this document continues to play a profound role in the personal identity of Christians, (seeing as Christians have adopted the Jewish scriptures for their own use) and more specifically in one's sense of sexual identity as a Christian. I have argued in this chapter that one cannot simply apply the aspirational element of myths across different historical epochs with very different concerns and questions. Christians today are not faced with the same issues that Jews of the seventh century B.C.E. and second temple Judaism were faced with. Christians are not a nation, nor a political unit in the world, struggling for their very existence. What could be conceived of as issues of life and death in the development of an ancient national identity, are not the same issues that we are faced with today. Nevertheless a sense of identity continues to be important in today's context. We still need narratives to negotiate the complex

realities of contemporary existence. The aim of this thesis is not to abolish or make redundant the biblical narrative, but rather to make us more aware of our own individual 'hermeneutical moments' (interpretative activity and responsibility) in search for meaning as we engage the text in a search for identity, in particular, with regard to sexual conduct. In pursuing this aim, I also strive to shift the emphasis in the dialectical relationship between text and reader, from one in which the text dominates the reader (as in Gagnon's reading of the creation myth), to one in which the reader takes proper responsibility for the interpretation and application of the text. I explore this theme further in the second chapter, as I take a closer look at the relevance of a Jewish national grand narrative in the formulation of a sense of sexual identity, using the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Rorty.

CHAPTER TWO

GADAMER AND RORTY

Introduction

In this chapter we shall focus on the *limitations* inherent in using national grand narratives to create normative systems with regard to sexual behavior. An example of how there is an inherent limitation to a national grand narrative will be demonstrated through the explanation and use of Gadamer's concept of finitude. Understanding that national grand narratives have inherent limitations will help us to see that Gagnon's use of the biblical narrative to argue for a contemporary sexual ethics is undermined by the fact that the biblical narrative is limited, in that it is historically situated and was compiled to address certain issues that the biblical compilers faced in their day. Therefore Gagnon's use of the biblical text as a dominating text to unilaterally prescribe certain ethics with regard to sexuality becomes problematized; in that it ignores the influence of that the contemporary world has in the reader's interpretation of the text. And so through Gadamer's development of the analogy of the game, we will also observe how that it is possible to shift the focus of the dialectical relationship between text and reader, from one in which the text dominates the reader to one in which the text and reader share an egalitarian and essentially dialogical relationship, in which they are able to mutually question each other. In addition to exploring Gadamer's hermeneutical insights, we will also focus on Richard Rorty's understanding of hermeneutics, by which he argues that hermeneutical understanding is achieved through a process of dialogue. We will see that Rorty shifts the dialectical relationship from a relationship of that between text and reader, to a relationship between reader and their contemporaries. This will help us to understand that the task of reading is more than just an individual sitting in front of a text and deciphering its meaning for themselves. Rather, the task of reading is to be understood as a communal task, in that our understanding individual of a text is influenced by the context of the community in which we find ourselves situated. Furthermore, this 'Rortyan' understanding of the hermeneutical moment will make us aware that we live in a society in which various discourses compete for our attention. In fact not only can it be said that various discourses compete for our attention, but also that there are certain discourses that dominate our attention, so that our understanding of

the world and of particular texts tend to be skewed. This being the case no one (including Gagnon) can claim to represent a 'neutral' stance when interpreting the bible. And so in this chapter we will be considering some of the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Rorty with regard to the subject of hermeneutics.

First, the insights of Gadamer that we will be looking at are his understandings concerning: finitude, openness, effective history, the game and language. Under the title of Application of Gadamer's Concepts to the Issue of Homosexuality and the Bible, we will also consider the role that these concepts can play in enabling us to achieve a better perspective with regard to the redactorship of the biblical narrative, specifically in understanding the *historical situatedness* of the narrative, and thus the *limitations* of trying to apply the specific text of the creation myth *across cultural contexts*.

Second, to further problematize taking the creation myth at face value, or reading it superficially, we will consider Richard Rorty's criticism of the assumption that our knowledge about the world is like a 'mirror reflection', as though it were humanly possible to apprehend (or reflect in our minds) the world as it 'actually is'. This assumption that our knowledge can be a mirror reflection of the world is particularly relevant to the idea of the redactorship of the biblical narrative, specifically with regard to the redactors' use of language in trying to circumscribe and capture a particular type of 'reality', i.e. the national identity of what it is to be a Jew. This assumption will also be further explored through the concept of naturalistic fallacies, which I have started to address in chapter one. In elaborating Rorty's criticism of the mirror conception of knowledge, we will see how Rorty explores the notion of language games as expressed in terms of 'dominant (normal) discourses' versus 'abnormal discourses', as well as the projective nature of knowledge and how, according to the theory of hermeneutics, we are able to come to an 'understanding' of the world. The concept of dominant discourses will of course become relevant to our understanding of Gagnon's use of the creation myth / biblical narrative to dominate the reader, as related to the dominant function that national grand narratives can play in regulating a sense of personal identity. We will end this chapter seeing how Rorty's understanding of hermeneutics further shifts the dialectical relationship between text and reader, to one in which the focus is on the relation between the reader of the text

and the *contextual or reading community* in which the reader finds themselves situated. This will help us to understand that the hermeneutical moment of reading the biblical narrative is far more complex than what Gagnon actually acknowledges.

1. HANS-GEORG GADAMER

In what follows I give a brief overview of a number of central concepts within Gadamer's hermeneutical thinking and show how they are interlinked. These are: finitude, openness, effective history, game-playing, and language. After this overview of Gadamer's theory, I will apply his insights to my argument against Gagnon's way of using of the creation myth to condemn Christian homogenital activity in the twenty-first century.

Finitude

The notion or idea of 'finitude' as developed by Gadamer is important for my argument concerning the relevance of the redactorship of the biblical narrative, as I will later show. As the term itself implies, finitude has to do with *limitations*, particularly as regards our culture, as well as our historical situatedness (Gadamer, 1975: 225). Such limitations can be seen or experienced in the biases that we have (Gadamer, 1975: 271). These biases can be said to arise as a result of our cultural conditioning that comes from growing up in a particular society and historical period of time. Biases can be expressed as *biases for* or preference for one's own culture (ethnocentrism), and as *biases against* or dislike of other cultures (e.g. xenophobia). However these biases can be said to work on an implicit or unconscious level, so that we often behave in certain ways, or prefer certain things, or interpret texts in a certain way without even being self-conscious as to *why we choose* particular behaviors or have preferences for particular things, or interpret texts in certain ways. Another way our biases are expressed, and related to our interpretive skills, is in *the way we understand* our world, or what Gadamer, following Heidegger, refers to as 'fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975: 271).

In other words, our culture not only affects our behavior and our preferences, but also our understandings of the world in which those behaviors and preferences find their expression. It then becomes obvious that when we encounter another alien culture, our own culture's understanding of the world influences our understanding of that other

culture. Self-awareness of such historically situated understanding enables us to realize, that when it comes to our knowledge of the world, our claims to a *universal* understanding are always limited and situated (Gadamer, 1975: 271). Such universal claims or assumptions include ways of *understanding the world in general*, an example of such a comprehensive frame of reference being a national grand narrative. However, it can be said that our understanding of the world is not static, that there remains a 'multiplicity' of possibilities (Gadamer, 1975: 71) of understanding as times and circumstances change. Changes, which can influence and shape our understandings, naturally come from events in our lives, for example encounters with other cultures. An example of such an encounter can be the reading of a text from another time or historical period (Gadamer, 1975: 71).

<div align="center">Openness</div>

And so naturally, if we want to apply the textual insights of another culture or historical period our own culture and time, openness would become an essential component of our encounter of the *other,* be that other a person or a way of life, a text or a national grand narrative. Such openness entails that there must be a willingness on our part, on the part of the 'reader' of the situation, person or culture, to be 'open' towards the 'other' (Grondin, 1994: 97), an openness that is nevertheless always still experienced through the tinted glasses (or finitude) of our own existence (Gadamer, 1975: 271). Openness obviously does not mean that we completely abandon our cultural understanding of the world. Apart from this being practically impossible, it is also not desirable. For to completely abandon our own historical situatedness would leave us with a vacuum of understanding, in that there would not be anything in our repertoire of knowledge with which to compare new experiences, and thus make 'sense' of them. For Gadamer, our existing knowledge, experience, biases and meaningful constructs form the point of departure from which we may understand new situations, persons and experiences. Without such prior understandings, we would have no 'tools' with which to 'grasp' the new situation. In other words, our cultural and historical biases are not just a limitation on our capacity to understand another epoch or culture, they also in fact form the precondition for such (always limited) understanding in the first place.

On the surface of things, it would seem that the concepts of finitude and openness are contradictory. This is because finitude implies limitation, whereas openness implies lack of limitation. However, finitude is a limitation only when we are not aware of our own finitude (Dostal, 2002: 44), or stubbornly want to resist any new ideas. But awareness of such finitude can only be brought to our consciousness when we are confronted with new situations, for example new national grand narratives (Dostal, 2002: 45). It is in the (hermeneutical) moment of such a confrontation with novelty or alterity that we have a choice and a responsibility. We can choose to simplistically reject the new information that the other culture or national grand narrative confronts us with, and persist in our own cultural understanding of the world. Or we can choose to be open to the new information that we are presented with. Such openness does not mean that one simplistically embrace or adopt the new understanding, but it does entail that we must *take responsibility* (for example as readers of a text) and thus *first acknowledge our own situatedness* or finitude (Gadamer, 1975: 271). In other words, we must acknowledge that there is a certain fundamental or inescapable limitation to our capacity to understand the world (including ourselves and other people), and that we must therefore always be open to the possibility that the 'other' may have something to teach us. In other words, openness implies humility, a willingness to learn from others, as well as a willingness to acknowledge our own ignorance, finitude, and limitations, which are a part of the human condition as such. Openness implies a basic willingness to have one's horizons of understanding expanded by new or different ways of understanding the world, and as such, Gadamerian openness is based or rooted in self-aware finitude.

Related to this concept of openness, for Gadamer it is the task of the reader to 'disappear in the face of the text' (Dostal, 2002: 28). This does not mean that the text dominates the reader, so that the reader has nothing of his or her own to contribute in the hermeneutical moment of reading the text. Rather, this disappearance in the face of the text means that there is a process of focused attention taking place in the reader, which allows the reader to be 'absorbed' by the text, or the world of the text. This absorption by the text allows a process by which there is meaning to be *discovered* as the reading experience unfolds (Dostal, 2002: 28). In our encounter with the text, meaning is discovered because the text presents us with a challenge or 'truth claim' (Warnke, 2003, 49), in that it has something unique and new to present us with, a new

world, new meaning giving structures or perspectives on old matters, or even new world views. Herein lies the very rationale for reading at all. If reading is to be worthwhile, my pre-existing understanding, my assumptions have to be challenged, expanded, or have their shape modified into new understanding. Put simply: the aim of reading is to learn. Through engaging the text, we enter into a relationship with the text, a relationship that can help us to discover new *meaning* for ourselves, and for our own culture and thus for our own sense of identity.

Effective History

Identity is always and inescapably historically situated, in that it has to develop in the context of a particular place and time. And so one way to conceive of one's historical situatedness is to use another concept that Gadamer develops, that of temporal distance or *effective historical consciousness* (Gadamer, 1875: 297). Temporal distance constitutes awareness of our historical situatedness or cultural horizons, so that we know that we belong to history long before history belongs to us (Gadamer, 1975: 13, 252). Thus there is a reciprocal relationship between the consciousness of the individual reader and their history: history gives birth to consciousness, but consciousness in turn shapes the reader's understanding of history (Gadamer, 1975: xv; Grondin, 1994: 115). Such a reciprocal relationship obviously has to take shape over a period of time. And so temporal distance unfolds in the process by which understanding of the events of the past shifts and evolves with the advent of new knowledge and new experiences. Thus it can be said that 'temporal distance is productive. The meaning of a work is created in the histories of its interpretations' (Widdershoven in Josselson & Lieblich, 1993: 12). Once again, what this means, is that the reader's understanding of the world, and thus their culture, is never static. It is constantly undergoing an evolutionary process of change and adaptation. Such change and adaptation is sparked off by new encounters and events.

The Game

The discovery of meaning thus becomes an *event,* a type of relational or conversational event with the text, always (for Gadamer) playing itself out within a conversation and as such it is not something that can be contained within, limited to,

or viewed as intrinsic to a text (Dostal, 2002: 279). Gadamer's idea that the reader somehow 'dissolves' in the face of the text testifies to the idea that the gaining of new insight is for Gadamer not a static or passive phenomenon, but it is inseparable from having a certain experience, living through a meaningful or meaning-giving event, which is produced in the reading activity as such. Thus it is possible for a situation to arise in which in the process of the (contemporary) act of reading it is really we who speak on behalf of the text (Dostal, 2002: 278), seeing as the meaning derived from the text tends to be framed in terms of the lived experience of the reader. For Gadamer, speaking on behalf of the text is not the same as simply reading one's previous understanding 'into' the text. Rather, if any understanding takes place, then it takes place in the mind of the reader, and therefore the 'fusion of horizons', or the expanded understanding is achieved within the reader's lived experience. But in order to benefit from the new insight (new to us as well as new to the people of the past, because the new insight results from a merging of the two understandings which transcends both understandings taken alone), and as already stated above, there is intrinsic to this dialectic (or conversation) the *need for openness* (Gadamer, 1975: 350), or for a preparing of oneself that the other might be right (Dostal, 2002: 32). As part of this openness, there has to be willingness on our part, that if proved wrong, to change, or have our previous convictions modified, thus enabling the process of dialectic to progress onto new 'revelations' (Gadamer, 1975: 355). This requires that the reader take responsibility for the use of the text, and so become hermeneutically self-aware, or *conscious of their own hermeneutic moment in reading*.

However, it is intrinsic to the game of conversation that it is not a unilateral affair, but rather it can be said that 'to every claim there is a counterclaim' (Gadamer, 1975: 353). As such there is a likely tension between the 'interests' of the text, and the 'interests' of the reader. In a sense there is an interaction, or inter*play* between the text and the reader. It is on this tension that I would like to focus more. One analogy that Gadamer uses to explore the nature of this tension is that of the game.

In order to understand Gadamer's use of the analogy of the game, we must understand that the reader of a text cannot be divorced from their own realities / historical situatedness, or stand outside their lives as impartial observers, for there is no such thing as an 'impartial observer', and even the act of observation is *itself* participation.

Thus, it can be said that the reader's life and their material situatedness is a game-play in which they find themselves (Gadamer, 1975: 103), so that their life itself, or the act of living can be understood to be a game. And by extension of analogy it can be asserted that 'all playing is a *being played* ' (Gadamer, 1975: 106, emphasis added), in the sense that the rules of the game condition the nature of the game played. However, it is not only the game that is conditioned, but also the readers or players themselves, so that there is a need for each player to be aware that their 'historical consciousness [can be said to be] a mode of self knowledge' (Gadamer, 1975: 228). Thus in the relationships that are created in the enactment and structuring of the game, *self-knowledge* is a vital component, in that each participant needs to be cognizant of their own historical situatedness or *position* and *role* in the game. It is in the enactment of the game that a creative and dynamic fusion or play takes place between the subjective self and 'objective' world of reality. What I am referring to by a creative and dynamic fusion is the process that takes place in the enactment of reading or of the hermeneutic moment that a fusion takes place between the 'horizons' of the reader and the text. Likewise with regard to the text itself, it can be asserted that 'the *being* of a work of art is *play*' (Gadamer, 1975: 156), so that literature, or the text itself, is not some 'static entity' that we encounter, but can be said to be a game that the reader enacts or *activates* in the process of reading.

Game-play invariably involves 'sparring partners', in that as part of the fun of a game is the challenge to overcome difference. Such difference may be in physical strength or in mental agility. As such, 'difference' can also refer to the various or different perspectives of each player of a game. It is this difference of perspective that contributes to the play of the game, and facilitates a process of communication. If we all saw the world in exactly the same way (so that here would be no difference or perspective), there would be no need for communication. So for example if we all had the same abilities, playing a game would be impossible, as there would be no winners or losers or progress (or even retrogress) possible. The fact of difference itself makes the game possible in the first place. Furthermore, different abilities imply that intrinsic to the game is the idea of 'struggle', thus dialogue is not just question and answer, it is also a *struggle* (Shneer & Aviv, 2002: 166), and by extension it is a *struggle for meaning*. Thus we have to acknowledge that there is a difference between the text and the reader, in that there is a difference of perspectives. However, as the reader

activates the game of reading, there is a type of fusion that takes place between the reader and the text. The reader absorbs the text into himself or herself, as they try to assimilate the new knowledge that it brings to them. The reader may play by the objective rules (or exegetical principles) of the game of reading, in order to initially understand the text. But for the text to be meaningful for the reader, the reader has to go 'beyond' the objective rules of the game and make the text a part of himself or herself. In making the text a part of a contemporary African reader, e.g., the text can however also not remain static, but must be made to transcend its original *Sitz im Leben* and speak to another audience than the originally intended one. How can a text from ancient Israel be made meaningful to a contemporary reader in such a way that the contemporary reader learns something worthwhile from the text? How it is possible to make a text a part of oneself across such a historical and cultural divide is demonstrated in the way that language is used.

Language

With regard to the above struggle for meaning that comes about in the reciprocity or game that exists between the reader and the 'reality' of the world that the text would present us with, it is important for Gadamer that all knowledge, including self-knowledge, can only be accessed through the vehicle of *language*. And so, as in the analogy of the game where the individual is subsumed to the reality of the game itself (Gadamer, 1975: xiv), so likewise we are subsumed in our relationship with the text to language, by which it can be argued that language speaks us, rather than that we speak language (Gadamer, 1975: 459). In other words, language provides the conceptual vocabulary with which to make sense of the world and of experience and of our own sense of identity. Language is the vehicle, or the means by which a sense of identity is given shape or structure. Language is the means of our apprehending 'reality'. However, while being a means that shapes our sense of reality and of identity, language is also simultaneously the limiting factor that *circumscribes* our reality. It can be said as an extension to the analogy of the game, that *language is the game* that plays us (Bernstein, 1983: 145). We now turn to exploring the *game of language* as understood in Gadamerian terms.

Just as it can be said of most games, language is a communal / social activity, i.e. it takes place between people and influences how individuals think and reason their way around in the environment and in society. Furthermore, language doesn't exist as an entity on its own, but 'language is crystallized into *discourse*, and it is discourse which positions and places people within the relating networks (in which) they participate' (Devetzis, 1998: 32, emphasis added). However, such categories of discourse are not stable or intransient phenomena, seeing as language is not a static phenomenon, but a constantly evolving dynamic, being socially, historically and geographically situated. After all, language is *human* language. So while it can be said that language helps us to articulate what it is to be *human*, a question can also be asked as to what are the parameters of language? (Crossan, 1975: 14).

In an attempt to answer this question, the first thing that can be said is that one of the first tasks that we are subjected to after we are born, is to learn our mother tongue. And by learning our mother tongue we are able then to articulate and find our way around our world. However, as already noted, language is not merely an instrument or vehicle through which to negotiate day-to day challenges. For Gadamer it is much more, it is namely 'the essence of hermeneutics' (Grondin, 1994: 106), the essence of our being in the world. Gadamer thus asserts, 'being that can be understood is language' (Gadamer, 1975: 470). Or to put it another way, language is not merely an 'objective' instrument that we can choose to use (or that uses us) and set aside whenever we like, it is the very 'medium' of our existence as meaningful (Bernstein, 1983: 145). From this we can argue that in Gadamer the concepts of *being* and *language* merge, so that to make a distinction between being and language is to be guilty of creating a false diathesis. The word thus takes on our ontological reality, so that in speaking we are expressing our true reality, the only reality that truly exists for us, i.e. for the one speaking. Being in the world precedes articulation, while articulation makes manifest the existence of being to itself; 'language is (thus) self-revelation' (Venema, 2000: 30). To put it another way: we both are, and partake of, the 'conversation that we ourselves are' (Dostal, 2002: 106). In other words we are 'subjectively' constituted through language, that is to say, it is impossible to have an understanding of oneself, without having a commonly shared vocabulary through which to give expression to that self. Let us now use Gadamer's insights to address the issue of homosexuality and the bible.

Application of Gadamer's Concepts to the Issue of Homosexuality and the Bible

Gagnon's attempt, in using the creation myth, to establish contemporary normative rules of conduct with regard to sexual behavior, can be problematized through Gadamer's development of philosophic hermeneutics.

So for example, the attempt to use the creation myth to establish universal normative guidelines for sexual behavior is immediately faced by the finitude of the text itself. The text arose in a particular culture at a particular historical period. In addition, the text arose as an *answer to specific questions* or needs or issues of the time. Such needs or issues include concepts like what it is to be a Jew, or what right and wrong conduct is when it comes to sexual activity within that context. To universalise such concepts is to imply that everybody would agree on their meanings. However, this is blatantly not the case. Even within a 'particular' national group, such as 'Jews', there is not universal agreement on what it means to be a Jew. Hence you have the religious / secular divide among Jews. And even among religious Jews there are the orthodox, the conservative and the reformed Jews with significantly different, even contradictory views on fundamental aspects of their worldviews. And so using Gadamer's concept of finitude to understand the biblical narrative we can see that what took place in the development of the biblical narrative was the formation of certain biases. Biases *for*, in that the Jew now had parameters within which to express their sense of identity in the world, and biases *against*, in that certain behaviors were proscribed for the Jew, so as not to become like of the original 'pagan' inhabitants of the land.

And so we can see, that our knowledge of the world of the biblical redactors helps us to become aware that there is a limitation (or finitude) to how much we can apply the biblical narrative to answer contemporary questions around sexuality. Such finitude however does not imply that we are completely incapable of understanding other cultures or historical periods (Dostal, 2002: 45), otherwise openness toward the 'other' would not be possible or fruitful. But what it does mean is that we are not capable of *completely escaping our own historical period and cultural context*, so as to achieve some objectively 'neutral' understanding of another culture or historical

period (Dostal, 2002: 65; Gadamer, 1975: 277). Being aware of our historical situatedness means in essence that when we are confronted with a text, like the biblical narrative, that originates in another culture and at another time period, in our hermeneutic or interpretive moment we must be 'sensitive to the text's alterity' (Gadamer, 1975: 271).

Such alterity of the text becomes even more obvious when the process of effective history becomes obvious to us and confronts us. In one sense it can be said that the text of the biblical narrative is very familiar to us, and not really so alien. This is partly because as Christian readers we are already acquainted with the text through our encounters with it at church or Sunday school. However, our familiarity with the text is mediated through our contemporary and often unconscious interpretive readings of the text. Gadamer's development of the concept of effective history helps us to realize that our contemporary readings of the text are really the result of a cumulative process in which the text has been subjected to many different interpretations over a period of many centuries. Thus our understanding of the text tends to be conditioned by a *tradition of interpretation*. Gadamer's concept of effective history helps us to realize that we need to become more self-consciously aware of our contemporary cultural assumptions when we are reading the biblical text, but also that we should become aware of the extent to which the tradition of reading, interpreting and applying the text, influences our own reading of it.

So for example if we were to use our modern day conception of the idea of 'democracy', and use such a political term to try and understand the hegemonic relationships of leaders with their peoples in the context of seventh century Jewish kingship, our idea of Josiah's reign in Judah would become distorted. This is because we would be trying to understand the politics of that time through the historical lenses and finitude of our own day. But the reverse can also be true, when trying to apply the national grand narrative of the biblical text from the seventh century B.C.E. to our current context. So for example, how many conservative Christians today who would insist that we apply the national grand narrative of the Jew in observing the rules against homogenital activity, would also insist that all their sons be circumcised, or that they should observe the Sabbath, instead of Sunday which is traditional among Christians?

There is however an implicit assumption with regard to Gadamer's notions of openness and effective history, and that is, that different cultures and historical periods must have at least some characteristics in common, some areas or concerns of overlap. For if there were not at least some ground in common between cultures and times, no point of contact for openness would be possible. No doubt there are many features that our contemporary culture shares with those of the biblical redactors, not least of which is a need for a sense of identity in the world. But it is in these shared features or characteristics where the concepts of finitude and openness become tricky. For underlying the notion of shared characteristics or features is a *universalistic assumption*. And as we have already seen above, universalistic assumptions with regard to any one culture's understanding of the world are problematic in that they tend to suffer from a naturalistic fallacy, particularly if one culture would assert that its understanding of the world is the only true understanding of the world that there can be. It is with regard to this implicit universalistic assumption that Gadamer's analogy of the game can help us overcome the seeming impassable *cul-de-sac* of universalistic assumptions.

Gadamer's analogy of the game is an important concept in the hermeneutics of sexuality, for it focuses on the reciprocity (or shared experiences) that is at work between the text of the biblical narrative on the one hand, and the person or reader who is engaged in a process of struggling to establish a sense of identity on the other, sexuality being a part of a person's over-all sense of identity. Thus, we can assert that with regard to the above analogy of the game, it can be argued that 'mythologies [or grand narratives – SH] present games to play' (Campbell, 2004: 6). What then, we may ask, has this analogy of the game got to do with reading the biblical narrative? It can be said that we also 'activate', or enter into a game with national grand narratives (such as the biblical narrative) by reading or reciting them or appealing to them, using them in a narrative way, in an attempt to answer questions in our lives. A ramification of this insight is that we are not merely passive players of the game, (or compliant readers of the dominating text as Gagnon would have us be) but are also potential 'creators' of the game, in that each player brings to the game their own unique perspective (Warnke, 2003: 50), and creative skill in applying the rules of the game.

And with each new perspective added to the game, the dynamic constitution and play of the game changes, and as the game changes, so too do its rules.

What this implies for our understanding of the role that the national grand narrative of the creation myth can play in the process of us struggling to form a sense of identity in the world, is that both the text and the reader are in a process of mutual transformation. The text becomes 'transformed' in the sense that it is *used or interpreted in a particular way*. Not only are there assumed shared characteristics between the two, but also a common experience as both the text and the reader engage in a common struggle that changes both of them. The text is 'changing' in that the reader, (because of their unique experiences and different cultural situatedness with regard to the text), can bring new insight (or as noted above, use the text in a new way) and meaning to the text. This is evidenced in the process of effective history, as new interpretations are added to the collage of the text's overall meaning. The text in turn can change the reader, in that it can challenge the reader's most basically held assumptions about their own lives and their own culture, by the way it is being used.

So for example with regard to the creation myth, and more specifically the issue or concept of cosmic order, the modern day reader's sense of sexual identity may be challenged. For the text presents us with an idea of identity that is *holistic* in the sense that we are not merely *separate* entities alone in this world; we are part of a bigger picture, and our personal story is always embedded within larger narratives and histories. This contrasts with our contemporary notions of identity, which tend to be based on individualistic approaches to identity. In other words, the creation of an identity (such as the one that may emerge from a certain interpretation of the creation myth) is not a process that takes place in isolation, but in context. This can be a very challenging notion for us today in modern Western society in which so often emphasis is placed on individual rights, and on being self-sufficient, among other ways also in the creation of the own identity. Thus one way that the text of the creation myth challenges or 'plays with' the modern day reader, is to ask of us, how much of your sense of identity is really your own, and how much of it is really something you inherited from your environment? (This tension between the individual and the environment will be elaborated on more in chapter three through a discussion of Judith Bulter's development of the concepts of performativity and interpellation).

What does the above insight mean in terms of our knowledge of biblical redactorship, and the hermeneutics of sexual identity? As can be seen through the use of narratives, language is the medium through which we express our experiences of the world. Language shapes our understanding of those experiences. One way it does this is through games or language games. One form or one type of such language game is the narrative, and more specifically that of the national grand narrative. National grand narratives in turn are the unique experiences of a people captured in, but also transformed through narrative form. Part of what constitutes their uniqueness is that because they are derived from the particular experiences of a people they are invariably historically situated and culturally specific. What this means in terms of the hermeneutics of sexual identity, is that when we read the creation myth, we cannot simply take it at face value. We need to be self-consciously aware that in reading this text we are engaging in a game, in a hermeneutical moment. Such a moment is a game that we enter into, a game that involves a *struggle for meaning*. It is not so much a contest of wits as it is a process of give and take. The way the text can be used is to ask of us to question our sense of identity. Who and what we are in the world, viewed in light of the text that confronts us, drenched, as it is in another world with other concerns. In responding to this call or this question about our identity, we can find ourselves on a long path of sometimes painful struggle and sometime delightful surprise, as we re-evaluate our deepest held beliefs about our identities, including who we are as sexual beings.

So far what we have learnt from applying Gadamer's hermeneutical insights with regard to the creation myth, is that in attempting to use this myth to understand sexuality, we need to be cautious as to how far we can take the elements of the story, (which evolved and combined to answer unique questions of a people, the Jewish people, a long time ago), in trying to find answers to the questions of today with regard to the ethics of sexual conduct. The creation myth can be used to challenge us to enter into a game in which there is a struggle for meaning. This is possible on the basis of assumed shared characteristics between the reader and the text. But in such a struggle we need to be aware that the elements of the creation myth took on their unique combination due to the language games or discourses that were at play at the time of its constitution. Such games can be said to have arisen and be conditioned by

the Israelites' need to establish firm identity boundaries due to their historical situatedness, as a people trying to survive a world of diversity and hostility, as in the exile and the second temple period. Thus it can be said, that as a national grand narrative, the creation myth was underpinned by the dominant discourse of *uniqueness*, and not *universality*. It answered (and continues to answer) the question of *what is it to be a Jew*? As far as the question as to what constitutes valid sexuality is concerned, the answer in terms of the text itself, would thus be limited to the dominant concern of what it is to be Jewish. This is not to say that the creation myth has no relevance for us today as we struggle to establish a sense of our own identity in the world. But in order for the text to play a valuable role in our sense of identity today, we have to be aware of its historical situatedness, as well as our own, and nevertheless allow ourselves to be drawn into the 'game' of an open conversation with the text about human sexuality.

With the advent of Christianity it can be said that, as part of the effective history of the creation myth, it was used in a different way from that in which the Jewish priests used it, and so took on an *extended* meaning, a meaning beyond the original intention of the priestly redactors of the biblical narrative. Christians adopted the creation text for their own religion. This effectively means that a nation's national grand narrative, a narrative that answered the *specific needs* of a particular people at a particular time, was now made or stretched to have to answer the *universal questions* and needs of many peoples over an unlimited span of time. This included importantly an appropriation by the Christian tradition of the creation myth's Jewish interpretation as underpinning or justifying a hetero-normative understanding of human sexuality.

Thus in reading the ancient text of the creation myth it can be asserted in terms of Gadamer's argument, that one needs to be aware that the interpretation of a text of the past is a complex hermeneutical endeavour, involving awareness of the text's historical situatedness, as well as the effective history that separates us from the text, the fact that the text was composed to answer specific questions of a specific time and people, and also awareness, that as readers of the text we bring with ourselves our own historical situatedness, questions and needs of the present (Gadamer, 1975: 285).

And so we as modern day readers of the creation myth with an eye to considering sexual morality (including Robert Gagnon) come to the biblical narrative, and more specifically the creation myth, with specific concerns and questions that are deeply embedded in *our contemporary needs*. However these needs do not exist in a vacuum, but are historically conditioned, so that 'the knower is himself conditioned' (Gadamer, 1975: 225, 278), that is to say, that it can be asserted that even our *personal* questions and realities do not originate with us, but are in a sense given to us by our culture and times. And because of our historically conditioned status, and the fact that history itself is an ever evolving and changing phenomenon, there is no possibility of finding *absolute* answers, with the result that 'to *be,* historically, means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete' (Gadamer, 1975: 301). And so we have seen a shift taking place in the dialectical relationship between text and reader, from one in which the text dominates the reader, towards one in which the text and reader become equals, to the point that the text is absorbed by the reader, even as the reader 'disappears in the face of the text'. Nevertheless a distinction remains, in that both the text and the reader remain historically bound by their own finitude. In addition, knowledge gained in the process of 'absorption' is complicated by the language used in the process of gaining such knowledge. The limitation of such knowledge is evidenced in the idea that the use of language to describe reality is never a simple reflection of reality 'as it is'. I have already started to make this argument, using Gadamer's insights into the nature of language. To elaborate on this point and make even clearer what is at stake in the linguistic mediation of reality, and also to illuminate the aspect of power relations present in competing world views, I now turn to discussing Richard Rorty's take on the hermeneutic endeavor to understand the 'other'.

2. RICHARD RORTY

Naturalistic Fallacy

In chapter one, under the heading of The Role of the Creation Myth with regard to Identity, I began to address the relationship between the ideal function of myths (or national grand narratives) and universalistic assumptions. I did so using the concept of the naturalistic fallacy, in which I mentioned that there is a confusion (or a slippage of registers) that takes place when we understand our national grand narratives to

represent reality *as it is*. Richard Rorty develops further the critique of this type of fallacy in asserting that, in our modern day search for knowledge systems that reflect accurately the reality of the world that we are attempting to know, there is a tendency towards a *confusion between describing things as they are, and advancing a system of justification for the way things ought to be* (Rorty, 1980: 255). Thus, in his book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980), Rorty questions the 'notion of knowledge as accurate representation of reality' (Rorty, 1980: 6). It is here where he asserts that the idea that knowledge can be represented as a one-to-one isomorphic relationship between an external 'reality' and an internal awareness is misleading. That is to say, underlying this question of representation of reality is the implicit *belief that the mind acts as an internal mirror accurately reflecting external reality* (Rorty, 1980: 170).

In other words, one can say that, according to this common but mistaken view, there are really *two fundamental realities* that somehow mystically interact. They are on the one hand, the immaterial reality of the mind, and on the other hand, the material reality of the body and the world of objects. At this point it can be seen that this type of belief raises sticky issues with regard to materialism and immaterialism, such as at which *point* does the immaterial mind interact with the material world, and also, how can two things with such different intrinsic natures be copies of each other? Furthermore, to what degree does the internal reality reflect the external reality and how can it be tested? For it can be asserted that there are two fundamental realities, expressed perhaps as two 'separate realms', the one being the *mind*, which acts as a mirror to reflect the other, the *external reality*. If this is the case it can be argued that such reflection as one *hundred percent accuracy* is humanly impossible, and theoretically only possible of God (Rorty, 1980: 376). Thus, if we were to subscribe to such a theory of knowledge, our apprehension of the world would be inaccurate, or at least incomplete, and so the 'notion of "correspondence" with such entities [i.e. external reality – SH] as the touchstone to measure the worth of present practice' (Rorty, 1980: 179) is contested, thus leaving a way open for an alternative way of understanding.

Thus that one could argue that even if we were to assume that the mind acts as an internal mirror reflecting the things and events of the external world, this in itself is no

guarantee for accurate distinction between what is 'knowledge' and what is not (e.g. what is mere opinion, impression, bias, emotion, and so forth). This is the case simply because there is a difference between raw data that enters our conscious awareness (or what can be called the interior space of the mirror), through our five physical senses, and knowledge as created and stored in our brain / mind. That is to say, perceptions received through external stimuli have first to be 'processed' and made sense of via an 'interpretive grid' (for example a national grand narrative). Such an interpretive grid doesn't merely serve the purpose of a mirror in reflecting and 'absorbing' the world as 'it is', but *makes* sense of that world, or *purposively structures the experience of that world*, focussing on some aspects and neglecting others, remembering some elements and forgetting others. One kind of such interpretive grid is created through the means of a cultural history, in which meaning giving systems (national grand narratives) have evolved.

Assuming, as we did earlier with Gadamer, that language is our main vehicle for apprehending knowledge, or making sense of the world, we will come to see that for Rorty, the use of language to capture reality tends to be deceptive in that it is *slippery*. There is no one-to-one correspondence between language and the reality it tries to capture. To put it another way, words and the objects they describe are not one and the same entities. Words may refer to things, but they are not the things themselves. We can use different words to indicate the same object in the world. But with the use of each different word, there is also the possibility of slightly different meaning or association attached to each different word. In this sense language can be deceptive and slippery. Thus in English we may refer to an object x, as being a *tree*. However in Afrikaans we refer to it as being a *boom*, and in Greek as being a *dendron*. Here we have three *different words* attempting to capture the reality of one object, or one class of objects, x, in the world. However, while different words may give us slightly different shades of meaning with reference to a particular object, the *complete* reality of what the object can never be fully captured by any one of these three words. There will always be something of the object that will elude any attempt of language to fully capture it.

Nevertheless, it can be argued against Rorty that the different sounds / words, such as 'boom' and 'tree' refer to the same objects in the world, namely the physical trees,

and that there is thus indeed a *type* of one-to-one correspondence between language and the world of objects. What is entailed in this one-to-one correspondence is an *implicit ought*. In a sense 'knowledge' is not just descriptive, but it is also prescriptive. In other words, we all have *an idea* in our minds of what the object may look like when we hear the word 'tree' spoken. The word tree automatically implies that an object must have certain defining features in order for it to qualify as a tree. Thus for example a tree must have a trunk, branches and green leaves. However, 'reality' is never that simple. We tend to come across exceptions to the rule. Thus the leaves of some trees may not only differ from the leaves of other trees in their shapes, but even in the colours they may sport, or a certain tree may be leafless at a certain point in time. This is where the concept of the naturalistic fallacy comes into play. For when we begin to insist that all trees must adhere to certain preconceived notions of what a tree ought to be, we find that trouble arises when we come across something that looks like a tree, and yet somehow is different from all the other trees that we have encountered before.

However, while this may be the case when we are referring to something as 'simple' as a tree, it becomes much more complex when we address the issue of sexuality or what sexual conduct ought to consist of, which is an abstract, rather *intangible* thing, as well as a complex and highly layered term. For it can be argued that even within the same language, what is meant by the term 'gay' is not agreed on by all the 'experts', nor even by the people called 'gay' themselves. What makes the issue of sexuality so much *more complex* than the issue of identifying an object in the world as a tree is that unlike the activity of defining trees, the issue of sexual conduct or sexuality has to do with the greater and more personal task of defining *ourselves*. The 'complexity' of self-definition lies in the fact that unlike defining objects in the world, when it comes to defining ourselves, such definitions are intimately tied up with our sense of self in the world, and by extension, our sense of security in the world. The difference between trees and ourselves is that if we have to rethink our understanding about trees, we would not necessarily find that a threatening task to do. We may even find such a task an exciting adventure. But when it comes to the issue of redefining ourselves, what it means to be human, this can be a very threatening task to be confronted with. It challenges our sense of security, in that it may start to question our claim to being fully human. When we are forced to question our own identities, our

sense of our world, and our *sense of order* is challenged on a deeper, much more profound level. This also can be an exciting adventure. But it can also be a dreadful adventure when we feel that our *very existence* or familiar self conception is under threat.

And this is in a sense the feeling that the Jews of the exile and postexilic period must have had. Their very sense of identity, and thus in a sense their *very lives* in the world was threatened. National identity became of paramount importance, and with it the need to survive in a hostile world. Part of such a survival no doubt entailed the need to pro-create to ensure that there would be future generations of Jews in the world. And so the very need to survive became a determining influence in a Jewish normative understanding of sexuality and in particular of sexual conduct. Language was thus used in the biblical narrative to inform and enforce categories of sexual conduct. Thus the terms *male* and *female* were not merely descriptive terms, but acted as normative terms governing sexual conduct towards procreative means. Hence when these terms are used in these constitutive texts such as the creation myth, there immediately follows the imperative to procreate (Genesis 1: 26-27). Even the very name of Eve, meaning 'the mother of all living' carries with it the implied imperative to procreate (Genesis 3: 29).

With regard to this relationship between survival and national grand narratives we will now turn our focus onto the insight that language games give us. Already we have seen the importance of language for enabling us to give expression to our sense of identity. But we have seen that language in addition to enabling a freedom of expression, also paradoxically can become a constricting instrument with regard to such freedom of expression.

Language Games

The idea of 'language games' has already been touched on in the above discussion of Gadamer. But also for Rorty, much of the history of knowledge creation can be reduced to 'attempts to externalize a certain contemporary language-game' (Rorty, 1980: 10). That is to say, that what we consider to be the criteria for what constitutes knowledge, in fact constitute a particular language game that we happen to subscribe

to at the time. This language game is exalted to the status of 'normal discourse' and any assertion that contradicts this 'established practice' becomes labeled as 'abnormal discourse' (Rorty, 1980: 365). So for example, science, in particular medical science, has become the contemporary dominating or normal discourse for sexuality, so that theories of sexuality that cannot be 'substantiated' through medical or scientific empirical means, become part of *abnormal* discourse on the topic. But before the modern day advent of science, the language of sexuality was constructed and dominated mainly by religious discourse, very much the same type of religious discourse that we experience in the biblical narrative. Normal discourse comes to dominate over abnormal discourse, which is consequently rejected as irrational. This can be seen to be true in Gagnon's use of the biblical creation myth. For even though it can be said that he wants the text to dominate the reader, what is actually taking place in Gagnon's use of the text, is that it is not so much the 'text' that dominates the reader, but rather a particular use or interpretation (Gagnon's) that comes to dominate the reader. In other words, it can be said that Gagnon taps into the contemporary dominant discourse of heteronormativity around sexuality, in which the binary of homosexual and heterosexual is maintained, and uses (perhaps unconsciously) this dominant discourse as an interpretive grid with which to understand and use the creation myth as a means to prescribe sexual behavior.

However, concerning this above contrast between normal and abnormal discourse, Rorty wants us to shift our emphasis from a scientific paradigm for epistemology, or the study of knowledge, towards an alternative standard for justification (Rorty, 1980: 389), i.e. hermeneutics. In what can be termed the 'linguistic turn' (Rorty, 1980: 257), there is a shift from epistemology as such, to an emphasis on language. What this entails for Rorty, is the acknowledgement that through hermeneutics there can be the recognition that there are grey areas in life (including with regard to moral rules or principles), in which it is difficult to ascertain absolute and definite objective knowledge (Rorty, 1980: 317), morality or normative assertions concerning *sexual conduct*, being a clear case in point. In a sense hermeneutics helps us to shift from a need to obtain *objective certainty,* that is evidenced in implicit universalistic assumptions, to an acknowledgement of the *subjective* apprehension of experience (Rorty, 1980: 318). It is a shift from 'scientific' knowledge founded on empirically verifiable methodologies, to moral knowledge, which has to adapt its 'methodology'

from circumstance to circumstance (Rorty, 1980: 319). It is a shift from 'constraint and confrontation' (Rorty, 1980: 315) towards *dialogical* interaction, or to put it another way, conversation between equals, and very often also between different and opposing language games. A shift can thus take place from a situation in which the text is used to dominate the reader (as though it were some objective measure of reality), to a situation in which the reader can use the text with a greater understanding of the ambiguities of language that inform the relationship between the text and the reader. However, Rorty's insights can take us even further than that.

Rorty advances the idea that the closest we can come to an idea of certainty with regard to moral practice, is a certainty based on *shared communal consensus* (Rorty, 1980: 190), in other words, intersubjective rather than objective 'knowledge' or certainty. Thus justification for knowledge claims is shifted from being premised on some privileged internal 'touchstone', (such as reason or perception) of supposedly objective knowledge, towards the public arena where dispute and discussion separates knowledge from prejudice and other forms of non-knowledge (Rorty, 1980: 254). In a sense Rorty wants to level the playing field between discourses, and between power hierarchies (to be discussed below), so as to enable what can be called a more 'democratic' approach towards issues of ethics. This means rather than appealing to God (or a text) or to science as final arbitrators of ethical issues, we should rather honestly and earnestly engage each other in mutual dialogue. Part of such an honest engagement, is the willingness on the part of both parties to acknowledge their own finitude with regard to the text, and not to pretend as though the interpretations they come up with, with regard to the text are somehow 'absolute' or God's *own* truth. It requires that parties on both sides of the conversation (i.e. Gagnon and us) are aware of their own hermeneutic moments, and take responsibility for their interpretations and uses of the text. In other words what is required is a Gadamerian openness towards the other, thus allowing parties on both sides of the debate to enter into genuine dialogue with each other. Such openness must entail self-awareness of one's own universalistic assumptions. In addition, we now no longer read a text in an assumed isolation of the dialectical relationship in which there is a one-to-one interaction, i.e. one book and one reader. What happens now is that we come to understand that reading is not an individual activity, but really a community activity. Our understanding and use of texts is invariably contextually bound. The very

language that we use in our attempt to appropriate or use a text, is created and maintained by the community of others amongst whom we find ourselves as readers. Our understanding of life and of texts takes place in the complex web that is our linguistic and social matrix.

Conclusion

In unfolding a hermeneutics of sexual identity in this chapter I have looked at valuable insights that two philosophers, Gadamer and Rorty, have brought to the table. When it comes to the issue of the ancient Jewish national grand narrative, we have come to see that the understanding of the world expressed through this narrative is necessarily bound by the biases of its own finitude. Not only is this national grand narrative bound by its own finitude, but we as readers with an interest in the text's normativity also are bound by the finitude of our own historical situatedness. One way to bridge the gap between these finitudes is through being open towards the otherness of the text, and to let oneself be drawn into the game of the text, into the world opened up by the otherness of the text, in order to have one's own horizons expanded. Openness entails self-awareness of one's own universalistic assumptions. Openness allows us to enter into a hermeneutic game with the text in which we engage in a struggle for meaning. We come to realise that such a struggle for meaning has implications for one's very identity. Through acknowledging that there is an effective history that separates us from the original context of the text, we also come to realise that our identity issues differ. For the text, it was a struggle for the national identity of the Jewish people at a particular time in history. For us it is a struggle for identity around issues of sexual orientation. With regard to this struggle, Rorty helps us to understand, that when we read a text, our interpretation of that text is influenced by the dominant discourses of our time. In our contemporary context, the discourse that dominates our understanding of sexuality can be said to be that of heteronormativity, in which sexual relations between people of the opposite sex are considered the norm, and homosexual relationships are considered the ab-norm. Thus, it would be easy for a contemporary reader of the biblical text to 'understand' the creation myth as approving of heterosexual relationships. And any sexual relation that deviates form

the 'norm' as exemplifies in the creation myth is therefore viewed or interpreted as wrong.

So far we have looked at some of the ways in which national grand narratives, in particular the national grand narrative of the Jewish people, can have a limiting effect on our sense of sexual identity in the world, in limiting us to a heterosexual model of sexual conduct. However, such 'limitation' of the text paradoxically depends on us as readers. How the text is used depends on our own openness or limitations, specifically on the way we use language, and the way we engage each other in mutual dialogue.

 In the rest of the thesis I would like to explore another way that national grand narratives can come to have an influence in our lives, that is, through the mechanism of the imagination. By understanding how the imagination can function in enabling us to use (or abuse) texts, we can come to see how it is possible to take full responsibility (as readers) in the use of the text to create a sense of identity using the means of national grand narratives. We will also focus on the potentially liberating power of national grand narratives and of the imagination to help us reinvent a sense of our own identities. To do this we will employ some of the insights of Richard Kearney and Judith Butler.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION, PERFORMATIVITY AND INTERPELLATION IN CONSTRUCTING SEXUAL IDENTITY

Introduction

Up to this point in the thesis we have explored the dialectical relationship that exists between the reader and the text. What we have seen in Gagnon's use of the creation myth is that he treats the text in such a way that the creation myth can be said to have a 'one-sided' dominating effect on the reader. In other words, the text comes to have a 'static meaning' that is supposed to apply across contexts and historical periods. Not only is there a static meaning of the text for Gagnon, but also Gagnon wants the reader of the text to *merely submit* to this supposedly static and universally valid meaning. This treatment of the text creates an unbalanced relationship between the text and the reader, in which the text has the 'final say' and the reader must do their best merely to comply with the 'demands' of the text, i.e. the reader must be obedient and live 'according' to the text. However, what Gagnon cleverly avoids is the issue that no text merely 'speaks' to a passive reader, but that every text must be actively *interpreted* by the reader. In other words, the reader is not some 'passive object' that just sits in front of a text, but is really an active subject that necessarily plays a role in the interpretation and therefore the meaning of a text.

Through Gadamer's concept of the analogy of the game, we have come to see what is the nature of the role that the active subject plays in the meaning of the text. Through the analogy of the game we see that there is a more egalitarian relationship between the reader and the text, than Gagnon allowed for. So for example, on the one hand the text challenges the gay reader, by questioning their preconceived notions with regard to sexual identity. On the other hand, the gay reader comes to the text with his or her own historically situated unique set of questions. Thus there remains a tension between the text and the reader, seeing as the creation myth was collated to answer particular questions of a particular time. This is not to say that the text no longer has meaning for us today. Meaning can still be derived from the text. 'Answers' to contemporary questions can still be found in the reading of the text. But Gagnon's

understanding of reading is incomplete in that he neglects to acknowledge the extent to which the reader shapes the contemporary meaning of the text and therefore also its normative application. In particular, he fails to see that the authoritative 'meaning', which he supposedly simply 'finds' in the text and endows with universal validity, is partly construed by himself, and shaped through the historically specific question which he puts to the text, namely the question about homosexuality as we would understand it today. Gadamer's notion of reading as game-playing alerts us to the fact that Gagnon helps to shape the very meaning which he proposes to simply find in the text, as well as its application to today's questions and context; it points to the reader as an agent in interpretation and by implication to the responsibility of the reader for the interpretations he or she comes up with.

How 'answers' to the questions that we pose to authoritative texts can be found, was made a little clearer through my discussion of Rorty's treatment of knowledge in chapter two, in which it was shown that it is through the use of language, that the human subject in a sense creates reality. In other words language doesn't simply reflect reality, but in a sense reflects the subject's *understanding* of reality, so that even before we start to interpret texts that we consider to be authoritative, we are already partially responsible for the very world in which we live, because of the linguistic nature of the meaning we create. This means that we are also responsible for creating a meaningful world (a linguistic reality) in which the question of homosexuality arises as a moral question at all. So really the subject doesn't play a passive role in the acquisition of knowledge, or in reading, but rather plays an active role in the creation or formation of knowledge and reading. If this is the case, the dialectical relationship between the text and the reader is not really one of equality, or even one in which the text necessarily dominates the reader, but is in an important sense one through which the meaning of the text is *created by the reader*. This is not to say that the reader must totally disregard the text, or ignore its challenges. But it does mean that the *responsibility* for the *use* of the text lies with the reader (or the community of readers, in Rorty's understanding), and can therefore not be understood as being intrinsic to the text itself.

But now the question arises, how does a reader take the apparently 'static text' of the creation myth and *give* it meaning, such that the reader can find answers with regard

to the contemporary issue of sexual identity? To answer this question, I propose in this chapter, that it is through the use of the *productive imagination* that a reader as the 'imaginative subject' (Kearney, 1988: 243) can make sense of an ancient text like the creation myth and can apply it as normative or treat it as speaking to contemporary issues.

And so this chapter will cover two broad issues:

Firstly, in my discussion of the imagination, I look at the general function of *productive imagination* and its use by the imaginative subject in the construction of sexual identity, using Richard Kearney.

Secondly, I look at imagination as a necessary link between national grand narratives and identity. Here I address the issue of how identity (particularly sexual identity) is formed, by looking at Judith Butler's concepts of performativity and interpellation.

1. The Productive Imagination in The Construction of Sexual Identity

Seeing, as I assert in this chapter, that the imagination is important in the ability to assimilate knowledge, the natural question to ask is, *how* does the imagination fulfil this role of knowledge acquisition? Firstly, it is significant, that when it comes to issues of sexual identity, the 'imagination enables man [or woman – SH] to think in terms of *opposites*' (Kearney, 1988: 40, emphasis added). The imagination *facilitates* notions of sexual identity in terms of male and female, or man and woman or heterosexual and homosexual. Our linguistic system, under the spell of western oppositional thinking, presents such dualisms as pervasive and 'natural', and the imagination then helps us to view the world as naturally existing of such dualisms or dichotomies or complementarities. Such rigid dualisms tend to pervade discussions around the issue of homosexuality and the bible. But it can be asked, that if through our imaginations we can impose dualistic structures onto nature, such as our bodies, is it not also possible through the imagination, to think up *alternative categories* of existence with regard to sexuality?

To explore the above questions, it is significant to note with regard to Rorty's argument, i.e. that our perception of reality is linguistically conditioned, that there is indeed a bridge between the world of outer reality and the 'inner' mind, and that Kearney helps us to see that this *bridge is the imagination* (Kearney, 1988: 169). In what follows, I will unpack this idea of Kearney.

Kearney provides us with a wide range of possible understandings of the imagination (Kearney, 1988: 16). He does so by exploring what he labels as three different types of imagination, namely the mimetic, the productive and the parodic imagination (Kearney, 1988: 17). He explores these different types of imagination with the aim to 'proposing the possibility of a post-modern imagination capable of preserving, through reinterpretation, the functions of narrative identity' (Kearney, 1988: 32). However, it is by making this link between the imagination and narrative identity that Kearney makes a contribution to our understanding of sexual identity in the context of this thesis.

Kearney, is his development of the concept of the productive imagination, emphasizes the subject's capacity through use of the imagination to *create new combinations* or configurations of objects or things already existing in the world. What I am interested in, for the sake of my argument here, is Kearney's insight into the imagination's capability for the construction and use of material forms and figures to represent real things in some 'unreal' way (Kearney, 1988: 16). In particular, I am interested in the imagination's capacity to construct, reconstruct and recombine mental images and narrative elements, including mythic themes, to represent real things existing in the world (such as our sexuate bodies) in some 'unreal' of imaginary way. In other words, the imagination has the ability to reconfigure on a concrete level (as in art works but also in stories) the meaning of what exists physically in the world. In this way, the imagination can assist us to rethink something like the meaning of the concrete, sexuate body and its practices, through the creative recombination and reconfiguration of existing mythic and narrative elements. As this chapter unfolds, we will see that through the use of the productive imagination in particular, when it comes to the issue of sexuality, the imaginative subject tends to his or her body in an 'unreal' way. In other words, through the use of the productive imagination and the medium of language, the imaginative subject creates categories (in a sense unreal or not

'naturally' found) of sexuality, that don't exist in nature as such, but rather in complex systems of linguistic signification. By defamiliarizing us with what we thought we knew or understood, by presenting us with 'unreal' or unexpected ways of conceiving of something 'real', something physically present in the world, the productive imagination allows us to see *that* we linguistically produce our world and its meanings, and also *how* we do this. In other words, the productive imagination problematizes the meaning-giving activity as such, and challenges us with the constructed nature of what we consider to be 'naturally' existing categories or meaningful relations in the world.

Kearney notes that through the productive imagination we have a capacity through the use of our imaginations to adapt old knowledge to new situations in life (Kearney, 1988: 16), because through the productive imagination we are for example able to detect 'similarities' between new experiences and old ones. Stories of the past can come to have 'meaning' for contemporary situations. So for example, Deuteronomistic history can continue to have meaning for the contemporary Jew or Christian, precisely because through their productive imaginations they can come to see contemporary issues *reflected* in the stories of the past. However, the productive imagination not only facilitates looking for *similarities* between past and current narratives, but also the production of *new* narrative, or creative new interpretations of texts from the past.

The productive imagination, or 'productive paradigm' (Kearney, 1988: 155) correlates for Kearney with 'the autonomous expression of *man* [or woman – SH]' (Kearney, 1988: 10). By 'autonomous expression' is meant the idea that through the imaginative subject's use of their productive imaginations, they can think *beyond* the apparently 'natural' patterns and conglomerations of objects in the world. They are *autonomous* in that their ability to create meaning is not fixed or limited to what 'naturally' occurs in the world. In other words, the imaginative subject can go beyond the realm of nature, towards creating its *own natural world* that doesn't necessarily conform to the 'outer realities' of the world of nature (Kearney, 1988: 16) or which radically reorganises those realities into new meaningful patterns. Thus, the imaginative subject, through the productive imagination, transcends 'reality' by being able to produce new configurations or new 'realities'.

An example of such a conglomeration is the mythical chimera (variously configured as an agglomeration of different types of animals, and as such not a naturally occurring phenomenon). The productive capacity of the imagination becomes important when the imaginative subject is dealing with issues around the development and construction of a sense of identity. This is because identity as such is not something that is passively 'found' in nature, but is really something that is constructed, patterned and thus created by the imaginative subject. A clear example of such identity creation is found in the biblical redactors' reconfiguration of old literary and oral materials to produce a grand narrative that essentially was introducing a *new understanding* of what it meant to be a Jew, as I have discussed in detail in chapter one. What is also noteworthy about their project, however, is that in constructing this national grand narrative, they simultaneously created the impression that this understanding (and indeed this essential Jew) had existed (as though it were something 'natural') since the very beginning of time, and thus their very creation carried with it the suggestion that it was not a (human, finite, temporal) creation at all, but rather just the record of something found in reality.

In chapter one I addressed the relationship between the imagination and the ideal function of myths, particularly in those myths that I call national grand narratives. With the introduction of Kearney's concept of the productive imagination, the ideal function can now be better understood to play a motivating role in myths, in that through the narrative unfolding of a myth as a story or narrative, the reader, through imaginative association with the characters of the myth, is inspired to emulate acceptable behaviour and eschew negative or detrimental behaviour. In addition, it can be said that the imaginative subject *uses myths, through the ideal function*, to create categories of existence. It should be clear that the use of myths in their ideal function is not always conducive to individual existence: in its ideal function, myth as an aspiration can become a coercive instrument through which people can be included in society or rejected from society. When used in this way, myth functions to demarcate the mythically constructed community, and its ideals serves to exclude certain individuals from that community when they are seen to reject or counter those ideals. This is a similar process to the power-political game of pitting 'normal' against 'abnormal' discourse as explained in the section on Rorty. To stay within the mythically construed community, one has to 'toe the ideological line' and confirm the

normal discourse, use the dominant language game when conceiving of reality. To question the dominant discourse and the mythic aspirations is to run the risk of being ejected from the mythic community.

While there is this potentially negative aspect with regard to the above-created categories of existence, this very same aspect of categories of existence as created by the imaginative subject, allows for options. This is because the productive imagination can be used to create a space within which there is the potential for difference to arise; indeed, the productive imagination is bound to do this, to offer this potential as some stage in every person's life. How this might work, is that an imaginative subject might have experiences that contradict accepted categories of existence. Instead of being sexually attracted to a woman, as he expected, a man may experience feelings for another man. This in turn creates a crisis of identity for the man, especially one who has grown up in a strongly hetero-normative culture. The productive imagination can be used to work through this identity crisis, in that it enables the man to *re-imagine* what his existence or identity could be. His existence as a gay man can now be imaginatively re-configured, to make space for, and include alternative possibilities that his existence as a heterosexual man did not allow for.

At this point in the thesis I would like to make the reader aware that the following discussion and use of Judith Butler's queer theory (in terms of performativity and interpellation) will be *androcentric*, in that I apply her theory specifically to *male homosexuality*. There are at least three reasons for this. Firstly the Old Testament texts that I refer to, are themselves very androcentric, being created by an essentially patriarchal society of conservative male Jewish priests. Thus when it comes to the issue of *homogenital acts*, the focus of the texts is on penetration or *male sexual activity* (Greenberg, 2004: 85). Secondly, due to the focus being so much on male sexual activity, it can be argued that lesbianism is not something that the Torah texts themselves address at all (Greenberg, 2004: 85-86). Thirdly, I would like to point out, that while the conclusions of this thesis do have an influence on the overall idea or concept of sexuality in general, this thesis is nevertheless a thesis on *a* hermeneutics of sexuality. I do not pretend to cover *all* aspects of sexuality in this thesis, nor even female homosexuality or lesbianism as such, as I believe that lesbianism would

require a separate thesis in itself, as female homosexuality and situated life experience cannot be simply thrown under the same umbrella as male homosexuality (Jagose, 1996: 44). This is because it can be argued that lesbianism 'has substantial cultural differences' not only from male homosexual experience, but also even lesbians (for example through the politics of lesbian *feminism*) would argue that not all lesbians can be said to experience their homosexuality in the same way (Jagose, 1996: 44, 49, 56, 64).

And so to return to the argument of this chapter, the creation of space through the productive imagination, is one way in which myths as narrative, can come to have the power to inspire the imaginative subject, thus opening up possible *potentialities for the self* to realize (Venema, 2000: 7, emphasis added). By developing the productive imagination, through narrative stimulation, one 'open(s) up a transitional space' (Gerkin, 1984: 154), or a 'space of reflexivity' (Venema, 2000: 11). So for example reading the creation myth allows a gay person to suspend their own reality for a while, and enter into the realm of a different world and time. The creation story can thus come to stimulate reflection in the gay person's imagination or thoughts, in which it can be said that the 'imagination straddles two fields of discourse: *cognitive and practical*' (Venema, 2000: 48). As noted above in the discussion of Kearney (?), imagination can be said to function as a bridge between the outer world of reality and the inner realm of the mind. Thus, cognitive thoughts, or stirrings of the productive imagination can lead the imaginative subject towards creating new expressions or manifestations of self, which at first has to do with an 'unreal' or as yet non-existent self. In other words, through the imaginative subject's thoughts (specifically their imaginations) and the creation of categories of existence, they can structure (make sense of) and develop their everyday activities and expressions as sexual beings. In a sense their imagination can serve as an invisible yet fluid mold that gives shape and meaning to their actions. In turn, their actions can affect their thoughts and imagination. One way their actions can do this is through experimentation (living through new experiences, performing different actions from our usual ones) or perhaps just accidentally doing something *differently*, an event that can help them gain new insights, and thus further develop their imaginations. Events like these create and deepen a sense of meaning and personal identity. An example of such a meaningful event that can take place in one's life, is the hermeneutical moment of

reading a text, so that even reading a text can inspire a person to a different understanding of, or imaginative alternative to, their own sexual identity.

With regard to the above reciprocal relationship between our imaginations and actions, it can thus be said that through the faculty of the productive imagination 'human stories always involve some core *imagery of the meaning* of human action and of the forces that interplay in the causation of behavior' (Gerkin, 1984: 165, emphasis added). The meaning we assign to ourselves through our assumed sexual identities involves the imagination. One way in which this happens, is through the use of images. A heterosexual man has in his imagination (whether consciously or unconsciously) an image of the 'ideal' heterosexual man. Such an image may be based on his experiences of his father, or on action heroes that he admires but which do not exist in reality. Nevertheless, this image influences his behavior as a heterosexual man. Another example of identities arising through the use of or stimulation of the imagination, with regard to the biblical narrative, and one Christians are familiar with, is that of the phenomenon of Sunday school in which bible stories are told to children with the aim of instilling in them a sense of morality or ethics. Bible stories are used to inspire children towards good behavior and the avoidance of bad behavior. Likewise when these children come across life situations that resonate with a particular bible story they heard, they are then perhaps able to identify through use of their imaginations with certain characters in those stories. Identification with certain characters or life scripts then in turn would inspire such children to emulate the behavior of such good characters.

Using this example of Sunday school children one could easily come to see how that there is an overlap through the imagination between fact and fiction. Thus, there is an aspect to human existence or identity that is a 'fictional' reality (Reinhartz, 1998: 13), so that it can be said of texts like Genesis chapters one and two, that 'images of ultimate reality are used to enrich discourse about everyday life' (Carr, 2003: 137). 'Ultimate reality' here can be understood to refer to the categories of sexual existence as 'created' by God. But what this ultimate reality is, is usually made known to us through the fictional means of narrative, as is the case with the creation myth. And so it can be said that 'truth' is revealed through story. However what is important to note, is that this overlap between fact and fiction tends to create grey areas in the lived experience of our lives, simply because no matter how well written a story may be, or

how comprehensive a story may be, no story can cover every foreseeable potentiality that may arise in real life. So while the story of Adam and Eve may be used by Gagnon to elicit a certain understanding with regard to sexuality, the story in no way can be said to cover *all* aspects of human sexuality. Neither the story nor the characters really assist the person who experiences (maybe for the first time) homosexual desire in making sense of such an experience.

And so an important ability that the productive imagination brings to the imaginative subject is the ability to *thrive on grey areas* of life, for example moral areas or aspects of our lives in which there are no definite certainties or boundaries. It is in these moral grey areas that there is scope for possibility, for potential, for new conglomerations. However, some people dislike grey areas, for they are regions of uncertainty, of doubt, of shadow lands. They create feelings of insecurity, a sense of disorientation. In their reasoning these people strive for a simplistic unity to reality, and it is precisely their hunger for clarity and simplicity which is stilled by the imaginative use of myths, such as the creation myth, which gives them a sense of a fixed place and function in the unfolding universe. Alternatively, however, the productive imagination can also be used to strive for *alternate or new* possibilities (Kearney, 1988: 93), an aspiration which typically arises when the existing and available stories do not cover or clearly respond to a new situation or experience one is faced with.

As already noted, reality would not be accessible or make sense, without first having been assimilated (and thus in some way altered) through the imaginative filter (Kearney, 1988: 395). Indeed one could say that the imaginative filter is an intrinsic part of our overall interpretive grids. And so in this respect it can be asserted that the 'imagination itself is a crucial aspect of what constitutes reality' (Cornell, 1995: 158). In other words, imagination finds expression through the stories we tell about ourselves, and thus through the 'narrative identity' that we create for ourselves (Kearney, 1988: 17). It also ultimately finds expression in the sexual identities that we adopt. Such sexual identities are possible because the productive imagination facilitates 'unity and continuity' (Kearney, 1988: 165) in and of a life. Not only does the imagination play an important role in the project of self-realization, but imagination also has an impact on our (sexual) relationships with others (Gatens,

1996: 135), seeing as the imagination plays an intrinsic role in the creation of sexual identity, and in the creation and expression of desire.

Sexual identity can be understood to be a process (rather than an outcome or product) through which the imaginative self strives to *articulate* and constantly re-articulate its existence. One way it can do this is through *projecting* a *style* of being, a mode of existence, or identity. By the term projection, I am referring to the process of verbally and textually externalising as it were, thoughts and feelings about ourselves, thoughts and feelings about our sense of identity. One way this projection is achieved is through the stories we tell about ourselves. We all grow up with(in) personal, family and ethnic (or national) (hi)stories. Such histories tend to be formulated or structured in terms of narrative telling. In turn, this same narrative process through use of the productive imagination, forms part of the identity creating function of grand narratives. To recall the above example of the Voortrekker monument, it can be said that for many Afrikaners, their personal sense of identity was shaped through the national story of the Great Trek and the founding of a homeland. For many a young man, to be an Afrikaner was to live a life as represented in the Great Trek narrative, a pious life based on the Scriptures and emulated on the lives of the heroes of these tales. Thus, through use of this example of the Voortrekker monument, it can be said that there is through the process of story telling an intimate connection between personal identity and grand narratives (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 74). Through a process of appropriation or identifying with a narrative, the fictions of grand narratives can become the realities of our lives. In this way it can be said that sexuality or gender that is narratively constructed is in one sense a fiction. It is because the fiction in the form of a narrative has a moulding and shaping influence on our lives. Nevertheless sexuality or gender, though being fictions, are in a sense 'necessary fiction(s)' (Weeks, 2000: 84), 'necessary' in that they enable us to *function* within the cultural matrix in which we find ourselves embedded, in that these fictions can help us to *articulate our roles* in society. They facilitate the functioning of society in that they provide roles or scripts that enable people to fulfil their *functions* in the social order, thus maintaining a sense of social harmony, and also providing an enduring sense of self, carried by a coherent life story.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that 'a (person's) character is formed by the way (s/he) sees things, by (his or her) vision' (McClendon, 1974: 31), which, as I have argued thus far, tends to be shaped and coloured by the dominant grand narrative of their society. Stories or grand narratives have the 'power' they do over our vision, because they furnish us with a pre-existing repertoire of narratives and concomitant experiences that we can draw from to give meaning to our present experiences. Not only do we have pre-existing repertoires on which to draw, but also stories *affect* us. There is a powerful *emotional element* that informs the intuitive appreciation of, and imaginative feeling-into, stories. This emotive element could be described as one of the links between the apprehension of a story in *theory* and the pragmatic application thereof in *practice*, so that 'metaphor [or story – SH], though not factually informative, (is) decisive in forming a judgment or guiding our action' (McClendon, 1974: 97). In other words, people seldom act on the 'facts' of a matter alone.

For example, smokers are generally not easily deterred from smoking when they are faced with a barrage of the 'facts' that smoking can lead to lung cancer. It is when they are confronted by the stories of other smokers who have developed lung cancer and have *suffered*, that emotionally some smokers are convinced to quit. This is because on a narrative level, the productive imagination of smokers is stimulated by their emotions. Through use of their productive imagination, not only can they *identify with* their fellow suffering smokers, but also through the use of the very same productive imaginations, smokers are stimulated to think of *alternatives* for their lives. On a cognitive level, stories or grand narratives may be understood to be part of our national histories, in that they can provide identity links that form and shape our thinking and perceptual awareness. But it is on an *emotional level* that stories become a *part of us in a personal way*. And so it can be said that *creation of identity* is a complex amalgamation of affective and cognitive elements that are brought together or strung together through the use of narrative by the connecting thread of productive imagination.

Furthermore, it is also true that community plays a significant role in the creation of sexual identity formation through common or shared characteristics, and that sexual identity is 'shaped through intimate relationships' (Weeks, 2000: 214). We are not sexual beings in isolation, but in community. It is here where Rorty's hermeneutics

plays an insightful role, in that it is through engaging other members of your community in a dialectical process that an understanding of sexuality becomes possible. However, this understanding of sexuality can be hampered by the presence of dominant discourses in such communities. This happens because in a sense to be part of a community is to be part of a continuum. What I mean by this is that in any particular community there are a variety of examples of sexual expression. If we were to arrange and categorize such sexual expressions along a continuum, we could speak of a community as comprising of a certain number of heterosexuals on the one hand and on the opposite side of the continuum, a certain number of homosexuals. Between these two extremes one could find a variety of other expressions of sexuality, for example bi-sexuals, and transgendered persons. Furthermore, it is possible that in each individual member of that particular community, there are degrees of heterosexual orientation. So that it can be said that in the sexual continuum both 'sexes' (male and female) share characteristics with each other (Weeks, 2000: 35). Thus some men can be described as 'feminine' or some women as being 'masculine'. So even though in the hetero-normative matrix, 'mainstream identities' (Devetzis, 1998: 107), such as male and female may seem to exist as 'separate' categories, yet at a fundamental (or narrative) level there is much that is shared in common human experience. For example suffering can be said to be the common lot of men and women.

In spite of these nuances, overlaps and continuums, in society people are nevertheless separated out and made to conform to gender stereotypes or scripts that are narratively constructed. In fact, 'we learn to become a woman or a man by following the gender scripts that our culture hands out to us and each performance re-inscribes that gender upon our bodies' (Stuart, 2002: 9). This powerful role that community typically plays in creating dominant discourses that function to shape and control our sense of identity, and in particular our sexual identity, is once again aptly demonstrated in the use of the ancient Jewish national grand narrative. Intrinsic to the narrative itself is emphasis on the role of the community in sharing moral responsibility for each other (Leviticus 19: 2; Deuteronomy 19: 6-11). This 'sharing' of moral responsibility for others is of course framed in terms of the dominant discourse of the biblical narrative.

However, even though there is such a strong element of social influence, through the presence of dominant discourses, in identity formation, it can be asserted that 'identities, whether racial or other are not permanently fixed' (Whitebrook, 2001: 38). This is because not only does an individual person change along their life span, so that the child is a different 'self' from the adult, (yet the two continue to co-exist in the adult), and thus 'history might be altered as one's perspective changes' (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993: 49), but also entire communities can and do undergo a shift in identity over long periods of time. And so it can be asserted that 'identity is transitional' (Devetzis, 1998: 145), as the sexual continuum of a particular community shifts with the lapse of time. This transitional element of identity can be seen in the processes of national grand narratives undergoing transitions or changes through the process of effective history.

This is why it is contended in this thesis that the identities that we tend to assume are neither fully imposed, nor really freely chosen. There is a tension between our sense of personal identity, and the identity that the society in which we live would want us to have. On one hand, our identities come from our parents and our communities through the medium of national grand narratives as well as other myths. An example of such identity assignment can be said to be the names we receive with the personal histories that our parents hand down to us, even though this does not mean that just because we assign a name to someone, that we have necessarily captured his or her entire identity by that name (Reinhartz, 1998: 191). On the other hand, our personal identities are really partly of our own making. So for example the personal choices that we make in our lives have a formative influence on our individual identities within our society. But just as no one can capture the entire identity of another person through naming or labelling them, so also no one person (such as a Jewish priest) can claim that their own sense of identity is representative of or normative for the community at large. And so 'no one [person] should be allowed to say that her [or his] symbolic translation is the only authentic one' (Cornell, 1995: 145). I would argue that such a claim to authenticity and normativity is present in all national grand narratives which function to demarcate a mythic community. This is because naming or identity assignment is not merely a descriptive event, but also entails *normative implications*, in that it can be said that in the naming process itself there are concomitant *expectations*.

And so in the context of our debate, when we call someone gay, or we identify ourselves as being gay, we often have not only a preconceived notion of what a gay person is, but also what they *should* be like. This becomes problematic, in that for one reason, each (gay) person wants to decide for themselves who and what they want to be. Thus it can be said that identity (including sexual identity) is not something that can be autocratically assigned (as by a Jewish priest), it must be *claimed* on a personal level, if it is to be effective or lived at all (Morland & Willcox, 2005: 185). What is true of gay people in this sense is also true of heterosexual people. While in this thesis I am not denying the role that biology can play in sexual development, what I am focusing on is the subtle but profound influence that society, through the use of dominant discourses to influence the productive imaginations of individual members of a community can and does play in the creation of our sexual identities and the resultant control exercised on our sexual conduct. To gain deeper insight into this matter, while at the same time finding a way to express the notion that the individual strives to claim and express their sexual identity over against societal pressures, we will now focus on two key concepts that Judith Butler develops in her queer theory, those of performativity and interpellation.

2. Judith Butler – Performativity and Interpellation

Intrinsic to the experience of modern day Christian faith is the feeling of 'alienation' from the past (Niebuhr, 1972: 110, 121). Christians' every day experiences tend to clash with the grand narratives of their religion. If we look in particular at the personal life stories of some gay Christian believers we find that it can be said that their experience is often at the 'edge of language' (Crossan, 1975: 46), hinted at by story, for example by stories of deep and loving male friendships within Scripture, but it is never *fully thereby encapsulated*. In other words, a *rift* or dissonance between myth and practice is often found in the personal experiences of gay Christians. They feel that due to their personal life stories they know themselves to be different from most of their fellow believers, especially with regard to their sexual orientation, and they feel that their religious myths do not sufficiently speak to and about these differences.

What is significant about this experience of difference is that it can lead to shared experiences with others who share in this particular 'difference', and shared experiences can lead to 'interpretive communities' or 'narrative cultures' on the margins of Christian communities. Within these, particular experiences as well as stories with similar plots are seen to be shared, and then common narratives are constructed to bestow meaning on what it is to live the life of a gay Christian. This is very similar to the way in which the biblical narrative arose out of the Jewish interpretive community, an interpretive community that shared the same experiences of loss of identity in captivity, i.e., a marginalized existence. 'Interpretive communities' is a concept that Ken Plummer uses in his book *Telling Sexual Stories. Power, Change and Social Worlds* (1995). He sees interpretive communities as communities that develop around people sharing the same experiences (political and sexual) with regard to identity issues. As a result, these communities develop common vocabularies with which to articulate and make sense of their experiences (Plummer, 1995: 94). In this way interpretive communities provide individuals within those communities with a 'vocabulary of values' (Weeks, 2000: 181) within which they make sense of their lived experiences. Such vocabularies may include concepts like homosexual or heterosexual, or they may serve to problematize these distinctions.

This shared experience that takes place in interpretive communities can be said to take place in the shape of a narrative, through the use of the productive imagination (as happened with the Jewish community). It can be argued, as an example, that a contemporary instance of gay narrative building is the formation of gay identity as expressed in some circles of the gay rights movement. What is important for many gay people is the need to build up supportive communities. The way this takes place can be seen as follows: a person who has certain feelings and experiences begins to look for others whose 'stories' match those feelings or experiences, so that they can know that they are not alone. From this search they build up communities in which they share the same or similar *stories*, and find mutual support (Plummer, 1995: 43). There is a type of *ritualizing of story telling*, such as 'coming out stories', or 'how God called me', in which recognizable and stereotypical scripts emerge. These in turn tend to shape and give structure to the lives of new members of such a community (Plummer, 1995: 44, 84). As a part of the narrative process of story telling, it can be said that their experiences tend to take on a general format of 'suffering, surviving,

and surpassing' (Plummer, 1995: 49), that is to say, suffering the stigma of being different, coming to terms with one's difference and then finally using that difference not only to make a success of one's own life, but as a means to inspire others who are going through similar difficulties. And so a 'gay' Christian community has begun to evolve.

What is significant though, in the evolution of such gay interpretive communities, is that they invariably take shape against the background of a dominant heterosexual culture. With the result that much of the vocabulary used to create interpretive communities around issues of sexuality, is already saturated with hetero-normative meaning and context, so that it can be said that 'body parts become epistemologically accessible through an imaginary investiture' (Butler, 1993: 60). By 'epistemological accessibility' Butler means here that body parts have been invested with certain linguistic and conceptual significance, for example the possession of certain genitalia placed a person in a particular category. To have a penis, in terms of heterosexual meaning, means that one is a male, and as such should behave as a 'male' behaves. In other words, gay interpretive communities struggle against the 'normal' discourses described by Rorty, and there is a need to employ the productive imagination in an attempt to transcend the almost overwhelming power of established, dominant (also Christian) discourses on sexuality. Butler (1990: 70) points to the experiences of transsexuals as an example of how this imaginary investiture can be problematized and contested. They show that it is possible to have the body parts of a male yet to feel that one is essentially a female, thereby contesting the automatic equation of an anatomical penis with male behavior. Such contestation of what can be called essentialism (that is, having certain body parts means that you must necessarily behave in a certain way) raises the question of '(gender) identity as a normative ideal versus (gender) identity as a descriptive feature of experience' (Butler, 1990: 16). Gender identity *as* a normative ideal (instead of *as* a descriptive feature of experience) tends to dominate the discourse around homosexuality and the bible.

From the above line of thought one can now see how it is possible to arrive at an essentialist *understanding of sexuality that is in reality based on linguistic constructs* that arise out of narrative communities who happen to share common experiences. But that there should be a reliable or accurate connection between 'reality' and the

language in terms of which such essentialism is expressed, has already been problematized by Rorty's argument that our linguistically derived knowledge of the world cannot be said to be a 'mirror' reflection of reality as it is in itself. So that for example, when we speak of males, we are really using language to create the 'reality' of maleness. We are projecting as it were a linguistic ideal (derived in part from the Jewish national grand narrative as hetero-normative and historically specific) onto reality. However, there is a way forward, if we recall Rorty's emphasis on the role that hermeneutics can play in creating dialogue between different discourses, or parties that differ with each other. Thus one way forward is to examine the language (like male – female, heterosexual – homosexual) that is used around notions of sexuality. And so now we will turn to two of the major concepts that Judith Butler employs in examining the complexity of gender and language, that of *performativity and interpellation.*

<div align="center">Performativity</div>

When it comes to the nature of sexuality or gender, Butler asserts that 'gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred' (Butler, 1990: 16). One way to understand this statement is to assert that 'the body is not naturally 'sexed" (Spargo, 1999: 55). In other words, sex or gender is something that is *said about* the body, not something that *comes out of* or is *intrinsic* to the body. If this is the case, how then do we explain gender and sexuality? Firstly, one can say that 'gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing' (Butler, 1990: 112). Or to express it differently, gender is construed, not as a noun, but as a *verb* (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 59). In other words, gender, rather than being a *static* entity, or object in the world, is a *fluid* reality. And the way that gender can be said to be fluid is to say that gender, as a *word,* as a point of linguistic signification or verbal meaning, is really a word of *action* or doing. Following this line of reasoning, one can say that 'we do not behave in certain ways *because* [SH] of our gender identity' (Spargo, 1999: 56); rather we have a certain gender identity because of the *way we behave.* Thus, for example, men are men, because they behave in a 'manly' way; they don't behave in a manly way because they are firstly men in an essentialist way.

To put it another way, Butler postulates that there is no pre-discursive reality (or reality that exists outside of language) or what can be called a naturally sexed body (Butler, 1990: 55). Thus, there is no 'stable subject' or 'substantive being' (Butler, 1990: 5, 10) and therefore, 'there is no gender identity *behind* the expressions of gender' (Butler, 1990: 25; emphasis added). And so in terms of Butler's theorizing it can be said that the gendered subject should be understood as the *result* of language, rather than the *cause* of language. To augment this idea, it can be asserted that identity categories 'are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 58). Sexuality or gender can thus be described as an *effect* or outcome of language that is used (Butler, 1993: 187) in a particular culture or interpretive community.

With regard to the idea that *sexuality is an effect rather than a cause*, it can be said that for Butler, crucial to sexual identity formation is the *rehearsal* of certain norms (Butler, 1993: 8), so that gender is a 'stylized repetition of acts' (Salih, 2004: 114). In describing gender in terms of 'performativity', or stylization of acts, what Butler is asserting, is that gender is something one *does*, and not something that one *is*. However, her concept of performativity is more complex than that, in that Butler is not reducing our sexuality to coital activity, but rather she is looking at the totality of how we express ourselves as individuals. So firstly, by describing gender in terms of performativity, Butler is not asserting that gender is something that is completely *freely chosen*, so that one can say, 'I choose to be gay', or 'I choose to be heterosexual'. Rather, gender is something that we are 'born' into, not in the sense that we are genetically predetermined as a particular gender, but in the sense that the culture that we are born into 'determines', through its own systems of signification or language, the gender that we are (or 'have'). Likewise, Butler is asserting that gender takes on its meaning in terms of language. Language not only determines the range of possible meanings of our gender, but language itself is *constitutive* of gendered persons. Another way to put it is to say that when we are born, the language of our natal community already exists, and thus certain notions or ideas of gender already pre-exist us, so that it can be said that we are simply placed in a 'position' within that system of linguistic signification, or verbal meaning, of language. Our position or gender on the level of language alone then becomes conditioned by our linguistic situatedness in relation to other words or linguistic signifiers. Thus what we do, and

the way we behave, is interpreted or understood by our pre-established position or *positionality* within language that we come to 'inherit' as a result of the body parts we are born with, or as a result of a combination of those and our sexual behavior.

But with regard to this 'linguistification' of reality, it can be said that language itself is not static, and thus it can be argued that our positionality is not indelible. In other words, the meaning of gender surrounding our bodies, that we have come to inherit, is not necessarily permanently tied to us throughout our lives. Not only is it possible for example for a man to come to have a different understanding of his genderedness or sexuality the older he becomes, but it is also possible that on a cultural level, ideas concerning the expression of gender or sexuality can and do change. Thus in terms of Butler's theory of performativity, it can be asserted that gender is not a biological absolute, but something that can be changed or expressed differently. To demonstrate that gender is not something that we are essentially born with, Butler uses the idea of parody of drag, to assert that these 'positions' of gender within language can be challenged (Comstock & Henking, 1999: 195). It can be said that the process of performativity involves the aspect of reiteration or constant repetition. What is significant with regard to the reiterative aspect of performativity is that it becomes a site of potential disruption, or a point of rupture leading to instability (Burrus, 2004: 126). One reason for this is that no human process of repetition involves exact reduplication. But with every iterative act comes slight difference, a shift, ,modification or change. This introduction of difference is one way to understand how it is possible for Butler to argue that intrinsic to the symbolic is an inherent possibility for change. Thus men wearing women's clothing is not only visually contentious, but challenges on a profound level our notions of maleness and femaleness. But what makes the challenge difficult is that it can only take place within a set of already established terms. However, as already noted, these terms are not immutable, so that for Butler, one way to challenge current gender norms, is by challenging the meanings that we associate with them.

In the above line of reasoning, Butler uses 'Nietzsche's insight that "there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything"' (Salih, 2004: 91). In other words, 'the psyche is not in the body, but in the very *signifying process* through which that body comes

to appear' (Salih, 2004: 134, emphasis added). Thus, to reiterate, there is no subject behind the doing, the *doing itself constitutes the subject* (Salih, 2004: 130), so that it can be said that gender, if subject to change, can be described as an open-ended *process* in that it has no fixed 'origin', nor has it any clear destiny (Salih, 2004: 90). This is because, 'sexuality always exceeds any given performance' (Salih, 2004: 131), due to the fact that no one person is ever the 'perfect' male or the perfect female (Ruse, 1988: 9). Therefore it can be asserted that 'the norm (of heterosexuality) cannot be reduced to any of its instances … neither can the norm be fully extricated from its instantiations' (Butler, 2004: 52). However, what is it that constitutes the norm? If gender is 'just' a matter of performativity or positionality, why then does it seem like our genders or sexual orientation constitute so much of who and what we are (Comstock & Henking, 1999: 196)? What can be said to be the web or matrix comprising the relationality in which gender as term finds itself implicated or entwined? In terms of Butler's queer theory this complex web is provided by heteronormativity.

The term heteronormativity can refer to the cultural imposition of heterosexual gender norms, so that it can be said that heteronormativity is the prevailing ethos in our Western culture that *privileges heterosexual relationships* over any other forms of relationships, particularly over homosexual relationships[12]. Butler explains that intrinsic to the identity formation of the heterosexual is a disavowal, or repudiation of its antithesis (Butler, 1993: 3), that is to say, homosexuality. In other words, a binary opposite is created, establishing a *negatively* reinforced identity (Butler, 1993: 115; Weeks, 2000: 67), in that the heterosexuals can be said to define themselves in terms of *not* being gay. Furthermore in this 'negative' development of heterosexual identity is the enforcement of a lack of self-knowledge, in that men in particular are discouraged from exploring any 'potential' possibilities of homosexuality in themselves (Sedgwick, 1990: 186). In other words, Butler argues, that the 'heterosexual identity' can be said to be formed through the denial of the presence in oneself of anything that might resemble a moving away from the norm of sexuality, or

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[12] However, it can be said that 'heterosexual practices are not the same as heterosexual norms' (Butler, 2004: 199). So for example faithfulness in marriage is extolled as a virtue, but in reality, many men are unfaithful to their partners.

that which can be said to be a moving towards the 'abnormal'. It is here where Rorty's distinction between dominant and abnormal discourse becomes relevant with regard to the development of sexual identity. In terms of issues surrounding sexuality, the heteronormative model is the dominant discourse, while the homosexual model becomes the abnormal discourse. However, it can be said that in a sense the abnormal does not exist separately or autonomously, but is actually a part of the continuum of the norm (Butler, 2004: 51). In other words, while normal or dominant discourse might exert hegemony over abnormal discourse, it at the same time paradoxically depends on abnormal discourse, in that you cannot have a norm without at the same time having an ab-norm, i.e. something that deviates from the norm, thereby reinforcing the norm itself.

As a logical extension of the assertion that the 'abnormal' is part of the norm, it can be said that even for homosexuality itself to remain a stable category, it does so through repudiating heterosexuality (Salih, 2004: 255). In other words, what we have here is a binary relationship, formulated in linguistic terms (in an attempt to describe apparently stable or essential realities), in which one category defines itself in terms of being *not the other*. An obvious problem that results from this binary relationship is that it can be said that neither gender (in the sense of heterosexual or homosexual) can stand on its own. Thus for example, in terms of gay marriage, Butler argues that an underlying problematic, is that while on the one hand, gay people are striving to claim equal rights for themselves through recognition of their unions, on the other hand, gay people are falling prey to having their relationships being made to conform to heterosexual norms, so that to 'install (heterosexual marriage) as a model for sexual legitimacy' (Butler, 2004: 26), is a process that itself tends to legitimise homosexuality in terms of a heteronormative model. Thus what can happen is that 'the state (through the institution of marriage) becomes the means by which phantasy (sic) becomes literalized: desire and sexuality are ratified, justified, known, publicly instated, imagined as permanent, durable' (Butler, 2004: 111). By legitimizing homosexual desire under the rubric of marriage, the state discourse thus might be distorting homosexual desire in the attempt to control and organise it in predictable ways. One way that the state can perform this function is through the use of language, and a particular type of use of language, known as interpellation.

Interpellation

As should be evident by now in this thesis, and as we have seen also in the discussion of Gadamer and Rorty, it can be said that language itself plays an important role in our understanding of sexuality, in that while on the one hand it may sometimes obscure truth, on the other hand Butler asserts that truth cannot be 'found outside of language' (Salih, 2004: 44). One ramification of this insight is demonstrated in the concept of interpellation. Originally as formulated by Louis Althusser, (Macey, 2000: 9), interpellation can be said to be the process through which an official (such as a policeman or state official) brings a subject into 'being' by directly and verbally addressing them. The specific example that Althusser uses is that of the situation in which a policeman shouts out at someone in the street by addressing them as 'Hey, you!'. The person turns around to face the policeman, because that person knows that he is being addressed by the policeman (Salih, 2002: 78), and in the process that person's identity is construed in terms of the policeman's terminology: he is the kind of person to whom a policeman says 'Hey, you!'. Through this example Althusser elaborates how that it is ideology (through linguistic discourse) that brings into being the existence of the 'subject' (Kearney, 1988: 262). The subject exists only to serve the ideological system (Kearney, 1988: 262). What is powerful and yet at the same time subtle about interpellation is that the subject is created by the system, yet at the same time through the system's manipulation of the subject, the subject naively considers themselves to be independent of the system.

Thus, for Butler, interpellation is an example of performative language, in that the *naming act* itself, or the verbal articulation that is directed at a subject, is the very vehicle that brings that subject *as that subject* into existence (Salih, 2004: 138). One consequence of this process of interpellation is that the culturally constructed language creates the illusion that its own created reality is the *only reality* that there is (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 76). And since 'all representations of reality are mediated through ideology [and thus language SH]' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 76), there is no contestation on the part of those who find themselves interpellated (called into being) as homosexuals in terms of the master ideology, which is heteronormativity. The dominant system which naturalizes heterosexuality thus construes the homosexual subject as such: as a deviant or abnormal subject defined in

terms of its sexual difference from the norm. In one sense the designation of homosexual is beyond the control of the person to whom it is directed. Being labeled as a homosexual is to be brought into 'existence' in terms of another person's understanding of reality.

However, this does not mean for Butler that there can be no resistance or agency on the part of the ascribed or designated homosexual person, since ideology 'is also paradoxically and with promise, a resource, the means by which (one's) transformation becomes possible' (Butler, 1993: 247). Thus for example, the verbal abuse of 'fag!' or 'queer!' can be said to interpellate the queer subject. However, such abuse is subverted through *reappropriation* by the queer subject of the negatively intended term, into something that the individual queer subject *owns* for themselves (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 129). By owning and appropriating the term actively, as a subject and an agent, the 'queer subject' transforms the very meaning of the term. Such a phenomenon is aptly demonstrated in the history of Christianity. For the very word or term 'Christian' itself was intended to be a derogative term aimed at followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). However, the followers of Christ re-appropriated the term, and have subsequently worn it as a badge of honor and pride.

Thus paradoxically through the very medium of interpellation it is possible to 'constitute a truth of oneself through the act of verbalization itself' (Butler, 2004: 163). And so, in declaring oneself to be queer or gay, by coming out of the closet, one is, in the verbal declaration itself, *reconstituting* one's own existence, both publicly and in terms of self-ascribed linguistic signification. One in effect reclaims subjectivity for oneself, in that a person takes the verbal abuse that is meant to objectify them, and turns the verbal abuse around into an appellation of subjective pride. However, it can be said that the phrase, 'I am gay' is both performative as well as yielding to interpellation, in that the above person is choosing a term that is already in common currency, and as such is a term that has been created by the dominant group to 'other' certain groups of individuals, but at the same time, re-investing the term 'queer' with new significance, so that queer can come to mean, not one that is (passively) *perverted*, but rather, one that chooses (actively) to be *different*.

An additional aspect to the interpellative act is that 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes' (Salih, 2004: 121). What this means is that gender terms such as *gay* or *heterosexual*, have intrinsic to them, normative implications, as they form part of society's dominant discourse surrounding sexuality and sexual conduct. In other words, it is not possible 'just' to have sexual intercourse, since 'there is no sex that is not already gender' (Salih, 2004: 91). This means in effect that every time having sexual intercourse, one does or acts *as* or from a *position* of genderedness. Another way to describe this process is to say that a person conforms to a particular narrative script. Thus, by being interpellated by another person as 'gay man' or 'heterosexual woman', this creates certain social expectations of a person, certain behavioral scripts that come with being part of that category. An example of such a narrative script is the instance in which homosexuals tend to be stereotyped as having 'feminine' behavior, because that is the expected gender script associated with the term gay, as if any gender which 'falls away' from the supposed heterosexual male norm should be regarded as the 'deviance of lack', i.e. femininity.

It is important to note once again that Butler does not deny the possibility that in the construction of gender there are possible 'extra-linguistic' factors that might contribute to one's sexuality, such as genetic factors. Indeed, it can be said that for Butler, 'language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, (but) what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified' (Salih, 2004: 152). In other words, it can be said that 'language and materiality are … chiasmic in their interdependency' (Salih, 2004: 153). To put it another way there is an area of overlap between linguistic discourse surrounding sexuality and the biological realities underlying sexual orientation. But in terms of the Jewish national grand narrative, and specifically in terms of Gagnon's argument against homosexuality, we have come to see that it is the linguistic discourse around sexuality, the verbal conceptualization of reality around sexuality and sexual conduct, that has come to have a dominating effect on our understanding of homosexuality.

A final aspect to the phenomenon of interpellation is that while it can be said that language both forms and determines the meaning of norms, norms are however not unilaterally imposed, but are activated through fantasy and the imagination (Salih, 2004: 264). In other words it can be said that gay and heterosexual 'subjects'

themselves are implicated in their own 'slavery' to gender, which happens for example through the normative adoption and internalization of terms that have *universality or absolutism* as their aim. So that in asserting that masculinity should conform to certain norms, one is also asserting that all men in the world should conform to a particular understanding of masculinity. However, Butler does not have a problem with *universality* per se (Butler, 2005: 6-7), but would argue, that we cannot accept such a term on *face value*, but need to problematize it, if we are ever to achieve social justice. Thus Butler believes that the point of post modernity is not to completely reject concepts such as 'universality' but rather to *reappropriate* them (Butler, 2004: 179). So for example, as part of such a process of reappropriation, we try to discover what are the limits of concepts such as gender or sexuality (Butler, 2004: 191). As another example, we do not just accept that only certain behavior ought to accompany the gender designations of 'male' or 'man', but instead we challenge societal norms with regard to what ought to constitute male behavior.

As part of such a process of reappropriation, it will be necessary to translate such terms into signifiers of new possibilities. Such appropriation is also not a unilateral affair, but (as already clearly noted in Gadamer's and Rorty's theories of hermeneutics) must take place in *dialogue*. What this can mean in terms of gender is that gender becomes a dialogue in that the 'other' calls us to account (Butler, 2005: 11). However, with regard to being 'called into account' it can be said that 'narrative capacity constitutes a pre-condition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one's actions through that means' (Butler, 2005: 12). Giving an account of oneself implies that the 'other' must be willing to *recognize* one. But recognition has to be mediated through the vehicle of language, and its concomitant narrative culture (Butler, 2004: 132). Thus it can be said that in terms of the *norms of recognition* (Butler, 2005: 23), otherness can only be understood by means of the social networks of meaning giving structures (Butler, 2005: 25). In utilizing such structures, one paradoxically becomes 'dispossessed by the language that (one) offer(s)' (Butler, 2005: 26). For example (as already noted) the terms that one uses to describe oneself, are terms that have been created and given meaning by others. So that while it can be paradoxically stated that self-identity is constructed outside of oneself (Butler, 2005: 42), we are nevertheless not helpless victims, but still retain a degree of 'agency', through the exercise of choice.

With regard to the idea of choice, an appropriate term, that Stuart Hall uses, that can be used here to describe the relationship between the 'subject' and a system of linguistic signification in which the subject comes to be positioned is 'suturing' (du Guy, 2000: 19). The term suturing implies a sewing together of two materials, so that the end result would be a seamless whole. In other words, what happens, with regard to discourse around sexuality, is that a subject is sutured into a linguistic position, such as 'gay' or 'straight'. Such suturing creates the illusion for the subject of seamlessness between the language used to describe them, and themselves as an individual being. Being gay or straight is thus not merely an epithet to describe a subject, but it is understood to be the very essence of a subject. The term is used here to imply an 'active' aspect on the part of a 'subject' in the process of adopting a position within a system of signification. However this notion of suturing can be problematized in that at the moment of suturing it can be said that 'the subject inserts itself into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier, (but) in so doing gains meaning at the expense of being' (Silverman in du Guy, 2000: 76). With regard to the exercise of choice, or agency, in terms of Butlerian queer theory, it can be asserted that an *actual subject* is not a necessary pre-condition. What is important in the concept of agency is the aspect of *choice*. Thus one could argue as follows: language itself provides us with the concept of agency, in that intrinsic to language is the capacity for change, and change in turn pre-supposes the possibility of options. Options in turn, suppose the possibility of choice, and finally with choice, comes the possibility of agency. Thus agency arises in that 'subject positions' can change, and with change of position, comes a change of constitution or to put it another way, comes *linguistic reconstitution*. Does this line of reasoning then fall into the trap that people like Gagnon would want to set for gay people in asserting the possibility that a gay person can change and become a straight person? Not necessarily, though such possibility is not completely eliminated in terms of the above line of reasoning. What this above line of reasoning does imply is that due to the very nature of language itself, in terms of this thesis, we cannot say that sexual orientation exists as an objective fact *independent* of language. Furthermore, because language changes, it means that there is possibility for a change in our understanding of gender. And with a change in our understanding of gender and sexual conduct, also can come a change in

our understanding of the creation myth and thus our understanding of the Jewish national grand narrative.

Of course Butler can be accused of ignoring the very 'real' suffering that is caused by homophobia to many sexual minorities with regard to their sexual orientation, by reducing their very real experiences to 'mere words'. Butler certainly does not deny that such suffering is indeed very real. However, she would probably point out that so much of a person's experience or perception of suffering is indeed shaped by the language used to understand and describe that suffering. So while suffering does remain real, and steps ought to be taken to prevent unnecessary suffering, such steps could be greatly enhanced by investigating the role of dominant discourse in the creation of homophobia, and in the creation of the homosexual's suffering. One way this can be done is to shift the *responsibility* for the *use of the biblical text*, from the so-called 'authority' of the text (in which the text is used by officials in the church or in society to legitimize certain dominant forms of discourse), in which the text dominates the reader, to emphasizing that the responsibility for the use of the text lies with every individual reader. In this way the collective wisdom of the community can help shape a more realistic understanding of the biblical texts as we have them today. However, it is certain that even the collective wisdom of the community cannot absolutely guarantee that other forms of dominant discourses will not arise to create new experiences of oppression in the community. Thus once again it becomes incumbent on the individual reader of the text to strive to the best of their ability to be as self-conscious as possible in their hermeneutic moment when reading a text. And so always be self-consciously aware of their own finitude and limitations and the need to remain open towards alternative understandings.

Conclusion

What is it that Gadamer, Rorty, Kearney and Butler have to teach us with regard to the issue of homosexuality and the bible? What we have learnt thus far is that in the dialectic that takes place between the gay Christian reader as an imaginative subject and the text of the creation myth, there is a dynamic taking place in which the *reader has to take final responsibility* for the interpretation of the text. This responsibility is more effectively fulfilled the more the reader as imaginative subject becomes aware

of their own hermeneutical moment. This requires the imaginative subject, whether it is a gay Christian reader or Gagnon, to acknowledge the role of their own productive imagination in 'discovering' meaning in the text. Such meaning does not so much inhere in the text itself, as it does in the *imaginative subject's use of the text*. Such use of the text in turn is influenced by the imaginative subject's context (specifically linguistic), in which they find themselves. To be aware of one's linguistic context, is to be aware of one's own historical situatedness, one's own finitude, as well as the dominant discourses that informs one's perspective with regard to gender issues.

In this chapter we have looked at the role that narratives, in particular national grand narrative, can play in the construction of gender or sexual identity with regard to sexual conduct. Such a relationship between narratives and identity is enabled through the capacity of the imaginative subject's productive imagination. Through the use of the productive imagination, the imaginative subject creates categories of existence. Such categories of existence can come to play a coercive and oppressive role with regard to gender identity in the form of dominant discourse, as the narratives of our national grand narratives inspire us towards action, but I have also argued that the very same productive imagination provides the possibility for transforming existing meanings and categories of existence. Related to this insight, we have come to realize through Butler's exposition on the concepts of performativity and interpellation, that such gender categories of existence are really linguistic constructs. As such they are not immutable, and can be re-appropriated, as our understanding of the world and our experiences change, and therefore, concomitantly our language systems also change. What this means in terms of the creation myth of the Jewish national grand narrative will be explored in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

Concluding Argument

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the argument that already beginning with the early days of Christianity, the Jewish national grand narrative started to be rejected as being authoritative for a Christian sense of identity, and as such becomes a shaky basis for constructing normative principles for sexual conduct in the contemporary world. In addition I will give an example of a queer reading or commentary on the creation myth.

The burning question that dominated this thesis was, is it valid for Gagnon to simply take the text of the biblical narrative (which was compiled between the seventh century and the time of the second temple Judaism) at face value, (or read it superficially) and use it as a dominating text to establish normative rules with regard to sexual conduct in our contemporary twenty first century world?

To answer this question, in chapter one I introduced the subject of a hermeneutics of sexual identity by looking at Robert Gagnon's use of the creation myth to condemn homosexual practice. Specifically we saw Gagnon drawing on the idea that reality is governed by a cosmic order that God imposed on the created world. A particular aspect of this cosmic order that Gagnon focuses on, is gender complementarity, namely the view that only heterosexual intercourse is an acceptable form of sexual conduct due to the fact that persons of the opposite sexes have a natural biological fit.

I questioned Gagnon's *use* of the biblical narrative, specifically the creation myth of Genesis, to establish normative rules with regard to sexual conduct, in particular to condemn homosexual acts. I did so by questioning the idea that the biblical text simply reflects reality as it is. The way I did this was in raising the issue that the biblical text is not necessarily a reflection of reality as it 'is'. We established that the purpose of the biblical text was to furnish the Jews with a national grand narrative,

through which they could establish, a sense of their own identity in the world. This sense of identity enabled them to survive as a people in the hostile environment of captivity. Part of such survival entailed the need to procreate. Thus part of the function of the national grand narrative was to regulate sexual conduct for survival purposes.

In chapter two we further questioned the function of this national grand narrative in its ability to accurately represent reality. We needed to do this, because underlying the notion that such a narrative accurately reflects reality is the ideal function of myth as part of the biblical narrative, by which we understand that the narrative is not simply a descriptive account of events as they occur, but is also a vehicle for establishing normative rules, including those with regard to sexual conduct. Thus we looked at the concept of a naturalistic fallacy, in which we become guilty of a slippage of registers when we take a narrative that is assumed to be a description of reality as it is, and use that same narrative to prescribe moral conduct.

Other concepts that we used to expose this tension between narrative and reality were Gadamer's insights with regard to finitude, openness, the game and effective history. Explaining these concepts we came to understand that there is a distance that separates us from the text's original composition, both in terms of time, as well as in terms of culture and language. So we came to understand that if we were to gain any clarity with regard to the text, we had to be aware of our own hermeneutic moment in reading the text, and take responsibility for it. In other words we don't rely on some 'authority' figure to interpret the text for us, or on a so-called authoritative interpretation of the text. Rather we self-critically engage the text in our hermeneutic moment. Crucial to such a moment is the awareness of our own historical situatedness, as well as that of the text. Furthermore, with the help of Rorty, we became aware that behind this issue of the biblical narrative and homosexuality, lies a contemporary tension between the dominant discourse of heterosexuality and the abnormal, marginalized discourse of homosexuality. Awareness of such tension is necessary, because as Rorty points out, a fruitful hermeneutics is one in which conversational partners are treated with equality, thus enabling an open and honest approach to the text, in which we can learn from each other's insights.

Finally in chapter three we came to see that the Jewish national grand narrative, while potentially restrictive in our understanding of sexual conduct, could also be a potential medium for exploring our sense of identity in the world. This is because through the power of the productive imagination, the imaginative subject is enabled to use the grand narrative to aspire to a different (perhaps better) understanding of themselves. This is done through their imaginative ability to identify with the literary characters of the text, but also through use of their productive imaginations to engage the text for new meaning-giving possibilities. Such possibilities became more apparent, when we discovered through the insight of Butler's concepts of performativity and interpellation, how language can be used to bring into existence certain realities. Thus it can be said that the Jewish national grand narrative brought into existence the 'reality' of the Jew. In addition, it also brought into existence for the Jewish priest a certain understanding of the 'reality' of such concepts as male and female. Seeing as language can be used to create realities, it can also be used to create new realities, or recreate old realities. So for example terms that were initially derogative, such as 'Christian' or 'gay' can come to have new meaning and vitality, as they are re-appropriated.

Thus, what do Butler's insights mean in terms of a hermeneutics of sexual identity? With regard to Gagnon's argument using the creation myth that the bible does condemn homogenital conduct (at least in terms of male sexual activity), it would seem that the evidence points in the direction that Gagnon is correct. This is because underlying the biblical narrative with regard to Jewish priestly redactorship there is the need of a people to *survive*. Such survival depended on a strong sense of national identity, and on the need to procreate. Of course reasons were provided for procreation through the mechanism of retrospective theology. For instance, procreation is presented as being linked to a direct command from God's own mouth. Applying this text across contexts however does raise difficult questions.

Jewish Narrative not Determinative of Christian Identity

Why can it be said that the Jewish national grand narrative is not determinative of Christian identity? One reason mentioned by Paul Germond is that 'most times we

read the bible without examining the complexities of the way we read it, without being aware of the *unexamined assumptions* we bring to our reading of the text' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 188, emphasis added). The presence of such assumptions is aptly demonstrated in the use of Gadamer's conceptualisation of finitude, through which we are made *aware* that we are historically situated, so that as a result it can be said that 'our use of the Bible is never neutral' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 190), in that our interpretation of the bible is invariably influenced by our contemporary understandings of the world and of reality. There is lack of neutrality because as a reader we come to the text full of assumptions, assumptions that are culturally specific and which are conditioned by the current issues of our day. Paul Germond mentions two examples of such assumptions, and they are as follows:

1) 'As a predominantly heterosexual institution the Christian Church assumes that heterosexuality is the normative form of human sexuality' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 194);

2) 'A second assumption is that heterosexuality is an essential constituent element of human nature' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 195).

With regard to point one above, and as already noted earlier on, Robert Gagnon can be accused of merely reading his own heterosexual assumptions into the text of the creation myth, and thus coming up with a 'cosmic order' that happens to favour heterosexual relationships. But as we have already seen, a large part of the responsibility for such assumptions favouring heteronormativity lies squarely on the shoulders of the priestly redactors of the biblical narrative. In other words, Gagnon follows a reading strategy / tradition started by the Jewish priestly creators of the biblical narrative.

With regard to the second assumption above, that heterosexuality is seen to be an essential and constituting element of human nature, we have already used the insights of Judith Butler in developing the concepts of performativity and interpellation, to see that language creates sexual identities. So that any idea of 'essential constitutionality' needs to be rigorously examined to uncover the underlying influences of dominant discourses on so called abnormal discourses.

However, when it comes to the issue of homosexuality and the bible it can be said that 'tragically many Christians return to the law [Pentateuch –SH] for their salvation' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 209). We have seen Gagnon doing this in his use of the creation narrative of Genesis to condemn homogenital conduct. Without being consciously aware of his own hermeneutical moment, he has been indiscriminately using the historically situated Jewish grand narrative to establish universal normative principles with regard to sexual conduct. However, what makes Gagnon's use of this narrative tricky is that this narrative is really the *foundational starting point* for the Christian religion. Christianity draws much of its religious imagery from it. So for example the death of Jesus on the cross would make no sense without the background history of the practice of sacrifice that is an intrinsic part of the Jewish national grand narrative (see for example Leviticus chapters one to five). However, if we were to look at the New Testament, we can already see that at the very beginnings of Christianity, even though the biblical narrative, including the Pentateuch, was foundational to the Christian religion, that Christians already had an ambivalent attitude towards it.

Thus, a breakdown of the Jewish national grand narrative can already be seen in the theology of Paul so that it can be asserted that 'Paul no longer took the Torah at face value' (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 192). Firstly Paul relativizes the Sinaitic covenant by implying that it is of lesser value than the covenant God made with Abraham (Galatians 3: 17). He further implies that the observance of holy days is not necessary for salvation, and in fact, might even be a definite hindrance for salvation (Galatians 10). Furthermore, Paul insists that circumcision is no longer mandatory for salvation (Galatians 5: 1-6). And finally Paul goes on to imply that the Law, far from being a blessing is really a *curse* (Galatians 3: 1-14), in fact the Law (though 'holy, just and good' Romans 7:12) is seen by Paul (or at least the Pauline tradition represented in the book of Ephesians) to be our enemy (Ephesians 2: 14). Most powerfully of all, the early Christians seem to announce (perhaps without realising the full consequences and implications of such an event) the *dissolution and breakdown* of the Jewish national grand narrative, by declaring that the 'middle wall of division' (Jewish nationalism?) has been abolished by the work of Jesus (Ephesians 2:14). Having said this though, it is strange that Paul still seems to hold on to this national grand narrative in his condemnation of homogenital acts (Romans 1: 26-27). I would

hypothesize that this is probably because Paul is still trying to hang onto the Jewish sense of 'cosmic order', in which there are 'natural' (Romans 1: 27) categories, categories which if transgressed would lead to confusion and ultimately to idolatry (Romans 1: 23).

If already with the advent of Christianity, many aspects or elements which were regarded as definitive of the Jewish national identity were revised or even rejected, what does this imply for the main question of this thesis, namely whether the creation myth can be used to condemn homogenital acts in the current situation? Even if we can show that the creation myth is in fact still used to shape and even determine many Christians' sexual behavior, the question remains whether this is justified. What I have tried to do in this thesis on *a hermeneutics of sexuality*, is not to reject the bible out of hand. I wanted to show that the bible could still be relevant to our day and age: the creation myth may still inform the shaping of sexuality in Christian and other readers of that text. However, such 'relevance' needs to be approached cautiously, in a hermeneutic spirit of self-awareness and an open willingness for parties on both sides of the argument around the issue of homosexuality and the bible to be willing to acknowledge their own *limits* with regard to understanding the bible. The bible can be used as a tool of reconciliation and inclusiveness (Germond & de Gruchy, 1997: 203) or it can be used as a weapon with which to destroy our enemies. How we use it is determined in part by our sense of identity in the world. I would surmise that the more secure we feel in our own sense of identity, the more open we would be to the other, and the more hermeneutically mature we would be when reading the bible.

As an example to demonstrate the continued relevance of the bible for the gay (or heterosexual) Christian in our contemporary society, I will now attempt a queer reading or commentary on the creation myth. Remember that in the introduction a queer reading of or interpretation was presented as one that closely examines the language of a text. It does so by looking at apparent binarisms, and how the text itself tends to undermine those binarisms by not strictly adhering to them. We will see that this undermining of binarisms is the case in the creation myth, not only with regard to Adam and Eve, but also even with regard to the apparent cosmic structure of the world.

2) THE GENESIS MYTH REVISITED

Before I begin the brief synopsis of the Genesis myth in terms of the creation myth helping us to understand sexuality, it is important that I point out that this explication of the Genesis myth is by no means an exhaustive theological treatise of the Genesis myth. Such a treatise would no doubt include a detailed survey of all the prominent theological interpretations of this text, which as no doubt as you can image, would run into encyclopedic volumes. What I propose here is but one possible queer understanding of the Genesis text, an understanding that is constructed through use of my productive imagination. Furthermore, using the insights of the philosophers and theorists visited in this text, what I am doing here is reconstructing an understanding of the text. Therefore, please note that I am in no way presenting the below interpretation as a *definitive* interpretation (queer or otherwise). Furthermore, I do welcome challenges to the interpretation that I present, as this is conducive for dialogue, and dialogue in turn is central to the dialectical process of philosophy.

BRIEF SURVEY OF GENESIS TEXT CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

I would like to point out that as part of any exegetical or hermeneutical interpretive task, that the interpreter or hermeneut tends to focus only on select material as they proceed to interpret the text. One simply cannot focus on the entire text all at once. This may seem obvious, but what I want to counter, is the accusation that my interpretation is slanted, because I *only focus on some things* and not on others. One way interpretation is complicated is through the process of *selection*. Thus it becomes apparent that 'self and object interpretations are always selective' (Gerkin, 1984: 153), this is because of, amongst other things, our human finitude. Our experiences are limited, and in turn our understanding of the world becomes circumscribed by those experiences. Thus it can be asserted that 'the idea of a perfect translation that could stand for all time is entirely illusory' (Gadamer, 1975: xi), and so it can be further argued that it is not possible to 'reconstruct (a) work (of literature), in the understanding, as *originally* constituted' (Gadamer, 1975: 158). The only way I suppose to do so is to board a time machine and return to the original Sitz in Leben

genesis of the piece of literature. Even then, one would have to find some way to 'merge' with the original author so as to directly participate in their thought processes.

However, 'the meaning of a text goes beyond its author' (Gadamer, 1975: 296), i.e. the text exists as an entity on its own, so that not only does the author ultimately not have control over how the text will be interpreted (Warnke, 2003: 54; Vanhoozer, 2003: 157), but also, when it comes to the *plenary interpretative possibilities* of the text, the author themselves are not aware of the possible *fuller* implications or 'fuller wealth of conviction' of their writings (Dostal, 2002: 13; Dan Stiver in Vanhoozer, 2003: 179). Thus, 'it takes many interpreters to hear the one word of God in all the fullness of its glory and truth' (Vanhoozer, 2003: 169). Furthermore, 'interpretation is an open process which no single vision can conclude' (Venema, 2000: 33). Vision must be articulated, in order to be understood, and no understanding exists without language (Dostal, 2002: 115), which in turn does not exist without culture, which in turn is predicated upon experience, both communal and individual. However, it is because of the *generative* quality of language that what is said or written never exhausts all the possibility of what could be said (Dostal, 2002: 118). Another way to put it (and as noted above in Rabbi Greenberg's understanding of those who heard the Torah at Sinai) is to say 'there is no single correct way of reading texts, *only ways* of reading that seem normal because they are relatively stable extensions of community interests and habits' (Vanhoozer, 2003: 154).

However, as any hermeneut would agree, it is true that all interpretations can be said to be *slanted*, if for no other reason than that we all suffer from a Gadamerian finitude and a limit of horizons. Hence once again, as elaborated on in this thesis, the important need for dialogue.

Chapter one: verses 1-2, starts off with God or *elohim* creating the heavens and the earth. Significant here is the central role of the *word* in the creation of the world and the heavens. This focus on the word as the means of creation is important, because as I tried to demonstrate in this thesis, the way in which we comprehend our world is through the medium of the word or language. In terms of the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve the world comes into existence and takes shape through the medium of language: as God speaks, so things come into existence. Thus it seems intrinsic to the

Genesis myth itself, that there is an implicit acknowledgement that what we know of the world is determined by the language used to 'discover' or construe it.

Another significant point is that the world starts out in confusion and chaos, and God proceeds to establish *order* as well as *categories* for the existing world. In verses 26-28, God creates humanity in his likeness and proceeds to bless them and orders them to procreate and fill the earth. In chapter two God creates a garden and places the man He created in the garden. He then presents all the wild life to Adam for purposes of naming (categorizing?).

In looking at the Genesis myth I will be focusing on four key concepts in order to present an alternative interpretation of this myth to that of Gagnon. The four key concepts that I will look at are: imperfection, the word, choice and knowledge. I choose these four concepts in my attempt to present another interpretation of the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve, simply because they augment the salient point that I have attempted to make in this thesis, which is that our 'knowledge' is determined by language (or the word), and as such is imperfect knowledge, simply because language cannot mirror reality. However, just because our linguistically obtained knowledge is imperfect, does not mean that we have to be paralyzed with regard to the use of the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve, as there still remain some options or choices that we can follow. And so while we may not have *certainty* with regard to knowledge, we can still pursue creative possibilities that can liberate us from this need for 'certainty'.

IMPERFECTION: if language circumscribes our understanding of the world, and if we assume that language is an imperfect medium for the apprehension of knowledge with regard to that world, then the myth of creation as presented in Genesis one and two can be said to be a myth about *imperfection*. So for example intrinsic to the story, we see that when God begins His creation there is *chaos and confusion*, or imperfection, and so 'darkness was upon the face of the deep' (Genesis 1: 2). As part of his act of creation, God proceeds to *order* the world. Each creature is created 'after its kind', and then ordered to procreate and fill the earth. However, imperfection continues to dog the Genesis myth. Firstly it can be said that only a part of the world is 'perfect', the Garden of Eden. Secondly, Adam is presented as incomplete, needing a partner or 'help mate'. Thirdly, already the presence of evil, in the form of the

serpent, is never far off. Fourthly, even in paradise, Adam and Eve are presented as being mortal, with the certainty of death if they make the wrong choice. Fifthly, even in paradise there is the distinction between 'good and evil' as represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sixthly, Adam and Eve are not 'perfect' in that not only are they capable of making a *wrong* choice, but they eventually *do make* a wrong choice. Finally, the 'reality' of sexuality appears to be only an afterthought, especially as the story unfolds in chapter two.

Thus with the centrality of the idea of imperfection, one possible conclusion that we can draw from the Genesis myth itself, is that the 'natural' world was not intrinsically ordered, but was in need of a god to *impose* an order on it. It is almost as though one could infer from the myth itself, that the material of the world is really a malleable substance that can be shaped and structured as the creative imagination desires. God proceeded to impose a certain order on the creation in Genesis chapter one, but already, as the Genesis narrative unfolds, we can see this order dissolving, so that we can infer that there is no 'absolute' law upholding the order of the material world because logically, had there been, the created 'order' would not then start do dissolve. And while it can be argued that we do not have God's absolute power to totally reconfigure nature, nevertheless we can and do exert significant influence on the world around us, and not only on the world around us, but especially on how we choose to express ourselves through our bodies. So it can be argued from the idea of imperfection as manifested in the Genesis myth, that ultimately, the world is not governed by inviolable static or unchangeable foundations as Gagnon's argumentation would imply. This is encouraging for the 'gay' Christian, in that the bible text itself demonstrates that we live in a malleable world (not a world trapped in the straight jacket of immutable gender categories), one subject to change. Being gay can thus become a viable option for one's identity or self-expression. But it also challenges the gay Christian not to condemn other expressions (or gender performatives) of sexuality, such as bi-sexuals, transgendered persons or even heterosexuals.

THE WORD: significant in the creation account is the role that the word, or language plays. It is through the *word* that God *creates* the heavens and the earth, and all the creatures on the earth. Here I would like to place emphasis on the idea (using a

Butlerian focus on the role of interpellation in language), that one way in which the word plays a significant role in the creation, is that it can be said, that *a thing* does not *exist* until it is first named / called into existence. In other words, things come to have existence once they are inducted into the realm of the significatory order of language. It is through being enmeshed in the web of *interpellation that language provides*, that it can be said that a thing comes into existence or is 'created'. This idea that things come into existence or are created through the medium of the word, can be further augmented by asserting that the human use of language is a sharing in the creative capacity of God. Hence what is also significant in the Genesis account of the creation is how Adam was able to 'share in' or imitate God's act of creation, in that through the use of language he *named* the creatures that God brought to him, and thus in a sense called them into existence as *those things*. So, just as God gave names to elements in His creation, for example, He calls the light 'day', and the darkness he calls 'night', so too, Adam partakes of this divine function (in a limited capacity), in that he names and thus orders the animals. So it can be said, that as part of the Genesis myth, the power of language to create categories, can play a significant role in our understanding, not only of the world in general, but of sexuality in particular. And if through language we can share in the divine power to create categories, or 'realities', is it not then also reasonable to suppose (using the insights of queer theory) that through the very self-same medium of language, we are able to *un*create categories, or even *re*create sexual categories *differently*? So once again through the Genesis myth we can learn of the power of language, and the significant role that language plays in creating our realities. What this can teach us is that no linguistic category such as gay or straight is an absolute or unchanging category. Firstly these are categories that we have created through the use of our language. Secondly, it is reasonable then to suppose that these self-same categories (and our *understanding* of them) can be challenged and changed through the use of the word or language.

CHOICE: of course it can be asserted by the conservative Christian, that the categories that God has created (specifically male and female) are not up to us to change. In other words the 'natural' order of male and female is an intrinsic part of the created order, and not subject to humans altering it. Once again, it can be argued that the idea of sex is really an *afterthought* in the Genesis myth (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994: 204). Of all the creatures that God creates, man is initially created *alone*. In fact

as Rabbi Greenberg argues, when God discovers that Adam is feeling lonely, He doesn't *straight away* create Eve (Greenberg, 2004: 51). He *first* brings all the animals to Adam as possible 'companions' (here Greenberg raises the question of whether or not Adam actually tried them out *sexually* – Greenberg, 2004: 51), and only after seeing that Adam is still *dissatisfied*, does God *then* think to create a 'companion' in the form of Eve for Adam. Here the above assertion that entities come into 'existence' only after they are named also becomes significant. For in a sense, Adam's companion only *takes on existence* or meaning after he *names* her Eve, 'the mother of all living'.

In sharing in the creative capacity with God, through use of the medium of language, it can be argued (as noted in chapter three), that we also share in God's capacity for *choice*, since creativity would involve the use of choice in bringing about new realities. Hence, firstly, Adam and Eve were presented with a choice between two trees, then secondly, the warning that if Adam and Eve were to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would become like gods, *knowing* good and evil (Genesis 3:5). This 'knowing' of good and evil implies a discerning capacity, in other words a capacity to distinguish between two choices. But it also implies much more than that.

I would argue that a discerning capacity already existed in that Adam and Eve were told to make a choice between two trees. What distinguishes this choice from the capacity to know good and evil, lies in the words 'to know'. Here I would argue, that 'knowledge' is not something that is passively obtained, in that knowing good and evil, is simply a matter of observing phenomena, (and the phenomena themselves having properties of good and evil inherent to them), but rather, the capacity for 'discerning good and evil', lies in the idea that Adam and Eve would, from the moment they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, be able to *decide for themselves* what is good and evil. In other words, becoming like gods meant partaking of the divine capacity to *determine for themselves* what is good and what is evil. I do realize that this interpretation that I am presenting here is not a traditional theological interpretation concerning the story surrounding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, it is a *possible* interpretation, and part of this thesis has been the claim

that the productive imagination[13] is necessary for us to look beyond the 'normal', or usual way of seeing this myth, and start looking for other possibilities of interpretation. So to sum up, based on the above argument, it is possible to see in the Genesis myth that as part of our humanity as being created in the image of God is the inherent *capacity for choice*. This choice in turn implies, that not only are we capable of 'passively' discerning differences in the world, but we are also capable of *actively creating differences* in the world. Thus it can be said that 'we are not only dis-covering the universe; we are involved in *universe making*' (Tessier in Comstock & Henking, 1999: 218).

And this capacity to actively create differences in the world has profound significance when it comes to morality and ethics, in particular, understanding sex and sexuality, seeing as it is through this capacity of choice that we can create understandings with regard to sexuality.

KNOWLEDGE: this capacity for actively creating differences takes on new meaning when it comes to the idea of knowledge. As mentioned above, there are two significant instances in which the word knowledge appears in the Genesis myth. The first is in regard to the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3: 5). The second instance is when Adam is said to have known Eve (Genesis 4: 1). The Hebrew word *yada* here means to have sexual intercourse. However, the same word in other contexts carries the usual meaning of 'knowledge'. So it is possible to argue, based on the double meaning that is encapsulated in the single word yada, that sex implies more than just the act of sexual intercourse, seeing as yada, or the word knowledge, has a wider semantic meaning that can overlap with other uses of the word *knowledge*. And so in reading the word knowledge, a semantic shift of meaning can be employed to argue that knowledge here also implies *sexual knowledge* or *knowledge of sexuality*. And if knowledge of sexuality, then straight away, also knowledge of the *possible forms* of sexuality, such as homosexuality or bisexuality.

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[13] Another example of the use of productive imagination (in constructing that which is not 'normally' found in nature) in the Christian tradition, and which is mentioned in Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's book *God's Phallus and other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, is the doctrine of the Virgin birth (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994: 224).

Furthermore, when we combine knowledge in this context, with the capacity for choice, we can say, that Adam in knowing Eve not only implies a degree of 'passive' knowledge, in that he 'discovers' qualities inherent to her, but also 'active' knowledge, in that he decides, or 'attributes' qualities to her, hence the significance that the 'help mate' of Adam takes on, when *he names* her Eve, 'the mother of all living'. And so we can see that it is possible using the Genesis myth, to argue that while God may have created humanity 'male and female', that nevertheless, *God also created* humanity with the capacity for *choice* and the *ability to name*, and therefore with the capacity to give meaning (or to 'create') their own world. Thus it can be said with regard to the Genesis text, in terms of linguistic signification, that sex or sexuality is not merely an entity that exists as intrinsic trait in the world, but is rather more significantly reality that is created through the use of choice as expressed in the use the *word*, or language.

A final queer observation that I would like to make with regard to the creation myth is to focus on the 'gender' relationship between Adam and Eve. If we were to assume for argument's sake that the gender category of 'male' is usually associated with the concepts of aggressiveness and 'activity', and that the gender category of 'female' is usually associated with the concepts of submissiveness and 'passivity', we will come to see that what takes place in the Garden of Eden (before the Fall) is the undermining of gender categories. It is interesting to note the 'passive' role that Adam plays in terms of the narrative as presented in the creation myth text itself. Adam doesn't actively go out looking for a mate, but kind of 'sits back' so to speak, and waits for God *to bring* potential mates to him (Greenberg, 2004:51). Not only this, but Adam is fast *asleep* when Eve finally 'appears' on the scene (Gen. 2:21)! Furthermore, Eve takes an *active* interest in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6), and actively gives some of its fruit to Adam. And Adam, far from being the 'man of the house' in *taking responsibility* for his actions, is the first to pass on the responsibility onto Eve! So in terms of the narrative itself, we see that in the 'perfect' Garden of Eden, a reversal of gender roles, a *passive* man in the form of Adam, and a very much *active* female in the form of Eve.

To conclude, it is important to note that the above productive interpretations of the Genesis text are all the more possible, in that they can be made outside of the *Sitz im*

Leben context of ancient Israel. In other words through Gadamerian effective history, we are not limited in our treatment of the text, to the original constraints under which the texts were first produced. We are aware of its mythic function, and thus are able to retain critical distance. This is not to say that this myth cannot have a profound meaning for us today. As seen from the above line of reasoning, profound meaning for our day and age can still be elicited form the Genesis text. Words, knowledge, choice are still important today, and they can take on greater significance for us, especially when we begin to realize how much of what we assumed to be 'just' the *world out there*, is shaped (created) and affected by us. If we have choice in participating in creating the meaning of the world, then the world is no longer something that 'merely' acts upon us. In the narrative of Genesis we are not portrayed as passive participants or merely obedient slaves to the divinely ordained order, but we rather from the very beginning are active agents for good or bad. And so it can be asserted, using the Genesis myth, that the world that we experience today is *a world of our own creating*. In this sense it can be said that the Genesis myth can be treated, not as a story of events that are 'dead and gone', but as an ongoing narrative, in which we as humanity continue the 'creative work of God' today. In turn, this creativity has a profound (productive) role to play in developing our sense of identity, as we explore the deeper significance that sex and gender can play in articulating an existence of being Christian in the world of God's (and our own) making.

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