
On a second controversial issue, Eberstadt suggests that ineffective governmental and medical systems may not be responsible, as many believe, for high rates of infant mortality in America, and that we need to know more about the attitudes and behavior of pregnant mothers. But research into this aspect of the problem meets strong resistance—for political reasons. It “blames the victims,” something avoided at all costs these days, even that of failing to understand—and end—the true causes of high infant mortality.

Eberstadt’s approach is clearly provocative, and his passionate commitment to getting the figures and the correlations right lends his work a genuine moral dimension. That’s too rare a quality in contemporary social science to be ignored.

VIRTUALLY NORMAL: An Argument about Homosexuality. By Andrew Sullivan. Knopf. 205 pp. \$22

Andrew Sullivan, the editor of the *New Republic*, is a romantic at heart, or maybe just below the skin. He still believes in happy endings; at least, he refuses to disbelieve in them. Sullivan’s book is “about how we as a society deal with that small minority of us which is homosexual.” Unimpeded by statistics and footnotes, it has the pressing, insistent tone of serious conversation. It is inevitably a book about politics—specifically, the conflicted politics of homosexuality in America today. What Sullivan wants for homosexual citizens is nothing more than public equality with heterosexual citizens, that is, equal treatment by the state. That is all, he believes, one can or should expect of the state, and it would be enough. The state cannot legislate an end to private scorn and hatred of homosexuals.

Sullivan argues from observation and lived experience, true to his epigraph from Ludwig Wittgenstein: “One can only describe here and say: this is what human life is like.” On the basis of his own life and the testimony of many others, he contends that “for a small minority of people, from a young age, homo-

sexuality is an essentially involuntary condition that can neither be denied nor permanently repressed.” For such individuals, homosexuality is, quite simply, natural, and to deny it is to go against their nature.

Sullivan assigns—somewhat artificially, as he admits—the most prominent arguments currently being made about homosexuality to four groups: prohibitionists (for whom homosexuality is an abomination and an illness, and who feel that homosexual acts call for punishment and deterrence by the society); liberationists (for whom homosexuality is not a defining condition or inherent natural state but an arbitrary social construction); conservatives (a variety of liberals, actually, for whom homosexuality is a condition to be tolerated in private because individuals’ privacy must be respected, but disapproved in public lest it fray the social fabric); and liberals (for whom homosexuality is an individual’s right, to be protected by law in the society, along with the myriad other “rights” liberals have discovered in the process of educating a skeptical and reluctant public about what’s good for it).

Alert to the need for nuance and qualification, Sullivan gives each of these positions its due before arguing its insufficiency. He would replace all of them with his own politics of homosexuality, “one that does not deny homosexuals their existence, integrity, dignity, or distinctness.” What he proposes is less a parting shot than an opening volley: an end to all public (as distinct from private) discrimination against “those who grow up and find themselves emotionally different.” “And that is all,” writes Sullivan, as if the proposal were as simple as it is reasonable: accord homosexual citizens every right and responsibility that heterosexuals enjoy as public citizens.

The consequences? Well, for one, equal opportunity and inclusion in the military. For another, and even more provocatively, legalized homosexual marriage and divorce. For many in the society this would be the last straw; for Sullivan it is the best hope. He may be prescient, and he may be right; for the historical moment in American politics, he is merely quixotic—romantic even. But his book honors and advances the debate.