



Review of Jack Malebranche, *Androphilia: Rejecting the Gay Identity, Reclaiming Masculinity* (Baltimore, MD: Scapegoat Publishing, 2006) xiii + 143 pp.

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Readers get an immediate taste of this book from its cover blurb, which describes the contents as a “Boot Camp” and the author as a drill instructor. With reservations about what I was getting into, I continued reading. Malebranche is a man who has sex with men, and who calls the man to whom he is committed his “compadre,” because “partner” is a lesbian word. Malebranche, who describes himself as an “unrepentant masculinist,” offers a stinging critique of “gay culture” and “the gay community.” As one who has turned his back on such identifications, he challenges members of the gay community to “become a man” by leaving the gay community, including gay politics, and embracing traditional masculinity, with all its self-reliance and personal responsibility, and to become not just lovers of men, but lovers of masculinity (androphiles) who are barely distinguishable from straight men.

Malebranche, a man in his late 30s from Portland, Oregon, is white, educated, widely read, and articulate. He is also strongly opinionated and a fag-hater who wants biological males to do masculinity his way. While acknowledging the diversity of the gay community as often containing “straight” men, straight women, non-straight women, crossdressers, and a variety of other people who do not identify as gay, he nonetheless lumps together the whole variety of those people as promoting a Gay Advocacy Identity that gains its cohesion from the “illusion” of oppression and victimization. Malebranche scorns such people, and calls for his readers to distance themselves from “the gay community” by integrating themselves into the larger community of males, most of whom identify as heterosexual. There, men can find their “essential masculinity” (which no gay man has, apparently) in “the desire to be assertive, to exert strength, to be aggressive, to be independent, to differentiate oneself from women, and to idealize manhood” (p. 78).

Malebranche claims that the Greek word *philia* implies sexual love (p. 22). Technically, this is simply not true (Culbertson, 1996). For example, I am a bibliophile (a lover of books), a cinephile (a lover of film), a logophile (a lover of words), and an ailurophile (a lover of cats), but I am not sexually aroused by any of those four things. *Philia* implies a deep, connecting admiration, affection, and commitment based on pleasure, usefulness, or benevolence. In this sense, I would presume that all readers of JMMS are androphiles, in that we are committed to, affectionate about, and admiring of men, and take great pleasure in promoting a variety of healthy identities among men. Perhaps there is even an erotic edge to our attraction to men, but that does not automatically imply that we lovers of men want to be sexually active with the males we know.

Few forms of identity other than androphilia escape Malebranche’s denigration. Homosexual males are “men run amok” (p. 78). Feminism, he claims, has made men more effeminate. Scholars of men’s studies write from the point of

view that “masculinity is acceptable only if viewed as a construct in need of deconstruction, and only so long as lip service is paid to the feminist dogma often favored by lesbians” (p. 42). His response to ideas, identities, and arguments that he doesn’t like is made patently clear by ending his discussions with a resounding “Fuck that!”

The primary modern source in men’s studies upon which Malebranche draws heavily is David Gilmore’s *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (1990). Gilmore’s work is, of course, important in the field of men’s studies. Unsurprisingly, there was little reference to the work of others in the pantheon of contemporary Mens/Gay/Queer Studies to support Malebranche’s “manifesto.”

I am writing this review from my home in Palm Springs. Six months ago, nineteen middle-aged men were arrested on the other side of town for having sex in public (the bushes near some of the gay resorts here). Though the case has not yet gone to trial, all nineteen now are threatened with living the rest of their lives as registered sex offenders. Public opinion is divided in this small town—some arguing that as long as no one was getting hurt, and all participants were mature males, being registered as sex offenders is a draconian punishment. Others argue that this town, like other small towns in America, does not need to tolerate sex in public, by anyone. Even after reading Malebranche’s book, it was unclear to me whether this case would be considered a part of the Gay Identity Advocacy that Malebranche eschews, or whether it would be considered a normal part of androphilia—the sexual desire by men for other men, other lovers of masculinity, acted out in a manner that is unrepentantly masculinist. Perhaps Malebranche’s analysis of the event would hang on whether the men involved identified as androphiles or as gay/queer. To me, the event should be judged on the basis of community standards. Certainly, Palm Springs’ gay community has only in part rushed to defend the nineteen men, and other members of the gay community have condemned their activity as inappropriate, though all are fairly well agreed that the pending sentence of a life-long registration as a sex offender is not a fair sentence in this case.

As negative as this review might sound, I actually enjoyed reading this book. I disagreed with lots of it, but the strong opinions therein were expressed in such an “in your face” way that I repeatedly had to stop and ask myself whether I agreed with Malebranche or not, and if not, why? Agree or not, like it or not, this book was fun to read because it kept pushing my buttons as a scholar of Men’s Studies, and to a lesser extent, of Gay Studies, forcing me to reexamine my own thinking over and over.

The first few pages of the book are not well edited (aknowledgements, rather than acknowledgements, for example) and hopefully the publisher can correct these errors before anyone else purchases the book.

Reference

Culbertson, P. (1996). Men and Christian friendship. In B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men’s bodies, men’s gods: Male identities in a (post-) Christian culture* (pp. 149-180). New York: New York University Press.

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