

# *Transatlantische Emanzipationen*

Freundschaftsgabe  
für  
James Steakley

Herausgegeben von  
Florian Mildemberger



James Steakley und Sigmund Freud  
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HARRY OOSTERHUIS

Good Guys and Bad Guys:  
A Dutch Comment on an American Interpretation  
of German Sexual History

More than four decades ago James Steakley, in his 1975 book about the early German homosexual emancipation movement, opened up a new historical research field. His pioneering work was followed by dozens of historical studies about the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German origins of sexual science, identities, and politics. Apart from German and some Dutch, British, and French historians, American scholars in gay and lesbian or queer studies in particular have contributed to the avalanche of publications about the ways in which »peripheral desires,« to quote Robert Deam Tobin's book about *The German Discovery of Sex* (2015), were framed in biomedical, politico-legal and cultural discourses and how these affected society and individual lives. Next to the one by Tobin, many recent studies enrich our historical knowledge: Robert Beachy's *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (2014); Edward Ross Dickinson's *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880–1914* (2014); Laurie Marhoefer's *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (2015); Andrew Wackerfuss's, *Stormtrooper Families: Homosexuality and Community in the early Nazi Movement* (2015); Scott Spector's *Violent Sensations: Sex, Crime, and Utopia in Vienna and Berlin, 1860–1914* (2016); Clayton J. Whisnant's, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880–1945* (2016); Ralph Leck's *Vita Sexualis: Karl Ulrichs and the Origins of Sexual Science* (2016); the collection *Not Straight from Germany: Sexual Publics and Sexual Citizenship since Magnus Hirschfeld* (2017) edited by Michael Thomas Taylor, Annette F. Timm and Rainer Herrn; Heike Bauer's *The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture* (2017); Kirsten Leng's *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany 1900–1933* (2018); and Katie Sutton's *Sex Between Body and Mind: Psychoanalysis and Sexology in the German-Speaking World, 1890s–1930s* (2019). These

works are more sophisticated than those of the 1970s and 1980s, and they also show that perspectives have changed since that time – historiography often reflects the concerns of the present.

This article is a discussion of the political agenda aired in one of the works mentioned above: *Vita sexualis: Karl Ulrichs and the Origins of Sexual Science* by Ralph Leck. My criticism of Leck's book is stirred by my research into the works and careers of two leading German (proto-)sexologists, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) and Albert Moll (1862–1939) and how they articulated the modern experience of sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Krafft-Ebing has become a household name in sexual history, Moll's role in sexual science is usually only mentioned in passing. He is often depicted in a one-sided way as a conservative and homophobic sexologist, whereas the contents of his innovative contributions to the modern understanding of sexuality have largely been overlooked. In the 1890s he elaborated the most wide-ranging and erudite sexual theory, including biomedical, psychological and sociocultural insights, before Sigmund Freud published his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905) and Havelock Ellis started his multivolume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928). Around 1900 Moll was one of the most prominent pioneering experts in sexology in Central Europe, but his reputation was eclipsed by the widespread adoption of psychoanalysis and Magnus Hirschfeld's (reinvigorated) fame as epoch-making protagonist of sexual reform and gay rights. Moll in fact ended up in bitter conflicts – involving ruthless

1) See my »Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity« (Chicago – London 2000); »Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll«, in: *Medical History* 56,2 (2012) S. 133–155; »Albert Moll's Ambivalence about Homosexuality and His Marginalization as a Sexual Pioneer«, in: *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 28,1 (2019) pp. 1–43; »Freud and Albert Moll: how kindred spirits became bitter foes«, in: *History of Psychiatry* 31,3 (2020) pp. 294–310. – This article is a revised version of the first part of »The Pitfalls of Political Correctness in Writing Sexual History: Politics and the Study of Sexual Science. An exchange between Harry Oosterhuis and Ralph Leck« (H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences, November 2018. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=51478>).

character assassinations – with both Freud and Hirschfeld about priority claims regarding new insights and discoveries in sexology as well as leadership in sexual science. Moll is an interesting case for revealing some of the ambivalences and paradoxes in the development of the modern science and politics of sexuality and the related conflicts and rivalries. My problem with Leck's book – without denying that his scholarship deserves credit – is that such tensions are largely covered up in a clear-cut black-and-white scheme of conservative repression versus progressive liberation. His perspective raises some pertinent questions about the fascination for and perspective on German sexual history in American Gay Studies and Queer Theory.

Leck's study, which focuses on German-speaking Central Europe, but also pays attention to Britain, is about the historical origins of »modernist« sexual science and the related ideal of a liberated sexual life. It has a neatly arranged storyline: there is the pioneering hero mentioned in the book's title, the lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895), who was the first public advocate of equal rights, not only for »urnings,« or homosexuals, but also, as Leck argues, for other minorities whose gender identity or sexual preference did not conform to the established heterosexual and reproductive norm. Then there are a number of German and British followers of his idol who daringly continued his resistance against the oppressive legacy of Christian doctrines, Victorian prudery, and bourgeois hypocrisy: Karl Maria Kertbeny, Johanna Elberskirchen, Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, Auguste Forel, Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, John Addington Symonds, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter. These brave and democratically minded luminaries distinguished themselves from the established and conservative – if not reactionary – defenders of the patriarchal and »heterosexist« status quo as well as of bourgeois-capitalist hegemony (p. 29, 68). The last narrow-minded villains include leading psychiatrists and neurologists such as Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Albert Schrenck-Notzing, Albert Eulenburg, Paul Mantegazza, Jean Martin Charcot, Valentin Magnan, and Cesare Lombroso, who supposedly systematically demonized all irregular sexual behavior and fully supported »compulsory heterosexuality« (p. 29). According to Leck, the pioneering scholarship

and sexual politics of Ulrichs have been disparaged because he was overshadowed and marginalized by these mainstream medical sexologists, as well as by Sigmund Freud. Whether Freud also belonged to the conservative camp, remains unexplained because Leck does not discuss psychoanalysis. In fact, Leck's claim that some innovative and gay-friendly thinkers challenged established sexual science, resonates with Freud's own crude and largely unfounded rejection of medical sexology as prejudiced and backward in order to boost his self-promotion as a revolutionary thinker.

The objective of sexual modernism, as Leck defines it, was the social and legal recognition of a variety of sexual desires and gender identities as natural and equal. Several strategies were employed to advance this ideal: the introduction of neologisms such as »urning« and »homosexual,« »dioning« and »heterosexual,« sexual »intermediaries,« »third sex« and »psychosexual hermaphroditism,« all of which contributed to »a complete new epistemology of human sexuality« (p. 41); the redefinition of nature in empirical, quantitative, and inclusionary terms against the view of nature as normative standard implying the branding of deviance as unnatural; the framing of sexual rights as a fundamental sociopolitical issue and the linking of such rights with human and civil rights in general; and the replacement of the procreative norm with the free expression of consensual sexual pleasure. This agenda was inspired by an empathic and compassionate attitude that was rooted in the personal experiences of its main proponents, most of whom – Ulrichs, Symonds, Carpenter, Hirschfeld, Karsch-Haack, and Elberskirchen – were homosexual. Their subjective involvement played a crucial role in their scholarship and emancipatory outlook.

Leck's account of these sexual modernists appears to be inspired by a particular political commitment and a moral imperative for studying the history of sexuality. »[A]ny history of the sexual science movement,« he writes, »must delineate between those who described the protean sexuality found in human history as natural from those who inserted a preemptory moral division between natural and unnatural sexuality into the study of sexual variance. Classificatory-epistemological differences often correspond to political differences« (p. 18).

Leck claims that there is a fundamental difference between the medicalizing and stigmatizing science of *psychopathia sexualis*, which affirmed the oppressive status quo, and critical and engaged scholarship that celebrated the free expression of sexual diversity. The result is a book in which the author sets himself up as a judge, praising some sexologists while downplaying the problematic aspects of their thinking, and condemning others for their assumed prejudices and backwardness while ignoring their innovative thinking.

Leck admits that modernist thought was not without contradictions and that it was still entangled with established notions of gender, sexuality, and politics. The intellectual elitism and political liberalism of Ulrichs, Kertbeny, and Symonds largely ignored social and gender inequality and, as Leck phrases it, »tended to perpetuate an exclusionary tradition of civic fraternity« (p. 54). Also, modernist explanations of sexuality, in particular those of Ulrichs and Hirschfeld, hinged on biological determinism. Apart from emphasizing its inborn, inevitable and unchanging nature, they adopted the dominant view of sexual desire as a magnetic attraction between male and female opposites. Their conflation of sexual desire and gender identity, which implied that same-sex preference was equated with gender inversion (homosexual men and women were supposedly born with a soul of the opposite sex), confirmed gender stereotypes and the hierarchy of active (masculine) and passive (effeminate) roles. The naturalist model of sexuality in terms of appeal between gendered opposites barred an understanding of sexuality as an attraction on the basis of physical and mental similarity. This perspective complicated their defense of homosexual rights, as pointed out by one of the leading German medical authorities, Rudolf Virchow. Virchow, who corresponded with Ulrichs and chaired a commission that advised the Prussian government in 1869 to abolish the penalization of »unnatural« intercourse between men, criticized his approach. According to Virchow, Ulrichs' assumption that effeminate urnings were attracted to masculine »dionings« (heterosexuals), together with his claim that they were entitled to sexual gratification, implied that heterosexual men should engage in same-sex behavior and thus act against their own inborn sexual nature. This implication showed one of the contradictory aspects of



Ulrichs' thinking and it also tended to confirm the widespread prejudice and fear that urnings would seduce heterosexuals into homosexuality.

One of the most problematic aspects of sexual modernism was its reliance on the moral authority of a naturalistic discourse, positing that a wide variety of sexual behaviors should be accepted because they are supposedly given in nature and therefore cannot be wrong. In fact this contention mimicked the age-old naturalistic fallacy, current in both Christian doctrine and secular enlightened thinking: the confusion of nature as empirical reality beyond good and evil and its definition as a moral standard and prescription for what is supposedly acceptable or not. The suggestion of Ulrichs and other sexual modernists up to Alfred Kinsey that what is natural cannot be immoral, was disputed by the Hungarian writer and journalist Károly Mária Kertbeny (born as Karl Maria Benkert, 1824–1882), who coined the term »homosexuality.« He insisted that the legitimacy of sexual acts could not be based on the argument that sexual diversity is rooted in nature, because this would imply that enforced and violent sexuality, including rape, sadism, incest, and abuse of children, should also be endorsed. Ulrichs and his followers of course did not want to back up such a radical amoral view, expressed earlier by Marquis de Sade; that would have been self-defeating. Moreover, employing a discourse of nature could prove to be counterproductive (as it also actually was), because the opponents of sexual modernity used a similar naturalist rhetoric in order to disqualify what they branded as »unnatural« sexualities. According to Kertbeny, the (un)naturalness of any sexual conduct was irrelevant for its legitimacy: the moral, legal, or social validity of sexual acts could only be based on the classic liberal definition of individual liberty and civil rights, including the need for mutual consent and the prevention of harm to others. Assuming that Kertbeny was not homosexual,<sup>1</sup> Leck suggests that his arguments were part of

1) Which is doubtful because in his diaries many references to his intimate contacts with young men can be found; see Judit TAKÁCS: *The Double Life of Kertbeny*, in: Gert HEKMA (ed.): *Past and Present of Radical Sexual Politics* (Amsterdam 2004) pp. 26–40.

his allegation that Ulrichs was too subjective and that his self-interested logic, starting from how he personally experienced his same-sex desire, was not necessarily the best one in the struggle for legal equality and social acceptance. The divergent perspectives and involvement of these two protagonists also showed up in their different understanding of what homosexuality was about: whereas Ulrichs defined it in terms of a mental and emotional constitution and gender identity, Kertbeny prioritized the more tangible physical impulse and bodily contact.

Ulrichs' (disputable) argument that categories of sexual desire are given and fixed by nature served as a major tenet of the twentieth-century homosexual rights movement, even though time and again some of its leaders and also the sexologist Albert Moll – who, I would suggest, were in some ways more »modern« than those relying on biological arguments – would tend to Kertbeny's viewpoint. Although Leck acknowledges that the naturalist discourse as an emancipatory strategy has its weak spots, he still defends it – not very convincingly, I believe – as an intrinsic part of the humanistic values in sexual modernism. In his view there is a crucial difference between, on the one hand, deductive and dualist discourses of nature that confirm the (unjust) status quo and exclude what is stamped as »unnatural,« and, on the other hand, the inductive and monistic understanding of nature which is inclusionary and undermines the normative purport of the first approach. Regrettably, Leck does not explain how this would solve the moral and sociopolitical issue of differentiating between »good« (consensual and beneficial) and »bad« (enforced and harmful) sex within the inclusionary modernist viewpoint. Apparently, he does not (want to?) see that ethical and political discussions about sexuality should better keep well away from knotty questions about what is natural and what is not.

Another thorny issue was the penchant for taking ancient Greek culture as a model for modern sexual mores in general and the social shaping of homosexuality in particular – an approach that was cultural and historical rather than biological, although not without underlying naturalist assumptions about the universal and timeless occurrence of same-sex desires. Since Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Geschichte*

*der Kunst des Altertums* (1764), Hellenism had served as a vehicle to idealize male homoeroticism. In 1830s Heinrich Hössli, combining this perspective with Romantic and liberal ideas, emphasized the relational dimension of sexuality in order to bestow moral value on and incite a sympathetic understanding for same-sex relations. The ideal of durable amatory attraction of like-minded on the (basically liberal) basis of free choice and common cultural, aesthetic, and civic values was an alternative for an understanding of sexuality in terms of gender polarization and irresistible natural instincts. Leck devotes a chapter to the adoption of the Greek ideal of agape in modernist sexual science, which in his view broadened psychopathia sexualis into »a science of love« (p. XIII), even though the classics scholar John Addington Symonds, who admired Ulrichs, demystified Greek erotic culture as an example for modern sexual relationships. Whereas other sexual modernists rather uncritically embraced Greek erotic culture, Symonds pointed out that Greek homosexuality, or paiderastia, in military, athletic, and educational settings should not be idealized. More often than not, it was rooted in inequalities of age and power as well as misogyny. This was in line neither with a modern liberal approach toward sexuality in general, nor with the consensual and reciprocal egalitarianism of modern intimate relationships along romantic lines in particular. Ulrichs, who stressed that urnings were similar to dionings in their craving for romantic love, tended to agree with Symonds, although he also used the Greek example in order to bestow dignity on homoeroticism.

Leck contrasts Symonds, Ulrichs, and also some feminist thinkers to the so-called antimodernist masculine branch of the German homosexual movement represented by, among others, Adolf Brand (leading the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*), Elisár von Kupffer, Edwin Bab, Benedict Friedlaender, and Hans Blüher, who embraced the Greek model and largely adopted its elitist, masculine – »male homosexual« (p. 24), in Leck's words – and antifeminist elements. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on these outspoken critics of Ulrichs' and Hirschfeld's approach. There is, however, much more to say about their cultural and homosocial perspective, for example that it involved a challenging criticism of the liberating potential of sexual modernism

and its epistemic and normative naturalist assumptions in particular. They rejected biological determinism and the related belief in a more or less fixed boundary between exclusive homo- and heterosexuality – that one is either straight or gay.

Although Leck acknowledges, mostly only in passing, that there was quite some overlap between »modernist« and »conservative« sexual science and politics, and that the complexity of historical reality does not always allow for a black-and-white picture, his presentation of the first is far more nuanced than that of the second. For example, he briefly refers to the autobiographical case studies in the works of Krafft-Ebing, Moll, and several other medical authors, which enabled »perverts« to express themselves, even when their views were not in line with medical theories. Rejecting Michel Foucault's well-known depiction of medical sexology as an instrument of control and discipline, Leck adds that these psychiatric experts were not »medical tyrants« and that not all of their patients »were passive victims of the medicalization of deviance« (pp. 223–224). But he does not elaborate on this any further, while he also ignores the broader significance of the active role of homosexuals and also of some other »perverts« such as fetishists and masochists (as patients, correspondents and informants of medical experts) and their diverse and changing interactions with physicians and medical theories and institutions.

Leck steadily downplays the many similarities between progressive and conventional sexual scientists, such as the basic definition of the sexual drive as a forceful impulse from within the body and the mind as well as the notion of constitutional homosexuality as an inevitable condition of a minority versus more diffuse same-sexual behavior, which should be countered. Instead, he builds his repetitive and insistent narrative on their alleged »monumental dissimilarity« (p. 26). He asserts that there was a deep-seated cultural conflict between the two groups, which »was historically real,« adding that »the sexology of Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing can be treated as ideal types of sexual modernism and conservative sexual science« (pp. xv, 187). But Leck fails to support this claim by a close reading and thorough analysis of the work of the so-called conservative thinkers, nor does he assimilate



late some important historical studies about medical sexology which would question his assumption.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas his presentation of the sexual modernists is rather nuanced, his picture of their alleged opponents is simplistic and selective, even close to outright caricature. This misrepresentation, it seems, helps him to forge a false contrast between the two groups, with the progressives paving the way for the recognition of sexual variance and egalitarianism and the conventional medical experts holding on to established patterns of thought, merely replicating all irrational and unfounded prejudices of the day. Apart from some other influential »conservative« thinkers, such as the renowned criminologist Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, the author of an influential best-seller about cultural degeneration (1892), Krafft-Ebing and Moll seem to function as Leck's main phantom enemies of sexual modernism. Again and again he refers to them as the prototypical doctors who stood for a stigmatizing sexual science that relied on the sociobiological theory of degeneration, bolstered the repressive sexual and gender order of bourgeois society, and suppressed Ulrichs' legacy. Their pathologizing perspective, according to Leck, was in fact nothing more than »a medicalization of sin« and a replication, in scientific guise, of Christian and Victorian prejudices (p. 147).

All these various assessments are misguided and not based on any evidence whatsoever. Leck refers to the first edition (1886) and a supplementary edition (1890) of *Psychopathia sexualis*, but he does not

1) Apart from my »Stepchildren of Nature« and TOBIN's »Peripheral Desires« see also for example Klaus MÜLLER: *Aber in meinem Herzen sprach eine Stimme so laut. Homosexuelle Autobiographien und medizinische Pathographien im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1991); Jonathan KATZ: *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York 1995); Arnold DAVIDSON: *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and The Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA 2001); Volkmar SIGUSCH: *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main – New York 2008); Philippe WEBER: *Der Trieb zum Erzählen: Sexualpathologie und Homosexualität, 1852–1914* (Bielefeld 2008); Andreas-Holger MAEHLE – Lutz SAUERTEIG (eds.): *Sexology, Medical Ethics and Occultism: Albert Moll in Context*, in: *Medical History* 56,2 (2012).

mention its other eleven editions published between 1887 and 1903, or any other work by Krafft-Ebing apart from a book review. With regard to Moll, Leck does refer to his main works, *Die konträre Sexualempfindung* (the third edition of 1899, not the first one of 1891) and *Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis* (1897–1898), but only in a succinct, fragmented, and selective way that does not do justice to their manifold and complex contents. My key point is that Krafft-Ebing and Moll cannot be labeled as sexual conformists. Their work also challenged the status quo, and they were innovators too, and at least as radical as Leck's modernist heroes, if in slightly different ways. At the same time, both the modernist and conservative groups grappled with established notions about sexuality and still echoed time-honored stereotypes. The differences in views between, on the one hand, Krafft-Ebing and Moll, and, on the other hand, Ulrichs, Kertbeny, Hirschfeld, Bloch, and other so-called progressive thinkers were in no way larger than such differences among the members of the last group or between the first two sexologists.

It would take up too much space to discuss in detail all of Leck's unfounded and arbitrary generalizations, partisan claims, and failures to mention crucial facts about Krafft-Ebing and Moll and the contents of their works, but I will briefly address the main flaws in his argument. For one thing, it is just not true that Krafft-Ebing and Moll, as Leck claims, »drew sharp distinctions between normal and abnormal sexual desires« (p. 182) on the basis of the procreative norm; that their explanation of perversion was completely molded by pathologization, biological determinism, and degeneration theory; that Moll »simply branded homosexuality as carnal madness« (p. 112); that they were blinded by cultural ethnocentrism; that they hardly addressed »the injustice of existing penal codes« (p. 187) and systematically denied human rights to sexual minorities; that they did not empathize with their homosexual and otherwise sexually deviant patients or clients; that they banned discussions of love and affection from their, in Leck's words, »anti-Greek science« (p. 111); that they fully discredited Ulrichs's ideas because of his subjective involvement in the issue as a homosexual; that they highlighted the acquired and immoral character of homosexuality and tended to deny its innate and permanent

nature; or that Hirschfeld, instead of Krafft-Ebing and Moll, was the »undisputed leader of the Central European sexual science movement by 1900« (p. 64).

Already in the second edition of his *Psychopathia sexualis* (1887) and also in his laudatory preface to Moll's book about homosexuality (1891), Krafft-Ebing referred to homosexuals and other deviants as »stepchildren of nature,« and this ambiguous characterization was all but an outright denigration. It expressed the feeling that the criminalization of their behavior was cruel and unjust, and that they deserved compassion and humanitarian treatment.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Krafft-Ebing first explained homosexuality in terms of immorality and pathological degeneration, in the 1890s he developed a more psychological and sympathetic perspective. Around 1900 he admitted that his earlier views had been one-sided and that Ulrichs had a point with his plea for homosexual marriage: same-sex love was comparable to heterosexual love and therefore legitimate. He had come to believe that homosexuality was not so much a disease as a biological and psychological condition that had to be accepted as a more or less deplorable but natural fate. From the early 1890s on, both Krafft-Ebing and Moll criticized traditional moral-religious and legal denunciations of homosexuality (with arguments overlapping with those of Ulrichs and Kertbeny), and they were among the first to sign Hirschfeld's petition (1897) against Section 175 of the German penal code that made particular sexual acts between men punishable. Around 1900, Krafft-Ebing and Moll were, together with Hirschfeld, at the forefront of a liberal and humanitarian approach to homosexuality. Although Ulrichs regretted that Krafft-Ebing still tended to associate uranism with disorder, at the end of his life he praised him for advocating the decriminalization of homosexual behavior, thus continuing the campaign he had started. When, in the 1890s, other homosexuals began to organize themselves, they referred to Krafft-Ebing as a scientific authority who was

1) Richard von KRAFFT-EBING: *Psychopathia sexualis*. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der conträren Sexualempfindung: Eine klinisch-forensische Studie (Stuttgart 1887) pp. vi, 139; Albert MOLL: *Die Conträre Sexualempfindung: Mit Benutzung amtlichen Materials* (Berlin 1891) pp. v-vi.

on their side and he was the connecting link between some men who considered homosexual activism before the foundation of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee.<sup>1</sup> And in a letter to Hirschfeld written early in 1902, he expressed his willingness to contribute to the »good cause.«<sup>2</sup>

The works of Krafft-Ebing and Moll contain a wide range of case histories, including (auto)biographical accounts, letters, and intimate confessions of patients and correspondents. The prominent role of the individual case study model opened a space for »perverts,« in particular homosexual men but also others such as fetishists and masochists, to express feelings and experiences that so far had been largely silenced in public. Using the forum of medical science, upper- and middle-class men contacted Krafft-Ebing and Moll of their own accord as private patients or informants, and they would analyze themselves, speak for themselves, and tell their personal life-stories. These articulate individuals hoped to find acceptance and support; for several of them Krafft-Ebing's and Moll's works provided an eye-opener and it even brought them some relief. They capitalized on sexual science in order to part with the charge of immorality and illegality and, by appealing to the naturalness and authenticity of their feelings, to explain and justify themselves. Their stories certainly touched a nerve in Krafft-Ebing and Moll, and both referred to such cases as an empirical basis for their theoretical considerations, which, rather than being static, changed in response to information and insights from some of their patients and informants.

Building on the work of Krafft-Ebing, Moll, in his monographs about homosexuality and the *libido sexualis*, elaborated a comprehensive and sophisticated sexual theory that foreshadowed several

1) See Otto DE JOUX: *Die Enterbten des Liebesglücks*. Ein Beitrag zur Seelenkunde (Leipzig 1893) pp. 15, 72–73; *Das Comité für Befreiung der Homosexuellen vom Strafgesetz*. Aufruf an alle gebildeten und edelgesinnten Menschen! ([Berlin] 1899), *Nachlass Richard von Krafft-Ebing* (The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London); Kevin DUBOUT: *Der Richter und sein Tagebuch*. Eugen Wilhelm als Elsässer und homosexueller Aktivist im Deutschen Kaiserreich (Frankfurt am Main 2018).

2) *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 5 (1903), first unnumbered page.

insights of Freud and Havelock Ellis. More in general his perspective shared many elements with those of the sexual modernists, and some aspects were even more innovative than the approach of Leck's prototypical sexual progressives. Competing with Hirschfeld for leadership in German sexual science, Moll's views on homosexuality would regress after 1900 to more judgmental and negative attitudes, though without renouncing his basic theoretical assumptions and his support for decriminalization. In several ways he was the modernist sexologist par excellence.<sup>1</sup>

In his book about homosexuality, Moll questioned several of the prevailing notions about it. He doubted that a same-sex preference could be acquired through mere behavioral influences, such as moral corruption, seduction, or masturbation. His central tenet was that in most cases homosexuality involved a deep-seated innate feeling and that as such it should not be considered immoral and illegal. On the basis of the liberal principle of individual freedom, Moll argued, in the same way as Kertbeny, that same-sex acts between consenting individuals above the age of sixteen or eighteen should not be punishable. Echoing Krafft-Ebing's »stepchildren of nature,« he talked about »unfortunate human beings« who deserved compassion and fair treatment. Like Krafft-Ebing, he also acknowledged the importance of Ulrichs' writings, even though in his eyes his appeal for the right of »urnings« to marry was bizarre.

Moll did not doubt that homosexuality was a medical issue, but his evaluation of its pathological nature and the associated physical causes was cautious. Like other physiological and psychological functions, sexuality, he explained, showed considerable variation without absolute boundaries between normal and abnormal. Although numerous homosexuals came from neuropathic families and suffered from hereditary taints and nervous troubles, he also found that many of them were healthy, without any degenerative or other pathological symptoms. There was no sufficient ground for considering inborn

1) About Moll's ambivalent and changing attitude towards homosexuality and his rivalry with Hirschfeld see OOSTERHUIS: Albert Moll's Ambivalence about Homosexuality.

homosexuality to be full-blown psycho- or neuropathy. Using the qualification »morbid-like« and occasionally also »variation,« Moll's comparison of it to more elusive disturbances was not very different from Hirschfeld's equation of this orientation with harmless malformations, such as color-blindness or a harelip.<sup>1</sup> Mental and nervous distress among homosexuals, Moll added, could be caused by the social pressure they endured or by sexual frustration, another insight he shared with Hirschfeld.

Tacitly Moll undermined the labeling of homosexuality as pathology even further by putting it on a par with heterosexuality, which he defined as attraction and intercourse between males and females without any procreative intention – behavior which according to traditional norms deviated from nature's purpose. Both orientations, Moll suggested, were of the same kind. The close connection between the sexual drive and the love impulse toward a specific individual, which distinguished humans from lower animals, was as prevalent among homosexuals as among heterosexuals. In line with what some of his patients made clear – that partnership was as important to them as sexual gratification – he noticed that the manner in which they experienced sexual passion, as well as dating and love, was in no way different from how heterosexuals felt these things. Neither did homosexuals distinguish themselves from heterosexuals through a particular preference for youngsters; in both groups only a minority showed such desires and therefore there was no reason to equate homosexuality in itself with »pederasty« or »pedophilia«, the label Krafft-Ebing had coined for inborn sexual attraction to minors. Another, even more consequential finding of Moll was that (other) sexual perversions occurred in the same way and to the same degree among homo- and heterosexuals. Ten years before Krafft-Ebing and fifteen years

1) MOLL: Die Conträre Sexualempfindung pp. 131, 189–190, 202–204; Albert MOLL: Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis (Berlin 1898) pp. 543–546, 555–556, 626, 635, 644; Albert MOLL – Havelock ELLIS: Die Funktionsstörungen des Sexuallebens, in: Albert MOLL (Hg.): Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaften. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der kulturgeschichtlichen Beziehungen (Leipzig 1912) pp. 603–740 (quote on p. 652).

before Freud,<sup>1</sup> Moll thus underlined the dichotomy of hetero- and homosexuality as the fundamental sexual categorization, while bisexuality would be their stepchild, and perversions were to be considered as derived sub-variations.

Moll's frequent use of the term »heterosexuality« next to homosexuality implied a separation between sexuality and reproduction. Without ruling out procreation as the underlying natural aim of sexuality, he shifted the focus to its subjective, experiential dimension. He made a crucial distinction between the sexual drive, of which people are subjectively aware, and the unconscious, goal-oriented reproductive instinct. This instinct, merely a biomedical matter according to Moll, was not very relevant for sexology's task to work out a joint physiological, psychological, and cultural understanding of the sexual drive. In his work the traditional moral distinction between procreative and non-procreative acts clearly gave way to the modern focus on the differentiation of sexual desires. This also marked a shift from the medical-psychiatric understanding of deviant sexuality as a derived, episodic, and more or less singular symptom of an underlying physical or mental disorder to viewing it as an integral part of an autonomous and continuous sexual drive.

In his *Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis*, Moll argued that perversions were nothing more and nothing less than modifications of the sexual drive, which, he added, was not inherently and exclusively heterosexual. Thus he cast doubt on the self-evidence of heterosexuality as the standard of normality. The diversity of individual preferences, he noticed, was boundless – a complete catalogue of all existing sexual urges basically being unfeasible, an assertion that resembled Ulrichs' claim, cited by Leck, that nature had created »thousands of

1) See Richard von KRAFFT-EBING: Ueber sexuelle Perversionen, in: E. von LEYDEN – F. KLEMPERER (eds.): Die deutsche Klinik am Eingang des 20. Jahrhunderts in akademischen Vorlesungen, Vol. 6 (Berlin – Wien 1901) pp. 113–154; Richard von KRAFFT-EBING: Neue Studien auf dem Gebiete der Homosexualität, in: Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen 3 (1901) pp. 1–36; Sigmund FREUD: Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie (Leipzig – Wien 1905).

gradations« (p. 74). Regular and deviant sexualities were interconnected, Moll stressed, and could only be understood in their reciprocal relation. His study of homosexuality fueled his thinking about heterosexuality, but his consideration of fetishism, sadism, masochism, and other perversions raised his understanding of normal sexuality as well. Fetishism, for example, was an intrinsic feature of it, because the specific individual preferences in sexual attraction and, connected to that, monogamous love were grounded in a distinct penchant for particular physical and mental characteristics of one's partner.

The blurring of clear boundaries between the normal and the abnormal showed itself in particular in Moll's analysis of childhood sexuality, which in his view also clarified the nature of adult sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Infantile sexual manifestations, including masturbation, homosexual leanings, and even fetishist and sadomasochistic tendencies, were far from exceptional and in themselves not necessarily symptoms of perversion caused by either degeneration or immorality, as many believed. The wide range of sexual impulses and activities found among children and adolescents were, according to Moll, part of a transitory stage from undifferentiated and erratic sexuality to a differentiated and constant drive in adulthood. Eventually, the majority of adults would show a heterosexual desire, while a minority of them would exhibit a homosexual or bisexual one, and all of them possibly with specific perverse leanings.

If the largely random sexual drive had a built-in natural aim at all, Moll stressed, it was not reproduction but physical as well as mental pleasure and satisfaction. He distinguished two dimensions of the sexual drive: physical discharge (Detumescenztrieb) and physical as well as psychological attraction (Contrectationtrieb). The first manifested itself in physical arousal and centered on the sexual act, whether with someone else or alone, as a means for the release of sensual energy and tension in orgasm. The attraction drive incited love of a real or imagined partner and expressions of affection, which were linked to social feelings. Moll's discussion of the attraction drive underlined the decisive role of mental factors in the development

1) Albert MOLL: Das Sexualeben des Kindes (Leipzig 1908).

of relational sexuality. Physiological processes and abilities were not more than necessary preconditions for sexual functioning. Mental stimuli, such as imagination and fantasies, were crucial, and the satisfaction of the sexual urge was not only made up of physical release but also of emotional fulfilment. In Moll's analysis, sexuality emerged as an intricate complex of physical functions, reflexes, bodily sensations, behaviors, experiences, feelings, thoughts, memories, mental associations, desires, imagination, fantasies, and dreams. Therefore, sexuality as a field of research did not belong to biology and medicine only, but should also, in Moll's view, involve psychology and cultural analysis. He published a historical study about »famous homosexuals«, in which he argued that not all intimate bonds between men could be labelled as homosexual and that various same-sex relations should be understood in their particular cultural-historical context.<sup>1</sup> In his *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaften. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der kulturgeschichtlichen Beziehungen* he included three long chapters about the social, cultural and artistic aspects of sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, Moll's approach to sexuality initiated a shift from a biological and physiological to a more psychological approach. Moll distanced himself from the medical endeavor to locate the causal factors of sexual aberrations in hereditary and degenerative defects of the body. There was no definite proof that the sexual drive could be reduced to the physiological process of the brain, nervous system, gonads, or hormones. Since the physiological functioning of homosexuals and other deviants was in many ways similar to that of heterosexuals, the difference in their desire was to be found in psychic processes and emotional arousal. Subjective inner life and personal history, not the body or behavior as such, were the decisive criteria for the diagnosis of sexual orientation. Mental processes affected the sexual organs rather than the other way around. Moll fully adopted a new style of reasoning, before Freud would do so, about perversions as functional disorders of a sexual drive that was situated in the personality instead of the body.

1) Albert MOLL: *Berühmte Homosexuelle* (Wiesbaden 1910).

2) MOLL (Hg.): *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaften* pp. 309–602.

In his explanation of the genesis of the sexual drive, Moll shunned monocausality and reductionism. He questioned the causal role of hereditary degeneration as well as the idea that perversion was merely acquired by psychological association. Shades of both perspectives can be found in his argument, but he foregrounded the interaction of nature and nurture. The inherited biological basis of sexuality should not be understood as a predetermining cause, but as a potential. The sexual drive was the result of possible »reaction-capacities« or »reaction-modes« that had to be incited by external stimuli and attachments to particular love objects.<sup>1</sup> In general the sexual potential would eventually tend towards the opposite sex, but if this inclination was fragile or hampered, a susceptibility to homosexuality possibly emerged. Environmental, behavioral, psychological, and sociocultural factors played a seminal role in the formation of the more specific, possibly perverse, contents of hetero- and homosexual desires. Moll's basic idea was that sexual desire is neither natural, definite, and inevitable nor made-up, accidental, or shaped by conscious will. Sensorial stimuli, mental association, upbringing, and habit formation during childhood and adolescence were crucial on the individual level, whereas the broader cultural and historical dimension also mattered. Not just people's moral and social attitudes, including their openness or feelings of shame toward sexuality, were shaped by culture and history; the same was also true of the substance of the sexual drive itself.

Several of Moll's insights foreshadowed central tenets of Freud's psychoanalysis: the importance of the psychic and infantile components of sexuality; the libido as a fragmented pleasure drive; and the explanation of normal heterosexuality as the result of a conversion of polymorphous perversity. In the light of the prevailing standards and prejudices of his time, Moll's general approach of sexuality was at least as liberal and pragmatic as that of Freud, while also tending towards historical and cultural relativism with regard to sexual morality. As a believer in scientific rationality, he denounced prudishness, secretiveness, moral crusades and double standards, and pointed out that excessive repression of sexual desire could be detrimental to health

1) MOLL: *Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis* pp. 306–308, 497, 505.



and wellbeing. At the same time Moll shared with Freud a more or less pessimistic assessment of the unsolvable tension between sexuality and civilization. His evaluation of sexuality – on the one hand believing that it is beneficial as a relational force and that sexual restraint may turn into unhealthy repression, while on the other hand viewing it as a destructive threat to the social and moral order – was perhaps more true to life than the sexual modernists' one-sided and wishful assumption of some sort of unspoiled »natural« sexuality.

Moll's consideration of the historical and cultural dimension of sexuality was somewhat akin to that of Iwan Bloch and at least as sophisticated. Leck glorifies Bloch as a brilliant sexual innovator because he supposedly cleared away »the old views« (p. 182) of Krafft-Ebing and Moll and, through his historical interpretation of the work of Marquis de Sade (published in 1900 and 1904), he paved the way for a social and cultural analysis of sexuality. That may be true, but the views of Bloch were not as unique as Leck claims, for in the previous decade Moll had already explained sexuality in terms of an interplay of biological, psychological, and cultural factors. Moreover, Bloch's historical-cultural approach did not prevent him from asserting, in line with Hirschfeld's views and in opposition to Moll's approach, that sexology was to be firmly based on biology. In Bloch's view, culture foremost determined the extent to which assumedly natural and universal sexual drives were contained or could be expressed according to different times and places – he was far from conceptualizing the sociocultural shaping of sexual behaviors, a perspective that was suggested – although not fully elaborated – by Moll. Neither was Bloch a proponent of sexual modernism in other aspects. Just like Moll and Krafft-Ebing, he envisioned the connection of sexual pleasure with egalitarian romantic love as a central tenet of the modern sexual ethos, but whereas the first two cautiously suggested the possibility that homosexual relationships could be included in this model, Bloch tended to marginalize non-heterosexual preferences in terms of social abnormality and »cultural degeneracy« (p. 210). Bloch's approach of homosexuality – labeling it as a primitive and infectious monstrosity and stressing the need for repressing it – was far from benign – although he revised his opinion under the influence of Hirschfeld. So,

who is the sexual modernist and the sexual conservative here? Leck's claim that Bloch's prioritization of heterosexuality was »less judgmental« (p. 215) than the interrelated views of Krafft-Ebing and Moll is highly disputable.

The same applies to his assessment of the Swiss psychiatrist Auguste Forel as modernist because he advocated »sexually frank, free, and egalitarian relations« between heterosexuals (p. 140). But how should we evaluate Forel's exclusion of »non-heterosexuals« (p. 140), as acknowledged by Leck, his pathologization of homosexuality, and his radical social-hygienic, eugenic, and even racist perspectives? Why should Forel, stressing the need to remove all misfits from society, be viewed as progressive and Moll, who also favored relational sexuality and a social-hygienic approach but who explicitly rejected eugenics and racial hygiene, in particular if enforced upon individuals by the state in the name of the collective interest, be considered conservative?

Similar questions can be asked if we compare the views of Moll and those of Hirschfeld, the two leading sexologists who were continually involved in rivalry and conflicts between the early 1900s and the 1930s. Following Ulrichs, Hirschfeld basically adopted the current understanding of sexual desire as a secondary gender characteristic and as attraction between contrasting male and female elements. Evolution had supposedly advanced an increasing distinction between males and females and their mutual polar magnetism, but at the same time nature continued to produce a range of intermediate genders. According to Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, and other sexual scientists, sexual diversity was the result of a range of random variations in the differentiation of the physical and mental characteristics of men and women: homosexuals, characterized by a female soul in a male body (or vice versa with regard to lesbians) belonged to an intermediate »third sex,« which also included bisexuality, androgyny, transvestitism, and transsexuality.

Moll did not completely rule out this explanation, but at the same time he cast doubt on the correlation between same-sex desire and physical, mental, and behavioral features of the opposite sex. Many homosexuals were entirely masculine in their thinking, appearance,



and behavior, he noticed, whereas effeminate men could be found among heterosexuals. His observations signaled a shift away from the understanding of same-sex desire as gender inversion to the (more modern) idea of sexual orientation in terms of same-sex partner-choice only. Moll, who much more than Hirschfeld acknowledged a variety of homosexual desires and behaviors, also fundamentally questioned Hirschfeld's notion of a clear-cut and fixed homosexual identity and his emancipatory strategy that was based on biological determinism. Hirschfeld's fight for acceptance of homosexuality and against legal discrimination was intrinsically linked to his biogenetic explanation in terms of a deep-seated innate disposition, implying that those concerned generally bore no responsibility for their condition and sexual behavior. Moll, on the other hand, pointed out that whatever its causes might be – whether inborn or acquired or a combination – these were not relevant for the legal and political assessment of homosexuality and individual responsibility.

A striking point in the strained adverse relation between Moll and Hirschfeld is their forensic role as expert witness in court cases with regard to violations of Article 175 and their associated evaluation of homosexuality as a psychiatric condition or not. Although Moll did not change his mind that this law was untenable, he criticized Hirschfeld's efforts to exonerate offenders from conviction by arguing that they could not be held accountable for their behavior because of their inevitable innate homosexuality. Hirschfeld appealed to Paragraph 51 of the German penal code stipulating that defendants who were diagnosed with mental disturbances or a state of unconsciousness and who had committed felonies under the influence of these conditions, could be acquitted because of irresponsibility. According to Moll, Hirschfeld's strategy (which of course was pragmatic in serving the objective of acquittal) was inconsistent: whereas he generally emphasized that homosexuality should not be considered as pathological, as an expert witness he suggested that the mental state of homosexual offenders was similar to that of psychiatric patients. Moll countered Hirschfeld by stressing that homosexuality by and large was not such a serious pathological condition that it justified the application of Paragraph 51; the responsibility of most homosexual defendants was

intact. Moreover, he asserted that the forensic expert should provide objective medical information about the nature of a defendant's sexual misbehavior without considering the legal verdict. Whatever its causes might be – either inborn or acquired or a combination – these were not relevant for the legal and political assessment of homosexuality and individual responsibility. Although Moll's position may have been more harmful for the fate of defendants, at the same time he also exposed the contradictory nature of Hirschfeld's course of action.

Hirschfeld's biological model was also entangled with eugenics, and he would accept drastic experiments such as Eugen Steinach's transplantation of testicles, because the underlying endocrine research appeared to underpin his biological theory. In this connection, Hirschfeld suggested that homosexuals should not propagate because of the considerable risk that their offspring would suffer from degenerative disorders. Arguing that the natural purpose of homosexuality was in fact the prevention of degeneration, Hirschfeld was willing to link the decriminalization of homosexual intercourse with a legal ban for homosexuals to have children. Moll remained skeptical about such arguments and all biological explanations of homosexuality, including Steinach's endocrine theory. Moreover, whereas Hirschfeld and most other sexologists uncritically embraced eugenic assumptions, Moll time and again pointed out the scientific and ethical flaws of such thinking. Moll's well-founded criticism of widespread biological reductionism and eugenic thinking – a very underrated issue in Leck's argument – distinguished him from most of his conservative as well as progressive colleagues.

To be sure, for several reasons, such as the rivalry about leadership in German sexology and his nationalist leanings, Moll increasingly opposed Hirschfeld's emancipatory sexual politics (without withdrawing his support for legal reform and revising his nuanced approach of sexuality) and his ruthless character-assassination of Hirschfeld – even to the point of denouncing Hirschfeld's homosexuality to the Nazi authorities in 1934 – showed his worst side. But that does not imply that we can explain the differences between them simply in terms of progressiveness versus conservatism. If Moll was not as pro-gay as Ulrichs and Hirschfeld, overall his level-headed and pragmatic views

overlapped with those of other sexual scholars whom Leck foregrounds as modernists such as Bloch, Forel, and Havelock Ellis. All of them shared an enlightened and liberal trust in rationality and science, as well as in the ideal of hetero- and sometimes even homosexual egalitarianism, reciprocity, and relational intimacy. The means for ensuring and promoting sexual health had to rely not so much on penal law or religious authority, but on medicine, psychology, education, social hygiene and reform, eugenics, and responsible citizenship. This reformist approach implied liberating as well as restrictive and normalizing consequences – the last ones in particular with regard to irregular and promiscuous sex in public; sexual relations between adults and minors; patterns of sexual behaviour that cross the well-guarded border between the assumed exclusive hetero- and homosexual categories; and the expression of transgenderism and »bizarre« sexual preferences such as fetishism and sadomasochism. Sexual modernism is much more ambiguous than Leck's rather one-dimensional picture suggests.

All of this indicates the arbitrary nature of Leck's judgment of sexual progressiveness and conservatism. More troublesome, his systematic disregard of the modernist elements in the sexology of Krafft-Ebing and Moll comes close to historical falsification. Although I do not dispute the author's pro-gay or »queer,« feminist, antibourgeois, anti-capitalist, or whatever political position as such, what I find disturbing is that it seems to fully dictate his interpretation, which, aside from being selective, grossly misrepresents the thinking of Krafft-Ebing and Moll. Neither do I want to trash Leck's entire study; many parts of it are informative and stimulating. Unfortunately, these merits can only in part compensate for the book's basic shortcoming, which touches on a historian's fundamental task to present sources and facts in an open-minded and balanced way, and also to do justice to earlier and canonical historical contributions to the subject. Leck is not the first and only American historian of sexuality who has tended to ignore the earlier work of European historians about the development of sexual science or read it in a selective way.

Overall Leck's book is arbitrary and contradictory; it is also often biased and misleading. His claim that there are close affinities between,

on the one hand, sexual modernity and gay emancipation, feminism, and socialism, and, on the other hand, between conventional sexual science and the repressive sexual politics of bourgeois conservatism and even fascism and Nazism, is shaky. Such a crude teleological scheme overlooks the many ambiguities and dilemmas in the development of the modern science and politics of sexuality. Leck's approach exemplifies the dubious trend in gay and lesbian studies to smuggle a presentist and politically correct agenda, either »queer« or not, into their interpretation and assessment of the past. The fabrication of such a »usable« history may serve the polarized identity politics that nowadays sways (and partly poisons) the political and cultural climate in the United States and increasingly in Europe as well, but it comes with the risk of hampering our historical understanding.