

**A NEW FORMULATION OF A
NATURAL-LAW ARGUMENT AGAINST
CONTRACEPTION**

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“THE naturally given structure of the sexual act”—that is a phrase one often encounters in discussions of contraception. The contention here is that there is no such thing, if we are talking about the *human act*; for human acts have their structure from intelligence. Just insofar as an action is considered according to its naturally given structure, it is to that extent not considered as a *human act*—i. e., as a moral act—but rather as a physiological process or as instinctive behavior. Action with a given structure and acts structured by intelligence differ as totally as nature differs from morality. Nature has an order which reason can consider but cannot make and cannot alter. Morality has an order which reason institutes by guiding the acts of the will.

There is, then, no naturally given structure of the sexual act as a human act. I do not mean to deny, of course, that there are given anatomical, physiological, and even psychological structures. But *all* sexual acts presuppose and make use in one or another way of what is given by nature. Masturbation and homosexual behavior are observed among some of the higher animals, and such behavior must be admitted to be natural. It no more violates laws of nature relevant to sex than orbiting the earth violates the law of gravity. In both cases, all relevant natural laws will be seen to be fully observed if these laws are considered in all their complexity. The violation is illusory and the illusion arises from the abstract consideration of one natural law apart from others. In concrete cases the whole group of natural laws, including those we usually ignore, leads to unexpected consequences.

As soon as this point is understood, one sees that it is futile to argue that any act is right or wrong by appealing to its

naturally given structure. The given structure of sexual action is a matter of fact, and since it is natural, it *can not* be violated. The morality of sexual acts is a matter of *ought*, and the very meaning of "ought" implies that the subject matter is in our power to such an extent that what will in fact occur is contingent on our freedom.

Artificial interference in the physiological process of ovulation for the purpose of remedying sterility—e.g., by means of rebound therapy—is accepted as moral. Therefore, if the natural process were the standard of morality, a contraceptive use of the same hormones would be no less acceptable. Interference in intercourse by transporting semen from the vagina to the higher parts of the uterus to remedy sterility is accepted as moral. Therefore, if the integrity of the structure of the act were the criterion, taking the semen on a trip in the opposite direction would be equally acceptable.

More basic is the point that the structure of sexual intercourse itself does not occur simply as a given fact of nature. It depends on choice. Man, unlike the dog, has a fertile imagination for designing new postures. There are plenty of possibilities, as the books on technique indicate, for adopting different arrangements in the coupling of bodies. And there are plenty of possible sexual acts that do not couple bodies in a way that would ordinarily be called intercourse—e.g., sodomitic relations using the anus, sodomitic relations (which may be mutual) using the mouth, or simple mutual masturbation—and all such sexual acts are equally suited to heterosexual and to homosexual relationships. As we see from Kinsey, a biologist viewing behavior merely from a biological viewpoint can see nothing more or less natural about any of these acts.

Clarity on this point—that the structure of human sexual intercourse is not naturally given—is important for at least three reasons. In the first place, if this point is understood, we will waste no time trying to deduce morality from anatomy, physiology or psychology.

In the second place, we also will avoid the grievous error of

supposing that if we surrender on contraception, a certain residual respect for the so-called natural structure of the sexual act will allow us somewhere to draw a line. Everyone discussing the morality of contraception should be honest enough to admit that if contraception is morally admissable, there is no reason why women should not exchange the natural use for any agreeable unnatural one, and why men should not exchange women for other men, unless that reason be a psychological one. But the psychological value—the unhealthiness of such practices even for those who willingly cooperate in them—while perhaps true in general, seems impossible to prove as an absolute, unexceptional universal.

However, I do not want to dwell on this point. One cannot show in this way that contraception is evil. One can only show it to be no worse than many acts generally thought to be evil, since contraception and other so-called “unnatural acts” are acceptable on the very same principles.

The third, and most important, reason why it is vital to see that the structure of the sexual act is not naturally given is that only after gaining this insight can the true issue be appreciated. That issue concerns the principles according to which a human being ought to structure his sexual conduct. Because this structure will be the work of intelligence, and because its realization can be accomplished only through free choice, either intelligence must know immediately what the structure should be, or the structure will have to be articulated from some prior knowledge. The latter is evidently the case: the structure of human sexual acts is articulated through a rational process. Reason proceeds from some principles of action and concludes to the formulation of possible acts about which it also pronounces the judgment: Such and such ought (or ought not) to be done.

Our problem, then, takes us right to the central question of ethical theory: What is the ultimate standard of right and wrong in human acts, and how is this standard to be applied? No meaningful position can be adopted in the contraception controversy without first taking a clear position on this central

question, for the concrete issue hangs upon the question of principles more than on anything else. Thus to start out the argument anywhere after this question really will be to miss the point and to beg the question rather than to deal with it. Most proponents of contraception have made this error by assuming implicitly that contraception is not intrinsically immoral, and that it thus can be justified by proportionately good reasons.

Kant attempted to set up a strictly formal standard of right and wrong, but his theory is inadequate, for such an *a priori* rational standard does not provide sufficient direction for formulating action. Others have suggested that the ultimate standard must be established by authority, for example, by the authority of God, but this position either presupposes that there is an independent norm showing the reasonableness of accepting divine direction or it implies that there is no reason for anything in human life. Many contemporary thinkers more or less openly suggest that human arbitrariness, expressed either by the individual will or by the social consensus, is a suitable substitute for divine arbitrariness. One form of voluntarism is neither less nor more reasonable than the other. In both cases, reason begins only after an arbitrary *fiat* has been imposed upon it, and the imposition has to be accepted by blind submission.

Throughout the history of ethical theory, the proposal has been made repeatedly that the ultimate standard of morality is simply given by nature. Man has in fact certain drives, needs, or wants, and he cannot help but seek to satisfy them. He will proceed in a more or less efficient way, depending upon how well he uses the mind with which nature has provided him as an instrument for obtaining their satisfaction. In naturalistic theories of this sort the ends are established by nature, and the imperatives of morality become hypothetical. "If you want such and such (and you do, willy-nilly), then you must do so and so." Kant criticized very tellingly heteronomous principles of this kind, even though his proffered substitute for them was inadequate. Such theories eliminate morality and

turn human life into a product of technique. Sin is ignorance or mistake; freedom is an illusion. The good for man is so completely defined by nature that there is no room for man to transcend the limited goals set by his humanity and so contrive his own existence. Much less can such naturalism allow that man might be elevated by grace to share in divine life.

I would suggest that the only adequate ultimate standard for right and wrong in human acts is the total possible good that man can in any way attain. This total possibility is in a certain sense given, for man does not exist of himself but is created in intelligence and freedom, with an innate capacity for indefinite self-transcendence. At the same time, this total possibility is not some definite end, established by nature, that could ever be attained by some efficient means. For this very reason, human intelligence must contrive the structure of human acts, but only freedom can effectively execute the order which intelligence proposes, because a finite nature does not include any necessary and inerrant means for attaining a perfection that is inherently indefinite and open to the infinite.

Given the task of contriving human existence in the light of the possibility of infinite self-transcendence, human reason must start somewhere to give its first direction. Intelligence looks to experience, not because naturally given inclinations must be followed, but rather because no human act is possible if there is no inclination to use as its vehicle. Practical reason, which must project goals toward which it will direct action, must form its initial insights concerning all possible goals of human action by referring to the several modes of inclination that are naturally given in human nature.

Thus it is that the tendency to self-preservation is transmuted by the alchemy of intelligence into a self-evident principle of practical reason: Human life is a good to be preserved. The tendency may be egoistic; the principle is non-discriminatory. The tendency is dispersed among many physiological and psychological drives; the principle is understood more or less clearly as expressing an intelligible goal, which man makes his own, toward which all those drives are disposed.

A number of fundamental categories of human goods are understood in this way. There are not many modes of human good altogether: human life, which includes health and safety; all the arts and skills that can be cultivated simply for the sake of their very exercise; beauty and other objects of esthetic experience; theoretical truth in its several varieties; friendship, both relationship in immediate liasons and organization in larger communities; the use of intelligence to direct action; the effective freedom to do what one chooses with the whole force of an integrated personality; and a proper relationship to the fundamental principles of reality—i. e., to God.

In this list of basic human goods I think we must include, as a distinct item and not merely as an aspect of the good of human life as such, the value of the initiation of human life. This good consists not merely in generation, but in the initiation of human life on all its many levels, for physiological, psychological, moral, and spiritual life each must be initiated and the initiation of human life is not complete until the new person is equipped with the starting points from which he can proceed to live on all of these levels. Once his life is begun, each person has as his own task to carry on and to develop his life in cooperation with others. Consequently, as childhood progresses passivity gives place to activity and dependency to autonomy in cooperative relationships.

There are several reasons for thinking that the good of the initiation of human life, the procreative good, is a fundamental human good and that it is distinct from the good of human life as such.

In the first place, the procreative good is peculiar inasmuch as it is always an object for action whose end is a person other than the agent. One can pursue the good of human life, on the other hand, in a manner that is directly self-regarding, and on the level of natural inclination the good of life as such is represented by the drives which insure self-preservation. Only indirectly can one pursue the procreative good in a manner that is self-regarding, since the good primarily accrues to a person other than the agent himself, and on the level of natural

inclination the good of procreation is represented by drives that do not promote self-preservation—which, in fact, often conflict with it—although these drives do yield satisfaction for the agent as well as the achievement of a fundamental human good in another person.

In the second place, the procreative good is the object of the ultimate function of all human organisms precisely insofar as they are organisms. The work of procreation is the work of maturity and full power; every other function leads on to this one while for the agent organism as such this function leads to nothing beyond itself. The good of human life, on the other hand, is the goal of the weakest and most primitive functions of the organism. Now, man, of course, is incomparably more than any other organism. But man is in truth an organized body, and his perfection as such cannot be reduced to any higher plane of his existence, as if the highest plane could save everything below by using it as a means or by encompassing it in a more eminent mode. The simple physiological process of human reproduction already is incomparably more important than the process of reproduction in other animals by the mere fact that the former terminates in the existence of a human person while the latter terminates in the being of a beast. Man is not an incarnate spirit; he is a rational animal. The dualism implied in the definition of man as incarnate spirit threatens to become a totalitarianism which will distort the true shape of man's nature and thus destroy the only solid foundation for a realistic personalism. And Christian personalism must be realistic, as has been declared repeatedly in the past against gnostics, manichees, cathars, and jansenists.

In the third place, we can discern the status of procreation among basic human goods because a whole domain of human action is devoted to the work of procreation. Having a family of one's own—this is one, though not the only, unquestioned goal that most people have in life. The most universal and ancient human institutions are founded in the light of this good, for they are instituted to promote it. Marriage varies greatly from culture to culture, but anthropologists have no

difficulty in picking out the phenomena to be recorded in all their variety under this heading. They are the regular phenomena connected with having and raising children. The problem of population itself is proof of the fundamental and universal drive, for even in the most primitive cultures there are means—birth control, abortion, and infanticide—to limit population. And sexual activity almost everywhere flourishes outside marriage as well as within it. But people want children and they usually devote considerable effort to bringing up their children. From the point of view of egoistic theories of human action, the whole business will have to be explained by some implausible account, or it may be absurd, but nevertheless it goes on, for very few people really are consistently egoistic.

Now someone may be willing to grant the primary and distinct place of procreation among a group of fundamental human goods, and he may grant us as well that these goods provide the starting point for practical reason when it sets out to articulate possible human acts. But he still will ask how these fundamental goods provide a practical standard of right and wrong. How, he will wish to know, do the principles that render human acts possible determine that a proposed act will fall in one or the other of these contrary moral classes?

One proposal is to try to see how each proposed act would in fact affect the realization of all the basic goods, to add up the good and subtract the bad effects, and by means of such a moral calculus to judge whether the action ought to be done or not. This suggestion might seem plausible, especially if it is added that one must give greater weight to the goods that are higher in dignity—e. g., to friendship rather than to life—and that the effects to be measured are the actual consequences as they impinge upon persons, and benefit or harm them.

However, the suggestion will not work. In the first place, it is impossible to know what the actual effects of actions will be unless one limits the inquiry somewhere. In the second place, and what is more important, it is impossible to subject to a common measure various concrete consequences in regard to diverse goods. For example, while friendship as such un-

doubtedly is more valuable than life itself, since friendship presupposes life, and adds much more perfection to it, one cannot measure the value of a hero's life against the value of the community when the hero lays down his life for some undeterminable benefit to the community. Heroism is possible, but moral calculation can never render it intelligible.

In the third place, and what is still more important, the theory that proposes to measure concrete consequences in order to assess the moral value of proposed acts also involves an unavoidable element of arbitrariness. For which consequences are to be considered? The consequences upon myself alone? That is egoism, a completely arbitrary position. The consequences upon all others who will actually be affected by the act? This alternative seems more reasonable, yet it too is arbitrary, as will readily appear if we reflect upon the various degrees of responsibility for others that we all recognize. Our own family, our friends, and strangers do not hold equal place in our affection, and no one seriously maintains that they should. Moreover, shall we consider all those who now are alive, or must we not consider also those who may yet live after us? The latter cannot be disregarded altogether, and this is apparent in politics, for example, where we provide not only for ourselves but also for our posterity.

In the fourth place, and what is most important, the theory that right and wrong depend on actual effects upon the realization of the basic goods runs directly counter to the facts of everyone's experience of moral obligation. In reality, no one considers that act alone to be right which results in the greatest net good. Such a position leaves no room for acts better than those which are merely right. Yet we all admit considerable room for heroism—acts good *beyond* the call of duty. Nor do we readily approve an act as right, however good its total consequences may be, if it directly violates some one of the basic goods. That is why utilitarians, whose theory is susceptible to attack, for instance, for allowing innocent life to be violated, always try to provide protections for it and to find some grounds in the consequences for other human goods for

excluding such violations. That also is why the secular world is so interested in the present intramural controversy among Catholics over contraception. No one who practices contraception can be completely easy about it, and even unbelievers feel the Church's staunch condemnation as an irritating reminder that endangers their ease of conscience.

The attempt to determine right and wrong in human acts by an appeal to their concrete consequences—shown by all these reasons to be inadequate—seems to me to rest upon a misconception of the very nature of morality and its essential conditions. Moral acts are man's own contrivance; moral agency is the adventure of human existence. It follows that the moral standard cannot be simply factual, whether the facts be past, present, or predicted. The moral standard must be ideal. Moral acts are the creatures of freedom; to judge right and wrong by actual consequences would be to reduce morality to technique. Moral life is a progress open toward infinite self-transcendence; if the ultimate principle for our discrimination of right and wrong were actual consequences human life would have finite limits. Man not only must be engaged in his present act, he also must be detached from its particular effects, or he shall never attain beyond a finite good. Moral life is autonomous and moral maturity is perfect autonomy—self-directedness—but if the standard were concrete consequences man would always have to look for signs outside himself to use for his norm. That is all human action could amount to if man's intelligence were no more than a better way of doing the work of instinct, if man's will were capable only of following paths laid out for it by nature, and incapable of proposing its own destination to itself.

Instead of the measure of actual effects, I defend a quite different way in which fundamental human goods determine the rightness and wrongness of human acts. The fundamental human goods must be viewed as participations in Goodness Itself, which is the only adequate norm of a will open to infinite self-transcendence. The fundamental human goods make it possible for practical reason to begin its work, and to articulate

possible lines of action. They underlie the structure of every human act that anyone proposes to do. And every act that is fully human therefore will be good, provided only that it does not involve the will in setting itself against some human good. For one would never be willing to oppose any fundamental human good unless he had been willing, at least implicitly, to substitute some single good or some one kind of good for the true and only adequate norm, Goodness Itself.

The good man need not pursue every possible good—in fact, he cannot do so. But he must avoid directly violating any of the fundamental goods. Thus some kinds of acts are intrinsically immoral, for some kinds of acts necessarily include in themselves a turning against some basic good, an aversion which also inevitably implies an aversion from Goodness Itself.

This standard is a dynamic and an existential one. What is required for the goodness of a human act is not that it have the best possible consequences, but that it proceed from a truly good will, a heart bent upon all the human goods as the images of Goodness Itself. Such a moral standard alone befits the dignity and freedom of man. This standard requires of human intelligence only that some manner of attaining some good be found, not that impossible calculations be completed. This standard does not define a good attainable once and for all by limited means, but it keeps the person open and it presses him on toward the Infinite Good beyond the human self and beyond all the particular goods that mankind can comprehend and surpass. This standard can be internalized in good will, and brought to life in a personality integrated around such a will. Yet the standard conforms to our experience of moral judgment, for it leaves open wide ranges of alternative acts that would be more or less good although quite different from one another. There is no arbitrariness about the standard I defend, for it is simply an orientation toward all the possible goals of human effort, insofar as they represent man's total possible participation in Goodness Itself. Nothing is omitted, nothing is excluded, except partiality and exclusion itself. The goods accessible to man can direct his effort if his supreme aspiration

is for the Good Itself. The quantity of good effected could direct human effort only if man's supreme aspiration were for quantity itself. Yet even infinite quantity is finite reality. Why freeze man in the finitude of calculation of consequences when he should be freed into the open ocean of self-transcendence toward Infinite Goodness?

A morality that judges in terms of actual consequences either must know the *ultimate* good for man and judge acts by their consequences for that good, or it will be arbitrary. No such morality can admit that the ultimate good transcends human comprehension, or all its calculation would become impossible. Such a morality has two alternatives: with presumption to assume that man himself can *make* the ultimate meaning of reality or, with despair to set aside ultimate meaning as irrelevant. Contemporary man oscillates so rapidly between the two alternatives that he almost seems to have succeeded in synthesizing them. The result is that there is nothing so like man's image of God as man's image of himself—fully competent to know good and evil, to discern the two one from the other, but incompetent to master the necessities of existence, wherein freedom is fulfilled only by honest acquiescence in the inevitability of evil as the price of some greater good.

Now let us consider contraception. I do not think of contraception as if it were an act already given, the moral judgment on which would be made apart from and after the understanding of the act. No, I am concerned with a human act, an act which is performed through a specific choice. It is a mode of behavior selected by someone engaging in sexual intercourse to prevent or to make improbable the initial attainment of the procreative good that otherwise would follow from his sexual act. The very meaning of this act includes a basic human good. The act precisely is a choice to behave in a way effectively contrary to that good.

I do not condemn contraception because of its bad consequences. No doubt it sometimes has bad consequences for various human goods, and then if those consequences are noticed, this sort of behavior will be condemned more easily.

But I point to something bad that is essential to the act. Contraception involves setting the will directly against a basic human good, and this implies foreclosure against some aspect of human good as good and a consequent aversion from Goodness Itself. The first bad consequence is that one who chooses contraception loses purity of heart. He is willing to violate one good when only a principle seems to be at stake, and thus in principle he is willing to violate other goods, for there is no more compelling reason not to violate other goods unless it be a consideration of balanced consequences. One cannot make just one exception to the principle that he will adhere to goods as such and be faithful in regarding them as his norm. The very same considerations which lead one to violate a fundamental good by approving contraception tell equally in favor of violating another fundamental good—life itself—in difficult cases. Either one admits intrinsic immorality or one rejects it. Either one admits that human practical wisdom is bound by the basic human goods that man can discern, or one claims sufficient knowledge of the ultimate end of man to employ it as a standard for moral judgment. Either one admits he is a creature or one claims to be God.

Some assert that to insist upon the inviolability of basic human goods in every particular case is to sacrifice the actual to the merely possible, and the latter they equate, like good nominalists, with the utterly unreal. But the true issue is not between actuality and possibility. All the standards for human action are in themselves ideals, not existent actualities. To fix one's sights upon the actually existent is to despair of all progress and to surrender the idea of human life as self-transcending creativity in freedom. I do not say that one should not practice contraception as if it would violate the right of a child as yet unconceived to exist. The possible child has no rights, of course, but to offer this as an argument in defense of contraception is narrow-minded legalism. I do not say the statement is legalism, but the use of it as an objection is such, for it reveals the presupposition that good and evil occur only in cases where duties are fulfilled or rights are violated.

This is not so. Justice is a virtue, but it is only one virtue, and to reduce morality to justice is to omit everything that makes justice a matter of morality and not merely a social convention. Contraception does not violate justice; it is not against anyone's rights (assuming, of course, that both parties agree to it). It violates one of the basic human goods, and since it occurs in the domain of sexual activity, the virtue it offends against is chastity, which is the virtue for serving all the relevant goods by engaging in sexual activity or refraining from it according as diverse kinds of acts, various intentions, and differing circumstances may require.

However, it will be asserted that the act defined above as contraception does not imply a direct violation of the procreative good. After all, other goods are also at stake in sexual intercourse, and the procreative good itself is complex, so that what violates it in one respect may indirectly promote it in another.

To understand the answer to this kind of objection one must keep steadily in mind the fact that the act of contraception is one which we ourselves articulate. In order to contrive it, some good must provide reason a starting point, and we could not choose the act except because it seems to serve that good. Yet we cannot arrive at a fully reasonable judgment by adhering to the implications of one principle and ignoring those of another. Sometimes, we quite rightly act in ways which do considerable concrete damage to instances of basic human goods, but then we are acting without willing contrary to these goods as principles. For instance, a man may offer his own life by risking it to save a friend, and nothing could be more morally acceptable than this. But in such an act he defines what he does in terms of the good at which he aims, and he only indirectly wills the possible bad consequence for his own life.

To indirectly will such bad consequences becomes more difficult if they follow from one's own behavior—if one's own choice is implicated in efficiently causing them. But even in such a case one might be able reasonably to interpret his act according to the good it serves, and then he need not set his will

against the principle to an instance of which the bad consequences of the act accrue. From this point of view we can understand the possible moral acceptability of the conception-preventing behavior of a woman who has been raped. If the act is morally good, it must be understood as self-defensive, not as anti-procreative. The victim in a case of this kind has not placed herself within the ambit of the procreative good; this value in no way informs her behavior because it does not direct her choice at all.

However, if someone does choose to engage in sexual activity which may lead to conception, he already has defined his action in the light of the procreative good. Not that in every act of intercourse this good must necessarily be sought nor that it can always actually follow. No one claims that either is the case. But an act is not fully human if it is not fully understood, and such sexual activity cannot be understood without understanding its reference to procreation. Indeed, there would be no point in trying to prevent conception if one did not see the relevance of one's action to it. In such a case, therefore, an act that does nothing except insofar as it effectively prevents conception is formulated precisely as contra-procreative.

It is useless to object that the contraceptive act really is intended to serve other goods. Undoubtedly, it is intended to promote indirectly some good or other. But the contraceptive act in and of itself does not promote any other good or prevent any other evil. If it did so, we could define it differently than we do, and then we might reasonably accept it in that other definition. However, we cannot define our acts arbitrarily, or merely in terms of results, or merely by the end intended. To try to omit from the principles applied in judging a human act any good which cannot be omitted in understanding the act, is incompatible with the function of human goods as starting points of practical reason.

Nor is it any help to assert that the good one hopes to promote is procreation itself—i. e., the education of previously born children. For this good is not really promoted by the

contraceptive act. The act of contraception itself happens to be singularly sterile. Contraception never educated anyone, although in the order of actual effects contraception undoubtedly can be an efficient way of preventing births which ought not occur, and where the "ought not" is determined by a sound judgment of the good of children previously born. But killing the innocent also can save lives. Lying about fundamental truths can perhaps serve the truth, at least scientists working under tyrants have thought so. Even oppression is claimed by many to be necessary for freedom. One need not look beyond the sad history of America's treatment of its native population for a plausible instance. Are we to approve life-saving abortion, truth-serving lies, liberating oppression? If not, there is no better reason to approve procreative contraception.

To complete my argument, much more would have to be said. After all, one cannot sketch the foundations of ethical theory and a difficult application of it in a short paper except by using broad strokes. But there is one more point that should be discussed here, both because it is important in itself and because my view on it has been distorted and misrepresented repeatedly during the last two years.

My argument against contraception in no way questions the value of true sexual love. Sexual intercourse can be useful for the promotion of marital unity and then any married couple do well to engage in it even if procreation happens to be impossible. Such intercourse in itself can be a better human act than intercourse used specifically as a means to procreation. Moreover, genuine conjugal friendship—which, of course, ought not to be identified with the act of conjugal intercourse—is superior to procreation if the two goods as ideal values are compared absolutely to one another, for procreation only initiates the human journey toward self-transcendence, while genuine conjugal friendship presupposes many steps along this path and easily conducts the couple further toward their goal. Moreover, the good of procreation is the primary end of marriage only in the sense that procreation specifies the marital relationship, and by giving it a meaning grounds its possibility.

But once marriage as an institution is defined by procreation, the marital unity which becomes possible is of itself an instance of a fundamental human good. So good is marital unity directly and of itself that marriages for which procreation happens to be impossible nevertheless share the true nature and value of marriage. Their moral relation to procreation suffices, and this relation consists in the fact that in marrying the couple consent to a mutual, exclusive, permanent exchange of rights to engage in conjugal acts—i. e., acts which in their structure *as human acts* are suited to procreation.

Still contraception is to be condemned. Why? Not because I value marital love less than those who say they want to help it gain strength by prescribing the tonic of contraception. Rather because the position I have taken values marital love more. In reality, contraception does not strengthen marital love; contraception only makes it easier to have frequent orgasms in sexual acts which simulate conjugal intercourse. However, orgasm is not identical with love, although the two are by no means in necessary opposition to one another.

The following, at least, is true. If anyone suffers from so strong an urge for orgasm that he cannot forego it without this abstinence causing trouble for himself or without his behavior causing trouble for others, then the sexual act by which orgasm is obtained is not an ideally free and generous gift of self. If one acts with full freedom in choosing to give himself by intercourse in an act of love, then he also has such an ability of self-restraint that he could have chosen to abstain without bad consequences had his devotion to all the basic goods required it. Contraceptive intercourse at best would be an ambiguous act of love. Is it the person saying: "I love you"? Or is the libido saying: "I want release"? I think that the force of necessity is something quite different from the choice of freedom. And I think anyone who is impartial can notice that many Catholics who are defending contraception are trading on the ambiguity of the "act of love." They would be ashamed to try to defend contraception used in the service of mere physiological urge or psychological addiction. But they

would be unable to defend it as necessary for the service of true acts of love. Hence they confuse the two.

Sexual capacity emerges at puberty and breaks upon the growing personality with a power that is almost explosive. Perhaps even for physiological reasons, it is difficult to integrate this new function. Moreover, human sexual capacity is extremely plastic, and psychologically it is available for use as a sphere of displacement into a mechanical self-gratification which allows one more or less completely to avoid facing the risks and opportunities of a fully human life. Sex is the first good we encounter which we can form as an idol to replace in our hopes and dreams the fullness of perfection really to be found only through infinite self-transcendence. At least as things go at present, the sexual mechanism almost always is set into play to afford such a displacement and it gains a more or less firm hold on the emerging moral consciousness of the child. Thus moral intelligence is confronted with an incomprehensible sphere organized by the semi-human acts of sexual automatism.

Such pseudo-sex begins easily with masturbation, for if the child shrinks from trying to master the obstacles in the way of self-transcendence, he can at least find solace in the self-gratification of worshiping his own phallic idol. If girls seem to masturbate less than boys, this may be mainly because the whole of a woman's body is her sexual instrument, and so the perversion of sex into a mechanism for self-gratification is more generalized in girls than in boys. This pseudo-sexual activity persists in adolescent sexual acts, such as heterosexual petting and sometimes also homosexual activities. The same perversion of true sexual love most commonly matures into a habit of regular and mechanical sexual acts which is supported by the practice of contraception.

Such semi-human pseudo-sexual acts are altogether different from the free gift of one's whole bodily self in genuine marital love, but for almost all of us the complete exclusion of automatism from true sexual love is a long and hard struggle. The remedy for the difficulties of marriage is love, more and more

genuine love, including the perfection of fully human acts of authentic sexual love. That perfection, which promises ever grander fulfillments of our human desire for ecstasy—fulfillments such as contraceptive couples will never experience—that perfection, which carries with it freedom for the sexual act in the joyous ability of perfect self-restraint without the slightest repression—that perfection is too lovely, too truly and humanly spontaneous to be confused with genital automatism. Genital automatism expressing itself in semi-human pseudo-sexual acts is an enemy of reason and of moral law, but only because it is an enemy of genuine sexual love, whose spontaneity is that of choosing to give a gift, and not that of a compulsive urge for self-gratification.

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