

# THE MORAL PROBLEM OF CONTRACEPTION

by

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### INTRODUCTION

In a discussion of the moral problem of contraception it seems wiser to avoid as far as possible the use of terms “nature”, “natural”, “natural law”. The variety of meanings attached to these terms is so great that their continued use only leads to greater misunderstanding. In any case, it should prove possible to exploit the meanings while avoiding the terms. Consequently, in what follows we will avoid using the terms until the position on contraception has been presented. The ambiguity of the terms will be discussed in the final section.

Further to the simplification of this discussion no attempt will be made to enter into the debates that fill the literature on the subject of contraception. While reference to current writing will be made where this seems helpful we will avoid second-order entanglement in talk about contraception. This is not to deny the value of such talk, but our aim is to reap its fruits rather than to sow fresh seed.

As will be clear, the entire discussion turns around different aspect of human action as expressing response to value. (1) After delimiting the precise issues which are at stake, we define what we understand by the contraceptive act and set forth a brief statement of position together with clarifications. (2) In defense of the position we examine a) the difference between a morality of meanings and a morality of consequences in their approach to value; b) the necessity of achieving adequate response to value in human behavior; c) the significance of the distinction between direct and indirect voluntareity. (3) Consideration of the alternative to contraception opens up the deeper dimensions of response to value and provides the occasion for discussing the role of revelation, magisterial teaching end individual conscience. (4) Difficulties are analyzed. (5) Some reflections are made on the development of response to value at the level of society, in the life of the individual and in the philosophy of morals. (6) Finally, the ambiguities of the terms “nature”, “natural”, and “natural law” are explored.

### Sec. (1) THE CONTRACEPTIVE ACT

## LIMITING THE ISSUE

At the outset it will be well to exclude certain issues which are not here in debate. The issue is not the morality of controlling the population of countries and regions. One can easily conceive of circumstances in which control of numbers would occupy a legitimate place within a comprehensive scheme to close the gap between numbers and resources. Neither would it be difficult to find instances in which population control is a tired refusal to face up to deeper sources of want and deprivation. Bringing the question to still smaller compass, the issue is not that of family limitation in a particular household. Family limitation could be an act of high moral virtue, even obligatory in some circumstances. It might also be an act of gross selfishness. Lastly, the question is not whether it is right or wrong to interfere with physical processes in general (1. 1)<sup>1</sup>-. It is sometimes very good to do so, and sometimes very evil. The question which is under discussion here is not any of these. Rather it is the question whether a particular method of population control, a particular method of family limitation, a particular mode of intervention in a particular physical process is morally good or morally evil. More precisely, the question is whether the contraceptive act is inescapably immoral in every case. All will agree that the contraceptive act is sometimes immoral. No one contends that the indiscriminate practice of contraception is morally worthy. Indiscriminate practice may, indeed, be widespread, but no one defends it. No, the debate is between those who deny any legitimacy to the contraceptive act and those who concede it some. Needless to say, those who take the more restrictive point of view have not thereby ruled out of court the other issues mentioned above, and it would be stupid to accuse them of doing so. But these issues are separate questions not dealt with here. Having used the term “contraceptive act” we must now make its meaning more precise.

## CONTRACEPTIVE ACT DEFINED

Morality accrues to human behavior, not to physical events (1.2). “Shedding blood” is a physiological event and as such is morally neutral, but “murder” is a human act with moral significance. Clinical description of a contraceptive relationship is insufficient as a basis for discussing the moral issue. We must define a morally significant complex of human behavior which we will label the “contraceptive act”. The following description would seem to be adequate to permit a judgement of morality. The contraceptive act is a double barreled act in which two choices are coupled together. One is the free decision on the part of husband and wife to engage in sexual relations. The other is the decision to make the relationship certainly sterile (1.3) by a directly willed positive act. It is the combination of the two choices, not the second considered apart from the first, that constitutes the contraceptive act for the purposes of our discussion. Obviously, the two choices need not take place at the same chronological moment. They need be linked together only by intent. Nor is there any need to make any distinction as to methods by which the relationship is made to be sterile — physical, chemical, or simply “natural” (onanism). Notice, too, that we are speaking of husband and wife. We are concerned with the conjugal act (1.4). Contraceptive relationship between the unmarried contains an additional morally significant choice, namely, the decision to detach sexual activity from the wider interpersonal context which we call the covenant of marriage. It is sufficient for our purposes to limit consideration to the conjugal act.

## POSITION STATED

With this definition in hand, we can now go on to state the following position. The combination of these two

choices is morally wrong; not by reason of any extrinsic consequences that flow from it, but in view of the meaning intrinsically inherent in it, which is a devaluing of a basic human good — the power to initiate human life — by treating it in a pragmatic fashion. Clearly, there are extrinsic consequences that flow from the contraceptive act. There are ulterior purposes which it serves. Equally clear is it that the consequences are in service of, and the purposes in response to high human values (recall that we have ruled out the issue of indiscriminate use as not being a subject of serious debate). But the point here is that the antecedent to the extrinsic consequences of the double choice and apart from ulterior purposes there is already present a meaning intrinsic to the double choice and upon which it founders morally.

### SOME CLARIFICATIONS

A few comments are called for by way of clarification. Note that the trouble with the contraceptive act is said to be that the spouses choose to make the relation sterile (more accurately, prevent it from possibly being fertile), not that they choose a sterile relation. There is nothing immoral about choosing a sterile relation. Older spouses do so all the time. But choosing to sterilize a relation to which they freely consented “means” quite differently in relation to value. Though the subject of rhythm will be considered later (sect. 4), it may be well to insist at this point that the moral difference between rhythm and contraception (1.5) has nothing to do with the mere presence or absence of artifice. In fact, both practices employ artifice, but in the one case to discover the presence of sterility, in the other case to secure its presence. The resulting extrinsic consequences might readily be the same in both cases (equally worthy motives of family limitation), but the inner meaning is radically different.

Notice again that nothing is said about the hopes, the wishes, the desires of the spouses not to have children. Such desires are common to both rhythm and contraception, and — since we have ruled out indiscriminate practice in either case are in themselves laudable. That which distinguishes the two practices from the point of view of moral meaning is the way in which the desires are translated into action — effective sterilizing in the one case, but not in the other.

A further point is that the sterilized relation must have been freely chosen in the first place. Hence, the contraceptive act as defined is not verified in the behavior of one who takes conception- preventing measures in the face of the danger of forced relations (rapist, drunken spouse, etc.).

Lastly there is the question of sterilization that flows from a directly willed positive act. Thus, for instance, the person who takes annovulant pills for therapeutic reasons, though they choose relations freely and have caused them to be sterile, have not done so by a directly willed act. Their behavior does not come under the contraceptive act as defined. Nor is this mere juggling with words. No discussion of morality can proceed without precise definition of moral objects. just as “murder” does not include every form of blood-shedding, so contraception does not include every form of conception preventing behavior. As we remarked at the outset, morality accrues to human behavior and human behavior is more than physical event. It is the confusing of behavior with event which leads to the reprehensible kind of moral absolutism, something quite distinct from the absolutism that results from the careful definition of some moral objects.

## Sec. (2) RESPONSE TO VALUE IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR

### a) A MORALITY OF MEANINGS VERSUS A MORALITY OF CONSEQUENCES

The position states that the contraceptive act is morally wrong, not in view of extrinsic consequences, but in view of intrinsic meanings. This statement opens up the gulf which more and more separates traditional morality from contemporary thinking. So strong is the pragmatic stance towards human affairs that the question commonly asked about a proposed course of action is, "What good or what harm will it do?" rather than, "How does it signify?" Not that meaning and significance are ignored, but that they are measured in terms of factors extrinsic to the deed itself. (2.1). Assuredly, there is more to the meaning of a deed than is expressed by the deed itself. The point here is there is not less. The fact that an action may have no harmful consequence, may indeed yield quite profitable dividends of response to value, is no guarantee that the action already in its own objectivity (2.2) may not signify rather badly. If I should want to commit adultery, or if I should blaspheme (in the strict sense of the word), the consequences are usually negligible. Life goes on as usual. Nevertheless, I have put myself in a condition of negative response to the good, to say the least. The consequences of the act are trivial, but the significance to value is profound. There is nothing that context can do to erase the already existing meaning. Of course, the opposite case is also possible. An act considered in itself may be so devoid of significance for value, so lacking in moral objectivity, so neutral in meaning, that only an appeal to further consequences will serve to specify its human meanings; e.g., rain-making. But whether this is the case will appear only after the act has been scrutinized for inner meaning.

The point is well expressed by McCabe (2.3)

"Now human behavior is just the study of behavior in so far as it says something or fails to say something. This is not to say that ethics is uninterested in behavior in so far as it gets something done, that ethics is not concerned with the consequences of my acts, but its precise concern is with my acts as meaningful. The two are closely related. It is because of the effect on you of having a knife stuck into you that my act of knifing you has the meaning that it does, but the connection may be quite loose.

Our contention here is that by reason of the double choice, to engage in conjugal relations and to effectively secure their sterility, the contraceptive act means badly. It gives a response which is directed adversely against a basic human value. The power to initiate human life is not simply set aside as would be the case if continence were chosen. It is simultaneously invited and pushed aside by the double choice of the contraceptive act. The first choice propels the spouses in a direction which points towards the possibility of initiating life. The second choice effectively closes off this possibility. The combination of the two speaks a positive "No" to a basic human good. The act is not just expressive of a non-choice. It expresses an anti-choice. Underlying the anti-choice is the pragmatic handling of value in the sense that a human good is viewed primarily in terms of "good for". It is treated instrumentally. Action is taken against it for the sake of another human good, leading one to surmise that when at other times the spouses act favorably towards the power to initiate human life, it would still be because it was viewed in terms of "good for". The last remark is important as indicating the heart of the matter.

It would be easy to slip into the error of thinking that if only the conjugal act were physiologically unhampered, everything would be fine — as if the trouble lay in the “physics” of the act as such, rather than in the “physics” as revelatory of a pragmatic stance towards a human good; as if the same pragmatism might not also inhabit a “proconceptive” act. But at least the, proconceptive act is able to be free of the pragmatic flaw. The contraceptive act is not. Therein lies the heart of the matter.

Such is the meaning that is inseparable from the directly willed and effective sterilizing of the conjugal act in one who freely chooses to engage in it. This is the meaning which cannot not be asserted in the double choice. What we are contending here is that the body-language of conjugal sexual relationship is so value-laden in its objective meaning that the contraceptive act is inescapably “anti-talk” about a basic human good. In another sense of the word the partners “mean” well. Their attention is focussed on the further beneficial consequences of their action. But they are not listening to what their action is “saying”. This is not to find fault with their wish to achieve good, but to point out that it is accomplished at the expense of the “rhetoric” of action. To which, no doubt, the pragmatic response would be, “Rhetoric be damned”. There precisely is the point of ethics. Ethics does for the whole of life what literary criticism does for a small part (2. 4) — it educates towards style. But style bakes no bread. Hence, the scorn for the rhetoric of behavior. Like blasphemy, lapses in the rhetoric of behavior hurt nobody. Nobody, that is, except the one who utters them. But if the contraceptive act “speaks” pragmatically about the good, what is so bad about that? To this point we now turn.

#### b) ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO VALUE

Many arguments against the contraceptive act are based upon the limited domain of man over creation. He may exercise technique over a wide range but there are domains where he must yield to the higher dominion of God. That is, there are some things which he should not do. The statement is not false, but it always sounds a little arbitrary, a fence erected in an open space. Perhaps the truth contained in it could be better expressed in literary or rhetorical terms. There are some meanings to which a man should never give utterance, because they “blaspheme” the good. The point is worth considering. One of the most essential elements of personality, says von Hildebrand (2.5), is the consciousness that we owe to value a due response. This response is due on the part of the person because the value is such as it is in itself, not for the sake of what he can get out of it for himself. The ultimate in such response is the adoration of supreme value — God. But long before we meet supreme value face to face, we find it already manifested in personal and finite human values. To these we owe an unambiguous response in the sense that we must never be caught in an anti-choice. At stake here is a man’s openness beyond himself and to supreme value (2.6).

By fidelity of response to personal human values, the theocentric man is distinguished from the egocentric. The egocentric man does not abandon himself to the world of meaning and value for its own sake (2.7). He deals with human values on a pragmatic basis. He is quite prepared to aim at some high human good (family limitation) by means of an action which devalues another human good (the power to initiate human life). Such a response to the good is inadequate because it refuses to treat a basic human good at the level of an ideal and for its own sake. There is nothing which separates such an utterance from the failure to achieve self — transcendence (2.8). Difficulties against this view suggest themselves right away. They will be considered later (see 4d). Just now, we must turn to the significance of direct and indirect voluntareity in relation to the

adequacy of response to the good.

### c) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIRECT INTENTION

We have argued that the contraceptive act is intrinsically wrong, and, therefore, never justifiable. The act cannot escape a meaning against a human good. At the highest point, where the doer can finally break through the containment within the finite good, he falls back. But we must now note that one of the components of the contraceptive act is the direct positive character of the act of will by which the sterility of the relation is chosen. In the absence of this component there may be room for legitimate conception- preventing behavior. There are cases in which the sterility of the relation falls outside the scope of effective intention, cases of so-called indirect voluntareity.

The assumption is commonly made, as Grisez points out (2.9), that if an act is to be intrinsically evil, it must be so simply by reason of the outward behavior itself apart from intention. But this is to assume that the internal act of will may be discounted in judging the morality of the external act — the opposite error to that of thinking that only the intention need be considered (on this, see 4b). As we have seen, the act of will entered into the definition of the contraceptive act, and together with the outward behavior, constituted an intrinsic relation to value in the act. Now we note that other situations are possible in which effective conception- preventing behavior can be present but not as falling within the scope of direct intention. It is there incidentally.

Foreseen effects of behavior that do not guide and shape it, fall outside the scope of intention. In going to the dentist, I foresee that I will suffer pain, but I do not, therefore, intend it. It is my own doing in the sense of being a unavoidable concomitant of my decision. It is no accident, but that does not make it intentional in the strict sense of the word. (Note that one can use “intentional” in another sense, viz., non-accidental). I cannot be accused of masochism. In the same way, if conception-preventing behavior should fall outside the scope of intention, I cannot be accused of the contraceptive act. But for this to be the case, the conception-preventing must be a genuine concomitant, and, therefore, not sought as an end in itself nor related through a casual link to an end which is intended, as in the contraceptive act.

Extensive discussions of the subject of intention are to be found in the literature (2. 10). We will not pursue them here. Our concern is with the necessity that response to value should be adequate. Is the will of the doer reaching moral self-abandonment through a disinterested embracing of higher values, or is it still considering every human good as a means. Only analysis of the act of intending can decide what it is that the will is wrapped around. That is our reason for insisting that what may often seem like casuistic hair-splitting about “direct” and “indirect” is in reality a sensitiveness to the deepest meaning of human action.

### Sec. (3) BEYOND ETHICS

#### CONFLICT SITUATIONS

The alternative to the contraceptive act is continence. It may be greater, it may be less. We have in mind here that degree of containment of the sexual expression of conjugal love which would be necessary to secure the

modest fertility at which discriminating contraception is aimed. So outlandish is this suggestion to the average person that we must first hasten to plead its cause, leaving it for later (see 4f) to consider the more obvious objections .

Certainly the ability to contain the deepest human longings associated with other departments of human life has always been regarded as the noblest and the most ennobling whenever it was exercised out of regard for response to value. Thus a man who cannot speak the truth without hurting another prefers to remain silent at some cost to himself rather than lie. A man who engages in business prefers to remain poor and disadvantaged rather than imitate the sharp practice of his unscrupulous competitors. A man who is not permitted to remain in his own country except under conditions which would amount to a treasonable rejection of its cultural heritage prefers to go into exile. A country which refuses to engage in obliteration-type warfare against an enemy devoid of such scruples chooses to go down in defeat. These are the finest moments of moral life when man refuses to manipulate one good to achieve another, when he honors a value by dying to it, loses all the world but saves his soul. Does not the same hold true in relation to the dilemmas of conjugal life?

What makes for anguish in all such cases is that the good person is caught up in conflict situations which are not of his own making. The hurt that flows from speaking the truth, the unscrupulous practices of the business world, the unfair choice given between treason and exile, the savage tactics of the enemy — all of these put the good man at a disadvantage unfairly. Things should not be that way! But they are! The good man could extricate himself by actions which would amount to a dishonoring of some essential human value — of truth, of justice, of patriotism, of humaneness. Consequence-wise he would be 'ahead'. He would be freed from the burden of silence, the miseries of poverty, the barrenness of exile, the horrors of defeat. But meaning-wise he would have responded against the good of truth, mocked at good of justice, betrayed the good of fatherland and attacked the good of innocent life. He would have gained one good but only at the expense of value. This he refuses to do. For this we have always admired the hero. Not that we would have despised him if he had failed to meet the challenge. After all, which of us could be sure of his own behavior in such circumstances? But we would have been saddened by his failure. Conversely we are heartened when he rises to the point of letting all go for the sake of value. Self — transcendence makes a man nearer to the gods.

How we ask can a man be so unpragmatic; so idealistic about the good? Certainly not because he is carried along by the strength of mere philosophical argument. Such heroism has always come as the fruit of a life lived in the conviction that there is a dimension of existence beyond the present, one in which the losses endured in fidelity to the good would prove not to have been in vain. The honoring of finite human values would dispose a man to receive the vision of supreme value. (3. 1)

Likewise in the present instance, married persons are caught up in conflict situations where, to mention only one difficulty, human population is running ahead of resources. The resulting economic pressures are not of their own making. More likely they can be laid at the door of past human improvidence, maladministration of governments, economic exploitation and greed, reckless breeding. Whatever their origin, married persons could extricate themselves from the situation by actions which would involve them in a dishonoring of a basic good. Consequence-wise the contraceptive act would free them from pressing burdens, but meaning-wise they would have given a hostile response to human value. Should they prefer the silence, the poverty, the exile, the defeat

of continence? But how could this be done? Certainly not within the framework of a merely scientific or philosophic view of man's world. It would be possible at all only within the context of a theological view of world salvation (3. 2) which without denying a place to man's scientific contribution to problem solving would insist at the same time that there are limits to the role of human action, determined by the need of adequate response to human value, and that there is a saving efficacy in the passion which endures out of deference to the good, and that in the end it is god who saves the world. What is needed in the face of the situation of conflict is a theology of morals, embracing a doctrine of grace, a view of death, an eschatology. Ethics alone will not answer.

## REVELATION

We have reached the point where revelation and church enter the problem of contraception. The question is often asked "where in the Scriptures is anything said about contraception" and if, after sundry arguments about the story of Onan, nothing definite is said then is not the Catholic position a mere ethical theory and as such outside the competence of the magisterium whose only (sic) concern is with revealed truth?" That kind of query reflects a fundamentalist view of revelation seen as giving a set of specific answers to human problems, a kind of appendix to the ethics of reason (3 .3). It would be much closer to the reality to see in revelation a disclosure on a broad scale of the mystery of the world's creation-redemption. The ability of an ethical position to dovetail into this broad context would then provide a negative test of the validity of the position. Thus in order for revelation to enter into the debate on contraception it is not necessary that one find somewhere in the bible a discussion of the specific problem of contraception. What is necessary is that reason have discerned in the contraceptive act the problem of response to value at a cost to human nature and then to find in the sources of revelation a wisdom concerning response to value at the cost of human loss and pain, even death.

This is the point at which any purely rational system of morals begins to fail. Up to a point human reason, even in a fallen world, is able to discern what is the good and noble course of action. Where assurance falters and courage fails is at the juncture where fidelity to one human good can be retained only by foregoing another value that is held dear. At that point the awful question is posed, "Is it good for the world's creation-redemption that a man should lose out, perhaps without hope of recovery in this world?" Before such a question reason is perplexed. On the one hand the call of reason is to respect a basic human good. On the other there is dismay at the prospect of having to relinquish another. How then is the world going to be saved? Should we "take care of ourselves" by sacrificing some good? Obviously what is needed is an assurance about the world's salvation. It is at such junctures in the moral life of man that the recurring theme of salvation, rising to its height in the person of Jesus speaks out in favor of letting go one's grip on some human good in faith and hope and love. Up to that point technique and manipulation. Beyond that point, when response to human value is at stake, an admission that the saving of the human situation is ultimately God's gift rather than man's achievement.

Here we must pause a moment. Maybe it is reason that is at fault in posing the dilemma in the first place? Perhaps the good and noble course is to take matters into our own hands, assert power and, if need be, suppress one human good to achieve another? Maybe it is not yet time to invoke the cross ? There is precisely the question before which the Christian people will stand divided. Is this a moment and are these the circumstances where now again, and not for the first time in the history of man's moral life, the question of the cross is raised.

Salvation history is replete with moments of refusal to force a way through at the expense of value, moments of continence, of exile, of penury, even of death. Is this such a moment?

### MAGISTERIUM

Such is the agonizing existential question in the face of which Christian society finds the need of something more than written sources of revelation, which cannot speak for themselves., which have not experienced the new form of the old problem. Something more is needed than divided voices each claiming to speak in the spirit. What Christian society finds need of is a living voice, undivided because single, and authorized to speak in the Spirit; not seeking to suppress debate but capable, having listened, to bring it to resolution; not refereeing arguments but deciding on further direction. Has this not always been the *raison d'être* for a teaching office centered finally in one person? — Sometimes we need a voice, sure and — undivided which will unfold in living actualities the truth which is Christ so that his people may move forward in a dynamic of growth. That the cross is present in the saving of the world and at many moments we know from the history of salvation. That this is such a moment we can know only from a living voice in the Church.

### THE ENCYCLICAL

It is a further question whether that voice has chosen now to speak a word that is irreformable or not (3 .4). If the Pope has not spoken irreformably a moral problem arises as to the extent and limits of the right to dissent. These questions have been treated at length elsewhere and we will not go into them here. Dissent as such is a dull topic, of little interest to those who prefer to ponder the problem of contraception. Our only concern at the moment is to point out the manner in which revelation and magisterium enter into a problem of sexual morality. They are not a mine from which to quarry new arguments. They give assurance about directions in which to probe. (3. 5) When rational argumentation points in a direction where adequate response to finite human value seems impossible without heroic sacrifice we are being confronted with still another facet of the general mystery of death versus survival, of creation-redemption, of discontinuity of world and kingdom. (3 — 6) A revealed word is needed and revelation needs an authentic voice to make a choice of direction. This is not a counsel to abandon reason, but a plea that we must go beyond it.

### CONSCIENCE

Eventually it comes down to the decision of the individual in the face of his conscience. Here it seems desirable to be clear on a distinction. Conscience is the self as advocate praising and blaming one's own behavior. It is not the self as practically intelligent reflecting and judging. Conscience does not tell me what is right and what is wrong, but granted that I already know in some other way what is right or wrong, conscience pleads with me to do the one or to avoid the other. Knowing is another matter. Knowing what is right is a function of the self as practically intelligent, forming moral judgements about situations. The distinction, once grasped, is helpful in avoiding a further misunderstanding. (3.7)

The self as advocate is solitary — alone it speaks to us, approving or condemning us for our response to value or our rejection of it. It is as it were supreme Value speaking in us pleading to be loved for what it is in itself —

as we rightly call it, the Voice of God asking to be chosen in the finite good. But the self as practically intelligent is not solitary. It is communitarian. It is in debate with the practical intelligence of others that we elaborate a judgement of morality. True, it is I who must decide in the concrete what is the right or wrong course of action. I must think for myself. No one else can do it for me. Yet it is not by myself that I do it, but with others. What others? The “others” will certainly include friends and neighbors, teachers, and ultimately, the wisest minds in society. In particular, a Catholic is one who believes that the “others” must include the Word of God acting through his Spirit working in diverse ways. These ways include a magisterium which has a power of definition. For the Catholic a paramount value lies in pursuing the search for value in the Church.

If this much be granted, it will be clear that certain conflicts can arise. There can be a conflict between myself and my conscience, the self as doer and the self as advocate. There can be a conflict between my opinion on contraception, for example, and the magisterial position — the self as practically intelligent and the magisterium as authentic teacher. But it seems incorrect to speak of a conflict between conscience and magisterium, as if conscience rather than my practical intelligence were providing the conflicting opinion. This is the confusion which leads wrongly to investing solitary practical intellect with the majesty that properly belongs to solitary conscience. Solitary conscience must be heeded at all-costs not solitary moral opinion.

In fact, my solitary conscience would rebuke me for acting on a solitary opinion if I judged as most men do, that acting on a solitary opinion bespeaks a lack of response to the basic human good of companionship in knowing. Well then, does opinion cease to be solitary simply when many hold it? Do mere numbers ensure sound moral judgement? Basic to the Catholic tradition is the belief that the solitariness of the human mind is finally relieved only when to friends and neighbors and savants is added the Spirit of God speaking, however rarely, through those whom Jesus has sent. Hence, a Catholic conscience would rebuke its owner if his judgement on contraception were solitary in the sense of apart from any serious consideration of magisterial teaching. Again, this would be a conflict between the person and his conscience regarding his way of forming moral judgement, not between his conscience and the magisterium. Conscience is not violated by a teaching which goes counter to one’s judgement. It is violated by force exerted to make a person do what he judges to be wrong or to prevent him from doing what he judges to be an obligatory good. But teaching, even when forceful, is not force.

We have traced in (2) the effort of reason to locate value in behavior and to give it adequate response. Now we have seen in (3) how in the face of this effort a man is brought face to face with elements of self-transcendence, a kind of death to self for the sake of the good, whose meaning he cannot penetrate short of a revelation, authentically interpreted and conscientiously received. It is time to turn to a consideration of some of the difficulties which such a position naturally raises for the discerning mind.

#### Sec. (4) OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

The objections that are raised against the position on contraception which we have presented above in (2) and (3) fall into two classes. There are those which are directed against the arguments advanced in favor of the position, and there are those which take issue with the consequences. The former are treated below in (a) — (e)

and the latter in (f) — (i).

a) Absoluteness. A general uneasiness arises from the fact that an unlimited moral conclusion ( X is never lawful) is being extracted from a limited behavioral complex ( X is defined as such and such a pair of choices). Surely in some circumstances X might take on a different moral coloration? How can you be so absolute? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that the absolute in question is a negative one. Such absolutes are more easily achieved. Thus, while our knowledge of nutrition and dietetics is severely limited so that it is hard to make absolute statements about what one simply must eat, it can be said with definiteness that prussic acid is a must not. The same is true of many other “poisons”. The practical intellect is more easily able to come up with negative absolutes in the world of the “ought-to-be”. One is reminded here of the parallel situation of the speculative intellect in facing the world of the “to be”. In a limited sample of the finite being the theist can “monstrate” the absolute in being, but again only because of the negative character of understanding reached — that which cannot not be. Mention of the subject of God’s existence prompts the observation that there is some similarity between the endless probing of arguments for the existence of God and the interminable debates about the morality of actions (4. 1). In each case, too, the role of argument in relation to knowledge and practice is that of second-order reflection rather than primary acquisition.

b) Meaning and Intention. More troubling is the contention that whether a sample of behavior be large or small, its meaning is what you choose to put into it by your basic intention. Hence, in the present instance, the act which we have described as “contraceptive” should rather be labelled “family limiting”, “love expressing”, etc. Behind this kind of reasoning there may be present a confusion between two distinctions, that of external act versus internal act of will, and that of means versus end. No external act achieves moral meaning and stature apart from an interior act of will choosing or permitting. But this external internal composition is to be found in both the means and the end, and not just in the end. Each is a moral composite of external- internal act. Each is capable of being good, bad, or indifferent on its own. If means is already possessed of a moral meaning, it retains it even within the totality of means and end. Thus, dope-trafficking does not take the moral coloration of pietas thought it be pursued with the intention of supporting a family. Sometimes, of course, the means are indifferently related to human value. They are said to be “justified” by the good end (this is the original meaning of the phrase). But perhaps it would be more exact to say that the means remain indifferent. Our contention has been that the contraceptive act has a moral coloration of its own, distinct from that of the end (family limitation, etc.), inherently of a certain kind and unable to be negated or transmuted by that of the end intended. (4. 2)

c) Biology and Meaning. Do you mean to say that a mere biological act could have an indelible moral meaning? This is the place in the debate at which one encounters lengthy and perhaps needless discussions about the “naturalistic” fallacy of arguing from “is” to “ought”, from facts to values, from physiology to morality. However, it is becoming less easy to maintain a rigid wall of separation between these opposites. The same unsound Cartesian dualism which separated spirit and matter, mind and body, and eventually subject and object, to breed a long legacy of pseudo-problems of epistemology — that same dualism may also be latent in the effort to effect a radical separation between fact and value, generating pseudo problems in moral philosophy (4.3). Values cannot be reduced to facts, it is true, but neither can the two be separated.

However, it may be permissible to sidestep such issues by simply insisting that the contraceptive act as defined, and about which alone a moral judgement is made, is not a biological act, but a pair of human choices incarnated in a biological act with procreative potentiality. This is the behavior complex which cannot help but express an anti-choice of procreative capacity. It is simply untrue to say that we are dealing with a mere biological act. You might as well say that dope-trafficking is mere commercial transaction.

Moral meaning is not being read into biology. Nevertheless, a change in biology could be significant for morality. Perhaps someday the sexual apparatus in man might become non-generative — at the moment it becomes so in individuals after menopause. But, if so, this would not mean that the contraceptive was now morally good. It would mean that there was no longer a contraceptive act of the kind we are discussing. The second choice mentioned in its definition would no longer present itself to be made.

d) Values and God. Granted that the contraceptive act is not merely biological and that it “means badly” in reference to a basic human value, a further difficulty presents itself. Why should the fact that the act “means badly” towards human value be regarded as decisive against the doing of the act? Are we not guilty of absolutising a human value? Why should it be so wrong to “speak” against a human value? This difficulty comes close to the very heart of the matter. Close attention has been given to it (4.4). Naturally, no limited human good can receive in itself the acclaim proper to the supreme Good. All human goods are finite. Being finite, they are all “equidistant” from the infinite. They cannot be arranged in an ascending scale in which they mount higher and higher towards the infinite with one of them being highest. No calculus of lower and higher exists which would allow using the destruction of one to be the means of achieving another. They are on the same level. That level is the level of the personal (not the merely “biological”, “Psychological”, etc.) so that they are not able to be subordinated horizontally to one another in the instrumental way in which non-human goods might be treated. Finally, though beyond all of the human goods a man must desire the supreme Good, this desire is not one which man has the natural ability to fulfill except to the extent that the goods which he can choose participate in the perfect goodness to which he aspires. It is the deepest element in human “nature” (see Section 6) to reach to the infinite, but through the finite.

This transparency of the finite to the infinite and man’s thirst for the infinite are the ultimate determinants in his approach to those goods which rank highest in his world, the essential human goods. He need not always choose every human good. A man might even forego some of them so as to leave himself more effectively open to others of them. He must always try to further them. The thing which he cannot do is to set himself positively against one of them by making its suppression a means to securing another one. He cannot anti-choose one of them without falling back from reach to the transcendent. Such choice is not compatible with theocentricity. A non-positive attitude to the good — not addressing oneself to it or letting it pass — could, in many cases, preserve direction, but an antipositive attitude is at odds with the “right thing” viz. that a man keep his reach towards the supreme Good, clear of ambiguity. The only choice that can lift a man beyond confinement is disinterested choice, which, happily, is in his greatest interest. Somewhat in the same way the “useless” liberal arts are everlastingly “useful”. By bringing this same liberal stance to bear on the relations of man and wife, we are not absolutising the conjugal act-. We are refusing to relativize it.

There are serious counter-objections which can be raised when one thinks of war and capital punishment. Are

they not instances which treat human goods of a high order instrumentally? A satisfactory treatment of them would take us too far afield. The reader is referred to recent and greatly improves discussions on the subject (4.5).

The Individual Act and the Totality of Acts. The objection treated in the preceding paragraphs dies hard. It rises in another form in the appeal to the totality of acts in conjugal life. As long as on the average the address of will is towards a human good, as long as the ensemble of acts is not anti-good, then it does not matter if here and there, in occasional acts and for generous reasons, the rhetoric of action is antipositive in tone. It is the overall meaning of life that counts (4.6). The objection is urged the more strongly today because of its moderate tone. It is a plea for the approval of a modest degree of contraception, just enough to hold fertility at the most generous height which the world can afford. Yet here, too, is hidden the same flaw of practicality, the same shrinking from the “merely” ideal; and, hence, the same failure to let go to the infinite in the finite. Suppose one were to say that as long as on the average one spoke well of God, occasional blasphemies might be permitted so as to avoid misfortune, what then? Yes, but we are not dealing here with God! We are dealing with a human good. Very well, suppose we should say that as long as, in the main, a husband showed love for his wife, he might be permitted occasional “affairs”, what then? Is average dedication to a human good real dedication? Or is not average response to a finite human value a sign that one has still got one foot on the ground, so to speak? Moral self — transcendence, like pregnancy, is not capable of degrees. One can approach it by degrees, but it is reached through a radical discontinuity. We may not try to keep God “in the hand” while we relax our grip on the “solidity” of finite good, without losing both. Again, we are brought to face with the all or nothing element in moral life; a thing which, like death, is not to be run after suicidally, yet is to be received when the alternative is worse than death. Indeed, only a loving easiness towards death integrated with the joy of living is able to save a man from moral relativism. In default of such easiness, there’s no such thing as “worse than death”. When survival is paramount, nothing human deserves more than average, common-sense response. But that is the death of humanness (4.7).

The Demands of Human Love. But what happens to human love in all this? In the desire to respond adequately to the good of human procreative power, are you not slamming the door shut on the good of human love? The objection has been vigorously urged that periodic continence — which in some shape or form is the consequence of our position — is productive of agonizing tensions or destructive of the tender spontaneities of conjugal life (4.8). One might reply that these statements have been just as vigorously denied (4.9). But that apart, and mindful that discriminating contraception (which alone we are concerned to deal with) also imposes a burden of restraint, the answer would seem to be that it is not tensions and deliberateness of themselves that are damaging to love, but tensions and deliberateness undertaken in the absence of conviction that one is fighting in a worthwhile cause. Those who cannot “see” the case against contraception — and “seeing” in this case goes beyond reason (cf. Section 3) could hardly expect to live without contraception. Needless to say, that same inability would relieve them of subjective fault. Even those who “see” the position would have to face the loss of spontaneity in the sexual expression of love. But, as is well pointed out by Joyce (4.9), one should distinguish between the spontaneity that is achieved by the good pianist after painful exercise from the spontaneity of the “strummer”. The music is different in the two cases.

It is easy to be facetious. The serious answer to those who protest the harm done to love is to point to the nature

of true love. It lies in the unison of two hearts fully responding to basic human goods as manifesting the supreme Good, even at the cost of suffering; perhaps even more on that account. Love does not die in exile unless it is made bitter by doubts about the value of the love of fatherland for which it was undertaken. From this point of view, the contraceptive \*act is not expressive of true love, It unites two hearts in a pragmatic compromise towards a human good. That, and not any absolutizing of biology, is the basis of the statement in “*Humanae Vitae*” that the unitive and the procreative elements in the conjugal act cannot be separated. It is not because God will not “allow” it. It is because it cannot be done. The “prohibition” is in the nature of the love of finite human beings.

Obviously, if the partners do not “see” it that way, their compromise with value causes them no sadness. They see their love as beautiful. Could so many be wrong, we ask? Still, many people painlessly tolerate cheap music, barbaric writing, cheap art, and tired movies. Perhaps taste in conjugal love and its sexual expression is susceptible to the same vulgarization that has overtaken the arts in a machine age. If this were indeed the case, then the response would have to take the form, not of scolding contempt of the sexual life of the masses, not of desperate attempts to rationalize the “new” morality, but of patient struggle to re-educate towards moral sensitivity, towards openness to value for its own sake. But for this, the teachers would have to be attuned to an ethics of meanings in the case of morality, as they would have to be attuned to an esthetics in the case, of art. The good, no less than the beautiful, is apt to be betrayed by technical overreach. The treason engulfs even the true when efforts are made to remedy the harm by constructing a situationist ethic to sustain morality and by constructing a relativistic esthetic to rescue the arts. The final casualty is human love, which is inseparable from fidelity to the true, the beautiful, and the good.

g) The Good of Science. The most vehement objection is that which comes from the direction of scientific humanism (4. 10). It strikes a responsive chord among those religionists who are anxious to bring about an accommodation between Christian morality and modern progress (4. 11). Both object strenuously to the position defended in this article. Technology, they say, would still be in the Dark Ages if we had not constantly intervened in endless ways in every manner of natural process. The objection is tied in with the endless confusion arising from the phrase “natural law”, about which there is more later (see Section 6). Irritation has been further heightened by the appeals of many moralists in the past to a principle which is not generally true viz. that one may not lawfully frustrate a natural human faculty, or that contraception is immoral because it is an artificial interference. At best, these are half truths (4. 12). Let it suffice to point out that as far as moral principle goes, there is but one limit on the exercise of technology viz. that when we deal with meaningful relations which possess high human value in themselves and which we can only contemplate with the deepest reverence, then that intervention — with or without artifice — alone is wrong, which, by its very nature, implicates the will of the doer in an antipositive response to a basic human value.

Accordingly, as technology expands and more frequently approaches the human sphere, the number and complexity of moral questions grows apace. Sometimes the verdict is going to be against the use of technique. In the absence of an unexceptional technique, some ills will have to be endured together and in mutual loving care until such time as a way is found which will not conflict with response to value. This is what is described by some moralists by saying that man’s domain over nature is limited. The limit is not in some arbitrary reservation of the creator mysteriously conveyed to the churches. It is inherent in what it means to be a man

seeking the infinite through his responses to the finite good. Unlimited technique is not a human good. It is an idol. That this conflict of morality and technology should surface most acutely in the sexual domain is due to the fact that nowhere else is response to value so deeply expressed and incarnated. Here is the place where the best — and the worst — in the human spirit is embodied. — Here worship is separated by a hair's breadth from idolatry.

h) The Needs of Progress. Well then, if that be the case — so a final objection goes — we are rendered powerless against the forces of decline. We might as well call in the undertakers of the human race. That is putting the objection sharply. However, this is the “sticking point” of the duel between technology and Christian morality such as it is presented in the encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*”. Let us put the objection in concrete terms. Response to human value as an ideal and for its own sake is fine up to a point. But when a population calamity is on our doorstep, that kind of morality makes no sense. It may be fine for esthetes and celibates, but people are dying of hunger!

Let us grant for the moment that it really is a question of contraception or calamity. Then the Christian man would ask his fellow-men to go down in honor rather than to survive in dishonor. He would do this in the strength of God's disclosure in Christ of the mystery of the world's redemption. That redemption comes by way of the meeting of two elements — man's achievement pushed to the limits of true love, meeting, even-in death, the graciousness of God's power. This is not to advocate doing nothing, and leaving It all to God. It is to urge that we do our human best — nothing demonic or Faustian or titanic — a *lá* Christ.

As for the rest, we yield in glad confidence. Something is left for God to do. All is well. On the other hand, should we do our inhuman best on the plea that “If we do not save the world, who will?” (technocracy), then we lose. The question that is at issue in the contraception debate is, of course, the nature of our “human best”, the limits of technology in relation to the conjugal life. “*Humanae Vitae*” places limits in one direction, but that is not to say that there are no other directions.

Today's situation regarding population and world resources is indeed a serious one. But does it really pose a choice between contraception and calamity? Maybe the discontinuity between world and kingdom has begun to appear more evidently than before, but technology is still young and surely there are an awful lot of tricks left in the technological bag, not all of which are going to be found in conflict with response to human value considered as an ideal and for its own sake. Family limitation we must certainly achieve. But is it not possible for us to learn to predict ovulation ahead of time on each occasion, and, thus, with a modest degree of restraint — itself an expression of loving concern — learn to regulate conception (4. 13) ? Other measures would need to be added to this, of course — an end to compulsive consumption by the overprivileged, just distribution of resources, etc. Yes, but in the meantime, and until all this gets done? In the meantime the powerless suffer and die. Is that not an evil? Evil, yes, in the sense of misfortune. Moral evil, no, except to the extent (which is enormous) that present distress is the legacy of years of moral recklessness and to the extent that we do not now hasten at great sacrifice to ease the problem by every morally good means. Should it now be too late because of past neglect to turn the tide of misfortune, we ought to prefer losing the battle with honor than behaving like rats do when caught in a trap — desperately. Sins are reversed by repentance, even by death, but never by fresh sins.

i) *Lunacy*. That kind of talk is dangerous. It is the sort of lunacy that should be stopped by force before it gets picked up and spread by religious fanatics and senseless fundamentalists ! Let them kill themselves if they want, but the rest of us are going to take care of ourselves! No doubt the position does sound like lunacy to many. Still, it is well to remind ourselves that the paradox of Christ was a scandal to the Greeks — losing his life to find it! We are not arguing that every scandalous position is therefore Christian. We are pointing that its lunatic appearance does not make it unChristian. *Somewhere* a Christian theology of morals will expect to be incredible. that is to say, unable to be believed by many.

It would be foolish to think that what is going on today is just a silly squabble about sex between some Catholics and the rest of the modern world; that, hopefully, Pope and bishops will join the modern world or quietly get lost. No, there is hidden in this controversy those perennial questions that concern the meeting of God's graciousness and man's efforts, an understanding of death in the midst of life, the power and the limits of human endeavor, sin and the dilemma of atonement, the integration of reason and revelation. These are questions which do not go away. If they are dismissed in one area, they will re-emerge in another — abortion, euthanasia — wherever survival seems threatened.

#### Sec. (5) GROWTH IN RESPONSE TO VALUE

It will be convenient to summarize our argument at this point. As is apparent, the discussion of the moral problem of contraception has centered around the notion of response to value. First, human behavior is sometimes intrinsically expressive of meanings that are significant for values. Secondly, the response to human values ought to be adequate, sometimes choosing them, sometimes not choosing them, but never antichooseing them. Thirdly, such response alone is a God-reaching, self — surrendering, and, mysteriously enough in view of the “deaths” to which such response can lead, world — redeeming. We now come to a final consideration regarding response to value. It is dynamic and evolving. Response to value has a history of development. Some of the forms taken by this development will be described. They appear notably at three levels — in the history of a society, in the life-span of an individual, and in the progress of academic debate.

#### SOCIETY

Take as an example the moral problem of slavery. Slavery was, in its time, an economic institution. In its day, slavery was seen as offering a solution to the economic problem of production of abundant wealth. But it did so at the expense of the human good of liberty. Was it morally justifiable? Certainly, if slavery was defined as including inhumane treatment, the practice could not be countenanced. But did it have to be that way? How, if slavery were to be defined as covering ownership of the laborer and his labor with consequent restrictions on his choice of work, place of residence, etc.? Add the consideration that without this more discriminating kind of slavery, there would be wholesale economic disruption. The answer is less obvious now. Still, even when you thoroughly humanized the practice, even took the slaves into the family, etc., was there not some inherent devaluation of the human good of belonging to oneself? Society never had an easy conscience about slavery. Even the generous and humane servitude was troubling. At the worst, Christian moralists were silent. At the best, they pleaded with masters for humaneness and with slaves for faithful service. Underneath, all the time lay

the vexing question of how to ensure cheap production. It was the appearance of the machine that finally opened up the way to a solution. The machine would do the slaving. Men could be set free. Soon the erstwhile liberal moralists became quite conservative. Slavery is inherently immoral.

Had there been a development in the matter of response to human values? Among moralists? Yes and no. Yes, in that they finally were unanimous in condemning slavery. No, in that many were not able to see the point until the advent of the machine alternative let them “off the hook” of anxiety about the economy. Among masters? Yes and no. Yes, in that they abandoned the practice. No, in that their economic anxiety remained to surface again in the moral problems of the treatment of factory workers. If there was any unalloyed growth, it lay with those moralists who did not cease to wrestle with the problem of slavery, refusing to make humane slavery mean something else (“rational economic production”) than what it inherently meant in itself (absolute ownership of the laborer). Of course, they had no answer to the economic problem. They could only refuse to sacrifice a morality of meanings to a morality of consequences and suffer the resulting opprobrium of being “incredible”. Or else it lay with those who might have owned slaves and prospered but preferred to endure the misfortune of poverty for the sake of response to human value.

The foregoing is not to be taken as proving anything about the moral problem of contraception, the case against which must stand on its own merits. We bring it up for another reason. It has been argued (5.1) that development in the liberal direction might be expected in the case of contraception according as the traditional position became increasingly at odds with the demographic facts of the modern world. Had not something like this happened in the past in regard to the traditional stand against usury and in regard to the problem of authority and freedom of conscience? Despite longstanding condemnations the Church and moralists finally reversed their stand. Changing conditions in the worlds of commerce and of government called for a new morality. Aside from the fact that the argument is not without serious ambiguities (5.2), it seems only fair to add to usury and authority the case of slavery — a case in which the development of morality that took place was not less development, though it took place in the conservative direction, and in which development had to wait for the appearance of the machine. It is not too fanciful to suggest that an improvement in the techniques of predicting ovulation would take the liberal moralist “off the hook” of his anxiety, so that he would no longer be inclined to make contraception mean something else (family limitation procedure) than what it inherently means in itself (anti-choice of the power to initiate life). If that were to happen, the moral development would be of the same ambivalent kind as described above for the case of slavery,

It is a harmless pastime to extol the merits of a dynamic and evolving morality — like praising motherhood. The real problem is to decide which direction is the forward one. Calling the contraceptive solution an evolutionary step in morality begs the question of whether a morality of useful consequences is really a step forward in man’s response to value.

## THE INDIVIDUAL

Individuals repeat in their own life-span some of the history of moral development of society. They move from the egocentric life to the theocentric life. From loving things and using persons, we move to using things and loving persons. In place of merely toying with behavior, a man moves to communing deeply with the meanings

of his actions and their significance as response to value and ultimately to God. Prior to that point, moral life differs little from an effort to observe the “rules of the game”. It is only when life as a whole is felt to be meaningful that rules of behavior are felt to be anything more than practical dispositions at the traffic control level (5.3). You may tell the adolescent that masturbation means badly in relation to the value of transcending self-enclosure in isolation so as to achieve fruitful mutuality with another! You may tell him, but he will not easily understand. He does not yet discern the body as language. His literary critical skill has yet to develop. And it does. Even so does the slave-owner, the usurer, the libertarian, the authoritarian, the racist come to know what his actions are really saying. Then moral conversion ensues. Double talk is replaced by fair speech. Impatience with what he viewed as mere rules of the grammar of life fades. To some extent, life has been made harder for him. It was easier to be slovenly in the “speech” of his actions, now he must “speak” with discernment about the good. But, like the artist or the poet in their fields, the morally developed individual has come into the presence of the divine. He is off the earth in a way which makes him remote from the world of the useful and the practical.

### ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

As with theodicy and God, so with ethics and the good. First comes actual knowledge that God is. Then comes critical analysis of arguments for the existence of God. First comes behavior, good and bad, sharply distinguished. Then comes ethics. Development in belief and behavior stimulates academic discussion, deepens insight and sharpens wits. Reference will be made here to a few questions which have been sharpened in intensity as a result of the debate on the moral problem of contraception. They concern the role of reason in moral discourse: What is the nature of proof in ethics? Why do alleged “proofs” fail to convince? What is the nature of the recourse to revelation?

What is the nature of proof in ethics? It used to be maintained in theodicy that one could “prove that God exists”. Similarly in ethics, it was the fashion to speak of “proving that contraception is-immoral”. In regard to the first, it seems that “proof” is not the best word to use. It smacks of a Cartesian rationalism, in which, from a few clear ideas, the rest might be deduced. That is not the case, of course, and so it might be less misleading to say that the function of the “proofs” is to lead one to discover for oneself that God is. We do not so much demonstrate his existence as we “monstrate” him in the finite and the dependent. The “proofs” indicate to the listener the direction in which to look if he is to see God for himself (5.4).

In regard to the second, the case of ethical “proofs”, the situation may well be the same. Ethical arguments do not compel one “more geometrico” from premises to conclusion. Rather, they enable one to “discover” the good as present or absent in a sample of human behavior. They point out the direction in which the searcher after values must do his own looking. But the proofs cannot make him see.

Why do alleged “proofs” fail to convince? Much ink has been spilled in angry criticisms of traditional arguments against contraception. They do not convince. In part, this failure must be laid at the door of the moralists. Shabby argumentation abounds. Nevertheless, even the best exposition does no more than point in the direction of the good. Beyond that stage, failure to be convinced is a problem of vision rather than a matter of logic. It may be particularly hard to “see” the good today. One who looks at the world with eyes conditioned

by nineteenth century objectivistic, value-free science is very apt to judge that there is nothing “out there” but objective facts, and nothing “in here” except subjective preferences (5.5). Argument in ethics will contribute to discovery of the good when “fact” and “value” have been reunited in our understanding (5.6). Things are more than objects, and actions are more than processes. History is more than science, and language is more than propositional calculus. That they are not less is indeed true. But that they are more is an admission on which the success of ethical discourse depends. The movement towards reintegrating fact and value is a significant development in academic discourse about morals.

So also with the closer union of reason and revelation. Revelation does not provide convenient texts with which to bolster failing arguments. Rather, it provides a larger context, a wider horizon, a window on the world that steadies us against a failure of nerve before the conclusion to which the arguments point. More exactly, it is the person of Christ that provides in an eminent way the context, the horizon, the window on the world. It is in him that we see man completely surrendering to supreme Value and coming by way of the cross to resurrection. He has no part with the demonic will to survive at all costs. He loves life, but he is not unwilling to let it go in response to the good. In him, ethics is laid open to an order of divine graciousness where it would otherwise be closed within the circle of human achievement. The greatest development in the academic area of morals is in this improved integration of reason and revelation.

#### Sec. (6) NATURE, NATURAL, NATURAL LAW

At this stage we may more profitably explore the ambiguities of the terms “nature”, “natural”, and “natural law”. We have avoided using them throughout the discussion of contraception because they have been a prime source of misunderstanding. We will illustrate three meanings of the word “natural”, and reflect on the consequent ambiguities of its use. Some concluding remarks will be made on the phrase “contrary to natural law”.

##### a) OUTSIDE A MAN

John lives out in the woods, eats uncooked foods, wears no clothes. We say that John has gone back to nature. He is living the natural life. In this usage, the term “natural” describes the jungle untouched by artifice. The jungle is the jungle outside a man — “Nature”. The artifice is that of technical skill.

##### b) INSIDE A MAN

John pulls out a pistol and shoots a man whom he discovers making love to his wife. It was only “natural”, we say. People panic and rush for the exit when the theatre curtain goes up in a blaze. We say it is “natural”. Here the word also describes a jungle untouched by artifice — But the jungle in question is the jungle of impulses and instincts inside a man, and the artifice in question is the restraint of reason and the discipline of will. As in the first case, “natural” is opposed to “artificial”; in the second case “natural” is opposed to “inhibited”.

##### c) AT THE HEART OF MAN

Now we are all in agreement that if a man persists in behavior that is natural in senses (a) and (b), he is failing

to respond to “what is best in him” He “owes it to himself” to tame the jungle outside of him as well as the jungle inside of him by the artifice of technology in the one case, and the artifice of self-discipline in the other case. By doing so, he acts in a way which better accords with his “nature” as a man. Thus, it is “natural” to man that he should choose to take up arms against “nature”

Clearly, we have introduced a third usage (c) of the word “natural”. In this usage, the word has reference neither to environmental nature surrounding man nor to brutish and instinctual nature residing within him. It refers to the deepest elements in a man, what is “best” in him, the cognitive-appetitive elements. This is no longer inorganic or brute nature. This is specifically human nature. Note that “cognitive-appetitive” does not exclude the entire somatopsychic complex in which knowing and choosing proceed. It is to this cognitive-appetitive element at the heart of man that we refer when we say that a man should act in accord with his nature. Confronted with any situation, he should open his cognitive eyes to the values involved in the situation and he should close his appetitive grasp upon those values (or, at least, not put himself in the position of making an antichoice against a basic human value). It is “natural” to man, thus, to give adequate response to basic human goods in the sense that man is drawn by virtue of his native equipment to give free response to good perceived as present in a situation. The law of his nature is, “Thou shalt give adequate response to perceived value”.

### SOME AMBIGUITIES

We can now expose some of the ambiguities that result from the three uses of “natural” according as it is opposed to the artificial, the inhibited, and the immoral. First, it is never morally right to go against nature in sense (c). In fact, acting according to-the natural law in sense (c) is just a synonym for acting rightly (6. 1). Hence, you do not prove the immorality of X by saying that X is against the natural-law. You simply state the fact in other terms. It is fatuous to say that contraception is wrong because it is “against the natural law”. Secondly, it is almost always natural in sense (c) to act against nature in sense (b) . The exercise of self control is a virtue unless one carries it to the point of rigidity and compulsiveness. Instincts should be controlled, not smothered. Thirdly, it is sometimes natural in sense (c) to-employ artifice against nature in sense (a). Not always, because some uses of artifices against the jungle outside of man could be of such a kind as to involve the doer necessarily in hostile response to basic human value. Infanticide as an artifice to remedy overcrowding would be an example. Usually the fault would lie not in the use of artifice against nature (a), but in its excessive use, leading, for example, to environmental damage. But there would be cases where the use itself is wrong. These would occur when the artifice impinged upon the human in a way that would have implications for basic human values. Contraception would be a case in point here. That kind of artifice would be reprehensible in any case, but it becomes doubly so when the jungle outside a man which is under attack owes its existence to a prior failure to exercise control against some element in the jungle inside a man. Our temptation when confronted with problems that have grown out of human misconduct is to take technical shortcuts to eradicate the problem when we ought to take action against the source of the problem in turbulent human passions. Such artifices “solve” a human problem in one sense, but they dissolve humanness and create a much deeper problem.

Should we, then, “Interfere” with nature? Does the Catholic moralist believe in interfering with the jungle? Yes, he does, but you had better include the jungle inside a man. Furthermore, you must not use attacks against

the jungle outside a man as a substitute for dealing with the jungle inside a man and at the expense of response to human value. Sometimes the artificial accords with the natural law (c). Sometimes it does not.

### CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW

In the light of the above distinctions and keeping in mind our discussion in Section (2), we can now make clear what it is that is implied by saying that contraception is “contrary to the natural law”, is “out of accord with the nature of marriage”, does not respect “the nature of the conjugal act”. All of these phrases have reference to violations of human nature in sense (c) — man as responder to value. Everything man does, his entry into the covenant of marriage, his expression of love in the conjugal act are sacred in the sense that in the conduct of them he must lie open to human value. Marriage, sexual life, are violated in their human nature by the purely pragmatic manipulation of a basic human good — the power to initiate human life — by a focussing on further consequences to the detriment of immediate meanings, by the failure in the conjugal act to bear unambiguous witness to the good. All this is pithily summed up, but not explained, by the convenient label “against the natural law”.

Further to the same point, one can now see the fallacy of arguing that if nature does it, we can do it too; that because nature provides for intercourse without conception, therefore man is entitled to bring about the same result by using any means whatever. Mere correspondence with natural (a) processes is no guarantee that the behavior is natural (c). Nature provides for the death of people, but it does not follow that direct killing of the innocent is permissible.

### ULTIMATE INTERFERENCE WITH NATURE

In Section (3), we were led to consider continence. Some will say that continence is “unnatural”. That it is so in sense (b) who will deny? Not that the sexual instinct can be fairly labelled a part of the “jungle” inside a man. Still, restraint goes against the grain. That continence is unnatural in sense (c), not in accord with what is best in man’s nature, though not openly declared, seems to be implied by the cry that in the face of mounting problems people should not be crushed by unreasonable burdens. Morality is not a set of absolutes, it is said, but a dynamic understanding of man’s unfolding nature ( (b) or (c) ? ).

Morality is, indeed dynamic and unfolding. But the question is, in what direction are we to choose to unfold? Towards increasing manipulation of nature (a) to the detriment of response to value, or growing mastery over nature (b) for the sake of the good. Which, in the circumstances, is the true line of development of nature (c) ? How are we to be true to our nature (c) ? Is continence in this instance a good? Beyond this question is the more distant one, is death a good in any sense? These are the questions whose emergence into our lives makes men wish that the divine Word would become flesh and speak in his body., At this point the Christian is prepared to listen in faith to the Word responding with a witness that was, so he believes, surpassingly human. Nothing less than this word can lift a man to the point where he will be prepared to embrace the ultimate interference of death, or of continence, for the sake of the good.

Only in a love which includes the cross will a man consent to be emptied of his nature so that he may be

graciously fulfilled! This is the radical interference with nature (c) which does not violate the natural law, but carries a man beyond it. In that sense, Christian morality is not a mere ethics. Finally it comes down to this as between Christian morals and modern science — scientific interference with nature (a) ceases to be good in so far as it shuts off man's openness to the radical interference of the cross in life.

#### CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT

Throughout this entire discussion, we have had in mind solely the problem of the objective morality of the contraceptive act. Nothing that has been said should be taken as implying any judgement concerning the subjective dispositions of persons who favor the practice. A great deal of writing has appeared on this subject in recent years. It gives indication of a Very enlightened pastoral prudence in dealing with what, for many spouses, is a most difficult problem. But before one comes to the challenge of growing towards a moral ideal, the first requisite is that one be convinced that it is indeed such. The present discussion has had only one purpose in mind, namely, to be of service, hopefully, to those who have difficulty in recognizing the position of "Humanae Vitae" as the Christian moral ideal.

## NOTES

(Works-referred to in the notes are listed in the bibliography)

- 1.1 “physical” is used in the broad sense here to include chemical, biological, psychological, etc.
- 1.2 Leslie Dewart on “*Casti Connubii* and the Development of Dogma” in Roberts p.223. Dewart points out that the question exactly what is condemned by a moral teaching depends very largely upon the reason why it is immoral. The reason why is the formality that defines the moral truth of a proposition. He also clarifies the distinction between the objectivity of the physical event and the objectivity of the human act.
- 1.3 “sterile” is used in a loose sense here to mean non-productive, nonfertile. Though the act might have been sterile apart from the action of the partners, yet their action is effective in that it removes all possibility of doubt. In that sense, their act effects sterilization.
- 1.4 Dewart in Roberts p.233 demonstrates convincingly that “*Casti Connubii*” limits itself to the conjugal act, and bases its argumentation on the nature of marriage. On the significance of the latter phrase, see the present article Section 6 — Contraception and the Natural Law.
- 1.5 Grisez in CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW pp. 157–167 presents an extensive discussion that clearly marks off the specific moral difference between rhythm and contraception. The difference is such that rhythm can be wrong, but contraception cannot be right (p. 167).
- 2.1 The question of acts and the determinants of their meaning is taken up again in Section 4 (b), (c), and (e).
- 2.2 Again the reader is warned that “objectivity” here is moral objectivity, something which goes beyond the physicist’s or the biologist’s description of an act. “To say that Fred killed Charlie is to say something of a quite different kind from ‘this particle moved from point p at time  $T_1$  to point q at time  $T_2$ ’ ” (McCabe in WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT p. 93)
- 2.3 McCabe in WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT p. 92. Focussing on further consequences while sliding over inner meanings would appear to be what is at the root of the shift from behavior as self-expression to behavior as self-assertion. The distinction is examined by McCabe op.cit. p. 101
- 2.4 McCabe draws significant parallels between ethics and literary criticism. Action is speech and communication. As such, it has its rules of rhetoric. (in WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT p. 94). The “rhetoric of ethics” should be compared with Weaver’s “ethics of rhetoric”. Our value system shines through in the way in which we write on paper! (ETHICS OF RHETORIC Chap. 9 “Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric”).
- 2.5 In LITURGY AND PERSONALITY Chap. 6 “The Spirit of Response-to-Value in the Liturgy”
- 2.6 Grisez in THE THOMIST (October ‘66) pp.352–353. 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.
- 2.7 von Hildebrand in LITURGY AND PERSONALITY p. 47
- 2.8 Lonergan in THEOLOGICAL METHOD p.37 Chapter 2 contains penetrating discussions on value, judgements of value, growth and decline, moral self-transcendence.
- 2.9 Grisez in CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW p. 17 7

- 2.10 Grisez in *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF JURISPRUDENCE* (1970) Vol. 15, pp. 64-96, gives a luminous discussion of the principle of double effect, direct and indirect voluntareity. Similar searching criticisms are to be found in Walter McDonald: *PRINCIPLES OF MORAL SCIENCE* Book 2.
- 3.1 The reverse movement away from the divine towards successively less comprehensive syntheses and the surrendering to the coercion of economic pressures, political forces, and psychological conditioning is well described by Lonergan in *INSIGHT* pp. 627–633. The solution to the problem of moral impotence lies along the direction of a higher integration of human living with transcendent being at the level of reason. (*INSIGHT* p.632)
- 3.2 The deeper dimensions of the problem of evil are described by Lonergan in *INSIGHT* pp. 688–693. They call for a higher integration of human life going beyond the natural level (pp 718–730).
- 3.3 See Baum O.S.A. in *COMMONWEAL* 81 (1965) pp. 369–371 quoted in Valsecchi, *CONTROVERSY* p. 184 “since the solution is in no way contained in divine revelation . . . “. On the latent biologism and fundamentalism in much criticism of the traditional position, see Joyce: *MEANING OF CONTRACEPTION* pp. 82–83.
- 3.4 Pius XI *Casti Connubii* AAS (22) 1930. Pius XII *Allocutio* AAS (43) 1951. Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* AAS (60) 1968. Curran: *DISSENT IN AND FOR THE CHURCH*.
- 3.5 See e.g., McHugh in *CLERGY REVIEW* August, September, October 1969.
- 3.6 Congar in *LAY PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH* pp. 53–101 examines the relation ship to the kingdom of, on the one hand, the world and history; on the other, the Church. The bearing of this on the nature of man’s contribution to the building of the kingdom is treated on pp. 92–93.
- 3.7 von Hildebrand in *HUMANAE VITAE, A SIGN OF CONTR ADICTION* pp. 65–84.
- 4.1 Lawler in Roberts p. 17.9 makes some interesting comparisons between the difficulty of knowing God and the difficulty of knowing the natural law.
- 4.2 See Grisez in *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF JURISPRUDENCE* (1970) Vol. is, pp. 82–89; and in *CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW* p. 145.
- 4.3 The folly of trying to separate facts and values is examined by Grene in *THE KNOWER AND THE KNOWN*, Chap. 6.
- 4.4 Grisez in *CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW* p. 114 and p. 127 n. 10. A further statement of his position is found in *THE THOMIST* October '66, p. 353.
- 4.5 Grisez in *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF JURISPRUDENCE* (1970), Vol. 15, pp. 64-96.
- 4.6 McCabe in *NEW BLACKFRIARS*, November '65, p . 94, raises the question whether sexual relations may relate to the totality of sexual activity in the way in which single moves in a football game relate to the general progress of the game. Sometimes to carry the ball for-ward, one must run backward. Perhaps contraceptive acts, like backward moves, have a place in the total strategy! But, then, are sexual acts void of inner meaning of their own, like plays in a game? Kippley in *COVENANT, CHRIST, AND CONTRACEPTION*, p. 73, discusses totality.
- 4.7 McCabe in *WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT*, pp. 98–99, The deepest meaning of an action is the meaning it has in terms of continuing quest for greater seriousness and deeper understanding.
- 4.8 Ruether in Roberts p. 81. Egner in *CONTRACEPTION VS TRADITION*, pp. 94-112. Novak editing *THE EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE*. (Darton, Longman, Todd: London '65; Hoyt p. 199.)
- 4.9 Grisez in *CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW*, p. 8; von Hildebrand in *HUMANAE*

VITAE, A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION, p. 54; Joyce in THE MEANING OF CONTRACEPTION, pp. 43-45; Kippley in COVENANT, CHRIST, AND CONTRACEPTION, pp. 69-72.

- 4.10 Baker in BIOSCIENCE, February '70, p. 143.
- 4.11 Hoyt pp. 68-72
- 4.12 Grisez in CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW pp. 27-31 exposes the fallacies in the "perverted-faculty" argument. EGNER in CONTRACEPTION VS TRADITION, pp. 44-48.
- 4.13 see Billings, THE OVULATION METHOD p. 90.
- 5.1 Noonan in CROSS CURRENTS 16 (1) Winter '66, p. 55.
- 5.2 Constanzo in THE THOMIST, October '70, pp. 649-650; and Beck in THE LONDON TABLET, November 16, '67.
- 5.3 Moore in GOD IS A NEW LANGUAGE, p. 56.
- 5.4 White in GOD THE UNKNOWN, pp. 46-51. O'BRIEN IN METAPHYSICS AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, pp. 93, 216, 240. Watkin in THE BOW IN THE CLOUDS, P. 54.
- 5.5 Maslow in RELIGION, VALUES, AND PEAK EXPERIENCES, p. 43.
- 5.6 The necessity of restoring the personal element in knowledge and the bearing of this on the restoration of meaning to life has been the subject of many works in recent years. See e.g., Polard: PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE Frankl: THE WILL TO MEANING.
- 6.1 Grisez in CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW, p. 32; Anscombe in NEW BLACKFRIARS, June '65, p. 517.

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#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Grisez's CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW (out of print) is the most thorough examination of the ethical arguments. EGNER's CONTRACEPTION VS TRADITION is an erudite presentation of the objections to the older forms of the "natural law" arguments. Originally published as BIRTH REGULATION AND CATHOLIC BELIEF by Sheed and Ward, London '66, the Herder and Herder edition is missing some 80 pages (now out of print). Kippley's COVENANT, CHRIST AND CONTRACEPTION is a scholarly presentation which takes full account of the ecclesial, theological, and philosophical aspects of the question. The deeper underlying problems of the nature of ethics are well examined in McCabe's WHAT IS ETHICS ALL ABOUT. They are dealt with in more rigorous fashion in Grene's THE KNOWER AND THE KNOWN.

<sup>1</sup>— Reference is to notes at the end of the article.