

Natural Law and Sexual Ethics

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I am honored to be among the lecturers in this series on natural law. Many of the speakers are among my heroes and friends. One of my heroes, Alasdair MacIntyre, used one of his favorite terms in his talk: he spoke of "plain persons" and their grasp of morality and natural law in contradistinction to the experts and professional philosophers and their grasp of these matters. A few years ago in Dallas he gave a talk entitled "Do plain persons need to be moral philosophers?" When I was asked to give the response to his talk, I was most honored because I considered Prof. MacIntyre one of the foremost moral philosophers in the world and it was a thrill to comment on his work. I felt dreadfully underqualified -- I felt like some high school kid going up against Larry Bird -- until I realized that I need not respond as an expert, as a moral philosopher of his caliber, but that I could respond as the quintessential plain person -- for that is what I am. After all, I am Janet Smith, daughter of John and Anne Smith; I grew up at 5 Hill Street and went to Home Street School -- I could go on but it is all very plain.

The point I am making here is not merely a flip one -- designed to ease us into more serious matters through an attempt at humor. There is a serious point here -- natural law, is the "plain person's" morality -- in a sense it is simply plain old common sense. There are profound and sophisticated ways at explaining natural law, but the practice of reasoning in accord with natural law principals, according to the theory itself, is natural to plain persons -- that is, natural to all mankind for natural law holds that many of the most fundamental principles of moral reasoning are obvious, that is easily known by all. Yet, in spite of the plain commonsensicalness of natural law, it can seem shocking and provocative in many ways, for like natural law, plain old common sense does not command a lot of followers these days and can be shocking when juxtaposed to the values of our times.

My talk is going to be very basic in several respects. It will review some of the basic principles that other speakers have covered, some in depth, some more in passing. It will also be very basic in being the one talk that attempts to make an application of natural law to concrete moral issues; issues in the realm of sexual ethics. My job is not to justify natural law ethics but to explain it and apply it. As did many of the earlier speakers I will largely be following the thought of Thomas Aquinas on these matters and of Aristotle from whom Aquinas learned many of the principles that informed his teaching on natural law. I shall also

incorporate into my arguments the thought of another stellar natural law theorist, still alive and well: I shall make use of the work of Karol Wojtyla, now known as Pope John Paul II. I will refer to him as Wojtyla simply because I do not want to be thought to be invoking his authority as Holy Father; I cite him simply as a philosopher who has made great advances of our understanding of natural law, particularly in regard to sexual ethics.^[1]

So let me begin with a review of the principles of natural law. As several other speakers have noted, Aquinas maintains that the first principle of natural law is "do good, avoid evil". As he notes, that is a self-evident principle and obvious to all; if we want to be moral we should do good and avoid evil. No controversy here. The question is, of course, what is good and what is evil and how do we come to know which is which? Some think we can't know what is good and evil so the best we can do is live by the conventions of our times. Others think it best to let our passions be our guide to whatever we want to do. Others think only revealed religion can give us absolutes. These three positions capture the predominant views of our times.

Aquinas holds none of these positions.^[2] He argues that reason should be our guide to morality. Not only does he hold that the first principle of natural law, "do good, avoid evil" is self-evident, he argues that there are other self-evident first principles, such as "harm no man". These he says are imprinted in the minds of all by God; I believe other precepts such as "provide responsibly for your offspring", "give to each man his due" and "seek knowledge" would qualify as precepts that Aquinas thinks all men know. Men (and I use the term generically here and throughout) may act against these precepts out of passion or because ignorance of some fact operative in a situation, but all would agree that such principles are moral truths. Aquinas goes on to say that what he calls primary precepts of natural law are naturally and immediately known by man; he cites the 10 commandments as examples of these types of precepts. These precepts are justified by the primary principles. From the most general principle "give to each man his due", from an understanding of what one owes to one's mother and father, it is clear that one "should honor one's father and mother."

Now this is not to say that one discovers the moral law by discovering these precepts in a deductive manner moving from the most general to the more particular. Rather, it seems that often moral discovery, as the discovery of other general truths, moves from the particular to the universal. That is, an individual could witness or participate in a transaction and quite immediately make the moral judgment that the act is good or bad. That is, for instance, an individual could witness someone honoring or dishonoring his parents and judge the action to be good or bad; from this action and others of the same sort one may come to formulate the

"law" that one should give each man his due. But it is because we already naturally know -- in an unexpressed and unformulated way -- that one should give each man his due, that we are able to see readily that honoring one's parents is good. Much in the same way that we, without musical training, can judge certain tones to be off pitch, we have moral "perceptions" that some actions are good and some bad, without having any explicit training about such kinds of actions. I speak of these as moral "perceptions" not because they are equivalent to sense perceptions, but because of their immediacy and their unformulated quality; indeed, I believe them to be rational in several important respects, not least because they are cognitive acts and they are in accord with reality. [3]

Let me speak now about rationality and the Thomistic claim that "one should act rationally." Indeed, one could formulate the first principle of natural law not only in the most basic formula "do good, avoid evil"; in Thomistic terms, several formulas serve to express the same truth: for Aquinas, the following phrases are synonymous: "act in accord with nature"; "act in accord with reason" or "act rationally"; "act in accord with virtue"; "act in accord with the dignity of the human person"; "act in accord with a well formed conscience"; indeed, "act in a loving way", properly understood, serves as well.

While it would be of great profit to elaborate how each of these phrases is synonymous with the other, I want to devote most of my efforts here to explaining how "act in accord with nature" and "act in accord with reason" are synonymous and worthy guides to moral behavior.

First we must try to get as clear as we can what it means to say "act in accord with reason" or "act rationally". In our day, reason often gets a bum rap. This is a fault not of Aristotle or Aquinas but of Descartes and Kant and their followers. Since they retreated into the mind and abandoned the senses and emotions and nature as guides to truth, they made reason seem like something coldly logical, impersonal, abstract and completely devoid of experiential and emotional content. In their view, mathematics and geometry are seen as the quintessential rational acts; to be rational is to operate totally within one's mind and to be completely unemotional. Another view of rationality that dominates modern times is the view that only that which can be measured scientifically deserves any recognition as objective truth. No truths other than those substantiated by scientific proofs -- truths that can be quantified largely in the laboratory -- count as truth. No proof other than scientific proofs count as truth; only science and that which approximates to scientific truth is truly rational. Neither view is the view of reason and rationality held by the ancients and medievalists -- those who defined the view of natural law I am defending here. The ancients and medievalists did not think rationality

was possible without the senses and the emotions for both are tools to reading reality; they provide the intellect with the material needed to make a good judgment. The etymology of the word "rational" is rooted in the word "ratio" which means "measure or "proportion". One is being rational when one's thought and action are measured to, are proportionate with, or when one's thought and action correspond with reality (which itself is measured or governed by discernable laws; more about this momentarily). The thought that leads to acting in accord with reality is called rational. Now this thought need not be and perhaps only rarely will be the kind of abstract, cold, logical reasoning of a Descartes, Kant, or research scientist. This thought can be intuitive, creative, poetic, inductive, deductive, indeed, whatever human thought can be. It is all called rational thought not because it proceeds by syllogism or because it is subject to certain scientific tests; it is called rational because it corresponds with reality -- and this includes all of reality, the spiritual and the transcendental as well as the logically provable and the scientifically measurable reality. Such thought cannot proceed without abundant data from our senses and our emotions. The intellect processes such data and orders it; it determines what values are important in the data and decides on the appropriate response. If one acts rationally, one then acts in accord with the ordering done by the intellect. While the intellect should govern the emotions, it is not a natural law teaching that all rational behavior will be devoid of emotion. Again, the emotions can provide essential data to the intellect. Emotions that are well-habituated may lead one quite spontaneously to respond correctly to situations. One may spontaneously get angry at witnessing some act of injustice and, if one knows one's emotions to be well-ordered, one could respond quite immediately and correctly to the situation -- and even angrily to the situation. Indeed, at times it may be an appropriate response to reality to rant and rave. One doing so, is properly called rational, in spite of our common parlance.

This talk of the mind and of rationality as something that is measured to reality suggests, as mentioned above, that reality is a thing that can be grasped. Natural law depends upon such. It rests upon the claim that things have natures and essences that we can know and correspond our actions to. There are many reasons for making this claim. One is the fact that things act in a predictable fashion; when we learn the properties of oil and water, for instance, we can predict certain things about their behavior. The fact that we build bridges which stand, that we make artificial hearts that work, that we put men on the moon, also indicates we are able to measure our thoughts to the external world and to act in accord with it.

Moreover, natural law operates on the premiss that nature is good; that is, that the way

things naturally are is good for them to be; it holds that the operations of things and parts of things contribute to the good of the whole. The wings of different birds are shaped in certain fashions because of the sort of flying that they must do to survive; different digestive systems work in different ways because of what is being digested. Indeed, natural law holds that the natural instincts of natural things are good; they lead them to do what helps those things function well and helps them survive. Since natural things have an order there is said to be a ratio or order to them; not one of which they are conscious but one that is written into their functioning. Natural law holds that we live in a universe of things that have a ratio to them and that we shall get the best out of these things if we act in accord with the ratio or nature that is written into them.

Now, man is a natural thing. He, too, has parts and operations and instincts that enable him to function well and to survive. Man differs from other creatures in that he has free will; that is, he can either cooperate with his nature or act against his nature, whereas other natural things have no such freedom. What enables man to be free is his reason, his rationality; he is able to weigh and measure different courses of action and to determine which actions are good or bad. According to natural law, those actions are good which accord with his nature and with the nature of other things. Since man is by nature a rational animal, it is good for him to act in accord with his reason. By acting rationally he is acting in accord with his own nature and with a reality that is also ordered. When he acts rationally, he acts in accord with his own nature and reality and in accord with the nature and reality of other things.

Now, let's get concrete. Let's talk about acting in accord with the nature of a few specific things. Take tomato plants, for instance. Tomato plants have a certain nature. In order to have good tomato plants one must act towards these plants in accord with their nature; one must water them, give them sunlight and good soil if one wants to produce good tomato plants. Such is acting in accord with nature in respect to tomato plants, such is rational behavior in respect to tomato plants. If one's tomato plants fail to produce tomatoes, one knows that one is doing something wrong; if one's tomato plants produce good tomatoes, one knows one is doing something right. Prof. Charlie Rice, whose book Fifty Questions on Natural Law that I understand several of you are reading, speaks of the rationality of putting oil and not molasses in the engine of a car.^[4] One needs to act in accord with the nature of things if one wishes them to perform well.

So now let us, moving quickly, move to human nature. If a human being wishes to function and perform well, what does his nature require of him? Let us begin with his physical

nature. There is a considerable consensus about what makes for physical health and what is conducive to physical health. Those who don't get sick, who are able to function well in their daily activities, who are not overweight, we call healthy. We know how to produce such individuals. We are regularly and rightly advised to eat well, exercise regularly, and to get plenty of sleep. Those who do so generally flourish physically -- because they are acting in accord with nature, with reason, and with reality. Psychological health is also understood to some extent; we know we need friends and rest and interests to sustain our psychological health; that is our nature; that is reality.

Nor are we in the dark about what makes for moral health or moral goodness. We recognize the goodness of the various virtues such as self-discipline, reliability, justice and fairness, kindness, truthfulness, loyalty, etc.; those who exhibit these qualities we generally recognize to be good -- that is morally good -- human beings. Parents who have children who display such qualities are rightly proud of them; their "tomato plants" turned out well.

So, in regard to sexual behavior, to sexual moral health, so to speak, what qualifies as acting in accord with nature, with reason? How do we determine what it is?

Now, for Aquinas, these are not difficult questions, though, apparently, they are extremely difficult questions for modern times. We are terribly confused about what proper sexual behavior is. College newspapers are filled with news of campuses that are devising codes of moral sexual behavior -- codes that are designed primarily to stop or reduce the incidence of date rape on campus. These codes suggest, mandate, require -- I am not certain what is the correct word -- that in sexual activity neither individual proceed to the next level of sexual activity without obtaining the permission of the other individual. These codes reflect what has been the principle governing sexual behavior in modern times for sometime -- whatever one feels comfortable with and whatever one agrees to is morally o.k. This is basically what we are teaching to our young people and they are doing much what one would expect given that teaching. As long as it feels good, and they have consented to it, there is no reason for them not to do "it".

Is this working; is this principle leading to moral health or moral sickness? What can we say about the moral sexual health of our society? What does the fact that 68% of African-American babies are born out of wedlock suggest? The figure is now 22% in the white community and rapidly growing. This figure, of course, would be higher if it were not for the one and a half million abortions a year. One of two marriages is going to end in divorce. AIDS is decimating some portions of our population. Are there any hints here that we are violating

nature, acting irrationally, failing to live in accord with reality? Are our tomato plants thriving?

Let's think about each one of these as a concrete moral fact: when we see the heartbreak and social dysfunction associated with out-of-wedlock births, don't our immediate and natural moral perceptions and judgments say "something is wrong here"; when we learn that a woman has had an abortion, no matter what our view of the morality of abortion, don't we say "something has gone wrong here?"; when we hear of a divorce and all the surrounding heartbreak and dysfunctionality, don't we think, "something has gone wrong here?" When we see young people dying of AIDS, don't we think, "something has gone wrong here?"

Now what I am going to say soon, the moral principle I am soon going to articulate, may seem perfectly obvious to some and to others seem quite ridiculous. Before I articulate the principle, I would like to comment briefly on the significance of the diversity of predicted response to it. MacIntyre spoke about how curious it is in the modern age that we have so little consensus on the most straightforward claims of natural law; what seems obvious to some, seems ridiculous to others. Whereas some take this lack of consensus to suggest that claims about the universalizability of natural law are false, MacIntyre took this lack of consensus to indicate the moral corruption of our times. That is, we have become so corrupt, we cannot discern what is obvious. I am not going to try to analyze how this came about, but I do want to make a suggestive analogy with the physical senses. Just like our ears when subjected to noises that are too loud and sharp, lose some of their ability to hear, so too does our moral "sense" when subjected to too much corruption lose its ability to judge what is right and wrong. Much of what I am going to say will sound strange to modern ears because we have lost our moral sense to some considerable extent.

What is this obvious principle I am threatening to articulate? It is a principle readily justified by natural law reasoning. A natural law theorist reasons that man certainly has a natural inclination to engage in sexual intercourse and that that natural inclination is good for man -- much in the same way that sunshine is good for a tomato plant. As for all animals, sexual intercourse leads to the perpetuation of the species and that is good. Because man is rational, he can naturally and readily see that his natural sexual inclinations differ from those of animals who copulate and reproduce willy-nilly. Human sexual intercourse is clearly for much more than simple reproduction of the species. Sexual intercourse conduces to the well-being of human beings in many ways. For instance, sexual intercourse can expand the opportunities for humans to love -- not only to love their sexual partner but also to love the offspring they may have. It allows spouses to build a family together and to have a meaningful life.

It would be profitable for us to consider a little more how human sexual behavior does and should differ from animal sexual behavior. Certainly, for both animals and men, sexual intercourse is extremely pleasurable. But for humans that pleasure is not an uncomplicated pleasure. First, we have a powerful sense of the power and mystery of sexual intercourse. We sense that we are dealing with something fraught with emotional risks, fraught indeed with serious responsibilities. These responsibilities are two-fold, at least; they are the responsibilities that come with the babies that naturally result from sexual intercourse and with the bonding between the partners that naturally comes with sexual intercourse. So here is the key for natural law ethics. Since sexual intercourse has this two-fold natural purpose that must be respected -- the purpose of bringing forth new lives and the purpose of uniting men and women together, whoever participates in sexual activity must do so in a way so as to protect these natural goods of sexual intercourse.

Let us speak of babies first. Again, as with animals, the extremely pleasurable act of sexual intercourse naturally, thought not always or even usually, can lead to the birth of an offspring. Unlike most animal offspring, a human baby needs years of prolonged and devoted care to come to maturity. The evidence is overwhelming that such care is best given by the parents of the baby. And here is where the first major moral principle of sexual behavior becomes manifest. Given the nature of human babies, given this reality, isn't it right to posit the moral principle; rational behavior requires that those who are not prepared to be parents ought not to engage in sexual intercourse? Now that principle sounds shocking and strange to modern ears, whereas I want to claim that it is plain common sense; indeed, that it is obvious.

Let me elaborate more upon it. Most individuals want to be good parents. They see that being a good parent is part of being a good human being and living a full and good human life. They recognize that children need parents with at least some degree of maturity. They agree that those who are not ready for babies ought not to have them. They even agree, for the most part, that being ready to be parents, means being married, for only those who are willing to commit to marry have the kind of commitment needed for those who are going to be parents. (Even those men who are sexually promiscuous are generally uncomfortable with the idea that they may have fathered children who they never know or care for or that some of the babies they have fathered may have been aborted.) In spite of this consensus and plain common sense, in our times, these insights do not translate into seeing that one ought not to have sexual intercourse until one is ready for babies. We think it is perfectly all right for those who aren't prepared to have babies, to have sexual intercourse. We think so because we rely

upon contraception to sever the natural connection between having sexual intercourse and having babies. And we think we are being responsible if we contracept; that is, after all, what responsible sex is, isn't it?

You may have thought that my first principle of sexual morality, "don't have sexual intercourse, until you are ready to be parents" (or more precisely; "don't have sexual intercourse until you marry -- for only the married are truly ready to be parents") is the shocking and provocative part of my plain, common-sensical talk. Well, I intend to shock you further. I am going to say, that in spite of our modern practices and views about sexual responsibility, contraception is not a rational or natural act. In fact, I think that contraception is one of the great evils of modern times for it has been the fuel that has allowed the sexual revolution to rage. And the sexual revolution has led to the sexual chaos of our culture that I sketched earlier -- millions of babies born out of wedlock, millions of divorces, tens of thousands dying from AIDS. And this chaos, as we know, leads to multiple other social ills.

Again, I claim that contraception is at the center of this reality and a major contributor to it because it severs having sex from having babies and allows millions to participate in an act whose consequences they are not prepared to face. Millions are involved in relationships that are not prepared for the eventuality of a baby; when a baby is conceived, abortion or out-of-wedlock birth are the most common results. In my reading, contraception does not foster responsibility; it fosters irresponsibility by promoting the view that one needn't be prepared to be a parent in order to have sexual intercourse responsibly.

The consequences of a contraceptive culture are abundantly clear to us. I think that once one ponders how unnatural contraception is, how out of accord with reality it is, the sexual chaos that characterizes our culture should not surprise us. Why would I say that contraception is not respecting the nature and reality of sexual intercourse? First, I simply ask you to consider the reality of contraceptives, what they do to a woman's body. The "pill" is the most popular form of contraception. Furthermore, when does one generally take a "pill"? Obviously, when one is ill. But is fertility a sickness? Isn't fertility, a healthy, natural condition? Doesn't "The Pill" treat fertility as though it were an illness, a defect, not a natural good? And think of the side effects of The Pill. The insert that comes with The Pill lists a large number of counterindications or bad side effects. It can cause blood clots and strokes and infertility; in a small percentage of cases to be sure, but when millions of women are using The Pill, the small percentages can add up to large numbers. Think of the everyday, common side effects. It is common for women who use The Pill to complain of increased irritability,

depression, weight gain, and a decreased libido. Isn't The Pill something every woman wants - - something to help her be more irritable, to be more depressed, to gain weight, and to have a decreased desire to have sexual intercourse! Why would any man want the woman he cares for and maybe even loves to take such a chemical monstrosity? In our age when we have come to discover how foolish it is to dump alien chemicals into the environment, why do we think it sensible for women to put so many alien chemicals into their bodies?

The most serious feature of The Pill, however, is that it can operate as an abortifacient. The Pill (and Norplant and Depovera) works in three ways. It works by stopping ovulation; if a woman doesn't release an egg, she cannot get pregnant. It works by changing the viscosity of the mucus that either helps or hinders the sperm from getting to the egg. And it works by rendering the uterine wall hostile to the fertilized ovum -- or, in my thinking, to the new human being. A woman never knows how the hormones in the pill are affecting her body; she does not know how it is preventing her from becoming pregnant. It could be preventing her from ovulating but it also could be causing her to self-abort. The IUD which has been taken off the market because it endangered the very lives of women, also operates as an abortifacient. It may stop ovulation, but more often makes the uterine wall hostile to the fertilized ovum, the new human being. Thus, the same natural law arguments used to demonstrate the immorality of abortion can be used to demonstrate the immorality of The Pill, Norplant, Depovera, and the IUD. Any man or woman opposed to abortion should have nothing to do with these contraceptives.

The barrier methods of contraception begin to disclose another feature of contraception that is against the goods of sexual intercourse. They reveal that contraceptives not only work against babies, a natural and good outcome of sexual intercourse; they also work against the uniting and bonding of the sexual partners. The very name "barrier" is revealing. A couple wishes to make love, but first they must get their "barriers" in place. They may decide to use a good spermicide to kill whatever sperm may approach the egg. This action is saying "I want to love you and give myself to you and to receive you, but I want to kill any sperm that may penetrate my being" Is there not a discordant note of hostility now in act that is meant to be a loving act. Does not the rejection of one's beloved's fertility also mean a rejection of one's beloved, as well, at least to some extent? All of contraception says, "I want to give myself to you and to receive you but I reject completely your fertility; it is not welcome here."

Here is where Karol Wojtyla's analysis of sexual ethics has made a major contribution. Wojtyla has written extensively on human sexuality; it is possible here to give only the briefest

of sketches of his thought. He observes that male and female are made for each other. Each sex is really incomplete without the other; physically and psychically the sexes complete each other. The story told by Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium comically portrays this reality. Aristophanes suggested that the first human beings at one time had two heads, four legs and arms, etc. They were then cut in half -- one half male, another female and they spend an enormous amount of energy trying to reunite.

Wojtyla maintains that we have a deep and natural need to give ourselves to another person; to make ourselves whole by giving ourselves to another. He says that this giving is most completely performed in the sexual act between male and female, an act that is meant to express the deep commitment and desire for union that we feel and wish to express. Wojtyla says that the attempt to thwart the fertility of the sexual act means that one is withholding one's fertility from the other -- one is withholding something that belongs in the sexual act. To withhold it diminishes the meaning of the sexual act. One way of seeing Wojtyla's point is to think of the difference between the phrases "I want to have sex with you" and "I am open to having babies with you." The first phrase is one our culture utters with the greatest of casualness; contracepted sex is often engaged in with the same commitment that going out to dinner or playing tennis with another suggests -- that is, not much. Being open to having a baby with another, however, bespeaks a very great commitment to another, the kind of commitment that should be made by those engaging in an act that might in fact result in a baby! It bespeaks the willingness to have one's whole life entwined with another, to have breakfast together, to go to little league games, to plan weddings.

Many in our culture can not imagine life without contraception. They think the alternative means no sexual intercourse at all or lots of babies. Since our culture is so obsessed with sex and so hostile to babies, both possibilities seem unthinkable. Few have any idea how satisfying it is to wait until marriage to have sexual intercourse with someone one has vowed to spend one's life with. Few have any idea how deeply meaningful noncontracepted sexual intercourse is; how doable periodic abstinence is in marriage for those who have abstained before marriage. They know nothing about how methods of natural family planning work; they often refuse to believe, in spite of the most solid scientific evidence, that methods of natural family planning are more reliable and effective than any other form of birth control.

Many fail to see any moral difference between contraception and methods of natural family planning. They think that since a contracepting couple and one using natural family planning both intend not to have a child and intend to have sexual intercourse that doesn't

issue in a child, what they are doing amounts to the same thing. The standard distinction between means and end is certainly operative here; though they may have the same moral end limiting their family size, one couple chooses the means of thwarting their fertility, of engaging in potentially fertile acts and simultaneously working to destroy that fertility, the other couple respects their fertility and when not prepared to accept a child, refrain from fertile acts. A standard example demonstrating the difference between contraception and natural family planning, is the analogy with eating. Some who wish to avoid a weight gain, eat and then force themselves to vomit; they wish to have the pleasure of eating but not to accept the consequences. Others who wish to avoid a weight gain do not eat foods that have the consequences of effecting a weight gain. They abstain from rich foods and only eat them when prepared for the consequences. The parallels with contraceptive sex and natural family planning are clear.

But the differences between the two means of birth control are much greater than the above too-quick argument portrays. As a simple indication that what contracepting couples and couples using methods of natural family planning are doing is remarkably different, I ask: If they are so similar why are contraceptors so reluctant to switch to a method of natural family planning and why do those who use natural family planning find contraception so revolting? Both couples recognize that to switch would be to adopt a whole new view of sexuality, of their relationship with their spouse (or sexual partner, in the case of contraceptors) and indeed perhaps a whole new lifestyle. Actions that are morally equivalent rarely are perceived to be so different in so many respects.

The differences between contraceptive sex and sex governed by the principles of natural family planning are very many; there is not room here to enumerate them all. Let me, however, note just a few features of NFP that may suggest how it is eminently human and draws upon fully human resources. There is something radically anti-female in contraceptives - they suggest it is better to have a male body that can engage in sexual intercourse and not get pregnant. Many women resent contraceptives for the unpleasant side-effects and also resent the male who wants them to use contraceptives. Women who use NFP, on the other hand, are generally very positive about it, because it does not in any way threaten their health; it reveres their fertility whereas contraception, as noted above, treats their fertility as a liability. They have confidence in the love of their husbands who revere their fertility to the extent that they don't wish to mess with it. They understand abstaining to be another form of love. After all, many abstained before marriage, precisely out of love for their beloved.

Let me mention with one other tantalizing thought on this issue: contraceptors divorce at the rate of 50% while evidence shows that couples using natural family planning divorce at a rate of under 2%. While several factors undoubtedly contribute to this disparity, that there is such a disparity suggests that the quality of the relationship of the couples is vastly different. I suggest the quality of the sexual relationships may be a major factor and I suggest that the much greater meaningfulness of a sexuality that respects the baby-making power of sexual intercourse may be the key. The notion that children are an optional offshoot of sexual intercourse and not a natural and good consequence that should be respected, leads individuals to make bad choices for marriage partners. Because our culture denies the intricate relationship between sexual intercourse, babies, and marriage, those who engage in sexual intercourse often have few thoughts of marriage or babies in their minds. When they do marry, they are often simply marrying a sexual partner that they have become used to. Sexual attraction and sexual compatibility become the chief foundation for relationships. Often when I suggest to young people that the primary question they should ask themselves when they are looking for a spouse is "Would this individual be a good parent to our children?" they are astonished by the question and realize that it would radically influence their choice of a spouse -- and they admit that such a consideration has been far from their minds!

Our culture is a mess and it is largely young people and particularly young women who are suffering the consequences of this mess. We can hardly blame them for the choices they make since they are the choices that we have deemed "responsible". Most who contracept have little understanding of what damage contraception can do to their relationships and to society as a whole. But as any biologist knows, if one is ingesting poison, even if it is cleverly disguised as a good, one will still suffer the ill effects of the poison. No matter how reliant our culture is on contraception, no matter how good we believe it to be, the evidence is becoming clearer and clearer that contraception is not the good many hoped it would be. If Aquinas is correct that nature is ordered and ordered to what is good and if flouting the natural law leads to things not functioning properly, the current situation should be no surprise. The reality of sexual intercourse is that it is intimately and naturally connected with having babies and with creating strong bonds between the sexes. Natural law ethics acknowledges that living in accord with reality and nature limits our choices and our actions, but it holds that it limits them in a way that promotes our human good.

statements I make about Aquinas' position are based upon questions 90-100 in the Summa 100.

For an excellent description on how one comes to know the precepts of natural law, see "Knowing Natural Law" in Pictures, Quotations, and Distinctions (Notre Dame, IN: Notre

Charles Rice, Fifty Questions on Natural Law (San Francisco, CA; Ignatius Press, 1993)