

CHAPTER X

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THE HUMAN BODY AND SEXUALITY IN THE TEACHING OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that at times some Christian thinkers have adopted implicitly a very dualistic view of the human person—dualistic in the sense of viewing the self as something which *has* or *inhabits* a body, rather than being a living, bodily entity. For example, some have thought of heaven, or the completed kingdom of God, as something purely spiritual, with no thought given to the role of the body.¹ On that view, bodily goods, including biological life, turn out to be nothing but mere means, or perhaps temporary vessels, for what alone is intrinsically valuable (but see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 34). Recently some Christian thinkers have adopted a basically Kantian view of human action, downgrading conscious choices bearing on limited goods—“categorical choices”—as quite secondary or peripheral to a mysterious, sub-conscious “transcendental,” fundamental option toward or away from the Absolute, God (Rahner, 1986, pp. 24-44, 90-106). On that view, once again, bodily goods, being the objects of mere “categorical choices,” are demoted to the level of mere external signs of what is truly important, and purely spiritual. Such views lend credence to the widely held secular view of Christianity that it has a dim view of the human body and matter.

2. THE PROBLEM OF OBJECTIFICATION

The ethical teaching of Pope John Paul II, especially that concerning sexuality and marriage, should help to show that such dualism is simply a distortion of Christian teaching. That the human person is essentially a bodily being, a unity of body and soul, and that therefore the masculinity or femininity of the human being is internal to his or her personhood (rather than just interesting external “equipment”), has been a constant theme of Pope John Paul’s teaching throughout his pontificate. In this paper I would like to

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explore the logical consequences for the basic ethics of sexuality and marriage of Pope John Paul II's insistence on the unity of the body and the soul. Specifically, I would like to suggest a particular interpretation, or rendering, of his "theology of the body" as it applies to the core issue of sexual ethics: under what conditions are sexual acts morally right? This issue is obviously a central one in bioethics, since most of the questions regarding fertility, reproductive technology, and sexual identity depend in some way on an answer to that question. A perennial question in sexual ethics is: is there something "special" about sex? That is, are there moral norms which govern sex in addition to the prohibitions of deception and coercion?² It seems that there is something special about sex, and it seems that we can be aware of this point whether we accept revelation or not. For example, it seems clear to most people that a punch in the nose is far less serious than rape, although both involve violence. And it seems that this can be true only if sexual acts have some feature or features making them significantly different from other bodily acts.

Scott Anderson points out that, while some would argue that commercial sex (prostitution) is actually not ethically wrong, and should be legalized and normalized, very few would be willing to accept the concrete consequences of this (Anderson, 2002). Compare the following two scenarios. In the first scenario, A buys B an expensive dinner with the mutual, though tacit, understanding that B will tutor A in philosophy to prepare for A's upcoming mid-term exam. B accepts the dinner but then wishes to back out of the deal. In the second scenario, C buys D an expensive dinner with the mutual, though tacit, understanding that D will have sex with C. D accepts the dinner but then wishes to back out of the deal. I don't think we would hesitate to say that in the first scenario B owes it to A to follow through with the deal. Moreover, if the agreement had been formalized by a signed contract we would not hesitate to say that civil authorities could with justice enforce the terms of their agreement. However, our attitude is surely different with respect to the second scenario. As Anderson points out, although we may think it bad for D to agree to such a bargain, still: "we don't hold that the frustrated party is entitled to enforcement of the bargain against the wishes of his date (2002, p. 775)."

In other words, it is clear that sex is quite different from other bodily acts. A and B could enter a contract involving physical therapy, dental work, hair cutting, and so on, all actions which B might perform on A's body. And with respect to such acts we have no hesitation about their being commercialized, and the relevant contracts being enforced. A may hire B wholly or in part because B is a skilful physical therapist. Moreover, B's continuing to provide that service may quite properly be a condition of his or her continued employment. But most of us would at least balk at saying that C could hire D wholly or in part because of her sexual skills and make her continued employment conditional upon her continuing to provide those services (Anderson, 2002).

Moreover, we do not hesitate to say that bodily actions such as physical therapy are appropriate actions to perform with anyone, including one's parents, one's children, or even lower animals (as in veterinary). Yet sexual actions are not appropriate with our

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children or parents, or with other animals. Thus, there must be some feature or features of sex which do make it quite distinct from other bodily actions. But what is it? What is it about sex that makes it quite different from other bodily acts?

In sexuality more than in other areas we tend to describe immoral instances of it as treating someone as a mere thing, as objectification. Is there some feature or features whose presence means that the act is an immoral act of manipulation? What must a sexual act possess in order *not* to be an instance of immoral manipulation?

Thomas Mappes argues that voluntary and informed consent to an act is sufficient to render it different from immoral manipulation (Mappes, 2002). But if this were true, then our different reactions to the different scenarios described above would be groundless. If he were correct, then the woman who enjoyed dinner at the lavish spender's expense not only would be engaging in deceit (indeed we might be tempted to say that she too, though in a different way, was merely using him), but she would *owe* it to him to fulfill her part of the tacit bargain.³ This, however, seems to be incorrect. Mappes's position cannot account for the different attitudes we have toward sexual acts and other bodily acts.

Moreover, I believe some feminists have correctly shown that pornography involves an attitude toward women as mere things or toys for use⁴ even though the participants may have informed consent. Martha Nussbaum commented on the case that Andrea Dworkin and others have made regarding pornography. Nussbaum evidently does not agree that *all* pornography is reductive, but she does hold that *Playboy* magazine involves treating persons as mere things. Her appraisal is worth noting: "*Playboy* depicts a thoroughgoing fungibility and commodification of sex partners, and, in the process, severs sex from any deep connection with self-expression or emotion (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 406)." This seems correct. It seems that to avoid reducing persons to mere things, a sexual act must in some way be connected to "self-expression or emotion." But the question remains: what must be the case for a sexual act to have this connection?

3. LANGUAGE OF THE BODY AND SEXUAL MORALITY

Pope John Paul teaches that in order for a sexual act to be non-objectifying it must express a marital communion. In that way it realizes a basic human good, the marital communion of the spouses, and thus does treat both oneself and the other as subjects, rather than as mere objects of use. This, of course, is a traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. Yet John Paul's explanation of this teaching is quite distinctive; it differs from the basic arguments usually attributed to friends of traditional sexual morality. For it is often assumed in treatments of sexual ethics that the central argument in its defense is simply that extra-marital acts, contraception, etc., are unnatural, that is, contrary to the direction inscribed in the reproductive or procreative power. This argument, often described as the "physicalist" or "naturalist" argument, has been, in my judgment, rightly criticized.⁵ For example, it is not clear that acting contrary to the orientation of a biological power, or contrary to the natural orientation of the sexual act, is necessarily wrong. Nor is it clear

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that all extramarital sexual acts are really contrary to that direction (instead of being outside it.) Pope John Paul himself has rejected this kind of argument:

Therefore this law [that is, natural moral law] cannot be thought of as simply a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body. To give an example, the origin and the foundation of the duty of absolute respect for human life are to be found in the dignity proper to the person and not simply in the natural inclination to preserve one's own physical life. Human life, even though it is a fundamental good of man, thus acquires a moral significance in reference to the good of the person, who must always be affirmed for his own sake (1993, no. 50).

It is true that, speaking as the visible leader of the Catholic Church, the Pope is not expected to provide an extensive *philosophical* defense of his teachings. After all, the claim of the popes, including in this century Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, as well as John Paul II, has been that the Catholic Church's basic teachings on sexuality and marriage are part of the teaching handed down from the Apostles and divinely guaranteed.⁶ Still, some *explanation* is usually provided, and philosophical arguments can be extracted from such explanations.

Often John Paul explains why only within marriage is sexual intercourse non-objectifying by referring to what he calls "the language of the body." For example, in his commentary on the book of *Genesis* in his weekly audiences in the beginning of his pontificate, he describes the sexual act as a kind of "prophetism of the body" (1997, p. 358). And he teaches that sexual intercourse is a language that has an objective meaning, and that its meaning is full conjugal communion:

In the texts of the prophets the human body speaks a "language" which it is not the author of. Its author is man as male or female, as husband or wife—man with his everlasting vocation to the communion of persons (1997, p. 359).

He then argues that to have sexual intercourse with someone who is not one's spouse is a type of lie. Fornication and adultery contradict the language objectively inscribed within man and woman and their two-in-one-flesh union:

If the texts of the prophets indicate conjugal fidelity and chastity as "truth," and adultery or harlotry, on the other hand, as "non-truth," as a falsity of the language of the body, this happens because in the first case the subject (that is, Israel as a spouse) is in accord with the spousal significance which corresponds to the human body (because of its masculinity or femininity) in the integral structure of the person. In the second case, however, the same subject contradicts and opposes this significance (1997, p. 360).

Such passages can be interpreted in two different ways. At first glance one might interpret such passages as arguing as follows: It belongs to the nature of the sexual act to signify total self-giving. Yet to engage in the act and withhold an aspect of the self is to contradict the natural signification of this act. And to contradict the natural signification of the sexual act is wrong.

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There are difficulties with this argument. In fact this argument is not, in its structure, very different from the simple “physicalist” or “naturalist” argument mentioned above, and as a consequence it has similar logical defects. Even granted that it belongs to the nature of the sexual act to express total personal communion, why should it be in itself wrong to alter the natural symbolism of this act? If it is not in itself wrong to act contrary to the nature of the natural teleology of an act or power, why would it be in itself wrong to act against, or not fully in accord with, the natural symbolism of an act? Or one might instead question whether sexual intercourse necessarily, or by its nature, symbolizes *total* personal communion. Some might argue that it is an apt symbol for a close personal, though not necessarily permanent, union—a union not necessarily open to having children, and not necessarily heterosexual. In short, if the sexual act is viewed fundamentally as a *symbol*—that is, if one views *symbolizing* as the basic type of act one is performing when one has sex—then it is not clear that its natural meaning is (morally) inalterable or that its meaning is necessarily what the Pope has claimed it is (namely, *marital communion*).

4. POPE JOHN PAUL ON BODY AND SOUL

However, there is a second, and I believe more accurate, way of interpreting the argument referring to sexual acts as “language of the body.” The rest of this article will be devoted to explaining this second interpretation. To understand John Paul’s teaching we must return to his re-affirmation of the unity of the body and the soul in the human being. John Paul insists at several points in clear terms that we *are* bodily entities, that we are living bodies—rational animals and persons, but essentially bodies at the same time. For example, John Paul does not hesitate to say that human persons are bodies, albeit, he adds, also having self-consciousness, free choice, and immortal souls:

However, the fact that man is a “body” belongs to the structure of the personal subject more deeply than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female (1997, p. 43).

As the expression of self-determination, choice rests on the foundation of his [man’s] self-consciousness. Only on the basis of the structure peculiar to man is he a “body” and, through the body, also male and female (1997, p. 50).

Thus formed [that is, created in God’s image], man belongs to the visible world; he is a body among bodies (1997, p. 38).

Later in this same work, John Paul comments on the *Genesis* text which says: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,” (1:27). The standard interpretation of this text has usually been that man is the image of God in his mind, in his intellect and will. Without denying this point, John Paul boldly teaches that man and woman are created in God’s image precisely in their body, precisely in their complementarity, which orients them to full marital communion.

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The same “man,” as male and female, knowing each other in this specific community-communion of persons, in which they are united so closely with each other as to become “one flesh,” constitutes humanity. That is, they confirm and renew the existence of man as the image of God (1997, p. 83).⁷

Moreover, John Paul insists at several points that the truth that human persons are body and soul, not just souls, and not just consciousnesses, is central for ethical issues, especially in sexual ethics. In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*, he replies to ethical theories which would reduce the biological aspects of the human person to mere presuppositions for action and thus deny their intrinsic importance. To such views he replies as follows:

This moral theory does not correspond to the truth about man and his freedom. It contradicts the *Church's teachings on the unity of the human person*, whose rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body.[here a footnote refers to the Ecumenical Council of Vienne and The Fifth Lateran Ecumenical Council] The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole — *corpore et anima unus* as a person [here a footnote refers to the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #14]. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties (1993, no. 48).

And in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio (On the Christian Family)* he explains that sexual immorality involves in some way an alienation of the body from the spirit. He teaches that only marital sexual acts that express marital communion and are open to procreation, “recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion” (1981, no. 32) He then says: “In this way sexuality is respected and promoted and in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never “used” as an “object” that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God’s creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person (1993, no. 48).”

5. SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AS SUBSTRATUM AND CONSTITUENT OF MARRIAGE

This doctrine of the unity of the body and the soul is important for understanding John Paul’s teaching on sexual morality because, according to that teaching, the sexual act is *not* a mere extrinsic sign or symbol (as the misinterpretation of the “Language of the Body” argument would have it), but *expresses* or *embodies* a personal communion.

To see how, we must first note John Paul’s teachings on the complementarity of man and woman, and on marriage, which is the personal communion to which the differentiation of the sexes and their complementarity are intrinsically oriented. Man and woman are complementary. In a sense human nature is complete only in the two together. Their union, on the level of the body, emotions, and spirit, is marriage. And this union is a

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fundamental human good, that is, intrinsically good as opposed to merely instrumentally good:

This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need (1981, no. 19).

Thus, marriage is the fulfillment of the basic need or natural inclination toward complementary personal communion. It is the union of man and woman precisely as man and woman.

Commenting on the Genesis text, “The man and the wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (2:25), John Paul speaks of an original innocence in which the man and the woman viewed each other as bodily persons. And they understood their masculinity and femininity *as intrinsically orienting them to personal communion, or reciprocal self-gift, in marriage*. Without a return, in a certain sense, to this innocence and an *acceptance* of the other as gift, the sexual act is reduced to a mere *use* of the other for one’s own satisfaction:

This dignity corresponds profoundly to the fact that the Creator willed (and continually wills) man, male and female, “for his own sake.” The innocence “of the heart,” and consequently the innocence of the experience, means a moral participation in the eternal and permanent act of God’s will. The opposite of this “welcoming” or “acceptance” of the other human being as a gift would be a privation of the gift itself. Therefore, it would be a changing and even a reduction of the other to an “object for myself” (an object of lust, of misappropriation, etc.) (1997, p. 70).

It is a multi-levelled union. That is, it is essentially bodily as well as spiritual:

The gift of the Spirit is a commandment of life for Christian spouses and at the same time a stimulating impulse so that every day they may progress towards an ever richer union with each other on all levels—of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul—revealing in this way to the Church and to the world the new communion of love, given by the grace of Christ (1997, p. 70).

This point is distinctive and important. Many theologians and philosophers have viewed marriage as essentially a spiritual reality, a distinctive sort of friendship. They have then viewed the sexual act within marriage as an extrinsic sign that fosters marital love and friendship by signifying it. In effect, the inaccurate interpretation of the “language of the body” argument (which also makes it unsound) discussed above presupposes this view of marriage and of the sexual act’s relationship to marriage. John Paul’s teaching is different. According to John Paul, marriage *includes* bodily union.

This position, he points out, is implied by the constant teaching of the Church (though the implication has often been missed), that marriage is not *consummated* until there is sexual intercourse.⁸ As a consequence, the way the sexual act contributes to marriage, according to the teaching of John Paul, is by embodying it, expressing it, making it bodily present. It is, he says, the bodily *constituent or substratum* of that multi-levelled union:

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The consummation of marriage, the specific *consummatum*, is also enclosed in this knowledge [the sexual intercourse which the bible refers to as “knowing”]. In this way the reaching of the “objectivity” of the body, hidden in the somatic potentialities of the man and of the woman, is obtained, and at the same time the reaching of the objectivity of the man who “is” this body. By means of the body, the human person is husband and wife. At the same time, in this particular act of knowledge, mediated by personal femininity and masculinity, the discovery of the pure subjectivity of the gift—that is, mutual self-fulfillment in the gift—seems to be reached (1997, p. 81).⁹

Thus, morally right sexual intercourse in marriage is not merely instrumental to other goods. It is not just a means of giving and obtaining pleasure. Nor is it just a means of producing children. Though procreation is a fundamental good, and, as we shall see, morally right marital intercourse must be open to procreation, the bodily unity achieved in the marital act is not a mere means in relation to it. And, most importantly here, the marital sexual act is not a just means of signifying a spiritual union distinct from it.¹⁰ Although John Paul describes marital intercourse as a type of “language,” the marital act is a *constituent* of the marriage, the marriage being a multi-leveled union *including* the bodily as well as the emotional, intellectual, volitional, and so on:

In this way the enduring and ever new language of the body is not only the “substratum,” but in a certain sense, it is the constitutive element of the communion of the persons. The persons—man and woman—become for each other a mutual gift. They become that gift in their masculinity and femininity, discovering the spousal significance of the body and referring it reciprocally to themselves in an irreversible manner—in a life-long dimension (1997, p. 356).

Thus, instead of saying that sexual intercourse is a sign of mutual love—lest it be construed as an *extrinsic* sign—John Paul most often will say that it *expresses* love, or total self-giving. This expression is not extrinsic to what it expresses, but is the visible and tangible embodiment of it.

But how is the sexual act within marriage an embodiment or constitutive element of the marriage? How exactly does the sexual act complete (consummate) or renew the marriage? John Paul’s answer to this question is a literal reading of the following text of *Genesis*: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they *become one flesh*. (2:24)” The man and the woman are each by themselves, with respect to the sexual act (the type of act that disposes them to procreation), incomplete. As a lock is incomplete without a key, so the man and the woman are themselves each only part of human nature with respect to actions suitable for procreation. Thus, in sexual intercourse they become bodily, or organically complete, and thus one.¹¹ And this bodily complementarity is only one level of their total personal complementarity. In marriage the bodily completion and unity in the marital intercourse is only one level of their sharing of their total lives, that is, of their total personal communion:

Even though due to the poverty of the language, in speaking here of knowledge, the Bible indicates the deepest essence of the reality of married life. . . . In Genesis 4:1, becoming “one flesh,” the man and the woman experience in a particular way the meaning of their body. In this

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way, together they become almost the one subject of that act and that experience, while remaining, in this unity, two really different subjects (1997, p. 79).

And reiterating this point in this next paragraph, he explains that this bodily unity is, in marriage, an expression or embodiment of the mutual giving of their whole selves:

We must consider that each of them, man and woman, is not just a passive object, defined by his or her own body and sex, and in this way determined “by nature.” On the contrary, because they are a man and a woman, each of them is “given” to the other as a unique and unrepeatable subject, as “self,” as a person (1997, p. 79).

Thus, by becoming co-subjects of a single act, an act to which they are bodily, emotionally, and spiritually oriented by their nature, the man and the woman become “one flesh.”¹² And this real bodily oneness *actualizes*—not just extrinsically signifies—their total marital unity.¹³

As a bodily union, this conjugal act is also a sharing by the man and the woman of their masculinity and femininity. Speaking of the sexual act as a “sacramental sign,” and as a “language of the body,” John Paul says:

The structure of the sacramental sign remains essentially the same as “in the beginning.” In a certain sense, it is determined by the language of the body. This is inasmuch as the man and the woman, who through marriage should become one flesh, express in this sign the reciprocal gift of masculinity and femininity as the basis of the conjugal union of the persons (1997, p. 356).

This sharing of masculinity and femininity essentially includes a sharing of the potential fatherhood or motherhood. That is, becoming one flesh is an element of their mutual self-gift; but in becoming one flesh they dispose themselves to procreate with each other. Hence this bodily union points ahead, as it were, toward its fulfillment in the bearing and raising of children together.¹⁴ John Paul comments on the *Genesis* text (4:1) which says, “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore” He speaks of the original conceiving and bearing of children as the threshold of man’s history. He then says:

On this threshold man, as male and female, stands with the awareness of the generative meaning of his own body. Masculinity conceals within it the meaning of fatherhood, and femininity that of motherhood (1997, p. 85).

And returning to this same point much later, he says:

In this truth of the sign, and, later, in the morality of matrimonial conduct, the procreative significance of the body is inserted with a view to the future—that is, paternity and maternity (1997, p. 363).

In *Familiaris Consortio* he succinctly teaches: “Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving of the spouses” (1981, no. 28).

Thus, morally right sexual acts within marriage embody marital communion, a communion which is oriented to procreation.¹⁵ So, John Paul’s teaching is distinct from

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the position suggested by Gareth Matthews, in his book *Body in Context*.¹⁶ Matthews argues that one can philosophically establish only that sexual acts are *gestures* that naturally symbolize affection or care, but not necessarily marriage in the traditional sense (1992, pp. 92-109). According to Matthews, sexual acts are in the same category as embraces: they do not literally say or assert anything, but they do have a natural meaning or natural symbolism. For John Paul, however, the sexual act is much more than a gesture (though it *is* that as well). A morally right sexual act does not make present in an indeterminate way just some-union-or-other. Rather, becoming one flesh is the sort of act designed specifically to make present *marital* communion, that is, the sort of union oriented to, and fulfilled by, procreation: *that* is the kind of communion it can embody (and if it does not, then it, and the persons involved, are being *used* for extrinsic purposes). Sexual intercourse is a real, biological unity, and if it is loving and respectful sexual intercourse within marriage, it is the substratum or constitutive element of marriage: a joint act, not just a gesture, in which the two become co-subjects and thus become one. Thus, it is fundamentally a real act, and a real unification, and *because of that*, it is a gesture with profound significance or meaning.¹⁷ So, when John Paul speaks of sex as a “language of the body;” he is not regarding the sexual act as a mere extrinsic sign. Nor is he saying only that the sexual act is a *gesture* or a natural bodily *symbol*.

6. EITHER EXPRESSION OF MARITAL COMMUNION OR IMMORAL OBJECTIFICATION

So, what is distinctive of sex according to John Paul II? What makes it so different from other bodily acts? His answer is that sexual acts are distinctive because they have the potential to embody or renew marriage, marriage being the union of a man and a woman that is characterized by its orientation to, and is naturally fulfilled by, procreation. As embodying marriage, these sexual acts have a dignity and even a sacredness. God designed human nature as masculine and feminine, and designed their differentiation as oriented to the multi-leveled, complementary union that is marriage, a union naturally fulfilled in procreation.¹⁸ So, first, the personal communion of the masculine and the feminine, precisely as masculine and feminine, is an intrinsic and irreducible good or value. Second, this communion of the masculine and the feminine as such cannot occur except as including an openness to, and as being the sort of communion that is naturally fulfilled by, procreation. This type of union is, of course, marriage. A sexual act realizes or participates in a fundamental human good when it consummates or renews, by embodying, a marriage.¹⁹

And why must the sexual act be confined to marriage? Why does the sexual act involve objectification, treatment of a person as a means of satisfaction, if it is not an expression of marital communion? Extramarital sex is wrong, and involves objectification, not because such acts signify a false belief or a false proposition. Rather, they are wrong because they

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fail to realize any fundamental human good. Thus, what is being done cannot be the joint realization of a common good actualizing (or renewing) a communion. The act, then, can only be the pursuit of an illusory experience—pleasure or an illusory experience of union, affirmation, power, or so on—a satisfaction in one’s consciousness without the realization of an actual, fundamental (and common) good.²⁰ It follows that such an act involves objectification and use of the other, and of one’s own body, as a means to obtain that satisfaction. This understanding of the argument explains (while the misinterpretation discussed above fails to explain) why, according to John Paul, only sexual intercourse that expresses marital communion respects the unity of the body and soul (see Section 4).

In sum, the interpretation I propose can be indicated by the following text which summarizes John Paul’s general argument for the basic principle in sexual ethics:

Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally (1981, no. 11).

Here John Paul does call the sexual act a “sign,” and does say that immoral sexual acts are lies. But in the immediately preceding sentence he says that sexuality is realized in a truly human way, “*only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.*” Were extramarital sex wrong simply because it is a lie, in the sense of the signification of something one thinks or knows is not true, then there would be no point to that sentence. In other words, sexual acts *are* signs, and can be spoken of as language, but they are signs and language in a sense unique to themselves. More fundamentally, sexual intercourse is a real bodily unity, and this bodily unity is either used for purposes of private satisfaction (in acts that do not express marital communion) or is a *constitutive element or substratum, a part*, of marriage (in acts of loving and respectful marital intercourse).

So, too, the implications for specific issues regarding reproductive technologies are quite clear. John Paul’s approach emphasizes the unity of the body and the soul, and thereby also the importance of the family as the appropriate environment for the bearing and raising of children. The communion of the spouses is naturally oriented to developing into family: “Conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household” (1981, no. 21). And this conjugal-familial communion is quite properly rooted in the bodily complementarity and union of the spouses: “This communion is rooted in the natural bonds of flesh and blood, and grows to its specifically human perfection with the establishment and maturing of the still deeper and richer bonds of the spirit...”(1981, no. 21).

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Thus, the question whether a specific type of reproductive technology is morally right must be based on whether it is an act that is respectful of the bodily and spiritual unity of the three components of the family: sex, marriage, and children. Reproductive technologies that separate one or more from their integral unity are contrary to the fundamental good of marriage and family, and thus the fundamental good of human life (in its transmission or education). Children who come to be within a loving family come to be with bodily and spiritual connections or communions that form for them as it were a protective cocoon. Deliberately to sever the tight unity among sex, marriage, and family is to violate the respect and reverence due all of these fundamental goods (since they form, both bodily and spiritually such a unity). So, for example, *in vitro* fertilization separates procreation from the marital act, and thus is an eroding of the respect due both the child and the nature of family. The child comes to be as viewed in his or her first instant of existence as a product rather than as a person. As another example, *cloning* human beings would go even further in separating procreation from the context of sex and marriage. Cloning human beings would separate the procreation of a child not only from the marital act (which *in vitro* fertilization already does) but would go further and separate all three (sex, marriage, procreation) from each other. Contraception (immorally) severs the sexual act from any connection (such as openness) to procreation. Cloning would separate procreation not only from any particular sexual act (as does *in vitro* fertilization) but would also separate procreation from any sexual differentiation (it would be *asexual* reproduction) and thus also make procreation in itself separate from marriage.

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NOTES

- 1 Catholic teaching, however, is quite clear that there is a resurrection of the body, and thus heaven, or the completed kingdom of God, will include *both*, the spiritual and the bodily.
- 2 Two articles that have raised this issue are Goldman, 1977, and 1984.
- 3 Moreover, if Mappes were correct, then it would be logically or metaphysically impossible for someone to treat himself, or his own body, as a mere thing.
- 4 See Dworkin, 1974. I think the same point, however, goes for the rarer instances of pornography displaying men.
- 5 For an early criticism by a proponent of traditional sexual morality, see Grisez, 1964, esp. pp. 19-32.
- 6 In *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul states that although the teaching authority of the Church has the duty to teach that “some trends in theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations are incompatible with revealed truth,” still: “Certainly the Church’s Magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one” (1993, no. 29). And in the encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul teaches: “The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others (note omitted). The underlying reason for this reluctance is that, even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods.” (1998, no. 49) This reluctance to appeal to a specific philosophical system where unnecessary should be

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remembered when John Paul's texts are interpreted. His texts are of a different genre than a philosophical article appearing in a philosophical journal. It seems to me that this reluctance leads him often to refrain from tracing back to its roots the possible *philosophical* justification for the premises of his arguments—arguments that are given not so much to convince people not yet convinced but to *explain* or *make intelligible* the position which is held because it is part of the constant teaching of the Church. In other words, it makes it inappropriate for him to enter, at least in too much detail, the philosophical dialectical fray.

- 7 See also John Paul II, 1997, pp. 50, and 113.
- 8 The position that marriage is consummated by sexual intercourse is also held by most political communities in the west as well.
- 9 John Paul further writes, "The coming into being of marriage is distinguished from its consummation, to the extent that without this consummation the marriage is not yet constituted in its full reality. . . . Indeed the very words "I take you as my wife—my husband" refer not only to a determinate reality, but they can be fulfilled only by means of conjugal intercourse" (1997, p. 355).
- 10 See also George and Bradley, 1995.
- 11 An organic action is one in which several bodily parts—tissues, cells, and so on—participate. Digestion, for example, involves several smaller, chemical actions of individual cells. But the several components of digestion form a unitary, single action. The subject of this action is the organism. So, the organism is a composite, made up of billions of parts. Its unity is manifested and understood in its actions. For most actions, such as sensation, digestion, walking, and so on, individual male or female organisms are complete units. The male or female animal organism uses various materials as energy or instruments to perform its actions, but there is no internal orientation of its bodily parts to any larger whole of which it is a part, with respect to those actions. (And this is why we recognize individual male and female organisms as distinct, complete organisms, in most contexts.) However, with respect to one function the male and the female are *not* complete, and that function, of course, is reproduction. In reproductive activity the bodily parts of the male and the bodily parts of the female participate in a single action, coitus, which is oriented to reproduction (though not every act of coitus is reproductive), so that the subject of the action is the male and the female as a unit. Coitus is a unitary action in which the male and the female become literally one organism. One might object that the action by which the male and the female become organically one is really only completed by actual conception, and so if they do not reproduce they do not literally become one. However, if conception *does* occur that may be hours later, and whether they *now* become one cannot depend on events that occur only later. Moreover, the conditions for a successful conception are not all within the scope of their behavior. Whether a particular act of coitus results in conception depends on conditions extrinsic to the act of coitus itself. But whether their action is the sort of action that makes them one cannot depend on something wholly extrinsic to that action. And so one cannot say that the male and the female become one organism only in those acts of coitus that actually result in conception. In coitus itself—whatever may happen *after* coitus—the male and the female become one organism. Their reproductive organs are actualized, as internally designed, to be a (now) unitary subject of a single act. On this point see: Grisez, 1993, pp. 634-636.
- 12 Of course, not every instance of two entities sharing in an action is an instance of two entities becoming one organism. In this case, however, the potentiality for a specific type of act, reproduction, can be actualized only in cooperation with the opposite sex of the species. The reproductive bodily parts are internally oriented toward actuation together with the bodily parts of the opposite sex. So, the same type of unity which shows that the various bodily parts of a single horse or human constitute a single organism, is found in the bodily parts of the male and the female engaging in a reproductive-type act. So they are literally, not merely metaphorically, one organism.
- 13 A common objection to this position is that the tradition recognizes that the sexual act of a married couple who are infertile (for example, because of age or the woman is already pregnant) is morally right. Yet such an act (the argument continues) is no different in its relation to procreation than is the sexual act of a couple (whether hetero- or homo-sexual) that is not reproductive in type. (See, for example, Matthews, 1992, pp. 161-162.) However, in the case of the infertile married couple it is only a condition extrinsic to the act that

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- renders it infertile, and so they do become biologically one (and personally one if the act is done with respect and love). In the other case the act itself lacks what is necessary for realizing a biological union.
- 14 So, the fundamental goods of marriage (personal communion and procreation) should not be viewed as two distinct goods, but as two aspects or elements of the one fundamental good of marriage. On this point see: Germain Grisez, 1993, pp. 554-569; and Finnis, 1995. John Finnis shows that this position (marriage is a single basic good, communion and procreation as aspects of it) is found in St. Thomas Aquinas himself, though it seems to have dropped out in later interpretation of him: Finnis, 1998, 143-154.
 - 15 Marriage (as is also true of marital intercourse) is not merely instrumental to procreation but is good in itself. Yet it is intrinsically oriented to, and naturally fulfilled by, procreation. Hence a marriage that does not result in children (for example one or both of the spouses are infertile) is still a genuine marriage, and is still intrinsically good, though it lacks its intrinsic natural fulfillment. On this point, see: *Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes*, no. 47-51; Germain Grisez, 1993, pp. 554-569; Finnis, 1997.
 - 16 Gareth Matthews interprets John Paul's position as saying that sexual acts are speech in the strict sense, and that immoral sexual acts are wrong because they are lies in the strict sense—that is, asserting something one thinks is false with the intent to deceive (1992, pp. 94-107). I think Matthews successfully shows that these positions are mistaken (for one thing, some instances of casual sex, and most instances of commercial sex, may not involve deception). But I have argued above that to interpret John Paul in this way is inaccurate. For more on why this interpretation is inaccurate, see below, pp. XXXX.
 - 17 Were it just a gesture with the meaning, close personal communion, then it is difficult to see why it would not be an appropriate act to share with one's parents, children, students, teachers, and so on.
 - 18 This, of course, is not to say that marriage is merely instrumental to procreation.. Both marriage, and the act that particularly embodies it (chaste marital intercourse), are intrinsically good even if they do not reach their natural fulfillment in procreation. This point is explained well by Grisez, 1993, pp. 554-569.
 - 19 On the notion of fundamental human goods, see *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 50-51.
 - 20 This point is expressed well by John Finnis, in an exchange with Martha Nussbaum, Finnis, 2002.

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