

## Homosexuality and Natural Law



Let us look at how natural law philosophy understands and morally evaluates human sexuality and the implication it has on homosexual conduct. This particular summary is a modified version of one found in J. Budziszewski's book, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (InterVarsity Press, 1997).

People have a basic, ethical intuition that certain behaviors are unnatural and therefore wrong. We perceive intuitively that the natural sex partner of a human is another human, not an animal. The same reasoning applies to the case of homosexual behavior. The natural sex partner for a man is a woman, and the natural sex partner for a woman is a man. Thus, people have a corresponding intuition concerning homosexuality as they do to bestiality – that it is wrong because it is unnatural.

Natural law reasoning is the basis for almost all standard moral intuitions. For example, it is the dignity and value that each human being naturally possesses that makes the needless destruction of human life or the needless infliction of physical and emotional pain immoral. This gives rise to a host of specific moral principles, such as the unacceptability of murder, kidnapping, mutilation, physical and emotional abuse, and so forth. The natural law is the moral law written by God into the heart of man and discerned by reason reflecting on human nature and the ultimate purpose toward which it tends, and the types of actions that fulfill real human goods. It is in this metaphysical and teleological sense that the theory uses the terms “natural” and “unnatural.”

Human nature is constituted by human goods that give man reasons to act and to refrain from acting, and not by desires that may, rightly or wrongly, also provide motivation. These natural goods are basic inasmuch as they are ends or purposes that have their intelligibility as intrinsic aspects of human well-being and fulfillment. Far from being reducible simply to desires, basic human goods give people reasons to desire things – reasons that hold whether they happen to desire them or not, and even in the face of powerful emotional motives that run contrary to what reason identifies as humanly good and morally right.

By reason reflecting on the real human goods of what our sexuality is inclined towards we can discover the meaning of human sexual activity and what facilitates or frustrates its

purposes. This can give us a moral standard by which to regulate its desires and evaluate certain acts.

In the natural law approach by drawing the two sexes together sexual desire can be made to serve two human goods, one called the procreative the other called the unitive. Why not a third purpose, one might ask, like pleasure? The answer is that pleasure is a result of our activities rather than their intrinsic purpose. It may be the subjective reason we choose a particular action but it is not the intrinsic purpose for which a natural inclination exists. For example, food can be pleasurable, and we often seek food we enjoy, but eating exists for more than this mere pleasure. Therefore the desire for pleasure cannot be used as a criterion for judging between good and bad inclinations; rather the ultimate purposes of the inclinations must be used to judge between morally and immorally sought pleasures.

Now the procreative purpose of physical union is to bring forth children into a secure family in which they can be taught and properly cared for. Only a man and a woman together can procreate a child. The sexual powers are ordered to the conjugal act, which in turn is ordered by its very nature to the generation of new human life. Any action that therefore impedes or distorts the conjugal nature of the sexual act is wrong. It violates the integrity of the act itself and its intrinsic dignity as the instrumental cause of human life. A society that artificially severs the institution of marriage from the procreation and education of children does so at its own peril. There is as well a “natural teleology” to the body that makes monogamy the true expression of the conjugal act and marriage; for only two people, no more and no fewer, can generate a child.

The unitive purpose of the conjugal act is to deepen the bonds of affection between a man and woman. This is for their good and for the good of any children that might result from it. To understand the unitive purpose we must recognize that the sexes are not only different but also complementary. There could have been just one self-sufficient sex but there is not. Instead there are two sexes, each of which senses itself incomplete and longs for the other. They are alike and yet different from each other physically, emotionally, intellectually and psychologically. This is a source of confusion and conflict but also of excitement and deep satisfaction.

There are forms of sexual expression that do not bridge the differences between the sexes nor are they complementary. Solitary sex sinks a person more deeply into the self; homosexual acts sink him into a looking-glass idol of the self; and promiscuity merely uses the other for the purposes of the self. By contrast, permanent bond of marriage holds forth the prospect of forgetting the self in care and sacrifice for the other. We come to ourselves by losing ourselves. This extraordinary intimacy is among the profoundest of natural goods. Divine law goes even further than natural law in describing it as a foretaste of our supernatural good – that still deeper union which we are invited with the One who is wholly other, who is God.

In terms of the procreative end for which sex is intended, solitary sex, contraception, and homosexual actions are all gravely disordered while promiscuity violates the good of the

potential child to a secure, stable and loving environment. Since homosexual activity cannot achieve either the unitive or procreative purposes of conjugal act, it must be immoral by its very nature.

Notice how this reflection on the real human goods toward which our sexual powers are rationally ordered enables us to distinguish between natural and unnatural forms of sexual expression. Homosexual acts are evaluated as an unnatural form of sexual expression.

When there is a disconnection between the natural end of an organism and its behaviour, a disorder ensues and the good of the organism is compromised. Man is ordered to woman, and woman to man, and that's a fact in biology, psychology and natural philosophy. When this order is breached, as it is in homosexual relations, we expect to see profound consequences. And research is increasingly indicating that we do.

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