

Nature, “Naturalism,” and the Immorality of Contraception

A Critique of Fr. Rhonheimer on Condom Use and Contraceptive Intent

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In a recent contribution to the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, Fr. Martin Rhonheimer argues that the evil of contraception is rooted strictly in the *intention* to prevent new life. Unlike adultery or homosexuality, its immorality is not intrinsically related to any *physical* behavior of the human body. Accordingly, Fr. Rhonheimer argues, one cannot evaluate the morality of an act of condomistic sex between spouses until one knows *why* they choose to use a condom during intercourse. He explains:

“Having sexual intercourse by using a condom” is the description of an act in its natural species ... Only when it is conceived as being related to an end can this act be understood as a human act and in its moral species. It is morally different to use a condom in order to “prevent conception” versus in order to “prevent infection”; I hold that the latter can be reasonably done without referring it to a contraceptive end.¹

Because there is no “contraceptive end” in the mind of the couple, there is no contraceptive wrong in the deed of the couple. Since “the prevention of conception” is, for the couple seeking to prevent HIV infection, *praeter intentionem*, it cannot be reckoned as something chosen. Accordingly, the couple cannot be said to have contracepted, and thus to have done anything intrinsically wrong.

¹ Benedict Guevin, O.S.B., and Martin Rhonheimer, “On the Use of Condoms to Prevent Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 5.1 (Spring 2005): 43–44.

In responding to Fr. Rhonheimer's position, I will refrain from engaging the nuances of his action theory (with which I have only minor quibbles), and focus instead on his claim that the immorality of contraception has nothing to do with what is physically performed at the bodily level. I maintain, on the contrary, that physically frustrating the aptitude of the marital act to be generative, for whatever reason, is contraceptive in nature. I think it is an error and an (unintentional) departure from Catholic teaching to hold that the evil of contraception exists only in the mental *intention* to prevent new life during conjugal intercourse.

To make my case, I will defend the following natural-law norm: Any marital act engaged in—for whatever reason—in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated *in its natural power to generate life* is a grave violation of the natural moral law. Thus, contrary to Fr. Rhonheimer's claim, I believe the moral specification of a marital act as contraceptive in nature is constituted by any deliberate choice which, in the marital act itself, renders it *physically* inapt for the generation of new life. In this way, contraception is not simply a matter of the interior act of the will, but of the external act itself, which reason can see to be undue matter. This is not to diminish the importance of intention or "the perspective of the acting person," but merely to point out that the intention in question is inclusive of physical, bodily behavior, such that any choice to render procreation impossible, physically or otherwise, is objectively immoral.

As St. Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa theologiae*, a voluntary human act is always twofold: interior and exterior, formal and material.² The intention of the end, which is the object of the internal act of the will, is not the only morally relevant element of human action. For it is brought to bear on the object of the external act, which reason can discern either as due or undue matter. Thus, a human, morally specifiable act always has an intention of an end, but the intention need not always be the morally determinative aspect of the act. Sometimes reason grasps that an action, independent of any further end in view, is immoral precisely and only because it lacks due matter. Such external actions are incapable of being ordered to God regardless of the intention at work. One thinks here of acts such as adultery, homosexual activity, and bestiality. It would be implausible, for example, for someone to say: "'Having intercourse with a woman not one's own' is the description of an act in its natural species ... Only when it is conceived as being related to an end can this act be understood as a human act and in its moral species."

The larger intention that is leading a man to have sexual intercourse with a woman who is not his wife may not be known, but we nevertheless already know that the act is wrong simply from its natural species. A man may not have intercourse with a woman who is not his wife regardless of the end he intends in such an act. He may, under violent coercion, be threatened with the execution of both his wife and this woman if he does not have intercourse with her. Such a man, surrendering to this threat, could certainly engage in this act with the intention only to save his wife, not from an intention to be unfaithful. However, the act would still be immoral, for

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, Q. 18.6.

“intercourse with a woman not one’s own” is an external act that is incapable of being rendered moral by any intention.

Fr. Rhonheimer, of course, recognizes the truth of this as a general principle. He articulates the sometimes decisive role of the external act itself when he writes:

We cannot continually and arbitrarily redescribe our actions, because intentions, at least in many cases, also depend on objectively given conditions. Not any intention can *reasonably* inform any act or behavior: one cannot swallow stones with the intention of nourishing oneself, nor are genital acts between persons of the same sex apt to be an expression of friendship and love.³

Clearly, Fr. Rhonheimer is not an Abelardian who reduces morality to intention. It is also clear, however, that one may concede that a husband could genuinely have no contraceptive intent in using a condom, and yet still object to his use of it on account of the external act itself being undue matter.

Thus, the debate specifically centers on the following question: Does choosing to physically block insemination during the marital act, and thus rendering the biological operation of our generative faculty infecund, constitute an external act which is wrong regardless of intention? Or is the moral evil of contraception purely a matter of the subjective intention that has nothing to do with external behavioral patterns? Put otherwise, is contraception evil in the way that adultery and homosexuality are evil, or is it evil in the way that killing a man could be evil?

The Purpose of the Generative Faculty and Its Organs as Morally Relevant

Aquinas’s answer to this question is clear: Choosing, in the very act of marital intercourse itself, to physically block insemination is an external act that is intrinsically wrong, like adultery, because it fundamentally contradicts the end to which the human generative organ is ordained. How does Aquinas arrive at this conclusion?

Speaking to this issue in his discussion of lust in the *De Malo*, Aquinas articulates grounds for judging the external act itself as evil. Rooted in the understanding that to follow reason is to follow nature, he puts forth the principle that our bodily organs have an ordination to the proper ends of our natural faculties, and must therefore be used in accordance with their meaning and purpose. Any activity that seriously violates or contradicts the ends for which a faculty is intended is a disordered act.⁴ In the context of sexual activity he writes:

Sometimes the disorder of desire is also accompanied by a disorder in the very external act as such, as happens in every use of the genital organs outside the conjugal act. And every such act is evidently disordered of its very self, since we call every act that is not properly related to its requisite end a disordered act. *For example, eating is disordered if it be not properly related to bodily health, for which end eating is ordained. And the end of using genital organs is to beget and educate offspring, and so every use of the aforementioned organs*

³ Guevin and Rhonheimer, “On the Use of Condoms,” 44.

⁴ The proper qualifications of this principle will be explained shortly.

*that is not related to begetting and properly educating offspring is as such disordered. And every act of the aforementioned organs outside the sexual union of a man and a woman is obviously unsuitable for begetting offspring.*⁵

In other words, human nature, and thus the parts of human nature, are the measure of our activity, for man's nature determines his purpose and the purposes of his parts. And man's purpose and the purposes of his parts are the measure against which the moral quality of man's activity is determined. The latter is judged either good or bad to the degree that it conforms to man's purpose and the purposes of his faculties, which, as we have stated, are determined by his nature and constitute his natural inclinations.

NOTE: To follow reason is to follow *our* nature, our human nature, and our *rational* animality: not animality as such, and not animal biology as such. We must reject as a simplistic caricature the position ridiculed by such people as Charles Curran,⁶ who see Aquinas's view as an absolutizing of a brute animal or simple biological processes. Our actions are measured against the meanings and purposes of *our* human, rational nature, which has, of course, an intrinsic organic, bodily dimension. They are not measured against digestion or procreation as found in nonrational animals, as if the significance of our nutritive and generative faculties was univocally and absolutely the same as the significance of those faculties in animals without reason. All the same, we *are* animals, and thus to act in accordance with our nature will have organic, bodily applications. It will necessarily include our animalic faculties. Thus, to act in a way which contradicts the ends of man's natural faculties, and the organs which are the instruments of these faculties, is to act in an unnatural and hence immoral way.

Since man's nature is derived from his form, which is his soul, one can articulate the above truth by stating that one needs some understanding of the human soul in order to judge the morality of our activity. As Aquinas writes in his commentary on the *De Anima*, "As regards moral philosophy, we cannot perfectly acquire the science of morals unless we know the powers of the soul; thus it is in the *Ethics* that the Philosopher assigns the virtues to the different powers of the soul."⁷ This, of course, does not mean that one must be acquainted with the speculative arguments of the *De Anima* or be a learned, scholarly philosopher of the human soul in order to know the difference between right and wrong, but it does mean that one needs to know what it means to be a human being, and thus what human nature is in terms of its proper acts and ends.

Now the nature of something comes from its form. Our form is our soul. Therefore, one must know something about the soul if one is to judge what is fitting and unfitting, proper and improper, good and bad, and right and wrong for a human being. My very unscholarly grandmother had a good bit of this knowledge, not through academic philosophy and its demonstrations, but through extensive experi-

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 15.1 (emphasis added), published in English as *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 421.

⁶ For Curran's mistaken critique of traditional natural law theory as fatally flawed by "biologism," see his contribution to *Natural Law and Theology*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991)

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis Librum De Anima Commentarium*, I, lect. 1, 7.

ence of being human, adequately interpreted by her use of reason, all of which was made possible by her good habits and rectified appetite.

The Role of Practical Reason

It is, of course, the essential role of practical reason to direct our activity in such a way that it conforms to the good of man's nature. Reason must therefore determine in each of our acts whether it is ordained to its proper end. Thus, while reason actively measures our actions, while it creatively establishes an order among our voluntary acts, it is itself measured by our nature, its purpose, and the purposes of its parts. Thus, as Aquinas states, eating is disordered if it is not directed to bodily health, which is the purpose of the nutritive faculty. The use of one's genital organs is disordered if they are not directed to begetting and educating offspring, which is the purpose of our generative faculty. Thus, while reason imposes order among our acts, it does so to conform them to such ends.

It would be an unjust caricature of this position to disallow any but the most wooden and mechanistic applications of this principle. Like most other principles, there will be circumstances where the proper application of "follow nature" will be subtle and nuanced. Reason can see that often one faculty is subordinate and ordained to another. The faculties of sensation, for example, are ordered toward the faculty of understanding. If one has a cancer of the eyes that would spread to the brain if the eyes are not surgically removed, it would not be a repudiation of the principle of not acting contrary to our natural faculties to remove the eyes and thus destroy the faculty of seeing. On the contrary, one is, under tragic necessity, destroying a natural faculty for the sake of something that is *more properly natural to us*, namely, our understanding and our very life. It is natural for the part to be subordinate to the whole and the lower subordinate to the higher. It is therefore sometimes necessary to sacrifice a part for the sake of the whole and the lower for the higher. This is no different from the nuances involved in applying other principles, say, for example, "obey legitimate authority." Under certain circumstances, it is necessary to disobey a legitimate authority. But one does so only because one must, in such cases, obey a higher legitimate authority. This does not mean that the principle, "obey legitimate authority" is false and unworkable for morality. What it means is that its application will sometimes be complex. So it is with "follow nature." When we are obliged to act contrary to a part of our nature, we actually follow and conform to it at a higher level.

Again, Aquinas's way of reasoning about the immorality of contraception cannot be casually dismissed by pointing out that it is not immoral for people to chew sugarless gum or wear earplugs, for example.⁸ The licitness of these acts undermines

⁸ See Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1983), 105: "It is a sign of the basic flaw in scholastic natural-law theory that it provided only question-begging arguments for specific norms of Christian morality. Against contraception, for instance, it argued that this practice perverts the generative faculty by using it while frustrating its natural power to initiate new life. In reply, people reasonably note that perverting faculties in this sense cannot always be wrong—no one objects to the use of earplugs or chewing sugarless gum."

the principle of “follow nature” only if one holds to the most wooden and superficial version of it. As Aquinas explains, the matter of an act must be weighty, and thus the violation of a natural end must be serious, for there to be a genuine moral problem. As Aquinas writes in the *Summa contra gentiles*:

It is either a slight sin, or none at all, for a person to use a part of the body for a different use than that to which it is directed by nature (say, for instance, one chose to walk on his hands, or to use his feet for something usually done with the hands) [when] *man's good is not much opposed by such inordinate use*. However, the inordinate emission of semen is incompatible with the natural good; namely, the preservation of the species.⁹

Chewing gum might be tacky and unbecoming, moving one's checker pieces with one's tongue might be gross and indecorous, and the president walking to the podium on his hands to give a speech might be inappropriate and undignified, but they do not constitute a serious matter and therefore are either not immoral at all or, as perhaps in the case of the presidential circus act, are so only in a venial way. As Aquinas specifically points out, the same cannot be said of the emission of semen, which is necessarily bound up with the generation of human life, and therefore is a very serious matter. Thus, the sugarless gum refutation is not quite to the point.

The same holds true for the earplug objection. Some have argued that the view I defend would make wearing earplugs wrong because it goes against the natural finality of hearing. However, we know that it would, on the contrary, be prudent to wear earplugs while operating a jackhammer in order to protect one's ears while working. But clearly this objection is misconceived. Aquinas's claim about not seriously violating the ordination of our bodily organs does not entail the immorality of wearing earplugs in this situation, but the immorality of *not* wearing them. Why? Because to not wear earplugs needlessly damages the ears and thus potentially destroys our faculty of hearing. It is to protect one's faculty of hearing that one prudently uses earplugs. Thus, the example does not constitute a counter-instance of my position, but an instance of it.

The Place of Virtue

Our practical reason is capable of directing us to our proper acts and ends only to the degree that our habits approximate virtue, for good habits keep one's appetites rectified, and thus prevent them from distorting our judgment, which they consistently do when our passions are disordered. Thus, virtue is, as Fr. Rhonheimer emphasizes, absolutely crucial for prudential discernment of the general precepts of the natural law, as well as how any individual situation ought to be evaluated morally.

However, it is important to note that what is virtuous and what is vicious are, like reason, also measured by the natural ends of human nature. For what determines the difference between a virtue and a vice for our given nature is, as Aquinas notes

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, III, 122 (emphasis added), published in English as *Summa Contra Gentiles 3: Providence, Part II*, trans. Vernon Bourke (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 146.

above in his comments on Aristotle, the power of the human soul, whose proper operation, in accordance with our natural ends, renders man excellent. As Aquinas says in *Summa theologiae*, I-II, Q 55.1, “Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power.” Virtues are habits which dispose us to actualize our proper operations well, and thus to be excellent human beings. Thus temperance, which disposes us to experience rightly our bodily pleasures of touch and taste, takes this form because it disposes us to gastronomic and sexual activity and pleasure that accords with our nature. Thus, far from replacing our natural ends and operations as normative for natural law, the virtues are distinct because of our soul’s natural powers and the ends of those powers.

Contraception as a Physical Human Act

Turning back to the *De Malo* text, Aquinas then specifically speaks to the particular issue of the generative organ’s seminal emission in the conjugal act itself. Responding to an objection that semen is merely a biological fluid that is not morally relevant, he writes:

Semen is indeed surplus regarding the nutritive power’s activity but necessary for begetting offspring, and *so every voluntary emission of semen is licit only if suitable for the end for which nature strives*. But other surplus things, such as sweat, urine, and the like, are unnecessary for begetting offspring, and so it does not matter how they are discharged.¹⁰

Despite opening himself up to the regnant caricature of his position that is often characterized by the terms “physicalism” and “biologism,” Aquinas does not hesitate to state that the disorder of contraception is bound up in the use of the organ itself in such a way that every voluntary emission of semen which is deliberately rendered inapt for the generation and education of offspring is wrong.¹¹ Our generative organs are ordered toward the end of our generative faculty, and any intentional use of them which contradicts their purpose is morally wrong. Pius XI, in his encyclical *Casti connubii*, articulates a magisterial version of this precept. Responding to the betrayal of the Anglican “ecclesial” community on the issue of contraception, Pius XI reiterates the Catholic teaching:

Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question, the Catholic Church, to whom God has entrusted the defense of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 15.1, ad. 4 (emphasis added), in *On Evil*, 422.

¹¹ It should be noted that this way of reasoning in the *De Malo* does not represent a rare aberration on Aquinas’s part. He reasons in precisely the same manner in both the *Summa theologiae* (II-II, Q. 154) and the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (III, 122). The point is of only secondary importance, of course, as I am not arguing from authority, but rather philosophically appropriating the arguments that Thomas makes. However, it is at least worth mentioning, in light of the widespread assumption that reasoning from the ends of natural faculties of human nature is an un-Thomistic development of later post-Tridentine, Baroque casuistry.

the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain, raises her voice in token of her divine ambassadorship and through Our mouth proclaims anew: *any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life* is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.¹²

If some people think *Humanae vitae* is either ambiguous or silent on the issue of whether contraception involves the choice to render the conjugal act *physically* inapt for generation, we have the consolation that *Casti connubii* is quite clear on the matter. Pius XI and, given the context, the teaching Church clearly follow Aquinas on this point.¹³

Fr. Rhonheimer's Critique of this Position

Along with a chorus of other moralists, Fr. Rhonheimer thinks that this conclusion and this way of reasoning embodies the vitiating fallacies of "physicalism," "naturalism," or "biologism." These fallacies derive moral significance from the ends or purposes of the natural faculties of human nature, inasmuch as they are characterized as "subrational nature." The natural purposes of our nature and the function of organs instrumentally ordained to our natural faculties are either "facts" of biology or pieces of "metaphysical speculation" that have no direct moral significance. Without designating Aquinas or Pius XI as culprits, Fr. Rhonheimer argues that such a physicalist way of articulating natural law norms, and thus of answering the question before us concerning what is morally significant in the act of contraception, is weak and erroneous. He writes:

There are some moral theologians, it is true ... who deny that such an act, in which insemination is impeded and which, as they say, is therefore not of a generative kind, may any longer be called a marital act. If this argument is sound, it would in fact be a powerful objection to my position; but I think it is unsound. This argument, it seems to me, is a relic of an older view, focused on

¹² Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, n. 56 (emphasis added).

¹³ Just for the record, I do not think that Paul VI in *Humanae vitae* was ambiguous on this point. He refers to the issue at stake in a number of places. For example, "In relation to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect of their functions; human intellect discovers in the power of giving life biological laws which are part of the human person" (n. 10). Note how the Holy Father sees our very bodies as expressive of our properly human personhood. This is why he goes on to say, "just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, with particular reason, he has no such dominion over his generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life, of which God is the principle" (n. 13). Similarly, "The Church ... considers the use of means directly contrary to fecundation" as "always illicit" (n. 16). Why? Because "they impede the development of natural processes" (n. 16). Finally, and most directly, Paul VI teaches that there are "insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions ... And such limits cannot be determined otherwise than by the respect due to the integrity of the human organism and its functions" (n. 17, emphasis added).

seeing the evil of contraception in the frustration of natural patterns, of its destroying the physical aptitude of sexual intercourse to be generative.¹⁴

Obviously, the error here cannot simply be that moral disorder is deduced from a “natural pattern of physical behavior” *as such*, for Fr. Rhonheimer has already conceded that there are certain “objective conditions” which are morally problematic without regard to interior intention. Thus, Fr. Rhonheimer cannot simply be detecting a fallacy based on a general principle of the moral underdetermination of any and all natural patterns of behavior. It must be the case that he judges this *particular* conclusion about deliberately “destroying physical aptitude” in the marital act to be flawed, for he would not make the same claim about adultery, homosexuality, or bestiality. We must therefore look at the reasons Fr. Rhonheimer and others offer for rejecting the view that contraception pertains to the external act and not simply the interior act of the will.

In his *Quarterly* contribution, Fr. Rhonheimer alludes to the text of *Humanae vitae*, n. 11, which states that each conjugal act must “remain *per se destinatus* to the procreating of human life.” He then argues: “The ‘openness’ of each marital act to the procreation of new life cannot reasonably be understood as physical openness to the possibility of procreation. This is obvious because otherwise sexual intercourse in knowingly infertile times ... or that engaged in by entirely sterile couples ... would be morally illicit.”¹⁵

It is fairly easy to see that Fr. Rhonheimer’s statement does not follow, for it is based on a misconstrual of the position articulated here, which sees the natural end of our generative faculty, and thus the use of that faculty’s organs, as morally relevant. The claim is not that any conjugal act which happens to be physically incapable of producing offspring is immoral, but that any deliberate choice that knowingly and willingly renders the conjugal act physically incapable of producing offspring is immoral. As Pius XI stated, “any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is *deliberately* frustrated in its *natural power to generate life* is an offense against the law of God and of nature.” The Natural Family Planning (NFP) couple and the sterile couple do nothing to deliberately frustrate the natural power to generate life. In the case of the former, they simply refrain from the act so as to respect its nature when they do not want to conceive. In the case of the latter, the failure to realize the fullness of God’s design for human sexuality does not reside in their choice, but in a defect or infirmity of the body. Responding precisely to this issue in the *De Malo*, Aquinas says:

General laws are laid down regarding general conditions, not accidental particulars. And so we say that an act in the genus of sexual lust is contrary to nature if begetting offspring cannot result from the act by reason of the act’s species, not if begetting offspring cannot result from the act because of an accidental particular such as old age or infirmity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Guevin and Rhonheimer, “On the Use of Condoms,” 44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *De Malo*, 15.2, ad. 14. See Aquinas, *On Evil*, 429.

In the clarification of his article in *The Tablet*, Fr. Rhonheimer attempts another *reductio ad absurdum* to show that “physical behavior” cannot be relevant here. He writes:

If this is true, how can we justify, for example, the direct and complete removal of a whole female ovary in order to prevent the cancerous cells contained in it from spreading? If the above objection is sound, then the physical criteria on which it relies should be applied also to this case, saying that such a removal means to choose sterilization as a means to achieve the further goal of preventing the cancerous cells contained in it from further spreading.¹⁷

Once again the non sequitur is not hard to see. The woman is not choosing to engage in a conjugal act in such a way as to frustrate the natural ordination of her procreative organs. Rather, she is seeking to save her life. Contrary to Fr. Rhonheimer’s claim, the removal of the cancerous ovary does not intend sterilization. The loss of her generative capacity is clearly an unintended consequence (*praeter intentionem*) of her only means of surviving. Like my example of the cancerous eye above, there is no desire to destroy a natural faculty as such, nor to use one in such a way as to violate its purpose. There is only the resignation to suffer the loss of a natural faculty in order to preserve what is more properly natural to her life.

Fr. Rhonheimer offers another way of manifesting the implausibility of the so-called physicalist approach: this view “counter-intuitively” renders condomistic sex analogous to sodomy and masturbation. He writes:

This argument puts condomistic sex of any kind in a certain analogy—though not similarity—with sexual acts “against nature,” like sodomy and masturbation, even in the present case where the condom is used only for preventing infection, and in the case of sterile couples. I think this is incorrect; at a minimum, it is counter-intuitive. It seems to me obvious that solitary sex or acts of sodomy—anal and oral sex—are “unnatural” and even plainly “against nature”: their behavior structure is as such not of a generative kind. The same cannot be said of condomistic sex: here the act as such is of a generative kind, but it is modified by human intervention. It is only this modification which renders the act non-generative.¹⁸

I am at a bit of a loss to make much sense of this claim, for the force of the connection strikes me in precisely the opposite way. I think it counter-intuitive not to see these sexual acts in a certain analogy, for all four of them (masturbation and anal, oral, and condomistic sex) share the same basic intentionality, which is a deliberate engaging in genital acts which necessarily frustrate the natural power of the generative faculty to bring about life, three of them by providing unnatural receptacles, and one no receptacle at all. Thus, all four contradict the natural place for ejaculation in the context of a loving, one-flesh union with one’s wife.

Fr. Rhonheimer, however, wants to claim that condomistic sex, with no contraceptive intention on the part of the acting subject, is of a generative kind, only slightly

¹⁷ Martin Rhonheimer, “The Truth about Condoms,” *The Tablet* (July 10, 2004): 8.

¹⁸ Guevin and Rhonheimer, “On the Use of Condoms,” 44.

modified by human intervention. This claim I find highly unconvincing. Its implausible nature is, I think, nicely brought out if we simply combine Fr. Rhonheimer's last two sentences. Without distorting the meaning of the two sentences as Fr. Rhonheimer penned them, their combination would then read: "Here the act [of condomistic sex] as such is of a generative kind, but is modified by human intervention to render the act non-generative." This is not credible. The human "modification" under discussion is of a kind to render the act inapt for generation. In this way the "intervention" renders the act infecund and makes procreation impossible. It is therefore not of a generative kind.

I therefore conclude that Fr. Rhonheimer has not provided a cogent rejection of the Thomistic and, as I believe, magisterial understanding of what constitutes contraception. Seeking to avoid the pitfall of "biologism" in its caricatured form, he has thrown out the Thomistic baby with the Ulpian or Suarezian bathwater and fails to appreciate sufficiently the intimate substantial integration that exists between our bodily and psychic life. His position creates too great a separation between "the language of the body," as John Paul II writes, and the interior intentionality of our reason and will. Aquinas's way of reasoning, on the other hand, takes seriously that our rational soul is the very form of our body, and therefore will naturally express our rational nature *even in our bodily being*, especially regarding human sexuality, which so profoundly touches on the core of our personhood. In this way, Aquinas's position is in continuity with John Paul II when he writes in one of his Wednesday catecheses: "The situation that is indicated, in such a concise and at the same time inspiring way, by the original revelation of the body as seen in particular by Genesis 2:25, *does not know an interior rupture and opposition between what is spiritual and what is sensible*."¹⁹

Sexuality is one of the most profound instances of the body's "expressing the person."²⁰ I conclude by reaffirming that there is no interior rupture or opposition between what is life-giving in sexuality at the bodily level and what is life-giving in sexuality at the intentional level.

¹⁹ John Paul II, general audience of January 2, 1980, in *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, general audience of January 9, 1980, 60–63.