

Artificial Contraception and Abstinence: Reflections on the Human Act

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Sommario: 1. *Morality and the Value of Persons*. 2. *Sex and the Value of Persons*. 3. *Contraception by Abstinence*. 4. *The Injustice of Artificial Contraception*. 5. *Analogies to Artificial Contraception*. 6. *Artificial Reproduction*. 7. *Infertility*.



How can it be immoral to prevent conception while engaging in sex if it is moral to prevent conception by refraining from sex? In each case the goal is the same, the prevention of conception; so presumably that is a morally permissible goal. Whether it is a morally permissible goal in all circumstances need not concern us. I will be comparing two means of attaining the same morally permissible goal. The argument will be based on an analysis of what makes human acts morally good and evil and of the moral value of persons, by which I mean beings of a rational nature. The analysis assumes that persons have freedom of choice over the ends of their actions.

This essay is philosophical and takes no theological position. It is worth noting, however, that the analysis of moral value below does not just make the core ideas of *Veritatis splendor* (that moral value derives from rationally known truth) and *Evangelium vitae* (that the human person is of incomparable worth) true; it makes them identical.

1. Morality and the Value of Persons

Moral good and evil are primarily properties of the interior act of choice. Whether a chosen external act is morally good or bad can depend on the choice's

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intention and always depends on the knowledge on which the choice is based; we do not judge those who are inculpably ignorant of the relevant facts to be morally responsible. As properties of choice, moral good and evil must consist in success or failure in achieving some goal to which we are oriented by our faculty of choice: the will or rational appetite.

Most current presentations of natural law ethics express this goal as that of acting in accord with reason¹. Typically, these presentations make “accord with reason” mean conformity with reason’s value judgments; reason would make the value judgments themselves by the standard of achieving a goal like happiness or contemplation. Recently, however, an internal problem with this understanding of acting “in accord” with reason has come to light. The primary and self-evident precepts of natural law are «Love God above all things» and «Love your neighbor as yourself»². Since love of friendship (willing the good of persons for their own sake) has priority over love of “concupiscence” (willing other goods for the sake of persons), these precepts principally command love of friendship and secondarily love of concupiscence. But happiness and contemplation are goods loved by concupiscence³. If they provided the basic standard by which reason makes value judgments, the obligation to have love of friendship for God and neighbor would be derived from an obligation to have love of concupiscence. The latter obligations could not, then, be primary and self-evident; nor could love of friendship have priority over love of concupiscence⁴.

To give an account of how the will’s acts accord with reason that is based on metaphysical principles, we must start with the fact that, like truth, goodness is not a real feature added to those making a thing what it is; “good” describes what something is by a being of reason stating that the thing is a term of a relation of desire. So what is good (desired) about something is not really distinct from, but is identical with, what the thing is.⁵ Since moral good is a property of a specific kind of “desire”, choices based on rational knowledge, a specific kind of identity with what things are must determine the moral value of those choices. The “what something is” that is the good for choices based on rational knowledge must be identical with a “what something is” that is a rationally known truth. Therefore, evil in the rational appetite’s act must be a privation of that identity between “what something is” as known by reason and the “what something is” that is the term of a relation of desire (choice) on the part of the rational appetite.

To see how this comes about, note that choices give things the status of being

¹ Following THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II 94, 3.

² AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II 100, 3 ad 1.

³ AQUINAS, I-II 2, 7 ad 2; I 60, 4 ad 3; II-II 25, 2. On all these matters see D.M. GALLAGHER, *Person and Ethics in Aquinas*, «Acta Philosophica» [Italy] 4 (1995), pp. 51-71.

⁴ See J.C. CAHALAN, *Natural Obligation: How Rationally Known Truth Determines Ethical Good and Evil*, «The Thomist», 66 (2002), pp. 101-132. The rest of this section is based on that analysis of the nature of moral value.

⁵ AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I 5, 1.

ends or means to ends for us. To give something such a status is to assign it a value, to evaluate it. And in every choice potential values are in opposition; if not, we would not have to choose between them. So choices are evaluations that give things differing places in our system of values. (By “system of values” I mean the set of motivations for the choices we actually make, not our intellectual beliefs about what those values should be.) Choices value some things more highly than others. For example, God is an infinitely perfect being; as such God is the possessor of everything any possible appetite could have as its object, plus infinitely more. A person who knows this but who fails to give God the place, in her system of values, of being the highest and ruling value is not evaluating God to be what he is as known by reason, the being with everything any appetite could possibly have as its object. As a result of someone’s choice to, say, lie under oath, there would be a contradiction between what God is in her values and what God is in reality. Since that contradiction would result from a reason-based choice, the choice would be defective by the standard that what God is in her system of values, as a term of a relation of choice, contradicts what God is in reality, as known by reason.

Choices also relate us to created things such that what they are in our values either is or is not the same as what they are in reality. Choices give things the status in our values of being our ends or means to our ends. Unlike other things, persons pursue their good by freely choosing their own ends; so persons must evaluate all things, including other persons, by reference to their own freely chosen ends. We can so choose our ends that we treat other persons as means (good, bad, or indifferent means) to our ends; if so, in our values other persons are things directed to our freely chosen ends to the exclusion of being directed to their own. But then, what persons are in our values contradicts what they are in reality, since in reality persons are beings who pursue their good by directing actions to their own freely chosen ends. Such a reason-based choice would be defective by the standard that what persons are in our values is not what they are in reality, as known to reason.

Since the only things choices do is make things our ends or our means, there is only one alternative to valuing other persons as means to our ends. We can make other persons’ achievement of good by their free choice of ends one of our own ends (and so love our neighbors as ourselves); if we do, in our system of values other persons are things directed to achieving both our ends *and* their own. Thus, our choices can give other people the status in our evaluations of beings whose actions are directed to ends of their own choosing, not to our ends to the exclusion of theirs. When a choice gives other persons that status, the choice is successful by the standard that what persons are in our system of values is what they are in reality. We can only evaluate things by reference to our own chosen ends, but we can choose the end of treating things as if they are what they are with respect to being directed to their own freely chosen ends. To do so is to choose the end of being moral.

Moral value consists in the success or failure of choices to achieve the goal of accord with reason, where “accord” means so making things our ends and means that what things are in our values is what they are in reality, as known to reason. That is why inculpable ignorance excuses; when we judge someone morally responsible, we are holding her choices to the standard of treating things in a way that does not conflict with her rational knowledge of what things are. Because the will is a disposition for acting on the basis of rational knowledge, choices that fail to make things ends and means in accord with what we know things to be are necessarily defective, just as a false belief is defective, by the standard of a goal that is nonhypothetical because it is intrinsic to that kind of act⁶.

To give persons the status, in our values, of being oriented to pursue ends of their own choosing is to evaluate them as being *ends-in-themselves*, things whose actions (and so whose existence) are directed to ends that are their own because they freely choose them. That is one way to express the moral value of a person⁷. Another way is to say that persons are things that exist for their own sake and for the sake of which everything else exists. There is a traditional theistic argument for this position; God creates persons, the only things to whom he gives the privilege of knowing and loving him, for their own sake and everything else for the sake of persons⁸. I will present a theistically neutral argument.

If persons can measure the value of everything else only by reference to ends of their own choosing, to make other persons’ pursuit of their ends one of our ends, we must give them the status in our evaluations of being, like ourselves, determiners of the ends by reference to which the value of other things is measured. To evaluate persons as determiners of the ends that evaluate nonpersons, we must measure the positive or negative value of all things, ultimately, by their benefit or harm to persons, and that is to evaluate persons as things for the sake of which everything else is what it is. If I evaluate nonfree things as not being for the sake of persons, (for example, if I value animals equally to persons), I am still measuring the beneficial or harmful character of all things by my own chosen ends (for example, the end of ensuring that animals are eaten only by other animals). But since in my evaluations nonpersons would not exist for the sake of persons, in my evaluations other persons would not be, as they really are, determin-

⁶ Since morality is based on the orientation persons have, before choosing other ends, to the goal of evaluating things as being what they are, that prior orientation cannot, short of self-contradiction, obligate us to make our own end other persons’ pursuit of goods by choices of ends in violation of that prior orientation. The duty to will the achievement of ends for other persons is the obligation to will their good as our own, where “good” is defined by the natural orientations to ends persons possess prior to choice — especially the end of being moral. See J.C. CAHALAN, *Natural Obligation*, pp. 115-118.

⁷ Aquinas did not use the term “end-in-itself” but clearly recognized the features of persons because of which I use that term: *S.Th.* I 18 3, 29 1; I-II 1, 2 and 3; II-II 25, 3. In I-II 26, 4, he uses «*bonum... simpliciter*» (absolute value) as opposed to «*bonum secundum quid*» (relative value).

⁸ *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3, 112; *De caritate* 7 ad 5.

ers of the ends that measure the value of nonpersons. If my evaluations do not give other persons the status of determiners of the ends that measure the value of other things, I am measuring the value of nonpersons by my chosen ends to the exclusion of also measuring it by the ends of other persons. So I am giving other persons the value of being oriented to the pursuit of my ends but *not* also to their own. I am evaluating them as things whose existence and behavior is for the sake of my ends to the exclusion of also being for their ends, since all that my choices can do is make things my ends or means to my ends.

If we are evaluating persons as not being determiners of the ends that measure the value of other things, in our evaluations persons are not what they are in reality. Therefore, to achieve the goal of evaluating things as being what they are, choices must give persons the status of being *that for the sake of which everything else exists*. An act of will that gives persons the value of existing for their own sake is what love of friendship, love of persons for their own sake, is.

Since persons are that for the sake of which everything else is what it is, another way to express the moral value of persons is that persons are *moral absolutes*. In order for our evaluations to be morally correct, it is not enough that we value persons more highly than other things. "More highly" is a relative description. We can value persons more highly relative to other things without valuing them as that for the sake of which everything else exists. To evaluate created persons as being that for the sake of which all other created things exist, we must give them the status of being the value to which the value of all other created things is relative and whose value cannot itself merely be relative to the value of any other created thing.

It follows that without the existence of persons there could be no objective, nonarbitrary moral values. If only animals existed and not rational beings, all values would be relative to subjective appetites, that is, to appetites that happen to have a necessary orientation to desire some specific finite mode of being. Because reason is open to knowing what all things are, being in the fullest sense, and in particular is not just open to knowing those modes of being that are the ways the environment acts on our sense faculties, there are values that we are obliged to honor because our choices result from an orientation towards goals that is not a subjective appetite but a rational appetite, an ability to freely value things as our ends and means according to reason's knowledge of what things are, beings that either do or do not freely choose their own ends.

The critique of artificial contraception will be based on the fact that the morality of choices depends on valuing persons to be what they are. The most precise way to express the moral value of persons may be that they are that for the sake of which everything else exists or that they exist for their own sake. For variety I will use phrases like "ends-in-themselves", "moral absolutes" and "absolute values" as equivalent expressions of the value of persons. Unless otherwise stated, I will be referring only to created values.

One more important preliminary: The duty to so choose that we give persons

the value of ends-in-themselves extends to our evaluations of ourselves as well as other persons. For example, if I choose to get drunk, my choice fails to give a person, myself, the place in my values that the goal of evaluating things to be what they are requires. I must evaluate persons as ends-in-themselves because their action is directed to ends of their own free choosing, and it is rational knowledge that gives us free choice. By choosing to suppress my ability to reason, as I do if I get drunk, to the extent that I no longer have rational control over my behavior, I am temporarily valuing some other good over that of having rational control of my behavior, and so valuing another good over being something for the sake of which everything else is what it is⁹. To choose some other good over that of being an end-in-itself is defective for the same reason that treating another person as not being an end-in-itself is defective; it fails to achieve the goal of evaluating something with the ability to direct his behavior to his own freely chosen ends to be what he is, the value for the sake of which all other values exist.

2. Sex and the Value of Persons

Artificial contraception is wrong because we cannot separate sexual morality from the value of human life; we cannot separate the value we place on our procreative ability, that is, our sexuality, from the value we place on human persons, and vice versa. The value we place on human life — as being or not being that for the sake of which everything else is what it is — will either determine or be determined by the value we place on our sexuality — as being or not being for the sake of procreating human life. I will begin by summarizing the argument, first in philosophical terms and then in more colloquial terms.

For choices to be moral they must evaluate persons as that for the sake of which everything else is what it is. If a choice gives a means for creating persons the status in our evaluations of not being what it is for the sake of creating persons, the existence of persons does not have the status of being that for the sake of which a means of giving existence to persons is what it is. And if the existence of persons does not even have the status of being that for the sake of which a means of giving existence to persons is what it is, in our evaluations the existence of persons is not the existence of that for the sake of which all other values, which must include our sexuality, exist. Any conscious choice to prevent procreation

⁹ Strictly, it is our most fundamental causal orientation to acts of intellection and consequent-ly of free choice, not the acts themselves, that makes us ends-in-ourselves. Interfering with these acts is suppressing the fulfillment of the orientation to ends that makes us ends-in-ourselves in favor of the fulfillment of an orientation to some nonabsolute good. See J.C. CAHALAN, *Natural Obligation*, pp. 122-125, and *A Prolegomenon to Any Future Ethics of Abortion, Life and Learning VIII: Proceedings of the Eighth University Faculty for Life Conference*, Joseph Koterski, S.J. (University Faculty for Life, Washington 1999), pp. 327-362.

while using sex entails our understanding that sex is capable of producing persons. So we cannot choose to use sex and prevent it from procreating persons without evaluating persons as not being ends-in-themselves. By refusing to give sex the status of being a means to the existence of persons, we would be diminishing the status of persons in our values, where “diminishing” does not just mean lowering the status of one relative value vis-à-vis others but giving an absolute value the status of not being an absolute value.

Colloquially, we can put the point of the argument in terms of the pro-abortion slogan, “Every child a wanted child.” That sounds humane and compassionate. But “It is better for the child not to exist if it is unwanted” deprives persons of the value of being ends-in-themselves; they cannot be ends-in-themselves if the value of their existence depends on their being wanted by things other than themselves. Nor can we consistently give ourselves the value of being ends-in-themselves if we do not give other things of a rational nature that value. Likewise, if our choices give sex the value of creating human life only because *we want* sex to have that value, the existence of the effect, a human life, has value only because we want that life to exist. And if another human life has value only because we want it to exist, a human person is not something that exists for its own sake.

It might seem that any decision as to how to use sex is consistent with persons having that value. Giving persons existence is not the only way sex benefits persons. Whatever a person chooses to use sex for will be, by hypothesis, an end that the chooser is seeking, and so using sex will be something done for the sake of a person’s, the chooser’s, ends. For a decision to value persons as existing for their own sake, however, it is not enough that the decision be made by a person for a person. Not every choice of ends satisfies the goal of valuing things to be what they are; otherwise, there could be no such thing as a decision that treats other persons as means to our ends. Murderers act for their own ends, but they do not choose ends in a way that achieves the rational appetite’s goal of evaluating other persons as beings that exist for their own sake. And if murderers do not evaluate other persons as having that kind of value, they cannot consistently value themselves as having that kind of value; for what makes them ends-in-themselves also makes other persons ends-in-themselves.

The fact that persons exist for their own sake does not give us any obligation to persons who will never exist. (We have obligations to future generations since it is unreasonable to make any other assumption than that future generations will actually exist, but we have no obligation to anyone to the extent that assuming their future existence is counterfactual.) So that for the sake of which our sexuality exists must be already existing persons, ourselves. But sex can be “for our sake” in two senses. First, like any other faculty, sex can provide us with things that only have value the way nonpersons have value. Nonpersons have value *solely* because they benefit persons. They have value solely in relation to our ends, by being our ends or means to our ends. Sex can give persons things, for example, companionship and pleasure, that have value solely by being among the “every-

thing else” that exist for the sake of persons. What is “for our sake” in this sense are things that are only relative values, things that have value only in relation to something else for the sake of which they exist.

Second, sex can be “for our sake” in the sense of giving us the privilege of causing the existence of things that do not exist “for the sake of other things” in the first sense but exist for their own sake and are that for the sake of which all other things exist, persons. Persons can certainly be our ends or means to our ends, but their value cannot consist *solely* in being ends or means for other things, even other persons. That is why we are obliged to choose the end of valuing persons to be ends-in-themselves. Sex can give us the privilege of procreating things whose value is not determined solely by their relation to other things but that are also, like ourselves, things from which the value of everything else derives. Our sexuality exists to provide us with things like companionship and pleasure, which are relative values since they have value solely by being ends or means for other things, but it also exists to allow us to cause the existence of the absolute values to which relative values are relative.

To achieve the rational appetite’s goal of valuing things to be what they are, our choices cannot give persons a status in our system of values subordinate to the value of other things. The value of everything else derives from the value of persons, since persons must measure the value of everything else in relation to their freely chosen ends. If we place a lower value on persons than on other things, we are valuing persons and other things as if the value of the latter did not derive from the former. So to subordinate the value of persons to the value of things that are “for my sake” in the first sense would be to reduce the value of persons to that of things that are for my sake in the first sense, but that is to value persons as if they are not what they are. And if I reduce the value of persons to being for my sake in the first sense, I cannot consistently evaluate the entity doing the evaluating, myself, as an absolute value because I am not evaluating beings as absolute values whose nature is the same as mine with respect to what makes me an absolute value.

To choose to use sex as a means to some other end and to do so in a way that prevents sex from procreating persons is to evaluate our sexuality as being a means to some other end to the exclusion of being a means of giving persons existence, and that is to temporarily subordinate using sex to give persons existence to using sex to give something else existence as values *for us* and so as values to be pursued “for our sake.” Using sex to give existence to persons would be for our sake in a way subordinate to the way that using sex to give existence to something that has value solely in relation to our ends is for our sake. But the value of the means derives from the value of the end. If using sex as a means of giving existence to persons is subordinate in our values to using sex as a means of giving existence to something else, the value of this end, the existence of a person, is subordinate to the value of that other end. To place a lower value, however, on the existence of persons than on the existence of other things is to evaluate persons as

if the value of other things did not derive from the value of persons. And since we are evaluating persons as if they are not that for the sake of which other things exist, we are reducing the value of persons to that of being things that are for our sake in the first sense.

Again, if Y is subordinate to X in our values, where X is something that does not exist for its own sake, Y does not have the status of something that exists for its own sake; it does not have any status except that of something whose value derives solely from its relation to our ends. When we choose to use a means to end X in a way that prevents it from also achieving end Y, end X has a higher place in our values, at least for the time and circumstance in which the choice is made. If X and Y are both relative values, there need be no moral implication in the choice, even if Y is something higher than X on some scale of being. A flower may be a higher mode of being than a rock, but if we have to choose between keeping our flower garden and keeping our rock collection, keeping the rocks would not constitute a moral misvaluation. The reason is that since neither flowers nor rocks are ends-in-themselves, their *moral* value is determined, not by their place on a scale of being, but by their relation to the ends of things that are ends-in-themselves.

Like rocks and flowers, companionship and pleasure are relative values whose pursuit can be morally indifferent. But compare pursuing one of the ends, companionship or pleasure, while deliberately preventing the means of pursuing it from achieving the other end, to pursuing such an end while deliberately preventing the means of pursuing it from causing procreation. There may be no moral implications in, for example, my declining to enjoy a movie with others in order to stay home and enjoy it alone. Since companionship and pleasure have value solely in relation to things other than themselves, my choice need not be morally defective because I am not putting myself in opposition to valuing an absolute value as an absolute value.

But when I subordinate the value of using sex as a means of procreation to the value of using sex for another purpose, I subordinate the value of sex's being a means of procreation to the value of its being a means to something that exists solely for our sake. And since the value of the means derives from the value of the end, if being a means of creating a person is subordinate in my evaluations to being a means to something that has value solely in relation to my ends, the value of the existence of persons is subordinate to something that has value solely in that way. But something whose value is subordinate to what has value solely in relation to our ends can itself have value only in that way. So if I prevent sex from creating persons in order to use it for some other purpose, I am treating persons as if they had value the way companionship and pleasure have value, solely by being ends for other things. Preferring rocks to flowers and pleasure to companionship can be moral because such things have value solely in relation to our ends, and valuing using sex as a means to end X more highly than valuing sex as a means to procreation can be moral if and only if using sex as a means to procreation has value solely in relation to our ends.

So I may be pursuing a value like companionship or pleasure “for my own sake”, but if I am refusing to also value my sexuality as a means of procreation, I cannot consistently be pursuing that value as if the “my” in “for my own sake” referred to the kind of being for the sake of which all other things exist. And even though I may sometimes chose *not* to prevent sex from being a means of procreation while I use it for some other end, if I do so as a choice between options that have the same moral status in my values, I still cannot consistently value myself and other persons as absolute values.

This being such a sensitive issue, I will put the argument in some other ways. Since the value of the end determines the value of the means, whether we value persons as that for the sake of which everything else, including our sexuality, exists must have consequences for how we value sex as a means to ends. If we choose to use A, a means to the existence of persons, as a means to some other end and to do so in a way that prevents A from procreating persons, we are giving A the status in our values of only being a means to something that is for our sake in the first sense, something that has value solely in relation to our ends, since we are consciously excluding A’s being a means to the only created things that are for our sake in the second sense. But A is in fact a means to the existence of persons. A means to an end is something that can cause that end¹⁰, and A is a cause that can create persons. So a cause of the existence of persons has the status in our evaluations of being a cause that can produce only ends that have value solely in relation to us. And since the value of the means derives from that of the end, this end, the existence of persons, has the status of something that has value solely in relation to us. For as a result of our choice to interfere with procreation, everything A is a cause of, as far as our evaluations are concerned, has value solely in relation to us. In reality, A is a means to the existence of persons, and in our evaluations everything A is a means to has value solely in relation to our ends. So in our evaluations the existence of persons has value solely in relation to our ends.

The following syllogism illustrates this: Whatever A is a means to is something that we are evaluating as having value solely in relation to our ends; A is a means to the existence of a person; therefore the existence of a person is something that we are evaluating as having value solely in relation to our ends. As acts of a rational appetite, choices evaluate things as if what they are in our values is what they are in reality. So the major premise expresses what the choice evaluates A to be in reality, only a means to things that are relative values (“*Whatever A is a means to is...*”); for the purpose of choosing artificial contraception is deliberately to exclude A’s being a means to persons. But the minor premise expresses the fact that a choice does not change A’s nature as a cause that can create a person if another cause does not interfere. A choice may imply a wish that A did not have that nature in reality, but wishing does not make it so. At

¹⁰ See section 7.

those times that give people their motive for choosing contraception, sex is a cause that can create a person unless some other cause interferes. When we choose to take action that will prevent conception while we are using sex for some other purpose, we are refusing to give what is now something that can cause procreation and that will remain so, at least until we carry out our decision, the status in our values of being something that can cause anything other than relative values.

The conclusion expresses what persons are in our values as a result of the choice. As an act of a rational appetite, a choice has the goal of evaluating things to be what they are. Since what persons are in our values is not what they are in reality, the choice fails to achieve a goal the choice has as an act of an appetite that is a rational appetite.

And if I am the effect of something that only causes things that have value in the way that companionship and pleasure, for example, have value, I have value only in that way. If sex can morally be evaluated to be a cause only of things that have value the way things like companionship or pleasure do, persons are effects of something that can morally be evaluated to be a cause only of things that have value in the way companionship and pleasure do. But then I can be morally evaluated as having value only in the way companionship and pleasure do; for the cause of my existence can be morally evaluated as a cause exclusively of things that have value the way companionship and pleasure do. So my own existence would have value solely because I am among the “everything else” that existed solely for the sake of my parents, solely by being an end for their use of sex as opposed to being that and something in relation to whose ends everything else must have its value.

Also, nature has so designed us that the existence of persons will result from the satisfaction of desires for things other than the existence of persons. But from a moral point of view, giving us existence is incomparably more important than anything else sex does for us, not just comparatively more important, as calling existence the “highest” or “primary” end of sex might suggest; for existence is that without which we could achieve no other values. Since without existence no other value would be possible for persons, nothing else could possibly have any value that derives from a relation to persons. Prior to the existence of persons, things could have value relative to the ends of animals or plants. But neither animals nor plants have free choice; so their ends are not the ends of things that are ends-in-themselves. Once persons exist, they must evaluate all other things by ends they freely choose, and to do that is to evaluate other things as existing for the good of persons. So we must evaluate persons as that for the sake of which all other *possible* (created) values exist, and therefore evaluate persons as things whose value cannot possibly be subordinate to the value of any other (created) thing.

If we evaluate the means that brought us into existence as not existing for the sake of giving a person existence, but for the sake of giving a person some other

value, in our evaluations giving existence to a person is not giving existence to that for the sake of which every other possible value *must* exist. To correctly evaluate ourselves as things for the sake of which all other possible values must exist, it is not enough to evaluate ourselves as things to which some, or even all, other values happen to be relative. We would be valuing things, for example, pleasure or companionship, as our ends just as animals value certain things as their ends. But that is different from valuing ourselves, not only as things to which other values happen to be relative, but as things to which all other possible values must be relative. Whatever “intellectual” feats animals may be capable of, they do not understand the concept of a thing for the sake of which all other possible values must exist; so animals cannot make choices that implicitly judge themselves or anything else to be that kind of thing. Since we do understand that concept, however, our choices fail to evaluate persons according to our knowledge of what they are if we evaluate them as not being things for the sake of which all possible values must exist.

But if human sexuality does not exist for the sake of giving that without which no other value would be possible, existence, to the things without which no other values would be possible, persons, we cannot consistently value the product of using that means-to-ends, ourselves, as being things for the sake of which all other possible values must exist. We would be valuing other things in relation to our ends but not valuing ourselves as the kind of thing whose value cannot possibly be subordinate to the value of anything else. If sex has the status, in our values, of being for the sake of giving something else, X, to persons in a way that excludes it from giving existence to persons, the value of being a means of giving existence to persons is subordinate to the value of giving X to persons. But the value of the end determines the value of the means, and the place of sex in our values would derive from the existence of end X to the exclusion of deriving from the existence of a person. So the value of persons would be, at least temporarily, subordinate to the value of end X. Subordinating the value of persons to the value of X, however, is subordinating the value of persons to the value of something to which the value of persons cannot possibly be subordinate, since the existence of all other possible things has value solely for the sake of persons.

In sum, if it was moral to prevent conception while using sex for some other end, the value of using sex for creating persons would derive solely from our ends; and if the value of using sex for creating persons derived solely from its relation to our ends, the value of what is created would derive solely from our ends. When our choices do not make God the highest and ruling value, we are evaluating God as if he was not the being that possesses in an infinite way everything any appetite could desire. When our choices give created persons the status, in our values, of being oriented to ends of our free choosing to the exclusion of their own, we are evaluating persons as if they were not in reality directed to ends of their own choosing. And when our choices give a means of procreating persons

the status of merely being a means to a relative value, we are evaluating persons as if they really were relative values.

Companionship and pleasure can certainly be intermediary ends worthy of a person's pursuit. But the existence of a person cannot be merely an intermediary end, just as it cannot be merely a means to something else. Morally, any intermediary end achieved by sex must ultimately have the value of a means relative to the existence of an absolute value. This does not imply that procreation must be the psychological end of a sex act, the object that by our consciousness of it motivates us to engage in sex. Thinking only of pleasure or companionship, for example, does not require us to contravene the goal of procreation, since procreation can result from the conscious pursuit of those other goals. The situation is morally different, however, if we are consciously preventing sex from being a means of creating an absolute value while consciously using it as a means to intermediary ends.

On the one hand, all the other values produced by sex are for the sake of already existing persons, ourselves; on the other hand, all those other values exist for the sake of the coming to be of new persons. How can we prevent a conflict between these two "all... for the sake of..."? The only way is to ensure that our conscious way of pursuing those intermediary ends, for the sake of what they contribute to us, does not oppose their existing for the sake of bringing into existence another end-in-itself.

3. Contraception by Abstinence

What the preceding arguments show is that we cannot value persons as ends-in-themselves if we prevent sex from being a means of procreation *when we choose to use sex*. The external effects of contracepting artificially or by refraining from sex are the same. But morality is a property of the interior act of choice, not the external effect. A choice to refrain from using our procreative ability need not put us in opposition to the absolute value of persons. To begin with, we have no obligation to a merely hypothetical person who does not exist but would exist if we used our sexuality; so no obligation to such a person could require us to use sex. The merely hypothetical value of that person cannot cause a choice to refrain from sex to lower the status of persons in our values.

But you might ask why, if it is wrong to interfere with procreation to achieve another end, is it not wrong to refrain from sex in order to seek an end other than procreation, say, the end of sleeping? Does not refraining from sex in order to sleep place a higher value on sleep than on the existence of a person *at that time*, since I am then preventing sex from being a means of procreation? When I refrain from sex in order to sleep, I need not be subordinating the value of *persons* to that of sleep at that time; I need only be placing a higher value on sleep than on *using* my procreative ability at that time. A procreative act is not as valuable as persons

are. A procreative act is not an end-in-itself; it exists to bring about ends other than itself¹¹. The mere fact of having sexuality cannot give me the obligation to use it, if using it is not itself something for the sake of which everything else exists. Because sex does not have the same value as a person, it would in fact be morally evil to evaluate using sex as a universal obligation, the way I must evaluate seeking the good of existing persons, though there certainly can be circumstances in which I am obliged to use sex.

Since neither sleeping nor using sex are ends-in-themselves, the morality of giving either one a higher place in my values at a particular time depends not on their place on a scale of being but on their relation to the otherwise legitimate ends of beings that are ends-in-themselves. Sleep is certainly a legitimate end, since sleep is necessary for ends-in-themselves to achieve other ends.

Because our procreative ability is not itself an absolute value, we are not obliged to use it whenever we can, but because persons are absolute values, we are obliged not to so use our procreative ability that we evaluate something to which it is a means, persons, as not being absolute values. The fact that the value of persons does not oblige us to use something but if we use it, does oblige us to use it in certain ways is not unusual or paradoxical; it is commonplace. We are not obliged to drive cars, but if we do, our choice of the way in which we drive must respect the dignity of persons. Likewise, we are not obliged to have sex, but if we do, our choice of the way we have sex must respect the dignity of persons as ends-in-themselves.

¹¹ In one sense, the value of a means should be considered the same as that of the end, but only insofar as a means has the status in my values of something *used* for an end. In itself a means differs from the end; so a means cannot be considered to share the value of the end in itself but only from the viewpoint of its status in my evaluations. (AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II 12, 4 ad 2.) Compare (1) choosing *whether* to use sex or use refraining from sex as a means to an end to (2) choosing *how* to use sex as a means to an end. The issue in (1) is whether to give sex a status it does not yet have in my values, that of a means to an end, and so whether sex will or will not share the value of an end. Only at (2), when we evaluate sex as being or not being a means to persons does what is in reality a cause that can create persons correctly share the value of persons or incorrectly fail to share it in my evaluations. Since sex shares the value of the end insofar as it is used for an end, using it and deliberately subordinating using it for end X to using it for end Y subordinates X to Y in my values. So my choice of how to use sex as a means to an end necessarily evaluates an end for which I choose not to use sex as not being an absolute value. But refraining from using sex does not put me in opposition to sex's sharing the value of X if and when I use sex as a means to an end; so refraining need not subordinate X to anything. If I choose refraining as the means to my ends, I will not face the choice of evaluating sex as sharing or not sharing the value of persons. The value of persons can even be the reason I refrain. In (1) I am choosing to achieve some relative value, while preventing procreation, by either using or refraining from sex. To make choice (1), I can look forward to (2) and see that using sex to achieve an end that refraining could also achieve would require me to oppose the value of persons by evaluating a cause that can create persons as not being a cause that can create absolute values. I can then refrain at (1) to avoid opposing the value of persons at (2).

And refraining from using our procreative ability can itself be a way of respecting the value of persons; a choice to refrain from sex can result from the fact that persons have the status of ends-in-themselves in our evaluations. Refraining from using something does not mean the status of the thing in my values must differ from the status it has when I am using it. If I am crossing a desert and my life depends on making the water in a canteen last as long as possible, I will refrain from drinking any more than I need to stay alive. At those times when I am not drinking, am I declining to value the water as a means of staying alive, since I am not then using it for that purpose? No, I am refraining from drinking precisely because in my values the water has the status of being a means of staying alive, not just a means of quenching thirst.

A choice to refrain from sex can result from the fact that persons have the status of ends-in-themselves in our evaluations, just as a choice to refrain from drinking can result from water's having the status of a means of staying alive. When I choose as means to my ends both a use of sex and an act interfering with sex's procreative ability, I necessarily evaluate my procreative ability as not existing for the sake of the existence of persons. But in deciding to achieve an end by refraining from using my procreative ability, I can be evaluating my procreative ability as something that should not be so used that its ability to create persons is deliberately frustrated precisely because doing so would require me to value persons as if they were not moral absolutes.

Refraining is consistent with evaluating other aspects of sex, which would be my ends if I chose not to refrain from sex, as ultimately having the status of means to an absolute value; for I can be *sacrificing* those ends to avoid evaluating a means of creating persons as not being a means to an absolute value. So I can be sacrificing those ends to achieve at least two other ends. First, not using sex would achieve an end associated with not having a child, for example, being able to afford treatment for an existing child with a genetic disease that a new child would likely inherit. But second, the way I achieve that end could also achieve the end of not valuing other aspects of sex as intermediate ends, or means to such ends, *in opposition to* valuing them as means to moral absolutes. So evaluating refraining from sex to be a means to achieve some relative value can be the moral antithesis of evaluating having sex to be a means solely to relative values.

Assume that something is a means to the existence of both end R, a relative value, and end A, an absolute value. If I pursue the existence of R in a way that evaluates a means to A as not being what it is for the sake of achieving A, in my evaluations A is not that for the sake of which everything else exists. And in artificial contraception, avoiding goal A for the sake of goal R requires me to evaluate sex as not being what it is for the sake of A. But if I sacrifice end R because sacrificing it allows me to evaluate sex as being what it is for the sake of achieving A, A can still be that for the sake of which everything else exists, in my evaluations. So I must either pursue R without preventing sex from accomplishing A or refrain from using sex to pursue R.

Someone might describe refraining from using sex to avoid procreation as “not valuing sex as a means of procreation at that time.” If so, however, (1), “not valuing sex as being X,” would have a different sense from (2), “valuing sex as not being X.” Sense (1) is the sense in which I could be described as not valuing the water as a means of staying alive if I am not then actually using the water as a means of staying alive. But the reason I am not valuing water as a means of staying alive in sense (1) can be that drinking the water would require me to value the water as not being a means of staying alive in sense (2), since drinking it when I do not need it to stay alive would be both using it and preventing it from being a means of keeping me alive. Although there are cases where not to decide is to decide, there is nonetheless a difference between “not choosing to” and “choosing not to.” So far today I have not chosen to give money to charity; but that is different from choosing not to give money to charity. Likewise, not choosing to value sex as a means of procreation in sense (1), or not choosing to drink the water, differs from choosing to value sex as not being a means of procreation in sense (2), or choosing to drink the water in a way that prevents it from being a means of keeping me alive. Valuing sex as not being a means of procreation in sense (2) is the same as being in opposition to valuing sex as a means of procreation; not valuing sex as a means of procreation in sense (1) does not put me in opposition to valuing sex as being a means of procreation. The external result of not valuing sex as a means of procreation in sense (1) is the same as the external result of valuing sex as not being a means of procreation in sense (2). But the morality of the internal choices can differ.

4. The Injustice of Artificial Contraception

Artificial contraception is an injustice to existing persons, our partner and ourselves in particular. The first thing that is due existing persons from us is that our choices give them a certain status in our values, the status of being what they are, ends-in-themselves. But giving persons that status is inconsistent with giving sex the status of being a means to some other value to the exclusion of being a means to the existence of persons. So we cannot consistently give existing persons what is due them from our acts of will if we choose to use sex while interfering with procreation. No matter how much we may desire to be giving our partner and ourselves their due as end-in-themselves and no matter how much we may convince ourselves that we are succeeding in doing that, we cannot consistently do so when we evaluate our procreative ability, and so ourselves insofar as we are sexual beings, as not being what they are for the sake of creating ends-in-themselves.

At this point, someone might make an objection like the following. I decide that a sex act will not have the end of procreation, because I can reasonably expect that my wife will die if she becomes pregnant, and I want to save her life. Is not my decision consistent with valuing persons as ends-in-themselves, since my

intention is to save the life of a being who exists for her own sake? But the issue here is not the sincerity or strength of my motivation to save a life; I might even be willing to lose my own life to save hers. The issue is whether the basis of my choice can be the fact that already existing persons genuinely have the status, in my system of values, of being ends-in-themselves. Is my choice to achieve the goal of saving her life by evaluating our procreative ability not to exist for the sake of procreation consistent with my giving her the status in my evaluations of being the kind of thing for the sake of which everything else exists?

To answer that question, compare someone who chooses artificial contraception as a means of saving his wife with someone who chooses to save his wife by refraining from sex rather than evaluate a means of creating persons as not existing for that sake. Does not the value of a person have a higher place in the estimation of someone who saves his wife's life by abstaining from using his procreative ability for that reason than someone who saves it by preventing that ability from creating persons? A reply might be that the value of persons is higher in the estimation of the former than the latter and that to give persons such a higher place might be admirable, but does it follow that anyone is morally obliged to give persons that higher estimation? Yes, because "higher" is a relative term, but the value we are talking about is an absolute value. If created persons have a lower status in Joe's evaluations than in Tom's, in Joe's system of values created persons are not absolute values.

Examining one aspect of the human act will show most completely why choosing artificial contraception does an injustice to already existing persons. Among the many senses in which "abstraction" is used is that in which it refers to the logical isolation of some feature or set of features of concrete individuals from other features, for the sake of knowing causal connections between that feature or set of features and other features similarly isolated. In evaluating Ann to be an end-in-herself because she is a person, we are not evaluating her with respect to what is expressed by the concepts of having two eyes or opposable thumbs. We are using the concept of what it is to be a person to focus on the aspects of her that do, and so to *abstract* from the aspects that do not, cause her to deserve to be evaluated as an end-in-herself. But *logical* isolation is not *real* separation. We know that features have no existence apart from that of the concrete things to which they belong, so it would violate the will's goal of choosing in accord with what reason knows to evaluate our sexuality as if it had any existence other than as a feature of concrete wholes, ourselves.

When we are deciding whether to use artificial contraception, we are evaluating concrete realities, our sexual ability and so ourselves and our partner insofar as we are sexual beings, evaluating them to be or to have, respectively, an ability that is a means to something else. Anytime we underestimate the value of what someone's abilities can produce we are doing the person, not just his abilities, an injustice, though not necessarily a moral one. If I had judged that Heifitz did not have the ability to produce music that would please a certain segment of the pop-

ulation, I would have failed to give what Heifitz was, an entity with an ability to create music, its due, where “due” is defined by the goal of making a true judgment about the music he could produce. That aesthetic injustice would not have been a moral injustice, however, if it was done on the basis of inculpable ignorance caused, for example, by my being tone deaf. When misevaluating a person’s musical ability is a moral injustice, the moral evil comes from the fact that the ability to make music belongs to and cannot be evaluated as if it existed in abstraction from a being who also has the ability to pursue his own chosen ends. The ability to pursue our own ends, not the ability to produce music or any other relative value, is what makes persons ends-in-themselves; in itself the ability to create music, is morally indifferent. (A misevaluation of a horse’s ability to win a race does not give what the horse is its due, but that is not an injustice in a moral sense.) But we cannot evaluate one ability, like musicianship, as if it had an existence separate from being a feature of a concrete entity who has another ability that makes him an end-in-itself without evaluating both the entity and his abilities as not being what they are.

A failure to give what we are its due, however, is much more serious if we underestimate the value of what our procreative ability can create; and that is what happens whenever we value sex as not being a means of creating an absolute value in favor of its being a means to some lesser value. In this case the value of the effect is not itself morally indifferent. The misevaluation’s being a moral injustice does not result solely from the ability’s belonging to an absolute value — as the moral, rather than aesthetic, injustice of misevaluating someone’s musical ability results solely from that fact — but also results from the fact that the product of that ability is an absolute value. If the misevaluation of someone’s musical ability is inculpable, the evaluation need not lessen the moral status of the entity with that ability in the evaluator’s system of values; I could inculpably devalue Heifitz’s musical ability and still consistently respect him as a moral absolute. But even an inculpable underestimating of the value of the product of our procreative ability would imply an (inculpable) underestimating of persons as less than moral absolutes¹².

In choosing both to have sex and to contravene procreation, we evaluate concrete realities, our procreative ability and ourselves as the beings who have that ability, with respect to the value expressed by the (abstract) concept of person, and that is the same thing we do whenever a moral choice requires us to evaluate any already existing concrete things to be ends-in-themselves or means to our ends. So there is no difference except in degree between what makes a choice of, say, cheating another person or of valuing nonpersons as if they were ends-in-themselves, a morally

¹² If I use another person’s ability to, for example, make music, for the dignity of the person as such to be respected, it usually suffices that my use of his ability is consensual on his part. For his faculty of choice, not his musical ability, is what makes him a moral absolute. Consent does not suffice when we use each other’s procreative ability. See notes 17 and 18.

defective choice and what we do when we choose artificial contraception. Morally, the core evil is the same, a failure of the interior act of choice to properly evaluate existing things with respect to the value expressed by the concept of person. And whether we decide to cheat or to treat our sexuality, and so ourselves as sexual beings, as not being what it is for the sake of creating persons, we are implicitly evaluating all past and future products of human sexuality as if they were not ends-in-themselves; for unless we deliberately change our mind, further choices cannot consistently use the concept of person to evaluate the concrete existence of past or future products of sexuality to be the existence of ends-in-themselves¹³.

5. Analogies to Artificial Contraception

Although all of our faculties exist for the sake of absolute values, ourselves, none of our other faculties, except for reason and will, have absolute values as what they contribute. So it is difficult to find analogies, from the standpoint of there being absolute values at stake, for decisions to use sex in a way that defeats the purpose of conception. But that difficulty is itself indicative of why artificial contraception is evil: Sex's relation to absolute values is unique among our physical faculties.

However, another objection can be made here. Our nutritive faculties have as their main goal the continued existence of an end-in-itself. One aspect of our nutritive faculties is a desire for pleasure, a nonnecessary goal the pursuit of which can supply means necessary for our continued existence. But we can choose to use our nutritive faculties to experience pleasure even though we are simultaneously acting to frustrate the goal of nutrition by ingesting something with no nutritional value, for example, artificially sweetened candy. What is the moral difference between using the nutritive faculties while preventing them from providing nutrition and using the procreative ability while preventing it from procreation?

The difference is, first, that living a longer (or healthier) life cannot make an absolute value more absolute. A ten-year-old's value is not more absolute than a nine-year-old's. So nutrition is a means to relative values, things that get their value from their relation to an already existing absolute value. Of course, doing anything that has the effect of shortening a person's life would be, perhaps unintentionally, causing a person to cease to exist. But second, thwarting the nutritive function of an act or even of multiple acts need not shorten a person's life; so thwarting the nutritive function of acts does not itself require us to oppose the

¹³ If we made a machine that could create persons entirely artificially, with no involvement by human parents, it would not be wrong to modify the machine so that it could not produce persons. The machine itself is not a person, so nothing we do can constitute an injustice, in a moral sense, to it. But we cannot evaluate our procreative ability as if it is not for the sake of creating ends-in-themselves without diminishing the value of the persons who give our procreative ability all of its existence.

nutritive function's goal of the continued existence of an absolute value. Therefore, if causing a person's nonexistence is not our intention in thwarting the nutritive function of acts, we need not be evaluating the continued existence of persons as if persons were not that for the sake of which everything else, which must include our nutritive faculties, ultimately exists¹⁴. But we frustrate the procreative potential of any sex act precisely because a single sex act is not only necessary but also sufficient, at those times that give us our motive for using contraception, for achieving the goal of procreation; so thwarting the procreative potential of any sex act, even because of the mere possibility of procreation, requires us to oppose our procreative faculty's goal of creating persons. And that is to evaluate the existence of persons as if persons were not absolute values.

A better place to look for analogies to artificial contraception is the area of religion, where absolute values are at stake in the view of the religious person. The following story is told about lawyer William J. Fallon, known for his success in defending Irish gangsters in New York City. He would go for hung juries by getting some devout Catholics on the jury; then during his summations, he would reach for a handkerchief, causing a rosary to fall from his pocket in view of the jury. For the sake of argument, assume that Fallon did not in fact pray the rosary, so that there is no doubt that he was deceptively manipulating the jury. What he did, however, was even worse than that. He could have put some New York Yankees fans on the jury and let a Yankees season ticket fall out of his pocket. But deceiving someone about being a Yankees fan is one thing; deceiving someone about having the same values regarding what is sacred is quite another.

Fallon was not just using a rosary for a purpose other than its sacred purpose; he was using it in a way that contravenes its sacred purpose. The Catholic religion requires Catholics to love others as themselves, not deceptively manipulate them. So Fallon was consciously pursuing a goal by using a rosary in a way that required him to act contrary to its sacred purpose. He was committing blasphemy. Likewise, the person who practices artificial contraception is not just using sex for a purpose other than procreation; she is using it in a way that contravenes the purpose of procreation. If someone uses a rosary, not just for another purpose, but in a way that deliberately contravenes its sacred purpose, what place does that purpose have in the values of that person? Not the place of being something sacred. Likewise, persons do not have the place of being moral absolutes in the values of someone who uses her procreative ability while acting contrary to conception¹⁵.

¹⁴ On the moral difference between intended and unintended effects, see section 7.

¹⁵ The analogy would hold even if Fallon was a sincere atheist who believed there was nothing real about what the jurors held sacred. It would still be wrong to deceptively manipulate what are, by hypothesis, the deepest beliefs and commitments of beings who deserve to be treated as ends-in-themselves, not just as means to his ends. In his evaluations, what place is occupied by the fact that what he is exploiting are the deepest and most important commitments of ends-in-themselves? At the very least, he would not be valuing their use of religious freedom to be as important to them as his use of religious freedom is to him.

The rosary, however, is much more remotely connected to what Catholics hold sacred than sex is to procreation. The connection between the rosary and a Catholic's commitments is purely conventional and contingent; nothing in their religion requires Catholics to say just those prayers in just that order. But the connection between sex and conception is natural and, at the times that give people a motive for practicing contraception, even necessary.

We can, however, use a rosary for nonreligious purposes without acting contrary to its religious purpose. If a Catholic tries to pull something out of a hole by tying a magnet to a string and finds the string to be too short, what is wrong with tying the other end of the string to a rosary so that the magnet can reach further into the hole? In no sense is she evaluating that purpose to be equal to or higher than the rosary's religious purpose. This case is analogous to preventing conception by refraining from sex. The person who refrains from sex is not achieving the goal of procreation just as the person who uses a rosary as a string may not be, at that time, achieving the rosary's sacred purpose by praying. But the person who refrains from sex is not using sex while also contravening its connection to an absolute value, and the person who uses a rosary as a string is not using it to act contrary to its sacred purpose, as Fallon did by using a rosary to manipulate.

6. Artificial Reproduction

A potential objection comes from the possibility of creating persons by artificial means. If there are other ways to create persons, are we free to use sex while frustrating its ability to create persons? Although I believe that the only morally acceptable form of procreation is sexual intercourse, arguing that is beyond the scope of this essay. But the argument against artificial contraception presented here would be sound even if intercourse was not the only moral means of procreation.

As long as sex is a procreative ability, if we evaluate it as not existing for the sake of procreation, we cannot consistently evaluate persons as absolute values. Preventing sex's procreative function and, for example, letting a machine create a person instead, would be the moral equivalent of what we do now by using sex and deliberately interfering with its procreative function. Sex would remain a procreative ability; so in substituting a machine for sex in order to use sex for an end other than procreation, we would be evaluating sex, and so ourselves and our partner insofar as we are sexual beings, as not existing for the sake of creating persons, which would amount to evaluating persons as if they were not that for the sake of which everything else exists.

To argue that other means of procreation relieve us of evaluating our procreative ability as existing for the sake of procreation would be like arguing that it was not blasphemy for Fallon to use a rosary in a way that deliberately flouts its sacred purpose because there are other means of achieving that purpose. That

there are other means of prayer available to Catholics is irrelevant to the fact that by consciously choosing to use the rosary to accomplish something that directly contravenes its sacred purpose, Fallon was choosing to give that purpose the status, in his values, of not being something sacred. He was not just inadvertently overlooking the rosary's sacred purpose; he was using his knowledge of how important that purpose was in the eyes of the jurors to do something that flouts that purpose. Likewise, we choose artificial contraception because we know there is a possibility of creating a person; therefore, we are consciously evaluating a means of creating persons as not being a means of creating that for the sake of which everything else exists.

Compare choosing to prevent conception while having sex with choosing to prevent ends associated with some other faculty. What if we found a new use for our organs of sight that required us to frustrate their ability to cause sight? And what if we simultaneously got visual information from another source, say a machine connected to the brain? In using our sight organs for another end while preventing them from producing sight, we would be evaluating our power to see as if it did not exist for the sake of sight at that time. So we would be (correctly) evaluating sight as if it was not that for the sake of which everything else, which must include our power of sight, exists; if sight is that for the sake of which our sight organs came into existence in the first place, still sight is not that for the sake of which everything else exists. In using our power of sight for another end while preventing it from producing sight, we would be (correctly) evaluating ourselves precisely insofar as we have the power of sight to be the moral equivalent of animals or of machines for making things that are not moral absolutes. But if sight was that for the sake of which everything else exists, it would have to be that for the sake of which our sight organs exist; so using those organs for another purpose while preventing sight would be evaluating absolute values as if they were not absolute values. Likewise, using sex while replacing procreation by sex with artificial procreation would, in effect, be evaluating ourselves insofar as we have a procreative ability as if we were the moral equivalent of animals or of machines for making less than absolute values, and so evaluating ourselves as if we were less than absolute values.

Also, if we evaluate an artificial means of creating a person as able to adequately replace a person that a sex act would create, persons are not moral absolutes in our values. Each person must be valued for her own sake; so the value of each person must be absolute as something unique. Everything is unique, but unless it is a person, what is unique about it is only of relative value. So when a pet dies or a tool breaks, something unique is lost, but what is lost is a morally replaceable value. When a person dies, what is unique is not morally replaceable; if it was, it would not be something that must be valued for its own sake¹⁶.

¹⁶The ethic of replaceability applies only to relative value and the ability to produce it; so the moral use of someone's sexuality requires a permanent commitment to the sex partner as

7. Infertility

Because persons are absolute values, sex is always what it is, even in cases of permanent infertility, for the sake of what it can do at times of fertility, just as the brain is what it is for the sake of intellection even when we are sleeping, since it is through intellection that we are able to be ends-in-ourselves¹⁷. Can it be objected, then, that we must refrain from sex at times of infertility, since sex is always what it is, in the last analysis, for the sake of what it can do at times of fertility? No, choosing sex when infertile no more causes us to evaluate persons as if they were not ends-in-themselves than a Catholic's using a rosary for a purpose other than prayer necessarily causes her to evaluate the sacred as if it was not sacred; nor would we have to be opposing the goal of creating ends-in-themselves any more than we would have to be opposing the goal of keeping ends-in-themselves in existence when we use our nutritive faculties in a way that does not nourish us.

This critique of artificial contraception is a critique of choices that require us to evaluate sex as not being what it is, ultimately, for the sake of procreation. If a choice does not require us to do that, we need not be opposing sex's having that goal when we make the choice. We may in fact be in opposition to sex's having that goal, but if so, we are in opposition by reason of some other choice, not by reason of the choice in question. The choices we are now considering would evaluate what sex is at times of infertility as being or not being, ultimately, for the sake of what it can do at times of fertility. If we choose to do something when we

such, while the moral use of other abilities does not require a permanent commitment. For our procreative ability to have the value of being a means to moral absolutes is to have the value of being a means to things that are irreplaceable precisely in that respect in which they are absolute. Since the effects of one's procreative ability are unique moral absolutes, the value of one's procreative ability is unique as a means to procreating things that are unique in their moral absoluteness. Each of us can only produce children that no one else could produce, and each child would be a moral absolute precisely as something unique. Those children are merely hypothetical, but my partner, myself and our procreative abilities are realities that I am obliged to evaluate with respect to the value of persons. If I do not value my sex partner as an irreplaceable (and so, *exclusive*) sex partner, I evaluate her as having morally replaceable value with respect to that for which I choose her as such a partner, her sexuality. If I evaluate her to have morally replaceable value with respect to her sexuality, I evaluate her sexuality to have morally replaceable value. If I evaluate her sexuality to have morally replaceable value, I evaluate her sexuality as not being a means to absolute values; for each person she could procreate would be an absolute value only if it was valuable for its own unique sake. If I evaluate her sexuality as not being a means to absolute values, I cannot consistently value her and myself as absolute values. But I can replace a cook, for example, without offending his dignity as a person. Insofar as I am valuing him for his food-making ability, I am valuing him as a producer of effects that, while unique, are of replaceable moral value. Since the absolute value of his procreative ability is not at stake insofar as I value him as able to make food, I can replace him and still consistently value him as an end-in-itself. Functional value is replaceable; personal value is not.

¹⁷ So it is always wrong, even at times of permanent infertility, to value sex as not being what it is for the sake of what it can do only through heterosexual vaginal intercourse.

are infertile for the sake of preventing a use of sex from causing procreation when we would otherwise be fertile, we have chosen in a way that evaluates sex not to be what it is for the sake of procreation. But doing something that will not interfere with fertility would not prevent us from still evaluating sex as having the goal of procreation, and having sex while infertile does not interfere with being fertile at other times.

When we choose to have sex while infertile, we are using sex for some goal other than procreation; so we might not then be evaluating sex as being what it is for the sake of procreation. But again, not evaluating sex as being what it is for the sake of procreation differs morally from evaluating sex as not being what it is for the sake of procreation. Choosing to have sex while infertile, and not advert-ing to sex's purpose of procreation (not evaluating it as being...), is perfectly consistent with a prior or later choice to try to conceive the next time we are fertile. Choosing to do something while infertile in order to prevent conception the next time we would otherwise be fertile (evaluating it as not being...) would not be consistent with choosing to conceive the next time we would otherwise be fertile.

Finally, it might be objected that sex's status as a means to an absolute value would oblige us never to do anything that would unintentionally cause infertility, for example, to take a medicine whose side effect was infertility. But the relative good caused by the medicine, for example, a longer life, may justify an unintended loss of fertility, which is not itself an absolute value. Looking more closely at how human acts become morally good and evil will help us better understand why we are not always obliged to preserve fertility.

Since an external action is chosen precisely to be a cause of an effect, choices make selections between conceived sequences of events, assumed by reason to be at least possible cause-effect sequences, that we use as plans for directing actions toward ends. (Even, for example, "Let's see what happens if I rub a rabbit's foot before betting".) We can bomb a factory because we choose to use the perceived possibility that bombing it will help us win a war as a plan to direct our action to that end, or bomb it because we choose to use the perceived possibility that bombing it will kill someone we dislike as a plan to direct our action to that end. So choices can direct the same action (cause) to different ends (effects). Choosing between cause-effect plans is the way rational beings determine what ends they intend or do not intend, because that is the way they consciously direct actions toward this end or that¹⁸. Even prior knowledge that an effect (for example, short-

¹⁸ J.C. CAHALAN, *Making Something out of Nihilation*, in *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics*, John F.X. Knasas (Notre Dame: American Maritain Association, 1988), pp. 192-193; IDEM, *Natural Obligation*, pp. 131-132. What I am calling a "plan" of action John Finnis calls (as suggested by AQUINAS: I-II 19, 3 and 5; 20, 1 ad 1) a "proposal" for action: «the proposal, combining envisaged end (effect) with selected means (cause), which the acting person adopts... by choice». IDEM, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision and Truth* (Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1991) p. 40, and 67-73; IDEM, *Object and Intention in Moral Judgments According to Aquinas*, «The Thomist», 55 (1991), pp. 1- 27.

ening a war) will result from an action does not make that effect our intended end, if we did not choose the action by using the connection between that action and that effect as our plan of action.

Choices of some cause-effect connections are in themselves evaluations of moral absolutes as not being moral absolutes. If we intend the death of even one innocent person to be a means of saving the lives of many persons, no matter how sincere our desire to save the others is, our choice must be evil since it cannot evaluate every person as being a moral absolute. But when the consciously conceived cause-effect connection does not itself make a choice moral or immoral, for example, if we are bombing a factory to shorten a war by means of destroying machinery rather than by taking innocent lives, prior knowledge of unintended effects can make the choice moral or immoral, depending on whether the value of the intended effect is sufficient to justify the unintended loss of value. If we are choosing to destroy machinery with the intention of ending a war, the intended extending of many lives can justify the unintended shortening of a few lives, since the cause-effect connection we are choosing as a plan does not by itself require us to miscalculate moral absolutes.

The case we are considering is that of taking a medicine with the intention of causing the continued existence of a person by means of causing the existence or nonexistence of some condition other than fertility. We are evaluating taking the medicine as a means to the existence or nonexistence of the other condition and evaluating that intermediate end as a means to the continued existence of an absolute value. But we are not evaluating taking the medicine as a means of preventing sex from creating absolute values when we engage in sex. Doing something with the intention of preventing sex from creating persons when we engage in sex for some other purpose would require us to evaluate persons as not being that for the sake of which everything else, including sex, exists. But if we are not doing something with the intention of preventing a use of sex from being a means of procreation, we need not be evaluating sex as not being for the sake of creating persons. To achieve one relative value, the continued existence of an absolute value, we are sacrificing another relative value, which happens to be a means for creating absolute values. And we can still be evaluating the relative value lost as a means of creating absolute values; for choosing one relative good (for example, exercise) over another (for example, rest) does not amount to evaluating the other as if it does not have the relative value that it has. Since the choice of a cause-effect connection is what determines which of multiple effects is our intended end, and since the cause-effect connection directing our action in the present case does not itself make our choice oppose sex's status as being a means to an absolute value, to decide the morality of the choice, we have to ask whether the relative value of the intended effect is sufficient to justify the unintended loss of relative value.

What ends-in-themselves need in order to achieve their good provides an objective standard for comparing relative values. Our continuation in existence is

a greater relative good than the continuation of our fertility for the objective reason that without existence ends-in-themselves could achieve no ends whatsoever. If our fertility were an absolute value, no relative good could justify its loss. But we are not always obliged to preserve our fertility for the same reason that we are not always obliged to use sex at times of fertility; the use of our procreative ability is not itself an absolute value.

However, if we can save a life by an action that results in sex's ceasing to be a procreative ability why is it so important that we avoid choices evaluating sex as not having the relative value of being a procreative ability? Because no matter how sincere our desire to save a life may be, if the way we save a life requires us to evaluate sex as not existing for the sake of procreation, we cannot be evaluating persons as ends-in-themselves. The moral good or evil of choices is not determined simply by the comparative value of their external results. Bombing a factory to kill a personal enemy would be immoral even if it unintentionally shortened a war. Moral good and evil constitute the success or failure of persons, ends-in-themselves, as such; for they constitute success or failure in achieving a goal to which persons are oriented by the ability by which they determine their own ends, the ability to make reason-based choices¹⁹. So the value of the moral good and evil of interior acts of choice objectively transcends the value of the external good and evil that result from free choices, no matter how great the latter are, as the value of ends-in-themselves transcends the value of other things. If we sacrifice the good of persons as persons for some other good, we are evaluating being a person as not being an absolute value. And if persons are not absolute values, there can be no objective moral values. The existence of any nonarbitrary moral values is at stake in the question whether interior good and evil transcend the exterior — just as the value of human life is at stake in questions of sexual morality²⁰.

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Abstract: *Non si può separare la morale sessuale dal valore morale che si dà alla vita umana, perché esso dipende necessariamente dall'intenzione che si pone nel generarla. Se la sessualità serve solamente per ottenere un "prodotto" che "ci sta a cuore", allora le persone non hanno più nessun valore come fini in sé stessi. Perché esse conservino questa dignità, le uniche alternative moralmente lecite sono non togliere intenzionalmente all'uso della sessualità la sua capacità procreativa, oppure paradossalmente l'astensione dalle pratiche sessuali.*

¹⁹ AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II 1, 1.

²⁰ I am grateful for the kind help of Raymond Dennehy, Michael Pakaluk, Janet Smith and an anonymous reviewer.

Carlos Cardona in dialogo con Heidegger: l'oblio dell'essere non è irreversibile

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Sommario: 1. Ricordo di Carlos Cardona, nel decimo anniversario della morte. 2. Il saggio postumo *Olvido y memoria del ser*. 3. *La diagnosi heideggeriana del Cogito e del suo influsso sulla metafisica moderna*. 4. *Primo in intellectu cadit ens: come garantire un autentico realismo metafisico*. 5. *La "difficile riscoperta dell'essere"*.



1. Ricordo di Carlos Cardona, nel decimo anniversario della morte

Il 13 novembre del 1993 moriva, a 63 anni, Carlos Cardona¹, che molti docenti dell'Università della Santa Croce ricordano con gratitudine. Nato nei pressi di Barcellona, visse a Roma dal 1954 al 1977. Amico di Cornelio Fabro e di Augusto Del Noce, diede vita con essi per un certo periodo a un seminario di studio, che si teneva a casa dello stesso Del Noce e a cui ebbero occasione di partecipare, tra gli altri, C. Vansteenkiste, G. Perini, L. Elders, R. Buttiglione, A. Giannatiempo, A. Dalledonne, L. Clavell e J.J. Sanguineti. Formatosi filosoficamente all'Angelicum e alla Lateranense, Cardona ha condotto una profonda e originale rilettura del pensiero tommasiano, pubblicando numerosi articoli di esegesi tomista e collaborando ad opere collettive di presentazione del pensiero dell'Aquinate. In occasione del decimo anniversario della scomparsa di Cardona, desidero con queste pagine commemorarne la figura di vigoroso pensatore metafisico, ricco di passione speculativa, e delineare alcuni contenuti della sua riflessione, che ritengo

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¹ Sulla figura e sull'opera filosofica di Cardona si possono leggere: M.C. REYES, *El ser en la metafísica de Carlos Cardona*, «Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico», Pamplona 1997; M. PORTA, *La metafisica sapienziale di Carlos Cardona. Il rapporto tra esistenza, metafisica, etica e fede*, Edusc, Roma 2002.