

CATHOLIC SEXUAL ETHICS

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SUMMARY OF CHURCH TEACHING:

1. **Morally Permissible Sexuality:** Marital union open to life (in the right circumstances)
2. **Morally Impermissible Sexuality:** All other voluntary sexual pleasure, consummated or not.
 - i. “[M]ortal sin is always committed whenever [sexual] pleasure is directly sought or deliberate consent is given to it, even though the [sexual] excitement be little and stop short of consummated sin.” (Slater, S.J., 1925, p. 219)
 - a. *Contraception within marriage*; i.e. intentional obstruction of the procreative possibilities of the act
 - b. *Fornication*, i.e. sexual pleasure (consummated or not) between the unmarried.
 - ii. “Mortal sin will be committed as a rule by indulging in passionate and prolonged embraces and kisses; otherwise the sin will be only venial.” (Slater, S.J., 1925, p. 220)¹
 - b. *Adultery*, i.e. ... between married non-spouses
 - c. *Incest*, i.e. ... between relations by blood or marriage
 - d. *Criminal Assault*, i.e. use of force to compel a person to commit a sin of impurity
 - e. *Rape*
 - f. *Sacrilege*, i.e. the impure violation of a sacred person, place, or object consecrated to God.
 - g. *Sins against nature*, i.e.
 - i. Masturbation
 - ii. Sodomy (and homosexual acts more generally, i.e. ... between those of the same sex)
 - iii. Bestiality

PRIMER ON NATURAL LAW

THE MORAL CRITERION

1. An act is good when it is directed by reason to the ultimate end, i.e. happiness. (Cronin, 1930, pp. 127–139)
 - a. A person tends to his *ultimate* natural end when he tends to the *immediate* natural end of his own being as a human person.
 - b. In other words, we tend to (and can know) our ultimate end by following and looking at the direction of our more immediate natural ends. (*Consider: knowing the end of watch or boat by knowing its nature*)
 - i. Our immediate natural ends can be classified by considering human nature:
 1. **Nutritive** –those inclinations that are shared by plants and animals (e.g. eating)
 2. **Appetitive** –those inclinations of animals but not plants (e.g. seeking society, procreating and raising children)
 3. **Rational** – the unique goods of *rational* animals (e.g. seeking truth, God)
2. Thus, to know the ultimate end of humans, we look to the immediate ends of human nature (which tend to the ultimate end), and these are known by our natural appetites.
3. **Primary Moral Criterion:** “Those objects or acts to which we are directed by natural appetites are good—they lead us to our final end, and what is necessary for the attainment of these objects is also good. Actions that oppose our natural appetites and their objects are bad.” (Cronin, 1930, p. 133)
 - a. Put slightly differently, a natural faculty (or power) used toward its natural end is morally good, and an unnatural use of a natural faculty (or power) is morally bad.
 - i. Why? A natural use is ‘by nature’ directed toward the ultimate end of our nature (which is our good), and consequently an unnatural use deviates from that ultimate end.

¹ See also St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, IIaIIae 154:4. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3154.htm#article4>

CLARIFICATIONS

- A 'natural inclination' (or appetite) is the inclination to use a natural faculty (or power) in its natural way, namely, in that way that nature has imbued the faculty to achieve its natural end.
 - For instance: We have a natural inclination to ingest food, and even infants (who have no concept of digestion and nutrition, the 'end' of eating) still are naturally inclined to do the same, in the natural way.
- A "faculty" is, or "powers" are those capacities we have, arising from human nature (briefly detailed above).
- Natural and unnatural use of a faculty:
 - A faculty is used *naturally* when used in the way as is naturally conducive to its own inherent end.
 - A faculty is used *unnaturally* (or perversely) when (1) it is used, and (2) for the sake of an unnatural end (i.e. in opposition or contradistinction from the end nature intended for its use).
 - "The natural end of the faculty of speech is the expression of inner conviction to another. But if speech be used to express what we believe to be false, the faculty is used unnaturally, and the act is morally bad. And as every lie involves this perverse use of speech, the lie is intrinsically wrong and unjustifiable."
 - Conversely, to not speak at all is morally permissible (not satisfying condition (1), above).
- Hierarchy of ends:
 - There is a natural ordering of the powers inherent in human nature, and the hierarchy is based upon the breadth of object of each faculty; the superiority of faculty is also determined by object.
 - The nutritive powers pertain to one's own body (narrow).
 - The appetitive powers pertain to knowledge of the world of sense (broader).
 - The rational powers pertain to all things knowable: physical and immaterial, past, present and future (greatest breadth).
 - The rational powers have the greatest breadth and are the most superior, the nutritive powers are the most narrow and of the greatest inferiority.
 - The inferior faculties are *for the sake of* (and subservient to) the higher faculties.
 - Consequently, it is also immoral to use an inferior faculty to the detriment of a higher faculty.
 - For instance, it is wrong to get drunk which involves the loss of one's reason.
 - But it is permissible to take an anesthetic and be rendered unconscious for surgery that promotes the continuance of the body, and thus reason.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE ARGUMENT

- Just as we can see that it is wrong and disordered for me to eat in a way that thwarts or avoids nutrition (e.g. by eating and intentionally vomiting), so we can see it is wrong for me to seek sexual pleasure in a way that thwarts or avoids procreation (e.g. homosexual acts, contraception, etc.).
 - We can see that eating is naturally for nutrition and sex is naturally for procreation.
- Similarly, we can see that some circumstances/pairs are unfit for procreation: (a) the parents are close relations, (b) the parents are not married; (c) the child is the result of a forced (or coerced) sexual act; etc.
- Additionally, and as an aside, governments ought to promote the common good of society and eliminate threats to the common good. Intuitively, the common good of society is not well served by enshrining and promoting what is seriously immoral as if it were on par with what is morally good. So, the gov'n. should not call homosexual unions (or immoral sexual partnerships) "marriages"

* Cronin, M. (1930). *The Science of Ethics* (3rd ed., Vols. 1-2, Vol. 1). Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, Ltd. Retrieved from <http://archive.org/details/scienceofethics01cron>

Slater, S.J., R. T. (1925). *A Manual of Moral Theology* (5th ed., Vol. 1). London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd. Retrieved from http://archive.org/details/MN5034ucmf_1