

Nutrition, Procreation, and the Common Good: A Response to Christopher Arroyo

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In an article for Cambridge University's *Philosophy*, Christopher Arroyo attempts to refute Edward Feser's defense of the perverted faculty argument—which argues that intrinsically non-procreative sexual activity is immoral—and argues that intrinsically non-procreative sexual activity *can contribute* to a person's individual flourishing.¹ Arroyo accuses Feser of limiting the scope of how our sexual faculty may contribute to our flourishing by “generalizing” our situation with that of other animals, failing to see our *species-specific* situation. Setting aside Feser's articulation of the perverted faculty argument and Arroyo's specific response to the same—which would require interpretive analysis of Arroyo's representation of Feser and his application of the logic of Philippa Foot's notion of “natural goodness”—I will focus my response on a more general interest: the rhetorically powerful parallel Arroyo draws between the licit use of our digestive power for non-nutritive ends and the use of our sexual power for non-procreative ends.

In arguing against restricting the engagement of our sexual faculty to *per se* procreative behavior,² Arroyo compares our sexual faculty with our

¹ Christopher Arroyo, “Natural Goodness, Sex, and the Perverted Faculty Argument,” *Philosophy* 97 (2022): 115–42.

² This is as distinct from sexual behavior that is *per accidens* non-procreative. In such a case, the behavior surrounding and within the sexual act remains, in principle, procreative. Yet, due to unique circumstances, such as sterility, the act will not *actually* result in procreation. As Arroyo acknowledges: “The Catholic Church does not condemn coitus between sterile spouses because the Catholic Church conceives of such sex acts

digestive faculty.³ In a tradition that goes back to at least Jeremy Bentham, Arroyo identifies a variety of licit ends we pursue through our digestive faculty—not all of which seem to be nutritional—and concludes that, if the logic of the perverted faculty argument does not have moral weight when we consider the many ends we pursue by engaging our digestive power, then the same logic should hold no weight in sexual morality. Eating is not simply about nourishment, but also about social engagement, celebration, commemoration, and emotional healing, among other ends, which are all part of our species-specific flourishing.⁴ Therefore, according to Arroyo, we must recognize the *species-specific* ends we can pursue through our sexual faculty, which need not be limited to its physical end of procreation in order to contribute to our flourishing. Yet the parallel Arroyo draws on to strengthen his argument is flawed. For there is not sufficient parity between our digestive and sexual faculties. Consequently, any conclusions drawn by analogy between one and the other do not undermine the distinct moral logic of each.

Improper Parity

Dessert may be partaken of without scruple or need of apology or danger of incurring reproach. Yet no more does any part of this desert contribute to nutrition—to the preservation of the individual, than does any portion of sexual appetite employed in an utterly unprolific shape does to propagation—to the preservation and perhaps increase of the species.⁵

—Jeremy Bentham

The best eating is often unnecessary; it is a treat, something that we do over and above what we need, just because it is delightful. We also recognize a value in positively feasting, in self-indulgence, occasionally eating beyond necessity contributes to human well-being. . . . Though sex is necessary for the survival of the species, that

as merely accidentally, rather than as intrinsically, non-procreative" (Arroyo, "Natural Goodness," 115n2).

³ Arroyo, "Natural Goodness," 129–33, 136.

⁴ Arroyo, "Natural Goodness," 132.

⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *Sextus*, in *Of Sexual Irregularities, and Other Writings on Sexual Morality*, 60–61, as quoted in John Skalko, *Disordered Actions: A Moral Analysis of Lying and Homosexual Activity* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019), 315–16.

is no reason to say that sexual activity should be limited to what is necessary for the species to survive. To have sex beyond necessity is to appreciate it as a good in itself, one of the things that contribute to the festal quality of human life.⁶

—Gareth Moore

In Arroyo's article and in the quotes from Moore and Bentham, the contrast between the varied ends we can pursue by engaging our digestive faculty—without moral objection—and the stringent moral restrictions proposed for the sexual faculty implies a double standard within Catholic natural law theory. Obviously, these are significantly different faculties, but this is not denied by Arroyo. The point of the parallel is that, if the moral logic behind the restrictions placed on our sexual faculty is that it is wrong to engage a faculty—qua faculty—for an end contrary to what is considered its proper end, then those who propose restrictions on the sexual *faculty* based on this logic must call for similarly stringent restrictions on the use of our digestive *faculty*. Yet the latter seems absurd. Following the way Arroyo, Moore, and Bentham present things, it appears that those who argue for restricting the sexual faculty based on the immorality of engaging this faculty for a contrary end are stuck in an ungrounded double standard when we consider how they engage their digestive faculty. Consequently, these must either: (1) abandon talk of “perverted faculties” and, thus, continue to enjoy desserts without scruples; (2) apply this moral logic consistently to all our human faculties—goodbye dessert; or (3) broaden the scope of what the sexual faculty is ordered towards within the *human* animal—just as our rational capacities seem to transform the scope of how we engage our digestive faculty, which is what Arroyo seems to propose.

Nevertheless, when we look at another contemporary work concerned with Catholic sexual ethics, we find that the sexual faculty's parallel with another human power *reinforces*, rather than undermines, the moral logic of the perverted faculty argument. The work is John Skalko's *Disordered Actions: A Moral Analysis of Lying and Homosexual Activity*. Like Arroyo, Skalko reinforces his conclusions on sexual ethics by comparing our sexual power to another power of the human person, but one that does have sufficient parity with our sexual faculty: our power of rational communication. Unlike our digestive faculty, our power of rational communication, like

⁶ Gareth Moore, *The Body in Context: Sex and Catholicism* (London: Continuum, 1992), 68–69, as quoted in Arroyo, “Natural Goodness,” 131 and 134.

our power of sexual reproduction, is ordered not merely to the individual's good, but to the *common* good.

Commonality in End and Commonality in Logic

What is the moral logic behind an absolute restriction on lying? As Skalko identifies—in the ethical tradition followed by both him and Feser, that of Thomas Aquinas—it is the same logic behind an absolute restriction on intrinsically non-procreative sexual activity:

Aquinas held that lying . . . and homosexual activity were wrong for similar reasons. . . . Aquinas held that the syllogism showing why such actions are wrong involves a shared premise. Lying is wrong because it violates the purpose of speech. Homosexual acts are wrong because these acts oppose the purpose of the generative power.⁷

In both lying and intrinsically non-procreative sexual activity we are engaging a power of the soul in a manner that is contrary to its natural ordering.⁸ It is key to emphasize that the action is contrary to the end of the power—ordering the same in opposition to its natural end—rather than being a question of disordering the use of our bodily organs: “*Natural use* is rooted in the power; insofar as organs are instruments of a power, their natural end changes according to the power that uses them.”⁹ For example, our teeth can function as instruments of our nutritive power while we chew, but can also function more generally as instruments of our motive power when we use them to hold a flashlight while we work with our hands.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the key similarity between our sexual faculty

⁷ Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 15–16.

⁸ This is not the same as simply not engaging the faculty. Lying is in direct opposition to the truth, while simply keeping silence does not engage the faculty at all. Similarly, while both fail to lead to procreation, not engaging in sexual activity is not the same as engaging the sexual faculty in an intrinsically non-procreative manner (see Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 245). An analogy would be the difference between a bus driver who is simply not assigned to the US-to-Mexico bus route and a bus driver who takes control of the bus destined for Mexico from the US and drives it—in the opposite direction—to Canada.

⁹ Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 262.

¹⁰ See Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 234–35: “The end of an instrument [i.e., an organ] is malleable according to the use of the instrument. . . . [They] have no single end fixed

and our faculty of rational communication—the reason why they share a stricter moral logic in distinction from the digestive faculty—is their ordering to the common good.

By nature, man is a social being.¹¹ Consequently, the social common good *completes* the good of the individual. As Aquinas notes: “The proper good of man can be understood in different ways; . . . *insofar as he is political, his good is the common good of the city.*”¹² Nevertheless, the common good *transcends* the individual as a whole does a part.¹³ This does not imply any disharmony between the common good and the individual, because the good of a part—qua part—is *within* the good of the whole, and man is by nature part of a wider social whole.¹⁴ Similarly, the good of a whole is constituted by the ordered good of the parts. Therefore, the common good “should be identical to the good of its members.”¹⁵

Both particular and common goods are truly goods of the individual, yet the latter are of a higher order than the former. The transcendent nature of common goods is grasped when we consider the intelligibility of

by nature, unless the organ is identical with and able to be used by only one power. Since organs are instruments of a power, they have natural ends insofar as they are used by a power. . . . [For example,] when the penis is used to urinate, the nutritive power is engaged. . . . When the teeth are used to hold a flashlight only the motive power is engaged.”

¹¹ See Aristotle from *Politics* I: “Therefore, it is evident from these things that *the political community exists by nature*, and that *human beings are by nature political animals*. And those who live outside a political community because of their nature and not by misfortune are either wicked or superhuman” (as quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2007], 6 [emphasis added]).

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *De caritate*, a. 2, corp., as quoted in Charles De Koninck, “The Primacy of the Common Good against the Personalists,” in *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press 2009), 74–108, 80 (emphasis added).

¹³ See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.22: “And the political community has priority over the household and every individual, since *the whole* as such necessarily *has priority over the parts*. For example, take away the whole body, and neither hands nor feet exist (except equivocally, as one might speak of the hands or feet of a statue). . . . The political community by nature also has priority over the individual. For if separate individuals are not self-sufficient, they will be *related to the whole in the same way as other parts*. Things incapable of participating in a political community and things in no need of it because of their self-sufficiency are not parts of it. And so those who live outside political communities are either beasts or gods” (quoted in Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, 6 [emphasis added]).

¹⁴ See Aristotle *Politics* 1.22.

¹⁵ De Koninck, “Primacy,” 103.

a soldier dying for his country or a martyr willing to die for the truth. Just as it is intelligible to subordinate individual body parts for the integrity of the whole body, so too is it intelligible that merely individual goods are to be subordinate to the more universal goods of the whole.

Regarding our sexual faculty, Aquinas notes: “Among natural [bodily] acts *generation alone is directed to the common good*, since *eating* and the discharge of other superfluities regard the individual, but procreation regards the preservation of the species.”¹⁶ Engaging our digestive faculty is directed to our good qua individual and can naturally be subordinated to other goods of the *bodily* and *spiritual* whole. For example, the negative consequences of smoking a cigar can be balanced against the psychological benefits it presents for an individual. And this same balance of individual considerations also applies to the consumption of dessert.¹⁷ Our sexual faculty, however—following Aquinas’s anthropology—is directed to a common good.¹⁸ Consequently, to order this power exclusively towards a less universal good, *per se* excluding its order to the propagation of the species, is to subordinate what is due to the whole to the private interests of a part—rendering the action disordered. This too is the case with lying.¹⁹

Returning to the nature of the common good, consider that the full life of a human person is in communion with others.²⁰ We see this manifest

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, chap. 123 (trans. Laurence Shapcote, ed. and rev. The Aquinas Institute, aquinas.cc/la/en/~SCG3.C123.7 [emphasis added]).

¹⁷ Further, while dessert is an unbalanced form of nutrition, it still provides nutrients for the body. As Skalko notes, responding to the dessert argument from Bentham: “Nourishment includes all foods, both nutritious and less nutritious. Dessert remains food and so its consumption can be ordered towards the preservation of the individual” (*Disordered Actions*, 316). Further, see the quote from Aquinas, *De malo* in note 18, below.

¹⁸ The same point is brought out by Aquinas in *De malo*, q. 15, a. 2, ad. 12: “The act of generation is ordered to the good of the species, which is a common good. While the private good is subject to the directive of each person, the common good must be ordered by law. Therefore, in an act of the nutritive power, which is ordered to the preservation of the individual, anyone can determine for himself what food is appropriate. But to determine in what way the act of generation is to be performed does not pertain to just anyone” (quoted in Steven J. Jensen, *Knowing the Natural Law: From Precepts and Inclinations to Deriving Oughts* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015], 162).

¹⁹ See Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 296–97.

²⁰ This paragraph and the next are modified versions of paragraphs found in Desmond A. Conway, O.P., “Did Jacob Lie? Were His Words Inspired? Examining Genesis 27 in Light of Augustine, Aquinas, and Lombardo,” *New Blackfriars* 104, no. 111 (2023): 294–305.

itself at the very start of life; not only do newborns need a community of persons to care for them physically, but a young person's rational capacities require a community within which to unfold.²¹ We reach our full humanity only through other persons, and one of the essential abilities we have in order to establish, sustain, and perfect such a community of rational creatures is to communicate our rational thoughts.

In light of this ordering of human nature towards community and the essential role that communication plays in such a community, we can see that our ability to communicate rational thoughts is ordered towards this complete good, this common good, of the human person. This helps us understand Aquinas's words: "As words are naturally signs of intellectual acts, it is *unnatural and undue* for anyone to signify by words something that is not in his mind."²² It is *unnatural* and *disordered* because it is oriented *away* from the good of the human community, which coincides with the good of the individual as a natural member of the same.

As Skalko summarizes regarding both faculties: "The shared good of man contains truth as well as the good of the species. Nature has dictated that certain acts or powers are the only means whereby one may per se order oneself to these shared goods. Using these means contrary to their purpose, whether by using assertions untruthfully or the generative power ungeneratively, is to oppose the shared good."²³

A Wider Framework

Arroyo holds that "being intrinsically nonprocreative does not render a human sex act intrinsically immoral."²⁴ So far we have outlined why an intrinsically non-procreative human sex act is intrinsically *disordered*. Yet, we have not explicitly outlined the intrinsic immorality of these activities. That the power engaged has an *intrinsic ordering to a common good* and that these activities *fail to be so ordered* may both be conceded, but also followed with a shrug—"why does this disorder render the action immoral?" That lying is immoral *because* it fails to be ordered to the common good is more easily grasped. Lying seems to cause harm to the community, to

²¹ As my former ethics professor, Paul McNellis, S.J., would note, anyone alive today is alive because a community of others has said "yes" to their existence and flourishing.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 110, a. 3, corp. (trans. Laurence Shapcote, ed. and rev. Aquinas Institute, aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.II-II.Q110.A3 [emphasis added]).

²³ Skalko, *Disordered Actions*, 274.

²⁴ Arroyo, "Natural Goodness," 118.

the integrity of communication within the same. The defective order of communication in lying is what causes harm, therefore its disorder renders the activity immoral. Yet, with the particular example Arroyo focuses on, that of auto-erotic stimulation,²⁵ even if it is accepted as being “disordered” by subordinating what is due to the whole to the private interests of the part, the question remains: “If it does not harm the whole, why does that mean it should be avoided?” To answer this question, we must continue to follow the example set by Arroyo’s article, grounding our ethical conclusions within our anthropology. For being ordered towards common goods which transcend the individual is only one aspect of the anthropology which renders intelligible the position that *per se* non-procreative sexual activity is not simply disordered but, for that very reason, immoral.

Veritatis Splendor (VS) is “the first time . . . that the Magisterium of the Church has set forth in detail the fundamental elements of [its Christian moral teaching].”²⁶ The document’s principal focus in treating these fundamental elements is the reality of intrinsically evil actions—of which *per se* non-procreative sexual activity would be considered an example.²⁷ Nevertheless, in accomplishing this, the document sets out the Church’s principles of moral evaluation and grounds the same within her account of anthropology. Regarding the former, the document refers to “what is traditionally called the problem of the ‘sources of morality’” and identifies these sources as “the *intention* of the acting subject, the *circumstances*—and in particular the consequences—of his action, [and] the *object* itself of his act.”²⁸ These “sources” are distinct aspects of human action. By considering these in their distinction and order, one is able to make a moral judgement about an action.

The intention is the end the agent aims at, what motivates their action. Circumstances refer to relevant particulars of attempting to achieve this end within the agent’s unique situation. Finally, the object refers to the concrete means chosen by the agent to move towards the intended end—and this constitutes the most important element in moral analysis: “*The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the ‘object’ rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the*

²⁵ See Arroyo, “Natural Goodness,” 135–40.

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* [VS] (1993), §115.

²⁷ See VS §115: “Each of us knows how important is the teaching which represents the central theme of this Encyclical, . . . the *reaffirmation of the universality and immutability of the moral commandments*, particularly those which prohibit always and without exception *intrinsically evil acts*.”

²⁸ VS §74.

insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas [Aquinas].”²⁹ If the object of an action is morally defective, the entire action is defective, regardless of any further intention or circumstances. This is precisely the case with *per se* non-procreative sexual acts, as will be discussed below. First, however, we must clearly grasp what is meant by “moral object” and how such an object can be judged “good” or “evil.”

According to *VS*, the moral object is a “freely chosen kind of behaviour,” but not “a process or an event of the merely physical order.”³⁰ The object is more than a physical activity, but includes the concrete and physical nature of the activity chosen.³¹ Consequently, from one vantage point, the moral object refers to the means undertaken in order to arrive at the intention or ultimate end of the agent. Yet, more precisely, the moral object refers to the behavior undertaken by the agent *under the aspect of being freely chosen by the will*. And it is this involvement of the will that makes the moral object *moral*.

The “goodness” or “evil” of the moral object—upon which “the morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally”—is grounded by *VS* in the nature of the human agent. Generally, an act is “good if its object is in conformity with the good of the person.”³² Therefore, a good object is one which is in conformity with the good of the person. Nevertheless, a central aspect of a person’s good is the goodness of their will, and the moral object “determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.”³³ Consequently, when the object is in “conformity with the order of reason, it is the cause of the goodness of the will; it perfects us morally.”³⁴ In summary, a moral object contributes to our perfection not simply by moving us towards our ends in a manner which conforms to the goodness of the person, but, by virtue of its being chosen, contributes to our moral perfection.

Some of these assertions may seem tautological: a “good” object is one that causes our will to be “good” and is in conformity with the “good” of the person. We must, however, keep in mind that there is an order established among the integral nature of the person, the object, and the will,

²⁹ *VS* §78.

³⁰ *VS* §78.

³¹ In grasping the nature of the moral object, I have been aided by Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015); see especially 76 and forward.

³² *VS* §78.

³³ *VS* §78.

³⁴ *VS* §78.

such that the goodness of the will is measured with reference to the goodness of the object and the goodness of the object is measured in reference to how perfective it can be of the integral nature of the person. Through our intelligence, we are able to grasp what we are and what we are made for, and when we choose behaviors that are truly conducive to these ends—that is, *truly* perfective of us—we are not only perfected by the actions insofar as they move us towards these ends, but we are *morally* perfected insofar as we have *freely ordered ourselves* within the truth of who we are. And this mode of perfection—moral perfection of the will—is central to the species-specific dignity of the human person.³⁵

In summary, within the Church's anthropology, human beings are perfected by their actions at two levels. First, in obtaining or participating in a hierarchy of natural ends. Secondly, by *doing this freely*, ordering our wills towards these natural ends in their due order. Now, even if we have a good intention or end for our action, if the means we freely undertake for this end—our moral object—are not compatible with the ordered hierarchy of our natural ends, then the action is not *truly* perfective of the agent.³⁶ Regarding the first level at which action perfects the agent, the incompatibility between the object and the hierarchy of our natural ends renders the action *disordered*. For the action fails to properly order the person within this hierarchy. Regarding the second level, if the person has *freely chosen* this disordered action, the disorder causes a *moral* defect. Consequently, if an action is intrinsically *disordered* (i.e., not defective due to some further end or circumstances, but by the nature of its object), it will necessarily also be *immoral*—for the free choice of the same will produce a defect in the will. This is the case with engaging the sexual faculty in a *per se* non-procreative manner.

One could engage the sexual faculty in an intrinsically non-procreative manner with a further end or intention in mind that, in and of itself, may be noble, and do this within circumstances where no one would be harmed or scandalized. Yet, as a moral object, beyond any other aspects of

³⁵ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, §17: "Human dignity requires man to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings, and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means" (as quoted in *VS* §42).

³⁶ See *VS* §78: "The true good of the person . . . is really pursued only when the essential elements of human nature are respected."

the action, this behavior is intrinsically immoral. Regarding the first level at which action should perfect an agent, such an activity is intrinsically disordered for the reasons outlined in our previous section: it subordinates our ordering towards a higher common good to the pursuit of lower particular goods. Further, because this activity is—in light of the common-good anthropology of the human person—intrinsically disordered, if it is freely chosen by the will, it will produce a disorder in the will. Therefore, *because* of its inherent disorder, it is an inherently immoral choice. And this is why it should always be avoided, not because of some harm towards others or some *physical* harm to oneself, but because of the *spiritual* disorder it causes in the will—ordering the person away from their integral good. The middle term between *intrinsically* non-procreative human sex acts and their *intrinsic* immorality is their *intrinsic* disorder.

It should be clarified that, if an agent is *completely* unaware of the disorder between their behavior and their flourishing, they are not culpable for this defect in their will. Nevertheless, correcting such a person is an act of love because this ignorance is frustrating not only their general fulfillment as a human being—obtaining ends that are truly perfective of their nature—but also their moral perfection, the order of their will towards and within the hierarchy of our natural ends. Finally, in concluding this section, it is helpful to consider how moral goodness can remain even when an action's first level of perfection is frustrated.

A person who aims at a truly perfective end, such as the procreation and education of children, through means that are genuinely conducive to this end and without undermining the pursuit of any higher end, may be *frustrated* in accomplishing this goal. They are, however, still *morally* perfected by their actions. This would be the case of spouses who are infertile due to some biological defect. Not obtaining the end does not render their will defective. On the contrary, by pursuing something truly perfective of their nature in a manner that does not undermine any higher ends, they *have been* morally perfected.³⁷ On the other hand, a person who aims at

³⁷ One may object that, once the couple is aware of their infertility, they are then engaging in a *per se* non-procreative sex act. This, however, is not the case. Their activity remains *per se* ordered to procreation, but is frustrated in obtaining this end *per accidens*, that is, due to special circumstances of the individuals, *not* due to any defect in the behavior as such. Though circumstances keep the natural end of the activity from ever obtaining, the moral object is in no way disordered. As John Murray of Dublin City University notes, “fertile behavior” always remains such even if biological circumstances keep the behavior from *actually* being fertile. This would also be the case with fertile couples who engage in the marital embrace at periods of natural infertility.

what they consider to be a legitimate end, within circumstances where they do not foresee to harm anyone—including themselves—will not for these subjective reasons be truly perfected, neither generally, nor morally. Consider the example focused on by Arroyo: someone who engages in auto-erotic stimulation. Despite accomplishing any further end they have for engaging their sexual faculty—such as avoiding venereal disease by not engaging in sexual activity with others—³⁸and avoiding any physical harm or scandal (defective circumstances), what they have done is immoral. For the moral object of their action is, in light of their *species-specific* nature, intrinsically disordered and, therefore, neither *truly* conducive to their integral flourishing nor choice-worthy.

Conclusion

This article has not engaged with Arroyo's own approach to anthropology, nor has it defended Feser's account of the perverted faculty argument. Yet, insofar as Arroyo's article has implied an incoherence in the Catholic account of sexual morality—most concisely by contrasting the diverse moral logics applied to the digestive and sexual faculties—I have attempted to outline that there is no such incoherence. The conclusion that all *per se* non-procreative sexual activity is always and everywhere immoral is grounded in a coherent account of the moral act and the human agent. It is with the human person's *species-specific* flourishing in mind—our flourishing as free and intelligent creatures ordered to ends that transcend us as individuals—that the Catholic natural law vision restricts the engagement of the sexual faculty, as it does our power of rational communication, to the pursuit of the common good.

The root of many modern moral disputes is found at the level of anthropology, specifically, whether or not there is a transcendent and common truth called human nature, ordered to ends beyond the designs of individuals.³⁹ Ultimately, the idea of an object being “good” or an intention being “good” or “evil” can be intelligible only within a shared framework of the nature of the human person, specifically the vocation or teleological ordering of such a nature. The tensions between secular and Catholic visions of what constitutes ethical behavior can be resolved only in terms

³⁸ This is one among several examples given by Arroyo for how such activity “contributes to human flourishing” (“Natural Goodness,” 139).

³⁹ See *VS* §32: “There is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil. . . . Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.”

of anthropology. The first step is an agreement *that* there is such a universal nature, and then moving to agree on *what* it is. Being the ultimate ground for the intelligibility of moral judgements, it is in terms of anthropology that modern ethical discussions should be had, and in this regard, Arroyo's *mode* of dissent should be complimented. He does not simply assert that a particular activity is moral because it seems so to the majority or because he sees no reason why it should be regarded as immoral, but clarifies his approach to determining what is perfective of the human person and then argues for why a particular activity should be regarded as perfective of such a nature.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, with a different anthropological vision, the Church and—more specifically—the Thomistic tradition within the same, come to different conclusions.

Within an anthropology that abstracts from man's natural ordering to the common good, where there is only room for particular goods in accounting for flourishing, the moral logic associated with engaging our digestive faculty—broad and balanced against other private interests—seems a satisfactory model for engaging any other human faculty, *qua* faculty.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this is not a true anthropology. The human person is made for and most fully themselves through rational participation in the common good, and this is precisely what our powers of communication and procreation are ordered towards.⁴² To subordinate these powers to our own private interests is to order ourselves *away* from our complete good and towards a counterfeit freedom: "Such a one may be said to be free, as a brick in a pile is free from the order of the building."⁴³

Regarding our sexual faculty in particular, those who wish to separate its

⁴⁰ See Arroyo, "Natural Goodness," 117: "What heterosexual couples choose to do or find valuable is irrelevant to the question of whether their sexual acts run contrary to a natural end, and the fact that people engage in sex for various (nonprocreative) purposes does not rule out there being some intrinsic, natural end to sex that obtains regardless of the desires of the person or persons engaging in sexual activity." He asserts later: "mere regularity does not entail a connection to natural goodness" (125).

⁴¹ The common good of society overlaps with other common goods, such as truth and virtue, which man is naturally ordered towards. Due to our current focus, we have not made space to unpack the distinction and interrelation of the other common goods to which man is ordered. Nevertheless, participation in any common good—if it is truly such, and not simply some aggregate of particular goods—will by nature transcend any set of particular goods.

⁴² As alluded to in note 41, it would be more fitting to speak of common goods, and specifically a hierarchy of common goods, with God as the highest and most common good of all creation.

⁴³ Gregory Froelich, "Friendship and the Common Good," *Aquinas Review*, 2005, 37–58, at 56.

unitive potential⁴⁴ from its procreative order are left with only counterfeit intimacy. For the common good is “the most intimate link of persons with one another and the noblest.”⁴⁵ When husband and wife embrace in a *per se* generative manner, they are not turned simply towards each other, but together move towards a good that transcends their individuality and can consequently bind them more intimately than any mere overlap of private interests ever could. NV

⁴⁴ Or “significance”; see Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (1968), §12, as trans. A. C. Clark and G. C. Crawford (London: Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 1968).

⁴⁵ De Koninck, “Primacy,” 97.