

Fundamental Inclinations and Sexual Desires

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THERE IS A COMMON misunderstanding of the classical natural law tradition concerning the nature of—and the naturalness of—sexual desire and sexual acts, and specifically of same-sex desires and acts. It is an argument that has its most interesting (for me, anyhow) manifestations in the writings of those within the Catholic tradition, or who at least have a Catholic background. The argument runs something like this: The basis for natural law proscriptions of same-sex acts is grounded in the fundamental natural inclinations or drives of human beings. Thomas Aquinas, to use a well-respected version of the natural law argument, says that we have fundamental inclinations to sexual intercourse and care of offspring. This would seem to indicate that sexual intercourse here is taken by Aquinas to mean an act between a man and a woman, since that is how you would make offspring to care for. However, what is different about those who consider themselves to have a same-sex orientation is that they experience a different desire than many people, a deep desire as unsought and uncontrolled as the desire in heterosexuals, but for sexual union with a member of the same sex rather than the opposite sex. By this argument, the natural law is essentially different for those with same-sex attraction.

The reasoning expressed above relies on some basic misunderstandings of the nature of the fundamental natural inclinations: first, about the relationship between these inclinations and conscious desires, and second, about the relationship between inclinations and our nature as human beings. It is an easy mistake to make, especially given how we use language today.

One reason it is easy to fall into this mistake is a common contemporary notion of the self. Charles Taylor, in an analysis used brilliantly by Philip Turner to dissect the contemporary sexual understanding, notes three things about the contemporary “self”: 1) it is defined by its inward depths that distinguish it from other selves; 2) a meaningful existence for this self is not heroism or sainthood, but everyday life; and 3) the point of everyday life is the satisfaction that comes from exploring one’s inner depths. These principles are accompanied by three moral ideas: a) benevolence, b) equal justice, and c) elimination of suffering.¹ To the degree that a person assumes that “sexuality” and “sexual desire” are not merely important aspects of one’s depths, but indeed definitional of one’s very self as a person, “it is immediately appealing to say that sexual relations ought to be pried loose from anything like an ‘order’ that prescribes for them goods that are not matters of choice or that denies some people access to these relations *ab initio*.”²

The denial of the right to explore one’s sexual depths in whatever way one chooses is seen to be a denial of all three of the moral principles invoked by the contemporary position. This is not a surprising conclusion to come to in the contemporary way of thinking. Turner references *The History of Sexuality*, in which Michel Foucault claims that the term “sexuality” today works now for many people as the word soul once did: as the nexus uniting the various aspects of one’s being, giving one an identity.³ Nicholas Bamforth and David A. J. Richards, in the flyleaf to their book *Patriarchal Religion, Sexuality, and Gender*, quote none other than H. L. A. Hart: “But interference with individual liberty may be thought an evil requiring justification for simpler, utilitarian reasons; for it is itself the infliction of a special form of suffering—often very acute—on those whose desires are frustrated by the fear of punishment. . . . The suppression of sexual impulses generally is. . . . something which affects the development or balance of the individual’s emotional life, happiness, and personality.”⁴

¹ Philip Turner, “Undertakings and Promises: An Anatomy of Sexual Ethics,” *First Things*, April 1991, 8–9. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ H. L. A. Hart, *Law, Liberty, and Morality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963), 22, cited in Nicholas Bamforth and David A. J. Richards, *Patri-*

One difficulty that arises from this contemporary notion of the self is relatively easy for Turner, and his readers, to spot:

The problem with their view is that it fails to recognize that a sexual self, liberated from any notion of undertakings that have a moral claim upon it prior to any of its particular intentions and choices, has no satisfactory way to make moral judgments about what it intends and what it chooses. It can only follow the prompting of its own depths, and so must appear like a dog chasing its own tail. . . . [This] can only mean that the most insistent prompting of the self always is taken as definitive of the self's true nature and good. The self's depths are used to judge the self's depths. . . . One's desires and intentions, by virtue of the strength of their presentation, are both "natural" and "good."⁵

Imagine reading the natural law tradition against such a backdrop, with no reference to any objective reality outside the desires of the one desiring. It is easy to slip to the conclusion that the self is nothing more than this bundle of desires whose body exists, at best, to serve those desires.

What, however, if one were to reject such a take on the kind of thing a human self is, properly speaking—indeed, if one were to take seriously a Catholic/Thomistic view of the human person as created by God with a soul that is the form of the body? Would this be enough to move us clear of the difficulties caused by this notion of self? Perhaps it would—if the Thomistic tradition is properly understood. The problem is that one can find reasons *within the Thomistic rendering* that can cause a similar confusion.

I

Gareth Moore, O.P., offers a reading of Aquinas's account in chapter 7 of his book *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality*.⁶ There are many aspects of his reading of St. Thomas that go astray, but we will look here only at his understanding of the notion of fundamental

archal Religion, Sexuality, and Gender (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), vi.

⁵ Turner, "Undertakings and Promises," 10.

⁶ Gareth Moore, O.P., *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

natural inclinations. Here are two quotes illustrating his position. He first writes: “As well as being thinking creatures, we have other aspects to our nature. In particular, we have natural inclinations. We naturally want certain things, so we naturally see those things as good. (Let us call such things natural human goods.) We also naturally want to avoid certain things, so we naturally see those things as bad. It is these inclinations that, for Aquinas, give content to the natural law.”⁷ Shortly thereafter, he continues:

The continued existence of the species is, according to Aquinas, a natural good of the species, for he believes, as we have seen, that all things naturally seek to conserve themselves. But this belief is not true; things in general do not seek to conserve themselves. Animals, including human beings, very often do, but not always. Inanimate things do not seek to conserve themselves at all, for the reason that they do not seek anything. The fact that human beings on the whole seek to preserve themselves was meant to be equivalent to their naturally seeing their own survival as good, since for human beings to desire something is to see it as good. But things which are not animals do not desire anything, and things which are not rational animals do not see anything as good.⁸

In a footnote to this latter passage, Moore comments on the ambiguity of the terms “inclination” and “tendency,” admitting that Aquinas could mean by these terms merely that both animate and inanimate things *actually move* in certain ways, rather than that they *desire* to act in those ways. His example is the difference between a person who tends or is inclined to smoke after a meal and a person who tends to cough while smoking: one activity is willed; the other is not. We may share the latter kind of tending with inanimate creatures, but not the former. Since it is the former alone that can be a matter of moral concern, Moore sticks with it as his interpretation of “inclination” or “tendency” as desire.

There is another difficulty that arises from Moore’s interpretation: what if I am a person who does not “naturally desire” what other people “naturally desire”? Let us look at another interpreter of the natural law tradition who tackles that very question.

⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁸ Ibid., 185.

II

In chapter 1 of his book *Virtually Normal*,⁹ journalist Andrew Sullivan attempts to grapple with the language Catholicism uses to explain herself concerning human sexuality, and particularly with shifts of emphasis that Sullivan believes have left the Church in contradiction with herself. He makes this attempt on the way, he hopes, to what eventually will be a proper understanding of human sexuality and, in particular, of the morality of homosexual acts; he recognizes the contribution of Thomas Aquinas (and his predecessor, Aristotle) to that understanding, and so wrestles with the notion of “nature.”

Like Moore, Sullivan goes astray in many places. He begins his argument by noting that “Aquinas took the notion of an individual nature and universalized it.”¹⁰ Borrowing from Aristotle’s notion of nature as normative, Aquinas theorized that all human beings have a single fundamental nature and natural end. The natural end of the genital act is the potential to create new life. Because it can happen, it should always happen, and this is what sex is for. If so, homosexual acts are not merely against one’s own nature and law, but against the order of the universe.¹¹ The problem, of course, is that not all human beings are naturally heterosexual. Simple observation reveals that, throughout history, there has been a steady occurrence of homosexuality. If only a fraction of the human race is unavoidably—naturally—homosexual, then there is a flaw in Aquinas’s logic. The Church has been caught up in an attempt to show that something naturally occurring is at the same time unnatural (i.e., against the end of God’s creation).¹²

These two arguments, Moore’s and Sullivan’s, though not identical, are alike in that they see the possibility that, in the deepest core of who we are as human beings, there may be a fundamental difference, a difference in ends and desires, that places a subset of human beings apart from the majority—and perhaps not even the majority, if there are enough people out there who have simply been repressing what they really most desire in order to fit into a social narrative.¹³ To

⁹ Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 33.

¹³ Cf. Daryl J. Bem, “The Exotic-Becomes-Erotic Theory of Sexual Orientation,” chapter 10 in *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science and Culture of*

address these two separate but related issues, we must first discuss the relationship between desires and fundamental natural inclinations, and then the relationship between these fundamental inclinations and our nature.

Ad 1

When we say, in common parlance, that we are inclined to a certain act or behavior or decision, we typically mean that we have a more or less well-understood desire for that act or behavior or decision. In other words, my desire is something of which I may be fully cognizant and for which I understand the reasons, but it may be that I am only dimly aware until the moment comes that I desire such an act or behavior or decision. When asked why I desired and chose as I did, the best I may be able to say about it is: “Oh, I don’t know; I just felt like it.”¹⁴ So, for example, when I say that, given the thirty-one options at the ice cream counter, I am inclined to go with the Mango-Melba Surprise, this means that my strongest desire, unless the options change or I can be persuaded otherwise, is to order the Mango-Melba Surprise. Here, the terms “inclination” and “desire” mean essentially the same thing.

Thus, when we look back at medieval physics and find the claim that a rock has a natural inclination to fall downward, while fire has a natural inclination to rise, it is quite easy for us to interpret this claim as some silly notion that rocks and fire have desires, which would

Homosexuality, ed. John Corvino (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), a shortened version of which appears as “Exotic Becomes Erotic: A Developmental Theory of Sexual Orientation,” *Psychological Review* 103(1996): 320–35. In an argument about the origins of sexual orientation that might otherwise be compatible with Aquinas, Bem repeatedly insists that the fact that the majority of people have a heterosexual orientation is the result of “a gender-polarizing culture.” One takes from this assertion that, without this cultural pressure, we might very well see a much larger homosexual—and perhaps otherwise sexually diverse—population.

¹⁴ For an interesting discussion of the experience of desire, see Alexander R. Pruss, *One Body*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), ch. 3 (“Desire”). Whether we in fact agree or disagree on some important points remains a bit unclear, as Pruss does not employ the notion of fundamental inclination/desire. Is his notion of a “subconscious desire,” or the pursuit of a value over years that was not felt but acted as an organizing principle, “something in me that explains the multifarious pursuits, and . . . seems to have played the same explanatory role that a desire would have” (49), actually a Thomistic fundamental drive? It is not so properly speaking. However, “love” and “union” as described in his ch. 2 seem to have a role somewhat like fundamental drives as a basic force behind human action.

seem to indicate that rocks and fire have some sort of awareness of their surroundings.

Someone who wishes to defend the medievals as not simply silly might say something like “It’s a very primitive form of desire” or “It’s not desire like we have, but is metaphorically or even analogously like our desires.” They would not be without authority: Aquinas himself seems to say this. For instance, at *Summa contra gentiles* III, ch. 26.8, Aquinas talks about everything having desire, with each kind of desire being distinguishable according to the kind of knowledge necessary for its activation. The term *orexis* can be translated in a number of different ways: desire, appetite, appetency, tendency, inclination. Still, it is fairly easy to identify three types of *orexis*: natural, which requires no knowledge within the being for its activation; sensitive, which requires sense knowledge within the being for its activation; and intellectual, which requires intellectual knowledge within the being for its activation.

When we look at his discussions in the *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*), however, especially concerning the fundamental inclinations in *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2, as opposed to the notion of desire expressed in his discussion of sensitive and intellectual appetite at *ST* I, qq. 80–83, we can see that the more typical way that Aquinas uses the word “desire” is one that more readily matches a contemporary notion. It will be particularly useful for this discussion to make a distinction between “inclinations” and “desire.” Desires are always *for something identifiable by the one desiring*, a desire for X. A desire for X cannot happen unless I have knowledge of X. It may be sense knowledge, or it may be intellectual knowledge, but there has to be knowledge. Thus, I cannot simply want: I want X, and I want X insofar as I know X.¹⁵ I will be satisfied (or at least I believe I will be satisfied) when I

¹⁵ See Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009). 130: “[A] sensory-appetitive motion cannot be ‘in act’ if it does not have an object, which is supplied by an act of sensory apprehension. . . . It bears emphasizing that a motion of the sensory appetite—and thus an emotion—is irreducibly intentional.” She continues at 158n7 (in the same chapter): “Indeed, Aquinas holds that every appetitive act or motion is in a sense intentional, such that even the appetite of the stone for the surface of the earth exhibits intentionality. The object of the earth (construed as suitable for the stone) is present, not in the mind of the stone (for the stone does not have a mind), but in the mind of God, which determines the stone to have the nature it has (*Truth* 22.1). This is a way of saying that everything that is, is characterized by appetite; appetite as such is always directed toward an object; and there is a principle of order

attain X. Animals have desires because they have sense knowledge. Plants and rocks, on the other hand, have no form of knowledge at all, and so it is incorrect to attribute desire to them. Moore is correct about this.

It is perfectly reasonable, however, to talk about the drive in a plant, for instance, to preserve its own existence. It would be incorrect, according to the more careful usage just outlined, to call it a desire in the plant, but clearly it is driven toward an overall goal of staying alive and toward a number of intermediate goals that are means to this end. In fact, Aquinas states that *every substance* has the drive to self-preservation,¹⁶ and we see it manifested in all the mechanisms by which substances hold themselves together unless a stronger force breaks them apart.

Unlike desires, these fundamental drives well up in us, even without our having any knowledge at all, and they have goals, even if we have no idea what they are. Let us stay with this drive for self-preservation, to keep oneself in existence whole and intact. How is it manifested in animals—and, in particular, in the human animal? The infant has certain self-preservative reflexes (e.g., to suck) even without knowing what it is doing (or even *that* it is doing it). The point of the reflex to suck is to take in food, the point of which is self-preservation. The baby does not know this; it simply is driven to these acts. Without such reflex actions, it would never survive long enough to develop a desire. Eventually, however, it will learn that the sucking brings satisfaction; then it will figure out that a certain satisfaction derives from the food; and then it will find out that there are certain foods that taste better than others. At each stage of knowledge, there is a new kind of desire (the satisfying feeling; the food; the candy). But the *origin of the possibility* of the desires is the fundamental drive. It is perfectly reasonable, once I come to know it, that I will not only be driven to self-preservation, but desire it, but in the beginning, I cannot desire it because I do not know it.

It is also possible that, as my desires develop, I will come to desire things that, all things considered, do not really help to bring about the overall goal of self-preservation and may even work against it. I might want to eat paste, or paint chips, or lots and lots of sugar, but refuse to eat vegetables. There is nothing wrong with the fundamen-

that accounts for how all object-oriented appetites come together to compose a functioning whole.” We will take up this principle of ordering in our next section.

¹⁶ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, corp.

tal drive to self-preservation, the goal of which is that my life goes on. However, there can be a problem in the desires, which may be at cross-purposes with the fundamental drive from which they originate. How does this happen? It depends. Sugar tastes good, and it is easy to get. I may associate a certain food with other pleasures, or with pain. I may have been given certain foods and denied others. Worse things may just be there, while other, better things are not. It may simply be that my taste buds and some foods just do not get along; some tastes are simply overwhelming. Some reasons are physical, some are psychological, and some are a matter of what I know versus what I do not know. No matter what, we form habits of eating and habits of enjoyment. Our tastes do not come fully formed at birth; they have to be developed, and they are capable of change.

One thing we do know is this: the point of eating is to take in nourishment, and the points of nourishment are: a) self-preservation and b) continued growth. Secondly, and going along with this, it is an experience that can be more or less pleasant, depending on what I eat and the circumstances under which I eat. Furthermore, since we are social creatures, we find that the consumption of food can serve all kinds of functions when enjoyed in the company of others. At the very least, however, we know that its purpose is nourishment. This is what makes sense out of the organs we have and most of the things we do with food. It is for this reason that we can say that eating in ways that go against this drive as found in these bodies—eating for the taste, and then vomiting, for example—are unreasonable, a violation of our very nature.

Now human beings also have a fundamental drive to sexual union—and, interestingly, to take care of their offspring that come as the natural result of such a union between a man and a woman. The drive only makes sense, given the bodies we have, as a drive that has a proper goal in the conception of new human beings. We have these drives before we know what is going on in us. Once puberty hits, however, things change. We start having a longing for something, and we do not know what it is at first. Even if two people were left alone on an island, they may well discover for themselves what the urge is for. At first, though, we do not have a desire, but a drive. The desires come later, when we can begin to understand—or misunderstand—the drive and its end, and who and what we should desire such that we can properly accomplish the end of the drive.

What is different about the sexual drive from, say, the drive to survive, is that it does not start right away at birth. The urge kicks

in later, when there has been time to develop; if things go well, we develop maturity and skills. Certainly what has developed by this time are habits—habits of acting toward and thinking about people and relationships. Once the drive hits, we are already in a matrix of relationships and have an understanding of the world that shapes how it is that we desire in relation to this drive. It will affect who, what, and how we desire. So the sexual drive and sexual desires are rather like the drive to live and the desire to eat food in that my desires and tastes need to be formed. Sex, however, is unlike food in that my actual desires are already being shaped even before I experience the fundamental sexual drive. The drive does not start out on fresh ground, but on ground already developed by years of living—and the formation does not end there. The teen years are extremely volatile years in the formation of relationships. We are formed not only by our parents, but also our siblings, our friends, and the culture at large, and we are subject to the vagaries of our bodies, especially hormones.

This is where the problem in sexual desire lies: a few people are well formed and the rest are not, such that some desire rightly and others not. I can tell you now that, somewhere along the line, I was not entirely well formed (and I cannot find a way to blame any other person, if a person must be blamed, except myself), and thus I ended up desiring badly for a number of years. Fortunately, there was also that part of me that, on the intellectual level, desired rightly, and that made it possible for me eventually to begin to get it right in most respects. It took years, however, to overcome some very bad habits of thought and action formed through the influence of hormones and acquaintances and my own choices. Some of those habits rise up to surprise me at certain moments, even now in my late fifties, mostly under conditions similar to the original circumstances in which they were developed to begin with—when I am tired, or angry, or bored, or nervous, or alone, or otherwise feeling vulnerable.

What is the overall point of our lives? To know and to love—ultimately to know and love God, and in this world to do that through knowing and loving those around us, to offer a gift of self to others and receive their gift. All sorts of things in our lives offer us the opportunity to know and love. The sexual drive is one particular, and particularly powerful, invitation to self-gift.¹⁷ We can make

¹⁷ This is the whole thrust of Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility* in particular and of Roman Catholic teaching on sexual ethics in general. I recommend giving this book a read, if you have not already, especially in the newer translation by Grzegorz Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2013).

some sense out of sex without self-gift, but it would not be fully human. The drive to give ourselves to others in self-gift (true love, going out of oneself) must take up and subsume the sexual drive and particular sexual desires (the love of affection and of bringing this other to myself) in order to fit them into the whole picture. We live in a culture that is having some difficulty distinguishing sex from love, and frequently of even recognizing the possibility, let alone the reality, of love as self-gift. We live in a culture that reduces love to desire, and frequently only to sexual desire. We live in a culture where people say, with increasing frequency, “If you do not affirm my sexual desires, then you do not affirm me as a loving being, and consequently you do not affirm me as a person.”¹⁸ Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Ad 2

The answer to Sullivan’s argument will take us a bit deeper. Recall that his argument is basically that there are two conflicting pieces of information: the “natural” end of the sexual act to create new life, and the fairly steady proportion of the population who are unavoidably (thus, “naturally”) not drawn to these sexual acts. There must be a flaw in Aquinas’s (and the Church’s) logic, and something has to give.

This notion can be refuted on one level by reference to the argument just given in response to Moore. We have an explanation of the development of same-sex attraction—grounded in our fundamental natural inclinations, yet distorted in its ultimate manifestation—that, if correct, demonstrates that same-sex attraction is not inherently unavoidable (even if, at the moment, we do not know very well how to avoid it). Furthermore, it is certainly not natural: not natural in the more proper sense that it is part of the nature of this particular *kind* of creature, nor even “natural” in the sense that it is part of the inborn dispositions of this particular person. However, one could very well respond that, while the foregoing explanation is possible, a seemingly equally possible explanation is that some human beings have a different fundamental natural drive in relation to sexuality. This would explain the facts while undermining the claim of the “unnaturalness” of same-sex attraction and acts. Our task here is to show that this latter “equally possible” explanation is not, in fact, possible at all.

¹⁸ This, I believe, is the problem with marriage in our culture. It is not that we do not take vows. It is that we think the vows should be about what gives us pleasure, and if it fails to give us what we want, we bail out.

How are we to properly understand the relationship between our fundamental drives and inclinations, our bodies, and our sense- and intellectual-level desires? Aquinas is a good Aristotelian, and so we can easily look back to Aristotle's *Physics* (2.7–9), *Parts of Animals* (2.1) and *De anima* (2.1; 2.4) for the beginning of an explanation. Aristotle says the form of any thing acts not only as the formal cause but also as the efficient and final causes. This is most apparent in the form of a living thing—a soul.

The form is, of course, the formal cause; that is, it makes the thing to be the kind of thing that it is, bringing a material being into existence as a body of a particular kind with a set of potentialities that differs from the set of potentialities of other things. The form is also the efficient cause. That is, when particular ends are presented to it, the form supplies the ability, the power, to perform its operations. What, however, are the operations about? What is their end? This, too, is the form. The ultimate end of its actions is the achievement of its potentials, the actualization of its fullness of being, the completeness of its form as this kind of thing. So, one way of looking at this relationship is to say that a thing has the body it has, the operations it has, and the ends it has because of its form.

This, though, is an incomplete picture. Let us think from the perspective of the one who comes up with the idea for the thing—the architect, the engineer, the craftsman. Here, it is more useful to turn to Aquinas, who speaks in *Summa contra gentiles* about the mastery of God over creation: we call God “Lord” because we are masters of the things subject to our will.¹⁹ The things subject to our will over which we are masters, in this situation, are those things for which we are responsible because we came up with the idea of them and made them according to a plan. Anyone is the master of a thing if he a) comes up with an end for that thing and b) designs it with the inherent principles that enable it to reach the end. The inventor asks, “What is the end I have in mind to attain?” For, the kind of thing one makes depends on the end one has in mind. Having established this, the inventor asks, “What sort of operations will my invention have to perform to reach that end?” Once the kind of operations begin to come into focus, the inventor can then ask, “What kind of thing, with what kind of body, must I make to perform these operations, so that it can reach the end I have in mind?” In other words, the form the invention assumes is for the sake of the operations, which are for the sake of the end.

¹⁹ SCG III, ch. 1.1.

So it is with God. We cannot explain ourselves. We did not bring ourselves into being. We did not design ourselves. Nothing in the universe can explain itself or its nature. God creates things with ends in mind, and designs them so they can attain those ends. How do we know what those ends are? They are manifested in the creature's fundamental drives and inclinations, which indicate what is naturally good for the creature.

So, God has ends—goods—in mind for each creature. Those ends are the *point* of the form the creature has (in living things, the soul), what the activities of the soul are moving toward and in which that creature reaches its fulfillment. The most fundamental thing about any soul, which is the *act* of the thing, is its set of fundamental drives and inclinations toward its basic ends. *To be a creature of a certain species simply is to have a set of fundamental inclinations shared with other members of the species.*

When we say, “It is because we have this kind of soul that we have the bodies we do,” we are only getting to the first level of explanation of the relation between body and soul. *Why* would this kind of soul form this kind of body? The answer is: “So that the soul can perform its functions.” What are those functions? Why is the soul the first principle of these functions rather than other functions? Because we have these inclinations. *And why do we have those inclinations? Because they drive us toward the ends ordained by God for us.* It is because we have these ends that we have inclinations toward these ends, and it is because of these inclinations that we have the bodies we do. It is these inclinations, in these bodies, that give rise to the very possibility of desire.

If one were to grant that human beings do not all have the same fundamental natural inclination to sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex, we run into real problems. We would have people with human male bodies and people with human female bodies, most of whom have a fundamental drive to sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex; some males, however, would have a fundamental drive to a somewhat similar act with members of the same sex, while some human females would have a fundamental drive to acts that bear no similarity to sexual intercourse at all. By having a distinct and different set of fundamental inclinations, it would be reasonable to say some people are members of a different species than the majority of human beings. In fact, it would be reasonable to say that same-sex-attracted males are members of a different species from same-sex-attracted females.

Such a claim would be difficult to justify. Two situations put the lie to it: bisexuality and the simple fact that at least some people—even if it is a very small number—do, in fact, change their orientation. Yet, even if human beings had no experience of these two phenomena, the very idea that there are two or more species with the exact same kind of body leaves us with some important puzzles. Those with a fundamental inclination to genital pleasure with a member of the same sex but no inclination to intercourse with members of the opposite sex are designed as organisms that, by their very nature, are driven to acts incapable of reproducing, but using bodily organs that, to all appearances, are designed for reproduction. So the soul informing the body of such a person has a reproductive power, yet is *incapable* of inclinations to that end. It then forms a body that is proper to the function of sexual intercourse but has no tendency to performing this particular function.

One could perhaps escape this puzzle by assuming that the goal of our sexual inclinations is not intercourse, but pleasure or some other feeling, like closeness. Yet this, too, leaves us in the same conundrum. Now we would be able to explain the drive but not the bodies that have been formed by the soul. If we are to find an explanation of our sexual drives, our sexual bodies, and our sexual acts, it must include all these aspects. If we are to find the purpose of X, we must ask two questions: whether X actually brings about the purpose Y, and whether Y explains the existence of X.²⁰ Our sexual drives move us to acts that, when performed in the kinds of bodies we have, bring about closeness and pleasure. However, these things can be obtained in many other ways, and probably more efficiently, than through all the clumsy fumbling of our sexual acts. Why do we have *these* bodies, with organs that, when brought together can, and in fact often do, result in offspring?

If the goal is pleasure or even feelings of closeness, then these sexual bodies, and the fundamental sexual drives *in most people*, make no sense at all. No, these bodies with these organs and these drives are designed for sexual intercourse and the conception of children. The soul forms a body with its various operations and inclinations to reach a certain set of ends. These ends explain the inclinations, the inclinations explain the operations, and the operations explain the kind of body and its organs.

²⁰ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2012), 25.

Conclusion

As noted from the start, this essay responds to a very specific kind of argument, an argument that attempts to make use of the idea of fundamental natural inclinations as the basis of the natural law, and thus of Church teaching, to show that the natural law and Church teaching should be making room for the possibility that same-sex desires and acts are in keeping with our fundamental drives and inclinations. To the notion that our fundamental natural inclinations are simply our deepest desires, I have attempted to show that this claim confuses fundamental drives with desires based on knowledge. Rather, fundamental drives anchor the possibility of such desires. To the claim that human beings can have different fundamental natural inclinations, I have attempted to demonstrate that this reading of the notion of fundamental natural drives is, in fact, impossible.

There are, of course, implications for either position. The point of arguing for the idea that there are fundamental drives to same-sex acts is to argue that, for some people at least, such acts would have to be morally permissible, or even morally imperative. If the argument I have presented is accurate, then it becomes impossible to accept this moral conclusion. Any creature's fundamental natural drives indicate what is fundamentally good for that creature.²¹ A non-rational creature will, without hesitation, move toward these goods, and away from their opposites. A rational creature, being free, does not choose these ends automatically. However, having arrived at the indemonstrably true conclusion that good is to be sought and its opposite avoided, and realizing further that certain things are good based upon his grasp of human fundamental inclinations, he realizes that these things are to be sought and their opposites avoided if he is to achieve his ultimate end.²² In regard to sexuality, the only description of the fundamental sexual drive in human beings that makes sense of the bodies we have and the acts most human beings pursue in this regard is that the drive grounding all of our sexual responses is toward sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Despite the fundamental natural drive, a particular person develops dispositions and habits that run counter to this drive. This can develop due to any number of factors.

Furthermore, it would seem to be the case that those who argue for same-sex attraction as a fundamental natural drive would also

²¹ *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, corp.

²² *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2, corp.

be likely to believe that this attraction in anyone is a fixed phenomenon that cannot be altered. This proposition is also doomed if my argument is correct. The state of same-sex attraction is a situation of brokenness, and any brokenness can, in principle, be repaired, even if we do not currently know how to fix it. Even death, which is out of the hands of human repair once it occurs, is reparable by the Creator. How much more can we expect that same-sex desire, which by this account certainly appears to be a psychological condition, should be fixable if we can determine its cause and the proper approach to it. N.V