

John F. X. KNASAS

University of St. Thomas, USA  
Šv. Tomo universitetas, JAV

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# Thomistic Metaphysics and Human Sexuality

## TOMISTINĖ METAFIZIKA IR ŽMOGAUS SEKSUALUMAS

**SUMMARY.** The article confronts a number of hot-button issues of human sexuality from the perspective of Aquinas's metaphysics. Aquinas bases his metaphysics upon an intelligible object, or commonality, discovered within the things of our experience. Aquinas calls this object the notion of being, the *ratio entis*. Being is a unique commonality because it is analogical; it runs through the differences of all things. As analogical being possesses a luster that renders it instantly attractive, and so being is also called the good. This leads to ethics. Because the human intellects being, the human possesses being more intensely than other things. Hence, ourselves and others stand forth as objects of respect and solicitude. When the sexual embrace is recognized to be essentially unitive, the previous thoughts lead to a deep respect and solicitude for one's sexual partner. With that thought in mind, the article assesses the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a number of sexual practices. In this limited but profound way, the article attempts to contribute to the future of Christian thinking. The text of this article was presented at "The Future of Christian Thinking Conference" at St. Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland, April 27–30, 2022.

**SANTRAUKA.** Remiantis Tomo Akviniečio metafizika, straipsnyje apsarstomi keli šiomis dienomis karštai diskutuojami klausimai apie žmogaus seksualumą. Tomo Akviniečio metafiziką remiasi jo pažinimo samprata – intelektas daiktuose suvokia intelektualinį objektą, apimančią daiktų skirtumus ir išreiškiantį jų bendrumą. Tomas Akvinietis šį objektą vadina buvimo samprata, *ratio entis*. Buvimas yra unikalus bendrumas, nes jis yra analogiškas – apima visų daiktų skirtumus. Analogiškumas suteikia buvimui švytėjimą, kuris daro jį patrauklų, ir todėl buvimas taip pat vadinamas gėriu. Taip prieinama prie etikos. Žmogus suvokia buvimą, todėl jį turi intensyviau negu kiti daiktai, tad žmonės vieni kitiems yra pagarbos ir rūpesčio objektai. Kai seksualinis apkabinimas atpažįstamas kaip esmiškai jungiantis, šios mintys veda prie gilios pagarbos ir rūpesčio savo seksualinio partnerio atžvilgiu. Pagal šiuos apmąstymus straipsnyje nagrinėjamas įvairių seksualinių veiklų tinkamumas ar netinkamumas. Šis straipsnis buvo skaitytas konferencijoje „Krikščioniškos mąstysenos ateitis“ Šv. Patriko popiežiškajame universitete Maynoothe, Airijoje, 2022 m. balandžio 27–30 d.

KEYWORDS: analogy, the notion of being as the good, the human as intellector of being, the sexual embrace as essentially unitive.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: analogija, buvimo supratimas kaip gėris, žmogus kaip buvimo suvokėjas, seksualinis apsikabinimas kaip esmiškai jungiantis.

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## Introduction

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In his *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*<sup>1</sup>, Aquinas asks if the human will can become so hardened in evil that it naturally can never be brought back to good. His reply is negative. One of the great sources of evil action, namely, passion, dissipates. Consequently, the evil that appeared good in the wake of the passion loses its attraction. In that quiet time one's conscience or someone else can instruct one in the good and so dispose one, however remotely, to virtuous acts. Perhaps because of some recognition of Aquinas's observation, political and economic powers of the Western world have artificially stoked the fires of sexual passion and have advanced sexual pleasure as a human right. E. Michael Jones has ripped the mask from these activities by revealing sexual liberation as a form of political control.<sup>2</sup> Taking advantage of an original liaison between a thesis from Aquinas's metaphysics and human dignity, this article extends that dignity to one's sexual partner. The implications of that extension for a number of current sexual issues are discussed. In this limited but profound way, the article attempts to contribute to the future of Christian thinking.

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## The Object of Aquinas's Metaphysical Science – the Notion of Being (*Ratio Entis*)

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Aquinas's above remark from the *De Veritate* is still valid. The continued existence of Catholic colleges and universities, eviscerated as they may be, still offer ethics courses as part of their academic core. Provided the right kind of faculty can be enlisted, these courses can be the dispassionate venues during which the data of reason are brought before the reflection of students. It has been said that the aim of a university education should be to introduce students to objects more beautiful and precious than sensible

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate* 24, 11c, "The reason why no one can be so obstinate in evil in this life that he is unable to cooperate in his liberation is clear from what has been said [in art. 10]. For passion is dissipated and repressed, habit does not wholly corrupt the soul, and reason does not cling so stubbornly to what is false that it cannot be led away from it by a contrary argument." Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 2, 186.

<sup>2</sup> E. Michael Jones, *Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control* (South Bend: Fidelity Press, 2018).

goods. This article presents some reflections from an undergraduate ethics course successfully taught for many years.

For that small step towards virtue, what should be that object more beautiful and precious than sensible goods? That question brings one to a profound and unique debt of Aquinas's natural law ethics to his metaphysics. Usually human dignity is rooted in rationality. But at the root of rationality is the intellection of being, the *ratio entis*. This understanding of ourselves as intellectors of being has ethical import because for Aquinas being is also the good, the *ratio boni*. Consequently the human person stands forth as a heightened presentation of the good. Such a status cannot but have ethical implications.

Other publications have advanced this interpretation through an analysis of *Summa Theologiae* I–II, 94, 2.<sup>3</sup> That textual analysis will not be repeated here. Now the focus is on the intellection of being and how the intellection of being is understood so that the door of ethics is presented and opened.

Besides categorizing ourselves as humans, animals and bodies, we also categorize ourselves as beings or existents. The first three categorizations imply commonalities intellectually perceived in appropriate wider groupings of ourselves and other things. For instance, in Tom, Dick, and Harry, one intellects human. Adding Fido, Flicka, and Flossy to the group, one grasps the wider commonality of animal. Finally, when one juxtaposes all of these to Mount Everest and the Atlantic Ocean, one intellects the commonality of body.

What is the appropriate multiplicity for the commonality of being? It is all the mentioned extramental things plus those things also cognitively existing in our sensation. The human is never so sunk into its sensation that the human loses awareness of itself. Aquinas reiterates Aristotle that we know things directly and ourselves by the way.<sup>4</sup> The cognitive existence of real things is the expression of what is called Aquinas's immediate realism. This sense realism enables the original notion of being to be wider than *ens mobile*, the subject of natural philosophy, and so able to initiate metaphysical science.<sup>5</sup>

Being, however, is unique not simply because it is most wide among commonalities. Aquinas argues that being is a non-generic commonality. We form generic commonalities by placing the differences of the commonalities extrinsic to

<sup>3</sup> See John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), ch. 8, and *Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel: Thomistic Reflections on the Problem of Evil* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), ch. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Aquinas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics* XII, lect. 11, no. 2608, on Aristotle's remark "But science, perception, opinion and thought always seem to be about something else and only indirectly about themselves." Also, see Joseph Owens, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992), 5.

<sup>5</sup> See John F. X. Knasas, "The Role of Sense Realism in the Initiation of Aquinas's Metaphysics," in Christopher Cullen and Franklin Harkins, ed., *The Discovery of Being: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 61–83.

the consideration of the commonality. The mentioned commonality of animal, for instance, does not include the differences of rational and non-rational, and body does not include the differences of living and non-living. This approach, however, will not work to form the commonality of being. If the approach is taken, it would render the differences of things extrinsic to being and so reduce the differences to non-being. In contradiction to sense realism, reality would cease to be populated by different things. So, Aquinas says in the *De Veritate*, XXI, 1, that in a generic *ratio* the differences are implicit but potentially present, but in the *ratio entis* the differences are not outside the essence of being.<sup>6</sup> This should mean that the differences of being are implicitly and actually within the essence of being. Earlier at *De Veritate* I, 1c, Aquinas had said that the differences of being are expressed, or surfaced, from the *ratio entis*. This should mean that in forming the commonality of being, the human intellect render the differences implicit, or submerged, in the *ratio*.

The result of these thoughts about being is that one appreciates being as an unlimited concrescence of perfection. As such the *ratio entis* has the luster to act as a final cause and to call forth the motion of the will in relation to which being is called the good, the *ratio boni*.

There are other cases of this startling phenomenon of sameness within difference. If one is asked what makes Rome a charming city like Paris, one will mention its ruins, crooked and narrow streets, and its gelato. Yet all of these are what Rome has but not Paris. So surprisingly one found what makes Rome like Paris in what makes Rome different from Paris. The same consideration can be made beginning from Paris instead of Rome. The differences of these cities are not extrinsic to them as charming. Charming city is a sameness that possesses these differences and who knows what others. Before one knew Vienna, London, Hong Kong, would one have thought that charming city could take those forms? Would one not have been surprised by them? This thought is enough to generate a life-long love of travel to learn more of the depths of this commonality of charming city. Other ordinary examples of this sameness in difference phenomenon could be provided. They are important to present to students because just like Plato's gradual introduction to the good from narrower commonalities, ordinary examples of sameness within difference can prepare students for contemplation of being.

## **The Human Person as Intellector of Being and the Emergence of Obligation**

For purposes of this article, it important to note that the commonality of being is not equally present through things. This unequal presence is not the standard Aristotelean

<sup>6</sup> "Animal is limited by man because what is contained in the notion of man determinately and actually, is only implicitly and, as it were, potentially contained in the notion of animal <...> being is narrowed down in the ten categories, each of which adds something to being – not, of course, an accident or difference which is outside the essence of being, but a determinate manner of being which is founded upon the very existence of the thing." *Truth*, 3, 5–6.

unequal presence of being in a substance and in an accident. It is the unequal presence of being among substances. Being is present in a more intense and heightened fashion in humans than in granite, cows, and daisies. The heightened presence is due to the human's intellecting this commonality. Thanks to intellection, being, also known as the good, is drawn more intensely into the human instance than into the others. The human instance of being could be called an epiphany of being. Does not this fact make a world of difference in our estimation of the human? Does not the fact of the heightened intellectual presence of being as the good in our fellows issue to our freedom a command of respect and solicitude? One would never think of burning down the Louvre because of the precious artworks that it contains. On Aquinas's philosophical analysis the human, just on the natural plane, contains something far more precious than the Mona Lisa or the Venus de Milo. The human contains the notion of being of which these artworks, as well as Rome and Paris, are only dumbed down instances of the perfection of being. How much more unseemly is it to disrespect the human?

It is in the confrontation with the human person understood as an intellector of being that one has the primal experience of obligation. Other encounters with the *ratio entis* as the good will not deliver precisely obligation. First, in itself the *ratio entis* engenders a necessary and spontaneous movement of the will called volition. There is no obligation here because there is no freedom. Second, in its non-human instances, the *ratio entis* presents goods that leaves one simply free without obligation just as one is free in an ice cream shop without any obligation to pick chocolate over vanilla. Only in its intellectual configuration in the human instance does being assume a guise that can provoke precisely obligation.<sup>7</sup> Again, if one can cherish the Louvre because of the

<sup>7</sup> How to understand correctly the *ratio boni* as the subject of the self-evident first practical principle is the crucial matter for Aquinas's natural law ethics. Previously, Aquinas explains that taken by itself the *ratio boni* generates necessary volition, i. e., the first motion of the will, and also disposes the will indeterminately before any finite good, i. e., human freedom. The generation of obligation is still missing. If, however, the *ratio boni* is configured as in the intellect of the human substance, then it seems evident that one is before a finite good that does not necessarily move one but also does not leave one totally free. Rather, one experiences a moral necessity, or obligation, to be respectful and solicitous of the human intellector of being. For a discussion of the Thomistic texts for this interpretation, see note 5 above. In his *Knowing the Natural Law: From Precepts to Inclinations to Deriving Oughts* (Washington, D. C., The Catholic University of America Press: 2015), 32, Steven J. Jensen argues, contra Ralph McNerny, that the Aquinas's first natural law principles cannot be *per se notum* according to the first mode of perseity in which the understanding of the subject includes the predicate. Jensen remarks, "Unfortunately, it is difficult to imagine how propositions like 'knowledge is good' or 'knowledge ought to be pursued' can fit in the first mode. Presumably, neither 'being good' nor 'ought to be pursued' falls in the very definition of knowledge." In my opinion, if the *ratio entis* is regarded as at the heart of knowing, then ipso facto knowing ought to be pursued just as respect and solicitude ought to be pursued in sexual relations. In the end, Jensen transcends a hypothetical ought for a categorical ought by appealing to a knowledge that something, for example, knowledge, completes or perfect the whole person: "<...> judging what is necessary for this cause to attain its completion. We ought to do the good, that is, insofar as we are inclined to our completion, it is necessary that we do the good. We have reached virtual practical knowledge." (p. 222) Jensen never explains why one is inclined to act for one's completion. It seems assumed as a given. The recognition of oneself as an intellector of being throws light on this assumption.

art that it contains, should one not cherish all the more oneself and others because of the intellectual presence of being?

Before some implications of these thoughts for sexual morality are elaborated, a distinction that is crucial for the discussion needs to be explained. To begin, one might object that by rooting obligation in instances that are intellectors of being, ethics is made too narrow. Ethics would apply to mature humans only. Hence, the obligation to be respectful and solicitous would not extend to humans who for some reason could not intellect being. These humans could be the unborn, children, the insane, the elderly. This worry, however, fails to utilize a distinction that is made often. The distinction is between essential presence and actual presence. For example, an open and extended hand is a gesture that by its very character is friendly. That gesture can be compared to a raised fist. Each gesture just as a gesture says something quite different. In other words, the open and extended hand is essentially friendly. But in fact an open hand can be offered by a conniving politician. So something, for example friendship, can be absent actually but present essentially. Now the essential presence of the intelligible object of being is true of all humans as human – born or unborn, insane or comatose. So, even though ethics is approached in and through the actual intellection of being, what is learned there must be extended even to those in which the intellection of being is only potentially but nevertheless essentially present. In other words, just as one realizes that if one is to perform the essentially friendly gesture of shaking hands, then one should be actually friendly unlike the conniving politician, so too one realizes that if one is to deal with any human who as human is essentially an intellector of being, then one should be respectful and solicitous. Essential presence suffices to generate obligation.

## **Human Dignity and Some Issues of Human Sexuality**

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Turning to sexual morality, sexual activity in Aquinas's thinking has both a unitive and a procreative dimension at least essentially speaking. Aquinas also claims that these facts are self-evident to us, in Latin, *per se notum quoad nos*. In light of today's widespread sexual freedom, Aquinas's claim appears fantastic. The problem, however, is not that people do not acknowledge these dimensions but that they do not privilege them. In other words, just as one may acknowledge that the bolt is essentially for the nut, one nevertheless does not hesitate to use the bolt for other things, for example, as a paper weight or a missile. Likewise, those who practice sex just for the pleasure will concede to you that sex is unitive and procreative, even essentially so, but neither of these is for them right now. Marriage and children are just being postponed perhaps. Why they miss Aquinas's privileging of these dimensions is explained in the following section of this article.

In Aquinas the discussion of sexual morality is heavily from the procreative dimension of sex. In this article's discussion of some topics of sexual morality, the

focus is on what can be said from the essentially unitive dimension of human sexuality. Aquinas calls the essentially unitive dimension of human sexuality *fides*. Along with procreation, *fides* is the end both of natural, non-sacramental, matrimony and of the sexual embrace. By *fides* Aquinas chiefly means the giving of oneself exclusively to one's spouse.<sup>8</sup> In this respect the sexual act actualizes the marriage promise to be faithful somewhat similarly as the handshake cements a promise of friendship.

The sexual embrace is eminently respectful of being. In the sexual embrace being is received by something that can receive it – another intellector of being. Sexual activity outside this context amounts to throwing being, the good, away. How respectful is that?

The topics to be considered are the following.

First, monogamy. The sexual embrace is essentially unitive. Other behaviors are essentially unitive, e.g., a hug, a handshake, a tennis match, but one can walk away from them. Why? The difference between them and the sexual embrace is that the latter is essentially unitive to a high degree. It is in essence, if not in fact, a surrendering of one person to another. In no other physical activity is this degree of unity achieved. This unitive dimension is not achieved by promises of mutual fidelity. As noted, the act itself is unitive. The promises compliment the act, just as words of friendship compliment the handshake. One's sexual partner, however, is an intellector of being understood as the good. Hence, in one's sexual partner, one is intimately handling the good. Can you handle the good in a casual way? Many material things one regards as precious, e.g., jewels and art works, and so coming into their possession entails a responsibility to care for them. The human person as previously understood, however, is much more precious than a simple material thing even if the material thing is a priceless artwork. Hence, if one is to engage in sex or continue to do so, the appropriate context for the conducting of sex appears to be a context of commitment. Finally, that the context be also monogamous appears to result from the intensity of the essentially unitive nature of the sexual embrace. Morally speaking, there is simply no more of one to go around to any other sexual partner.

Does this personalist approach to monogamy make the divinely ordered polygamy of the biblical patriarchs impossible? The divine sanction is possible because as subsistent *esse*, God instantiates the intelligible heart of the *ratio entis*. Hence, by taking another wife by divine command, Abraham was continuing to be faithful to the good. In other words, if one has more of an obligation to persons than to things because of the heightened presence of being in persons, then one has an even greater obligation to God who instantiates the perfection of being.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 49, 2c and ad 2m and ad 3m. John Finnis extensively discusses *fides* in his "The Good of Marriage and the Morality of Sexual Relations: Some Philosophical and Historical Observations," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 42 (1997): 106–111.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham was likewise faithful on the sanctity of innocent human life when God instructed him to sacrifice Isaac. This Thomistic position does not, however, give God *carte blanche* to command anything; see note 10.

The essentially unitive dimension of the sexual embrace provides a reason for the inappropriateness of pornography. Pornography displays the sexual embrace to third parties. What is a giving of oneself to another is made available to third parties. In other words, because the sexual embrace is so unitive, it is appropriate that it be so private.

Second, in-vitro fertilization. The essentially unitive character of the sexual embrace also seems to entail the unseemliness of in vitro fertilization (IVF). Is not the sexual embrace a far more seemly context in which to bring forth a new human person, understood as an epiphany of being, than is a laboratory procedure? True, given the best intentions of all of the participants, IVF may be actually loving like one giving another a ride home can be actually considerate, but neither the laboratory procedure nor the car ride is loving by its very nature. As essentially unitive, the sexual embrace is essentially loving. The notion of being is given to what can receive it – another person. In contrast to the sexual embrace, the laboratory procedure involves no such exchange. That deficiency will always make IVF appear to be unseemly for initiating human life. This is not to say that essential love without actual love is a morally fit context for new life. No, the fit context is both. It does say, however, that there are cases in which actual love cannot make up for essential deficiency. Consider how out of actual love, wives in the 1950's gave cartons of cigarettes to their husbands on their husband's birthdays.

Third, contraception. One contracepts when one intends to knock out one's reproductive capacity either permanently or temporarily. There are many ways to do this which will not be listed here. If we again assume the mindset of Aquinas's natural law ethics, contraception appears morally problematic at least for this multifold reason. By intending to knock out one's reproductive capacity either permanently or temporarily, the contraceptor disrespects his or her own dignity as an intellector of being. How so? As mentioned, being is also the good. So, by deliberately acting against oneself, one is acting against the good. How seemly is that? Secondly, contraception intends to mar, or spoil, the gift of person that, as just noted, the sexual embrace essentially intends to be given whole and integral. In other words, by engaging in an essentially unitive act that in this case is not fully unitive, the contraceptor disrespects the sexual partner. In sum, contraception is like cracking a gift of fine china before it is given. How seemly is that violence both to the china and to the recipient of the china? It is true that one can give one's life for another. For example, the person who is killed while pushing a child from the path of an onrushing car. In this case, however, giving one's life is not intending to give it even if one knows that one will be killed. On the other hand, contraception involves, as noted, a deliberate act, a choice, against the good. Obviously, methods of avoiding procreation that focus on times of infertility do not involve that choice.

Does the above thinking mean that sexual activity must then be confined only to times of fertility, for is not infertile sex the giving of a diminished gift? In the perspective of the person as an intellector of being, an affirmative answer does not seem to follow. As a sameness-in-difference the notion of being is already present in a diminished

condition in the human person. So, the gifting of the good in a diminished condition has already been admitted for the sexual embrace. If serious reasons exist for avoiding actually procreative sex, then it seems difficult to question the appropriateness of sex during infertility. Such a giving of self is still a giving of the good. Likewise, one would never say myopic persons should not try to see even if they cannot see perfectly, or say that the lame should not try to walk because they can only limp.

Fourth, masturbation, or autoeroticism. Is sex so essentially unitive that every use of one's genitals must be unitive? As mentioned, many things exist for something, even essentially so, but one does not hesitate to use them for something else. For example, the bolt is meant for the nut but one can use the bolt for other things like a paper weight or a missile. Why not the same for one's genitals?

The difference between the bolt and one's genitals is not that one has an essential ordering and the other does not. Both have an essential ordering – one to the nut, the other to the opposite sex. The key difference between them lies in the value of what the essential ordering is an ordering to. The nut is just another piece of metal; the person by the intellection of the non-generic commonality of being is a heightened presentation of the good. Hence, there is no problem using the bolt for a paperweight or for a missile. But the essential ordering of one's genitals to an intimate personal union makes another sexual use of them unseemly. As with contraception, masturbation appears as morally problematic for a multiform reason. In denying one's gift of self, the masturbator does a moral harm to the partner for whom the gift is intended. The masturbator also does a moral harm to himself by throwing away the gift that he is. This last reason validates calling masturbation self-abuse. What is intended to be a precious gift is never given.

Fifth, homosexual activity. Even though it is not essentially unitive, a sense exists in which homosexual sex is unitive. The partners trade pleasure and with that pleasure there is a union. This pleasure can be considered a thoughtful gift, especially as it assuages depression and loneliness. Obviously, however, not all giving of pleasure is moral, for example, giving of pleasure from addictive drugs. With gay sex the evil involved in giving pleasure is not a physical evil but something more serious. The participants contradict themselves understood as intellectors of being, as epiphanies of the good. How so? One partner says that he can give the other pleasure for his troubles if the other will let the partner pleasure the other outside an essentially unitive context. In sum, the partner is encouraging the other to masturbate. The gift of self is throw away. But the self is an epiphany of the good. How seemly is it to throw away the good? So even granting that the ultimate good between homosexuals may be loving, there is a very disrespectful step in the process. Again, wives loving their husbands on birthdays with cartons of cigarettes comes to mind.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In his "Moral Absolutes and Thomas Aquinas," edited by Charles E. Curran, in *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* (Washington, D. C. Corpus Books, 1968), 182, John Milhaven concludes that it is "unquestionable" that for Aquinas God possesses the "power to authorize any physical means for a good end."

The understanding of the human as an intellector of being may also be helpful to understand the psychogenesis of homosexuality. It has been argued by psychologists that behind homosexual attraction lies an earlier failure of male bonding either with one's father or with one's male peers.<sup>11</sup> The pariah status can be so psychically lacerating that when puberty is reached the youngster will find relief in sexual pleasure.<sup>12</sup> If this is so, then when the youngster discovers the existence of homosexuality, he will be inclined to enter that life. Now the young man can have the pleasure in and through the male attention that he has sought.

A tragic play of the notion of being can explain the depth of the initial rejection and isolation that the youngster has experienced from the father or peers. If being is not so exotic a commonality that it can be understood as automatically abstracted in the life of the mind, it is possible that once abstracted being becomes falsely integrated with some of its instances. As a result, these instances acquire a value out of all proportion to the truth. They are fauxized. These instances become faux epiphanies of being. Instances especially prone to this fauxizing are the great and the small. So, for example, to the

J. Milhaven wonders if just as God could command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God could command acts of usury and contraception. It seems that the list could also include acts of sodomy and sex with children. Finally, J. Milhaven asserts something that Aquinas did not know: God has shared with man this ability to order any physical means to a good end. The basis for that claim is man's discovery of "the extent of man's fantastic power over nature and human life and the extent of his inescapable moral autonomy." (185) J. Milhaven's analogy with the divine dispensation to take life begs the question. Aquinas has already shown that for the maintenance of a material cosmos that reflects his perfection, God ordains that things have their time and then be corrupted. God can even delegate that task to a created spirit or to a first physical cause. The command to sacrifice Isaac is an extension of this ordering to corruption. J. Milhaven does not cite Aquinas giving God the ability to command essentially non-procreative acts, for example, masturbation, that can be extended to sodomy.

Neither does J. Milhaven's thinking work from the unitive dimension of human sexuality. God does not have the ability to command essentially non-unitive sexuality that could be extended to sodomy. Not only does heterosexual sex as essentially procreative contribute to the perfections of the universe, so too does heterosexual sex as essentially unitive. The mere existence and continuousness of species are not the full perfection of the universe. The full perfection of those species is also a part of the perfection of the universe. The full natural perfection of the human species is found in a life according to natural law. As has been argued above, such a life is a life of respect and solicitude for oneself and others. In short, it is a life of love. Love is the end of natural law and so the end of the universe. But heterosexual sex is not diverse from love, essentially speaking. It is not a preparation for love that we must get through quickly, so that we can love. Heterosexual sex is one of the few human actions that is essentially loving. Hence, because it is a part of the perfection of the universe, God could not command essentially non-unitive sex, for example, masturbation, that could be extended to sodomy just as he could not command essentially non-procreative sex that could be extended to sodomy. For an extended discussion of J. Milhaven, see J. F. Knasas, *Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel*, 113–121.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard J. M. van den Aardweg, "On the Psychogenesis of Homosexuality," *Linacre Quarterly* 78 (2011), 330–354. See especially the opening pages for a critique of studies trying to establish genetic and biological causes of homosexuality.

<sup>12</sup> At S. T. I–II, 38, 1, Aquinas says that any pleasure is a remedy for sadness. This remark makes sense for the young adult suffering from the "father wound." If the wound is so lacerating because male-rejection has been confused with being and if being is an abstraction from sensible data, then insofar as pleasure focuses our attention on the sensible, pleasure distracts us from being. That distraction should produce an alleviation of the sadness.

American Indian on the Western plains, the mountain becomes something mystical. Or to Immanuel Kant the starry night immediately brings forth the thought of God Or finally Aquinas can say that in the natural knowledge of God possessed by most men, men mistakenly identify God with the heavens or with the elements.<sup>13</sup> Since being is the be all and end all as mentioned, then the fauxized father's rejection of the boy is devastating. To feel rejected by being in this way is to suffer absolute loneliness.<sup>14</sup> As a release from his "father wound," the young person becomes prone to masturbation and then homosexuality. Aquinas does also say that pleasure is a solution to suffering. This result is understandable if the suffering has an intellectual basis. The pleasure will keep one's attention on the sensible and not allow the intellectual factors behind the suffering to have their play. These thoughts also indicate that the most helpful way to relate to someone with homosexual attraction is in a nonsexual way as a strong male friend.

Finally, transgenderism. By transgender one understands someone who has the body of .a male or female but considers himself or herself otherwise and undertakes the necessary medical means to change the situation in favor of the psychology. Does the approach of this article have anything to say to transgenderism? Again, the body has its own language. Considered sexually our bodies are essentially unitive of persons understood as intellectors of being, also understood as the good. Who, then, would want to deny someone's ability to take part in the sexual embrace with its gift of self? That erasure, however, is precisely what the actualization of transgender entails. No transgender surgery can make a woman a man and vice versa. It can only destroy one's ability to love via the sexual embrace.

Hermaphrodites are different. In this case the body itself is speaking ambiguously. It is not impossible to understand this as an anomaly from sexuality as male or female. The natural world is fraught with unreduced lines of causality whose impacts can be deleterious. That such is the case with hermaphrodites is clear from applying the above thoughts on monogamy. If one has given oneself as male to another, then one cannot give oneself as female to another. Rooted in the essentially unitive nature of human sexuality, hermaphrodites can know that they are necessarily male or female, not both.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "But this knowledge [of God possessed by most men] admits of a mixture of many errors. Some people have believed that there is no other orderer of worldly things than the celestial bodies, and so they said that the celestial bodies are gods. Other people pushed it further, to the very elements and the things generated from them, thinking that motion and the natural functions which these elements have are not present in them as the effects of some other orderer, but that other things are ordered by them." *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 38, *Inquirendum*; trans. by Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), part 3, volume 1, 125–126. For commentary on how Aquinas can nevertheless say that God is reached here, see John F. X. Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* (Washington, D. C., The Catholic University Press: 2019), 197–204.

<sup>14</sup> At this point of insignificance, the play of being may again occur and the young person may fauxize himself as an epiphany of being resulting in a self-grandiosity typical of narcissism.

<sup>15</sup> For an interesting description of discussion of hermaphrodites in medieval and early modern civil and ecclesiastical law, see Christof Rölker, "The two laws and the three sexes: ambiguous bodies in canon law and Roman law (12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries)," *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kannonistische Abteilung* 100 (2014), 178–222.

## **The Intellection of Being and Ethical Disagreement**

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In conclusion, this interpretation of Aquinas's natural law is effective with ethics students. They can be brought to some recognition in their own mental life of the intellection of being and to its denomination as the good. Examples of narrower samenesses-in-difference like charming city help them to rise to an appreciation of being. But best of all they are surprised by its connection with ethics. They never see it coming and so their defenses, especially in the area of sexual behavior, are down. Moreover, the students always knew that there was something special about sex. A grudging recognition of this is their insistence that it is between consenting adults and no one is getting hurt and contraceptives are used. A Thomist can see this as a hazy recognition of a primary precept of natural law: "Respect one's sexual partner and the procreative dimension of sexual activity." The student has a weak grasp of the subject of this proposition and consequently the student has a weak grasp of the bindingness of the proposition. The student will not be able to understand why Aquinas privileges the proposition and what follows from it.

Aquinas's abstractive and realist epistemology makes that weak grasp understandable. Since abstraction begins from a sensible multiplicity, one's attention can be snagged by the data and not notice the commonality that the intellect goes on to abstract. Hence, Aquinas can claim that it is no surprise that most people value sensible pleasure over intellectual pleasure because they have no intellectual experience.<sup>16</sup> This claim does not mean that most do not intellect but rather that most are not aware of doing it. In many respects the human intellect is like the human heart. The human heart functions so automatically that one is unaware of it most of the time. Likewise, the human intellect can abstract so automatically that its products can lie unaware in the human mind and still have conscious effects. Furthermore, Aquinas follows Aristotle's sense realism and so has the human cognition focused on the sensible data. Knowledge of oneself is peripheral to this focus, or "by the way." The combined effect of these two points is that the intellectual presence of being in oneself can be dimly appreciated. The appearance of obligation will not be clear enough to grasp correctly neither the primary precepts of Aquinas's natural law nor the secondary ones that follow. Hence, it is no surprise that many will not dispute that the sexual embrace is both unitive and procreative, even essentially so, but nevertheless fail to privilege that essential ordering as Aquinas does. That grudging acknowledgement still indicates nevertheless the presence of being in their minds and so provides the Thomist with an opening to lead the interlocutor to another understanding of sexual relations.

<sup>16</sup> Nor do more persons seek the pleasure that is associated with knowing rather than the knowledge. Rather, there are more people who seek sensual pleasures than intellectual knowledge and its accompanying pleasure, because things that are external stand out as better known, since human knowledge starts from sensible objects." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III. 26, *Non autem*; Bourke trans., 109–110.

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## Conclusion

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This article has offered a novel line of thought that can be introduced into wide-spread Western cultural discussion of human sexuality. The novelty lies in an integration of Aquinas's philosophical understanding of the human person as an intellector of being (*ratio entis*), also known as the good (*ratio boni*), and the understanding of the sexual embrace as essentially unitive. Conjoined, these two thoughts instantly impose upon the sexual partners an obligation of respect and solicitude to the other and to oneself. The reason is that one cannot intimately handle the other person without handling the good. From this Thomistic perspective, the article determined the extent of this respect and solicitude by looking at a number of hot-button issues in human sexuality. Monogamy appeared appropriate for human intellectors of being insofar as non-monogamous relations unseemly jettisoned the good given in previous relations. By its display of the sexual embrace, pornography took the good meant for one's sexual partner and offered it to third parties. By deliberately acting against oneself by knocking out one's reproductive capacity, the contraceptive both acts against the good present through one's intellection of being and also consequently renders the sexual embrace not fully unitive as it essentially intends to be. By exercising sex outside the sexual embrace, masturbation both throws away the self with the good that the self involves and also denies some other what should be a gift to them. As essentially non-unitive, homosexual activity is little different from masturbation. Transgenderism destroys one's bodily ability to exercise the sexual embrace with its capacity to gift the good to another.

In sum, the analytic result is that the respect and solicitude owing to one's sexual partner takes the form of a permanent monogamous relation between a man and a woman open to new life. The article also pointed out that disagreement with these results does not follow from an incommensurability between the interlocutors but from an inchoate grasp of the intellection of being in one's consciousness. Because the notion of being is derived from sensible things and one's basic attention is on sensible things, then one's dignity as an intellector of being, can be escape notice or be only dimly appreciated. But the notion of being is in the human person, and it can be uncovered by a patient analysis as noted in this article. So, the promise of fruitful dialogue between parties of good will is offered by the article. In the limited area of human sexuality, this article has tried to illustrate succinctly a future for Christian thought using time-honored ideas taken from Thomas Aquinas.

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Gauta: 2025 12 09

Parengta: 2026 03 19

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**John F. X. KNASAS** – Professor emeritus at the Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, USA. E-mail JKnasas@stthom.edu.

**John F. X. KNASAS** – profesorius emeritas Šv. Tomo universiteto Tomistinių studijų centre, Hiustone, Teksase, JAV. El. paštas JKnasas@stthom.edu.