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THE PHILOSOPHY OF SEX
ACCORDING TO
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

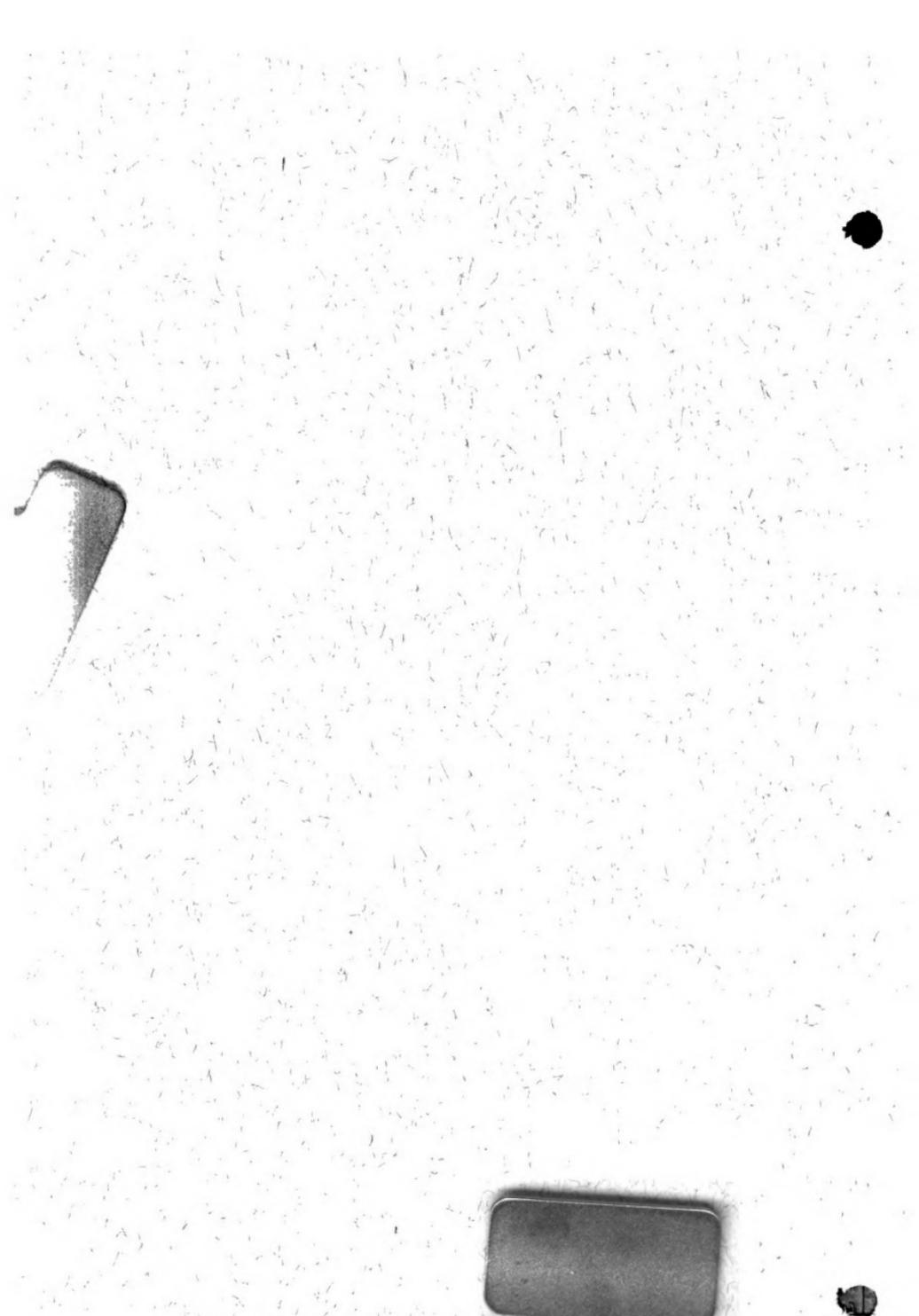
AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION
*Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Philosophy of the
Catholic University of America in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy*

by

REVEREND MARK TOON, O.S.B., M.A.



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA PRESS
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PREFACE

THE purpose of the dissertation of which this abstract is a brief summary is to give an exposition of St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy of sex. The particular task undertaken in the dissertation was to discover the widely scattered texts of St. Thomas on the philosophy of sex, to correlate and compare them, and finally to fit them into the modern divisions of Thomistic philosophy. The author of the dissertation hopes that by collecting and systematizing the philosophical observations of this great Catholic thinker on a subject so widely discussed in our time, he may have performed a service for philosophical and scientific scholarship.

It has been found necessary to limit rather carefully the subject matter covered by the dissertation. Theological doctrines of St. Thomas that relate to sex have been excluded from the dissertation except for a few passing references. Furthermore, any consideration of sin which is involved in the dissertation is based on philosophical, not theological, foundations. It was found impracticable to deal with the historical background of St. Thomas' philosophy of sex, rewarding as such a study would be. Because of the nature of the dissertation it has been advisable to omit any definitive historical study from it. We should add that this is not a discussion of marriage or the family, although these topics are treated obliquely in reference to the philosophy of sex.

It is important to note that we restrict our consideration of St. Thomas' philosophy of sex to its particularization in human beings.

To show the relations between sex and philosophy in St. Thomas, we will have to determine what St. Thomas knew about sex. This empirical knowledge about sex is presented principally in PART ONE—THE BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEX. It will not be our aim in this dissertation, however,

to criticize or correct St. Thomas' ideas on sex, or even to complete them when they are evidently incomplete. We wish only to give an exposition of St. Thomas' views on the matter.

We use the term "sex" in this dissertation in its modern American usage as referring to a number of related concepts, all having their force from the phenomenon of human generation. Sex as used in this dissertation includes three meanings: the peculiarities of structure and character pertaining to the disjunctive function of the male and female in reproduction; the sources of reproductive drives and appetites; the sphere of behavior dominated by the relation of male and female. At times "sex" will be used to express one, at times another of these meanings, and as used in the title of the dissertation it includes them all.

The author of this dissertation wishes to thank the Rt. Rev. Ignatius Esser, O.S.B., Archabbot of St. Meinrad Archabbey, for the opportunity of pursuing graduate studies at the Catholic University of America. He also wishes to thank those who have contributed to the publication of this work, especially Very Rev. Ignatius Smith, O.P., Dean of the School of Philosophy, for his kind and competent direction of the dissertation. Thanks are also due to the Reverend Doctors John K. Ryan, Charles A. Hart, and Leo A. Foley, S.M., for reading and criticizing the manuscript; to Doctor Albert Mitterer of the University of Vienna, Austria, for his interest and advice; to Capt. Lawrence Keegan, U.S.A., Ph.D., of the Graduate School of Walter Reed Army Medical Center; and to Fathers Bonaventure Knaebel, O.S.B., and Philip Mahin, O.S.B., of St. Meinrad Archabbey.

THE BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEX

NOWHERE in the works of St. Thomas do we find what may be called an explicit and systematic treatment of the biological aspects of human reproduction. Scattered throughout his works, however, we find written evidence of his knowledge of sexual anatomy, physiology, and biology. We will endeavor to present a summary of his teachings on these subjects here.

THE ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION

In regard to the extent of St. Thomas' knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of sex, we may state that he knew as much as a careful observer can determine without the use of scientific instruments. His knowledge of the external organs and actions of sex is complete and exact. He was not acquainted, however, with those internal organs and functions, especially in the woman, which demand microscopic study and dissection.

According to St. Thomas generation in the case of humans is effected by an organic power, that is, the generative power is a faculty of the soul that operates through a special set of bodily organs. The generative organs in the male are thus enumerated by St. Thomas: the *membrum generationis* or *membrum genitale* (penis), the *testiculi* (testicles), and the *viae seminales* (seminal vesicles). The females organs are listed as follows: *mamillae* (breasts), *meatus* (the birth canal), *claustra pudoris* (the hymen), *matrix*, *venter* or *uterus* (the womb).

THE PROCESS OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION

St. Thomas does not give a physical description of the act of sexual intercourse, but he does make reference a few times to the purposes and circumstances of this union of the male and female organs. Though located in separate

individuals these sexual members become one organ, so to speak, in the sexual act. Contributing to this act are the bodily transmutations that occur by agency of bodily heat, spirits, and humors. The purpose of the act of copulation is to cast the seed of the male into the *matrix* of the woman and to draw down the blood of the mother to the womb, where it will contribute to the nourishment of the child. As a result of the act of sexual intercourse venereal pleasure is experienced.

In his treatment of the conception and birth of the human offspring, St. Thomas makes a distinction between two kinds of birth: birth within the womb, and birth from the womb. The first of these he calls conception. Although in conception the child lives within one of the generators, nevertheless it exists as a separate entity with a distinct *esse*. The mode of conception of a human being, according to St. Thomas, is quite different from the generation of plants and inferior animals, even in its physical aspects. The multiplication of plants can be effected by the common principles of matter, that is, the power of the heavenly bodies as an active principle, and the power of the earth as a passive principle. The multiplication of imperfect animals can result by division of an individual of the species, or in some cases by spontaneous generation, that is, by the action of the sun on matter without a principle, active or passive, of the same species.

In the case of the more perfect animals and especially of man, the case is quite different. Although the external agents that bring about spontaneous generation, such as the sun, contribute something to the generation of the more perfect animals, nevertheless agents of the same species are required for these beings. These agents in the case of man are father and mother as active and passive principles, respectively. In the male the generative function is active, and consequently more perfect than in the female; his role is to give the nature and species to the child, to form the child. In the woman this operation is passive, and consequently imperfect, for her function is to prepare the matter for the child, to conceive it, to nourish it, and to give it birth.

To become more specific, the particular part of the human composite that acts toward generation is the seed, *semen*, by which the child is generated. Both the man and the woman have a seed, according to St. Thomas.

Although he speaks of a female seed, St. Thomas did not mean by this the ovum as we understand it. We must say that St. Thomas had no knowledge of the ovum or the function it plays in human generation. When St. Thomas spoke of the female seed, he referred to both the vaginal fluid that is exuded during coition and the menstrual fluid. Both are imperfect kinds of seed. Of the two the menstrual fluid is the more important; St. Thomas' ordinary explanation of the menstrual fluid is as follows.

The function of the woman before conceiving is to dispose and prepare apt matter for the seed of the male. The raw material of this matter is the ordinary blood of the woman; the generative power of the woman selects this blood for its own use and subjects it to a process of purification, so that the blood that actually contributes to the growth of the child is *puri sanguinis*, purified blood. The impurities that result from the process of purification are cast off from the body of the woman by the regular menstrual flow.

St. Thomas gives extended consideration to the male seed, for he assigned all the functions that we assign to the male and female gametes to the single male sperm. He resorts to his theory of nutrition to explain the origin of the male seed. He notes that food after the process of digestion (as he understood it) is in a state to be used by any part of the body. The ultimate determination to become one part or another of the body comes from the organ into which the digested food is to be changed. But in this instance before the food is requisitioned by any particular organ, the generative power seizes it, and keeps it from becoming any particular part of the body. Before as food it was potentially an entire man, for it was disposed for the use of any part of the body; now, under the influence of the generative power, this food becomes *semen*, which is potentially a man in a new

and distinct way, i.e., it has an active potency to become a man.

The elements that enter into the male seed are four: corporeal substance, vital spirits, heat, and formative power. The corporeal substance is simply the residence of the formative power, and disappears with time. The vital spirit is an instrument of the formative power through which this power operates on the matter supplied by the female. Heat, of which St. Thomas recognizes three types, namely, natural heat, heat of the soul, and the heat of the heavenly bodies, acts as an instrument of the formative power to change the matter received from the mother into the substance of an organized body.

The fourth and most important element of the male seed is the formative power, which St. Thomas equates with the *ratio seminalis* of St. Augustine. The purpose of this formative power is to establish human nature in a determined individual; it produces this effect by exemplary causality. Using the vital spirit and heat as its instruments, the formative power organizes the matter prepared by the mother. In a certain sense, too, the formative power educes the vegetative and sensitive souls from the potency of the matter.

The male seed, according to St. Thomas, does not possess a soul of its own. From what source, then, does the seed derive its power? St. Thomas answers, from the soul of the father. Although the male seed is separated corporeally from the body of the father, the formative power operates in virtue of the soul of the father. The male seed is a man potentially, but not actually. The formative power of the seed remains constant throughout all the successions in the fetus; it prepares apt subjects for the successive vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMBRYO

After the male seed has been deposited in the womb of the mother and the formative power of the seed begins to modify the matter supplied by the mother, the embryo passes

through several stages. The body becomes more complex and organic, while the soul becomes successively more perfect. The bodily development proceeds in this fashion. The first stage is the sperm itself, which draws to itself material elements from the mother. The next stage is the appearance of the embryo as a mass of blood. Then follow the elements and humors particular to a man; then the organs, the first of which is the heart; after the organs come the nerves, bones, and the skin, until the body is organically organized with due quantity. The body of a male child is completely formed with distinct members by the fortieth day of conception, while similar development in the female does not occur until the ninetieth day.

It is a clear teaching of St. Thomas that there is a succession of souls in the human embryo. He bases his opinion on the succession of souls on the definition of the soul as the first actualization of a physical, organic body. Matter in a certain quantity and organized in an organic way is necessary for the presence of a soul. As the body becomes successively more perfect, the souls succeed one another. There cannot be two souls present at the same time, for there can be only one substantial form in the body at one time. It is not correct, either, to say that the vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls change into each other; no, they succeed each other in the embryo and are numerically distinct from one another.

St. Thomas says that the successive vegetative and sensitive souls of the embryo are not created, but are educed from the potentiality of matter. By the operation of the formative power on the matter supplied by the mother there is present a vegetative soul from the first union of the seed with the matter. This is the point at which life really begins in the embryo, for the vegetative soul is the first intrinsic principle of life in corporeal beings. When the matter united with the vegetative soul has reached a degree of perfection through the instrumentality of the formative power, the sensitive soul is traduced and succeeds to the functions of the vegetative soul. These souls are dependent on matter for

their being, for they can operate only through bodily organs; so also are they dependent on matter for their becoming.

To the sensitive soul there succeeds the rational soul, which then becomes the sole and proper form of the body, conferring a distinctly human *esse* on it. This rational soul is not and cannot be educed from the potentiality of matter, for it is independent of the body in operation and being. The only possible source of the rational soul is creation. Perhaps the best proof of this is this magnificent bit of reasoning in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

Everything that is produced in being is either generated *per se* or *per accidens*, or created. The human soul is not generated *per se*: for it is not composed of matter and form, as was shown above. Neither is it generated *per accidens*: for since it is the form of the body, it would have to be generated along with the generation of the body, which comes about by the active power of the seed; and this has been disproved. Therefore, since the human soul begins to exist anew: for neither is it eternal nor does it exist before the body, as was shown above: there is left that it comes into being by creation. However, it was shown above that God alone can create. Therefore He alone produces the human soul in being.¹

When is the human soul infused into the body? St. Thomas definitely states that the embryo has a human soul before it is born. He quotes Aristotle as saying that the conception of the male is completed in 40 days, while the female takes 90 days to mature. He even notes that St. Augustine added six days to the number given by Aristotle for the perfection of the male. St. Thomas includes these considerations in his writings as the opinions of men he recognized as respected and competent authorities.

St. Thomas does definitely adopt a relative norm in deciding when the rational soul is infused into the body. As in the cases of the vegetative and sensitive souls, so also in the instance of the rational soul he decides the time of infusion by the disposition of the matter. The rational soul

¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. II, ch. 87.

is like the other souls the first actualization of a physical, organic body; and in this instance "organic" means organized with the customary elements and humors and organs of the human body. Consequently, when the body, which in the case of a human is a complex of balanced forces, has been formed, the soul is infused at once.

Thus we see that the father, the mother, and God work together in a marvelous way, according to the mind of St. Thomas, toward the infusion of the rational soul. The mother supplies the matter that becomes the body to which the soul is united. The father gives the formative power, which organizes and determines the matter in such a way that the infusion of the soul is possible. Finally, God creates and infuses the soul.

The relation of the child in the womb to the mother, according to St. Thomas, is not simply by corporeal presence, but also by a certain closeness and union called *coaptatio* and *connascentia*. The child is still in a limited sense a part of the mother. St. Thomas uses a beautiful simile to illustrate this relation: he says that the child's relation to the mother is that of a fruit hanging on a tree to the tree itself.

In scattered places in his *Opera Omnia* St. Thomas has a few things to say about the actual birth of the child. The birth and its immediate antecedents—the loss of color during pregnancy, the danger to life and the fear experienced in childbirth, the labor and anxiety involved—are a punishment of original sin. St. Thomas characteristically notes that this very trouble and anxiety make the mother love the child more than the father does, and contends that it is much better to suffer such pains than to be barren and have no children at all.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE INDIVIDUAL

There can be no doubt that St. Thomas in treating of sex in the individual considered the male superior to the female. The male has a more powerful reason, a stronger body. This attitude toward the sexes reveals itself in an interesting dis-

cussion offered by St. Thomas on a problem which is of concern to scientists in our own day—the cause of a particular sex in an individual. St. Thomas considered the problem in this light: the active power in procreation comes from the male, and since the purpose of generation is to beget an effect similar to the active generator, it seems that every child should be a male. What then is the cause of the generation of an effect, a female, which is dissimilar to the active power in generation?

St. Thomas in answering this question distinguishes between the nature of man in general and the constitution of a particular child. With regard to the nature of man in general it is certainly the direct purpose of generation to beget females, for they are strictly necessary for the work of procreation. Consequently the female sex is an imperfection intended by nature, not against its tendencies. But if we push the matter further and ask, “why is this particular child of the female sex, and not a male like her active principle?” St. Thomas offers many possible answers, some of which appear trivial to science. He says that the cause of the procreation of a particular female is a deficient and privative cause, such as insufficient heat in the seed, indisposition of the matter, the influence of the heavenly bodies, the will and imagination of the parents, the forces of nature, e.g., the wind, the position of the parents during coition, etc. St. Thomas declares that although it is the intention of nature to produce a perfect animal, nature also has a secondary intention to approximate this ideal in so far as it is able under the circumstances; this accounts for the birth of *terata*.

Puberty is the time at which the individual's sexual powers become operative. This age is around twelve for girls and fourteen for boys; it differs with individuals as well as with sex. At this time the desires of the body become more powerful. Consequently St. Thomas advises that youth should be instructed and held under discipline, because this surge of passions tends to overcome the judgments of prudence. This accounts for the birth of *terata*.

St. Thomas has some interesting teachings on the subject of heredity. He affirms that some personal traits of the parents are transmitted to their children; in accidents that pertain to the form, children will be most like the father, while in accidents relating to matter, they will be similar to their mother. Proper accidents, such as risibility, are almost always transmitted. Bodily perfections and defects in the child can result directly from the favorable or unfavorable dispositions of the seed and matter, but mental perfections can be transmitted only potentially, i.e., in so far as the body and brain of one individual is better disposed to acquire a mental perfection or skill than that of another person. St. Thomas gives some examples of characteristics that can be inherited: speed of foot, quickness of reaction, grammatical skill, leprosy, stolidity of mind, and even the absence of a limb.

Finally, we may mention that there is no direct evidence in St. Thomas for the argument from genetics for evolution of species.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEX

THE aim of this section is to explore St. Thomas' explanation of the relation of sex to the soul itself and to the various powers of the soul in the developed individual.

THE GENERATIVE POWER

According to St. Thomas man is a composite of body and soul. Besides the primary effect that the soul has on the body—the imparting of existence to it—it also has other effects, its operations. These operations are performed exclusively through the various powers of the soul. There are certain powers of the soul that operate through the body, and even more particularly, through a special organ. The power is related to the organ as act to potency; hence it is more proper to speak of the organs of the body being diversified in order to bring to perfection the various powers, than the powers diversified because of the various organs: for potency is ordered to act, not vice versa. One of these organic powers is the generative power, which of course is really distinct from the soul itself.

What then is the generative power in man? It is a property flowing from the human soul acting through a corporeal organ for a specified end. It is more correct to speak of the generative power in the case of man as a vegetative power of the rational soul than as a power of the vegetative soul, for there is only one soul in man. The important thing to remember is that this power does not act independently, but only in virtue of the human soul.

The generative power is really distinct from the other powers of the soul. This truth is readily ascertainable, for in man this power has special organs and special modes of operation that are very different from those of any other power. St. Thomas offers a more involved and more metaphysical proof of this, too. The distinction of various powers

is determined by their variegated acts; the acts in turn are distinguished by their objects. One object of vital acts is the human body itself, whose different processes give rise to different acts. One of these processes is that by which the body comes to be, i.e., reproduction; consequently there must be a distinct power in the generator corresponding to this act, that is, the generative power.

When considering the relationship of the generative power to its organ, St. Thomas insists that the sexual organs in men and women are just as necessary for the integrity of the body as the other organs. The organ and the power have a reciprocal effect on each other. The power moves the organ and gives it its effectiveness, while the act of the generative power depends on the disposition of the organ.

The generative power is the most perfect of the three vegetative powers, for the nutritive and augmentative powers work toward the furtherance of generation, and thus show that they are directed toward it. The generative power has different magnitudes in different individuals. The first difference is between individuals of different sexes, for the generative power in the male is an active power, while in the female it is a passive power. Even in individuals of the same sex there are degrees of effectiveness in the generative power; this does not result from the power itself, but from differences in the organism and the generative organs.

We distinguish the essence of the generative power from its natural appetite, though they are not really distinct. A natural appetite is the inclination of any power towards its proper object, an inclination that arises from its very nature; in every power there is a natural appetite that prods it to act. The power of generation has such a natural appetite; in man this natural appetite performs its function even without knowledge or reason.

THE GENERATIVE POWER AND OTHER POWERS OF THE SOUL

Besides the generative power and its natural appetite there are also many other powers in the human composite. The generative power has general relations with all of them

in so far as they are all parts of the same individual; to certain of them, however, the generative power has close and well-defined relations in the sexual philosophy of St. Thomas.

We have already explained the relation of generation to nutrition and augmentation, for nutrition supplies the seed and the matter of the embryo, while augmentation prepares the individual for the exercise of the generative power. It is only when nutrition and growth have brought the individual to a certain perfection that the generative power begins to function, for to generate another is the sign of a perfect being.

Of the external senses the senses of sight and touch are mentioned by St. Thomas as being related to the generative power. The sense of sight gives rise to the remote disposition to the act of generation, in as much as we come to the knowledge of the desirable object by sight. The external sense most closely allied to the generative power is that of touch. The pleasure of sense in the case of the generative act is primarily and principally situated in the sense of touch. St. Thomas realizes, of course, that sexual pleasure has resonance throughout the whole body and even in the higher powers of the soul.

Pleasure is the satisfaction of an appetite, recognized as such by a cognitive power, in its object. The primary appetite in the case of sex pleasure is the natural appetite of the generative power, and the cognitive power that immediately perceives this satisfaction is the sense of touch. Sexual pleasure is the most intense pleasure of the senses, though in dignity it is the least noble, for it is the most material and most animal of the pleasures of man. Great though it is, sexual pleasure, because it pertains to the senses, has its limitations.

What is the purpose of sex pleasure? Pleasure is the inducement offered by nature for the performance of an act. The responsibilities and cares consequent on the sexual act make this inducement necessary, for otherwise men would shirk the duty of conserving the species. Since this is the purpose of pleasure, it is true to say that pleasure is ordered

to operation, and not vice versa; pleasure and operation together make up a perfect act, for pleasure is the perfection of operation.

St. Thomas has little to say about the relations of the generative power to the memory, the imagination, the *sensus communis*, and *vis aestimativa*. He devotes much more space to the relation of sex to one of the sensitive appetites, i.e., the concupiscible appetite. The acts of the sensitive appetites, which are called the passions or emotions, are concerned with sex in the case of love and desire on the part of the concupiscible appetite, and in the case of shame on the part of the irascible appetite.

Love is analyzed extensively by St. Thomas. He deals with sexual love, however, as a relation between husband and wife, not between man and woman. This is not to say that he does not consider love as a bond between the sexes, but his treatment of it was only in connection with its relation with the married state. St. Thomas is insistent that the love of man and wife, though it begin in desire, must end in the perfect love of friendship. In fact, he says that this love of man and wife is the greatest human friendship; it is based on the close union of the couple in the sexual act, as well as on their whole domestic life in common. St. Thomas takes care to observe that this friendship does not necessarily imply agreement in all matters, but rather in those great issues and affairs that are the stuff of life. The effects specifically mentioned by St. Thomas as flowing from this love of man and woman are union and zeal, which might almost be called "jealousy."

Strange to say, St. Thomas does not have much to say about the emotion of concupiscence or desire as it relates to sex. He seems to be more interested in fitting it into the general scheme of classification of the emotions than giving particular examples of it from human life.

Shame is an emotion resulting from the more general passion of fear; it is felt not only for sinful acts, but also for those that are ignoble and gross. Sexual acts, even between married persons, are a cause of shame, for the people con-

cerned feel shame that they do not have rational control over their genital members, and realize that this implies some turpitude in the act of intercourse itself.

With regard to the relations between the intellect and the generative power, it was remarked by St. Thomas that each had an effect on the other. The intellect has what is called a "political" rule over the sensitive appetites, that is, the intellect does not control them absolutely, but they have something of their own by which they can resist the command of the intellect. The command of reason has even less control over the vegetative powers of the soul than it does over the sensitive. St. Thomas states flatly that the bodily humors and the vegetative powers are not subject to reason; neither does it have direct control over the state and disposition of the genital organs of the body.

The act of the generative power has an effect on the intellect which forms the basis of St. Thomas' ethical attitude toward the sexual act. He says that of all the acts of the human composite the act of sexual intercourse obstructs the acts of reason the most; he even states that during the act of sexual intercourse the intellect loses its power of deliberation. Other consequences of the sexual act are the withdrawal of the mind from God and intelligible good, and the steeping of the soul in sensible affairs and worldly cares, thus preventing it from reaching the highest contemplation.

What control does the will have over the generative power, organs, and act according to St. Thomas? Not much; for he states clearly that the generative power does not obey the will. The acts of this power and its organs cannot be entirely controlled by the will, either, but there is a certain amount of voluntary supervision in so far as the circumstances and approaches to the act are subject to the will. We will consider this problem further in the section on **THE ETHICAL ASPECTS OF SEX.**

THE METAPHYSICAL ASPECTS OF SEX

THE great philosophical concept under which sex in all its ramifications best fits is that of generation. For St. Thomas human reproduction is an example of one of the processes, common to animate and inanimate nature, that bring about change in the world. This great process is called generation.

The three principles that bring about generation of a new being are matter, form, and privation. The form is the cause *a quo* of generation, that is, the source of the existence and specification of the new being. By the introduction of a new form into matter the old form is expelled. Matter and privation pertain to the being that ceases to exist in generation; though matter also belongs to the newly generated being. Matter takes the part of the permanent subject in generation, as well as the role of potency. Privation is the lack of a particular form in a being that can naturally possess it, but does not possess it. This lack of the form is called privation, and the non-existence of the being whose form is lost is called corruption. Generation proceeds from matter and towards form, but what is ultimately generated is the composite of matter and form. There is no third entity binding matter and form together, for they are intrinsically ordered to each other as potency and act.

Besides these intrinsic principles of generation there are also the extrinsic principles, the efficient and final causes of generation. Matter and form are ordered to each other, it is true; but there must be some force that brings the two together so that they can exercise this mutual causality. Nothing that is in potency can reduce itself to act, but must be brought into act by an efficient cause.

There are two main purposes intended by nature in generation. The first is the existence of the composite that is

generated. Since generation is a process ordered to new existence, it reaches its purpose when the new being begins to exist. The second purpose of generation, especially in living beings, is the continued existence of the species. This is the main purpose of generation in beings below the human level, for the reason why a number of individuals of a species exists is the conservation of the species. St. Thomas even says that on the subhuman level every action of a being is ordered toward the conservation of the species. This leads us to the principle that, in lower nature at least, the species is of greater importance than the individual.

THE METAPHYSICS OF HUMAN GENERATION

Human generation fits very well under these general metaphysical principles of generation, though some adjustments have to be made because of the nobility of the human composite and the origin of its form. The material cause in human generation is the matter taken from the mother to form the embryo. The formal cause is manifold, the successions of souls that appear in the matter developing under the formative power of the male seed. The rational soul is the final term in the process of human generation. As such it is the substantial form of the body and gives existence to the composite; it is incorrect to conceive of the soul, according to St. Thomas, simply as the mover of the body.

The father and mother are secondary efficient causes of the body, whereas God is the primary cause of the body and the sole efficient cause of the soul. St. Thomas also calls the parents instrumental causes of human generation if their action is compared to that of God. The heavenly bodies and especially the sun are in some efficient manner the cause of human generation. The primary cause of human generation, however, is God, who as universal and primary efficient cause gives existence to the new individual.

The final cause or purpose of human generation corresponds to a limited extent to the purpose of generation in

general. Just as in the case of inferior beings, generation in man is also directed toward the conservation of the species. But nature aims also at the preservation of human nature in individuals as well as in the species. When God creates an immortal soul, He knows that it will exist forever as an individual, and not merely as a carrier of the species. Consequently we can say with complete truthfulness that human generation is directed toward the continued existence of the individual generated as well as of the species.

Another purpose of human generation is to produce an individual similar to the generator in species, in power, in qualities, and in form. A good example of the likeness in power is the transfer of the generative power itself from the parent to the offspring. With regard to the similarity in form, St. Thomas says in various places that an end of the entire process of human generation is the human soul. Here we have a case of the final and formal cause of generation being identical, even numerically the same, for the form of the individual generated is the end of the generation. As a corollary of the continuation of the species, generation is also ordered toward the perpetuity of the state or nation, and in the religious sphere, toward the propagation and increase of the faithful.

METAPHYSICAL PROBLEMS IN HUMAN GENERATION

Now we will discuss St. Thomas' views on certain metaphysical problems connected with human generation. There is no special logical connection between the topics treated except that they all deal with human generation and give rise to a difficulty or problem. Some of the topics are presented here, too, because they are points connected with human generation on which St. Thomas differed with other philosophers.

THE METAPHYSICAL NATURE OF SEX

The problem we will try to solve now is, what is sex in the individual person? What is the place of the factor in human

personality called "sex" in the realm of being and in the individual human?

According to St. Thomas, sex in the individual is an accident, considered both as a predicable and a predicament. As a predicamental accident, sex is distinguished from substance, and is related to the third type of quality, potency. It is a predicable accident, too, not a property of the essence; for if it were a property, it would be the same in all individuals of the species, which it is not. Two marks of sex as an accident are that it is caused by principles of the individual, and that it is a permanent and inseparable accident of the individual. Sex is called permanent because it lasts throughout life; it is called inseparable because it is found in every individual of the species in one form or another.

THE UNICITY OF THE SUBSTANTIAL FORM

It is a clear and evident teaching of St. Thomas that there can be only one substantial form in a being at a particular time. This is one of those primary principles that St. Thomas will not sacrifice despite the difficulties that may attend their application in special cases. The process of generation in man does offer difficulties; to St. Thomas it seems to offer a choice between a plurality of souls in one being or a succession of souls. (St. Thomas will not admit the infusion of the rational soul in ordinary cases at the time of conception because of another principle: matter must be disposed and quantified for the entrance of the soul.) Of the two alternatives he endorses the succession of souls as his own opinion.

But what is the nature of these vegetative and sensitive souls? What sort of plant and what sort of animal, ontologically speaking, are these stages of the embryo? St. Thomas does not seem to give a clear answer to this question, if it is a fair question. He is content with the statement that the beings informed by the sensitive and vegetative souls in the human embryo are incomplete forms leading to a final, complete form, the rational soul.

ACCIDENTS, DISPOSITIONS, AND SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE

Another vexing problem in the metaphysics of generation is the continuity of the accidents in substantial change. Considered in the context of human generation, the question resolves itself into this: by investigation we can determine that there is some type of continuity in the accidents of the embryo. But if there is a reduction to prime matter in this as in every substantial change, how can the accidents remain?

St. Thomas does teach that in the substantial changes that occur in the embryo, there is a reduction to prime matter in each instance. He adds further that the accidents that appear to remain identically the same in the embryo are specifically the same, but numerically different. The new form or soul is the cause of these accidents, not the ousted form. Exemplifying this teaching in the case of human generation, St. Thomas says that when the rational soul is infused, numerically different sensitive and vegetative powers succeed to the powers formerly possessed by the sensitive soul. The previous and proximate dispositions (as they were called by later Scholastics) give rise to the misconception that the numerically same accidents perdure in the human embryo under its successive substantial changes.

GENERATION AND INDIVIDUATION

There is no special problem about individuation in the case of man, for the explanation of individuation in man follows the general rules of individuation as given by St. Thomas for all material things. The individuation of the human soul may cause some confusion, however, because of its individual creation. St. Thomas holds that the soul is individualized by its proper body; it is created when it is infused and is infused by creation; hence the pre-existence of the human soul is impossible.

The subject of generation is not the nature of man, but the *hypostasis* or person. The purpose of generation is to cause

an individual, which in the case of human nature is a person, to subsist in a human nature. All the factors in human generation, the body, soul, nature, are ordered to the person, who is the end and perfection of the process of generation and its elements.

RELATIONS CONSEQUENT ON GENERATION

Generation gives rise to certain relations on the part of the generators and their effect. In the case of man these three relations are called paternity, maternity, and filiation. Filiation as used here applies to offspring of both the male and the female sex. The relations of paternity, maternity, and filiation in human generation are real accidents of human substance. Evidently the relations in the father and mother are really distinct. Paternity is peculiar to the father, because of his active part in human generation, while maternity is proper to the mother because of her passive role. The relation of filiation in the child, on the contrary, is numerically identical toward both the father and mother, for the child proceeds from both working together as co-principles in generation.

THE ETHICAL ASPECTS OF SEX

From the attitude of St. Thomas toward sex and the intellect which was discussed under THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEX a person could arrive at the opinion that St. Thomas had a contempt for sex. Nothing is further from the truth. It is true that St. Thomas was convinced of the disturbing effect of sexual pleasure on intellectual attainment; but he recognizes other values in life that can compensate for this loss and render sexual actions morally acceptable.

THE DIGNITY OF SEX

It is evident to St. Thomas that sexual acts are not of themselves evil. He cites many reasons for this. The act of sexual intercourse cannot be intrinsically evil because it is natural; because the inclination to it comes from God; because it is not unreasonable; because it is a necessary means to a good end; because the sexual organs, their end, and their use are natural, come from God, and are directed according to divine providence. If the sexual act is not of itself illicit, then neither can the pleasure that naturally flows from it be illicit. A special problem arises here because of the intensity of sexual pleasure. Would it not seem sinful to enjoy a pleasure that is so intense it interferes with reason? St. Thomas answers that the morality of pleasure is not to be judged by its intensity, but by its accordance with reason. It is true that in the performance of the sexual act reason itself is clouded and the clear vision of the final end is lost; yet the act is still directed toward God as final end, for it was thus ordained by reason *before* the act was placed.

Although the sexual act in man is intrinsically good, there is connected with it an inordinateness that merits a certain

amount of disfavor in St. Thomas' view. What are the elements that enter into this inordinateness of the sexual act? First of all, there is a certain bodily uncleanness in the very act of discharge of the seed, both in male and female. Secondly, there is an excess of sensible pleasure in the act of intercourse, for the concupiscible appetite rushes toward sex pleasure in an unbridled manner. Thirdly, St. Thomas is convinced that during the performance of the sexual act the reason is clouded. With his high opinion of man's intellect, St. Thomas disliked to see it lowered or impeded, even for a short time. Finally, the sexual act contains an inordinateness in so far as it keeps a person from the complete service of God. If indulged in to excess, the act of intercourse can lead to the complete submergence of the personality in sense pleasures and the consequent neglect of the things of God. Even lawful sex pleasures draw a person down from the summit of virtue.

The morality of the act of sexual intercourse, which is intrinsically good, is also affected by the end and circumstances surrounding the act. One of the chief circumstances necessary for its virtuous performance is the state of matrimony. The chief ends of matrimony are the generation of the child, which is brought about by sexual intercourse, and his education, which is secured by the common life and work of the parents. St. Thomas lists three special values in marriage, which are called *bona matrimonii*: *proles*, that is, the begetting and rearing of the child; *fides*, that is, the common life and permanent union between husband and wife; and *sacramentum*, which is a special value of Christian marriage. These three values of matrimony as a natural institution and as a sacrament compensate, according to St. Thomas, for the inordinateness found in the act of sexual intercourse.

The second value, *fides*, does not mean marital fidelity alone, but also includes all the complex relations of husband and wife. It indicates the love which husband and wife should have for each other, the permanence and exclusive-

ness of monogamous marriage, and the performance of sexual and everyday obligations of married life. St. Thomas declares that the greatest human love and friendship exists between married partners. This mutual love expresses itself by a closer union of the two. The partners seek to know each other intimately, and delve into the secrets of each other's being. They rest in each other's love; they think and will and work for each other's welfare in a close union of love.

SEX AND THE VOLUNTARY

Moral evil, or sin, can proceed only from a voluntary act. Our aim now is to determine what St. Thomas taught about the influence of sexual forces on the voluntary, the free act of the will. This will necessitate an inquiry into external forces and internal passions, a consideration of violence and temptation, and also of those sexual actions that take place in an unconscious or semi-conscious state. Finally we must add a note on the gravity of sexual sins.

St. Thomas realized, of course, the natural inclination of the sexes towards each other. Contributing to this inclination and fostering it are certain external forces. One of these is bodily beauty, which St. Thomas describes in terms of due proportion between the members of the body with the glow of healthy color. Another is the use of make-up, attractive dress, modulations of voice, etc. St. Thomas gives a complete treatment of the circumstances and purposes that affect the morality of these artificial aids to beauty. He also describes in detail the steps involved in sexual excitement. First of all comes the sight of an attractive person; then, a detailed study of the charms of this person directed toward sexual desire; next, consideration of sexual matters; then the surge of sensual pleasure itself. The last steps are the voluntary consent or rejection of the pleasure; if consent is given the whole person then becomes intent on the sexual act itself. The best escape from such pitfalls is to avoid the occasions and temptations of sex, and to flee from them

when they do arise, at least by turning the mind to other considerations.

To what extent do the concupiscible passions, love and desire, affect the freedom of the will in regard to sex? It is clear that at times there is a struggle between the will and the passions in matters of sex. The passions are not absolutely subject to the will, and will try to induce the will, if it opposes them, to follow their lead. The passions cannot force the will, but they can impede its action or induce it to follow their lead by offering it a desirable object. In matters of sex, then, sexual passion lessens the freedom of the will in every case, and if it is intense enough, it may even take away freedom entirely. It can cause the will to change from a repudiation of the passion to an acceptance of it. In this case the will chooses the particular good offered it by the passion in preference to the universal good of reason. When the passion has surmounted the will, both move with greater force and intensity toward their common object.

St. Thomas mentions two types of involuntary sexual acts, those proceeding from violence and those occurring during sleep, i.e., nocturnal pollution. With regard to the former type there is no question of sin unless consent is given to the sensual pleasure. With regard to the latter, St. Thomas says that nocturnal pollution is never a sin itself, but sometimes is the effect of a preceding sin, hence is sinful in cause. In sleep the will cannot act freely; consequently there is no possibility of sinning during sleep.

St. Thomas holds that sexual sins are of their nature mortal. Two of the reasons he gives for this are the serious opposition of the sexual sin to the commands of God and the serious injury actually or potentially done to neighbor. He adds that it is not the excess of concupiscence that makes the sins mortal, but they are so in themselves. Internal sins of sex, i.e., consent to the sexual pleasure without the external act, are also mortal; sexual touches, kisses, and embraces that are illicit are also by nature mortally sinful.

SEXUAL VIRTUES

Practically all of the many virtues listed by St. Thomas have some connection with sex. Most of them, however, relate only indirectly to sex. We will consider here only those that relate directly to sex; all of these center around the cardinal virtue of temperance.

Temperance considered as a special virtue has the task of moderating a special power of the human composite in regard to certain determined objects. The subject of the virtue of temperance, that is, the faculty in which it operates, is the concupiscible appetite of sense. The end of temperance is not some external object, but to render an individual moderate in his concupiscible desires of sense. The proximate object of temperance, i.e., the matter with which it is concerned, is the desires, the emotions, and the pleasures of sense; the remote object is the material and physical things that give pleasure, especially food, drink, and sex. Besides the duty of moderating the purely internal acts of the concupiscible appetite, temperance has the added task of restraining the acts and pleasures of the external senses, especially those of touch. Convinced as he was of the natural nobility of sex, St. Thomas never tires of insisting that the purpose of temperance is to moderate passions in accord with reason, not to exterminate them.

Chastity is a virtue subordinate to temperance that is directly and exclusively concerned with sex. Its subject and end are identical with those of temperance; but its objects are related to sex exclusively: sexual passions, sexual pleasures, sexual organs, and sexual acts. Chastity is able to be acquired by persons in all states of life. St. Thomas states that this virtue gives its possessor the ability to judge, *per quandam connaturalitatem*, about the morality of sexual desires and acts. Closely allied to chastity is pudicity, which differs from chastity in as much as it moderates the circumstances and preparations for the sexual act, such as looks, kisses, embraces, etc., whereas chastity deals with the act of sexual intercourse itself.

Virginity, according to St. Thomas' mature opinion, is a special virtue that is concerned with sex. St. Thomas distinguishes a formal and material element in virginity: the formal element is the resolve to abstain perpetually from all venereal pleasure, and the material element is the physical integrity of the body. St. Thomas calls virginity the most excellent of the virtues that relate to sex. But even virginity must be practiced in accord with right reason; it is not a virtue if it proceeds from a scorn for sex.

Continence is a virtue allied to temperance; it has the same object and purpose as temperance, but a different subject. Continence resides in the will, and keeps the will resolute against the illicit and excessive passions toward food, drink, and sex. In addition, it may at times oppose even the licit appetites for sense pleasure. Continence, like chastity, may be acquired by persons in all states of life. Reason must determine when and in what matters to practice the virtue of continence.

Modesty is another virtue allied to temperance. In St. Thomas' understanding it governs bodily actions and dress and cosmetics in matters of sex.

SEXUAL VICES

There are several vices that have relevance in matters of sex which St. Thomas does not consider very thoroughly, at least in their relation to sex. A list of these vices is as follows: intemperance, the opposite of temperance, whose partial object is venereal pleasure; incontinence, which is the antithesis of continence, residing like continence in the will; immodesty, which is the source of immodest dress and action and cosmetics; and insensibility, the unreasonable contempt of all sensible pleasure. With regard to this last vice, St. Thomas observes that because of the proneness of men to pleasure, insensibility in sexual matters occurs rarely as a matter of fact.

Lust (*luxuria*) is the most prevalent vice in matters of sex. It is opposed to chastity, virginity, pudicity, and to

temperance, too, in its reference to sexual matters. Sins of lust are included under the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which is a general prohibition against all irrational use of the sexual impulse. Lust is listed by St. Thomas under the capital sins, that is, those sins which give rise to many other sins because of the desirability of their objects.

The internal sins of lust are those in which an excess of internal pleasure and desire alone is consented to. Such sins can occur without an external act, or in conjunction with an external act that is licit but whose circumstances are not praiseworthy. This latter case may obtain in the married state, for an excess of concupiscence or a perverse intention can make an act that is of itself good venially or mortally sinful. E.g., a venial sin is committed in marriage if sensuality rushes into the act of sexual intercourse without the consultation or approval of reason.

By external sins of lust we mean those that are of themselves sinful and have reference to an external action with all its circumstances. The types of external sins are listed by St. Thomas in several ways, but he is consistent in enumerating these: fornication, violation of a virgin, *raptus*, adultery, incest, and unnatural sins. The bases of this distinction of sins are the aptness of the sexual act itself for human generation and education, and the condition of the person who commits the sin or with whom the sin is committed.

Some sexual sins are catalogued by St. Thomas as *secundum naturam*, that is, the sexual act is performed between man and woman in the natural way. Their intrinsic malice comes from a deranged reason and will, not from a derangement of the generative power itself. Their common flaw is that they are committed outside the state of matrimony, which is a necessary requisite for the rectitude of sexual intercourse. These sins, in order of increasing gravity, are fornication, violation of a virgin, abduction for sexual purposes, adultery, and incest. From all of these

sins, however, it is possible for the primary end of the sexual act, the conception of the child, to take place.

This is not true of those sexual acts that St. Thomas lists under the general title of sins against nature, which are the most heinous kind of sexual sins. In order of gravity St. Thomas lists the unnatural sins in this way: bestiality is the worst, then sodomy, then copulation with the opposite sex but without the proper organs, then other monstrous and bestial ways of copulation, and finally masturbation, which is the least heinous. We should carefully distinguish this last from what St. Thomas calls nocturnal pollution, for masturbation is voluntary, whereas nocturnal pollution is not, at least not entirely so.

St. Thomas gives thorough treatment to the effects of the sins of lust on man. He repeats and enlarges on St. Gregory the Great's listing of the *filiae luxuriae*, the daughters of lust. These daughters of lust are weaknesses in the acts of the intellect and will caused by too great an adherence to the pleasures of the sexual appetite. They are, in order, blindness of mind, lack of consideration, precipitateness of judgment, inconstancy, love of self and hatred of God, and finally affection for this world and despair of the world to come. St. Thomas also endorses the effects of sexual sins on speech as listed by St. Isidore of Seville. They are, in order, impure speech, silly talk, foolish talk, and stupid remarks.

The Angelic Doctor lists some effects of lust drawn from his consideration. Lust gives rise to dullness of perception and insensibility toward higher goods; it offends God, who is the author of the body, by misuse of the body; it pleases the devil, who thus secures a strong hold on a man's soul. St. Thomas recognizes, too, that sins of lust have a strong influence on the common good, especially on the morals of society.

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