

# **I. INTRODUCTION: A CATHOLIC ARGUING IN A SECULAR FORUM**

## **I.0 Topics of this chapter**

To whom am I writing and what do I want to tell them? What is my line of argument?

From what religious and philosophical background do I approach issues?

### **I.1.1 Intended readership**

I imagine conversing with readers from three overlapping groups : secular intellectuals, Catholics and academic philosophers. My imaginary conversation, albeit one sided, is with my stereotypic representatives from these groups. Sometimes I direct remarks to all three.

Frequently, though, I address only one or two of these “representatives.” The book does not divide neatly into segments for: secular public intellectuals, Catholics, philosophers. A result is a shifting tone and style. I may shift from the style of preparing a draft for a professional article to that of preparing notes for a presentation to an undergraduate philosophy class while drifting to a more “down to earth style” suitable for a blog or article in an opinion magazine. This shifting perspective is crucial to how I think about the issues.

I have spent several years preparing the manuscript. Topics in public discussion of sexuality varied during this period. Not all issues are presented as they are currently discussed. For instance, when I began only the most progressive discussed same-sex marriage. Accelerating articulation of an increasingly radical progressive sexual morality provokes a sense of urgency. There needs to be a secular resistance to this nihilism in our culture. That sense of urgency has kept me working on this project. I no longer write for professional advancement or reputation.

When I make my case that individuals should follow and society support my principle for guiding male sexuality, I think primarily of what I consider intelligent contemporary U.S.A. and generally Western readers. I turn to the philosopher when I justify the principle and justify my

method of justification. I struggle throughout to articulate a secular view that correct moral norms are in our nature. So I frequently address the philosopher, who need not be an academic philosopher. People who regularly read *The New York Review of Books* are typical members of the secular intellectual group. I am such a reader but I am not a member of the secular intellectual group. My stance on sexuality is not the dominant stance amongs these readers. My views come closer to those of social conservatives. Nonetheless, “liberal” or “progressive” opinion is “the opinion of mankind” when I concede, using a phrase from the Declaration of Independence, that a “decent respect for the opinion of mankind” needs to be addressed. In the twenty-first century, decent respect for the opinion of mankind requires that careful justification be publicly presented for proposal of a strict traditional rule of sexual conduct for men. This is especially true, because the rule implies that the lives of many are immoral and aimless.

### **I.1.1 The secular focus**

To secular public intellectuals I make a case throughout the book that the traditional sexual morality expressed in the Paternal Principle below is strongly motivated and well supported without dogmatic appeals to religion or tradition. This principle is the “main character” of the book and “his” name is capitalized throughout. The Paternal Principle can be used respectfully for social criticism and formation of public policy. I am proposing that foundations for the Paternal Principle are intellectually accessible to all rational people so that the principle can be used for social criticism and formation of public policy. “Intellectually accessible” does not mean “intellectually compelling.” Nonetheless, it is as proper to use this principle, as any other, to promote public policies which may have disturbing implications for some people.

Around the turn of the century, John Rawls' (1921-2002) conditions for respectful public reasoning challenged me. Rawls' doctrine of public reason<sup>1</sup> can be summarized as follows: *Citizens engaged in certain political **activities** have a duty of civility to be able to justify their decisions on fundamental political **issues** by reference only to public values and public standards.* Since then public debate has shown me that scrupulously restricting oneself to public standards and public values is a self censorship conforming to the received opinions of a progressive articulate intellectual elite. In the meantime actual public debate is an uncivil mix of sense and nonsense. I do not follow the idealized standards of Rawls. I try to stay above the almost non-existing standards of actual debate. One revision of this chapter was made during the 2011-2012 Republican primary debates. Those who remember those “debates” might still shudder at the low level of public discourse. The subsequent election campaign was also painful.

Respect for the opinions of others requires trying to avoid those fallacies analyzed in elementary critical thinking courses while struggling to be clear.

### **I.1.1a Sceptical dismissal of philosophical analysis of terms**

Terminological clarity is far more difficult than fallacy avoidance. I do not draw on that vast body of philosophical literature analyzing crucial terms such as one of my fundamental terms: “character.” The literature of conceptual analysis, which began with Plato’s Socratic dialogues, discourages me from saying or writing anything. Socrates suggested that such discouragement might be a good thing. However, I thought it important to write a book on the significance of forming sexual moral character. In effect, I ignore the literature striving for definitions; nor do I contribute to it. The attempted analyses raise questions about the use of the terms which we cannot answer at all or cannot answer without contradicting ourselves. Being unable to answer all questions about the use of a term does not entail that we cannot use it clearly

enough in conversation to convey significant information and ideas. In conversations intelligent people can, *ad hoc*, make imprecise concepts a bit more precise. They do not need philosophers to clarify terms before the conversations start. Working definitions work well enough for intelligent conversation. And that is the best for which we can hope.

The Socratic dialogues and the failures of philosophical analyses teach me a scepticism pervading the whole book. I have no hope of saying exactly what “morality,” “character,” etc., mean. So, I have no hope of offering rigorous proofs compelling the ascent of all intelligent people. The “bad news” is that readers should not expect to find out what things are. The “good news” is that readers need not fear the scholastic effort to test complex definitions with counterexamples.

### **I.1.1b No appeal to divine authority**

For two reasons, I do not support my case with religious doctrines. Citing religious doctrines weakens my case in the secular forum which I address. During one of my many revisions of this chapter, I was encouraged by reading a remark of Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, in a Jan 24, 2012 address at Fordham Law school. He said that the most effective way to engage in conversations about human life with people who disagree with the church’s position is to “untether” discussions of natural law “from what might be thought of as unique Catholic confessionalism.”

Secondly, I cling to a Lockean moral Deism that God has “written the moral law in our hearts.” The secular status of morality is in my Catholic tradition. But I first attached it to an important philosopher in an undergraduate history of modern philosophy course. God provides us with affective and cognitive powers to uncover, articulate and obey His law without His doing anything else to inform us of the moral law.

### **I.1.1c Rationale for the title**

I mention the *New York Review of Books* because a provocation for writing this book are several reviews citing details of lives of statesmen, scientists, artists, writers and other talented and creative people whom I have admired. Frequently the reviews delve into the sex lives of these men. To maintain my admiration for their achievements, I found myself dismissing their wretched sex lives as not mattering in their lives — as being for nothing. To maintain my respect for them I separated their public from their private life. As a much younger man, I had difficulty accepting reports of JFK and rumors of Martin Luther King as a “womanizers.” I missed much other news as I tried to avoid details about President Clinton’s affairs. Even as a much older man, I still feel great disappointment when I hear of the sexual affairs of sports, military, and political men I admire. As a result I am tempted not to admire those men as full human beings. I abstract their achievements from their sexual lives by treating their sexual lives as not mattering. I looked at the records of their achievements more as a script for playing the role of political leader, artist, writer, soldier, etc.. I ignored what they were as full human beings. My dismissal of their sexuality as not mattering induced anxiety that if such a pervasive feature of human life was for nothing, then all of human life might be for nothing. Thus my title: *Confronting Sexual Nihilism*. To restore them to wholeness, to look at them as full human beings, I had to appreciate that they were badly flawed men who nonetheless accomplished great things. To identify the flaws I needed to make moral judgments about sexuality. Thus my subtitle: *Traditional sexual morality as an antidote to nihilism*.

Reflection on the implications of dismissing the significance of sexuality in the lives of public figures was a major cause of my anxiety about dismissing sexuality as significant in every person’s life. This book, though, is not about how to understand the accomplishments, and

failures, of prominent people. When we learn about them as public figures, we are not interested in them as full human beings. We want to find out the role they played, or are playing, in public life. The problem for historical accounts is getting accurate information. For the most part, their sexual activity is irrelevant to appreciating what they accomplished, or failed to accomplish, in public life. The study of a public figure is properly *not* the study of a full human person.

However, the daily living, even of the most distinguished public figures, is the task of becoming a morally correct full human person.

### **I.1.2 My Catholicism**

I am a practicing Catholic. I address Catholics who are concerned about Catholic sexual morality either by way of supporting it or modifying it. I accept and try to follow traditional Catholic sexual morality although I may differ on assessment of the gravity of certain “sins.” I also assume a Catholic tradition that sexual morality need not be based on religious authority although I do not use any type of reasoning which could be accurately called “natural law reasoning.” So writing within the boundaries of the secular intellectual group is consistent with my Catholicism when writing on sexual morality. I shall find occasion to address so-called artificial birth control and share concerns about its morality. Reluctantly I profess that abortion is the unjustified killing of a human being. I write “reluctantly” because abortion is an easy solution for some very nasty personal and social problems. If you avoid imagining what is actually done, abortion can seem like waving a “magic wand.” Realistically, though, abortion is killing a human individual before he or she is born, and public policy should focus on its reduction and elimination. I am a dues-paying member of the National and Ohio Democrats for Life, support National Right to Life and participate in pro-life activities in Central Ohio. I do not here argue

against the morality of abortion because discussions of its morality are discussions about justice; not primarily sexual morality.

*Nothing I write has any standing as Catholic teaching!*

### **I.1.3 The emphasis on philosophy**

I am an Emeritus Philosophy Professor from The Ohio State University. Of course, the character and quality of The Ohio State University's Department of Philosophy, in which I had the privilege to serve for thirty-seven years, should not be judged by my work. I imagine critical challenges from philosophers in the USA and British tradition when I write. But my primary audience is not professional philosophers as academics. So I do not address the philosophical literature; either classical or contemporary. Sometimes, though, to give readers familiar with 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy hints about influences on me, I interrupt my exposition to cite names and books. If I fail to give proper credit to a classical or contemporary source for a significant idea, I do not want credit for it. I have no desire to promote my argument or positions as original. I do not systematically propose and critically refute alternatives to my claims and arguments. If my work points to others who have expressed better what I am trying to say, I am delighted. I would be more than delighted if some philosophers found some of my ideas worth developing.

Although I am not writing primarily for professional philosophers, I ask for no compromise on philosophical criticism with respect to clarity of claims and cogency of argument. Despite efforts to write as a public intellectual, I fear that I write primarily as a philosopher. Some features which make my writing philosophic are

- I intend to address all rational people.
- I thrive on making distinctions and qualifications.
- I express anxiety, perhaps excessively, over justification for claims I make.

- I display effort to strengthen my arguments by minimizing assumptions about what there is in reality. (This concern over minimizing assumptions about “the furniture of heaven and earth” or ontology may be an idiosyncratic feature of some 20<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking philosophers.)
- I try to avoid reliance on factual claims.

This book offers few if any facts about sexuality. Its focus is on moral principles and critical thinking.

## **I.2 Overview of topics**

The focus of the book is male sexuality. I make a case that the morally proper way for a man to guide his sexual life is to make a Paternal Principle a fundamental guideline for his sexuality. In addition to condemning fornication and adultery, it condemns three of what Aquinas called the unnatural vices: masturbation, homosexuality and bestiality.<sup>2</sup> (The fourth so-called unnatural vice of extra-vaginal dispersal of semen in the sexual intercourse of married people is discussed in Chapter VIII.) As already emphasized, I am concerned with more than making a case for the Paternal Principle. I argue that the stance from which I make the case is as intellectually respectable as any stance from which to argue on such principles. The legitimacy of taking the stance supporting the Paternal Principle is established by showing it to be an antidote to nihilism. There are already millions of articulate voices arguing for the principle. I shall show that my stance supporting the principle is as legitimate as what I call the progressive stance and intellectually better than the other two stances: dualistic and romantic. I call my stance marital or parental.

### **I.2.1 The Paternal Principle, 1<sup>st</sup> Statement**

*A male may intentionally attain a sexual climax only in sexual intercourse with a consenting woman to whom he is bound by a life-long, monogamous, socially recognized union for*



*procreation, In addition he should:(1) intend to cooperate with his spouse to protect and promote the lifelong natural development of any conception resulting from this intercourse and (2) strive to appreciate with his spouse the natural value of their sexual satisfactions and cooperate with her to enhance those satisfactions.*

### **I.2.2 Preliminary clarifications, marriage**

The principle focuses on the activity of the male. However, sexuality includes courting, mating and bonding. So, sexual satisfactions are not only the intense pleasures of orgasms. Sexual satisfactions included those special excitements of courting and deep contentment of bonding or being in love. The principle includes St. Paul's injunction to the Ephesians: Husbands, love your wives! The fact that I say little about love is no suggestion that it is not of extreme importance for a complete sexual morality. I do not pretend to offer a complete sexual morality. Setting aside a discussion of love, with what notion of marriage do I work?

A necessary condition for being in a socially recognized union for procreation is being the type of people whose sexual intercourse can lead to pregnancy, namely male and female. For this work, the most important consequence of forming this unit or marriage is the creation of moral relations with particular individuals. There are moral privileges: You may have intercourse with her. There are definite moral duties: Forsake all others. There are indefinite duties: Love her and care for her all the days of your life. There are duties to individuals who might be conceived. By having a spouse in accord with the Paternal Principle, a man is developing and controlling his sexual life morally. However, bonding is governed by moral rules of justice as well as moral rules of sexuality.

In marriage, a man and woman give their bodies, especially their reproductive organs, to each other as property. As property of my wife my sexual organs and use are not mine to do with

as I will. As property, someone who does harm to my wife's body harms me as well as her. A society is needed for the institution of property. For there to be property there needs to be a society to extend the individual to places, objects and persons at a distance from the individual. Monogamy is the fair way to give bodies as property to another since in other arrangements one party may receive less than he or she gives. My characterization of marriage is influenced by Kant.<sup>3</sup> Kant (1724-1804) helped me to be clear, at least to myself, how married couples are a new unit in communities created by secular operations, and as such a unit can have specific duties, rights and privileges. The union with its uniting of sexual faculties is specifically for procreation, rearing off-spring and pairing men and women. It is not some other type of unit for political alliances, friendship, business partnership, doubles team etc.

In my opinion sexual bonding has been afflicted with worse "perversions" than courting or mating because justice as well as sexuality is perverted. Marriage arranged primarily for the economic and political advantage of parties other than the couple getting married is perverse.

### **I.2.3 On restriction to male sexuality,**

The Paternal Principle is frequently restated throughout the book as I clarify and defend it. Three special theses of the parental stance from which I justify the Paternal Principle explains my restriction to male sexuality. The other stances consider human sexuality as patterns of behavior to be restricted by application of general rules. The first special thesis is moral sexism. Some obligations may be imposed, or privileges granted, simply by saying "because you are a man," "because you are a woman." The marital stance is more than sexist. Through male/female bonding special privileges and obligations are established. So phrases such as: You are my son, you are my mother, you are my cousin, you are my grand daughter, etc., provide moral justification. This observation shows that taking sexuality as fundamental for morality clashes

with stances that make no fundamental discriminations amongst people to whom we have moral obligations. My attempt to found moral obligations in human nature is explicitly what Peter Singer classes as a *specieist* morality<sup>4</sup>.

The second thesis is that human rationality is inseparable from human sexuality. The third thesis holds that by virtue of being a use of the rationality of animals capable of self control by rules, human sexuality itself gives specifically sexual rules for its proper use through human thought. My phrase “think with sexuality” is odd, but it makes sense in this context in which it has been proposed that sexuality is, amongst other things, use of human reason. So, people think sexually to find the proper way to live with it. Men are sexually different from women. With different functions to perform. men have different systems to control. People have to apply general rules to themselves to have personal principle by which to live. Consequently men have to think with their male sexuality to develop their basic personal principles or maxims for keeping their sexual character in compliance with fundamental rules for male sexuality.

### **I.2.3a Not seeking origin of sexual morality**

The cause of my focus on male sexuality is a conviction that sexuality primarily needs moral control because of the disorder brought about by men’s pursuit of sexual satisfaction. I do not believe that the need for moral restrictions comes from special features of sexual acts such as the intense emotions, pleasure or voluptuousness.

Aurel Kolnai wrote early in his book<sup>5</sup> on sexual morality, “In general sexual pleasure arouses misgivings of a very special kind.” In his fourth chapter he specified: “Sexual pleasure considered by itself is *voluptuousness*.” Kolnai then went on to propose a reason why there is sexual morality at all. “Without this fundamental moral rejection of “*voluptuousness*” in the

sense indicated and this demand to keep a watch on sexual arousal as such sexual morality would be simply unthinkable and indefensible.”

Until I read Kolnai, I had not thought about sexual morality developing because of the voluptuousness in sexual acts. Once I thought about it, I concluded that if the voluptuousness is properly attained, it is one of the goods in human life. In any event, speculations about the causes of people having sexual morality is not of primary importance in a case for the Paternal Principle. Neither is my speculation that male pursuit of orgasms poses the main need for restrictions on sexuality, including moral restrictions. I offer a moral argument for the Paternal Principle; not a socio-psychological explanation of why people have at least professed acceptance of it.

Perhaps Kolnai meant that arguments for moral rules on sexual acts are based on a sense that they are all basically wrong because they produce a bad pleasure. The term “voluptuous” suggests inappropriate pleasure. Then the thoughts expressing sexual moral rules are developed to grant permission for the necessary sexual acts. Here the justification of the rule begins with a sense or feeling. An effective negative moral rule needs both a thought that the act is wrong and a sense that it is bad. However, in the justification for the rule justification of the thought is primary. Rules are not to be justified as expressions of what we feel to be inappropriate. A sense of wrongness is to be allowed and encouraged to support what is judged to be wrong.

Since I will write so often of moral neutrality, I should bring out that I regard sexual pleasure, and pleasure in general, as morally neutral. Pleasures have no morally right or wrong ways to be. For morality there are only right and wrong ways to attain pleasures. The Paternal

Principle specifies some of the right and wrong ways to attain the voluptuous pleasure of orgasms. To be sure, pleasure can be regarded as a natural good because, well, it feels good.

### **I.2.3b Principle primarily for forming male sexual character**

Men have attitudes about attainment of orgasmic satisfactions. Action in accord with most of these attitudes not only undermines the purpose of sexuality; it also disrupts civilization. Be that as it may: The role of the Paternal Principle is to guide men in developing morally proper attitudes in this pursuit. How does a principle guide attitudes? In my fifth chapter “Kant, Empirical Facts, Utilitarian Reasoning,” individual principles of action, or Kantian maxims, are characterized as articulations of attitudes. For a man’s pursuit of an orgasm to be morally permissible his maxim expressing the attitude with which he pursues it needs to be consistent with the Paternal Principle. The main moral role of the Paternal Principle is, then, to guide men in formation of their moral character by leading us to morally correct maxims.

The principle is intellectually accessible to women. Women, though, cannot think of it as founding their sexual morality. Of course, most aspects of humanity are common to men and women. So mutual collaboration is possible and needed for a full human sexuality. The Paternal Principle focuses almost exclusively on the distinctive feature of male sexuality: sperm dispersal. My thinking with male sexuality shows me that proper control of sperm dispersal can be the foundation of male sexual morality. I do not know how to think with female sexuality to locate a foundation for female sexual morality on such a single event.

### **I.2.3c No principle for female sexual morality proposed**

Should a basic principle for female sexuality, a maternal principle, be formulated? I do not know how to formulate it. Paul’s recommendation that Ephesian women be submissive to their husbands has its appeal. Unfortunately, I cannot repeat it with moral conviction. I

conjecture that a basic maternal principle may include courting and bonding more than mating. Certainly the prospect of pregnancy and child-bearing would be central. It has been easy to formulate what I call the Paternal Principle. The Paternal Principle is frequently violated. It describes the behavior of few, if any, men. Nonetheless it is honored in a wide variety of cultures. Cynics may say the principle primarily exhibits pandemic hypocrisy. Indeed, since I know little of the mechanisms of social causation, women may have played a crucial role in development of the Paternal Principle. Anecdotal evidence suggests to me that principles for female sexuality, known to me, are developed primarily to keep male behavior somewhat in accordance with the Paternal Principle. I certainly do not claim this to be a fact. But I have a sense of there being a “woman’s world” operating in accordance with some moral and non-moral rules inaccessible to me.

#### **I.2.4 The sexual triad: Courting, mating, bonding**

The Paternal Principle covers only a “third” of sexuality. Human sexuality is a rule-restricted triad of courting, mating and bonding for procreation and cooperation of the sexes. We may all speculate why it is rule restricted. But the fact is human beings have burdened it with almost every type of rule restriction available to humans: prudential, legal, etiquette, traditional customs, divine revelations and moral. I am concerned with moral restrictions. Moral restrictions, if any, have a dominance over other types. Morality passes judgment on the moral correctness of the other types of restrictions. Henceforth, I shall not bother to mention that human sexuality is rule restricted and that our interest is moral restrictions.

##### **I.2.4a Focus on male orgasm**

The Paternal Principle focuses on mating from the male side. As claimed above, if there is a right way for the male part of mating, men’s reasoning about it is most likely to uncover the

principles for its right use. Courting and bonding also have right ways to be. However, courting and bonding are mutual activities and are characterized much more by culture than physiology. Ejaculation is a physical process which the individual man experiences. It is easiest to focus on male pursuit of orgasm because it is important for procreation and is most easily discussed apart from cultural characterizations of what it is. Rules for proper courting such as constraints on courting close kin, very young children, people of the same sex and non-human animals would rely on cultural definitions.

#### **I.2.4b On not using notion of “intrinsically evil act”**

I do not find rules for proper use of intentional pursuit of male orgasms by close scrutiny of the male sex organs and their functions. The principle for male mating requires consideration of its function in the context of courting and bonding. Acts are judged evil because they violate the general principle. It is for this reason that I do not use a phrase such as “intrinsically evil act” which is crucial in a recent Catholic encyclical on moral theory.<sup>6</sup> In my Kantian moral theory rules are needed to identify moral evil.

The Paternal Principle has primacy over fundamental principles for courting and bonding. Because of its cultural invariance, constraint on male orgasms places constraints on the culturally variable practices of courting and bonding.

#### **I.2.5 Focus on character building, character ethics,**

The value of fundamental moral principles is not primarily for keeping social order. There are always rules of culture and law to restrict sexuality. To be sure, if people try to adhere to moral principles, they are likely to be sexually well behaved in their cultures. The purpose of these fundamental moral principles is to guide formation of character. I claim that the primary function of morality is formation of character, viz., becoming the right kind of people. For moral

rules to have the function of supplementing customs and statutes, individuals need the moral character to take the moral rules as binding on them.

If such principles are accepted as guidelines, men and women have an antidote to nihilism. Why? People always have the morally important task of making and keeping themselves sexually proper human beings. Something, namely character, always matters. There is no “existential unemployment.” It is also important to have all sorts of rules and guidelines on how to behave sexually in the indefinitely many circumstances in which people find themselves. I offer very few suggestions on proper sexual behavior in problematic cases: so-called casuistic questions about sexual morality. I am concerned with showing how pursuit of a morally correct character with respect to sexuality is crucial for having a justified sense of living a significant life.

In line with my medical metaphor of an "antidote for nihilism," consider that I am proposing an “off label” use for morality; especially the morality of character formation. The main function of morality might be to have people behave rightly and become the proper kind of people. *However, religious or some other kind of non-moral thinking leads people to have anxiety about the significance of life. This book is a prescription of the character-development aspect of morality as an antidote for such religious or existential anxiety.*

### **I.3 Main themes in a case for the Paternal Principle as an antidote to nihilism**

I cite important themes of my case. No outline of an argument replaces the details of the case. The whole book is the argument.

#### **I.3.1 Preliminary remarks on nihilism and moral worth**

This book is a prescription for avoiding nihilism; not a theoretical discussion of nihilism. I do not explore the intellectual and social origins of what might be called nihilism. Nihilism is a



stance towards living. A nihilistic outlook accepts that nothing matters and life, in particular human life, has no significance. If I had to classify my study of nihilism, I would call it a “therapeutic” treatment. In discussion and practice of sexual morality, I find what I think are errors and unhappy conditions which are not implausibly called “nihilistic.” I hope to provide an antidote for them. A ninth chapter, “Nihilisms and its Antidotes,” elaborates on nihilism.

I focus on moral nihilism. Full moral nihilism holds that there are no standards for anything to be morally good or evil, morally right or wrong. A full moral nihilist holds that everything is permitted, viz., nothing is forbidden. Moral nihilism is a stance towards living which holds that human moral life has no significance. It does not matter whether or not we act morally. Nor does it matter what kind of people we strive to be. Curing moral nihilism is not merely the moral theory task of arguing for moral realism; for an objective morality. There needs to be hope that following the moral law gives significance to human life. An antidote for moral nihilism is an antidote for nihilism. Why? Something matters. Something gives significance to human life. This something is developing a proper moral character.

A choice to conform with the right moral order has moral worth for building character and giving significance to life when the choice is for the sake of being in harmony with the right order. This book is not a study of Kant nor do I seek support for my position by claiming that it comes from Kant. But, of course, my use of “moral worth” has been influenced by Kant’s notion of moral worth<sup>7</sup>. “Worth” is a relative term. X has worth for Y. For me to say that an action has moral worth is to say that the moral action has worth for building character and giving significance to life.

### **I.3.2 Role of character stances in the argument**

To propose striving to become a morally proper person is to propose a moral but secular significance for human life. To so strive is to take a character stance. Different interpretations of morality lead to different character stances. The four character stances compared are constructed for this study. My tenth chapter, “Sexual Nihilism and Alternative Stances” defends using this typology: Parental, Progressive, Romantic and Dualist. I advocate the parental stance as correct and spend effort developing it throughout the whole book. I construct the alternative stances by mixing components of moral theories with theses holding that there **are** no specific moral rules for sexuality. The parental stance holds that there are specific moral rules for sexuality. The alternatives take sexuality to be morally neutral.

### **I.3.3 Sexual nihilism as moral neutrality of sexuality**

A sexual nihilist holds that by itself anything sexual is permissible. I often characterize moral nihilism about sexuality as a thesis of the moral neutrality of sex. *Sexual moral nihilism* does not imply *moral nihilism*! People can hold that there are no specific rules of sexual morality. Rules for sexual morality, they might say, are obtained by application of objective rules of justice. A major argument of this book is difficult because the challenge is to show, mainly in my eleventh chapter, “A Pragmatic Defense of the Parental Stance,” that character stances adequate as antidotes to moral nihilism cannot be developed with interpretations of morality under which sexuality is morally neutral; but the parental character stance is adequate. I emphasize: A crucial thesis is that *a character stance adequate for overcoming nihilism is incompatible with holding that sexuality is morally neutral*

### **I.3.4 Parental stance and morality from nature**

What I think of as a naturalistic stance holds that human nature has a way it ought to be and an obligation for everyone is to strive to become the kind of person one ought to be. Human

nature is the authority for these obligations. The parental stance is the naturalistic stance on sexuality. The word “naturalist” has so many uses that I shall use “parental” when I am talking about my stance on both sexual morality and other areas of moral concern. Preliminary remarks on how I think nature gives morality have already been given above in my second and third reasons for focusing on male sexuality. I struggle throughout the whole book to make sense of nature giving morality. A sixth chapter, “The Paternal Principle in Nature,” emphasizes this theme with special attention to how my approach differs from what could be called natural law moralities.

### **I.3.5 Parental stance and the Paternal Principle**

The parental stance does not imply the Paternal Principle. Another hard challenge, then, is to make a case for the Paternal Principle from the parental stance. I use a type of “Kantian” moral reasoning in a fourth chapter, “Case for the Paternal Principle from the Parental Stance.” to make a case for the Paternal Principle. I concede that the argument has at best rhetorical force. I realize that it will not compel all clear-thinking, rational people. In an eleventh chapter, “Pragmatic Defense of Arguing from the Parental Stance,” I defend using pragmatic arguments to allow oneself to become convinced of the parental stance and the Paternal Principle even if our intellects are not compelled.

### **I.3.6 Paternal Principle and daily life**

The Paternal Principle would hardly give significance to life if it did not have significance for daily life. It brands many of us as sinners. In a seventh chapter, “Living with the Paternal Principle and Sin,” we consider its implications about infidelity, masturbation, homosexuality, sex education *et al.* I found a need to write a whole eighth chapter on birth control. I present the Paternal Principle as a categorical imperative. That does not mean that all

rules we develop to apply it are categorical imperatives. A final chapter, “Conflict Evasion and Stance Dimensions,” brings out that a variety of considerations, **many** concerning the consequences of actions, are legitimately used in its application. One example of a stance dimension is severity of sanctions, if any, to be placed on violations of the principle. Another example of a dimension is the extent to which legal statutes should enforce the Paternal Principle. Discussion of stance dimensions is part of the case for the Paternal Principle because it shows how it can be maintained in ways compatible with contemporary secular life.

This chapter synopsis might suggest that the argument of the book is straight forward and linear. However, many other topics and, to me, interesting concepts are introduced. Some themes, especially that of nature giving morality, are repeated in slightly different ways throughout the book. This repetition and supplementation comes with the rhetorical character of the argument. Also my overall line of argument may suggest a three-step process. First develop a conceptual scheme, viz., the parental stance, in which the Paternal Principle is established. Second, make what is called a pragmatic argument for opening oneself to things in themselves apart from the conceptual scheme with a hope of becoming convinced by things in themselves of the correctness of the conceptual scheme. Third, become convinced by things in themselves of the scheme’s correctness. However, these are not steps taken in order. They are phases of thinking philosophically about the topic and go on simultaneously. For me philosophizing is a dynamic activity in which a conceptual scheme is regularly being refined in light of what is going while always being anxious about whether **or** not I have a right to be convinced. In the more than ten years during which I have been preparing this book I have allowed what I have been experiencing lead me to frequent modification of my Kantian conceptual scheme. I am now past seventy-eight. It seems an appropriate time to share my thinking with others. For others it

needs to be as it has been for me. The words I present will not be sufficient for persuasion. That is part of what I mean by downgrading my argument as rhetorical. They need to be considered in light of readers' experience, both actual and fictional, of sexuality; especially those trivializing or demonizing sexuality.

### **I.3.7 Role of sexual alienation in the argument**

The next or second chapter, "Sexual Trivialization As Sexual Alienation," reminds us that sexual mating is not too trivial to have right and wrong ways to be. A third chapter, "Sexual Demonization As Sexual Alienation," reminds us that sexual mating is not too dirty, dangerous and irrational to have a right and wrong way to be. These two preliminary chapters form a case that sexuality is not to be alienated from our humanity. Our humanity is amongst other things a way we ought to be. The point of these two chapters against sexual alienation is to show that our sexuality is integral to our humanity. If sexuality is integral to our humanity the whole human person has a right way to be. If moralism is to give the meaning to life, the moral goal is most stable if it is for the whole human person; not some "purely rational" or spiritual part.

A subtle corrective for a dualist view of the person as a body and a separable mind or soul is to interpret sexuality as an activity of the soul. A soul with sexuality is not a spirit lacking spatial features. In particular, it has genitalia!

### **I.3.8 Special features of my line of argument**

- I do not present my argument as compelling the intellect. I present it to persuade living in such a way that life experience leads to being convinced of the conclusion. So I label my argument rhetorical and supplement it with a pragmatic case.

- Taking a stance on sexuality which entails the above Paternal Principle provides a sufficient condition for a judgment that human life is significant whereas alternative stances on sexuality fail to provide this sufficient condition.
- I try to preserve the tolerance and healthy common sense of relativism without slipping into the moral weakness and theoretical incoherence of moral relativism. To do this I develop what I call “dimensions of a stance.” This relativistic attitude will be shown to be compatible with taking the Paternal Principle as a categorical imperative!
- I shall not criticize alternative stances on sexuality as providing an inadequate sexual morality. Discussion of stance dimensions brings out that the alternative three stances have sufficient flexibility to require tolerably decent sexual moral behavior

This book, then, offers neither a denunciation of contemporary sexual morality nor a celebration of sexual liberation.

Some introductory remarks about myself and philosophical background are useful for understanding and critically evaluating my line of argument. The personal remarks are not offered to reveal details of my sexual life. I do not do that in this book or anywhere else.

#### **] I.4 Early Catholic education**

During the 1940s and 50s I was taught in grade school and high school in St. Paul, Minnesota, by Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and the Christian Brothers. I am profoundly grateful for the work of those dedicated women and men. In this Catholic culture the claim was that sexual morality was based on natural law. Being based on natural law meant that there was no need to use principles of religion to support sexual morality. In my recollection almost nothing was said about any philosophy of nature in which functional ends in nature were also normative ends. Of course, we were taught that God was deeply concerned with how well we

acted in accordance with this bit of natural law. But we were not taught any Divine Command foundation for morality. Fortunately, I gave little credence to suggestions that the priests, nuns, and brothers taught us this sexual morality as part of some vast **conspiracy** to deprive young people of pleasure.

There was much discussion of sexual morality with much disagreement. Students and their parents challenged teachers and pastors in, and outside, the classroom. However, the discussion was always on prudential issues on how to live in accordance with the traditional principle. The endless, and to me boring, discussions focused on courtship techniques for avoiding premarital mating. Even in the writing of this book, I find casuistic discussion of proper sexual behavior a curious mixture of being boring, viz., no theoretical interest, and offensive. viz., inappropriate attention to other peoples' intimate activities.

The basic principle struck me, and I think many others, as sensible. Once I learned the basic tenets of the sexual intercourse theory of conception the traditional principle seemed to me to be the right way to use sexuality. I realized, of course, that the right use of sexuality would require struggling against some of my natural inclinations. On the basis of what I learned about nature, I concluded that I would have to struggle against nature to use my sexual nature properly. Implicitly, at least, we realized that what we learned from nature on proper living would require working against nature in some ways. Perhaps, implicitly, the myth of a fallen human nature was being used. In any event, the traditional principle was, so to speak, an axiom underlying all of our discussions and disputes. I must interject, though, that I never recall any discussion of birth control for married people. The principle stated the way we hoped our fathers were. Children with fathers who manifestly weren't that way were unfortunate even if their fathers were rich and famous. Life in accordance with the principle was difficult but doing well always required effort.

Our teachers were committed to a far harder way. I had inchoate hopes that I would find an intellectually respectable justification after high school.

#### **I.4.1 Confrontation with birth control**

In the next section on philosophical background, I explain my failure to realize these hopes. Some remarks on my experience with Catholic prohibitions against birth control are in order. After a few years in the Army immediately after high school, I returned to the Catholic culture of St. Paul. My experience in that culture during the mid-50s was that very many girls were impatient to be married in their early twenties. Suffice it to say that I married a Catholic girl in 1957 when both of us were twenty-two years old. Prior to premarital counseling with a priest I had not paid much attention to Catholic teaching on birth control. Upon learning of it, I realized that adherence to the teaching might cause problems later on. Since the custom in that culture at that time was to have a child or two very early in a marriage, I did not think of it as a pressing problem. At that time, career advancement was far more important to me than morality and religion. My wife, however, was firmly committed to the regulation. I would not pressure anyone to violate firm religious or moral convictions.

It became a problem. Natural child planning was not especially effective. We had four children within five years and five within seven years. Four of the children were born while we were still living on my salary as a philosophy teaching assistant. Having the family we did has been the best parts of our lives. In retrospect, I am glad about the ineffectiveness of natural family planning of the 1950s. However, in my efforts to practice it, I significantly reduced our physical intimacy in many ways different from sexual intercourse. I violated the final clause of the Paternal Principle for which I am arguing. For this violation I have deep regret. We had to focus on other things. Fortunately, a large family provides many other things on which to focus.



#### **I.4.1 No personal revelations**

This book is in no way confessional about my sexual life. I note my experience with the Catholic prohibition on birth control because I address the topic. These remarks show that so to speak I have “paid my dues” for a right to address it. Also this prohibition is one of the factors leading me to write this book. Over the years, I have become more and more convinced that the prohibition reflects some deep truth about sexual morality. I always kept, at least “in the back” of the mind, a conviction that remembering that sexuality is for the reproducing of human beings is the corrective for both trivializing and demonizing sexuality; especially by regarding women as “boy toys.” Indeed for men looking at women as primarily sex objects is an opening to nihilism. If women are human beings who are sex toys, what are we? Still I could not judge blocking conception wrong because it blocked a natural process. In general, it is permissible to block natural processes. For the most part whether or not a natural process is to be interfered with depends upon considerations external to the process. The natural process does not show us that there is a morally right or wrong way for it to be. Most natural processes are morally neutral. So if contraception is wrong, mating (copulating) is not morally neutral. There is a right and wrong way for mating to be. But what shows us this? This book offers an answer.

I bring no great experience in sexuality. For a brief period in my late teens I drifted into a “macho” romantic stance that a man had a right to sexual intercourse with any willing woman and that manliness was ability to make them willing. By that standard I was not especially manly. Otherwise, I have struggled through failures all of my life to live in accordance with the Paternal Principle. The struggle lies primarily in disciplining what I look at, read, think about, places to go and people with whom to associate. Avoid proximate occasions of sin! If my lack of experience weakens my case, so be it.

## **I.5 Philosophical background**

A sketch of my philosophical background helps explain my inability to appreciate the metaphysics and epistemology underlying one of the most significant foundations for traditional sexual ethics, viz., the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). From the “great philosophers,” the modern philosophers Immanuel Kant and David Hume (1711-1776) set the framework in which I philosophize.

### **I.5.1 Training as a logical positivist**

I first studied philosophy under logical positivists. Herbert Feigl (1902-1988), of the Vienna Circle, directed the Philosophy of Science Center at the University of Minnesota when I began study of philosophy in 1956. I acquired the picture that the proper ordering of our intellectual life was first to systematize all logical, mathematical, and scientific truths and then find a place, if any, for other claims such as moral and religious. This simplistic, intellectually charming, nihilistic picture will tempt me until the day I die. From this positivistic perspective the question about the reality of moral obligations becomes the fundamental question of moral theory, and it receives a quick answer. Hume’s reminder about not logically getting “ought” from “is” left no intellectually respectable place for moral judgments. It should be noted that Hume had respect for human sentiments, and if the foundations of morality lay in sentiment rather than reason, Hume found morality quite respectable. Moral claims along with those of religion were discarded into a category of emotional expressions and were typically dismissed as intellectually disreputable as in A. J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*<sup>8</sup>. This positivist paradigm was supported by more than the erroneous verification theory of meaning. At times to many of us it seems simply obvious that there is nothing but that which is accessible by empirical science.

As the influence of positivism waned, moral philosophy gained new respectability in the second half of the twentieth century. One fruit was, in my opinion a classic in philosophy: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>9</sup> A prevailing assumption, though, was that unsophisticated people mistakenly believed that morality was primarily focused on control of sexuality. Sophisticated thinkers did not discuss sexual morality. Sophisticated thinkers held that sexual morality could be covered by application of principles of justice. My arguments that sexuality is neither too trivial to need special moral rules nor too “animalistic” to characterize our humanity challenge that assumption of sophisticated thought.

### **I.5.2 Wittgensteinian influence,**

I locate my philosophizing as mid-twentieth century, by acknowledging the tremendous influence of Wittgenstein (1889-1951). My Ph. D. dissertation and first book focused on his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.<sup>10</sup> The following may sound as cryptic as many of Wittgenstein’s pronouncements. I could make no progress with my case until I realized that there was no ideal language in which I could present a rigorous case for the Paternal Principle; or any moral principle. I could use only ordinary language with the result that the case would have at best rhetorical force.

A philosophic axiom I retain from my positivistic training is that while philosophizing, in which I do no experimental reasoning, I should make no claim about human thoughts and attitudes which could be formulated and tested by natural science.

I have learned much from Hume. If I would accept nihilism, I would “default” to Hume. At the end of his 1777 *Inquiry Concerning Human Understand*, Hume wrote that books making factual claims without experimental reasoning should be consigned to the flames for they will

contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. There is a constant struggle with Hume throughout this book. Nonetheless, I like to think of myself as temperamentally akin to Hume.

Because of my fear of doing “armchair sociology,” I frequently point out how what might seem to be a sociological claim about sexuality is not presented as a factual claim. But I do not write as a logical positivist. My philosophizing has been the effort to move intellectually beyond positions such as emotivism in ethics, nominalism in metaphysics and atheism in theology.

### **I.5.3 Kantian influence but no Kantian scholarship,**

Another way of characterizing my philosophizing is as a series of efforts to reconcile insights of Hume and Kant. However, no views in this book are offered as interpretations of Hume or Kant. If anything of worth in what I present can be traced to Hume and, especially, Kant, they deserve the credit. I offer no scholarship tracing views back to these seminal thinkers.

In the ten years or more of the thinking to prepare this book, I believe that I have won my way to accepting that nature is normative as well as what is the case. The world is not only everything that is the case. The world is what is the case and what ought to be. The basis of my realization that nature is normative is the fact that there are normatively controlled animals; at least humans. Nature is normative because we are normative and we are natural.

My philosophizing about sexuality starts with the effort to move beyond the trivialization of sexuality expressed with the thought that it is OK if it doesn't hurt anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, John Rawls, section 3.6 Check: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls/>

<sup>2</sup> Summa Theological, II,II, 154,11

<sup>3</sup> For the Kantian text see *Theory of Justice*, AA VI 277-280 Good translations of Kant's works have the page numbers of the Academy Edition AA in the margins.

<sup>4</sup> For use of the term, see Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, 1975, 1990, 2002, Harper Collins, New York

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<sup>5</sup> *SEXUAL ETHICS: The Meaning and Foundations of Sexual Morality*, Aurel Kolnai, trans. and edited by Francis Dunlop, Ashgate Pub., Burlington VT. 2005

<sup>6</sup> *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II, 1993, See sections 78, 79.

<sup>7</sup> The best known source is *Kant's Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV 397ff.

<sup>8</sup> A.J. Ayer (1910-1989) 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Victor Gollanz, London 1936

<sup>9</sup> John Rawls (1921-2002), *Theory of Justice*, Harvard 1971.

<sup>10</sup> *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, eds. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Macmillan, 1956, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trans. G.E. M. Anscombe Macmillan, New York, 1953, 1958, *Examination of Ludwig Wiggstein's Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1962 *Strict Finitism*, Mouton & Co. The Hague, 1970