

HOMOSEXUAL ORIENTATION AND ANTHROPOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON THE CATEGORY "OBJECTIVE DISORDER"

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[Editor's Note: Since the category "objective disorder" is pivotal to the magisterium's evaluation of homosexual orientation, the author seeks to clarify its meaning within Aquinas's anthropology. The doctrine of a directly created, subsistent soul is an essential element there. On the other hand, evolutionary theory suggests a markedly different understanding of human nature. If evolutionary anthropologies were to find a place in Catholic discourse, the judgment about the objective disorder of homosexuality would need to be reconsidered.]

HOMOSEXUALITY is a volatile topic. Both an emerging awareness of sexual orientation and a humanitarian impulse have led many to question the traditional negative judgment on homosexual relationships. That there is something like sexual orientation is relatively new information. One's sexual orientation is discovered, not chosen. Sexual orientation embraces more than the object of erotic passion. Sexuality is a defining human characteristic and involves an individual's drive to the goods of friendship, intimacy, and romantic relationships.¹ Simple compassion suggests that individuals who find themselves homosexual ought not to be deprived of the common consolations and joys of human life. It seems unreasonable to insist that homosexuals live lonely, asexual lives. Nor should they suffer discrimination in employment, housing, and other public spheres. In turn, these trends have met with strong opposition and have led to frequently heated public debates. In recent years opposition to the "radical, homosexual agenda" has become the *cause célèbre* of right-wing political and religious groups.

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¹ See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics," *Origins* 5 (January 22, 1976) 485-94, also the Pontifical Council for the Family, "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality," which states that "sexuality is not something purely biological, rather it concerns the intimate nucleus of the person" (*Origins* 25 [February 1, 1996] 529-52, at 531).

As one would anticipate, this frequently acrimonious discussion has found its way into Roman Catholic discourse. Some who minister in our Church have become more tolerant of homosexual relationships. Efforts to ban discrimination against homosexuals frequently find allies within the Church. Some theologians question whether the tradition's judgment that all homosexual acts are wrong ought not be reconsidered.² There is strong opposition in the Church to these developments.³ Without doubt the most significant participant within the Roman Catholic debate is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). In a series of interventions the congregation has resisted efforts both to reconsider the tradition's negative judgment of homosexual relationships and to grant homosexuals civil protection from discrimination. At the core of that position is the assertion that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. This judgment determines the congregation's interpretation of Scripture, its moral analysis, and its opposition to civil protection for homosexuals. Given its pivotal role in the congregation's interventions, the category "objective disorder" deserves careful scrutiny.

The following article first comments on the CDF's interventions and points out the pivotal significance of the category "objective disorder." Then I seek to clarify the meaning of this category by locating it within Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology. The doctrine of a directly created soul is an essential tenet of the metaphysical anthropology that grounds the universal application of the judgment "objective disorder." Finally I indicate the problematic character of Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology in view of evolutionary theory. Evolution of the human body is generally accepted. But what about human consciousness and intellect? Aquinas argued that humanity's intellectual functions require a subsistent, directly created soul. I suggest that the hypothesis of a subsistent and directly created soul is incommensurate with evolutionary theory and unnecessary. The major portion of this sec-

² Some theologians, while insisting that heterosexual relations are normative, seek a more pastoral and accepting approach for individuals who find themselves irreversibly homosexual; see Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Moral Methodology: A Case Study," *Chicago Studies* 19 (1980) 171-87; Charles Curran, *Critical Consensus in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984); Philip S. Keane, *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective* (New York: Paulist, 1977); Richard McCormick, "Homosexuality as a Moral and Pastoral Problem," in his *The Critical Calling: Reflections on Moral Dilemmas since Vatican II* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1989) 289-324. Others have suggested that the morality of sexual acts depends on the quality of relationship and that both heterosexual and homosexual relationships can be moral or immoral; see John McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978); Gregory Baum, "Catholic Homosexuals," *Commonweal* 99 (Feb. 15, 1974) 479-82.

³ See Benedict Ashley, "Compassion and Sexual Orientation," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality: Reactions to the "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,"* ed. Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 105-11; John Harvey, *The Truth About Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

tion treats an alternative explanation for the emergence of the human intellect. Leslie Dewart offers an explanation of how the human mind might have evolved. My aim is not to offer Dewart's work as definitive; I simply suggest that there are good reasons for adopting anthropological perspectives different from that of Aquinas. If such anthropologies can find a place in Catholic discourse, a space is opened for reconsidering the judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. The final section of the article considers some possibilities consequent on this opening.

THE CDF ON HOMOSEXUALITY

In its 1975 "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics," the CDF recognized something like sexual orientation in its comment that there are "homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable" (no. 8). This recognition suggested to some a more tolerant attitude toward homosexual relationships. In the ensuing years the trend toward toleration grew both inside and outside the Church. The 1986 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" is the CDF's response.⁴

The 1986 Letter to the Bishops describes pressure on the Church "to accept the homosexual condition as though it were not disordered and to condone homosexual activity." The pressure comes from Catholics frequently tied to groups outside the Church, groups which "reflect, even if not entirely consciously, a materialistic ideology which denies the transcendent nature of the human person as well as the supernatural vocation of every individual." The letter states that "there are many who seek to create confusion regarding the Church's position, and then to use that confusion to their own advantage" (no. 8). It speaks of "the movement" within the Church that claims to represent all homosexual Catholics but, in fact, speaks only for those who have no intention of following church teaching. A favorite tactic of "the movement" is to protest any criticism or reservation about homosexual persons as discriminatory. Efforts are made to manipulate well intentioned pastors with the aim of changing civil laws. The letter asserts that the Church is concerned "about the many who are not represented by the pro-homosexual movement and about those who may have been tempted to believe its deceitful propaganda" (no. 9).

The pivotal assertion of that letter to the bishops, some believe the very reason for its publication,⁵ is found in section 3. The congregation

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality* 1–10.

⁵ Richard Peddicord, *Gay and Lesbian Rights, A Question: Sexual Ethics of Social Justice?* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996) 100; William Shannon, "A Response to Archbishop Quinn," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality* 26.

observes that its recognition in 1975 of "the homosexual condition" led some to mistaken conclusions.

In the discussion which followed the publication of the Declaration (on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics), however, an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral, or even good. Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.

This judgment grounds the CDF's remarks about gay-rights legislation in its 1992 letter to the U.S. bishops entitled "Some Considerations concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons."⁶ This letter was not written for official publication but was prepared as a private response to some American bishops seeking guidance on how to deal with proposed legislation. The congregation released a slightly revised version of the letter after the original had become public.⁷ The letter sees gay-rights legislation as a threat to the family (Forward and no. 15). While homosexual persons have the same rights as all human beings, there are situations in which discrimination is justified (no. 12). Adoption, foster care, the employment of teachers and athletic coaches, and military recruitment are mentioned (no. 11). Precedent for such discrimination is found in the recognized right of the state "to restrict the exercise of rights, for example, in the case of contagious or mentally ill persons, in order to protect the common good" (no. 12).⁸ The grounds for the congregation's position is that sexual orientation, unlike race or ethnic background, is an objective disorder (no. 10). Therefore, civil-rights legislation should not be extended to homosexual persons.

Archbishop John R. Quinn attempted to soften the effect of the phrase "objective disorder" by pointing out that it is a technical, philosophical term.⁹ The category "objective disorder" reflects the natural-

⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Some Considerations concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons," *Origins* 22 (August 6, 1992) 174-77.

⁷ Coleman points out that because that letter was not intended as an official document, it lacks the CDF's letterhead, does not indicate what type of document it is (decree, instruction, letter, etc.), does not have the signature of the Prefect of the Congregation, and does not indicate papal approbation (Gerald Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* [New York: Paulist, 1995] 98-100).

⁸ John Tuohey argues that CDF's call for discrimination without supplying proportionate reasons amounts to a rewriting of the Roman Catholic moral tradition ("The C.D.F. and Homosexuals: Rewriting the Moral Tradition," *America* 161 [September 12, 1992] 136-38). An extreme example of Church-supported discrimination is the request of Archbishop Cardinal Antonio Quarracino of Buenos Aires, Argentina, that homosexuals be contained in segregated zones; the cardinal described homosexuals as an "ignoble stain on the face of society" (*National Catholic Reporter*, 23 September, 1994, 4).

⁹ John R. Quinn, "Toward an Understanding of the Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," *America* 156 (1987) 92-95, 116. The archbishop's observations

law tradition, and especially the thought of Aquinas, that has long served as a pillar of Catholic sexual ethics.¹⁰ The following section of my article seeks to clarify the meaning of “objective disorder” within Aquinas’s anthropology. But it is important to point out here that the way in which the CDF uses this category leads to a tension within that same natural-law tradition. In the opening sections of the 1986 Letter to the Bishops, the congregation states that the traditional moral perspective of the Church finds support in “the more secure findings of the natural sciences, which have their own legitimate and proper methodology and field of inquiry.” The Catholic moral viewpoint, however, is founded on human reason illumined by faith. “The Church is thus in a position to learn from scientific discovery but also to transcend the horizons of science and to be confident that her more global vision does greater justice to the rich reality of the human person in his spiritual and physical dimensions, created by God and heir, by grace, to eternal life” (no. 2). The Church’s vision of the human person involves the judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder; neither data nor scientific findings can touch that vision. This amounts to an a priori judgment that any new data on sexual orientation, and related anthropological data, are irrelevant to moral discourse. This a priori exclusion seems to contradict the tradition of rational discourse that grounds the notion of, and gives meaning to, the category “objective disorder.” Natural-law theory requires the consideration of new data. Alasdair MacIntyre’s description of the character of rationality at work in the *Summa theologiae* makes the point clearly.

Every article of the *Summa* poses a question whose answer depends upon the outcome of an essentially uncompleted debate. For the set of often disparate and heterogeneous arguments against whatever position Aquinas’ enquiries so far have led him to accept is always open to addition by some as yet unforeseen argument. And there is no way, therefore, of ruling out in advance the possibility that what has so far been accepted may yet have to be modified or even rejected. In this there is nothing peculiar to Aquinas’ procedures. It is of the nature of all dialectic, understood as Aristotle understood it, to be essentially incomplete.¹¹

John Mahoney questions whether the metaphysical anthropology that has served as a pillar of Catholic moral reflection can be maintained in the face of mounting data. He suggests that the Catholic moral tradition, which consistently insists on objective moral stan-

received an approving response from Cardinal Ratzinger who wrote to Archbishop Quinn thanking him for his comments on the letter to the bishops: “May I express our gratitude to you then for your careful analysis and hope that all the faithful entrusted to your care will profit from the clarity and pastoral sensitivity you have shown in this most sensitive matter” (Coleman, *Homosexuality* 185, n. 54).

¹⁰ Coleman, *Homosexuality* 94.

¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988) 171–72.

dards, must take seriously the findings of modern anthropology. In the face of evidence to the contrary, the notion of a stable human nature might itself contradict objectivity.¹²

Mahoney's suggestion points to the central thesis that I am proposing in this article. The debate about homosexuality within the Catholic Church revolves, in no small degree, around the question of anthropology. The category "objective disorder" reflects Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology. My suggestion is that this anthropology is problematic. Evolutionary theory has profound implications for anthropology and, consequently, for the meaning of sexual orientation.¹³ The following reflections aim at showing that it is unreasonable to grant a metaphysical anthropology unquestioned hegemony within Catholic discourse.

AQUINAS'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE DISORDER

Aquinas and the Soul

The question of causality offers perhaps the clearest starting point for this reflection. It is a time-honored Aristotelian principle that to understand something is to know its causes. What causes homosexual orientation?¹⁴ Of course, this is a question about human sexuality in general and, therefore, about the causes of heterosexuality. While contemporary biologists, geneticists, psychologists, and others are only beginning to explore the question, the metaphysical anthropology of Aquinas has its answer. The cause of human sexual desire is the soul, the formal cause of human existence. Human sexual desire is directed

¹² John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 206.

¹³ Gregory Baum makes this point when, in discussing the Church's judgment on homosexuality, he observes that the argument based on nature has become problematic. "The reason for this is not the influence of existentialism or what is sometimes called situation ethics—this represents too individualistic an emphasis to fit into the Catholic tradition—but, rather, the realization, derived from the analysis of culture and society, that what is called human nature has a history and is, in part at least, created by people, their interaction, and their symbolic language. Human nature is not simply a given. It is a given for the individual born into a specific environment, but looked upon historically and collectively, human nature has been created by the actions of people bound together by institutions and a common set of symbols" (Baum, "Catholic Homosexuals" 480). Leslie Dewart's similar observations about human nature are treated later in this article.

¹⁴ The realizations that the human sexual drive takes a variety of forms and that some persons are attracted to the same or both sexes are relatively recent. The categories of homosexual and heterosexual orientation appear only in the mid-19th and early-20th centuries. These categories are ambiguous; it is probably more accurate to conceive sexual orientation in terms of a spectrum rather than of bipolar opposites. The prevalence of homosexuality, its origins, and multiple forms remain controverted topics requiring further study; for a survey of research on these topics, see Simon LeVay, *Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research in Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1996).

toward the good of human procreation. This is true of every human being in every time and place. The soul's direct creation by God frees it from the flux of matter and history, and assures a universal, unchanging human nature. As a consequence of this anthropology, the CDF can make the claim that homosexual orientation is always and everywhere an objective disorder.

The validity of this position rests in no small part on Aquinas's account of the human soul. According to Aquinas, beings manifest what they are by how they look and by what they do; we know what things are by observing them. Each nature has its own form, its own look or shape; each nature acts in its own way. Flowers do not look like dogs. Flowers grow, turn to the sun, produce pollen, and so on; dogs explore their environment through smell, reproduce, and seek the company of other dogs and people. Human beings seek knowledge, friendship, and love.

These beings—flowers, dogs, and human beings—are matter in varying forms. Since our examples are all living beings, we call their forms souls. A soul is the formal cause of a living being, that which causes this material object to look like, act like, be what it is. A being manifests its nature in its movement from possibility to actuality. When the dog sniffs out its environment, eats, and reproduces, it actualizes its potentials. Naturally inclined toward these activities, the dog thus fulfills its nature and attains its good in their performance. The movement of beings from potential to actuality manifests God's order and design of creation.¹⁵ When the dog acts out its nature, actualizing its potentialities by moving toward its telos (goal, end, good), it "obeys" the *ratio* by which God orders and governs creation.¹⁶ "Natural desire is a tendency a thing has deriving from its very nature, so that every power has a natural desire for what suits it."¹⁷

Humans are rational animals. We share many of the characteristics of other animals; for example, we have natural inclinations to eat and reproduce. These inclinations are ordered to the goods of personal and communal survival. Because we have a rational soul we can understand these inclinations and their telos. The dog eats out of a natural inclination and in doing so attains its goods of health and survival. Human beings can know the reasons for eating. We are not inclined to eat merely by hunger. We understand the good toward which this inclination tends. We can therefore choose to eat responsibly, in accord with right reason, for the sake of that good, namely health and survival. We can also eat in an unreasonable, unhealthy fashion. We thereby choose not to pursue the good toward which this natural inclination tends.

When we grasp the good toward which our nature inclines us, we

¹⁵ *Summa theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] 1, q. 2, a. 3.

¹⁶ *ST* 1-2, q. 91, a. 1.

¹⁷ *ST* 1, q. 78, a. 3.

know the divinely established order of creation. Natural law is the rational participation of creatures in the eternal law, in the divine design by which God orders and governs creation.¹⁸

Pursuing our example, we see that human eating is a more complex matter than simple nourishment for survival. In different cultural and historical contexts eating can have profound social and religious significance. One might eat unhealthy food because hospitality seems to require it. Again, one might refrain from eating to the detriment of one's health for the sake of spiritual discipline or to share one's food with the hungry. And few would consider it a violation of God's will to indulge in a rich dessert from time to time. So while we may have determined that we, like all animals, eat for health and survival, the complexity, plurality, and richness of human existence admit a breadth of ways in which this human activity can find legitimate expression. Eating can be ordered to a variety of sometimes conflicting goods (e.g. health vs. hospitality). The prudent person knows how to negotiate this complexity.

But, in sexual matters, Aquinas and the Catholic moral tradition admit no such breadth. The good toward which sexuality inclines us is procreation. Procreation involves more than the physical reproduction of children. Children require sustenance and education. Therefore right reason requires that sex must always be physically ordered to procreation and may occur only between husband and wife. Any sexual act outside this context contradicts the natural law and God's will manifest therein.

Some have suggested a bit more breadth within this teaching. They argue, for example, that historical-cultural circumstances and our understanding of sex have changed since Aquinas. Sex is more than simply procreative; it also expresses the love between wife and husband. When another child might seem an irresponsible choice, would not artificial contraception be a legitimate alternative? Or, we have learned that some people find themselves homosexual; could they not have a committed, intimate relationship with a partner of the same sex?

The Roman magisterium's response to such questions is clear. The "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics" asserts: "[A]ll evolution of morals and every type of life must be kept within the limits imposed by the immutable principles based upon every human person's constitutive elements and essential relations—elements and relations which transcend historical contingency" (no. 3). In practical terms this means that human nature does not change in history. Its fixed character, at least in regard to sexuality, has been comprehensively identified by Aquinas and the reception of his teaching in the Catholic tradition. Similarly in *Splendor of Truth* John Paul II insists

¹⁸ ST 1-2, q. 91, a. 2. See Jack A. Bonsor, "An Objective Disorder: Homosexual Orientation and God's Eternal Law," *Horizons* 24 (1997) 193-214.

on the unchanging character of the Church's teaching concerning sexual morality, invoking the doctrine of the soul as pivotal to this teaching (no. 50).

These same premises ground the CDF assertion that homosexuality is an objective disorder. Its assertion applies to every human person in every time and culture. The universal and immutable character of this claim rests on the conviction that there is a uniform human nature and teleology. This perspective, when combined with the congregation's interpretation of Genesis, answers the question "What causes homosexuality?" Genesis describes God's creative design of man and woman in the divine image. Their complementary union is "cooperation with Him in the transmission of life by a mutual donation of the self to the other" (no. 6). The male and female bodies have a spousal significance, a notion frequently invoked by John Paul II.¹⁹ While this is the divine design for every human being from the beginning, it is obscured by original sin. "Thus, in Genesis 19:1–11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations" (ibid.). In other words, while the form of human existence remains the same, in some cases (homosexuals) it is "deformed" by its infusion into the history of sin. John Paul II continues the long tradition of tracing excessive sexual passion, the erotic impulse to acts that contradict right reason, to original sin. Homosexual orientation is an extreme example. The attraction to same sex partners contradicts the divine design for human sexuality. The homosexual's desire for love and intimacy is, in fact, an impulse to intrinsically evil acts.

The point of these observations is to indicate that the CDF's teaching about homosexual orientation presumes a universal human teleology that has been adequately described by the tradition. A fundamental tenet for asserting this universal, human teleology is the stable form of human existence, the soul.

The Soul Subsistent and Directly Created

Aquinas's conception of the human soul reflects his Christian retrieval of Aristotle. Aquinas insisted, with Aristotle, that the soul is the form of the body. He rejected any notion that material existence is

¹⁹ In *The Splendor of Truth* the pope underscores the importance of Thomistic hylomorphism. "In fact, body and soul are inseparable: in the person, in the willing agent and in the deliberate act they stand or fall together" (49). John Paul II continues: "At this point the true meaning of the natural law can be understood: it refers to man's proper and primordial nature, the 'nature of the human person,' which is the person himself in the unity of soul and body, in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations and of all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of his end. 'The natural moral law expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person. Therefore this law cannot be thought of as simply a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body'" (50).

opposed to or the denigration of the human spirit. The soul's natural function, its proper place or role, is to inform matter. Bodily functions and physical sensation are activities of the human soul. They are manifestations of its character as the form of human nature.

Christian practice and doctrine told Aquinas that the soul is immortal. But if the human soul's nature is to inform mortal flesh, how can one assert its immortality? Aquinas resolved this difficulty by developing one of the most obscure and controverted of Aristotle's texts. In *De Anima* 3.5 Aristotle had stated, "When mind is set free from its present conditions it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal." Aquinas's argument that the human soul is subsistent and immortal pivoted on the soul's intellectual functions. The unique characteristic of human nature, that which sets us apart from other animals, is rationality. Aquinas cited Aristotle's position (*ibid.* 3.4) that reason requires no physical organ. Since rational functions do not need a bodily organ, "the human soul can act in its own right, and so must be able to subsist in its own right as itself a thing. So the human soul is itself both a thing and a form."²⁰

Human knowledge involves abstracting a universal from particular sensed entities and achieving an understanding free of matter or physical particularity. I can understand "dog" without reference to imagination or any particular dog. Following Aristotle, Aquinas argues that understanding cannot be the function of a physical organ, as sight is the function of the eye, since material organs can only attain materiality.

And so the life-principle of a thing with understanding has to act on its own, with activity peculiar to itself not shared with the body. And because activity flows from actuality, the understanding soul must possess an existence in and of itself, not dependent on the body. For forms that depend for existence on the material or subject [they form] don't have activities of their own: it is not heat that heats but hot things. For this reason then later philosophers have judged that the understanding part of the soul is something that subsists of itself.²¹

Two aspects of Aquinas's position ought be noted. First, he argues that human thought, reason, and understanding cannot be the functions of a physical organ. Rational functions transcend the physical and require an incorporeal substance. Second, the human soul subsists. That is, it is a being itself—something. While it is the form of the body, and its natural condition is in-body, the soul *is* in its own right. Therefore it does not cease to exist when the body it informs dies.²²

The same premises about the soul's intellectual functions lead

²⁰ Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de Anima* 1, 1 (the translation is from *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993) 186; see also *ST* 1, q. 75, a. 2.

²¹ Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de Anima* 1, 1 (in *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings* 188).

²² *ST* 1, q. 75, a. 6; *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 79.

Aquinas to another, critical conclusion. Each human soul must be directly created by God. The human soul cannot be caused, brought into existence, by semen. The mode of a thing's becoming corresponds to its mode of being.²³ The human soul exists in its own right and is capable of functions that transcend physical existence. Thus the rational soul cannot be produced by matter. It can only be produced by God's direct action.²⁴

In sum, the soul is the subsistent form of human existence directly created by God. The human soul, therefore, does not have its origins from within the flux of matter and human history. Its origin is from outside history. Here are the metaphysical grounds for asserting that human nature is universal and transhistorical with a fixed teleological structure. While the particularities of time and place might affect how the soul's potentialities move toward actualization, human teleology and the goods toward which it moves are the same everywhere. Thus natural law is both universal and immutable.²⁵ "As regards the general principles whether of speculative or of practical reason, truth or rectitude is the same for all, and is equally known by all."²⁶

Here are the philosophical grounds for the universal claim that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. This claim applies to all human beings in all times and places. It reflects Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology. But can this metaphysical anthropology be reasonably maintained in view of a mounting consensus about human evolution? And what are the consequences of evolutionary theory for theological anthropology and the question of sexual orientation?

DIRECT CREATION OF THE SOUL AND/OR HUMAN EVOLUTION

Pope John Paul II has encouraged and actively participated in a conversation between the natural sciences and theology. This openness to science includes the question of human evolution. The pope has suggested that evolutionary theory might bring light to theological anthropology.²⁷ In a recent article in this journal Elizabeth Johnson cited this papal suggestion when insisting that a conversation between theology and science is essential if the faith is to be both credible and relevant.²⁸ We must take seriously the cosmological perspectives emerging from the contemporary scientific view of the universe as evolutionary and riddled by chance. Johnson argues that Aquinas's

²³ *ST* 1, q. 90 a. 2.

²⁴ *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 87 and 89; *ST* 1, q. 90, a. 2 and 1, q. 118, a. 2.

²⁵ *ST* 1-2, q. 94, a. 5.

²⁶ *ST* 1-2, q. 94, a. 4.

²⁷ Papal message reprinted in *John Paul II on Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View from Rome*, ed. Robert Russell et al. (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1990) M1-M14, at M 11. For this section of my paper I am indebted to unpublished presentations made by Anne Clifford and Michael Barnes at the 1997 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

²⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *TS* 57 (1996) 3-18, at 3.

conception of God's relationship with creation, his "conviction of the integrity of natural causes, while formulated within a largely static worldview, accommodates evolutionary science with almost surprising ease."²⁹ But what of the implications of evolutionary theory for theological anthropology?

John Paul II's openness to human evolution is limited and cautious. In a 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences he reaffirms the common Catholic conviction that scientific truth cannot contradict revealed truth. He observes that, while scientists may differ regarding its mechanisms, they commonly accept that the human species has undergone a process of evolution. The pope accepts human evolution, but he cautions against a materialistic reductionism that negates the divinely revealed dignity all persons possess by virtue of their human spiritual soul. He notes that Pius XII in *Humani generis* had already affirmed biological evolution to be "an open question, as long as it confines its speculation to the development, from other living matter already in existence, of the human body."³⁰ A theory of evolution that conflicts with the doctrine that souls are directly created by God is unacceptable.³¹

In other words, while the pope is open to evolutionary theory, he inserts the direct creation of the soul into the evolutionary process and thereby grounds a metaphysical anthropology. He does so to insure humanity's ontological difference from the rest of creation. This ontological difference is humanity's unique status as *imago Dei*.³² But, as we have noted, direct creation of the soul also provides the ontological ground for asserting a uniform, unchanging human nature and the consequent notion of an objective disorder.

I would like to suggest that this mix of evolutionary theory with a Thomistic, metaphysical anthropology is, at the least, problematic. For the sake of clarity I separate and treat sequentially the topics of physical evolution and the appearance of human consciousness. Aquinas's argument that the soul is subsistent and directly created by God rests on its intellectual functions. But this in no way compromises his insistence that the soul is the form of the body. The soul determines the human body's shape and functions, including those functions, (i.e. sensation) on which the soul's intellectual activities depend. So the soul directly infused by God informs the human body.

In evolutionary theory, the mechanisms of natural selection led to the emergence of human-like species, beings with the physical characteristics of humans.³³ If at this stage God intervened and began

²⁹ Ibid. 14.

³⁰ "Message to Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution," *Origins* 26 (November 14, 1996) 349–52, at 351.

³¹ Ibid. 351–52.

³² Ibid. 352.

³³ Jared Diamond points out that the genetic difference between human beings and pygmy chimps is only 1.6 percent. "The remaining 98.4 percent of our DNA is just

directly to create and infuse souls, thereby giving rise to human nature as we know it, how are we to understand the physical effects of this intervention? Presumably these prehumans had mortal souls. Now God infuses an immortal human soul, which is the form of the human body. Is this a different kind of body from that of its prehuman ancestors? Perhaps the infused soul accounts only for human intellectual functions. But does not this division compromise Aquinas's insistence that the human soul is the form of the body?

There is a hint of a possible approach in Aquinas's remarks on embryonic development: "Thus, the vegetative soul, which is present first (when the embryo lives the life of a plant), perishes, and is succeeded by a more perfect soul, both nutritive and sensitive in character, and then the embryo lives an animal life; and when this passes away it is succeeded by the rational soul introduced from without, while the preceding souls existed in virtue of the semen."³⁴ In this way the physical process set in motion by semen develops to the point where the embryonic entity is disposed to the infusion of a rational soul. Perhaps this account of the animal soul corrupting in order to give way to an infused soul could be applied to the evolution of the species. But, of course, Aquinas has the biology wrong.

I linger with these issues to show that the mix of evolutionary theory with a metaphysical anthropology is incoherent. It is both poor science and poor Scholastic philosophy. The metaphysical categories of Aquinas cannot simply be added onto evolutionary theory as if these were two continuous and commensurate systems. If the infused soul is truly the form of the body, as Aquinas insisted, then physical evolution is unnecessary. And, if evolutionary theory is capable of explaining the emergence of humanoid bodies, the infusion of a soul is both a superfluous hypothesis and the imposition of incommensurate metaphysical categories, at least in as much as the soul is the form of the body.

More, when it comes to the causes of homosexual orientation, one must add to this mix of metaphysics and science a somewhat literal understanding of the Genesis myth. If homosexuality has some biological basis, as most researchers think, must we conclude that Adam's sin affected human biology? This complex and problematic combination of modern science, classic metaphysics, and myth is intrinsic to the CDF's category "objective disorder."

But what if the notion of an infused soul is as superfluous to the development of intellect as it is to the formation of the human body? What if the intellectual functions that Aquinas thought required an infused, subsistent soul can be accounted for by evolutionary theory? That is the question to which we turn.

Normal chimp DNA" (*The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1992] 23).

³⁴ *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 89, 11; see also *ST* 1, q. 118, a. 2.

The Evolution of Intellect

Aquinas's argument that the soul is subsistent and directly created by God rests on its intellectual functions. But this hypothesis becomes superfluous if evolutionary theory can offer a reasonable account for the emergence of human self-consciousness and intellect.³⁵ Of course Aquinas's description of intellectual functions differs from most modern epistemologies. My premise in these remarks is that, while Aquinas argued for a subsistent soul, using Aristotle's categories, the matter at issue is the origin of intellectual functions. For the sake of our considerations I will set aside the differences between Aquinas's epistemology and contemporary theories. My concern is the origin of the human intellect which various theories of knowledge seek to describe.

I do not champion a specific theory of physical or cultural evolution. It is enough to indicate that evolutionary theory can offer an account of the emergence of those functions that Aquinas thought require an infused, subsistent soul. To this end I consider the hypothesis of Leslie Dewart about evolution and consciousness.³⁶

Genetic variations, and the physical evolution to which they give rise, are a necessary but not sufficient condition for human evolution. Aquinas and contemporary anthropologists agree that physical reproduction (conception and birth) cannot cause human self-consciousness and intellect. Another mechanism is required. Anthropologists and philosophers frequently theorize that the human intellect and self-consciousness emerged with the development of language. Dewart offers a careful and detailed account of how speech might have caused self-consciousness and intellect.³⁷ His frequently dense argument traces the origins of distinctly human characteristics to speech: "[C]onsciousness appeared when the interaction between mere experience and speech transformed the plain, animal ability to experience into the

³⁵ Karl Rahner strives to sort out these difficulties. He rejects the notion that God's creation of the soul is "an event resulting from an intervention of God which is viewed as an act occurring at a point of time when the human reproductive cells unite." He holds that "in such a creation of the human soul the human parents produce a human being and not just the material substratum for one . . ." One must understand divine causality not as an intervention in time "but as the dynamic ground and bearer of all evolution." In this way one can hold both direct creation of the soul and evolution. Rahner also points out that in the ancient Church direct creation of the soul was not uniformly held. This suggests a latitude for contemporary interpretations. In brief, Rahner recognizes the problem with church teaching. He offers two strategic responses. First, he so interprets direct creation as not to mean divine intervention. Second, he suggests possibilities within the early ecclesial tradition for alternatives to the notion of direct creation ("Natural Science and Reasonable Faith," in *Theological Investigations* 21, trans. Hugh M. Riley [New York: Crossroad, 1988] 44-45).

³⁶ Leslie Dewart, *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989).

³⁷ See H. A. Nielsen's review of Dewart's book in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 32 (December, 1992) 193-94.

human ability to experience consciously.”³⁸ Speech in turn is the inheritance mechanism whereby conscious life reproduces itself.

Dewart’s identification of speech as the inheritance mechanism for conscious life has profound implications for our topic. Dewart agrees with Aquinas that the distinctly human characteristics of self-consciousness and intellect cannot be reproduced by physical generation alone. Rather they are reproduced through social interaction and speech. There is no need to posit the infusion of a subsistent soul to account for these functions. I will not attempt to repeat Dewart’s argument in detail, but to offer the reader a general sense of how Dewart explicates the rise of self-consciousness from speech.

Animals are conscious and they communicate. Anyone with a pet dog knows this. A dog communicates its desire or need to get outside. There is a universal sign among dogs when they want to play: they lay their front legs on the ground while raising their hind quarters. You can say “Let’s play” to a dog by striking this pose. Forms of communication occur among animals. But what accounts for the radical difference between simple animal communication and the complex forms of communication among humans?

One important reason for the difference is that human beings are capable of a wide range of vocal sounds. Genetic changes had to establish a physiology able to form the many sounds that make up complex speech. A necessary step to the development of human language “may have been some modifications of the protohuman vocal tract to give us finer control and permit formation of a much greater variety of sounds.”³⁹ Another commonly recognized factor is that mental capacity requires the physical development of the brain. It is generally agreed that uniquely human functions are based in the physiology of the human brain. Damage to brain matter results in the loss of mental functions. Current research seeks to locate the areas of the brain and the interrelationships among these areas that make possible various mental activities. There is no brainless mind.

But, again, physical evolution alone cannot account for the distinctly human attributes of self-consciousness and intellect. Two related questions require explanation: How are the distinctly human attributes of self-consciousness and intellect reproduced within our species? How did these qualities and, thus, human nature first evolve? Dewart’s answers to these questions pivot around speech. Aristotle set forth the common, Western understanding of speech:

Spoken words are signs of experience and written words are the signs of spoken words. Like writing, speech is not the same for all peoples. But the experiences of which spoken words are the immediate signs are the same for all, as

³⁸ Dewart, *Evolution and Consciousness* 20

³⁹ Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee* 54–55

are also those things of which experiences are the representations. . . . A name is a spoken word that signifies something by convention.⁴⁰

Dewart names this the *semantic* interpretation of the relationship between consciousness and speech. First there is inner, conscious experience. This experience gives rise to thought and conceptualization. There is a kind of inner word that is expressed in speech. Dewart reverses the order of semantic interpretation. He names his position *syntactic*. Speech makes thought possible and thought creates consciousness.

I noted above that animals are conscious and communicate. How does human communication differ from that of animals? Dewart's concern is the difference between a dog's posture and the human statement "Let's play." Both communicate, but the human sound is *assertive*. When human beings speak we do not merely convey a certain meaning, we mean the meaning we convey. "To speak is to *assert* what one communicates."⁴¹ This meaning of meaning in assertive speech presumes a communicand who is likewise capable of assertive speech and, therefore, can grasp the meaning meant.⁴² The intention to communicate a meaning to one who can similarly communicate constitutes the uniquely human mode of communication—assertive speech.

Furthermore, self-consciousness is generated by speech. Dewart argues that specifically human characteristics are produced by social interaction. He notes, for example, the unhappy incidents when infants have been deprived of social intercourse. These cases "without exception, show that when a humanoid organism matures outside a human social environment, every form of life at the specifically human level is absent."⁴³ While all human organisms have the potential for a self-conscious inner life, the potential is purely notional. It is "a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of the specifically human level of life."⁴⁴ Human nature is not transmitted by physical reproduction alone. It requires a unique mode of reproduction and that mode is speech.⁴⁵

But we have here something like the "the chicken or the egg" question. Which came first? If speech and culture are the necessary conditions for human nature, whence speech and culture? Language precedes speech. By this Dewart means that a system of signals precedes and makes possible distinctly human communication. In this sense animals have language in that they have sets of symbols that communicate. Certain sounds, for example, alert the pack to danger. A dog's posture communicates its desire to play. Presumably prehumans had similar kinds of signals.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 1 (16a4–9), cited by Dewart, *Evolution and Consciousness* 91–92

⁴¹ Dewart, *Evolution and Consciousness* 104

⁴² *Ibid* 109

⁴³ *Ibid* 169

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 173

⁴⁵ *Ibid* 174

Dewart suggests that a fundamental change occurred when this signal making became assertive. Prehumans experienced the fact that the sounds they made had effects. Conversely, one would experience the effects of another's signal. The experience of such effects is not reflective, since reflection requires thought and thought is yet to emerge. But recognition of the relationship between sign and effect made possible the desire for effect or the desire to communicate. "In the first phase he had learned that signals had a communicative effect, achieved by the communicand hearing, quite as he did, what the signal told. In the final phase he learned that signals had to be sent before they could have a communicative effect, and that they were sent so that they should bring about such effect. Signal-making had become signal-asserting, and the voicing of vocal signals now *said* what the signal told."⁴⁶

With the emergence of this kind of speech, making vocal sounds with the goal of communication, the road was open for self-consciousness, culture, and human nature. The communicator learned that she is a communicator. She learned this by learning that her behavior caused the same effect on a communicand as the communicand's behavior had on her. Language became assertive.

Having learned to speak to another she could also speak to herself. She could think. Being able to assert what she meant in speech to others, an early speaker could also speak to herself, grasping her own meaning. It is a small step for this self-speech to become inaudible. "The ability to *say* something in imagination only, and to 'hear' it as clearly as if it were being said aloud, had appeared." Humanity could think.⁴⁷ The inner conversation wherein one asserts what one experiences constitutes self-consciousness, an immediate awareness of self over and against what is not self.

Self-consciousness and thought (the rudiments of intellect) thereby evolved by a natural process based in physical evolution. No special intervention, no directly created subsistent soul, no *deus ex machina* are required for the appearance of self-conscious intellects.

Human Nature Has a History

This account already posits the historical character of human nature. The movement from rudimentary, animal communication to assertive speech was, presumably, a long and complex process wherein acquired characteristics were transmitted to offspring. The emergence of assertive speech and self-consciousness described above is the achievement of millennia.

Speech is the medium by which these acquired characteristics are transmitted. Children come to self-consciousness and intellectual func-

⁴⁶ Ibid. 172.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 201.

tions by learning to speak.⁴⁸ The development of the species is repeated in the individual as each child repeats and appropriates assertive speech and comes thereby to intellect and self awareness. In this account the capacity to conceptualize, which is pivotal to Aquinas's argument that there must be a subsistent and directly created soul, originates in a child's learning a language. Knowledge of universals is attained by learning how to use words.⁴⁹

Speech carries a way of being-in-the-world, an interpretive structure that Dewart calls the socio-cultural matrix. Speech is neither static nor universal. It is a changing phenomenon, altered by human use and the creativity it enables. The "socio-cultural matrix not only develops the consciousness of individuals, but may also change the nature of consciousness. Human cultural society operates so as to render possible the evolution of the essential nature of man."⁵⁰ Speech and the socio-cultural matrix are the womb of consciousness, the origin of those distinctly human characteristics that cannot be reproduced by physical procreation alone. It follows that human nature is neither univocal nor universal. The reality, experience, and interpretation of selfhood are structured by the socio-cultural matrix. Similarly human intellect, its apprehension of reality, and its modes of rationality are formed by the matrix.

Dewart offers an interesting example of this latter point in a brief treatment of various language groups. He points out that the verb "to be" appears only in Indo-European languages.⁵¹ This verb structures how speakers experience and think about the world. It opens the possibility for metaphysical speculation. This verb form also suggests a notion of reality that *is*, standing on its own, independent of human knowledge or perception.⁵² This notion of reality, which can pass for common sense and a given, occurs within and is made possible by a matrix of linguistic traditions. It is given in the structure of speech. To grant it hegemony, as if it captured reality "as it is in-itself," is to neglect both the historical-cultural character of speech and the fact that speech is intrinsic to what is given as real. The very category "the thing in-itself" reflects the structure of Indo-European predication. The premises of natural-law theory—an objective order, a universal human nature and telos, and a univocal notion of reason—exemplify the character of our socio-cultural matrix.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 168.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 117–48. Plato held that human knowledge of universals was based in memory. The account offered here similarly posits memory as the necessary condition for human ideas. But it asserts that memory is deposited in the language one appropriates rather than in the soul.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 213.

⁵¹ Ancient Sumerian is the one exception to this generalization.

⁵² Dewart, *Evolution and Consciousness* 259–300.

POSSIBILITIES

The evolutionary anthropology described above offers theological discourse both challenges and possibilities.⁵³ There will not be universal agreement on these topics. Different notions of revelation and different philosophical perspectives will lead to an inevitable pluralism within Catholic discourse. A central purpose of the present article is to point out that it is unreasonable to grant Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology an unquestioned hegemony within the Church. The implications of evolutionary theories for theological anthropology, and for understanding homosexual orientation, ought to be permitted a voice within theological discourse. In this concluding section I return to the 1986 Letter to the Bishops in order to indicate some possibilities for reflection and dialogue consequent on permitting a voice to evolutionary perspectives.

Creation and Science

The 1986 Letter to the Bishops is certainly correct when it states that the theology of creation is key to evaluating homosexuality (no. 6). The CDF invokes the first creation account (Genesis 1:1–2:4a) wherein God is pictured as sovereign Lord establishing a well-ordered universe. All is set in its proper place by the divine, creative word.⁵⁴ Human beings must conform to this preestablished, permanent, and universal order. God creates human nature, male and female, in the divine likeness. The complementary distinction between the sexes is set in place by God's creative act so that the love of spouses can participate in God's creation of new life (6). The directly created soul offers a metaphysical foundation for this interpretation of creation and sexuality. As noted earlier, the soul is the formal cause of human nature and the seat of the human impulse toward intimacy, love, and procreation. Human sexuality is uniform and universal. In this view, homosexual orienta-

⁵³ The most obvious challenges of an evolutionary perspective for theological anthropology are the questions of personal immortality and the dignity of the individual. First, Jesus revealed the resurrection. The promise of eternal life is grounded in that revelation. The doctrine of the immortal soul is frequently invoked to account for the continued existence of an individual during the "time-between" personal death and resurrection. Perhaps reflection on the mysterious relationship between existence within history and existence within God's eternity renders such an account unnecessary. Second, there seems no essential contradiction between the dignity of each individual and an evolutionary anthropology. What is at stake here is the manner of God's creation—direct or through secondary causes. This difference does not touch the dignity of each human being. One can argue that physical and historical evolution within divine providence give rise to a creature with an obediential potency for God's Self-communication.

⁵⁴ Richard E. Whitaker, "Creation and Human Sexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seow (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996) 3–13.

tion results from sin. It contradicts the divinely established order for creation, that is, God's design of and will for human sexuality.

The metaphor for creation operative here, and certainly operative in Aquinas, is that of an artisan. Creation is like an exercise of practical reason in which an artisan executes what she has previously designed. But is this an apt metaphor for how the created universe seems to work? The image of the cosmos emerging from contemporary science is not that of a well-ordered world. This topic is too complex to explore here in detail, but Elizabeth Johnson's article cited earlier offers an excellent summary of the emerging scientific perspective.⁵⁵ It appears that we do not find ourselves in a well-ordered cosmos of fixed natures and clear distinctions. Rather, it seems that God has created a universe riddled by chance and random development. Johnson asks a rather speculative question: What if one could turn back time to a period before life had appeared on earth? Would the evolutionary process repeat itself and give rise to human nature as we know it? She responds: "Scientists are virtually unanimous in saying 'no,' so multiple and diverse are the factors that combined to produce our species."⁵⁶ Johnson's speculative query dramatically underscores a tenet of contemporary scientific cosmology. There is no "detailed blueprint or unfolding plan according to which the world was designed and now operates." The world develops through an interplay of chance and law. Evolution is neither anarchy nor teleological. The laws of nature are "descriptive rather than prescriptive, that is, abstract descriptions read off from regularities in the universe that approximate what we observe, rather than rules that preexist platonically apart from the universe, operating to dictate or enforce behavior."⁵⁷

If we bring this perspective to the question of homosexual orientation, new possibilities appear. If human nature evolves, perhaps homosexual orientation is a possibility served up by nature for human sexuality, intimacy, and love.⁵⁸ Perhaps homosexual orientation falls within divine providence, a providence that works within a cosmos wherein nature pursues multiple and diverse possibilities.

The Origins of Sexual Orientation

What causes homosexual orientation? The second part of this article presented the answer of the metaphysical anthropology that under-

⁵⁵ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?"

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 7. Johnson cites William Stoeger, "Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature," in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nacey Murphy, and C. J. Isham (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory; Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1993) 209–34.

⁵⁸ E.g., Patricia Jung and Ralph Smith suggest that homosexual orientation is a natural variation within the created order (*Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge* [Albany: State University of New York, 1993] 30).

girds the 1986 Letter to the Bishops: homosexual orientation is the result of sin; it is a deformation of the soul's natural inclination to heterosexual union. If one accepts Aquinas's anthropology, the data about sexual orientation from other disciplines are irrelevant. Homosexual orientation is an objective disorder: it contradicts the nature's (the soul's) natural inclination to the goods of married love and procreation. From this premise flow the positions of the CDF in its various interventions on this topic.

But most researchers into the origins of sexual orientation do not presume Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology. Rather, they work within the evolutionary perspective generally accepted by contemporary science. Theories about the causes of sexual orientation abound, and no one claims to understand fully the complex character of human sexuality. Some biological basis for sexual orientation is commonly accepted, although most think that causality cannot be reduced to biology. Given the mix of biology and social factors described in the evolutionary perspective just presented, clear divisions between nature and nurture (social construction) cannot be neatly drawn. The second chapter of Gerald Coleman's recent book, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice*, offers an excellent summary and evaluation of various theories (genetic, hormonal, psychological) concerning the causes of sexual orientation. Coleman concludes, "As of this writing, the cause/causes of homosexuality is/are unknown; and the scientific study of sexuality is truly in its infancy." There is "substantial reason to approach the scientific topic of homosexuality with caution, respect and humility, as the overwhelming complexity of the issue merits."⁵⁹

Perhaps the preceding reflections can help to open a space, so that the insights of this infant science can find a voice in Roman Catholic moral discourse. The CDF's judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder is an a priori declaration that new evidence is irrelevant (unless it bolsters the congregation's perspective). In view of the limits of the metaphysical anthropology that grounds the category "objective disorder," the need for reconsideration "with caution, respect and humility" seems clear. Moreover, as suggested earlier, this opening is consistent with the spirit of Aquinas who made use of the best science of his day to construct his anthropology. One is faithful to his spirit not by dogmatizing his best judgments, but by continuing his quest.

The Meaning of Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation embraces more than the object of erotic passion. It involves our desire for the goods of intimacy, friendship, and romantic relationships. A number of commentators have indicated that the

⁵⁹ Coleman, *Homosexuality* 53–54.

1986 Letter to the Bishops never really comes to grips with this understanding of sexual orientation. Robert Nugent points out that, while that letter acknowledges a distinction between the homosexual condition and genital acts, it seems to collapse one into the other.⁶⁰ There is a recognition that "a homosexual person, as every human being, deeply needs to be nourished at many different levels simultaneously" (no. 16). Spiritual nourishment is commended, especially the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation (no. 15). The help of the psychological, social, and medical sciences is also recommended, but only insofar as they conform to church teaching (no. 17). What of the other needs of homosexual persons? For example, may lesbians and gay men at least enjoy the intimacy allowed in the chaste dating practices of adolescents? The admonition that a "truly pastoral approach will appreciate the need for homosexual persons to avoid the near occasions of sin" (no. 15) seems to exclude even this.⁶¹

The logic of the CDF's approach is based on its judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. The sexual impulse and the impulse toward intimacy cannot be divided into discrete units. Often impulses to intimacy and love are intrinsically erotic. If the hormones of homosexuals are disordered, so too are their hearts. The heterosexual's impulse toward love and self-giving ranks among humanity's highest potentials. Indeed it can lead couples to become the very sacrament of divine love. But for homosexuals these impulses are taken to be the result of sin and directed toward evil.⁶² For the heterosexual the impulse to sexual union is a marvelous gift from God. For the homosexual it is considered the curse of Adam's sin. According to the Letter to the Bishops, the homosexual's disordered sexual inclination is "essentially self-indulgent" (7). Consequently, the homosexual's

⁶⁰ Robert Nugent, "Sexual Orientation in Vatican Thinking," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality* 52-54. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adopts the same strategy: "Homosexuality refers to relations between men or women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex." Homosexuality is defined as "relations." Then, citing Scripture and natural law, the catechism asserts that homosexual acts are a "grave depravity" and "intrinsically disordered" (2357). The catechism observes that the number of people who have "deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible." The homosexual condition is not chosen and "for most . . . is a trial." "Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (2358). One notes the awkward wording here. The word "orientation" is avoided and "discrimination" is modified, one presumes, to conform to the CDF's position that some discrimination is advisable.

⁶¹ The advice of *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes the same point. After recommending chastity and self-mastery to homosexuals, the catechism suggests homosexuals can approach Christian perfection "at times by the support of disinterested friendship" (2359). I take "disinterested friendship" to be a euphemism for relationships free of romantic or erotic feelings.

⁶² One of the reasons many Catholics, heterosexual and homosexual, reject the Church's teaching on this topic is that their experience of gay relationships contradicts what must follow from the congregation's position.

impulses to intimacy and love are judged to be impulses to selfishness and evil which should be repressed.

How does the CDF know this? It is an inevitable conclusion deduced from the major premise that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. Deduction is the manner of logic appropriate to a metaphysical anthropology, and the logic of the congregation's position is irresistible. If the form of human existence, the soul, is directly created by God and its sexual drive is ordered toward heterosexual union, then the homosexual's spontaneous impulse to intimacy and romantic love is disordered. No matter the assurance that homosexual orientation is not a personal sin, being so disordered is a shameful condition that, as the congregation seems to recommend, is best kept secret.⁶³

If other anthropological perspectives are permitted space within ecclesial discourse, other data and possibilities, including the lived experience of homosexual persons, can find a voice. Perhaps what homosexuals describe as good and as authentic human love might be just that. Perhaps the fidelity of partners and friends through terminal illness, so frequently commented on by caregivers, flows from grace-filled love rather than from an "essentially self indulgent" impulse. However, as long as the metaphysical anthropology described above enjoys an untroubled hegemony, such data are hidden beneath a cloak of deductive certitude.

The Church and Public Policy

I noted earlier the CDF's resistance to any public policies or structures that seem to validate homosexual acts or the homosexual lifestyle. For example, in the case of the hiring of teachers, the congregation justifies discrimination against openly homosexual persons. As a consequence young lesbians and gay men are deprived of positive role models. How are individuals who find themselves homosexual to structure their lives? Heterosexuals are offered positive role models and are supported by a variety of social structures (e.g., dating and courtship rituals, and the institution of marriage with all its legal supports and sanctions) to help them construct healthy, integrated lives. Yet even with all this public support, heterosexuals do not find integration and chastity easy. By opposing efforts to establish public structures that help homosexuals integrate their lives in a healthy manner, the Church risks making itself part of the problem rather than the solution. But the category of objective disorder leaves no alternative. Based on the CDF's interventions, the only advice the Church can offer homosexual persons is to stay celibate and quiet.

In contrast, should the opening I am suggesting occur, the Church might enter into a dialogue with homosexual persons about what pub-

⁶³ CDF, "Some Considerations concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons" 14.

lic policies and structures would be helpful for human flourishing.⁶⁴ Young people who find themselves homosexual might be offered positive role models. They might be helped to integrate their sexuality in wholesome, generous, and fully Christian ways.

A Concluding Word

Finally, let me assure the reader that I am not so naïve as to think my suggestions on this topic will be widely embraced. But it seems to me unreasonable to grant Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology an unquestioned hegemony within Catholic discourse. I entitled this last section "Possibilities." I have in mind the possibility of thinking about human nature in a manner consistent with contemporary science, the possibility of building theological anthropologies from within this perspective, the possibility of rethinking the CDF's judgment that homosexual orientation is objectively disordered, and the possibility of reconsidering ecclesial opposition to public structures that support homosexual persons. Finally, I have in mind the possibility that the authentic love of homosexual persons might indeed be a gift within the provident care of God.

⁶⁴ Many Roman Catholics already participate in this kind of dialogue. But such efforts by theologians and pastoral ministers (e.g. New Ways Ministry) frequently come under Roman scrutiny and are marginalized by local ecclesial authorities.

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