

Conscious Birth Restriction

By Paul L. Blakely, S.J.

Are we brutes, or have we fallen to a level below the brute, for which there is no name but perversion? A brute may be held in some respects a noble creation, swift of foot it may be, glossy of coat, a delight to the eye. Even your hog with ringed nose tip-tilted above the swell of the mire, is as God made him. He has no rational soul; but he is absolutely true to his instincts. Within his lowly sphere, he fulfils, by the compulsion of nature, it is true, Falstaff's resolution to live cleanly as a gentleman should. For he is no pervert. He has no desire to limit or end his kind. In comparison with the beast which the harpies of modern social progress would make us, he is a ministering angel, kindly, gracious and lovable.

In the pages of certain American newspapers and magazines, this social progress is "gabbling like a thing most brutish." We are regaled with details hitherto confined to the pages of textbooks on veterinary science. Whether or not the methods of birth restrictions therein recommended are fit and profitable may be left to the decision of the expert stock raiser. They are intended for brutes, and they may be suited for brutes, but man is not a brute. He has a rational soul. Independently of divine revelation, he knows the difference between right and wrong, and he can not free himself from the responsibility attaching to acts freely posited. He differs, therefore, and essentially, from the beast of the field. To apply the methods of stock raising to the human race is a thing more vile and stupid than any plot cooked in the befuddled brain of drunken Caliban, at home in his mud. For Caliban, be it remembered, very like a hog in many respects, like a hog was no perverter of the law of his nature.

According to Section 1142 of the New York Penal Code, to give information leading to race suicide is a misdemeanor. "This law," says an apostle of modern progress, "is a disgrace and a scandal." "The most progressive men and women," warns another, "can see the danger to the race in this and similar archaic legislation." "It is a matter of common supposition," adds a third, "that contraceptives are used by the well-to-do and better-educated classes. It is fairly evident that such methods are not being used by the poorest and most ignorant people. Thus the rate of increase is coming fastest from those who, by their physical and mental status and their environment, are least able to bring into the world healthy children, and to raise them to be efficient men and women." "Any person with a scientific education," argues a lady, who recently sued for wages due her for advocating, as a disinterested witness for "the uplift," certain moving pictures banned by the New York police, "must believe that this law should be

repealed. The knowledge of birth control should be given to all classes." This is the noisome argument of the "uplifters," most of them, to our shame be it confessed, women, who are endeavoring to repeal or amend Section 1142, the one poor, slender bar which prevents those for whom statute law is the sole norm of morality, from doing what they can to put an end to the human race by frustrating the law of nature.

The ostensible purpose of these vampires of society is to improve the human race. This they will do by popularizing a practice which directly and primarily makes the continuance of the human race impossible. Without restricting marital rights, this practice will relieve the contracting parties of the burden incidental to the rearing of children until such time as husband and wife are able to perform these duties satisfactorily. When this stage, economic, physical or moral, has been reached, it is proposed to allow the law of nature to operate without interference. It is also plain that a general knowledge of effective contraceptives will be of great value to persons contemplating or sustaining illicit unions.

It may be remarked at the outset, that no proof is offered, or can be offered, tending to show, first, that the physical organs functioning in procreation, are made fitter for their office by deliberate, habitual misuse; or, secondly, that the moral and psychic changes induced by this practice, and affecting the domain of the will, strengthen the individual to assume the necessary burdens of parenthood. But apart from these considerations, and granting for the moment that, year by year, thousands of human beings come into existence diseased and crippled, to fill our foundling homes, or to pass from surroundings of poverty and vice into hospitals, lunatic asylums and jails, let us come to the fundamental point at issue: Can men and women freely posit the act of which procreation is the natural term, and licitly shirk parenthood?

To this question, a negative is the only possible answer. No interference with the law of nature can be tolerated, whether the act leading to procreation be promiscuous, or sanctioned by the bond of marriage. If, in a given instance, valid reasons make the natural result of the union of the generative principles inadvisable, this end must be attained, not by a perversion of the functions of nature, but by abstinence.

This position, championed notably by the Catholic Church, is founded neither upon an arbitrarily chosen basis of man-made morality, nor upon changing reasons of expediency. It rests upon the natural law, the rule of conduct found in the constitution of our being. It was to this law that Cicero referred when he spoke of that ordination "not written, but born within us; which we have not learned or received by tradition, or read, but which we have sucked in, imbibed, from nature itself." St. Augustine, one of the master-minds of time, defines it "as the reason or will of God, commanding the observance of the natural order and forbidding its

violation"; St. Thomas, as "the rational creature's participation in the eternal law." It is not given by supernatural revelation; both in being and in point of time, it is prior to revelation, strictly so called. It presupposes, as Kant admits, that knowledge of God which is acquired, not through revelation, but by reason; and its purpose is to guide all contingent beings to their natural end.

A master of jurisprudence, Blackstone, offers the following illuminating comments upon the natural law:

As man depends absolutely upon his Maker in all things, it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker's will. . . . This will of his Maker is called the law of nature. . . . When He created man and endued him with free will to conduct himself in all parts of life, He laid down certain immutable laws of human nature. . . . He laid down only such laws as were founded in those relations of justice that existed in the nature of things antecedent to any positive precept. . . . These are the eternal immutable laws of good and evil. . . . which He has enabled reason to discover, so far as they are necessary for the conduct of human actions. . . . This law of nature. . . . is binding all over the globe, in all countries and at all times: no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this.

It is not necessary, then, to invoke supernatural revelation to show that acts militating against the preservation of the human species are in violation of the natural law, for, as Blackstone points out, this law is made known to man "by reason, so far as is necessary for the conduct of human nature." Man has, by his nature, the propensity and power to propagate his kind. This power, unless we are to accept a philosophy of hedonism and anarchy destructive of all society, is not given primarily for the good of the individual, but for the good of the species. Man can not attain the development suggested by nature without society; society can not exist if the generative function be perverted. The preservation of the human race, imperatively demanded by right reason and order, can be secured only by the means provided by nature. According to nature's law, the effect of the union of the generative principles is, *de se*, procreation. But the use of contraceptives effectively prevents procreation. It is, therefore, a violation of the natural law, and of its nature, forbidden.

To this argument, the following rebuttal has been offered. It is not intended to advise a permanent use of contraceptives. Like every human faculty, the generative power is to be exercised only under a wise restraint and with full understanding of its consequences to the individual and to society. But the natural law is not defeated by a single isolated act, or, indeed, by a series of such acts, restricted to a given pair. On the contrary, the true purpose of the law, the conservation of society, is best served by producing, through selective processes, a stock which will evolve a more highly perfected race.

In reply, it must be said that the time limits proposed by the advocates of birth restriction have no bearing on the argument. Common sense bears witness that the essential morality of an act is determined by its agreement or disagreement with a fixed norm; and this without reference to past conduct or to resolutions for the future. Lying is lying, whether I propose to give over lying after a single isolated infraction of the truth, or whether I have the unalterable determination of lying as long as I have breath. An individual is rightly called a thief, despite his intention to tread the ways of honesty after he has acquired a competency by thieving. Furthermore, it is nothing less than anarchy to sanction a violation of law on the ground that a single infraction does not effectively destroy the general purpose of the law.

Equally outside the question is the avowal of these advocates, that their sole intention is to improve the human race. The end does not justify the means; and it is with their methods, not with their intentions, that precise issue is raised. The order that is in the essence of things postulates that a faculty attain the end to which its nature impels it, and for which it is primarily and essentially intended. Such interference, then, as effectively prevents the faculty from attaining its end, violates the nature of that faculty. To uphold the contrary of this proposition involves a denial of the existence of the natural law. Now, no argument can obscure the fact that the primary end, intended by the very nature of the generative principles, is procreation; for these principles by their nature tend to this end and to no other. But the use of a contraceptive directly and effectively prevents the generative principles from attaining the end for which they are primarily and essentially intended, and is, therefore, an act specifically prohibited by the natural law.

Times have changed from the days when mother, wife, child, were terms which bore about them a sweetness and a sanctity almost supernal. We have thrown God out of our literature, our philosophy, our politics, our schools, our practical lives, and now we are taught that it is holy to eliminate Him completely from our very nature. Hence we are brought face to face with that most horrible of corruptions, the unnatural rottenness that is worked by fleshly lust unchained. In the first chapter of Romans, St. Paul bears witness to the fearful perversion of a once hardy, virile people. What stands between us and like ruin, if the counsels of these modern apostles of unutterable vileness, "whose very name it is a shame to speak," prevail? The truth of the living God, the law expressed in their nature, they made a lie; for this cause God gave them over to shameful affections. It is inevitable. Blot out God, and eternal night descends; and through the reeking vapors, the harpies hasten to feast upon this decadent mass that once was decency, high-mindedness, the purity of womanhood and the honor of man.

This article was originally printed in *The Catholic Mind*, June 22, 1915,
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