

MAN AND NATURAL BEHAVIOR

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WHY sure it's natural—just like the urge to eat." Thus the defender of all things labeled "liberal" was discoursing about the sex instinct. His final sentence was intended to clinch his case. It was to be the finishing touch of his whole argument that the sex urge was natural to man, and therefore, should always be satisfied. He even extolled divine Wisdom Who implanted this urge in our human nature with the purpose of bringing delight into the lives of men and women! To slake one's sexual thirst at any human font was natural and in accord with human nature. We must not suffer inhibitions! Not even marital obligations should unduly limit this noble impulse! This apostle for modern ideas carried on his apologia for sexual promiscuity in this vein (and subsequently condemned celibacy as unnatural and selfish). Then he made a polemic mistake—he took time out to catch his breath. Before he had chance to continue, I became so ungentlemanly as to ask him this question: "By the way, this word *natural* has me confused. Would you mind telling me what you mean by it?" My question perplexed him for a few seconds, but he was not to be floored so easily. He began to explain. It was then that I really saw that his argument for being human was constructed on the shifting sand of "double-talk." He was employing the word *natural* in a way that was both misleading and deceptive. He had become a victim of a disease as widespread as the common cold—the misuse of words. The most notable symptom of this malady is the use of common words and attaching to them singular meanings. The victims of this sickness are legion. It is our purpose in this article to bring into relief the true meaning of the word *natural* in relation to human actions, and also to give the basic elements for an antidote against the virus of "double-talk" that frequently causes moral death.

DECEPTIVE SPEECH ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

In most false arguments there is some semblance of truth. Truth allures our minds. The "double-talker's" arguments are appealing and attractive because of the truth, however little, they contain. But

the arguments they offer so confidently are not so strong as they would have you believe. The weak link in their intellectual chain is the unorthodox notions of human nature. They endeavour to fortify these notions by the deceptive use of so common a word as *natural*.

We have said that these people resort to treachery in speech. Now the most effective way of exposing this cunning strategy in the misuse of speech is to see words used properly, for,

. . . true expression like the unchanging Sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.¹

Perhaps a story will illustrate this proper use of words. Close to our high school there was a French restaurant the students were wont to patronize. Everything was French: the menu, conversation, and even the preparation of the food. There were many advantages. It was not only a way to have a great deal of fun, but was likewise a very practical pedagogical trick in learning French. Then too, the food was excellent. I remember my first experience in the place. We had been subjected to a semester of French and thought that we knew something about the language. But, on scanning the dinner special on the menu for that day I was a bit puzzled. Some of the words looked more like—well, anyway they weren't in my limited vocabulary. However, one dinner special struck my fancy. But, the word describing it had me guessing. It was *chateaubriand*. I thought it would be good; the price indicated that. It was not long before the uncanny waiter sensed my trouble and came over to our table. In faulty French I asked him for the name of this special in English. He answered smilingly: "Why that's steak." That day I ate *chateaubriand*—a big juicy steak. Now the point of this story is that words should aim at communicating truth. Though words may be materially different they should express the same objective reality. The waiter and I knew that the thing about which we were talking was objectively the same. There was no "double-talk."

There is, then, a proper mode of using words. Though languages may differ in their word structure, nevertheless, there should be a unity in the things they represent and signify. In our story the difference in words was only material and linguistic; the words had a proper unity in representing the same objective reality. This proper manner of speech may be illustrated further by another example. Wood or bricks may be used in the construction of a house. The

¹ *An Essay on Criticism*—Alexander Pope.

same thing (i.e., the house) is produced even though the materials used are quite different. So too, in communicating an idea, people of different countries may fittingly use words that are materially different but are formally the same in the thing they represent or symbolize. In this proper utility of speech the thing which the words purport to signify is objectively the same. This is proper speech.

Now we must analyze "double-talk" which springs from and is caused by the improper use of words. Deception is the product of "double-talk." This is evident from the way in which that married man argued about the sex urge being natural and good. He claimed his principle was true even if the sex urge was satisfied in extra-marital relations. Whatever is natural is good, is his principle of human living. There is much truth in this principle because being and goodness are convertible. But, his application of the principle to justify his licentious way of living is unfounded and untrue. The reasons for his error will be explained later on. It is sufficient here to maintain that he is wrong. His life, insofar as he is man, is more bestial than human; and, such a life is unnatural to man as man. Knowingly or unknowingly this liberal, like so many others, has been duped about the purpose of human living. Yet, he too, with almost apostolic zeal endeavours to dupe others by this deceptive use of the word *natural*.

Those who resort to this deceptive mode of speech as a ruse, or as an excuse, for their promiscuity are guilty of sophistic talk. They are real "double-talkers." This trick is accomplished by attaching a special and improper meaning to a common word. They will employ the same words used in everyday conversation, but the meaning they intend to convey is very singular. Their most effective weapon is deception, like the Jap clad in the uniform of one of our Marines in the Guadalcanal campaign. This equivocal talk so common today is a deception that arises from one word signifying many things in different ways. This "double-talk," which is also known as Fallacy in Speech, consists in a unity of word structure and a diversity of things represented. The word *natural* has many meanings, and unless it is used properly, "double-talk" arises.

"Double-talkers," in exhibiting their plumage of sophisms, are as proud as peacocks. "Double-talkers" and humble men are seldom close friends. Humility is closely allied to truth. In conversations and discussions sophists are seldom in quest of truth, but "wishing to appear wise" seek self-glorification, self-justification, and the hearty applause of their auditors. Equivocation is directly opposed to the proper use of words. We saw that in proper and truthful

speech there can be a material difference in words, but they must always be one in the object signified. However, in "double-talk" there is a material likeness in words, but the thing signified is formally and completely different. Double-talk is not a modern invention, like a bazooka gun; it was bequeathed to the world by the ancient intellectuals who practiced this art. Many used Latin in their speech and were masters of equivocation. The Latin word—*canis*—is a good example of this double-talk; for this word means any of three things: dog, dog star, dog fish. Often they had the dog star barking! Such speech brings confusion, not truth. The word *natural* is often so misused by the "double-talkers" of today.

MAN IS AN IMAGE OF GOD

We have said that the protagonist for promiscuous sexual pleasure as *natural* employed this word in a deceptive and untrue way. Our next task is to prove this statement. This too calls for a close analysis of Man. Now the word *natural* as applied to Man can have two meanings, each in a different order. Human actions have a material part and a formal part. For the sake of convenience, we shall call the material part of human actions our PHYSICAL consideration of the nature of Man, and the formal part of human action our MORAL consideration. This distinction is very fundamental and very necessary for a complete and true notion of human life. This distinction is not original; it is based on the moral teachings of the Angelic Doctor.²

In the physical order an act is considered to be *natural* if it is an action proper to the nature of a faculty.³ It is natural to use your legs in walking, ears in hearing, and eyes in seeing, as experience teaches. The faculties of our mind and body are so constituted by God that their special functions can be performed easily. We may thank Divine Wisdom for that. What wisdom is manifested in the intricate make-up of the human eye and ear! But Man is not fenced in by things physical. In the physical sphere only part of Man is taken into consideration. Man is a composite of matter and spirit—and the spiritual part is the more noble. To look at the physical side of Man and judge all human actions by physical norms is to caricature God's image. Such a lopsided view is prevalent today in all spheres of society. The conclusions of such a philosophy

² Cf. *Summa Theologica*; I II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3; q. 18, a. 4; q. 20, a. 6; II II, q. 141, a. 1, ad 1.

³ Cf. *Summa Theologica*; I, q. 78, a. 1, ad 3.

of life manifest its falsity. Strength and size would be the greatest human virtues. Then the ox and the elephant would be our models for living. Pain and pleasure would be the criteria for actions. The top rung of success would be bodily health. That would be the great desire to be fulfilled in this life. Then promiscuity would be considered an aid to health, therefore good and natural, provided one did not become infected with any virulent disease. The virtue of patriotism would have little or no attraction, because men would shudder at such evils as pain and sacrifice.

From the perfection in knowledge the human mind is able to attain, it is evident that Man is more than corporeal. We can know many intangible realities that transcend the realm of sense knowledge. Men are willing to fight for and defend such things as goodness and truth and freedom, because they know what these realities are. In other words, the physical make-up of Man is not as distinctive a part of human nature as is the spiritual soul. It is Man's soul that makes him distinctively human and causes the sensitive life of Man to be more noble and more perfect than in the members of the animal kingdom.⁴ This sense perfection in Man is due chiefly to his rational soul.

So far we have seen that Man's likeness to the brutes is only material and generic. From a correct and unbiased human perspective this similarity is minor and incomplete. There is a chasm between human and animal life that can never be adequately bridged. No matter how perfect a brute becomes, he can never reach the sphere of human life. It follows, then, that the word *natural*, when applied to any human action, has a very particular signification. It must refer primarily to the formal part of the action—namely, the act insofar as it is human. Only when Man acts in accord with his human nature is he really being human. Human nature is essentially a union of body and soul.⁵ To overemphasize either part is to disfigure Man. Man is neither an angel, nor a brute. He is in a class by himself, though he has something in common with both kingdoms.

TO BE HUMAN, MAN MUST BE MORAL

To judge whether or not a human action is *natural*, we must refer to that which determines that action as human. This is necessary because Man is not just a physical entity, but is primarily a MORAL being. He is a moral being, subject to the rules of moral-

⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologica*: III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; I, q. 76, a. 3, ad 4.

⁵ Cf. *Summa Theologica*: I, q. 75, aa. 1, 4, 5.

ity because he is lord and master of his human actions. He possesses this sovereignty over all those human actions which he does willingly and with some deliberation.⁶ In other words, Man's actions are human only when they are deliberately willed. This power to deliberate about human actions is the touchstone of human liberty. We are entitled to this freedom of action because of our rational nature. Freedom, too, is a word, like *natural*, often misused—freedom does not consist in doing only what you want; that leads too often to the abuse of this precious heritage of Mankind. To find out, then, what is proper to Man as Man we must consider the integral Man, the WHOLE Man, the man with whom we rub elbows everyday on trains, streetcars, and in the corner-store. Human corpses and souls separated from their bodies by death are not whole men. Therefore, human actions that are worthy of the name are actions of Men who are not forced to do things against their will. Human actions, insofar as they conform to the rules of the moral law established by God, make us more like Him Whose image we are; insofar as Men do not follow these moral laws inscribed on their hearts, the image is marred and the temple desecrated. These moral laws change neither with the seasons nor with the weather. They are objective and stable, implanted in our souls by God Himself. The rule for determining the morality of all human actions is the blueprint of human action in the divine intellect. Morality is not something subjective only, as some would have us believe; neither is a thing's utility an adequate gauge of morality. Through our human nature we creatures participate in the knowledge of the Divine Architect's blueprint for human actions. For us men and women the stern and heartless judge of our human actions is Right Reason. Reason gives us the moral verdict of our actions. It does not do this in a public trial, but through the soft-spoken voice of our consciences. From this it should be evident that to be genuinely *natural*, a human act must perfect us according to the divine design, God's blueprint. Any other act, though performed by Man willingly and deliberately, is not natural in the order that is specifically human—the Moral order. Only when a human action conforms to the inexorable laws of right reason is it morally good and genuinely trademarked *natural*. A virtuous life is connatural to Man; vice makes men monsters. We Catholics, it should be noted here, are aware that we cannot be truly virtuous without the grace of God, which elevates our actions to the super-natural plane.

⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologica*: I II, q. 1, a. 1.

So far we have been considering the dual significance of the word *natural* as applied to human actions. This twofold signification we have called Physical and Moral. Human acts are truly *natural* when they are morally good. To identify physical goodness and moral goodness in human actions is to distort the wisdom of the Creator. The "double-talker's" error about the nature of Man consequently leads to a complete identity of things that are essentially different. They concentrate on the material likeness of things and neglect the formal differences. In doing this they are imitating, whether they know it or not, the craft and cunning of that creature who is to "lie in wait for Her heel."⁷

By analyzing the word *natural* in relation to human actions we have exposed the error of the man who claimed that promiscuous sexual pleasure is natural. He was wrong because he confused moral goodness and physical goodness. He tried to make what is material in man—the body—the measure for things natural to Man. He had a bit of truth which he was distorting to the shape he desired. An antidote for such deceptive speech is a better knowledge of the world about us and a more intense love of the Creator. Then we shall be able to speak correctly about God's creatures and not be misled by subtle talkers whose aim is to destroy our souls. All of us Catholics, in these days when "double-talk" is so prevalent and Christ's teachings are so perverted, may well heed the warnings of Saint Paul:

Now this I say, that no man may deceive you by loftiness of words. Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit; according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.

Col. 2 vv, 4 and 8.

⁷ *Genesis*: c. 3, v. 15.