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Snježana Prijić – Samaržija
Department of Philosophy,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Rijeka
prijić@uniri.hr

The Moral Status of Contraception and Openness to Procreation

Abstract: *Permissibility of contraception as a method of birth control is closely connected with issues of moral justification of reproductive autonomy, namely the question whether or not individuals should be allowed to autonomously and freely decide if they are going to have children, when and how many. The development of medical and scientific technologies led to the usage of artificial methods of contraception that can prevent conception with the goal of postponing and planning the birth of a child. In the first part I analyse the bioethical arguments that appear in debates about reproductive autonomy and which can be mobilized against the permissibility of contraception. In the second part I have compared the bioethical arguments to those used against the artificial contraception in the literature about the philosophy of sexuality. In the third and final part, I have argued against the stance of G.E.M. Anscombe and J. Finnis that there is morally relevant distinction between artificial and natural methods of birth control.*

Key words: *contraception, bioethics, philosophy of sexuality, reproductive autonomy, intention, natural and artificial methods*

1. Introduction

The development of medical and scientific technologies led to the usage of artificial methods of contraception (barrier methods, hormone and chemical methods, intrauterine devices, surgical methods) that can prevent conception with the goal of postponing and planning the birth of a child. Individual autonomy in deciding whether to have children, how many and when becomes far greater than in the time when birth control was reduced to abstinence and the rhythm method of fertile and infertile days. As a result, the debate about the moral status of contraception is opened in a way that some participants qualified the use of artificial methods as morally unacceptable.

The dubious moral status of contraception and birth control was primarily derived from the broader procreative theory of human sexuality. More precisely, the moral prohibition of contraception was directly associated with the stance of the Catholic Church as an institution that supports a more restrictive view of sexual ethics and especially reproductive autonomy. However, the views on contraception that were set out in the Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI

and that were defended by reputable Catholic philosophers such as John Finnis and G.E.M. Anscombe are the main target of our questioning. (Pope Paul VI 1968, Finnis 1970, Anscombe 1975, 1981). It should be noted that this Encyclical Letter provoked great attention of theorists and the public because the traditionally more restrictive doctrinal stance on birth control and contraception was liberalized. Namely, even though the general view on procreative autonomy was specified in the words: “each and every single married couple must be open towards creating life”, the so-called natural methods of birth control or the methods known as the rhythm method (of fertile and infertile days) were allowed. At the same time, all artificial methods of contraception were labelled as morally wrong: every action specifically intended to prevent procreation is forbidden, including both chemical and barrier methods of contraception because all these were held to directly contradict the natural and moral order which was established by God. I have argued in this paper against the arguments of G.E.M. Anscombe and J. Finnis that artificial contraception is morally more questionable than the natural methods of birth control. The main issue of the paper is the analysis of what is wrong with the artificial birth control methods or specifically, what is the morally relevant difference between natural and artificial birth control methods that can justify the different treatment of these methods.

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It has to be noticed that the moral status of contraception is closely connected with the issues that appear in bioethics debates about the moral status of abortion, medically assisted conception or in vitro fertilisation, surrogate motherhood and similar topics. However, comparatively with the mentioned issues regarding procreative autonomy, questioning contraception was rarely stressed as relevant topic in bioethical debates. On the other side, the moral status of contraception received deserved attention in the seventies and early eighties of the last century in the debates about human sexuality. Consequently, we will investigate the moral status of contraception firstly in bioethical debates and then in the debates about the philosophy of sexuality (in the framework of which Finnis and Anscombe offer their proposals).

2. The status of contraception in bioethics debates

Contraception can be defined as a procedure/method of preventing conception with the goal of planning the birth of a child or simply as a method of pregnancy control. Some authors, such as, for instance, G.E.M. Anscombe, suggest that only artificial methods can be named as contraception refusing to apply the same label to natural methods. However, we will use the notion in a broader sense in which natural methods as well as artificial methods should be treated as contraception because all of them aim to prevent conception.¹

1 When debating artificial methods, I will not refer to post-coital protection, the use of emergency pills and methods such as sterilization. Although sterilization of men and women

On the other side, the absence of the problem of contraception as the focus of bioethics debates can seem quite odd. Debates about reproductive autonomy need to embrace contraception as well as other issues such as abortion, assisted reproduction, surrogate motherhood, prenatal diagnostics, experimentation on embryos, ectogenesis and similar topics. Or, as Devine explains, contraception as well as abortion and infanticide are all measures that enable human beings to enjoy the form of sexual experience most of them prefer while at the same time avoiding or negating its reproductive consequences. (Devine 1983). On the other side, it is comprehensible because the arguments about the moral permissibility of abortion, medically assisted conception or especially infanticide are based on the question whether or not murder is admissible, which makes the issue of contraception less morally severe. For instance, a majority of pro-life philosophers define abortion as homicide because the life of a person with all her rights, including the right to live, allegedly starts at the moment of conception. However, the same philosophers hold that contraception cannot be treated as a homicide.

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Nevertheless, contraception as well as abortion or in vitro fertilization imposes the dilemmas concerning the intrinsic value of life or the value of 'humanity as an inviolable end'. (Masek 2008). "(...) we believe (...) that a premature death is bad in itself, even when it is not bad for any particular person. Many people believe this about suicide and euthanasia—that a terrible thing has happened when someone takes his own life or when his doctor kills him at his own request even when death may be in that person's own best interests. We believe the same about abortion: that it is sometimes wrong not because it violates a fetus's right or harms its interests, but in spite of a fetus's having no rights or interests to violate. (...) the life of a human organism has intrinsic value in any form it takes (...). (Dworkin 2001: 158). Contraception truly prevents the creation of life or decreases the number of people that would exist if contraception was not used. There are several argumentation lines that appeal more or less directly to the potentiality: it is wrong to prevent the existence of any potential person who would naturally become a rational and conscious person which would be able to think and feel pain or it is a serious mistake to intervene in a process that has some degree of potentiality in terms of the creation of a new person.

can also be classified as an artificial contraception method, in this article I will leave the specific debate about the permanent status and irreversibility of this method out of our focus. Also, I'll leave post-coital contraception aside because this type of contraception is distinct in nature and, according to many philosophers the moral status of these pills includes the discussion of abortion (the aim of this device is to prevent further pre-natal development if conception has already occurred). Also, the inclusion of this procedure in the discussion would require additional moral debates, such as, for example, whether doctors and specialists may refuse to give the pill because they for reasons of conscience refuse to assist in performing abortions and similar issues, which are not relevant for the majority of other artificial devices. (See in Card 2007).

However, it seems that the majority of participants in the discussion about potentiality deny the possibility of applying this argument to the case of contraception. For instance, Laura Purdy stresses the non-identity problem claiming that there seems to be no reason to believe that possible individuals are either deprived or injured if they do not exist. If we had not been created, we would not exist and there would be nobody to be deprived of anything. (Purdy 1996). Don Marquis holds that his 'deprivation argument' cannot be applied here because the wrongfulness of contraception cannot be deduced from the argument of damaging the future person-like-us, simply because there is not a subject that we can non-arbitrarily identify as one of those who suffer any harm. Nothing at all is denied such a future by contraception, he writes. (Marquis 1989: 201). Further, John Noonan noticed that the probability that the sperm and egg will, after sexual intercourse, develop into new life is not sufficiently high to talk about a potential person and her potential rights. Contraception needs to be permissible because of the small likelihood that spermatozoa will develop into thinking and feeling moral agents²(Noonan 1970). It seems that the majority of pro-life philosophers think that contraception does not violate any person's rights nor in any clear and proximate way injure common purposes of civil society (Grisez 1965). Besides, to this potentiality argument a certain slippery slope objection can be set out: if not being brought into existence was an injury and we were committed to a principle of minimizing harm, this would imply the absurd conclusion that failing to reproduce at a maximal rate is a moral wrong (Card 2007).

We can resume that from the bioethical perspective, it seems that there is no proper reason to prohibit contraception: it does not violate the intrinsic value of life, nor the humanity as an inviolable end. However, more important here is the conclusion that no matter how we summarize the bioethical debate about the moral status of contraception, it is essential to notice that that the participants in the discussions do not perceive any morally relevant difference between artificial and natural methods of contraception. If, for the sake of birth control,

2 J. Noonan argues that in each ejaculation there are 200 million sperm cells from which only one has a chance to develop into a zygote; and from 100 000 oocytes only 390 ovulate. On the other hand, even if we take into account that there is a 20% chance of miscarriage, in about four of five cases a new being will have a chance to develop before conception. However, according to him, after conception, a sharp change in probability happens, which also signifies a huge jump in potentialities. (See in Prijić – Samaržija 2007). It should be noticed that some philosophers criticize Noonan's and Marquis's position according to which the prohibition of contraception does not follow from the prohibition of abortion. However, their conclusion is not directed against the moral permissibility of contraception but, rather, that abortion need to be abolished. (Norcross 1990). I do not want here to enter into the discussion whether antiabortionists are right when they approve contraception while arguing against abortion. I only want to register that even antiabortionists do not think that the arguments they use against abortion could be applicable to contraception.

sexual relations are practiced only during the infertile days when it is impossible to conceive, the creation of a new person is prevented in the same way as in the case of usage of artificial contraception during the fertile days. In other words, the stances presented in the Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*—according to which the rhythm method is admissible while artificial contraception is not—cannot be supported with the arguments that are offered in bioethical debates.

3. The procreative theory of sexuality and contraception

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Surprisingly or not, more systematic argumentation about the moral status of contraception can be derived from the field that deals with the issue about the nature of human sexuality. The Christian doctrine has, from its very beginning, connected human sexuality with the fallen human nature that cannot control its sexual urges and lust and, consequently, recognizes sexuality as wrong and shameful (St. Augustine 1966). However, it is clearly realised that sexual relations are the only way of conception and procreation. The resulting stance of the procreative theory about human sexuality was that sexual intercourses are legitimate and morally permissible only if they lead to conception, or, in other words, if they fulfil their procreative potential. Pre-reformed Christianity, consequently, assumed that contraception converts natural sexual intercourse between spouses into non-natural; it is not aimed at procreation, which means that it is a deviant and morally unacceptable act. They rely on the Aristotelian terminology and theory, arguing that the natural function of the sexual organs is conception and procreation, that is, that procreation or childbirth is a natural function of human sexuality (St. Thomas Aquinas 1975). In other words, the authority of the wise creator of nature determines procreation as the ultimate purpose of sexual relations. Consequently, it is an articulated moral imperative according to which sexual intercourse is legitimate and moral only if there is a possibility to conceive. Procreation, we need to be more precise, is not just about conception and the birth of a child, but also includes raising children and the community of men and women in the indissoluble marriage, which is conceived as an optimal framework for this task. So, the fundamental attitude of Aquinas' sexual ethics is that morally permissible are only the sexual relations between spouses in which it is possible to conceive. Marital sexual relations in which it is not possible to conceive are contrary to the natural law and the creator. Pleasure itself should not be the aim of sexual relations and the aim of procreation should not be sacrificed to pleasure (St Augustine 1966, St. Thomas Aquinas 1975). Contraception, i.e. any method that prevents conception converts the natural intercourse between spouses into an unnatural, deviant and morally unacceptable act.

It should be noticed that *Humanae Vitae* presents a remarkable declination from this traditional procreative theory because sexuality is understood here as a necessary part of marital closeness, love and care. It is true that, according to

Humanae Vitae, every action specifically intended to prevent procreation is forbidden: “Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means” (Pope Paul VI 1968: §14). However, the rhythm method, in which there is no active interference in the sexual intercourse, is allowed as a birth control method: (...) the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles (...)” (Pope Paul VI 1968: §16). Pope Paul VI concludes: “Consequently, unless we are willing that the responsibility of procreating life should be left to the arbitrary decision of men, we must accept that there are certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go, to the power of man over his own body and its natural functions—limits, let it be said, which no one, whether as a private individual or as a public authority, can lawfully exceed” (Pope Paul VI 1968: §17).

John Finnis is the representative of the so-called new theory of natural law (Finnis, 1970). Although John Finnis does not directly consider the issue of contraception, but the general question of unnatural and morally defective sexual intercourses, it is clear that he holds that artificial contraception can be considered as an *active interference* while the rhythm method only makes sexual partners temporary sterile. Finnis emphasizes that procreation and raising children is a basic human good such as, for example, life and knowledge. The basic human goods are not morally good in itself, which would mean that they are not a moral obligation for all but they must be chosen when we are faced with a choice between some of these goods and other personal aims. For instance, according to Finnis, procreation and raising children is not an obligation for all, but in sexual relations between spouses, they always have to choose the sex in which it is possible for a woman to become pregnant. Finnis raises the question of what actions, according to their causal structure, include a choice that is appropriately open to the fundamental values, and what actions, according to their causal structure, assume a choice against the fundamental values. He, himself, concludes that the choice that excludes the possibility of procreation in a sexual relationship is clearly and unambiguously (there is no requirement for further arguing about Christian values) directly opposite to the basic good (Finnis 1970). From this Finnis’ attitude it could be concluded that the use of any method of contraception is not an option because sexual behaviours should always be open to conception.³

3 Similarly, sexual intercourse between homosexual partners or masturbation should be classified as acts that are not open to the fundamental good of procreation. J. Finnis is actually much more focused on moral status of these forms of sexual behaviour than to contraception.

However, he differentiates the moral statuses of the choices in which someone actively takes steps to prevent procreation from those when they are not taken, but the circumstances are such that it is impossible to conceive. The rhythm method (in spite of the fact that the 'full' sexual relation is not fulfilled) respects the value of procreation, because sexual intercourse is appropriately open to the basic good. For example, sexual relation between naturally sterile spouses cannot end in procreation, but it is not considered as a choice against the fundamental goods: it is appropriately open to the value of procreation. It follows undoubtedly that artificial contraception can be considered as active intervention in sexual intercourse while sexual intercourse during infertile days can be treated as sexual intercourse of temporary sterile partners (infertile days can be regarded as a kind of natural temporary sterility). Indifference toward procreation in cases of natural contraception is not a serious problem as long as their sexual intercourse is *natural* in the sense of the lack of any active intervention into sexual intercourse.

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Such a position is much more elaborated in the articles of G.E.M. Anscombe, in which she explicitly argues in favour of the moral admissibility of the rhythm methods and against artificial methods (Anscombe 1975, 1981). She claims that, even if behind both artificial and natural methods there is the same desire and intention to avoid conception and pregnancy, except only artificial methods need to be forbidden. Similarly to Finnis, she claims that active intervention in sexual intercourse makes a morally relevant difference between the allowable act and the improper act. When a couple uses contraceptives, the intention of avoiding conception is an *integral* part of the sexual act. At the same time, the same intention is only *furthered* in the case of relying on natural methods. Sexual intercourse in the infertile days is identical to sexual intercourse when it is possible to conceive. The first differs from second only in the time frame of the cycle of fertile and infertile days. Although sexual intercourse during the infertile days is *de facto* a *non-generative* act in which it is not possible to conceive, such an act is *intrinsically generative* because there is no difference between such an act and an act in which it is possible to conceive. On the other hand, the use of artificial contraception transforms a natural sexual act into a perversion of the natural order because it changes the nature of the sexual act in a physical sense: the act that is naturally open to conception becomes non-procreative due to human intervention (Anscombe 1975).

What can be derived from Anscombe's words is that a responsible attitude toward sexuality for an 'honest and responsible' person always involves *openness to procreation* of children, where 'openness' can be interpreted in two ways: (i) the sexual act is open to procreation if there is a *spirit* open to procreation (ii) the sexual act as a physical act is open to procreation if it is intrinsically generative. Natural birth control, according to Anscombe, satisfies both conditions of moral conduct.

4. Natural, artificial and (im)moral

In what follows, I will try to propose some critical remarks on the arguments Anscombe and Finnis offered.

4.1. Openness to procreation

Anscombe claims that a sexual act is open to procreation if there is a spirit that is open to procreation. It is pretty mysterious what is ‘a spirit open to procreation’. However, no matter how we interpret her words, it seems that any conscious and intentional prevention of conception (natural or artificial) equally disregards the spirit of openness to procreation. Anscombe does not consider that a couple should have as many children as they possibly could and she holds that abortion is far more wrong than contraception. So, the mere intention of avoiding conception is not opposed to the spirit of procreation. She writes that it is undeniable that married couples, for acceptable reasons, are perfectly clear in their intention to avoid children (Anscombe 1975). Moreover, she refers to the words of Pope Paul VI that it cannot be denied that a marital couple is perfectly justified in their intention to control conception and the birth of a child: “It cannot be denied that in each case the married couple, for acceptable reasons, are both perfectly clear in their intention to avoid children and wish to make sure that none will result” (Pope Paul VI 1968: §16).

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If the intention to avoid conception is morally legitimate, it does not matter whether it is *integral* to the act, or only *further*. So, from the perspective of the spirit open to procreation—artificial contraception is open to procreation just as much as natural birth control: any prevention of conception disregards the openness to procreation and, consequently, natural birth control contravenes to the spirit open to procreation in the same way artificial contraception does. Secondly, if the intention of avoiding pregnancy is not morally doubtful in itself then the intention behind the usage of artificial methods is morally acceptable as well as the intention behind the rhythm method. It seems that: (i) the intention of avoiding pregnancy is present as the *integral* intention both in cases of natural and artificial methods, but (ii) if this intention of avoiding pregnancy is not generally wrong, it does not matter whether it is *integral* or not to the act.

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Although, Anscombe also writes that the sexual act as a physical act is open to procreation if it is intrinsically generative. A sexual act in which the couple uses artificial method is not intrinsically generative and a certain difference in intentions can be noticed: there is a difference in the *intention to intervene into the sexual intercourse by using artificial devices* that can prevent pregnancy and the *intention*

to use the *rhythm method* to prevent pregnancy. Therefore, the only relevant difference between these two legitimate intentions to avoid conception and pregnancy is the intention to use an *artificial device*. Moreover, she writes that a sexual intercourse is defective and shameful if, before, during or after the act the couple *does something* that assumes the prevention of conception (Anscombe 1981). We realize now that ‘does something’ refers to the use of artificial devices.

4.2. Natural and artificial

What is wrong with the use of artificial devices? Anscombe explicitly states that she is not against the use of artificial means in general and that the mere use of artificial means is not contrary to natural law. There are permissible interferences in the natural order of things, but the use of artificial contraceptives is not; it opposes to the natural law, which is understood as the moral law in a similar way in which conception without sexual intercourse opposes to the natural law (Anscombe 1981). So, we can ask her a question: how can an act that is essentially correct (the use of artificial devices in general) become wrong because a part of its character involves an intention (to avoid conception) that is also correct (Teichman 2003)?

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If someone wants to claim that sexual intercourse with artificial devices is morally distinctive from a sexual intercourse without them, it is necessary to provide further explanation why the usage of artificial devices in this specific case is not morally appropriate. Namely, it implies that only the sexual intercourse without artificial contraception could be treated as natural behaviour, while the other one is not natural and hence it is defective and shameful. Firstly, it is crucial to define what ‘natural behaviour’ is and why such behaviour excludes intercourse with artificial devices. Secondly, it is necessary to explain why natural behaviour (in a ‘physical sense’) is exclusively moral or, even if we accept that only the sexual intercourse without artificial devices is (physically) natural, why is such natural behaviour exclusively moral.

Some philosophers argue that there is no sense in talking about the natural and the unnatural in sexual relations because there is no sexual behaviour that is not natural (Slote 1975). Contrary to such a stance based on the authority of nature, Catholic philosophers ground their stance on the authority of the creator. However, it is worth noting that it is possible to separate the view, which claims that procreation is the primary function of a sexual relationship from the religious or theistic assumptions: for instance, from the perspective of evolutionary theory of human sexuality, a sexual relationship in which it is not possible to conceive due to artificial devices is unnatural and deviant. However, the qualifications need to be understood exclusively in a biological sense. Such behaviour opposes to the natural purpose or function of sexual intercourse, but it does not mean that such

behaviour is morally defective. In other words, even if we accept that the use artificial contraception is not natural in a biological sense, this claim cannot be extended, without any further explanation, into a position that the use of artificial contraception is immoral (Ruddick 1984). It is seriously misleading to identify the biological (physical) structure of sexual act with the moral structure of a sexual act.

Secondly, if we identify 'natural behaviour' with behaviour that is in accordance with the natural law conceived as an ethical cogito, there is also no reason to classify sexual intercourse with artificial contraception as unnatural behaviour. Namely, there are two basic kinds of arguments which might be offered in defence of the position that artificial contraception should be classified as unnatural behaviour (as opposed to natural law): the analytical argument and the empirical argument. There is no analytical (conceptual) relationship between a sexual intercourse with artificial contraception and the idea of the natural law, which is understood as an ethical imperative about the full realization of human nature. The biological (physical) structure of any act cannot determine the moral status of the act, and no reason is offered to think that a sexual act is an exception. Also, there is no empirical evidence in favour of correlation between artificial contraception and the alleged 'evil effects' against nature or the natural law such as, for instance, the high divorce rate, infidelity, hostility towards children, the lack of self-control, selfishness, sterility, race extinction, or even adultery or abortion. The same reasons that are used to justify the rhythm method as consistent with the natural law—medical, eugenic, economic, and social⁴—may also justify artificial contraception. The principles of natural law, in certain circumstances, may even demand the usage of artificial birth control as well as they demand rhythm (Beis 1965). Contrary to the objection that sexual relations with artificial contraception are a manifestation of morally suspicious, self-centred and egoistic ethics, altruistic ethics could require the use of contraception in the circumstances of overpopulation (Cooper 1931).

We can now conclude that nothing concerning artificial contraception can possibly make a sexual act unnatural in any morally relevant sense: if there isn't anything wrong in the intention not to conceive during sexual intercourse, if there isn't anything wrong with artificial devices and if intercourse with artificial devices is not unnatural in a morally relevant sense—the only question left to consider is whether active intervention with artificial devices is a this morally relevant distinction.

4 "If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances (...)" (Pope Paul VI 1968: §16).

4.3. Active intervention

Finally, it could be said that active intervention with the use of artificial contraceptives into a sexual intercourse with the aim to prevent conception is morally defective behaviour (while the rhythm method is not because there is no active intervention with any devices). Active interference in the procreative process is impermissible while passively letting things happen in the procreative process is, on the other hand, permissible. Such a stance can be comparable with the anti-abortionist stance that abortion is wrong because it is an active interference that kills a person (a fetus) while letting a person (a woman) die due to pregnancy is not. Also, in a debate about euthanasia, active killing is morally far more severe than passive not-saving someone's life.

14 It needs to be realized that there is no analogy between these debates about abortion and euthanasia on the one side and the debate about contraception on the other: as we could previously see, contraception is not a question of killing/letting die, since there is not a person or a human being here. Some other debates about the moral distinction between killing and letting die stress the questions about responsibility and intention. However, as we tried to show above, none of the arguments succeeded in showing the distinction in intentions that could imply a distinction in responsibilities.⁵

Finally, the rhythm method cannot be classified as passively letting things happen because a couple actively counts the fertile and the infertile days (using a calendar or measuring the basal temperature). A couple intentionally and actively takes part in sexual intercourse during the infertile days in which they are temporary infertile just because they are infertile: it is not the case that sexual intercourse happens to them during a period in which they are temporary infertile. So, both natural and artificial contraception are certain *prevention strategies*. The difference between the artificial and natural birth control methods can eventually be in the difference between the 'passive' and 'active' prevention strategies to avoid risk. However, no prevention strategy can be considered passive behaviour. In other words, active interference as a trait of solely artificial contraception cannot be a morally relevant distinction.

5. Pleasure and contraception: a possible interpretation

Finally, I will try to propose a possible hidden assumption in this reformed Catholic stance about what is the morally relevant distinction between the sexual intercourses in which a couple uses natural and the sexual intercourses in which the couple uses artificial methods of birth control. Also, I will try to show that, even under such an assumption, there is not a morally relevant difference.

5 H. Kuhse and P. Singer show generally that there is no morally significant distinction between killing and letting die. (Kuhse and Singer 1985).

If artificial contraception was morally permissible it would imply that *all* sexual intercourse conducted solely by the desire for pleasure is right. According to the procreative theory of sexuality, however, pleasure in itself may not be the goal of sexual intercourse: while *Humanae Vitae* legitimises pleasure in marital sexual relations in a sense that it is not condemned, pleasure still may not be the purpose of sexual relations. Since the acceptance of artificial methods of birth control can result in sexual intercourse purely motivated by pleasure, it would result in ‘the general lowering of moral standards’. “Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection” (Pope Paul VI 1968: §17).

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Such an interpretation could be supported by Anscombe’s stance that the use of artificial contraceptives by a married couple is worse than adultery and that it is contrary to the idea of marriage itself (Anscombe 1975). A marriage in which there is an intention to enjoy sexual relations while also avoiding the full intention of conception is incorrect. Therefore, the approval of artificial contraception legitimises and allows invalid marriages that are based purely on pleasure. Consequently, the most coherent assumption behind Anscombe’s stance about artificial contraception is that sexual intercourse motivated by pleasure, and not procreation, brings into question the spirit of openness to procreation.

From this perspective, we can now interpret the previously elaborated distinction between natural and unnatural sexual relations. For example, Donald Levy defined ‘unnatural’ in terms of the basic human goods: the basic human goods are those which are necessary and those anyone wants regardless of circumstances, such as life, health, control of physical and mental functions, the ability to acquire knowledge, love and the capacity to love (Levy 1980). The basic human goods are those that define humanity in a way that the lack of such goods can be identified with inhumanity. It is unnatural for human beings to reject their own or others’ basic human goods (except in some extreme cases in which the basic goods themselves are in conflict). Pleasure is not a fundamental human good. When someone sacrifices their own or other people’s fundamental human goods to pleasure, it can be said that it is an unnatural or deviant act.

So, we can now offer a possible (religious) answer to our questions about what is wrong with artificial birth control or what is the morally relevant difference between the natural and the artificial birth control methods than can justify the

different treatment of these methods: (i) it is wrong that pleasure is the purpose of sexual relations; (ii) artificial methods of birth control can result in sexual relationships motivated purely by pleasure; (iii) therefore, artificial contraceptives are not acceptable. I have no intention to claim here that this interpretation is correct; such a hypothesis definitely requires further investigation. However, I would like to stress that even under this interpretation there is no valid reason not to allow artificial contraception if a natural method has already been approved.

16 Firstly, we agree here with Igor Primoratz, who claims that pleasure is not morally valuable in itself, but it is also not immoral in itself either. Pleasure can be good in a sense that is not amoral, so pleasure does not have to seek moral legitimacy. Pleasure is not subject to moral judgment (unless it involves violence or other forms of coercion and manipulation, in which case it can, naturally, be immoral) (Primoratz 1999). Additionally, most people do not use artificial contraception in order to fully avoid procreation but as a method of family planning that is more reliable than the rhythm method. Sexual relationships with artificial contraception are motivated by the seeking of pleasure just like the sexual relationships in which the couple relies on natural methods. Moreover, it is possible to imagine that couples that ‘sacrifice procreative potential to pleasure’ rely completely on natural birth control methods. So, there is nothing essential in natural contraception that prevents ‘invalid marriages based purely on pleasure’. Also, there is nothing in artificial contraception that implies that sexual relations with artificial contraceptives necessary signify the indifference to the (alleged) fundamental good of procreation.

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Snježana Prijić – Samaržija

Moralnost uporabe kontracepcije i otvorenost prokreaciji

Apstrakt

Moralna prihvatljivost kontracepcije kao metode kontrole rađanja usko je povezana s pitanjem moralnog opravdanja reproduktivne autonomije, odnosno s pitanjem treba li pojedincima dopustiti da autonomno i slobodno odlučuju o tome hoće li imati djece, kada i koliko. Razvoj medicinskih i znanstvenih tehnologija doveo je do upotrebe umjetnih metoda kontracepcije koji sprječavaju začće s ciljem odgađanja i planiranja rađanja djece. U prvom dijelu članka analiziram bioetičke argumente koji se iznose u raspravi o reproduktivnoj autonomiji, a koji bi mogli biti mobilizirani protiv dopuštanja upotrebe umjetne kontracepcije. U drugom dijelu, uspoređujem bioetičke argumente s daleko razrađenijim argumentima protiv umjetne kontracepcije koji se pojavljuju u raspravama u filozofiji seksualnosti. U trećem i posljednjem dijelu, iznosim argumente protiv stavova G.E.M. Anscombe i J. Finnis koji opravdavaju upotrebu prirodne metode kontrole rađanja, ali ne i umjetnih sredstva na način da ukazujem da nema moralno relevantne razlike između ove dvije metode kontrole začća i rađanja.

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Ključne riječi kontracepcija, bioetika, filozofija seksualnosti, reproduktivna autonomija, prirodne i umjetne metode.