

have sunk after the election when he thought of these words and his responsibility.

For himself, he decided, there should be no external honour, no special place in choir and refectory, no standing up on his entry into a room. 'No external honour' indeed. And the result was plain for almost all to experience who visited the refectory, say, at Santa Sabina in those years. Where was the Master? Sitting down there, anywhere, and receiving from the brethren great respect and honour as the successor of St Dominic, or he was travelling all over the world, visiting the brethren. He went with the minimum of luggage, just a small bag that, one would think, had hardly enough for a week-end. His own personal poverty had an obvious Franciscan quality, and was quite unselfconscious. He practised what he preached. Visiting Santa Sabina was a great experience, unlike any other of my life; the community came from perhaps twenty different provinces of the Order, but were as though they came from one.

Bede Bailey OP

## Aquinas and the Act of Love

Michael Nolan

Newman's Anglican days made him acutely aware of how the language of Catholicism sounds strange in unaccustomed and indeed suspicious ears and how readily misunderstanding ensues. Infallibility is taken to be a claim to be right on everything, the Immaculate Conception is confused with the Virgin Birth, and the remission of sins becomes a permission to continue in evil ways. It is, he saw, a general problem in dealing with the unfamiliar, and he wondered what a hostile foreigner would make of the maxims of the laws of England. Might he not, reading in Blackstone's incomparable Commentaries that 'the power and jurisdiction of parliament is so transcendent that it cannot be

confined either for causes or persons within any bounds', see a blasphemous claim to divine omnipotence? Might not the assertion that 'the king can do no wrong' seem an arrogant claim to divine sinlessness? In truth, of course, all that is meant is that in English law there is no higher authority than Parliament and that the King cannot be sued in his own Courts: nothing more. Newman could but ask the hostile foreigner to abide a while and abate his hostility.

Aquinas, writing in a highly technical Latin and within a philosophy and theology alien to modern ears, is no less prone to be misunderstood, and the modes of misrepresenting him, often unwitting, are many. What he has to say about marriage and related issues has been the object of recent attacks: often he is read as if he were a Lutheran or Calvinist. It may be well to note some of these types of error before dealing with his own understanding in these matters.

There is, for instance, straight mistranslation. Thus in a recent television discussion<sup>1</sup> it was claimed Aquinas held that 'masturbation is a more serious sin than rape.' It is true that Aquinas says that what he calls unnatural acts (bestiality, sodomy and masturbation) are a more serious type of sexual sin than what he calls *raptus*. But *raptus* does not mean rape in the sense beloved of the panting readers of the national dailies, and the learned professor who made the equivalence is a manifest uncle of the schoolboy who thought that the Pope bestowed on Henry VIII the title of Fido the Offensive. *Raptus* is a technical word in Roman civil law, and in medieval as well as current canon law means rape in the sense of 'the act of carrying away a person, especially a woman, by force' (*Oxford English Dictionary*)—what we commonly call abduction. That this is Aquinas' meaning of the term is shown by his explicit reference to canon law (*ST*, II-II, 154, 1), and equally by his assertion that the crime of *raptus* is committed even if intercourse does not actually follow (*ST*, II-II, 154, 7). He is dealing with a law meant to protect women against a forced consent to marriage: it is a crime to abduct them with a view to sexual intercourse, even if this does not occur. It presumes that any apparent consent to intercourse in these circumstances is not true consent and it makes any attempted marriage invalid.

It may of course be said that *raptus*, even in the sense of abduction, is a more serious crime than masturbation. The suggestion shows the need to read Aquinas carefully. The passage in question refers, not to the seriousness of an individual deed but the seriousness of *types* of sexual sin. Aquinas does not say that every sin of masturbation is more serious than any sin of *raptus*. He distinguishes between the seriousness of types of sin in the same way as civil law distinguishes between the

seriousness of types of crime, but accepts, as does civil law, that the seriousness of an individual and specific act depends on the circumstances (*ST*, I–II, 72, 3 & 7). In English law burglary, for which the maximum sentence is fourteen years, is a more serious crime than theft, for which the maximum sentence is ten. But it would be ludicrous to suggest that in English justice a person who breaks a neighbour's window at nine o'clock on a summer's evening and takes a flowerpot—which is burglary—has committed a more serious crime than someone who slips through the open door of an old man's house and takes his life-savings from under his bed—which is theft. Similarly, murder is a more serious crime than causing grievous bodily harm, but would one say that Irish justice takes killing a brutal spouse in a quarrel to be a worse offence than torturing a child for pleasure—yet one is murder and the other the causing of bodily harm? A case of *raptus* could be a willing elopement, or it might involve the repeated violation of a woman for the vilest of motives. Masturbation might be the hesitant act of a person in distress, or the act of someone watching lecherously, while others abuse a child. The relative seriousness of *individual* acts is not a matter that can be decided in writings on moral theology or in a statute. As sins, they are matter for a confessor, as crimes, for a judge and jury.

Aquinas' understanding of the seriousness of types of sexual sin turns on the extent by which a type of act differs from the matrimonial act, which he takes as normative. He sees rape (in the modern sense) as being a serious sin precisely because it lacks the consent which is necessary for marriage (In IV *Sent.*, 41, 1, 4).

There is a further consideration. We tend to see sins as offences against a commandment or law: Aquinas sees them as offences against a virtue, and he categorizes them as such. The more important a virtue, the more grievous a sin—more precisely, type of sin—against that virtue. He classifies sexual sins in his discussion of chastity, and injuries to the bodily integrity of another person in his discussion of justice (*ST*, II–II, 65). But an individual act may be a sin against more than one virtue. Aquinas considers the moral principles applying to such acts (*ST*, I–II, 73, 6 & 7): their variety is obviously infinite and he confines himself to some illustrations which do not include rape in the modern sense. But in his system rape is manifestly a double sin: a sin against chastity and a sin against justice. And since justice is a more important virtue than chastity (*ST*, II–II, 161, 8), then rape is principally a sin against justice. It was not, one may note, a crime that medievals took lightly. William the Conqueror decreed that a rapist should have his eyes gouged out and his testicles cut off; the Statute of Westminster in

1364 made it a hanging offence, and continental jurists were scarcely less imaginative.

Aquinas is open also to the dangers of the infelicitous translation of his highly technical medieval Latin. Thus Noonan in his scholarly work *Contraception*<sup>2</sup> translates *Utrum luxuria quae est circa actus venereos possit esse peccatum* as 'Can the lechery which pertains to the venereal act ever be a sin?' (p. 245). There are strange things here. The plural *actus venereos* is translated as the singular 'venereal act' and the singular is then turned into the typical by the addition of the definite article: 'the venereal act'. *Circa* is rendered as 'pertaining to' when 'in' or 'accompanying' would have sufficed. Moreover *luxuria* is translated as 'lechery' and again the definite article is added. Webster (a fair test, since Noonan is American) gives lechery to mean 'inordinate indulgence in sexual activity', while the Oxford Dictionary gives 'habitual indulgence of lust, lewdness of living'. But Aquinas is dealing with *luxuria* as one of the seven deadly sins where the normal translation is 'lust'. Moreover in using the word 'lechery' Noonan departs from the usage of the two standard translations of Aquinas, both of which translate *luxuria* as 'lust'. At best, from his point of view, Noonan might have translated: 'Can lust in venereal acts be a sin?'—which rings very differently from 'Can the lechery which pertains to the venereal act ever be a sin?' But what is most curious is that Noonan ignores the definition of *luxuria* which Aquinas gives in his answer to this very question: *hoc autem pertinet ad rationem luxuriae, ut ordinem et modum rationis excedat circa venerea* which I translate: '*luxuria* means "to exceed the order and measure of reason in venereal acts"'. Aquinas writes:

Venereal acts (*usus venereorum*) are very necessary for the common welfare, and precisely because of this they must take place in accordance with the rules of reason... *Luxuria* is a transgression (*excedat*) of these rules and as such is certainly sinful. (*ST*, II-II, 153, 3)

It is as though Aquinas had asked 'Whether gluttony in eating is a sin' and this were translated 'Whether the gluttony that pertains to the act of eating can ever be a sin'—a phrase that suggests, if it does not explicitly assert, that all eating is somehow gluttonous.

One moves on from mistranslation to the failure to distinguish between the different meanings of words. Ranke-Heinemann<sup>3</sup> makes the bizarre accusation that 'Masturbation in the view of St Thomas was a vice more damnable than intercourse between mother and son.' This presumably turns on Aquinas' assertion that incest is a lesser sin than sodomy and other 'unnatural' sins. The word 'incest' conjures up gothic

images of dark deeds in hidden places, but in the present context (in which he makes explicit reference to canon law) Aquinas is using it simply to mean sexual relations between people within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity—for example, a relationship between second cousins. But he distinguishes sharply between two forms of consanguinity and hence between two types of incest: that between parents and their children, and that between people descended from the same parents or grandparents. Prohibitions on relations between the latter, which would scarcely be called incestuous in the usage of modern English, vary from culture to culture, he says. It is quite other with relations between mother and son, or between father and daughter. These are forbidden by natural law, most of all relations between mother and son, for here the son would not show his mother the respect that is her due. He is aware that a union of father and daughter can be fertile, but insists that it is wrong because it disturbs the appropriate relationship between them (In IV *Sent.*, 40, 1, 3). He even expresses his horror of such relationships by retelling Aristotle's folktale of the stallion that covered its mother and then in shame threw itself over a cliff. Thus parent-child relations and masturbation are both unnatural, though in different ways, and Ranke-Heinemann's allegation is simply untrue.

One moves on to selective quotation. The precise reason why a male or female child is conceived on a particular occasion was not known in the middle ages, as it is not today. (It depends on which type of sperm the ovum receives and this is said to happen at random—that is, what determines it on a particular occasion is not known). We do know today that in some species it depends on the time of day or on the environmental temperature. Aquinas accepts that it may be due to some such circumstance. He does indeed write that a female child may be conceived because the wind is from the south and this is much trumpeted as evidence that he regarded a woman as 'a freak product of environmental pollution' (Ranke-Heinemann, p. 165). But if he says that a female child is conceived because of a southern wind (which, after all, is warm and pleasant), he equally writes that a male child may be conceived because the wind is from the north—and this is cold and harsh. Yet he does not commit himself to this. The sex of the child, he thinks, may be determined by the wishes of the parents. Indeed in the 'state of innocence'—in Utopia—this would certainly be the case and parents would as often choose to have a girl as a boy, for the completion of the human species requires that there be both men and women and that each person should have a partner (*ST*, I, 99, 2).

These instances show some of the difficulties of understanding

Aquinas. Yet, beyond such technical difficulties, there are deep conceptual problems. Aquinas—and the remark is not facetious—is a Catholic and the English-speaking world is—as Newman stressed—Protestant. Aquinas lived in a culture which was soon to produce Dante and Boccaccio, and the figures of Beatrice and *La figlia del suo figlio* and the mirthful women of the Decameron. Modern English developed in the world of Milton and Satan and sinful Eve, a world in which the word concupiscence—which simply means desire—came to mean ‘sinful desire’, and even sin itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates the change: concupiscence is ‘eager or vehement desire; in Theological usage, the coveting of “carnal things”, desire for “things of the world”’; it adds a second meaning: ‘especially, libidinous desire, sexual appetite, lust’. The ‘theological usage’ is that of Lutheran, not scholastic, theology. In Aquinas concupiscence carries no moral value in itself but is morally good or bad according as it is directed by reason and will to a morally good or bad object (*ST*, I–II 4, 1). To read Aquinas as though every time he uses the word *concupiscentia* he means concupiscence in the English sense is rather like taking a German who says ‘*Ich habe Lust*’ to be in a state of sexual arousal.

But the difference in the meaning of concupiscence is rooted in a deeper difference in the meaning of original sin. For Luther the sin of Adam positively damaged human nature, for the scholastics it did not. Luther himself was quite aware of the difference. He writes:

The scholastics argue that original righteousness was not a part of human nature but, like some adornment, was added to man as a gift, as when someone places a wreath on a pretty girl. The wreath is certainly not a part of the virgin’s nature; it is something apart from her nature. It came from outside and can be removed again without any injury to her nature. Therefore they maintain about man and about demons that although they have lost their original righteousness, their natural endowments have remained pure, just as they were created in the beginning. But this idea must be shunned like poison, for it minimizes original sin. Let us rather maintain that righteousness was not a gift which came from without, separate from man’s nature, but that it was truly part of his nature . . . so, after man has fallen from righteousness into sin, it is correct and truthful to say that our natural endowments are not perfect but are corrupted by sin. (*Lectures on Genesis* 3, 7)

He stresses his difference from the scholastics:

Nothing was more common and received more general acceptance in the schools than this thesis [that our natural endowments are still perfect]. (*Ibid.*)

His own account of the effects of original sin is simply stated:

Original sin really means that human nature has completely fallen; that the intellect has become darkened, so that we no longer know God and his will and no longer perceive the works of God; furthermore that the will is extraordinarily depraved, so that we do not trust the mercy of God and do not fear God. (Ibid. 2, 17)

Of procreation he writes:

It is a great favour that God has preserved woman for us—against our will and wish, as it were—both for procreation and also as a medicine against the sin of fornication. In Paradise woman would have been a help for duty only. But now she is also, and for the greater part at that, an antidote and a medicine; we can hardly speak of her without a feeling of shame, and surely we cannot make use of her without shame. The reason is sin. In Paradise that union would have taken place without any bashfulness . . . Now, alas, it is so hideous and frightful a pleasure that physicians compare it with epilepsy or falling sickness. Thus an actual disease is linked with the very activity of procreation. We are in the state of sin and death; therefore we undergo this punishment, that we cannot make use of woman without this horrible passion of lust, and, so to speak, without epilepsy. (Ibid., 2, 18)

It is only right to add that Luther insists that marriage is honourable:

Marriage should be treated with honour; from it we all originate, because it is a nursery not only for the state but also for the church and the kingdom of Christ until the end of the world. (Ibid., 4, 1)

The scholastic account of original sin, which will be discussed later, may be gathered from Luther's criticisms and contrasts. He writes:

It is a cause for great errors when some men minimize this evil [original sin] and speak of our depraved nature in the manner of the philosophers, as if it were not depraved. Thus they state that the natural endowments have remained unimpaired not only in the nature of man but in the devil. But this is obviously false. (Ibid. 3, 1)

He again contrasts his position with that of the medievals:

See what follows if you maintain that original righteousness was not a part of nature but a sort of superfluous or superadded gift. When you declare that righteousness was not a part of the essence of man, does it not follow that sin, which took its place, is not part

of the essence either. Then there was no purpose in sending Christ, the Redeemer, if the original righteousness, like something foreign to our nature, has been taken away, and the natural endowments remain perfect. What can be said that is more unworthy of a theologian? Therefore let us shun those ravings like real pests and a perversion of the Holy Scriptures. (Ibid., 3, 7)

For Luther, all of these defects of human nature constitute concupiscence (Ibid. 2, 17). He criticizes the scholastics for limiting the meaning of the word to what he calls 'wretched and hideous lust'. As we shall see, this is most certainly not the meaning of the word in Aquinas at least and, I suspect, in many other scholastics.

The penetration of Luther's ideas into the English-speaking world is obvious in the Book of Common Prayer. Article 9 reads:

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek (*phronema sarkos*), which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

It is quite difficult for anyone who has grown up in a culture in which the words concupiscence and original sin have these meanings, to read the scholastics without carrying forward the notion that these words imply depravity of some degree. To this must be added a further difficulty, again deriving from—or perhaps one should say best illustrated by—a Protestant thinker: the Kantian feeling that a truly moral act cannot be pleasurable and if pleasurable is not truly moral.

Aquinas of course accepts the notion of original sin, but accepts it precisely in the sense which we have seen criticized by Luther: 'an adornment, added to man as a gift . . . it came from outside and can be removed without any injury to nature.' He distinguishes between deficiencies, evils and faults. A deficiency is simply the absence of something, such as the absence of life in a stone. An evil is the absence of something that should be there, such as blindness. A fault is an evil



arising from a voluntary act, such as sin. Now human nature has obvious deficiencies: man finds it hard to fix his mind on God, who is his true goal; emotions run riot and overwhelm reason; illness and distress end in death. These things, as such, are deficiencies arising from the mere fact of being human and seen in this way they are most certainly (*proculdubio*) natural deficiencies. But since man in Adam was constituted in 'original justice', a state in which deficiencies were overcome by the gift of God, and since that state was lost through sin, then looked at from that viewpoint, the deficiencies are penalties for sin and are due to it (cf. In II *Sent.*, 30, 1, 2). He puts the same point in another way:

It would have been possible for God at the time he made Adam to have created another man and to have left this man in his natural condition. That man would have been mortal and subject to suffering, and he would have experienced the battle of concupiscence against reason . . . but the state of that man would not be a state of sin or penalty. (In II *Sent.*, 31,1, 2, ad 3)

It follows that there is no way by which, looking at man as he is today, we could come to know of the existence of original sin—unless revelation taught us that is the case. We know of it only through faith (In II *Sent.*, 30, 1, 1, ad 1). Aquinas disagrees with the modern theologians who believe we can observe the 'fallen-ness' of man.

This enables us to understand what he means when he says something is 'due to original sin'. One may think of two men doing heavy work on a farm on which both were born. One won a lottery, gave up his work, drank his way through the money and is back on the farm again. The other has spent all his life on the farm. Both are suffering the strain of labour, but only of the first can one say that he is suffering the price of his foolishness, or that his suffering is due to his foolishness. In one sense it is due to his foolishness but in another sense his backache is due to precisely the same causes that give his fellow-worker backache — arduous labour. His foolishness has not altered his physiology: it is not the cause of his backache in the sense in which heavy labour is the cause.

What Aquinas takes original sin to be we can see in his discussion of the fate of unbaptized infants who die 'in the state of original sin'. (One recalls that in his thinking Adam and Eve had the destiny of seeing God *in sua essentia*—face to face, as it were; that they lost this destiny through sin, as did their descendants, and that it is restored by baptism.) He argues that they will experience neither physical or mental suffering. He writes:

Any penalty should be proportionate to the fault. The defect which is passed on from generation to generation and which does indeed meet the definition of fault, is not a taking away or corruption of any good which belongs to human nature as such, but is a taking away or corruption of something which had been added to human nature. And this fault is the fault of this individual person only in so far as the human nature with which he was born could, and was meant to, have this additional good and does not have it. Hence no other penalty is due to that individual person except that of not being able to reach the goal which the added good would have enabled him to reach and which cannot be reached by human nature as such. But this goal is the vision of God. Hence the lack of this vision is the one and only penalty of original sin after death. (In II *Sent.*, 33, 2, 1)

He explains that a physical punishment can be applied only if a person has done wrong, but the person who dies unbaptized has in fact done no wrong and should not therefore be punished. He goes on to argue that they are equally free from mental unhappiness. They will be completely happy, he says; they will know God as fully as human nature permits, they will know they do not see God face to face, and this will not cause them any unhappiness either. (In II *Sent.*, 33, 2, 1)

Aquinas is of course aware of a long tradition which asserts that original sin is concupiscence. (The precise meaning of that assertion merits examination, which I would hope to undertake elsewhere.) As so often, he accepts the words but gives them his own meaning. Concupiscence is either habitual or actual. Now actual concupiscence, concupiscence experienced here and now, cannot be bad in itself (otherwise, he says, it would be a sin to be thirsty), but it would be bad if directed to a bad object—a yearning for heroin, say. Habitual concupiscence is the capacity or disposition to experience actual concupiscence. Now, as a fact, we can erupt into evil desires and that capacity or disposition so to erupt is a deficiency, and since that deficiency is due to original sin—‘due’ in the sense described above—it is, *materialiter sed non formaliter*, original sin. This distinction between actual and habitual concupiscence is subtle, but is essential for understanding what Aquinas has to say on marriage.

If Aquinas’ theology is different from that which floats in the minds of English-speakers, his philosophy is equally strange to ears tutored by Descartes and Locke. If one asks a person today to show you ‘a thing’ he will point to a stone or a car or another inanimate object. If one asked a medieval thinker to show you a thing he would have pointed to a flower, perhaps, or a baby. For moderns, the world is basically a physical object or set of physical objects from which all else is derived

either by the processes of evolution—and these are seen as basically random processes—or by the work of man. Such derived objects are not fundamentally real and have no meaning or significance within themselves. Such meaning and significance as the man-made enjoys comes from the man who made it or the person who uses it. It follows that its structure tells us nothing of God. At best he is the creator of the physical world. All else is accidental.

For Aquinas the world in all its aspects is full of meaning. It is sacred, and as such is not just to be used by us as we wish. Aquinas in fact has an attitude to reality which we would today call an ecological sensitivity. Many now feel that forests are not simply 'things' which we can destroy at will to provide our daily papers, nor animals simply 'objects' which we can exterminate to provide aphrodisiacs (the rhinoceros) or domestic ornaments (the elephant). Something of what Aquinas means by 'natural' is to be found when we say that it is unnatural to rear hens in batteries or calves in darkened pens, or when we prefer foods 'with no artificial preservatives'. The concept of 'natural' comes under much attack when it is used by theologians. Curiously, its meaning is quite clear to weight-lifters, a group rarely noted for their intellectual subtlety, but fully capable of grasping—if that is the word—the difference between natural food, of which they can eat any variety, and 'artificial substances', which they must eschew. *Ex ore gigantium* . . . In Aquinas, though he naturally never uses the term, our own body is an ecological object, indeed for us the primary such object.

This belief in the goodness of nature leads him to say that a person is born with certain incipient virtues. Reason already possesses the basic rules for understanding the world and the will has a natural desire for good, though these need to be developed by virtuous acts (*ST*, I-II, 63, 1).

The belief equally leads him to write of procreation:

Granted that the material (*corporalis*) world has been made by God, and is good, it is impossible to argue that what needs to be done to conserve that world—something which in any case we are naturally inclined to do—is wrong. So since nature inclines us to produce children, it is impossible to say that the acts by which a child is conceived are always wrong and that it is impossible to perform them virtuously. (In *IV Sent.*, 26, 1, 3)

Anyone who denies this, he says, is 'insane' and must believe that the material world was created by an evil god, and that, he says, is the very worst of heresies (*Ibid.*). The marriage act is not only not sinful; is meritorious (In *IV Sent.*, 26, 1, 4). He considers counter-arguments.

Some authorities have said that the marriage act is 'excused' by virtue of the good values associated with marriage. But what is excused is sinful. Hence the marriage act is sinful. He replies that we excuse something that looks bad, but is not bad, or at least is not as bad as it looks. Now if the marriage act looks bad it is because it seems to show a loss of self-control. Hence the word 'excuse' is sometimes used of it without implying it is really bad (In IV *Sent.*, 26, 1, 3, ad 4).

We can understand his point if we reflect on some of the occasions when we do say 'Excuse me'. We say it when we sneeze in company, or need to blow our nose repeatedly. We have done nothing morally wrong: why then ask to be excused. Aquinas thinks that we ask to be excused when in some way we have behaved with limited self-control. We say it too when we come by accident upon a couple in a delicate situation. Then, in the best tradition of investigative journalism, we make our excuses and leave—but we are not asserting that they are necessarily doing anything wrong.

He considers the argument that the marriage act is so abundantly delightful that the pleasure is excessive and must therefore be evil. He replies that whether pleasure is excessive or not should not be judged from its abundance but from whether it arises from doing what it is reasonable to do. But the marriage act is reasonable and the objection fails.

He even considers—and one must remember that the arguments Aquinas deals with were often put to him by ingenious and mischievous students—the difficulty that a couple in congress cannot raise their mind to God, to which he replies, more or less, that there is a time for everything (*ST*, II, 153, 2, 2).

He considers the objection that the marriage act is '*turpe*', shameful or perhaps indecent. His reply to this merits special attention for it is often misunderstood. He says that the 'shamefulness' of the marriage act *non est turpitudine culpae sed poenae*: it is not the shamefulness of fault but of penalty (In IV *Sent.* 26, 1, 3, ad 3). The language is highly technical, but the distinction is one we readily use. If you are invited to dinner and are found stealing the spoons, that is shameful: the shamefulness of wrongdoing. If while at table you are beset by a bout of hiccups that too is shameful but not in the same way. It is but one of many things in human life which are shameful—better perhaps, shame-making—but in no way wrong, things which we seek to do in private: the relief of natural needs, etc. Aquinas calls this the 'shame of penalty' because he thinks that in the 'state of innocence' such things would be fully under our control, not semi-controlled as they are now. The fact that a couple would be embarrassed if caught in the marriage act does

not, for him, imply in the least that they are doing anything wrong.

One may disagree with Aquinas as to what makes sexual activity 'indecent'. It remains that the civil law regards sexual activity in a way in which it does not regard eating or drinking, and forbids it in public. The features of sexual activity that cause the law to regard it in this way are precisely those that Aquinas is indicating. Accusing him of hypocrisy in this matter is like accusing society of hypocrisy because on the one hand it publicly celebrates marriage and on the other accuses any couple performing the marriage act in public of behaving indecently.

None of this is meant to suggest that Aquinas approves in the slightest of sexual activity outside marriage. He does not. But neither does he regard the marriage act as sinful. As we have seen, he explicitly says it may be meritorious.

The connection he makes between the marriage act and original sin is easy to misunderstand. Original sin is inherited through the marriage act, not because the act is pleasant, but because it is the *only way* in which *anything* can be inherited. Consider a deposed king and queen. Any children born to them could be said to *have lost* their inheritance, but the same could not be said of any *child* they might adopt. Aquinas illustrates his point with a *fanciful* example. Suppose, by some miracle, a child was produced *using* material from its father's finger. That child would *not incur* original sin because he is not in a true sense his father's child and cannot inherit from him. (*ST I-II*, 81, 4).

What then of the relation between original sin and the pleasures of the marriage act? Aquinas argues that actual delights of intercourse cannot possibly transmit sin because they can be experienced without sin, as in the marriage act. And even if the delights are themselves sinful (as in an adulterous relationships) they still do not transmit sin. What children inherit from their parents is the capacity for concupiscence, and concupiscence, as we have seen, is, *materialiter*, original sin. Formally, of course, original sin is the fact that 'original justice' was not transmitted. Aquinas writes:

The libido which transmits original sin to children is not actual libido. For even if, by some miracle, there were no actual libido, original sin would still be transmitted. (*ST*, II-I, 82, 4, ad 3)

Aquinas' meaning may be shown by an analogy. Suppose that a father could transmit to his children a disposition to anger. That disposition would be transmitted to his children no matter what his mood at the actual time his children were conceived. It would not really matter whether on the occasion of any particular act of intercourse the

father was in vile temper or unaccustomedly mild: the child's inherited dispositions would be those of the father.

It is worthwhile to notice some further things Aquinas has to say about the pleasures of marriage. (He calls them '*delectationes*' which is better translated 'delights'). Inquiring whether the marriage act is meritorious, he considers the claim that 'merit lies in difficulty, as does virtue, but the marriage act is delightful [and hence cannot be meritorious]' and replies that marriage itself is difficult: merit does not require that the marriage act be also difficult (In IV *Sent.*, 26, 1, 4, ad 4). He is aware that some have stressed St Paul's reference (1 Cor. 7, 6) to 'concession'—which, it should be noted, may well not have referred to the marriage act but to abstention from the marriage act—and observes 'there is no reason why a person availing of a concession should not merit, because the good use of the gifts of God is itself meritorious' (In IV *Sent.*, 26, 1, 4, ad 3). Then when inquiring whether marriage is a sacrament he considers the problem that sacraments derive their efficacy from the passion of Christ, but marriage [i.e. the marriage act] is delightful and answers: 'even if marriage is not like the passion of Christ in its suffering, it resembles it in the love he showed' (In IV *Sent.*, 42, 1, ad 3).

The reference to love leads us to inquire how far Aquinas talks of love between husband and wife. Rather than the word 'love' (*amor*) itself he uses its derivative 'friendship' (*amicitia*). He writes:

The greatest love would appear to exist between husband and wife, because they are united not only in the act of carnal copulation, which even in animals produces a sweet relationship (*suavis societas*), but also in the total sharing of family life (*totius domesticae conversationis consortium*). (CG, 3, 123)

He believes that the friendship of husband and wife is 'honourable, useful, and delightful'. He also believes that it is pre-figured in the Creation story. Man and woman were directly created by God (ST, 1, 92, 4), one from the earth, the other from Adam's side. Aquinas sees this as signifying that between husband and wife there should be an alliance (*socialis conjunctio*). Eve was not taken from Adam's head, because a wife should not rule over her husband, and she was not taken from his feet because a wife is not subject to her husband as a slave is (ST, 1, 92, 3).

Why he does not primarily use the word 'love' is clear from what he has to say about friendship:

Not all love is friendship, but only the love in which we wish the other person well. If we love something for our own sake, as when we love wine ... that is not the love of friendship.... But in

friendship there must be mutual love and there must be sharing.  
(*ST*, II-II, 2 1)

'A friend wishes to be in the company of his friend and share his life with him (*familiaris conversatio*)' (*ST*, I-II, 65, 5). Love brings about union: a real union with the person when physically present, and a union in the mind when absent (*ST*, I-II, 28, 1). Each wishes to have access to the inner world of the other. The lover is not satisfied with a superficial knowledge of the beloved: he wants to know every single detail. What is good for the beloved is good for him, what is bad for the beloved is bad for him (*ST*, I-II, 28, 2). Love produces ecstasy: the lover is out of his mind (*ST*, I-II, 28, 3) and of course jealous (*ST*, I-II, 28, 4). It never does to forget that Aquinas came from Italy.

What he has to say about marriage is more complex than has been assumed, and the present article does not presume to offer a definitive treatment of this topic. He certainly takes chastity to be a Christian virtue, and virginity to be a virtue as a mode of chastity and to be 'more excellent' than marriage. But he makes it clear that he is talking about states rather than about individuals, and quotes Augustine: 'How does the virgin, solicitous for the things of the Lord as she may be, know that some hidden weakness of mind does not make her not ready for martyrdom, while the [married] woman (*mulier*) she sees as inferior to her may even now be ready to drink the chalice of the Lord's passion' (*ST*, II-II, 15 4). He says that virginity is not the greatest virtue, and faced with the scriptural phrase that virgins follow the Lamb wherever he goes he replies that they may indeed follow the Lamb but are not necessarily those who follow Him most closely (*Ibid.*). He notes Augustine's assertion that feminine blandishments throw a man down from the peak of (spirituality, presumably) but argues that they do not interfere with the practice of everyday virtue (*ST*, II-II, 153, 2, ad 1).

He accepts the tradition deriving from Augustine that marriage has three goods: the good of offspring, the good of faithfulness and the good of being a sacrament, but he interprets these quite widely. The good of offspring is not merely procreation of children but also 'their upbringing and the sharing of life-work that this brings about between husband and wife': this sharing too is a good of marriage (In IV *Sent.*, 31, 1, 2, ad 1). The good of faithfulness is not principally the exclusion of other partners: it lies rather in giving to each other what is due—i.e. intercourse (*Ibid.*, ad 3). The *bonum sacramenti* is not merely the lifelong quality of marriage but everything else that this signifies (*Ibid.*, ad 7). He regards the procreation of offspring as the most essential element in marriage but the sacramental unity as the most worthy (In IV

*Sent.*, 31, 1, 3). He says that the intention of realizing either the good of offspring or the good of faithfulness legitimates the act of marriage (In IV *Sent.*, 31, 2, 2)—which is not to say that the good of faithfulness could legitimate an unnatural act, for this, by definition, is not an act of marriage. And of course an intention need not be something that is actually present in consciousness here and now: a man on a journey does not have to keep his point of arrival in mind while he takes every single step (*ST*, I-II, 1, 6, ad 3).

He does say that it is sinful to perform the marriage act purely for pleasure (In IV *Sent.*, 31, 2, 2) and some may think this rigorous. But what of the husband who comes home half-drunk, incapable of showing his wife true affection, yet demanding what he is pleased to call his rights? There are those who would be angry that Aquinas should call this only a venial sin. The distinction he draws between the spouse so set on pleasure that he would have intercourse with anyone and the spouse who at least remains faithful to his partner has been criticized as unlikely to be of practical use<sup>4</sup> but Aquinas—who taught in a university and was certainly no innocent—may have been thinking of the workings of phantasy. Indeed sometimes when reading his critics on this point one wonders whether to sympathize with their lack of imagination or admire their manifest avoidance of erotic literature.

Aquinas accepts that what he calls ‘the carnal conjunction’ makes for sweetness between the partners, but he says this only once (see above) and does not put this effect at the centre of his account of marriage. He is not a great romantic. Equally he will be misunderstood if his language is taken in a Lutheran sense: if original sin is seen as a deformity or depravity in human nature; if concupiscence is taken formally to mean original sin and to be as such sinful in its very nature; if statements that something is caused by sin are taken as referring to an actual effect of sin within human nature and not as referring to a lost inheritance, and if ‘*bonum prolis*’ is taken as referring to the conscious intention of procreating a child here and now. It would be equally wrong to imply that Aquinas anticipates, or would have sympathy with, current attitudes. But as Max Beerbohm noted, it is difficult to keep up with the leaders of modern thought as they disappear into oblivion.

1 Channel 4 Television, 7 September 1990.

2 John T. Noonan Jr., *Contraception*, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, p. 245.

3 Ute Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for Heaven*, London, 1990, p. 281.

4 John T. Noonan Jr., *Contraception*. p. 251.