Original Article

Contraception and abortion: Fruits of the same rotten tree?

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This article seeks to show how contraception, when generally accepted in a society, helps to bring about a radical change in social perceptions of sexual intercourse, human life, the human person, science, and morality in general. On account of this, contraception helps to ingrain abortion and other anti-life practices into the culture that accepts it and, therefore, in no sense can be considered as a panacea for abortion. Particular attention is given to the thought of John Paul II on this matter who noted that “despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree” (Evangelium vitae, n. 13).

Lay summary: *The article considers the connection between contraception and abortion and defends Pope John Paul II’s claim that “despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree.” The thesis is that contraception is a “game-changer” in the sense that it changes the way we think about some very fundamental realities such as attitudes to sex, to life, to science, to the human person, and to morality. Any one of these changes would have a significant impact on a society in terms of promoting a culture of death: together they are devastating.*

Keywords: Contraception, Abortion, Evangelium vitae, John Paul II

CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION: FRUITS OF THE SAME ROTTEN TREE?

Consider the following proposition: Amnesty International is a major cause of the growing number of political prisoners in the world. The reason is that it is on account of the campaigning of Amnesty International that political activists are emboldened to speak out against dictators, thereby forcing the latter to imprison them.

I think that most people in their right mind would find it hard to assent to this kind of logic. How is it then, that not a few find it possible to blame the Catholic Church for the continued scourge of abortion? In an interview with the London

newspaper *The Guardian*, Lord David Steel (the architect of the British abortion law) claimed that the Catholic Church’s opposition to birth-control methods like condoms was “contributing to the use of abortion as a contraception” (Borland and Martin 2008). Hence, the logic goes, it is because the Catholic Church opposes contraception that many are forced to kill their unintentionally conceived unborn children.

Ludicrous as this at first appears, perhaps, on closer analysis, Lord Steel does have a point. Could we not mount a plausible argument that went something like this: a major reason for abortion is that a woman conceives a baby that neither she nor her partner wants. The number of such

unintended pregnancies might be reduced if contraception were more widely used. Hence, all those interested in the reduction of abortion should likewise support the greater use of contraception.

In this paper, I want to think through this question. We might rephrase it as this: what should the attitude of pro-life persons and the pro-life movement be toward contraception? Should one promote it, oppose it, or merely be indifferent?

THE FACTS

Let us first start with some facts and then later on move to some ideas; and in fairness to our esteemed interlocutor (Lord Steel), let us start with some studies that seem to support the advocates of contraception as a way to reduce abortion.

In Eastern Bloc countries during the Communist era, abortion rates rose to mind-boggling proportions. After the fall of Communism, the greater availability and use of modern forms of contraception seem to have led to a dramatic reduction in these rates. In Russia, for example, the abortion rate between 1960 and 1990 ranged from 102 to 165 per 1,000 women of child-bearing age. Between 1990 and 2010, the rate fell from 114 to 42, as rates of modern contraceptive use increased (Marston and Cleland 2003). Now, we have to be a little careful here because the studies do not allow us to determine the use of abortifacient contraception, so it may well be that many abortions are now hidden. Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that contraception has had something to do with reducing rates of abortion in Russia. This, then, I would not deny: namely, that in extreme cases contraception can trim off certain excesses. But this really is in extreme cases because the rate of abortion in Russia (and other Soviet bloc countries) was far higher than in

other parts of Europe. To put this in perspective, the rate in England and Wales was 21 per 1,000 women of child-bearing age for 2010 (Johnston 2012). So the rate in Russia was, at its peak, eight times higher than this, and is still double the rate of most Western countries.

Russia, in the latter part of the Soviet era, was a culture in which the accepted standard form of family planning was abortion, and a country in which there was little or no cultural opposition to this. It is an extreme case rather than a typical case. Studies in other countries seem to show a different relationship between contraception and abortion. In Spain, a marked increase in the use of contraception between 1997 and 2007 (30%) was matched by a significant increase in abortion (48%). This represents an increase from 5.5 to 11.5 abortions per 1,000 women of child-bearing age (Duenãs et al. 2011, 82–87).

Something similar can be seen in England and Wales, in which the use of contraception increased significantly among sexually active unmarried women between 1970 and 1990 from 26 to 97 percent (the use among married woman was already at saturation point), and this paralleled a similar increase in abortion from 8.8 to 19.9 per 1,000 women.¹

Then again, in another study—this time in Turkey—we observe yet another pattern (Senlet et al. 2001, 41–52). When abortion and contraception are liberalized, we see a sharp increase in *both* contraceptive use and abortions. This seems to follow the Spanish and British models. After a time, contraceptive use becomes saturated though not ubiquitous (there will always be men and women in any society who do not use it). Once this level of use is attained, the abortion rate begins to drop, returning to somewhat above its initial pre-liberalization level.²

In these three cases (Spain, UK, and Turkey), we observe a hand-in-hand increase in the use of contraception and the rate of abortion. The most plausible

explanation for this is that both phenomena reflect a change in attitude toward sex and babies. Supported by the increased use of contraception, extra-marital sex is becoming more prevalent, *and* women are orientated more and more to smaller family sizes: there is a more-sex-less-babies attitude developing.³ This in turn is likely to lead to more pregnancies being unwanted and in turn to more abortions.⁴

Certainly, in the case of Turkey the abortion rate drops once contraception use saturates, but it never returns to where it began, rather it levels off at a rate that represents an overall 40 percent increase in abortions.

The conclusion I would draw from this data is, therefore, the following. There is no convincing way of arguing that contraception is a panacea for abortion. Even if the extremes of Soviet Russia can be clipped, there appears to be in other situations a positive correlation between contraceptive use and abortions built upon the fact that contraception is an important element in changes in cultural attitudes, especially the attitude toward sex. To put this another way: we might say that contraception is the linchpin in a cultural revolution that has abortion as one of its principal effects. The overall result of this is that, far from liberating a culture from the scourge of abortion, contraception engrains, and entrenches this practice into a culture that accepts it.

Let us be clear, even if contraception were a solution for abortion, we would be forced to oppose it as an immoral solution. But the fact is, it is not even an immoral solution: it is no solution at all, even on a practical level. I cannot, therefore, concur with the thinking of the aforementioned British statement. Rather, it seems right that I turn to the wisdom of a Polish pope who noted that

despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. (John Paul II 1995, n. 13)

My goal, then, is to understand what the late pontiff meant when he made this statement because he clearly believed that there is a profound connection between these two phenomena. In order to do this, we need now to move from facts to ideas.

CONTRACEPTION AS THE BACK-BONE OF A CULTURAL REVOLUTION

My principal argument here is that modern contraception is what is commonly called today “a game-changer.” The New Oxford Dictionary defines “game-changer” as “an event, idea, or procedure that effects a significant shift in the current way of doing or thinking about something” (Oxford Dictionaries 2014).

To a limited extent, the secular world recognizes the game-changing character of contraception, and it is on account of this that hormonal contraception is a frequent member in lists of “ten things that changed the world,” alongside earlier inventions like the wheel, the compass, the printing press, electric light bulb, and newcomers such as penicillin and the Internet (cf. Wolchover 2012).

When the secular world thinks of contraception as a game-changer, it perhaps has in mind categories like giving women power over their bodies. However, the game-changing nature of contraception goes far beyond this. The dictionary says that a game-changer effects a significant shift in ways of thinking. I wish now to develop this point. Contraception changes the way we think about very fundamental realities, because contraception changes attitudes to sex, to life, to science, to the human person, and to morality. Anyone of these might have a significant impact on a society in terms of promoting a culture of death: together, as we shall see, they are devastating.

CONTRACEPTION CHANGES THE MEANING OF SEX

The most fundamental reason why contraception fosters abortion is that contraception changes the meaning of sex, and not just in this or that act of sexual intercourse, but in the consciousness of whole cultures. I have already touched upon this in commenting on the reason for the hand-in-hand growth of contraceptive use and abortion rates in the two case studies mentioned above: but I need to expound on this a little more.

The key point is that contraception uncouples (in the mind of the individual who accepts it as normal behavior) the relationship of sexual intercourse to babies and to life-long commitment: in a word, it trivializes sex. Trivial sex, in turn, leads inevitably to unwanted pregnancies, which inexorably leads to abortion.

To put this another way: when sex becomes recreational, individuals engage in sexual intercourse with persons whom they certainly would not want to collaborate with in the long term and demanding task of child-rearing. In this sense, contraception falls under what is known as the Peltzman effect. Samuel Peltzman was an economist who claimed that some road-safety regulations had no long-term benefits in terms of preventing serious accidents because, since they made people feel safer, they led to more reckless driving. Some claim that the Peltzman effect can be discerned in the area of ski safety. Apparently, the advent of ski helmets has led to more risky behavior on the slopes and the “risk index” is higher for helmeted than non-helmeted skiers (Ružić and Tudor 2011, 291–296).

The point, of course, is that contraception seems to make sex less risky vis-à-vis pregnancy, and so people engage in sex with persons with whom they have no intention of raising children, and so when

pregnancy does arise—as it undoubtedly will—*unwanted* pregnancies arise. This phenomenon can be seen particularly with teenage pregnancy and abortion (Arcidiacono, Khwaja, and Ouyang, 2011; Edgardh 2002, 352–356; Girma and Paton 2006, 1021–1032; Girma and Paton 2011, 373–380; Paton 2002, 207–225; Wiggins et al. 2009, 1–8).⁵

A report from Yale and Duke Universities on the success (or otherwise) of programs to reduce teenage pregnancy noted that

Our results suggest that increasing access to contraception may actually increase long-run pregnancy rates even when short-run pregnancy rates fall. On the other hand, policies that decrease access to contraception, and hence sexual activity, may lower pregnancy rates in the long run. (Arcidiacono, Khwaja, and Ouyang 2011, 30)

The authors give reasons for this. They note that

should contraception become more available, those who switch from unprotected sex to protected sex will lower the teen pregnancy rate, while those who move from abstaining to protected sex will increase the teen pregnancy rate due to contraception failure. (Arcidiacono, Khwaja, and Ouyang 2011, 2)

In essence, this study (like others) shows that what contraception gives with one hand (in reducing abortions) it takes back with the other by bringing women into the casual-sex-no-babies market.

CONTRACEPTION CHANGES OUR VIEW OF LIFE

In an attempt to lampoon Catholic attitudes toward child-rearing, the British comical ensemble Monty Python have a scene in one of their films (*The Meaning of Life*) in which the father of a very large group of ghetto-dwelling children tells us

in a song precisely why he is the father of so many. The song has the memorable refrain in which the father assures us that “every sperm is sacred, every sperm is great, if one sperm is wasted, God gets quite irate.”

This leans in the direction of suggesting that Catholics oppose contraception because it is a crime analogous to murder: the idea that every sperm (as well as every child) is sacred points in this direction. It is clear from the quotation above from *Evangelium vitae*, that John Paul II, at least, does not equate contraception with murder because he says abortion and contraception are “different in nature” and not just different in the degree of seriousness.⁶

Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that contraception is an essential part of a culture that is ambivalent, at best, about the generation of new life: it is anti-life in a different way than abortion is anti-life but, at the very least, it leads to the general idea of pregnancy as something to be guarded against as a potential disaster.⁷

Now, once this seed of doubt about the goodness of new life is planted and nurtured in the mind of a people, then the doors to abortion have been unbarred (if not opened); and as sure as day follows night, abortion will become law. To think that, in a given culture, one can permit contraception but ban abortion is *similar* to telling children that pneumonia is bad for him and that is why he should wear a hat in the cold weather, but then, when he does contract pneumonia (because he did not wear the hat or it slipped off in all the excitement of a snow ball fight) to tell him that he cannot take antibiotics.

The anti-life atmosphere exuded by contraception goes a long way to explain why countries that permit contraception very quickly follow up with laws permitting large-scale abortion. There was just eight years separating the legalization of

contraception and abortion in the USA (1965 and 1973); seven years in Britain (1961 and 1968); eight in France (1967 and 1975). Ireland held out longer, thirty-five years (1978–2013). I suspect this is a record but perhaps has something to do with the fact that Irish women could abort their babies in Great Britain. The point is that once contraception is legalized, its anti-life inner character begins to do its work: the writing is on the wall. Of course, for many countries liberalized contraception and abortion comes as a package under the euphemism of reproductive health rights.

The anti-life character of contraception is perhaps even more starkly evident in the acceptance of the morning-after pill. So-called “emergency contraception” is a testimony to how contraception “naturally” extends its inner logic toward abortion. Here is where the anti-life essence of contraception spills over most directly into the anti-life practice of abortion since no longer is any effort made to separate these two realities.⁸

Another way that contraception changes attitudes toward human life is that it engenders an exaggerated and ultimately despotic power over the origins of human life. This is because, as John Paul II points out, to decide for contraception is to take the stance of an arbiter rather than a minister with regard to one’s power to transmit human life (cf. John Paul II 1981, n. 32). In accepting contraception, mankind becomes forgetful that his role in the transmission of human life is one of partnership with God. After all, the mother and father can only contribute the material part of every new human being; the spiritual element must come directly from God.⁹ In *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI reminds couples about this very point several times by using the word “munus” (meaning “mission” or “office”) to describe the task assigned to spouses. If the task of

transmitting human life is understood as an office bestowed upon the parents, the notion of collaboration with God is better preserved (cf. Smith 1993).

But contraception fools us into thinking that we are in charge of the whole process of generating human life. This, in turn, leads to the perception that since we alone create a child, we alone can decide arbitrarily when we shall and shall not exercise this power. It gives the impression that we are the gatekeepers of human life. This totalitarian and autocratic notion of our power over the origins of human life easily leads to despotic attitudes with regard to unwanted and unplanned human life, either as regards unwanted pregnancies or the destruction of spare embryos in fertility treatments such as in vitro fertilization.

CONTRACEPTION CHANGES OUR NOTION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

A few years ago, a colleague of mine told me a story about an experience of his own son at school. My colleague's wife was expecting their sixth child, and their eldest son had announced this happy news to one of his friends at school. This friend, on returning home to his own family, asked his mother why they might not also have a new baby brother. The mother told her son that they would not be having any babies because she, the mother, had had one of those operations "like you give to rabbits" to stop that unfortunate type of thing happening.

To my mind, it is significant that this mother explained things in terms of the fact that she had had an operation that had also been given to the pet rabbit in order to stop it breeding. It strikes me that this explanation has embedded in it yet another powerful effect of the contraceptive culture, namely the blurring of distinction between humans and animals.

It is not too much to say that one of the very distinctive aspects of human beings is that they can control themselves in matters of sexuality—they can harness their sexual desires and integrate them into higher forms of love. This is, by my reading, the central thesis of Wojtyła in *Love and Responsibility*, where the pope-to-be explains that human beings are able to bring reason to bear upon their sexual drive and thereby use it as raw material for self-sacrificing love (Wojtyła 2013, 125–157). Contraception is a discouraging phenomenon because it suggests that this is not really possible: in this way, it conflates the difference between humans and animals in matters of sex. Something similar goes on in some forms of modern sex education. The view is taken that girls are no more capable of developing virtue than are rabbits: so it is better just to give them some pills in order to chemically neuter them.

But this conflation of what is human and what is animal has implications for life issues. When techniques proper to the farm (such as neutering) are deemed suitable for human beings, then destructive forms of artificial fertilization are likewise seen to be acceptable. Here we can also see a logical link to euthanasia, because animals are routinely "put down" when either they are no longer useful or when they are sick and suffering.

In his 1994 *Letter to Families*, John Paul II touches upon a more subtle, but no less significant, shift in the attitude toward the human person that is brought about by contraception. This is closely tied to what the pope calls the re-occurrence of Manicheanism (John Paul II 1994, n. 19). By this, he means an exaggerated dualism in which the body is estranged from the person, being seen more like a mere tool or vehicle.

John Paul II believed that this exaggerated dualistic anthropology is implicit within a contraceptive mentality. His

argument works as follows: when a couple engage in sexual intercourse and at the same time intentionally render themselves sterile (as they do by contraception), they are at one moment seeking to give themselves to each other for the sake of communion, and at the same time seeking not to give (or receive) something important, namely their fertility. This only makes sense if the couple believe that the body (of which fertility is an important characteristic) need not be included in the personal communication because it is not really part of the person. The body is seen as a kind of tool used by the person to achieve union, but not part of the person and part of the personal gift of self-inherent in sexual intercourse. In short, John Paul II is pointing out that contraceptive sex implicitly operates on the basis of an exaggerated dualistic anthropology.

Hence, the anthropology underlying contraception subtly but profoundly distorts our view of the human person and, thereby, removes a formidable psychological obstacle to abortion. It can translate into a belief that while a human body might well be present in the womb of the mother—by which is meant, that matter of a human type is present—a human person is not present because, on account of the underlying contraceptive anthropology, the human body and the human person are radically distinct.

CONTRACEPTION CONTRIBUTES TO A CHANGE IN OUR VIEWS OF THE PURPOSE OF SCIENCE

C.S. Lewis was very interested in the question of the relationship between science and magic. This issue is given formal treatment in his essay *The Abolition of Man*, and it also appears, no less brilliantly, in his novel *The Magician's Nephew*. In the latter, we discover the

warped character of Uncle Andrew, an amateur magician who unscrupulously sends a little girl called Polly out of this world and into another (by tricking her to put on a magic ring) and then sends his own nephew, Digory, after her because he is too cowardly to go to save Polly himself.

In both *The Abolition of Man* and *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis perceives a likeness between science and magic on the basis that both are interested in gaining power over nature. Magic, however, as it is practised by Uncle Andrew (and later in the story by the much more powerful and cruel Jadis), differs from true science in the fact that its thirst for power is not constrained by what is good and right.¹⁰

Uncle Andrew explains to Digory why he is fully justified in cutting himself loose from the bonds of morality in the pursuit of power through magic when he says:

Of course you must understand that rules of that sort [the basic rules of morality], however excellent they may be for little boys – and servants – and women – and even people in general, can't possibly be expected to apply to profound students and great thinkers and sages. No Digory, men like me, who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules just as we are cut off from common pleasures. Ours, my boy, is a high and lonely destiny (Lewis 1998, 19).

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis expresses concern that science is going the way of magic because he observes that modern science is also cutting itself loose from the question of the good and the true, and is inviting us to pay attention only to the possible. As an example of this tendency, Lewis points to contraception (Lewis 2001, 55).

To understand why Lewis might alight upon contraception (when he considers

power divorced from the true and the good), it is instructive to consider for a moment two of the candidates for the 10 inventions that changed the world, mentioned earlier. Penicillin and hormonal contraception stand side by side historically, because they were created within 10 years of each other, in the first half of the twentieth century. However, what separates these two is, for our purposes, more interesting than what unites them. While both give to mankind a power over himself (over his body), one, namely penicillin, fights against disease and promotes health and hence is clearly ordered to the true good of man, whereas the other, contraception, seeks to frustrate the operation of a healthy faculty, rendering it inoperative.

This difference is very significant. Lauding hormonal contraception as one of the greatest achievements of humankind represents a quintessentially modern view of science. It sees progress as a task unconstrained by the question of what is really good for mankind. It is a manifestation of what Benedict XVI liked to call technocracy—meaning the ideology that what is *possible* is by that fact *good* (Benedict XVI 2009, nn. 69–71). Or as Lewis would perhaps put it: the distinction between science and magic has become blurred.

The key point is this: contraception embraces a notion of science and progress as the search for power unconstrained by the question of the good.¹¹ This philosophy of science has obvious and disastrous effects when it is applied to other life issues. It inevitably leads to a totalitarian claim over the origins of life itself, which manifests itself not just in abortion but in illicit forms of artificial procreation, cloning and embryo experimentation: according to the logic of technocracy, as these technologies become possible, they become good.

CONTRACEPTION CHANGES OUR MORAL OUTLOOK

The final “game-changing” aspect of contraception is the way that it helps shape a culture’s basic moral outlook.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to focus on what is called the connection of the cardinal virtues. According to St. Thomas, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are so related that there cannot be growth in one without growth in the others and, likewise, weakness in one is a weakening of all (cf. Aquinas 1947a, *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 65). It is on account of this that, elsewhere, Aquinas can argue that the thing that more than anything else undermines prudence is intemperance (and especially sexual intemperance, namely lust) (cf. Aquinas, 1947b, *Summa theologiae*, II–II, q. 53, a. 6). The reason is that the intemperate person has psychologically placed himself at the center of the universe. Yet, this is just not true because none of us really are the center of this universe, and to the extent that we think we are, we are deluded and see everything in a distorted way. In short, we become imprudent, because prudence is nothing other than seeing things the way they really are. As Pieper notes in his book on the cardinal virtues, the

will-to-pleasure prevents [the unchaste man or woman] from confronting reality with that selfless detachment which alone makes genuine knowledge possible. (Pieper 1966, 161)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien nicely captures this connection between prudence and temperance in the character of Gollum. It is Gollum’s covetousness of the ring of power that ultimately makes him insane. (Tolkien 1993).

We need now to factor into this insight of Aquinas (and Tolkien), an insight of John Paul II concerning contraception, namely that contraception contributes

significantly to the problem of intemperance. This is, in fact, perhaps the major complaint leveled at contraception by John Paul II in the *Theology of the Body*. For him, contraception is not so much anti-life as anti-love, in the sense that it promotes concupiscence understood as sexual intemperance (John Paul II 1981, n. 32).

It does this because it totally removes from sexual relationships the need for self-control, and in a post-lapsian world this is a recipe for lust. Fallen human sexuality is inclined to sexual selfishness by default. Something has to be done about this, and contraception is a major obstacle in this regard because it undermines the acquisition of self-control through removing any need for abstinence. As Paul VI warned in *Humanae vitae*, “a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman” (Paul VI 1968, n. 17.) Hence, contraception fuels intemperance in cultures that accept it, and intemperance distorts and obscures our moral vision.

The upshot of this is that intemperate persons and cultures just see the world differently from temperate persons and cultures. This accounts for the disconcerting fact that unchaste cultures cannot see what is entirely obvious to the chaste: including the humanity of the unborn child. It is not even a matter of bad will: intemperate cultures simply cannot see it because they are blinded by their intemperance.

Or again, the unchaste are not able to see beauty. They cannot see it because the appreciation of beauty demands the appreciation of something “for its own sake.” This is not possible for a person or a culture that is fixated on consumption—which is at the heart of intemperance. Only the pure can see beauty so only the pure can see the beauty of human life in every life.

And finally, only the pure can see God. Jesus tells us in the Sermon of the Mount

that “blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). To have a pro-life view of the world, one cannot do without this purity of heart. The ultimate reason to respect every human life, no matter how small or compromised it might be, is that every human life is stamped through with the image of God: however, only the pure in heart can see this, because only they can see God.

Let us note here that all this points to a wider issue. I am taking contraception as a major contributor to intemperance in our culture, but it is not the only one: there is pornography, lurid music, various forms of immodesty, and consumerism. To the extent that these fuel intemperance, just like contraception they cloud our vision of the truth, and they are, therefore, elements of the culture of death.

Finally (on the point of the connection of the virtues), the Gollum effect also points up the relationship of temperance and justice, or rather of intemperance and injustice. Gollum’s covetousness not only leads to his becoming insane, it leads to acts of gross injustice: it drove him to kill his own kinsman, Deagol. The unbending logic of the connection of the virtues has, likewise, meant that the intemperance of contraception has driven many parents to kill their own kin by way of abortion.

A second way that contraception disturbs our moral compass is by way of undermining the notion of moral absolutes. John Finnis makes this point explicitly in his definitive work on moral absolutes. He notes that “the formal attack on the moral absolutes emerges, among Catholics, in response to the problem of contraception” and that in its wake has come the denial of the moral absolutes of killing innocents (abortion), of telling lies (deceiving the public in matters of state security), of marital intercourse as the only legitimate form (masturbation, homosexual unions), of procreation as the result of

marital intercourse (artificial forms of procreation and embryo freezing). His point is that contraception is the soft underbelly of moral absolutes.¹² It seems a less serious issue than abortion and sodomy, for example. People are much more prepared to admit that there might be special cases in which married couples might do a little evil (use contraception) for the sake of the good, such as the good of marital intimacy. But once this is accepted, the horse has bolted (cf. Kaczor 1999, 269–281).

What I am arguing here is that the widespread acceptance of contraception, especially among Catholics, fatally undermines the opposition that can be mounted against abortion by the only organization that can mount a global challenge to the culture of death. This is because along with the acceptance of contraception comes the implicit acceptance of consequentialism and the denial of moral absolutes.¹³ This fatally undermines effective opposition to abortion, to euthanasia, to embryo experimentation, and so on. After all, the moral analysis that would justify contraception—namely consequentialism—can certainly also justify these other elements of the culture of death in many cases.

CONCLUSION

There are, no doubt, other important connections between contraception and abortion (and other anti-life activities) which I have not touched upon here. There is for example the legal connection, most evident in the case of the USA where the law permitting abortion is built upon a case law permitting contraception.¹⁴ There is also undoubtedly a demographic connection, namely that contraception contributes to a top-heavy population that stokes the flames of euthanasia.

Here, however, I have chosen to focus more on the psychological effects of contraception and how they have helped to bring about a cultural revolution that has itself ushered in the culture of death. One might say that as a mind-warping phenomenon the contraceptive pill is more powerful than a tablet of LSD. The latter only changes one's perception for an evening; the former has changed the minds of a whole culture and a whole generation.

I have been following closely here the teaching of John Paul II. However, on one thing I would humbly beg to differ. The late pontiff says that contraception and abortion are "fruits of the same tree." I would suggest that contraception is not the fruit of this tree, but its rotten root: abortion, euthanasia, and embryo experimentation are the fruits. Historically, contraception has predated these other evils, but this is only because these other crimes pre-exist in the logic of contraception, which inevitably takes time to unfurl.¹⁵

In conclusion then, I do not believe the pro-life movement can be indifferent about the issue of contraception. In some way, it has to address the root of the culture of death. Every gardener knows from bitter experience that if the root of the weed is not entirely destroyed, then it grows back and often with a vengeance. We need to set the axe to the root of the culture of death, and this root is contraception.

ENDNOTES

1. For contraceptive use, see McEwan et al. (1997, 5–8). For abortion statistics, see Johnston (2012).
2. When the laws were first liberalized in 1983, 12% of all pregnancies ended in abortion. This increased to nearly 24% in 1988. However, by 1998 the rate

- decreased to 16%. The authors of the study claim that this is due to the greater availability of contraception. There has been fluctuation in this rate since, but by 2007 it had leveled at 17%. The 2007 rate of abortions is nearly 40% higher than before liberalization of contraceptive laws (see Senlet et al. 2001; Marston and Cleland 2003).
3. The argument here is not that the widespread availability of contraception is the *only* factor behind the sexual revolution and, in particular, the dramatic increase in pre-marital sexual intercourse. However, it cannot be denied that it is an indispensable element of this cultural change (cf. Heer and Grossbard-Shechtman 1981, 49ff; Greenwood and Guner 2009). In a similar way, the advent of cheap air travel is not the only reason for the explosion of foreign travel in the last 40 years: but its absence in the past was a major restricting factor, which meant that formerly very few people traveled abroad for holidays.
 4. An important factor to consider here is the failure rate of contraception. For example, the failure rate for condoms is 2% with perfect use and 18% with typical use. This means that in typical use, 18 women per 100 who use condoms as the sole means to prevent conception become pregnant each year (see Trussell 2011, 397–404).
 5. None of this is to deny that it is possible to find studies where aggressively targeted contraception campaigns on particular groups of women—offering them free long-term contraception and monitoring their use of it—can reduce the abortion rate of these women in comparison to their peers (cf. Painter 2012). However, promoting a culture of contraception (as opposed to individual projects) is bound to draw more women into sexual activity with resultant unwanted pregnancy.
 6. This is at least true of barrier methods of contraception such as condoms. Some other methods, such as IUDs and perhaps some forms of hormonal contraception, have an abortifacient mode of operation. In these cases, the distinction John Paul II makes does not apply.
 7. Some authors try to explain the Catholic Church's opposition to contraception primarily on the basis that it is anti-life behavior, rather than appealing to natural law arguments (cf. May 2008).
 8. The mode of operation of the morning-after pill is disputed with even the manufacturers of these products uncertain of exactly how it works. The Pontifical Academy of Life has clearly condemned the use of these drugs as abortifacient (see Pontifical Academy for Life 2000). Scientific support for this position can be found in Kahlenborn, Stanford, and Larimore (2002, 465–470). Even supporters of the use of this technology accept that its mode of operation includes interfering with the post-fertilization phase of pregnancy (see Trussell, Raymond, and Cleland 2014). However, some sound ethicists have argued against this position (see Austriaco 2007, 707ff).
 9. It is impossible for the spiritual soul to emerge out of the material contribution of the parents. Nor (given the immaterial nature of the soul) is it reasonable to argue that the souls of the parents “split” in order to create the soul of the child. The soul must, therefore, be created directly by God (cf. Brennan 1941).
 10. Lewis sees this tendency in the philosophical founder of modern science, Francis Bacon, and optimized in Christopher Marlowe's *Faustus* (see Lewis 2001, 77–78).
 11. This point is also evident in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, where he says that: “The problem lies in maintaining the adequate relationship between that which is defined as ‘domination ... of the forces of nature’ (HV 2), and ‘...self-mastery’ (HV 21), which is indispensable for the human person. Contemporary man shows the tendency of transporting the methods proper to the first sphere to those of the second” (see John Paul II 2006, 630–631).
 12. “The formal attack on the moral absolutes emerges, among Catholics, in response to the problem of contraception. Not in response to the desire to maintain a counter population deterrent strategy of annihilating retaliation; or to tell lies in military, police, or political operations; or to carry out therapeutic abortions; or to arrange homosexual unions; or to relieve inner tensions and disequilibria by

masturbation; or to keep slaves; or to produce babies by impersonal artifice. Those desires were and are all urgent enough, but none of them precipitated the formal rejection of moral absolutes. The desire to practice and approve of contraception did" (Finnis 1991).

13. Cf. Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion (1930). See also the Majority Report of the Birth Control Commission set up by John XXIII. The authors of this report commenting on different methods to prevent pregnancy conclude that "the means to be chosen, where several are possible, is that which carries with it the least possible negative element, according to the concrete situation of the couple" (Hoyt 1969). All bets are off: there is nothing that could not be justified, as contraception is being justified here, in terms of what "carries with it the least possible negative element."
14. It is quite well known that the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that permitted abortion for the first time, the so-called *Roe v. Wade* (1973) hung on a previous case concerning contraception. This case is the so-called *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and concerned the criminalization of the sale and use of contraceptives in the State of Connecticut. The State of Connecticut lost because the Supreme Court judged that the use of contraceptives by married persons was a private matter according to the Constitution. This was used in *Roe v. Wade* to argue that becoming a mother or not was also a private matter and so criminalizing abortions was unconstitutional.
15. This is not to deny that there might be some reality that underlies both contraception and abortion such that they are both fruits of that common reality. As Ratzinger notes "contraception and abortion both have their roots in that depersonalized and utilitarian view of sexuality and procreation which we have just described and which in turn is based on a truncated notion of man and his freedom" (Ratzinger 1991). Nonetheless, I have sought to argue here that at the level of cultural change contraception and abortion align more as cause to effect than just as two unrelated effects of some third reality.

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