

End-less Sex and Selfishness

Angela Franks, PhD
Professor of Theology
St. John's Seminary

I begin by contrasting two interpretations of the sexual status quo: the first, represented by Luke Timothy Johnson and his book *The Revelatory Body*, can be summarized as a view of sex as "messy," not capable of being clearly morally delineated, and yet fundamentally positive in its expressions. The second, represented by the #MeToo movement, portrays sex as a fraught area of aggression and consent. I will argue that the second view more accurately represents the post-lapsarian reality, albeit with no resources for a positive sexual morality.

The heart of the paper is an examination of desire. #MeToo underscores that sexual desire has unstable and aggressive possibilities latent in it. In order to unpack why, I will provide an examination of St. Thomas Aquinas's treatment of desire. Thomas knows that desire is good because it is ordered to goods that fulfill us as the kinds of beings that we are. But our desires tend to infinity, because they are ultimately ordered to God. This means that desire must be ordered to its natural end, or else it becomes end-less and weird. It goes rogue.

The third section will apply these insights to the issue of contraception. I will argue that contraception orders the sexual act to private and subordinate goods rather than the true goods of procreation and unity. Contraception thus structures sex in a selfish way, which enables precisely the Harvey Weinstens of the world. Sexual desire ordered to its natural end, on the other hand, is perfective of the human person.