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**CATHOLIC ETHICS.  
By Victor B. Neuburg.**

The following letter appeared, as a contribution to a controversy on Birth Control, in G.K.'s *Weekly* of July 23rd, 1927:-

**"THE WISDOM OF A HERETIC."**

Dear Sir,—The opponents of the use of contraceptive devices (usually described by the slipshod reasoners who advocate it as "birth-control") are as well aware of the naturalness and legitimacy of the sexual passion in man as is Victor B. Neuberg, otherwise they would advocate universal abstinence from sex-relations. They believe, however, that what distinguishes man from other animals is his possession of will and reason whereby to control his appetites (and the notion is not exclusively a Christian one); and they maintain (1) that the use of the appliances referred to is intended or calculated (to use Parliamentary language) to avoid the necessity of observing the law of temperance in sex-relations which is common to Christian, Jewish, and decent Pagan ethics, and (2) that by the introduction of the clement of deliberation the sex-relation is degraded to the level of simple prostitution.

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To talk of an action which has been prepared for by "pre-cautions" as being dictated by passion is sheer hypocrisy. Moreover, prevention of conception is certainly not natural. It is, in fact, anti-natural; and if there is anything sacred about Nature (as Christians believe) it is a blasphemy against her, and should be abhorrent to one who appeals to Nature to support his case—but it is probably hopeless to look for consistency in a Freethinker, who is seldom a free thinker.

As regards "enabling people to avoid begetting more offspring than they can comfortably maintain": if the principle be admitted that size of families should be determined by financial considerations, what delightful prospect for the sponging classes generally! "Birth-control," first made legitimate and respectable, could presently be made compulsory for the lower

classes (whose enslavement their masters are already commencing), their numbers could be permanently restricted to such limits as would suffice to create their own living allowances and the fat dividends on which the "hupper suckles" could live and bring up such families as they desired. This is, of course, the logical conclusion of the process which *G.K.'s Weekly* and the League exist to denounce and oppose.

Norman R. Turner.

The following reply, on the other hand, sent on July 25th, has so far (October 22nd) been suppressed. (It is to be noted that *G.K.'s Weekly* itself initiated the debate by printing, in its issue of May 28th, a religiously virulent article, headed "The Stupidity of Stopes."")

### THE WISDOM OF A HERETIC.

#### A Rejoinder.

Dear Sir,—Although quite an alien "bird" in your Cockpit, I claim a little ground wherein to spar with Mr. Norman R. Turner.

May I point out that "will" and "reason" do not, and cannot, make man absolutely continent, while he has a physical body? A sexual relationship that occurred once a year (an impossible ideal for the normal man) might very well result in the production of offspring. "Continence," therefore, or self-restraint, is absurd as a rival to contraceptive methods.

There is not the slightest proof that the use of contraceptives makes man sexually intemperate. But "continence" means sexual starvation (the first step towards neurasthenia), and, from the naturalistic viewpoint, the satisfaction of hunger is legitimate and desirable.

The Jewish sexual "ethics" are to be found in abundance in the Old Testament. They are not particularly pleasant, as Mr. Turner may discover for himself in the Sacred Volume; in any case, they are too nasty to be discussed here. As to Christian ethics; when Mr. Turner has correlated and harmonised the slightly differing views of Paul, Origen, the later Tolstoy, and Dean Inge (all *soi-disant* Christians), we may find them excellent, especially if we may be allowed to include representative Skoptski and Mormon ideas. Pagan ethics are in the same boat. The phrase "pagan ethics" is as meaningful and suggestive as "Continental food." *Whose* ethics? Those of Epictetus? Diogenes? Petronius Arbiter? Juvenal? Marcus Aurelius? Homer? My dear Mr. Turner, there are *no* collective Pagan ethics, as

there are *no* collective Christian ethics. "Decent" is merely a question-begging adjective; the very meaning of "decent" shifts with every decade.

Mr. Turner does not believe in "the element of deliberation" in the sex-relationship; then he must believe in pure impulse. How he reconciles this with the use of will and reason I leave him to explain. Yet he inveighs against man being classed with the other animals, although it is will and reason that make man different from this "younger brothers."

It is interesting to learn (from a Christian especially) that any sex-act that is not absolutely "impulsive" (that is, born of animal desire), is "simple prostitution." Yet it is unlikely that the happiest marriages result from a series of moral rapes on the part of the husband! Mr. Turner, who is presumably unmarried, has a good deal to learn about love. I can assure him, without any hypocrisy, "sheer" or unsheer, that passion and precaution can co-exist quite happily.

"It is hopeless to look for consistency in a Freethinker." Is Mr. Turner certain that he would recognise consistency if he saw it?

No thought is "Free"; for it is governed by laws; a Free-thinker is not one who is outside the laws of thought—a thing "impossible in nature"—but one who holds certain views in relation to what is called Revelation.

A word as to Nature: There is nothing outside Nature that anyone has ever discovered. Man is the child of Nature, his inventions (or "findings") her grandchildren. Contraceptive devices are, therefore, no more anti- or unnatural than lightning-conductors, which are "preventives" for another purpose. "Unnatural" is a variable term like "decent"; it is a question-beggar; an adjective that we apply to what we dislike. I define Nature in the words of the Inscription upon the Temple of Isis; the quotation is from Plutarch's *Moralia*: "I Isis am all that has been, that is, or shall be; no mortal man hath ever me unveiled." Nature includes *everything*, and the only "blasphemy" against her is to deny her potentialities.

A final word as to Mr. Turner's economics, and I have done.

The upper classes in this country, as in others, have already limited the number of their offspring. From the view of these temporary "dominants," the more children begotten by the slaves or employees the better, for two reasons. The first is that of competition; the more people there are after a job, the keener they all are to obtain it, and the principle of undercutting or blacklegging begins to operate, to the financial benefit

of the employer. The second reason is that it is obviously to the benefit of the ruling class to have as much choice as possible, for personal reasons, in the selection of their servants.

No one proposes to make birth-control compulsory. *All* forms of prohibition are, to me, objectionable. The idea is simply the alleviation of human suffering.

Victor B. Neuburg.

This hitherto burked reply is given here in order to indicate, as publicly as possible, what things are feared (and hence suppressed) by our Catholic opponents.

It is interesting to compare the treatment accorded to Mr. A. J. Ellison, M.A., LL.B., by the monthly *New Generation* with the treatment accorded to me by the weekly *G.K.'s*. But be it borne in mind that the *New Generation* has a true and noble Freethought lineage, while *G.K.'s Weekly* merely "believes in" freedom, that is, Catholic freedom; and what *that* is is written in bright red blood upon the torn pages of the history of Religious "belief," or faith, has deluged the world in blood and bitterness; this evil flood has subsided in direct proportion to the rise of thought or philosophy. It is not accidental that the most famous Birth-Control pamphlet that ever appeared had for title "The Fruits of Philosophy." It is not coincidence that all the bravest pioneers of birth-control have been Freethinkers. It is not remarkable that Christian controversialists should sneer at Freethought.