

“*Finis* superabundant *operis*”: Refining an Ancient Cause for Explaining the Conjugal Act

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Abstract. Dietrich von Hildebrand denominated the generation of new human life as the “superabundant end” of the spousal act not to deny but to refine the scholastic view that the child is the “end of the act,” simply. The act at the source of human generation is not straightforwardly generative; rather, its generativity is metaphysically grounded in it as a concrete act of union between the spouses. There are thus in some sense two finalities structuring the act, with a specific order between them: union and the fruitfulness following superabundantly from it. In this essay I bring to evidence the framework underlying von Hildebrand’s position by examining love as the *forma* of the spousal act and the significance of sexuality as an embodied act. I will conclude with some thoughts on how the concept of superabundance accommodates certain truths about the spousal act more readily than does the simple notion of finality.

I.

Initial Explanation of the Principle of Superabundance.¹ The concept of “superabundant finality” was introduced by Dietrich von Hildebrand in his writings on marriage and sexuality to capture theoretically the relationship of the conception of new human life to the spousal act.² The traditional formulation, represented and articulated most fully by Aquinas and

¹My aim in this essay is not a critique of the traditional view that the child is the *finis operis* of the spousal act, but a clarification of how von Hildebrand enriches that view with the addition of the concept of superabundance.

²See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Purity: The Mystery of Christian Sexuality* (Steubenville: Franciscan University Press, 1989); von Hildebrand, *Marriage, The Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1991); von Hildebrand, *Man, Woman, and the Meaning of Love* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2002); and von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969). The first was originally published in 1930, the second in 1942, the third in 1966, the fourth in 1968.

his followers, framed this relationship as one of finality, simply: the child is the *finis operis* (“end of the act”) of the conjugal union of the spouses.³ By adding the concept of superabundance to the concept of finality, in denominating the child as the “superabundant end” of the conjugal act, von Hildebrand was in no way departing from the perennial Catholic position on the inseparable and primary ordination of the spousal act to the possible generation of new human life. Rather, his aim was to bring more precision to the ancient “final cause” as applied to procreation, that it might capture more exactly the complex structure of human generation in relation to the act at its origin: as a human act, von Hildebrand maintained, the act is one of personal union between the spouses—and this unitive character of the act then metaphysically grounds (and thereby secures as inseparable) its additional “superabundant” ordering toward generative fecundity. This essay seeks to make clear von Hildebrand’s idea of superabundant finality via an analysis of two important dimensions of von Hildebrand’s thought deeply linked to, and therefore illuminative of, the concept: namely, the essential constitution of love by the dual aspects of union and fecundity, and the love-embodying nature of sexuality. It will conclude with some thoughts on how the addition of superabundance to the concept of finality accommodates certain truths about the spousal act more readily than does the simple notion of finality.

Von Hildebrand explains what he means by the “principle of superabundance” in some detail in his late work *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction*.⁴ He introduces it by showing how it applies to the reality of knowledge: knowledge has the important role of enabling the person to undertake action, and more importantly still, to undertake the work of moral perfection and sanctification. In this sense, it functions as a means for achieving some end. But prior to this end-achieving function that it is able to take on, knowledge possesses a nature, and therefore a meaning and value, of its own, as the act in which the human person apprehends reality as it is in itself. Its *raison d’être*, as von Hildebrand writes, is not determined exclusively by its service to the achievement of some end; its existence is “justified” already by virtue of the value of its intrinsic nature. When it additionally functions as serving the realization of

³I have not actually found this concept of *finis operis* used by Aquinas himself with reference to the spousal act in relation to the child. He speaks only of offspring as the “principal end” (see for example *ST, Supplementum*, q. 65, a. 1). But Aquinas’s concept of *finis operis* has taken on a technical status, such that its eventual application to this relation by his followers can meaningfully be traced back to him.

⁴Von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 29–34. Von Hildebrand deals with this on pages 74–80 in his much earlier *Man, Woman, and the Meaning of Love*, and he discusses the issue in slightly different terms in *Purity*, 10–4.

some end, this role can be said to stand in a superabundant relationship to its intrinsically-constituted nature and meaning.⁵

Von Hildebrand contrasts this situation with one of instrumental finality. In this latter case, something has its nature, meaning, and value (which in turn grounds its *raison d'être*) only in virtue of the end it serves to bring about. He gives the example of a knife: the end of cutting determines the nature of the knife; it has its only reason for existence insofar as it serves that end; apart from this function of cutting (qua knife), it has no meaning or value. It is, in short, merely a means to an end, its nature and meaning not intelligible apart from reference to its instrumental function.⁶

Von Hildebrand applies the principle of superabundance to the spousal act. He does this in light of his analysis of marriage as a bond having love as its inner soul, and of the spousal act as a unique expression and completion of spousal love and its culmination in the bond of marriage. Thus, for von Hildebrand, the conjugal act possesses a meaning already as a realization of conjugal love existing between the spouses. When one discovers its service to the end of the creation of new human persons, one understands that this end is related to the spousal act (as an act of spousal union) in a superabundant manner:

The intrinsic meaning and value of marriage consists in its being the deepest and closest love union. We saw that in its mutual self-donation and in its constitution of a matchless union, the conjugal act has the meaning of a unique fulfillment of spousal love. But to that high good, which has a meaning and value in itself, has been entrusted procreation. The same act, which in its meaning is the constitution of the union, has been superabundantly made the source of procreation; thus, we must speak of procreation as the end—but not in the sense of mere instrumental finality. Though we may consider the sexual instinct in animals as a mere means for the continuation of the species, as an end in the sense of an instrumental finality, this is patently impossible with respect to the love between man and woman or to their union in marriage.⁷

By introducing the concept of superabundance, Von Hildebrand sought to accommodate theoretically a newly emerging insight into the conjugal act: the spousal embrace is not only an act with two separate dimensions or aspects (as held by Aquinas and reflected in the teaching of the Church up to that time), each having its own proper end—one “primary,” the generation of new life, and one “secondary,” “*fides*” (expressed by Aquinas as “the mutual services which

⁵Von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 30.

⁶*Ibid.*, 30–1.

⁷Von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 31.

married persons render one another in household matters,”⁸ which includes among them the Pauline “rendering the debt to one another”).⁹ While this traditional view may be true as a partial description, the insight brought to the issue by von Hildebrand was that the act in its inner constitution possesses an essential unity, by virtue of which the two dimensions of the act are not simply juxtaposed, but are organically united.¹⁰ What binds them together is the *nature of love itself*, as possessing the dual aspects of union and fecundity.¹¹ According to von Hildebrand, the act possesses an interior metaphysical dimension fashioned to be animated by love (to be discussed in detail below)—and it is therefore that the act is at once unitive and procreative: “It is no chance that God has invested that act with this creative significance. As God’s love is the creative principle in the universe, so love is everywhere creation, and there is a profound significance in the nexus—at once symbol and reality—whereby from the creative act—in which two become one flesh from love and in love—the new human being proceeds.”¹² No mere “instrument” of the coming to be of new human life, the conjugal act as unitive rather gives rise from its own depth, from the heart of its intrinsic meaning, to this fruit: for the union of love is necessarily fecund.

This indicates that the principle of superabundance as it operates in the case of the spousal act in fact has a twofold application: there is here not only a structural superabundance—as in the case of knowledge—but a contentful one. In the case of knowledge, there is no meaningful, material connection between the act of knowledge in its specific nature as knowledge and the content of the task it makes possible by a superabundant addition. There is only a superabundance structurally or formally, where superabundance refers only to the fact that knowledge has a second (and therefore “superabundant”) meaning and function in addition to its own intrinsic meaning. In the case of the spousal act, the superabundance refers to this structural moment; but the concept of superabundance also captures the contentful, meaningful relation that subsists

⁸Aquinas, *ST, Supplementum*, q. 41, a. 1. (All quotations from Thomas Aquinas are translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.) For Aquinas, the fact that the male and the female contribute different but essential elements to the proper functioning of the household (“since one is not self-sufficient in all things concerning life,” Aquinas, *ST*, q. 41, a. 1) is the secondary reason for the natural inclination to marriage.

⁹*Ibid.*, q. 49, a. 2, ad3.

¹⁰This insight is found in the writings of Pius XII, in *Gaudium et spes*, in *Humanae vitae*, and in the work of Karol Wojtyła. It is widely acknowledged that von Hildebrand was one of the major inspirations of this approach to spousal love and marriage.

¹¹This idea of the organic and therefore inseparable unity of the two dimensions of the spousal act is at the heart of *Humanae vitae*’s defense of the Church’s teaching on contraception. Paul VI uses the term “meaning” to refer to both the unitive and fecund dimensions of the conjugal act.

¹²Von Hildebrand, *Purity*, 14–5.

between the union of the spouses and the coming into being of the child as the *fruit of that union*. That is, superabundance also captures the truth about the intrinsic essence of love itself, according to von Hildebrand, that it is constituted of two inseparable dimensions: union and the “overflow” or fecundity of that union.¹³ Speaking of the child as the superabundant end of the act thus not only tells us that the act has a second meaning, apart from the end it brings about in the creation of the child, but also that the creation of a child is organically and inseparably (at least in concept or meaning) related to the union between the spouses, as “embodying” the fruitfulness of the union of love.¹⁴ Thus, the spousal act as unitive can in no way be understood as standing in an instrumental relation to human generation.¹⁵

Those who misread von Hildebrand’s position, as entailing the moral liceity of separating the aspect of sex as unitive and sex as procreative, miss precisely the specific meaning of superabundance that is implied in the case of the spousal act.¹⁶ In fact, von Hildebrand’s vision brings metaphysical grounding to the equation: It is only when we understand that this bodily act is intrinsically structured to be the embodiment of the spiritual act of spousal love (even if it is not always lived in this way)¹⁷ that we can make sense of the fact that precisely it, and not

¹³“The fact that the closest communion of love between two people produces a new human being mysteriously reflects the fruitfulness of love as such” (von Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 30). Kevin Schemenauer writes of this dimension of superabundance in von Hildebrand, though he does not indicate that it is different from what I call structural superabundance. See his *Conjugal Love and Procreation: Dietrich von Hildebrand’s Superabundant Integration* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 139ff.

¹⁴The term “embodiment” is not used by von Hildebrand, but is everywhere implied. An exact account of it will play a central role in the course of this article.

¹⁵Von Hildebrand does not himself clarify this point, but it would seem that because only the first, structural sense of superabundance applies to knowledge, it stands in a merely instrumental relation to the end that it brings about.

¹⁶Von Hildebrand himself writes in a late work: “It was occasionally said that by affirming that the marital act retains a meaning and high value even when—through no intervention of ours—conception cannot occur, I was opening the door to a justification of artificial birth control. But this approach showed a misapprehension of my position, for I had emphatically stated in many articles and books that artificial birth control cannot be allowed. It was precisely my intention to call attention to the great mystery of God’s having entrusted the generation of a new human being to the most intimate union of love. The dignity and beauty of the marital act as an irrevocable mutual self-donation in which the two spouses become ‘one flesh’ cause the mysterious link between this act and the birth of a new human being to shine forth in all nobility and grandeur” (*The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, xi). See Schemenauer’s review of von Hildebrand’s critics on this issue in his *Conjugal Love and Procreation*, ch. 4 sec. D. Since I will not address the issue in this essay, I will add that Schemenauer here also points the reader to the passages in von Hildebrand’s works where he affirms the Church’s position that the child is the “primary end” of marriage.

¹⁷See von Hildebrand’s comment on this in *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 42–4.

some other act, should be ordained to be at the origin of new human life.¹⁸ The child proceeds from this act because it is an embodiment and specific realization of the essential “diffusivity” (or “superabundance”) flowing from the union of love and, as such, cannot be separated from it without violation of the act as an act of love.¹⁹ “The God-given, essential link between love of man and woman and its fulfillment in the marital union, on the one hand, and the creation of a new person, on the other hand, has precisely the character of superabundance, which is a much deeper connection than would be one of merely instrumental finality.”²⁰ Were the act to achieve its essence only from its function of bringing about new life, or were the act as procreative simply juxtaposed to the act in its unitive meaning, the creation of the child would remain in some significant sense external to the love between the spouses.

Now, if it is to be maintained that the act is procreative in virtue of the unitive dimension of the act, as its organic outflow, the act already as a physical act would have to be unitive not merely by the addition of the subjective factor of the spouses engaging in it “lovingly,” but by having a unique metaphysical constitution which would make it inherently unitive: it would in its intrinsic structure have to be fashioned to be incorporated into the personal act of love. Von Hildebrand’s position on sexuality provides just such a vision of the spousal act: it is by its nature a kind of “incarnation” of love, “embodying” the two dimensions of union and fruitfulness.²¹ We now turn to considering this part of von Hildebrand’s view of sexuality in its intrinsic relation to love.

¹⁸“We can do justice to the significance of this mysterious process [of the procreativity of this particular physical act] only if we take the union of love into full account. It is possible to gauge in its fullness and depth the sublimity of the connection between sex and the origin of a new human being, or to recognize all that is implied by the fact that it is no mere living thing, but a man, who comes into existence, only if we already understand the peculiar relationship which subsists between physical sex and wedded love” (*Purity*, 15).

¹⁹This argument against the direct separation on the part of the spouses of the conjugal act from the possibility of conception is not the main one featured in von Hildebrand’s writings. He puts more emphasis on the divinely-appointed character of the connection between union and procreation, and on their separation as therefore an act against *religio*. See William Marra’s “Human Love and the Sacredness of Sex,” in *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 4, no. 4, (1980): 334–44, for a reflection on this dimension in von Hildebrand’s thought. Von Hildebrand writes, “The sinfulness of artificial contraception is rooted in the fact that one arrogates to oneself the right to separate the actualized love union in marriage from a possible procreation, to sever this wonderful, deeply mysterious connection, instituted by God, and to approach this mystery in an irreverent attitude. We are here confronted with the basic sin or irreverence toward God, the denial of our creaturehood, the acting as if we were our own lords. It is a basic denial of *religio*” (*Man, Woman, and the Meaning of Love*, 80).

²⁰Von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 34–5.

²¹Besides the metaphysical weakness of the position that posits the link between the procreative dimension of the act and the love of the spouses simply in the subjective enactment of a

II.

The Conjugal Act as “Embodiment” of Love. As stated, von Hildebrand’s position on the superabundant relation between the spousal act as unitive and as procreative rests on his conviction of the absolute centrality of spousal love to marriage and to the spousal act in its intrinsic structure. The inseparability (at least in meaning) of the two within the spousal act, then, rests on the inseparability of union and fruit within the unitary essence of love itself, which the conjugal act must embody in a concrete way.

In his work *Marriage, the Mystery of Faithful Love*, von Hildebrand writes about the essential connection that exists between love and fruitfulness:

The fact that the closest communion of love between two people produces a new human being mysteriously reflects the fruitfulness of love as such. For we must not forget that every true love possesses an intrinsic spiritual fruitfulness and that conjugal love harbors this spiritual fruitfulness of love quite independently of procreation. This fruitfulness expresses itself in an *élan* of the soul, which is implied in love, in a new awakening of the soul which stimulates it to spiritual growth and a higher moral life. It expresses itself in the influence which the spouses unconsciously exert on one another, in the spiritual elevation of one another which their mutual understanding makes possible.²²

Love itself is constituted of two dimensions, the unitive and the fruitful, distinct in their *rationes*, but only together making up the constitutive essence of love.²³ In considering this, we must avoid thinking abstractly of the union of love, but focus on it as an essentially personal reality: the particular character of the union of persons proper to love, achieved by the free acts in which each spouse makes a sincere gift of him/herself to the other, realizes a kind of intensity of being that from its very roots entails a growth, an expansion, an overflow, that fills up the souls of those so united, and then has a tendency to move beyond them towards others.²⁴ Love’s proverbial generosity is one specific

loving attitude when entering into the act, von Hildebrand writes that “it is incompatible with the very nature of the person to consider the deepest human spiritual experiences as mere subjective aspects of something which, in God’s eyes, is a means for an extrinsic end” (*Man, Woman and the Meaning of Love*, 79).

²²Von Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 30. If “the good is diffusive of itself,” this is true *a fortiori* of love.

²³While not having a *pris de conscience* of its essentially personal character, Plato saw clearly the essentially creative and expansive nature of love, which played a central role in his philosophy of the person and the “redemption” of the soul.

²⁴The “finding of self” in the “sincere gift of self” spoken of in the passage so often quoted by John Paul II from *Gaudium et spes* exemplifies this fruitfulness.

articulation of this expansiveness proper to love.²⁵ Insofar as it is love itself that is thus constituted, we must resist thinking of the fruitfulness as a “result” of love. Rather, the fruit proceeds organically out of the union and is integral to it, always already leavening it in its inner constitution.²⁶

Further, while each fruit of love has a being of its own, that which “overflows” from love is not something which has its complete meaning in itself, but bears the “stamp” of the union that is at its origin; as fruit, included in its nature and meaning is a qualitative echo of the union that is its source.

Here we must note two things that are implicit in the above reflection: first, the grounding character of union in relation to the fruit; and second, while both dimensions of union and fecundity belong to love, each has its own, distinct intelligible structure, and the two are not to be conflated. One difference that concerns us here is the fact that the union of love is freely established by the persons, while the fruit of the union arises as a gift.

This distinction between and inseparable unity of the two dimensions of love is one cornerstone for understanding von Hildebrand’s idea of superabundant finality as applied to the spousal act. In effect, each dimension will have its own “trajectory” within the exercise of the spousal act, with a definitely determined order between them. Superabundant finality will line up with the act’s relation to the generation of new human life, as an “outflow” of the union between the spouses established through the mutual gift of self.

The second cornerstone to understanding von Hildebrand’s principle of superabundance is the nature of embodiment, and more specifically, of the conjugal act as an embodiment of love. To begin with, the body is “always already” personal. The union between the human soul and the human body is such that the human body participates in personhood, itself taking on a personal character. In the human being we find, as it were, one single reality existing in two dimensions: the spiritual-personal and the material-bodily—with the personal giving metaphysical form to the unity, rendering the bodily wholly

²⁵Beginning from the reality of the gift, Aquinas also argues for the connection between love and generosity: “Now, the reason of donation being gratuitous is love; since therefore do we give something to anyone gratuitously forasmuch as we wish him well. So what we first give him is the love whereby we wish him well. Hence it is manifest that love has the nature of a first gift through which all free gifts are given.” *STI*, q. 38, a. 2.

²⁶Fruitfulness is so integral to the union of love that it is not always easy to isolate it conceptually. Von Hildebrand often writes about the liberating power of love: of its ennobling of the soul, raising it out of pettiness into the world of true values, and so on. Some other examples of this fruitfulness are the happiness consequent upon the union of love, a deepened experience of one’s worth arising from being received in love by another, a sense of flourishing that arises in and through the other’s love, and a new moral courage for the good with which one is often filled—to name only a few.

personal in character.²⁷ In short, the personal soul is “embodied,”²⁸ and the body is “ensouled.”

But the mutual “indwelling” of body and soul that constitutes the incarnate person’s way of being is not all that underlies the transmission of self in the case of the spousal act. In fact, the contact between body and soul is constituted by depth dimensions. That is, while the person is one single substance in “two dimensions,” we could say that, in some way, there is a hierarchy in the degree of intensity to the contact between body and soul. According to von Hildebrand, there is a unique intersection between body and soul in the sexual sphere, in virtue of which the bodily experience of sex is essentially and organically connected with spiritual and psychological experiences in the human person.²⁹ Furthermore, if we were to conceive of the body-soul unity in this way as becoming progressively more intimate as the depth of the human person himself is approached, we would find that the sphere of sex occupies a most deep and intimate place within the person. “When [sex] speaks,” writes von Hildebrand, “it is no mere *obiter dictum* [casual expression], but a voice from the depth, the utterance of something central and of the utmost significance.”³⁰ Sex, according to von Hildebrand, contains the “secret” of the person, as it “belongs to his inmost being.”³¹ Von Hildebrand points out that sex is originally fashioned to “speak” the central word of a radical self-donation in the depths of the person’s being, whereby the person comes to truly belong to the other, and thereby

²⁷Ann-Therese Gardner makes the interesting observation that von Hildebrand’s theory of the body-soul unity is driven off of his deep insight into the way in which love interiorly defines bodily spousal union. See her “The Phenomenology of Body and Self in Dietrich von Hildebrand and Edmund Husserl,” *Questiones Disputatae* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 28–36. The body’s role in the living of spousal love implies a metaphysics according to which the body is deeply related to personal interiority, able “to participate in the interior realms of affectivity and acts of will”; the body is “somehow part of [the Ego], though mysteriously so” (33).

²⁸This is a term used by John Paul II in *Letter to Families*, par. 19 in his discussion of this crucial issue. I would like to see the term take on a technical status, to delimit clearly the wholly *sui generis* way in which the personal body and certain personal acts exist: namely, as possessing an interior metaphysical space ordained to rendering bodily spiritual realities. See Damian Fedoryka’s article on this topic, “Proportionalism: Some of its Presuppositions and the Consequence for Ethics,” *Anthropotes* 1 (1993): 69–102.

²⁹Von Hildebrand, *Purity*, 5. Coming from a different angle, but descriptive of the same thing, is the statement of John Paul II that sexuality involves “the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person.” John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (Vatican: The Holy See 1981): 32. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html. John Paul is here speaking of the spousal act in its fecundity but this concept of the interaction between nature and person would apply just as much to the spousal act considered in its unitive dimension—as we shall see.

³⁰Von Hildebrand, *Purity*, 5.

³¹*Ibid.*

simultaneously achieves a genuine self-possession. But it can alternatively entail a radical flinging of oneself away when it is employed in the pursuit of pleasure; because of its centrality to the human personality, its misuse entails a correspondingly deep wound and loss of self.³²

Finally, the spousal act as a physical act is wholly unique among physical acts in that it has an *intrinsic* ordination to containing a *particular* spiritual content. There are very few bodily actions of this kind; the kiss and the embrace are two such others. In virtue of this intrinsic ordination, these acts have proper to them one and only one meaning, even if this meaning may contain shadings. Compare these with other bodily actions—such as a wave of the hand—in which, while it is truly the person acting, the meaning of these bodily actions is not intrinsic to them, but it is assigned to them “from without,” by convention.³³ The meaning of the bodily act of sex, by contrast, is not given to it from without; rather, it is intrinsically structured to contain one and only one meaning: the spiritual reality by which its interiority is structured to be animated is *spousal love*.³⁴

More particularly, firstly, sex in the various dimensions of its psychological and bodily features, in its gestures and in its “dynamism,” *already as bodily* is fashioned as an *objective analogy* of the character of spousal love; thus, the experiences and gestures, both psychological and physical, and, most importantly in the present context, the procreative function (which as such is not a gesture or behavior or even, indeed, a rational activity), do not stand in an arbitrary relation to spousal love, but they repeat, as it were, in their qualitative character and in their physical structure the characteristics of spousal love.³⁵ Secondly,

³²Ibid., 15: “[The person] surrenders himself after a unique fashion [in sex]—encounters either the mystery of wedded love or the mystery of a terrible sin. Either the mysterious union of two human beings takes place in the sight of God (*in conspectus Dei*) or man flings himself away, surrenders his secret, delivers himself over to the flesh, desecrates and violates the secret of another, severs himself in a mysterious fashion from God.”

³³Fedoryka (“Proportionalism”) writes that the latter kinds of acts are “instrumental acts,” while the former are “embodying acts.”

³⁴Von Hildebrand writes: “We cannot grasp the mystery embodied in this sphere until we grasp that its deepest meaning consists in being a unique fulfillment of spousal love and its desire for union. We must realize that this sphere is essentially ordained toward the constitution of a lasting, irrevocable union, the union to which spousal love aspires, and which is sanctioned by God; only then can we grasp the real sinfulness of every isolation of the satisfaction of sexual desire from the constitution of this God-sanctioned union. Only when we understand that the sexual act implies a mutual, irrevocable self-donation and is by its very nature called and destined to constitute an indissoluble union, can we see the desecration involved in sexual satisfaction outside of marriage” (*The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 7).

³⁵Using the language of “organic unity” rather than analogy, von Hildebrand emphasizes this point in his *Purity*: “There exists . . . a profound relation of quality between the bodily union and that psychological and spiritual factor of specifically matrimonial love formulated under the terms *mutuum adiutorium* (mutual assistance), and *fides* (fidelity) as one of the three

the bodily aspect of the spousal act possesses an interior “metaphysical space,” ordained to be “animated” by the spiritual reality of mutual self-donation in its highest instance, as the consummation of spousal love. Thus, in the spousal act, the body and spirit are destined to form one single reality, now existing in two dimensions.³⁶

We can here briefly review these characteristics of love which the bodily conjugal act embodies: In love, one is drawn towards the other—the “dynamism” of sexuality³⁷ “incarnates” this tendency; the one who loves makes a gift of himself which is “repeated,” as it were, in the bodily sphere in the inherent structure of sexuality as an experienced bodily transmission of self to the other; the experienced union of love as found in affectivity is embodied in the specifically intimate quality of sex as articulated above; the attendant happiness of the union is embodied in the bodily pleasure. Finally, love is fruitful; it is fruitful in virtue of the fecundation that is effected by mutual self-giving and receiving. Sex also embodies this fruitfulness, and that in a supreme way: in the possible coming to be of new human life as a gift intended by God to both child and parents, which flows from the bodily union of the spouses and is received by them as a gift.

Here, then, in the sphere of sex, what is true of the body generally is true in a more intensive sense: the body can be a co-subject with the soul in personal-bodily activity in an elevated and intensified way. This unity of the body with

ends [of marriage]. We have here to do with an organic unity, deeply rooted in the attributes of wedded love on the one hand and of sex on the other.” More particularly, “In virtue of its profound centrality and intimacy, as also of its mystery, sex is capable of a particular relationship with love, the most spiritual and the deepest of all experiences” (*Purity*, 7); when lived properly, the quality of sex possesses “a blend of intimacy, centrality, mystery and tenderness, which gives expression to a unique liberating surrender and unites in a fashion beyond words to describe” (*Purity*, 16).

³⁶While it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop this further, it is important to see the distinction of the second point from the first, and even more, to see what the second adds to the first. It well known that Paul M. Quay recognizes the importance of the capacity of the material to be fashioned on the analogy of the spiritual, thus becoming a “symbol” for it in the sphere of sexuality; but as far as I can tell, he stops short of a real *prise de conscience* of the factor of embodiment in sexuality: “The material sign that we call a symbol has a sign-value not only by some sort of convention or by material similarity but by the fact that its material form, structure, action, or appearance is similar to or like the immaterial or spiritual thing it signifies. Hence, once we know that something is a symbol, it can lead us by itself to knowledge of its significance and meaning.” *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 16. My position here is that the spousal act does more than point by its form to the spiritual reality of spousal love; it actually forms one “thing” with it in virtue of its interior metaphysical space, and thus forms a “second dimension” with the act of love, even while adding its own perfection to the love.

³⁷What Roger Scruton calls “sexual desire,” emphasizing that it is an intentional response to the beloved. See his *Sexual Desire* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

the soul in the spousal exchange is the reason that John Paul II can speak of the “language of the body.”³⁸ The bodily conjugal exchange now speaks on the behalf of the spirit—actually “amplifying” its word, expanding its scope. This expansion of scope is particularly conspicuous in the case of generative fruitfulness: without the body, the spouses as contingent could never bring a new being into existence. For as finite beings, they cannot create out of nothing, nor can they communicate their own souls to a new being; but in and through their body, a body incorporated into the selfhood of the spouses in the way articulated above, they are able to transmit themselves to the child generated by their act of mutual self-giving.³⁹

But I anticipate somewhat. In putting together our reflections on love with our reflections on embodiment, we can draw out the intelligible connection between spousal union and human generation. In the spousal act body and soul constitute two dimensions, as it were, of a single personal act: namely, a unique kind of self-donation which is specifically spousal. At the same time that the deepest and most complete mutual self-giving in love proper to human existence takes place, the highest kind of fruitfulness flowing from spousal union reveals itself: the coming to be of a new human person. Thus, both dimensions of spousal love have their highest and most proper instance of embodiment in the spousal act as unitive-generative.

While there are many other, spiritual dimensions of fecundity proper to the conjugal act, the possible generation of a new human person corresponds most directly to the kind of union that takes place between the spouses. In this connection, it is worth quoting in full one of Karol Wojtyła’s reflections on the astonishing depth of this union:

By its nature, because it is what it is, the person is its own master (*sui juris*), and cannot be ceded to another or supplanted by another in any context where it must exercise its will or make a commitment affecting its freedom. (It is *alteri incommunicabilis*.) But love forcibly detaches the

³⁸What I describe here is the metaphysical underpinning for his idea that the body (in the spousal act) is able to speak the language of spousal love in unison with the soul-person—even, as he says, on the person’s behalf: “Man—male or female—does not merely speak with the language of the body. But in a certain sense he permits the body to speak ‘for him’ and ‘on his behalf,’ I would say, in his name and with his personal authority.” *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 106:1.

³⁹Pope Benedict XVI wrote of this mutual ennobling of body and soul through their union in *Deus caritas est*, 5: “Christian faith . . . has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility.” It is striking to consider that the angelic being cannot co-create—cannot participate in God’s fatherhood—as can the human person.

person, so to speak, from this natural inviolability and inalienability. It makes the person want to do just that—surrender itself to another, to the one it loves. The person no longer wishes to be its own exclusive property, but instead to become the property of that other. This means the renunciation of its autonomy and its inalienability. Love proceeds by way of this renunciation, guided by the profound conviction that it does not diminish and impoverish, but quite the contrary, enlarges and enriches the existence of the person. What might be called the law of *ekstasis* seems to operate here: the lover “goes outside” the self to find a fuller existence in another.⁴⁰

Von Hildebrand writes that in the giving of self proper to spousal love “the giving is literally complete and ultimate. Not only the heart but the entire personality is given up to the other.”⁴¹

We might say that to the great “potency” of this particular, spousal union of persons corresponds the astonishing possibility that new human life be generated as its fruit. Though we could not have anticipated it, and though the connection is not a necessary but a contingent one, once we see it, we recognize the deep, intelligible correlation between this profound mutual self-donation of love, marked by its fecundity in the interiority of the spouses, and the creation of a new human person, who will be a new agent of love entering into and expanding the circle of love founded by the spouses.

Here emerges with more clarity the point mentioned at the beginning of this essay: the fact that the child stands in the relation of a superabundant end to the act does not entail the liceity of directly separating the spousal act from the possible coming to be of a child. If love in its essence is constituted by union and fruitfulness, and the spousal act is a concrete embodiment of spousal love in its two dimensions, we can conclude that to directly divorce the fruitfulness from the union is in a real way to make a strike against the love.⁴² If the spouses willfully close off the possibility of this fruitfulness, then they alter what happens in the conjugal act itself, insofar as it is so deeply and intelligibly related to that spousal mutuality of self-giving, as articulated above. If the spouses do effect this separation, the conjugal act is not “filled out” with the “interior soul” which it is metaphysically fashioned to embody; for if it were, the spouses would be open to the fruit to which it is organically related, whether or not the fruit comes into

⁴⁰Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 125–6. We see at the end of this quote a reference also to the fruitfulness essential to love.

⁴¹Von Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 8.

⁴²Another angle from which to make this point is to say that the biological intervention that contraception entails is never merely biological. As the conjugal act is intrinsically fashioned to contain the spiritual reality of love, one cannot tamper with it physically without tampering with the act of the spirit.

being. A violation of the act then occurs. The body becomes an “instrument,” no longer an “embodiment” of something spiritual, no longer participating in the subjectivity of the spouses; it becomes rather a means to some end other than union (usually pleasure in the generic sense of satisfaction).

III.

The Child as the Finis Superabundant Operis of the Spousal Act. Having explored the foundations of von Hildebrand’s position, we can now return to his idea of superabundant finality, briefly comparing it with the scholastic view and seeing what it adds to it, even while retaining its essential structure. According to Thomas Aquinas, the general principle of human acts states that certain actions have a *per se* end and are determined in their nature by this end. Aquinas states that “the object [of the act] . . . stands in relation to the act as its form, as it were, through giving it its species.”⁴³ This end of the act is referred to by Aquinas as the “*finis operis*,”⁴⁴ which he distinguishes from the aim of the agent, the “*finis operantis*.” This analysis is a theoretical account of the fact that certain acts have a nature proper to them, such that the nature is not in these cases determined by what the agent’s motive may happen to be.

Not denying that finality structures the relationship between the act and the coming to be of the child, von Hildebrand sought to capture the complexity present in the spousal act, as an act of love encompassing the two dimensions of union and fruitfulness. The act does have the possible coming into existence as its end, and this end does indeed define the nature of the act as procreative; but this end, and in turn this procreative nature, is embedded, as it were, and grounded in the act’s metaphysically prior ordination to uniting the spouses in love. In the case of animals, it would be accurate to say that the coming into existence of progeny is the end of the act, simply. This is because the generative act in this case has only one function, and thus only one dimension: the continuation of the species. But in the case of the act at the source of human generation, we find another element, which entirely changes the metaphysical nature of the case: the child is a *fruit of the act of a mutual exchange between the spouses*, with all that this implies as articulated in section II above. As soon as we recognize that this is the case, we must create a theoretical space for the unitive dimension which is the source of this fruit, as a distinct dimension of the act, with its own relative integrity. This dimension is constituted by the exchange

⁴³Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 2, ad2. The full response reads, “The object is not the matter ‘of which’ (a thing is made), but the matter, ‘about which’ (something is done); and stands in relation to the act as its form, as it were, through giving it its species.”

⁴⁴The term *finis operis* is variously translated as “end of the external act,” or “the proximate end of the act,” or “moral object.”

of two persons as gifts, who mutually give and receive their very selves—which yields the manifest presence of a purpose and meaning distinct from (even if essentially related to) that constituted by the act’s capacity to be the source of new life. The act is constituted as unitive by the fact that it is objectively formed to be an embodiment, and not, as we have seen, merely an expression, of the mutual love between the spouses, which is concretely realized in the directedness of the spouses to each other as ends. Their mutual self-giving is what then organically gives rise to the act’s possible generative fecundity.

We thereby discover two “finalities”⁴⁵ structuring the act, but each in its own proper way, the one corresponding to the unitive dimension of love, the other to the fecundity of love. In short, the child is, if we may put it this way, the “*finis superabundant operis*” of the spousal act. The end of union is one at which the spouses aim directly, insofar as their sincere, mutual self-giving is willed as the direct end of their activity. This leaves open the question of how it is that the spouses are related to the superabundant end, the possible conception of the child. The answer to this I will suggest in the course of this essay’s final section, where I consider the way in which various truths about the spousal act can be more easily accommodated by the addition of the concept of superabundance to the concept of finality.

IV.

Implications, and “Friendly Amendment” to the Traditional Theory. In what follows, I would like to bring home the usefulness of the concept of superabundance by way of reflecting on some well-known truths about the spousal act and demonstrating that adding superabundance in defining the finality of the act serves to theoretically accommodate those truths more elegantly than could be done without this addition. I hope that this reflection will serve to highlight the unique nature of the human act of generation as a participation in God’s creative love—and thereby as standing a universe apart from animal generation.

Firstly, incorporating the concept of superabundance in framing the nature of the spousal act gives a foundation to the traditional idea that the act has, in addition to the primary end of generation, the secondary end of “*fides*”—of an

⁴⁵The rather abstract concept of finality ought here to be filled out in its particular meaning with reference to the case at hand: since the spousal act is itself actually an embodiment of love, the union achieved between the spouses in its exercise is not an “effect” or “result” achieved external to the act, but is rather already “lived” in the very act itself. The coming to be of the child should be similarly viewed: as organically flowing from the union itself; fruitfulness is in some sense “internal” to the act, at least in its meaning; the marriage expands into “family,” a “unit” of separate individuals metaphysically bound together by the bond of love.

enduring relationship of loving community between the spouses. It does this by relating the two ends intimately and organically, bringing to evidence the intelligible connection between them: it makes eminent sense that the act which is at the source of human life should “coincide” with the act which unites two persons in the most intimate bond of love. In fact, it shows that only because the act is by its very structure an act of *fides* does it make metaphysical sense that it should also be procreative. As we saw, the concept of superabundance reflects the truth that the generative act in the case of the human person is precisely not straightforwardly generative; rather, the act which is generative is first a mutual self-donation establishing a personal union between the spouses, and not only an act ordered to the union of gametes, as in the case of animal generation—and it is this union of persons in love that is the metaphysical origin of the child’s being.⁴⁶

Secondly, adding the concept of superabundance retains the child’s status precisely as a *fruit* of the love of the spouses. It is because the act is itself metaphysically structured as an act to be undertaken by the spouses as an exchange of love between them, that the child can truly be said to be a fruit of their love—and not either merely a “product” of their physical activity, or directly brought into being as an effect of the agency of the spouses (more on the latter below). Were the act straightforwardly a reproductive act, and not intrinsically structured as an act of love-union whereby the spouses have each other as addressees (more on this below) with generation flowing from it, this would in an important sense remove the coming to be of the child from the context of love. Given that the contribution of the parents to the child’s being is bodily, for the child to truly have its origin in love, the physical act would have to be internally structured as an act of mutual self-giving between the spouses; for the child to stand in the position of fruit, as argued above, the act would have to be a genuine “embodiment” or “incarnation” of their mutual self-donation. It would not be sufficient to counter this by saying that while the act itself has conception as its *finis operis*, the child is nevertheless a fruit of the love between the spouses for the reason that it is performed “lovingly” by them. For this addition would only be an accidental one (metaphysically speaking), and thus would not be sufficient to establish the love-origin of the child in any hefty metaphysical way.⁴⁷

⁴⁶This metaphysical structuring of human generation as a personal act of love between the spouses is central to the teaching of *Donum vitae* (“Instruction on Respect for the Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day” [Vatican: The Holy See, 1987], http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html). I will refer to this document more than once in the following reflections.

⁴⁷When *Donum vitae* rejects the liceity even of homologous artificial fertilization in saying, “the child has the right, as already mentioned, to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of

Thirdly, denominating the child as the superabundant end of the spousal act also corresponds to the fact that the child does not come into existence by the direct agency of the spouses. This is true in two respects: Firstly, from the biological perspective, the spouses do not effect directly the uniting of the gametes; they only bring about the proximate conditions for this to occur. Strictly speaking, conception is not part of the spousal act itself, considered as the human act which is freely accomplished by the spouses. As a reflection of this, it is deeply meaningful that the spouses are not aware of the moment of the creation of the child; it occurs “beyond” their consciousness, and is not part of the actual exchange of persons as such. Framing the possible coming into existence of the child as the superabundant end of the act allows one to account for the human act of the spouses as being one of self-giving which has union as its end—while at the same time retaining the inseparability of possible conception, by stating that it is the superabundant end, related to their union in the way articulated above. (More will be said on this point below.) But secondly, this reality—that conception is not directly brought about by the activity of the spouses—symbolizes the deeper, metaphysical reality underlying this one: namely, that it is only by the direct action of God that the soul of the child comes into existence.⁴⁸ Thus, God “superadds” to the act of the spouses his own power that they do not of themselves possess, which entails that, metaphysically speaking, it is not possible for them to have the child as the direct, intended end of their human conjugal activity.⁴⁹ This third point is beautifully expressed by the Catholic Bishops of England in a document on in vitro fertilization, where they say that the new life conceived is a “gift supervening on” the spousal act.⁵⁰

his parents” (II, B, 8), the underlying truth is this one about the intrinsic structure of the spousal act as unitive. If the act were not unitive in its own interior structure, and only thereby having the metaphysical justification to be at the source of new life, it would be difficult to understand why the Church would forbid homologous artificial insemination.

⁴⁸I say that this is true of a genuinely conjugal act, where there is a sincere, mutual self-giving, in which the beloved is truly the addressee of the act. Of course, it is possible for a couple to have the creation of the child as the direct, intended end if the act is not genuinely conjugal in this way or if they undertake artificial or in vitro fertilization—though even here, while they perform a gesture of wresting from God a power which is meant to be exercised by Him alone and which is precisely acknowledged and safeguarded when the couple respects the conjugal structure of the act, they cannot fully accomplish this, as He must directly create the soul.

⁴⁹It could be said that this point introduces a new and distinct meaning of superabundance, in addition to the “structural” and the “content-ful” senses of the term articulated in the first section of this essay.

⁵⁰Catholic Bishops of England Committee on Bioethical Issues, *In Vitro Fertilization: Morality and Public Policy* 23 (London: Catholic Information Services, 1983), as quoted by William May, “Begetting vs. Making Babies,” *Christendom Awake* (2004): http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/may/begetting.htm#_ednref8. The passage from May’s article, which contains this quote, reads: “When human life comes to be in and through the marital act, it comes, even when ardently

This concept of gift in fact emerges as central to our considerations and may act as the organizing concept in the analysis of superabundant finality. While spouses cooperate with the creation of new human life in a way that inspires awe, insofar as it is the embodied love between them that is truly a co-source of generation, their cooperation consists in receiving—not initiating—what has its ultimate and direct origin in God.⁵¹ Fourthly, then, framing the procreative potential of the act as its “superabundant end” preserves the child’s position vis a vis the spouses as a gift to be received—not an end to be achieved. While admittedly the concept “end of the act” does not in its own logical structure specify in what way the person is related to that end, and thus leaves open the possibility that the agent is related to some end as receiving but not causing it, the traditional use of *finis operis* indicates that the agent is related to some end as something to be realized by that agent. While someone may perhaps argue with my reading of how the concept of *finis operis* has been employed, one can nevertheless recognize that the concept of superabundance has the advantage of specifying without further ado that the end is one that is given by another and that, consequently, the agent is related to it as receiving it. That the child is superabundantly added by the agency of God to the conjugal act of the spouses who intend union implies not simply that the agents are not able to achieve that end on their own, but rather that they stand in the position of ones to whom a gift is given—even while they contribute in some way to its coming about—that demands on their part the posture of receptivity. I believe that this idea of the child as a gift stands behind the Church’s never having (to my knowledge) stated that the spouses are required to aim at the coming to be of the child, but refers rather to the requirement for “openness” to new life as a gift given at God’s initiative.

desired, as a ‘gift’ crowning the act itself. When husband and wife engage in the marital act, they are ‘doing’ something, that is, engaging in an act open to the communication and fostering of their unique conjugal love (its ‘unitive’ meaning) and open also to receive the gift of new human life from God should the conditions for receiving this gift be present (its ‘procreative’ meaning). . . . Should human life come as a gift crowning their personal union, they [do not] ‘make’ the baby. . . . The life they beget is not the product of their art but, as the Catholic Bishops of England accurately noted some years ago, is a ‘gift supervening on and giving permanent embodiment to’ the marital act itself. When human life comes to be through the marital act, we can truly say that the spouses are ‘begetting’ or ‘procreating’ new human life. They are not ‘making’ anything. The life they receive is ‘begotten, not made.’”

⁵¹Everything that has been said up to this point does not mean that it would be wrong for the spouses, in their longing for a child, to engage in the spousal act quite consciously during times of fertility. But once again, to be rightly related to the reality of the case, they ought to be conscious that they are more exactly aiming at receiving a gift initiated by Another; and further, that, to be conformed (again) to the truth about marriage, the child, the spousal act, etc., their desire will flow from their own life of love and unity, and not displace their attention to each other in the concrete exchange of love.

This leads directly to the fifth point: by preserving the dimension of gift, the concept of superabundant finality allows one to account for the important truth that it is prohibited for a contingent person to be the direct cause of the coming into existence of another contingent person. This is one of the truths that *Donum vitae* seeks to preserve in denying the liceity of homologous artificial fertilization, and it is very striking that it grounds the preservation of the gift-character of the child in the child's origin in, firstly, the parents' love for each other, and secondly, a love expressed in a concrete spousal exchange: “The human person must be accepted in his parents' act of union and love; the generation of a child must therefore be the fruit of that mutual giving which is realized in the conjugal act wherein the spouses cooperate as servants and not as masters in the work of the Creator who is Love. In reality, the origin of a human person is the result of an act of giving. The one conceived must be the fruit of his parents' love.”⁵² *Donum vitae* casts this gesture of the contingent person's wanting to arrogate to himself the creative act of God in terms of insisting on the “right” to have a child, which it sees as violating the child's right to have God as its ultimate origin and master over its life: “A true and proper right to a child would be contrary to the child's dignity and nature. The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, ‘the supreme gift’ (*Gaudium et spes* no. 50) and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents. For this reason, the child has the right, as already mentioned, to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents.”⁵³ We see again in this quote the insistence of the document on the mutual exclusiveness of making the child the direct end of a creative act and the child's being the fruit of “the specific act of the conjugal love” of the parents. Relating this to our discussion of the finality of the conjugal act, one can see here the way in which adding superabundance to the concept of *finis operis* adds a modification that beautifully accommodates this teaching.

Finally, modifying the *finis* of generativity with the concept of superabundance makes it possible for the spouses to consciously and freely embrace the two ends of marriage without running into a contradiction; for were the two ends of marriage—“*fides*” and “*proles*”—ends in the same sense, or “parallel” ends, it would be difficult to understand how a conflict could be avoided in the intention of the spouses striving to live marriage fully. What I mean is this: in one of its rulings, the Roman Rota distinguished the objective end(s) of marriage (the *finis operis*)—the end(s) established by God, existing in the very nature of marriage and the spousal union—and the subjective end(s) of the

⁵²*Donum vitae* II, B, 4, c.

⁵³*Ibid.*, II, B, 8.

spouses that they may happen to adopt (the *finis operantis*).⁵⁴ Ideally, however, when the spouses enter into marriage, they adopt the objective ends as their own ends. Now, were the spouses in the conjugal act to make their own end the coming to be of the child, this would come into conflict with a cardinal moral requirement of the act—perhaps the guiding one of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*—namely, that in the act, the spouses are to be wholly centered on one another, each affirming and receiving the other in his/her own preciousness, and relating to the other as end-in-him/herself.⁵⁵ But by modifying the child’s position in relation to the spousal act as one of superabundant end, this issue is resolved on a structural level, and thereby on the level of the intention of the spouses: there is no tension between affirming the child as an end and gift intended by God (by the spouses’ being open to it and receiving it in the case that it is given) and a full attention to one’s spouse as end in the moment of conjugal self-giving.⁵⁶

⁵⁴See *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 36 (1944).

⁵⁵For von Hildebrand, the awakened consciousness so strictly demanded by the spousal act—a demand which cannot be logically proven but which is clearly present to anyone having any sensitivity to the mystery of sex—is evidence of its objective metaphysical structuring as an act of union between the spouses, and not merely as a procreative act in which the consciousness of the spouses would be simply an external and “subjective” addition (see *Purity*, 12).

⁵⁶Referring to this—and indeed, capturing more than one of the points discussed in this essay—Wojtyła writes in *Love and Responsibility*: “Marital intercourse is in itself an interpersonal act, an act of betrothed love, so that the intentions and the attention of each partner must be fixed upon the other, upon his or her true good. They must not be concentrated on the possible consequences of the act, especially if that would mean a diversion of attention from the partner. It is certainly not necessary always to resolve that ‘we are performing this act in order to become parents’. It is sufficient to say that ‘in performing this act we know that we may become parents and we are willing for that to happen’. That approach alone is compatible with love and makes it possible to share the experience of love. *A man and woman become father and mother only in consequence of the marital act: it must be an act of love, an act of unification of persons, and not merely the ‘instrument’ or ‘means’ of procreation*” (24, emphasis in original). Von Hildebrand does not deal with this question directly, but Schemenauer’s reading between the lines as to von Hildebrand’s resolution of the issue goes in a somewhat different direction from the one I articulate here—though I believe my position follows directly from von Hildebrand’s principle of superabundant finality. See chapter 4, sections B and D, of Schemenauer’s *Conjugal Love and Procreation*. Von Hildebrand distinguishes actual from super-actual responses to value; the super-actual value response exists on a deep level of one’s being and is a product of a commitment that remains even when one is not actually focused on the value. Because the super-actual value response occupies a sphere of consciousness that is above actual consciousness, it allows for a person’s simultaneously responding to another value in the actual moment. In the case of the spousal act, Schemenauer suggests that von Hildebrand’s position would be that in actual consciousness the spouses are to be centered on one another, but on the super-actual level “even more than foreseeing the fruit [the spouses] should voluntarily will the superabundant fruit” (Schemenauer, *Conjugal Love and Procreation*, 61).

V.

Conclusion. I hope to have shown that von Hildebrand’s concept of superabundant finality is uniquely suited for capturing theoretically the complexity of human generation as an embodiment of love in its two dimensions of union and fecundity. The concept implies, on the one hand, that the child’s conception has as its source a concrete act of embodied love, flowing as it does superabundantly from the act intrinsically defined as an act in which the two spouses have each other as ends in mutual self-giving. On the other hand, the concept also firmly secures the connection of the possible conception of the child to the act, insofar as superabundance implies precisely an organic and essential relation to the union from which it flows. Accounting for both of these truths about human generation also sets the stage for explaining various truths about the spousal act that are not as easily accommodated without this addition of the concept of superabundance to the concept of finality.

I would like to end by pointing out another use to which von Hildebrand’s view can be profitably put: namely, in countering the criticism of the Church’s position on contraception as biologicistic. I would suggest the following: von Hildebrand’s view as I have distilled it here departs from a way of distinguishing between the “two ends” of marriage and the spousal act that has recently entered into the discourse on marriage—namely, that the order of nature and the order of persons each has an end proper to it: the order of nature, the child, and the order of persons, the union between the spouses.⁵⁷ On von Hildebrand’s account both the ends and the act realizing them belong by their very structure to the order of love—and thereby to the order of persons. On the one hand, it is clear that the personal union of the spouses is served by the body; this is possible because, as we have seen, the body forms “one thing” with the spirit’s act of love by embodying it. On the other hand, the coming to be of the child is metaphysically explicable only through the presence of love, which is demanded both metaphysically and in the order of justice: and indeed, in von Hildebrand’s view, the coming to be of the child is, also, an embodiment of the fruitful dimension of love. On this account, while the coming to be of the child is made possible by the workings of nature, it is secured as an end that may not be licitly separated from the act *only because the act is (metaphysically) drawn into the order of love*, as “enformed” by love through its metaphysical status as an embodying act: just as the two dimensions of love cannot be separated without destroying the love, so one may not separate the fecundity of this particular embodying

⁵⁷This is the approach that Wojtyła takes in *Love and Responsibility*. See also the work of Paul Gondreau, for example, “The ‘Inseparable Connection’ between Procreation and Unitive Love (*Humanae Vitae*, §12) and Thomistic Hylemorphic Anthropology,” *Nova et Vetera* 6, no. 4 (2008): 731–64.

instance of union without destroying the act as an act of love. Not the natural end of the act, but the essential inseparability of the two dimensions of love, gives rise to the prohibition against contraception. But I leave the exploration of this issue to another article.

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