



**A Review of Robert R. Reilly.
*Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing
Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything.*
San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014. 215 pp. \$17.74.**

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In late 2013, *Duck Dynasty* reality TV star Phil Robertson, an outspoken evangelical Christian, made a moral proposition that drew public outcry: He stated that homosexual conduct is sinful. While refraining from offering the full quote, Robertson ended his statement on homosexuality saying, “It’s not logical, my man. It’s just not logical.” However crude or inarticulate Robertson’s comments were (and indeed, his language isn’t commendable), Robertson expressed what was once a common moral sentiment in American life: That homosexuality is immoral, taboo, and indecent; that it defies the pillars of human essence.

Robertson’s appeal to logic, and the seeming obviousness of his statement, didn’t seem logical to the adherents of sexual libertinism. Robertson’s statements muster an important proposition—that there is an intelligibility or structure inherent to sexual activity. But what happens when the obviousness of male and female complementarity is cast asunder? What happens if sexuality is construed solely by the assumptions of modern society—assumptions that deny sexual *telos* and renders sexuality purposeless? Sexuality becomes subject entirely to self-definition.

An important book was published in early 2014 that addresses how society can rationalize and internalize sexual error. The book is Robert Reilly’s *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything*.

I want to state this book’s praise upfront. Though I’m weary of the theatrics that arise from grandiose praise, *Making Gay Okay* stands as the most persuasive natural law argument against homosexuality I’ve ever read.

THE RATIONALIZATION OF IMMORAL BEHAVIOR

To conserve space I will focus more on the foundation of Reilly's main argument and less on the supplementary and evidentiary examples that Reilly uses to strengthen his main point. The second half of the book, titled "Marching through the Institutions" simply demonstrates how the rationalization of homosexuality has become mainstreamed in prominent American institutions such as education, the Boy Scouts, and the military.

Reilly begins his book by offering a meta-level analysis on the two ways in which persons can construe reality:

There are two fundamental views of reality. One is that things have a Nature that is teleologically ordered to ends that inhere in their essence and make them what they are. In other words, things have inbuilt purposes. The other is that things do not have a Nature with ends: things are nothing in themselves, but are only what we make them to be according to our wills and desires. (xii)

The role of "Nature" weighs heavily throughout the book. Borrowing a metaphysical concept from Aristotle, he cites the claim: "Nature is a cause that operates for a purpose." Reilly argues that Nature is not something we manufacture. We recognize it as something intrinsic to a being's structure. It is *what is*. So, for example, a tree is to live out the qualities of *tree-ness* (a function of being), which necessitates growth and the bearing of leaves. When a tree can operate in accord with its purpose, it achieves or fulfills its essence. Something is unnatural if a being frustrates its natural purpose and acts out of sync with its full potential or actualization.

For Reilly, the cultural debate about homosexuality and same-sex marriage is about the "Nature of reality itself" versus the "primacy of the will." The backdrop of Reilly's argument is that the structure of male and female complementarity exists and is ordered by nature to constitute and fulfill the marital goods that follow from their comprehensive union. Thus, a male and female united in marriage, a marriage oriented to, and fulfilled by, the presence of children is an immutable good beneficial for society.

Humanity and society can choose to live between these two options. The first option recognizes restraint, order, and purpose as inherent goods to the universe. The second does not. The second is one in which humanity self-wills or manufactures reality according to moral, legal, and cultural fictions.

There are two options available to society that underwrite our current social and moral predicament, derivable from either the Aristotelian tradition that recognizes *telos*; or a tradition found in Jean Jacques Rousseau, a tradition that insists upon the malleability of human personhood and the denial of *telos* or nature. He quotes Aristotle who wrote, "Men start revolutionary changes for reasons connected with their private lives."

Since acts of sodomy (defined as anal intercourse performed by either heterosexuals or homosexuals) frustrate or thwart humanity's sexual *telos*, Reilly argues that the acceptance or affirmation of such acts requires a re-wiring, so to speak, of public morality. "Habitual moral failure, what used to be called vice," Reilly writes, "can be tolerated only by creating a rationalization to justify it" (7). Society will need to "rationalize" such behavior by way of moral inversion. As he writes, "Entrenched moral aberrations then impel people to rationalize vice not only to themselves but to others as well" (9). Pursuing a vice works to "pervert reason," thus allowing a true moral revolution to have occurred. Fast

forward to present day where the former taboo reserved for homosexual practice has now been transferred to those who still deem homosexual conduct immoral. In a memorable statement, Reilly writes:

The homosexual cause moved naturally from a plea for tolerance to cultural conquest because the rationalization upon which it is based *requires* the assent of the community to the normative nature of the act of sodomy. In other words, we all must say that the bad is good in order for the rationalization to be secure in itself. (10)

It is at this point that Reilly's explanation for the ubiquity of cultural affirmation for homosexuality seems most compelling. He argues that moral wrongs, in order to become persuasive, must "aspire to universality." Certainly Reilly is right in this conjecture, which explains the fixation that contemporary society has with sexual behavior, not least of which is homosexual conduct. The degree at which homosexuality has become a rallying cry for expansive notions of justice simply demonstrates the profundity of America's rationalization of homosexual conduct.

Readers will notice that Reilly uses categories dominant within Catholic social ethics. Reilly does not locate our current predicament solely on the LGBT "agenda" as some call it. Instead, long trains of privations have worked to coordinate our current context. The de-linking of sex to procreation, according to Reilly, forever severed the social and legal necessity to keep the marriage union as inherently distinct from other illicit sexual activity.

If sex can be denied its purpose—and accepted at a societal level—Reilly argues that revision and revolution were then inevitable. At one point, he cites the Catholic intellectual Mary Eberstadt, writing that "Once heterosexuals start claiming the right to act as homosexuals [non-procreative sexual acts], it would not be long before homosexuals started claiming the rights of heterosexuals."

It's at this point that Protestant ethics would have a point of disagreement with Reilly, as Protestant renderings of marriage locate the unitive and procreative goods of marriage within the larger covenant of marriage, not the primacy of each individual marital act. That disagreement aside, Reilly's argument remains forceful and persuasive.

The progression away from privileging heterosexual marriage relations as normative has dire consequences according to Reilly: "The separation of sex from procreation logically leads to the legalization of contraception, then to abortion, and finally to homosexual marriage and beyond. The logic is compelling, in fact, inescapable. Only the premise is insane" (82).

The seamlessness at which he weaves the progression of Sexual Revolution throughout the US legal system is perhaps the most practical section of the book, one that details how far America has gone in its adoption of sexually libertine policies. With the adoption of privacy jurisprudence starting in the 1960s with the *Griswold v. Connecticut* case, Reilly traces how several opinions related to contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage all follow from the trajectory of having first divorced sexuality from the idea of sexual *telos*—which in his heavily Catholic rendering is the procreative and unitive goods of marriage. When sexuality lacks any normative poise, it becomes subject to judicial and democratic revision, which is where Reilly places the causes for today's moral and sexual free-for-all.

Frustrating "Nature," as he calls it, results in corresponding and corroding effects for those who violate the rational goods of sexual *telos*. Here, Reilly demonstrates how homosexuality results in real bodily harm for those practice it—male homosexuals have drastically high rates of promiscuity, which results in bodily damage, psychological duress, and catastrophic rates of disease. These factors considered, Reilly explains how professional guilds such as the American Psychological Association are full

endorsers of homosexuality due to the politicization of sexual politics, of which the homosexual lobby is the most vocal.

This work is a commendable asset to social ethics. Moreover, his concise and accessible overview of such thinkers as Aristotle and Rousseau, along with the detail to which he has traced the legal proceedings of our culture's sexual regression, makes the book's purchase fully justified.

APPLICATION TO CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS

To review *Making Gay Okay* fairly, I must assess Reilly's argument on the grounds upon which he makes his argument, not how I would prefer him to make it. As a young Christian ethicist this means there are not only preferences, but also requirements to measure all claims against a biblical standard, regardless of whether the book is argued on biblical grounds or not.

Making Gay Okay does not make biblical arguments nor does it appeal to divine revelation. The author, a Catholic, relies exclusively on philosophical categories long associated with the natural law tradition. Nonetheless, the book does not make arguments that materially conflict with Scripture.

Consider one argument aside from his larger argument that homosexuality is immoral. Reilly's argument of how immoral behavior can become "rationalized" comports with biblical precedent that warns against the searing of one's conscience (1 Tim 4:2). Indeed, his argument is a natural law appropriation of having inverted the understanding of sin on a social level, such that biblical warnings of Isaiah 5:20 ("Woe to those who call evil good and good evil") bear exact resemblance.

Reilly's book comes at a time when America's moral revolution seems to have made its peace with homosexuality. Picking back up with Phil Robertson, it's important to recognize that hostility to Reilly's arguments are part of a larger cultural trend now against an older sexual order informed almost exclusively from the Christian sexual metanarrative, a metanarrative that Christianity assumes is normative for all of humanity.

In the end, Reilly's book makes an important contribution to public theology and Christian social ethics. *Making Gay Okay* supplies Christians with a social grammar to discuss sexual morality within the categories of natural law and general revelation. This is important because among Christians, there is a temptation to base the authority or appropriateness of our views within the public square on claims of free speech and pluralism (which is certainly true and commendable). Often, however, these statements are made ignoring the moral basis for why Christians believe what they do about sexuality. Christians believe there are biblical and moral goods associated with human sexuality. Christianity's teaching on sexuality is not merely a preference; it is one inextricably tied to our basic understanding of humanity's composition and fulfillment. It seems odd that a natural law argument would better bolster the Christian understanding of homosexuality's error, yet that is what I believe this book has accomplished.

When Christians engage in social ethics to the exclusion of moral proclamation for fear of moral indictment, we are guilty of ignoring biblical criteria necessary for moral reasoning, and we unwittingly bow to the idea of the Naked Public Square. Reilly's volume is an important contribution to social ethics, one that is complementary to Holy Scripture, in providing Christians a social grammar related to sexual ethics; ethics that we believe are normative and must be accounted for. *Making Gay Okay* is an invaluable aid in offering a comprehensive view of sexuality based on natural law inferences to the purposes of human sexuality.