that *One Body* makes to the field of Christian sexual ethics is the systematic approach that it provides for those who want to investigate these issues further. Pruss shows us that a traditionally-minded Christian sexual ethic need not be cold and impersonal, or contrived and ad hoc. It can and should be systematic and precise. But it should also remain founded on an ethics of love.

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This is a valuable book, no doubt about it, and in saying so I join a large chorus of Catholic scholars, activists, and public intellectuals who offer Reilly great praise for his accomplishment. Reilly intentionally emphasizes only logic and reason to make his case. He did not write the book as a specifically Catholic analysis, and the word “religion” is not even in the index. Still, this book is receiving widespread coverage in faithful Catholic media, because his philosophical foundations and normative vision are completely consistent with Catholic religious and social thought.¹

Why is this book so laudable? I think most importantly it is because Reilly has created a thoroughly comprehensive, *integrated* analysis of the culture war now raging between two competing worldviews and social projects. Reilly has a wide background in the federal government, teaching, foreign policy analysis, communication, and the arts. This gives him a big-picture or true liberal-arts sensibility: he effectively connects cultural systems, processes of persuasion, and political power in explaining how homosexualist ideology has been so successful in fostering rapid, radical social changes. While many works on this general subject tend to focus on one or two dimensions of the culture war—the psychological, the historical, the sociological, the legal, the moral, the philosophical—Reilly knits them all together in a tightly argued yet easy to read multidisciplinary analysis.

Part I of the book, called The Rationalization and How It Works, very aptly explains the foundations of our culture war in a contest between two radically different visions of the person and human existence. In natural-law realism, derived from Aristotle, things and human beings have an intrin-
sic, teleological nature whose designed-in purposes make them what they are. Violating this lawful nature—here, maleness and femaleness—means personal and societal trouble. The opposite view, derived from Rousseau, is antinomian relativism and subjectivism: there are no intrinsic purposes and ends in anything or anybody, only what we make them to be with our desires, wills, and technologies. While the realist, teleological view acknowledges that males and females can be disturbed and find themselves attracted to the same sex, heterosexual attractions and behavior express humans’ true nature. Homosexualism reflects the opposite, constructionist worldview by claiming that all dimensions and forms of sexual attraction and behavior are learned, malleable, and equally legitimate, without grounding in any essential reality. Freedom for Aristotle was about using the mind to hew close to nature, master unruly passions, and enable the polis. Freedom for Rousseau was about “letting it all hang out,” with society merely a convenient arrangement for enabling the pursuit of individual pleasures. In our day, Rousseau’s general worldview, a tyranny of desire over reason, is trumping natural law realism, with many dire consequences.

Part I also includes excellent chapters carefully refuting current homosexualist arguments for equivalence with heterosexuality from justice and biology. My favorite chapter is called “Inventing Morality.” It is an excellent account of the logical progression in key Supreme Court and lower court cases leading up to and including recent decisions declaring the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and other laws that defined marriage as between one man and one woman, unconstitutional. Reilly effectively connects the dots between contraception law, abortion law, and the triumph of same-sex marriage law. He also explains the falsity of the claim that homosexuals belong to an ascribed social category akin to sex, age and race, and thus deserve special legal protection.

This part of the book also contains Reilly’s explanation for the widespread adamance of homosexualist advocates to press for wider and deeper change. It is the process of rationalization—the key term in his subtitle—which essentially means to invert natural law by transmogrifying the bad into the good through radical denial and suppression of conscience. A door was opened in society for such rationalizations to take root with the earlier separation of sex from marriage and conception among heterosexuals; today, homosexuals just continue further along the same path. Homosexuals violate the natural law in their sexual behavior, and the natural law’s power cannot be long denied without very real, boomeranging consequences that threaten the stability of the rationalization. Therefore the visible evidence of that law’s truth power must incessantly and compulsively be beaten back or obscured lest a deep natural conscience,
never quite lost, re-surface and exert its truth. Any reminder of the natural law—say in another’s moral disapproval, or a legal prohibition, or in the heterosexual functioning of any institution—must be attacked without mercy and without much reasoning. Judicial power is used if necessary in a disturbingly irrational, totalitarian way to compel others’ allegiance in the rationalization. This is why in more recent battles of the culture war, gay advocates talk less about tolerance for their lifestyle and more about demanding its embrace—or even more poignantly, the utter irrelevance of moral judgments and hierarchies. To cement that point, Reilly includes a valuable appendix reviewing recent morbidity data related to homosexual behavior, and in his main text gives several examples of how the natural, negative physical and mental health consequences of homosexual activity are blamed not on the behavior that causes them, but on the failure of institutions to cure them or on homophobia.

Because the sexual revolution contains within it challenges to every realm of human thought and endeavor, in Part II Reilly applies his approach in a series of excellent overviews of recent gay victories across a whole range of institutions, with chapters on science, parenting, pre-K through undergraduate education, scouting, the military, and foreign policy. From a Catholic social-scientific perspective, these chapters help the reader see how various levels and domains in the cultural struggle are interdependent, and why the sexual war is about more than sex.

Reilly’s conclusion is not cheerful: natural law and correlated Christian morality are both under attack, and will be for a long time. And since these form the bases of our civilization, our very being is jeopardized by the triumph of the irrational. Good people will continue to live lives in accord with reason and nature, however, and their sacred manifestations may eventually triumph. Reilly calls his book a distress signal in the night, a challenge to recall and tell the truth.

I have two modest reservations. One is that while Reilly intends to deal with homosexuality in general, he focuses almost all his attention on male homosexual behavior and its consequences. Lesbianism is a distinctive cultural force and has its own patterns and deserves more ample, distinctive consideration. Second, Reilly’s book is helpfully seen as a strong entry in the current debate about whether natural law arguments for moral direction have salience in the current postmodern climate—something crucial for Catholic religious and social thought at this time. It might have been helpful for him to explore a bit more fully what those who worry about the difficulties of using natural law reasoning as a persuasive tool in today’s climate are saying, to set his position in a more nuanced context. These are, truly, very modest reservations.
Note


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Charles E. Rice, Right or Wrong? 40 Years inside Notre Dame. South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2013. 434 pages.

Ed. note: The author of this review earned his law degree from Notre Dame in 1980 and has known Professor Rice since his student days at Notre Dame in the late 1970s.

Charlie Rice is one of a kind. He has had a distinguished academic career, mostly at Notre Dame Law School; he is now Professor Emeritus of Law at Notre Dame. He has been a beloved teacher and mentor to thousands of Notre Dame students since he joined the law faculty there in 1969. He has authored many scholarly books and articles. He was the long-time co-editor of the American Journal of Jurisprudence, perhaps the leading scholarly journal devoted to the natural law. He has been active in the political arena. He co-founded the New York Conservative Party and has served as a consultant to various government agencies. He has also been an activist, particularly on pro-life issues.

This service on behalf of the pro-life cause has taken many forms. Perhaps the most important has been his effort to clearly articulate and defend the teachings of the Catholic Church on pro-life issues. He has done so in scholarly books. But perhaps equally important have been his efforts to defend Church teaching on issues such as contraception, abortion, assisted suicide, and the death penalty in more popular venues. He has written innumerable short essays and delivered countless speeches throughout the country on these topics.