



# NFP and Me

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*In this issue*

## Free Fertility Apps Review

Have you ever gone on vacation and forgotten to bring along your paper chart? I have. Or perhaps you worry about children or clueless relatives finding the chart you oh-so-cleverly forgot to put away after marking down that temperature. Or do you find yourself wishing you had a way to easily e-mail charts or share fertility info with an instructor, a helpful friend or your spouse? If any of these apply to you, you may have found yourself wishing for an app. If you're like me, you spent far too much time researching and downloading a fancy new app only to find that it doesn't correspond to the Boston Cross-Check method at all!

There are a few reasons our method currently doesn't have an app, but fortunately for you, there are a few options that will work for the BCC if you learn how to navigate them. In this issue, I am going to compare the \*free\* versions of three of the best and most popular fertility apps for Android: Kindara, Fertility Friend, and Ovuvue to see how they stack up against one another and how you can use them with BCC. **Each rating is out of 5 hearts.** There are comparison charts on page 5 at the end of the article.

I should note that I (unfortunately) am not being compensated by these companies for my reviews, so rest assured that these are my honest opinions!

### Kindara

Fertility sign compatibility: ♥♥♥

Ease of sharing info: ♥♥♥♥

Chart interpretation: ♥♥♥♥

Visual appeal: ♥♥♥♥♥

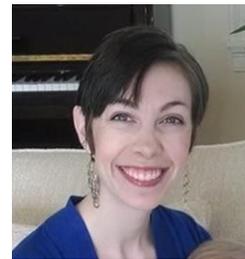
Overall ease of use: ♥♥♥♥♥

I love the look of Kindara: it's so sleek, feminine and feels very tech-savvy. The promise of a basal body thermometer that immediately syncs to your app (called Wink) is a nice one, but with a pre-order price of \$99, I'm not sure I'd trade the slight convenience for the price tag. Yet Kindara, unlike other apps, does not have a "free version" and then a VIP or Subscriber version—it's free for everyone and comes equipped with all sorts of features that I love. Here's how the app handles:

Getting started with Kindara is pretty simple. Go to the settings menu and you'll find customizable options for data entry, fertility signs, or even what your current goal is (tracking fertility, avoiding or achieving pregnancy).

### App Review – Going “Natural” – Rule Refresher – NFP News in Brief

This newsletter is distributed for users of the Boston Cross-Check Method of Natural Family Planning and others interested in general topics pertaining to NFP. If you would like to learn this method, or have further questions, please contact me!  
summamommaop@gmail.com



If you haven't seen it yet, visit my new website:

[www.summamomma.com](http://www.summamomma.com)



Summa Momma

(soo-maa ma-ma)  
GOD. FAMILY.HOME.

What you will not find under the settings, however, is an option to add your fertility monitor readings. If you select “tests,” it will allow you to enter OPK or pregnancy test results, but as of now Kindara does not easily accommodate a sympto-hormonal method like ours. In order to put these results on your chart, I recommend taking advantage of their “custom” field. You can create three options and (in this order!) title them Peak, High and Low. What this will do is add three custom rows at the bottom of your chart, each corresponding to P, H, L on the monitor. You can see how this looks in my sample chart below. It’s not ideal, but it can work.

While we’re on the topic, I will say that my biggest issue working with Kindara is the “chart view.” There’s no doubt it’s a pretty chart, but it’s incredibly counterintuitive for interpretation. Your cervical fluid observations (including menses) appear as a color-coded bar graph, with your most fertile observations being lowest on the chart. The bars not only track the type of mucus, but also the subjective quantity, which is something you don’t need for interpretation at all.

As with all of the apps in this review, Kindara uses 5 categories of cervical mucus (none, sticky, creamy, egg white and watery). Since the BCC only requires you to distinguish between 3 categories (dry, moist, slippery) I suggest that for charting purposes you always mark your mucus observations on Kindara as “medium” quantity, and limit yourself to “none,” “creamy” and “watery,” to represent our standard D, M, S. This will clean up the chart view quite a bit. Something I love about the cervical fluid observation in Kindara, however, is that you can manually mark a “peak” day, which it notes just as we do with a P, and then a count of 4.

For temperature observations, you’ll need to access your online portal. I can only speak for the Android app, but so far I have yet to get it to show interpretation. If I log into my web account, however, there I can do all sorts of fancy things. It will automatically show a temperature shift (which it calculates almost the exact way we do!), or you can enter one manually.

The other thing you will have to keep track of is the start of your fertility each month. Kindara stores your past charts, but doesn’t take them into account when

marking particular days as “fertile” or “infertile” on your chart. It just follows signs from the current cycle, so you will need to keep track of and supply that information yourself.

Finally, I should point out that should you wish to share your chart, Kindara has a few nice options. Your account can be accessed by multiple devices, so husband and wife can have updated charts on both their phones, or you can log in to the account from anywhere using a computer. If you want to “share” your charts with your NFP teacher, there is an option to select them as your Practitioner. By sending them your account information, they can create a Practitioner Portal online which gives them up-to-date access to all of your charting and cycle history. You can manage which signs/notes get shared with your instructor from your web account. You can also invite friends to view your charts, if you have someone other than an instructor helping you out. Unfortunately, I haven’t found a way to share a single chart except with the Kindara community, but you can always take a screen shot if you’d rather not give someone full access.



On the whole, I do like Kindara and would recommend it to my clients. I have not used it extensively, but from what I’ve seen it can be a very good option for those looking to chart electronically for the Boston-Cross-Check method. If you use Kindara and love it (or hate it!), e-mail me with your experiences and I’ll pass them along!

## Fertility Friend

Fertility sign compatibility: ♥♥♥♥♥

Ease of sharing info: ♥♥♥♥♥

Chart interpretation: ♥♥♥♥

Visual appeal: ♥♥♥

Overall ease of use: ♥♥♥♥♥

I started using Fertility Friend years ago at the recommendation of (fittingly) a friend. FF is unabashedly a “pro-conception” group, meaning that they make it very clear you are charting to conceive, rather than postpone, a pregnancy (TTC, in the forum lingo). They do not recommend that you use their charting software to avoid pregnancy, partially because their predictive and interpretive algorithms are tuned to identify only fertile days. They do not care about things like “start of fertility” at the beginning of the cycle because that is irrelevant when TTC. Fortunately, we don’t want the VIP membership with all the interpretive bells and whistles anyway, because we like FREE things and because we want to interpret the chart on our own using the BCC rules, so this really isn’t a problem. As with Kindara, you will just have to keep track of start of fertility on your own.



With the free version, you will get a very comprehensive charting option, plus access to their e-books, video charting tutorials, and basic chart interpretation. Unlike Kindara, you can use it with very little tweaking for the BCC, because you can customize your favorite fertility signs including monitor readings and it will automatically incorporate them into your chart.

Though FF does not mark and count your peak days in the free version, it will shade your most fertile signs (S mucus, H and P on the monitor) in green, making it very easy to identify and do your 4-day count for each of those signs. With regards to temperature, FF will look for a shift and then mark a cover line and the day before your shift (which they assume is ovulation, but that isn’t

necessarily the case). I should note also that Fertility Friend uses five categories of cervical fluid: dry, sticky, creamy, watery and egg white. For this app, you should limit your entry options to “dry,” “creamy” and “egg white,” which it will mark respectively as “-“, “C” and “E.”

I like the fact that this app is also “account based,” like Kindara, which means that any info you enter into your phone or the web version is synced to your account. This means that you can have multiple devices accessing your information, so you and hubby can be on the same page. Sharing charts is incredibly simple from the online platform, where you can just click a button to e-mail or print your chart. The only catch I have found is that FF automatically assumes you will not want to share your intercourse info, so it hides that section of the chart before e-mailing. You will have to supply your instructor with this information separately, or just take a screen shot of your chart view. A handy alternative would be to use the handy “annotate” button from the app! This will allow you to mark key areas on your chart with arrows and/or questions for your instructor to look at. You can then email this annotated version directly to yourself and then forward to whomever you wish.

Because Fertility Friend has been around for a long time, it has a very comprehensive resource base to draw from and to offer. It’s not as flashy as some of the other apps, but it gets the job done and even its basic features prove that it has been used and tested by a LOT of women. It can easily be used with the BCC if you are trying to postpone, but especially if you are trying to conceive.

The only place I really dock FF is in the “visual” department. Because they really want everyone to purchase a VIP membership, your interface is bombarded with ads for content and features you *could* have access to, but currently don’t. Sometimes they even have a little bit of click-bait, suggesting that you can access a feature only to realize you need a VIP account to go farther.

## OvuView

*OvuView isn't made for the iPhone and the developers have admitted they don't have the time or money to do so. So if you're set on getting something from the App Store, I'd stick with FF since that seems to be the runner-up in popularity.*

Fertility sign compatibility: ♥♥♥♥♥

Ease of sharing info: ♥♥

Chart interpretation: ♥♥♥♥♥

Visual appeal: ♥♥♥♥

**Overall ease of use:** ♥♥♥♥♥

I will start with the feature I like \*least\* about OvuView, because the rest of my review will be glowing: the free version doesn't come with sharing capabilities. Unlike the other two apps I've reviewed, this one does NOT have an accompanying web platform, nor is it account-based. When you download OvuView for your phone, there is no "create a user ID"—at least for the free version. This means that all the data you enter into your phone stays on your phone and cannot be accessed anywhere else. If you lose your phone, you lose your data. I hope they change this soon!

A related problem is that because you can't have multiple users access your information, sending your chart is a little more cumbersome than with other apps. There is an option to do a screen shot and send, but if your cycle is long, you may not be able to get all the info on one screen. You can also send \*last\* month's cycle, but not a current one. Of course, this is no more clunky than taking a picture of your paper chart and e-mailing it to your instructor, but I'd like to see better capabilities with an app.

Now that we have the difficult part out of the way, let's talk about why I love OvuView: IT'S TRANSPARENT. And it's adaptable. This is an app that doesn't assume everyone wants to observe and interpret fertility signs the same way! When you go to your cycle options, there is a tab which says "Methods." Under this you will find things like "Rule B (Billings)," "5 Day Dry Up Rule," and "Simple Days Method." Click on the method and it will tell you exactly what criteria you need to meet in order to apply these rules. Unfortunately, the free version does not allow you to customize which rules it is applying, but at least you know how it is calculating everything, including the calendar rhythm method to set your start of fertility. If you wanted to use this app even without the BCC rules, you'd have a pretty good little charting method on your hands; however, for a mere \$4.99, you can get full access to all of the Pro Features which would allow you to customize

rules. This would also enable you to share charts much more easily, so maybe for \$5 this one is worth it.

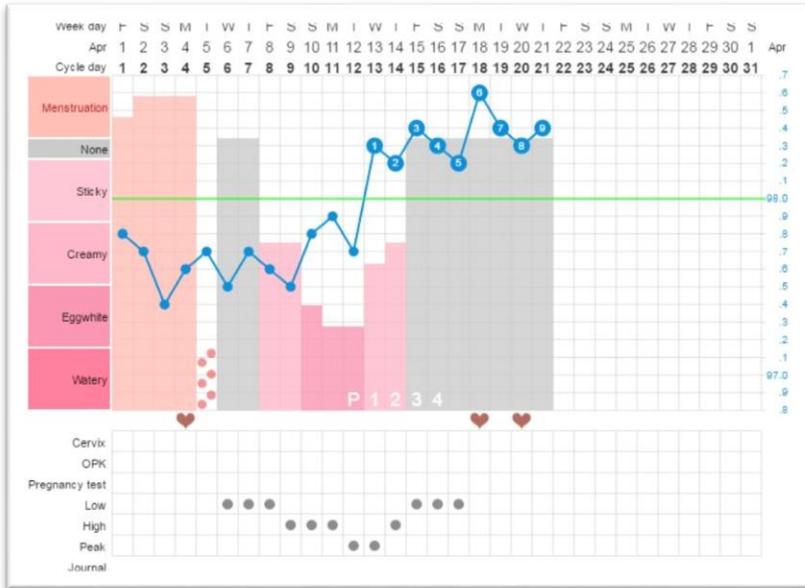
Going back to the free features, however, you have a wonderful selection built in and ready to use. You can choose to view your data in a cycle wheel, fertility predictor calendar, or a simple "symptom" calendar which marks each day with a little icon based on your fertility observations. All of these are easy and intuitive to read. If you switch over to the chart view, you'll find an easy-to-customize format which also takes very little time to "translate" (this is good for instructors!). Your monitor readings show up as 1, 2 or 3 bars. Note that even though there are 6 different cervical fluid categories, (dry, feeling damp, sticky, creamy, watery, egg white), OvuView simplifies these to three categories: circle, circle with a (-) and circle with a (+). So you do not have to limit your mucus observations with this app as you did the others: just click the descriptor that is most accurate and the app will (accurately) classify these according to our D, M or S categories. Also: how cool is the SLIDING temperature input touch screen??



But wait! It gets better! All of these apps have pretty simple "import" features if you want to transfer data from one to another, but I have yet to see "manual cycle preferences" on another app. So let's say that instead of charting in a different app for 6 months, you've been dutifully using your pencil and paper. With FF and Kindara, you would have to manually input all of your previous 6 months into electronic charts in order to use that information. With OvuView, simply enter your shortest/longest cycle information, along with your average luteal phase length (assume ovulation was the day before a temperature rise) and you're good to go. It can now do prediction and interpretation, without the hassle of converting all of your charts! It also has fertility and charting tips, easy demos for all of the features, and you can even set the color scheme if you are particular about those sorts of things. I also like the option of switching to "demo" mode if you want to play around with things without affecting your actual data.

So, despite some obvious short-comings, I really do love this app. I would recommend it to any client looking to use the BCC, as well as anyone who is just getting into charting for the first time.

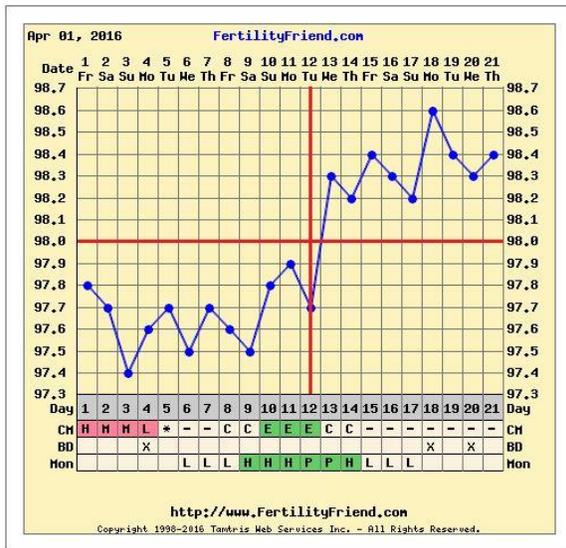
*(Next page: chart view comparisons. Each chart was constructed using identical data from BCC sample teaching chart 3A)*



**Kindara: Web View**

NB: I created my custom fields backwards so they read low, high, peak. You get the idea.

Shaded bars show type and quantity of cervical fluid. Hearts mark intercourse days. Green line is coverline.



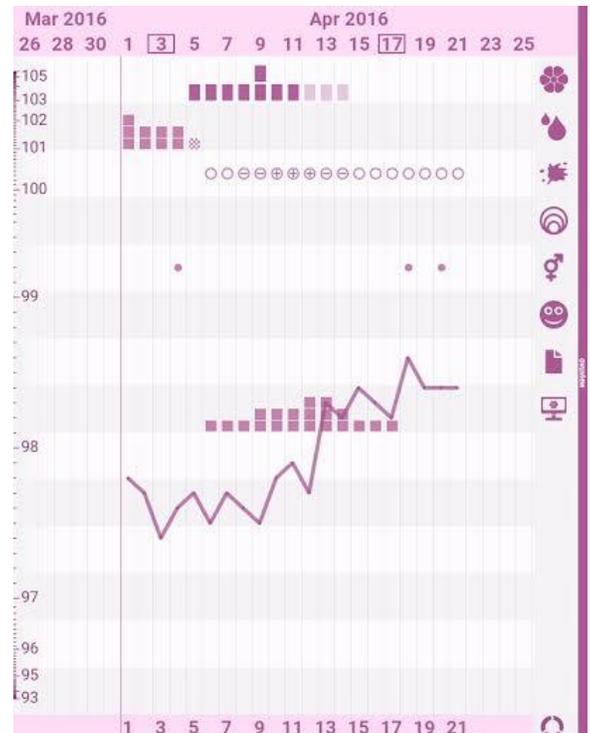
← **Fertility Friend**

Note coverline and vertical line marking suspected ovulation day. Intercourse is marked under BD, for “Baby Dance” (their term, not mine!) I hope you get to use that to win a trivia contest someday.

**OvuView →**

Temperature is overlaid on the rest of the graph. You can opt to turn off that view if it’s too distracting.

Legend: Flower shows fertility status, drops are menses, “Splat” icon is cervical fluid, male/female is intercourse, the monitor screen is monitor readings. We do not use cervical positioning, moods or “other notes.”



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## Theology Corner: Going “Natural”

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I went to the grocery store the other day and found myself running back and forth bewilderedly and desperately looking for some bacon for Sunday brunch. There were about a dozen types of breakfast sausages which were easy to find, but the only bacon I could see was the pre-cooked microwaveable stuff... no way. “Perhaps they have it under *Specialty Meats*?” I pondered, as I marched down the length of the store for a fourth time. When I arrived at the counter, I saw a whole array of packaged meats with the label “Nature’s Promise.” This is the natural, organic label for Stop & Shop, and people were crowding and pushing their way through to get at all of these specialty meats. Unfortunately, there was no bacon.

Yet it got me pondering again on our culture’s recent fascination (in some cases bordering on obsession) with “natural” options. I decided to visit Stop & Shop’s website to find out about their “Nature’s Promise” brand and under the definition of natural, they provide:

Natural is defined as being produced or existing in nature. Natural food may have been grown with the use of pesticides or other conventional methods, but is processed without preservatives or artificial additives.

The term “natural” is currently restricted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only as it applies to added color, synthetic substances, and artificial flavors. The term “natural” is not certified, and therefore can mean different things when used by different companies.

If natural products are your focus, look for the terms “natural” or “all natural” on the packaging. Because this terminology is less regulated, be sure to always read the ingredients list to see if you are comfortable with what is in the product. ([www.stopandshop.com/shopping/our-stores/natural-organic/](http://www.stopandshop.com/shopping/our-stores/natural-organic/))

There are some people who may be attracted to “Natural Family Planning” because it is a method which is free from the artificial hormones or chemicals found in other birth control methods, yet I find it curious that NFP is a term used only by those practicing these methods accompanied by religious or moral conviction. If you step outside this group, people are much more likely to refer to “Fertility Awareness Methods” or worse yet (probably in your practitioner’s office) they are stuck with the term “Rhythm Method.” Why is that?

Partially, it has to do with the fact that the Church had the term first. People approaching sympto-hormonal or other methods of family planning from purely secular (or even anti-church) mindsets might want to steer clear of any association with the perceived hierarchical oppression of the Catholic Church. The other, perhaps more poignant, reason is that NFP is widely recognized as groups of methods which require abstinence during fertile periods in order to postpone pregnancy. In order to distance themselves from this umbrella term, people who relied on condoms, douching or other preventive measures during the fertile window needed to create another term: “Fertility Awareness”, or “Body Literacy.” The names of these methods imply that one understands how to “read” your fertility

signs, but it does not require that this knowledge form the basis of your family planning techniques. Someone using FAM may chart in the same way as would a woman using NFP, but her birth control method might actually be “condoms,” whereas the woman using NFP uses the method itself. Thus, both women meet the criteria for “natural” family planning in the sense of not using hormones, but it is clear that the term “natural” when used with NFP means something more than that.

One could think of the term “natural” colloquially, meaning something that “feels right” or “comes easily.” A coach might tell a player to relax, forget the formal instruction, and just do what comes naturally. Or we might say that someone is a “natural” when it comes to baking, growing a garden, or dancing. Yet anyone who has tried doing fertility observations, charting and abstaining during fertile periods can tell you that NFP is decidedly *not* natural in that sense. Nor does “natural” mean that we can’t use high-tech devices like monitors, apps or computer programs to make the best of our chosen method. So what does “natural” mean for those of us using NFP? And why does it matter (because it does)?

The first way it is said to be “natural” is that through proper use of NFP, no act of intercourse is deprived of its *natural* ability to create life. In other words, nature (that is, biology) has given our bodies cycles during which there are periods of time when a couple is capable of conceiving and times when a couple is incapable of conceiving. No act is committed before, during or after intercourse to interfere with the natural (that is, biological) consequences of that particular act. This is very different from FAM, where natural cycles are observed and charted, but intercourse might be deprived of its natural consequences.



## RULE REFRESHER:

### MONITOR TIPS

You can conserve test sticks each month because the monitor goes on autopilot at peak day. When you see a P, go ahead and mark the next day as a P, then an H, then Ls from there on out.

When using the monitor postpartum, remember to reset after 20 days of testing: otherwise the monitor isn’t reading anything and you may just get some weird results!

But this definition alone is not enough to answer the critics of NFP, who would argue that following such logic would reduce Catholics to saying absurd things about what we can and cannot do with our bodies. If the line of argument is simply “it is not right to interfere with any natural process,” we’d be hard-pressed to defend our use of things like deodorant, nail clippers, dialysis machines or stomach pumps. Wouldn’t we be forced to say that body odor, long finger nails, kidney failure and death by poison are simply the natural consequences of natural processes? People who received gastric bypass surgery would have to be denied Holy Communion!

Part of the response to this *reduction ad absurdum* is that there is a marked difference in the morality of shutting off healthy, natural biological processes (e.g. reproduction) and trying to thwart natural processes that are unhealthy and might lead to death (e.g. illness, poison). A person who has undergone therapeutic gastric bypass is not in the same position as a person who would like to shut off their digestive tract completely in order to binge eat without

repercussions. Likewise, cutting one's fingernails in no way inhibits the process of nail growth, but deodorants are often anti-perspirants as well. Perhaps we are not so much concerned about the interruption of functioning, healthy systems, but in this case we are particularly interested in *this* system, namely the reproductive system. How is it so different from others, like my endocrine system? What underlies this response is an implicit appeal to the other reason we call NFP "natural" and that is because of *natural law*.

The Church defines natural law in a moral, philosophical sense (in contrast to some usage in which "natural law" would apply to strictly demonstrable scientific principles that are called Laws of Nature), meaning "the rule of conduct which is prescribed to us by the Creator in the constitution of the nature with which He has endowed us."<sup>i</sup> We, as people of faith, believe that God has created mankind in such a way that it is in our "nature"<sup>1</sup> to be able to know and pursue the Good and avoid doing Evil. Some of these simple rules of conduct include the proscription to murder and steal, as well as prescriptive behaviours to uphold the equal dignity of all peoples. This is the basis of "rights language" and when pressed, most people believe that some sort of innate moral law is the foundation for effective laws and governance.

Perhaps it may come as a surprise, but in his encyclical "Humanae Vitae," Pope Paul VI bases his teaching on moral means of birth

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<sup>1</sup> I pondered omitting this term because it can be used here both in a technical, philosophical sense and as a familiar concept. The former definition of "nature" can be summed up as: *that which makes a thing what it is*. It is the essence, or the form, of a thing. We can talk about natures as distinct from their occurrence in individual specimens, e.g. we can talk about all of the qualities of "tableness" as an abstract concept without speaking about any table in particular. Conversely,

control not on sacramental theology (which beautifully supports his conclusion), but primarily on this very concept of *natural law*. He writes: "The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."<sup>ii</sup> Thus the moral proscription against hormonal/artificial contraception is not merely something that we, as people of faith, must adhere to: it belongs to the very nature of mankind, and thus should be followed by all people. He goes on to further say:

"Unless we are willing that the responsibility of procreating life should be left to the arbitrary decision of men, we must accept that there are certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go, to the power of man over his own body and its natural functions—limits, let it be said, **which no one, whether as a private individual or as a public authority, can lawfully exceed**. These limits are expressly imposed because of the reverence due to the whole human organism and its natural functions." (emphasis added)<sup>iii</sup>

In a culture which sees birth control not only as a fundamental right, but also in some cases a moral obligation, this sort of teaching seems ludicrous, if not downright insane. The very fact that so many people, including well-intentioned and faithful people, believe that contraception is and should be the normative behavior in our society begs the question of whether or not

one can point to a thing which someone else has called a "table," but if it does not actually possess "tableness" (maybe it is actually an elephant), then no matter how much he calls it a table, it is not and will not and cannot be a table. The latter, less technical definition of "nature" is simply the basic, inherent features of a thing, e.g. "It is in the nature of fish to swim."

this issue can be called a part of *natural law* at all. How can something be an innate “rule of conduct” when so many people obviously don’t agree?

To put it bluntly: there is nothing in natural law theory which prohibits the vast majority of people from being egregiously wrong. Natural law doesn’t mean that every single person (or even every society) will naturally come to the right conclusions on their own. What natural law *does* say is that it is in the nature of *mankind* to be able to discern and live these rules. There are two important implications here:

First, while every individual is morally bound to live by natural law once it is known, there is no guarantee that every individual can properly discern the natural law. This could be due to mental incapacities, or erroneous cultural climate in which they were raised. I’ll set aside the question of culpability in these cases, because that’s notoriously difficult to discuss.

Second, the application of this particular rule and our ability to understand it also hinges on our comprehension and right reasoning on related issues, in particular: marriage. Note that Paul VI forms his teaching around the moral legitimacy of family planning within the “marital act.” You will never find a document discussing the Church’s Magisterial Teaching on contraception outside of marriage, because for the Church, such a question doesn’t make sense. It would be like asking the Vatican to make a declaration on whether or

not one could morally use a handgun while robbing a bank. The fact that our society and the Church have *very* different definitions of marriage as a natural (social) institution hinders our very discourse on the issue of birth control in the first place.

All of this is not to say that we are at a total impasse when it comes to talking with our “secular” friends about NFP, but it does mean that we are at a huge disadvantage. Our underlying assumptions about what the *natural* meaning of marriage, and consequently marital sex, is will make it difficult to convince our friends (or family, or doctors) that we aren’t just brainwashed gluttons for punishment. For those who first may have chosen NFP purely because they were attracted to a “natural” (i.e. non-hormonal) option of family planning, this is also an opportunity for deeper understanding and appreciation of our whole married life—not just in sacramental language, which is rich and abundantly meaningful in itself, but in the language of Creation, through which our Creator quietly speaks to all of us of His plans and His designs. Perhaps it will be most effective to begin discussing these things through the lens of “natural”/Green/non-toxic family planning, but the meaning of *Natural* Family Planning goes far beyond that limited sense of the word: indeed, it is at the very heart of Who We Are as people. For my part, I am glad that the term “Fertility Awareness Method” exists as an intentionally separate phenomena, so that the Church can continue its role in challenging the culture through the gospel of **Natural** Family Planning.

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<sup>i</sup> Fox, James. "Natural Law." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 25 Apr. 2016 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09076a.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> *HV*, §11

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.* §17



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### NFP News in Brief!

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I have it on fairly good authority that Dr. Ferhring at Marquette University is looking at releasing a new post-partum protocol for the monitor which would require significantly less abstinence. Has he found a work-around for those pesky auto-highs?? I'll let you know as soon as I get more details!

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Also: I think it would be great if we had some way to verify ovulation. If you've ever had a missed peak on your monitor, or had some funky temperature non-shifts, you know how tricky the rest of your cycle charting can be! Well, it turns out that years ago, someone had patented a progesterone test stick, similar to a pregnancy or OPK test. Instead of checking for pregnancy hormones and LH, however, it simply checks to see if your body is producing enough progesterone to show that you've ovulated. The inventor never became a developer and apparently the patent is up for grabs!

A bright young researcher now has her sights set on developing a home progesterone kit, which could help thousands of women with their family planning goals! When that comes on the market, you can be sure I'll let you know.

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I talked in my last issue about TempDrop, the automatic BBT which you wear while you sleep. Progress with investors has been slow, but production is going and they intend to ship by Christmas!

Visit [Tempdrop.xyz](http://Tempdrop.xyz) for more details.

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