

Love & Responsibility

Putting the Norms of Catholic Sexual Morality on a Firm Basis

An introduction to Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility*, whose effort is "to put the norms of Catholic sexual morality on a firm basis, a basis as definitive as possible, relying on the most elementary and incontrovertible moral truths and the most fundamental values or goods" p. 16

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Part II: Personalism, Utilitarianism, & Love

I. Using and the Dignity of Persons

- A. We intuit that it is wrong for persons to be used, to be just a means by which someone gets what they want. We see this in sexual matters, work relationships, and a host of other areas. *Wojtyła is attempting to explain and philosophically justify this intuition.* He is answering the question *why* using people, i.e. treating them as instruments, is wrong.
- B. "To use": to employ some object of action as a means to an end. The means are subordinated to the end and are subservient to it i.e., the human use of natural resources.
- C. **Can a person be legitimately treated as merely such a means?** *The answer to this question will have far reaching implications.* "A person must not be *merely* the means to an end for another person. This is precluded by the very nature of personhood, by what a person is. For a person is a thinking subject, and capable of taking decisions...*Anyone who treats a person as the means to an end does violence to the very essence of the other, to what constitutes its natural right.*" (26-27 emphasis added)
- D. "This elementary truth – that a person, unlike all other objects of action, which are not persons may not be an instrument of action, is therefore an inherent component of the natural moral order. Thanks to this, the natural order acquires personalistic attributes: the order of nature, since its framework accommodates personal entities as well as others, must possess such attributes." (27)
- E. **The Personalist Principle:** This truth leads to the formulation of the personalist principle: "Whenever a person is the object of your activity, remember that you may not treat that person as only the means to an end, as an instrument, but must allow for the fact that he or she too, has, or at least should have, distinct personal

ends.”(28) Persons may not be treated as instruments. Instruments have their ends chosen for them. This does them no harm if they are not capable of choosing them anyway. A person, however, is an end-chooser. “the role of a blind tool or a means to an end determined by a different subject *is contrary to the nature of a person*” (28 emphasis added)

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- F. The alternative to using persons is to have the person desire the same common good. Then a common bond of good, a common aim is established, uniting the persons under a common goal. When two people choose a common aim this puts them on equal footing; i.e. employer – employee relation, soldier – commander relation. When they both desire the same end it is impossible that one be used. In the marital act, to exclude the danger of using another, the two must share the same end. This end must of course be in accord with the natural law.
- G. **Instrumentalizing: Treating People as Tools:** If one hires a plumber, one could treat that plumber as a mere means to an end; i.e. by not paying him a fair wage, however a just exchange will fulfill the personalistic norm. *Justice is giving one their due*, respecting the natural goods that are involved in a given action. To cause a natural deprivation, a *privation*; to directly stifle or attack the natural goods of the person in order to “get something out of it” is to “instrumentalize” the person in some way. Examples; embryonic stem cell research instrumentalizes the unborn in order to gain useful stem cells, slavery instrumentalizes persons by not respecting the natural good of freedom in order to acquire cheap labor, contraception instrumentalizes the person by not respecting the good of procreation in order to gain pleasure, etc.
- H. **Love Demands Integration: To respect the person means to respect the whole person. It is an integral look at things.** The proper end of sexuality is procreation, the family, and the ripening of the relationship between two people. *These objective purposes of marriage create the possibility of love and exclude the possibility of treating a person as a means to an end.* One must be ready to subordinate oneself to these values that the person represents. A person cannot be for another person only the means to an end – in this case sexual pleasure or delight. *Enjoyment must be subordinated to love.*

II. Egoism: The Problem With Utilitarianism and Seeking Pleasure as the Sole Good.

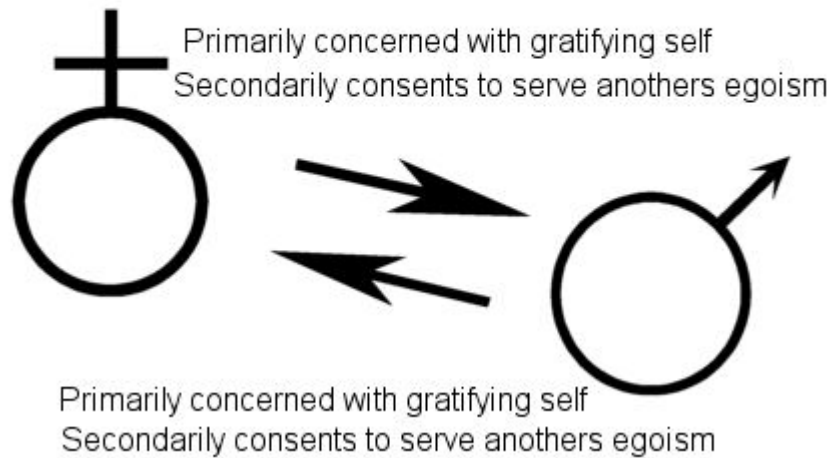
- A. *Utilitarianism* is a philosophy that holds *pleasure* as the sole good, thus the utilitarian's primary moral principle is to "maximize the pleasure of the greatest number and minimize suffering". This utilitarian principle looks good at first glance but really is weak and superficial. The problem is the recognition of pleasure as the sole good to which everything else must be subordinated. "The real mistake is the recognition of pleasure in itself as the sole or at any rate the greatest good, to which everything else in the activity of an individual or a society should be subordinated...Pleasure is *essentially* incidental, contingent, something which may occur in the course of action" (36 *emphasis added*)
- B. **Pleasure cannot be the main factor in determining what is good and bad.** Doing the right thing sometimes involves pain and/or the renunciation of pleasure. "Quite obviously, that which is truly good, that which morality and conscience bid me do, often involves some measure of pain and requires the renunciation of some pleasure. The pain involved, or the pleasure which I must forego, is not the decisive consideration if I am to act rationally." (36) *Sometimes morally good actions result in a denial of pleasure* (i.e. to refrain from being a "peeping tom") *and some morally bad actions result in a greater amount of pleasure* (unacknowledged rape = 1 pleasurable experience and 0 bad). Ergo, attaining pleasure is incidental to human actions and cannot be the primary good.
- C. **Wojtyla's central objection to utilitarianism:** If pleasure becomes the main goal, then everything else becomes subservient to this goal and everything else, including persons, may be used to reach it. Persons then become "pleasure instruments" and this position does violence to their very nature as ends in themselves. *Utilitarianism reduces to absurdity by putting a price on everyone's head. As long as some majority attains pleasure, anything goes.* Under utilitarianism, ten innocent people may be legitimately sacrificed to a new medical experiment that will save hundreds of others. Many such absurd results logically follow from utilitarian principles.
- D. Wojtyla's point is the *internal contradiction* of utilitarianism: Pleasure is subjective, particular, and for the moment. Different people take pleasure in a wide variety of different things, and we all have the common experience of those who take pleasure in that which is not good for them (i.e. one may take pleasure in eating too much junk food, taking drugs, committing adultery, etc.). *Pleasure then, only pertains to individual particular desires and cannot possibly pertain to a common transcendent good.* Personal pleasures cannot be transmitted to the greatest number. A utilitarian cannot get from egoism to altruism. As long as pleasure is the sole criterion, there is no way of escaping egoism and "*We cannot transcend the bonds of what is good for me alone*". (37)
- E. **Utilitarianism is particularly damaging in the sexual sphere.** We can close this gap only by a fiction, namely, "Its pleasurable to maximize another's pleasure" or "it gives me pleasure to maximize someone else's pleasure" (38) Love is dead in this scenario. If my only reason for acting is to get pleasure out of someone else's

pleasure, as soon as my pleasure ceases, as soon as I cease to experience my pleasure, then the show is over. The problem is that if the act ceases to be pleasurable, then the pleasure for the other person ceases to be one's obligation. Wojtyla calls it a "fiction" because it is pretending to be truly interested in the other but in reality is still only interested in one's own pleasure. It is also a pretence because it tries to hide the underlying reality of selfishness.

- F. **UTILITARIANISM AND LOVE ARE INCOMPATIBLE.** A "harmonious egoism" is still egoism - it is now just twofold. Once a personal advantage is gone, love collapses. *A union of egoism holds together only conditionally.* "If it ain't fun I'm outta here." "I am in this relationship as long as I get X out of it." *Unfortunately, this is the perhaps the most common ground for relationships today. Their claim to "love" is only a pretence for personal gratification. Relationships today, which should be grounded on the objective dignity of the person, are instead blatantly utilitarian. This is only a bond of selfishness. There is no objective good to ensure the existence of the relationship.*

The Problem of Harmonious Egoism

Primarily views the other as a tool for pleasure
 Secondly views oneself as a tool for pleasure



- G. "I use you and you use me" is not a common goal but two mutually advantageous goals. The only escape from this egoism is to recognize a *common objective good* as the foundation for love. (38) *Utilitarianism is unable to guarantee love.*
- H. Wojtyla backs this analysis up with moral theology: The NT commandment is to love others, not get your pleasure. *If utilitarianism is accepted, the commandment to love is meaningless.* If the commandment to love others has any meaning at all, utilitarianism must be rejected and another basis adopted. The personalistic norm is the only other valid option. "the value of the person is always greater than the value of pleasure." (41) The only adequate response to persons is love and "Love for a

person must consist in affirmation that the person has a value higher than that of an object for consumption or use” (42)

III. The Correct Interpretation of the Sexual Urge

A. *Love grows out of the urge and is given its definitive shape by the will; it is not the urge itself.* The urge does not deprive man of his powers of self-determination. Humans have the power of reason, *that is natural instincts can be controlled and directed towards the good.* “Man is not responsible for what *happens* to him in the sphere of sex since he is obviously not himself the cause of it, but he is entirely responsible for what he *does* in this sphere.” (47)

B. **The sexual urge is crucially good because it is inescapably bonded with the existence of human persons:** “The existence of the whole species *Homo* depends upon it. The species could not exist if it were not for the sexual urge and its natural results.” (51) *It furnishes the “raw material” upon which love and families are built and thus is fundamental for humanity.*

C. Wojtyla’s remark here is one of the most noteworthy passages in the book; “Now existence is the first and basic good for every creature. The existence of the species *Homo* is the first and basic good for that species. All other goods derive from this basic good. *I can only act while I am.*” (51, emphasis added) This idea of the “primacy of existence” has St. Thomas written all over it and the point is quite profound; **all human goods are grounded in the sexual urge.** This is the existential significance of the sexual urge. “Man’s multifarious works, the creations of his genius, the fruits of his holiness are only possible of the man – the genius, the saint – comes into existence. To be he had to exist. The natural route by which human beings begin to exist passes through the sexual urge.”(52) *This existential significance equates to an immense moral significance. The sexual urge is inextricably bound with the most fundamental of human goods.* The point cannot be overemphasized.

D. **Two Incorrect Views:** The *Puritanical* or *rigorist* interpretation exaggerates the good of procreation to the neglect of pleasure and unification, while the opposite Freudian *Libidinstic* extreme exaggerates the good of pleasure, which is to place the subjective purpose of pleasure over the objective existential purpose.

E. **Wojtyla draws conclusions connected to traditional Church teaching on the objective goods of marriage.** *Insofar as one of these goods is stifled, an evil is done.*¹
In order of importance:

¹ This definition of evil, namely a missing good that ought to be present, goes as far back to Augustine. Technically evil is not a “thing”; it is a privation, a lack of something that should be present given the nature of the object in question. For example, it is a *physical evil* to be born only with one eye. It is a *moral evil* to cause a man to go blind in one eye. This is because man, by nature, has two functional eyes.

1. Procreation
2. Unification, complementation, and support
3. Satisfaction of desire

F. **These objective goods of sexuality rule out subjectivism:** “Marriage, objectively considered, must provide first of all the means of continuing existence, secondly a conjugal life for man and woman, and thirdly a legitimate orientation for desire. *The ends of marriage in the order mentioned, are incompatible with any subjectivist interpretation of the sexual urge, and therefore demand from man, as a person, objectivity in his thinking on sexual matters and above all in his behavior. This objectivity is the foundation of conjugal morality.*” (66 emphasis added)

G. This order is objective and binding because it is accessible by reason and “seeks to emphasize that procreation is *objectively* more important than that man and woman should live together, complement each other and support each other, just as this second purpose is in turn more important than the appeasement of natural desire.”⁶⁸

IV. Love Examined: Metaphysically, Psychologically, and Ethically

A. The Metaphysics of Love

Attraction

- Seeing the other as “good” It is not just thinking about the other as good, it’s a commitment of the will to consider the good.
- The sexual urge is operative here.
- It is inter-personal; there is a value to which you are attracted and something in you which is attracted to that value

Desire

- Presupposes awareness of some lack
- “I want you because you are good for me”, seeing the object as good for the subject.
- This stage comes closest to utilitarianism but avoids it by adhering to the personalistic norm

The gap between desire and goodwill is the most important gap to fill. If the gap is not filled, we lapse into utilitarianism. Love would be evil if it went no further than desire.

Goodwill

- We must long for the other persons good. “I long for that which is good for you”
- This is an uncompromisingly altruistic orientation.
- Desire and goodwill are complementary – if you want the other person as a “good” for yourself, you want that other person to be “really good”. However, goodwill itself is free of self-interest
- As time goes by, love must move from desire to *unqualified goodwill*.

The Problem of Reciprocity

- Love cannot be a one-way street. Fully realized love is inter-personal, not an individual matter. With bilateral love we get the beginning of a “WE” arising from the two “I’s”.
- “Reciprocity is the proof that love has matured, that it has become something ‘between’ persons.” p. 85
- “Reciprocity brings with it a synthesis, as it were, of love as desire and love as goodwill.” P. 86
- **Reciprocity creates trust.** You desire the good of another, they desire the good for you – and when they know that, the couple trusts each other.
- “This accounts for that trust in another person which brings freedom from suspicion and from jealousy – that trust which is so important a factor in making love a genuine good for two people. To be able to rely on another person, to think of that person as a friend who will never prove false, is for the person who loves a source of joy.” P.87
- When desire alone is brought, using each other, to seek pleasure, then reciprocity does not exist. *With no reciprocity there is no trust.*
- “It is impossible to put your trust in another human being knowing or feeling that his or her sole aim is utility or pleasure.” P. 87 You cannot even trust if you yourself are looking for pleasure only. “It is enough for one of the persons to have utilitarian aims, and ‘mutual love’ will become a problem which begets many suspicions and jealousies.”
- Bringing a consumer attitude to the relationship, seeking mere pleasure, is not a good that binds and unites people for very long. They remain tied only as long as the pleasure is there. When this happens. The “illusion of reciprocity will burst like a bubble.” P. 88

Sympathy & Friendship: The Transition From ‘I’ to ‘We’

- **Sympathy:** Experiencing together, an emotional unification
- Sympathy alone is weak because of its lack of objectivity, however it gives human love their subjective intensity, “Only sympathy has the power to make people feel very close to each other” (90) For this reason it is very important. Sympathy is how we become aware of our love, “As soon as sympathy breaks down they usually feel that their love has come to an end.” (90) Love cannot remain on the level of mere sympathy - it must develop into friendship.
- **Friendship** brings out the forming of the two “I”s into a unity. *The will to unite.* It enables a unification of persons. Your “I” becomes mine, lives within my “I” as well as within itself. This is a different unification than sympathy; here the will is involved.
- Sympathy must be transformed into friendship, and friendship supplemented by sympathy. Sympathy creates the conditions for friendship and then adds warmth when the friendship has already occurred. The will would be cold without it.

- “A mistake often made in love between people, and especially between man and woman, is to leave it, so to speak, at the level of sympathy, with no conscious attempt to mould it into friendship. One consequence of this mistake is the belief that when sympathy breaks down love is also at an end. This belief is very dangerous to human love, and the mistake from which it arises indicates one of the main gaps in the education of love.” (92)

Thus far Wojtyla indicates *two key transitions* - from escaping the self by goodwill, and the transition to friendship: “Love in the individual develops by way of attraction, desire, and goodwill. Love however, finds its full realization, not in an individual subject, but in a relationship between subjects, between persons. Hence the problem of friendship, which we have analyzed here in our discussion of sympathy, hence too a problem connected with friendship, that of reciprocity. The transition from ‘I’ to ‘we’ is no less important for love than the escape from one’s own ‘I’ by way of attraction desire, and goodwill.” (95)

Betrothed Love: The ‘Gift of Self’

- Different from all other forms of love. The decisive character of betrothed love is *the self-giving of one’s own person to another*. It is something more than merely desiring the good for another. When betrothed love enters, something more than friendship results. *It is a devotion of self to another, a mutual dedication.*
- “The fullest most compromising form of love consists precisely in self-giving, in making one’s inalienable and non-transferable ‘I’ in this way, and secondly in that the ‘I’ far from being destroyed or impaired as a result is enlarged and enriched – of course in a super-physical, a moral sense.” (97) Mt 10:39, Gen 2:24, “they become one flesh”
- Not merely psychological, nor merely physical, not merely sexual, give the whole person.
- “If marriage is to satisfy the demands of the personalistic norm it must embody *reciprocal self giving*, a mutual betrothed love.” (P. 99 emphasis added)
- This self-giving does not diminish, but rather enhances and enriches the existence of the person. A lover goes outside the self to find a fuller existence in another. “Lose yourself to find yourself”!

B. Psychological Analysis of Love

Sensuality & Sentiment: It is generally recognized that man by nature is more *sensual* while woman is more *sentimental*.

Sensuality

- Sensuality is viewing the body of another as an object of enjoyment. Danger here of using a person for an object of enjoyment. Sensuality in itself always has a consumer orientation – it is primarily and immediately directed towards a body.

- “the body is an integral part of the person, and so must not be treated as though it were detached from the whole person...” (107)
- “At the same time we must recognize that when man and woman come together, sensuality as the natural reaction to the person of the opposite sex, is a sort of raw material for true, conjugal love” (108)
- “All this however most certainly does not go to show that sensual excitability, as a natural and congenital characteristic of a concrete person is morally wrong. An exuberant and readily roused sensuality is the stuff from which a rich- if difficult- personal life may be made.” (109)

Sentiment

- Sentimentality is connected with the whole person, not the body alone, and is a desire for nearness, proximity, and intimacy - manifests in hand holding, looks, gestures, etc.
- Runs the danger of attributing false idealizations of the other and loving an image instead of a real person. The imagination may project values that are not consonant with what the person really is. Idealization of the object of love is a well-known phenomenon – especially in the young.

Love cannot be merely in either of these two psychological states: “If ‘love’ remains just sensuality, just a matter of sex appeal, it will not be love at all, but only the utilization of one person by another, or of two persons by each other. While if love remains mere sentiment, it will equally be unlike love in the complete sense of the word. For both persons will remain in spite of everything divided from each other, though it may appear that they are very close because they so eagerly seek proximity.” (113-114)