

HOW NOT TO BE USED: *LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY*

by Dale O'Leary

First published in the Boston Forum as "How Not to be Used"

Year? Month?

In the last thirty years, advocates for a revolution in sexual ethics and practice have mounted a frontal assault on traditional morality. These Sexual Revolutionaries have presented themselves as promoters of pleasure and freedom, working to liberate the world from the bondage of sexual restraint. Their activism has led to the removal of legal restrictions on sexual behavior, popularization of what a generation ago would have deemed pornography, and a shattering of social norms. In today's media-driven culture the defenders of traditional sexual morality face derision and contempt. The powerful entertainment industry delights in breaking down barriers and portraying sexual rebels as heroes persecuted by neurotic, hypocritical bigots. Journalists treat Sexual Revolutionaries as victim/heroes fighting for freedom against oppressive discrimination.

Is it possible to mount a credible and convincing defense for Catholic sexual morality? Some may ask why bother. Other religious groups have surrendered to the demands of the Sexual Revolutionaries and become "tolerant" of what was previously universally considered sexual sin, why should the Catholic church waste its resources defending a system which is indefensible?

Because in the area of faith and morals, the Catholic Church considers itself under the protection of the Holy Spirit. If the Church has been wrong for 20 centuries in such a crucial matter, then all its other claims are suspect. If Catholic teaching on sexuality can be discredited, then the final obstacle to the total triumph of the Sexual Revolutionaries will be eliminated.

Love and Responsibility

Is there a way to answer the challenge posed to traditional sexual morality by the Sexual Revolutionaries, one which will appeal to the heart, answer the legitimate questions, and not compromise the truth? Yes, in the book *Love and Responsibility*, Fr. Karol Wojtyla, (Pope John Paul II) presents a clear analysis of why the Sexual Revolution is fundamentally anti-person and how Catholic sexual morality, based on the truth about the human person, is the path to true love. *Love and Responsibility* is

not a marriage manual, even less a list of dos and don'ts. It is a dense philosophical treatise filled with deep psychological insights.

The media may try to dismiss John Paul II as the product of a backward country, personally popular, but out-of-touch with modern problems. Nothing could be further from the truth. He has been a direct witness to the great conflicts of the 20th century. The Sexual Revolution was introduced into Poland in the 1950s, a decade before it took hold in the West. The Communist occupiers actively promoted sexual immorality and abortion as a way of undermining the power of the Polish Catholic church. As a confessor Fr. Wojtyla saw the effect on souls.

During the 1950s Fr. Wojtyla, combined his pastoral duties with work as a professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin -- the only Catholic University which survived the Communist take over of Eastern Europe. In 1957 on a vacation with philosophy, psychology, and medical students in the Mazurian Lakes region of Poland, he discussed the draft of a book he was writing on sexual and marital ethics. The students input was crucial to the development of an approach to sexual ethics which confronted the real problems of ordinary people. The material was further developed in a series of lectures entitled "Love and Responsibility" which he delivered from 1957 to 1959, and then published as book under the same title in 1960.¹

In his introduction to the first edition, then Bishop Wojtyla explains his purpose:

"...although it is easy to draw up a set of rules for Catholics in the sector of 'sexual' morality the need to validate these rules makes itself felt at every step. For the rules often run up against greater difficulties in practice than in theory, and the spiritual adviser, who is concerned above all the practical, must seek ways of justifying them. For his task is not only to command or forbid but to justify, to interpret, to explain. The present book was born principally of the need 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. Such a good is the person and the moral truth most closely bound up with the world of persons is 'the commandment to love' -- for love is a good peculiar to the world of person."²

Fr. Wojtyla begins *Love and Responsibility* with an analysis of the verb "to use" and a critique of Utilitarianism. According to Fr. Wojtyla, "Utilitarians regard the principle of maximization of pleasure accompanied by the minimization of pain as the primary rule

1 George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*. (NY: Cliff Street Boosk, 1999) page139.

2 Karol Wojtyla (1994) *Love and Responsibility*, New York : Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Translated by H. T. Willets. page 16.

of human morality"³ and regard pleasure as an end in itself. While this may seem attractive, by making pleasure in itself the sole or greatest good, other values including the value of the person are subordinated. Persons are inevitably reduced to objects to be used to maximize the pleasure of others. Utilitarianism does offer a "semblance of altruism," but Fr. Wojtyla explains how this fiction inevitable devalues the human person:

"If, while regarding pleasure as the only good, I also try to obtain the *maximum* pleasure for some else -- and not just for myself, which would be blatant egoism -- then I put a value on the pleasure of this other person only in so far as it gives pleasure to me: it gives me pleasure, that someone else is experiencing pleasure. If however, I cease to experience pleasure, or it does not tally with my 'calculus of happiness' -- (a term often used by utilitarian) then the pleasure of the other person ceases to be my obligation, a good for me and may even become something bad. I shall then -- true to the principles of utilitarianism -- seek to eliminate the other person's pleasure because no pleasure for me is any longer bound up with it -- or at any rate the other person's pleasure will become a matter of indifference to me and I shall not concern myself with it.

"'Love' in this utilitarian conception is a union of egoism, which can hold together only on condition that they confront each other with nothing unpleasant, nothing to conflict with their mutual pleasure. Therefore love so understood is self-evidently merely a pretense which has to be carefully cultivated to keep the underlying reality hidden: the reality of egoism and the greediest kind of egoism at that, exploiting another person to obtain for itself its own 'maximum pleasure'. In such circumstances the other person is and remains only a means to an end..."⁴

The Utilitarian ethic, sharply contrasts with the Christian norm "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" which contains the corollary: You may not use persons as objects. Fr. Wojtyla formulates this principle in philosophical terms as: "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 person ends."⁵

This norm provides a universally applicable basis for ethical thinking. According to Fr. Wojtyla, "... we must never treat a person as the means to an end. This principle has universal validity. Nobody can use a person as a means toward an end, no human

3 *Love and Responsibility*, page 35.

4 *Love and Responsibility*, p. 38-39

5 *Love and Responsibility*, p. 28

being, nor yet God the Creator." ⁶

It also provides a foundation for the defense of human rights for: "Anyone who treats a person as a means to an end does violence to the very essence of the other, to what constitutes its natural right."⁷ Once this simple principle is understood and accepted, then the "rules" of sexual morality fall into place, not as arbitrary "don'ts" but as the logical demands of an ethic founded on respect for the human person.

Fr. Wojtyla does not disparage sexual pleasure, the value of sexuality, the value of the body, erotic feelings, or the emotions associated with love. Rather he points out how these can be dangerous if not governed by a true love which puts the person first:

'Sinful love' is often very emotional, saturated with emotion, which leaves no room for anything else. Its sinfulness is not of course due to the fact that it is saturated with emotion, nor to the emotion itself, but to the fact that the will puts emotion before the person, allowing it to annul all the objective laws and principles which must govern the unification of two person, a man and a woman.⁸

The particular danger of "sinful love' consists in a fiction; immediately, and before reflection, it is not felt to be 'sinful', but it is, above all, felt to be love."

"Sin is a violation of the true good. For the true good in the love of man and woman is first of all the person, and not emotions for its own sake, still less pleasure as such. These are secondary goods, and love -- which is a durable union of persons -- cannot be built of them alone." ⁹

Utilitarian Sexual Contract

Sexual Revolution is founded on a Utilitarian Sexual Contract which, while rarely explicitly spelled out, can be summarized as follows:

I can use you as a sex object. I may at some point want to share housing with you or even enter into a marriage and decide to conceive a child, but our relationship will always be contingent on your remaining useful to me by supplying me with sexual and other pleasures. If the discomfort I feel is greater than the pleasure I gain from this relationship, I am free to terminate the relationship unilaterally. I will let you use me as a sex object, provided you gain my explicit consent before each encounter. We will

⁶ *Love and Responsibility*, p. 27

⁷ *Love and Responsibility*, p. 27

⁸ *Love and Responsibility*, p. 163

⁹ *Love and Responsibility*, p., 165.

negotiate the safe-sex practices to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. I understand that you are under no obligation to continue the relationship should your discomfort be greater than your pleasure.

The acceptance of Utilitarian sexual ethic is so pervasive that many young men and women do not recognize its fundamental immorality. Date rape trials and sexual harassment law suits hinge not on whether or not one person has been used as a sexual object -- it is assumed he or she has -- but on whether consent was obtained and the use was terminated on demand.

Modern women and men consider themselves liberated from the need to conceal their motives. No one feels is supposed to feel guilty for using another person. On the other hand, under the Utilitarian sexual ethic, those who expect commitment or fail to allow the other person to exit the relationship without recrimination may find themselves condemned. If they protest, they are told to "get over it."

It is not surprising that, in the vernacular, men who engage in a series of short term sexual relationships are referred to as "users" or that women frequently complain about being "used." When the value of the person is subordinated to the value of the sexual pleasure gained by using the person and the person's body, the person feels "used." Although the persons involved may use the word "love" and may try to convince themselves that they are "in love" so long as "using" is at the heart of the relationship, true love is impossible.

As long as the relationship continues one or both of the parties involves may convince themselves that they are being loved for themselves, but the moment the relationship is terminated, they are faced with the truth that they were being used for pleasure, not loved for themselves. This revelation has a nasty way of reaching back and corrupting the memory of the pleasure and reaching forward, instilling fear of being used in the future.

If the Sexual Revolution is inextricably linked to Utilitarianism ethical theory, then it is not simply a question of whether specific acts are sinful or not. The Sexual Revolution promotes a way of thinking about the person which is intrinsically contrary to human dignity. Once this mentality has taken root marriage may not be a sufficient remedy. A couple accustomed to using each other as sexual objects will continue to do so after they marry, unless they undergo a profound conversion. If the husband views his wife primarily as object which provides him sexual pleasure, she will feel used, and if he ceases to experience sufficient pleasure or her unhappiness at being used is greater than the value she derives from being married, divorce will appear to be a logical option.

Rebellion of the Sex Objects

When persons are treated as objects, -- particularly as sexual objects -- they feel degraded. It is not surprising that women rebelled against this objectification. Unfortunately the women's movement failed to understand the cause of these feeling and instead embraced sexual liberation as a necessary part of the liberation of women. "Men have used us," they argued, "now we will use them. If in the past the women were viewed as objects to be used by men, now women will be free to control their own sexuality."

While this strategy sounded appealing, it did not free women from being used as sexual objects. If a woman wants to use a man for her own sexual pleasure, she first has to entice him into a relationship and this involves presenting herself as a sexual object which will provide him pleasure. Under these conditions, the value of her body to the man becomes more important not less -- she is even more an object of use. Since relatively early in the relationship, she is expected to present herself unclad to be used as an object by her partner, she cannot rely on the various methods of camouflage traditionally employed by women. She cannot expect that the man's love for her as person will be so developed that he will be able to overlook minor flaws and defects. Her body has to sculpted and designed by additions or subtractions to pass the close inspection of a relative stranger who has no commitment to continue the relationship if she does not in every way provide the visual and other pleasures he expects.

Not only does the woman continue to be an object to be used by the man, she also experiences all the negative effects of being a "user." Using other people as objects necessarily causes the user to harden his or her feelings to the object of use. This hardening of the heart which is essential if one is to use others as objects can be particularly difficult for women who care deeply about the feelings of others.

It is not surprising that the modern young woman caught up in a series of user/used relationships should long for respect. Unfortunately, most of the these young women are so accustomed to being used as sexual objects that they cannot even imagine how to conduct a chaste relationship. Those who have discovered the satisfaction of being valued as a person in their professional work or for their achievements wrongly suppose that if the man who is using them as a sexual object would only value their work or achievements, the terrible sense of being used would disappear. Unfortunately, respect for work-place success no matter how sincere does not lead a man to seek true unification of persons. No matter how much a man may value a woman's achievements, if he is at the same time using her as a sexual object, she will feel used, because she is being used.

Calculating the Consequences

The Sexual Revolutionaries initially argued that the restrictions of sexual freedom might have been understandable in a time when pregnancy outside marriage had devastating economic consequences and sexually transmitted diseases were rampant and incurable, but modern technology solved this problem. The pill, penicillin, and the new tolerance for out-of-wedlock birth, they argued, made the old prohibitions unnecessary.

This optimism has proven ill-founded, even with advances in contraceptives "unwanted" pregnancies have increased, the devastating effects of fatherlessness are undeniable, and abortion has not become "rare". Pathogens have taken advantage of the pathways provided by promiscuity. Sexually transmitted diseases unknown only decades ago are now epidemic; some are incurable, some fatal.

The Sexual Revolutionaries are undaunted. In the face of the world wide HIV/AIDS epidemic, they insist that the answer is more Safe-Sex education, more contraception, and more condoms. However, the spontaneity of unrestricted sexual access which Sexual Revolutionaries promised has given way to the Safe-Sex "regime of protection. Barriers to disease and pregnancy must be used in every encounter from start to finish. Children must be taught in elementary school how to "negotiate safe-sex." Sexual Revolutionaries decry the old fears and guilts, but introduce new ones. Omit one of the precautions and the blame is on the careless user not the intrinsically flawed strategy.

In spite of all the Safe-Sex education and promotion, the negative consequences have increased and not decreased.¹⁰ And this calculation does not even take into consideration the psychological and social consequences of sexual promiscuity.

As a substitute for Safe-Sex education, the opponents of the Sexual Revolution have offered abstinence education. In many of these programs, students are encouraged to calculate the risks involved in sex before marriage and compare these to the transient pleasures involved in uncommitted relationships. It is true that any honest calculation of risk would come down on the side of abstinence, but such reasoning contains a fatal flaw: It accepts the underlying Utilitarian premise that the maximization of pleasure is the highest value. If the negative outcomes could be avoided, why should the adolescent abstain from the pleasure provided by causal sexual encounters?

It is not that the abstinence educators do not have any other arguments, but their desire to compete with safe-sex programs for public funding has motivated them to shy away

10 The Abstinence Education Department , "Take Twelve – the Truth About Abstinence Education (Colorado: Focus on the Family, 2001) nos. 6 and 9 [also at www.family.org/cforum/research/papers/aoo15156.html]

from non-utilitarian arguments, they are afraid that other arguments may be perceived as "religious" and a therefore a violation of the separation of church and state. If, as Fr. Wojtyla argues, the Utilitarian premise that is the root cause of the problem, then this premise is what must be attacked directly. If using a person as an object and allowing oneself to be used are contrary to human dignity and an abuse of freedom, then opposition to the Sexual Revolution and its Utilitarian view of the person, is not a sectarian belief but based on fundamental principles which can be defended in the secular marketplace of ideas.

The Path to True Love

Too often the Catholic sexual ethic is characterized as a series of prohibitions. In *Love and Responsibility* one finds an entirely different approach. Sexual attraction, sexual pleasure, the value of the body, desire are all treated as things which are good, but only in their proper place. None of these are worthy of being treated as ends in themselves. None should be given priority over the value of the person. None can justify using the person as an object.

Love and Responsibility can be seen the outline of a classic romance novel or a great adventure story. This story of true love begins with **love as attraction**, perhaps initially as attraction to the characteristics the person possesses, but eventually attraction toward the person himself or herself. This is followed by **love as desire**. Desire is "felt as a longing for some good for its own sake: 'I want you because you are a good for me.'"¹¹ And so love becomes a longing for the person. This is followed by **love as "goodwill"**, because "It is not enough to long for a person as a good for oneself, one must also, and above all, long for that person's good."¹²

But for love to be love it must be reciprocal. "**Reciprocity** assumes the characteristics of durability and reliability" and allows for **trust**.¹³ "It is impossible to put your trust in another human being knowing or feeling that his or her sole aim is utility or pleasure. It is equally impossible to put your trust in a person if you yourself have the same thing as you main object."

Persons on the path to love feel "**sympathy**" for one another - they experience the feelings of the other. They also need to become **friends**, who want what is good for the other. And finally all this lead to a free decision to enter into **betrothed love** - "the

11 *Love and Responsibility*, p.81

12 *Love and Responsibility*, p. 83

13 *Love and Responsibility*, p. 86-87.

giving of one's own person (to another)." Because the gift is reciprocal, because it is based on a unification of the persons on the basis of attraction, desire, goodwill, sympathy, and friendship, and because they give themselves freely to each other, the two are able to become one without either becoming a object of possession or use by the other. Once they have become one in all these aspects and one by a decision of their wills, only then do they have a right to become one flesh, only then are they ready to accept together joint permanent responsibility for a potential new life, the fruit of their union, and to commit to care for each other not just when it is pleasurable but in sickness and in health, for richer, for poor, till death.

"The unification of the two persons must first be achieved by way of love, and sexual relations between them can only be the expression of a unification already complete."¹⁴

Through betrothed love, the woman's desire to give herself without feeling she is merely an object or possession is realized. The man's desire to have the woman for himself alone is satisfied, because "When a woman gives herself to a man as she does in matrimony this -- morally speaking -- precludes a simultaneous gift of herself to other persons in the same way."

Marriage safeguards and formalizes this mutual reciprocal gift of self. The two become one, agreeing on a common objective good, namely the bringing forth and nurturing of children and the mutual support of one another. The sexual intimacy they desire can now be enjoyed, really enjoyed.

And in spite of everything else that people do -- all the ways in which they use others sexually or allow themselves to be used -- somewhere in the deepest part of their hearts is a desire for true love, a desire to be loved for themselves, a need to be able to trust the person they love. When this marvelous romantic adventure is compared to the user/used relationships promoted by the Utilitarian sexual ethic, the bareness of Utilitarianism becomes obvious. The Utilitarian sexuality can never satisfy this deep need for love. Sooner or later, the reality of that one is being used or using another poisons the relationship.

Freedom Exists for Love

As the negative consequences of sexual promiscuity have become more apparent, Sexual Revolutionaries have pulled back from promising that sexual liberation will resolve psychological hang-ups. They now argue that the Christian sexual ethic is impossible, that no one really lives that way they only pretend to. But in this, as in all else, they are simply wrong.

¹⁴ *Love and Responsibility*, p.127

Young men and women, many of whom have tasted the bitter fruit of Sexual Liberation are discovering the true love that this possible through a sincere gift of self. And many have been influenced by John Paul II and his truly Catholic approach to sexuality. By reanalyzing the problem of sexual morality, he has produced a defense of Christian sexual ethics that is a different from previous approaches as an unhatched egg is from brand new chick. Absolutely faithful to what he received, he has subtracted nothing. Everything he says was there from the beginning -- through perhaps hidden, not fully understood. He has opened up Catholic sexual morality and marvelously revealed that what appeared hard and impenetrable is soft, living, lovely.

John Paul II has challenged the world by presenting the truth about the human person as the foundation for all social policy and personal morality and by insisting that human freedom cannot be separated from truth, and that freedom must be directed toward love:

Freedom exists for the sake of love. If freedom is not used, is not taken advantage of by love, it becomes a negative thing and gives human beings a feeling of emptiness and unfulfilment.¹⁵

The generation of men and women who have experienced the emptiness and unfulfilment predicted by Fr. Wojtyla forty years ago have a right to be presented with an authentic ethic of love. They need more than a system for calculating the risks involved in various choices, they need to be exposed to the vision of true betrothed love presented in *Love and Responsibility*.

15 *Love and Responsibility*, p.135