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The Consumer Ideology and the Truth about Man

“[M]an, who is the only creature on earth which
God willed for itself, cannot
fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”¹

Abstract: The formation of the human conscience is a controverted question in both philosophical ethics and moral philosophy. Conscience refers to one’s conception and understanding of the moral good. An especially significant manifestation of the problem of conscience in the 20th and 21st centuries is the impact of ideology on the individual person’s moral sense. This article considers the impact of two 19th century philosophies—Mill’s utilitarianism and Marxism—on contemporary moral thought insofar as the interaction of these two produce a powerful materialist ideology to determine the modern European and American conscience. We then turn to the thought of Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła), who in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* and in his earlier philosophical writings developed an account of moral truth by which the dangers of materialistic ideology can be overcome. It is argued, with John Paul II, that only in the context of truth can a coherent account of freedom of conscience under the moral law be developed.

Keywords: conscience, morality and moral law, utilitarianism, Marxism, John Paul II, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill

Returning to Poland in June 1991, Pope John Paul II rejoiced with his fellow Poles that after the fall of the Communist empire Poland was again free. However, addressing the world of culture in Warsaw, he sounded an unwelcome

¹ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 24.

note, an admonition about materialism and the use of freedom.² After praising the recovery of the treasures of Polish art and music, he proceeded to warn his countrymen about the dangers of Western materialism.

The ideological system which conferred on us the tone of our existence during the period of the past decades, consonant with its materialistic premises, did indeed propose the primacy of *having*. It tried ultimately to see the culture in terms of production–consumption. [...] Individuals habituated to seeing their own existence according to the primacy of ‘having’ (and hence of the primacy of material values) are often found in the West, where this primacy of human *having* is better consolidated. [...] In every case, systematic materialism, in its dialectical form and again in this practice, sacrifices the human *being* in favor of *having*.³

Having escaped the materialism of communist materialism, Poland must not fall into another materialism, because the issue of freedom is not about the freedom to *have* but the freedom to *be*. The central issue before his newly independent fatherland was not the administration or things but the communal life of human beings, of persons. Like Solzhenitsyn’s sharper, but similar, address at Harvard University thirteen years earlier to Americans, John Paul II’s address was not well received. The danger to Poland, and indeed the other central European nations, was the compelling lure of materialist utilitarianism. In this paper, we shall examine the implicit ideology of utilitarianism in relation to John Paul II’s moral proposal, especially as found in *Veritatis Splendor*.

Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II on Utilitarianism

Throughout his academic and pastoral career, Karol Wojtyła strongly and consistently opposed the utilitarianism foreshadowed by Hume and articulated by Bentham and Mill. Without entirely agreeing with them, he could admire and make use of the thought of Plato, Scheler, or even Kant, but Wojtyła never grants a favorable nod toward utilitarianism. To the end of his life, Karol Wojtyła’s firm

² John Paul II, “Discourse to Representatives of the World of Culture, Warsaw, Poland,” June 8, 1991. *The Holy See*, accessed May 28, 2012.

³ *Ibid.*

opposition to philosophical utilitarianism never softened.⁴ The problem with utilitarianism is that it neglects the truth about the nature of the human person. As early as *Love and Responsibility* he wrote,

The utilitarian considers pleasure important in itself, and, with his general view of man, fails to see that he is quite conspicuously an amalgam of matter and spirit, the two complementary factors which together create one personal existence, whose specific nature is due entirely to the soul.⁵

He will later develop this thought more deeply and thoroughly in his papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. Before examining that critique, however, we turn to the *ideology* of western utilitarianism.

Ideological Utilitarianism

We use the term ideology advisedly, for we are not confronted so much with an ethical theory as with a system of thought that explains everything and invalidates what it does not explain. Speaking of the ideology regnant in Communist Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel wrote that this system:

Commands an incomparably more precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion. It offers a ready answer to any question whatsoever; it can scarcely be accepted only in part, and accepting it has profound implications for human life. In an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in a state of crisis, when people are being uprooted and alienated and are losing their sense of what this world means, this ideology inevitably has a certain hypnotic charm. To wandering humankind it offers an immediately available home.⁶

Utilitarianism also constitutes such an ideology. Let us examine its elements through the writings of John Stuart Mill.

⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Wykłady lubelskie* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2006), 214–250. Karol Wojtyła, *Lubliner Vorlesungen*, trans. Anneliese Danka Springer and Edda Wiener (Stuttgart–Degerloch: Seewald Verlag, 1981), 304–356; Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 35–37.

⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. Harry T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 35.

⁶ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Open Letters: Selected Prose 1965–1990* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), 127–214.

The Purpose of Life

Although we do live in “an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in a state of crisis,” Mill argues that the purpose of life is given to our immediate experience. The goal of life is to be happy, to enjoy pleasures of the body and mind, and the ultimate end is:

An existence exempts as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality. [...] in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive and having as the foundation of the whole not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing.⁷

This sort of life is for everyone in a reasonable and well-ordered industrial-commercial society with universal education and well-formed public opinion. For the most part, Westerners are reasonably well-fed and literate, provided with medications for ordinary pains, good hospitals, and almost universal medical care. Life in western societies is reasonably safe for most people, and the threat of warfare is distant from most citizens. Life in Europe, the United States, Australia, and other nations formed by western law and traditions really can be good. Mill goes on to write:

Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. [...] As for vicissitudes of fortune and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect of either gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions.⁸

Indeed, Mill goes so far as to maintain that his greatest happiness principle, that the good is coextensive with happiness understood as pleasure and the absence of pain, is the clearest indicator of God’s will for his creatures.⁹

The greatest happiness principle applies to all human beings (indeed, to all sentient beings), and no one is warranted in giving priority to his own personal happiness. The greatest happiness to which one must attend is the happiness of all concerned with one’s decision:

In an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity

⁷ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Cambridge, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

with all the rest; which, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself in the benefits of which they are not included.¹⁰

Indeed, Mill proposes that such an ethic be given even the “psychological power and the social efficacy of a religion, making it take hold of human life, and color all thought.” Mill stresses the importance of forming individual consciences according to this standard, conscience being “a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty.”¹¹ The ultimate sanction of morality is this subjective feeling, a discomfort with one’s violation of duty. Whatever the objective source of this feeling may be, its importance is such that it be fostered in relation to the greatest happiness principle.

Justice and Individual Rights

“Justice implies something which it is not only right to do, and wrong not to do, but which some individual person can claim from us as his moral right.”¹² There are no preordained, transcendent, and objective rules of justice. “Justice” is the set of practices that enable members of society to feel safe in their lives, to have their basic rights protected. In Mill’s day—the Victorian era of England—human rights were not a matter of controversy. In our day, they are. If, as the greatest happiness principle holds, the good is identical with happiness—pleasure and the absence of pain—then each individual human being is ultimately his own judge of the good for himself. In many respects, this is unproblematic. I love opera, even if my neighbor finds it intolerable—“chacun a son goût.”¹³ If we can assume (as Mill apparently does) that all human beings enjoy the same basic pleasures—everyone enjoys *some kind* of music, after all—then this question of the good is unproblematic. However, if we turn to Mill’s own *On Liberty*, we read:

Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign. [...] The only Freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ “Each has his taste.” Sung by Prince Orlofsky in Johann Strauss’s *De Fledermaus*.

¹⁴ Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 9, 12.

Mill goes on to amplify this and the reason for it:

Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.¹⁵

Whatever one identifies as his own good is his happiness. To enjoy one's own pleasures is his right, with which others are not entitled to interfere. This is the fundamental intellectual principle underlying Hugh Hefner's "Playboy philosophy," which he promulgated in his popular magazine in the 1960s. On a more serious level, Steven Pinker cites this hypothetical, but plausible, case:

Julie is traveling in France on summer vacation from college with her brother Mark. One night they decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. Julie was already taking birth-control pills, but Mark uses a condom, too, just to be safe. They both enjoy the sex but decide not to do it again. They keep the night as a special secret, which makes them feel closer to each other. What do you think about that—was it O.K. for them to make love?¹⁶

Pinker's point is precisely that according to the utilitarian calculus, which he endorses, it is impossible to label the behavior of Julie and Mark as evil or bad. They both enjoyed it. No one was hurt, and because they were away in France, there was no scandal.

In our age, this subjectivation of rights has powerfully impacted our civilization. Practices previously identified as immoral—premarital sex, nonmarital cohabitation, homosexual practices, transexual self-identification—are widely accepted as morally acceptable. Indeed, in both common practice and, increasingly, in law the public disapproval of such behavior is sanctioned. Similarly, religious belief or lack thereof is a matter of taste. Those who find religious expression uplifting or comforting are free to enjoy their devotions, provided that they do not infringe on others, who may find religion pointless or even annoying. Where religious teachings and values impinge on moral views, then the religious values must be suppressed. Thus, in many jurisdictions Christian ministers who preach publicly on Scriptural teachings on sexual morality may find themselves in trouble with the law. In my own country, where religious freedom has been sharply debated in recent years, advocates for LGBT+ rights argue what religious freedom is simply a license of bigotry.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Steven Pinker, "The Moral Instinct," in *New York Times Magazine* (January 13, 2008), accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html>.

The Essential Marxist Step

A fundamental principle of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* reads: "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles."¹⁷ In Marx's day, there were economic, workers, and capitalist classes. But today, they are classes of people defined by where they find their happiness or identity. As a result, today we have conflicts of women vs. men, black vs. white, gay vs. straight, etc. Each of the oppressed classes has its rightful claims (according to the greatest happiness principle) upon the oppressors. And the oppressors have no legitimate authority to refuse those rights that are claimed by the oppressed. Claims of justice become increasingly difficult to sort out.

Living in Truth

In his address cited at the beginning of this paper, Pope John Paul II warned his listeners against precisely this materialism of consumption, which I have characterized here as an ideology. As he insisted in that address and on other occasions, this ideology arises from a false conception of what it is to be human. That is to say, the human being is not reducible to matter and to this-worldly principles. In his theology of the body, John Paul II argues for the development of an "adequate anthropology" in order to address what is truly human:

"Adequate" anthropology relies on essentially "human" experience. It is opposed to reductionism of the "naturalistic" kind, which often goes hand in hand with the theory of evolution about man's beginnings.¹⁸

An adequate account of the human cannot be reduced either to biological theories or to sensation alone. As he repeated in his Warsaw address, we must see our existence according to the primacy of *being* rather than of *having*. An antidote, if we may call it that, to living according to the materialist ideology is to live in truth, because this ideology is founded on principles that are only partially true. Freedom in truth is the central theme of *Veritatis Splendor*. The utilitarian ideology is founded on *having*, especially on having desirable experi-

¹⁷ Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 203.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, ed. Michael Waldstein, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 179 fn.

ences, but also on having good things that help to provide those experiences. As we have noted above, to deprive a person of the opportunity for pleasant experiences is wrong.

From its first chapter, which is structured on Christ's encounter with the rich young man (Matt 19: 16—21), *Veritatis Splendor* addresses the *being* of man. The young man asks, "What must I do to have eternal life?" John Paul II comments, "For the young man, the *question* is not so much about rules to be followed, but *about the full meaning of life*."¹⁹ Christ immediately directs the young man to God, who is *the Good*:

*Only God can answer the question about what is good, because he is the Good itself. To ask about the good, in fact, ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness.*²⁰

God transcends every other good, for indeed every good thing comes from God the Creator. Therefore, the life of which Jesus speaks has to consist in some sort of union with the Good, who is God. When the young man, having averred that he has kept the commandments, pushes further his question to Jesus, the Lord responds, "If you would be perfect, [...] follow me."²¹ Because Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, this is precisely an invitation to union with God.

Although John Paul II's argument is clearly theological, it resonates clearly with the philosophical tradition. Four hundred years before Christ, Socrates maintained that he was called by the God whom he did not know to prod his fellow Athenians to care more for their souls than for their property or public positions.²² For his part, Aristotle commended the life of contemplation, because it is the most god-like of activities.²³ For these ancient Greeks, the highest good was not the acquisition of some material thing or condition, nor was it to be the enjoyment of a nexus of pleasures (Mill's assertion in *Utilitarianism* notwithstanding). The highest good for the human being could only be an imitation of or participation in the life of the divine—even though, as they realized, their understanding of the divine was only partial and very imperfect.

Christian thinkers from the earliest Fathers, through Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to John Paul II, recognized the truth of this ancient principle.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Encyclical: Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), § 7

²⁰ *Ibid.*, § 9.

²¹ Mt 19:21.

²² Plato, "Apology," in *The Complete Works of Plato*, by Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30ab.

²³ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by John L. Ackrill and James O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1178b8–24. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 936a6.

Unlike Socrates and Aristotle, however, they knew that God can be known, because God had revealed himself, partially to the Jews and fully in Christ. Hence, it follows that the Christian ethics differs essentially from any utilitarian or consequentialist ethics, as indeed it does from Kant's deontology, too. The good to be attained is not a possession, a state of the human being who attains it, or an ecstatic, all-consuming experience. Rather, it is a union with the perfect good, which is necessarily transformative of the one who attains it. This is a good that the person *becomes* by following Christ:

Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."²⁴ [...] Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life.²⁵

Therefore, attainment of the highest good—the perfect good—is ultimately something that is beyond the natural capacity of the human being in this life, even if it is well foreshadowed by the life of virtue described by Aristotle.

Freedom and Conscience

Although in this essay, we cannot analyze the entire encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, we do well to look closely at two principal themes of that encyclical: freedom and conscience. In 1991, the Polish people were at long last free. The independence taken from them by the Nazis in 1939 and then seized by Soviet arms had finally been regained. And now, in June 1991, when all seemed good, the Polish pope was warning them against the misuse of their freedom. In the consumer society, freedom results from having a variety of options. In this sense, one who can choose among peas, green beans, corn, and broccoli, is freer than one who has only cabbage to eat. Freedom thereby consists in having a variety of options from which to select. This is indeed a kind of freedom, but it is not fundamental. In *Gaudium et Spes* we read that:

Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain "under the control of his own decisions" (Sir 15:14), so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come to utter and

²⁴ Jn 15:12.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 20.

blissful perfection through loyalty to his. Hence man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure.²⁶

For his part, Karol Wojtyła, who played an important role in drafting the Pastoral Constitution, characterized freedom in terms of self-determination.²⁷ Misled by the conception of freedom as simply the capacity to choose among options, many thinkers have absolutized freedom:

Certain currents of modern thought have gone so far as to *exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values*. This is the direction taken by doctrines which have lost the sense of the transcendent or which are explicitly atheist.²⁸

Later in the encyclical, John Paul II remarks that on this basis, “Man would be nothing more than his own freedom!”²⁹ The model of freedom at work in this is of a capacity to choose among options external to the person himself. These may be very personal options, such as to marry this person or that, to seek work in law or medicine. Plato presents an amusing, but accurate image of such freedom in his description of the “democratic man”:

And so he lives on, yielding day by day to the desire at hand. Sometimes he drinks heavily while listening to the flute; at other times, he drinks only water and is on a diet; sometimes he goes in for physical training; at other times he is idle and neglects everything, and sometimes he even occupies himself with what he takes to be philosophy. [...] There's neither order nor necessity in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives.³⁰

Of course, few, if any, such persons really exist, except perhaps for a time during youth, but Plato's argument does not depend on this. Clearly, the “democratic man” cannot sustain such a scattershot freedom without order or necessity. In his narrative, he argues that if such a person does not discover and live by wisdom, he will fall prey to a dominant tyrannical desire that will suppress and dominate all his desires and his will. In other words, the purported freedom

²⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 17.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn – oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL), 161; Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 47.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, § 46.

³⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 561cd, trans., rev. D. C. Reeve and George M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), 428–429.

of the democratic man to choose among his options will necessarily be guided by either some predominant appetite or by reason. If his freedom is to be his own, then the principle guiding his choices must come from within, from his own rational power. Otherwise, his choices will be dictated by appetites within or by forces without. An indeterminate freedom is nothing at all.

If freedom means to be guided by one's own reason, then freedom is inextricably joined to truth. The object of reason is truth. The human person is therefore able rationally to direct his own life according to how things really are, that is, according to truth. This encounter with the truth brings us directly to the question of conscience:

Consequently, *in the practical judgment of conscience*, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, *the link between freedom and truth is made manifest*.³¹

The truth at stake in this encounter of conscience is inevitably the truth about the good.³² The human being, gifted with intellect, is enabled to recognize the truth about the good, which is to say to recognize moral norms.

Two Norms and Great Commandments

In the writings of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II, we find two such truths about the good—norms—from which we infer the two great commandments. We have already seen that in *Veritatis Splendor*, Christ tells the rich young man that God alone is good, that he is indeed the good from which all goods derive. God is the highest, the supreme good. From this we infer the first great commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mt 22:37). If the first principle of the natural law is to seek and do good and to shun and avoid evil,³³ then this commandment follows with logical necessity from the truth that God is the supreme good.

Expanding on his answer to the Pharisee, Jesus cited a second great commandment which is like the first: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”

³¹ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 61.

³² Adrian J. Reimers, *Truth about the Good: Moral Norms in the Thought of John Paul II* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2011).

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, IIae q. 94, a. 2. [Great Books of the Western World]. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Vols. 19–20 (Chicago, London, Toronto: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

(Mt 22:39). This second great commandment, which underlies the commandments of the so-called second table of the law, is inferred from the truth about the good of the human person. Let us note, too, that most of the text in chapter two of *Veritatis Splendor* is concerned with the morality of interpersonal relationships, and not with idolatry, taking God's name in vain, or observance of the sabbath. Our author first lays out this norm as the personalist norm in *Love and Responsibility*. There we read:

The person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form, the personalistic norm confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.³⁴

The basis for this norm is found not in scripture or the Catechism but in human experience, if we attend closely to it. The human being is a person, that is, a rational being capable of self-determination on the basis of its own understanding and free will.³⁵ Like Kant before him,³⁶ Karol Wojtyła insists that the person cannot be reduced simply to the status of a tool, a thing, because whereas a tool is subject to the will of its user to achieve the tool-user's end, the person lives from his interior to attain the ends of his own choosing. To use a person against his will was to violate his nature and in this his dignity. Karol Wojtyła carries the analysis a step further than Kant.

After stating that the person is not to be treated as an object for use, he writes that "the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love."³⁷ He argues this philosophically and not on theological or religious grounds. For one to access the services of another, to get the other to help him or to work with him, it is necessary for that person to agree to do so.³⁸ Because the person acts on the basis of his own will (rational appetite), he must make that act his own, as it were, by agreeing to perform it. That is to say, without agreeing to some good he will not act. The basis, therefore, for acting in common is the mutual embrace of some common good. Karol Wojtyła remarks that this is clearly realized in marriage.³⁹ However, this also applies even in situations where a manifest inequality is at work, such as between the commander and the soldier, in which case a proper understanding of the rela-

³⁴ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

³⁵ Ibid., 23–24; Wojtyła, "Człowiek jest osobą," in *Osoba i czyn – oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2000), 418.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*. Kant's gesammelte Schriften, vol 4 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 191), 428–429.

³⁷ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 42

³⁸ Ibid., 28.

³⁹ Ibid., 30; Wojtyła, *Person: Subject and Community*, trans. Teresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang. 2006), 247.

tionship is that both parties act out of love for their country and fellow citizens. Even in the realms of commerce and industry, the dynamic of the common good governs proper human interactions. Workers and their supervisors foster the common good of the society by their ordered work to produce goods and services. Wojtyła argues that it is precisely the common good and common aim that joins two persons in love. Their love is constituted and, as it were, formed by the nature of the common good that joins them.

Here, we can and often do encounter an abuse of the love that should exist between persons. The general may command his soldiers to act not for victory over the enemy, but for the commander's own advantage; consider King David's orders to his commander Joab to see to the death of Uriah the Hittite in order to cover up David's adultery with Uriah's wife.⁴⁰ The slaveholder seeks to acquire wealth, but he does not expect the slave to share this aim. Rather, he threatens the slave with pain, which he avoids only by following orders. One could multiply examples, of course, but the principle is always the same. One person *uses* another and treats him as a *thing* by threatening evil or depriving his subject of some good. Uriah fought and died for king and country, but David commanded him to engage in a specific sortie in order to hide his own sin. The slave wants not to pick cotton or mine salt, but to preserve himself from torture or death. He lives and acts for a good different from that proposed by the superior. In ordinary less dramatic situations, the same pattern is repeated as persons manipulate each other by means of seduction, emotional pressure, financial inducements, promises of future pleasure, and the like. Even two partners in sin who support and cooperate with each other in wrongdoing do not work for a common good, violate the personalist norm, for they work not for a common good but so that each can enjoy a personal good.

From this personalist norm, we can validly infer the evangelical commandment of the love of neighbor.⁴¹ As we have noted above, in his dialogue with the rich young man, Christ cites the commandments of the second table of the Law, which are summed up in the commandment of the love of neighbor. John Paul II continues:

In this commandment we find a precise expression of *the singular dignity of the human person*, "the only creature that God has wanted for its own sake."⁴² The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person, at the level of the many different goods which characterize his identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbor and with the material world.⁴³

⁴⁰ 2 Sam. 11:14–25.

⁴¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

⁴² Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 24.

⁴³ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 13.

This text supports and complements the argument that Karol Wojtyła had developed in *Love and Responsibility*. Let us note especially his reference to the *good of the person* in the second sentence of this text. Because of the “singular dignity of the person” one is commanded to act for the good of the person. The continuation of this sentence makes it clear that fostering the good of the person amounts to more than simply providing material or sensual benefits, although these may certainly be included; the Good Samaritan bound up the victim’s wounds and took him to an inn for care. However, the good of this person involves many different goods related to his spiritual and bodily being. In every case, the one to be loved is a spiritual and bodily being with both spiritual and bodily needs. If the hungry and homeless man turns out to be the prodigal son, then to love him may require one to encourage him to swallow his pride and return to his father. Implicit in the text too is the requirement that the agent too act in accordance with his own dignity as a person, whom “God has wanted for his own sake.”⁴⁴

Intrinsece Malum

It is in this context of the love of God and one’s neighbor that the notion of intrinsically evil acts becomes intelligible:

Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature “incapable of being ordered” to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.⁴⁵

The first and second great commandments oblige the person—every human person—to act in love. Hence, Father Józef Kowalski refused to stomp on his rosary when a Nazi guard at the concentration camp ordered him to. Love for God, the first great commandment, obliged him to refrain from this act, which predictably resulted in Fr. Kowalski’s experiencing greatly increased torment and eventual martyrdom.

At this point we do well to consider the concept of the *object of the act*. John Paul II writes:

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, § 80.

The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behavior. [...] By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.⁴⁶

In the case of Fr Kowalski, the act in question was deliberate—to step on a rosary. One does not necessarily do wrong by stepping on a rosary. If the rosary has fallen unseen to the floor, someone may accidentally step on it. The object of the act is what deliberately intends to perform. Every human act includes a decision of the will to *perform this act*, which has its specific end. The inept murderer whose manipulation of his weapon results in the capture of a criminal and not in the death of his intended victim is, in his heart at least, a murderer and not a public servant. Fr. Kowalski certainly knew that to disobey a Nazi guard would result in severe punishment. He doubtlessly realized that no matter what he should do, his rosary would be desecrated. Had he stepped on the rosary, he could go more freely about his activities and even help other inmates. But the act that he was to perform was more than a simple motion of placing his foot in a designated spot. He was to step on an object that represents Christ's sacrifice on the cross and that is intended for devotion to the Virgin Mary. It was to be an act of contempt for God and what belongs to him. To perform this act—here we may think of the ancient martyrs disobeying the emperor's demand that they pinch the incense in homage to an idol—was an act incompatible with the love of God. It was to show contempt for God.

The same kind of analysis applies to offenses against another human being. John Paul II cites a list of such acts from *Gaudium et Spes*:

Murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction [...] mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself [...]. Such acts are a supreme dishonor to the Creator.⁴⁷

The problem with such acts is that they directly offend the dignity of the human person, not so much in their effect, but in the nature of the act itself according to its object. To cut into a human body is, on the physical level, an evil insofar as skin tissue is damaged and the blood that it normally restrains begins to flow out of the body. To open the wound and remove tissue inside is arguably a greater evil, because it damages the integrity of the body. However, when a surgeon performs this action to remove a kidney for transplantation to another patient, the act is regarded as good. Peter Knauer asks whether this means that

⁴⁶ Ibid., § 78.

⁴⁷ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 27.

it is licit to do something evil in order to attain some good. His answer is that the injuring of the body is not an evil act. He explains:

Self-mutilation may be an evil means. [...] Here it is not at all a matter of two different acts, the first of which [mutilation of the donor's body] would be evil and therefore cannot be justified through the second [transplanting a healthy organ]. Rather, from the start it is only a single act, whose "object" or "objective of action" is the saving of another human being's life.⁴⁸

Knauer has confused the intention with the object of the act. The surgeon's act is to remove a healthy and nonessential organ from a donor. Indeed, we may properly speak of a joint act by the donor and the physician. The donor is probably incompetent and, in any case, must be incapacitated to remove his own organ. He asks a surgeon to perform the operation. The act, which involves a degree of suffering and even self-mutilation is properly described as the surgical removal of a nonessential organ. The object of the act is to remove an organ, with the intention of giving it to a sick person. The act is not accurately described as self-mutilation (indeed, every step will be taken to minimize both pain, disfigurement, and health risk to the donor). Although deliberately to mutilate one's body may be evil, the act of donating one's organ may be a noble and generous act of love. Knauer (unwillingly) helps us to see this more clearly when he goes on to apply this principle to the action of performing an abortion to save the mother's life. In that case the unborn child is deliberately and directly killed—a violation of that human person's dignity. On the other hand, although no one is justified in the unauthorized removal of another person's kidney—to do so would indeed violate that person's dignity—one can freely forsake a spare kidney to save another.

We dwell here on Knauer not only because he was a pioneer in consequentialist moral reasoning,⁴⁹ whose subtle reasonings have profoundly influenced subsequent discussion in moral theology, but also because his argumentation clearly illustrates the kinds of confusion that John Paul II seeks to correct in *Veritatis Splendor*. Knauer states, "There is fundamentally no act for which the description of the physical process of the act is sufficient to determine it as morally evil."⁵⁰ In one trivial sense, Knauer is right. What his argument intends, however, is to show that the act can be evaluated morally only on the basis of its premoral consequences, whether these are good or evil. The cutting open of two bodies in order to move a kidney from one to the other is justified morally

⁴⁸ Peter Knauer, "Zu Grundbegriffen der Enzyklika *Veritatis Splendor*," 25, *Stimmen der Zeit*, 212. Band, Heft 1 (Januar 1994), 14–26.

⁴⁹ See also Peter Knauer, S.J., "Teleologische als deontologische Normenbegründung," *Theologie und Philosophie*, Vol. 55, Heft 3 (1980): 321–360.

⁵⁰ Knauer "Teleologische als deontologische Normenbegründung," 348.

by the continued life of a patient who would otherwise have died. However, John Paul II's point is that the description of the physical process is *never* a satisfactory description of the act. The act must be regarded from the *perspective of the acting person*.⁵¹ If the organ donor is unwilling, then to cut into his body is indeed an evil. The spy who sleeps with the enemy general may well be serving her country's war effort,⁵² but the object of her act is to engage in sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband. The term to describe this act, whether patriotically motivated or not, is adultery. And as such it is a violation of the dignity of the person who is seduced—even as he is a willing partner in the seduction. In short, any act by which one offends the dignity of another human being cannot be an act of love. It is incompatible with the Creator's love for that person and is therefore intrinsically evil.

Conclusion

In his address to Poland's cultural leaders in 1991, Pope John Paul II warned against a materialist culture—a culture of *having* rather than of *being*—and the ideology of utilitarianism. This distinction between *being* and *having* is central, because it parallels and, indeed, reflects the distinction between the interior and the exterior of the human being, between what belongs to him as a person and what pertains to a particular human being. The utilitarian or consequentialist calculus depends on what is external to the human being. John Stuart Mill writes, "He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble."⁵³ Peter Knauer provides the following criterion for an act evil in itself: "An act is 'evil in itself' only if one allows or causes in it a harm without an appropriate or corresponding reason [*entsprechenden Grund*]."⁵⁴ In both instances, even if more crudely in Mill, the ultimate standard lies outside the acting person. A physician's act of slicing into a healthy body is justified as morally good only if for the sake of a correspondingly important good. In a limited sense, this is correct. An act that is not expected to result in some good is not justified. To

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 78.

⁵² Lest this example appear sexist, men have also used sexual seduction to obtain secrets from national enemies. See Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin. *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁵³ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 18.

⁵⁴ Peter Knauer, "Handlungsnetze: Über das Grundprinzip der Ethik," *Knauer – Handlungsnetze*. March 17, 2017, accessed January 4, 2021, <http://peter-knauer.de/knauer-ethik.pdf>.

plant rice in a region where winters are normally harsh is foolish, a bad choice. We are happy to pay the lifeguard who saves the careless swimmer's life. The question of moral evil lies deeper than the evaluation of possible outcomes to one's act. The seducer spy may be very effective, saving the lives of scores of soldiers. Nevertheless, we may question whether such acts of sexual intercourse are morally good.

The interior, or the 'heart,' of the human being is the core of his personal reality, in his conscience. John Paul II writes, "The relationship between man's freedom and God's law is most deeply lived out in the 'heart' of the person, in his moral conscience."⁵⁵ Furthermore, "in the far reaches of the human heart, there is a seed of desire and nostalgia for God."⁵⁶ In his personal notebook, John Paul II wrote that the heart is to be a library of God's spoken word in Scripture.⁵⁷ This interior, this 'heart' is not an emotional center founded on the person's subjective feelings and desires. Rather, personal interiority itself arises from human rationality.⁵⁸ It is in his interior that the person relates to truth and goodness, freely determining himself in accordance with the truth about the good. Hence, the spy may love her country to the point of readiness to sacrifice her own life for its welfare and security. However, she also knows that the gift of her body in sexual intercourse is far more than a (possibly) pleasurable physical interaction. Its true and objective meaning is the gift of one's whole self to another, a gift that she does not at all intend to give to an enemy of the homeland that she loves.⁵⁹ By her actions, the spy denies her own human dignity, reducing her body to a tool for deception, as well as that of her target, deceiving him in his moral weakness. The abortionist directly kills another human being—for the fetus is a human being and not something else—to deny the motherhood of the pregnant woman for the sake of his own profit and the temporary alleviation of the mother's anxieties.

The utilitarian ideology behind contemporary western materialism ignores the principle expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*, namely, "Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself;" the principle that only in love can the human being truly become his proper self. Otherwise, the human person becomes nothing more than a tool of the totalitarian state or—transferring the discussion to the West—a political and economic cipher to be manipulated by the greater powers within society.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, § 54.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, § 24.

⁵⁷ Wojtyła, *Jestem bardzo w rękach Bożych: Notatki osobiste, 1962–2003* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2014), 243.

⁵⁸ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 22–23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 34, 131; John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 531 ff.

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Adrian J. Reimers

L'idéologie du consumérisme et la vérité sur l'homme

Résumé

La formation de la conscience humaine est une question controversée à la fois en éthique philosophique et en philosophie morale. La conscience se rapporte à la vision humaine et à la compréhension du bien moral. Une manifestation exceptionnellement significative du problème de la conscience aux XXe et XXIe siècles est l'influence de l'idéologie sur la conscience d'un individu. Cet article discute de l'influence des philosophies du XIXe siècle, à savoir de l'utilitarisme de Mill et du marxisme, sur la pensée morale contemporaine en fonction de l'influence que ces systèmes philosophiques ont eue sur la naissance d'une idéologie matérialiste forte qui détermine la conscience européenne et américaine contemporaine. Ensuite, le texte attire l'attention du lecteur sur les idées du pape Jean-Paul II (Karol Wojtyła), qui, dans l'encyclique *Veritatis splendor* et dans ses premiers écrits philosophiques, a élaboré le concept de vérité morale, grâce à laquelle il est possible de surmonter les dangers de l'idéologie matérialiste. L'auteur soutient, après Jean-Paul II, que ce n'est que dans le contexte de la vérité qu'un concept cohérent de liberté de la conscience et conforme à la loi morale peut être développé.

Mots-clés: conscience, morale et loi morale, utilitarisme, marxisme, Jean-Paul II, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill

Adrian J. Reimers

L'ideologia del consumismo e la verità sull'uomo

Sommario

La formazione della coscienza umana è una questione controversa sia nell'etica filosofica che nella filosofia morale. La coscienza si riferisce alla visione umana e alla comprensione del bene morale. Una manifestazione eccezionalmente significativa del problema della coscienza nei secoli XX e XXI è l'influenza dell'ideologia sulla coscienza di un individuo. Questo articolo discute l'influenza delle filosofie del XIX secolo, in particolar modo quelle dell'utilitarismo di Mill e del marxismo, sul pensiero morale contemporaneo in termini di influenza che questi sistemi

filosofici hanno avuto sulla nascita di un'ideologia materialista forte che determina la coscienza europea e americana contemporanea. Il testo richiama poi l'attenzione del lettore sulle idee di Papa Giovanni Paolo II (Karol Wojtyła), che nell'enciclica *Veritatis splendor* e nei suoi primi scritti filosofici, sviluppò il concetto di verità morale, grazie alla quale è possibile superare i pericoli dell'ideologia materialista. L'autore sostiene, dopo Giovanni Paolo II, che solo nell'ambito della verità si può sviluppare un concetto coerente di libertà della coscienza e conforme alla legge morale.

Parole chiave: coscienza, morale e diritto morale, utilitarismo, marxismo, Giovanni Paolo II, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill