The inadequacy of secular humanistic understandings of human sexuality has been demonstrated in the contemporary dissatisfaction with the superficiality of sexual activity and romantic relationships. The limitations of the secular psychology that gave rise to the debased contemporary view of sexuality—exemplified in the work of Carl Rogers—can be overcome by applying the fuller personalist anthropology of Pope John Paul II. This application is made by examining the topics of man’s relationship with God, subjectivity versus subjectivism, the source and character of morality, the nature of freedom, and the nature of marriage.

INTRODUCTION

The “hook-up” culture has failed. Instead of liberating man into a sea of sexual ecstasy, it plummeted him into an abyss of meaninglessness. In Last Night in Paradise, Katie Roiphe comments on the stupefaction of being able to “do whoever she wants.” She remarks, “It’s not the absence of rules exactly, the dizzying sense that we can do whatever we want, but the sudden realization that nothing we do matters.”¹ There seems to be a correlation between the more sexual partners one has and the less meaningful sex becomes.² It is the moral of the old story in which a man gets everything that he ever wanted and finds himself bored.

The impetus behind the hook-up culture is multifaceted. One factor is modern psychology as dominated by secular humanism. Secular humanism, which denies the existence of God and places man at the center of the cosmos, has strongly influenced modern psychology since the late 1950s. Its anthropology is grounded in naturalism and materialism, as it attempts to define man and his reality exclusively in natural and evolutionary terms.³ The anthropology of secular humanism is the primary anthropology that informs humanistic psychology, a holistic approach to psychology that values individual freedom and seeks to answer basic questions about human nature. As a therapeutic approach, it is very effective in allaying man’s worldly anxieties. Even as a theoretical and philosophical system,
it contains psychological insights into the nature of man that can be useful in helping him understand how he is to act.

However, there remains the looming question of whether, by itself, humanistic psychology has been successful in answering man’s fundamental questions about himself. One of the enigmatic aspects of human nature that humanistic psychology seeks to elucidate is human sexuality. It is no secret that the views of the psychological establishment have been at loggerheads with traditional Catholic understandings of sexuality for some time. In 1973, in the wake of the humanistic euphoria, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) revised the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* to exclude homosexuality as a form of mental illness. The following year, the American Psychological Association began encouraging the de-stigmatization of homosexuality. One of the most influential humanistic psychologists is Carl Rogers, who was selected as the most influential figure in the field by a large margin in a major 2006 poll. Rogers spent much of his career arguing for the reevaluation of sexual morality, and his immense influence can be seen in the changes that have occurred in the field of psychology regarding human sexuality.

Modern psychology, rooted in the anthropology of secular humanism promoted by Carl Rogers, purports to offer practical solutions to man’s problems, especially his sexual frustrations, through its therapeutic methods. It contends that it has the answers to uncovering the fundamental questions about human sexuality. Yet the humanism upon which humanistic psychology is constructed espouses the very same tenets that encourage the hook-up culture, thus raising the question of its efficacy. This essay will argue that Rogers’s psychology by itself does not offer any viable solutions to man’s questions concerning his sexuality. While germs of the solution can be found in Rogers’s thought, a more complete solution can be found when that approach is supplemented with and purified by Pope John Paul II’s personalistic humanism, which not only confirms the truths found within Rogers’s psychology but also exposes the sexual lies of Rogers’s secular humanism. Such supplementation and purification can liberate individuals trapped in the mire of the consequences of modern thought about sexuality.

**CARL ROGERS AND JOHN PAUL II**

Raised in the former Chicago suburb of Oak Park, Carl Rogers grew up in an environment which Ernest Hemingway, who came of age there at the same time, would later categorize as having, “wide lawns and narrow minds.” Through most of Rogers’s youth, he acquiesced to his family’s rigid puritanism, which led to negative attitudes about both his mother and father. However, Rogers would escape the myopic palisades of suburban

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**Mark W. Gonnella**
life by traveling across the country with his father, who was deputy chief for the Chicago Central Railway. This peripatetic life enabled Rogers to become acquainted with many cultural and moral systems that differed markedly from that of his childhood.

Though Rogers remained religious throughout his time at the University of Wisconsin, he became entranced by liberal theology and soon adopted an Arian conception of the nature of Christ. After graduating from Wisconsin, he attended Union Theological Seminary, a bellwether for liberal theology in America, where he developed an idealistic sense of evangelization, desiring to convert the world to his liberal form of Christianity. While still at Union, his encounters with various liberal thinkers of his day and his interactions with sexual psychologists, such as G. V. Hamilton, at Columbia, eventually led Rogers to “think his way right out of religious work”; as a result, he transferred across the street to the Teachers’ College at Columbia University. His departure from Union also marked his departure from Christianity. His experience at Columbia and as a struggling psychologist in the 1940s proved formative for his Person-Centered therapy, in which the goal is to prompt the client to solve his own problems through the assistance of unconditional positive regard, which required the therapist to accept everything about the client unconditionally.

Born on May 18, 1920, Karol Wojtyla, the future John Paul II, would emerge from the depths of Nazi and Communist Poland to become a luminary for human rights and dignity. By the time he reached his undergraduate studies at Jagiellonian University in 1939, his anthropological intuitions had begun to crystalize in the form of drama. The themes of human freedom, dignity, and the nature of the human person permeate John Paul II’s writings, all being tied to his own experience and the experience of his fellow countrymen living in Nazi-occupied Poland. In his Lublin Lectures, delivered as the Professor of Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin, he broaches the essential themes that would soon become the bedrock of his incarnational humanism. He also engages contemporary currents of thought, such as the modern shift toward the subject and the phenomenological thought of Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler. However, John Paul realizes that a “secularization of interiority” characterizes modern philosophy, which posits that the self is the foundation for certitude and the basis for moral evaluation. For this reason, he initiates a purgation of phenomenology from its subjectivism and its absolutization of consciousness and harmonizes phenomenology with metaphysical realism. Not just any metaphysics will suffice, but rather an “existential metaphysics of being,” which does not orient itself to the abstract but to the concrete reality of the person.
DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS: GOD OR MAN

Like Sigmund Freud before him, Rogers’s humanism begins not with God but with man. He disliked institutional religion and believed religion was only meritorious when it was flexible and subjective (and even then, he had his concerns). For Rogers, man can help religion but religion cannot help man, for man is not a static being and therefore does not resist change as religious institutions do. To be human is to be self-determined, and to be the director of one’s life. The locus of control and evaluation is ultimately internal, and man determines the meaning of his subjective experience and does not need to appeal to an external arbiter.

Rogers’s anthropology is founded on what he considers man ought to be. Although he contends that his view of human nature is supported by scientific evidence, Rogers bases his conception of human nature on his own observation and presuppositions. First, without providing any evidence to the contrary, he dismisses belief in the supernatural and thus presumptively describes human nature in purely naturalistic terms. Second, he constructs his philosophy of man based on deductions he makes from the animal world. Rogers argues that man doubtlessly has a basic nature, a nature singularly characterized by a general trustworthiness and an inherent drive toward self-regulation and self-mastery, but this nature need not be conceived in religious terms. This is done, according to Rogers, to preserve man’s freedom and to allow man to fulfill the desires inherent within his organism. While this understanding of human nature could be conceived within a theistic framework, Rogers chooses not to do so, for he presupposes from the beginning that the supernatural does not exist.

Rogers believes, without any substantial evidence, that external theoretical systems constrict man and prevent him from becoming who he wants to be. Man’s nature is fixed only in regard to its inherent disposition toward independence, and thus in a certain sense Rogers’s philosophy of man echoes Sartre’s, that “existence precedes his essence.” Man, according to Rogers, is singularly driven by the desire to “actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism.” Man, by his very nature, has the resources to become who he desires to become, and through his internal navigation, he realizes his true values and nature by actualizing his experiences. In other words, man subjectively knows by virtue of his nature who he should be and what he should be doing, and this process toward fulfillment is interrupted when he internalizes the dictates of others. These include the teachings of religion, philosophy, of his parents and teachers, and even, at least theoretically, of the therapist. Man, Rogers proposes, has a self-navigation system and he alone is its guide.
Contrary to Rogers’s secular humanism, John Paul II posits a theistic humanism, which is grounded in God’s creation of man, specifically that man was “created in the image of and likeness of God.” Since man has a Creator, man also has a nature and an essence. Although man’s creation is connected with the creation of the material world, only man is created in the image of God, and therefore he is spiritual. John Paul provides then a point of reference for understanding who man is and how he is to act by observing that man is the only creature in relation to Being itself, as man is created in the likeness not of creatures but of God Himself. Man is not just a physical creature but a spiritual one as well: Both dimensions are essential to understanding the human person.

The bodily nature of man is indispensable to understanding John Paul’s theology of the body, for, “Man . . . bears the divine image imprinted on his body ‘from the beginning.’” Though Rogers claims that man is a spiritual being as well, his secular humanism cannot substantiate this claim. Rogers’s secular humanism posits that the material world is all there is, and thus change and growth in the world occur by virtue of an evolutionary process. Rogers often speaks of man’s self-actualizing tendency being an evolutionary mechanism, a mechanism which tends to “preserve and enhance himself [man] and his species, and perhaps to move it toward its further evolution.” However, this is philosophically untenable, for materiality can never evolve, transform, or self-actualize into spirituality. The spiritual soul, in the way John Paul understands and uses the term, is a special act of creation and does not come from preexisting matter. Rather, man must have been made spiritual from the beginning by being made in the “image and likeness” of a spiritual Being.

This is not to say that Rogers’s self-actualizing tendency is wholly incompatible with a Catholic anthropology. One might characterize the self-actualizing tendency as being propelled toward the Being who is Pure Act. If the self-actualizing tendency were interpreted to mean not that man is the author of his destiny, but rather that he is the principal actor toward his destiny, the approach might avoid the extreme individualism and subjectivism that Rogers’s concept commonly produces. Man longs for and pursues the truth; it is he who is willing and acting on the good. This does not mean that he creates the good, that the good is a mere individual preference particular to that person, but rather that it is he who desires it and acts to achieve it. But this interpretation must be had within a theistic framework, and thus one would have to abandon’s Rogers’s materialism.
SUBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVISM

There is a certain philosophical commonality between John Paul and Carl Rogers; namely, they both operate within a phenomenological framework. Rogers is generally considered a phenomenologist\textsuperscript{35} for his insistence on the importance of subjective experience, or as he puts it, the “phenomenal field of subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{36} Although it is inaccurate to consider John Paul a strict phenomenologist,\textsuperscript{37} it is clear that he uses phenomenological analyses in his philosophy, and that he considers the phenomenological method as essential to moral philosophy and philosophy of man.\textsuperscript{38} Yet, in spite of their conceptual agreement, Rogers and John Paul arrive at different conclusions.

Both authors rightly include man’s subjectivity in discussions on nature and morality, and Rogers’s phenomenological analysis of the human person is meritorious in its own right. However, it does not provide a complete picture of the human person, because Rogers divorces man’s subjective experience from his objective existence. He argues that it is impossible for one to have objective knowledge of the universe, for each person sees reality in terms of his “phenomenal field” that is grounded in the person’s subjective experience.\textsuperscript{39} Rogers is critical of any attempt to locate meaning for one’s life outside of the self, as if a person is appealing to some objective, universal standard from which he derives meaning. All meaning and ideas originate in one’s subjective experience, and Rogers seems to imply that within the human organism is an evaluative operation that reveals what is good and meaningful for the person.\textsuperscript{40} This process is spontaneous and it mostly occurs at the preconscious level, which prevents the fruits of the process from being codified into intellectual standards. For the human organism is always changing, which is reflected in the value process, and thus to codify the fleeting results of the internal value process would result in self-alienation, or a flight from the self and its desires.\textsuperscript{41}

In contrast, John Paul’s treatment transcends the description of human consciousness and man’s subjective experience into the realm of metaphysics. While the need for description of human consciousness is important, John Paul says, it must also be supplemented with interpretation and explanation, for only “metaphysics is able to provide some notions and categories that can adequately interpret the content of human experience.”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, John Paul complements his phenomenological analysis of the human person with a metaphysical realism that provides the “‘metaphysical terrain’—the dimension of being—in which personal human subjectivity is realized, creating . . . a condition for ‘building upon’ this terrain on the basis of experience.”\textsuperscript{43} John Paul does not adopt phenomenology...
as his philosophical creed, for he remains tethered to a metaphysical realism; rather he adopts the phenomenological method in order to penetrate human experience and from there proceed to metaphysical reasoning. He includes man’s subjective experience in his understanding of the human person, yet he never divorces man’s concrete or “lived experience” from the objective nature of the human person as a substantial being with a rational nature.\(^4^4\)

For John Paul, phenomenology is about wholeness. It is about including all components of the human person as it reflects on the common experiences of life as the person experiences them.\(^4^5\) Understanding the human person in the Boethian sense as merely an “individual substance of a rational nature” is not sufficient for capturing the reality of the whole person, for this formulation prevents insight into “the question of that which is original and essentially human, that which accounts for the human being’s complete uniqueness in the world.”\(^4^6\) To avoid reductionism, John Paul II posits a personalistic philosophy of man that does not reduce to a mere cosmological understanding; instead he suggests that one should “pause in the process of reduction . . . in order to understand the human being inwardly.”\(^4^7\)

Consequently, a complete picture of the human person must include man’s interiority, or subjectivity, the inner operations of the human person reflected in human consciousness.\(^4^8\) Subjectivity, for John Paul, refers to man’s personhood, the reality of the person as a subject (as an “I”). It is the concrete self, the objective nature of man and his subjective reality, that reveals the irreducible in man, as it reveals the uniqueness of the human person as a “personal subject.”\(^4^9\) Lived experience, or human subjectivity, refers to the inner life of human consciousness, that is, how a person experiences himself as an acting subject. It reveals the human person as being a personal subject who is capable of self-experiencing, self-possession, and self-determination.\(^5^0\) In other words, it reveals that the human person acts freely and knows that he is acting freely, that when he acts, it is \(he\) who is acting and no one else. It is in our lived experience that we recognize our complete and utter uniqueness as a person.

As mentioned above, this understanding of human subjectivity is compatible with Rogers’s thought, particularly his self-actualizing tendency. Rogers would agree with John Paul’s personalism but only insofar as it refers to human subjectivity—for Rogers seems to argue for only one side of John Paul’s personalistic picture, namely, its personal subjectivity. Divorced from man’s objective nature and the belief in objective values, in a strict Rogerian system all values and meaning are relative to an individual’s subjective experience. Hence Rogers’s hypostasizing of
consciousness diverges from John Paul’s understanding of human sub-
jectivity by positing a form of a subjectivism, the idea that all value and
meaning is limited to subjective experience. Whereas John Paul merges a
philosophy of consciousness with a philosophy of being, Rogers focuses
completely on human subjectivity to the point of distortion. This key dif-
fERENCE has significant implications for an understanding of the nature of
morality. While John Paul combines the facts of morality with the experi-
ence of morality, Rogers rejects the “facts of morality,” which causes the
experience of morality to atrophy.

MORALITY: FROM MAN OR FROM GOD?

Central to the disagreement between Rogers and John Paul II is Rogers’s
denial of objectivity. Left with only subjectivity, Rogers expands the scope
of human authorship: Not only can man construct who he is, but he can
also decide how he should act. This denial has significant implications
for the foundation of morality, for man’s relationship to the moral plane
becomes not one of receptivity but one of authorship. He creates rather
than receives the moral law. Just as man does not receive his being or his
nature from God, neither does he receive moral proscriptions from God or
any external agent. Rather, values and moral codes are actualized and in-
ternalized by the person through an organic process of self-actualization.51

As mentioned above, Rogers’s view of human nature, a view analogous
to Rousseau’s romanticism,52 posits that the human person has a single,
fundamental drive, a drive toward actualization and enhancement.53Left
alone and unencumbered, man will naturally progress toward these two
ends, for it is the person’s own subjective confirmation of experiences that
produces values, including moral values. The person knows what he wants
or needs, and thus for Rogers the locus of evaluation must remain solely
within the self, and he must not seek out others for judgment or evaluation.
Doing so impairs the authenticity of the individual.

The clearest expression of the valuing process, according to Rogers, is
seen in infants, who, being unconcerned with the approval of others, natu-
urally know what they want and therefore choose it.54 The infant’s valuing
process is flexible and capable of change because it is internal and operates
according to the will of the infant. The valuing process becomes rigid and
intransigent when a person adopts creeds that are not his own for reasons
that he did not choose.

For Rogers, the process of accepting a set of values imposed on a per-
son from without is severely harmful to the fulfillment of the person. The
deepest form of despair, according to Rogers, is “for one to choose to be
another than himself.” In other words, moral values must come from the person and not from religion, one’s parents, or any other person.

The area of morality in which Rogers’s position finds its fullest expression is in sexual morality, for no one uses Rogers’s values theory to justify murder or stealing. Thus, Rogers’s secular humanism logically leads to his “hominization” of sexual morality, namely, that sexual morality is a social convention, and, therefore, it is malleable. Rogers’s aversion to sexual morality as something foreign that is imposed from without can be seen in his philosophy of the person. A staple of that philosophy is that a person should move beyond the “oughts,” and should concentrate only on what “is,” or what he wants to become. Morality needs to come from the individual and not from a socially constructed list of sexual taboos.

John Paul II rejects this subjectivistic notion of sexual morality that treats sexuality as open-ended. For him, sexual morality refers to the truth inscribed in human nature. He reveals this by penetrating man’s interiority in his theological anthropology to illustrate that morality and the truth it conveys are not in conflict with man’s nature and that from the beginning man had a relationship with Truth itself. As a result, John Paul establishes an “essential continuity and a link” between man’s historical state and the experiences of his prehistory, which is the period of original innocence before the Fall. By doing this, man can trace the “echoes” of his original experiences of his integral nature when he was in the presence of God’s love. This should, John Paul contends, allow man to experience morality subjectively, to experience the objective truth of morality, and to know subjectively what is right and fitting.

At this stage of the analysis, there is a level of agreement between Rogers and John Paul. Both value the importance of human subjectivity and morality. Both realize that morality cannot “come from the other” so as to render the moral system foreign to the human subject. Both agree that one must not become alienated from the moral system to which he adheres, but rather one must experience directly the truth and meaningfulness of morality. However, again, the difference lies in Rogers’s denial of the objectivity of moral values, and he confuses the task of human subjectivity in understanding the nature of morality. Human subjectivity, in John Paul’s anthropology, does not create morality but rather discovers it, experiences it, and in that experience conforms one’s will to its truth. Rogers and John Paul agree that one must take ownership of the moral truths to which one adheres, but this ownership is not the same thing as authorship. Though the human person must experience the value of morality directly, he does not within that experiencing create it.
The difference between the two views of morality can be seen in their analyses of shame. Shame, according to Rogers, is a socially imposed feeling of rejection. In fact, shame is one of the abnormalities that Rogers insists on eradicating by his categorical approbation of the client and his life. Religion is commonly the culprit in generating the client’s shame. By imposing an artificial moral and value system on the client, religion makes him feel guilty and ashamed when he does not conform to its capacious dogma. In fact, Rogers claims that his secular humanism is more revelatory and elucidative of the human person than religion is, for humanism reveals the person as a perpetually progressing being, always open to new experiences.

For John Paul, shame is “a tendency, uniquely characteristic of the human person, to conceal sexual values sufficiently to prevent them from obscuring the value of the person.” As persons, we are not objects and therefore remain inviolable subjects. Shame serves as a reminder of our “supra-utilitarian character of the person”—that we should never be treated as objects by another person. Shame reveals the wrongness of being objectified by another and of the objectification of another. We feel shameful because we know of the risk of being objectified or of objectifying another. Shame is not an artificial feeling from without as Rogers believes, but rather it is a reminder from within of the “essential nature of the person.” For John Paul, shame is the echo of man’s original experience, an experience of union with God and with man. Shame, for John Paul II, reminds man of his true freedom, while for Rogers shame reminds man of what needs to be eradicated—that is, the guilt of morality—in order for man to be truly free.

This contrast between Rogers’s and John Paul’s moral theory reveals a fundamental divergence between the two thinkers concerning the nature of moral autonomy. Moral autonomy, for Rogers, means that man is free from any external value imposition. This might be understood to be consistent with John Paul’s approach if it meant simply recognizing the dangers of uncritically receiving one’s moral code from someone else. However, this assertion seems to be a reflection of Rogers’s denial of objective moral values, and thus Rogers’s understanding of moral autonomy refers to man’s place as his own moral legislator. Conversely, John Paul, who recognizes the existence of a divine Lawgiver, contends that such moral subjectivism expunges genuine freedom, for true freedom is only in relationship with the Author of freedom, the one to whom man owes everything. John Paul insists upon justice toward the Creator: Since God is the creator of the whole order of nature, our relationship to God is one of utter dependence. In particular, John Paul refutes Rogers’s “autonomism,”
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the idea that man is his own legislator, by contending that “man is just towards the Creator by striving in all his activities to achieve “particeps Creatoris,” that is, man shares in the law which God has bestowed on the world.\(^67\)

By rejecting the eternal law of God, Rogers believes he is liberating man from moral proscriptions. By his rejection, Rogers de-legitimizes morality by implying that the moral law is a hindrance to human flourishing and the source of emotional distress. The moral law no longer has a binding nature, for the moral law is “only from us.” John Paul argues instead that, “This whole norm-generating aspect disappears when we conceive the person in a totally subjectivistic way as pure consciousness.”\(^68\) Morality is then no longer normative, and hence no longer has the essence of a law, for it is no longer grounded in nature or being.\(^69\) Morality cannot bind us to it inasmuch as a man who handcuffs himself is not truly bound if he still has the key. By rejecting the “facts of morality,” Rogers also rejects the weight of morality and thus vitiates the experience of morality, for the person does not actually experience anything except his own subjective affirmation of values.

While both thinkers disagree with the conception of morality as heteronomous,\(^70\) coming from outside of man and inimical to his freedom, they do not agree on an alternative concept of morality. Rogers rightly criticizes heteronomous morality, but he does not provide a satisfactory alternative understanding. If morality is not an external system imposed on man from without, Rogers reasons, then it is an internal system created by man. Morals have value only insofar as man chooses them to have value. In contrast, John Paul, while agreeing that there must be an internalization of morality for morality to be meaningful, argues that morality must be experiential and not merely subjective. In other words, even though one must experience morality subjectively, morality does not originate in the human subject. Rather, the internalization of morality results in experiential moral knowledge, the fruit of exploration and discovery of the objective moral order within the human person.

For John Paul, the moral life is relational and participatory, or as he calls it, participated theonomy, which means that man’s intellect and will participate in the eternal wisdom and providence of God.\(^71\) The moral law is not something imposed on man from without, but rather its existence is within man himself, as it guides and directs him to what is proper and good. By submitting to the moral law, man submits to the truth of creation and acts in accordance with his human dignity, for it is the law that directs man to his final end and thus rightly orders his actions to attain that end. The moral law, then, helps man become who he was created to be, and
is a necessary precondition to freedom, for without the law man would not know what actions are proper for him, and thus will not know how to find fulfillment. Thus, the truth that morality conveys is inextricably tied to the dignity of the human person. Therefore, Rogers’s denigration and de-legitimizing of traditional morality as a social convention degrades the inherent dignity of the person, for it is founded upon a false understanding of freedom.

**FREEDOM FROM OR FREEDOM FOR?**

Implicit in Rogers’s position is belief in a division between freedom and the moral law, a division that John Paul rejects. Rogers’s de-legitimization of morality results from his denial of an objective Lawgiver and thus an objective law, and his false understanding of freedom as being only freedom from something. In other words, true freedom is freedom from morality, which allows the person to create himself and to express himself as truly authentic. Rogers applies his sense of freedom to man’s sexual autonomy, thereby arguing for the plasticity of human sexuality, namely, that humans are free to use their sexuality as they desire. Rogers seems to be fixated on the lowest level of man’s freedom, his natural freedom (the freedom to choose), and his view reflects a notion of freedom similar to that of John Stuart Mill’s, that is, “liberty consists of doing what one desires.”

In a certain sense, this may be seen as compatible with John Paul’s view of the matter. If one’s desires are natural—or proper—then freedom is the acting on those natural desires. It is unclear, though, whether Rogers perceives a distinction between natural and unnatural desires, that is, whether he would qualify the norm that one should simply act on whatever desires seem to be present at a given moment. In contrast, John Paul understands that the highest level of freedom is freedom for the good, which is freedom rooted in truth.

Rogers conflates autonomy and license with freedom, and therefore presumes that simply because man can do something, he should do it. However, in the view offered by John Paul, if man deliberately chooses falsehood, he is no more free than an addict who chooses his drug. By rejecting the truth for which man was made, man relegates his free will to that of the animals, that is, simply following the basest of passions and impulses instead of choosing a true good. John Paul’s view matches that outlined by philosopher Michael Polanyi, who argues that choosing the responsible good, the good that one ought to choose, enables man to be freer than simply choosing whatever is subjectively pleasing. “While compulsion by force or by neurotic obsession excludes responsibility,” he writes, “compulsion by universal intent establishes responsibility.”
freedom of the subjective person to do as he pleases is overruled by the freedom of the responsible person to act as he must.”

For man to be responsible for the choices he makes, he must have the ability to choose between goods; however, in order for man to know the true good, he must have a law. Thus, contrary to Rogers, the moral law is not an impediment to freedom but an essential condition for it. Freedom is not unlimited in the sense that it does not have an end, for the end of freedom is to achieve the good. Therefore, true freedom requires a moral law so that man can know the good. Freedom without a moral law nullifies freedom, because it does not lead man into freedom but to aimlessness.

Rogers’s false understanding of freedom and his determined effort to convince people to be their own moral legislators can be seen in how his “Encounter Groups” promoted the dissolution of sexual limitations. Encounter Groups are a form of group-style therapy, consisting of either a homogenous sex group or combinations of both sexes, in which the goal is to remove all defensiveness within a person’s social expression, so that he can move toward authenticity and self-actualization, that is, being his true self unencumbered by traditional value systems. “Social defensiveness” usually referred to sexual behavior, which is why in 1964 Rogers began disseminating information on his Encounter Group training seminars to Catholic women’s religious orders. Rogers sought to engage women religious with his new workshops, which contributed to the practical eradication through laicization of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in California in the early seventies. In a 1969 issue of Psychology Today, he posits that the typical feelings that develop between group members, particularly between men and women, have a “sexual component.” By arguing for liberation from sexuality morality, Rogers’s secular humanism undermines the most fundamental form of sexual relations, that is, the institution of marriage.

MARRIAGE

Both in his personal life and in his writings, Rogers displays what is from the perspective of Catholic tradition an inadequate and unwholesome view of marriage, which he evaluates based on a standard of pleasure: If the marriage is not sexually stimulating, then the marriage is likely a bad idea. Rogers’s fixation on the sexual aspect of marriage derives from his incomplete view of the institution. For Rogers, marriage is a social construction, merely a highly flexible social contract between two people who express intimate feelings for one another. Marriage is not an institution or even a structure, but rather marriage is a process of self-discovery and mutual fulfillment. Therefore, marriage is not something fixed, but rather it is
fluid, capable of changing and being reconstituted. Rogers determines that spouses can construct their marriage, just as their sexuality, to fulfill whatever they desire.

For John Paul, marriage is not a human construct; God established it at the beginning of creation. Matrimony consists not simply of a social contract between two people; it is a “sacramental expression which corresponds to the communion of persons.” For John Paul, man, created in the image and likeness of God, was “called into existence through love,” and he thus is called into being “for love.” Therefore, “love is . . . the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.” Marriage then is one of the ways in which man fulfills his most fundamental calling to love. Having an objective nature and purpose, marriage does not consist of variables but rather of essentials. Marriage is an institution and not a mere contract, because an institution “denotes something ‘instituted,’ ‘established,’ in accordance with the concept of justice.”

Marriage as an institution affects communicative justice and social justice, for not only does it accord justice to the husband and wife, by preventing the objectification of the person, but to society as well. Marriage gives us the family, which is the very first society, and consequently forms the larger society. This love, which is manifested in the union of marriage, needs to be affirmed socially in order for its full meaning to be realized, for man, being a social creature, wants to share the love formed in marriage with society and desires to have his love recognized by others. Social recognition signifies the maturity of the union between husband and wife, and it testifies to the goodness of their love. Thus, the institution of marriage, besides having a divine origin, is objectively meritorious in granting interpersonal and societal justice. Man cannot reconstruct marriage or redefine it however he pleases. Doing so eradicates the institution of marriage, thereby removing one of the ways in which man’s intrinsic vocation is fulfilled.

Since Rogers rejects traditional marriage, he must construct his idea of marriage upon something else. Regrettably, he chooses to construct it upon sexual satisfaction. As a result, his concept of marriage becomes utilitarian, because the good of marriage is grounded in pleasure, and because he does not believe in the indissolubility of marriage. In utilitarian axiology, pleasure is the highest good, and for Rogers this is the case with marriage. A utilitarian model of marriage considers either partner as a means to a particular end. To see whether Rogers adopts this model, one must ask the question, do either of the spouses serve as means by which the other tries to achieve some individual end? If the husband or wife desire independent ends for themselves, then the marriage is utilitarian, for each one serves simply as a means to a particular end for the other.
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To avoid a utilitarian model of marriage, one must employ the personalism posited by John Paul. According to the personalistic norm, the only way to prevent one spouse from being an object to the other is for them both to share a common goal toward which they act. The bond of a mutual good is what enables authentic love to occur. As John Paul states, “this special bond does not merely mean that we both seek a common good, it also unites the persons involved internally, and so constitutes the essential core round which any love must grow.”85 When a husband and wife choose a common aim it makes them equal to one another, thus rendering the objectification of either impossible.

For Rogers, the common good in marriage is sexual satisfaction, which remains his litmus test for whether a marriage is good, both in his own life and in his therapeutic model. Rogers’s inordinate concern about sexual satisfaction is evident in his autobiographical writings. For much of his early adulthood, Rogers was apprehensive about his sexual inexperience and he later constantly worried about his wife faking orgasms.86 In therapy, Rogers plays hedonistic calculus with the union between a man and a woman. If the marriage is not providing designated levels of sexual satisfaction, then the marriage needs correction. While it is true that lack of sexual fulfillment can signal real problems in a marital relationship, Rogers seems to be convinced that sexual satisfaction is the *summum bonum* in marriage. In his book on marriage, Rogers interviews various couples about their marriage, and in each case he infers that sexual dissatisfaction, due to a lack of openness, was a significant contributor to their strained marriage.

For John Paul, the common end of marriage cannot be pleasure, for pleasure is a transient and individualized goal. Making pleasure the highest good in a marriage involves an internal contradiction, for “pleasure is, of its nature, a good for the moment and only for a particular subject . . . and so, as long as that good is recognized as the entire basis of the moral norm, there can be no possibility of my transcending the bounds of that which is good for me alone.”87 John Paul argues that sexual relations must be unselfish, that they must consist of a full giving of oneself to another, and that they must “not serve as means of allowing sexual excitement to reach its climax . . . but the climax must be reached in harmony, not at the expense of the other partner.”88 He argues for an inclusion of sexual ethics within sexual relations, and that sex must be not merely a consequence of sexual arousal, but must seek the true good of the other person as well, thus being an essential act of the will mediated by love for the other person.89 The common end of marriage, for John Paul, is not limited to procreation, although this too is an essential end of marriage. Rather, the
“inner and essential raison d’être of marriage is not simply the eventual transformation of the couple into a family but above all the creation of a lasting personal union between a man and a woman based on love. Marriage serves above all to preserve the existence of the species . . . but it is based on love.” Therefore, to prevent a utilitarian model of marriage, the common good cannot be sexual satisfaction, as it is for Rogers, because this is a fleeting good that can only reside in the individual. John Paul insists that pleasure is “essentially incidental, contingent, something which may occur in the course of action.” Pleasure is a fundamental aspect of the sexual act between spouses, but it should not be the essential aspect. When it is isolated from the integral nature of the sexual act, it becomes an idol, and one engages in a “calculus of happiness.”

The second reason why Rogers’s model of marriage is utilitarian is that he rejects marriage’s monogamous and indissoluble nature. Rogers’s conception of a “Now” marriage, an appellation of validation for Rogers, regards sexual satisfaction as so essential that he encourages seeking extramarital affairs to find sexual fulfillment. He urges both husband and wife to explore their attraction to other people and to engage openly in sexual relations with them, resulting in a polyamorous relationship. He views change in sexual behavior as usually positive, and he remarks how his clients’ extramarital trysts strengthened their marriages and resulted in a heightened sexual satisfaction.

Clearly, polyamorous relationships undermine the personalistic norm that is foundational to John Paul’s conception of marriage and thus renders the relationship utilitarian. If man is a person and therefore a subject, he in a certain sense is his own master (only answerable to God). Therefore, man can never be used as an object or become the property of another. Yet a peculiar thing happens when a man gives himself in love, which is the essence of marriage, for in that moment, he chooses to belong to another. The paradox of love and thus marriage is that a man and a woman give themselves to each other not by vitiating but by enriching their supra-physical and moral nature. This paradox can only be actualized when the union is between one man and one woman. A man cannot give himself fully to a woman when he is divided among many women.

Likewise, the indissolubility of marriage must be maintained in order for the union to be supra-utilitarian. Rejecting the indissolubility of marriage not only ignores that God ordained it as such, it also falsifies the union and instrumentalizes it. If the union between a man and a women is not lifelong, then the union must end when a level of dissatisfaction, whether sexually or emotionally, is reached. The indissolubility of marriage justifies man (i.e., it is just toward him) in that being a person with
dignity and value, man’s personhood warrants love. Marriage then is the indissoluble commitment to that innate dignity of the person; it is the perpetual affirmation of that person. As John Paul II eloquently says,

If indissolubility and monogamy are not respected then marriage itself is then only . . . an institutional framework within which a man and woman obtain sexual pleasure, and not a durable union of persons based on mutual affirmation of the value of the person. For such a union must be durable, must last until one of the parties to the relationship ceases to exist. I am speaking not of spiritual existence, which is above and outside of time, but of existence in the body, which ends with death.96 If marriage is temporary, then the affirmation of the value of the person is contingent upon a variable—the variable of sensuality or emotion—and this inevitably devalues the person. As mentioned above, the deliberate transience of sexual relations has not increased man’s satisfaction. The reason for this, as John Paul indicates, is that man is made for covenants, whether it is with another person or with God. The hook-up culture fails because it is based on a lie, namely that man is made for fleeting pleasure. Since man’s existence is but a speck in the vast cosmos, this view goes, man’s relations with another person must reflect his own existential fleetingness. This, however, is a lie, because man is made for God who is eternal. God’s love for man is unconditional and impassible, and therefore man’s relationship with others must reflect, albeit imperfectly, this essential relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Humanistic psychology purports to have the answer to man’s deepest questions about his nature, especially his sexuality. While humanistic psychology can offer valuable psychological insight that can assist man in understanding how he is to act, it cannot do so if viewed in isolation from metaphysical truths about the human being. Within the theoretical framework of Rogerian humanistic psychology, there lie erroneous, and even destructive, propositions about human sexuality. Rooted in a secular humanism that denies God and an objective morality, Rogers’s psychology posits a sexual autonomy that perverts man’s fundamental inclination toward the other and toward God. Taken by itself, it may result in a vision of human sexuality that is egoistic, and one that renders marriage a utilitarian contract, which results in the denigration of the person by using him as a mere object.
John Paul II’s personalistic humanism more fully illuminates man’s true vocation as a creature made from God and for God. It legitimizes marriage as a divine institution, and values its monogamous and indissoluble nature for the good of the spouses and society. John Paul’s personalism is other-centered, not self-centered, and therefore speaks of man’s true calling as being a gift-for-others, as he is a gift from God. This personalistic humanism reveals the true vision of marriage, a vision that captures husband and wife in their complete glory. By having a healthy and proper vision of marriage, it reminds spouses of their true calling: to be gifts to each other and to society.

Southern writer Walker Percy was well aware of the futility of psychology to solve man’s deepest existential problems. In Love in the Ruins, Dr. Tom More, a psychiatrist dealing with bouts of melancholy and suicidal ideations, notices a strange upsurge of mental disorder among the inhabitants of his small town: an inexplicable sense of longing. More’s psychological invention (the Lapsometer) could not cure the ailments, but rather served as a distraction from virtue. Humanistic psychology, when it is idolized, serves as that distraction. John Paul II’s personalistic humanism calls man back to virtue, back to the mode of being for which he was made. In the end, Dr. Tom More resolves his existential angst by leading a quiet and leisurely life, in which he finds a renewed love for his wife not in the propositions of psychology but in the Eucharist. John Paul’s personalistic humanism leads the person to the very same Sacrament.

Notes

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8. Ibid., 38.
9. Harry Emerson Fosdick is an example of a liberal thinker who may have influenced Rogers. His *Christianity and Progress* (1922) makes the argument that Christianity is a progressive religion and therefore is a religion of intrinsic relativity, and thus it is constantly changing. Fosdick’s other book, *On Being a Real Person*, bears a striking resemblance to Rogers’s first book, *On Becoming a Person* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1961), in which he outlines his fundamental psychology.

11. Though Rogers never explicitly declared his atheism, it certainly can be inferred from his psychology and from his aversion toward religion in general. In an interview with Richard Evans, Rogers remarks that he is “too religious to be religious.” In other words, Rogers, as we will see, believes in himself more than he believes in God. See Richard I. Evans, *Carl Rogers: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975), 73.

12. This form of therapy has become widely popular, and Rogers has developed a quasi-cultic mythos, being viewed by some as “almost a God.” Cohen, *Carl Rogers*, 15.


16. Ibid., 31.

17. Ibid., 37.


21. Freud believed religion is the creation of wish fulfillment with no possibility of being fulfilled, and therefore religion is a perversion of the mind. His aversion toward religion is seen in many of his works, such as *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).


27. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 110.
31. Ibid., 2.
32. Ibid., 01/02/1980, 58.
33. Evans, Carl Rogers, 164. Rogers expresses his discontent with ‘scientism,’ and he urges that the individual become attuned with the “universe within.” This refers to man’s consciousness and will, and his ability to choose for himself the process through which he becomes authentic. This is contra a materialistic view of man, as posited by B. F. Skinner, with whom he debated frequently.
34. Rogers, “A Note on ‘The Nature of Man,’” in The Carl Rogers Reader, 405. Rogers uses the word “spiritual” to denote the supra-physical reality, which exists in terms of phenomena unidentifiable by the senses. He is primarily speaking in terms of physics and chemistry. Incidentally, Rogers’s self-actualizing tendency has been argued to be contrary to Darwinian evolution, in spite of Rogers’s evolutionary framing. See Marvin Frankel, Lisbeth Sommerbeck, and Howard Rachlin, “Rogers’ Concept of the Actualizing Tendency in Relation to Darwinian Theory,” Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies 9:1 (2010): 69–80.
37. This was done by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, who translated John Paul II’s The Acting Person but is often accused of superimposing a phenomenological bent foreign to the original text. His interest in phenomenology seems to have been primarily methodological. See Weigel, Witness to Hope, 174–75.
40. Rogers, On Becoming a Person: a Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy, 189.
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41. Rogers, “A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationships as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework,” in The Carl Rogers Reader, 244–49.


44. Ibid., 210–13.

45. Weigel, Witness to Hope, 127.


47. Ibid., 213


50. Ibid.


53. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 35.


55. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 110.

56. Hominization is an evolutionary term that refers to the process of becoming human. In regards to morality, it refers to an understanding of morality as a human phenomenon and a byproduct of social and evolutionary forces.

57. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 168.

58. TOB, 04/15/1981, 218.

59. Experiences of our prehistory consist of original solitude, original unity, and original nakedness, in addition to original innocence and original happiness. Original solitude refers to the moment in man’s prehistory, as depicted in the story of Adam, in which he realizes through his embodied existence his personhood, which is distinguishable from the rest of creation, and man realizes that he is called to communion with God. Original solitude serves as a precursor to original unity, for man realizes he is unique in creation and his consequent longing for “another.” Original unity occurs after the creation of Eve, when Adam and Eve recognize their sexual differences and realize their call to union with each other. It overcomes original solitude as well as affirms it, for through interaction between male and female, both realize their unity and uniqueness (i.e., solitude). Original nakedness refers to the subjective experience of the first man and woman in which they experienced each other’s nakedness and were not ashamed. For John Paul II, this is not a state of immaturity, in which case shame was underdeveloped, nor is
it a state of shamelessness. Rather, it was the proper state of man and woman in
which both recognize the fullness of their dignity and embodied union. See Gen-
eral Audiences from TOB, 09/05/1979–12/19/1979.

60. Ibid., 09/29/1979, 32.


62. Evans, Carl Rogers, 75.


64. Ibid., 178.

65. Ibid.

-splendor_en.html.


68. Karol Wojtyla, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics,” in Person and
Community, 287.

69. See Karol Wojtyla, “On Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of
the Moral Norm in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler,” in Per-
son and Community.

70. Rogers argues that the purpose of the actualizing tendency is to move
a person to “develop toward autonomy and away from heteronomy, or control
by external forces.” See Carl Rogers, “A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and
Interpersonal Relationships as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework,” in,
Science and Human Affairs, ed. Richard E. Farson (Palo Alto, Calif.: Science and

71. John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, no. 41.

72. Ibid., no. 42.

73. John Stuart Mill, Critical Assessments, ed. John Cunningham Wood
(New York: Routledge, 1999), 297.

74. John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, no. 85.

75. Jerry H. Gill, The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi’s Postmodern Philoso-

76. E. Michael Jones, “Carl Rogers and the IHM Nuns: Sensitivity Train-
ing, Psychological Warfare, and the ‘Catholic Problem,’” Culture Wars (October

77. Carl Rogers, “Community: The Group Comes of Age,” Psychology To-
day (July 1969): 30.

78. Carl Rogers, Becoming Partners: Marriage and Its Alternatives (New

79. TOB, 06/25/1980, 123.

80. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 11.

81. Ibid., 11.

82. The other ways to fulfill this vocation of man is celibacy and virginity in
which the person “awaits the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church,”
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and while he becomes physically infecund, he becomes spiritually fruitful. See *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 16.

84. Ibid., 220.
85. Ibid., 28.
88. Ibid., 272.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 218.
91. Ibid., 36.
92. Ibid., 38.
93. Rogers, *Becoming Partners*, 58–70. Indeed, Rogers was so convinced of this putative truth in his own life that, when his wife’s illness made her incapable of having sex or simply undesirable, he sought sexual satisfaction elsewhere, mainly with women with whom he did group counseling sessions. Cohen, *Carl Rogers*, 211–13.
95. Christ decrees in Mark 10:9, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

**Bibliography**


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