

# *Karol Wojtyła, Sex Reassignment Surgery, and the Body–Soul Union*

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*Abstract.* Dialogue about the moral permissibility of sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in Catholic health care has recently received considerable attention. In an effort to further this discussion and bring clarity to the debate, the author uses Pope St. John Paul II’s robust theological and philosophical anthropology to evaluate the morality of SRS and enter dialogue with current arguments that suggest SRS is morally licit. The author argues that John Paul II’s anthropology renders SRS morally illicit. Moreover, current arguments supporting SRS rely on an anthropology of body–soul dualism. This conclusion suggests that future arguments for the permissibility of SRS in Catholic health care will always be invalid if they fail to uphold the body–soul unity of the person. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 17.2 (Summer 2017): 291–302.

The dialogue about the moral permissibility of sex reassignment surgery (SRS) for persons with gender dysphoria is just beginning in Catholic health care. A handful of recent articles have put forward arguments on both sides of this debate.<sup>1</sup> A few have

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1. See, for example, Carol Bayley, “Transgender Persons and Catholic Healthcare,” *Health Care Ethics USA* 24.1 (Winter 2016): 1–5; Becket Gremmels, “Sex Reassignment Surgery and the Catholic Moral Tradition: Insight from Pope Pius XII on the Principle of Totality,” *Health Care Ethics USA* 24.1 (Winter 2016): 6–10; and E. Christian Brugger,

recognized that any examination of the ethics of SRS in Catholic morality gives rise to questions about anthropology, specifically whether the person is a body–soul unity.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Pope St. John Paul II made significant contributions to the Catholic understanding of the human person and morality. In his academic work, he developed a robust philosophical and theological anthropology that greatly influenced his interpretation of morality and ethics. His writings in philosophy, anthropology, and morality have had an immeasurable effect on the Catholic Church’s morality, making him an ideal thinker to bring into the current discussion of SRS in Catholic health care.<sup>2</sup>

The American Psychiatric Association notes that a variety of definitions and meanings have been attributed to the terms used when discussing gender dysphoria, of which SRS is a particular component. It is therefore necessary to begin by defining the terms pertinent to our discussion. *Gender dysphoria* refers to “distress that may accompany the incongruence between one’s experienced or expressed gender and one’s assigned gender.” *Sex* is used to describe the biological indicators of male and female, while *gender* denotes the “public (and usually legally recognized) lived role as boy or girl, man or woman.” The term *transsexual* has a narrower meaning than *transgender* and therefore is more relevant to the present discussion. *Transsexual* refers to “an individual who seeks, or has undergone, a social transition from male to female or female to male, which in many, but not all, cases also involves a somatic transition by cross-sex hormone treatment and genital surgery (sex reassignment surgery).”<sup>3</sup> To narrow the scope of this paper, the present moral analysis will focus only on SRS pertaining to the genitalia, what some have deemed “bottom surgery.”

### Catholic Morality and the Current SRS Debate

In the last year, the topic of SRS has garnered considerable attention in *Health Care Ethics USA*, the journal of the Catholic Health Association. Carol Bayley and Becket Gremmels both published articles in the Winter 2016 issue suggesting that

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“Catholic Hospitals and Sex Reassignment Surgery,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 16.4 (Winter 2016): 587–597.

2. A similar project was undertaken by Christopher Gross in “Karol Wojtyła on Sex Reassignment Surgery: An Application of His Philosophical Anthropology,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 9.4 (Winter 2009): 711–723. While we come to similar conclusions about the morality of SRS, the purposes of our articles are different. I intend to identify the common anthropological problem with current arguments in favor of the permissibility of SRS in Catholic health care. I suggest that future arguments must closely examine what anthropology is being used. Gross’s article broadly shows that SRS is morally illicit in light of Wojtyła’s anthropology and concludes that transsexuals should pursue psychological treatments to alleviate suffering (723). In examining Wojtyła’s early philosophical anthropology, I rely primarily on interpretations by Jaroslaw Kupczak and Jameson Taylor. See Jaroslaw Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000); and Jameson Taylor, “Beyond Nature: Karol Wojtyła’s Development of the Traditional Definition of Personhood,” *Review of Metaphysics* 63.2 (December 2009): 415–454.

3. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 451.

SRS could be morally permissible in Catholic health care. Bayley argues that the principle of double effect allows for the permissibility of SRS surgeries: “The surgery itself is neutral. The good effect, from the perspective of the person undergoing it, is that his or her body will come to present to the world the person in the gender he or she experiences inside. The relief of suffering this represents is profound. The inability to bear or father a child is a regrettable and foreseen consequence, but it is not a means to the good end.”<sup>4</sup> She not only concludes that SRS should be permitted in Catholic health care but warns that institutions should be careful not to violate nondiscrimination policies that protect those seeking SRS.

Gremmels takes a different approach than Bayley, examining SRS from Pope Pius XII’s principle of totality in the removal of body parts. Gremmels acknowledges the difficulty of justifying SRS according to this principle but finds a potential rationale in the Pope’s 1952 address to the Congress of Histopathology when he said that a patient “may use individual parts, destroy them or mutilate them, when and to the extent necessary for the good of his being as a whole.”<sup>5</sup> On the basis of this quote, Gremmels suggests that the meaning of *whole* in the principle of totality comprises a human being’s physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. He goes on to say, “This is especially interesting if gender dysphoria is understood as a disconnect between the soul and the body, i.e., an inability of the form to properly manifest itself due to a defect in the matter.”<sup>6</sup> If gender dysphoria is understood as a disconnect between the soul and the body, then SRS could be morally permissible if the surgery could be proved to restore wholeness. The caveat for Gremmels is that more research is needed to confirm that the benefits of SRS outweigh the burdens for the transsexual person.

Various Catholic ethicists have taken issue with Bayley’s use of the principle of double effect and Gremmels’s interpretations of the principle of totality. In another article published in *Health Care Ethics USA*, Elliott Bedford and Jason Eberl examine Catholic anthropology to address the morality of SRS and offer opinions contrary to those of Bayley and Gremmels.<sup>7</sup> Building on traditional and recent magisterial teaching and influenced by Thomistic philosophy, they assert that the Catholic belief in body–soul unity means that the soul is “sexed” by virtue of its relationship to the body.<sup>8</sup> A transgender person, in their view, has “a discrepancy between the perceiving mind and the existing body—a body–self dualism.” They point out that while some

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4. Carol Bayley, “Transgender Persons and Catholic Healthcare,” *Health Care Ethics USA* 24.1 (Winter 2016): 4.

5. Pius XII, quoted in Becket Gremmels, “Sex Reassignment Surgery and the Catholic Moral Tradition: Insight from Pope Pius XII on the Principle of Totality,” *Health Care Ethics USA* 24.1 (Winter 2016): 8.

6. Gremmels, “Sex Reassignment Surgery and the Catholic Moral Tradition,” 8.

7. Elliott Louis Bedford and Jason T. Eberl, “Is the Soul Sexed? Anthropology, Transgenderism, and Disorders of Sex Development,” *Health Care Ethics USA* 24.3 (Summer 2016): 18.

8. There is an ambiguity in Bedford and Eberl’s concept of the soul as sexed (20–22). See Edward J. Furton, “The Soul Is Not Sexed,” *Ethics & Medics* 41.11 (November 2016): 3–4. Furton argues that the soul is sexed in the sense that the soul, as it exists in its embodied

may argue that the ultimate end of bottom surgery is to unify the body–soul disconnect, the immediate end reinforces a body–soul dualism. Furthermore, Bedford and Eberl contend that arguments claiming that SRS “helps align or integrate a person as a composite being” deny at least one of the following tenets of Thomistic hylomorphism: “1) that the soul is simple and not comprised of parts (e.g., the part informing the brain is female while that informing the genitals is male), and 2) an organ of a live human being that is typically developed (even those atypically developed) and functional is not properly informed by a human soul.”<sup>9</sup> From this understanding, they conclude that the integrative goal of SRS presupposes an “ontological dis-integrity” that is contrary to the Catholic understanding of the human person. In their perspective, these anthropological conclusions call into question Bayley’s use of the double effect and Gremmels’s application of the principle of totality.

Rev. Travis Stephens similarly takes issue with Gremmels’s interpretation of the principle of totality on the basis of Christian anthropology and human sexuality. He argues that Gremmels’s line of reasoning is in accord with that of René Descartes’s, mainly the dualism that conceives the soul to be trapped in the human body, that is, the meaning of the body must be defined by the mind. In contrast, a Christian anthropology understands human persons as “embodied souls, not souls trapped in bodies.” Stephens’s understanding of Christian anthropology and sexuality leads him to conclude that sex reassignment surgeries are “not only immoral because they render the patient sterile, but also because they reject the God-given personhood that is manifest through one’s sexuality.”<sup>10</sup> He concludes that the principle of totality therefore does not apply to SRS, which is still not morally permissible. The arguments presented in all four articles operate either explicitly or implicitly from a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person.

### **Major Influences on John Paul II’s Philosophical Anthropology**

In his early academic years, Karol Wojtyla began to form his own anthropological vision through studies of several major philosophers, namely, Max Scheler, Immanuel Kant, and St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>11</sup> Wojtyla found Scheler’s phenomenological ethics useful but discovered serious problems with his understanding of the human person. Scheler developed a neo-Kantian ethics of values and eliminated an ethics of obligation all together. Wojtyla saw this ethics of values as not fully compatible with a Christian ethics that understands the human person as the subject of his moral values and the cause of his own actions. Scheler’s phenomenological ethics was valuable when describing “the person’s experience of ethical values” but was limited by its inability to “define the objective principle that decides why a human act is morally

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state, forms part of our male or female psychological identity. I will assume Bedford and Eberl mean the soul as sexed only by its relation to the body.

9. Bedford and Eberl, “Is the Soul Sexed?,” 24, 26–27.

10. Travis Stephens, “The Principle of Totality Does Not Justify Sex Reassignment Surgery,” *Ethics & Medics* 41.11 (November 2016): 2.

11. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 28.

right or wrong.”<sup>12</sup> In terms of understanding the human person, Wojtyla was critical of Scheler’s emotional anthropology because, by comprehending the person as only a unity of feelings and different experiences, not a substance, Scheler was unable to account for the human experience of being the cause of one’s own actions. Although Wojtyla found Scheler’s philosophy lacking wholeness, the future Pope would use parts of Scheler’s phenomenology to explain the human person as “not only an object or ‘something,’ but also a subject, or a ‘somebody.’”<sup>13</sup>

Wojtyla found Kant’s focus on duty to be at the opposite extreme from Scheler. Kant made the mistake, according to Wojtyla, of ignoring the “*a posteriori* data of human experience” and forming his ethics on the “*a priori* form of practical reason.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, Kant did away with the bodily human experience and focused only on what could be rationally deduced. Wojtyla concluded that both Kant and Scheler set value and duty in opposition to each other, basing their ethics on only one of these principles while eliminating the other: Scheler focused on values and eliminated duty, whereas Kant only gave credit to duty and ignored values. Wojtyla believed duty and value were compatible, and he found the balance between the two in Thomas Aquinas, whose theory of the will accounted for both duty and desire because of his understanding of the human person as a body–soul unity.

A full analysis of Aquinas’s influence on Wojtyla is beyond the scope of this article, but for our purposes it suffices to recognize that Wojtyla built on the Boethian–Thomistic definition of personhood by providing “an interpretation that understands the basic concepts of substance, rationality, and nature as part of a deeper unity that also includes the aspects of subjectivity, consciousness and personal love.”<sup>15</sup> Here we can already begin to see Wojtyla’s integration of the whole person and his affirmation of body–soul unity. Thomistic influences are evident throughout Wojtyla’s anthropology, especially in regard to the body–soul relationship. In addition, Wojtyla’s recognition of both sense experience and rational thought is particularly relevant to SRS.

### Integration of the Person in Action

One of the most original parts of Wojtyla’s conception of the person is the idea of the integration of the acting person.<sup>16</sup> Philosophically, Wojtyla describes integration as “the realization and the manifestation of a whole and a unity emerging on the basis of some complexity rather than the assembling into a whole of what was previously disconnected.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, rather than bringing together dissimilar

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12. Ibid., 23.

13. Taylor, “Beyond Nature,” 424.

14. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 33.

15. Taylor, “Beyond Nature,” 418. Taylor’s article provides a detailed examination of the development of Karol Wojtyla’s understanding of the human person and its roots in the Boethian–Thomistic definition of personhood.

16. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 140.

17. Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Boston: Reidel, 1979), 191.

parts, integration realizes the wholeness that has always been present. Wojtyla points out that this integration is different than the commonly used psycho–physical unity, which describes only what the empirical sciences can assess. Preferring the term “psychosomatic” to “psycho–physical” unity, he explains that integration refers to a higher level of unity than psychosomatic unity in the empirical sense.

Important in our discussion is an element of the psyche termed “emotivity.”<sup>18</sup> Wojtyla explains that *emotivity* refers to “the whole wealth of the differentiated domain of human emotions, feelings, and sensations as well as . . . the related behaviors and attitudes.”<sup>19</sup> He explores multiple areas within emotivity, such as man’s ability to feel bodily sensations. Of particular significance for us is man’s integral feeling of himself, termed “sensitivity.” Human sensitivity, or the sense perception of the person, is rooted in the intellectual and spiritual life.<sup>20</sup> It shapes the person’s ego, or being-in-the-world, and to a degree his or her experience of the world. Wojtyla explains that sensitivities become the “nucleus for the crystallization of an experience of value.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the integration of these feelings or sensations through consciousness is directed toward values. But, differentiating himself from Scheler, Wojtyla explains that these feelings are not the only means for a person to know his values.

In fact—and this is vital to understanding Wojtyla’s concept of the integration of the human person—experiencing values through these sensitivities is insufficient in itself. One final integration is necessary: the subordination of sensitivity to truth. Wojtyla writes in *The Acting Person*, “The fusion of sensitivity with truthfulness is the necessary condition of the experience of values.”<sup>22</sup> Only when a value is derived from truth can an authentic value be formed and authentic action follow. Moreover, if a person derived values only from feelings, he or she would be confined to only what happens in himself or herself, thus becoming incapable of self-determination.

Wojtyla is essentially saying that in the process of self-determination, the will is governed by one’s knowledge and self-knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, if a person relies only on feelings, he or she ignores the knowledge that he or she possesses to guide the will. Wojtyla goes on to note, “Self-determination and the closely related self-governance often require that action be taken in the name of *bare truth* about good, in the name of values that are not felt. It even may require that action be taken against one’s actual feelings.”<sup>24</sup> Wojtyla recognizes that one can have a conflict between sensitivities and an objective truth. In these cases, there is no debate for Wojtyla: the acting person must follow the value informed by truth.

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18. Wojtyla’s use of emotivity should not be confused with the moral philosophy of emotivism, which Alasdair MacIntyre critiques in *After Virtue*.

19. Wojtyla, *Acting Person*, 224.

20. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 137.

21. Wojtyla, *Acting Person*, 232–233.

22. *Ibid.*, 233.

23. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 118.

24. Wojtyla, *Acting Person*, 233, original emphasis.

How does this integration of the acting person apply to the discussion of SRS? Wojtyła's understanding of sensitivities goes beyond emotions and feelings to include self-perception influenced by intellect and spirituality. He would acknowledge the feelings and self-perception of the person with gender dysphoria, including the desire to alter the sex organs, but for Wojtyła, this sensitivity, or self-perception, would not justify SRS. The desire for SRS could be morally permissible only if it aligned with objective truths about the nature of the human person.

### **Body–Soul Relationship, Freedom, and Human Nature**

To understand whether SRS can accord with the truth of the human person, we must briefly investigate Wojtyła's conception of the body–soul relationship. Writing as Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor*, Wojtyła affirms the teaching of the Council of Vienna that the rational soul is essentially the form of the body. He writes, “The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole—*corpore et anima unus* [body and soul]—as a person.”<sup>25</sup> John Paul II follows the traditional magisterial understanding that a unity of body and soul exists in the human person. This means that an action of the body affects the soul, and therefore moral acts cannot be separated from the whole of the person. This body–soul relationship is so fundamental to the human person that *Veritatis splendor* says the meaning of the human body can only be grasped when it is understood that the soul expresses itself in the body, which is informed by the immortal spirit.<sup>26</sup> For John Paul II, this fundamental understanding has implications for the idea of freedom, the dignity of the human person, and natural law.

An understanding of body–soul unity would not be complete in John Paul II's anthropology without considering the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. As the Pope explains in *Theology of the Body*, Aquinas's reflections on the meaning of the resurrection for the human person led Aquinas to abandon Plato's conception of the body–soul relationship for a more Aristotelian view. Jesus's resurrection confirms that man's eschatological perfection and happiness must be understood as “*the definitively and perfectly 'integrated' state of man* brought about by such a union of the soul with the body.”<sup>27</sup> At the resurrection of the body, there will no longer be a feeling of opposition between the body and soul, but rather the body will be in perfect harmony with the soul, as the spirit will fully permeate the body. In other words, the full realization of the human person as body and soul will be fulfilled at the resurrection, further advancing the anthropological idea of body–soul unity.

The nature of the human person as a body–soul unity can be more fully understood in relation to authentic freedom. As a person is confronted with various objects, he or she must be able to view them through the lens of truth in order to maintain an independent attitude toward them. Wojtyła puts it this way in *Love and Responsibility*: “His ability to discover the truth gives man the possibility of self-determination,

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25. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 48.

26. *Ibid.*, n. 50.

27. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 390, original emphasis.

of deciding for himself the character and direction of his own actions, and that is what freedom means.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, we need truth in order to be free to choose the good. When truth is removed from the discussion, a person’s actions become determined by his or her emotions and desires for objects. These objects will take possession of the person, directing and determining his or her actions, so that the person ceases to have freedom for those actions.

When a person tries to achieve freedom by removing himself or herself from all tradition and authority while ignoring even the most basic objective truths, he or she begins to make decisions based on subjective and changeable opinions, that is, his or her selfish interests.<sup>29</sup> John Paul II notes, “A freedom which claims to be absolute ends up treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, freedom without truth paves the way for the manipulation and use of the body in any way that seems fit to the person at that moment in time.

This separation of freedom from truth can also be accompanied by a reduction of human nature. In *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II observes that the present age has often brought nature and freedom into conflict. We see people place the highest value on freedom and personal autonomy while neglecting the nature of the person. The Pope also points out several faulty conceptions of nature. For example, some moral theologians reduce human nature to raw material that needs to be transformed and overcome whenever this materiality of the human inhibits one’s idea of freedom. Another view proposes that values are formed out of man’s power and advancement, his freedom, and denigrates human nature, reducing it to biological and social material. In this moral construction freedom becomes self-defining and therefore so do one’s values. The result for John Paul II is that “when all is said and done man would not even have a nature; he would be his own personal life-project.”<sup>31</sup> These faulty conceptions of nature implicitly fail to recognize the unity of the body and soul. When the person has been reduced to a biological nature, he is free to manipulate and use the body in accord with his desires and self-perception of what is good. For John Paul II, reducing human nature to its biological component and separating freedom from truth create a division within the person.

A truthful understanding of nature and freedom enables a proper understanding of the natural law. Quoting *Donum vitae*, John Paul II writes, “The natural moral law expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person.” This means that the moral implications derived from the natural law rely on this anthropology of body–soul unity. The practical implication of this natural law is found in the rest of the quote: “Therefore this law cannot be thought of as simply a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the

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28. Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 115.

29. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995), n. 19.

30. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 48.

31. *Ibid.*, n. 46.



Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body.”<sup>32</sup> John Paul II recognizes here that the natural law is greater than what can be considered biologically normative; rather, it must include the human person as body and soul as well as freedom connected to truth. When these realities of the human person are separated, the universality of the natural law as it pertains to the dignity of the human person is lost.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, and this is essential, natural law and the understanding of the human person cannot be separated from a theological anthropology. John Paul II goes to great lengths to develop the theological interpretation of the human person in his major work, *Theology of the Body*. For the present discussion, it is only necessary to acknowledge a few general theological truths that inform John Paul II’s understanding of the human person and natural law. The human person is brought into existence through the love of God, and each person bears the *imago Dei*, that is, every human is endowed with inherent dignity that must not be violated. Moreover, we are called first to love God and second to love our neighbor. This forms the very foundation for John Paul II’s anthropology. Incorporating these theological statements into the Pope’s philosophy and anthropology, one can conclude that a dualistic anthropology contradicts the Catholic understanding that God created the human person as a body–soul unity. John Paul II’s theological, philosophical, and anthropological beliefs reveal that, to be morally licit, actions like SRS must uphold certain universal truths of natural law.<sup>34</sup> We are now in a position to apply John Paul II’s understanding of the human person to the issue of SRS.

### **John Paul II’s Anthropology and SRS**

SRS alters the biological sex organs to conform to the understanding a person has about gender identity. To be permissible in Catholic health care, SRS requires a moral justification that can account for the manipulation of the body from one sex to another by the removal of sex organs and in many cases the addition of a neovagina or neophallus. The moral justifications for SRS inevitably fail to satisfy John Paul II’s anthropology of body–soul unity, because the conversion of healthy male sex organs into female sex organs or vice versa requires a dualistic conception of the human person.

To elaborate further on this dualism, it may be beneficial to briefly contrast John Paul II’s unitive understanding of the body and soul with René Descartes’s dualistic one. Descartes was by no means the first philosopher to propose a dualism in the human person; as already mentioned, the resurrection of Jesus led Aquinas to abandon a Platonic dualism for a more Aristotelian hylomorphism. Descartes’s “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am) emphasizes the mind as the sole principle of truth.<sup>35</sup> The rational thinking person is what we can come to know, and this process of knowing does not depend on the body. Therefore, a separation of the soul

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32. Ibid., n. 50.

33. Ibid., n. 51.

34. For more, see *ibid.*, n. 52.

35. Stephens, “Principle of Totality,” 1.

from the body naturally occurs, and the soul does not need the body to be able to find meaning.<sup>36</sup> In this dualistic conception of the person, one could argue, as Stephens points out, that a person is free to ascribe one's own meaning to his or her body.<sup>37</sup>

Contrasting Descartes with John Paul II, we can see the two vastly different conclusions that can result from dualistic and unitive understandings of the human person. Descartes's dualism opens the door for the body to be changed according to the desires of the rational mind. In contrast, we can see John Paul II's phenomenological influence in his recognition of the body's profound meaning. This does not do away with the meaning found in the soul but rather highlights the anthropological necessity of recognizing the human person as both body and soul in unity. SRS negates the biological meaning of the body by changing the sexual organs of the human person to match a self-perception. At the anthropological level, it appears that to morally permit SRS, one must subscribe to a type of dualism that views the body as mutable and inferior to the gender perception of the mind—an anthropology that John Paul II would reject.

It is important to bring John Paul II's idea of freedom into dialogue with SRS. It appears that in an autonomy-focused health care system, a person should have the freedom to choose SRS if he or she believes it will improve health and well-being. As noted earlier, John Paul II believed that freedom means a person must act in accord with truth.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, if SRS is to be morally permissible, it must be in agreement with the truth of the human person. As mentioned previously, if freedom is separated from truth, decisions are based on a person's subjective and changeable opinion; the self becomes a project to be molded in whatever way the individual believes is best. Consequently, the ability to choose SRS does not in fact make one authentically free, because SRS does not adhere to truths about human nature and the natural law.

This brings us to John Paul II's conclusion that a morally licit action must accord with the natural law and be directed toward the teleological end of union with God. This means that a person's action must do the following: uphold the human person as a body-soul unity, recognize the person as made in the *imago Dei* and therefore respect his inherent dignity, and accord with the call to be in relationship with God and others and therefore align with the command to love God and one's neighbor. Applying John Paul II's understanding of the human person, it is clear that SRS is not in accord with the natural law and consequently is not morally permissible in Catholic health care.

### **John Paul II in Dialogue with Recent Catholic Arguments**

John Paul II's philosophical and theological anthropology does not condone SRS as a morally permissible treatment for gender dysphoria, and it is time to bring this framework into dialogue with the present discussion in Catholic health care

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36. Grzegorz Holub, "Karol Wojtyła and René Descartes: A Comparison of the Anthropological Positions," *Anuario Filosófico* 48.2 (2015): 345.

37. Stephens, "Principle of Totality," 1–2.

38. Gross, "Karol Wojtyła on Sex Reassignment Surgery," 719–720.

that I highlighted at the beginning of this article. Thinking about the way his moral framework would engage the present discussion will help illuminate the problematic anthropology present in the arguments that SRS is permissible within Catholic morality.

As noted at the beginning of this article, Bayley invokes the principle of double effect as her main argument for the moral permissibility of SRS. She explains that the surgery itself is neutral; the good effect is matching the person's biological self to the gender he or she experiences internally, thereby providing relief from suffering. While the inability to procreate is a regrettable and foreseen consequence, is not a means to the good end.<sup>39</sup> John Paul II would probably find multiple issues with Bayley's conclusion. First, he would disagree with her assessment that SRS is a neutral surgery. Its object is the removal of a healthy sexual organ and in many cases the creation of a neo-sexual organ for the sake of a person's perception of his or her gender. This dualism is not in accord with the nature of the person, rendering the object of the act morally impermissible and nullifying the principle of double effect.

Moreover, in evaluating the intention of SRS, John Paul II would probably find that Bayley's stated intention of alleviating a person's suffering is a laudable goal, but he would be quick to point out that she glosses over the intention of SRS to transform the body to fit the person's gender perception. He would agree with Bedford and Eberl that while Bayley and others may claim that the proper end of this surgery is body–soul integrity, the immediate end is “premised upon and reinforces a form of body–self dualism.”<sup>40</sup> In addition, it would be appropriate to raise concerns about the lack of conclusive data demonstrating that SRS alleviates suffering by yielding positive health results for persons with gender dysphoria.<sup>41</sup>

Gremmels's argument uses the principle of totality to suggest that SRS could be permissible in Catholic health care if it could be shown that the benefits outweigh the burdens of “restoring wholeness” to the person experiencing a disconnect between perceived gender and biological sex. The critiques of Gremmels's argument by Bedford and Eberl and by Stephens are in agreement with John Paul II's anthropology. Gremmels falls into the same dualistic trap as Bayley when he explains gender dysphoria as a disconnect between the body and the soul that SRS might resolve. In fact, to argue that SRS restores wholeness or unity already presupposes a dualistic anthropology. Gremmels's conclusion is logical, because once dualism is accepted, the manipulation of the body to reestablish unity becomes permissible. In contrast, if one holds to the body–soul unity of John Paul II, then gender dysphoria is not a disconnect between body and soul but rather a perceived disconnect in the understanding of gender. This brings us back to the point made earlier that the sensitivities, or self-perception, of the person must always be integrated into the truth. Here again, in John Paul II's anthropology and moral framework it is not possible to accept Gremmels's conclusion.

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39. Bayley, “Transgender Persons and Catholic Healthcare,” 4.

40. Bedford and Eberl, “Is the Soul Sexed?,” 26.

41. Gremmels, “Sex Reassignment Surgery and Catholic Moral Tradition,” 7.

Furthermore, this discussion fails to recognize that SRS often involves more than the removal of the sexual organ, namely, adding a neophallus or neovagina. It is impossible to know whether John Paul II would have identified this missing component, but under his framework, it is important to note. The recognition that SRS often includes these additions to the body points to a disparity in the arguments that assume SRS is equivalent in moral nature to the removal of a body part to restore health to the body or prevent a foreseen bodily harm. When evaluating the morality of SRS, it must be acknowledged that the intent is not just the removal of an organ but also the transformation of the body to represent the other biological sex. This distinction supports the conclusion that Bayley's and Gremmels's arguments depend on a dualistic anthropology that is incompatible with Catholic anthropology.

### **Implications of this Work for Future Dialogue**

It is important to evaluate John Paul II's philosophical and theological framework because of his influence on Catholic morality and his affirmation of the Church's understanding of the human person as a body-soul unity. Looking to future dialogue, if SRS is to be considered morally permissible in the Catholic tradition, either it must be understood as upholding the body-soul unity of the person or Catholic anthropology itself will need to be altered. The latter is unlikely, as no reason is offered for it. Any future arguments for the permissibility of SRS that have at their core a dualistic anthropology like that of Bayley and Gremmels will continue to contradict the traditional understanding of the body-soul unity of the human person and thus ultimately fail as justifications for SRS within the Catholic moral framework.

There is more to be discovered about the nature of gender dysphoria and SRS. It will be important for Catholic ethicists to engage new research as they continue to discuss the morality of SRS. John Paul II gives us a model for bringing current scientific knowledge into dialogue with a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person.<sup>42</sup> As future research is conducted, new arguments for the permissibility of SRS in Catholic health care will inevitably be offered. Following John Paul II's precedent, it would be wise for scholars who propose these arguments to critically examine whether they presuppose or perpetuate a body-soul dualism. As I have shown in this article, if an argument for SRS is based on body-soul dualism, then the argument cannot be reconciled with Catholic anthropology, and SRS must remain illicit.

*Evangelium vitae* gives moral theologians and ethicists an important reminder for future dialogue about SRS: "Life on earth is not an 'ultimate' but a 'penultimate' reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters."<sup>43</sup>

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42. For an example, see the chapter titled "Sexology and Ethics" in *Love and Responsibility*.

43. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, n. 2.