

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON WOJTYLA'S PERSONALIST ETHICS

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to situate the ethics of Karol Wojtyla in the context of personalist philosophy - a 20th century philosophical and theological movement that seeks to investigate reality from the point of view of the human person. Personalism places persons and personal relationships at the center of theory and practice and explores the significance of personhood across a variety of disciplines and traditions. Personalist understanding of the person rests on a "belief in the primordial uniqueness of the human being, and thus in the basic irreducibility of the human being to the natural world."¹ In terms of methodology, personalism takes into consideration the data gathered by empirical sciences and our lived experiences as part of our community. It "is fundamentally phenomenological in character and is based upon descriptions of our observation and participation in reality."² It acknowledges the "mysterious character of human existence. This recognition, however, does not eliminate the possibility of investigating the human person, but it does affirm that no theory or set of insights can ever fully explain human person who is an infinitely complex subject."³ Personalism rejects relativistic and utilitarian ethical views that place the moral choice not on the person but on values external to the person. It "proposes that in any issue where man is involved the principal concern has to be the individual person and not man as an object, a thing."⁴ While not to be thought of exclusively as a moral philosophy, most personalist philosophies place strong emphasis on ethical concerns. This is because the distinct feature of this system is the affirmation that "human dignity and the intrinsic value of persons are revealed in human experience. Personalist philosophers maintain that

¹ Karol Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, trans. By Theresa Sandok OSM (USA: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1993), p. 211

² Joseph Selling, "Is a Personalist Ethic Necessarily Anthropocentric?" *Ethical Perspectives*, vol. 6 no. 1, 1999, p. 61

³ Colin Donovan, "The Thought of Pope John Paul II." <http://www.ewtn.com/jp2/papal3/thought.htm> 2004

⁴ "Dictionary of Key Terms for a Free and Virtuous Society." <http://www.acton.org> 2004

experience ought to be the starting point for the philosophical analysis of the person.”⁵ Some prominent personalist thinkers are Emil Brunner, Emmanuel Mounier, Martin Buber, Max Scheler, and Gabriel Marcel.

At the outset, it must be clarified that this paper is not a systematization of the ethics of Wojtyla per se for there is no such thing as Wojtyla's ethics that can be set apart from other ethical systems in general or Christian ethics in particular. Wojtyla did not develop his own “original” ethical system or philosophy. As many critics have pointed out, Wojtyla’s philosophical project can be best described as incomplete. His work is a picture of Aristotelian-Thomism enriched by phenomenological analysis of the human person. He develops a phenomenology of the subject grounded on a personalist principle. “This principle is an attempt to translate the commandment of love into the language of philosophical ethics. The person is a being for whom the only suitable dimension is love. We are just to a person if we love him. This is as true for God as it is for man. Love for a person excludes the possibility of treating him as an object of pleasure.”⁶ The person is never to be treated as a means, but always as an end in itself, and must not be subordinated to other lesser ends or values.

WOJTYLA’S CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE

Wojtyla seeks to harmonize divergent contemporary ethical theories by appealing to an integrally conceived experience of morality that lies at the basis of ethics. In dealing with morality, Wojtyla rejects two extreme views: radical empiricism and radical rationalism. The first is also called sensualism where ethical norms become irrelevant. Instead, the focus is on what in a given social group is descriptively considered morally good or evil. The second, also known as apriorism, claims that the human reason is the exclusive source of morality – anything that pertains to human experience is denied. The division between empiricism and apriorism is one “that allows for no reconciliation, a split in which the cohesiveness and unity of philosophy cannot survive.”⁷

Experience for Wojtyla is an immediate knowledge of a designated area or facts.⁸ Thus, human experience has two constitutive elements: cognitive and ontological, there is a sense of knowing, and a sense of what is known (that which is real). The act of cognition and reality are inseparable, and this explains the tendency of the human intellect to seek the truth. But amidst the manifold experiences of every individual human, there emerge a fundamental experience that does not only underlie all human experiences but is also presupposed in all of the latter, and that is the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, Crossing the Threshold of Hope.
<http://www.catholic.net/RCC/POPE/HopeBook/chapt.30.html> 2004

⁷ Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 108

⁸ Karol Wojtyla, The Acting Person, <http://www.i-logic.com/personalism/jp2/actingperson.htm> 2004

experience of human ⁹ where the person is both the subject and the object, the knower and the known simultaneously. This shows that human experiences, while varied and multiple, are not totally isolated and momentary. In experience of human, the person as a subject is not only the knower as opposed to the known, she is knowable and known (object) as a subject. This experience is integral (both subjective and objective) and deeply personal. Part of experience of human is the ethical that has its own intelligible content: the experience of what is good or bad. "Ethical experience forms a certain structural whole, which cannot be split up into logical and psychological elements, the investigation of which is then reduced to the methods of logic and psychology."¹⁰ The grounding of ethics on experience of human is essential for Wojtyla in order to maintain the realism of ethics.

"In this concept of ethics, the main "knowledge-generating" role will be played directly by an explanation of the data of experience."¹¹ The human mind plays an active role in experience. That is why every experience is also a form of primary or primordial understanding. In this manner, it can be the starting point for further understanding or interpretation, i.e. it can be deepened and enriched through reflection on many other experiences. By ascribing such a role to the mind in experience, Wojtyla not only shows his opposition to an extremely empirical conception of experience but, as it were, does away with the distinction between experience and interpretation. "The exploration of the experience of man ought to be a cognitive process in which the original apprehension of the person in and through his actions is continuously and homogenetically developed. At the same time, this first apprehension has to be enriched and consistently extended and developed."¹²

According to Wojtyla, interpretation of experience of human and morality should proceed according to Aristotelian induction.¹³ "Induction consists in grasping mentally the unity of meaning from among the multiplicity and complexity of phenomena."¹⁴ The role of induction is to provide unity amidst the diversity and plurality of human experiences. The phrase experience of human includes not just the experience of one individual but the experience of all human beings. Wojtyla emphasizes both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of analysis of experience of human, saying that the more we analyze the latter, the richer our knowledge of the person becomes. While our interpretation of another's experience is indirect (as opposed to direct and

⁹ "Experience of human" is not a well-formed English phrase, and "experience of humanity" tends exclusively toward the collective and misses a crucial individual aspect of Wojtyla's thought. However, it seems to be the best gender-neutral equivalent of the phrase "experience of man" of Wojtyla as it can be at once individual of oneself, of another human and of what is common to humanity. <https://michaelbrennen.com> › 2009/08/17 › karol-wojtyla-what-is-a-person 2009

¹⁰ Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 42

¹¹ Ibid., p. 113

¹² Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

¹³ Andrzej Szostek, "Karol Wojtyla's view of The Human Person," <http://www.crvp.org> 2004

¹⁴ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

immediate knowledge of our own), two factors make the experience of others accessible. These are our relation or closeness to the person and our involvement in her experience. “Action, he says, can be performed by human individuals together with others. The expression acting together with others indicates the communal or social quality inherent in the nature of a person.”¹⁵

Human person and morality can be known both by way of external and internal experience.¹⁶ The internal experience, however, retains its specific priority. It is in this realm that we experience our own “humanness,” i.e. what makes us human persons. However, external experience, which is our experience of the external world, also presupposes the experience of human because we experience, and thus interpret, our world from a human perspective. We do not only react instinctively to external stimuli. We always give human meaning and context to all our external experiences according to our specific situatedness. “Man’s experience of anything outside himself is always associated with the experience of himself, and he never experiences anything external without having at the same time the experience of himself.”¹⁷ Even in some cases when our reaction is immediate and instant as when we respond to pain caused by an external object, these reactions can be and are often followed by thoughtful self-awareness. In almost all of human experiences, the person is aware that she is the subject of all them. Thus, though varied and individuated, human experiences share a similar character. From different experiences of many individuals, it is possible to make a synthesis and arrive at a common experience. “The implication of these experiences (i.e. of man and of morality) is mutual and two-fold. Because of the strict connection (though not identity) found between their objects. One could thus reflect upon what the general experience of man says about morality and vice-versa, what vision of man is revealed by the experience of morality.”¹⁸ On the one hand, analysis of our ethical experience leads to understanding the essential features of the person as a phenomenological being and on the other, analysis of experience of human leads to understanding the essential features of morality.

WOTYLA’S CONCEPT OF THE PERSON

The human person can be analyzed from the subjective and the objective points of view. The two perspectives, though limited for they fail to capture the wholeness of the concrete, particular, and historical person, contain some elements of truth. The human person is a subject in as much as she is an object. Unfortunately, “most philosophical, scientific and theological studies have treated human beings as the objects who are known, rather than the subjects who know.”¹⁹ For Wojtyla, this dichotomy in the final analysis must be reduced to experience of human, which is both subjective and objective.

¹⁵ Rolyn Francisco, Karol Wojtyla’s Theory of Participation, (Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1995), p. 1

¹⁶ Szostek, Op. Cit.

¹⁷ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

¹⁸ Francisco, Loc. Cit.

¹⁹ Donovan, Op. Cit.

From the objective standpoint, man is defined as a “rational animal” following the Aristotelian tradition. This definition, however is purely cosmological and reduces man to a mere part of the world. This is the basic limitation of the objective approach. While it is valuable as far as science is concerned, “Man... is irreducible, and this irreducibility is identified with the subjectivity of man as a person.”²⁰ From the subjective standpoint, man as a person cannot be defined in so far as his being is not analyzable like any other object. It means that the human essence cannot be dissected, scrutinized, classified, or categorized, it can only be manifested and described. “To refer to the person as the noblest variety of Aristotelian First substance which can be subject but not predicate is merely to notice a rule of logic and to adduce incommunicability as the chief property of person is to express uniqueness without any way saying how that uniqueness is unique.”²¹

Philosophically, the person is often defined as “a concrete man, the *individua substantia* of the classical Boethian definition. The concrete is in a way tantamount to the unique, or at any rate, to the individualized. The concept of the person is broader and more comprehensive than the concept of the individual just as the person is more than individualized nature.”²² While this definition clearly complies with the Aristotelian requirement of a real definition (that which expresses the thing’s genus and specific difference), it does not express the richness of the person. This is because the Thomistic-Boethian definition or any definition of the person for that matter, implies that the person is part of a genus, a member of an aggregate. Wojtyla argues that the person is a totality, not just a part. As an individual, she is a unique being who is not universalizable or logically divisible into categories. On the other hand, the Aristotelian definition of man as a rational animal reduces man to the level of nature. Granted that the person is partly an animal, his animality cannot be reduced to that of the brute. Whatever characteristics the person possesses that he shares with animals participate in his rationality. Aristotle fails to define man as a subject and consequently, as a person.

The completeness of the concept of person consists “neither in the concept of the rational nature nor that of its individualization. Rather the completeness of the ontological structure of the person consists in the dynamic nature of being as existing and as acting.”²³ When dealing with the person, it is not enough to view him as a thing. This results in, at best partial truth. The philosophies behind Nazism, communism, materialism, totalitarianism, and evolutionism have had

²⁰ Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 13. For Wojtyla, subjectivity and irreducibility of the person are synonymous.

²¹ Austin Fagothey, “Conscience a Principle of Moral Action,” <http://www.crvp.org/books> 2004. The incommunicability that we find at the depths of personal being is “not a relative but an absolute incommunicability... Each person has an essential something that only he or she can have, or rather can be, an essential something that would forever be lost in the world, leaving a kind of irreparable hole in it, if the person embodying it would go out of existence altogether.” Peter Colosi, “The Uniqueness of the Person in the Life and Thought of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II, with Emphasis on his Indebtedness to Max Scheler,” *Karol Wojtyla’s Philosophical Legacy*, ed by George McLean et al, (Cardinal Station: CRVP, 2008), p. 73

²² Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, Op. Cit.

²³ Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 16

no difficulty in reducing human beings to objects of the state, of evolution, of capital, or of some other collective force, thereby depersonalizing and dehumanizing human beings. Personalism proposes that in any issue where human beings are involved the principal concern has to be the existing individual person and not man as an object or a thing. In order to understand the person, it is necessary to emphasize her subjectivity, uniqueness, and dynamism. The person is not only the subject of her own existence, but of her own dynamism too. “Man as a person is constituted metaphysically as a being through his own subject. He is the one who exists and acts from the beginning.”²⁴ He is not simply an individualized humanness. Consequently, his experience cannot be detached from himself and from his cognition of his actions. Thus, while we understand man as a rational animal, as a person, he is the subject, the suppositum that underlies all his actions as well as those that happen in him, of all dynamisms that transpire in him. Moreover, the person as subject-supposit is primarily an individual, concrete, existing being. “The supposit is first of all given as real, actually existing being, the man-being that actually exists and hence also really acts. Experience reveals the man-subject as the one who is, exists and acts as the subject of his own existence and action. As the philosophical axiom puts it: *operari sequitur esse*, whereby *operari* is meant all dynamisms derived not only from the fact of acting but also from all those which happen in man.”²⁵

“Reflection upon experiences accents the unique aspects of being human, namely consciousness and freedom.”²⁶ Consciousness is central in our understanding of the person as a subject. It is through consciousness that the person experiences herself as a subject, i.e. she experiences herself as a self who reveals herself to her own self by the processes of reflexion and interiorization. The essential attributes of the person are consciousness, freedom and self-determination. These attributes involve reflexion and interiorization because first, the human person fulfills herself by rising above the level of sentience and materiality. She moves from the external world to the internal, she returns to her innermost self, to the depth dimension of her being where she totally possesses herself and experiences her own thinking and willing. Reflection denotes “that consciousness, so to speak, turns back naturally upon the subject and discloses it to itself, revealing it to itself in its specific distinctness and unique concreteness and allows the person to experience in a special way his own subjectivity and to experience his actions as his own.”²⁷ Wojtyla is adamant in stressing that the person is an end in itself and can never be regarded as a means to an end. Self-determination then, is essential to the person.

However, the human self is not reducible to consciousness. The person experiences herself as a subject through consciousness. Thus, the person is constituted as a subject through the merging of consciousness and experience. For Wojtyla, this is the authentic subjectivity of the person. It signifies the person’s irreducibility, that she is unique and unrepeatable. He grounds the person’s subjectivity in metaphysics. As a subject, the person is a *suppositum*. As a subject of his own action

²⁴ Wojtyla, Person and Community: Selected Essays Op. Cit., p. 54

²⁵ Melchor Montalbo, Work and Man’s Self-Realization (From Rerum Novarum to Laborem Exercens), (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas, 1987), p.65

²⁶ “Dictionary of Key Terms for a Free and Virtuous Society.” <http://www.acton.org>

²⁷ Ibid p. 72

and experience, his essence is revealed through the latter. She cannot be detached from her experience or vice-versa. This is metaphysical, not in the sense of being extraphenomenal but rather transphenomenal.

Wojtyla warns that consciousness is not the essence of the person but merely his aspect, i.e. one of the acts of his being. “When consciousness is absolutized, then one ceases to account for the subjectivity of man, that is to say, his being the subject. Subjectivism conceives consciousness itself as a total and exclusive subject – the subject of experiences and values, so far as the domain of moral experience is concerned.”²⁸ What Wojtyla finds objectionable in Husserl’s phenomenology is its leaning toward idealism or subjectivism, especially with its notion of pure consciousness. Subjectivism is a mental attitude that tends to separate consciousness from experience, thereby absolutizing consciousness. The tendency to withdraw to the direction of pure subjectivity is characteristic of philosophy of consciousness.²⁹ When this happens, consciousness ceases to account for the subjectivity of the person and instead becomes a substitute for it. “Consciousness is understood realistically when it is connected with the person’s being as its subject, when it is an act of this being. Consciousness divorced from the being of the person and treated as an autonomous subject of activity is consciousness understood idealistically.”³⁰

SOME NOTES ON THE ETHICS OF WOJTYLA

1. Morality is a modality of action. Action may be categorized as internal or external. The former refers to our internal act of willing and thinking. External actions, on the other hand, are our bodily activities directed toward objects outside of us. While morality is rooted in internal actions, majority of external actions connote internal actions as well. They imply not only a choice of objects, but a choice of values, and in the end, a choice of the kind of person one intends to become. “In man’s reaching outside of himself towards objects that he is presented with as goods –and thus values- there is his simultaneous moving back into his ego, the closest and the most essential object of self-determination.”³¹ Every act of the person in so far as it involves intention, has a moral dimension. This brings to mind the traditional distinction in Christian ethics between human act - (*actus humanus*) and acts of man. Only human acts are moral because they involve knowledge and voluntariness. Acts of man are “events that happen to us” without our willing or knowing. In view of consistency, we will use the term human act/actions to refer to those actions that are performed with intention and voluntariness.

2. Morality is a conduct related to the person. “Every human act involves a particular lived experience that goes by the name ethical experience. The awareness that I am performing a certain action, that I am its author, brings with it a sense of responsibility for the moral value of that action.

²⁸ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

²⁹ Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” Review of Metaphysics, vol. 33, December 1979

³⁰ Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 54

³¹ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

I then experience myself, my own person as the efficient cause of the moral good or evil in the action, and through this I experience the moral good or evil of my own person.”³²

3. The dynamism disclosed in experience of human (when I act) is manifested in two distinct ontological structures that are distinguished in terms of moments of efficacy: (1) man acts, (2) something-happens-in-man. There is a difference between deliberate man-acts and something-happens-in-man. In the former, the person is conscious of his agency, in contrast to the latter where there is no awareness of himself being an agent. The difference between the two, therefore, lies in the moment of efficacy, which is the experience of being an agent or actor – one who performs the act, i.e. its efficient cause. In man-acts, there is the consciousness of being the agent who is responsible for one’s own action. Again, the difference between the two is grounded on experience of human.

4. As a modality, morality has a twofold nature. The first is that in relation to morally good and bad and in this respect, morality has an axiological nature. But as an act of the person, morality has an ontological nature. This is the reason why for Wojtyła, it seems that even a bad act has a personalist dimension. It is still an act of the person. But while the human person is fulfilled ontologically in his action whether this is good or bad, man can only be fulfilled axiologically through morally good actions. This is what authentic fulfillment of the person consists of for Wojtyła. As the person’s action may be good or bad, so the human person may also be good or bad depending on her actions.

5. Action is a particular moment in the apprehension of the person. “Action gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully.”³³ Because person and action constitute a single cohesive entity, action is that which can bring about fulfillment to the person.³⁴ The relation between the two is manifested in experience of human. Only a person can perform human actions, thus, such actions cannot exist without the person.

6. Moral value deepens our insight into the person. Since every human act presupposes the person and the latter is revealed in the former, the moral dimension that is inherent in every human act enriches our understanding of the person who is a moral being in as much as his act has the quality of being good or bad. Analysis of experience of human will eventually lead to moral discussion. The concepts good and bad do not only qualify human action but they also modify the person. “The concept of morality is connected with moral good and evil, with the occurrence of moral good and evil in a given subject, namely a person. The person is not only the subject in which moral good and evil occur but also the efficient cause of that good and evil.”³⁵ This is the reason why anthropology and ethics cannot be separated. The reality of the person cannot just be presupposed in ethics. On the contrary, anthropological discussion is also moral while morality is rooted in the very nature of the person.

³² Wojtyła, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 23

³³ Wojtyła, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Wojtyła, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 97

7. Morality exists because of the possibility of subordinating to the truth our relation to various goods. Truth is the object of human reason. The human being is by nature rational, is a person, an individual of a rational nature, and so morality is something natural and necessary for the human being. A human being must subordinate to the truth the various goods with which he or she is involved in acting, thereby also subordinating the activity itself to the truth. Morality is an irrevocable aspect of human act (*actus humanus*).

8. While Wojtyla accepts the Thomistic definition of human act (*actus humanus*) as action that is done by man freely and knowingly, he goes beyond the Thomistic terminology. For him, human act is not only the act that is proper to man as man (i.e. rational being), it is also proper to him as a person, i.e. a subjective being. “The action as an *actus humanus* reveals the inwardness and in-selfness of the person and also activates the self-possession and self-governance proper to the structure of the person.”³⁶ Action does not presuppose the person, on the contrary, the person is revealed in his action because it is through his action that the dynamism of his being is manifested. Dynamism refers “primarily to that actual dynamization of the man-subject which issues from within and may have the form either of acting or happening.”³⁷ Human dynamism manifests itself in two forms: as man-acts and as something-happens-in-man.

9. Only man-acts can be properly considered as *actus humanus* in the Thomistic sense. Wojtyla explains:

When acting I have the experience of myself as the agent responsible for this particular form of dynamization of myself as the subject. When there is something happening in me, then the dynamism is imparted without the efficacious participation of my ego. This is precisely the reason why we speak of the facts of the latter kind as of something-that-happens in man, indicating thereby that then the dynamism is not accomplished by efficacy, by that in the dynamism of man there appears the essential difference arising from having the experience of efficacy. On the other hand, there is that form of human dynamism in which man himself is the agent that is to say, he is the conscious cause of his causation; this form we grasp by the expression man-acts. On the other hand, there is that form of human dynamism in which man is not aware of his efficacy and does not experience it; this we express by something-happens-in-man.³⁸

10. While man-acts and something-happens-in-man are fundamentally different and opposed to each other, they are inseparable from each other. Wojtyla bases this proposition on the Aristotelian doctrine on act and potency – they are logically opposite but at the same time, correlated. The latter is actualized by the former. But actualization is a process. In so far as a being is “being actualized,” he is in a state of becoming, he is neither in full act nor in complete potency. “The structure of man-acts and something-happens-in-man constitutes the concrete manifestation of the dynamism proper to man...Wojtyla regards man’s acting as well as what happens in man to be the fulfillment

³⁶Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 232

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

of a potentiality. Potentiality he says refers to the source itself of the dynamism in man which is inherent and ceaselessly pulsating in man's dynamization. Every human dynamism implies a potentiality as its source."³⁹ As a person acts, he is also reacting and being acted upon in a sense that human act does not take place in a vacuum. In short, the dynamic nature of the person is revealed both in his experience of man-acts and something-happen-in-man. "Man's actions just as much as the things that happen to him, provide all in their own way, the realization of the dynamism that is proper to the human subject."⁴⁰ It is this very dynamism that Wojtyla tries to capture that makes him conclude that no definition can fully encapsulate the essence of the person and no single theory is sufficient to fully express and explain the richness of her being. The "who" of the person is a "becoming" that cannot be defined, it can only be described.

11. Conscious action implies that action is related to and a characteristic of the will. Any action pertaining to the will must be conscious. We see here the influence of phenomenology to Wojtyla. Intentionality of consciousness states that consciousness is consciousness of something other than consciousness itself. Consciousness then is not an independent entity. Consciousness should be understood in relation to "Action, to the dynamism and efficacy of the person."⁴¹

12. Consciousness constitutes the subjective dimension of the person. It is through consciousness that the person constitutes himself as an ego with its mirroring or reflexive function. Through consciousness, the person experiences his own self and his action. It is through consciousness that he becomes an acting person. He is aware that he is the author of his action and the cause of its concomitant effects. Owning his own act, he assumes responsibility for everything he wills and does. "For a man who acts consciously is not only the author of the act and its effects, but, through the will, as an attribute of the person, determines essentially his or her potentiality."⁴²

13. Wojtyla's treatment of human action is more anthropological than ethical. While the Thomistic treatment of human act focuses on its moral aspect in line with its voluntariness and deliberateness that determine the responsibility of the agent, Wojtyla treats human action phenomenologically, as something that expresses and reveals the human agent as the self-conscious cause of it. He likewise makes it clear that the personalist dimension of an act must be differentiated from the moral.

14. Freedom is essential in morality. Wojtyla emphasizes the importance for the person to fulfill himself as this is his moral obligation. At the same time, stress is given on the need to arrive at a personal decision in moral matters. It is important for the person to view moral norms as his own rather than being imposed on him from the outside. "Wojtyla leaves much room for personal dissent from the norms of ethics. The fundamental value of norms lies in the truthfulness of the good they objectify and not in the generation itself of duties. The real issue is not so much the objective truthfulness of norms as the experience of their truthfulness leading to conviction or

³⁹ Francisco, Op. Cit., pp. 26-27

⁴⁰ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 32

subjective certitude and the sense of obligation. Obligation and experience of truth are strictly concomitant.”⁴³

15. Obligation is not possible when a person is deprived of freedom. There is no opposition between the two. Obligation is the outcome of experience of truth. Man’s dignity precisely lies in the recognition of the fullness of truth about the person.

MORAL VALUE, DIGNITY, AND CONSCIENCE

1. Wojtyla’s phenomenological reflection on the person leads him to the discovery of values. “In experiencing his action, man discovers values – he neither fashions nor invents them.”⁴⁴ This is in contrast to many existentialists who claim that human beings are the creator of values. For Wojtyla, we can only speak of the person being the source of values in terms of their efficacy. Like other Catholic ethicists, Wojtyla gives emphasis on hierarchical nature of values. Although the person experiences many values, he “esteems more the higher ones, expressing his conviction that they will bring him closer to the objective good – that in themselves, they contain more of the good.”⁴⁵

2. “Moral value draws its binding power from the norm of morality, which is man as person together with the dignity that belongs to him.”⁴⁶ The ethical experience of a person is an important manifestation of "who" he or she is. Moral value is different from other kinds of values precisely because it appeals to man's distinctive character as a subjective being, i.e. as a person. Moral value derives its normative binding power from its essential link to the good of the person.

3. “Moral value refers directly to act and through action, reaches its author.”⁴⁷ Our awareness that we are acting-persons leads to our awareness of our responsibility for our action. This is the logical consequence of the inseparable bond between the act and the person. In a way, his action is non-transferable that makes him fully accountable for it. Of course, this depends on his willing it. Responsibility implies freedom in doing the act and being aware of its nature and effects. This is a basic tenet of traditional ethics. Since human act can be willed either perfectly or imperfectly (perfectly and imperfectly voluntary act), “Wojtyla employs this distinction in order to ascribe culpability or merit from both the objective and subjective angles. Objectively, a given act is definitively attributed to its author and categorized under a norm... Subjectively, we consider the degree to which a person really understood or was in control of what he did – the degree of

⁴³ Ibid., p. 38

⁴⁴ Peter Kwasniewski, *A Philosophy of Action and Love*, <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/7-8-98/PHILOSOPHY2.html> 2004

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Szostek, Op. Cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

ignorance and dominion, in traditional terms – and thus to what extent he can be held morally responsible for the act.”⁴⁸

4. “The choice of moral value is essentially a choice of oneself, of one's moral profile.”⁴⁹ There is an essential link or connection between the moral choice and the one who chooses that shows the foundation of moral values in the person himself and explains their specificity. “The normative foundation of values, their reference to act, and from act to the person, their special double character as object-oriented and subject-oriented and finally the mark of apodictic obligation – all these show that the proper position of moral value is the theory of "medium quo": by experiencing these, we experience the dignity of the person to which these values point by their entire structure.”⁵⁰

5. Through act that is either morally good or morally bad, the person becomes either morally good or bad. Morality is a modality of conduct that is intrinsically connected to the person. The person does not experience fulfillment in bad actions. Fulfillment lies in doing what is good and avoiding what is bad. Even though I can exercise my self-determination in killing someone and the act determines me into a certain kind of person (i.e. being a killer), it does not bring fulfillment to my personhood. Fulfillment and efficacy of action are not one and the same. Through man's freedom, he may bring fulfillment to his being or he may choose not to. Not even God will interfere with his use of freedom. But freedom is dependent on the specific mode of truth and good. Truth and good are reversible. Human freedom cannot be absolutized to the extent that it leads to the non-fulfillment of the person. This is the abuse of freedom. The judgment by which a subject recognizes the truth about herself and summons herself to acknowledge this truth by a morally good act is the judgment of conscience.

6. The function of conscience is not just on the cognitive level. It “consists of distinguishing the element of moral good in the action and releasing and forming a sense of duty with respect to this good. The sense of duty is the experiential form of the reference to the moral truth, to which the freedom of the person is subordinate.”⁵¹ Conscience does not only provide the subjective norm to which an act should conform, more than this, conscience relates the action to the recognition of the truth. It motivates the person to surrender himself to the moral good, thus, leading him from self-determination to self-fulfillment, and finally self-transcendence.

7. For Wojtyla, conscience is a necessary condition for the person's fulfillment in action. Such fulfillment is realized in the individual's recognition of the moral value of the action (the axiological nature of morality) and in the authentic exercise of freedom as it surrenders to the truth and the good. In doing so, the individual does not only fulfill the good and the moral action, she also fulfills herself as a person.

⁴⁸ Kwasniewski, Op. Cit.

⁴⁹ Szostek, Op. Cit.

⁵⁰ Kwasniewski, Op. Cit.

⁵¹ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

8. Through conscience, the person recognizes the truth of the moral value. It opens the door, therefore toward transcendence. It is conscience that enables the person to transcend herself and freely surrender to the truth. Conscience, therefore, “is a necessary condition of man’s fulfillment of himself in the action. The person fulfills himself both in the ontological and the axiological or ethical sense.”⁵² It shows that moral goodness and truth are one and the same so that truth acquires a normative character while goodness implies a cognitive demand. In other words, truth must be done (moral dimension) and the good should be known (cognitive dimension). The role of ethics is to establish the truthfulness of human conscience.

When man acts, therefore, he always acts in regard to (or in disregard of) the truth of things. As a consequence, the will in its moral acts is objectively bound to honor the truth of things discerned by reason: this unavoidable and necessary (as proceeding from the very nature of man) participation of truth in the action and existence of man constitutes the very essence of a moral norm, which St. Thomas conceives existentially.... Reason which is naturally related to the will, must also search for the truth in everything that the will strives after in each of its actions.⁵³

9. Dignity belongs essentially to the full truth about the person so that it is impossible to talk about knowing the person if we fail to take into account the obvious imperative to treat her as an end in itself, to treat every person as a being who, by reason of her own autoteleology, cannot be subordinated to other ends. This imperative is indeed included in our knowledge of the person. “The human person may never be evaluated as though he were merely an animal, a sociological stick figure, a consumer in the artificial world of economic forces, a piece of raw material upon which government agencies or global organizations can operate in the manner of laboratory technicians.”⁵⁴

10. The following quotation shows the dynamic relationship between freedom and truth:

Freedom untethered from truth is freedom’s worst enemy. For there is only your truth and my truth, and neither one of us recognizes a transcendent moral standard by which to adjudicate our differences, then the only way to settle the argument is for you to impose your power on me, or for me to impose my power on you. Freedom untethered from truth leads to chaos; chaos leads to anarchy; and since human beings cannot tolerate anarchy, tyranny as the answer to the human imperative of order is just around the corner. The false humanism of the freedom of indifference leads to freedom’s decay, and then to freedom’s demise.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Kwasniewski, Op. Cit.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ George Weigel, *John Paul II and the Crisis of Humanism*, <http://www.firstthings.com> 2004

11. The rootedness of freedom in truth is a constant theme in the papal writings of Wojtyla (a.k.a. John Paul II). In *Redemptor Hominis*, he writes, “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free. These words contain both fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world.”⁵⁶ In *Veritatis Splendor*, Wojtyla argues that human freedom is the most frequently debated issue of today. He condemns some trends in contemporary ethics that propose new criteria for evaluating the morality of human action. “Certain currents of thoughts have gone so far as to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes absolute, which would then be the source of values. This is the direction taken by doctrines which have lost the sense of the transcendent or which are explicitly atheist. The individual conscience is accorded the status of a supreme tribunal of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions about good and evil.”⁵⁷

12. Authentic human freedom is not the freedom to do anything, but the freedom to do good. The former is the abuse or perversion of freedom, the latter its perfection. We possess freedom only when we go beyond the limits of our hedonistic, instinctive, and narrow-individualist selfishness and reach out to that which reason perceives as objectively good and true, even if it is contrary to our self-inclination. Otherwise, we are only slaves to our own self-centered desires. Doing what is good does not diminish freedom but rather, perfects it. “Moral law as known by reason does not constrain us, it leaves us physically and psychologically free either to obey or to violate it. But if we reject the true good, we inevitably yield to the passions and instincts of our lower nature and thereby undermine our authentic freedom. To act freely against the truth is to erode freedom itself.”⁵⁸

13. Conscience is not an autonomous faculty. To say otherwise is to affirm moral anarchy. “The conscience is no lawmaker, it does not itself create norms; rather it discovers them, as it were in the objective order of morality of law.”⁵⁹ The recognition of the moral goodness triggers not just an intellectual consent but a moral sense of duty. This does not mean that the person is merely passive in such state of recognition. On the contrary, he is very active. The person accepts in freedom the objective norm of law thereby forming “the strength of the subjective conviction.” This means that what is an objectively good act becomes a part of one’s subjectivity, it is incorporated in one’s subjective moral conviction. Therefore, there is no dichotomy between what is objective and subjective in the final analysis. In true morality, the two become one. There is no feeling of compulsion, passiveness, coercion, or merely “following”. This is the creative role of conscience. In *Veritatis Splendor*, Wojtyla warns that

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979 no. 35

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993 no. 32

⁵⁸ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “John Paul II and the Truth about Freedom,” <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1995/08/004-john-paul-ii-and-the-truth-about-freedom> 2006

⁵⁹ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, Op. Cit.

Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualistic ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.⁶⁰

14. The dignity of conscience is secured by its conformity to truth. "In any event, it is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives. In the case of the correct conscience, it is a question of the objective truth received by man; in the case of the erroneous conscience, it is a question of what man, mistakenly subjectively considers to be true. It is never acceptable to confuse a subjective error about moral good with the objective truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent of the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience.... Conscience as the ultimate concrete judgment, compromises its dignity when it is culpably erroneous, that is to say, when man shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind from being accustomed to sin."⁶¹ Sometimes it is tempting to free oneself from the consequences of the truth recognized about oneself (one's dignity), but this deforms one's value as a person.

15. "The basic recognition of human subjectivity emerges first from within oneself, from the consciousness of one's actions, which belongs strictly to oneself and to no other. This consciousness ultimately brings about what Wojtyla calls reflexiveness, that is, consciousness of conscience."⁶² Reflexiveness is defined as "to turn back naturally upon the subject and discloses it to itself, revealing it to itself in its specific distinctness and unique concreteness and allows the person to experience in a special way his own subjectivity and to experience his actions as his own."⁶³ It is through her conscience that the ego comes face to face with the Other and thereby recognizes her responsibility. This begins with my awareness of my own personhood leading to my awareness of my action, my being an acting-person, and in turn leads to my understanding of the consequences of my action to another person. Therefore, there is no opposition between the self and the Other. The Other shares in the dignity of personhood that exists in and understood through me. My ability to commune with the Other, appreciate her dignity and value depends on my appreciation of my own personhood. This is the very essence of the second evangelical

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 32

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 63

⁶² Kwasniewski, *Op. Cit.*

⁶³ Montalbo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 72

commandment, love your neighbor as you love yourself, and the very foundation of the golden rule.

16. The idea of moral value is likewise rooted in experience of human. “Ethical experience is not just an experience of value but also an experience of the realization of the good.”⁶⁴ We become conscious of the moral values that motivate our actions by reflecting on our experiences and understanding good versus bad.

17. In his conscience, man’s transcendence is realized. “It is in conscience where truth is made to be heard as the source of moral duty. Hence, man’s acts are directed by reference to truth, both willingly and freely chosen.”⁶⁵ Freedom is realized in that moment when conscience willingly choose the true good. To do what is good and avoid what is evil, the person has to transcend himself and go beyond the threshold of his being or its boundaries (*trans-scendere*) and orient himself to *bonum honestum*. Conscience, therefore is in no way opposed to the use of external sources of traditional and revealed wisdom. It seeks help from authority in forming its judgments. Far from being an exception to the general rule that freedom is oriented toward objective truth, the experience of conscientious decision-making confirms the rule that, Wojtyla as Pope expresses, the freedom of conscience is never freedom from truth but always and only freedom in truth.⁶⁶

18. In conscience, the transcendence and fulfillment of the person are synthesized. This clearly follows from the foregoing discussion. As stated, persons become either good or bad by the actions that they made. The person may or may not fulfill herself. Her conscience, therefore, by choosing what is good leads to self-fulfillment. “Self-fulfillment is not to be identified with fulfilling the act, but depends solely on the moral value of the act. I do not fulfill myself because I accomplish an act, but only because I become good when the act is morally good.”⁶⁷

Conscience in its function of urging man forward toward the perfection of love and the highest use of his freedom in the expression of his unique personality can hardly speak with any clearness at all. It shouts no commands, it thunders no accusations, it does not even wave us on with a gesture of permission All this belongs to its legal aspect. The conscience of love can only hint and beckon. This should not be surprising. If conscience is to suggest what we should do with our freedom, it must leave us free.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 42

⁶⁵ Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 34

⁶⁶ John Paul II Veritatis Splendor, no 64

⁶⁷ Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 37

⁶⁸ Fagothey, Op. Cit.

SELF-DETERMINATION, PARTICIPATION, AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PERSON

“The acting person reaches his highest state of fulfillment when he has actualized his personhood, when he has entered deeply into an awareness of his subjectivity and into the resulting hunger for truth, beauty, meaning, and self-contemplation, according to the objective order he has glimpsed by engaging the world with full commitment.”⁶⁹ Fulfillment is one’s responsibility to oneself. In a sense, the person is his or her own object. She is the master of her own destiny, her future depends on her own choice. This however, is not to be interpreted in an atheistic-existentialist manner where the person becomes a traveler, a forlorn being in this meaningless world. In man’s conscious action he cannot fail to direct himself toward his own self as the goal. He cannot direct himself toward external goals or values without determining himself and his values. Human action is auto-teleological in a sense that it is self-end and this self-end is self-determination. Self-determination is the ability of the person to move from the “I can or I need” to “I want or I will.” Every authentically human “I will” is an act of self-determination. The person is not a “something” but a “somebody.” Her existence is characterized by self-governance and self-possession. It is in the act of self-determination where the person becomes an agent, not only in terms of what she does to the external world, but also in terms of how she fashions and develops her unique personal being. In his 1976 Harvard lecture he said: “I possess self not so much through self-consciousness as through self-determination.”

However, the emphasis that Wojtyla gives on subjectivity does not lead him into solipsism. It is not that the person has no other end but himself. “Wojtyla understands auto-teleology or having one’s fulfillment as a goal, quite differently. Man achieves his proper end of self-completion only to the degree that he subjugates himself to a reality greater than his individual self. The greater reality is by nature transcendent, the changeless anchor of objectivity; it surpasses whatever limited reality resides in any individual.”⁷⁰ While the person has self-fulfillment as the primary goal of his action, his act leads to greater fulfillment if it is in conformity with the transcendent and objective truth. “Man as the person both lives and fulfills himself within the perspective of his transcendence.”⁷¹ Doing otherwise leads to lesser fulfillment. Fulfillment then does not lie in his own individual being.

Self-determination allows one to experience himself as the one who possesses himself. Self-determination has two aspects or “movements”: inwardness and outwardness.

Self-determination, which expresses itself in particular willing, transcends the pure intentionality of those willings. Intentionality points as though outward – toward an object, which by being a value attracts the will to itself. Self-determination, on the other hand, points as though inward – toward the subjects, which by willing this value by choosing it,

⁶⁹ Kwasniewski, Op. Cit.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

simultaneously defines itself as a value: the subject becomes “good” or “bad”... Thus corresponds to the becoming of a human being as human being.⁷²

In outwardness, the person pursues an object as a goal outside herself, and this happens whenever she makes a choice between values. Inwardness “means that in every actual act of self-determination – in every I will – the self is the object, indeed the primary and nearest object.”⁷³ Thus, in his self-determination, subjectivity is revealed. It is clear that Wojtyla’s notion of self-determination is a reaction to the Sartrean existentialist view that gives every human person the absolute freedom to determine his own essence. Sartre claims that we value what we choose. For Wojtyla, self-determination is auto-teleological, the person commits herself to values as ends that transcend herself. In choosing a value, the person also chooses herself. Self-determination is both object and subject oriented. But neither meaning nor truth is given in the intentionality of willing.

Nonetheless, there is something that Wojtyla and the existentialists have in common: the incompleteness of the person. The person for Wojtyla is not a closed structure. For the existentialists, existence precedes essence so that no human being is a *fiat accompli*. Wojtyla, following the traditional framework of act and potency, argues that the being of the person is in actualization, not in pure act which in Thomism is ascribed only to God’s nature. Actualization is a process from potency to act. Here, he agrees more with Aristotle than Aquinas in discussing the person’s incompleteness or “contingency.” Man is incomplete in as far as he is in the process of actualization, not just because he is created ex-nihilo, which for some traditional Thomists is the root of man’s ontological limitation. The act of self-determination for Wojtyla is more than a “doing”; it is a “becoming”. In deciding to move toward this or that value I am deciding about myself, whether by this act I become good or bad. In self-determination the ego or “I” encounters itself as object of its action. The self is revealed. In the act of self-determination one experiences oneself as a person. In self-determined actions that are directed toward others for their benefit, the acting person becomes more fully herself as a person, since only persons are able to make a disinterested gift of themselves to others. More than Aquinas, Wojtyla emphasizes the relational as well as the substantive character of the person as revealed in mature acts of self-giving.

By virtue of participation, self-awareness leads to the recognition of the Other. According to Wojtyla, the Other signifies not only separateness but also contact. The consciousness that the Other is a different “I” points to man’s capacity to participate in the humanity of the Other, and to make participation fundamentally possible. “The subject I experiences the relation to the You in the action whose object is You and vice versa. Through the action directed objectively toward the You, the subject I not only experiences himself in the relation to the You but also experiences his own self in a new way in his own subjectivity.”⁷⁴ Self-fulfillment and participation are therefore, complementary. The affirmation of the Other is the affirmation of oneself, of one’s own humanity. When “I” relates to a “You”, the I experiences and fulfills her personal subjectivity.

⁷² Wojtyla, Person and Community Selected Essays, Op. Cit., p. 192

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” Op. Cit., p. 295

Inasmuch as the “I” and the “You” are correlative and reciprocal, participation results in the mutual perfection of the persons involved. “When the You whom a definite other person has become for my I, makes me his or her You, that is when two people become for each other reciprocally I and You... we find the real specificity of the community which is proper to the interpersonal pattern I-You.”⁷⁵ The I-You relation opens a direct channel from one person to another and allows one to participate in the personhood of the Other. The person is not only capable of existing and acting together with others; he is also capable of participating in the very humanness of other persons. Aside from mutually enriching, authentic participation does not lead to diminishment of the I or the You for both retain the personalist value of their being and acting and are mutually confirmed in their respective unique subjectivities. For Wojtyla, humanity is not something abstract. It is realized in every person. Every person shares or participates in that humanity that everyone else possesses. To denigrate then, the personhood of one is to denigrate the personhood of all. It is in this way that we speak of crime against humanity. To treat a person in a sub-human way is to victimize every other being who participates in that personhood.

Wojtyla stresses that participation is the property of the person expressed in the realization of his potentiality to actualize himself in his existing and acting with others. It is therefore, an accident in the person and not his essence. Participation is the actual moment when the person performs an action together with others in such a way that she is not absorbed by the communal interplay but rather, fulfills herself and manifests her transcendence. It reveals a new dimension of herself as a person-in-relation-to. The fulfillment of the “I” (person as an individual) through participation should not be interpreted in a metaphysical sense. The person as an “I” is open to relationship with the “You” (or the other) to experience her individuality. The Other helps me to affirm my own individuality. Therefore, these two aspects – the affirmation of the person as a person and the sincere gift of self – not only do not exclude each other, they mutually confirm and complete each other. The person affirms herself most completely by the giving of herself.⁷⁶ This is the fulfillment of the commandment of love. This is also the full truth about the person. However, Wojtyla does not mean to say that the I is not intelligible without the You. It is not an affirmation of the “looking-glass theory” that denies the possibility of self-knowledge without the other. What he means is that the I is not isolated from the You and vice-versa, and therefore, it is an error to conceive their relationship as oppositional.

Participation, while it is obligatory for one’s self-fulfillment is always a matter of choice. Wojtyla recognizes the social nature of the person and her relational needs for self-fulfillment. But he is also very careful to insist that it must be done freely. Participation in social life that is

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 294

⁷⁶ Human freedom is the capacity of the person to commit herself to others. In his book Crossing the Threshold of Hope, Wojtyla explains that: *If we deprive human freedom of this possibility, if man does not commit himself to becoming a gift for others, then this freedom can become dangerous. It will become freedom to do what I myself consider as good, what brings me a profit or pleasure, even a sublimated pleasure. If we cannot accept the prospect of giving ourselves as a gift, then the danger of a selfish freedom will always be present. Kant fought against this danger, and along the same line so did Max Scheler and so many after him who shared his ethics of values. But a complete expression of all this is already found in the Gospel. For this very reason, we can find in the Gospel a consistent declaration of all human rights, even those that for various reasons can make us feel uneasy.*

enforced or imposed from the outside of an individual person is not a genuine one. It defeats the very purpose of participation. One must realize the fulfilment of participation from within herself, the person must freely choose social involvement as an actualization of her participative nature. Participation is not an involvement in an abstract ideology or in a preconceived collectivity, it must be with real and concrete persons who exist here and now. “It is a choice of that very human being among others, which after all resolves itself in the fact that this very human being among others is *hic et nunc* given to me, or also assigned to me.”⁷⁷

For Wojtyla, community or human society has a personalist meaning.⁷⁸ It is the product of reciprocal interaction between persons. It cannot exist apart from the persons who comprise it. Society is not a substantial being. The very ability of the person to participate in the humanity of others is the very core of human society. Human community involves interhuman and interpersonal relations. It is not merely a summation or conglomeration of people acting and living together. The action that each I performs is related to the realization of the common good. The community is objectively formed in virtue of its relation to the common good and it tends to form the true subjectivity of all its members. The many subjects acting together experience their subjectivity in a new way while at the same time realize their transcendence in the action and hereby fulfill themselves.⁷⁹ There is no intrinsic conflict between common good and the good of the person or between fulfillment and transcendence.

Participation is the ground of common good. Common good conceived as the goal of acting together can be seen in a two-fold manner. Objectively, it is the good of the community. But subjectively, it is that which is chosen by the person as his own good in as much as the good of the community redounds to his own benefit. “The common good becomes the good of the community in as much as it creates in the axiological sense the condition for the common existence which is then followed by acting.”⁸⁰ In a way, common good is superior to individual good. This is so because common good is the condition for the individual good. Through common good, the good of the person is realized and fulfilled. The community does not take away the individual good in favor of the common good for the latter redounds to the former. Therefore, there can be no real conflict between the two. Because of its superior value, persons may sometimes ‘sacrifice their own good for the good of the community.’ Wojtyla clarifies that “In no way, however, does this mean that personal sacrifice or the offering of one’s life for the common good is reduced to a simple shifting of values between the common good and the individual good in this or that community.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In The Acting Person, Wojtyla uses society and community interchangeably despite acknowledging the semantic differences indicated by sociologists. But he gives preference to the term community and classifies it into community of acting and community of being (Francisco, Op. Cit. p. 52).

⁷⁹ Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” Op. Cit., p. 298

⁸⁰ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

⁸¹ Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” Op. Cit., p. 301

Self-fulfillment of the person in society is possible by virtue of participation. Since participation is a property of the person, it allows individuals to remain as persons while they act with others. Social living becomes a project that every person must accomplish in order to experience fulfillment. In cooperating with others, the person shares in the realization and the benefits of communal living. But neither society nor the good of all can be considered as an end in itself. The person's actions undertaken in common with others do not lose the transcendence and the integration that characterize his action as an individual. He participates freely as a person and in doing so, realizes his self-fulfillment while at the same time and in the same manner, contributes to the good of the community. Wojtyla is insistent that the person as a subject can never be an object of anything. The total subordination of the person to society is vehemently opposed by Wojtyla. Although each person is a member of society, the latter can never be the end of human life. To assert this is to deny the intrinsic value of the person and her transcendent end. Individually, the person is part of humankind, a being-in-relation to others. But personally, the person transcends society and has fundamental rights that cannot be sacrificed for it.

Wojtyla condemns two extreme views: individualism and totalism. Individualism sees the good of the individual person as opposed to or in conflict with the welfare of the community so that the individual has to be protected by isolating him from others and subordinating the good of society to that of the individual. "It isolates the person from others by conceiving him solely as an individual who concentrates on himself and on his own good; this latter is also regarded in isolation from the good of others and the community."⁸² In the same manner, totalism views personal and social goods in conflict but on the contrary, it seeks to protect the good of society from the individual who is only after his self-interest. Individualism limits participation since it isolates the person from others by conceiving him solely as an individual who concentrates on himself and his own needs, regarding the latter in isolation from the good of others and the community. For an individualist, the Other is always a source of limitation. Both individualism and totalism deprive the person of the possibility of fulfilling herself in communal living. In the same manner, Wojtyla condemns two extreme views regarding the state: the opinion that the state must never intervene at all in socio-economic affairs of its citizens on the one hand, and the other that teaches that the state must have absolute control over all elements of society. A responsible balance between these two perspectives is possible and necessary so that the state may exercise its authority over certain aspects of social life to promote the good of all while respecting individual freedom and autonomy of private institutions.

An authentic human community is directed toward the fulfillment of its members. "Wojtyla points out the primacy of personal subjects. The community which is constituted by personal subjects comes secondary.... It means that we cannot say anything essential about the community without ascertaining as our point of departure, man's personal subjectivity."⁸³ The notion of community is "being or acting together with others." Acting together with others is a fundamental dimension of human action.⁸⁴ The community is a direct outcome of persons acting together. Thus,

⁸² Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

⁸³ Francisco, Op. Cit., p. 45

⁸⁴ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

the integrity of both political and economic spheres of communal living can be grounded on a concrete understanding of "acting together with others."

In order for participation in the community to take place, there are four basic or fundamental requirements of social living that Wojtyla mentions. These are solidarity, opposition, subsidiarity, and dialogue. These authentic social attitudes allow the actualization of participation and are contributory to the transcendence of the person.

CONCLUSION

The starting point of Wojtyla's analysis is that the person and morality can be known through experience. It is in our everyday experiences and interpersonal relationships that involve actions and choices that we encounter, reflect, examine and answer moral questions. His analysis of experience of morality brings to light the features characteristic of the human being as a person, and these features can be known only with difficulty through other experiences connected with other persons. The person is a subjective being who is "capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization."⁸⁵ Reflection on experience of human reveals the uniqueness of the person — her intelligence and freewill. She is essentially distinct from nonpersons; she is the subject of her own experiences and actions. Moreover, the person is also a relational being who has the capacity to transcend herself by considering the vantage point of others and finding fulfillment in self-giving.

The grounding of morality on experience is essential in order to maintain a realist perspective of moral norms and avoid the fundamental flaws of rationalism and relativism. Following the phenomenological method, Wojtyla claims that reality, including that of the human, is so rich, multi-faceted, and dynamic that no single method is sufficient to disclose all its features and mysteries. "In his sensitivity to the influence of culture, environment, and life history, Wojtyla denies the sufficiency of any system which analyzes human nature purely in the abstract, or which claims to be able to deduce human behavior from axioms and postulates."⁸⁶ This dynamism makes every person capable of changing herself and growing into a mature and responsible individual. No person is inherently good or bad.

Human action and the person cannot be separated. In his book The Acting Person, Wojtyla criticizes the traditional casuistic view of ethics that relegates the human person at the background of inquiry. He makes it clear that his work is more on philosophical anthropology than ethics (although it does have significant ethical implications), for the person and not action should be the focus of philosophy. The problem with traditional ethics is that we investigate the action of the

⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, no. 6

⁸⁶ See Kwasniewski, Op. Cit. However, the author clarifies Wojtyla's attitude toward phenomenology by quoting Wojtyla himself: *A Christian thinker, and specifically a theologian, although availing himself in his writings of the phenomenological experience, cannot however be a phenomenologist. Consistent phenomenology will reveal to him ethical values as appearing in the experience of the person on the occasion of acting. However, it will always be the task of a theologian-ethician to scrutinize the ethical value of human actions themselves, in the light of objective principles.*

person, and then presuppose the nature of the latter. What Wojtyla wants to accomplish is to investigate the person as he acts, i.e. man as an acting person. Person and action form a single, deeply cohesive reality that cannot be separated – only a person can perform rational action and every rational act is that of the human person. One does not become an individual until he experiences herself as an acting individual. The basis for understanding him or her must be sought in experience. The experience of any human action is an experience of the "I" that is doing the action. This doing is a personal action. It entails consciousness of being a rational subject and an agent who is responsible for the action as good or bad. Wojtyla stresses the importance of analyzing the whole range of experience of human in light of the person's self-actualization.

An important implication of Wojtyla's analysis of the acting-person is the affirmation of the person's auto-teleology. Every act leads to an end, which is the realization of intention, its fruition. Guided by her conscience, the person determines and fulfills herself ontologically and axiologically through action. Fulfillment refers not just to the completion of the good act but to the fulfillment of the person who acts. "Every action contains within itself an intentional orientation; each action is directed toward definite object or sets of objects, and is aimed outward and beyond itself. On the other hand, because of self-determination, an action reaches and penetrates into the subject, into the ego, which is its primary and principal object."⁸⁷

With this accomplishment Wojtyla has "the merit of having adequately amplified the concept of experience. Transcending the positivistic mentality, he takes this experience beyond the world of sensitivity and into the trans-empirical dimension of sensitivity. Enriching the classical tradition, he does not stop at the intellectual and metaphysical aspects as usually done, but gives all the deserved importance to the moral and religious experience."⁸⁸

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⁸⁷ Wojtyla, The Acting Person, Op. Cit.

⁸⁸ Luis Clavell, *Karol Wojtyla's Integral Anthropology: An Invitation to Join Theology and Philosophy*, Jacques Maritain Center: Thomistic Institute, <http://www.nd.edu> 2004