

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

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IN THE LAST ten years before he became pope, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła did not publish as extensively in philosophy as he had earlier. His writings in those years consisted principally of pastoral addresses and of commentaries on the documents of the Second Vatican Council. A notable exception, however, are two articles he published in 1969 on "The Problem of Experience in Ethics"¹ and "The Problem of a Theory of Morality."² Together those articles constitute the mature fruit of many years of critical reflection on the basis, nature, and methodology of ethics. They may well be considered Karol Wojtyła's most original contribution to the field of moral philosophy, shedding light both on the man and on his pronouncements as Pope John Paul II.

To appreciate the rationale behind the argumentation in these articles, one needs to know something of the genesis of the Pope's philosophical thinking as set forth in some of his earlier publications. I will attempt in the following essay to provide a brief summary of that necessary background, followed by a detailed analysis of these two important articles, concluding with several personal comments and questions of an evaluative nature.

BACKGROUND

Karol Wojtyła wrestled with the problem of establishing Christian ethics on a solid foundation throughout his philosophical career, ever since he wrote his thesis qualifying him to teach at a university (habilitation), *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethic on the Principles of the System of Max Scheler*.³ He had turned to Scheler because of the resonance he found between Catholic moral tradition and Scheler's emphasis upon love and imitation.⁴ Likewise

¹ "Problem doświadczenia w etyce," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 17, no. 2 (1969) 5-24; also translated into German as "Das Problem der Erfahrung in der Ethik," in *W 700-lecie śmierci Św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, ed. S. Kaminski et al. (Lublin: KUL, 1976) 267-88. Because the German may be more accessible to the reader, page references in this article are to the German translation. The presentation of the contents, however, is based on a comparative analysis of both the Polish and the German.

² "Problem teorii moralności," in *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych*, ed. B. Bejze (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo SS. Loretanek-Benedyktynek, 1969) 217-49.

³ *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maksa Schelera* (Lublin: KUL, 1959).

⁴ *Ibid.* 6.

attractive was Scheler's insistence upon objectivity in ethics and his endeavor to create a system of objective values. Studying and teaching at the University of Krakow, Wojtyla was consistently confronted by scientism and empiricism in virtually every sphere of intellectual endeavor in Poland. The positivism represented by the Polish school of logic reduced to the empirical all that was human.⁵ Wojtyla recognized clearly that an epistemology which limits all intelligible reality to matters of fact and measurable data inexorably leads to skepticism and ethical relativism. Scheler appeared to offer an alternative with an ethics of "rigid ethical absolutism and objectivism."⁶

Wojtyla insists in his thesis on Scheler that, to interpret the moral data of Christian revelation adequately, a philosophical ethics must be able to determine acts as good or evil in themselves. Although Scheler's system includes some objective tendencies, its objectivity breaks down, Wojtyla contends, because of its phenomenological principles; good and evil only "appear" as phenomena of intentional feelings. Scheler's "emotional intuitionism" considers values in isolation from the context of human action; Wojtyla rejects it as unable to determine acts as good or evil in themselves. For moral values to be real and objective, they must be based on principles that are "meta-phenomenological, or, frankly, meta-physical."⁷

Although Scheler's phenomenological and emotionalistic principles do not suffice for a scientific interpretation of Christian ethics, Scheler's system can be "accidentally helpful" for Christian ethics, Wojtyla admitted, insofar as it "facilitates the analysis of ethical facts on the plane of phenomena and experience."⁸ Phenomenology permits us to penetrate into the ethical experience of the believing Christian and observe the pattern discernible there. But it plays no more than a "secondary and auxiliary role." "Our investigation convinces us that a Christian thinker, especially a theologian using phenomenological experience in his work, may not be a phenomenologist."⁹ One may not dispense with metaphysics. By analyzing consciousness, one cannot penetrate into the objective moral order, and that is something no Catholic thinker may relinquish.

For the very reasons he rejected the phenomenology of Max Scheler, Wojtyla espoused the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ Writing in 1967 as the Archbishop of Krakow, he described Thomism as the "one

⁵ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.) in the Introduction to K. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979) xxi.

⁶ M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, tr. M. S. Frings and R. L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973) xxiii.

⁷ *Ocena możliwości* 60.

⁸ *Ibid.* 122.

⁹ *Ibid.* 125.

¹⁰ "O metafizycznej i fenomenologicznej podstawie normy moralnej, w oparciu o kon-

and only example" of theological ethics which, because of its metaphysical categories, adequately interprets revealed Christian moral teaching philosophically.¹¹ Not everything in the Thomistic system is perfect, however; not everything in philosophy since St. Thomas has been a deviation. Wojtyła pointed to two areas in particular where Thomism invites further development:

1) Thomistic ethics is teleological, explicating moral reality in the light of its ultimate purpose. The task of Christian ethics today is not so much to point out the ultimate aim of moral behavior as to identify the ultimate basis of moral norms. Immanuel Kant was responsible for altering our conception and formulation of the central problem of ethics. Catholic moralists may take his point of departure without necessarily accepting his conclusions.

2) Thomism's metaphysical concept of the human person in a certain sense reduces personhood to nature. If one defines a person as an "individual substance of a rational nature," it follows that personhood is understood in terms of the faculties (*potentiae*) of human nature. Wojtyła sees Thomistic anthropology as open to enrichment with the concept of the human person offered by the philosophy of consciousness and phenomenology.¹²

St. Thomas' moral philosophy was teleological and naturalistic; ours, Wojtyła contends, should be normative and personalistic. He encourages Catholic moralists to keep pace with philosophical ethicists like Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. Catholic moral thinkers should not limit their efforts to historical efforts, productive as they have been, but should devote their energies as well to the foundation of moral norms.¹³ The challenge he posed to others Wojtyła did not hesitate to assume himself. The year that his major work of anthropology, *Osoba i czyn* (The Acting Person), first appeared in print, he published "The Problem of Experience in Ethics" and "The Problem of a Theory of Morality." He sets out in those two articles to establish the basis for moral norms as St. Thomas' teleology does not and, to his mind, as Scheler's emotivism cannot. In contrast to the ethical relativism arising from empiricism, he attempts to establish Christian ethics upon a foundation that is at once personalistic and objective. For Wojtyła, that means an ethics firmly founded upon experience.

cepcje Św. Tomasza z Akwinu oraz Maksa Schelera" (The Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of Moral Norms, Based on the Concepts of St. Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler), *Ethos Perenne* (Lublin: KUL, 1960).

¹¹ "Etyka a teologia moralna" (Ethics and Moral Theology), *Znak* 19, no. 9 (Sept. 1967) 1078.

¹² *Ibid.* 1080.

¹³ *Ibid.* 1081. Cf. also "Czym powinna być teologia moralna?" (What Should Moral Theology Be?), *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 58, no. 1 (Jan. 1959) 97-104.

"THE PROBLEM OF EXPERIENCE IN ETHICS"

In his article on "The Problem of Experience in Ethics," Wojtyla describes ethics today as existing in a "critical" situation of divergence (267). When questioned on the nature of their science, ethicists do not give a single, unambiguous answer. Some, like the logical positivists, deny that ethics is a science at all. At the basis of this disagreement lies the dissolution of the original unity of science into a multiplicity of special sciences, each with its own criteria. The Cardinal points to two main streams of thought regarding the criteria for a science. The first, empiricism, limits the basis for science not only to the realm of experience but to the "purely sensible." The second, "rationalistic apriorism," takes "first theorems" as its point of departure and the source of its certitude; these first theorems are said to lie not in experience but unconditionally in the understanding, directly and immediately apparent (268).

This divergence in epistemology explains the divergence in contemporary ethics. Should ethics be an empirical-inductive science or one that is aprioristic-deductive? Empiricists examine and describe moral phenomena in individual, psychic, or social life. The result is a psychology or sociology of morals, but not ethics. The apriorists collect norms and, using the deductive method, organize them into a "logic of norms." But they too fail to raise the essential question about the ultimate basis of norms. Neither positivist descriptions nor a logic of norms can answer the questions, what is morally good, what is morally evil, and why? Yet this is precisely the "fundamental and ambitious task" which ethics has traditionally set for itself, a task which is still "one of the chief needs" of our day. The vital questions of moral good and evil require norms, not just descriptions, for an answer. Unfortunately, "ethics appears to have retired from its perennial and great task to the sidelines" (270).

Ethics cannot be reduced to a psychology or sociology of morals, since each of these sciences deals with morality only *per accidens*. Moreover, a "moral fact" is more than a psychophysical or social fact. Morality has a specificity which alone can provide the point of departure for a genuine science of morals. "Ethics is the science of morals *par excellence*," because it demonstrates "an empirical character, in that it proceeds from facts which, as a totality, constitute a fully singular reality" (272-73). "The point of departure for ethics is the experience of morality" (273). Wojtyla disagrees here with those who maintain that no differentiation is possible between moral phenomena and the rest of human life and activity. He maintains that there is an "experience of morality" *sui generis* which provides an experiential starting point for ethics, so long as one abandons the "blind alley" of radical empiricism. The task of ethics is to explore moral experience and thereby determine ultimate reasons for the facts to be found there. "The real method of ethics, therefore, is not deductive

but reductive" (273). The Cardinal does not clarify what he means here by the distinction.

As the "starting point of science" and the "touchstone of realism," experience constitutes the basis for ethics. But how should one define experience? For the radical empiricist, the very concept of an "experience of morality" is meaningless. Moral good and evil have no "ontological status." The terms "good" and "evil" simply express the speaker's emotions. Wojtyla points to A. J. Ayer, Ch. Stevenson, and H. Reichenbach as exponents of this "emotivism," described by T. Geiger as "axiological nihilism" (276, n. 6). Experience, however, includes more than the sphere of "purely sensible impressions." The term "phenomenon" points to something that "appears," something that our intellectual faculties "perceive intuitively." Wojtyla regards such intuition as the "essence" of experience (275). If this is granted, "it is difficult to deny that morality 'appears' to us in a certain way, and that, thanks to this possibility, various moral facts can be experienced. . . . We have intuitive access to moral facts" (276). It is evident here that the Cardinal has reconsidered his criticism of Scheler and reassessed the contribution that an analysis of phenomena can make to ethics.

Reality and Knowledge

The Cardinal draws attention to two elements or aspects of experience—"undetermined feelings" they could be called. The first, a "feeling of reality," with the accent on reality, is the feeling that something really exists objectively, independent from the observer. The second, a "feeling of knowledge," is a feeling of a peculiar relationship, a contact or union between the observer and that which exists objectively in its own right. Though these two feelings of reality and knowledge are distinct, they are organically united. We speak, on the one hand, of "the feeling of reality in and through knowledge" and, on the other hand, of "the feeling of knowledge on the basis of reality. . . . In such contact and relationship, the feeling of knowledge is ultimately revealed as a striving toward that which really and objectively exists, as a striving for its object, for truth" (277). The Cardinal does not explain here what exactly he means by "truth." He goes on to claim, however, that this perception of knowledge and reality radically overcomes the sensualist meaning of experience. There can be no "purely sensual" experience, because we are not "purely sensual" creatures (277).

"In the perception of knowledge, there exists as an essential, constitutive moment the peculiar need to strive for truth" (277). If reality were identical with knowledge, *esse* with *percipi* (as idealists maintain), then the need to strive for truth in knowledge would be unintelligible. The need for such striving is explicable only on the basis of the transcendence

of reality with respect to knowledge. Knowledge does not constitute reality but must go outside itself to be fulfilled. One aspect of that reality is morality. "The fact of experience reveals that [morality] is a particular reality, a particular *esse*" (278).

The Experience of Morality

Cardinal Wojtyla proceeds to make a distinction between "moral experience" and "the experience of morality." Moral experience arises out of the practice of morality, wherein we "witness" ourselves as the "authentic cause" of moral good and evil. Wojtyla insists here, as he had done earlier in his study of Scheler, that morality cannot be separated from causality. Derived from moral experience and rendering it more precise is the experience of morality, a secondary but deeper experience. Morality is both practiced and experienced; it is an externally visible fact with a basically inner character. We experience this subjectively in ourselves through introspection and in others through intersubjective perception and participation. Because we can intuit morality, ethics deals not only with the teaching of moral facts but with morality itself, as it is rooted in experience (282).

Because persons are both the subject and object of moral experiences, "the experience of morality is always contained in the experience of personhood and, to a certain extent, is even this experience itself" (283). We experience ourselves as persons through morality, and we experience morality through ourselves as persons. Morality and humanity are inseparable, as can be demonstrated by the fact that ethnologists do not investigate whether or not a morality existed among a primitive people but what specifically that morality was. "The experience of being a person is a necessary implication of the experience of morality" (284). Philosophical anthropology and ethics have always been closely associated. However, warns the Cardinal, morality should not be so identified with personhood as to resolve ethics into anthropology.

Moral Feeling

Wojtyla concludes his treatment of experience in ethics with a consideration of moral feeling or the "so-called moral sense." The concept of a moral sense rose in the wake of sensualist tendencies in anthropology and epistemology. Its classical exponent, David Hume, reduced morality to an innate sense which permits us to distinguish virtue from vice according to the pleasure that accompanies virtue and the pain that accompanies vice. Utilitarianism elevated the moral sense to a basic principle of ethics by maintaining that morality was concerned with the maximalization of pleasure and the minimalization of pain. In this, Wojtyla contends, utilitarianism was guilty of gross oversimplification.

We cannot deny that human acts, especially with respect to their moral evaluation, are accompanied by deep emotional experience, by joy and satisfaction in good and by depression and despair in evil. But reducing feelings to the category of sensible pleasure and pain is an impoverished view of a much more complex emotional structure. We are indebted to Max Scheler and twentieth-century phenomenologists for deepening our understanding of the psychology of morality. "It appears to be a great achievement of contemporary science that attention is being directed to the fact that emotional factors participate in the experience of morality" (287).

The concept of a "moral sense" can and should be preserved in the vocabulary of ethics, although Wojtyla expresses a preference here for the Polish term "feeling" or "sentiment" (*poczucie*, corresponding to the German *Empfindung*). He does not give an explanation for his preference, but it would appear that he wishes to emphasize the noncognitive, affective nature of moral sense. He admits that feelings are an important factor in moral experience, enjoying a directive significance in that they point to that which is specific in morality. That which is specific, however, is not apprehended by the senses but by "a certain intellectual intuition" (288).

"THE PROBLEM OF A THEORY OF MORALITY"

Having the thesis that ethics must have the "experience of morality" as its starting point, the Cardinal elaborates his metaethical theory with an analysis and interpretation of that experience in a second article, "The Problem of a Theory of Morality." A theory of morality, he states, constitutes a foundation of ethics by objectifying the dynamism of morality, "extracting from its subjective context what is always proper to the experience of morality" (224). Among the contents of that experience he first identifies moral value and explains its differentiation into moral good and evil as having its "basis and source" in norms. Moral norms do not derive from moral values, but values from norms. "A norm is not only the basis of moral value, it is the source for the split of the sphere we call 'moral value' into moral good and evil" (224). From where else, Wojtyla asks, would the distinction between moral good and evil come? We differentiate between veracity and falsehood on the basis of the norm that commands veracity and prohibits falsehood. Thus "a norm is a deeper and much more basic element of morality than value" (225).

Guilt

The Cardinal illustrates his theory with the example of guilt. "The experience of guilt in its essential contents is the experience of moral evil. It is evil contained in a conscious, free act, of which a person is the cause"

(226). There is no guilt without conscious causality. "In the experience of guilt there is always included the causality of a personal Yes. If the objectification of moral value must adhere to experience, one cannot separate this value from act, or, more precisely, from the conscious causality of the person" (227). Wojtyla regards this as most important for defining moral value. "Moral value does not appear 'on the margin' of a human act or as a by-product of the act" (227). Rather, experience testifies to the fact that "moral value is realized in the act, within the dynamic structure that the act possesses as an *actus personae*" (227). As a consequence, "moral value 'settles' in the person, as it were, taking root in him and becoming his own quality. This is perfectly demonstrated in the experience of guilt. As the agent of a morally evil act, a man becomes morally evil himself. Evil goes, as it were, from the act to the person" (227).

The experience of guilt, Wojtyla believes, points clearly to the dependence of value upon the principles of conscience and norms. "Conscience is nothing else than the experience of the principle of moral good and evil. . . . Speaking generally, what we call a norm is a principle of moral good and evil" (228). The experience of guilt reveals a certain sovereignty of moral norms in the human person. "The experience of guilt includes not only conflict with the law but also conflict with conscience, which perceives and internalizes the fairness of the principle expressed by the law" (228). The fairness of the law stands in opposition to the act performed, both judging and accusing the agent. The conflict is painful but productive and human.

The Cardinal proceeds to interpret the experience of morality by naming and analyzing its constituent elements. "The scientific method requires steps that are thought through. Rigor and certitude depend on it" (229). He sets about a "controlled reflection" of the terms "moral value" and "duty."

Moral Value

"Value" belongs to the category of quality: by virtue of their "moral value," both human acts and the agents who perform them demonstrate their "proper quality" as good or evil, virtuous or sinful. Moral value includes the concept of moral evil as well as moral good. Though some moral philosophers prefer to distinguish between values and disvalues or negative values, Wojtyla finds the distinction artificial and not corresponding to the experience of morality (230). Moral evil, he explains, consists not only, nor even above all, of a contradiction of the good, but rather of a conflict with the moral principles of conscience and norms. Both the agent and the act must be related to norms. To neglect doing so is to fall into the error of separating one's psychic and psychophysical

functions from the whole human person. Such psychologism gives rise to idealistic subjectivism and positivism in moral interpretation. When a person is seen simply as a "consciousness," there is no other possibility than "subjectivizing" moral good and evil.

This "subjective" understanding of moral value is replaced by the Cardinal with one he regards as more objective. "A proper and adequate interpretation is one which conceives of moral value on the basis of man's being and becoming (*esse—fieri*) through his acts. Through his acts a man becomes morally good or evil depending on whether or not his acts are morally good or evil" (232). For the phenomenologist, a moral value is immediate and self-evident, a *Wertschau*. It is "something original and cannot be subsumed under some other more encompassing category" (233). Moral value, whether good or evil, is the "content of an intuition recognizing with immediate clarity . . . that moral good is that through which man as man becomes good, and moral evil is that through which man as man becomes evil" (233-34). This is a rather commonplace, prescientific understanding of moral good and evil, Wojtyla admits, but the role of science is not necessarily to make known in this instance that which was hidden, but to verify and define more precisely what is a common understanding.

In proposing that moral value is that through which "man as man" becomes good or evil, the Cardinal acknowledges that he is equating moral value with "humanity." A person's humanity "is the one and only key to understanding these values and the only possible foundation for explaining them. . . . We cannot interpret moral values or morality without humanity, nor humanity as such without morality. Morality constitutes the necessary key to understanding [humanity]" (234-35). Wojtyla allows for the possibility of adding a teleological interpretation to this personalist understanding of moral good and evil. Moral goodness contributes toward the full realization of both the act and the agent. An acting person is fulfilled through moral good and left unfulfilled through moral evil (238).

Duty

Duty is an "integral element" of morality. In fact, "to some extent, duty is more decisive for morality than value." It "denotes that constitutum of experience, to which we attribute a moral character in the proper sense of the word" (240). For Wojtyla, "I want or do not want to be good" constitutes the "very essence of morality." If I want to be good, it is necessary that I behave in a particular way. Thus duty is connected to the self-realization of one's being as a person (240-41).

At the basis of the experience of duty, one can perceive the potentiality of freedom, since a being deprived of freedom would be incapable of

experiencing duty. Furthermore, the experience of "I must" as opposed to "I want" reveals our spirituality as persons. It takes us across the threshold between the relative and the absolute. Not the absolute in an ontological sense, since that, for Wojtyla, would be ontologism. The absolute which corresponds to moral duty (Kant's categorical imperative) arises from the opposition between good and evil, whereby they mutually exclude each other (241-42).

Implications

The Cardinal concludes by drawing some implications from this theory for anthropology and axiology. "The reality of morality, especially duty, indicates that at the basis of morality one finds man as a person" (243). Personhood is in correlation to morality and cannot be supplanted by any other more general concept. No society or nation, no government or social class can take the place of the person as the subject and center of morality. "Through this aspect man stands as a person above the world, as it were" (244). It is a position as incommunicable and inalienable as personhood itself. Social morality cannot replace the centrality of personhood but can only enrich it. Thanks to persons, the world is transformed by being humanized. "The proper measure of the greatness of every human being is contained in morality" (245).

Besides human greatness, the Cardinal sees his theory of morality as pointing to the contingency of human existence. If moral good is fulfilment, moral evil is nonfulfilment or nonexistence. There is no ontic necessity for our existence. "Man experiences the absoluteness of good and thus encounters the aspect of the absolute in himself, at the same time not being absolute himself. Thus he constantly oscillates between the possibility of good and evil" (246). Because we experience our contingency relative to the absolute, morality is bound by deep ties to religion (247).

A final implication of this theory of morality pertains to axiology. The philosophy of being, which identifies objective good with being, has come to be replaced by a philosophy of consciousness in which good and evil are described as qualities of consciousness. The Cardinal believes that his theory of morality overcomes the dichotomy between these two philosophical orientations. A human being is a conscious being. As being and consciousness cannot be divided in a person, so are they inseparable as aspects of a theory of morality. Any effort to disjoin them can only result in absolutizing one or the other (249).

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

The issues which Cardinal Wojtyla addresses in his metaethics are so many and complex that anything like an extensive evaluation is neces-

sarily precluded. A few selective comments and questions may be appropriate, however, together with an expression of high regard. One cannot help but admire a philosophical endeavor of such intricate subtlety from a man who, as cardinal archbishop of Krakow, was necessarily taken up with the multifarious duties of a pastor and administrator. Though it is apparent that Thomas Aquinas, Kant, and Scheler all made an impact on Wojtyla, it is obvious too that he appropriated their thinking critically and creatively. He has produced a theory of morality that is marked by traits of intellectual vigor and originality. Catholic moralists may be surprised that the Pope has devoted so much thought to so central and critical an issue for moral thinking today as the foundation of norms.

Given the historical and cultural situation in which Karol Wojtyla found himself, one can well appreciate why he opposed empiricism and refused to accept impartial descriptions of human behavior as the sum total of ethics. In the aftermath of World War II and the Nazi occupation of Poland, he could hardly consent to the "axiological nihilism" that results from identifying morality with the emotions. If human knowledge is limited to the sensibly empirical, to *what is* to the exclusion of *what ought to be*, on what grounds could Hitler, the S.S., and Nazi atrocities be condemned? By what criteria can social custom and convention be criticized or public authorities indicted? For a penetrating thinker like Wojtyla, a superficial reduction of morality to emotions or custom was out of the question.

The Cardinal's major thesis that ethics must be grounded in experience finds ready acceptance in contemporary Western science and culture. The growing numbers of Catholic moralists operating from personalist principles can be gratified at the intimate connection the Cardinal makes between ethics and anthropology. His identification of the moral good with that which contributes to the fulfilment of the person as a human being serves as an endorsement of the personalist direction being taken by leading Catholic moralists today. Fully in accord, too, with contemporary Catholic ethics is his clear affirmation of the role of moral sensibility or feelings in moral experience and decision-making. Including feelings in moral decisions is quite different from identifying morality with emotions. We do not make moral choices as disembodied intellects but as feeling as well as thinking human beings.

The Cardinal's positive estimation of affectivity in moral judgment represents a mitigation of his earlier, substantially negative evaluation of Max Scheler's "emotional intuitionism." He has obviously reconsidered as well his earlier judgment that phenomenology cannot penetrate through the phenomena of subjective conscious experience into the objective order of being. His metaethics constitutes an endeavor to do precisely that. His efforts to subordinate the analysis of consciousness to

a philosophy of human action corresponds to a general tendency in philosophy today, putting him very much in the mainstream of current discussion.¹⁴

To understand fully what is behind the metaethics of Karol Wojtyla, one must appreciate the philosophical efforts of the "father of phenomenology," Edmund Husserl. Like Husserl before him, Wojtyla sees empiricism as responsible for much of the crisis in Western culture. The claim that only empirical evidence and the methods of natural science can produce exact, scientific knowledge excludes the possibility of coming to a certitude characterized by necessity and universality. For Wojtyla as for Husserl, it falls to philosophy to supply that certitude by providing pure and absolute knowledge and hence the ultimate foundation for other forms of science. Foundations are all-important. Philosophy must be the science of ultimate causes, the "science of beginnings," if it is to be a "rigorous science."

Scheler, however, more than Husserl or any other phenomenologist absorbs the lion's share of Wojtyla's attention. Scheler had subtitled his major work of ethics "A New Attempt toward the Foundation of Ethical Personalism." "The spirit behind my ethics," he wrote, "is one of rigid ethical absolutism and objectivism."¹⁵ Wojtyla is fully in accord with Scheler's ambitions, if not with his view of the purely intentional character of consciousness and its acts. For Wojtyla, not an emotive consciousness but an acting person is the subject of morality. Here, as elsewhere in his writings, he assumes a stance vis-à-vis Scheler that is highly dialectical. Much of the Cardinal's thinking in these articles consists of a critical response to Scheler. From an Anglo-American perspective at least, this constitutes something of a difficulty, since Scheler simply has not made a direct impact on our philosophy or theology.

This difficulty in understanding and evaluating the Cardinal's metaethics is compounded by the fact that he rarely makes use of standard critical apparatus. There are almost no references to the origin of his thought and no illustrations of its full implications for concrete ethical situations. This high degree of abstraction, coupled with several extremely fine distinctions (a reductive method as opposed to one that is deductive; the experience of morality as distinct from moral experience), renders his moral philosophy arduous and often obscure. The Cardinal is never quite clear, for example, as to what he means by ethics as a "science" or by terms like "truth" or "norms."

Wojtyla's attempt to prove that ethics is a science may well pose some

¹⁴ Guido Küng, "Man as an Active Agent: On the New Pope's Work as a Philosopher," *Universitas* 21, no. 2 (1979) 116.

¹⁵ Scheler, *Formalism* xxiii.

questions for moralists who do not share his phenomenological orientation. Certainly ethics is a science inasmuch as its practitioners are expected to proceed methodically, analyzing, organizing, and interpreting data gleaned from experience. Certainly its goal is objectivity, in the sense of being radically based in reference to reality. But this does not mean that ethics can enjoy an objectivity that is absolute and exclusive of reference to a subject. Critics of empiricism more recent than Husserl (M. Polanyi, for example) point out that even in the natural and physical sciences total objectivity is an impossibility. The "impartial observer" is unattainable in any science. All knowledge, including that of the natural, physical sciences, is personal and relational (which is not to say utterly relative). Truth can no longer be seen simply as a correspondence of the intellect to a reality "out there," since there is no way to transcend the relationship between the intellect and reality and objectively determine that correspondence. Truth, rather, needs to be recognized as the result of a continuing process whereby we develop an ever more adequate and productive relationship with reality.

Ethics, therefore, is not just a work of "uninvolved intellectuality." It is immersed in feelings and intuition and draws upon insight and imagination. Like the refinement of taste, it develops through lived experience and exposure to the works of gifted, sensitive, creative lives. All of which is to say, with John Dewey¹⁶ and Daniel Maguire,¹⁷ that ethics should be seen as an art as well as a science.

Similarly problematic is the Cardinal's theory that norms give rise to values and as a consequence are more basic to morality. He understands moral values in such a way as to include evil as well as good. Such use of the term is puzzling for those of us who are accustomed to viewing values only in a positive sense and contrast them with disvalues, and so regard values as giving rise to norms, not norms to values. The Cardinal appears open here to the accusation of arguing in a vicious circle, first asking where else the distinction between moral good and evil could come from if not from norms, and then positing that the distinction between value and disvalue is artificial because moral evil contradicts not moral good so much as moral norms. If they are deemed more basic than moral values, from where do moral norms originate? Are they innate? How specific are they? The suspicion arises that human dignity and freedom is capable of being impinged upon by some outside, possibly arbitrary authority. Such a view of norms, of human or divine law, including natural law, lays itself open to the charge of being heteronomous, based not on reason but the wilful prescriptions of authority.

In the tradition of Husserl, Wojtyla is sensitive to the dangers of

¹⁶ John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (rev. ed.; New York: Henry Holt, 1932).

¹⁷ Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Choice* (New York: Doubleday, 1978).

attempting to construct ethics upon psychology and thus ultimately robbing ethics of normativity by reducing it to a psychology of morals. While totally in agreement with this rejection of reductionistic psychologism, one may question whether the Cardinal gives adequate consideration to the insights psychology affords to moral philosophy and theology. From his analysis of the phenomenon of guilt, he argues both to moral causality and to objective moral principles. Psychology and experience, however, reveal numerous examples of guilt-ridden persons, victims of scruples, in no way responsible for perpetrating any moral evil. Psychology can also supply examples of people capable of the most immoral, antisocial behavior who suffer not the slightest remorse of conscience or experience of guilt. How does one distinguish between justified and neurotic guilt? Similarly, how does one distinguish between a warranted experience of duty and a neurotic compulsion?

Contemporary moral theology would tend to seek the answers to both these questions in an analysis and evaluation of the total complex reality that makes up the object of ethical inquiry. This includes not only the act but the persons, relationships, circumstances, and consequences involved as well. By concentrating exclusively on the "experience of morality" arising from a moral or immoral act, the Cardinal abstracts from the circumstances which not only accompany a moral or immoral action but enter into its very essence. Actions never exist in the abstract. They are posited within a complex of relationships and circumstances which must be included in the process of moral evaluation. It is not enough to say that morally good actions contribute to making a morally good person, or that morally evil actions make a morally evil person. That simply pushes the question back one more step; for what would then constitute the definition of a morally good or evil person?

To assume that good actions make a good person is to assume a basically Aristotelian stance that neglects the equally true and more biblical view (Mt 7:17-20) that a person, made good by grace, produces good actions. The Cardinal needs to define more explicitly the place of human passivity (and hence divine grace) in his theory. This may well necessitate making less discrete a distinction between person and act. (The original Polish title of the Cardinal's book *The Acting Person* is *Osoba i czyn*, *The Person and Act*.) By distinguishing too sharply between person and act, one falls into the danger of separating the inseparable, dividing what a person does from what a person is. The coherence between interior dispositions (person) and exterior behavior (act) is such that they exercise a reciprocal influence on each other.

Perhaps the greatest single difficulty with Karol Wojtyła's moral philosophy is the fact that it is incomplete. These two articles give an indication of being the first two chapters of a book-length study similar

to his anthropology in *The Acting Person*. Chapter 3 appears never to have been written, or at least has not been published. As it stands, the Cardinal's metaethics leaves many questions unanswered. The consequent ambiguity leaves his theory open to the possibility that concepts like intrinsically evil actions and negative moral absolutes fit in quite neatly.

Even in its present, unfinished state, however, the metaethics of Pope John Paul II constitutes an invitation to Catholic moral philosophers and theologians to give more serious consideration to the contribution which phenomenology can make to ethics. Phenomenological analysis and interpretation of experience may not be able to elicit absolute certitude or transform ethics into a rigorous science any more than empirical data can. But it may well aid in attaining moral certitude and thereby advance the science and art that is ethical inquiry. His pioneering efforts in metaethics make Pope John Paul II an interesting and notable contributor to that important enterprise.