

## The Place of Lived Experience in Karol Wojtyła’s Account of the Person: A Case Study<sup>1</sup>

Deborah Savage<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

It is manifestly evident that the category and the language of “subjective personal experience” is the idiom of our era. This modern obsession with personal “subjectivity” has contributed substantially to our public and private quandaries, including subjectivism and its well-known twin, relativism, as well as the elevated status now afforded any individual point of view, no matter how ill informed. All this has resulted in the widespread view that the only “truth” that exists is the “truth” of one’s own experience. Claims about the existence of universal truth or an objective moral order often cannot find a foothold when confronted with the argument that such realities do not resonate with a particular individual’s personal “experience.” It seems clear that, if we have any hope of evangelizing the culture concerning the truths of the faith – or minister to the pastoral or therapeutic needs of those the Church is called to serve – we must find a way to articulate the proper place of lived experience in a fuller account of the person. The thesis of this paper is that the account of the human person proposed by Karol Wojtyła provides the answers we need. I will demonstrate that his approach permits us to acknowledge the experience of actual existing persons without compromising the more properly “ontological” framework that we know reveals the unchanging truth about human personhood. I will show that his account gives us the foothold we are seeking in a culture convinced that subjective personal experience is the criterion of truth. And since, in the contemporary context, such criteria are often invoked on questions concerned with human sexuality, we will concentrate our analysis on that sphere of human action, specifically those experiencing same-sex attraction. Surely a tougher test case would be difficult to find. The

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Savage – Franciscan University of Steubenville, USA  
e:mail: dsavage@franciscan.edu • ORCID: 0009-0003-9097-3091

underlying aim of the paper is to provide a framework for addressing the pastoral needs of those suffering from the epidemic of sexual disorders spreading throughout Western society.

**Keywords**

Karol Wojtyła, lived experience, metaphysics, phenomenology, pastoral outreach, person, anthropology, same-sex attraction, sexual disorders

## Introduction

Since Descartes's "Copernican Revolution" initiated the "turn to the subject" in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the possibility of preserving the conviction that truth of any kind (other than that supported by scientific proof or empirical evidence) could be discovered by man has vanished bit by bit from both personal and public consciousness. Acknowledgement of the importance of what goes on in the interior of man, itself a legitimate and proper object of philosophical reflection, has morphed into the conviction that objective truth is not only inaccessible but non-existent. The modern obsession with personal "subjectivity" has contributed substantially to our public and private quandaries, including subjectivism and its well-known twin, relativism, as well as the elevated status now afforded any individual point of view, no matter how ill informed. All this has resulted in the widespread view that the only "truth" that exists is the "truth" of one's own experience. Claims about the existence of universal truth or an objective moral order often cannot find a foothold when confronted with the argument that such realities do not resonate with a particular individual's personal "experience." The priority given to subjective personal experience in determining what constitutes right thinking and moral human behavior, assuming that question is even asked, is well documented; sadly, personal preference has taken the place of sound reasoning from self-evident first principles in disputes on moral questions.<sup>3</sup> This is a reality confronted daily by persons in all circumstances, no matter what their philosophical persuasion. It is a position advanced by our culture and encountered in the media, in education, in academia, in our political discourse.

Perhaps these developments in the wider culture were inevitable in light of the relentless attacks on human reason that have served to steadily undermine it since the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> But at least until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church provided a firm line of defense against that onslaught. Unhappily, it appears we may be unable to count on that protection any longer. For there is evidence that this profound error, itself a feature of our post-modern context, seems poised to enter into the deliberations of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>3</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), especially ch. 1.

<sup>4</sup> R. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

Though the precise meaning of Pope Francis’s call in *Veritatis Gaudium* 3 for a “radical paradigm shift” remains a bit elusive, it has been interpreted by some to refer to a particular new approach to pastoral praxis, described as “above all an inversion of factors: doctrine and law must be subordinate to the lived life of contemporary man.”<sup>5</sup> It seems that the truths derived from Scripture and Tradition, that is, the deposit of faith and the normative guide that has informed the Church’s pastoral practices for centuries, will now be subject to a new criterion of truth: the subjective experience of the human person.

This development is alarming for a couple of reasons. First and perhaps most obviously, such a shift in thinking clearly risks further erosion of any firm commitment to objective moral norms such as those expressed so clearly in Pope St. John Paul’s II formidable encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. But there is a second and equally troubling reason: this new “paradigm” seems to introduce into the discourse of the Catholic Church – and through that to the world at large – a radically false dichotomy between lived experience and the search for understanding and truth. Indeed, it appears to make rivals of these two elements of the life of man, both essential in the effort to serve the people of God, when in fact, they are allies. And it seems to reveal an outright rejection – albeit perhaps an unconscious one – of the Catholic intellectual tradition and the philosophical realism that grounds the entire edifice of the Church’s truth claims.

As anyone familiar with the Church’s own methods should know, experience is not a separate category in the search for truth; is the starting place of the search for truth. The Church does not employ the methods of Cartesian rationalism, nor does she reduce knowledge to its twin, the deadly “sensism” of David Hume. Her proposals regarding the path to human happiness are not derived out of thin air, nor do they reflect a radical reduction of the person to merely his material existence. Rather they are derived from both faith and reason, both Scripture and the evidence of the senses, as well as centuries of reflection on their significance for man’s life and his actions in the world. The Church subscribes to a particular form of realism – to the conviction that truth is arrived at through contact with reality itself. She upholds the view that it is the direct experience

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<sup>5</sup> E. Pentin, “Pope Francis’ “Paradigm Shift””: <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/pope-francis-paradigm-shift-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond-to-it> (19.02.2024). See also J.A. Ureta, *Pope Francis’s “Paradigm Shift”: Continuity or Rupture in the Mission of the Church?”* (Spring Grove, Pennsylvania: The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, 2018). This call is found in Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, no. 3. Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin describes it as a “new spirit, this new approach.” <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/cardinal-parolin-amoris-laetitia-represents-new-paradigm-spirit-and-approach> (19.02.2024)

of the real that prompts the questions that then drive us all to pursue knowledge of the truth and an understanding of God's word.

In arguing that subjective human experience should take priority over and against “doctrine and law,” proponents of this view are rejecting not only the possibility of moral norms – but the very possibility of ever arriving at them. Lived experience is not a separate, distinct realm that operates in isolation from human cognitional acts; it is integral to them. Knowledge begins in the senses, which prompts the intellect to seek the meaning of the world and of our experience of it. Experience might be the launching pad and, when properly integrated into the whole of who one is, may lead one to grasp the truths embedded in the Church's own doctrine. But it cannot be confused with the truth itself. As Father Bernard Lonergan used to say, “insights are a dime a dozen.” Their true value is discerned through a deliberate inquiry and the scrutiny of judgment. The same can be said of experience. Sometimes it leads to a dead-end.

Now, having said that, I am nonetheless sympathetic to the deeper concerns reflected in this new paradigm. Surely, we can all acknowledge the kernel of truth at the heart of the shift under consideration in this new approach: the argument that abstract ideas, however carefully reasoned, are not enough to live the Christian life. With this I quite agree. Further, the starting place of any pastoral encounter is not likely to be a reiteration of doctrinal statements, no matter how carefully articulated. Clearly, abstract ideas must be translated, often in real time, into the lexicon of the pastoral minister. The starting place of such interactions – which are, after all, not with man *per se* but with concretely existing persons – will surely not be abstractions – but their personal lived experience.

Surely, we need to acknowledge the manifestly evident reality that the category and the language of “subjective personal experience” is the idiom of our era. Perhaps it is time we learned how to speak it. For unless we do, the souls for whom we are responsible will be denied the hope that comes from finally understanding one's own experience in light of the whole truth.

I would argue that there is no need to pit these two aspects of human reasoning against one another. Because already present within the intellectual legacy of the Catholic tradition is a way of understanding the place that lived experience has in the search for truth. Perhaps if the Church Fathers – whose good intentions cannot be seriously doubted – could be alerted to it, they would find a way to articulate more clearly the meaning of the “paradigm shift” the Holy Father suggests is needed. I refer here to the account of the human person proposed by Pope St. John Paul II,

otherwise known to us all as the philosopher Karol Wojtyła, whose philosophical anthropology offers a clear and coherent way forward. For Wojtyła, the reality of lived experience is central to any comprehensive understanding of the nature of man.

Indeed, Karol Wojtyła argues that at the epicenter of the entire debate about the human person is the “problem of the subjectivity of the human being.” It is this very problem, he declares, that “imposes itself today as one of the central ideological issues that lie at the very basis of human praxis, morality (and thus also ethics), culture, civilization, and politics.”<sup>6</sup> If philosophy is to perform its essential function in the recovery of our culture, he tells us, then we have no choice but to turn our attention to the subjectivity of human persons. And this can only be done by taking up the somewhat risky challenge of studying the reality of lived human experience.<sup>7</sup> It is this claim, that we seek to explore in this paper. Surely it holds at least one of the keys to the recovery of our culture.

The late Holy Father’s account is framed by a synthesis of two strands of philosophical thought, one that invokes and affirms the received tradition on the meaning of the human person (the objective, metaphysical account), while simultaneously affirming the person as unique and unrepeatable, a “someone” who is the subject of his own acts and “experiencings” (the phenomenological account). I will show that by integrating these two historically divergent visions of man, John Paul II reaches for the full truth about the human person, while providing us with a starting place in experience. It is an account that is not only grounded in an objective truth; it offers us a map from subjective experience—which can only ever be partial—to the possibility of an integration with the whole of what man is – and then finally, hopefully, to healing. And since pastoral praxis in the contemporary context often involves questions concerned with human sexuality, we will concentrate our analysis on that sphere of human action, specifically those experiencing same-sex attraction. Surely a tougher test case would be difficult to find. The underlying aim of this essay is to provide a framework for addressing the pastoral needs of those suffering from the epidemic of sexual disorders clearly spreading throughout Western society.

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<sup>6</sup> K. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, trans. by Th. Sandok (Peter Lang, New-York – San Francisco – Bern – Baltimore – Frankfurt am Main – Berlin – Wien – Paris, 2008) 219-220. See also D. Savage, “The Centrality of Lived Experience in Wojtyła’s Account of the Person,” *Annals of Philosophy* Vol. LXI, No. 4 (2013), 20.

<sup>7</sup> K. Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in: *Person and Community*, 212.

At the heart of this paper is the recognition that both the pastoral minister and the psychotherapist must pass through the same territory that, in the final analysis, also gives meaning to the work of the philosopher and metaphysician: the question of the truth about the human person.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this question stands at the border of two bodies of knowledge: the philosophy of being on the one side, and the positive sciences, in particular the psychological sciences, on the other.<sup>9</sup> Pastoral care, no matter how sensitively exercised, or therapeutic interventions, even when skillfully practiced, must never be divorced from that truth. We owe it to those whom we are called to serve to remain forever grounded in the full vision of the human person and to never waiver in our intention to point them toward it.

### Framework and Synthesis

A comprehensive treatment of John Paul's II entire anthropology is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>10</sup> I am pursuing just two aims in what follows next. The first is to offer an adequate synopsis of his understanding of the human person that is at once accessible and also accurate; we will have to limit ourselves to the elements that bear most directly on our questions here. Second, I hope to persuade the reader that John Paul's II framework provides us with an anthropology that can serve as the foundation for pastoral or therapeutic outreach. We need confidence that starting with the subjective experience of those we serve need not trap us in subjectivism or a relativistic agenda with no way out.

I begin with a brief summary of John Paul's II basic framework, showing how his synthesis is grounded in the metaphysical account found in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition (mediated to him through the existential Thomism of Étienne Gilson), while simultaneously informed by his insights into human subjectivity through the use of phenomenological method.<sup>11</sup> This synthesis

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<sup>8</sup> K. Schmitz, *Person and Psyche* (Arlington, Virginia: Institute for Psychological Sciences Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller treatment, please see: D. Savage, "The Centrality of Lived Experience of John Paul's Account of the Person," *Annals of Philosophy John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin* Vol. LXI, No. 4 (Dec. 2013).

<sup>11</sup> It is well understood that Karol Wojtyła was an "existential Thomist" in the school of Étienne Gilson. See G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 156. We will return to the significance of this feature of his thought toward the end of the paper. For now, it is sufficient to mention that it resulted in his conviction concerning the primacy of the actual *existence* of the person as opposed to their *essence*. In other words, *that* you exist takes precedence over *who* exactly you are, the state of your soul, your past sins, your disorders. These remain essential aspects of your being and are certainly critical to grasping who you are— but they are secondary to the fact that God created you and holds you in existence at every moment of the day.

leads him to invoke a particular approach, which he refers to as “pausing before the irreducible in the human person,”<sup>12</sup> and to his conviction that human subjectivity is itself an objective reality that can be investigated, analyzed, and understood. He argues that its features are disclosed within the orbit of consciousness and that when examined closely, it reveals itself to be constituted by two fundamental dynamisms, “man-acts” and “something-happens-in-man,” and to be ordered toward self-possession, self-governance, and self-determination through acts of both transcendence and integration.<sup>13</sup>

These elements will provide an essential point of departure for our questions here. For John Paul II argues that the sexual urge is itself an aspect of “something-happens-in-man,” the psychosomatic dynamism of his given nature, and, as such, at least in a rational animal such as man, is under the governance of the intellect and the will; it is therefore subject to the control of one’s free choices.<sup>14</sup> It is this freedom and how it is used, through conscious acts of the will, which will determine the extent to which one’s personhood is fully actualized.<sup>15</sup> With John Paul’s II help, I will demonstrate that all sexual attraction, including same-sex attraction (SSA), is subject to the guidance of the intellect and the will and therefore governed by the moral order within which human persons exist and act. Every decision, every act is a moment that represents an opportunity for self-governance and self-transcendence—and calls for integration into the whole of what one is.<sup>16</sup>

I will show that the anthropological framework provided by St. John Paul II gives us both a starting place in our encounter with others and an approach that can sustain us in our efforts to serve them. We will see that his method provides us with a way to affirm the whole truth about the person while allowing for an investigation of lived human experience, something which, he points

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<sup>12</sup> Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 213.

<sup>13</sup> K. Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” in: *Person and Act and Related Essays: English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*, trans. by G. Ignatik, (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America, 2021), 177.

<sup>14</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 45-51.

<sup>15</sup> That is, the extent to which I become most fully who I am meant to be in virtue of the nature and natural capacities I am given at birth.

<sup>16</sup> For a more extensive analysis of these questions and the phenomena of same-sex attraction within the context of western culture and the true meaning of friendship, please see my paper “At the Heart of the Matter: The Centrality of Lived Experience in St. John Paul II’s Integral Account of the Person,” found in *Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction*, ed. J. Smith and P. Check (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2015), 88-114.



out, is always an experience of a part in relation to a whole.<sup>17</sup> Here is where the pastoral and therapeutic implications of his account of the person will find practical expression. This will lead us, finally, to a consideration of the ways in which his account might inform the specifically pastoral and therapeutic practices employed in our outreach to those experiencing SSA.

### **The Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition Provides the Foundations**

First, John Paul II affirms the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition with regard to its treatment of the concept of the person. He acknowledges the usefulness of Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal, pointing to the fact that it has spawned much scientific investigation throughout history. He also affirms unequivocally the familiar Boethian definition (relied on by Aquinas) that the human person is "an individual substance of a rational nature;" in fact, he makes this his point of departure. He states that this so-called "*suppositum humanum*" (human substance) provides a necessary foundation in the "metaphysical terrain" of the dimension of being and is an essential reference point for any further discussion of human subjectivity. It represents human nature itself and is attributable to all persons.<sup>18</sup>

But, he points out that the tradition that has defined the human person as a rational animal or individual substance has viewed him primarily as an object, one of the many objects that exist and can be studied as a part of the natural world. Thus, on this account, the person becomes just another *suppositum* (substance), albeit of a rational nature, and in Aristotle's scientific framework, a "cosmological reduction."<sup>19</sup> He argues that such an approach simply is not adequate to the task of understanding concretely existing persons since it ignores the "primordial uniqueness of the human being", which should be the primary subject matter of philosophical and theological reflection: the person is a *someone*, not a something.<sup>20</sup> The reduction of the human person to a substance in the cosmic order does not and cannot capture completely the unique subjectivity of human persons for, he maintains, this *suppositum* is a subject of both existence and action, a person

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<sup>17</sup> In this regard, Wojtyła invokes a category from phenomenology known as "categorical limits," a technical term referring to the phenomenon of observing a part in relation to a whole and thus permitting the phenomenologist to make a judgment. This method will be important in our efforts to help the person achieve integration.

<sup>18</sup> Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible," 212.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-214.

who, when the aspect of consciousness is introduced, can be said to “experience himself as a concrete self, a self-experiencing subject.”<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, though he offers this critique of the traditional account, John Paul II does not intend to relinquish or compromise our hold on the existence of a universal human nature, abstractly conceived (the concept of the *suppositum humanum*); in fact, it is central to his schema. He argues that both the Aristotelian and Boethian definitions are required and that without them we lose our place in the cosmos. However, this starting place provides but the foundation upon which he intends to build; his project is to go more deeply into what this *suppositum humanum* contains and means, through an investigation of the inner experience of human acts, revealed in consciousness.

However, though John Paul II makes every attempt to account for the experience of the person, he is equally concerned to establish that experience is not divorced from or independent of the existence of a hierarchy of goods, an objective order that does not rely on the perception of the person to exist.<sup>22</sup> He states this unequivocally, declaring that “cognition does not in any way create “reality” (cognition does not create its own content) but arises within the context of the different kinds of content that are proper to it.”<sup>23</sup> For John Paul II, the human person never operates outside of a moral context; the proper *telos* of all of his impulses, his decisions, and his actions is the good itself.

Without a doubt, John Paul’s II formulation of the good, and of the human person and his capacity to know, is grounded in Thomist metaphysics and reflects the ontic structures grasped by Thomism.<sup>24</sup> What differentiates his account from the tradition is his way of reaching them, the way we come to understand and know them.<sup>25</sup> Wojtyła is a realist in the Thomistic sense of that term. The good and the true have an independent existence. These realities are accessible to human

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>22</sup> K. Wojtyła, “The Basis of the Moral Norm,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 78-80. Wojtyła argues that Aquinas combined Aristotelian teleology with Platonic-Augustinian participation and that “the basis of this union is the idea of exemplarism.” The resemblance of creatures to God and the degree of perfection they exhibit are “cognitively encompassed in the divine mind as their exemplar.” For Wojtyła, this constitutes the very heart of the normative order because it presents a “world of goods and models” instead of the “world of goods and ends” that both Kant and Scheler disputed as tending toward utilitarianism. Exemplariness, according to Wojtyła, results in an objective hierarchy of goods in which each good is measured according to how close it approaches the perfection of the exemplar that exists in the mind of God. (*Ibid.*, 76-79.) This earlier work shows up in significant ways in his papal corpus, in particular in his 1993 moral encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*.

<sup>23</sup> K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of Experience in Ethics,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 116.

<sup>24</sup> That is, the categories that comprise his understanding of Being and beings.

<sup>25</sup> J.W. Galkowski, “The Place of Thomism in the Anthropology of K. Wojtyła,” *Angelicum* Vol. 65 (1988), 187.

consciousness and cognition. But he will argue that they are grasped, not only through metaphysical reflection, but first and fundamentally, through the lived experience of the acting person.

The late Holy Father's framework begins with and remains grounded in an objective account of the person as a particular kind of substance that exists at a particular place in the order of creation – at the meeting place of the material and spiritual worlds – whose existence is governed by an objective moral order. He recognizes that these claims are essential, if we are to arrive at an account of human subjectivity without losing our footing in the framework of universal norms, in particular, those governing human sexuality. Indeed, it is the reality of a universal human nature understood against the backdrop of the created order that renders moral norms both coherent and normative.

His argument is that, though this is true in and of itself, it simply does not give us a full account of the human person as a subjective, that is, personal, being. He declares that the *suppositum humanum* is actually “subjectivity in the **metaphysical and fundamental sense**,” but states that he is interested in discovering “subjectivity in the sense proper to the human being, namely **subjectivity in the personal sense**.”<sup>26</sup> This discovery will require reference to and an analysis of actual, human experience, that is, lived experience.<sup>27</sup> This category—of lived experience—has a rather precise meaning for John Paul II; it will require the introduction of consciousness into the analysis of human personhood.

### **Phenomenological Method Enriches the Understanding of the Person**

We come now to the second element in the Holy Father's anthropological framework: his efforts to synthesize a Thomistic vision of man with the insights into human subjectivity made possible by modern phenomenological methods. While he recognizes the limitations of phenomenology *per*

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<sup>26</sup> Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 224 (my bold).

<sup>27</sup> Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible,” 212. Though here I will focus on the philosophical basis of John Paul's claims, it is important to note that his philosophical and theological outlook, especially the interest he has in an account of human experience, is grounded in the work of St. John of the Cross, his first scholarly interest and the subject of his dissertation, *The Doctrine of Faith According to St. John of the Cross*. See D. Savage, *The Subjective Dimension of Human Work: The Conversion of the Acting Person According to Karol John Paul /John Paul II and Bernard Lonergan*, (Peter Lang: New York: 2008), 112. See also, M. Waldstein, *Introduction*, in: John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books: Boston, 2006), 82-87. Waldstein points out that, though St. John was John Paul's II starting place, his encounter with the philosophy of consciousness “sharpened” his account of personal subjectivity.

se, maintaining that it is not able to replace metaphysical reflection on the question of being,<sup>28</sup> he also argues that its methods may provide a route into the realm of ontology from its starting place in the study of the human person, that is, the data of experience illuminated by consciousness as constituted by the person. As delineated by John Paul II, this “becomes a critical appropriation of the fundamental postulate of modern thought: *the starting point is man*. This means starting from the concrete reality of the person, not from the hypostatization of the notion of the subject.”<sup>29</sup>

In fact, John Paul’s II entire project reflects his interest in addressing the modern problem introduced by the so-called turn to the subject, without relinquishing the possibility of knowledge of an objective moral order. His method reveals his conviction that both metaphysical and phenomenological reflection are necessary to account adequately for the objective and subjective dimensions of existence. He demands that we recognize that the person experiences himself both as an existing embodiment of human nature and also as the possessor of a unique and unrepeatable subjectivity and as the agent of his own acts. He is absolutely committed to the development of an ethical and moral theory that begins with the reality of a “conscious being,” one who is not constituted by consciousness but instead is the one who himself constitutes consciousness.<sup>30</sup> His theory is firmly grounded in the experience of the human person, stating that even the “apprehension” of that which is essential for morality takes place first in experience itself and not only in some subsequent abstraction or reflection.<sup>31</sup> He argues that both man and morality are known through experience because even the origin of the cognitive process is found, not in any kind of abstraction, but in the experience of the human person.<sup>32</sup>

To consider and interpret the human being in the context of his personal subjectivity—without leaving the metaphysical terrain well established by his predecessors—John Paul II

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<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, especially 82-83 and 97.

<sup>29</sup> R. Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 226. See also K. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>31</sup> Wojtyła, “The Problem of Experience in Ethics,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 112. Wojtyła equates “lived experience” with the “irreducible” in the human person. See “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 21

<sup>32</sup> Wojtyła, “The Problem of Experience in Ethics,” 120-122. See also, A. Szostek, “Karol Wojtyła’s View of the Human Person in the Light of the Experience of Morality,” ACPA, Vol. 60, *Existential Personalism*, 50. This conviction is nothing new. Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that knowledge begins in the senses. There most certainly is an equivalency between “experience” and an adequate understanding of the senses, which Aquinas argues includes both the inner and outer senses.

introduces a method he refers to as “*pausing at the irreducible*.”<sup>33</sup> This methodological operation allows us to recognize the irreducibility of the human person, a someone who is unique, unrepeatable, and ultimately incommunicable—but not thereby unknowable.<sup>34</sup> It both preserves the objectivity of the *suppositum humanum* and the place the human being holds in the cosmic order while freeing us to analyze the human being as a concrete self, a self-experiencing subject. At this point we can introduce the reality of consciousness into the account – and our main concern in this paper begins to come into view. For this “methodological operation” can be understood as an invitation to all of us, including the therapist or the pastoral counselor, to “pause before the irreducible”: the unique instantiation of human nature fully embodied by the person we are called serve.

Here is what must be understood: In such encounters, we need not sever the person from his objective nature; we are simply pausing before the totality of who he is and attempting to go more deeply into it by acknowledging the person as a subject who experiences her own acts and inner happenings, and with them his own subjectivity.<sup>35</sup> In John Paul’s II account, this subjectivity is itself a manifestation both of human nature and personal being.

This experiential recognition of both aspects of his being is something that John Paul II points out is brought to the fore within the orbit of consciousness. He states: “consciousness interiorizes all that the human being cognizes, including everything that the individual cognizes from within acts of self-knowledge, and makes it all a content of the subject’s lived experience.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, lived experience as understood by John Paul II is already delimited; it is not merely experience *per se* that interests him, but experience consciously lived and cognized.

The value and the validity of John Paul’s II arguments regarding the significance of lived experience for a full account of the person can perhaps be grasped most readily by considering our own: I simply do not experience myself as a *suppositum humanum*, as merely another instantiation of a “human nature,” even if I am convinced that I am such in the abstract. I experience myself as a personal subject who both possesses a certain stable identity from moment to moment and also reflects a certain dynamism. I am a someone” who thinks and chooses, senses and acts, feels and

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<sup>33</sup> Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible,” 213.

<sup>34</sup> Something can be intelligible but impossible to reduce to words or definitions. For example, one “knows” one’s spouse, but who they are in their essence cannot be communicated in any ultimate sense. It can only be experienced.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 227.

desires, loves and hopes. I also know at some level that I am ordered toward happiness and fulfillment and that I am responsible for myself. Though certainly I can affirm that all of these powers and faculties are normative and universal features of human nature itself, this need not lead to a denial of the fact that they are also deeply personal aspects of my own subjectivity and experience.

The great task of each and every human person is to realize the fullness of one's own humanity by bringing one's personal subjectivity into conformance with the objective truth of what it means to be human, that is, who I am now, at this moment in my own process of development, but in light of the fullness of what God had in mind when he created me.<sup>37</sup> As a result of my status as a fallen creature, I will inevitably struggle with sin, with limitations, difficulties, and even disorders. But these foibles do not prevent me in any final way from becoming who I am meant to be: "a subjective being, capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about myself, with a tendency toward self-realization."<sup>38</sup> My lived experience of myself, when considered in its totality, will always reveal me to be a subject who can determine myself by transcending myself and integrating the various partial aspects of myself into the whole of who I am—a creature who is a unity of soul and body. And, as we will see next, John Paul II maintains that it is this capacity for transcendence and integration that is definitive of human personhood, a creature who is—or should be—always in the process of becoming who God meant him to be.

### **The Proposal: An Objective Account of Human Subjectivity**

We turn now to John Paul's II own proposal. In what follows, I have attempted to synthesize the aspects of his account that will shed light on the important questions we have in this paper. We will begin by considering more completely the fundamental distinction he makes between person and nature and then explore the dynamisms associated with them within the framework of his theory of transcendence and integration. This will call for mention of his understanding of human freedom and consciousness. Here we are continuing our effort to grasp the synthesis John Paul II offers us,

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<sup>37</sup> John Paul II is very clear in many places that there is no real conflict between person and nature - that our freedom as persons is found in realizing human nature in its fullness in ourselves. Perhaps the most important place this is found is in *Veritatis Splendor*, especially ch. 2.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 6.

but we are moving closer to grasping the point of departure for pastoral and therapeutic outreach that lies “hidden” within his analysis.

For John Paul II, the personal subjectivity of human persons is itself an objective reality that can be studied, analyzed, and understood. After all, human subjectivity has features that are themselves “transpersonal” and universally recognizable; it is this fact that makes it possible for us to understand each other and have compassion for one another. We have a set of experiences in common – the experience of being human. Though we can fail to investigate and distinguish these experiences by bringing them into the orbit of our consciousness, we do have the capacity to do so, and could thus come to see their place in our own personal development and their impact on us. In making that effort, we arrive at what most truly constitutes “lived experience” in John Paul’s II account. We will return to a full consideration of the meaning of consciousness shortly. For now, let us stipulate that John Paul II leverages this category of human existence – that of lived experience – to arrive at a normative account of human subjectivity. In other words, he “implements” his own proposal: against the backdrop of the place man occupies in the created order and all that it implies about his existence as the *suppositum humanum*, he “pauses before the irreducible” in the person to enter into an investigation of the dynamisms proper to the acting person.

We have already seen that John Paul II argues that the Boethian definition of the person does not fully express the dynamism of a being who is “the subject of both existence and acting” and whose existence is not merely individual but also personal.<sup>39</sup> John Paul II states that this dynamism is captured in two distinct ontological structures that “run through the phenomenological field of experience, so as to divide it, whereas they join and unite in the metaphysical field.”<sup>40</sup> These are the fundamental experiential phenomena that provide the basis for his analysis of human action: the experience of “I act,” i.e., of “man-acts,” and that of “something-happens-in-man.”<sup>41</sup> Both of these phenomena are given in experience; their common root is the being of the person who experiences them.<sup>42</sup> Taken together, they constitute the totality of the concrete manifestations of the dynamism proper to man.<sup>43</sup> This experiential difference is the starting point of his argument.

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<sup>39</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 177.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> This distinction is also made by Aquinas, though in different terms. It corresponds to the contrast Aquinas makes between “human acts” and the “acts of a man.” *Summa Theologiae II-I*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> That is, the *suppositum humanum* or, in ordinary terms, a stable, perduring identity; John Paul II calls this the “ego”.

<sup>43</sup> Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 65.

It is thus that in the dynamism of man there appears the essential difference arising from having the experience of efficacy. On the one hand, there is that form of the human dynamism in which man himself is the agent, that is to say, he is the conscious cause of his own 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*.”<sup>44</sup>

Only in the experience of “*man-acts*,” when the human person experiences himself as the efficient cause of his actions, can it be said that a fully human act, an *actus personae*, has taken place.<sup>45</sup> In this moment, the person experiences his own efficacy, he recognizes himself as “the actor.” This experience “discriminates man’s acting from everything that merely happens in him.”<sup>46</sup>

It is at the juncture of these two dynamisms that consciousness enters the picture and lived experience discloses the subjectivity of the person, as well as his freedom.<sup>47</sup> It reveals that, though both these dynamisms are rooted in the same *suppositum*, what is merely “happening” in the subject is experientially distinguishable from the dynamism associated with the experience of conscious actions. These refer to the conscious “I,” that is the person, as their cause.<sup>48</sup> Such experiences are a commonplace event in every person’s life. Even when no words accompany it, one knows the difference between something that appears unbidden – a physical or emotional desire, an angry reaction, surprise or shock, a sudden sense of fear or of contentment – and a conscious and intentional decision to act in a certain way. John Paul II argues that

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. See also K. Wojtyła, “Personal Structure,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 189.

<sup>45</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, John Paul II argues that *actus personae* is more precise and meaningful than the traditional *actus humanae*. He uses this latter term when speaking more globally, but we find more frequent references in his papal writings to *actus personae*.

<sup>46</sup> Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Importantly, in John Paul’s II account, the subjectivity of the person is not constituted by consciousness; rather consciousness is constituted by the subject. Consciousness belongs to the person and is an attribute of the whole person who, after all, is not simply “a consciousness” but a *someone*, who is both physical and spiritual, both subject and object. See K. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty. The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2000), 106.



It is the ego that is the agent of actions. When man acts, the ego has the experience of its own efficacy in action. When, on the other hand, there is something happening in man, then the ego does not experience its own efficacy and is not the actor<sup>49</sup>.

These two “distinct ontological structures” correspond to the distinction between nature and person that he argues is at the core of human subjectivity. We will begin with something-happens-in-man since it provides the substructure of the ontological unity of the person.

### **Something-Happens-in-Man**

The late Holy Father points out that the movements associated with something-happens-in-man take place in a particular way in the body, in man’s somatic constitution. These somatic activations happen purely on the level of nature. The dynamism of the body is fundamentally reactive; it responds to external stimuli and is outside the immediate sphere of consciousness. In their origin, its movements do not exceed the potentiality of the body; they include such instincts as thirst, hunger, and sex.<sup>50</sup> We will return to these elements shortly.

Though such instincts happen without being willed or chosen, they still remain under the purview of the good. As such, these dynamisms possess an internal compass and logic; they are aspects of the personal structure of subjectivity, a part of the whole that the person is. Such “happenings” originate in the person’s instinct for self-preservation or the natural desire for love and for happiness; they are ordered toward the good of existence itself and are the underpinning of the psychosomatic unity he seeks.<sup>51</sup>

Even though these somatic dynamisms often operate outside the sphere of consciousness and are not present in the person’s experience of his own intentionality, this does not in any way affect the “ontic unity of man.”<sup>52</sup> For it is manifestly clear that the person is not entirely alienated from these “happenings” and, though they may be unexpected or their source hidden, he understands that they are a part of him. While they may not have originated in anything consciously

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<sup>49</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 182. Also quoted in Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), Chapter 1.

<sup>51</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 321. Quoted also in Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 134.

<sup>52</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 321. Quoted also in Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 134.

intended by him, even without naming it he somehow knows that he is responsible for them and that his freedom is at stake in what happens next.

It is here that we come to the place of feelings in the experience of the person. While the somatic dynamism is reactive, the dynamism of the psyche is essentially emotive. Both are aspects of “something-happens-in-man”; emotivity does respond to external stimuli (a beautiful landscape, for example). But, in the psychic life of man, the internal effects of those external impulses transcend purely bodily reactions; they result in feelings, an unbidden response to a movement that comes from within. His mostly inchoate awareness that the body is “speaking” to him arises within the orbit of consciousness in particular via his feelings. Indeed, it is through his feelings that man can even experience his own body; they become a bridge between unconscious somatic reactions and consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

With a consideration of the feelings, we begin to move away from the purely sensory manifestations of the body.<sup>54</sup> Feelings have a basis in sensation, but they are more than that; they have a component of immateriality and thus enter into the properly psychic life of man. They lead to a particularly human sensitivity that is characterized by “different intentional directions that are deeply rooted in man’s spiritual life.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, John Paul II also attributes to feelings a certain intelligence, a cognitive function: they are directed intentionally to values, to what the person has come to see as the good. However, they cannot be said to rise to the level of “truthfulness”; this emotive experience of values is to be subordinated to the objective truth about values as cognized by the person’s intellect. Indeed, “*the fusion of sensitivity with truthfulness is the necessary condition of the experience of values.*”<sup>56</sup> Like the instincts of the somatic constitution, they fall under the purview of a higher intelligence, a guide that will enable their integration with the whole of who man is or could become. They serve as the substructure of the highest expression of feeling possible to man, that of genuine, objective love. But objective love is an aspect of “man-acts”; it

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<sup>53</sup> Wojtyła, *Persona and Act*, 338. Also quoted in Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 136 (Here quoting *The Acting Person*, 228). John Paul II states that “...instinct does not consist solely of the somatic dynamism in man. This is why its interpretation in somatic terms can never be complete. In fact, instinct as a definite dynamic trait affects also the human psyche, and it is in the psyche that it finds its proper expression... This experience itself of this urge... has a psycho-emotive character while the reaction of the organism only supplies it with the somatic ground.” Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 216. Found in a slightly different form in *Persona and Act*, 326.

<sup>54</sup> For an astonishingly perceptive and thorough account from the point of view of the therapist that parallels Wojtyła’s analysis here, see A. Terruwe and C. Baars, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing: Using All the Powers of the Human Psyche*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf Publishers, 1981), ch. I.

<sup>55</sup> Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 137.

<sup>56</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 233. See also Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 137.

requires a conscious act and the dynamism of intellect and the will. We will return to these themes in the next section of the paper.<sup>57</sup>

For now, I will point out that, in contrast to the pervasive assumption at work in our culture – that feelings are all the signal one needs to determine a course of action – John Paul II demonstrates that, as an aspect of “something-happens-in-man,” they cannot claim any kind of final authority, for, ultimately, they are subject to the natural law and the objective moral norms that constitute the milieu of all human action and human relationships.

The Holy Father maintains that the person’s experience of his body, its sensations and feelings, point him toward “the somatic structure of the whole subject that he is, of the whole ego.”<sup>58</sup> This arises out of the holistic experience of himself that John Paul II refers to as “self-feeling” whose object is “the whole somatic ego, which is not isolated from the personal ego but is, on the contrary, intrinsically cohesive with it.”<sup>59</sup> It is thus through the appearance of feelings and his awareness of them – this global experience of “self-feeling”- that man emerges from the subjective reactivity of his body and finds in himself the capacity to rise above it.<sup>60</sup>

And this leads us to our investigation of the second ontological structure of human subjectivity: man-acts.

## Man-Acts

We now enter into realm of the person, without, however, leaving the realm of nature (the psychosomatic dynamisms) totally behind. The lived experience of the “happenings” that we have been considering so far can be distinguished from the very different experience of the subject’s own efficacy, also witnessed within the orbit of his personal consciousness. It is a commonplace experience: the person thinks about the choices before him, compares them to some idea he has of the true or the good, navigates the feelings and desires he has about them, makes decisions, and acts with some measure of intention. He is aware at some level that his freedom is implicated throughout this entire encounter with himself, that he does have the capacity to choose—and

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<sup>57</sup> This formulation is part of the received tradition, a description grounded in the Aristotelian Thomistic understanding of human action. See R. McInerney, *Aquinas on Human Action: A Theory of Practice* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1992), 53-74.

<sup>58</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 229.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* See also Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 136.

<sup>60</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 228. See also Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 136.

choose freely. Though perhaps only vaguely, he senses that this freedom is compromised if he simply submits to the sometimes arbitrary happenings of his somatic constitution (the bodily appetites, for example); though these impulses are themselves ordered toward a good, they are in need of a guide to insure their expression reaches toward the higher order goods he seeks. He senses his personhood will be affirmed and strengthened if he makes a conscious and free choice consistent with the authentic good, something that, ultimately, is only truly known if conscience has been formed and habituated to helping him to choose well. These are personal acts that come under the purview of consciousness, intentionality, and freedom. However these choices play out, the concrete expressions of intellect, will, and freedom they represent (now clearly revealed as more than mere abstractions) are aspects of experience discernible at the level of the person.

With this as a starting point, John Paul II develops an account of the inner structure of the person within the context of “man-acts,” the sphere of human action that has the potential to lead to a fully actualized subject. He speaks here primarily of the natural drive of the person toward acts of self-determination, moments of efficacy in which he experiences himself as an actor—moments when he is aware of himself as responsible for his own becoming. These will require acts of transcendence, defined by John Paul II as the act of going beyond an established boundary in oneself to actualize a pre-existing potency. Acts of self-determination must be preceded by a movement toward states of self-possession and self-governance. These are necessary prerequisites for the act of self-determination, for no one can determine himself unless he is first in possession of himself and able to govern himself. They require that the person both transcend the psychosomatic impulses that emerge from the sphere of something-happens-in-man and, through acts of the intellect and the will, integrate them into the totality of who he is in light of who is meant to be.

John Paul II points out that every moment of choice is one in which both the intellect and the will are jointly faced with a decision; together they are responsible for making one that is consistent with the good. Indeed, each is a moment of truth on the way to the good—or not.<sup>61</sup> Such moments often arise as a result of the psychosomatic dynamism originating in the body, an occurrence of something-happens-in-man. They call for the exercise of authentic freedom. And they illuminate the fact that the person is the agent of in his own becoming, that because he is free to choose, he is responsible for whom he becomes. They call for a movement toward self-

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<sup>61</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 135ff.

possession and self-governance. When brought within the orbit of consciousness, these moments can be experienced and understood for what they are—moments in which we determine ourselves in ways that either correspond to our true nature—or not.

We are all familiar with such moments when a choice presents itself and our task as human beings is to choose what is authentically good. There are countless examples: the decision not to eat or drink excessively; opposing the impulse to express anger toward a child, a friend, a spouse; or resisting the urge to engage in what one knows to be illicit sexual conduct. John Paul II is pointing to such moments as steps on the way to becoming whom one is meant to be in the eyes of God – or not.

Though we can only point to its central aspect here, it is important to make explicit the fact that human love can only be correctly understood within the framework provide by “man-acts.” By definition, human love can never be purely sexual, though these psychosomatic impulses do serve as its substructure. We saw in the last section that the feelings themselves transcend the merely sensual level of the body, that they respond to the recognition of a value inherent in an object or a person. In John Paul’s II account, when it reaches its fullest expression, the experience of feeling as a response to a value extends into the realm of betrothed love itself, something that consists in the integration of all the different spontaneous processes – the sexual attraction and the sexual emotions – into a conscious act of the whole person that also involves his rational faculties.<sup>62</sup> It requires the recognition that the object of love is a person. Human love both requires and is sustained by an affirmation of the other person as a person, a creature who is an end in himself.

### **The Role of Consciousness**

We need to consider one last element in this account: the meaning of consciousness itself. John Paul II distinguishes two aspects or functions of consciousness. The first and more elementary is its mirroring or illuminating function, in which its role is simply to reflect to the subject what happens in him as well as his acting, “of what he does and how he does it.” It reflects the person as the dynamic source and subject of her actions and an awareness of all the things that the subject

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<sup>62</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 125-130. See also Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 46.

meets externally through her activities, whether cognitive or otherwise. At this level, the subject has an elementary and non-intentional awareness of her actions and of herself as the actor.<sup>63</sup>

But in addition to this illuminating function, consciousness has another, more essential function which is “the ultimate reason for its presence in the specific structure of the acting person.” This is the “reflexive” or “subjective” aspect: its function is “to form man’s experience and thus to allow him to experience in a special way his own subjectiveness.” It is illuminated in the first instance by the mirroring function of consciousness; it permits us “*to experience these actions as actions and as our own.*”<sup>64</sup> The reflexive aspect of consciousness is, in a sense, the realization of another level of awareness in the person. It goes beyond a primordial awareness of my existence, beyond a mere mirroring of objects; it is the experience of one’s own personal subjectivity that comes into more prominent view. For example, I have a direct experience of myself in the act of reaching for my spouse, hugging my child, or going for a run. I recognize that *I* am acting and that *I* have freely chosen to do so. Here consciousness “turns back naturally upon the subject,”<sup>65</sup> disclosing it “inwardly” and revealing it “in its specific distinctness and unique concreteness.” This “disclosing” is the precise function of the reflexive aspect of consciousness.<sup>66</sup> Through its action, I experience myself as the subject of my actions. It is in recognizing this that I become responsible for taking possession of myself and governing myself, for transcending and integrating those aspects of myself that appear, often without my willing it. When I resist the impulse to give expression to anger in disciplining my child and instead find a way to govern myself, I both transcend *and* integrate the emotional reaction – and in the process take another step toward self-possession and self-determination.

In John Paul’s II account, “it is one thing to *be* the subject, another to be *cognized* (that is, objectivized) as the subject, and still a different thing to *experience* one’s self as the subject of one’s own acts and experiences.” (The last distinction we owe to the reflexive function of consciousness.)<sup>67</sup> It is only when the person experiences herself as a subject that she can be said to be fully in act; every person is a subject because every person is a *suppositum*. But this itself possesses a potency that is meant to be manifest through the dynamism proper to it, that is, in the

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<sup>63</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. Italics and parentheses in original.

act of becoming herself.<sup>68</sup> John Paul II argues that man owes to this aspect of consciousness his capacity to appropriate his own subjectivity, making what are in fact the manifestly objective features of his being—that is, universal and normative for all human persons—personal.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, I am only fully the subject of my own actions when I experience myself as such. And it is within this context that I begin and sustain the process of moving toward self-possession, self-governance, and finally self-determination. It is only then that I can genuinely say that I possess, govern and determine myself. John Paul II does not deny that human subjectivity is the possession of every human person, for each is characterized by the existence of the *suppositum* and the potency that accompanies human action in both its manifestations. But all are in the process of becoming that full human subject that exists in some degree of potency at every moment.<sup>70</sup> Both aspects of consciousness are at play in the human person's efforts to become fully himself, a unity of body and soul; without consciousness, without an awareness of himself at some level, the person is unable consciously and intentionally to make of himself a gift to another.

### Spelling Out the Implications

We have already come a long way. But contained within this simple distinction—between things that merely happen and things that are or can be consciously intended—a distinction also immediately accessible to human experience—is the starting place we seek. For in stark contrast to the claims of those attempting to advance the flawed logic of gender ideology, John Paul II points out that the sexual urge itself (no matter toward whom it is oriented) must be seen to originate in something-happens-in-man; that is, it begins in the body and only transcends the somatic constitution when it enters into the realm of conscious and intentional human action. As such, in no case does one's sexual desire (or "orientation") define the person in his totality or form his identity in any substantive sense.

Since every human being is by nature a sexual being, at its root the sexual urge is a normative feature of human nature.<sup>71</sup> The sexual urge is only a partial aspect of the person, and

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<sup>68</sup> Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 227.

<sup>69</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 42.

<sup>70</sup> Or, as Father Bernard Lonergan would say, we become subjects "by degrees."

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, he declares that "[t]his sexual urge is a *natural drive born in all human beings, a vector of aspiration* along which their whole existence develops and perfects itself from within." Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 46. Italics in original.

though it is ordered toward more than the merely biological through expressions of feeling, desire, and ultimately, love, it cannot in any instance be thought to constitute the identity of the person. Until it finds its expression in action, it has not yet risen to the level of the personal and cannot be considered an authentically human act.<sup>72</sup> As John Paul II puts it,

The sexual urge in man is not a source of self-contained actions but it is a particular property of human existence which is reflected and finds its expression in action. That property is something natural and hence something fully developed in man. The consequence of that property is not so much that man behaves in a particular way as that something happens to man, something begins to take place without any initiative on his part, creating a base for definite actions, for considered actions, in which man exercises self-determination, decides for himself about his own actions and takes responsibility for them. This is the point at which human freedom and the sex urge meet.”<sup>73</sup>

Here we see how dramatically John Paul’s II account reveals the tragically diminished understanding of the person now governing the culture at large, characterized as it is by the assumption that the human person is actually defined by his sexual urges. Indeed, the whole thrust of gender ideology is to argue that, for all intents and purposes, the person is reducible to his sexual “orientation,” and yet, at the same time, also free to choose from one of any number of genders now on offer on any given day. Such a view is not only inherently illogical, it results in the fragmentation of the person, tearing his subjectivity in two by denying the evidence of the intimate psychic union he enjoys – or should enjoy - with his body (which is self-evidently only either male or female). Further, it fundamentally rejects the very thing that distinguishes the human person from non-rational animals. Human beings are characterized by our capacity for reason and freedom; the prevailing view of man traps him in a body that knows only instinct and desire unmoored from intelligence and the free pursuit of the authentic good.

John Paul II goes on to declare that though “man is not responsible for what happens to him in the sphere of sex” (since he is not the cause of it), “he is entirely responsible for what he does in this sphere.” Man is by nature capable of rising above instinct in any and all of his actions, including

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. And as we will see, human acts fall under the scope of the intellect and the will and, through them, are subject to the objective moral order.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.



in the sexual arena. If this were not the case, morality itself would have no meaning.<sup>74</sup> The mode of action typical of man includes reflection on means and ends; he is (or can be) conscious of his aims and free to choose the means by which he achieves them. Only animals have sex without thinking about it. But human freedom, by definition, cannot be detached “from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth.”<sup>75</sup>

Here we come to an important moment in our deliberations. For, according to John Paul II, authentic, objective human love is only possible if its point of departure is an affirmation of the other person as a person. This demands that I recognize him as a creature who is an end in himself, a someone, not a something, and who is pursuing his own ends and happiness. This recognition must be accompanied by the acknowledgement that it is thus always wrong to use the other as a means to an end.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the use of any person as a sexual object in any sense is absolutely ruled out. Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered because they obliterate the full meaning of the sexual act: the fullness of the sexual union is intrinsically creative and ordered toward the conception of children. One need not be religious to grasp that our bodies are designed for this purpose. Though the partners may feel genuine affection for one another, and even though some kind of emotional bonding may occur, since, in an objective sense, neither the truly unitive nor the procreative dimension of the sexual act can be present in homosexual acts, they must be said to be first and primarily ordered toward sexual pleasure. Such acts are simply incapable of being ordered toward anything else; they can never result in the total gift of self that all human persons are called to make. The physical union called for by such a gift is literally impossible.

Man’s acting in the sphere of human relationships is naturally governed by these laws; they cannot be transgressed for long if one’s goal is authentic human happiness.<sup>77</sup> John Paul II states that “love cannot take the form of use, even if enjoyment is mutual and simultaneous. Instead, it finds its expression in the union of persons” within its only proper context: marriage.

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>75</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 4. Though I can only invoke this encyclical here, clearly the document is grounded in the Holy Father’s anthropology and extends its significance for the moral life in profoundly meaningful ways. *VS* can be understood as an effort to translate the natural law and its moral norms into the language of personalism and human experience. More work needs to be done to illuminate the connections between these two complementary accounts and leverage them for our questions in this paper.

<sup>76</sup> Wojtyła refers to this as the “personalistic norm” throughout his writings.

<sup>77</sup> This is a reference, not to mere preference satisfaction, but to happiness understood as ordered toward the true and the good, and, ultimately, final union with God.

John Paul II has translated the objective account of the person that grounds the Church's teachings on man into the language of human subjectivity and experience. He has not altered that account in any way; he has simply decoded it, as it were, rendering it accessible to anyone willing to consider his experience in light of the whole truth about man. He has transformed it into something that can be leveraged in any encounter. For human experience is itself not a total mystery, detached from any internal unity or regulating feature. Nor is it a phenomenon alienated from the range of human reason or something that occurs outside its limits. It is always the experience of a person and, as such, is subject to analysis and appraisal. It is not a law unto itself but must submit to those laws, both natural and divine, that the evidence of our senses, reason, and conscience tell us govern the entire created order. It calls constantly for individual acts of transcendence and integration as the person moves from potency to act on their way to becoming that most excellent person that God had in mind when he created him.

But our work is not done. The concrete application of this account is still not clear. We will now turn our attention more explicitly to that concern.

### **When the Starting Place is Lived Experience**

We are ready now, finally, to consider the implications of John Paul's II account for our questions in this paper. How can his truly radical interpretation of the human person aid us in our efforts to engage confidently in pastoral or therapeutic encounters?<sup>78</sup> In what way does it help us to begin with experience and still avoid compromising the full truth about the person? Again, what, concretely, is our approach to be if we are to put lived experience at the center of our interpretation of the person – without falling inevitably into subjectivism? In what follows, I will suggest four essential insights derived from John Paul's II account that can guide our encounters with those experiencing SSA and for those who minister to them.

### **The Moral Context**

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<sup>78</sup> John Paul's II account is "radical" in the original sense of that term: he has gone to the root of the issue and arrived at a new vision of what constitutes a complete account of the person.

Unquestionably, the first thing to recall (though not necessarily the first thing to invoke in a meeting with others) is John Paul's II conviction that the human person never exists nor acts outside of a moral context, a milieu governed by the natural law and the objective moral norms that follow from it, not to mention the teachings of Christ. With the tradition, John Paul II maintains that the person is naturally ordered toward the true and the good and insists that these natural inclinations are to be followed and governed by an understanding of freedom bound by the truth.<sup>79</sup> What the sainted Holy Father contributes is the insight that the objective nature of this moral context is itself accessible to lived experience. For evidence, we need only to reflect on the discomfort that accompanies our actions when we ignore the dictates of conscience. Or acknowledge the unhappiness that ensues when we embrace a disordered understanding of the good and pursue sensual pleasures or indulge our unhealthy or neurotic tendencies. Or recognize the joy that comes from choosing the truly good. Though they may deny it, persons intuitively know, often through their own experience, that there are certain things that lead to happiness – and certain things that simply do not. Since happiness is the only thing that the human person desires of necessity, all human choices can be understood to be but means to that end. These are the facts of human experience; they are transpersonal feature of human subjectivity. They can be leveraged in any encounter, whether with a client, a child, or a friend. But whether or not this moral order is mentioned at all, we can never lose sight of the fact that pastoral ministry or therapeutic practices unmoored from the context of moral norms will result in a nihilistic outlook; it will be ineffective and hopeless. The person always acts within this context; it provides him with his “true north” and compass. We can be confident that it provides the milieu for the person's experience of himself even when entirely unacknowledged by him.

### **An Insight from Thomism: The Priority of Existence**

The second insight is found in John Paul's II particular brand of Thomism and the priority he places on the reality of existence rather than essence. Though it may be obscured by the metaphysical superstructure within which it resides, this understanding provides us with the existential starting place for any encounter with another. I have argued elsewhere that John Paul's II enormous

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<sup>79</sup> That these aspects of human existence are accessible to human experience is a theme developed at length in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, something we can only point to here.

personal appeal can be traced to the fact that he appropriated this idea into his very being – and it is precisely this insight that should inform every human interaction, most especially those of the pastoral minister or therapist.<sup>80</sup>

The Holy Father was what is known as an “existential” Thomist that is, a philosopher who subscribed to the interpretation of the Angelic Doctor proposed by Étienne Gilson. It was from Gilson that he learned that the philosophy of Aquinas should only be interpreted within the framework of his theological works and that this represented, not a systematic result, but an explicitly Christian way of doing philosophy. That is, an approach that remains true to the object and methods of philosophy but is undertaken within the horizon of the revealed truths of the faith. Most importantly for our purposes here, he also was introduced to Gilson’s demonstration that Aquinas gives a certain pride of place to existence in his metaphysics and exposition of the doctrine of creation.

According to Gilson, Aquinas had departed from the Aristotelian definition of metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being in which being is reduced to a “substance,” the concrete subsisting essence. Gilson points out that, for Aquinas, the doctrine of creation simply had to modify the very notion of metaphysics itself; it became instead “the science of being through its first cause.” In this regard, Gilson makes the quite legitimate claim that the context for the metaphysics of being in Aquinas was the passage in Exodus when God reveals his identity to Moses as “I am Who Am.” For Thomas, being thus meant the existence of the thing, not merely the thing itself.<sup>81</sup>

What is essential for us here is that, from his study of Aquinas, John Paul II now understood another fundamental truth about human personhood: that every human person, without exception, is held in existence—at every moment of his life—by a God who loves him. This can only mean that he is a good precisely because he exists. In other words, the starting place in grasping the significance of any living person is not who she is *per se*, but that she is. In his constant effort to come to know the person, John Paul’s II first step in every encounter is to affirm the fact of her

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<sup>80</sup> See D. Savage, “The Intellectual Conversion of Pope John Paul II: The Philosopher as Christian Witness and Pastor of the Church.” Paper presented as “The Secret Life of John Paul II” at a conference at Duquesne University: “The Phenomenology of John Paul II,” December 1, 2006.

<sup>81</sup> From this account in Scripture, Aquinas concluded that being was an act, not a form, since its function was to confer actual existence on the essence which receives it. See É. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), 154-89. This is a reference to Aquinas’s distinction between essence and existence and provides an important point of departure for his metaphysics. John Paul II appears to accept Gilson’s account of human knowledge though he makes some additional distinctions of his own. See K. Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 165-175, especially 170-171.

existence. He affirms her, he loves her, because she exists and therefore represents a good, one created and held in existence by God.

It is a familiar caveat—found in Augustine—who tells us that we cannot love that which we do not first know. This has led many of us to conclude that love of another can only follow once we engage in the process of getting to “know” that person. But John Paul II understood that the universal love demanded of us is based on the knowledge that **who you are**, that is, your essence, is secondary to **that you are**, that is, the fact of your existence.<sup>82</sup> There could be no better starting place for our encounter with others than the recognition of the unique good that each person represents in the order of creation.

As a practical matter, this calls us to make, first of all, a particular kind of effort in every interaction. If we are to invite another to consider the whole of who they are, then we must ourselves be aware of the whole of who *we* are. Here, we can admit to the experience we all have of being a sort of “talking-head,” or, as C.S. Lewis puts it in *The Abolition of Man*, “men without chests.”<sup>83</sup> We are ourselves a unity of body and soul and must bring all of who we are into the conversation if we have any hope of calling others to do so. We must learn to be *present* to others and, as just mentioned, to try not to forget that we are all held in existence at every moment of every day by a God who loves us and wills our good.

Thomas Aquinas defines love as the capacity “to will the good of another.” John Paul II echoes this teaching in *Love and Responsibility* when he argues that the only suitable disposition toward another person is love—that love means that we seek the good of the beloved.<sup>84</sup> Love is the only suitable disposition because each person is an end in and of himself, never used as a mere means or discarded because useless. We are to love literally everyone, no matter what their disorder or difficulty. It does not mean we have to hug them, like them personally, or approve of their behavior. But a Catholic therapist or pastoral minister is certainly, in the first instance, called to love, to will the good of the other, because real healing can only take place within that embrace.

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<sup>82</sup> In fact, I have argued that this is the basis for the enormous personal appeal of the late Holy Father, a matter of historical record. One had only to attend to the events immediately following his death in April, 2005 to grasp that it was a phenomenon that transcended religious and cultural boundaries, doctrinal differences, age and gender gaps. Many reported that in his presence, whether as part of a large crowd or in a private audience, one felt personally acknowledged, deeply affirmed and, indeed, called to a new level of holiness. My argument is that the source of this sense of “being known” was due to John Paul’s II recognition of existence as the first reach of the mind and his embodiment of that principle in his encounter with others.

<sup>83</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 1947), 2-3.

<sup>84</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 40-44. See also, R. Spinello, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 40.

This is the thrust of Pope Francis's entire message to the Catholic faithful<sup>85</sup>; it is the basis for the Christian understanding of pastoral care and the starting place of a radically compassionate posture toward the other. For true compassion is never divorced from a fundamental respect for the true dignity of each and every human person and a recognition of their true potential as a child of God.

### **From Phenomenology: The Use of Categorial Limits**

Finally a more complete answer to our question requires a brief consideration of one particular element in John Paul's II use of phenomenological method: his reference to something called "categorial limits," a technical term in phenomenology which refers to the cognitional act of recognizing a part in relation to a whole<sup>86</sup> Though an extensive treatment of phenomenology as a school of thought is well beyond our purposes here,<sup>87</sup> the term "categorial," is reasonably simple to grasp.<sup>88</sup> It is important here because of the use John Paul II makes of it in his efforts to assure us that we can start with lived experience without fear.

First, let us make it clear that John Paul II clearly grasps the significance of the problem posed for us by subjectivism and its lineage. He understands and affirms this as a legitimate concern.<sup>89</sup> But his response is equally clear: No, he argues, we are not "doomed to subjectivism" provided we maintain a connection to the integral experience of the human being,<sup>90</sup> provided we keep in mind the whole that, in truth, constitutes the person. He invokes this particular category of analysis, stating that we must always recall that all analyses aimed at illuminating human subjectivity have their "categorial limits," limits that cannot be transgressed or ignored. That is, our experience of constituting a specific phenomenon in ourselves must always be referred to the whole of which it is only a part.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013. See especially no. 169 and no. 171.

<sup>86</sup> See R. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 7.

<sup>87</sup> For a more complete account of phenomenology in general, see Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 89-93. The text provides an excellent and very sound analysis of phenomenology as a school of thought.

<sup>88</sup> Sokolowski states that "it is especially in its treatment of categorial intending that phenomenology provides resources to escape the egocentric predicament of modern philosophy. Some of phenomenology's most original and valuable contributions to philosophy are found in its doctrines about categorial intentions." (Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 89.)

<sup>89</sup> Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," 213.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 221. For a more complete account of this aspect of phenomenology, see Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 89-93.

When John Paul II argues that the analysis of human subjectivity is subject to categorial limits he is pointing out that it is not just an amorphous set of isolated and independent observations or a descriptive cataloging of individual phenomena; at a certain point, one is able to differentiate the part from the whole and make a judgment about it. He is arguing that we can know, through metaphysical reflection, that the person has a nature, a form, that takes shape in a certain body—and that any single experience must be seen as but a part and referred to that whole. No one, single human experience, no matter how profound its impact or meaning for me, defines who I am. It represents but a partial aspect of myself. It is, in fact, a moment of decision, a moment when I can choose, either to succumb to its demands—or recognize my own freedom to say “I may but I will not.”

A person’s “sexual” identity can never be seen as the totality of what constitutes the person. Clearly, it is only a partial aspect of their personhood and, as such, must be integrated into the whole of who they are. A therapeutic approach that permits the client to view himself or herself through the lens of a sexual identity, especially when this aspect of the person is causing discomfort and anguish, is fundamentally flawed. It is a form of medical malpractice.

### **A Final Insight: Transcendence and Integration**

John Paul II argues that becoming who I am meant to be will require that I engage intentionally in two complementary dynamisms: transcendence and integration. He defines transcendence as the act of going beyond an established threshold or boundary; it is both transitive and intransitive. It begins in intentional acts of cognition and volition and proceeds along two trajectories. Horizontal transcendence (the transitive aspect) refers to the moments in which the person steps out of his limits toward an external object. Vertical transcendence (the intransitive aspect) consists in going beyond an inner threshold in oneself; it is a movement in the direction of self-determination and a greater, more fully realized freedom. Both dimensions are often present together. For example, they are both at work in the act of making a choice or a decision about whether or not to reach for (yet another) piece of cake. That is, they are both implicated in the choice I make when I either give in to—or refuse to allow—the impulses, the “happenings” of the appetites or passions to determine, at least in this instance, who I am or will become. These are acts of the person in which the experience of efficacy and freedom appears within the orbit of consciousness. The way in which

the person chooses in the face of repeated instances of such moments will, in the end, determine who she becomes. One may struggle with disordered desires. In point of fact, all of us do. But in attempting to acquire virtue through habitually choosing the truly good, every single human person has the potential to develop this capacity to the extent that he arrives at a moment when choosing that good is simply natural for him; he chooses it because he knows it will lead to his authentic happiness and, perhaps, ultimately to the fullness of being.

The theory of integration is complementary to transcendence; it is its necessary corollary. It accounts for the role that the human body, human biology, and physiology play in the *actus humanus* (any human act). First found in *Love and Responsibility*, where John Paul II describes how personal acts of love integrate different dimensions and layers of the subject, it is fully developed in *The Acting Person*, where he integrates the body into the theory of self-possession and self-governance mentioned above. He describes integration as the “realization and the manifestation of a whole and a unity emerging on the basis of some complexity.” In this case, the psychosomatic complexity of the person integrated into a unity and a whole in every human action.

Thus, we see that transcendence is coupled with the need to incorporate and integrate the psychosomatic complexity of the person into a unity, into the whole of what one is, that is, a someone composed of both body and soul. These aspects of personhood are present in every human action and are features of the movement of the person toward a fuller realization of who he is meant to be.<sup>92</sup> They are bound up in the meaning of freedom and its relation to the efficacy of the will in moments of self-determination, experienced as an awareness of the fact that “I may but I do not have to.”<sup>93</sup>

The work of integration calls me to assimilate those aspects of my experience that call me to be most fully who I am meant to be. Such an undertaking cannot leave out the body; in fact, it is the dynamism of the body that demands it. In every moment and in the face of every experience, I am responsible for becoming who I am meant to be, a someone who is, from conception, a unity

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<sup>92</sup> For a superb analysis of John Paul’s II theory of transcendence and integration, see Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, ch. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 115-116. For John Paul II, though the intellect remains the governor in acts of choice, the will is the power to determine oneself because it is the seat of freedom, of deliberate choice and decision. But the freedom under consideration is not the “concept of freedom as such” but something that is “real” in that it is constitutive of the reality of man and the privileged position he holds in the world. Free will cannot be understood apart from its identity as an essential element in the whole structure of the human person; it is a “constitutive element of the personal structure of man.” In other words, it is a characteristic of the *person* and is the critical feature of self-determination. Also quoted in Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 113.



of a particular body and a particular soul, the totality of which can manifestly only ever be either male or female.<sup>94</sup>

Here we come, perhaps, to the heart of the matter. For the gender ideologues would have us accept that the body we are given at conception is merely accidental to our identity, that our identity is a matter of “conscious” choice. Let us here acknowledge the inherent contradiction in their claims. On the one hand they wish to maintain that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice since certain persons are “born” with SSA, thus arguing it is a “naturally” occurring phenomenon. On the other hand, they also wish to claim that the “choice” of gender is a decision each is free to make. It is difficult to make sense of this flawed proposition. Whatever its final resolution in the mind of its proponents, the fatal weakness at its heart is the manifestly false notion that our bodies (as either male OR female) and our consciousness have nothing essential in common. Whatever body we have, it is our consciousness that houses our identity – or so they claim.

John Paul’s II account reveals the essential unity of the body and the soul (here simply understood as that which makes me a living being and what I am), a theory not imposed by a historical tradition that many deem out of date, but one accessible and demonstrable to human experience itself. We have shown that the occurrence of same-sex attraction should be thought of as merely a partial experience; it simply does not constitute the identity of the person. On the contrary, the identity of the person is constituted by his given nature, including and most especially the body, which is characterized by potencies that, over time, are actualized through intentional acts of self-transcendence and integration.

It is the task of the pastoral minister or therapist to guide the client experiencing same-sex attraction toward this integration. Whatever experience he or she presents, we know that our work is to help them to understand that, no matter how compelling, it is merely a part of the totality of who they are and further—that it needs to be transcended and integrated in order for them to realize more fully who they are meant to be.<sup>95</sup>

The anthropological framework proposed by John Paul II provides us with a comprehensive and authentically Catholic vision of the person that can, indeed should inform both pastoral care

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<sup>94</sup> The rare exceptions to this norm notwithstanding.

<sup>95</sup> It is important to point out that the approach I am suggesting is not the equivalent of “praying the gay away.” The whole point is that it is ineffective and invalid to treat merely a fragment of the person. The work of the Catholic therapist is to bring the person in his or her entire personhood into a new sense of wholeness and integration and perhaps a newly oriented life in Christ.

and therapeutic practice. It seems ironic that, in contrast to the radical tolerance insisted on by our culture in the name of freedom, it is only this approach that will lead to liberation, healing, and hope. For it permits us to remain grounded in the full truth about the person even as we acknowledge a starting place in the lived experience of those we encounter. We have learned that this starting place is not only possible but essential if we are to recover our culture, one person at a time.

It seems clear that all of us, whether parent, friend, pastoral minister, or therapist, are in need of a set of skills and questions that will permit us to move those we seek from a starting place in experience to an encounter with themselves as a whole person.<sup>96</sup> The right response to someone who claims to be experiencing SSA is not disbelief, but compassion, not refusal but an invitation to further dialogue, not an argument—but an offer of friendship. It will require supernatural patience and love. Above all, it will require firm confidence in the whole truth about the person, a unity of body and soul, who is called in every instance to become a gift for others.

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<sup>96</sup> Here I would refer the reader to the notion of “threshold conversations” found in the work of Sherry Weddell. Though Ms. Weddell’s focus is evangelization, her insight is applicable to our question here. See S. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Washington D.C: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

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