

Self-Gift and Gratitude: Karol Wojtyła's Personalist Education¹

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Abstract

Karol Wojtyła underscores the perils of depersonalization as a fundamental threat to both individual dignity and societal cohesion. Depersonalization not only disrupts family structures but also reduces individuals to mere means, thereby justifying harmful actions under certain conditions. In response, Wojtyła advocates for the sincere gift of the self—a disinterested offering that preserves the inherent dignity of the person. Contemporary educational institutions increasingly exhibit manifestations of individualism and collectivism. Under individualism, for example, liberal capitalism transforms education into a transactional exchange in which students are treated as customers, teachers as employees, and administrators as asset managers, thus commodifying the educational process. This trend contributes to the corruption of educational professionals, who begin to regard others solely as potential sources of profit rather than as ends in themselves. As reiterated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, education must serve the truth and protect the intrinsic worth of every human being. In this context, the present research applies Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy to education. I argue that the principles of self-gift and gratitude provide a robust framework for addressing the moral challenges posed by universities afflicted with individualistic and collectivistic tendencies that promote transactional rather than personalist forms of education which absolutely squanders the *gift* of the capacity to know the truth and be in service of the good.

Keywords

education, gratitude, self-gift, personalism, truth

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Introduction

Education is one of the most fundamental rights of the human person because education is constitutive of the freedom of the human person. If one takes the term “education” in its foundational term, it is obvious that it is the reason for the civilization in each generation, the human factor in every decision, and the driving force for each social belief system that also shapes the different cultures in the world. Thus, education is responsible for human flourishing, but equally, it is also blameworthy for human failing, notably if education betrays its purpose and subverts itself to counterintuitive values and ideologies that often result in the exploitation of the dignity and worth of the human person.

It is, therefore, worth retrieving the real meaning of education by going back to its etymological roots. What does it mean “to educate”? It comes from Latin word “*educere*,” which is a combination of both the prefix “*e-*” which means “out of,” and *dux, ducis* which means “to lead.” Hence, literally, education means “to lead out of.” But from where does education lead the person “out of?” If one is to be faithful to its mission, education should lead the person to the *truth* so he can be in service of that which is *truly good*. The preeminent philosopher Robert Spaemann remarks that *education is an effect* to the human person. Correctly, he claims that “education is not a process we undertake in order to achieve a set goal. There is no special activity that we can identify as ‘educating.’ Education is rather a side effect, which comes about while someone is doing all kinds of other things.”³ In agreement with this, I believe that as an effect on the human person, education is essentially for the sake of the formation of values of the person. A conversion not only of the intellect from ignorance to truth but also a conversion of the heart and will from vices to virtues. The profession is only secondary to this effect. Thus, we first educate the person to value the person, before we educate the person to value his profession. Take, for instance, if a physician is educated to be put first, the worth and dignity of the person, he will not have a hard time being truthful to his Hippocratic oath and put the person first in his practice. Inversely, if the physician is educated first to be a physician and put value in the worth of his practice, the toil of his work in studying medicine, and to look at his profession as a way to get a *return of investment*

³ R. Spaemann, “Education as an Introduction to Reality,” *Humanum I* (2015).
<https://humanumreview.com/articles/education-as-an-introduction-to-reality> (28.02.2025).

in his education, that physician subverts the value of the person to the value of his profession. This is true not only in the practical sciences but also in an effect that principally concerns itself with *being* more than anything else. Therefore, what exists is only epistemological and semiotic divisions between and among education in experimental sciences and humanities *per se*. That is why, in the philosophy of education, I argue that it is proper to distance from *pedagogical methods* as it is the concern of those who are specializing in education from the aspect of *methods*,⁴ not from the point of view of *ens per se*. John Paul II reminds that education should essentially be an investigation about *being* because “abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.”⁵ Lest one forgets that Thomas Aquinas himself teaches that *truth and being* are convertible.⁶

If this is the view about education, what then is the underlying problem why there seems to be a problem in the society? It is impossible for this paper alone to answer all of these problems; however, since I limit this paper to the *personalist philosophy of education*, it is proper to revisit the problems that lead to *depersonalization*. These social distortions can be rooted in miseducation about the person and the fixation on the reductive education whose principle glorifies superficiality. This goes as far as the *advancement of education* at the expense of the person, with the only goal of prioritizing the advancement in technology, innovation, and research, even if it means the normalization of removing the person’s worth from the equation. This brings emergence to think again about education and how it can recover the real meaning of it, that is, to be in service

⁴ There is a danger to get fixated on the idea of the most effect method to *teach*, and forget about the actual needs and most important principles inside the classroom because of becoming too *methodical* and *pedagogically conscious* about the proper method instead of the quality of the content. I am not suggesting to totally abolish and absolutely veer away from the findings and principles of *methodical educators*—those who are teaching education as a profession—but to temper from the superficial and measurable criteria in education *If* one wishes to philosophize about education.

⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason*, 1998, no. 5.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* 1.2, ad 4. “Sunt enim multae res quae nostro intellectu non cognoscuntur; nulla tamen res est quam intellectus divinus non cognoscat actu, et intellectus humanus in potentia; cum intellectus agens dicatur quo est omnia facere, intellectus possibilis quo est omnia fieri. Unde in diffinitione rei verae potest poni visio in actu intellectus divini, non autem intellectus humani nisi in potentia...” (Truth, of course, does not depend on this, for many things exist that are not known by our intellects. There is nothing, however, that the divine intellect does not actually know, and nothing that the human intellect does not know potentially, for the agent intellect is said to be that “by which we make all things knowable,” and the potential intellect, as that “by which we become all things.” For this reason, one can place in the definition of a true thing its actually being seen by the divine intellect, but not its being seen by a human intellect, except potentially). English translation from <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDeVer.Q1.A2.Rep4> (28.02.2025).

of the person through affecting the person in turning away from what is evil and prioritizing the dignity of the person in whatever profession he pursues. This also leads to the question: How can Karol Wojtyła's Personalist Philosophy adequately respond to the depersonalization of education?

Through this humble paper, I argue that amidst this crisis in the meaning of education, Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy contains adequate substantial arguments to form educational principles that give priority to what is *foundational* to perfect that which is merely *superficial*. It is, therefore, worth revisiting the foundational philosophical principles in relation to education.

During antiquity, Socrates argued that education should be pursued for the sake of truth. He demonstrated that truth is of greater significance than life itself by willingly accepting death in its service. This perspective differentiates him from the sophists, who valued financial gain over truth and maintained their practice through flattery rather than honesty. Thus, "Whatever one does, one can do it *sophistically*, which means one literally takes only a superficial interest in it, or one can do it *philosophically*, which means one loves the reality itself. It is the difference between being and merely seeming."⁷

Plato reports that in the trial of Socrates, he clamored: "Clearly it should be a penalty I deserve, and what do I deserve to suffer or to pay because I have deliberately not led a quiet life but have neglected what occupies most people: wealth, household affairs, the position of general or public orator or the other offices, the political clubs and factions in the city?"⁸ In *The Republic*, Plato affirms this point of his master when he illustrates in the infamous *Allegory of the Cave*, the fate of the prisoner who escapes the cave. Having discovered that the images on the wall are mere shadows of reality, the freed prisoner is compelled to return and instruct his fellow captives on the path to the light of truth. Regardless of the danger that burdens him. Hence, the dialogue found in *Republic VII* 517a affirms this:

SOCRATES: And as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them [prisoners] upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?

GLAUCON: They certainly would.

⁷ D.C. Schindler, "Why Socrates Didn't Charge: Plato and the Metaphysics of Money," *Communio* 36 (3), 418.

⁸ Plato, "Apologia," in: *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 36b.

Clearly, to be an educator means to be a martyr for truth. This also intrinsically shows that education is a vocation that demands self-sacrifice even if it means going against what is popular and generally agreeable to the society⁹ for it must not be a profession that simply fulfills a simple duty of teaching what is written in the syllabus or in accordance with the rubrics of accreditation, quantification, and counterintuitive standardization.¹⁰

Consistent with this is Aristotle, who, in his work *Metaphysics*, emphasizes that the wise individual pursues knowledge for its intrinsic value rather than as a means to an external end. This pursuit is not motivated by practical utility or the acquisition of power but is valued as an *end in itself*. Aristotle contends that such an approach to wisdom and knowledge enables a deeper understanding of the fundamental principles that govern existence and reality. By seeking knowledge solely for its own sake, the wise cultivate a contemplative life that is aligned with the virtues and the intellectual inquiry necessary to discern truth and transmit it. Thus, Aristotle reminds that “a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant; therefore, since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.”¹¹ In a similar manner, the educator ought to instruct for the sake of truth alone rather than pursuing objectives that are contingent rather than necessary. This approach implies that teaching should be intrinsically motivated by the quest for truth, as opposed to being driven by extrinsic considerations such as economic benefit or personal advancement.¹² By emphasizing the intrinsic value of truth, educators are better positioned to cultivate a learning

⁹ It is important to note that presenting different perspectives and positions in classes are important. However, Spaemann warns that “The premature exposure to the pluralism of our society leads almost inevitably to the death of man’s deeper spiritual and intellectual powers; it leads to relativism. Relativism is man’s capitulation with respect to the task of acquiring a mature relationship to reality that is worthy of him. It makes man petty and allows him to make everything else petty. He simply levels out everything that is in dispute among people to the lowest common denominator.” (Spaemann, “Education as an Introduction to Reality.”)

¹⁰ I agree that standardization may help in the *quality* of content delivery, but I disagree that it is *absolutely* applicable in all fields of studies, especially in humanities which is essentially a *liberal art* that must not be strained in the same way as experimental sciences are being evaluated.

¹¹ Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, trans. W.D. Ross, ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), bk. 1.II.982b.20.

¹² It would be hypocritical if I hold that money must not be considered at all. That is basically unrealistic and dishonest. Hence, I agree with the fact that money must not be considered primarily but only secondarily in all professions and even in education itself. D.C. Schindler accurately points this out: “when Socrates introduces the concept of money himself in describing the true city in book II [*The Republic*], he establishes as its primary purpose, not to be an end for the sake of which one works, but to be a means that enables one to facilitate the exchange of one’s surplus for things that one needs, though he allows money in a secondary sense to play a more basic role specifically for those otherwise unable to engage in productive work, the tradesmen and wage-earners.” Schindler, “Why Socrates Didn’t Charge: Plato and the Metaphysics of Money,” 414.

environment that prioritizes intellectual inquiry and the pursuit of wisdom that ultimately serves the truth.

Equally significant are the lessons derived from the Medieval Age, during which numerous philosophers skillfully integrated reason with faith. In this period, philosophy was reconceived not merely as the genesis of wonder but also as an earnest quest for the Divine. This integration entailed a dual commitment: to uphold rational inquiry while simultaneously embracing spiritual and theological dimensions. The aim of this synthesis was to explore the transcendent, seeking to bridge the gap between human reason and divine revelation. In doing so, these thinkers aspired to provide a coherent response to Tertullian's provocative inquiry, "*Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?*"¹³ This question encapsulated the challenge of reconciling the wisdom of classical antiquity, represented by Athens, with the spiritual insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition, symbolized by Jerusalem. One learns from *Augustine of Hippo* who posits that education should serve not only the advancement of the *City of Man* but also the glory of the *Civitas Dei*, the *City of God*. He contends that the attainment of truth is contingent upon *Divine Illumination*, an indispensable aid that directs the seeker toward genuine understanding. Consequently, education must affirm that the mind ascends in its pursuit of truth only with the condition of *humility* and *receptivity* to the Divine, undergoing a transition from the natural domain toward the supernatural realm. He teaches that "...ascend to wisdom, which is the seventh and last step, and which he enjoys in peace and tranquility...For the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."¹⁴ Moreover, Aquinas taught that education should necessarily be virtuous. For example, he distinguished *studiositas* from *curiositas*. *Studiositas* refers to a moderated and disciplined pursuit of knowledge that restrains the individual from excessively desiring both sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge. In contrast, *curiositas* denotes an intemperate disposition, characterized by an excessive and unbridled desire for both sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge. He insists that "...the knowledge of truth, strictly speaking, is good, but it may be evil accidentally, because of some result, either because one takes pride in knowing the truth, according to 1 Cor. 8:1, Knowledge puffeth up, or because one uses the knowledge of truth in order to sin."¹⁵ Finally,

¹³ Tertullian, "De praescriptione ad haereticos," in: *Tertullian: Complete Works*, trans. Peter Holmes (U.K.: Delphi Classics, 2018), cap. 7; PL2, 23a.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 46.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 167, a. 1, resp. A. Ramos, "*Studiositas et Curiositas*," *Educational Horizons* (Summer: 2005), 274-280.

a decisive shift occurred with Ockham, who denied the existence of universals in things. This denial led to the notion that material entities share no commonality with their Creator. He claims “a universal is not a substance existing outside the mind can be evidently proved as follows: No universal is a substance that is single and numerically one.”¹⁶ Consequently, reason was stripped of its transcendent foundation and became severed from its celestial tether.

Modernity emerged in history through René Descartes, who effectively—though unintentionally—separated the soul from the body by introducing his famous concept of dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. In this paradigm, doubt became universal, and God was relegated to the role of merely providing truth rather than being *Truth* Himself. It is as though the *solipsistic cogito* existed solely for its own sake. Consequently, education was reduced to a mere avenue for acquiring knowledge—a purely mental exercise—specifically in service of the material world, making virtue and contemplation irrelevant in the pursuit of knowledge. Obviously, through this separation, education distanced itself from the importance of transcendence by detaching the soul from the body.¹⁷ As John Paul II reminds of its effect in his *Letter to Families*: “The separation of spirit and body in man has led to a growing tendency to consider the human body, not in accordance with the categories of its specific likeness to God, but rather on the basis of its similarity to all the other bodies present in the world of nature, bodies which man uses as raw material in his efforts to produce goods for consumption.”¹⁸

After Descartes, one encounters Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who famously proclaimed that “man is born free but is everywhere in chains.”¹⁹ In his educational treatise, Rousseau presented the fictional character *Emile*, whose story ignited a drive toward revolution and emancipation from obedience to others and adherence to tradition, focusing instead on knowing his own mind. Consequently, Rousseau advocated that education should establish its own meaning and not be shaped by any authority, including the authority of truth itself.²⁰

This has been succeeded by *utilitarianism*, particularly the kind of utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, which, in principle, is equally motivated by the same Machiavellian principle, hence

¹⁶ William of Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Ph. Boehner (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1990), 38.

¹⁷ R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. I. Maclean (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), IV 32.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to Families* no.19.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families.html (28.02.2025).

¹⁹ J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 2019), Bk. I.1

²⁰ Introduction to *Renewing the Mind: A Reader in Catholic Philosophy of Education*, ed. R. Topping (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 8.

stating that the only reasonable option is no other than which has chosen the *greatest number for greatest maximization of happiness*. John Stuart Mill is very specific on this: “The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.”²¹ This is a modern hedonism that invites one to *maximize happiness* and *minimize pain*, regardless of its effects. In effect, *education* is being used for the sake of *maximization of temporal happiness* and *minimization of supernatural ends* which requires sacrifices, discomfort, and pain. Following this, John Paul II warns that “the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture. From universal wisdom and learning, it has been gradually reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role. Other forms of rationality have acquired an ever higher profile, making philosophical learning appear all the more peripheral. These forms of rationality are directed not towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life; but instead, as ‘instrumental reason’, they are directed—actually or potentially—towards the promotion of utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power.”²²

In this view, to educate simply means to generate profit that will lead to comfort, and that means that the teacher is at the mercy of the students who evaluate them and not at the service of truth, especially if the students only listen to what they *want to hear* but not on what they *need to hear*.²³

No less treacherous is John Dewey, whose principle of education reduces learning into a form of materialism when he claims in his work *Democracy and Education* the infamous notion of “learning by doing.”²⁴ This intensified materialism in education, combined with pragmatism,

²¹ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121.

²² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 47.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html (28.02.2025).

²³ I call this *micro censorship* when students are given the absolute power to *demonize* their professor for having a value and views that are conservative and less favorable to whims of the progressive society. Noelle Mering is correct in her observation of this social phenomenon in progressive societies that subscribe to woke ideologies; they adhere to the “Group over Person” principle where those who voice against their preferred values are being dismissed as *victimizers* and *oppressors* instead of people who are objectively correcting them by reason of the fact that they truly care. See further the book N. Mering, *Awake Not Woke* (USA: Tan Books, 2021).

²⁴ J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 192. For the entire context, Dewey states this “When education, under the influence of a scholastic conception of knowledge which ignores everything but scientifically formulated facts and truths, fails to recognize that primary or initial subject matter

which was the only form of learning. This reduces education on the level of material alone without the aim for higher things. John Paul II clearly warns against this saying that “the practical consequences of this mode of thinking are significant. In particular there is growing support for a concept of democracy which is not grounded upon any reference to unchanging values: whether or not a line of action is admissible is decided by the vote of a parliamentary majority. The consequences of this are clear: in practice, the great moral decisions of humanity are subordinated to decisions taken one after another by institutional agencies. Moreover, anthropology itself is severely compromised by a one-dimensional vision of the human being, a vision which excludes the great ethical dilemmas and the existential analyses of the meaning of suffering and sacrifice, of life and death.”²⁵

The two modern ideas of *rationalism* and *empiricism* first gave rise to *scientism*, a framework that reduced the person to a mere scientific datum and confined universal truth solely to those phenomena that can be validated through the instruments of scientific method. In this context, the human being was reinterpreted as an object of observation and measurement, with all aspects of personal existence subjected to quantification and empirical scrutiny. Hence, John Paul II criticizes *scientism* saying that “This is the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences; and it relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy... and since it leaves no space for the critique offered by ethical judgement, the scientistic mentality has succeeded in leading many to think that if something is technically possible it is therefore morally admissible.”²⁶

Secondly, these intellectual developments produced *individualism*, a paradigm that exalts the individual over and against other members of the community, thereby valorizing personal autonomy and subjective experience while often marginalizing communal bonds and social responsibilities. This focus on the individual fostered a sense of personal supremacy that prioritized self-interest above the collective welfare. This is also rooted in the *crisis of truth* in education. If it serves only its self-interests, the truth becomes irrelevant. As John Paul II demonstrates, “Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion

always exists as matter of an active doing, involving the use of the body and the handling of material, the subject matter of instruction is isolated from the needs and purposes of the learner, and so becomes just a something to be memorized and reproduced upon demand. Recognition of the natural course of development, on the contrary, always sets out with situations which involve learning by doing.”

²⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 89.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 88.

of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.”²⁷

Thirdly, these modern ideas contributed to the emergence of *collectivism*, an orientation that, in its extreme forms, tends to vilify the good of the individual in favor of collective interests, thereby subordinating personal rights and developmental needs to the demands of the group. In this way, the legacy of rationalism and empiricism is seen in both the elevation of the individual as an autonomous entity and in the concurrent relegation of individual significance in the service of broader social imperatives.²⁸ These ideas are certainly responsible for the continued threat and exploitation of the dignity of the *human person*.

Education is not exempted from the problematic influences and effects of *scientism*, *individualism*, and *collectivism*. History attests to the crimes that were done by *educated professionals* who used *science* to collaborate with a murderer.²⁹ An *individualist* intellectual who

²⁷ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor: On the Splendor of Truth*, 1993, no. 32.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html (28.02.2025)

²⁸ J.M. Burgos, *An Introduction to Personalism* (New York: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 1-10.

²⁹ I have in mind Hitler's collaborators in Nazi Germany like *Josef Mengele* who conducted the medical experiments to serve and advance the evil plans of the *Fuhrer*. *Alfred Kinsey* is no less exempted from this when he collaborated with the *Fuhrer*. Unfortunately, even among the ranks of philosophers like Wojtyła, there is no exemption to the toleration and even conspiracy with the Nazis. George Weigel comments that “The twentieth century has, in the main, been a very bad century for intellectuals, and especially for intellectuals attracted by the allure of power. Heidegger and Sartre, two immensely influential philosophers, illustrate the point in their respective attractions to Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union.” G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Perennial; Updated edition, 2004), 852.

The letter from the Israeli education psychologist Haim Ginott that he gives to teachers from their principal best summarizes this instance:

“I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education.

My request is this: Help your children become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.” (M. Rozell, “So, I am suspicious of education,” *Teaching History Matters* April 2, 2012. <https://teachinghistorymatters.com/2012/04/02/so-i-am-suspicious-of-education/> (28.02.2025)).

was worried about self-preservation to the point that he wanted to control the population.³⁰ A *collectivist* genius who declared himself as the *dictator* and held power even if that meant killing his compatriots.³¹

Today, the *commodification* of education is the surest creation of these problems. For one, it separates *positive sciences* by degrading the worth of *humanities*, it fixes its attention on *measure*³² and the *income* that will be generated by boosting the ranking. Further, it injects and glorifies the idea of liberal capitalism³³ in education which holds the view that *profit* is greater than the dignity and worth of the person as everyone is dissolved into mere numbers. Much worse is the reduction of excellence and goodness in metrics. “You are a good administrator if you can *manage*, by all means, all of the tasks under your care, irrespective of how inhumane your method is”; “You are a good teacher if you produce numerous research outputs, even if it means cheating on its process”; and “You are a good student if you achieve a high grade. Regardless of whether you achieved it with all honesty and sacrifices.”

A commodified educational system has lost its sight of the person, it is the ultimate manifestation of *depersonalization* in education. It turns from self-dedication to self-gratification. Hence, should we be surprised if the students of today will become the tyrants of tomorrow? Clearly, knowing the truth and doing the *good* should be the fundamental reasons for education. Unless we want to repeat the crimes of yesterday, worse is when educators concede to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, who claimed that “conscience does make cowards of us all!”³⁴

³⁰ Malthus is one of the responsible thinkers in birth control that led to the permission of abortion, which have led to the genocide of millions of innocent human beings.

³¹ Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong are a few of the many examples that came into mind.

³² Jerry Z. Muller calls this as “metric fixation” which is “the seemingly irresistible pressure to measure performance, to publicize it, and to reward it, often in the face of evidence that this just doesn’t work very well.” (J.Z. Muller, *Tyranny of Metrics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 4.)

³³ John Paul II stresses that “In the West there exists a system which is historically inspired by the principles of the liberal capitalism which developed with industrialization during the last century. In the East there exists a system inspired by the Marxist collectivism which sprang from an interpretation of the condition of the proletarian classes made in the light of a particular reading of history. Each of the two ideologies, on the basis of two very different visions of man and of his freedom and social role, has proposed and still promotes, on the economic level, antithetical forms of the organization of labor and of the structures of ownership, especially with regard to the so-called means of production.” (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concern*, 1987, no. 20.)

³⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, i. 83-84, in: ed. J.D. Wilson, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

The Person As an Irreducible Gift

Karol Wojtyła starts his theory of the person by turning his attention to the person himself and his subjectivity. The reason, according to Wojtyła, is that when the point of departure is from “man as the subject, then it is easy to treat everything else that is located outside the subject.”³⁵ This simply means that man has greater importance than those material objects outside him. At any point, man is not simply a subject, but he is also somebody objectively. Wojtyła intends to show that even though man belongs in the material world wherein he exists together with other things,³⁶ his being is a *somebody*, unlike those *things* that are within the horizons outside of the person whose proper end is mere of utility insofar as those things exist only as *something*.³⁷ Wojtyła means that man cannot and should never be equated to mere material things of this world, for its end are of mere utility.

Following these thoughts, Wojtyła maintains that the word *person* is already an indicator that a human being cannot be reduced to *something*. Wojtyła emphasizes that the very fact that man possesses rationality elevates him among any other being, and it surpasses the description of man as only belonging to another type of animal species; although it suffices linguistically yet, it falls short in exhausting the fullness of man’s individuality. Because of these insufficiencies, the term *person* is conceived for the reason that “man cannot be reduced wholly to what is contained in the concept of a ‘specimen of the species,’ but has something more, some particular fullness and perfection of being.”³⁸ Wojtyła acknowledges the contribution of the Boethian definition of the person as an individual substance of rational nature. Yet, for Wojtyła, this definition cannot completely satisfy the dignity of man as a person because it implies only an objective difference from any created beings in the world, particularly that of animals.

Although this distinction is helpful, Wojtyła amplifies it by supplementing the more important reality in the being of the person other than his rationality. He underscores that “the person as a subject differs from even the most perfect animals by his *interiority* and a specific life,

³⁵ K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 3.

³⁶ Wojtyła himself explains this point saying “A thing is customarily considered a being that is deprived not only of reason, but also of life, a thing is an inanimate object.” Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

which is concentrated in it, i.e., an interior life.”³⁹ True enough, this specific life within the person gives him a feature that is proper to him alone inasmuch as animals, other than a human person, do not have an interior life because it is properly reserved for man alone. This interiority of man points to his spirituality.⁴⁰ Wojtyła contends that this spiritual life of man cannot be found in animals “even though bio-physiological processes, which are similar to man’s and which are related to the constitution that is more or less similar to that of man, take place inside their organisms.”⁴¹ Through this particular character of man, he is enabled to transcend beyond what is merely attainable within the external world. By virtue of this feature of his being, “he contacts...not only the visible world, but also the invisible one, and above all God.”⁴² What forms the spiritual character of the human person is his cognition and desire, particularly in attaining truth and living the good, for the proper object of the intellect is truth, and the proper object of the will is towards the good. Obviously, this does not happen to beings lower than the person.⁴³

Another important trait of a human person that makes him extraordinary among the created beings in the world is his nature which “includes the power of self-determination based on reflection and manifested in the fact that, while acting, man chooses what he wants to do.”⁴⁴ This power of self-determination is not possible if the person does not possess free will. Through his free will, the person is, on the one hand, a *sui iuris*, the master of himself/herself. On the other hand, the person is also an *alteri incommunicabilis*, for the person is ontologically incommunicable or *intransferrable*. This certain characteristic embedded in the dignity of a person indicates that no other person can will for himself/herself; he/she is always the author of his willing and acting.⁴⁵

Wojtyła starts his treatise on the *metaphysical subjectivity* of the human person by recalling the Traditional Aristotelian anthropology that identifies the man as a *rational animal*. This type of understanding of man, according to Wojtyła, can be termed as cosmological since it reduces man into the world as another type of species. Of course, Aristotle’s unequalled definition of man

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “In philosophy, ‘spiritual’ commonly means that which transcends the material...although the two—matter and spirit—are not absolutely opposite, since in the human being, they interact in that form of existence that is called ‘substantial unity.’” M. Acosta, “The Anthropology of *Person and Act*,” in: M. Acosta, A.J. Reimers, *Karol Wojtyła’s Personalist Philosophy: Understanding Person and Act* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 183 n. 80.

⁴¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

contributes to many developments in philosophical anthropology. But this *objective* understanding of man, Wojtyła explains, leads to a view that the human being is an object among the other objects in this world wherein man belongs physiologically.⁴⁶ Therefore, Wojtyła sees *subjectivity* as “a term proclaiming that the human being’s proper essence cannot be totally reduced to and explained by the proximate genus and specific difference.”⁴⁷ Taken in this sense, subjectivity is the characteristic that allows the human person to see his fellow human person as irreducible. However, Wojtyła reminds us that *objectivism* in the cosmological sense, and *subjectivism* in the sense of the irreducibility of man, are not directly opposed. In contrast, they only differ in the point of view of their method of treating the person: one treats the person as an object, while the other treats the person as a subject.⁴⁸ According to Wojtyła, the objectivity of treating the human person as a being in himself necessitates one to see that the human being is first a *suppositum*, which means that he is the object of action and existence and second as a *person*. Acosta explains that “suppositum is the transphenomenal expression of metaphysical subjectivity and the ultimate guarantee of the person’s existing and acting.”⁴⁹ At this point, Wojtyła recognizes the importance of the Boethian definition of the person, he remarks that “the Boethian definition mainly marked out the metaphysical terrain—the dimension of being—in which personal human subjectivity is realized...”⁵⁰ But why is this personal human subjectivity that makes a person irreducible very important in Wojtyła’s anthropology?

This personal human subjectivity is essential in Wojtyła’s anthropology not only because it “...is the fundamental expression of the whole experience of the human being,”⁵¹ but more importantly because it leads the person to realize that the human being is not simply “a being defined according to species, but as a concrete self a self-experiencing subject.”⁵² One shall pause at the irreducible because man cannot be understood best from the panorama of the cosmological type alone, but on a deeper level, it must be complemented by the personalistic type of understanding for this type allows the person not only to see himself as a material being, but it

⁴⁶ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Th. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 210-211.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Acosta, “The Anthropology of *Person and Act*,” 138.

⁵⁰ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 212.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 213.

leads him to realize the life within him—his inner life. This enables the person to travel *ad intra*.⁵³ Crosby clarifies this point by saying that “in the former cosmological type of understanding, man is considered ‘from without,’ in the latter personalistic type of understanding, he is considered ‘from within,’ that is, as he experiences himself in consciously living his being.”⁵⁴

This view implies that the person “is not just a *particular human being*—an individual of a certain species—but a *personal subject*”⁵⁵ The person being a *suppositum* is the principle of his *irreducibility* in the ontological sense, which amplifies even more, the value of the dignity of a human being as a person who cannot be a mere object of *use* in its twofold facet. Beyond any physical features that one can perceive about the person, this irreducibility makes one capable of seeing “everything in the human being that is invisible and wholly internal and whereby each human being, myself included, is an ‘eyewitness’ of his or her own self—of his or her own humanity and person.”⁵⁶ This is due to the reason that man is a *suppositum* which “etymologically...indicates what is placed under (*sub-ponere*). In anthropology, Wojtyła writes, it is the subject who is ‘under’ every acting and happening,”⁵⁷ However, it must be noted that *suppositum* does not remain suspended in the *abstract* since it is accessible to experience insofar as a *suppositum* is trans-phenomenal.⁵⁸ This is the ontological foundation of man’s personhood. Wojtyła explains the essentiality of this by saying, “the person is identifiable with an ontological basic structure in which a provision is to be made: the ontological structure of ‘somebody’ manifests not only its similarities to but also its differences and detachment from the ontological structure of ‘something.’”⁵⁹ In other words, *suppositum* is the distinctive factor of man as a person who is a *somebody* and not a *something*. Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that when it comes to human acting, Kupczak reminds that for Wojtyła, “the term *suppositum* does not describe, however, the reflexive aspect of consciousness...for this reason, the term ‘I’ is more comprehensive than the notion of *suppositum* since it combines the moment of experienced subjectiveness with that of ontic subjectiveness.”⁶⁰ The reason behind this is the claim of Wojtyła

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ J.F. Crosby, *The Personalist Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 244.

⁵⁵ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 214. [emphases original]

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 103.

⁵⁸ K. Wojtyła, “Person: Subject and Community,” in: *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 222.

⁵⁹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. A. Potocki (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 74.

⁶⁰ Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*, 98.

telling that personal human subjectivity is superior to metaphysical subjectivity alone. However, the former does not negate the latter; on the contrary, it intensifies it because it is the ground where it is revealed. Wojtyła explains this by pointing out that “after all, the lived experience of our *personal subjectivity* is simply the full actualization of all that is contained virtually in our metaphysical subjectivity...”⁶¹ At this point, one can see the consistency of Wojtyła’s notion of the person as someone who is worthy of being treated without any stain of utilitarianism in both its meaning as an *object of pleasure*, the first meaning and as an *object of using the person*, the second meaning, as a means to an end.

In a nutshell, for Wojtyła, there are two ways to understand the human person according to Wojtyła first is *cosmological*, which understands the human person based on external and biological factors alone. Like Aristotle’s conception that *homo est animal rationale*⁶², that of Boethius’s *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia* and finally, that of St. Thomas Aquinas’s teaching that man is *perfectissimum ens*.⁶³ These observations are true, yet these must be complemented by the second way of understanding the person: the *personalistic*, which seeks to understand the person inwardly: since the human being “...is then given to us not merely as a being defined according to species, but as a concrete self, a self-experiencing subject.”⁶⁴ John F. Crosby summarizes this point in a very accurate way saying that “...Wojtyła distinguishes between what he calls a predominantly cosmological understanding of man and a predominantly personalist understanding of him. In the former, man is considered ‘from without,’ in the latter, he is considered ‘from within,’ that is, as he experiences himself in consciously living his being...in the former, man is experienced objectively, and in the latter, subjectively, or according to his subjectivity.”⁶⁵

This leads Wojtyła to say that one must stop at the *irreducible in man*. At this point, it makes sense to ask what makes man irreducible? Wojtyła answers this in his work *Love and Responsibility*. There he first shows that in the world, there are *objects* which also exist as a being

⁶¹ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 232.

⁶² Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 211.

⁶³ K. Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in: *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 167.

⁶⁴ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 213.

The ‘irreducible’ here refers to the dignity of the human person and also of his subjectivity in contrast to objectivity, but added to that Wojtyła clarifies that he also refers by the *irreducible* “...everything in the human being that is invisible and wholly internal and whereby each human being, myself included, is an ‘eyewitness’ of his or her own self—of his or her own humanity and person.” (Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 214.)

⁶⁵ Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, 244.

in this world, yet these beings are deprived of reason and life. Therefore, a thing is an inanimate object in the proper sense of the word. But man is not an inanimate object; he possesses freedom, reason, and dignity; therefore, he is rightly and justly to be taken as a *subject*. Although man is also an *object* but in a different sense, he is an object inasmuch as he also belongs in the same world as other objects; he is an *objective somebody*, never merely an object as *something*. Hence, he can never be treated in the same way as any other object for the simple reason that he is a person, someone who possesses an interior life.⁶⁶ Thus, Wojtyła highlights the reason why a man/woman should be regarded as a *person*: “to stress that man cannot be reduced wholly to what is contained in the concept of a ‘specimen of the species,’ [i.e., *homo sapiens*, *homo est rationalis naturae*] but has in himself something more, some particular fullness and perfection of being. To emphasize this *fullness and perfection*, the word ‘person’ must necessarily be used.”⁶⁷ So, what makes man unique among any other being in this world? To answer this, Wojtyła gave us three answers. First, one of the characteristics that makes man unique is his *interiority*—his interior life⁶⁸, but because he has a body, he can also reach to his world—to other beings that surround him—but in a different way⁶⁹ insofar as he is not only composed of a body above all, he has a soul. This interiority, therefore, allows man to communicate with his creator—God. And this particular distinctiveness makes man the greatest and the *most perfect* being in the created world.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Wojtyła reminds us that “the contact of the person with the objective world, with reality, is not merely ‘biological’ (*przyrodniczy*), physical, as is the case with all other creations of nature (*przyroda*), nor only sensual, as is the case with animals.”⁷¹ Second, man, Wojtyła believes, is capable of self-determination and this reality is another truth that makes man an exceptional being in the world because this self-determination is “...based on reflection and manifested in the fact that, while acting, man chooses what he wants to do.”⁷² This capacity to choose what he wants to do is rooted

⁶⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 3-4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. [emphasis added]

⁶⁸ Wojtyła asserts that what forms the interior life of man is cognition and desire. He says “Cognition and desire in man take on a spiritual character, and therefore they contribute to the formation of the true interior life, which does not occur in animals. The interior life is the spiritual life. It focuses on truth and the good.” (*Ibid.*, 5.)

⁶⁹ Wojtyła tells us how does man differ from other beings in this world in terms of reaching to the objective world, he says that “...precisely through interiority and interior life man not only is a person, but at the same time mostly through them inheres in the objective world, in the ‘external’ world., where he inheres in the manner proper and characteristic to him.” (*Ibid.*, 5.)

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

in the fact that man possesses free will he is, therefore, *sui iuris*—the master of himself—the one who steers his direction through his chosen actions because he can rationally distinguish that which is right from wrong. Lastly, man, Wojtyła adds, is *alteri incommunicabilis*—nontransferable and incommunicable. This particular point is linked with man as *sui iuris*, for it both of them point to the power of self-determination of man, his interiority, and his free will. It shows the truth that “No one else can will in my stead. No one can substitute his act of the will for mine.”⁷³ Richard Spinello perfectly illustrates the expressions *sui iuris* and *alteri incommunicabilis* in the following way: “this self-possession, which becomes evident in the examination of human experience” Spinello argues, “is expressed in two ways. First, the person is aware of himself; only a person can utter the word ‘I’ and know that it refers to him. Thus, a person possesses himself because he is present to himself from within by being conscious of himself and his actions. Second, a person ‘possesses himself and determines himself’ because he has mastery or control over himself.”⁷⁴ *Mastery of the self*, requires proper education. Hence, miseducation of the person leads to an *unruly person*.

Self-Gift And Gratitude: Re-Turning of the Self to the Truth and Good.

The fall of man constitutes the archetypal model of arrogance and ingratitude, serving as a paradigmatic example of humanity's deviation from divine order. Similarly, the modern turn to humanity, although it has contributed positively to social and anthropological development in various respects, has widely engendered a disconnection from the divine. In this modern framework, doubt replaces wonder, and the gift of truth is met with skepticism rather than with gratitude.

Gratitude, therefore, assumes a crucial role in education, particularly in the cultivation of a receptivity to truth that enables the individual to revere it. It is imperative to recognize that genuine gratitude cannot exist without love, a relationship that underscores the transformation of the human condition. This perspective is further illustrated by the teaching that the disobedient Adam was filled with lust, whereas the New Adam is characterized by an abundance of love.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ R. Spinello, *Understanding Love and Responsibility* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2014), 17.

The turning away from God, emblematic of ingratitude, finds its remedy in a deliberate re-turning toward the divine through the practice of gratitude. Within the educational context, this reorientation is manifested in the conscious decision to renounce falsehood and to return to truth, just as the abandonment of evil is achieved through the embrace of the good.

In 1979, John Paul II highlighted in *Redemptor Hominis* the indispensable value of love in human person's existence. He explains that "man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."⁷⁵ This love is made possible through self-gift, which is conditioned by the personal subjectivity of the person.⁷⁶

The personal subjectivity of the person allows the person to be **self-possessed and self-governed**. This means that while having his roots in the Divine, he is at the same time at his own disposal. This is what Wojtyła means when he says that the *person is sui iuris*, the master of himself. This implies accountability and responsibility for the efficacious actions of the person since part of his dignity is his incommunicability. No one can will and act on this specific action other than myself. Karol Wojtyła paired this with **self-determination** when the person chooses to act based on truth and good, best expressed as "I can, but I need not." This rejection of morally evil action leads the person towards **self-fulfillment**. All of these are conditioned by *conscience*, which guides the person to affirm the good, and by *transcendence*, which enables the person to *subordinate his freedom to the Truth*. Indeed, only a self-possessed person can give himself as a sincere gift to others; only a person with self-determination can reject what is morally evil, which is counterintuitive to loving; only a conscientious person who transcends his actions can truly make himself a sincere gift to others. This self-gifting, however, does not make a person any less, by contrast, it perfects the person "through the gift of self in the moral sense, the person does not lose anything, but becomes richer instead."⁷⁷ This follows that a person who makes himself *a sincere gift to others* is a person full of *gratitude*, because another person received him and affirmed his being as a gift and not just merely another *object* among any beings in the world. By contrast, a person becomes sorrowful when he is exploited when being treated as a *means* to an *end* instead

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis: The Redeemer of Man*, 1979, §10.

⁷⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 281.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

of an *end in himself*. That is to say, when the person is reduced to a mere object of use instead of being treated as an *object and subject* of love.⁷⁸

No less important is the community where the person is formed through participation. Besides, this is where gratitude is formed. In his philosophy of the community, Karol Wojtyła highlights the complementary role of both the *individual good* and the *common good* in community and participation. He also distinguished the *authentic attitudes* and *non-authentic attitudes* of participation. The former comprises the *attitude of solidarity*,⁷⁹ the *attitude of opposition*⁸⁰, and the *principle of dialogue*.⁸¹ The latter is composed of *conformism*⁸² and *avoidance*.⁸³ If the person adheres to authentic attitudes, he will be able to participate correctly, while if the person concedes to non-authentic attitudes, he will experience alienation.⁸⁴

This leads to the fact that only a grateful person can participate *authentically* because he is humble enough to open himself in *dialogue* with others; he is *receptive* to any constructive

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 119-121.

⁷⁹ Solidarity Wojtyła argues that by means of solidarity, the human person accepts and realizes the value of shared responsibility. Through solidarity, the person is ready “to ‘complement’ by the act that I perform what others perform in the community.” (Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. G. Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 401-402.)

⁸⁰ **Opposition** according to Wojtyła “is an attitude that is fundamentally in accord with solidarity—and thus not as a negation of the common good and of the need for participation, but precisely as a confirmation of both. The content of opposition is only a way of understanding and, above all, of realizing the common good, especially regarding the possibility of participation. The experience of various instances of opposition, which had and have their place on the basis of human existence and action ‘together with others,’ teaches us that people who oppose do not want to withdraw from the community. Quite the contrary: they seek their own place in this community—thus, they seek participation and an understanding of the common good by which they can better, more fully, and more effectively participate in the community.” (*Ibid.*, 402.)

⁸¹ **Dialogue**: is the synthesizing attitude, so to speak, of the two prior attitudes. Through dialogue, the community can arrive at a resolution to the opposing views that its members offer for the sake of the common good. Here, the attitude of solidarity is sustained amidst differences, inasmuch as dialogue enables the person to be humble before truth. Indeed, the principle of dialogue is vital in participation because “it does not avoid tensions, conflicts, and struggles, which are present in the lives of different human communities, and because it addresses precisely that which is true and right in them, that which can be a source of good for the people.” (*Ibid.*, 403.)

⁸² **Conformism**: “contains above all a certain submission, a specific variation of the *pati* in which the man-person is only a subject of ‘happening’ and not an agent of his own attitude and his own commitment in the community. Man in this case does not form the community but in a sense ‘allows himself to be carried’ by the collective. The attitude of conformism conceals if not a denial or limitation then at least some weakness of personal transcendence—of self-determination and choice. In this consists the personalistic deficiency of this attitude.” (*Ibid.*, 405.)

⁸³ **Avoidance**: “Conformism avoids opposition, whereas avoidance shirks conformism, and in this way does not become authentic opposition. Opposition consists in taking up the common good and participation. Avoidance, on the other hand, is merely a withdrawal, perhaps as a sign of protest, though without an attempt at taking up. Hence, avoidance is a lack of participation; it is an absence in the community. As the saying goes, ‘Those who are absent are not right.’” (*Ibid.*, 406.)

⁸⁴ “As the antithesis of participation, alienation contributes to or (depending on what the alienating factor is) creates an occasion for man to be to some extent deprived of the possibility of fulfilling himself in the community—either in the social community ‘we’ or in the inter-personal community ‘I’-‘thou.’” (*Ibid.*, 511.)

opposition to his claims, ideas, and proposal, knowing that he does not have the monopoly of *truth*; and finally, he is not indifferent to his neighbors, allowing him to give importance in taking an active part in solidarity with others. Ultimately, only a grateful person can fully give himself to and for others.

Personalist Philosophy of Education

Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy of education critically responds to the distortions engendered by *scientism*, *individualism*, and *collectivism*. These distortions are against reality and, therefore, contribute to *depersonalization*. Likewise, these societal tendencies contribute to a misrepresentation of education by reducing the human person to a mere scientific datum, elevating the individual over the communal good, or subordinating the individual to collective imperatives. Such approaches have led to views of education that diverge from a holistic perspective, one that prioritizes the full and integrated development of the person. In contrast, Wojtyła advocates for an educational model that places the person at its center, affirming the dignity, moral worth, and unique potential of each individual. By applying these personalist principles in education, I find that Karol Wojtyła teaches the following educational principles that are attuned to the personalist framework:

First, education is scientific but not scientistic. Karol Wojtyła adheres to the Thomistic ontology ofhylomorphism, which posits that matter and form are equally significant in the constitution of reality. In this framework, the body is accorded a status equal to that of the soul. A similar approach applies to education: although certain scientific methods are effective and must be employed when necessary, they should not be regarded as the sole source of truth within educational endeavors. Moreover, the term science originates from the Latin *scientia*, meaning knowing. Thus, assuming the role of a knower involves submitting oneself to truth and its ultimate source, who is God the ultimate guarantor of truth.

Second, education is personalistic but not individualistic. Karol Wojtyła contends that education is inherently personal because only a person possesses the capacity to be educated and re-educated when circumstances necessitate such a process. In this perspective, education is not reduced to the mere assertion of individual autonomy, but rather it is understood as a dynamic and relational process in which the entire person—body and soul—is engaged. He highlights that

“education (*wychowanie*) is creativity concerning the most personal object—as always and only a person is educated whereas an animal can only be trained—and at the same time creativity in the material that is entirely human: everything that is by nature contained in the man being educated constitutes material for educators, material which their love should employ.”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, for Karol Wojtyła, education stands in opposition to individualism. For him, education is not merely a service for utilitarian ends, whereby the person is permitted to be reduced as a means to an end; it is also not a commodity or tool in the service of the exponential growth of profit, as seen in liberal capitalist regimes. Rather, education for Wojtyła is personal because it places the person above all other considerations. In this framework, the individual is treated as an end in himself rather than as an instrument for achieving external objectives. The proper response to the person, according to Wojtyła, is manifested through a *disinterested love*—an unconditional and selfless giving that is primarily concerned with fulfilling the true vocation of an educator, that is, *self-gifting* and *re-turning* to universal truth and true good.⁸⁶

Third, education is communal but not collectivistic. According to Karol Wojtyła’s principles, education ought to be regarded as a form of correct participation, wherein every individual engages in the search for truth. It is inherently *dialogical*, as the pursuit of truth is not confined to a single perspective but rather embraces the conviction that each person contributes uniquely to its discovery. In this respect, education also manifests as a form of solidarity, for as seekers of truth, no one is deemed superior or inferior. Instead, the process is undertaken in a spirit of cooperation and togetherness, because only the universal truth is superior.

In this context, the traditional roles of teacher and student are reconceived so that both become co-educators, learning from one another through reciprocal exchange. This arrangement does not signify the removal of authority; rather, it represents a restoration of the authority of truth itself. Furthermore, education under this model necessitates *constructive opposition*,

⁸⁵ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 39-40.

⁸⁶ Note that Karol Wojtyła’s concept of love is not confined to the realm of mere emotion; rather, it encompasses a far more comprehensive and self-giving mode of being. For Wojtyła, love transcends a simple affective state, becoming simultaneously an act of self-donation wherein one offers oneself to others without harboring any ulterior motives beyond the sharing of truth and good. In this understanding, love is essentially a form of benevolence, a selfless commitment to the well-being of others. He articulates this perspective by stating, “Benevolence is simply disinterestedness in love: ‘I do not long for you as a good,’ but ‘I long for your good,’ ‘I long for what is good for you.’” In this declaration, the emphasis is placed on the transformation of desire; rather than desiring another merely as an object of personal gratification, the benevolent individual aspires to the actual good of the other. This is achieved without any thought for oneself, and without any consideration of one’s own interests, thereby epitomizing a truly disinterested love. *Ibid.*, 67.

acknowledging that truth is not monopolized by any single individual. The humble acceptance of error is viewed as a clear sign of a person's receptivity to truth and willingness to be educated by it. Such an approach stands in stark contrast to collectivism and *false democracy*, which is often characterized by *conformism* and *avoidance*—attitudes that ultimately foster apathy among individuals.

Fourth, education is essentially a form of self-donation that springs from the abundance of love, because teaching the truth constitutes a disinterested gift to others. This process requires the courage to face rejection and hatred for the defense of truth. In this context, to educate is to offer oneself as a gift without expecting any return other than to serve as a living witness to truth and good. In this act of self-donation, the educator willingly sacrifices personal comfort and recognition to uphold and disseminate the truth. By doing so, the educator transforms the act of teaching into a selfless commitment, wherein the very self is entrusted to the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of goodness in others.

Lastly, education is fundamentally transcendental because it transcends superficial concerns and leads the individual not only to the knowledge of what is true but, more importantly, to the subordination of personal freedom to the truth that is revealed through the deliberate choice to perform moral good actions. Karol Wojtyła contends that education “precedes and conditions all moral values.”⁸⁷ This establishes it as the foundation upon which ethical life—which is basically life outside the walls of the university regardless of one's major or professional specialization—is built. In this view, education instills in the person the virtues that condition conscientious *self-possession*, *self-governance*, and *self-determination*, guiding the individual toward self-fulfillment and his *transcendence* of actions. This process is not confined solely to personal life but extends to the sphere of one's chosen profession, ensuring that moral considerations and the pursuit of truth inform all aspects of existence.

Conclusion

Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy of education uniquely constitutes an adequate response to the commodification of education. This commodification arises from the intertwined influences of *scientism*, *individualism*, and *collectivism*, whose common ground is an ungratefulness toward

⁸⁷ Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 381.

truth, a rebellion against the good, and a detachment from its ultimate source—factors that collectively lead to the exploitation of the person. Such tendencies reduce education to a mere transaction, thereby undermining its capacity to be personalistic.

This approach is predicated on the conviction that the value of education lies in the personalist approach of sincere gifting of the self. Wojtyła's personalist philosophy teaches that this self-gifting springs from a *disinterested* love for others, a love that is fundamentally rooted in gratitude to God—the wellspring of virtue and the source of truth to which one ultimately returns.⁸⁸ In this framework, education is reoriented from being merely a means of profit to becoming a moral and spiritual endeavor. The self that *turns away* from God “in which reality is not in the first place and above all a gift, but rather something that represents an obstacle to my self-realization,”⁸⁹ can finally *re-turn* to God, the ultimate source of reality.

⁸⁸ Spaemann accurately illustrates the *personalist philosophy of education* manifesting by loving the person in reality where the actually existing being is not forced to fit ideal principles. Rather, the actually existing being already possesses that universality, but may not be readily perfect. However, it is the duty of education to bring that person back to reality where universality is consistent. Despite its length, it is worth mentioning how Spaemann demonstrated this through the following words: “Education for reality is taking place whenever opportunities are created, like this, to do something for other people. But the perception of such opportunities, the perception of the reality of the other, presupposes that a child has first become real to himself. And the child becomes real for himself when he is loved, in a manner that is as matter-of-fact as it is unconditional.

Many children live here because previously the minimal amount of love they experienced was lacking either unconditionality or even matter-of-factness. ‘That’s how it always starts!’ sobbed a child that had been here in the house for only a few weeks. He sat on the cellar stairs. Some people had yelled at him because he was bad and had slammed the door in their faces. And now he was crying, because he was afraid he would be sent away, just as he had already been sent away from six other houses! Mrs. X said to him: ‘Listen. We don’t like it when you’re bad. But send you away? No. After all, you belong to us. You can be as bad as you want, but you still belong to us. We are certainly not going to ship you off somewhere else!’ And through the tears, the child became radiant. He began to discover something new: here, he was unconditionally accepted, even if he sometimes got a swat. Here, he was something precious. He was real. This is one of the most important experiences that there is.

There is a responsible way and an irresponsible way to treat oneself. A person can neglect himself and his immediate surroundings; he can neglect his head and his heart just as much as his bedroom and his clothes. *To educate for reality also means to teach children that they are absolutely real for themselves, that their identity does not consist simply in what they are for themselves, nor in what they are for others; it means to teach them that they belong neither simply to themselves, nor simply to others. They belong to God.* And this means, translated into practical terms, that their importance, their preciousness, does not depend either on themselves or on some other person. They are important, because they are real for God. *They are loved.*

To awaken this consciousness is the most extraordinary thing that can happen in a house like this. And it does indeed happen. When one considers the later curriculum vitae of so many of the people who once lived in this house, they are admittedly not all pure success stories. Inherited burdens, early childhood experiences and wounds often imply a fate that no one can overcome. And yet it makes a difference, a decisive difference, whether someone, when he is standing in mud up to his neck, just gives up on himself, as it were, or whether he recalls the word that has credibly been communicated to him here: ‘*You shall never perish, and no one will take you out of my hand*’ (Jn 10:28).” (Spaemann, *Education as an Introduction to Reality*.) [Emphases added]

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Against the backdrop of commodified and depersonalized education that is mesmerized by absolutizing standardization, ranking, and mathematization at the expense of the person, Wojtyła's personalist philosophy advocates that educated professionals must serve the person rather than *profit* from their practice. This can only be achieved if *educational system* and the *educators* themselves *re-turn* to the person, the *imago Dei*. In this way, the superficial will not be taken as superior, but complementary to the supernatural end of education. The true purpose of education is fundamentally *transcendental*, recaptured as the cultivation of virtue, self-fulfillment, and moral responsibility. As encapsulated in the timeless teaching of Christ, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul?"⁹⁰ this reminds us that the ultimate measure of education and profession is not the accumulation of material wealth and glorification of anything that is *superficial* but the preservation and enhancement of one's moral and spiritual integrity.

⁹⁰ Mark 8, 36.

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