

**A Review of Karol Wojtyła's *Philosophical Works, Volume 1: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System*, Kraków 2024**

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Karol Wojtyła, widely known as Pope John Paul II, was a thinker, theologian, preacher, professor and (at the crux of all these personas) a philosopher. Amidst his important discourses on faith and religion, this point risks being lost. The emergence of the “JP2 Generation” phenomenon and the “fan club” persona, which much of Wojtyła’s modern following has assumed, should be a warning that Wojtyła’s writings are at risk of a superficial reading and watered-down understanding. It is with great relief, then, that texts such as *Philosophical Works, Volume 1: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System*<sup>2</sup> are being published.

The prefaces provide a succinct examination of Wojtyła’s works, a considerable task as they endeavor to depict the manner in which Wojtyła’s thought developed. This is a necessary issue, as “These circumstances require that we take a closer look at the works of this thinker. The point is therefore to show how these interventions in the text, in all their complexity, were an expression of the desire to improve it and at the same time testify to the maturation of Karol Wojtyła’s thought.”<sup>3</sup> If one is looking for a text that encapsulates Wojtyła’s thought, they need look no further than here, as this work symbolizes the beginning of Wojtyła’s ethical systems and foreshadows the greatness that would emerge from his pen.

Wojtyła’s focus on Scheler’s ethical system served as the “first cause” of his personalist line of thought. If one were to trace Wojtyła’s scholarly achievements and interest in the human being, then they would understand that the subject of much of his work as priest, bishop, and then

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<sup>2</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Dziela filozoficzne*, Vol. I, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maxa Schelera*, ed. J. Merecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Original text: “Okoliczności te nakazują, aby pilniej przyjrzeć się dziełom tego myśliciela. Chodzi więc o to, aby ukazać, jak te interwencje w tekst, w całej ich złożoności, były wyrazem pragnienia jego udoskonalenia i świadczą zarazem o dojrzewaniu myśli Karola Wojtyły.”

Pope was built upon the foundation provided by Max Scheler's work and his critical discussion with it. Wojtyła's understanding of metaphysics, developed during the Second World War, undoubtedly played a key role in this construction.

Like many of Wojtyła's writings, the thoughts enclosed in this book are not easy. They may not be understood on the first reading. Nonetheless, reading them provides insight into the philosophical maturation of the author – whose writing occurred against the backdrop of a life greatly impacted by its surroundings and circumstances. The text lays the necessary foundation for working with Wojtyła's later texts and provides insights on what he wrote about. The reader may even begin to explore the question of "why" Wojtyła wrote about his chosen topics as the text spurs them to draw their own conclusions for future research.

As a philosopher, Wojtyła adhered to reality, rather than pursuing "fantasies" of what should or could be. In his work, one understands this by his examination of Max Scheler. What resulted from this was an understanding and depiction of how Scheler's ethics could assist Christian ethics. In a way, Wojtyła sought to build a bridge between the two schools of thought. This was significant in the timeline of Wojtyła's ethical development, as it moved him beyond examining philosophers and their thoughts to examining problems in ethics and philosophy and working to answer them. Wojtyła was an independent philosophical thinker and branched off from the phenomenology founder's thinking. In this way, his philosophical writings ceased being mere commentary on the thoughts of others and assumed weight and merit of their own. This allowed the pathway for his own ethical school to emerge.

The text's work to introduce the reader to Scheler simultaneously introduces the reader to Kant, whose ethical developments were opposed greatly by Scheler. Scheler argued for the basing of the entirety of cognition in experience. This, in juxtaposition to Kant, whose subject needed only to think in order to be. Nonetheless, Kant and Scheler were philosophically united by their understanding that values are not the point of focus for rational cognition.

It is at this point that another philosopher who played a part in Wojtyła's philosophical development should be named, Roman Ingarden, who was a lecturer in the 1930s. His ideas were part of the contemporary times of that era. A phenomenologist, Ingarden studied Edmund Husserl's (the founder of phenomenology) writings before World War II at the University of Lviv. Taking these names into consideration, one realizes that philosophical giants walked in Wojtyła's times. His brilliance was influenced and formed by their theories and suppositions.

Between the covers of *Philosophical Works, Volume I: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System*, one may find Wojtyła's ethical developments fleshed out. This statement serves as both an elaboration on the text and a warning. *Philosophical Works, Volume I: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System* is a work of philosophy and it is a complete academic text. Although all people should feel welcome to read it, making one's way through this book is not easy. It is best suited for those who have a background in ethics, philosophy, or academia. Nonetheless, all people who stay the course and manage to finish the text will come away with something very unique and special. They will understand how Wojtyła approached ethics, how he perceived and worked with it. They will see what he considered necessary in the construction of a Christian ethical system. Moreover, they will understand why he considered this field of ethics necessary. And they will more deeply understand the man and message behind such titles as *Love and Responsibility*.

The reader of *Philosophical Works, Volume I: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System* will learn about the philosophical dispute between Wojtyła and Scheler. At the base of this quarrel is a noteworthy issue – there is no way to build Christian ethics basing one's structure on Max Scheler's philosophy. Wojtyła clearly recognized that Scheler did not have a metaphysical background. Therefore, Wojtyła was unable to build a normative system. And, in consequence, he could not create a school of Christian ethics from Scheler's work.

Although it is admittedly a dense text to work with, one must consider all the merits of *Philosophical Works, Volume I: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System*. And in this field, there are many. From the tracing of Wojtyła's philosophical heritage to the in-depth examination of what fields such as philosophy and ethics meant to Wojtyła, the text has quite a well-rounded offer for the reader. Nonetheless, it is left to the reader to decide what they will take from it.

*Philosophical Works, Volume I: Assessment of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics with the Assumptions of Max Scheler's System* is a recently discovered text authored by Karol Wojtyła, also known as St. John Paul II. The manuscript is part of a project developing the impact of recent archival discoveries which revealed the earlier works written by Wojtyła. It predates Wojtyła's more well-known writings, such as *Love and Responsibility* and *Person and*

*Act.* The text examines the philosophical dispute between Scheler and Wojtyła and elaborates on how Wojtyła found there was no possibility to build a system of Christian ethics based on Scheler's philosophy. It is, consequently, an invaluable piece of Wojtyła's academic legacy and is a critical part of understanding the later works written by the Pope.