

**Irreducibility and the Personalistic Norm as a Departure from Thomism:  
A Critique from the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II**

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**Abstract**

Karol Wojtyła owed a considerable debt to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, affirming a great deal in Aquinas’s metaphysical apparatus that was wanting, in his estimation, in much of contemporary philosophy: a grounding in *substance*, and an *objectivity* according to which we can confidently appeal to the truly *knowable* in reality, and in which we can locate definitive moral laws. At the same time, however, Wojtyła took from contemporary philosophy, especially the phenomenology of Max Scheler, a new focus upon the human person—a focus lacking, even in the great Christian thinkers of Scholasticism, Aquinas included. Wojtyła criticizes Aquinas’s view of the human person as being too “naturalistic,” instead suggesting that we ought to construct a more thoroughly developed *personalism*, giving the personal subject’s *irreducibility* “the upper hand” over natural *functionality* while avoiding any trace of subjectivism in the determination of moral norms. As a result, analyses that may seem perfectly warranted within the purely metaphysical realm cannot stand unchallenged by the truth available to human reason through the careful application of the phenomenological method. This is the point we wish to explore in this paper. What, in the view of Karol Wojtyła / Pope John Paul II, is the nature of Aquinas’s mistake here? How does Wojtyła correct it? And what practical differences does this make in terms of concrete conclusions with respect to matters of faith and morals?

**Keywords**

Wojtyła, John Paul II, Aquinas, personalism, reductionism, Thomistic personalism

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There can be no doubt that Karol Wojtyła owed a considerable debt to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, affirming a great deal in Aquinas’s metaphysical apparatus that was wanting, in his estimation, in much of contemporary philosophy: a grounding in *substance*, and an *objectivity* according to which we can confidently appeal to the truly *knowable* in reality, and within which we can locate definitive moral laws. At the same time, however, Wojtyła drew from contemporary philosophy, especially the phenomenology of Max Scheler, a new focus upon the human person—a focus lacking, even in the great Christian thinkers of Scholasticism, Aquinas included. The impact of that “new focus” on the thought of Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II, and thus, on the Church’s understanding of the mysteries of the faith as they pertain to the human person, reaches far, indeed. While Wojtyła draws heavily from Aquinas, even defending, at one point, the notion that we can articulate a kind of “Thomistic personalism,”<sup>2</sup> it would be naïve to suggest that Wojtyła’s thought can be characterized as a development strictly continuous with that of Aquinas.<sup>3</sup>

It is well-known, of course, that Wojtyła wrote his first doctoral dissertation, on the understanding of faith in the works of St. John of the Cross, at the Angelicum in Rome under Classical Thomist Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. In his Introduction, he noted that St. John had been deeply influenced by the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas at the University of Salamanca as a consequence of the Thomistic revival of the late fifteenth century under the influence of Francisco de Vitoria. He notes, further, that under this influence, “even then he was laying the foundation for the mystical doctrine that he would later develop from sound theological

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<sup>2</sup> K. Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. by Th. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 165–175. The essay originally appeared as: K. Wojtyła, “Personalizm tomistyczny,” *Znak* 13 (1961), 664–675. According to the bibliographical note appended to the essay in *Person and Community* (165), Wojtyła had presented the paper at the Fourth Annual Philosophy Week at the Catholic University of Lublin, February 17, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> A case in point for this naive reading of Wojtyła may be found in Samuel Gregg, *Challenging the Modern World: John Paul II/Karol Wojtyła and the Development of Catholic Social Teaching* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999). See, especially, where he writes that, “*The Acting Person* reads like neo-Thomism couched in Husserlian language” (62). Cf., also, Romanus Cessario’s comment on the cover notes for Jarosław Kupczak’s *Destined for Liberty* (J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2000)), where he says, “Quite simply, he’s a Thomist!” This comment leaves the impression that Wojtyła / John Paul II does exactly what Gregg suggests and nothing more: couch neo-Thomism in Husserlian language.

principles,”<sup>4</sup> believing that St. John’s work in this period supports the view that there is “a basic conformity between the teaching of St. John of the Cross and that of St. Thomas Aquinas.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, even then, Wojtyła’s interest was less in the speculative dimension of St. John’s treatment of faith than in exploring St. John’s account of the experience of the theological virtue of faith, inasmuch as the doctrine is itself “a testimony of experience.” That testimony, he explains:

... is expressed in scholastic-mystical language, using words and concepts well known in Scholastic theology, but its primary value and significance is as a witness of personal experience. It is there, in fact, that we can discover the living and dynamic reality of the virtue of faith, its activity in the human intellect, its corollaries and the effects on the movement of the soul toward union with God.<sup>6</sup>

Having completed his dissertation in 1948, Wojtyła had not yet taken a turn toward phenomenology but, even then he resisted certain modes of expression he found too coldly objectivistic. Notably, his dissertation director had wanted him to employ the expression “divine object,” which Wojtyła refused to do. His turn to phenomenology would begin at the Jagiellonian University, where, for his habilitation thesis, he undertook a formative study of Max Scheler, asking whether and to what extent a Christian morality could find grounding in Scheler’s system of thought.<sup>7</sup> While, in the end, he did not find Scheler’s approach sufficient, his study of Scheler proved formative, becoming an integral part of his mature philosophical and theological perspective. Stefan Swiezawski notes that later, at the Catholic University of Lublin, the philosophy department had a tendency to become lost in abstraction, but that Wojtyła was among those “who helped us maintain the balance between *theoria* and *praxis*, a balance that might

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<sup>4</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross*, trans. by J. Aumann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 19. Original title: *Doctrina de fide apud S. Joannem a Cruce* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1948).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> K. Wojtyła, *An Assessment of the Possibility for Building a Christian Ethics Based on the Presuppositions of Max Scheler*, in: K. Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works*, “The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II,” vol. 2, ed. A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 383–500. Original title: *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maksa Schelera* (Lublin, 1959). The thesis was actually written for the Jagiellonian University Theology Department (1953), but this university was forced to close under Communist control in 1954, with the faculty reconstituting at the Seminary of Kraków.

otherwise have been lost.”<sup>8</sup> He notes further that Wojtyła “tended to view phenomenological language as more communicative than scholastic terminology.”<sup>9</sup> From this point forward, through his elevation to the papacy as John Paul II, Wojtyła would construct his moral thought along personalist lines. So, with the phenomenological method at his disposal, he would return to many of Aquinas’s key intuitions and yet go beyond them, departing from Aquinas on significant points, purifying and correcting his thought, and finally, moving forward to new conclusions.

Once again, while, in the main, considering himself to fall within and not in opposition to the Thomistic tradition (along with numerous others in the Lublin School), Wojtyła nonetheless comes to criticize Aquinas’s view of the human person as being too “naturalistic,” instead suggesting that we ought to construct a more thoroughly developed *personalism*.<sup>10</sup> “In St. Thomas’ system of moral theology,” he writes:

aretology had a teleological and “naturalistic” character. This aretology arose from the Aristotelian concept of the person as a nature. The human being was treated somewhat on the model of a biological organism, in which everything is explained and acquires meaning from the point of view of “maturing” and attaining its end. Today we find this “naturalistic” concept of the human being rather inadequate. The aretology being developed today is taking on a normative and personalistic character. “Virtues” and “norms” themselves are not changing, but the way they are presented in the subject is.<sup>11</sup>

Wojtyła notes that Aquinas’s moral theology rests on two interpretive elements. First, because, for Thomas, “moral theology ‘gets to the bottom’ of the reality of morality in the light of the teachings

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<sup>8</sup> S. Swiezawski, “Introduction: Karol Wojtyła at the Catholic University of Lublin,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, xiii–xiv. This essay appeared originally in Polish as S. Swiezawski, “Karol Wojtyła w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim,” in: *Obecność: Karol Wojtyła w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim*, ed. M. Filipiak, A. Szostek (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1987), 9–18. Sandok prints an abridged version in *Person and Community*.

<sup>9</sup> S. Swiezawski, “Introduction: Karol Wojtyła at the Catholic University of Lublin,” xiv.

<sup>10</sup> K. Wojtyła, “Ethics and Moral Theology,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 101–106. The essay originally appeared as: K. Wojtyła, “Etyka a teologia moralna,” *Znak* 19 (1967), 1077–1082. According to the bibliographical note appended to the essay in *Person and Community* (p. 101), the published essay is a summary of a lecture he had delivered at the Tenth Annual Philosophy Week at the Catholic University of Lublin, February 17, 1967. In this little-studied but singularly pivotal essay, written six years after his essay on “Thomistic Personalism,” Wojtyła begins to describe rather clearly what he had come to perceive, in the maturation of his own analysis, to be the limits of the Thomistic approach to moral reasoning against the horizon of contemporary philosophical insight.

<sup>11</sup> Wojtyła, “Ethics and Moral Theology,” 104–105.

on morality contained in the sources of revelation”<sup>12</sup>—that is, because moral theology, as a quest “to understand reality *per ultimas causas*,”<sup>13</sup> is constructed on the model of a philosophical project—“[i]t stands to reason ... that theology should derive the tools for an ‘ultimate’ analysis of its own revealed contents from philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> Second, and more specifically, “moral theology in the Thomistic sense ‘gets to the bottom’ of moral reality by explaining it on the basis of the ultimate end, which implies a particular concept of the good and a particular concept of being.”<sup>15</sup> Wojtyła goes on to explain that this account of the ultimate end “also implies a corresponding metaphysical concept of the human being, a concept in which a ‘person’ is in a certain sense reducible to a ‘nature’: *individua substantia rationalis naturae*.”<sup>16</sup> Wojtyła cautions that our justifiable admiration for Aquinas’s accomplishment—“a work of simply monumental proportions ... [which] can still astonish anyone who only takes the trouble to learn how to see and appreciate it ... does not have to mean—even should not mean—that we regard it as a work complete and perfect in every respect.”<sup>17</sup> Rather, he suggests:

... in connection with the general direction of the development of philosophy, which is a movement away from the philosophy of being toward the philosophy of consciousness, the two previously mentioned interpretive elements in the structure of Thomistic theology have undergone—or at least should undergo—significant modification.<sup>18</sup>

Practically speaking, for Wojtyła this means acknowledging that the human person cannot be reduced to a mere part within a whole—to any natural, social, or cosmological *functionality*—in the determination of moral norms. The human being, precisely *as a person*, enjoys, in other words, a certain *irreducibility* to the purely natural and cosmological, with the result that, at times, analyses that may seem perfectly warranted within the purely metaphysical realm cannot stand unopposed by the truth available to human reason through the careful application of the phenomenological method, as applied to the human subject and the experience of moral

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

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

agency. This is the point we wish to explore in this paper. How does Wojtyła correct the shortcoming he comes to see in Thomistic moral theology, and what practical differences does his approach to personalism make in terms of concrete conclusions with respect to matters of faith and morals?<sup>19</sup>

### Functionalism or Irreducibility?

We begin, then, by naming the problem as Wojtyła understands it. Aquinas, once again, is operating within the context of a fundamentally Aristotelian metaphysic. This is not to suggest that Aquinas does not adapt Aristotle; indeed, Wojtyła is well aware that Aquinas quite thoroughly reconstructs him—or more precisely, constructs an entirely new system of thought upon a retooled Aristotelian apparatus.<sup>20</sup> But the apparatus—skeletal at least—remains; and with it, a certain stultification of the vision of the human person Aquinas was never, himself, quite able thoroughly to overcome.<sup>21</sup> A question then arises. If the root of the problem is Aquinas's use of a fundamentally Aristotelian apparatus, does this mean that Wojtyła rejects such an apparatus?

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, in the space available to us, our examination of these questions can only be preliminary. They will inevitably open up much larger questions, not only for ethics, but for metaphysics as well. It is worth noting, however, that there are indications that Wojtyła understood the sweeping implications of this problem. Much later in life, as pope, John Paul II would call, in his encyclical letter, *Fides et ratio* (14 September 1998), not merely for a restoration of Thomism, but for philosophy in its full historical and intellectual maturity, inclusive of the contributions of contemporary thinkers, and making full use of their legitimate methods, to strive, once again, with renewed vigor, to stake out, for philosophy, a “genuinely metaphysical range” (Vatican translation, §83). He calls for this project even after affirming that, in Aquinas's thinking, “the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought” (§78). Again, these statements come more than two decades after “Ethics and Moral Theology,” but they evince the direction his thought had taken from that point. It would seem that Wojtyła did not think a simple return to Thomistic metaphysics would suffice in light of the post-Cartesian, and more importantly, post-Kantian philosophical dialogue, much less in light of the advances made in physics over the course of the twentieth century, but instead, that philosophers needed to attempt to develop a new metaphysical system of thought, capable of answering the challenges of modernity.

<sup>20</sup> Wojtyła speaks along these lines in, for example, his article, “In Search of the Basis of Perfectionism in Ethics,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 45–56, especially 46–49. This article originally appeared as, K. Wojtyła, “W poszukiwaniu podstaw perfekcyjizmu w etyce,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 5 No. 4 (1955–57), 303–317.

<sup>21</sup> “Classical Thomists” in line with Domingo Báñez, who pledged, “in all things to follow St. Thomas,” found themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, imprisoned within these limitations—limitations that the Church would finally begin to confront, if only indirectly at first, in the twentieth century, beginning with the *Ressourcement*, proceeding through the Second Vatican Council, and continuing through the papacies of the post-Vatican II era. This confrontation is certainly still ongoing. Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II was a participant in this process, both as pope and as a private thinker. Though never *hostile* to Aquinas—indeed, always filially loyal and even adoring of him—Wojtyła forced a return to the question of the human person, confident that the true Thomas, as a saint and lover of the Truth, would have embraced such a re-examination and confidently undertaken the call to rethink his previous conclusions in light of new and deepened insights.

Certainly, even a cursory reading of his life's work as a philosopher, as a theologian, and as a magisterial authority would compel us to answer that question in the negative. Indeed, he quite certainly *embraces* the heritage of Aristotle—overall, at any rate. But for Wojtyła, Aristotle and Aquinas are both received with reservations, and they both require certain modifications. His reservations are not based so much on what they saw and tried to show us, but on what they did not see and, thus, on what their teaching *left out*.

Let us be clear about this point; there is nothing wrong with the hylomorphic view of the universe, as such, nor even with the application of such a view to the analysis of human action in the moral arena. Wojtyła explicitly says as much in his essay “The Problem of the Will in the Analysis of the Ethical Act,” written nearly a decade before “Ethics and Moral Theology,” and we have no reason to hold that his increasing and enduring commitment to phenomenology ever changed his view on this matter.<sup>22</sup> He writes:

If ethical experience essentially consists in this specific becoming of the person, then the only interpretation of it that can be considered adequate is one that apprehends and expresses this ethical becoming. This is what also leads me to believe that we should consider the view of the human act developed by Thomas Aquinas an adequate interpretation of ethical experience. ... St. Thomas based his view of the human act on Aristotle's theory of potency and act, a theory by which the philosophy of being explains all changes that take place in beings. ... A conscious human act is, for St. Thomas ... an ethical experience because it is an act of will ... [and thus,] a passage from potency, since the will is a faculty

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, once again, his call, as pope, in his encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*, for a restoration of philosophy's properly metaphysical range (§83), supports the thesis that this concern remained central to his thought throughout his life, even as Hans Köchler recounts that, in a private audience in connection with the Annual Conference of the Italian Section of the International Husserl and Phenomenological Research Society, held that year in Viterbo, Italy, in February of 1979, “he [John Paul II] assured me [Köchler] that he will always remain committed to the phenomenological movement and consider himself a phenomenologist” (H. Köchler, “Karol Wojtyła's Notion of the Irreducible in Man and the Quest for a Just World Order,” in: *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*, ed. N.M. Billias, et al., Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I, Culture and Values, Vol. 35, ed. G.F. McLean, (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 169). In saying that a “phenomenology of the will alone does not suffice for interpreting ethical experience,” therefore, the stress must be placed upon the word *alone*. For Wojtyła, the phenomenological method of philosophical investigation merely provides the basis for the development of a proper metaphysics.

(*potentia*) of the soul. ... [Because it cannot give an account of this becoming,] a phenomenology of the will alone does not suffice for interpreting ethical experience.<sup>23</sup>

Wojtyła makes it clear, once again, that, for him, the problem is not the Aristotelean or Thomistic metaphysical framework *as such*. The problem, rather, is the fact that within this framework there is a tendency—a tendency to which both Aristotle and Aquinas succumb in their respective treatments of key questions—to reduce the human person to the status of an object: a *thing* among other things in the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> “Wojtyła accepts,” Rocco Buttiglione correctly asserts:

... that the traditional, nonphenomenological point of departure of anthropology objectifies man; his own point of departure is a phenomenological description of experience. While Wojtyła objects to the cosmological point of departure as inadequate in anthropology, he does not limit anthropology to phenomenology, and points to a transphenomenological approach for a complete anthropology. Wojtyła rejects Husserl’s idealistic turn, which leads to a subjectivist reflection and absolutization of consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

For Wojtyła, what is missing from ethical and moral systems based on the “traditional, nonphenomenological anthropology,” which “objectifies man” from its “cosmological point of departure,” is what he calls the “personalistic norm,” the content of which he states clearly in his work *Love and Responsibility*, saying, “... we must never treat a person as a means to an end.

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<sup>23</sup> K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Will in the Analysis of the Ethical Act,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 20. This article originally appeared as K. Wojtyła, “Zagadnienie woli w analizie aktu etycznego,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1955–57), 111–135. The present study will make clear that when Wojtyła says that a “phenomenology of the will alone does not suffice for interpreting ethical experience,” the stress must be placed upon the word *alone*. As Wojtyła uses the term *phenomenology* in this essay, he means specifically only a certain careful *method of observation* involving the distillation of what is *given* in experience. Because he understands phenomenology-proper in this way—that is to say, as a kind of *technique* for conducting observation—it cannot, by definition, stand alone in providing a philosophical explanation. All it does is provide the basis of raw data upon which philosophical explanations can be constructed. That said, there can be no question that Wojtyła believed deeply in phenomenology’s suitability for precisely this essential task, and that he considered himself a phenomenologist.

<sup>24</sup> On this point, see K. Wojtyła, “Ethics and Moral Theology,” especially 104.

<sup>25</sup> R. Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, trans. by P. Guietti, F. Murphy (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 331.

[For] by giving man an intelligent and free nature ... [God] ordained that each man alone will decide for himself the ends of his activity, and not be a blind tool of someone else's ends."<sup>26</sup>

Wojtyła derives this norm from Immanuel Kant's second formulation of the so-called "categorical imperative" in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, where he writes, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."<sup>27</sup> Admittedly, within Kant's framework, this formulation of the categorical imperative does not admit of an end for the human person beyond himself, and on this point, Kant's anthropology differs markedly from that of both Aquinas and Wojtyła, and so also, then, does his theory of ethics. In adopting this formulation from Kant, therefore, and shaping it into his "personalistic norm," Wojtyła adapts it to an anthropology according to which the realization of our own personal good involves embracing a good beyond ourselves and doing so precisely *because* it is beyond ourselves. Wojtyła refers to this moment as "participation," and herein the human person achieves "transcendence" of his mere individuality—the moral event in which Wojtyła locates the very essence of the person-in-act.<sup>28</sup> But, while Aquinas also holds the view that human nature is oriented to a good beyond that of the individual—also sharing with Wojtyła the thesis that our human acts shape our moral quality and thus, our ontological condition as good or bad—<sup>29</sup> he does not share Wojtyła's view that our personal good is always realized when we fulfill our particular purpose in creation. Rather, for Aquinas, in some cases—and indeed, in most—the realization of fulfilling our particular purpose in creation may, as we will see, come at the positive exclusion of the good of the person as *person*.

By reducing the human person to the status of an object among other objects in the world—in other words, prioritizing the function he performs or the purpose he serves within the cosmos as a larger whole—the unique and unrepeatably value of the human person as a for-its-own-sake being is obscured, and a mechanistic functionality is allowed to replace that uniqueness in our

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<sup>26</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by H.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 27. This text originally appeared as, K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1960).

<sup>27</sup> I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 96.

<sup>28</sup> K. Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 252–258, originally published as K. Wojtyła, "Osoba podmiot i wspólnota," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 24, No. 2 (1976), 5–39.

<sup>29</sup> Wojtyła discusses this point of confluence in his essay, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 190–193. This essay originally appeared in print as K. Wojtyła, "Osobowa struktura samostanowienia," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 29, No. 2 (1981), 5–12.

consideration of the person, of the person's dignity and worth, and thus of moral and even broadly theological questions.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, this tendency toward naturalistic reductionism is so pervasive a threat from within the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical and theological tradition that everything from anatomy to cosmology can give expression to it, and that, in sometimes rather disquieting ways.<sup>31</sup>

### A Caveat on Wojtyła, Thomas, and Varying Thomisms

At this point, and before we proceed further, I should emphasize that I am not proposing here that Wojtyła rejects Thomas, only that he has found a point of departure between his own approach to ethics and that of Aquinas. To be sure, elements of personalism can be found in Thomas's anthropology. For example, as I have already noted, Aquinas holds that moral goodness consequent upon the human act redounds upon the ontological condition of the agent, who, being good or bad morally, is good or bad as a human being. This idea is fundamental to Wojtyła's ethico-centric anthropology, and on this basis, Wojtyła can speak meaningfully of a "Thomistic personalism." Saying that it is possible to formulate a personalist ethical framework on the basis of insights derived from the thought of Thomas Aquinas, however, is not the same thing as saying that Thomas is, himself, a personalist, nor that his system of thought is compatible with personalism without modification. By 1967, as we have already seen, Wojtyła himself stated as much explicitly.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Wojtyła cautions, thusly, in his essay "The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates," in: *Person and Community*, 279–299 – see, especially, 284–291. This essay originally appeared as K. Wojtyła, "Zagadnienie katolickiej etyki seksualnej: refleksje i postulatory," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1965), 5–25.

<sup>31</sup> For example, cf. *Summa contra gentiles*, III, q. 94, a. 11, and q. 122, a. 4. It is important to understand that when Aquinas discusses the power of persons—i.e., individual substances of a rational nature—to exercise dominion over their own actions, "and which are not only made to act, like others; but which act of themselves" (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 1), he is speaking principally about the divine Persons, not human beings. So, while he holds that the created person is "what is most perfect in all nature" (*ST*, I, q. 29, a. 3), the fact remains that his metaphysic does not allow us to assert in an unqualified way that created persons, like God, "act of themselves," and "are not only made to act," but instead that God makes us to perform specifically those free acts he wills us to perform, and not others. His compatibilist theory of human free-will is worked out in his theory of predestination and reprobation, where, as we will see, it runs afoul of Wojtyła's personalistic norm. For English-language quotations from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, we use, throughout, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols., trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947).

<sup>32</sup> Wojtyła, "Ethics and Moral Theology," 103.

Thus, in the present work, it is not my intention to add further to the existing body of literature exploring the many and profound points of confluence and continuity between Thomas and Wojtyła, nor to those expounding upon the role he played in the larger Lublin School of Thomism, varied as it is. Rather, I seek to address a lacuna in drawing attention to what is *not* Thomistic in Wojtyła's thought, and to what is not personalist in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. I believe that doing so is necessary to restore a more honest understanding of the relationship between Wojtyła's "Thomistic personalism" and Thomas's own understanding of the meaning, purpose, and value of the human person in God's plan. On that score, I should stress that the reading of Thomas here is taken, with direct quotations, from Thomas's own texts. The texts chosen to make the point at the heart of this study may seem to some to paint an "extreme" view of Thomas's mind and a one-sided and distorted view of Wojtyła's posture toward it. Once again, however, that is not because the texts cited here are inauthentic, but only because the point of the article is a narrow one: to draw attention to a real difference between Aquinas and Wojtyła owing to "the general direction of the development of philosophy, which is a movement away from the philosophy of being toward the philosophy of consciousness,"<sup>33</sup> on the basis of which Wojtyła came to believe that Thomistic theology should undergo "significant modification."<sup>34</sup> The texts presented in this article are, further, illustrative of a certain line of thought within Thomas's system, openly defended by Classical Thomists in line with Domingo Báñez, including Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange,<sup>35</sup> Stephen A. Long,<sup>36</sup> and Thomas M. Osborne, Jr.<sup>37</sup> Their approach to Thomas fell out of favor in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, but it has enjoyed a significant resurgence in recent decades, especially in the United States. Many other variants of Thomism boast countless adherents,<sup>38</sup> and I am not suggesting that those who belong to those schools and do not hold the views I present here from St. Thomas are in no sense Thomists. Nonetheless, on the precise points at issue in the present study, the Classical Thomism of Domingo Báñez appears to me to represent a generally correct reading of St. Thomas in the texts considered here.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, trans. by D.B. Rose (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1944).

<sup>36</sup> S.A. Long, "Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2006), 557-606.

<sup>37</sup> T.M. Osborne, Jr., "Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2006), 607-632.

<sup>38</sup> R. Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

## Sexual Differentiation and the Condignity of the Sexes

Let us take, for example, the question of the relative dignity of woman to man. From within an Aristotelian framework, all contingent beings have some telic orientation and cosmic place. All things in the universe *tend* toward some *end*, seeking their ultimate resolution therein. All movement is understood on the basis of this premise. Heavy objects seek their downward place, acorns the maturity of the oak. But since all change is understood according to the reduction of some potentiality to a corresponding actuality, the development of a substance involves the interrelationship between some *active* and some *passive* principle. The active principle imparts form to matter, thus defining the object's *kinetic* trajectory.<sup>39</sup> The *father*—who is *male*—is seen as the source of the active principle in the generation of human beings, while the *mother*—who is female—is seen as the source of the *material* principle which finds itself *disposed to receive* a form: the form of the *father*, who, again, is *male*. Given the limited information available to Aristotle, and even to Aquinas—indeed, to any human being prior to the rise of contemporary biology—there seemed sound metaphysical reasons for holding this view, including the observable fact that children, who are less fully developed than adults, more closely resemble women than men in their overall morphology.<sup>40</sup> But this account of sexual differentiation still fails the test of *irreducibility*, and it ends with the assertion that the highest form of friendship is not available in

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<sup>39</sup> See, Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 728<sup>b</sup>22–729<sup>b</sup>20, 730<sup>a</sup>24–730<sup>b</sup>31.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle mentions this point in several places. In his, *On the Generation of Animals*, he observes, for example, that boys who are rendered eunuchs prior to puberty do not develop body hair beyond the pubic region, nor do their voices change, and that men rendered eunuchs tend to lose their body hair, except in the pubic region (784<sup>a</sup>5–12). Similar discussions occur in *Problems* (294<sup>b</sup>19–38, 895<sup>a</sup>32–36, 897<sup>b</sup>23–27). Aristotle also mentions the relationship between children and women when he speculates about why, in the bovine, the calf's voice tends to be lower than in the adult of the species, while this is typically not the case in other animals. He notes that this fact is consistent with his overall observation that the child bears a closer resemblance to the female in any given species than to the male, since, in the bovine, the voice of the cow tends to be lower than that of the bull (*Problems* 901<sup>b</sup>24–29). Of course, today, we know that the physiology at work in the process of development from conception to adulthood is far more complex than Aristotle could have been expected to have imagined it to be. Given this complexity, the fact that children bear a closer resemblance to women than they do to men cannot, in any way, lead to the inference that women are somehow ontologically stunted.

the relationship between husband and wife<sup>41</sup> because such a friendship requires *equality of dignity*, while the woman, as something *half-formed*,<sup>42</sup> is ontologically inferior to her husband.

Admittedly, Scripture makes quite clear the fact that this mistake is difficult for fallen man to avoid,<sup>43</sup> and thus Aristotle can be excused, to some extent, for making it. But what of Aquinas? He has the benefit of revelation, in which the primeval condignity of man and woman is made

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<sup>41</sup> See Aristotle's discussion of friendship in Books VIII–IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1156<sup>b</sup>5–1172<sup>a</sup>15). While he maintains that perfect friendship is based upon perfect equality (1156<sup>b</sup>5–35), he goes on to say that the friendship of husband and wife is based upon a condition of inequality between the parties (1158<sup>b</sup>13–18). To be fair to Aristotle, however, he does hold out the possibility that a friendship based upon virtue can arise between husband and wife in the event that both are virtuous (1162<sup>a</sup>25–26), but he simultaneously holds that men and women cannot be virtuous in qualitatively the same way in every respect (*Politics*, 1277<sup>b</sup>8–33).

<sup>42</sup> *Generation of Animals*, 737<sup>a</sup>27–29.

<sup>43</sup> This is very much to the point in the story of the Man and the Woman in the garden. The story shows the woman being made from the “rib” (עֲצָבָה = *tsélâ*) of the man—that is, from the *region of the body that envelops the heart: the very bones of the man in the deepest recesses of his being—the “chamber” of his soul*. The woman is formed of the man's own inner being—his deepest longings and vulnerabilities. At first, he does not, properly speaking, *name* her, as he names the other animals, placing them under his dominion. Rather, he *describes* her, discovering the fullness of his *own* identity in *her* otherness, and in the fact that her otherness has himself as its reference point. This enables him to see his own otherness to her, such that he discovers the fact that he, as a person, is referenced to another. He is called to make a gift of himself. (In his capacity as pope, John Paul II will develop this theme at length, for example, in the Wednesday *Audiences* he devoted to his *Theology of the Body*. See, especially, those lessons delivered during the span of January 2–February 20, 1980.) The Hebrew text also makes the point of male-female mutuality rather clearly when God says, “I will make a helper over-against him” or “a helper fitted-to-him” or “present-to-him” (עֹזֵר כְּנַפְּגוֹ: = *e'ēšeh lōw 'ezer kandeḡōw*) to describe what God intended the woman to be for the man when he first declared that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). She is to be *one-fitted-to-him*, not in the sense of subordination, but in the sense of complementarity and, to borrow a phrase from Martin Buber, “personal making present” (M. Buber, “Elements of the Interhuman,” trans. by R.G. Smith, in: M. Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays*, ed. M. Friedman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc, 1988), 68–71). Thus, it is only *after sin* that the woman becomes finally subjugated to the man and given over to his exploitation (3:16). This point is made, not only in God's utterance of the curse at 3:16, but also in the fact that the Man goes on to *name* her, in the proper sense, as they leave the garden (3:20). More subtly, revelation actually references this paradox in the fact that, in the *Decalogue*, the commandment against coveting one's neighbor's *possessions* and that against coveting his *wife* are given together in a single proposition (Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 5:21). This leads to ambiguity, such that the real meaning of the commandments concerning these questions can only be discerned if the heart is pure. Only, in other words, if we are sensitive to the *personalistic norm*, will we be able to see, given the concupiscible burden of fallenness, that a woman simply *cannot* be a possession, and thus that the sin of coveting one's neighbor's ox is not only *quantitatively* but *qualitatively* different from that of coveting his wife. John Paul II points out that the predominating language of the Old Testament did tend to objectify the woman as a kind of property belonging to her husband, and that the legal recognition of polygamy was, itself, a manifestation of this tendency (see his Wednesday *Audiences* of August 13, 1980–August 20, 1980). With Christianity, the ambiguity of the commandments is overcome, not only with Christ's restoration of the pure state of matrimony as it was “from the beginning,” and thus, the prohibition of divorce (Cf. Matthew 19:3–9), but also in Paul's development of the Bridegroom imagery according to which he works out a fully sacramental understanding of the relationship between husband and wife in the life of grace (Ephesians 5:21–33). For John Paul II's work on the *Theology of the Body* see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. by M. Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006) – we reference, here, pp. 177–204, and 267–274. For the Hebrew Old Testament, see *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, 4 vols., ed. & trans. by J.P. Green, Sr. (Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), vols. 1–3.

plain, and femininity revered as the fundamental expression of the human person's posture in relationship to God, who seeks us as his bride.

Actually, Aquinas does not fully perceive this truth. While he rejects Aristotle's conclusion that the highest form of friendship is not available between husband and wife,<sup>44</sup> he does not reject the underlying premise upon which Aristotle advances his argument.<sup>45</sup> Instead, pointing to the sacramental fullness of matrimony as an image of Christ's relationship to the Church, he appeals to the gift of *grace* by which a lower nature can be raised to a higher *posse*, such that, through the sacramental grace of matrimony, the woman is given a sort of *analogous* condignity with her husband,<sup>46</sup> just as the human person is, in this way, given condignity with God through the infusion of sanctifying grace, without thereby altering the brute fact of the creature's inherent inferiority.

It is worthy of note, of course, that while Aquinas accepts the claim that God presents his "image" in human being in both sexes,<sup>47</sup> he does not suppose that there is really anything about human sexuality *per se* to manifest that image.<sup>48</sup> Prudence Allen characterizes this view, which she calls "gender unity," as "supporting the importance of a sexless soul, and devaluing the human body."<sup>49</sup> The inner co-equality of relationality belonging to the nature of the Triune God does not,

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<sup>44</sup> *ScG*, III, q. 123, a. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Aquinas is quite explicit on the ontological inferiority of women. See, for example, *ST*, I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 2; I, q. 93, a. 4, ad 1; *ScG*, III, c. 94, §11; and *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 5, a. 9, ad 9.

<sup>46</sup> *ST*, III-*Suppl*, q. 49, a. 3. Here, Aquinas argues that *indissolubility* is the effect of grace in matrimony, and thus that this imprints a kind of character upon the recipients of the sacrament. In this case, it gives the man and the woman power over one another at the bodily level, extending beyond what natural procreative obligation appears to require. This kind of union gives the wife a share in her husband's life, and thus inferentially, a kind of *equality* with him, through the grace the sacrament affords. This degree of equality would not be possible in a purely natural marriage. Now, in his *Sententia libri ethicorum* (VIII, Lect. 12, §1723), Aquinas grants Aristotle's observation that if both husband and wife are virtuous, their marriage can be based on virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1162<sup>a</sup>19–24). But this alone does not raise the status of their friendship to the highest form, since the highest form of friendship requires equality *in all ways* (1156<sup>b</sup>5–35), while the virtues proper to husband and wife are different, in a way *analogous to*, but *not quite reducible to*, that proper to master and servant (*Politics* 1277<sup>b</sup>8–33). While, for Aquinas, a form of equality exists even in a purely natural (i.e., *licit*, but *non-sacramental*) marriage (*ScG*, III, q. 124, aa. 4–5), that equality is really one based upon a kind of *constitutional arrangement* whereby a micro-political organism is formed. The husband and wife are equal in the sense that the foot and the eye are equally oriented toward the good of the body, even as the eye possesses the greater dignity (*ibid.* III, q. 94, a. 11). The friendship of husband and wife may be based on virtue, but it is not the same *sort* of virtue; it is a virtue of *inequality* and, thus, preclusive of friendship's highest form without some superaddition to nature (cf. *ibid.* III, q. 123, a. 7).

<sup>47</sup> *ST*, I, q. 93, a. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* I, q. 93, a. 6.

<sup>49</sup> P. Allen, *The Concept of Women, II: The Early Humanistic Revolution, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 231. For more on the Neoplatonic roots of this issue in the period she describes as "early humanism," see the entire discussion under the subtitle, "Christian, Neoplatonic, and Stoic Roots of Early Humanist Views of Women", 224–233.

for Aquinas, find expression in the phenomenological given of human sexual differentiation, as such. Indeed, he explicitly denies this assertion<sup>50</sup>—a fact that, ironically, evinces the presence of the concept in his own time. Rather, Aquinas sees the image of God in the human being expressed exclusively in the specifying *differentia* of human nature, i.e., *rationality*.<sup>51</sup> He thus sees the distinction of the sexes as essentially twofold in purpose, at least as far as so-called “pure nature” is concerned. First, it affords the opportunity for the continuity in generative unity of rational animality, wherein the image of God, who is *rational*, is manifest in the material universe.<sup>52</sup> Second, precisely inasmuch as sexual distinction rests, according to this Aristotelian perspective, in a diversity of *ontic nobility*, it allows God to manifest his qualitative infinity in a universe of finite beings by expressing his majesty in the multiplication of creatures across a vast ontological gradation.<sup>53</sup>

Wojtyła, as John Paul II, takes a rather different stance with respect to this question; and he does so on the basis of the personalistic norm that allows room for the philosopher to “pause at the irreducible,”<sup>54</sup> and to question his metaphysical presumptions in light of what is clearly given about the person in the phenomenological moment. John Paul II is able to acknowledge that human sexual differentiation, as such, manifests the image of God.<sup>55</sup> Human persons discover, in their *maleness* and *femaleness*, a mutual orientation to the *other*. Most of all through sexual differentiation, the human person is able to *know* and *be known*, both *by himself* and *by the other*; and thus, in his own deepened *self-aware self-possession*, he is able to make a *gift* of himself to one who *receives* him and *embodies* him without consuming and negating him.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *ST*, I, q. 93, a. 6, ad 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* I, q. 93, a. 6.

<sup>52</sup> *ScG*, III, q. 94, a. 11; *De verit.*, q. V, a. 9, ad 9.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ST*, I, q. 92, aa. 1–2; *ScG*, III, q. 94, a. 11; and *De verit.*, q. V, a. 9, ad 9.

<sup>54</sup> K. Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in: *Person and Community*, 213–214. This essay, pivotal for any real understanding of Wojtyła’s broader philosophical views, originally appeared as K. Wojtyła, “Podmiotowość i ‘to co nieredukowalne’ w człowieku,” *Ethos* Vol. 1, No. 2–3 (1988), 21–28. According to the editorial notes appended to the translation, this paper is considerably earlier than its first publication would suggest; Wojtyła sent it to a conference in Paris, held June 13–14, 1975. Beyond the date of the conference, no further specifics of the event are provided.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 163–164. In this passage, delivered November 14, 1979, John Paul II not only suggests that the creation of the human being as “male and female” *does* present us with an image of God in and through sexual differentiation, but that, in fact, this *relational* dimension of the divine image “constitutes perhaps the deepest theological aspect of everything we can say about man” (164). The view expressed by John Paul II here borrows very closely from the Trinitarian model discussed by St. Augustine in his *De Trinitate*, XII.5—a view Aquinas had come to dismiss as “manifestly absurd” (*ST*, I, q. 93, a. 6, ad 2).

<sup>56</sup> This is precisely the line of reasoning employed by Paul VI in his encyclical letter, *Humanae vitae* (25 July 1968), §§8–9. Wojtyła discusses this idea in his essay, K. Wojtyła, “The Teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on Love:

This philosophical awareness prepares John Paul II to receive the Scriptural witness of Genesis in a way that seemingly escapes the horizons of Aquinas’s theological imagination; and thus is born, for the Church, a new and revitalizing theological approach—that of *somatic theology* or, as it is more commonly known, *the theology of the body*.<sup>57</sup>

Before going further in the present critique, of course, we should point out that the phenomenological method, though refined and brought to maturity in the twentieth century, is, at its root, properly something belonging, first above all, to precisely that philosophical realism to which Aristotle and Aquinas, and so many of the Scholastics, had attempted to give voice. Experience, and the *roots* of that experience, provide the brute facts concerning which whatever else we say must give account. These *givens* are to be the *matter* of our philosophical discourse—a matter already disposed to a certain *form* that comes to be known through a process, not of manipulation or contrivance, but of *discovery*, precisely in and through our encounter with the concrete evidence presented to us by the world. That being said—and we cannot enter into any lengthy discussion of the matter here, for it would take us far afield of our stated purpose—Duns Scotus, however much he may be criticized in his own right, must be heralded among the Scholastics for his sensitivity to the phenomenological given and his readiness to “pause before the irreducible.” He did not hold the Aristotelian-Thomistic view of the woman as an ontological inferior, but instead saw, consistent with revelation, that the woman, along with the man, operates as an active principle in the order of generation.<sup>58</sup> He knew no more about reproductive biology than Aquinas, but he was able to step back and allow what was given in the phenomenological moment to, as Wojtyła says, “have the upper hand” over metaphysical abstraction,<sup>59</sup> and thus to

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An Analysis of the Text,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 301–314. This essay originally appeared as K. Wojtyła, “Nauka encykliki ‘Humanae vitae’ o miłości,” *Analecta Cracoviensia* 1 (1969), 341–356, which he delivered in September 1968 at a theological conference on *Humanae vitae* (editorial note in *Person and Community*, 301). This theme is also consistent with his thinking in *Love and Responsibility*, and in his *theology of the body*, which he developed thoroughly early in his papacy as John Paul II.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, what we describe here is the essential thrust of the whole project. Again, see Wojtyła, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, (in toto).

<sup>58</sup> *Ordinatio* III, dist. 4, q. *unica*. This text, in both Latin and English, with a worthy complement of notes, is readily available in John Duns Scotus, *Four Questions on Mary*, trans. by A.B. Wolter (Saint Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 77–110.

<sup>59</sup> In his essay, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible,” Wojtyła says, “We cannot complete the picture through [metaphysical or naturalistic] reduction alone; we also cannot remain within the framework of the irreducible alone (for then we would not be able to get beyond the pure self). The one must be cognitively supplemented by the other. Nevertheless, given the variety of circumstances of the real existence of human beings, we must always leave the greater space in this cognitive effort for the irreducible; we must, as it were, give the irreducible the upper hand when thinking about the human being that is invisible and wholly internal and whereby each human being, myself

set a task for metaphysics as a discipline. Scotus was prepared to accept the challenge of re-examining his metaphysical principles and their implications in light of the givenness of real-life experience.<sup>60</sup> In the end, it is precisely the fruits of his phenomenological sensitivity with respect to this point that disposed him, philosophically, to receive from within the deposit of faith, as a theologian, the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and the scope of its importance to the whole of the faith.<sup>61</sup>

In any event, we have, in the absence of this habitual readiness to “pause before the irreducible,” a rather distorted view of human sexual differentiation and sexual meaning. From within this distorted view, we are led, moreover, to still other distorted conclusions in the realm of human sexuality. These arise, once again, on the basis of an overly *naturalistic* understanding of the human person.<sup>62</sup>

### The Sexual Act and Sexual Sin

The sexual act is *by nature* oriented to generation; and thus, any intentional subversion of that dimension of the act is *immoral* precisely insofar as it constitutes a free and informed choice—a human act—to contravene what is proper to nature. It is an offense against the natural law because, as rational beings, we are able to understand the order of nature, and thus we are bound to assent to that order as our own good.<sup>63</sup> This, all conscientious Catholic moralists would affirm

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included, is an ‘eyewitness’ of his or her own self—of his or her own humanity and person” (p. 214). A bit later in the same essay, he writes, “What does it mean to *pause cognitively at lived experience*? This ‘pausing’ should be understood in relation to the irreducible” (p. 215). Given the discussion in the whole of the essay, and in particular in the passages immediately following this second quote, it is clear that Wojtyła is speaking of the prerogative of the phenomenological method in directing and correcting metaphysical analyses. Indeed, he goes on to say, “The thinker seeking the ultimate philosophical truth about the human being no longer moves in a ‘purely metaphysical terrain,’ but finds elements in abundance testifying to both the materiality and the spirituality of the human being, elements that bring both of these aspects into sharper relief. These elements then form the building blocks for further metaphysical construction” (p. 216).

<sup>60</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the divergence between Scotus and Aquinas on the question of sexual differentiation, see R.H. Bulzacchelli, “Femininity as a Positive Perfection and the Active Participation of Woman in Generativity in the Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus,” in: *A Companion to Medieval Christian Humanism: Essays on Principal Thinkers*, ed. J.P. Bequette, Brill’s Companion to the Christian Tradition: A Series on the Intellectual and Religious Life of Europe, 500–1800, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto, vol. 69 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 274–296.

<sup>61</sup> *Ordinatio* III, dist. 3, q. 1. Again, the reader may find this text in Latin and English with notes in *Four Questions on Mary*, 29–62.

<sup>62</sup> K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates,” 288–291.

<sup>63</sup> *ScG*, III, q. 122, aa. 4–5.

without hesitation; but if we follow this line of reasoning too far before taking the time to “pause before the irreducible,” we end by weighing the relative gravity of various sexual sins in an intuitively bizarre and offensive way. For, according to Aquinas, this line of reasoning leads inexorably to the conclusion that masturbation, homosexual acts, outright bestiality, and the deliberate exclusion of the generative potency of the act between heterosexual partners are all qualitatively, and therefore, absolutely, more serious than rape and adultery.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Aquinas states quite explicitly that these sins rank second only to homicide.<sup>65</sup>

Aquinas is certainly correct to conclude that all four of these acts are objectively disordered and constitute grave matter, at the very least. But again, his analysis here fails the test of irreducibility. “Getting to the Bottom” of morality by explaining it on the basis of the ultimate end,” writes Wojtyła, “has given way to explaining and justifying morality on the basis of values and norms. We are concerned today not so much with determining the ultimate end of moral conduct as with giving an ultimate justification of the norms of morality.”<sup>66</sup>

From within the scope of a personalist analysis, these acts, however similar at the purely biological level—considering the natural generative purpose of the sexual organs—are really not reducible in the way Aquinas suggests. Phenomenologically, the real issues involved here are obvious. It is true, as Aquinas points out, that homosexual acts and acts of bestiality differ, biologically, on the basis of the fact that the first involves the use of the sexual organs within the context of an encounter with an individual of the wrong *sex*, while the second involves such

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<sup>64</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12.

<sup>65</sup> “Nor, in fact, should it be deemed a slight sin for a man to arrange for the emission of semen apart from the proper purpose of generating and bringing up children. . . . [T]he inordinate emission of semen is incompatible with the natural good; namely the preservation of the species. Hence, after the sin of homicide whereby a human nature already in existence is destroyed, this type of sin appears to take next place, for by it the generation of human nature is precluded” (*ScG*, III, q. 122 a. 9). We quote here from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, 5 vols., trans. by A.C. Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

<sup>66</sup> Wojtyła, “Ethics and Moral Theology,” 103. Here, there can be no question that Wojtyła understands himself to depart from Aquinas on this matter: “The credit for bringing about this change in how the central problem of ethics is posed and formulated undeniably goes to Kant. But to accept Kant’s point of departure in ethics—that is, to regard the problem of the justification of norms as the chief ethical problem—is not necessarily to accept Kant’s solution. Indeed, a search for the ultimate justification of moral norms may lead us straight to the ultimate end. This is not presupposed in advance in the point of departure. One thing, however, is presupposed right from the start: in the whole way ethics is treated, normative rather than teleological tendencies will prevail, even in the case of ‘teleological’ conclusions” (*ibid.*). Once again, for Wojtyła, this alteration in his point of departure from teleological to normative reasoning represents precisely the sort of “serious modification” to Thomistic moral theology he deems necessary (*ibid.*), and which cannot be presupposed from the start to yield the same conclusions. Even if it often does, the reasoning by which those conclusions are justified will not be the same.

use with an individual of the wrong *species*;<sup>67</sup> and he is probably correct to say that the latter is more seriously disordered than the former.<sup>68</sup> But in naming the reason for the relative gravity of these sins, he misses the more fundamental issue—that, in the case of bestiality, inasmuch as the act is performed with a member of a different *species*, it attempts a somatic union with a *non-person*. Failure to take this fact into account—the fact of the *personhood* or *non-personhood* of the sexual-other—cuts us off from a fully mature analysis of the moral stakes in question.<sup>69</sup> The same must be said of contraceptive acts between heterosexuals.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the juxtaposition, so commonly offered in today’s socio-political debates, of the committed homosexual relationship over against the transient, intentionally infecund, heterosexual encounter, in many respects forces precisely the right questions here. Aquinas’s judgment that contraceptive heterosexual acts are less grave than homosexual acts may be correct in the final analysis, but to make the case strictly on the grounds of the natural orientation of the organs is, once again, to miss the deeper point. It is to ignore the phenomenological givenness of sexual differentiation, precisely at the point of personal irreducibility; for we must insist that while sexual differentiation includes the biological purpose of the sexual act, it also transcends it quite definitively. Sexual differentiation thus includes other dimensions of meaning which must be taken into consideration if the nature of the offense is fully to be understood. The issue is not simply one of the orientation of the offenders’ respective *body parts*, but much more importantly, what it means to be *male* and *female*, and what it means to be a *psychosomatic unity* whose body-form reveals a truth about our identity, and about the fundamental orientation of our very *personhood*.

That being said, we can return, again, to the question of masturbation, which, by its very nature, often feigns, in the psyche of the sinner, a dimension of the experiential gesture of interpersonal encounter and mutual self-donation even while definitively excluding it. For that reason, Aquinas’s naturalistic analysis treats only the most superficial truth about the act, failing, thereby, to deal with the real problem. Masturbation represents its own sort of evil, thus engendering different moral consequences, both for the sinner and for the larger human

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<sup>67</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12, ad 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics,” 284–291. Wojtyła does not concern himself here, at all, with the question of homosexuality, but the reasoning he employs is easily applied.

<sup>70</sup> Indeed, see Wojtyła, “The Teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on Love,” 304–310, and, especially, 308.

community, than the other acts we have thus far considered.<sup>71</sup> *Is it* correct to say that the use of the sexual organs without venereal contact is more profoundly evil than the use of the same organs in a potentially fecund but morally self-directed, uncommitted, and commoditizing act of fornication? Psychologically, an act of masturbation may well stem from an otherwise healthy orientation toward fully marital intercourse, open to procreation, as the agent experiences the frustration arising from the absence of a marital relationship. The objective biology of the act is one thing—and we must, admittedly, accept the moral truth comported therein—but the motivating moral value to which the sin-act gives concrete expression can *neither* be ignored in the analysis. The irreducibility of the *person to nature* and *biology* defies any attempt to package masturbation, sodomy, and bestiality together in the way that Aquinas attempts to package them, because his taxonomy of sin, here, rests upon an emphasis so reductionistic as to pass by, entirely, the domain of lived experience whereby the irreducible human person is disclosed. Indeed, to do so would be a disservice, because the moralist would thereby forego an opportunity to bring to light the fullness of the moral truth, consequently abandoning any reasonable attempt to persuade *of* that truth those engaged in these behaviors, who know from the givenness of their own experience that such demarcations lack sufficient nuance to be finally trustworthy.

This, however, is not the end of the problem for Aquinas. For, as we have said, on the very same naturalistic grounds according to which he has argued thus far, he goes on to assert that, precisely insofar as the aforementioned acts positively exclude the procreative purpose of

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<sup>71</sup> It would be impossible to undertake a thorough analysis of the problem of masturbation here, but we can offer a brief indication of the direction such an analysis would have to take if we wished to offer a *personalist* treatment, rather than a strictly *naturalist* treatment, which now seems inadequate. Because masturbation involves the satisfaction of the sexual urge outside the context of mutual self-giving and is, thus, an *inward turning* in response to the urge to *transcend the limits of self-enclosure*, it ends by radicalizing the alienation of loneliness. This happens because there is a close link in human beings between the arousal of the sexual urge and the subjective experience of personal separateness. Ironically, therefore, masturbation tends to be addictive, even to the point at which the offender forgoes actual human contact for the sake of satisfying the sexual urge which, though temporarily quieted, *re-presents* itself with ever-greater intensity. The problem stems, really, from the fact that the sexual urge in human beings comports a spiritual and personal significance, calling the human person *out of* himself or herself, into the realm of the *interpersonal* and, finally, into the realm of the *we*. Thus, the sexual urge calls us to locate the *Self* in the *other*, while sexual sin tends to reverse this trajectory to varying degrees, with an attempt to locate the *other* in the *Self*. Masturbation clearly manifests this turn with its characteristic accompaniment of sexual fantasy, in which the *object* of desire—another human being—is denied any authentic personal subjectivity, but is instead *constructed* in the mind of the offender according to the prescriptions of the offender's own desires. This is why sexual sin—most of all masturbation—can never satisfy the sexual urge in the way that a genuine covenantal conjugal relationship can. It does not answer the *spiritual* need for personal self-transcendence that gives rise to it, but instead leaves the offender trapped within his or her own personal self-enclosure.

the sexual organs in the process of their use, they are the *most grave* of all sexual sins.<sup>72</sup> Aquinas is quite clear on this point: *rape* is *not* as serious a sin as *masturbation*, because while masturbation positively frustrates the generative orientation of the sexual organs in their use, rape does not; it is, at least in theory, possible for a rapist to impregnate his victim.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, for Aquinas, *rape*, as such, does not sink to the level of *any* of the sins we have mentioned thus far, for, where all of those sins are closed to the generative orientation of the sexual act, rape alone is open to it. But are we really prepared to say that even contraceptive intercourse between husband and wife is morally worse than *rape*, where the generative orientation of the sexual organs is not positively frustrated? Once we “pause at the irreducible,” it becomes clear that to intrude upon the psychosomatic self-determination of the person is an offense fundamentally more perverse than giving reciprocity to another person’s voluntarily self-exploitive inclinations. Both are morally wrong, and gravely so; but it remains important to name the precise nature of the sin in each case. If we fail to do so—in this case especially—we end by violating the dignity of the human person by a sheer act of philosophical analysis, inasmuch as we fail to give the *irreducible person* the upper hand over metaphysics.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> In the case of fornication, both parties sin, while in the case of rape, only the offender sins. Paradoxically, however, rape is more serious precisely because the victim is denied any real agency in the governance of her own person—her own psychosomatic integrity—in precisely that dimension of her bodily existence most closely tied to the value-modality of *self-possession* : *self-donation* (cf., on the concept of “value-modalities,” M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. by M.S. Fings, R.L. Funk, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy Series, ed. John Wild (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 104). This, after all, is really what it means to be *raped*. The exercise of the sexual faculty cuts to the very deepest reaches of our psychosomatic unity, such that to deny someone, in this very sphere, the dignity of *personal subjectivity*—that is, being *the subject of his or her own actions*—is to reduce that person to the status of a mere *object*. The offender fundamentally excludes his victim from the act, even as he absorbs her in it as its direct object. Rape, therefore, is among the most acute instances of what Wojtyła names *alienation*—that is, the opposite of what he calls, “participation,” which requires subjective affirmation, through personal action, of a commonly-affirmed value, as a consciously and freely affirmed dimension of each agent’s self-fulfillment (Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 252–258). We can and should argue, of course, that fornication also objectifies the person in a certain sense. But *lived experience* makes clear that human beings respond in profoundly different ways to these two modes of exploitation. Rape is *total* objectification, fornication is not, no matter how close it may come to the line. Indeed, this is precisely the point at issue in society’s outcry against “date rape drugs,” which are used to dissociate a woman’s *psychical discretion* from her *somatic activations*, reducing her to a non-participating sexual robot. The Casanova may care little about *who* his conquest is, but his thrill can only come through her voluntary self-surrender. The date-rapist has lost sight of even this value; he takes the outward appearance of surrender at the expense of its inner, voluntary character. This is an essential difference between fornication and date rape—an act which is really and properly rape. From a personalist point of view, this difference places rape at the very top of the hierarchy of sexual sins.

Today, many moralists who confess explicit fidelity to magisterial authority, and who ground their considerations in the personalist approach of John Paul II himself, would regard the presence of seminal fluids, with their potential to result in a wholly uninvited pregnancy consequent upon a violation of the woman's personal self-possession, as a *continuing assault*, and they would, on that basis, countenance the use of strictly anti-ovulatory measures provided there is no risk of abortion.<sup>75</sup> These thinkers reject the characterization of such measures as properly "contraceptive," since the question of *contraception* is taken to involve a *willingness* to engage in the sexual act, but with the intention, then, of frustrating its purpose. In the present case, however, there is no intention to frustrate the purpose of a sexual act, since the rape victim has not participated in any sexual *act qua act* at all. Indeed, her assailant has simply performed a sexual act, biologically speaking, upon her, unilaterally.<sup>76</sup> The use of anti-ovulatory interventions in this case represents, therefore, an attempt to preserve what remains, if anything, of the self-determination of the woman, whose *somatic boundaries* constitute a sacred space not to be transgressed through an act of interpersonal trespass wholly antithetical to her will. Those who endorse such interventions would argue that a woman enjoys a clear right never to *abort* a pregnancy, no matter the circumstances under which she conceived, but certainly to *prevent* a pregnancy consequent upon *rape*—and that, precisely on the basis of the *personalistic norm*, apart from which the deeper meaning of human sexuality, and thus of the sexual act, cannot be fully understood. For the time being at least, the Church appears to entrust this question to the academic debate, and to tolerate within the bounds of Catholic moral conduct the recommendations of these moralists. That fact alone speaks volumes about the Church's refusal to reduce the sexual act to the level of a purely natural purpose.

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<sup>75</sup> Indeed, this is the official position of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as articulated in *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 15, 2001), III.36. The bishops advise that "A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault. If, after appropriate testing, there is no evidence that conception has occurred already, she may be treated with medications that would prevent ovulation, sperm capacitation, or fertilization. It is not permissible, however, to initiate or to recommend treatments that have as their purpose or direct effect the removal, destruction, or interference with the implantation of a fertilized ovum."

<sup>76</sup> Wojtyła is quite insistent on this point in *The Acting Person*. He draws the distinction between an *activity* or *activation*, on the one hand, and an *act* in the full and proper sense, on the other. The latter implies *efficacious auto-determinism*. Thus, Wojtyła essentially equates the terms *act* and *human act*. On the part of the victim, rape is, by its very definition, not a human act, because it does not proceed from free-will (as in the case of *forcible* rape) or understanding (as in the case of *statutory* rape, for example).

## The Person and the Community

Now, we have spoken, thus far, only about matters pertaining to the ethics of the sexual act, and how too heavy an emphasis upon a naturalistic understanding of the human person often leads to incomplete and sometimes altogether errant judgments in this arena. But the implications of the naturalistic approach to the human person go deeper than this. For Aquinas, because the human person exists for the purpose of instantiating a nature—the *rational* nature—which can be realized according to varying degrees of perfection, the human being is really viewed not principally as an end in himself but as a *means* to a still higher end determined by God.<sup>77</sup> The primary value here is not the individual *person*, but the *species*, for the sake of which the individual person exists. Wojtyła recognizes and even legitimizes what is correct in Aquinas’s intuition, here—namely that the human individual cannot be understood solely in respect of himself, but always, at the very core of his being, is already a kind of reference to the *other*—to a *community* of persons.<sup>78</sup> But their confluence on this quality of the human person does not mean that we can simply *equate* the view of Wojtyła with that of Aquinas on the broader question of the person in relation to the community

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, *ST*, I, qq. 22–23; *ScG*, III, q. 94, a. 11. Aquinas is explicit in his assertion that the human person is *not* an end in himself, but an end ordered to something greater—something for the sake of which the individual person’s naturally (or even supernaturally) ordered good may have to be frustrated according to God’s providence. In spite of this, the contrary view is widely assigned to him. That said, it may well be the case that, in the mediaeval West, Aquinas first cast certain questions or concepts in a light that allowed for later development in the direction the Church, and even the wider philosophical discussion, have been able to follow to a fully personalist conclusion. This fully personalist position is affirmed consistently by Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II and finds articulation at the Second Vatican Council in the claim that the human person “... is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself” (Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), §24). It would be difficult to deny that this position expresses the mature mind of the Church, and that the Church sees this articulation as expressing the inner content of revelation in a rich and penetrating way. Nonetheless, this position is emphatically *not* that of Aquinas himself. In an earlier work of my own, I am guilty of ascribing the personalist view of the individual human being to Aquinas (R.H. Bulzacchelli, *Judged by the Law of Freedom: A History of the Faith-Works Controversy and a Resolution in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 53). Wojtyła seems to do this as well (“Thomistic Personalism,” especially 166–167, 174) since, there, he does not draw any distinction between the propositions “human beings are the noblest creatures in the universe” and “human beings are made for their own sakes.” Neither had I done so in my own earlier work. For Aquinas, however, the first proposition is true, but not the second. He would acknowledge that all things in the universe are ordained for the good of human beings, but he would not accept the claim that the universe as a whole is so ordained. Aquinas does not say, in other words, that “the universe exists for the sake of the human person,” but that “the human person exists for the sake of the universe” (*ST*, I, q. 23, a. 7).

<sup>78</sup> Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 173–174. Cf., also, *Gaudium et spes*, §25.

or the species. Indeed, the point of departure between the two can be illustrated clearly in their respective attitudes toward the just use of capital punishment.

On the question of capital punishment, Aquinas can only be characterized as an *enthusiast*. Because the human being exists to instantiate the rational nature and has his fundamental value as an individual precisely in this, a descent from rationality—as through sin—means a diminution of his *objective value*.<sup>79</sup> Of course, we must be careful to understand this point correctly, as Wojtyła, for his own part, certainly does. Aquinas’s metaphysic prevents him from suggesting that the human being ceases to be *human* by nature on account of sin;<sup>80</sup> and as far as this point goes, Wojtyła finds, in Aquinas, something of profound importance, especially for today’s debates over the whole panoply of life issues.<sup>81</sup> Wojtyła also finds, in Aquinas, the important intuition that the human being can change his *moral character* in and through his acts.<sup>82</sup> But where Aquinas’s belief that not only the moral *character* of the person but also the person’s *fundamental value* as an individual is tied to his acts, Wojtyła and Aquinas must part company. Again, Aquinas’s conclusion here is really the result of his tendency to engage in *natural reductionism*, whereby the natural purpose of the person is subordinated to a larger social purpose in quite the same way that a *body part* has its purpose and value in the *whole*.<sup>83</sup> Ironically, where Aquinas *underemphasized* this wholeness in his consideration of sexual issues, he now *overemphasizes* it in his treatment of this political issue. In both cases, he has lost sight of the *person* as the irreducible reference point of our considerations. For, in Aquinas’s view, the sinner is regarded, precisely in

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<sup>79</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 64, a. 3, ad 2. For Aquinas, *nature* pertains to what is *essential* in the human being, while *sin* is an *accidental characteristic*. It is one of the possible contraries a substance is capable of assuming; but the substance is capable of assuming it only on account of that which is essential to it. The fact that the human being is capable both of *sin* and *repentance* (even if repentance is only possible through grace) reveals to us that a substance—the human being—perdures through sin.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. by A. Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), ch. 3.2 (pp. 112–113), 3.3 (p. 120), 3.6 (pp. 130–131), 3.9 (pp. 146–147). See also his later work in his capacity as the Successor of Peter, Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor* (6 August 1993), §§75, 78.

<sup>82</sup> This is among the central points at issue in *The Acting Person*, for example. In his magisterial writings, of course, this point remained, for John Paul II, a central issue, and is at the root of his comments in *Veritatis splendor*, when he critiques a wide range of contemporary ethical theories (§§65–70, 74–75). Cf., also, John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, §89.

<sup>83</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 64, a. 2. Wojtyła sees this as a problem to which the events of the twentieth century drew the Church’s attention in a definitive way. He writes, “We know that such situations in history have frequently led to a deeper reflection on Christian truth as a whole, as well as on particular aspects of it. That is also the case today. The truth about the human being, in turn, has a distinctly privileged place in this whole process. After nearly twenty years of ideological debate in Poland, it has become clear that at the center of this debate is not cosmology or philosophy of nature but philosophical anthropology and ethics: the great and fundamental controversy about the human being” (Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 220).

his descent from rationality, as a *diseased appendage* of the body politic—a kind of *cancerous limb* to be amputated and cast away.<sup>84</sup> Aquinas regards this action—the execution of the sinner at the hands of the State—as something praiseworthy.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, when he argues in favor of the execution of heretics, he provides as a justification of the practice the fact that still lesser offenses, like the forgery of currency (*falsarii pecuniae*), are rightly punished by execution.<sup>86</sup> That being said, from within a personalist perspective, his argument in favor of capital punishment is stunning indeed. Unlike Augustine, who sees the practice as falling within the objective rights of the State but nevertheless discourages it for the sake of a witness to nobler things,<sup>87</sup> Aquinas *encourages* capital punishment as long as it can be administered without harm to the innocent.<sup>88</sup> He writes:

It is lawful to kill dumb animals, insofar as they are naturally directed to man's use, as the imperfect is directed to the perfect. Now every part is directed to the whole, as imperfect to perfect, wherefore every part is naturally for the sake of the whole. For this reason, we observe that if the health of the whole body demands the excision of a member, through its being decayed or infectious to the other members, it will be both praiseworthy and advantageous to have it cut away. Now every individual person is compared to the whole community as part to whole. Therefore, if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good, *since a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump* (1 Cor. v. 6).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 11, a. 3; q. 64, a. 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* II-II, q. 64, a. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* II-II, q. 11, a. 3. At this point, however, we should note that Aquinas sees this action as a very serious offense against society. In his world, money is a physical commodity tied to limited material resources and backed by the political community (usually in the person of the king), so forging money meant devaluing everyone's currency, which in turn meant not only lying but also stealing, proportionally, from everyone in society, including the poorest of the poor. His example of the forgery of money, here, could easily be substituted with any number of other offenses against society involving the fabrication of documents bearing the authority of the political community in some way, thus eroding the public trust and the integrity of the rule of law. One could imagine any number of examples here, and our own time and forms of government have not lessened the applicability of this concept.

<sup>87</sup> Augustine, *Letters*, 133, 134.

<sup>88</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 1–2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 64, a. 2.

It is not so much that what Aquinas says here is wholly *false*, but again, that it is false by way of its *insufficiency*, which belongs to it on account of its *reductionism*, which does not allow space for us to “pause before the irreducible.” John Paul II’s treatment of capital punishment in *Evangelium Vitae* reflects Wojtyła’s concern for the irreducibility of the human person and the application of the personalistic norm. There, his treatment does more than simply *urge* the State to temper justice with mercy; it represents much more than a departure from Aquinas on a question of *emphasis*. Precisely on the basis of the personalistic norm,<sup>90</sup> John Paul II reconsiders the objective moral character of the public act of execution, and on the basis of that reconsideration, he denies the State moral license to perform it unless doing so is a practical necessity for ensuring the safety of the innocent. Again, while Aquinas argues that capital punishment is to be *avored* even for *lesser* crimes, unless its application poses a mortal danger to the innocent *along* with the guilty, John Paul II takes precisely the *opposite* stance, declaring that, in the contemporary world, the circumstances that would justify its application are “very rare, if not practically non-existent.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> John Paul II clearly references the personalistic norm in his statement about the purpose of punishment immediately preceding his judgment concerning the status of capital punishment in industrialized society in his encyclical letter *Evangelium vitae* (25 March 1995), §56. His line of reasoning is based upon the duty of society to restore the offender to the proper exercise of personal freedom.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, §56. Following the publication of *Evangelium vitae*, Pope John Paul II ordered a revision of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1997, the first edition of which had been published in 1994. This revision added the following sentence to §2267, incorporating a quote from *Evangelium vitae*, §56: “Today, in fact, given the means at the State’s disposal to effectively repress crime by rendering inoffensive the one who has committed it, without depriving him definitively of the possibility of redeeming himself, cases of absolute necessity for suppression of the offender ‘today ... are very rare, if not practically nonexistent.’” In a memorandum directed to the bishops of the United States in 2004, intended to address an as-yet unresolved controversy regarding admission to Holy Communion in light of canon 916 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, as it may relate to persons in the public eye who advance grave evil (such as politicians who promote abortion), Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. For example, if a Catholic were to be at odds with the Holy Father on the application of capital punishment or on the decision to wage war, he would not for that reason be considered unworthy to present himself to receive Holy Communion. While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia” (J. Ratzinger, memorandum, *Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion: General Principles* (July 2004), §3). In 2018, however, Pope Francis ordered the complete rewriting of the paragraph to read: “Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good. [ ] Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption. [ ] Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty

## Cosmology or The Personalistic Norm?

No matter what other issues may come before us, however, there looms above all a fundamental *theological* question—the question of the ultimate destiny of the human person. For Aquinas, again, the human person is to be understood not as a *for-its-own-sake being*, but as a being for the sake of a higher, *divine* agenda. It is important for us to understand what this means for Aquinas. He does not hold simply that the human being is made by God for the purpose of becoming more than he already is by nature. Rather, Aquinas holds that the human person, *qua* human person, exists to serve a larger *cosmic* goal intended by God, namely the manifestation of the divine glory.<sup>92</sup> The individual human person is subordinated to this end and finds his real value precisely in this, most of all. For Aquinas, this cosmic purpose is positively *exclusive of*

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is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person' (Francis, *Address to Participants in the Meeting Organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization*, 11 October 2017: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 October 2017, 5), and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide." In his encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020), Pope Francis presents an extensive discourse on the death penalty, saying that "Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that 'the death penalty is inadmissible' and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide" (§263). In the declaration on human dignity, *Dignitas infinita* (2 April 2024), the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith describes capital punishment in language that appears to identify capital punishment as *malum in se*, as always and everywhere wrong, saying that it "violates the inalienable dignity of every person, regardless of the circumstances" (§34). In light of these teachings under Francis, a firestorm of controversy has broken out in Catholic academic circles over the question of whether Francis had contradicted the ordinary and universal magisterium, which until now had always left room for the just application of capital punishment, with some popes even describing it as positively good. Without entering into that controversy here, we would point out that even Francis, in *Fratelli tutti*, does not condemn capital punishment as *malum in se*, but instead condemns making recourse to capital punishment when alternative punishments are available to safeguard the public. Indeed, John Paul II and Francis both speak, in their respective encyclicals, from the privileged vantage point of a nation in the contemporary West, in which they find it "impossible to imagine that states today have no other means than capital punishment to protect the lives of other people from the unjust aggressor" (*Fratelli tutti*, §267, quoting from, Pope Francis, *Address to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law* [23 October 2014], II.a). Leaving aside the factual question of whether, in fact, it is true that there is, today, no political community on earth in which "no other means than capital punishment [is available] to protect the lives of other people from the unjust aggressor," it is impossible to deny that such political communities have existed in the past and could exist again in the future. Acknowledging these possibilities reveals that recent magisterial condemnation of the application of capital punishment is itself conditioned on circumstance. When the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith declares that capital punishment "violates the inalienable dignity of every person, regardless of the circumstances," we must consider that statement as something less than categorical and deny that it represents a pronouncement against the practice as *malum in se*. Present controversies aside, however, it is possible to see in recent magisterial teaching regarding capital punishment a certain development of approach to the question based on the application of the personalistic norm.

<sup>92</sup> *ST*, I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3.

the ultimate good of some—and indeed of the preponderance—of human persons.<sup>93</sup> This is a dimension of Aquinas thought that seems, largely, to escape our attention today. We tend either to dismiss it as a tangential, anachronistic appendage of his overall system, or else to ignore it altogether.<sup>94</sup> But with the advent of the personalistic norm, the question of whether, in the end, Aquinas’s system can stand at all without the *reprobate* would seem to have been forced upon us. However that question is finally to be answered, the role of reprobation in Aquinas’s system is a lucid manifestation of his tendency toward natural reductionism.

Aquinas is quite clear in his affirmation that rational beings exist to provide an audience for the manifestation of God’s glory.<sup>95</sup> Assembling this audience requires, in particular, the *elect*: those whom God chooses from all eternity to delight in him. In and through the elect, God displays his mercy and generosity,<sup>96</sup> and of these human creatures only can it be said that they are ends for ends. For, according to Aquinas, in order to reveal the full scope of his mercy, God also requires for the elect a counterexample. Thus, from eternity, God providentially intends the reprobation of the masses.<sup>97</sup> While he does not want to say that God positively wills sin, Aquinas does explicitly hold that the reprobate are not reprobate because of their sins, but that they sin because they are reprobate, and reprobates must go to hell.<sup>98</sup> In the end, Aquinas’s view on this question does appear

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, I, q. 23, a. 7, ad 3.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, in my own work, *Judged by the Law of Freedom*, I had rather consciously bracketed this dimension of Aquinas’s thought under the hypothesis that his metaphysical view actually suggests an alternative path that he, for his own part, could not appreciate on account of a certain poverty of exegesis with respect to the scriptural themes of providence, predestination, perseverance, election, and the Book of Life. I now wonder if the matter really moves the other way—that is, if his exegesis came to be driven by the metaphysical categories to which he had already given his assent. No doubt, Aquinas did not perceive himself as subordinating revelation to metaphysics, especially since his exegetical tendencies on these points were widely embraced by his contemporaries, even across metaphysical lines of disputation. But Wojtyła, too, seems rather critical of Aquinas on this score, even as he expresses his profound admiration for him. Once again, see Wojtyła, “Ethics and Moral Theology,” 101–106. There, he notes, once again, that St. Thomas is engaged in an exercise of interpreting “scripture and tradition in keeping with the magisterium of the Church *by means of a particular philosophical system*” (p. 101), which “appears as an intellectual synthesis that goes far beyond the threshold of exegesis ... [arranging the content of revelation] by means of metaphysical categories” (pp. 102–103). Again, Wojtyła cautions that “The admiration we have for this ‘summa,’ however, does not have to mean—and even should not mean—that we regard it as a work complete and perfect in every respect. The inner bond ... that exists between speculative theology and philosophy directs us today to look at this remarkable work [i.e., Aquinas’s system of speculative theology] as a ‘fruit of its times,’ that is, to view it not only within the framework of the state of philosophy in St. Thomas’ day but also from the perspective of the subsequent development of philosophy” (p. 103). Clearly, for Wojtyła, the inherent limits associated with all attempts, however noble, finally to synthesize the sum of natural knowledge even as we continue to advance in it must leave us cautious, lest we constrain God’s self-revelation within the bounds of what we already understand.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *ST*, I, q. 23, a. 5

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, I, q. 23, a. 7, ad 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, I, q. 23, a. 3.

to reduce not only to an assertion of the *eternal security of the elect*, but also to a thesis of *double-predestination*.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, there exists, for Aquinas, a two-tiered order of human worth. The elect exist for the sake of the manifestation of God's glory in terms of mercy, while the reprobate exist for the sake of the elect; they are *things*, like any other things in the great cosmic collective, not ends in themselves. Aquinas makes this clear:

[God] preordained the measurements of the universe, and what number would befit the essential parts of that universe—that is to say, which have in some way been ordained in perpetuity; how many spheres, how many stars, how many elements, and how many species. Individuals, however, which undergo corruption, are not ordained, as it were, chiefly for the good of the universe, but in a secondary way, inasmuch as the good of the species is preserved in them. Whence, although God knows the total number of individuals, the number of oxen, flies, and such-like, is not preordained by God *per se*; but divine providence produces just so many as are sufficient for the preservation of the species. Now of all creatures the rational creature is chiefly ordained for the good of the universe, being as such incorruptible; but more especially those who attain to eternal happiness, since they more immediately reach the ultimate end. Whence the number of the predestined is certain to God; not only by way of knowledge, but also by way of principle preordination.

It is not exactly the same in the case of the number of the reprobate, who would seem to be preordained by God for the good of the elect.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Aquinas is careful to draw a distinction between *predestination*, on the one hand, and *reprobation*, on the other (*ibid.*, I, q. 23, a. 3). Yet, in his system, both the number of the reprobate and the number of the elect are certain, fixed, and pre-assigned by God from eternity. Strictly speaking, the status of a person as reprobate or elect cannot be changed by his or her choices and actions. Rather, in and through our choices and actions, we merely go on to *realize*, in the course of time, our eternally fixed status. In the case of the *predestined* or the *elect*, this comes by virtue of the aid of grace. In the case of the reprobate, this comes precisely in the *abandonment* of the sinner by God, who withholds from him just that grace without which he will fail in the good. In Jamesian terms, this careful semantic distinction, however well it serves Aquinas's system, represents, in the kerygmatic arena, "a difference that makes no difference." As he puts it in his famous example about whether the man trying to catch a squirrel circling a tree is going around the squirrel or *vice versa*, "If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right" (W. James, *Pragmatism*, ed. B. Kuklick (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 26). We need not advocate for an unqualified Jamesian pragmatism here to recognize the applicability of his point to the present question. Whether, on a Calvinistic model, God positively predestines a man to hell, or, on a Thomistic model, he is excluded from salvation in God's eternal choosing and thus consigned to hell with a divine foreknowledge that is "the cause of things" (*ST*, I, q. 14, a. 8), makes no practical difference to the reprobate for whom the avoidance of hell was never within God's positive will for him.

<sup>100</sup> *ST*, I, q. 23, a. 7.

As pope, in his encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, however, John Paul II insists that the mystery of election includes “each and every individual,”<sup>101</sup> and again, “every man and woman.”<sup>102</sup> The possibility that some may be reprobate he nowhere ascribes to some fundamental orientation of God’s providence or his overall cosmic plan, nor does he even regard it as a certainty of revelation that any concrete historical person is definitively damned.<sup>103</sup> Rather, Wojtyła clearly holds that the human person is, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, of which, at the Second Vatican Council, he was among the principle authors along with Henri de Lubac, “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”<sup>104</sup> Only the most prejudiced reading of *Gaudium et spes* §24 would allow for the qualification of this claim through an *ad hoc* appeal to the reprobate. Indeed, it is precisely on the basis of the *personalistic norm* that such a move becomes immediately recognizable as an *absurdity*—for to *be a person*, for Wojtyła, is to be a *for-its-own-sake* being. If God makes some for the sake of others, to the exclusion of their own ultimate good, it is clear that he makes some who are *not persons* according to Wojtyła’s understanding of the term. In his pre-papal work, *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła is explicit on this point, directly contradicting Aquinas’s thesis, based, as it is, upon a naturalistic, cosmological understanding of the human person. Again, he writes:

... we must never treat a person as a means to an end. This principle has a universal validity. Nobody can use a person as a means towards an end, no human being, nor yet God the Creator. On the part of God, indeed, it is totally out of the question, since, by giving man

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<sup>101</sup> John Paul II, encyclical letter, *Dives in misericordia* (November 30, 1980), §7.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, §4.

<sup>103</sup> In his private pastoral work, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II holds out the theoretical possibility of hell as an inscrutable mystery, but one necessary for the safeguarding, precisely, of human-personal self-determination. He writes, “Can God, who has loved man so much, permit the man who rejects Him to be condemned to eternal torment? And yet the words of Matthew’s Gospel are unequivocal. In Matthew’s Gospel, He speaks clearly to those who will go to eternal punishment (cf. Mt 25:46). Who will these be? The Church has never made any pronouncement in this regard. This is a mystery that embraces the holiness of God and the conscience of man. The silence of the Church is, therefore, the only appropriate position for Christian faith. Even when Jesus says of Judas, the traitor, ‘It would be better for that man if he had never been born’ (Mt 26:24), His words do not allude for certain to eternal damnation.” His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. V. Messori, trans. by J. McPhee, M. McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 185–186.

<sup>104</sup> John Paul II, *Gaudium et spes*, §24.

an intelligent and free nature, he has thereby ordained that each man alone will decide for himself the ends of his activity, and not be a blind tool of someone else's ends.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, while we may well affirm precisely that non-persons—"oxen, flies, and such like"—can be treated as mere means to ends, even a cursory "pause before the irreducible" forbids us to say the same of a member of our own species. For he is more than a man; she is more than a woman; she is a *person*—a unique, unrepeatable, for her own sake being. She is, therefore, *irreducible* to some natural, societal, or cosmological purpose; for she is a child of God, chosen for love, and called, above all else, to delight forever in his heavenly embrace. She is made for an interpersonal encounter—the mutual self-donation between the creaturely bride and her heavenly Bridegroom, who formed her as an image of his own heart and loved her into being and life.

Due primarily to the influence of Lublin Thomism and, in particular, Karol Wojtyła in the past, roughly, half-century of Catholic thought (itself largely a consequence of Wojtyła's accession to the papacy as John Paul II on 16 October 1978), it has become common for Catholic intellectuals to speak of "Thomistic personalism." But, just as there are many variants of Thomism, which in various ways find in the thought of Thomas Aquinas a foundation upon which to build, while adapting Thomas's thought in light of new questions and findings, if our reference point for the phrase, "Thomistic personalism" is Thomas himself and "Classical Thomism," it is, in a certain sense, an oxymoron. This is because, to the extent that the term "personalism" requires the affirmation of personal irreducibility and the personalistic norm, as Karol Wojtyła insists, Thomas Aquinas himself is not a personalist, and there is no way to make him one without far-reaching, substantive revision—or, as Wojtyła says, "significant modification."<sup>106</sup> I am not, of course, suggesting that we should not speak of such a thing at all, only that in doing so we should recognize that we have had to make adjustments to the Thomism of St. Thomas himself and the Classical Thomists, according to whom the person is "chiefly ordained for the good of the universe ... more especially those who attain to eternal happiness. ... [while] the reprobate ... [are] preordained by God for the good of the elect. ..."<sup>107</sup> Wojtyła departs decisively from this view, insisting, once again, that "Nobody can use a person as a means towards an end, no human

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<sup>105</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 27.

<sup>106</sup> Wojtyła, "Ethics and Moral Theology," 103.

<sup>107</sup> Cf., *ST*, I, q. 23, a. 7.

being, nor yet God the Creator.”<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, if we are willing, as Wojtyła has done, to build upon the foundation Thomas has laid for Catholic thought, grateful for what he has provided while facing the limits of his framework and correcting his errors of omission in light of the genuine insights of contemporary philosophy and theology, it is possible, perhaps, to arrive at a new synthesis.

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<sup>108</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 27.

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