

***Divinus in Caro: Karol Wojtyła's Ontological Personalism
Between Theomorphism and Technomorphism***¹

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Abstract

Modernity's crisis of human self-understanding has been characterized by two opposed reductions of the person. On one side, a **theomorphic** tendency frames the human being exclusively in relation to the divine, often at the expense of the creature's own integrity and agency. On the other, a **technomorphic** tendency reduces the person to a manipulable object of technology and biology, flattening human existence to measurable functions. This paper argues that Karol Wojtyła's ontological personalism mediates these extremes through a deeper retrieval of the person as *divinus in caro*—the divine image manifested in flesh. Wojtyła's philosophy of the acting person, centered on efficacy, self-determination, and transcendence of the person in act, both affirms the human orientation to God (thus correcting technocratic reductionism) and insists on the creaturely reality and freedom of the person (thereby correcting one-sided theocentrism). In four parts, the argument unfolds the anthropological dilemmas of theomorphism and technomorphism and shows how Wojtyła's integration of classical metaphysics with phenomenology preserves the irreducible uniqueness and dignity of the human person, offering a philosophical defense of the person as both subject and end of moral action.

Keywords

personalism, theomorphism, technocracy, self-determination, efficacy, human dignity

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Introduction: *The Anthropological Dilemma of Modernity*

In the late modern age, the human being finds itself pulled between two opposing visions of what it means to be a person. One vision, born of an earlier religious epoch, sees the human chiefly as an image of God—*imago Dei*—defined by a relation of creaturely dependence and resemblance to the divine. Another vision, emerging from the secular scientific revolution, regards the human in purely naturalistic or technical terms—as an *object* within the empirical world, to be understood by the same methods that apply to animals or machines. These two visions, **theomorphic** and **technomorphic**, stand as extreme responses to the fragmentation of the once-unified Christian anthropology. Each contains a partial truth about the human person, yet each, when taken as complete in itself, imposes a profound reduction. The result is an anthropological dilemma: either define man so exclusively by a divine prototype that his own worldly reality and freedom are obscured, or define man so exclusively by technological and biological categories that his transcendent depth and irreducible dignity vanish.

This crisis did not emerge overnight but developed through the upheavals of modern intellectual history. The Enlightenment’s exaltation of reason and empirical science gradually displaced the pre-modern view of man as a creature “willed for his own sake”³ by a Creator (to use the famous phrase from *Gaudium et Spes*). In the wake of the Enlightenment, some thinkers responded by doubling down on the divine paradigm—seeking to re-ground human meaning in God alone—while others embraced an ever-purer secularism, treating the human being as nothing more than a clever animal or a biochemical machine. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the tension had become acute. On the one hand, *theomorphic* tendencies appeared in philosophies that defined moral value solely by reference to God or the “holy,” risking a neglect of human rationality and freedom. On the other hand, *technomorphic* tendencies took hold in ideologies that trumpeted the “death of God” and placed all faith in scientific progress or social engineering, often reducing persons to cogs in vast technological or economic systems. As John F. Crosby observes, personalist philosophers of the last century were united in opposing **both** these extremes: they resisted “turning persons into autonomous selves detached from all bonds of solidarity” (the individualistic trajectory of technocratic liberalism) **and** resisted “the opposite error of

³ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965), §24.

absorbing the individual person into the social whole”⁴ or into any overarching absolute that negates individuality. The drama of the person in modernity has thus been a struggle to assert a fuller understanding of human dignity against oversimplifications that would either subsume the person into divinity or dissolve the person into material nature.

It is precisely in this context that Karol Wojtyła—better known as Pope John Paul II—developed his **ontological personalism** as a response to the anthropological crisis. Wojtyła entered the philosophical scene as both a disciple of **classical metaphysics**⁵ and an innovator who employed **phenomenology** to deepen our grasp of lived human experience. In his work *Person and Act* (also translated as *The Acting Person*), Wojtyła set out to secure the insight that the human being is *irreducible*—not exhaustively definable by any lower principle or external archetype. He insisted on the **integrity of the person** as a being at once corporeal and spiritual, anchored in concrete action and experience, yet open to what transcends empirical determinism. This insistence can be seen as a mediated solution to the modern dilemma. Rather than a half-measure or compromise, Wojtyła offers a **dialectical retrieval**: he reaches back behind the false dichotomy to an ontology of the person in which the truths of both sides—the transcendent orientation of the person to the divine, and the concrete reality of the person as an active subject in the world—find their harmonious integration.

In what follows, we unfold this argument in four stages. **First**, we examine the *theomorphic reduction* of the human being, understanding both its motivation and its pitfalls. **Next**, we turn to

⁴ J.F. Crosby, “Preface to *Personalist Papers*,” in: J.F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), x.

⁵ John Paul II defends the preservation of the *sapiential dimension* of philosophy which can be found in a genuine metaphysical range that prevents swinging to any extremes. He says: “the need for a philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical* range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. This requirement is implicit in sapiential and analytical knowledge alike; in particular, it is a requirement for knowing the moral good, which has its ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good—God himself. Here I do not mean to speak of metaphysics in the sense of a specific school or a particular historical current of thought. I want only to state that reality and truth do transcend the factual and the empirical, and to vindicate the human being’s capacity to know this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical. In this sense, metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry. Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God. We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being’s interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.” John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §83.

the opposite, *technomorphic reduction*, which currently exerts enormous cultural influence through the proliferation of science and technology. Having seen how each one-sidedly distorts the truth of the person, we then explore Wojtyła’s personalist ontology as a **third**, deeper path that both negates and fulfills the extremes. **Finally**, we conclude by showing how this ontological personalism preserves the irreducible mystery and worth of the person, mediating between theomorphism and technomorphism on a more profound ontological ground. Throughout, we draw on Wojtyła’s own philosophical and magisterial writings, as well as the insights of contemporary commentators and critics of modernity, to substantiate each step of the argument. The aim is to demonstrate that only by retrieving the full truth of *divinus in caro*—the divine image in the fleshly, acting person—can we resolve the anthropological paradoxes of our time.

Theomorphism: False Deification

The first extreme to consider is what may be called **theomorphic anthropology**—an understanding of the human being primarily in terms of a resemblance to God. In this view, the defining mark of the person is that he or she bears a divine image or is related to a divine reality; apart from that relation, the meaning of “human” collapses. Such an approach has deep roots in Western thought: one thinks of the biblical idea of *imago Dei*, or the Platonic–Augustinian notion that the soul finds its true self only in God. Properly understood, the idea that the human being is *theomorphic* (God-shaped) is a radical affirmation of human dignity. It declares that what is highest in us is not reducible to any worldly element—our worth comes from a transcendent source. Wojtyła himself, as a Catholic thinker, fully embraces the truth that the human person is created in God’s image and called to communion with Him. The problem arises, however, when this truth is **isolated and absolutized** in a one-sided way. The *theomorphic* view can become reductive if it neglects the integrity of human nature and reason, collapsing the human into the divine in a manner that bypasses the person’s own act and experience. In its distorted form, theomorphism can lead to a kind of *fideism*—an excessive emphasis on faith or divine authority that undermines the proper role of reason and human agency. Wojtyła himself warned against this error. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II identified **fideism** as a tendency that “fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for understanding

faith,”⁶ and thus ultimately **undermines the truth about the human person** by severing it from reason’s insights.⁷ A theomorphic anthropology, if it lapses into fideism, risks portraying the person as a *passive receptor of divine attributes* rather than an *active, efficacious individual subject* (i.e., *Suppositum*).

A concrete example of the theomorphic reduction can be found in the ethical personalism of Max Scheler—ironically, a thinker whom Wojtyła both admired and later critically engaged. Scheler spoke of man as *the “theomorphic” being*, defining the human being by his unique orientation toward God as the highest value. In Scheler’s analysis, the human person is the only earthly being who can grasp “spiritual values,” especially the value of “the holy,” and thereby man is distinguished as God-related.⁸ Scheler thus rooted human dignity in the **experience of the divine**: “Only under the light of the idea of God does man constitute the highest of the earthly beings ... It is thanks to it that man is for Scheler a theo-morphic being.”⁹ On the face of it, this seems to echo the classic *imago Dei* doctrine, yet Wojtyła discerned a critical flaw in Scheler’s formulation. For Scheler, the divine to which man relates remains merely an “idea of God,” a value

⁶ *Ibid.*, §55. The Pope also criticizes fideism for undervaluing reason: “Against the temptations of fideism, however, it was necessary to stress the unity of truth and thus the positive contribution which rational knowledge can and must make to faith’s knowledge. Even if faith is superior to reason there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth.” *Ibid.*, §55. John Paul II warns that a proper Christian anthropology requires the harmonious collaboration of faith and reason, without which the human person is not fully understood.

⁷ Fideism, in its refusal to recognize the autonomy and validity of philosophical reason, is castigated within the framework of *Fides et Ratio* as a betrayal of both theology and philosophy. The rejection of reason as a legitimate partner in the pursuit of truth results in an impoverished faith, one that is reduced to mere subjectivity or sentimentality. Such a stance ultimately undermines the Catholic intellectual tradition, which has historically insisted on the harmony of faith and reason. Joseph Koterski emphasizes that fideism is not merely a theological error but a philosophical abdication, one that contributes to the broader collapse of metaphysical confidence in the postmodern academy, where “reason finds itself in need of some defense.” J.W. Koterski, “The Challenge To Metaphysics In *Fides et ratio*,” in: *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, eds. D.R. Foster, J.W. Koterski (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 22. The fideist’s dismissal of rational inquiry mirrors the postmodern suspicion toward truth itself, thereby capitulating to the very nihilism it ought to resist. It is precisely this retreat from metaphysics that renders fideism not only an error but a symptom of the deeper cultural malady—a surrender to what the text calls the “abyss,” where meaning is dimmed and the soul is left to stumble “without knowing where they are going.” *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ K. Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, “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.: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 473.

⁹ K. Wojtyła, “An Assessment of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler,” in: K. Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, 471–472. Here Wojtyła analyzes Scheler’s concept of the human person as *theomorphic*. He explains that for Scheler, man is “theo-morphic” only through the *Erlebnis* (lived experience) of the idea of God, founded on the value of the holy, rather than through any real ontological relation to the Creator. Wojtyła finds this inadequate for a Christian ethics, which demands a real relationship with the living God and a full acknowledgment of human freedom in response to God.

posited in the intentional feeling of the subject.¹⁰ The human person's theomorphic character, in this view, does not depend on a real, existing God who creates and calls the person; it depends only on the *experience of value*. As Wojtyła notes, Scheler "is not concerned with the real relation to God as to an existing, positively defined Reality. His point is only the lived-experience of the idea of God."¹¹ In other words, the human being is defined as the God-analogous animal solely by virtue of having a certain kind of religious consciousness. This move—which might be termed an *idealized theomorphism*—effectively sidelines the ontological reality of both God and man. It makes man's dignity rest on a subjective disposition (feeling the absolute value of the holy) rather than on the **being** of the person as such.

Wojtyła regarded this as insufficient, and indeed dangerous. In *Person and Act*, as well as in his earlier analyses of Scheler's ethics found in his habilitation thesis, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, Wojtyła argued that Scheler's approach, for all its appreciation of the spiritual dimension, failed to do justice to the **full truth of the person**. By prioritizing emotional intuition of value over the factual reality of human freedom, Scheler inadvertently diminished the role of the **human will and intellect** in moral life. The person became, in Scheler's phenomenology, a conduit for values rather than a self-determining agent. Wojtyła saw here an anthropological reduction akin to a subtle fideism: the person's lived experience of values (analogous to a kind of secular "faith") was allowed to override the structure of human action and reason. In effect, man was being **defined from "above"** by reference to God or the absolute, in a way that did not sufficiently account for man's own dynamism¹² "from within."¹³ This is precisely the pattern of theomorphic reduction we are concerned with. It acknowledges something true—that the human person transcends the merely material by relation to the divine—but it skews the balance by ignoring the autonomous participation of the person in that relation.

¹⁰ Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, 481.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 474

¹² Wojtyła explains that this term is "... connected to the Greek *dýnamis*, having both Platonic and Aristotelian genealogy; from there it was passed on to medieval philosophy (*potentia*). In modern philosophy, dynamism (Leibniz) is opposed to mechanism (Descartes). 'Dynamics,' which we most often understand—also in the context of this study—as the opposite of statics, is very closely linked to dynamism." W. Wojtyła, "Person and Act," in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, "The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II," vol. 1, ed. A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 161n1.

¹³ Blaise Pascal warns us against the same danger. He says: "If we submit everything to reason our religion will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous." B. Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by H. Levi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), §204.

The dangers of theomorphic reduction can manifest in various cultural forms. In religious contexts, it can appear as an overly theocentric human image that verges on suppressing human freedom and responsibility. One thinks of strains of thought in which human morality is conceived in purely extrinsic terms (“because God said so”) without understanding the person’s inner participation in the good. Carried to an extreme, theomorphism shades into a kind of religious **authoritarianism or quietism**, where the human is expected to efface himself entirely before God. Such an outlook, if uncorrected, paradoxically undermines the very dignity it seeks to protect—the person’s value is affirmed, but only as a sort of shadow of God, not as a true agent. This is at odds with the Christian understanding that grace builds on nature—that the divine image in man elevates rather than nullifies his created faculties of intellect and will. Wojtyła, especially in his magisterial teaching, took great pains to combat *false oppositions* between God and man. He emphasized that recognizing man’s relation to God should never mean the denial of human reason or freedom—rather, the light of faith **elevates** reason and the fulfillment of divine communion **perfects** human freedom; it does not abolish them.¹⁴

Thus, Wojtyła’s critique of the theomorphic reduction was fundamentally an effort to restore **wholeness**. The person cannot be defined solely by an abstract reference to God; the person must be understood in the concrete reality of personal being and action, even as we acknowledge the Godward dimension of that being. In place of a one-sided theomorphism, Wojtyła proposes what we might call an **integral theonomy**: the human person is indeed ordained to divine communion and bears God’s image, but this truth unfolds *through* the person’s own rational, free, embodied existence—rather than negating it. As the Second Vatican Council taught: “Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.” Wojtyła loved to quote this line, seeing in it a synthesis of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of personhood. Man is “willed for himself” by God—a direct refutation of any collectivist or purely instrumental view of human nature, yet man finds his fulfillment in

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §§48–50. John Paul recounts how the modern split between faith and reason led to opposite excesses—rationalism and fideism—and he proposes a recovery of their intrinsic unity. He often used circular or spiral imagery: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” In §§50-55, he specifically addresses fideism, to paraphrase, John Paul II contends that: “With the rise of the empirical sciences, some began to think that what is real is only what can be experimentally verified. In reaction, others pushed reason aside, making faith the only path to truth. This caused a separation harmful to the understanding of man. ... A mentality has developed that separates the realm of faith from the realm of reason. But truth is one. The unity of the human person demands a unified approach.” This teaching undergirds John Paul II’s approach of integrating the divine and the rational dimensions in anthropology.

making a **gift of self**—a refutation of any isolated, static theomorphism that would treat man as a mere receptacle of divinity. The self-gift implies an active, free, and relational character of human fulfillment. We will return to this idea later, for it is pivotal in Wojtyła’s resolution of the extremes.

In summary, the theomorphic reduction, when it forgets the human subject, leads to an anthropology of extrinsic dependence that can slide into fideism¹⁵ or a depreciation of reason. It upholds the truth that the **person is oriented beyond himself** to the absolute, but it misconstrues that truth by effectively absorbing the human into the divine or into an idea of the divine. Wojtyła’s philosophy agrees that the human person has a transcendent reference (indeed, this will be crucial to his own account), but it insists that this reference must be grounded in the **ontological structure of the person**—in the person’s own act of existing and self-determination. Only in that way can we safeguard what is irreducibly human while honoring what is divine. The full response to theomorphism’s shortcomings, however, will become clear only after we have examined the opposite error. For it is often in reaction to an exaggerated theocentrism that modern thought swings to the other extreme: the **technomorphic** vision of man as a purely worldly mechanism. Wojtyła’s genius lies in understanding the interplay between these errors and retrieving a stance that refutes one not by espousing the other but by going deeper than both.

¹⁵ More than *fideism*, another manifestation of this is what Christian Smith calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. He characterizes it as follows: First, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about inculcating a moralistic approach to life. It believes that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, and responsible; working on self-improvement; taking care of one’s health; and doing one’s best to be successful.” Second, “This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one’s prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God’s love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etc. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among ... teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.” Third, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism “is about belief in a particular kind of God, one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in our affairs—especially affairs in which we would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance. He is often described by teens as ‘watching over everything from above’ and ‘the creator of everything and is just up there now controlling everything.’” See Ch. Smith, “On ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’ as U.S. Teenagers’ Actual, Tacit, De Facto Religious Faith,” in: *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–172.

Technomorphism: The Cosmological Reduction of Man to Machine and Matter

If theomorphic anthropology places man *too high*—subsuming him under the divine without remainder—**technomorphic anthropology** does the opposite: it collapses man *downward*, defining him by sub-personal categories drawn from technology, biology, or animal behavior. Here, the human being is understood fundamentally as an object among objects, a clever primate or an algorithmic organism whose distinctive personal traits (mind, freedom, moral selfhood) are regarded as incidental or illusory. The rise of technomorphic thinking is intertwined with the ascendant power of modern science and technology. As scientific naturalism extended its explanatory domain, the ancient notion of man as *imago Dei* gave way to man as *imago naturae*—an image of nature, a product of blind evolutionary forces, differing in degree but not in kind from other animals. In parallel, the success of technology in controlling nature fueled a vision of the human as chiefly a *technician* or *machine-maker*, even a kind of machine himself. **Augusto Del Noce** diagnosed this trajectory as a result of what he called: “the eclipse of the sacred.” In modernity, he argued, this eclipse led to a civilization in which “every human activity ... [came] to be viewed from the standpoint of the competition man versus nature.”¹⁶ With no “invisible principle” like a soul or divine spark recognized in man, **every value was narrowed to the value of material well-being**, and even religion was tacitly reinterpreted as merely a means of vital enhancement.¹⁷ In such a worldview, the transcendent dimension is not merely ignored; it is actively denied. Man is not the steward of creation under God’s ordinance, but rather a self-interested being engaged in a zero-sum struggle with nature, seeking dominance through technique.

By the mid-20th century, this technomorphic perspective crystallized into what some have called the “**technocratic paradigm**.” The person came to be seen as a bundle of quantifiable processes: chemical interactions in the brain, drives inherited from our animal past, socio—

¹⁶ A. Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, trans. by C. Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 163–168. Del Noce examines how technological society emerged from the “eclipse of the sacred.”

¹⁷ Del Noce also writes: “it was not technological progress per se that generated this type of civilization, but the eclipse of the sacred ... The only remaining value will be the increment of perceptible life; in short, well-being, and every human activity, and religion itself, will be viewed as a vitalizing tool.” (Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 167.) He notes that this view of man is diametrically opposed to the one presupposed by Christianity and classical philosophy, which saw man as carrying an invisible divine principle. Thus, secular technocracy redefines man in purely immanent terms.

economic behaviors predictable through statistics, and so on. The unique *subjectivity* of the person—that interior space of consciousness and freedom—was either bracketed out as irrelevant or explained away in impersonal terms. The logical extreme of this tendency is evident in certain currents of contemporary thought and popular science. Historian Yuval Noah Harari, for instance, prophesies a future in which **Homo sapiens** is surpassed by its own technological creations, possibly even to the point of human extinction or obsolescence. In his provocative work *Nexus*, Harari argues that modern science increasingly understands organisms (including humans) as nothing more than **biochemical algorithms**, and that advanced algorithms (AI) may soon outstrip human intelligence.¹⁸ He warns that if humanity unthinkingly embraces a new faith in data and technology—what he terms “*Dataism*”—we might surrender our autonomy and dissolve “within the torrent of information ... like a clump of earth within a gushing river.”¹⁹ This graphic image of dissolution is the technomorphic nightmare: the human being reduced to a nugatory blip in the cosmic data-flow, no longer a sovereign subject but at best a *resource* or *information processor*. The very title *Homo Deus* (“Man-God”) is ironic, for it suggests that by the pursuit of godlike technological power, man may end up annihilating the qualities that made him human in the first place.²⁰

Yet one need not delve into speculative futurism to see the effects of technomorphism; they are apparent in everyday attitudes and institutions. Physician and writer Atul Gawande has candidly described how contemporary medicine, with all its miraculous technology, can fail to truly **care for the person**. In treating aging and dying as purely technical problems to be managed, modern medicine often subjects individuals to dehumanizing routines and interventions that ignore their subjective needs and dignity. Gawande observes that “we have allowed our fates to be controlled by the imperatives of medicine, technology, and strangers,” especially in the last stage

¹⁸ Y.N. Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks From Stone Age to AI* (New York: Random House, 2024). Harari argues that modern science has eroded the traditional humanist notion of free-willed individuals. He suggests that once AI and bioengineering advance sufficiently, humans may either merge with technology or be superseded by it. Though Harari’s tone is often speculative, his work exemplifies the *technomorphic* outlook in which human consciousness is seen as a hackable data-processing system rather than a soul or metaphysically unique entity.

¹⁹ Y.N. Harari, “Weaponizing Information,” in: *Nexus*, 19.

²⁰ In reflecting on *Homo Deus* a few years after its publication, Harari summarizes: “That book argued that the real hero of history has always been information, rather than *Homo sapiens* ... and that while we hope better information technology will give us health, happiness, and power, it may actually take power away from us ... *Homo Deus* hypothesized that if humans aren’t careful, we might dissolve within the torrent of information like a clump of earth within a gushing river.” Harari, “Weaponizing Information,” 19. This colorful metaphor captures the concern that human agency and identity could be lost in the tidal wave of big data and AI decision-making.

of life, leading to “callousness, inhumanity, and extraordinary suffering.”²¹ In a technomorphic healthcare system, the person is tacitly viewed as a biomechanical problem to be solved; the subtle aspirations of the soul—for meaning, for relational closure, for spiritual peace—are outside the purview of treatment. The result, as Gawande notes, is that “the waning days of our lives are given over to treatments that addle our brains and sap our bodies for a sliver’s chance of benefit. They are spent in institutions ... where regimented, anonymous routines cut us off from all the things that matter to us in life.”²² This poignant testimony illustrates how an exclusive focus on technical efficacy (prolonging life, managing organs) can **betray the person**, leaving their deeper good unaddressed. Lacking “a coherent view of how people might live successfully all the way to their very end,” technological society often sacrifices personal well-being to its own inexorable logic of control and efficiency.²³ The human becomes, in a sense, a prisoner of technology’s triumphs—a being whose life is orchestrated by machines and procedures, rather than by personal meaning and choice.

Philosophically, technomorphism is underwritten by **scientism**: the belief that only the empirico-mathematical sciences yield true knowledge, and thus that man must be understood in the same reductive terms those sciences employ. Michael Hanby incisively critiques this outlook. Modern science, Hanby notes, often operates with an ontology that gives “analysis ... priority over synthesis,” which reduces wholes to parts, and conflates **historical causality** with **ontological identity**.²⁴ In biology, for example, life is sometimes defined entirely by the evolutionary history of organisms and their genetic code, as if there were no formal or spiritual principles at work. Hanby points out that such reductionism “reduces ontological identity to causal history and systemic function.”²⁵ Consequently, when this approach turns to the human person, it tends to explain personhood *away* by reference to evolutionary advantage or neurochemical events. However, Hanby argues that this reduction is **self-defeating**: every time we state a truth about

²¹ A. Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 18–19. Gawande notes: “Lacking a coherent view of how people might live successfully all the way to their very end, we have allowed our fates to be controlled by the imperatives of medicine, technology, and strangers.” *Ibid.*, 19. He calls for a reintegration of personal well-being and meaning into how we handle aging and dying, implying an anthropological shift away from pure technicism toward personalism in medicine.

²² *Ibid.*, 8–9. This critique highlights the depersonalization that can occur in a hyper-technologized approach to care.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9, 15–16. He discusses how lacking a coherent view of a good life to the end, society inflicts harms in pursuit of safety or mere survival. These passages convey the human cost of a technomorphic mindset in healthcare: people’s qualitative needs and personal preferences are trumped by procedural efficiency and risk avoidance.

²⁴ M. Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

reality (even in the hard sciences), we implicitly invoke forms and meanings that cannot themselves be explained in purely material terms.²⁶ The very act of making an intelligible statement assumes a rational order that transcends brute factual occurrence. Thus, the scientific erasure of formal and spiritual causes cannot account for the intelligibility of the world—including the world of the knowing, willing subject. In a provocative turn, Hanby suggests reversing the modern ontological priority: instead of treating primitive physical processes as the paradigm for understanding life and being, we should treat the **person**—“the incommunicable existence of a rational nature”—as paradigmatic.²⁷ By doing so, we recognize that what is highest (personal existence) sheds light on what is lower, rather than attempting to derive the higher from the lower at the cost of meaning. This aligns perfectly with Wojtyła’s own approach, which as we will see bases its metaphysics in the irreducible experience of personal being.

Returning to the cultural manifestations of technomorphism, we find they oscillate between **two poles**: on the one hand, an individualistic ethos that treats each person as an isolated unit of consumption and production—an “**autonomous self**” defined by preferences, to be satisfied by technical means; on the other, a collectivist or systemic ethos that subordinates persons to the mechanisms of society or state (the person as a statistic, a worker, a replaceable part of the whole). These two might seem contrary, but as Del Noce observed, they can coincide within the same secular-technocratic worldview. With the loss of any higher truth, “the only remaining value will be the increment of perceptible life; in short, well-being,”²⁸ and all institutions and norms bend to that end. The “society of well-being” then treats truth itself as merely an instrument for life: what is true is what works for material prosperity.²⁹ Under such conditions, whether one emphasizes individual choice or collective efficiency, the **transcendent horizon** is gone. Man does not answer to God or to objective moral truth, but only to his own impulses and systems—which soon acquire a tyrannical momentum. It is no surprise that where technocratic materialism has reigned, it has led to dystopian outcomes: the trivialization of human birth and death, the specter of eugenics, the manipulation of human psychology for profit, and the degradation of the natural environment. Harari’s imagined future of intelligent algorithms

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 314-316, 348.

²⁸ Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 167.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 167–168. Del Noce explains the “society of well-being”: “*Benessere* in the original, which in Italian has a more specific meaning than the English ‘well-being,’ since it refers strictly to material and psycho-physical well-being.” (*Ibid.*, 217n.1.)

deciding our fates is but a continuation of a long trend: the displacement of the human person from the center of concern.

We can thus summarize the technomorphic reduction as follows: it **denies the vertical dimension** of the person (any openness to the transcendent) and flattens the **horizontal dimension** into impersonal processes. Man is either a god unto himself (in rhetoric) or a machine made of meat (in practice)—in both cases, not truly *someone*, only *something*. The ultimate paradox is that technomorphism often promises a kind of secular exaltation of man (through science we shall conquer all ills, perhaps even achieve immortality or “Homo Deus”), but in reality, it delivers a diminished humanity. This was foreseen by thinkers like Nietzsche, who declared the death of God so that the “Superman” could arise—but as history shows, the death of the divine image in man often eventuates in the sub-human creeping in. As one commentator put it, when man eliminates God in the name of self-elevation, “now it is our will that the Superman shall live”³⁰—yet that will to power eventually consumes its own creators, leaving not a god-man but a hollow man.³¹ We end up, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, “abolishing man” in the pursuit of mastering nature.³²

Against this bleak backdrop, Karol Wojtyła’s personalism stands as a radiant alternative. He saw clearly that neither a retreat into unreasoning fideism nor an embrace of soulless scientism could safeguard the full truth of the person. The human being demands an account that does justice to **both** the earthy reality of our existence and the heavenly calling of our nature. Any anthropology missing either of these poles will collapse into reductionism. Thus, if the preceding sections have delineated the *Scylla and Charybdis* of contemporary thought, the next section seeks the navigational path between—or rather, **above**—them. That path is Wojtyła’s **ontology of the person**, which can be viewed as a synthesis that transcends the thesis of theomorphism and the antithesis of technomorphism. It is to this positive vision that we now turn.

³⁰ However, as twentieth-century history shows, attempts to create “Supermen” via ideology or science often resulted in great dehumanization. Wojtyła was keenly aware of this history (living through both Nazi and Communist regimes) and it reinforced his conviction that only a view which upholds an objective moral order (ultimately grounded in God) truly protects human dignity.

³¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part IV (“The Song of Melancholy”), and *Beyond Good and Evil*, §126. Nietzsche famously has Zarathustra proclaim, “God is dead; now we want the Superman to live.” (cf. H. de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. by E. Riley, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 57–59). The idea is that by killing the idea of God, man might elevate himself to a godlike stature. Paul van Tongeren, in *Reinterpreting Modern Culture: An Introduction to Nietzsche’s Philosophy* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2000), explains how Nietzsche’s vision sought a transvaluation of all values with man’s will to power at the center.

³² See C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015).

Wojtyła's Ontological Personalism

Wojtyła's project can be aptly described as a *retrieval of the full reality of the person* at a metaphysical depth that undercuts the false dichotomy of the extremes. Rather than propose a superficial compromise between the sacred and the secular visions of man, Wojtyła returns to fundamental experiences and classical insights to rebuild an anthropology on solid first principles. His method is notably **integrative**: he brings together the objective perspective of Thomistic metaphysics (with its emphasis on *being, form, teleology*, etc.) and the subjective perspective of phenomenology (with its emphasis on *conscious experience, intentionality*, and the *interior life* of the subject). In doing so, he constructs a vision of the human person as an irreducible **someone**—an integral union of body and soul, an acting subject who realizes himself in moral freedom and in relation to truth, goodness, and ultimately, God. This personalism is **ontological** in that it is grounded in the very being of the person (not merely in social or psychological claims), and it is personalism precisely because it takes the *person* (not subpersonal elements) as the primary analogate for understanding reality.

A key move Wojtyła makes is to distinguish between what he calls the “**cosmological**” and the “**personalistic**” understanding of the human being. The cosmological approach (characteristic of classical antiquity—mainly Aristotle—and of medieval philosophy—mainly St. Thomas Aquinas) situates man within the larger order of being: man is a *rational animal*,³³ a substance composed of matter and form, classified by genus and species. This approach yields the enduring definition of personhood from Boethius: *persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*—an individual substance of a rational nature. Wojtyła has great respect for this definition; he sees it as fundamentally true. However, he also recognizes that by itself, it remains somewhat abstract and does not yet illuminate the **inner life** of the person. The personalistic

³³ D.C. Schindler correctly explains this attribution to Aristotle of *man as a rational animal*. Schindler points out that: “Because of the fundamental distinction between human thought and human action, and so between *theoretical* science and *practical* science, we ultimately have two master, or ‘architectonic,’ sciences, one for each order. The architectonic theoretical science is metaphysics and the architectonic practical science is politics. It is worth noting that this basic division in the sciences corresponds to the two classical definitions of man, which stem from Aristotle: man is the *rational* (i.e., ‘metaphysical’) animal, and man is the *political* animal.” He continues in a footnote: “It is worth noting that Aristotle does not explicitly use the expression ‘rational animal,’ but it is clearly implied as the point of this chapter in the *Ethics* and has been attributed to Aristotle no doubt by analogy to his expression ‘*zoon politikon*’.” D.C. Schindler, *God and the City* (Indiana, U.S.A.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2023), 23—24. [original emphases]

approach, by contrast, starts from the lived experience of being a self and an agent. It asks: *What is it like to be a person? How do we experience ourselves as different from objects?* Here Wojtyła introduces concepts like **self-governance**,³⁴ **self-possession**,³⁵ and **self-determination**,³⁶ which emerged from his phenomenological analysis of action and consciousness. In experience, the human person finds that he is not a thing moved by external forces alone; he has an **inner center of causality**. I do not merely undergo events; *I act*. This sense of “*I act*”—Wojtyła calls it the moment of **efficacy**—reveals that I am the efficient cause of my own free deeds.³⁷ And in causing my actions, I also, in some sense, cause *myself*: I shape myself morally, I become virtuous or vicious, I fulfill or deform my potential. This Wojtyłaan idea of **self-determination** means that through free choice, the person **determines himself to be a certain kind of person** (honest or dishonest, courageous or cowardly, etc.). It is an application of the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion that act follows being (*agere sequitur esse*), but Wojtyła casts it in the first-person perspective of the acting subject.³⁸

³⁴ Wojtyła highlights that: “*Self-governance* can also be expressed as a specific complexity: on the one hand, the person is the one who governs, who governs himself, and, on the other hand, he himself is the one whom he governs. We understand self-governance here as something different from what is indicated by the colloquial phrase ‘mastery over oneself.’” Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” 209.

³⁵ Wojtyła explains that: “*Self-possession* as a specific structural property of the person is revealed and at the same time confirmed in action through the will. The simple lived-experience ‘I will’ cannot be correctly read in the dynamic totality of man without considering that specific complexity in it, proper only to the person, contributed by self-possession. Self-determination is possible only on the basis of self-possession; every ‘I will’ is precisely such self-determination, not as the content of lived-experience isolated from the dynamic whole but as the content deeply rooted in this totality. ‘I will’ as actual self-determination structurally presupposes self-possession. For one can determine only what he really possesses. And only the one who possesses can determine. Man determines himself by the will because he possesses himself. At the same time, the will, every real ‘I will,’ confirms and realizes the self-possession proper only to the person—the fact that he is *sui iuris*.” *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁶ Self-Determination is the highest expression of Freedom. Wojtyła contends that “Freedom is identified with self-determination—with the self-determination in which we discover the will as a property of the person. Hence, freedom appears as the property of the person connected with the will, with the concrete ‘I will,’ which contains, as previously ascertained, the lived-experience ‘I can but do not have to.’ In the analysis of self-determination, we descend to the very roots of both this ‘I will’ and this ‘I can but do not have to.’ The freedom proper to man, the freedom of the person through the will, is identified with self-determination as the existential, fullest, and most fundamental reality.” *Ibid.*, 217.

³⁷ It is important to note what Grzegorz Hołub remarks on Wojtyła’s notion of efficacy. Hołub points out that for Wojtyła, “the subject’s efficacy is not a one- dimensional causation but an intentional coordination of various forces and powers, be they natural or non- natural ones. Thus, finally, we stand before a project that is between a traditional divide (realist vs. idealist philosophy), and it is therefore prone to criticism from both sides. At the same time, this type of conception provokes a philosophical discussion and that is why it is promising.” G. Hołub, *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2021), 146.

³⁸ One of the most indispensable value of “Self-determination” is that it separates the person from animals and emphasizes also his *uniqueness* and *irreducibility*. This has been explained accurately by Grzegorz Ignatik when he argues that “... animals lack not only the ability to determine their ‘I’ but also the ‘I’ itself. This lack is due to the absence of consciousness and the personal structures of self-possession and self-governance.” G. Ignatik, *Person*

From these considerations arises a picture of the person as a dynamic, self-directed whole. The classical “cosmological” definition is not negated but enriched: the person is an individual *who not only has a rational nature but owns and shapes this nature through conscious choices*. In Wojtyła’s terms, the person is a **subject**. By *subject* he does not mean an ephemeral stream of consciousness (as in some modern philosophies), but a being that exists in itself (*in se*) and can also *reflect upon itself*. Wojtyła was fond of the term “**incommunicable**”³⁹ to describe the person’s uniqueness: each person, being an *unrepeatable someone*, cannot be exchanged or substituted by any other. This notion echoes personalist thinkers like John Crosby, who stresses that the *unrepeatability* of each person is a fundamental source of dignity—one that “inserts [personal dignity] from the beginning within our common human nature”⁴⁰—without negating that common nature. Every human shares the same nature (and thus universal rights and value), yet each person bears that nature in a singular manner that is **theirs alone**. This incommunicability is precisely what is lost in both theomorphism (where individual persons might be seen as interchangeable instances of “the human as image of God”) and technomorphism (where persons are interchangeable units or functions). Wojtyła’s ontology insists on the unity of nature and person: *each person has the full shared human nature, but each person is much more than a mere instance of a category—each is a unique center of being and action*. This insight directly preserves the **irreducibility** of the person: no analysis into components (genes, neurons, social conditioning) can capture the person as person; nor can subsumption under a general idea (Man, or Image of God, or Citizen, etc.) exhaust the concrete reality of this *I* who acts and is aware of itself.

Another crucial aspect of Wojtyła’s personalism is the integration of the **body-soul composite (i.e. hylomorphism)**.⁴¹ Against any spiritualistic tendency of theomorphism that might

and Value: Karol Wojtyła’s Personalistic and Normative Theory of Man, Morality, and Love (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 41.

³⁹ To be incommunicable means to be *accountable* in every *conscious action* insofar as no one can *will* for you except yourself. Every decision and choices can only be executed by the person himself. Of course, this excludes special moral circumstances. Acosta is correct in saying that “From the point of view of action, we can distinguish an aspect of nature that is common to every human being and, at the same time, another exceptional aspect, metaphysically incommunicable, in each individual that constitutes his own identity, his personal ‘I.’” M. Acosta and A.J. Reimers, *Karol Wojtyła’s Personalist Philosophy: Understanding Person and Act* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 117

⁴⁰ Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, 22.

⁴¹ It is clear that “Wojtyła was far from proposing that the human being should be segmented. He never adhered to a thesis that the human being is only a bodily creature or a spiritual self, nor merely a moral being or a rational creature. Following Aristotle, Wojtyła still perceived the human being as an animal rationale. This was interestingly demonstrated when he distinguished two approaches to the human being: a cosmological and a personal.” Hořub, *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła*, 144.

downplay the body, and against any materialistic tendency of technomorphism that might treat the body as a mere biological mechanism, Wojtyła upholds the classical hylomorphic view (from Aristotle and Aquinas) that the human being is a substantial unity of body and soul. In his philosophical anthropology, he emphasizes the person's lived embodiment. We experience not only "I act," but also "*I feel*"—we have sensual, emotional, and bodily vitality, what Wojtyła calls the *somato-vegetative* and *psycho-emotive* dynamism of the self, which the Thomist tradition tends to overlook. These layers are not independent substances, but dimensions of the one personal being. Wojtyła introduces the idea of **integration**⁴² to describe how the rational and spiritual faculties (intellect and will) integrate the lower faculties (senses, emotions, instincts) into the unity of the acting person. A morally mature person is not one who suppresses or ignores his body, but one who harmonizes it under the guidance of reason and will toward genuinely good ends. Thus, neither the body nor the spirit is neglected: the person is essentially *someone incarnate*. This has profound implications for both extremes we discussed: it counters the technocratic inclination to treat the body as a mere object (for the body is inalienably mine—*my body*, suffused with personal meaning and subjectivity) and simultaneously counters any puritanical inclination to treat the body as a prison of the soul (for the body is genuinely part of the personal self, capable of being a vehicle of self-expression and gift). Indeed, in Wojtyła's later theological reflections (the *Theology of the Body*), he would say, "the body expresses the person."⁴³ Without straying into theology here, we can note how consistent this is with his philosophical foundation: the body is personal, not an extrinsic instrument.

From the integration of bodily and spiritual dimensions flows the concept of the **transcendence of the person in act**.⁴⁴ When the person freely chooses a good—especially

⁴² Aguas explains that, for Wojtyła, integration "... refers to the wholeness of the person which emerges from the complexity of the structure of the human person." J.J. Aguas, *Person, Action, and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II)* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2014), 125. However, we must be cautious, since *disintegration* may happen to a person—that is, the lack of self-governance in cases such as the psychological alteration of reality—but he does not cease to possess the wholeness of the dignity of his personhood.

⁴³ K. Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. by M. Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), 185 – (General Audience of Jan 16, 1980). John Paul II teaches that the human body, in its masculinity or femininity, "*expresses the person*" and manifests the spiritual and the divine image in the visible realm. This is a theological extension of the philosophical point that the body is personal. As he put it in an earlier audience (Nov 14, 1979), "The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible the invisible, the spiritual and the divine." This notion harmonizes with Wojtyła's philosophical integration of body and soul.

⁴⁴ Wojtyła identifies two kinds of transcendence: horizontal and vertical. Reimers illumines us in this specific point of Wojtyła. Reimers explains that "Horizontal transcendence is a response to value, as well as an effort to realize a value in a particular situation. Vertical transcendence, on the other hand, questions the value in terms of some standard of good, because the values as presented immediately in consciousness do not, of themselves, validate their

a moral good that is truly worthwhile—he or she experiences a *transcendence* of the self’s prior limitations. Wojtyła illustrates that, in a morally significant choice, the person not only affects the external world but also rises above the inertia of internal impulses or social pressures—*going out of oneself* toward value.⁴⁵ This is a kind of vertical transcendence: every free act affirms that the person’s identity is not bound by the momentary sum of desires or material conditions; rather, the person can *become more* through action. Here Wojtyła weds a classical notion of teleology (actions have an orientation toward ends, ultimately to the ultimate end which is God) with a phenomenological description of freedom. One perceives that true freedom is not arbitrariness but is deeply linked to truth and goodness: *to choose the good is simultaneously to fulfill oneself.*

own goodness.” A.J. Reimers, *Truth About the Good: Moral Norms in the Thought of John Paul II* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2011), 99. Furthermore, I wish to add that there is a distinction between *transcendence* in the ontological sense (i.e., *unum, verum, bonum, pulchrum*) and *transcendence* in the moral sense (which Wojtyła speaks about). Now, *transcendence in the moral sense* must affirm the *transcendence in the ontological sense* through action. Thus, in this sense the person’s basis for “ought” must always be “is.”

⁴⁵ Wojtyła’s distinction between “values” and “good” represents a fundamental critique of modern axiology and a return to classical metaphysical realism grounded in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The good (*bonum*) possesses ontological primacy as it is convertible with being itself—“*bonum et ens sunt idem secundum rem*” (K. Wojtyła, “The Lublin Lectures,” in: Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler*, 108)—while values constitute the experiential and phenomenological dimension through which persons encounter and respond to goods in their lived-experience. This distinction is crucial for understanding Wojtyła’s rejection of Scheler’s purely emotionalistic axiology, which treats values as autonomous realities irreducible to being and truth. As Wojtyła argues, “the weakest point of the Schelerian system is the complete separation of value, the good, from truth” (*ibid.*, 154). For Wojtyła, the good is fundamentally teleological, serving as the proper object of the will in its natural orientation toward ends, whereas values function as mediating experiences that must be grounded in rational judgment about what truly constitutes the good for the acting person.

The ontological foundation of this distinction lies in Wojtyła’s understanding of the good as rooted in the existential structure of being itself. Following Thomas Aquinas, Wojtyła maintains that “the good is identified with being” but emphasizes that “the good is not only identified with being but also constitutes the end of all being” (*ibid.*, 105). This teleological dimension means that the good functions as the ultimate terminus of rational appetite, while values represent the experiential pathway through which persons discover and choose particular goods. The crucial mediating role belongs to truth and conscience: “The moment of truth is essential in the lived-experience of value. This is the truth about this or that object as this or that good” (Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” 244). This integration of truth with value-experience distinguishes Wojtyła’s position from both Kantian formalism and Schelerian emotivism, as it requires that authentic moral choice involve both the phenomenological recognition of values and the rational judgment of conscience about the true good.

The ethical implications of this distinction are profound for Wojtyła’s understanding of human action and moral development. Unlike Scheler’s “purely emotionalistic intuitionism [which] excludes the rational, efficacious, and creative contribution of the person in shaping the morality of acts” (Wojtyła, “The Lublin Lectures,” 154), Wojtyła insists that moral values emerge through the person’s self-determination in relation to the true good. The person achieves transcendence not merely through emotional value-intuition but through the integration of value-experience with truthful judgment: “Freedom contains dependence on truth, and this is manifested with full vividness in conscience. For the function of conscience consists in designating the true good in the act and, with this, in creating duty” (Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” 259). This means that while values provide the experiential content of moral consciousness, the good represents the objective reality that grounds moral obligation and enables authentic self-fulfillment. The person fulfills himself not simply through experiencing values but through choosing the true good in accordance with the judgment of conscience, thereby actualizing his transcendent capacity for self-determination in truth.

Conversely, to choose what is evil or false is to violate one's own personal reality—a self-determinative act that distorts. In Wojtyła's striking phrase, "man, who is the only creature on earth God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self,"⁴⁶ we see a phrase we encountered earlier as a corrective to theomorphism, but it also crowns his personalism: it signals that the person finds fulfillment (transcends self) through self-giving love. This insight masterfully mediates between extremes. Against technomorphism's self-centered utilitarianism, it insists that fulfillment is not in self-assertion or consumption but in self-donation—a concept utterly at odds with a worldview that measures everything by productivity or biological success. And against a distorted theomorphism, it clarifies that the way man relates to God (and reflects God) is precisely through the exercise of love in freedom, not by a negation of his own faculties. In fact, the statement from *Gaudium et Spes* is an example of "**deeper ontological retrieval**": the Council Fathers retrieved an ancient Christian truth (that man images a self-giving God) in personalist language that overcomes the static individualism-versus-collectivism binary. Wojtyła's philosophy undergirds that move by showing that self-gift is rooted in the structure of the person as self-determining and self-transcending.

Having sketched Wojtyła's personalist ontology, we can see more explicitly how it mediates between the earlier extremes and preserves the person's irreducibility. **First**, Wojtyła does justice to the *theomorphic* truth without reducing it. He agrees that man is oriented to God—indeed, he would affirm that the person is *capax Dei* (capable of communion with God) and that the ultimate fulfillment of self-gift is a participation in the divine life of love. But crucially, this orientation is not imposed extrinsically; it is built into our very being. The person's spiritual faculties (intellect, open to truth; will, open to good) are the "places" of this orientation. Thus, the relation to God is realized *through* the exercise of reason in seeking truth and of will in choosing good, not by bypassing them. We might say Wojtyła promotes a *rational theomorphism*: to be God-like is not to abandon one's humanity, but to fully actualize it in accord with truth and

⁴⁶ John Paul II frequently discussed technology in his social encyclicals. In *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), §§15–16, he cautions that technological advancement without an equivalent advancement in moral responsibility leads to fearsome outcomes: "This epoch of history ... with the aid of science and technology, has ... remarkable hopes ... and also exposed the human race to the threat of self-destruction ... The ultimate test of technology should be the respect due to the human person." Similarly, in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), §37, he warns against treating profit and technological progress as ends in themselves at the expense of the person: "In fact, the human person is the measure of the dignity of work ... Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in the truth." These magisterial teachings reflect Wojtyła's personalist principle that technology must be subordinated to human values, not vice versa.

love. This clearly rejects any fideistic devaluation of reason. Far from seeing faith and reason as opposed, Wojtyła argues (in line with Thomistic tradition) that truth is one and that all genuine paths to truth converge. In the preliminary reflection in *Fides et Ratio*, he wrote that faith purifies reason and reason purifies faith; the two are “like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”⁴⁷ In personalist terms, the divine image in man—the *divinus in caro*—consists in the spiritual creature who can know and choose and thereby give himself in love. Wojtyła’s ontology thus validates the God-ward destiny of man, but only in tandem with the integrity of human nature. **Second**, Wojtyła absolutely refutes the *technomorphic* reduction by re-grounding all the phenomena that scientism misinterprets within a richer metaphysical frame. Where technomorphism sees only neurons firing, Wojtyła acknowledges neurons *along with* the conscious subject who uses and directs his physiological processes. Where technomorphism sees behavior conditioned by environment, Wojtyła points to the interior evaluation and decision that shape behavior from within. Importantly, Wojtyła’s view does not reject the findings of science—the body and its mechanisms are real, and the influences of biology and psychology are real—but it **integrates** them. As Hanby suggested, making the person the paradigm of analysis liberates us from having to treat the lower as the cause of the higher; instead, we can see the person as a *whole* in which material, biological, emotional, and rational aspects cooperate in a hierarchy. The personal soul is the form of the body, giving unity and direction. This means technology and science become *servants of the person* once again, instead of arbiters of his identity. Wojtyła often spoke of the proper place of technology: he lauded scientific progress for its benefits yet warned that, without a moral orientation toward the human good, technology could become a false idol or tyrant over man. In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, he famously stated that scientific and technological progress, for all its advantages, carries the risk of a “radical and sudden turn ... against man” if not guided by ethical truth about the person.⁴⁸ Only if the person, as a moral subject, remains the **measure** of technology will technology truly serve humanity and not the other way around.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, preface to *Fides et Ratio* (1998).

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), §§15-16: “Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what he can use and exploit ... We have to suspect that the growth of technology is not in itself enough to guarantee human happiness ... It is a question ... of the priority of ethics over technology, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of spirit over matter.” Here, the Pope reiterates—in pastoral form—the philosophical point that persons are subjects and ends, and that the material world, including technology, must be ordered to personal and spiritual ends.

At this juncture, one can appreciate how Wojtyła mediates the opposition of theomorphism and technomorphism through what can be called a **sacramental anthropology**—“sacramental” in the philosophical (not strictly theological) sense that the human person, as a *body-spirit unity*, makes the divine present in the world of matter in a real, though analogous, way. The title of this paper, *Divinus in Caro* (“the divine in flesh”), alludes to the Christological mystery that ultimately grounds Christian personalism: the Incarnation of God. While Wojtyła’s own philosophical arguments do not presuppose Christian revelation, they are notably congenial to it. By safeguarding both the spiritual dignity and the bodily reality of the person, Wojtyła’s ontology provides a rational foundation for the belief that humans are destined to share in God’s life while remaining fully themselves. The **irreducibility of the person**—the notion that each person is a unique subject who cannot be replaced or summed up by any categories—finds its ultimate vindication in the perspective that each person is directly called by God to a fulfillment transcending the world. Yet that transcendent fulfillment—in Christian terms, the beatific vision, the communion of saints—is not a negation of our humanity but its crown. Even at the level of philosophy, Wojtyła shows that transcendence is not an add-on but an essential capacity of human action and existence. This is why neither theomorphism nor technomorphism has the final word: each miss that the **transcendent** (the Divine) and the **immanent** (the human, the material) are not competitors at the deepest level of reality. They interpenetrate in the person, properly understood. Wojtyła’s friend and collaborator, the theologian Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), expressed a similar idea by saying that the anthropological question and the God-question are inextricably linked—remove God, and the anthropology goes awry; remove a true humanism, and our understanding of God becomes distorted. Wojtyła’s personalism stands exactly at that intersection, mediating the two.

To bring these reflections to a focal point: in Wojtyła’s personalist ontology, **the person is a being that is at once grounded in himself and open to what lies beyond himself.** This “beyond” has a twofold reference: beyond the self toward others (community, love) and beyond the created order toward the Creator (transcendence, worship). Wojtyła recovers the classical *communio* dimension of personhood—that persons exist in relation—but he does so without sacrificing the subjectivity and freedom discovered by modern philosophy. In his vision, each person is *incommunicably unique* yet called to give himself in communion; each person is under God, yet God does not annihilate human freedom but guarantees it. Thus, personalism is

the true **mediating third way** after the collapse of the old dichotomies. It refuses to see the relationship between man and God as a zero-sum game (as some moderns caricature it), and it refuses to see the relationship between person and nature as a zero-sum game. Instead, it posits an ontological generosity in being: the human person—precisely by being more fully human (rational, free, loving)—comes more into the likeness of God; and the human person, by respecting his own embodied reality and the rest of creation, ennobles nature rather than despoiling it. We recall Hanby’s observation that Darwin himself noted how the presence of higher faculties in man “ennobled” the lower creatures by analogy—a point suggesting that the emergence of mind does not degrade matter but elevates its significance.⁴⁹ Wojtyła would concur that, in the person, matter itself is taken up into a new, personal meaning; hence, the human body is not just matter—it is the matrix of personal presence and action).

Wojtyła’s thought also provides practical ethical orientation. If the person is a self-determining, self-giving agent of intrinsic worth, then he or she must never be treated as a mere means to an end. This sounds like Kant’s categorical imperative, and indeed Wojtyła acknowledged the value of Kantian ethics in affirming the person as an end. But Wojtyła pushes further: not only should we *not use* persons, but we are called to **love** them. In one of his early works, *Love and Responsibility*, he stated, “It is rightly due to the person to be treated as an object of love, and not as an object of use.”⁵⁰ Love, in this sense, means affirming the other as having absolute value and committing oneself to that other’s good. Such a posture fulfills both the law of reason and the deepest yearning of the heart—it is where duty and happiness coincide. Under technomorphism, love tends to be instrumentalized or reduced to biochemical attraction; under misconceived theomorphism, love might be overshadowed by duty to an abstract principle. But under Wojtyła’s personalism, authentic love becomes the synthesis of the true and the good in personal relations, reflecting the very life of God. Love is the mode of personal communion that mirrors the Trinitarian communion (though that theological connection lies beyond the scope of philosophy proper). The upshot is that the **irreducible person** is also the *responsible* person:

⁴⁹ M. Hanby, *No God, No Science?*, 348.

⁵⁰ K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by G. Ignatik (Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 26. Wojtyła states: “The person is a kind of good to which only love constitutes the proper and fully-mature relation” (*ibid.*, 25). This means that any use of a person (treating them as an object or means) is fundamentally incompatible with that person’s dignity. This ethical principle builds directly on his anthropology: since a person possesses self-determination and is an end in himself, the only appropriate way to relate to such a person is through self-giving love that honors his autonomy and worth. This principle synthesizes the insights of Kant (respect for persons) with the insights of Christian charity.

because each of us is a someone, each of us bears the responsibility to treat every other human being in accordance with their exalted status as *Divinus in caro*—and likewise to order our use of technology and our devotion to God in ways that honor, rather than efface, personal reality.

Wojtyła’s personalism *mediates* the extremes by retrieving the **ontological nucleus** that both extremes had lost. *Theomorphism* and *technomorphism*, despite appearances, are like mirror images—each in its own way divorces what must be united (the divine and the human, the subject and the object). Wojtyła reunites what is sundered through a deeper vision of *being-as-person*. In doing so, he does not oscillate between poles but regrounds the discussion at a level where the opposition is transcended. This is a classically metaphysical move: finding the more ample framework in which partial truths can be reconciled. The framework here is the act and being of the person. As David C. Schindler himself has argued in another context, any attempt to think being while excluding the mystery of personhood will end in contradictions, because personhood is the highest revelation of being’s interior richness.⁵¹ Wojtyła’s philosophy enshrines that insight. The person is *sui iuris et alteri partis*⁵²—master of himself and able to give himself—a paradoxical composite of autonomy and relation that reflects the very structure of reality better than any atomistic or monistic model. In Wojtyła’s metaphysical anthropology, we therefore find a powerful vindication of the **irreducibility of the human person**: irreducible to impersonal forces, irreducible to a mere exemplar of a genus, irreducible to anything but itself. Each person is a new locus of meaning and value in the cosmos, the meeting point of the finite and the infinite. In each person, in a certain sense, creation is recapitulated and open to transcendent fulfillment. This realization is what can save our culture from both the idolatry of techné and a reactionary sacralism—it gives us the true scale of the human being.

⁵¹ Hanby, *No God, No Science?*, 348–350. Hanby, drawing on D.C. Schindler, argues that modern ontology’s reduction of being to material history is untenable because it must tacitly employ the fuller notion of being (including form and intelligibility) even to describe history. In a footnote referencing D.C. Schindler, Hanby notes: “Transcendent form and identity are tacitly invoked even when they are denied; without them, history ceases to be intelligible at all.” (*Ibid.*, 349). He suggests that making the person (in Richard of St. Victor’s definition as “incommunicable existence of rational nature”) the paradigm of being is more adequate (*ibid.*, 348). This resonates with Wojtyła’s approach of understanding being through the lens of personal existence.

⁵² I am completely aware that Wojtyła uses the term “*alteri incommunicabilis*” in relation to Self-Determination. “If self-determination reveals that man is the object of his own subject, it thereby simultaneously manifests a particular complexity, which is proper to man as a person. St. Thomas, and with him the whole tradition of Christian thought, emphasizes that ‘*persona est sui iuris et alteri incommunicabilis*.’” K. Wojtyła, “Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 463. Furthermore, there is a difference between *ontological incommunicability* which is given at the very moment of creation of the person and *moral incommunicability* where the person *willfully* gives himself/herself to another person such as in Marriage. See K. Wojtyła, “On the Meaning of Spousal Love,” in: Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*.

Conclusion

Has philosophy reached its end as a meaningful endeavor, as some suspect in this age of specialization and polarization? If one follows the arc of our analysis—from theomorphism to technomorphism to their resolution in personalism—one finds a hopeful answer: the end of philosophy (its goal or purpose) is not to abolish mystery in favor of facile clarity but to lead us to a deeper contemplation of the mystery at the heart of reality—the mystery of the person. Karol Wojtyła’s unfolding of personalist ontology exemplifies this by taking the seemingly irreconcilable tensions of modern thought and showing that they are resolved in the higher unity of the truth about the person. **The irreducibility of the person**, which Wojtyła champions, is not a stubborn obstacle to understanding but rather the key to understanding everything else rightly. It ensures that neither God nor the world is misconstrued in our self-understanding: God is not the rival of human freedom but its ground and guarantor—though not *a la Descartes*⁵³—and the material world is not the master of man but the arena of his self-giving creativity under God’s providence. In Wojtyła’s philosophical vision, man rediscovers himself as *Divinus in caro*—a creature dust-born yet heaven-destined, immanent in nature yet transcendent in spirit.

The mediation achieved by Wojtyła’s personalism has profound implications. It guards human dignity in an era of biotechnological temptation, insisting that no enhancement or algorithm can ever replace the core of *who* a person is. It also enriches theological anthropology, suggesting that grace and nature, the divine and the human, meet in the person in a way that fulfills both without confusion—an insight traceable to the Chalcedonian principle that, in Christ, true God and true man, we discern the pattern for all divine-human interaction. In societal terms, Wojtyła’s vision challenges both the libertarian individualism that leaves persons isolated and the collectivist technocracy that subsumes persons into systems. It proposes instead a civilization of love and truth, in which each person is respected as a subject and encouraged to flourish through virtuous action and solidarity with others. Such a civilization would neither worship technology nor reject it but place it at the service of integral human development. It would neither impose a theocratic negation of reason nor embrace a secular negation of spirit but would cultivate the proper harmony of faith

⁵³ J. Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy* (Chicago, USA: Henry Regenery Company, 1959), 55-64.

and reason, recognizing that the human quest for meaning spans scientific discovery, philosophical wisdom, and religious insight.

In a nutshell, Wojtyła’s ontological personalism offers a compelling resolution to the anthropological crisis of our times by unveiling a more capacious understanding of being human. It is an understanding in which **efficacy** (man as an agent), **self-determination** (man as free), and **transcendence in act** (man as oriented beyond himself) are central categories—precisely those needed to counter the passivity of theomorphic reduction and the fragmentation of technomorphic reduction. What emerges is a portrait of the human person as a creature who, in all actions, stands at a crossroads of the material and the spiritual, time and eternity. Each person is a microcosm and a mediator of creation, capable of knowing the world and of knowing God, capable of shaping the world and of giving himself in love to God and neighbor. In the face of systems that would reduce this mystery—whether in the name of heaven or of earth—Wojtyła’s voice rings out in dense, challenging prose: the *person* is the fundamental category of reality to which all analysis must finally refer. To forget this is to lose our way; to remember it is to open the door to genuine wisdom.

To conclude, the irreducible person—the *acting person*, in Wojtyła’s thoughts—stands as the answer to the riddle posed by the extremes of theomorphism and technomorphism. Wojtyła mediates these extremes not by splitting the difference but by ascending to the source: the ontological structure of personhood itself, which images divine freedom in creaturely form. His philosophy exemplifies the dictum that truth is often “spherical” rather than flat—one must move to a higher dimension to see how apparent contraries unite. By developing a four-part dialectic that led us from problem to deeper problem to solution, and fittingly, we find that the “end of philosophy”—understood not as a termination but as a goal—is the contemplation of the person as the incarnation of the divine, *Divinus in Caro*. In every human person, an entire universe is in communion with the Creator; and in light of that metaphysical truth, all attempts to reduce the person to something less must be firmly rejected. The final word must be one of affirmation: **Yes, the human person truly is a mystery, irreducible and invaluable, the bearer of a divine likeness in the midst of a technological age.** To recognize this is to ensure that neither the promises of technocracy nor the fervor of theocracy will lead us astray from authentic personalism. It is to secure the inviolable core of what and who we are—beings made of earth, yet breathing the breath of God. And this simultaneously allows us to avoid repeating the error of

Descartes, who, according to John Paul II, is “The philosopher who formulated the principle of ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*’, ‘I think, therefore I am’, [and] also gave the modern concept of man its distinctive dualistic character, [which, in effect] makes a radical contrast in man between spirit and body, between body and spirit. But man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a *spiritualized body*, just as man's spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as *an embodied spirit*. The richest source for knowledge of the body is the Word made flesh.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (1994), §2.

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