Experience as a Source of Knowledge. Analysis of Karol Wojtyła's *Introductions* to *Love and Responsibility*[1]

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Abstract

The article argues that the "Introductions" Karol Wojtyła authored for the first (1960) and second (1962) Polish editions of *Love and Responsibility* function as a methodological key to his ethics of sexuality and his broader anthropology. Focusing on the opening argumentative sections of both "Introductions," it reconstructs a triple framework – historical, ecclesial, and philosophical – in order to explain Wojtyła's response to the claim that only those with marital experience can speak credibly about sexual ethics. Situating Wojtyła within the ecclesiastical scientific milieu of the mid-twentieth century, the study shows that his central move consists in expanding the notion of experience beyond empiricist immediacy in accordance with the fundamental insights of the phenomenological tradition (Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler). Read in this light and within the broader coherence of Wojtyła's corpus (his studies on Scheler and *Person and Act*), pastoral experience emerges as a distinct epistemic modality capable of yielding morally significant knowledge.

Keywords

Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, experience, phenomenology, pastoral experience, moral knowledge, sexual ethics, personalism.

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Introduction

The two "Introductions" written by Karol Wojtyła for the first (1960) and second (1962) Polish editions of *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (*Love and Responsibility*) – brief yet conceptually dense texts – serve not only as preliminary remarks to the work, but also as a genuine hermeneutical key for understanding the evolution of the author's thought. Far from functioning as merely editorial forewords, they articulate methodological premises that illuminate Wojtyła's approach to the human person, sexuality and moral agency. In particular, they reveal the philosopher-pastor's distinctive attempt to integrate phenomenological description with the Thomistic tradition, thereby grounding ethical reflection in lived human experience.

In this article, attention will be directed exclusively to the first paragraph of the 1960 "Introduction" ("Intro I") and to its counterpart in the 1962 text ("Intro II"). Our aim is to situate these passages within a triple framework. First, we will consider their historical context, marked by the intellectual climate of socialist Poland, the emerging debates on sexuality, and the delicate position of the Catholic Church in public life. Second, we will analyze their ecclesial context, referring to the scientific and pastoral environment in which Wojtyła spoke and wrote, and that shaped both his language and his concerns. Finally, we will examine the philosophical context of the "Introductions," focusing on the fundamental question of whether and how *experience* can be considered a source of knowledge – an issue that is central to phenomenology and, consequently, to Wojtyła's entire anthropological project.

By re-examining these introductory fragments through the prism of context, this study seeks to show that the appeal to experience in *Love and Responsibility* is neither incidental nor merely rhetorical. Rather, it constitutes a methodological threshold through which the reader may grasp the dynamics of Wojtyła's thought and, in other ways, the role of experience in moral cognition.

I. Contemporary Criticism of Clergy Activity in the Field of Sexual Ethics

A close reading of the two "Introductions" reveals that Wojtyła begins his work by engaging directly with a specific challenge of his time: the charge that priests and consecrated persons lack credibility in speaking about love, marriage, and sexuality. Before developing his anthropological

and ethical analysis, he confronts a widespread opinion that undermined ecclesial discourse on sexual ethics at the turn of the 1960s. As the original Polish editions of *Love and Responsibility* demonstrate, the question was not merely theoretical; it emerged within a cultural climate in which the clergy's authority in matters of affectivity and conjugal life was openly contested. The public expectation that moral reflection on sexuality should derive from lived, personal experience became a central argumentative obstacle – one that Wojtyła evidently felt compelled to address at the outset of his work.

To illustrate this context, let us consider two parallel fragments from the 1960 "Introduction" ("Intro I") and the 1962 "Introduction" ("Intro II"), where Wojtyła formulates the criticism explicitly. These passages set the stage for a deeper inquiry into the nature of experience as a foundation for moral knowledge and reveal how Wojtyła situates his ethical project in dialogue with contemporary criticisms of ecclesial teaching on sexuality. In the "Introduction" to the first edition, he writes:

> There exists a view that only married people may speak about marriage, and that only persons who experience [*przeżywają*] love between a man and a woman may speak about such love. This view demands personal and direct experience [*doświadczenia*] as the basis for speaking in a given field. Thus, priests, the religious, and celibate persons cannot have anything to say on matters of love and marriage (*Intro I*, 1).[3]

In the "Introduction" to the second edition, Wojtyła writes:

> Yet priests, as well as the religious, are often denied the competency to speak on sexual matters, precisely on the grounds that they do not personally encounter them the way that lay married people do, that they do not possess personal experience [*doświadczenia*] in that field (*Intro II*, 2).[4]

Both excerpts occupy a strategic position in the "Introductions," functioning as a programmatic statement of the objection Wojtyła intends to confront. In the first edition, he presents the claim

[3] K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by G. Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books&Media, 2013), xxi.
[4] *Ibid.*, xxv-xxvi.

almost verbatim – "only married people may speak about marriage" – as a succinct formulation of the reductive logic that equates moral competence with personal participation. The second edition reiterates the same idea with only a slight variation, suggesting that the issue not only persisted but perhaps intensified: priests and religious "are often denied the competency to speak on sexual matters" because they do not "personally encounter" marriage or conjugal love. Read together, the two passages reveal a shared nucleus: the notion that a celibate cleric should not, indeed cannot, engage authoritatively with the theme of sexuality.

This line of reasoning hinges on a presumed inseparability between direct experience and epistemic authority. To speak about love, one must have "lived" love; to teach about marriage, one must have "experienced" marriage. Celibacy thus appears as a structural disqualification, not merely a disciplinary difference. Such criticism, however, did not arise in a vacuum. It reflects the intellectual atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century Poland, where shifts in cultural attitudes, emerging discussions on sexuality, and suspicion toward ecclesial authority shaped the reception of moral teaching. Appreciating the force of the objection requires situating Wojtyła's response within this sociocultural and ecclesial landscape.

A. The People's Republic of Poland: Communist Propaganda and Its Influence

Under communist rule, public morality in the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) was marked by a complex paradox. On the one hand, sexual matters were taboo: state propaganda avoided open discussion of intimacy, marriage, or sexual ethics, preferring instead a façade of ideological propriety[5]. On the other hand, sexuality was simultaneously monitored and regulated, as ideological structures sought to control not only public behavior but also discourse itself[6]. Direct testimonies from the period are scarce, yet available evidence suggests that sexual themes did not belong to the space of legitimate public debate[7]. As one contemporary journalist observed in 1956, there prevailed a veritable "conspiracy of silence" (*zmowa milczenia*) regarding education for marriage and family life, reflecting the state's earlier ideological reluctance to recognize the family as an autonomous sphere of personal formation, since the primary locus for shaping the "new man"

[5] Cf. B. Klich-Kluczewska, *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm w Polsce 1956-1989* (Kraków: Libron, 2015), 19.
[6] Cf. K. Budrowska, "Cenzura, tabu i wstyd. Cenzura obyczajowa PRL-u (1948-1958)," *Napis* Vol. 18 (2012), 238-243.
[7] In fact, during the communist era, the introduction to *Love and Responsibility* was one of the very few officially available texts that openly addressed an issue which had not previously been discussed in public.

was understood within communist ideology to be the collective[8], to which the individual was expected to be subordinated as a part to the whole. Ubiquitous in private life, questions concerning sexuality nevertheless remained unspoken, veiled within a double moral code that sharply separated public rhetoric from lived reality.

This dynamic contributed to the formation of a latent social tension which became markedly more explicit after the fall of communism. With the political transformation of 1989 and particularly throughout the 1990s, long-suppressed criticism of the Church's position on sexual ethics surfaced with unexpected intensity. What had remained unarticulated in the PRL now emerged openly: for many, clerical involvement in questions of sexuality was interpreted less as pastoral concern and more as disproportionate fixation. The argument cited by Wojtyła in the early 1960s – questioning the legitimacy of priestly discourse on love and marriage – thus prefigures a critique that would later become widespread and explicit.

A revealing testimony comes from Czesław Miłosz, Nobel laureate, who addressed this issue in *Kultura* (1991), a major émigré journal. Miłosz observed that the "obsession of the clergy with matters of sexual morality"[9] could not be freely discussed in communist Poland. He further noted that, following the reforms of Vatican II, some Western Catholic circles attempted to adapt to modern liberal sensibilities, at times even surpassing them in displays of tolerance. Miłosz's evaluation – severe, but influential – captures well the intellectual atmosphere in which the suspicion described by Wojtyła took shape. It reflects a broader cultural perception that ecclesiastical teaching on sexuality was overly moralistic, insufficiently grounded in human experience, and therefore vulnerable to contestation.

Given this historical landscape, the objection formulated in "Intro I" and "Intro II" appears not as an isolated remark, but as a response to a broader socio-political mood. The next step is to examine whether and how this climate intersected with the ecclesial context, shaping both the reception of Wojtyła's work and his methodological appeal to experience as a basis for moral reflection.

[8] Cf. B. Klich-Kluczewska, *Przez dziurkę od klucza. Życie prywatne w Krakowie (1945-1989)* (Warszawa: Trio, 2005), 100.
[9] Cz. Miłosz, "Państwo wyznaniowe?" *Kultura* Vol. 7-8 (1991), 7.

B. The Pre-Conciliar Church: the Persistent "Ecclesial-celibate" Identification

In the pre-conciliar Church, the figure of the priest was almost naturally equated with the celibate state. Celibacy functioned as a recognizable mark of clerical identity, a symbolic separation from the lay experience of marriage and family life[10]. Wojtyła himself recalls this traditional vision when he describes priestly celibacy as a phenomenon situated "on the border line"[11] between service-motivated continence and virginal dedication grounded in spousal love for God. In this conception, the priest's life is directed toward the community and toward God, not toward conjugal partnership. Such an understanding, deeply rooted in centuries of ecclesiastical practice shaped also by earlier Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions of continence,[12] inevitably reinforced the perception that priests stood at a place removed from the domain of sexual experience – thus nourishing, for some, the accusation that they lacked competence in matters of conjugal ethics.

Yet Wojtyła is careful to nuance this view. In the same passage, he notes that "the sacrament of Holy Orders can be imparted to people who previously lived in marriage."[13] This reminder appears not in his treatise on marriage,[14] but in the section devoted to vocation,[15] which underscores its theological significance. Celibacy, he implicitly suggests, is not inherent to priesthood in a sacramental sense, but rather belongs to the sphere of ecclesial discipline – a historically shaped practice rather than a dogmatic necessity. Such a clarification does not weaken the value of celibacy, but it reframes its meaning: it is a choice emerging from a specific spiritual logic, not a biological or existential precondition for ministry.

This distinction proves important for understanding the tension underlying the criticism Wojtyła addresses. If priestly celibacy is not synonymous with priesthood itself, then the authority of clergy to speak on sexual matters cannot rest merely on a presupposed superiority of the celibate state. Wojtyła will therefore search for another foundation – one located not in personal conjugal

[10] Cf. J. Baniak, *Powołanie do kapłaństwa i do życia zakonnego w Polsce w latach 1900-2010. Studium socjologiczne* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, 2012), 52.
[11] Cf. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 238.
[12] Cf. S. Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church. The Beginnings of a Discipline of Obligatory Continence for Clerics in East and West*, trans. by M.J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 349: "The rule of continence was connected with the practice of cultic continence, which was taken for granted in Judaism and the pagan world. It was for the entire Greco-Roman culture of antiquity an eminent expression of religious reverence for God. In this respect Christians could—indeed, they had to—adopt it and even intensify the discipline."
[13] Cf. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 238.
[14] Cf. *Ibid.*, 195-230.
[15] Cf. *Ibid.*, 231-247.

participation but in a different mode of experience and knowledge, accessible within the clerical vocation and its pastoral engagement with the lives of others.

Having examined the social and ecclesial dimensions of the problem, we may now better appreciate the background against which Wojtyła formulates his argument. This diagnosis is a necessary step toward understanding the rest of the introductory paragraph, namely Wojtyła's first response, which increasingly moves the discussion from mere sociological observation to the level of a Church's activity in presenting the norms of sexual ethics. To grasp how this move becomes possible, it is essential to consider the intellectual milieu in which Wojtyła wrote.

II. The Ecclesiastical Scientific Milieu of the Period

Having analyzed the criticism of the clergy's competence to speak about love and sexuality in the first part, we must now turn to another essential element of the same introductory paragraph: Wojtyła's observation that priests do in fact frequently speak and write on these matters despite such objections. This shift in emphasis signals a move from external critique to internal ecclesial practice, prompting an examination of how theological reflection on sexuality was generated, transmitted and justified within the Church's intellectual landscape.

Wojtyła introduces this point immediately after citing the prevailing view that celibacy disqualifies one from addressing marital love. The juxtaposition of two successive passages reveals a tension characteristic of the period: despite claims of incompetence, the ecclesial environment continued to generate academic and pastoral discourse on sexual ethics, and Wojtyła placed himself – deliberately and self-consciously – within this tradition. In the "Introduction" to the first edition, he writes:

> Nevertheless, they often speak and write on those topics.... in pastoral work... (*Intro I*, 1).[16]

In the "Introduction" to the second edition, Wojtyła writes:

[16] *Ibid.*, xxi.

> The book titled *Love and Responsibility*, which was first printed in 1960 due to the efforts of Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, is hereby published the second time by Znak publishing house.... one must consider the fact that the author of the book is a priest (*Intro II*, 1-2).[17]

By situating himself within a community of priests who engage with sexual ethics, Wojtyła implicitly facilitates a broader examination of the intellectual and pastoral framework within which such discourse is produced. These concise observations function therefore as more than mere introductory clarifications: they point toward three dimensions that shape the underlying, closer context of *Love and Responsibility*. Firstly, they direct attention to the dominant theological culture of the period, which was structured around moral handbooks and casuistic approaches to sexuality. Secondly, they anticipate Wojtyła's own critical engagement with that model, marked by his desire to rethink moral theology through personal experience and philosophical anthropology. Thirdly, they allude to the pastoral and academic setting in which his thought was formed, where lived encounters and university discourse intersected.

In light of this, the present section will commence with an examination of the Catholic moral manuals that constituted the principal reference for sexual ethics in mid-twentieth-century ecclesial scholarship.

A. The Moral-Manual Tradition of the Era

As the primary reference for moral theology in mid-twentieth-century seminary education, particularly in matters of sexual ethics, Catholic moral manuals exercised a twofold authority: practical and doctrinal. They exerted their influence by shaping the consciences of future confessors, defining pastoral norms, and establishing the conceptual categories through which questions of human sexuality were addressed.

Among the manuals most widely used in the 1950s, the *Katholische Moraltheologie* by Heribert Jone, OFM Cap., held a privileged place. Since its publication in Paderborn in 1930, the book has been reissued dozens of times in various languages. Arguably, it was the most frequently consulted handbook. Found in nearly every Western seminary library, it was valued for its accessibility. Confessors frequently utilized it as a pragmatic casuistic guide, regarded less as a theoretical treatise and more as a compendium of concrete cases, distinctions, and moral

[17] *Ibid.*, xxv.

qualifications. The book's influence was considerable, particularly because it provided clear answers to practical questions, a feature that was especially significant in an era that demanded pastoral efficiency. Although the Polish translation has not been finalized, the work enjoyed a high reputation among Polish lecturers educated in Germany, France, Italy or Switzerland.[18]

A secondary yet pivotal reference was Dominic Prümmer OP's *Manuale theologiae moralis secundum principia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*. Published in 1915 in Latin, the text was written across several volumes. While it was customary within Dominican scholarly circles, it also circulated extensively among diocesan seminaries. In comparison to Jone's text, it is more intricate and methodical in its Thomistic exposition, thus serving as a sophisticated instrument for students specializing in confession and particular moral concerns. It was particularly well suited to courses on penitential practices. Where subtle distinctions regarding guilt and sin were of paramount importance, the manual offered "a method of presentation that always emphasizes the principles to be applied rather than their applications."[19]

A similar degree of influence was observed in certain regions with regard to the *Summa Theologiae Moralis* by Jerôme Noldin, S.J., which was frequently utilized in Jesuit seminaries and in institutions where faculty members had undergone Jesuit intellectual formation. This manual was regarded for its meticulous classification of sins against the sixth commandment and its sophisticated internal organization. In a manner consistent with its counterparts, it furnished systematic responses to moral inquiries by means of a taxonomy of acts and their moral species. The manual was "appreciated for its clarity and precision."[20] First published by Noldin in 1902, it received its thirty-third edition the year before the Second Vatican Council thanks to Gottfried Heinzel's work.

Of the three items mentioned, Noldin's textbook is the most noteworthy in terms of analyzing Wojtyła's scholarly background. The Cardinal Karol Wojtyła Library (BKKW) – preserved in the Archives of the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków – contained four volumes of this *Summa theologiae moralis*, published in 1955-56. The chronology of Wojtyła's acquisition of the items in question remains to be ascertained. However, the collection did include a volume entitled

[18] Cf. A. Derdziuk, "Podręcznik kapucyńskiego moralisty z Münster," *Roczniki teologiczne* Vol. 46, No. 3 (1999), 149.
[19] Cf. P. Harmignie, "Dominicus-M. Prümmer, O.P., prof. Un. Fribourg (Suisse), Manuale Theologiae Moralis secundum principia S. Thomae Aquinatis [compte-rendu]," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* Vol. 1 (1924), 122.
[20] Cf. E. Vansteenberghe, "Chronique de théologie morale et spirituelle [note critique]," *Revue des sciences religieuses* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1932), 260.

Complementum: De castitate, published in 1955, which explicitly deals with the norms of Catholic sexual ethics, and today bears the number BKKW 111.

Despite the presence of discrepancies in terms of style and intellectual lineage, the above-mentioned manuals exhibited several characteristics that were foundational to their nature. The emphasis on casuistry involved the frequent presentation of moral evaluation through the analysis of specific cases and gradations of culpability. The prevailing paradigm characterized sexual acts as inherently sinful, evaluated through the lens of objective moral standards rather than considering interpersonal dynamics or the intricacies of love. Consequently, their treatment of sexuality concentrated on specific acts – contraception, masturbation, withdrawal, extramarital relations – rather than on personal subjectivity, relational maturity, or the value of experience. This approach yielded clarity in moral discernment; however, it also risked reducing ethical questions to juridical classifications, leaving limited space for a positive anthropology of love.

It is within this intellectual environment that Wojtyła would introduce his own approach, one that neither rejected the manual tradition outright nor accepted its categories without critique. However, prior to embarking on a methodological response, it is imperative to undertake a more thorough examination of the second dimension of the ecclesial milieu: his advancing reflection that transcends the moral-manual paradigm.

B. Wojtyła's 1965 Article: Critique of Naturalism and the Move beyond Manualism

A definitive indication of Wojtyła's intellectual distance from the prevailing moral-manual paradigm is evident in his article *Issues in Catholic Sexual Ethics. Reflections and Demands* (1965).[21] Here, the author presents an explicit critique of the naturalistic and teleological tendencies that are evident in contemporary moral theology.[22] While acknowledging the presence of elements in the manuals that have the potential to evolve into a personalist approach, it is argued that the absence of conceptual elaboration results in an implicit reduction of sexuality to its biological dimension.[23] When moral analysis is grounded exclusively in sexology or in natural teleology, it

[21] K. Wojtyła, "Zagadnienia katolickiej etyki seksualnej. Refleksje i postulaty," *Roczniki filozoficzne* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1965), 5-25.
[22] Cf. *Ibid.*, 5, 9-11.
[23] Wojtyła writes: "By 'naturalism' here... we mean a one-sided 'purely' naturalistic interpretation of sexual facts in man and in human relations – an interpretation which does not take into account the basic fact that man is a person, and that human relations based on the factor of sex or related to sexual desire should be drawn to the requirements of the personalistic norm. We encounter such a purely naturalistic interpretation of sexual facts in biological or medical sexology." *Ibid.*, 15-16.

engenders a constrained perspective in which sexuality is predominantly evaluated in terms of its procreative function and objective norms that govern the sexual act. In this sense, the manuals do not so much deny the personal dimension as leave it unarticulated, thereby reinforcing a naturalistic reading by default.[24]

In the light of these considerations, Wojtyła proposes a methodological turn, asserting that the focus of sexual ethics should shift from the act of sexual intercourse itself to the relationship between individuals of different sexes.[25] This formulation indicates a discernible departure from the manualist approach. In contrast to the approach of Jone, Prümmer and Noldin, who take the individual act as the fundamental unit of analysis, Wojtyła places the interpersonal relation at the core of ethical reflection. As Richard H. Bulzacchelli has observed, this shift reflects Wojtyła's refusal to reduce the human person to "a mere part within a whole"[26] or to a merely natural function, thereby making the person, rather than the biological act, the primary locus of moral evaluation. Consequently, Wojtyła introduced a principle that is predominantly absent from manual literature: The personalist norm stipulates that an individual's inherent dignity and value are intrinsically tied to their identity, thus making every person worthy of love and never merely of use.[27] In this context, the criterion for moral evaluation encompasses not only natural finality but also the dignity of the person, understood as both subject and partner, not merely as participant in the biological process. The personalist perspective ultimately grounds true human dignity in the person's fundamental relation to Christ, who is the Truth. As Wojtyła writes in his recently discovered commentary on St Paul's sermon at the Areopagus, this dignity is constituted by "the disposition to listen to the Truth (that is, obedience), and the readiness to act in the Truth."[28]

Wojtyła elucidates this transformation through a specific and theologically acute case study: the use of contraception. The author's argument progresses through three distinct levels. Firstly, at the natural level, he corroborates the manuals' assertions regarding the necessity of respecting the

[24] Wojtyła notes: "As for the works or textbooks I am familiar with in the field of Catholic sexual ethics (e.g., tractatus de sexto), I believe that they implicitly contain elements of a personalistic approach, but because of their lack of explication, they can sometimes arouse naturalistic associations or suspicions." *Ibid.*, 9.
[25] Wojtyła writes: "... the following question arises: whether the material object of sexual ethics is only acts related to the sexual relationship itself (sexual intercourse) – taking into account everything that leads to it and results from it – or whether the object is simply the relationship between persons of different sexes with particular reference to the sexual relationship itself." *Ibid.*, 8.
[26] R.H. Bulzacchelli, "lrreducibility and the Personalistic Norm as a Departure from Thomism: A Critique from the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II," *Wojtyła Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Aug. 2025), 84.
[27] Cf. Wojtyła, "Zagadnienia katolickiej etyki seksualnej", 14.
[28] K. Wojtyła, *Teachings for an Unbelieving World. Newly Discovered Reflections on Paul's Sermon at the Areopagus* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2020), 36.

procreative orientation of sexuality. Secondly, he incorporates the concept of conscience, arguing that periodic continence respects the moral role of the individual as conscious guardian of natural order. Conversely, he contends that contraception compromises the agent in this task. This argument diverges from manualist reasoning. Thirdly, at the personalist level, he contends that contraception risks reducing the other to an object of use rather than a partner in love. In this passage, the novelty of his approach becomes evident. The criterion for moral judgment is no longer merely physiological teleology, but rather the integrity of interpersonal communion.[29]

The article *Issues in Catholic Sexual Ethics. Reflections and Demands* thus reveals the emerging contours of a moral theology grounded in personalism rather than casuistry – a development that illuminates the methodological gesture already implicit in the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility*.

C. Academic Pastoral Ministry: a Laboratory of Relational Ethics

From the early 1950s onward, Wojtyła recognized a crucial pedagogical limitation: abstract norms, even those rigorously formulated in authoritative manuals, were insufficient for forming the moral conscience of young adults entrusted to his care in the academic pastoral ministry (*duszpasterstwo akademickie*) in Kraków. The students he collaborated with were navigating a rapidly changing cultural landscape. They were skeptical of prohibitions that lacked convincing justification and eager to ask fundamental questions about life and love. These questions stemmed from what Wojtyła referred to as "critical faith"[30] at the time.

The inquiries posed by the aforementioned individuals were of an anthropological and existential nature. The fundamental question of human nature is at the core of this inquiry. The question of how to genuinely love is a profound and enduring one. These questions resonate in Wojtyła's 1960 drama, "The Jeweler's Shop." Such inquiries necessitated not merely clear articulation of doctrine but also a pedagogy firmly grounded in experiential learning, discernment, and the nurturing of interior freedom. For Wojtyła, the formation of individuals could no longer be predicated upon a catalogue of prohibitions; rather, it was to be informed by the reality of persons and their lived relationships.

[29] Cf. *Ibid.*, 18-19.
[30] K. Wojtyła, *Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał* (Kraków: Znak, 1979), 445.

In this context, Jerzy Ciesielski (1929-1970) played a pivotal role. A prominent figure within Kraków's academic milieu – first as a student, later as a professor of engineering – Ciesielski embodied the integration of intellectual rigor, moral integrity, and family life. The scope of his collaboration with Wojtyła extended beyond formal meetings, encompassing shared excursions, hiking trips, and kayaking journeys. These activities facilitated philosophical and ethical reflection, allowing for the integration of these discourses into the fabric of lived experience. In his professional capacity, Ciesielski was a distinguished scientist specializing in reinforced concrete structures. Notably, he served as a visiting professor in Sudan. He was characterized by his exacting nature, profound thoughtfulness, and unwavering humanitarianism.[31] Jerzy Ciesielski's demise in the Nile in 1970 had a profound impact on Wojtyła, who, in *Memoir on Jerzy Ciesielski*, stated that their dialogues served as a wellspring of inspiration for his work *Love and Responsibility*, which he claimed to have written "on the margins of these conversations."[32]

The *Memoir* is of crucial significance. This suggests that *Love and Responsibility* is not merely a theological treatise conceived in isolation, but rather the result of a sustained dialogue with real families and young adults seeking to unite love, truth, and moral responsibility in everyday life. Consequently, the thought of Wojtyła is not solely derived from doctrinal reflection but is also shaped by direct pastoral engagement, which is influenced by encounters, inquiries, and experiences that assess and refine ethical theory. It is this lived dimension that gives his approach both personalist depth and concrete realism.

In conclusion, the analyses of the second part provide a clearer understanding of Wojtyła's position outlined in the "Introductions." He is able to respond to the criticisms outlined in the first section precisely because he stands within a vigorous intellectual and pastoral environment. Firstly, the subject's theological foundation is firmly embedded in an active theological milieu that is shaped by the moral-manual tradition yet is receptive to renewal. Secondly, he adopts a critical stance toward the naturalistic limitations of that tradition, proposing an alternative ethics grounded in the individual and interpersonal relationships. Thirdly, the author's reflections are enriched by his unique pastoral experience, particularly within the academic community of Kraków, where ethical theory was evaluated through the lens of concrete situations, authentic inquiries, and practical relationships. The threefold context – intellectual, critical, and experiential – establishes

[31] Cf. J. Machniak, *Sługa Boży Jerzy Ciesielski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława, 2007).
[32] Wojtyła, *Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*, 102. Originally published in: *Tygodnik Powszechny* Vol. 51-52 (1970), 2.

the foundation for the central claim that follows in Wojtyła's introductory paragraph: the nature and value of pastoral experience as a genuine source of moral knowledge.

III. The Nature and Value of Pastoral Experience as a Source of Knowledge

Having reconstructed the historical pressures and the ecclesial-scientific milieu in which *Love and Responsibility* was conceived, the argument of Wojtyła reaches its philosophical core. The initial objection, namely, that a priest is incapable of offering a credible perspective on love and sexuality without having the personal experience of marriage, as well as invoking systemic facts that completely escape the alleged social demands, required of Wojtyła a precise clarification of what experience he means and how it serves as a legitimate source of knowledge. The issue under discussion has thus transitioned from the sociological and institutional to the epistemological.

Wojtyła's response is not characterized by defensiveness or mere apology. Instead, he reframes the question by expanding the concept of experience itself. Without denying the significance of conjugal experience, Wojtyła introduces a broader and more differentiated understanding. In doing so, he implicitly challenges the reduction of experience to first-hand personal experience, understood exclusively as biological or autobiographical immediacy, arguing that indirect experience acquired through pastoral encounter also possesses genuine epistemic value. Firstly, however, Wojtyła puts forward a particular philosophical concept that reveals his methodological preferences. In the continuation of the introductory paragraphs, he writes with particular lucidity:

> A lack of their own personal experience [*doświadczenia*] does not hinder them since they possess a very rich indirect experience [*doświadczenia*] proceeding from pastoral work. For in pastoral work, they encounter precisely these problems so often and in such a variety of ways and situations that another experience [*doświadczenie*] is created, experience that is undoubtedly more indirect and "alien," but at the same time much more extensive (*Intro I*, 1).[33]

In the "Introduction" to the second edition, Wojtyła writes:

[33] Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, xxi.

> ... that it is precisely experience [*doświadczenie*] – the indirect experience [*doświadczenie*] provided by pastoral work – that is one of the two sources of this book. This work so often places the priest or the religious face to face with sexual problems, in so many diverse moments or situations, that quite a specific experience [*doświadczenie*] ensues as a result. It is granted that this experience [*doświadczenie*] is not personal but "alien" instead, although at the same time it is more extensive than any exclusively personal experience [*doświadczenie*] (*Intro II*, 2).[34]

At this juncture, it is possible to identify the conceptual crux of Wojtyła's "Introductions," namely, the notion of *experience*. The issue at hand is no longer whether the clergy are socially or institutionally authorized to speak about love and sexuality, but rather, and in what sense, experience itself constitutes a legitimate source of moral knowledge. This prompts a refinement of the initial objection that has been a constant companion to the analysis: in what manner can a priest adequately engage with questions concerning love and sexual ethics if he has not had first-hand experience of marriage?

Wojtyła's response is articulated with notable clarity. He maintains that the absence of direct, personal experience does not disqualify priests from moral reflection in this domain, insofar as they possess an indirect experience acquired through pastoral practice. This experience is not merely compensatory, but qualitatively distinct and, in many respects, more comprehensive than purely individual experience. The experience of priests is characterized as indirect, yet "at the same time (much) more extensive." This particular formulation is reiterated in both of the "Introductions," thus serving to emphasize its methodological importance to Wojtyła.

Consequently, pastoral experience is not presented as a substitute for conjugal life, nor as a secondary or deficient form of knowledge. Instead, it can be argued that it constitutes a different mode of experiential access to moral reality. The scope of the priest's role is derived from his structural position within the religious hierarchy, which often places him in situations where he is confronted with a wide array of human experiences, particularly during moments of existential crisis. Within the uncompromising context of the confessional, the priest is entrusted with the duty to listen to narratives of love, failure, responsibility, and suffering that extend beyond the confines

[34] *Ibid.*, xxvi.

of any individual personal biography. In this sense, the epistemic weight of pastoral experience is contingent on the conceptualization of experience itself.

In order to clarify this notion, it is necessary to turn to the philosophical context of Wojtyła's thought. Accordingly, the following analysis will proceed along two complementary lines. Firstly, it adopts a historical-critical approach, attentive to the diachronic development of the concepts of experience within the closest history of philosophy. Secondly, it employs a canonical reading, treating Wojtyła's corpus as a coherent whole in which his later writings progressively interpret and develop his earlier thought.

A. In the Current of Philosophy: Experience as a Source of Knowledge

The philosophical debate concerning the role of experience as a source of knowledge profoundly shaped twentieth-century philosophy. It developed in opposition to a narrow empiricist conception of experience that dominated the modern sciences. Its central ambition was to rethink experience from a phenomenological perspective in order to restore the full intelligibility of being as it is given in lived experience.[35] The following analysis therefore provides a concise overview of this methodological debate as an indispensable framework for understanding Wojtyła's own approach, particularly his notions of "indirect experience" and "a more extensive experience."

a. Empiricism and the Narrow Concept of Experience

The dominant conception of experience within the scientific and philosophical culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was empiricism, whose epistemological assumptions decisively shaped the modern understanding of knowledge. A concise diagnosis of this tradition is offered by Edmund Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences,* where he summarizes the internal logic of modern empiricism:

> Locke's naïvetés and inconsistencies lead to a rapid further development of his empiricism, which pushes toward a paradoxical idealism and finally ends in a consummated absurdity.

[35] Claude Romano remarks: "From the perspective of the history of the phenomenological movement, the most significant event seems to have been Husserl's rediscovery of this polysemic expression 'experience' in one of its meanings considered paradigmatic. *Erfahrung*, experience in its broadest sense, is understood by Husserl as *Erlebnis*, lived consciousness. However, while all lived experience appears to be an experience, it is by no means certain that all experiences are of the order of lived experience." C. Romano, *Au cœur de la raison, la phénoménologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 469.

> The foundation continues to be sensationalism and what appears to be obvious, i.e., that the sole indubitable ground of all knowledge is self-experience and its realm of immanent data. Starting from here, Berkeley reduces the bodily things which appear in natural experience to the complexes of sense-data themselves through which they appear. No inference is thinkable, [according to Berkeley,] through which conclusions could be drawn from these sense-data about anything but other such data. It could only be inductive inference, i.e., inference growing out of the association of ideas.[36]

This passage encapsulates the fundamental tenet of empiricism. Derived from the Greek ἐμπειρία (*empeiría*) – "that which one has personally tried" – the concept of experience came to denote, in modern scientific usage, what can be directly observed by the senses and subsequently generalized through induction. According to this perspective, knowledge is defined as the accumulation, comparison, and generalization of sensory data, whether external (seeing, hearing, touching) or internal (feeling, sensing). The acquisition of knowledge is contingent upon the presence of sensory input, which serves as a gateway to the domain of valid knowledge.[37]

Husserl demonstrates how this epistemological starting point instigates a progression that appears to be inevitable. Locke's conception of the mind as a tabula rasa already implies that the subject has access only to its own impressions. Berkeley radicalizes this logic by concluding that the so-called bodily objects are nothing but bundles of sensations: the table, the tree, or the chair possess no being beyond the complexes of sense-data through which they appear. As Husserl emphasizes, such a framework permits no inference beyond the data themselves; reasoning becomes a mere association of impressions, and knowledge collapses into a closed circuit of subjective contents. Paradoxically, an epistemology that sought to ground knowledge in sensory realism culminates in a form of idealism in which reality is reduced to mental construction.

A similar diagnosis was previously formulated by Husserl at a conference in Vienna on May 7, 1935, which subsequently provided material for the work on the *Krisis*, completed in 1937. At the conference, Husserl provides the necessary contours of classical empiricism as governed by what he calls a "sensualism, or more precisely, a psychologism of *data*."[38] In this model,

[36] E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. by D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 86-87.
[37] Cf. F.M.A. Hossain, "A Critical Analysis of Empiricism," *Open Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 4 (2014), 226-227.
[38] E. Husserl, *La crise de la humanité européenne et la philosophie*, trans. by N. Depraz (Paris: Hatier, 1992), 76.

consciousness is conceptualized as a passive receptacle, gradually filled with raw, pre-analytic impressions. Meanings, values and intentions are regarded as secondary psychological derivatives, rather than as original dimensions of experience. Husserl contends that a pivotal schism occurs with Franz Brentano, who reconceptualizes psychology as the science of intentional acts – that is, of experiences that are inherently concerned with something. According to this account, consciousness is not merely a container of sensations, but rather a relational structure oriented towards meaning. Husserl's concluding assertion is that, while Brentano does not fully avoid the naturalism characteristic of his era, he does initiate a critical rupture within the empiricist paradigm by proposing the possibility that experience transcends the mere accumulation of sensory data.[39]

The anti-empiricist orientation of phenomenology found further expression in the work of Max Scheler. According to Scheler, one of the "two hidebound philosophical prejudices" obscuring philosophical inquiry consisted precisely in reducing what is originally given to what rests upon experience understood in an excessively narrow – indeed, merely sensory – sense. Against such a reduction, he writes:

> The first [prejudice] is that only what rests on experience (if at all possible, on sensual experience) may be regarded as "given" or, to be precise, as originally given, i.e. primary data. However, it can be no less true to say that to every kind of primary data there must correspond a manner of experiencing which is such that data of the kind in question can be given through it. Let us concede that everything which "is" owes an account of itself to experience. But conversely everything that is experienced has a claim to be posited as in some way existent. In this context nothing could be more disastrous for epistemology than to set up at the beginning of one's methodical procedure too narrowly exclusive a concept of "experience" — to equate the whole of experience with one particular kind of experience (sanctioning only that mental attitude which is conducive to it) and then refuse to recognize as primary data anything which cannot be reduced to this one variety.[40]

This philosophical moment is of crucial importance in order to understand Wojtyła's position. If experience is defined strictly in empiricist terms – that is to say, as direct, personal, sensory

[39] Cf. *Ibid.*, 76.
[40] M. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. by B. Noble (London-New York: Routledge-Taylor&Francis, 2017), 255-256.

acquaintance – then the objection he cites in the "Introductions" appears irrefutable: a priest is lacking in immediate experiential access to marriage and therefore in any valid knowledge of sexual ethics. The argument proposed by Wojtyła can only be rendered comprehensible once this restricted conception of experience is relinquished. By drawing – implicitly but decisively – on a broader understanding of experience, he is able to affirm that human experience encompasses not only sensations but also values, conscience, interpersonal relations, and the experience of others. It is precisely within this expanded horizon that pastoral experience acquires its cognitive significance, enabling Wojtyła to situate his notion of "indirect experience" as a genuine source of moral knowledge.

b. Phenomenology and the Expanded Notion of Experience

The analysis of the manner in which empiricism reduces experience to a mere collection of sensory data provides the necessary point of departure for comprehending the fundamental alternative that is introduced by phenomenology as such and its broader conception of being. It is precisely this alternative that could also be seen as enabling Wojtyła to argue for the cognitive value of pastoral experience without succumbing to subjectivism or mere sociological observation. Both considerations ultimately converge upon a single overarching reason. At the core of phenomenological methodology lies the principle that appearance is not opposed to being but rather constitutes its privileged mode of access. This principle is most explicitly formulated in the writings of Edmund Husserl, and in a closely related yet ontologically reinterpreted form, in the work of Martin Heidegger. The complete articulation of this insight can be found in the following passages, respectively from Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Husserl writes:

> The participation in apodicticity appears in the *formal law* (which is itself apodictic): So much illusion, so much being — which is only covered up and falsified thereby, and which therefore can be asked about, sought, and (by following a predelineated way) found, even if only with approximation to its fully determined content. This fully determined content

> itself, with the sense of something firmly identifiable again and again, in respect of all its parts and moments, is an "idea," valid a priori.[41]

Heidegger, likewise, states:

> There are various ways in which phenomena can be covered up.... This covering-up can become complete; or rather — and as a rule — what has been discovered earlier may still be visible, though only as a semblance. Yet so much semblance, so much "Being." This covering-up as a "disguising" is both the most frequent and the most dangerous, for here the possibilities of deceiving and misleading are especially stubborn. Within a "system," perhaps, those structures of Being — and their concepts — which are still available but veiled in their indigenous character, may claim their rights. For when they have been bound together constructively in a system, they present themselves as something "clear," requiring no further justification, and thus can serve as the point of departure for a process of deduction.[42]

The analysis of the so-called "first principle" described in the aforementioned texts by the foremost representatives of phenomenology must undergo several stages. At the very beginning of its influence, the first phenomenological principle "establishes an irrevocable interdependence between appearing and being... [between] phenomenological and ontological determinations."[43] Subsequently, being and appearing are inextricably linked, forming a symbiotic relationship in which one is in constant relation to the other.[44] The following phenomenological moment of the principle's realization consists in imposing on being the "measure" and "reason" that appearing brings with it.[45] Since the phenomenality of appearing is a decisive factor for and about the

[41] E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by D. Cairns (The Hague-Boston-London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), 103 [§46, Hua. I, 133].
[42] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson (Oxford-Cambridge: Blackwell, 1962), 60 [§7, 36].
[43] M. Henry, "Quatre principes de la phénoménologie: À propos de *Réduction et donation* de Jean-Luc Marion," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* Vol. 96, No. 1 (1991), 11.
[44] Characterizing the domains of appearance and being, Henry uses the metaphor of competing yet overlapping realms: "it is because appearance unfolds its reign that being also unfolds its own, because they have one and the same reign...." *Ibid.*, 4.
[45] Henry speaks here, respectively, of the functioning of being "to the extent" (*dans la mesure*) and "for the reason" (*pour cette raison*) that appearance functions. Henry also uses the phrase: "the foundation of the second [being] by the first [appearance]." *Ibid.*, 4.

manifestation of being, this imposition of measure and reason is evident in the fact that appearing is given "primacy"[46] over being, and phenomenality primacy over manifestation. In essence, despite its originally perceived "status of mere appearance,"[47] appearing, under the influence of the first principle, acquires a "ontological dignity"[48] superior to being, finding itself at least one step higher on the ladder of existence.

The primacy of phenomenality, i.e., one in which appearing – the fundamental phenomenological category – is the point of reference ("so much appearing, so much being"), is not, however, the only feature of the first principle, nor is its consideration the only and most correct way of interpreting it. An additional dimension, of greater significance for understanding the first principle, emerges when, in its context, the question of being ("how much being? – as much as appearing") is articulated as a point of reference and analysis.

Given the potential to reverse the aforementioned orders and expand the scope for formulating the first principle, Jean-Luc Marion describes this as a "typically metaphysical situation"[49] or a "thoroughly metaphysical climate."[50] He argues that such an event would result in categorizing the ensuing issues as "strictly metaphysical."[51] Although in a directly polemical manner, Denis Fisette ultimately clarifies Marion's point of view on phenomenology as a philosophical method, stating that "apart from the ontological status that is restored to the modes of donation, there is nothing metaphysical in this principle."[52] Accordingly, with its metaphysical ramifications, appearing, as articulated by the first principle of phenomenology, "gives access to beings that are not only material things in the world, but also essences and categories."[53] Understood in this way, the first phenomenological principle postulates an enlarged metaphysical concept of experience. Both the term "enlarged" [fr. *large*] and its phenomenologically correct

[46] J.-L. Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. by J.L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 11.
[47] *Ibid.*, 11.
[48] M. Henry, "Quatre principes," 4. It seems that Marion would prefer the phrase "ontic dignity" here, considering the goal that, in his opinion, guides the formulation of the first principle, namely: "to reestablish the ontic dignity of appearing." Marion, *Being Given*, 11.
[49] *Ibid.*, 11.
[50] J.-L. Marion, *La Rigueur des choses. Entretiens avec Dan Arbib* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 128.
[51] Marion states: "These are strictly metaphysical questions... [even if] Husserl had to gradually step outside himself and his starting point... [and] this effort was continued... by Heidegger and his followers." *Ibid.*, 128-129.
[52] D. Fisette, "Phénoménologie et métaphysique: remarques à propos d'un débat récent," in: *La Métaphysique: Son Histoire, Sa Critique, Ses Enjeux*, ed. J.-M. Narbonne, L. Langlois (Paris-Québec: Vrin-PUL, 1999), 97-98.
[53] P. Huneman, E. Kulich, *Introduction à la phénoménologie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997), 16.

understanding, i.e., one that does not equate phenomenon with being, can be found in the following passage by Marion, which refers to Husserl's *Ideas I*:

> If one still wants to insinuate that "phenomenology seems to harbor in itself all ontologies," because "the roots of all ontologies are their basic concepts and axioms," that restoration can remain legitimate only inasmuch as one well sees that "everything that the sciences of beings, the rational sciences and empirical sciences, offer us (in the enlarged sense they can all be called 'ontologies,' insofar as it becomes apparent that they are concerned with unities of the 'constitution') 'resolves itself into something phenomenological,' ['lost sich in Phänomenologische auf'] – a figurative expression that must not be misunderstood and whose more precise sense is still to be established."[54]

As the results of this analysis demonstrate in a new way how Wojtyła's system integrates phenomenology – the study of experience – with metaphysics – the study of being – it is worth examining the specific reasons why the first principle of phenomenology, as formulated in the foundational texts of this philosophical school, corresponds to his expanded concept of experience.

For Husserl, experience cannot be reduced to the passive reception of sensory data; rather, it consists in allowing things to appear as they give themselves to consciousness. This insight is crystallized in what he calls the formal law of phenomenology – "So much illusion, so much being" (*Cartesian Meditations*, §46). Appearing, on this view, is not a deficient shadow of being, but its privileged path of access. When something manifests itself to consciousness – whether an object, a value, an intention, or another person – this manifestation is not an illusion to be overcome but an opening onto the very structure of what is.

Heidegger articulates an analogous insight in a more explicitly ontological register. In *Being and Time* (§7), he insists that phenomena may be concealed, distorted, or covered up, yet even such

[54] J.-L. Marion, *Reduction and Givenness. Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. by T.A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 43. The footnote appended by Marion provides the following information: "Respectively, *Ideen III*, § 14, *Hua*, V,77 (our emphasis), 78 [Eng. trans., 66-67]. See *Cartesianische Meditationen*, § 64: "Wieder dasselbe besagt, die systematisch voll entwickelte transzendentale Phänomenologie wäre *eo ipso* die wahre und echte universale Ontologie; aber nicht bloss eine leer formale, sondern zugleich eine solche, die alle regionalen Seinsmöglichkeiten in sich schlösse, und nach allen zu ihnen gehörigen Korrelationen" (181); and also *Ideen I*, § 62, *Hua*, III, 147-49; likewise *Erste Philosophie*, II, *Beilage* 30, Hua, VIII, 482. Good clarification by E. Fink in *Studien zur Phänomenologie*, French trans. *De la phénoménologie*, trans. by D. Franck (Paris, 1974), 233-34." *Ibid.*, 215.

modes of concealment remain modes of appearing and therefore disclose something essential about being. The way in which something shows itself – or fails to show itself – belongs intrinsically to its mode of being. Appearing is thus constitutive of being, rather than accidental to it, and phenomenological analysis already touches the ontological structure of what manifests itself.

The ultimate implications of the first phenomenological principle were articulated by Edmund Husserl in what he famously called the "principle of all principles," according to which "*every primordial dator Intuition is* a *source of authority (Rechtsquelle) for knowledge*, that *whatever presents itself in 'intuition' in primordial form* (as it were in its bodily reality), *is simply to be accepted*."[55] In this form, the fundamental element of phenomenology – as what Paul Ricœur later described as a "method capable of multiple incarnations"[56] – were further developed by Max Scheler. In *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, he writes:

> We designate as "*a priori*" all those ideal units of meaning and those propositions that are self-given by way of an *immediate intuitive* content in the absence of any kind of positing [*Setzung*] of subjects that think them and of the real nature of those subjects, and in the absence of any kind of positing of objects to which such units of meaning are applicable. The point, therefore, is to leave aside all kinds of *positing*, including the positing of "real" or "non-real," "illusion" or "real," etc.... If we call the content of such an "intuition" a "*phenomenon*," such a "phenomenon" therefore has nothing at all to do with "appearance" (of something real) or "illusion." Intuition of this kind, however, is "*essential intuiting*" [Wesensschau], or, as we may call it, "*phenomenological intuition*" or "*phenomenological experience*."[57]

Just as Husserl's and Heidegger's works became, for Jean-Luc Marion, objects of historical-philosophical commentary and, at the same time, sources of phenomenological inspiration,[58] so Max Scheler's work assumed a comparable role in relation to Karol Wojtyła. On the one hand, the

[55] E. Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W.R.B. Gibson (London-New York: Routledge, 2012), 43.
[56] P. Ricoeur, *À l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1987), 8.
[57] 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. Frings and R.L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 48.
[58] Jean-Luc Marion recalls that he had been "doing phenomenology, like Monsieur Jourdain speaking prose, without knowing it, for many years, essentially through the practice of Heidegger." Marion, *La rigueur des choses*, 119.

reception of the above passage from *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* – taken from the second of the book's six chapters – is documented by the reading notes Wojtyła prepared during his study of the work,[59] as well as by the marginal annotations he entered in his personal copy.[60] The latter demonstrate that, from the outset, Wojtyła accurately identified what he regarded as the central methodological problem of phenomenology, writing the word "problem" ("point") in the margin next to the sentence: "We designate as '*a priori*' all those ideal units of meaning and those propositions that are self-given by way of an *immediate intuitive* content in the absence of any kind of positing [*Setzung*] of subjects that think them and of the real nature of those subjects, and in the absence of any kind of positing of objects to which such units of meaning are applicable." Likewise, alongside the passage – partly marked by a vertical line – stating: "If we call the content of such an 'intuition' a '*phenomenon*,' such a 'phenomenon' therefore has nothing at all to do with 'appearance' (of something real) or 'illusion.'" Wojtyła writes: "por. [cf.] Werte sind klare Phänomene." In doing so, he referred back to Scheler's earlier statement in the first chapter of the work that: "Values are *clearly feelable phenomena*."[61] Significantly, however, he omitted the reference to the affective accessibility of values (*fühlbare*), while deliberately emphasizing their phenomenological self-givenness (*klare Phänomene*).

On the other hand, whereas the reading notes and marginalia testify to Wojtyła's reception of Scheler's text, its *Wirkungsgeschichte* – that is, the way in which it continued to shape his own philosophical reflection – is visible in the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility*. Scheler's methodological shift provides an important key to understanding Wojtyła's conception of

[59] Karol Wojtyła summarized the passage in his reading notes on Max Scheler's *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* as follows: "Jako *a priori* oznaczamy te jednostki (pojęcia) znaczeniowe (*Bedeutungseinheiten*) i zdania, których treść sama się nam narzuca w drodze bezpośrednio-oglądowej. Wyklucza się tedy przy tym wszelkiego rodzaju *Setzung* tj. ukształtowanie (czy raczej postawienie, wywołanie) tych treści ze strony podmiotu myślącego za pośrednictwem jego przyrodzonej czynności. Wyklucza się również *Setzung eines Gegenstandes, auf den sie anwendbar wären*. W ogóle jakichkolwiek *Setzung*. Treść takiego oglądu (*Anschauung*) nazwijmy 'fenomenem.' Nie ma on jednakże nic wspólnego ani ze 'zjawiskiem' (rzeczy realnej), ani z pozorem (*Schein*). Jest to po prostu *Wessenschau* – ogląd istoty czyli ogląd fenomenolog[iczny] wzgl[ędnie] fenomenolog[iczne] doświadczenie." K. Wojtyła, "Notatki i tłumaczenie *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus* Maxa Schelera," in: K. Wojtyła, *Dzieła filozoficzne*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Merecki (Kraków: IDMJP2-UPJP2, 2024), 352-352. Karol Wojtyła's reading notes on Max Scheler's *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* are preserved in the Archives of the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków (AKKW CII 24/232; the present text is taken from card 50).

[60] Karol Wojtyła's personal copy of Max Scheler's *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, containing his handwritten marginal notes, is preserved in the Archives of the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków under the shelfmark BKKW 84.

[61] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, 16. In the original: "Werte sind klare fühlbare Phänomene." M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus* (Halle a. d. Saale: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1921), 11.

experience developed there. Once phenomenology expands the meaning of experience and recognizes multiple modes of being, it becomes possible for Wojtyła to accommodate a wide range of ontological domains within experience itself. For him, phenomenology is concerned primarily with how things give themselves, regardless of whether they are material, psychic, spiritual, relational, or axiological (such as values), and regardless of whether they are affectively accessible. Consequently, the experience of emotions, the experience of moral conscience, the experience of values, the experience of a life story entrusted in the confessional, or the experience of another person's interior drama all qualify as genuine experiences – phenomena that give themselves to consciousness and are capable of conveying authentic knowledge.

Seen in this light, "indirect experience" is not a deficient or secondary form of experience. It is simply a different mode of access to truth. This is precisely why Wojtyła can maintain that pastoral experience, though "indirect" and in a certain sense "foreign," is broader than strictly personal experience: it encompasses a wide diversity of phenomena belonging to moral human life.

B. The Works of Wojtyła: the Coherence of an Experiential Philosophy

Wojtyła's conscious participation in the broader philosophical debate concerning empiricism and the concept of experience is evident from his explicit reflections in the article *The Problem of Experience in Ethics* (1969). There he writes:

> Because of the latter ["empiricists"], it is not enough to say that we seek the basis of valuable knowledge in experience [*doświadczeniu*], but we must also specify more precisely what kind of experience [*doświadczenie*] we are talking about. As we can see, the very concept of experience [*doświadczenia*] is not strictly unambiguous, and therefore the scientific orientation that we call empiricism is not uniform either. As will become apparent later, it is precisely this lack of uniformity that creates opportunities to develop a coherent and integral concept of experience [*doświadczenia*], which is also operative in the field of ethics, something that seems impossible with a radical "empiricist" approach.[62]

This passage demonstrates, with particular clarity, that Wojtyła does not merely presuppose a notion of experience but thematizes it explicitly, situating ethical inquiry within a critical

[62] Wojtyła, "Problem doświadczenia w etyce," 6.

engagement with empiricist epistemology. However, the specific articulation of this concept in a focused, methodological form finds its systematic development across a broader arc of his philosophical work. In order to comprehend the affirmations made by Wojtyła in the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility* with regard to pastoral experience, which is described as "indirect," "foreign," and yet broader, it is necessary to situate that claim within the longer trajectory of his thought.

Two major works serve as decisive reference points in this regard. The first of these, written prior to *Love and Responsibility*, is *An Assessment of the Possibility for Building Christian Ethics Based on the Presuppositions of Max Scheler's System* (1953). The second, published after it, is *Person and Act* (1969). The first, a postdoctoral dissertation, signalled the commencement of an independent academic career; the second – referred to in academic circles at the time as a "professorial book" – represented its most mature product. When considered collectively, these texts demonstrate that the appeal to a broadened concept of experience in the "Introductions" is not an *ad hoc* justification devised in response to external criticism. Instead, it is an expression of a constant, deeply reflected, and structurally coherent element of Wojtyła's philosophy.

a. Before *Love and Responsibility*: Wojtyła as a Critical Reader of Max Scheler

Long prior to the publication of *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła engaged in a sustained and methodologically precise reflection on the nature of moral experience in his studies devoted to Max Scheler. In his early work, *An Assessment of the Possibility for Building Christian Ethics Based on the Presuppositions of Max Scheler's System* (1953), he already addresses, in a systematic way, the epistemological status of ethical experience and the appropriate method for its analysis. For the purposes of this study, it is particularly significant to note that Wojtyła situates ethical inquiry explicitly within the domain of experience, while simultaneously rejecting any reduction of that experience to psychological introspection or sensory observation. The position is articulated with notable clarity in the following passage, which forms part of the conclusion of his postdoctoral thesis:

> … we must take the experiential [*doświadczalnym*] position. We aim to examine ethical facts in an experiential [*doświadczalny*] way, for we observe that, as a particular kind of human lived-experiences [*przyżyć*], they constitute the object of internal experience

> [*doświadczenia*].… Scheler states that the proper means for experiential [*doświadczalnego*] examination of human ethical lived-experiences [*przeżyć*] is not introspection, that is, the internal experience [*doświadczenie*] in the form employed by psychology, but phenomenological experience [*doświadczenie*], which grasps the human person's given lived-experience [*przeżycie*] with its complete content. Thus, in Scheler's opinion, with the help of phenomenological experience [*doświadczenia*], we grasp the ethical fact as the lived-experience [*przeżycie*] of value, that is, the lived-experience [*przeżycie*] that is intentionally directed to value as to its objective content. To posit the matter in this way is correct. If we want to directly grasp ethical lived-experience [*przeżycie*] as a certain experiential [*doświadczalną*] whole, then we grasp it precisely as a lived-experience [*przeżycie*] of value. Value is the element that shapes that lived-experience [*przeżycie*] from within, for moral good or evil is doubtless such a value.… We [in turn] phenomenologically observe the normative character of ethical values in the analysis of the act of conscience, which, as lived-experience [*przeżycie*], still belongs to the range of phenomenological experience [*doświadczenia*].[63]

This text is of fundamental importance for understanding the later development of Wojtyła's thought. Firstly, he asserts – well before *Love and Responsibility* – that ethical experience is a genuine form of human experience: internal, lived, and intentional, rather than derived merely from external observation or empirical generalization. Secondly, he explicitly distinguishes between phenomenological experience and psychological introspection, insisting that the former alone is capable of grasping the moral experience in its integrity. The ethical experience, as outlined in this account, is not merely defined by the description of physical acts; rather, it is structured from within by value and intentionally oriented towards the good or the evil as meaningful realities.

Wojtyła's position aligns with Scheler's on a pivotal issue: the ethical experience is to be understood as an experience of value. The moral life is not confined to behavior but rather encompasses intentional engagement with values. This engagement could involve the recognition,

[63] K. Wojtyła, "An Assessment of the Possibility for Building Christian Ethics Based on the Presuppositions of Max Scheler's System," in: 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. by A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press), 2023, 495-496. The Polish terms come from the latest Polish critical edition: Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maxa Schelera*, 173-175.

affirmation, or betrayal of values. Simultaneously, Wojtyła advances beyond Scheler's contributions by underscoring the normative essence of values as they are elucidated in the act of conscience. This concept is methodically embedded within the domain of phenomenological experience. Conscience itself becomes a lived experience through which the obligatory force of value is disclosed.

This early analysis, conducted within the framework of the history of philosophy's inquiry, foreshadows the subsequent discourse by Wojtyła, who will thereafter elaborate on these themes in a more existential and pastoral context. In the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility*, the author will discuss the manner in which priests encounter moral experience through contact with the consciences of others. However, this will not be a novel concept. Instead, he will be extending a well-established phenomenological insight that he himself previously conceived: access to moral truth is gained through encounter with lived experiences of value. In this sense, pastoral practice becomes a privileged locus of ethical knowledge, precisely because it offers sustained contact with how values are actually lived, affirmed, and contested in concrete human lives.

b. After *Love and Responsibility*: *Person and Act* and the Experience of Others

A few years after *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła proffered a systematic elaboration of his understanding of experience in *Person and Act* (1969). Whereas *Love and Responsibility* may be described as a work of "material phenomenology," focused on concrete moral contents such as love, sexuality, and responsibility, *Person and Act* develops what can be called a formal phenomenology of the person. In this passage, Wojtyła offers a thorough exposition on the structure of experience itself and on its role in the knowledge of the human being. It is therefore particularly illuminating for interpreting his earlier assertions concerning pastoral experience. In the "Introduction" to *Person and Act*, he puts forward a conception of experience that decisively exceeds the limits of purely individual or autobiographical immediacy, and which can be considered almost programmatic in nature:

> … other people outside me are also the object of experience [*doświadczenia*]. The experience [*doświadczenie*] of man consists of the experience [*doświadczenie*] of oneself and of all other people who remain for the subject in the position of the object of experience [*doświadczenia*], that is, in direct cognitive contact. Of course, no individual

> man's experience [*doświadczenie*] reaches all people, not even all his contemporaries; it is instead necessarily limited to a smaller or greater number of them. The quantitative aspect plays a certain role in this experience [*doświadczeniu*]. The greater number of people that enter the sphere of someone's experience [*doświadczenia*], the greater the experience [*doświadczenie*]. Interrupting the course of these reflections on experience [*doświadczeniu*], the course that is important not for its own sake but on account of the whole problem of the knowledge of man, we must at once say that various people communicate to one another the results of their experiences [*doświadczeń*] concerning man even without direct contact. These results already constitute a certain knowledge and contribute to the increase not of the experience [*doświadczenia*] but of the knowledge of man – either scientific knowledge of various scopes and directions or pre-scientific knowledge. However, experience [*doświadczenie*] always stands at the basis of this knowledge, and therefore the knowledge of man communicated reciprocally by people can in a sense coincide with everybody's own experiences [*doświadczeń*].… In light of what we said about the connection between experience [*doświadczeniem*] and understanding… we ought to state that knowledge [which grows out of experience [*doświadczenia*] is a means of multiplying and supplementing experiences [*doświadczeń*].[64]

This passage clarifies several pivotal elements that are imperative for understanding Wojtyła's mature position. Firstly, he explicitly states that human experience is not limited to self-experience: it necessarily includes the experience of others, insofar as they are encountered in direct cognitive contact. Experience is thus relational by structure. Secondly, Wojtyła introduces a quantitative dimension: no individual can experience all the experiences of others, yet the greater the number of persons who enter the horizon of one's experience, the broader and richer that experience becomes. Consequently, human experience evolves not only in scope but also in depth.

Thirdly, and this point is particularly significant, Wojtyła emphasizes the communicability of experience. Human beings pass on the results of their experiences to one another, and this

[64] K. 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. by A. Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 96-97. The Polish terms come from the Polish edition: K. Wojtyła, "Osoba i czyn," in: K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*, "Człowiek i moralność," Vol. 4, ed. by T. Styczeń, W. Chudy, J.W. Gałkowski, A. Rodziński, A. Szostek (Lublin: TN KUL, 2020), 52-53.

communication constitutes a form of knowledge in itself. While the knowledge does not replace experience itself, it is firmly rooted in experience and, in turn, expands and supplements individual experiences. In this sense, the experience of another person is never transmitted as detached or purely propositional information. What is communicated as knowledge is received by the subject within the horizon of their own experience,[65] while remaining inseparably marked by the experiential depth of the other.[66] In Wojtyła's terminology,[67] this means that lived experiences (*przeżycia*) communicated by others do not remain on the level of mere *Erlebnis* but are integrated by the subject into experience (*doświadczenie*) properly so called – that is, into a cognitively structured and reflective grasp of moral reality. The mediation of knowledge thus preserves an experiential structure: it is knowledge of experience and through experience, rather than knowledge opposed to it or abstracted from it.

Read alongside *Love and Responsibility*, this analysis provides a precise philosophical foundation for Wojtyła's concept of pastoral experience. By entering into cognitive and personal contact with a large number of individuals and receiving communicated experiences – often in situations of moral seriousness and interior truth – the priest finds himself within a field of experience that is broader, and thus deeper, than that which could be attained through personal biography alone. In this sense, pastoral experience is not an experience marked by lack or deficiency. On the contrary, it is an experience of excess:[68] an expanded experiential horizon made possible by encounter, communication and shared knowledge of the human person.

When Wojtyła affirms in the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility*, that pastoral experience may extend beyond the confines of strictly personal experience, this assertion is not made with the intention of compensating for a presumed absence. This affirmation should instead

[65] This fundamental thesis of Wojtyła is confirmed in the fourth sentence of *Person and Act*, which states: "Man never experiences anything outside of himself without in some way experiencing himself in this experience." Wojtyła, "Person and Act," 95.

[66] According to Wojtyła, knowledge is a modus of experience, because its communicability– and the subsequent "interference of experiences" between one's personal experience and the experience of another person who is "in the field of [one's] experience" – always takes place as a "'specific' stabilization of the object" resulting from "mental differentiations and classifications." Cf. *Ibid.*, 97-98.

[67] As well as those of Husserl – cf. Note 28.

[68] The term "excess" is employed here not in its Aristotelian sense but in the phenomenological sense introduced by Jean-Luc Marion. More specifically, it is understood in the broader sense recently proposed to designate those forms of the "theological turn in phenomenology" that extend beyond the French-speaking phenomenological tradition and which, in the author's judgment, include Wojtyła's philosophical project. Cf. C. Gschwandtner, "Turn to Excess: The Development of Phenomenology in Late Twentieth Century French Thought," in: *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. by D. Zahavi (New York: OUN, 2012), 445-466.

be regarded as the concise expression of a profound and internally coherent line of thought that runs through his major philosophical works. Two fundamental insights converge here. Firstly, in dialogue with Scheler, Wojtyła conceives moral experience as an intentional lived experience – an experience of value – rather than as a mere accumulation of sensory or psychological data. The notion of moral knowledge is predicated on the process through which values are encountered, recognized, and responded to within the context of lived experience. Secondly, as articulated in *Person and Act*, Wojtyła demonstrates that human experience is inherently relational: the human subject experiences not only themselves, but also other persons, and this experience is broadened through the communication of lived experiences, particularly in concrete interpersonal encounters.

Ultimately, the significance of the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility* cannot be grasped solely in terms of the historical objections to which they respond. Their deeper coherence becomes apparent only when read in light of the methodological assumptions that govern the work as a whole. For Wojtyła, moral truth is disclosed within experience, and human experience necessarily includes the experience of others (where "of others" fulfills the function of complement of object as well as complement of subject). It is for this reason that pastoral experience, even when described as "indirect," can legitimately be understood as a particularly significant and epistemically fertile context for gaining insight into the human person.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze two short textual units – the first paragraph of the 1960 "Introduction" to *Love and Responsibility* and its counterpart in the 1962 "Introduction" – as a hermeneutical key to Wojtyła's broader project. The fundamental question guiding the study was of a philosophical nature: namely, the capacity of experience to serve as a source of knowledge in the context of moral reflection. By situating these passages within a triple framework (historical, ecclesial, and philosophical), the analysis demonstrated that Wojtyła's opening move is far more than a contextual remark about clerical credibility. This methodological declaration concerns the scope of experience and the conditions of moral cognition.

Historically, the objection he cites – namely, that priests lack experience of marriage – was not merely a private sentiment, but rather a critique that was socially formed, shaped by the discursive constraints and moral ambiguities of communist Poland. From an ecclesiastical

perspective, the critique was further fuelled by the preconciliar association of priesthood with celibacy, as well as by the preeminence of manualist moral theology, a discipline that tended to conceptualize sexual ethics primarily through act-centred non personalistic casuistry. However, Wojtyła was able to respond to this objection on the basis of three factors. Firstly, he belonged to a particular scholarly and pastoral milieu. Secondly, he advanced a perspicacious critique of naturalistic reductionism. Thirdly, our author matured his ethical vision through exceptional proximity to concrete human lives.

The most significant elucidation, however, relates to the philosophical plane. In addressing the sociological critique, Wojtyła employs philosophical arguments, asserting that experience is broader than sensory immediacy or autobiographical participation. Phenomenology facilitates comprehension of this expansion by conceptualizing "appearing" as a genuine access to being and by acknowledging the irreducibility of value, conscience, and interpersonal meaning to mere "data." When analyzed through a canon perspective, Wojtyła's "Introductions" demonstrate continuity with his earlier engagement with Scheler, wherein moral experience is conceived as an intentional experience of value, and with *Person and Act*, where the human experience encompasses the experience of others and is expanded through communicated experience and shared understanding. When considered from this perspective, the "indirect" nature of pastoral experience does not represent a deficiency that should be overlooked, but rather a distinct form of experiential access – often more extensive in scope due to its formation at the nexus of numerous lives, intricate moral dramas, and acts of conscience that are revealed through a sense of trust.

The main contribution of this study was to demonstrate that the opening paragraphs of the "Introductions" to *Love and Responsibility* were not merely apologetic or autobiographical remarks but a concise philosophical manifesto. Faced with a sociological objection concerning the alleged limitations of priestly experience, Wojtyła did not respond sociologically but redefined the very concept of experience. By extending experience beyond autobiographical immediacy toward phenomenological givenness, he established the epistemological foundations upon which his entire personalist ethics of love and sexuality would subsequently be built. In doing so, he formulated a methodological declaration that anticipated both his mature philosophical anthropology and the later account of experience in *Person and Act*. The decisive question, then, was not whether a priest can experience marriage, but how the phenomenological notion of experience opened access to

forms of human experience disclosed through pastoral encounter, thereby establishing pastoral experience itself as a legitimate source of knowledge.

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