

**Review of *Philosophical Works Volume 2: Contemporary Ethical Writing*,
by Archbishop Karol Wojtyła**

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The recently published *Philosophical Works Volume 2: Contemporary Ethical Writing* (“*Philosophical Works*”), by Karol Wojtyła, is a continuation of the previous volume. The work is a Polish text, although this review is written in the English language. The book encourages the reader to delve deeper into Wojtyła’s writings, beyond Wojtyła’s more well-known books, such as *Person and Act*, *Theology of the Body*, and *Love and Responsibility*. *Philosophical Works* introduces the reader to Wojtyła the ethicist—beyond merely his theological and philosophical interests. Within the tome’s pages, Wojtyła’s multi-disciplinary approach to philosophy—which enabled him to see “the bigger picture” that is offered by philosophy, past Aristotle and Socrates—is in full view. *Philosophical Works Volume 2 Contemporary Ethical Writing* provides a window into the multi-disciplinary writing of Karol Wojtyła, allowing his writing as a philosopher and ethicist to come to light, and subsequently shining a light on this contemporary thinker’s extensive work, beyond what he is typically known for.

At 698 pages, *Philosophical Works* is hardly a concise text. It features an introduction by Fr. Jarosław Mereck, who efficiently introduces Wojtyła’s work to the reader. This introduction involves walking the reader through Wojtyła’s philosophical system and breaking down his philosophical thought process for them. The text itself is 520 pages. Each chapter is followed by a series of notes from the editor related to the preceding chapter, a description of the sources used in the chapter, and information regarding variations in the text. At the end of the work, a series of biographical notes is provided on the mentioned philosophers and other connected people. *Philosophical Works* will become an especially important part of any philosopher’s library as it draws on archived materials. Much of the book’s content has evolved from material that was originally handwritten by the late pontiff. This point is key to understanding the text, as it shows

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the manuscript was an active part of Wojtyła's thinking—it was being written as it emerged from his mind. A glossary defining foreign words is provided, which provides great assistance to the reader. The table of contents is featured somewhat unintuitively at the end of the text. Although helpful, it is a strange place to find such a guiding part of the book. While readers from all backgrounds would benefit from reading this book, it will most likely resonate with those who have a background in philosophy, as this book makes use of philosophical terminology that could be unfamiliar to the uninitiated reader.

If *Person and Act* can be considered Wojtyła's masterpiece, then the content contained in *Philosophical Works* is the groundwork that had to be laid for the final piece to rest on. Wojtyła was analytical. His mind saw not only how the pieces of a puzzle fit together, but also the best order to assemble the pieces in to facilitate the end stage. What is contained within this work, therefore, should not be regarded from the same perspective as the masterpiece, *Person and Act*. Rather, it is a series of stepping stones propelling the reader in that direction. Like an artist, Wojtyła colored his writing with the varying hues of other philosophers. Nonetheless, his writing is not swayed one way or another by a particular philosopher's thought. True to his style, Wojtyła maintains his central path. He interacts with other thinkers; he gazes at the overview of their philosophical offerings on the human experience, yet he does not deem any one writer as having "the answer." Rather, his writing serves to compel the reader to make their own conclusions, as philosophers and thinkers. This makes the volume unique and worthy of reading, as it encourages intellectual growth and maturation.

It is interesting here is to note that, in this book, Wojtyła builds on the concepts used by St. Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler. Yet, as may also be noted in his later writings, he implements his own original thinking in his work. One can see how Aquinas and Scheler provided scaffolding for Wojtyła's efforts. In the beginning, he built around them; later, they would become the foundation on which he built his school of philosophical thought. This background makes his arguments of personhood more solid as they have a firm and steady underpinning to rest on. These discussions on personhood may be appreciated by Wojtyła's readers as—with the particular disregard for human life that can be noticed in the contemporary age—it is invaluable to have one's intellectual discourse reinforced by the thoughts of a writer so well versed and dedicated to the person's dignity.

If Wojtyła’s masterpiece can be considered *Person and Act*, and Wojtyła himself can be considered a Personalist, then it is important to place both of these points in context. Wojtyła’s work came from somewhere. It was not an isolated occurrence that just appeared. His particular ethical structure emerged from his concern for the person. The reality of this person became the focus of his work. To stay connected with this focus, Wojtyła had to truly engage in his study. Therefore, it remains a point of interest that *Philosophical Works* is not an isolated supposition on the Personalist topic, but rather a dialogue with philosophers who had already written on the person and discussed their reality. And through this dialogue between Wojtyła and his chosen philosophers, the reader is also invited to engage in their own dialogue with the historical line of philosophers—as well as with Wojtyła himself. In this way, they are able to form their own ideas. As a professor, Wojtyła does not force his views on his students. Rather, he presents his thesis and logical development of ideas to the reader and allows them to develop their own conclusions.

Preceding *Person and Act*, *Philosophical Works* gives the reader the tools they will need to adequately study Wojtyła’s further writings. Yet, taken on its own, this new book also acquaints the reader with St. Thomas Aquinas and his teachings on the person. Wojtyła then takes the reader “the rest of the way” as he enriches the foundations provided by classical metaphysics and allows readers to grow as philosophers as the text prepares them for modern problems relating to the person.

In contemporary times, students of all ages have experienced a teacher telling them what to think and how to come to this conclusion. Modern books often do the same—as their narration directs the reader to arrive at a pre-conceived conclusion. Amidst this scripted reality, Archbishop Karol Wojtyła’s book *Philosophical Works Volume 2: Contemporary Ethical Writing* is an intellectual treasure trove that invites the reader to *discover* its conclusions. It is a significant contribution to Wojtylian scholarship as it actively demonstrates to the reader how Wojtyła worked and how his thoughts were formed and took shape. Over the course of this discovery, the reader will encounter the person introduced to them by the personalist thinker, Archbishop Karol Wojtyła.