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## Moral theology in search of a method: metaphysics or phenomenology?

Our deliberations on the subject indicated in the title of this article, which will take place on the basis of an analysis of an early work of Karol Wojtyła, his 1953 habilitation dissertation entitled *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing Christian Ethics Premised on Max Scheler's System*, will begin with some general and introductory remarks<sup>1</sup>. They can be encapsulated in three theses. *Primo*, Revelation (theology) needs philosophy. *Secundo*, Revelation (theology) is always in search of an appropriate philosophy. *Tertio*, Revelation contains criteria for evaluating the philosophy on which it is based. Let us briefly try to substantiate these three theses.

As regards the first thesis, it may be helpful to reflect on the definition of faith that we find in St. Augustine: *cogitare cum assensione*<sup>2</sup>. Faith is “thinking with assent”, because it is an activity of the human reason and an invitation for the human rational subject to dialogue with God. This dialogical character of faith is highlighted by the word *assensio*, i.e., assent, adherence, which describes the activity of the will and human freedom. Faith, then, is not just reasoning, an activity of reason alone (*cogitare*), but an activity engaged in by the entire human being in which the human

<sup>1</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maksa Schelera*, Lublin 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione Sanctorum* II, 5, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia*, t. 10/1, Parisiis 1865, p. 964 (Patrologia Latina. Cursus Completus, 44); cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 2, 1, <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/>.

decision to enter into an interpersonal relationship with God is important<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, supernatural grace — the light of faith (*lumen fidei*), as traditional theology puts it — is necessary for Christian faith to arise, but this additional light, according to the basic paradigm describing the relationship between nature and grace: grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it (*gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*)<sup>4</sup>, means building on the foundation of the natural activity of reason. Therefore, theology is not concerned with proving the principle of non-contradiction, the existence of an immortal soul or the real existence of the world. Man's theological reflection is formed on the basis of the natural convictions of his reason and the contents of his thinking about God, himself and all reality (*cogitare*)<sup>5</sup>.

The history of theology shows how theology has constantly searched among various philosophical concepts for one onto which a Christian interpretation can be superimposed, that "addition" of grace referred to in the previous paragraph. The various traditions and narratives of the Old Testament drew on the ancient image of the world, believed to be true at the time, and on various myths and legends, reinterpreting them to convey the mystery of the God who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By way of illustration, the Greek writings of the Old Testament (Book of Wisdom, Book of Proverbs) attempt a reconciliation between the Jewish idea of law — the Torah as God's greatest gift — and the idea of wisdom, so important in the Greek world<sup>6</sup>. St. John the Evangelist uses the Stoic idea

3 For more on this subject see J. Kupczak, *O egzystencjalnym i poznawczym ujęciu wiary w teologii św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, in: *W prostocie prawdy, w pokorze miłości. Studia i materiały dedykowane ks. prof. Janowi Walowi*, Kraków 2008, p. 333–342.

4 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 1, 8 ad 2.

5 As John Paul II wrote almost half a century later in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*: "Faith is in a sense an «exercise of thought»; and human reason is neither annulled nor debased in assenting to the contents of faith, which are in any case attained by way of free and informed choice" (n. 43).

6 This is what John Paul II wrote about the Wisdom Books in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*: "What is striking about these biblical texts, if they are read without prejudice, is that they embody not only the faith of Israel, but also the treasury of cultures and civilizations which have long vanished. As if by special design, the voices of Egypt and Mesopotamia sound again and certain features common to the cultures of the ancient Near East come to life in these pages which are so singularly rich in deep intuition" (n. 16).

of the Divine Logos in the prologue to his Gospel; Ambrose uses the Greek model of the cardinal virtues to construct Christian ethics; and Augustine draws on neo-Platonism. Thomas Aquinas founds theology on Aristotelianism, and the transcendental Thomism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—besides relying on the work of Aquinas—attempts to use the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant (and, in part, of Martin Heidegger) to articulate the mysteries of faith<sup>7</sup>.

If we think of the various examples of the use of philosophy as a mental foundation for the interpretation of Revelation (some of which we have pointed out above), in each of these cases Revelation contains internal criteria for assessing whether a given philosophy can serve to convey the contents of faith. As a classic example, we can point to the way in which Thomas Aquinas modified, or “purified” Aristotle’s philosophy. Aquinas knew that particularly three elements of the Stagirite’s theodicy were irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of faith: the divinity of stars, multiple prime movers, and the eternity of the world and motion<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, each of these three elements gets either rejected by Thomas (this is the case with the divinity of stars and the multiple prime movers), or reinterpreted (as for the eternity of the world, Thomas argues that neither the eternity nor the beginning of the world can be proved philosophically; it is possible to accept such a thesis by faith alone)<sup>9</sup>.

In light of the three introductory remarks above, the history of theology thus appears as a history of the assimilation of particular elements of certain philosophical theories (of greater or lesser importance) and their integration into a system of theological thinking. The purpose of such

7 Ultimately, this relationship of philosophy and theology is theologically founded on the relationship between creation and salvation. And this is what John Paul II writes about this in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*: This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history” (n. 34).

8 Cf. T. J. White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity. A Study of Thomistic Natural Theology*, Ave Maria 2016, p. 122–126.

9 Cf. T. J. White, *Wisdom In The Face Of Modernity*, p. 76.

assimilation and integration is to speak of God in the context of the truth about all reality, about all that exists. The truth emerges as a key criterion for evaluating every philosophical claim to see if it is useful for theology. Importantly, it is noteworthy that the truth of philosophical statements also becomes a criterion for evaluating theological statements<sup>10</sup>.

## **Karol Wojtyła in search of a philosophy appropriate for Christian ethics**

The reason for Wojtyła's interest in Max Scheler's phenomenology was to see if Scheler's philosophical anthropology and ethics might be used for contemporary interpretation of the New Testament theological ethics. Therefore, in his habilitation dissertation, Wojtyła intends to do something very similar to what Aquinas did with Aristotle. The idea is to show in which elements the philosophy studied can serve to interpret and convey the mysteries of faith to contemporary man, and which elements must be rejected, purified, or modified.

The task of researching the thought of Max Scheler was suggested to Karol Wojtyła by his Cracow-based lecturer in dogmatic theology, Fr. Ignacy Różycki<sup>11</sup>. The context of this important suggestion, which so significantly influenced the future Pope's life, was that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Scheler was seen by many Catholic intellectuals as a potential ally in the confrontation with the frequently anti-Catholic and anti-Christian intellectual climate of the age. As a 14-year-old boy, fascinated above all by the Catholic liturgy, Scheler converted to Christianity from Judaism and was baptised in the Catholic Church. Later on, in his mature period, he wrote positively about the importance of religion, the Church and priesthood, as well as monastic life and virtue. Scheler's phenomenology received

<sup>10</sup> The deliberation on the hermeneutic circle indicated here in the relationship between philosophy and theology must be suspended at this point, as it would take us off at a tangent and away from the original subject of this text. Undoubtedly, John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio* serves as a valuable source for further reflection on this subject.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of his Thought and Action*, New York 1981, p. 115.

a friendly welcome in Catholic intellectual circles primarily because of his opposition to Kantianism. This is how Harvard University historian George Huntston Williams describes that: “All Catholic neo-Thomists would have a fundamental disposition to oppose Kant and his reasoned system that denied the possibility of the direct access of the mind to the ontic reality in Aristotelian-Thomist thought and, above all, undermined the objective and therefore binding character of revealed moral instruction. Scheler could, therefore, in the realm of ethics, no less than in epistemology, anthropology, and metaphysics, be regarded as a prestigious ally [...] in reasserting, by virtue of a new methodological analysis, the moral values of eternal philosophy”<sup>12</sup>.

The present text does not aim to detail the analysis performed by Wojtyła in his habilitation dissertation; the author has done so elsewhere<sup>13</sup>. For the purposes of this text, it is important to present Wojtyła’s final conclusions and the way they were substantiated. The concluding thesis of Wojtyła’s reflections in his habilitation dissertation is negative: Max Scheler’s philosophy cannot be used to interpret the theological ethics of the New Testament. This negative judgement flows from Wojtyła’s conviction of the fundamental incompatibility of the assumptions behind Scheler’s philosophy with the Christian worldview, or to put it more simply: from the fundamental errors in the Schelerian anthropology and ethics. Wojtyła points to four such fundamental errors. *Primo*, because of the phenomenological nature of his analysis, Scheler describes man not as a substance or the subject of his actions, but solely as a unity of feelings and various experiences. Hence, Scheler is unable to explain how human actions are subjectified in the person, and how ethical values of acts and of the subject himself depend on human efficient agency<sup>14</sup>. *Secundo*, Scheler’s idea

12 G.H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, p. 124.

13 Cf. J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty. The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*, Washington DC 2000, p. 10–24.

14 “Scheler reduces the essence of a person’s life to feelings, and the ethical life to the affective experience of values while at the same time completely excluding the person’s efficient agency” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości*, p. 81). Three years later, in the *Lublin Lectures*, Wojtyła reiterated this criticism of the Schelerian anthropology: “According to Scheler, phenomenological

to oppose Immanuel Kant's formalism in his ethics of material values was the reason why the German phenomenologist decided to radically exclude the concept of duty from his ethics. This resulted in a deformation of the ethical experience of the person, as well as in a false approach to the human conscience<sup>15</sup>. In realist ethics, the experience of ethical duty is an important part of the subjective encounter with a moral value, although not, of course, in the way Immanuel Kant presented it. *Tertio*, Scheler's negative assessment of the moral imperative cannot be reconciled with the positive approach to the commandment and the law in biblical ethics<sup>16</sup>. *Quarto*, emotional anthropology leads Scheler to present love primarily as a feeling, which is incompatible with the New Testament ethics, where *agape* is objective in nature: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15)<sup>17</sup>.

## On the usefulness of the phenomenological method for ethical deliberations

In the concluding remarks of his habilitation dissertation, after passing a negative judgement on the usefulness of the Schelerian ethics for the interpretation of Christian ethics, Wojtyła nevertheless concludes that Scheler's phenomenological method may be very useful for Christian ethics. Ethical facts, after all, form the content of the subject's inner experience; the ethicist, therefore, needs an appropriate method to describe and analyse them. According to Wojtyła, psychology cannot be the source of

principles do not allow us to analyse the person as an efficient cause, but only as a unity of acts. Therefore, the person does not realise anything, but only feels the values that flow through him in different directions [...] Neither acts nor values have their origin in the person as an efficient cause. At this point, Scheler's phenomenology loses all the dynamism of the human person, who for him is only a passive subject of feelings, and not an active cause of his own actions" (K. Wojtyła, *Wykłady lubelskie*, Lublin 1986, p. 32–33). Scheler's emotionalist anthropology means that he can be considered a forerunner of post-modern thought, in line with how this current of thought is described by Alasdair MacIntyre in his now classic work: *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, transl. A. Chmielewski, Warszawa 1996.

15 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości*, p. 75–86.

16 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości*, p. 86–90.

17 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości*, p. 91–97.

such a method because *ex principio* it is not interested in the normative and axiological dimension of the patient's ethical lived experience. George Williams accurately points out the reasons why it was in Scheler's phenomenological method that Wojtyła saw a useful tool for his own ethical and anthropological analyses: "Scheler himself, against the psychologies of his day, asserted that the proper means for experimental research into ethically lived experiences is not introspection and the psychiatrist's analysis of unconscious, hereditary, environmental, or idiosyncratic psychic drives and rationalizations, but rather the phenomenological approach without presuppositions, which, alone, of the disciplines, perhaps, takes up the lived experience of a person in its wholeness and the wholeness of the person himself"<sup>18</sup>.

Wojtyła agrees with Scheler that an ethical fact consists in experiencing the value, which is directed intentionally towards the value. Therefore, the phenomenological method can be used to analyse a Christian's lived experience, the essence of which lies in accepting in faith the ethical principles of the Christian Revelation. Nevertheless, according to Wojtyła, the usefulness of the phenomenological method thus understood is limited. It can describe the human experience of lived values, but it cannot define an objective principle by which a human act is morally good or bad. For, in order to define this principle, ethical values must be placed in a non-experiential and non-phenomenal order of objective goods, which is only possible in a metaphysical analysis. As Williams rightly concludes: "A Catholic ethicist may be phenomenological in his methodology but not a phenomenologist, for a consistent or exclusive phenomenology would impose the postulate that ethical value reveals itself only in the lived experience of a person when he acts in the moral realm [...] But Catholic ethicists may be encouraged to go further with the method than Scheler himself"<sup>19</sup>. It was about this usefulness, but also about the limitations of the phenomenological

18 G. H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, p. 136.

19 G. H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, p. 138.

method that John Paul II would write 40 years later, in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*: “from phenomenon to foundation”<sup>20</sup>.

## Wojtyła’s further methodological and metaphysical findings in the process of constructing an adequate description of the ethically acting subject

Karol Wojtyła would continue his search for an adequate description of the acting subject in his lectures, which he would undertake at the Catholic University of Lublin from 1953 onwards, and of which his book is a record: *Lublin Lectures*<sup>21</sup>. It is in these lectures that Wojtyła continues the line of thought he began in his habilitation dissertation: confronting the insight into meta-ethical problems, which comes from phenomenology, and the ultimate explanation that can only be of a metaphysical nature. Hence, in the title of each of the four monographic Lublin Lectures, one of the two terms is taken from classical metaphysics: act, good, *eudaimonia*, love; and the other from the philosophy of consciousness *sensu largo*: lived experience, value, norm, responsibility: “The act and the ethical lived experience”, “The good and the value”, and “The problem of norm and happiness”, “Love

20 John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*, n. 83. Canadian philosopher Kenneth Schmitz aptly described the reasons for Wojtyła’s turn to metaphysics: “[...] Wojtyła turns to metaphysics, not out of piety toward to a venerable tradition, but in order to retrieve the reality of act and in order to give to act the primary role within the entirety of the ethical life as it is lived and experienced. I venture to say that Wojtyła is not a metaphysician by calling, and that he is challenged immediately by the practical issues of life. Still, he too hungers after the truth of the way things are, and in order to give a more adequate account of the ethical life, this «ethicist of act» calls upon the metaphysics of being and its anthropology to explain how the human person emerges from being a passive subject of experiences to become a responsible agent of moral actions” (K. L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama. The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1993, p. 44–45). Elsewhere in Schmitz’s excellent study we read: “Metaphysics, then, is not simply complementary to ethical analysis; neither is it merely supportive of that analysis. Metaphysics is necessary and intrinsic to ethical analysis, if we are to give a thorough account of what ethical experience and ethical life are” (K. L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, p. 56–57).

21 With much validity, Professor Kenneth L. Schmitz pointed out in the 1990s that Wojtyła’s early writings: his habilitation dissertation and the Lublin Lectures, are unduly underestimated by Wojtyła scholars (cf. K. L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, p. 41).



and responsibility”<sup>22</sup>. The place where Wojtyła makes a mature methodological synthesis of phenomenological description and metaphysical explanation is precisely his most famous philosophical book: *Love and Responsibility* — a transcript of his final monographic lecture in the Lublin Lectures series.

There is not enough room here to analyse in more depth the interpenetration of phenomenology and metaphysics in Wojtyła’s thought; we can only indicate some places where such interpenetration and complementarity takes place. The first Lublin Lecture serves as a particularly interesting example of this methodological synthesis: “The act and the ethical lived experience”; in it, Wojtyła adds, as it were, some final conclusions to his habilitation dissertation, and continues the analysis begun there. At the beginning of this lecture, Wojtyła returns to the question already addressed in his habilitation dissertation — the one of the most fundamental relevance to ethics: what is the essence of moral values? In order to find an answer to this question, Wojtyła begins with a historical analysis: he takes a closer look at the ethical systems of two thinkers essential for understanding the modern era, Immanuel Kant (1723–1804) and Max Scheler (1874–1928). The analysis of the thought of these two ethicists leads to the thesis that neither of them has explained how a person becomes morally good or bad through his actions. Moreover, Wojtyła shows that the source of this shortcoming is an even more fundamental error: the failure to show what human freedom — the agency of the subject — consists in. The main problem — from the point of view of the questions posed by the Cracow-based thinker — is therefore the absence of an adequate approach to the human will in the philosophers under investigation. In Kant, in a manner analogous to ancient Greek ethical intellectualism, the will seems to be merely a part of the deliberating reason; in Scheler, who in opposition to Kant emphasises the role of emotion in human life, the will seems to be some form of emotional response to values<sup>23</sup>.

22 This parallel thinking with the categories of metaphysics and phenomenology was to be very evident in K. Wojtyła’s philosophical *opus magnum* — the 1969 book entitled *Person and Act*.

23 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Wykłady lubelskie*, p. 57–57.

In order to find a more adequate description of free will, Wojtyła turns to the metaphysical anthropology of Thomas Aquinas. In the Thomistic view of the will as rational appetite (*appetitus rationalis*), which by nature turns towards everything that reason recognises as good, Wojtyła sees the key to explaining the ethical consequences of the person's agency. In human decisions, the will thus appears as a rational power which, on the one hand, possesses its own independence, which constitutes human freedom (*motio quoad exercitum*), and, on the other hand, acts properly and in accordance with its nature when it cooperates with reason (*motio quoad specificationem*). In such a description, the will shows its true character as a rational power (*appetitus rationalis*)<sup>24</sup>. In the *Lublin Lectures* we read: "The will, by performing its act in accordance with the rational reason of the good, thereby itself becomes good in the ethical sense. If, on the other hand, it performs an act contrary to the rational reason of the good, it thereby becomes evil in the ethical sense. This becoming of the will is the very core of ethical human acts. The content of becoming is ethical value itself, which, in view of the above presuppositions, is nothing other than the particular realisation of that *rationalitas naturae* by which the individual substantial being is a person. Then, in turn, it is not difficult to grasp that the person himself too, through this act of will, becomes good or bad in an ethical sense"<sup>25</sup>.

The essence of man's becoming morally good or bad is what happens in the human will (which desires the good) in its relation to reason (which seeks the truth). Ethical values concern the ontological and not just experiential dimension of the human will. The basic tool to explain this ontological becoming of man through the becoming of the will is, according to Wojtyła, the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of potency and act. This is what, fifteen years later, he wrote on the subject in his book *Person and Act*: "So far we do not know another conception or language that would render the dynamic essence of change and all changes taking place in any being, except for this one conception and this one language with which we were

24 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Wykłady lubelskie*, p. 67–72.

25 K. Wojtyła, *Wykłady lubelskie*, p. 69–70.

endowed by the philosophy of *potentia* — *actus*. Every dynamism taking place in any being can be adequately grasped on the basis of this conception and with the help of this language. We must use these when we grasp the dynamism proper to man”<sup>26</sup>.

Before moving on to the concluding remarks, let us point out one more metaphysical finding of Wojtyła’s that allowed him to complement the phenomenological insight with an understanding that refers to the most fundamental principles. This finding comes from the above-mentioned fourth “Lublin Lecture”, which was delivered in the academic year 1957–1958, and then formed the basis of Wojtyła’s most widely known book of the pre-pontifical period: *Love and Responsibility*. The central part of the book is a comprehensive — metaphysical, psychological and ethical — analysis of love. However, it is the metaphysics of love — based on the classical Platonic distinction between the four types of love: attraction, desire, goodwill, and friendship — that is the key to understanding the essence of human love<sup>27</sup>.

The theme of love indubitably links Wojtyła’s lecture *Love and Responsibility* with his habilitation dissertation, since love is one of the important themes in Max Scheler’s philosophy; it was Scheler’s focus on the meaning of love that inspired many Christian and Catholic thinkers to take an interest in the Schelerian phenomenology. Nevertheless, Wojtyła critiques Scheler’s understanding of love because of its emotivist character<sup>28</sup>. For Scheler, love is merely a feeling to which the subject should submit; given such an understanding of love, it is difficult to understand, say, the following words

26 K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, transl. G. Ignatik, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2021, p. 166. A few pages further on, with regard to the philosophical justification of the ethical becoming of the person Wojtyła writes as follows: “At this point, phenomenology seems to enter most boldly into metaphysics and to most need metaphysics, for the phenomena themselves adequately make a thing manifest but are not adequately explained” (K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, p. 172).

27 K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, transl. H. T. Willetts, San Francisco 1981, p. 73–95. A more detailed analysis of each of the four forms of love can be found in: R. Buttiglione, *Mysł Karola Wojtyły*, transl. J. Merecki, Lublin 1996, p. 151–160; J. Kupczak, *W stronę wolności. Szkice o antropologii Karola Wojtyły*, Kraków 1999, p. 79–88; J. Woroniecki OP, *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*, t. 2/1, Lublin 1995, p. 196–206.

28 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości*, p. 91–98.

of Christ: “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me” (John 14:21).

In the lecture *Love and Responsibility* Wojtyła makes a necessary metaphysical correction to the understanding of love in Scheler’s phenomenology. The correction consists in retaining the phenomenological description of human lived experience and experience, but at the same time supplementing it with a metaphysical explanation. Wojtyła emphasises that in order to understand human love (both natural and supernatural), also from the point of view of its personal uniqueness, it needs to be set within the most fundamental principles of that which exists. Like any other being, man seeks to preserve his own existence, which is the object of the love of attraction (*amor complacentiae*). Like any other being, man behaves according to his nature and seeks his good, which is the object of the love of desire (*amor concupiscentiae*). In the case of persons: human beings, angels and God, this search for the good has a peculiar character — it turns out that the good we seek is the other person — concern for him or her is the content of *benevolent love* (*amor benevolentiae*), and striving for unity with him or her is the object of the love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*) and betrothed love, with which Wojtyła completes the classical metaphysical fourfold division of love. Through betrothed love, one becomes a gift for the other person. The value of this metaphysical approach to love lies in seeing that human love of ecstasy, sacrifice and self-sacrifice is typically a personal expression of the search for oneself, the search for the fulfilment of who the person is — a human, angelic and the Divine one<sup>29</sup>.

### “From phenomenon to foundation”. Final remarks

A careful reading of the subsequent works of Karol Wojtyła/Jan Paul II leads to a surprising conclusion. The reader will note that the subsequent development of this thought is not so much a retreat from what has been

29 The realism of the metaphysical approach to love shows its importance in the discussion of the subject of disinterested love (cf. J. Pieper, *On love*, transl. R. and C. Winston, in: J. Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, San Francisco 2012, p. 207–281.

said before, but rather an elaboration and supplementation of it. The evidence of the veracity of this hermeneutical method in the reading of Wojtyła is provided by comparing the above analyses with the content of one of the most important documents of John Paul II's pontificate, the 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio*.

John Paul II notes that “one of the most significant aspects of our current situation [...] is the «crisis of meaning»”<sup>30</sup>. In view of the aspectuality and fragmentation of human knowledge, the wisdom question about the meaning of human life and reality as a whole seems too ambitious and impossible to be tackled. At the same time, in the face of this scepticism of the contemporary times, philosophy cannot give up the question of meaning because — as the Second Vatican Council emphasises — that is the nature of human reason: “For his intelligence is not confined to observable data alone (*intellegentia enim non ad sola phaenomena coarctatur*), but can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partly obscured and weakened”<sup>31</sup>.

The need for a wisdom philosophy that inquires about meaning, points to the need for a metaphysical philosophy: “the need for a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. [...] metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry. Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them [...] We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from phenomenon to foundation, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality thinking must

30 John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*, n. 81.

31 Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 15.

penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation. [...] If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behaviour now widespread in our society”<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*, n. 83.

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## Abstract

### *Moral theology in search of a method: metaphysics or phenomenology?*

The link between faith and reason, theology and philosophy is neither external nor accidental; the word *logos* in the name of theology rather indicates the internal connection between the two kinds of cognition. Karol Wojtyła — John Paul II is one of the few theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who was proficient in the use of two philosophical languages and methods: the metaphysical and the phenomenological one. The article shows how, in his early work — the 1953 habilitation dissertation, Wojtyła reflects on the usefulness of metaphysics and phenomenology for the ethical analysis of the acting subject — crucial for both philosophical ethics and moral theology.

**Keywords:** philosophical ethics, phenomenology, metaphysics, reason, moral theology, faith

## Abstrakt

### *Teologia moralna w poszukiwaniu metody: metafizyka czy fenomenologia?*

Związek pomiędzy wiarą a rozumem, teologią a filozofią nie ma charakteru zewnętrzny i akcydentalny; słowo „logos” w nazwie teologii wskazuje raczej na wewnętrzny związek tych dwóch rodzajów poznania. Karol Wojtyła — Jan Paweł II jest jednym z nielicznych teologów dwudziestego wieku, który w sposób biegły potrafił posługiwać się dwoma filozoficznymi językami i metodami: metafizyczną i fenomenologiczną. Artykuł pokazuje, jak w swoim wczesnym dziele, rozprawie habilitacyjnej z 1953 roku, Wojtyła dokonuje refleksji na temat przydatności metafizyki i fenomenologii do etycznej analizy działającego podmiotu — kluczowej zarówno dla etyki filozoficznej, jak też dla teologii moralnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** etyka filozoficzna, fenomenologia, metafizyka, rozum, teologia moralna, wiara