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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this special edition of selected papers from the Society for Thomistic Personalism.¹ I formed this society, in 2008, to honor Wojtyła’s insight that Aquinas’s thought constituted “Thomistic personalism,” a term that he coined in a 1961 paper urging the use of Thomism to understand the person.²

In that paper entitled “Thomistic Personalism,” Wojtyła identifies the key personalist elements of Aquinas’s thought and argues that they are grounded both in Trinitarian theology and in the perfection of the human being. The latter, explains Wojtyła, enables Aquinas to argue for a personal God on grounds other than Trinitarian.³ Wojtyła also argues that the hylomorphic view of the soul as the substantial form of the body “is of basic importance for understanding the whole uniqueness of the human person, as well as for explaining the structure of the

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¹ <http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/rmllemmons/STP-home.htm>

² Karol Wojtyła, “Personalizm tomistyczny,” *Znak* 13 (1961): 664–675. Republished as “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM, *Catholic Thought from Lublin*, vol. IV, ed. Andrew N. Woznicki (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 165: “St. Thomas’s overall philosophy and theology allows us to speak of Thomistic personalism. We find in his system not just a point of departure, but also a whole series of additional constitutive elements that allow us to examine the problem of personalism in the categories of St. Thomas’s philosophy and theology.”

³ *Ibid.*, 167.

human person.”⁴ Hylomorphism thus shapes “the human personality.”⁵ It also corrects the faulty understanding of the person that arises from Cartesian thought and reduces the person to consciousness and lived experience.⁶ This favorable interpretation of Thomistic anthropology is then tempered by the criticism of incompleteness: Aquinas should have gone on to consider lived experience.⁷

The rest of Wojtyła’s 1961 paper consists of various ways in which he draws out and develops the personalism of Aquinas thought. In the realm of philosophical anthropology and psychology, Wojtyła acknowledges the profundity of Aquinas’s analysis of reason before emphasizing the creativity of human thought and its importance, especially in shaping personalities.⁸ Likewise, in his analysis of the will, he relies on Aquinas to argue that freedom is for the sake of morality and a higher spiritual law, while furthering Aquinas’s personalism by emphasizing “that which is most characteristic of a person, that in which a person (at least in the natural order) is most fully and properly realized, is morality.”⁹ This keen insight is yet to be fully appreciated. Moreover, Wojtyła’s analysis of love is thoroughly Thomistic with an emphasis on spiritual love and subordinating “sensory energies and desires . . . to a basic understanding of the true worth of the object of our love.”¹⁰ With these few words, Wojtyła identifies a core theme in his extended treatment of romantic love in *Love and Responsibility*.¹¹ In his 1961 paper,

⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 169–170.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 170–171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981; originally published in 1960). For an in-depth exegesis of Aquinas’s philosophy of love coupled with an argument that the love of God and

Wojtyła adds that this emphasis on love and relationships in the realm of religion is especially profound in Aquinas's thought, albeit without also mentioning Aquinas's treatment of friendship with God through Christian charity.¹²

When the realms of social and political philosophy are considered in "Thomistic personalism," Wojtyła argues that morality is constitutive to all forms of society, albeit without also citing Aquinas's work on the organic common good or his dictum that human law is just when based on the natural moral law.¹³ Rather Wojtyła argues that since the common good contributes to the welfare of individuals and vice versa, both individualism and totalitarianism err in sacrificing either the community to the individual or the individual to the community.¹⁴ In addition, Wojtyła emphasizes that human rights are protective of the human person, especially the right to the "freedom of conscience." In *Centesimus Annus* §29.1, he argues that recognizing the rights of conscience constitute "the primary foundation of every authentically free political order." Wojtyła's emphasis on the rights of conscience corrects a significant error made by Aquinas in the application

neighbor are foundational precepts of his natural law, see my *Ultimate Normative Foundation: The Cases for Aquinas's Personalist Natural Law* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011; paperback 2017). For an overview, see my "Aquinas as Teacher of Humanity: Lessons of Truth and Love," in *Thomas Aquinas: Teacher of Humanity*, ed. John P. Hittinger, Daniel C. Wagner (Cambridge Scholars Publications, 2015), 360–379.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II, 23–33, 44.

¹³ *S.Th.* I–II, 21, 3; I–II, 28, 1; I–I, 90, 2; I–II, 94, 3; I–II, 95, 2; II–II, 58, 9.

¹⁴ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," 174. Also see *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (New York, NY: Springer, 1979), 282; "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community*, 250: "The common good's superior character and the greater fullness of value it represents derive ultimately from the fact that the good of each of the subjects of a community that calls itself a *we* is more fully expressed and more fully actualized in the common good." For further explication see my argument from ontological poverty in *Ultimate Normative Foundations*, 146–153.

of his principles to heretics.¹⁵ It also opens, as Wojtyła notes, a new and “separate chapter in Thomistic personalism.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the paper’s concluding section, the future pope gives Thomistic personalism the highest praise possible for any philosophic system: namely, that the Gospel “corresponds to it extremely well” and can build upon it to explain what transcends the scope of philosophy.¹⁷ Overall, Wojtyła’s 1961 paper succeeds in establishing not only the personalism of Aquinas’s thought and the Thomistic character of Wojtyła’s personalism, but also Wojtyła’s conviction that Aquinas’s philosophy is indispensable for properly understanding human experiences. It thus anticipates the focus of his papal writings on the person and their Thomistic presuppositions—as shown, for instance, by his analysis of the moral object in *Veritatis Splendor*.¹⁸

Perhaps it was not always so. Eight years earlier, Wojtyła had explored, in his 1953 habilitation thesis at Jagiellonian University, whether the experiential values unmasked by Max Scheler’s phenomenological ethics could suffice for Christian ethics. The answer was negative reports his reader Stefan Swiezawski.¹⁹ In a paper, a few years later, Wojtyła argues that although phenomenology can “assist us in overcoming certain errors in views of the will that arise from an improper relation to the empirical facts, . . . it cannot serve as a tool for the sort of interpretation of ethical experiences upon which ethics as a

¹⁵ See Lemmons, *Ultimate Normative Foundations*, 328–329.

¹⁶ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸ I explicate the Thomistic presuppositions of *Veritatis Splendor* in “Countering Today’s Moral Crisis with the Thomistic Personalism of John Paul II and Aquinas,” *Quaestiones Disputatae*, forthcoming.

¹⁹ Stefan Swiezawski, “Introduction: Karol Wojtyła at the Catholic University of Lublin,” in *Person and Community*, xv.

normative science is based.”²⁰ In his 1974 paper “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” Wojtyła repeats this criticism of phenomenology even while arguing that philosophy must start by analyzing human experience: “In order to grasp the personal structure of self-determination, we must start from the experience of the human being. This experience obviously cannot be understood phenomenologically.”²¹ Human experience reveals that the efficacy of ethical action is personal, metaphysical, and constitutive of one’s very identity.²²

Given this analysis, it becomes clearer that Wojtyła did not identify Aquinas’s thought as a phenomenological Thomism, existential²² Thomism, or even personalist Thomism for several reasons. *First*, he was convinced that phenomenology was a dead end for philosophical inquiry as he argued in his habilitation thesis on Scheler. *Second*, he was convinced that the practical nature of personalism requires Thomistic analysis as shown not only by his 1961 “Thomistic Personalism,” but also by his 1974 “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination.” *Third*, Wojtyła was convinced that Thomism is properly understood as a form of personalism as shown by the collection of his papers in *Person and Community*. Hence, “personalist Thomism” would have been a redundant term. *Fourth*, Wojtyła was convinced that discovering what is true requires analyzing experience from the perspective of the acting person as shown by his books, *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*. The conviction that experience is the indispensable starting point for philosophy was also held by both Aristotle and Aquinas with each arguing that knowledge requires abstracting from experience. Each also demonstrated that one can use the facts gained through expe-

²⁰ Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Will in the Analysis of the Ethical Act” (originally published in 1957), in *Person and Community*, 21.

²¹ Karol Wojtyła, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in *Person and Community*, 188.

²² I argue this case in “Countering Today’s Moral Crisis,” forthcoming.

rience without always highlighting that source. One of the few times that Aquinas did draw explicit attention to experience was when he proved God's existence by the way of motion. *Fifth*, Wojtyła was convinced that understanding the person is the central philosophical question. This focus on the person was typical of Polish intellectuals, explains Stefan Swiezawski, who helped convince Wojtyła to join the philosophy department at the Catholic University of Lublin:

We knew with vivid clarity that all the evil that had assailed us in a dreadfully pure form, as well as all the good, which included incredible acts of heroism and sacrifice, had been the work of human beings. What then is the human being? What in the deepest sense constitutes the human person?²³

Hence, by describing Aquinas's thought as Thomistic personalism, Wojtyła was intentionally centering Thomism on the human person as he would later center Catholic thought in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*:

Each man in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is and what he does . . . is a "person," a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own. . . . Man in the full truth of his existence . . . and in the sphere of the whole of mankind—this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself.²⁴

And also:

This man is the way for the Church . . . because man—every man without any exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man—with each man without any exception

²³ Swiezawski, "Introduction," x.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michael Miller, CSB (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1996), §14.1.

whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.²⁵

In brief, according to Wojtyła, Thomistic personalism is the philosophy dedicated to understanding persons and their path to the fullness of existence.

In this collection of papers, we begin with *Anthony F. Flood's* endorsement of Michael Waldstein's argument that Wojtyła and Aquinas share a commitment to self-gift as being the key to life's meaning. Properly understanding this gift of self, argues Flood, requires understanding its basis in proper self-love and the reasons why non-trivial friendships elude the wicked. *John F. X. Knasas* then takes us deep into questions about the basis for respecting human dignity by contrasting how Kant, Aquinas and Wojtyła connect dignity to the will's liberty. Knasas explains that despite this similarity, significant differences exist with the Kantian formulation being not only self-defeating, but also contrary to experience for, as Wojtyła explains, the will would be "dumb and ineffectual," if it were turned "away . . . from all goods." The better analysis of the will, argues Wojtyła, identifies it as an appetite for intelligible good and being as Aquinas explains. Knasas then evaluates Wojtyła's Thomism by raising a few technical issues and suggesting that future work take up more fully the issue of "why we should pursue an ethics of perfectionism." *Catherine Peters* turns our attention to the natural law and argues that Wojtyła's understanding of consciousness, nature, and personalism develops Aquinas's thought. More specifically, she argues that the rational participation in the eternal law is a personal participation that preserves moral objectivity, while connecting with the contemporary concern for subjectivity. *Susan C. Selner-Wright* takes up the challenge given by W. Norris Clarke, S.J., to develop the personalist dimensions of *esse* (the act of existing).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §14.3.

She does this by adopting Wojtyła's differentiation of personhood and humanity as well as his differentiation of ontological and ethical dignity. She argues that the *esse* characteristic of human persons differs from that of other animals: only humans have *esse* given by the Creator in such a way as to enable them "to own it:" only the Creator "could sunder" *esse* from the person. This personalist implication of what Aquinas calls "subsistence" enables Selner-Wright to defend the ontological uniqueness of the person as irreplaceable, irreducible, and incommunicable, while also distinguishing the ontological and personal dignity given by *esse* from the ethical dignity given by being "a responsible ethical agent." She concludes by drawing out two entailments: namely, that ethical dignity ought to be fostered to the degree possible and that those who are too disabled to fully realize their subjectivity always retain their ontological dignity. This volume ends with *Daniel C. Wagner* taking up the challenge of understanding the penitential process through the lenses of Aquinas and Husserl. Wagner argues that, contrary to the standard interpretation with which Wojtyła was familiar, Husserl's phenomenology is "not idealist and . . . [is] fully open to a realism," and helpful for entering more fully into penitential reflection.

Altogether these papers demonstrate not only the degree to which Wojtyła relied on Aquinas's anthropology, ethics and metaphysics, but also the insightfulness of Wojtyła's arguments that the truth about the human person needs Thomistic personalism. As I've argued elsewhere,²⁶ this is particularly the case given that the ubiquity of today's secularism has left many unable to conceive that the wonders of nature have a divine cause, that missionaries have a divine wisdom worth hearing, and that love is more than a feeling. The secular person seeks comfort—not in God nor in self-transcending love—but in materialistic

²⁶ See Lemmons, "Countering Today's Moral Crisis." Also see "Modes of Re-enchantment: John Paul II and the Role of Familial Love," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* XXIX (2017): 91–114.

concerns or non-theistic and self-centered spiritualities. For, as John Paul II has pointed out, humans are attempting to live as if there is no God.²⁷ The misery that inevitably results opens the door to searching for the better way offered by Thomistic personalism. However, more work by Thomistic personalists is necessary, especially in the realms of psychology, anthropology, family studies, personalist feminism, metaphysics, and ethics in the individual, commercial, social, cultural, and political realms.



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²⁷ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, §24.2.

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