

CHAPTER FOUR: Wojtyła's Book about Scheler

Introduction

In 1942 Wojtyła entered the clandestine seminary set up by Cardinal Sapieha. His intellectual formation at the seminary was in substance Aristotelian-Thomistic, not unlike the formation St. John of the Cross received almost four centuries before him. After his ordination (Nov. 1st 1946), Wojtyła continued his Thomistic studies at the Angelicum.¹ His later encounter with Scheler and Kant enriched this formation. Looking back at the enrichment, John Paul II underlines in particular its pastoral relevance.

My previous Aristotelian-Thomistic formation was enriched by the Phenomenological method, and this made it possible for me to undertake a number of creative studies. I am thinking above all of my book *Person and Act*. In this way I was able to take part in the contemporary movement of philosophical Personalism, and my studies were able to bear fruit in my pastoral work. I have often noticed how many of the ideas developed in these studies have helped me in my meetings with individuals and with great numbers of the faithful during my apostolic visits. My formation within the cultural horizon of Personalism also gave me a deeper awareness of how each individual is a unique person. I think that this awareness is very important for every priest.²

Noteworthy in this text is the contrast between basic *formation* and *enrichment*. This contrast leaves open a range of possible weights for the two sides, Thomism and Phenomenology. The text suggests, at any rate, that Wojtyła can be characterized as a Thomist who also, by way of enrichment, employs the Phenomenological method.

The Phenomenological method does have a secondary and assisting role, he argues in his habilitation thesis³ on Scheler, but a Christian thinker cannot

¹ For detailed studies of this formative period in Wojtyła's life: Rodrigo Guerra López, *Volver a la persona: El método filosófico de Karol Wojtyła* (Madrid: Caparrós, 2002), 36-63, Buttiglione, *Wojtyła*, 18-43, Williams, *Mind of John Paul II*, 73-140.

² John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 93-4.

³ In the German university system, widely adopted in Europe including Poland, a habilitation thesis corresponds roughly to the first major book assistant professors in the US are expected to write after their doctoral thesis in order to prepare for tenure review. Passage of the habilitation enables a candidate to hold a chair as ordinary professor with tenure.

be a Phenomenologist (understanding that term as Husserl and Scheler understand it).⁴

When one compares this judgment with Wojtyła's main philosophical work, *Person and Act*, one can see an increased use of Phenomenology, a revised form of the Phenomenological method different from Scheler's and Husserl's, integrated into a Thomistic framework of natural philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and politics. It is Aristotle and St. Thomas who provide the architectonic order of the whole.⁵ In this sense, *Person and Act* is a Thomistic work. Of course, if one restricts the label "Thomist" to those who use primarily Scholastic terminology and reproduce primarily Scholastic questions and arguments, then the label does not fit Wojtyła. By that standard, St. John of the Cross is not a Thomist either, nor are Josef Pieper and Charles de Koninck. If, on the other hand, one applies the term to authors like these three, who see St. Thomas as a key teacher, who are docile to his teaching, deeply familiar with it, faithful to it, and interested in bringing it into dialogue with all contemporary thought, then Wojtyła should certainly be called a Thomist.⁶

Already Wojtyła's doctoral thesis on St. John of the Cross provides ample evidence for his familiarity with and faithfulness to St. Thomas. In great detail, he establishes the doctrinal continuity between the *Doctor Mysticus* and the Angelic Doctor.⁷ His habilitation thesis about Scheler provides further evidence of his closeness to St. Thomas and his critical distance from Scheler.

In the Introduction, Wojtyła explains why Scheler's ideas attracted the attention of Catholic thinkers. There were two main reasons. First, Catholic ethics had always focused on the *objects* of human acts, that is, on the good or value. Scheler criticizes Kant for his failure to do justice to these objects of acts, and proposes an ethics based on such objects. This is what Scheler means when he calls his own ethics a "material ethics of values" in contrast to Kant's "formalism," in which moral goodness is a matter of the universal form of the categorical imperative rather than the material content of the will, the good or evil willed by the person.⁸

The second point of contact is more specific.

There were also more particular theses that caused immediate associations with Christian ethics, especially with the ethical teaching of the Gospels. In his system Scheler underlines that love for the person and following an exemplary person have great importance and play a central role in ethical life as a whole.⁹

Scheler and the Gospel's teaching on following and imitating Christ, Wojtyła says, meet in their "personalism."¹⁰

⁴ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 196. The text is quoted above, p. ###.

⁵ See the overview of *Person and Act* below, esp. pp. ###.###.

⁶ See Michael Waldstein, "John Paul II: A Thomist Rooted in St. John of the Cross," *Faith and Reason* 30 (2005): 195-218.

⁷ See pp. ###.###.

⁸ See pp. ###.###.

⁹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 38.

¹⁰ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 68.

The personalist principle has a similar structure in Scheler and the Gospel: the principle of imitation is based on the expressly established ideal of the perfection of the person and it is supposed to help in reaching this ideal.¹¹

What Wojtyła calls “personalism” in these texts is a particular emphasis on the person in ethical life: the moral perfection of the person is proposed as a goal, love for the person and following an exemplary person, Jesus, are central.

Scheler’s emphasis on following is part of his opposition to Kant, who holds that following can play no role in moral life.

Imitation does not take place in the moral life at all and examples serve only as encouragement. They make the feasibility of the law clear beyond all doubt. They illustrate what the practical rule expresses in more general terms. Yet they never permit us to set aside the true original which lies in reason and to orient ourselves by examples.¹²

This text shows that the reason why Kant rejects imitation is his formalism, according to which autonomy is the supreme value. The only thing that counts is the goodness of the will, and the goodness of the will lies in one thing only: in its completely self-caused movement in accord with the universal form of legislation independent from any prior distinction between good and evil. When I deliberate whether I should help my friend in need, no example can be relevant since I must move myself by myself. In addition, my friend’s good which attracts me (in Kant’s terminology: the *matter* of my will) must not have any influence on my will, because this would reduce my rational will to the status of serving an interest foreign to it, an interest of my irrational appetites, whose ultimate object is happiness. The reason for helping my friend in need must be that my autonomous self-movement according to universal law requires that I do not exclude my friend’s good.¹³

In opposition against Kant, Scheler goes to the other extreme. Following an exemplar, he claims, plays *the* central role in moral life.¹⁴

Moral effectiveness, *infinitely superior* to all these kinds of effectiveness [that is, the effectiveness of laws and norms], consists in the fact that the pure and immediate vision of the pure value and pure being of the person invites free “*following*.” There is only *one* ideal content of the ought (there is no normative ought) that helps us to bring the phenomenon of Jesus to the fore: *he himself*.¹⁵

Model persons essentially are, from a genetic point of view, also *more original* than norms...The experienced relation that a person has with regard to the content of the personality of his model is following, based on love...Nothing on earth allows a person to become good so originally and immediately and necessarily as the evidential and adequate intuition of a good person *in* his goodness. This relation is *absolutely superior* to *any other* relation that might be considered the reason for becoming good.¹⁶

¹¹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 75-6.

¹² See Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 4.409; cited by Scheler, *Formalism*, 573, G 559.

¹³ See Kant, *Groundwork of Morals*, 4.441.

¹⁴ Scheler dedicated an extensive essay to this question: Max Scheler, “Vorbilder und Führer,” in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass I: Gesammelte Werke 10* (Bern: Francke, [orig. publ. 1921] 1957), Max Scheler, “Exemplars of Persons and Leaders,” in *Person and Self-Value: Three Essays* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, [orig. publ. 1921] 1987). For a summary of Scheler’s views about model persons, see Frings, *Scheler*, 71-80.

¹⁵ Scheler, *Formalism*, 222, footnote 50, G 229, footnote 2.

¹⁶ Scheler, *Formalism*, 575, G 560.

Modeling and following, according to Scheler, occurs on many different levels and in many different forms. For children parents are model persons, for a tribe its ancestors or leaders, for society its “lionized” prominent persons and arbiters of elegance, for a nation its national heroes, for a church its saints and founders. Some influences of model persons are deep and comprehensive, others transitory and peripheral. There are also negative models and anti-models.¹⁷

Following a truly exemplary person is connected with insight into that person’s unique value-essence.

There can be an evidential insight into a good whose *objective* essence and value-content contains a *reference* to an individual person, and whose ought therefore comes to this person and to him alone as a “call,” no matter if this “call” is addressed to others or not. This, therefore, is to *catch sight of the value-essence* of my person—in religious terms the value-picture, so to speak, which God’s love has of me and which God’s love draws and bears before me insofar as this love is directed to *me*.¹⁸

What the disciple intuitively by loving his master is, in the best circumstances, this individual and ideal value-essence of the model person. Again the sharp edge against Kant is clearly visible. The disciple is formed precisely by what is most unique in his master, not by the most universal principles of practical reason.

The influence of the model occurs primarily on the level of the person’s *being* and moral attitude or ethos, rather than individual actions. It is not a matter of willing to become like another through certain actions, but of a “free giving” of oneself to the influence of the model person by feeling his or her value-essence.¹⁹

Chapter 1. [Preliminary Overview]

In Chapter One, Wojtyła sketches the teaching of Jesus about the principle of following.²⁰ Jesus proposes following as a general principle valid for all. “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). “If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also must wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). To some he offers a path of particular closeness in following. “If you want to be perfect...come, follow me” (Matt 19:21). A condition for walking on the path of following is that one loves Jesus more than father or mother, son or daughter (cf. Matt 10:37-38). The ultimate exemplar to be followed is the Father himself. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

¹⁷ See Scheler, *Formalism*, 576, G 562.

¹⁸ Scheler, *Formalism*, 490, G 482.

¹⁹ See Scheler, *Formalism*, 579-80, G 565-6.

²⁰ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 70-4.

The Gospel's ideal of moral perfection in following Jesus, Wojtyła argues on the basis of these texts, has three main characteristics.²¹ (1) It is a *religious* ideal, both because the perfection to be realized is that of the Father and the Son and because following establishes the right personal relation with God as the final end. (2) It is a *real* ideal, because it aims at a real perfection of the person that is a likeness of a real perfection already found in Jesus. (3) It is a *practical* ideal, because it is realized by acts which the person can perform in following the exemplar, acts by which the person becomes really good.

At the end of Chapter One, Wojtyła's gives a preliminary overview of his evaluation of Scheler's anthropology which he then unfolds in the remainder of his book. He returns to the three points in which he had summarized the teaching of the Gospel, though he places the first point (*religious* ideal) last as the highpoint of his critique.

(1) The ideal proposed by the Gospel is a *real* ideal, because it aims at a real perfection of the person in imitation of a real perfection already found in Jesus. According to Scheler, by contrast, the ideal is an *ideal* value-essence. The reason why the model person is an object of following does not lie in its *real moral perfection*, but in its *ideal value-essence* which has the character of a call more than a reality. According to Scheler's definition of the person and his understanding of value, this ideal value-essence is, by its very nature, something *felt* rather than a real property of the person. It is exclusively something given in the intentional consciousness of certain acts of feeling.²²

(2) The ideal proposed by the Gospel is a *practical* ideal, because it is realized by acts which the person can perform in following the exemplar, acts by which the person conforms himself or herself to Jesus and becomes in actual reality good. Scheler sees following as something taking place in the intentional or cognitive aspect of feeling. Love feels the ideal value-essence. As a result, the self-feeling of the person who follows is affected. Deliberate acts of the person, he holds, are secondary. In addition, Scheler excludes moral goodness as a possible motive of any act of will. If one cannot intend a perfection, Wojtyła argues, it is certainly not a practical ideal.²³

(3) It is a *religious* ideal, both because the perfection to be followed is that of the Father and the Son and because following establishes the right relation with God and has the fruit of supernatural blessedness. Scheler understands the ideal value-essence of a person in religious terms when he calls it "the value-picture, so to speak, which God's love has of me and which God's love draws and bears before me insofar as this love is directed to *me*."²⁴ The Gospel goes further in seeing the perfection we must reach as the content of the will of God. In addition, "the person merits being admitted to participation in the

²¹ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 74-5.

²² See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 80-1.

²³ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 81-2.

²⁴ Scheler, *Formalism*, 490, G 482.

real supernatural divine good.”²⁵ Scheler’s essentialism leads him to deny this final end.

Wojtyła devotes the remaining three chapters (Chapters Two through Four) respectively to each of these three points of comparison. This three-step progression of the argument corresponds to Aristotle’s four causes (minus matter): the form (moral goodness as a real attribute), the agent (the person as responsible cause of that good) and the end (God as the goal of the moral life).

Chapter 2. “Ethical Values”

Wojtyła examines the question whether Scheler’s philosophy can do justice to the Gospel’s teaching that the ideal to be followed is *real*. The chapter has two sections. In the first, Wojtyła argues that the Phenomenological method as Scheler understands it does not allow him to give an account of moral good and evil as objectively real attributes of the person. In the second, he turns to Scheler’s particular Phenomenological account of moral goodness to argue that the Phenomenological method does not allow Scheler to affirm the full objective reality of moral goodness.

a. “The Principles of Phenomenology and the Material Order of the Rank of Values”

Wojtyła identifies the Phenomenological method as the main reason for the failure of Scheler’s ethical system. “It is, therefore, due to its Phenomenological principles that Scheler’s system is unsuitable for the interpretation of Christian ethics...”²⁶

His argument for this conclusion begins with an examination of the influence of Phenomenological principles in Scheler’s definition of value. Scheler considers values precisely inasmuch as they are phenomena. Wojtyła emphasizes that this does not mean Scheler’s values are purely subjective. Values and their hierarchy, according to Scheler, are objectively given.²⁷ Still, Scheler considers them only inasmuch as they are phenomena, inasmuch as they are given in intentional acts of feeling. This limitation of method to phenomena blocks the recognition of truly *objective and real* good and evil.

Since he considers values precisely in their givenness, in their intentional position as phenomena, Scheler pays special attention to the particular conditions under which values are given. Under what conditions is the value of moral goodness given, according to Scheler? Wojtyła quotes the following text in answer.

²⁵ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 83.

²⁶ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 97.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 85-6. Wojtyła refers to the extensive discussion of this point in Scheler, *Formalism*, 265-6, G 270-1.

Chapter 4. "The Religious Character of Ethical Values"

In Chapter Four, Wojtyła examines the question whether Scheler's philosophy can do justice to the Gospel's teaching that the ideal to be followed is *religious*. In the first section, he examines the relation to God which is necessarily present in all moral acts. In the second he turns to merit, which is one particularly important element in that relation to God. In the last he examines the final end of merit, the reward of blessedness and its true object, the goodness of the divine nature.

a. "The Religious Structure of the Moral Act"

According to Scheler, man does not have a specific nature. He cannot be defined as a living being endowed with powers such as sensation and reason. Rather, personal consciousness flashes up in certain conscious acts in organisms that have developed gradually and continuously on the evolutionary path from sub-human to human specimens.⁹¹

Among all human experiences, Scheler asserts, the most characteristic of the human being are acts of transcendence toward God.

"Man" as the being of "highest value" among earthly beings and as a moral being becomes comprehensible and phenomenologically intuitable only on the presupposition of the idea of God and "in the light" of this idea! We can even say that, correctly viewed, he *is* only this movement, the *tendency* and *transition to the divine*...How nonsensical it is to look at the idea of God as an "*anthropomorphism*," when, on the contrary, it is in the *theomorphism* of his [that is, man's] most noble exemplars that the unique *value* of his "humanity" lies!⁹²

The "theomorphism" of the human being does not, however, imply a relation of transcendence to the living God, but rather to a certain isolated essence given in Phenomenological intuition, namely, "the divine." This distinction between "God" and "the divine" is very important to Scheler.

In trying to intuit the *essence* of man, it is not the idea of God in the sense of an extant and positively determined reality that is presupposed; rather, it is only the *quality* of the divine, or the *quality* of the holy, that is given in an infinite fullness of being. On the other hand, whatever takes the place of this essentiality [*Wesenheit*] (in the historical time of earthly man and in the changing beliefs of positive religions) cannot be presupposed in any sense. Yet, this idea of God is not an empirical abstraction from diverse positive representations of gods that in different positive religions are the objects of worship and cults. The ultimate (that is, the highest) *value-quality* in the order of ranks of values originally *guides* the formation of all positive representations, ideas, and concepts of "God."⁹³

As Scheler goes on to explain, the case of the "essentiality" of the holy is only one particular case of the general principle that values can be given independently from and before the beings with which they are associated.⁹⁴ Thus

⁹¹ See above, p. ###.

⁹² Scheler, *Formalism*, 288-9, G 293.

⁹³ Scheler, *Formalism*, 292, G 296-7.

⁹⁴ See Scheler, *Formalism*, 294-5, G 299.

the divine value-quality “holy” can be given independently from and before the divine being.

Accordingly, what defines the human being is not a relation to the living God, but to the isolated essence of the holy.

For the Phenomenologist, man is a theomorphic being only and exclusively by virtue of experiencing the idea of God. Scheler is not concerned with the real relation to God as an existing, positive and defined reality. He is concerned with experiencing the idea of God.⁹⁵

Scheler’s general definition of the human being as a theomorphic being does not, therefore, imply a real relation between the human being as a moral agent and God. Scheler’s more specific account of moral life does not alter the picture. The ethical sphere and the religious sphere are each defined by their own set of value-essences that are irreducible to each other. The value “holy” does not belong to the inner constitution of the value “morally good.”⁹⁶

In the Gospel, Wojtyła argues, the connection between the moral agent and the living God is very close. Responsible human acts establish or damage the relation with the living God.⁹⁷ God is the aim or end of moral acts. “Jesus always stresses the goal-directed character of these acts...”⁹⁸

Although, from the point of view of ethics, the true object of human acts is not God, but the moral value of these acts, man nevertheless experiences his relation to God in these acts in view of their moral value. For if moral good is decisive for a good relation with God and evil for a negative one, and if man is the responsible causal origin of good and evil acts, then it follows that by the moral value of his acts he shapes his relation with God into a positive or negative relation. In this way moral values take on a religious character...⁹⁹

Moral values bear this religious character only inasmuch as they are genuinely practical, that is, inasmuch as the person is causally responsible for the moral good or evil of acts.¹⁰⁰ Since according to Scheler moral acts are not practical in this way, he cannot offer an account of their religious structure.

If Scheler’s system cannot account for this immanent link between ethics and religion, then despite all its theomorphic conception of the person, who is a person, and particularly an ethical person, only “in the light of the idea of God,” this system cannot help us in the interpretation of the most elementary principles of revealed Christian ethics.¹⁰¹

b. “The Problem of Merit”

Scheler explicitly excludes from the properly purified understanding of God any idea of justice in distributing reward and punishment according to merit.

⁹⁵ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 161.

⁹⁶ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 163.

⁹⁷ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 164-5.

⁹⁸ Wojtyła, *Scheler*.

⁹⁹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 165.

¹⁰⁰ See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 166.

¹⁰¹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 166.

The idea of a so-called *divine justice of reward and punishment*. This idea in *no* way corresponds, either in terms of its *essence* or its *meaning* (apart from its existence), to a purified [geläutert] idea of God.¹⁰²

Wojtyła nevertheless takes up the question of merit to examine whether it is at least in principle compatible with the principles of Scheler's Phenomenology. He outlines the Catholic doctrine of merit in some of its complexity. Without the supernatural grace of justification prior to all good works, no good act can be meritorious. Even after the justification of the sinner through baptismal faith, supernatural grace is necessary for any particular act to be meritorious. Moral acts are at one and the same time truly God's gifts and truly meritorious.¹⁰³ "By the law of works God says: Do what I command! By the law of faith we say to God: Give what you command!"¹⁰⁴

Wojtyła compares Scheler's principles and the Catholic understanding of merit on two main points implied in merit, full causal responsibility and the supernatural character of grace. Merit presupposes, first, that the moral agent has full causal responsibility for the moral good or evil of acts. Scheler's ethics does not posit such responsibility and therefore cannot offer an account of merit.

In the course of our investigations we have seen that Scheler's system does not allow us to grasp the person's responsible efficacy in relation to moral good and evil. For, in this system, the person appears only as the Phenomenological "subject" of these values that are given in that subject's intentional feeling. According to revealed Christian ethics, by contrast, reward and punishment are not given for a "good" and "evil" that are the content of the person's intentional feeling, but for the objective good and evil of the acts themselves that are clearly marked by the person's responsible efficacy.¹⁰⁵

Wojtyła's second main point of comparison is the supernatural character of the grace necessary for any merit. Since Scheler limits himself to the Phenomenological method and therefore does not give an account of real being, his philosophy offers no basis for the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Wojtyła offers two main arguments for this conclusion. In the first he argues by analogy between the objective moral value of an act and its objective supernatural value.

According to the teaching of the sources of Christian revelation, a human act must possess two goods in itself in order to merit eternal life: a moral good and a heavenly good. Due to its Phenomenological premises, Scheler's system does not allow us to grasp the objective ethical value of human acts. We must conclude that due to the same premises it does not allow us to grasp the objective supernatural values of human acts.¹⁰⁶

Wojtyła's second argument goes deeper, namely, to the focus of Scheler's Phenomenological method on the experience of feeling a value and the exclusion of an account of real being from this method. The distinction between

¹⁰² Scheler, *Formalism*, 368, German 368.

¹⁰³ See Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification* (1547), Canon 32, DS 1582; Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 172.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *De spiritu et littera*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 174.

the natural and the supernatural is only possible, he argues, if one gives an account of it in terms of real being.

According to Scheler, values are only given as the content of experience. We would therefore have to prove their essentially supernatural character in the content of the experience itself... Since the experience gains its essentially supernatural character from the relation to essentially supernatural *being*, it is impossible in the framework of Scheler's system to grasp and explain the essentially supernatural character of the experience... If we confess our allegiance to the principle of Phenomenology, as Scheler confesses it in his epistemological and methodological premises, we are unable to give an account of the reality contained in the concept "nature." In consequence, also the noun "the supernatural" or the adjective "supernatural" have no counterpart in the reality given as phenomena.¹⁰⁷

Scheler draws many mysteries of Christian faith into his essentialist philosophy as essences given immediately in presuppositionless Phenomenological intuition: grace, revelation, the Church, etc. Wojtyła finds that Scheler says much about these mysteries that is true. What gets lost, nevertheless, due to Scheler's essentialism, is the real drama of redemption, "redemption as an essentially supernatural union of the human person with God as the highest good."¹⁰⁸

c. "The Problem of Reward and Punishment"

Wojtyła's final and most radical critique of Scheler concerns precisely this loss of God as the highest good. Scheler agrees with Kant that happiness or blessedness cannot be the goal of moral goodness. Yet, while Kant locates happiness far from the core of the person as the irrational object of sensual inclinations, Scheler gives it the most central possible place in the human spirit as the *source* of all morally good acts. Dependence on Kant by exaggerated opposition is particularly clear in this doctrine.

Deepest happiness and complete bliss are dependent in their being on a consciousness of one's own moral goodness. *Only the good person is blissful*. This does *not* preclude the possibility that this very blissfulness is the *root* and *source* of all willing and acting. But happiness can *never* be a goal or even a "purpose" of willing and acting. *Only the happy person acts in a morally good way*. Happiness is therefore in no way a "reward for virtue,"¹⁰⁹ nor is virtue the *means* to reach bliss. Rather, happiness is the root and source of virtue, a fountainhead, although it is only a *consequence* of the inner *goodness* of the person.¹¹⁰

The dependence of bliss on moral goodness should not be understood in the sense that bliss *follows* the real moral goodness of real acts, that is, in the sense that it is a rejoicing *about* having really acted well. Bliss is absolutely prior to all such motivations.

Bliss in its pregnant sense is present whenever there is no particular state of affairs or values outside or inside us that could *motivate* us feelingly to this fulfillment in bliss, and whenever the being and enduring of bliss appears—phenomenally—*unconditioned* and

¹⁰⁷ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 174-5, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 176.

¹⁰⁹ Scheler seems to have Aristotle in mind here. "[Happiness is] . . . the reward and end of virtue." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.9; 1099b.16-17.

¹¹⁰ Scheler, *Formalism*, 359, G 359-60.

unalterable by any performable acts of will, by any deed, or by any way of life. *For it is the being and the self-value of the person himself* that is the “foundation” of bliss and despair.¹¹¹

The innermost source of bliss, according to Scheler, is thus the person’s individual value-essence, which is quasi identical with the divine nature when one acts “in God.” Such a quasi-identity with the divine nature is an unsurpassable source of unsurpassable bliss. No reward could equal such bliss. There is no need to reward good deeds because they flow from this unsurpassable bliss.

In his existence and his acts the “good” person directly takes part in the nature of God, in the sense of *velle in deo* [to will in God] or *amare in deo* [to love in God], and he is blissful in this participation. A “reward” from God could only put a smaller and lower good in place of a higher one, and a superficial feeling in the place of a deeper pleasure.¹¹²

In another text, Scheler states more explicitly what such willing in God and loving in God consists of. He criticizes Kant for focusing only on the commandment of loving God and not on the much deeper and much more characteristically Christian phenomenon of “loving in God.” The acts of God are and remain distinct from the acts of human beings, but the spiritual life-principle from which the acts flow is identical in the two. The awareness of this identity is deepest bliss.

Kant has in mind only the phenomenon of the love of God, not the highest Christian phenomenon of “love in God” (*amare in Deo*). In the latter, man rises above all laws, even the laws of God (if God can be thought of as a “legislator” at all), by virtue of the fact that man knows himself to have the immediate power of an essential identity of the spiritual principle of life (with simultaneously differentiated real acts)...¹¹³

One can observe in this text that Scheler’s rejection of commandments has indeed deeper roots than his arguments about the negative implication of all commandments (that is, the accusation that the recipient of the commandment does not want to do what the commandment prescribes). The human person ultimately rises above all laws, “even the laws of God,” because he feels in himself the immediate power of the first spiritual principle of life. This is “the highest Christian phenomenon.” In fact, it is Gnostic, not Christian.¹¹⁴

The highest Christian phenomenon is also, according to Scheler, the most distinctive new element of the Christian ethos. It is “the tremendous innovation of the Christian theory of life.” While other religions and philosophical systems seek to reduce pain by reducing human sensitivity to pain, Christianity affirms a blissful core of the person which is superior to all disastrous events of life. It is in this superiority of bliss over anything that might happen to the person, superiority over any loss the person might sustain, any unfulfilled longing the person might have, that one can find the novelty of Christianity.

A blissful man can suffer misery and unhappiness with joy and can do so with no need to deaden his sensing of pain and pleasure on more peripheral levels. No ethos has as-

¹¹¹ Scheler, *Formalism*, 343-4, G 345.

¹¹² Scheler, *Formalism*, 368, G 368.

¹¹³ Scheler, *Formalism*, 223, G 230.

¹¹⁴ See above, pp. ###.###.

simulated the sense of the above as deeply as the Christian. *The tremendous innovation of the Christian theory of life* was its presentation of a way in which one can suffer pain and unhappiness while remaining blissful...In the Christian theory of life the essential moment of what it calls the salvation of the soul is positive bliss in the center of the person...¹¹⁵

This text seems to express the quasi identification of the person with God, which was discussed above as a core teaching of Scheler both in his Catholic and his post-Catholic period.¹¹⁶

Wojtyła does not recognize the Gospel in this Phenomenology of bliss. One element is missing, an all-decisive element. We are not an end to ourselves. We lack the fullness of being and goodness. It is the living God who is our goal. He is that goal because of the fullness of his objective being and goodness.

We see that in the teaching of revelation, all emphasis in the doctrine of eternal blessedness falls on the object of blessedness, namely, the divine nature, which is this object. In Scheler's Phenomenological system, of course, this doctrine cannot be grasped and expressed... No good that comes from outside the person can be a greater good than the good which the person finds in himself when he experiences himself as the source of a morally good act... The greatest happiness and the greatest suffering—man draws these from within himself, he himself is its source for himself. This point of view seems to separate us completely from the Christian teaching. Given such a point of view, can we establish any point of contact with the revealed truth according to which the object of man's final blessedness is the divine nature?¹¹⁷

It is as solitary persons, prior to any relation with others, that we have our end within ourselves. At this point, the chasm between Scheler and the Gospel seems unbridgeable. Wojtyła nevertheless looks for a bridge. According to Scheler, he points out, there is a core of the person in which all social relations are left behind.¹¹⁸ Yet, this "intimate person" and, more deeply, this "absolutely intimate person," is not utterly alone. It still allows for one relationship, namely, with God. This relationship to God includes, in turn, a relationship to the community of the Church.

However, solitude does *not* exclude one communal relation, namely, the relation to *God*, who by definition is neither an individual nor a comprehensive person, but one in whom both individual and comprehensive person are solidary. Thus it is in God alone that the intimate person may know himself to be judged as well as sheltered. But he cannot know this without becoming indirectly aware of his solidarity (at least "in God") with the comprehensive person in *general* and, in the first place, with the Church. And without this certitude there would be no God, but merely a deceptive object of the highest nature, that is, an illusory God.¹¹⁹

Wojtyła remarks on this text that there is "a profound connection between these ideas of Scheler and the teaching of revelation."¹²⁰ The specter of the solitary human person drawing bliss out of himself alone in needless fullness

¹¹⁵ Scheler, *Formalism*, 346-7, G 348.

¹¹⁶ See above, pp. ###-###.

¹¹⁷ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 183-4.

¹¹⁸ See Scheler, *Formalism*, 561-72, G 548-58.

¹¹⁹ Scheler, *Formalism*, 563, G 550.

¹²⁰ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 184.

of life seems to be definitively banished in Scheler's vision of solidarity. Wojtyła finds this aspect of Scheler's teaching in conformity with the Catholic faith.

If in this most profound experience of oneself, which Scheler calls absolutely intimate person, the person does not cease from being in relation to God, then it experiences its happiness in the good and its despair in the evil of its own essence in relation to God. Does such a formulation help us to grasp and express eternal happiness in God and eternal rejection by God. Most certainly, Yes!¹²¹

Yet, Wojtyła does not stop with this positive conclusion, but probes further. Scheler speaks about this relation to God only on the level of experience lived by the person in his or her subjectivity without any truly transcendent object, the really existing living God. The person experiences a detached divine value-essence as an object of feeling. In the sources of revelation, he adds, the emphasis lies on the object of happiness. The real infinite goodness of God is the reason why he is the beatific end. When Scheler says that the person shares in the divine being, his Phenomenological premises reduce this participation to an intentional feeling of the self-value of the person who experiences a God-idea cut off from all real being.¹²² Wojtyła concludes,

A participation in God understood in this way *has nothing in common* with the real, essentially supernatural participation in God's nature and God's inner life. Only participation in God understood in this latter way constitutes the basis of final blessedness in God according to the teaching of revelation. The withdrawal of this participation is the basis of the definitive unhappiness of the human person as a consequence of its rejection by God. In Scheler's conception, by contrast, what the person feels as the real object of emotional bliss and despair—despite “participation in God”—is “good” or “evil” as self-values of the person that become perceptible at the source of the acts experienced by the person.¹²³

This criticism of the deepest point of Scheler's personalism converges with Balthasar's main objection against Scheler. Greek thought with its concept of a striving love, especially as expressed in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, is closer to Christianity than Scheler's theomorphic personalism of solidarity. It is closer to authentic Christian personalism.

Conclusion

Can one build Christian ethics on the foundations of Scheler's Phenomenology? Wojtyła concludes his book with two theses:

Thesis 1: The ethical system developed by Max Scheler is in principle unsuited for the scientific formulation of Christian ethics. For, although it establishes a relationship with the ethical content of the sources of revelation by defining ethical values as personal values, its Phenomenological and emotivist premises do not allow it to grasp this content completely and to understand it scientifically. In particular, Scheler's system is

¹²¹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 185.

¹²² See Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 184-5.

¹²³ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 185-6, emphasis added.

unsuited for grasping these sources theologically, which is absolutely necessary, given that they are sources of revelation and constitute an object of supernatural faith.¹²⁴

Thesis 2: Although the ethical system developed by Max Scheler is in principle unsuited for the scientific formulation of Christian ethics, it can help us indirectly in our scientific work on Christian ethics. It facilitates the analysis of ethical facts on the phenomenological and empirical plane.¹²⁵

Phenomenology can thus play an assisting role, but a Christian thinker cannot be a Phenomenologist. The theologian, Wojtyła writes,

should not forego the great advantages which the Phenomenological method offers his work. It impresses the stamp of experience on works of ethics and nourishes them with the life-knowledge of concrete man by allowing an investigation of moral life from the side of its appearance. Yet, in all this, the Phenomenological method plays only a secondary assisting role...At the same time, these investigations convince us that the Christian thinker, especially the theologian, who makes use of phenomenological experience in his work, cannot be a Phenomenologist.¹²⁶

Wojtyła's categorical judgment that "the Christian thinker...cannot be a Phenomenologist" should be understood with precision. It applies only to Phenomenology as understood by Husserl and Scheler, inasmuch as they abandon the philosophy of being to develop a philosophy of consciousness detached from real being. It does not apply to "realist Phenomenology" as developed, for example, by Edith Stein and Dietrich von Hildebrand. The point on which Wojtyła's judgment turns is that despite his profound critique of Kant, Scheler remains caught in the subjectivist shift of the philosophy of consciousness. "The modern shift gave to the human subject an absolute status precisely in its character qua consciousness; for human consciousness not only sets its own terms but the terms for reality itself."¹²⁷ By giving such an absolute status to human consciousness, Scheler's philosophy annihilates the personal subject; it loses real being; and it loses the final end of created persons.

The philosophy of consciousness would have us believe that it first discovered the human subject. The philosophy of being is prepared to demonstrate that quite the opposite is true, that in fact an analysis of pure consciousness leads inevitably to an *annihilation of the subject*.¹²⁸

The analysis of the systems of Kant and Scheler shows the conclusion that a consistent *teleology and perfectionism has no room in the philosophy of consciousness*. Of course, the end is something contained in consciousness, and the end is always some good or value, but *as a [mere] content of consciousness*, the end loses its perfective character. It possesses such a character only in connection with *being*, on the premises of a philosophy of the real. Only on this basis can one speak of a consistent teleology.¹²⁹

George Weigel writes in his biography of John Paul II,

¹²⁴ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 187.

¹²⁵ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 193.

¹²⁶ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 196.

¹²⁷ Schmitz, *Center of the Drama*, 135-6.

¹²⁸ Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: P. Lang, 1976 [1993]), 219-20, emphasis added.

¹²⁹ Wojtyła, *Lublin Lectures*, 244. In this passage, Wojtyła does not use the term "perfectionism," but the more unusual term "perfectionism" derived from the Latin comparative *perfectior*, "more perfect"; an account based on a *greater* degree of perfection.

That [Wojtyła] looked to Scheler as a possible guide, and that he put himself through the backbreaking work of translation so that he could analyze Scheler in his own language, suggests that Wojtyła had become convinced that the answers [to the question “Why ought I be good?”] were not to be found in the neo-scholasticism of Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.¹³⁰

If Wojtyła set out to study Scheler’s *Formalism* in this hope, one must conclude that he was disappointed. A Christian ethics cannot be built on Scheler. The answers were not to be found in the Phenomenology of Scheler. The failure of Scheler’s system is not due to particular problems here or there; the failure is systemic. “The whole difficulty is the result of the Phenomenological premises of the system and we must assign the blame to these principles.”¹³¹ Whatever should be said in detail about Garrigou-Lagrange, it is clear that Wojtyła’s habilitation thesis defends Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophical ethics as the foundation for moral theology against Scheler’s attempt to de-Hellenize Christian thought. In an essay published four years after his book on Scheler, Wojtyła is particularly clear in his support of Aristotle’s account of happiness.

An attribute of this [that is, human nature] is above all the desire for happiness. It is something natural and necessary. Man is unable not to desire happiness. He wills it always and in everything although he does not always name the object of his desires. And precisely for this reason it can seem as if he did not desire happiness, but only strove for the various values with which he is concerned, because he desires happiness in all and through all.

The desire for happiness does not lie on the uppermost surface of willing and even less so on the surface of human acts. It is not difficult, however, to discover it in them and grasp it objectively—nobody will deny that this desire is always alive in the depth of willing.

Ethics can neither reject this fact, nor occupy itself with it to the exclusion of all else. According to its nature, Ethics is not the doctrine of happiness, because it is a normative science, while happiness stands outside and above every norm. Happiness is the goal of nature and cannot be an object of choice, while the norm concerns only that which is an object of choice. The object of choice is always a way on which a particular person must walk.

Happiness, by contrast, is not a way, but the goal of all the ways of human beings. It is, therefore, not difficult to agree that in a mediate way Ethics shows human beings the way toward happiness. Aristotle understood the role of happiness in this way, and so does the Gospel.¹³²

¹³⁰ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 128.

¹³¹ Wojtyła, *Scheler*, 115.

¹³² Karol Wojtyła, “[Primer of Ethics] Die ethische Fibel,” in *Erziehung zur Liebe: Mit einer ethischen Fibel* (Stuttgart-Degerloch: Seewald, 1957 [1980]), 110-1. Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1960 [1993]), 137-8.