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THE CONCEPT OF VALUE IN THE ETHICAL THOUGHT OF CARDINAL KAROL WOJTYŁA

1. Preface – Introductory Explanations

The title of this article indicates a twofold delimitation of the problems in it discussed. The first delimitation is chronological: the theme under consideration is the ethical thought of Cardinal Wojtyła in the pre-papal period of his life. He started his work in this field with a series of journalistic essays, published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly) in the years 1951-1958, under the common title „*ABCs of Ethics*”¹. In the years that followed, Cardinal Wojtyła developed the thought that appeared in its initial state in „*ABCs...*” and the result of this ethical research were the two books: *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler*² and *Love and Responsibility*³. These studies were prolonged until 16th October 1978 when Cardinal Wojtyła was elected to the Holy See and became Pope. As shepherd of the whole community of the faithful of the Catholic Church he chose the name of John Paul II and started a new magisterial activity: he started to announce the revealed Word of God. And when in his teaching he did sometimes use philosophical-

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¹ *ABC etyki*, reprint: Kraków 1983, 2nd edition in Lublin 1999.

² This dissertation by Wojtyła: *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniu systemu Maxa Schelera*, and his later writings on Scheler may be found in Karol Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie podmiotu moralności* (Lublin: Catholic University of Lublin Press, 1991). The Scheler dissertation has been translated into German, Spanish (see Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, p. 154, note 44 for bibliographic references) and Italian (see Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, p. 54, note 17, for bibliographic references).

³ San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1993.

ethical categories, he used these according to their early, philosophically established contents and not according to his own scientific research.

October 1978 put an end to the further activity of Cardinal Wojtyła in the field of ethics. That was, however, in the very moment when his ethical thought had reached a level of maturity that presents an articulated personal philosophical-ethical position that can be taken as subject matter of an explorative investigation, especially now, after the Author's death. Within this reflection we have the second delimitation of this article's theme. We will focus on a single topic: the ever pertinent and vividly discussed question of *moral value*.

2. The Sources of Cardinal Wojtyła's Ethical Thought

The evolution of Cardinal Wojtyła's thought – starting with the above-mentioned early publications in this field and ending with the major work *The Acting Person*⁴ and other articles⁵ published around the same time and important for our theme – show precisely that one of the main sources of inspiration for father Karol Wojtyła's ideas was his study of contemporary philosophical trends, especially the phenomenology of M. Scheler and the rationalistic transcendentalism of I. Kant. The radical conflict between these two philosophical orientations brings one to wonder whether it be mainly one of these two that played the essential role in forming the proper ethical thought of the Cardinal (and if so, to asking which of the two had this central role). The whole of Wojtyła's work shows that it was not Kant but rather Scheler that represented for him the North Star on the intricate paths of philosophic reflection. Influenced by the works of Scheler, he undertook the „project of uniting two philosophical orientations, thomistic and the phenomenological philosophy of being and consciousness”⁶. Therefore, our first task consists in determining this mental category of „value” that was developed by father Wojtyła under the clear influence of Scheler's phenomenology, and which served him as the main tool for fulfilling the program outlined in the last sentence and especially for his theory of value in the context of the general theory of morality.

⁴ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, in: *Analecta Husserliana. The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, vol. X, translated by A. Potocki, edited by A-T. Tymieniecka, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1979.

⁵ *Etyka a teologia moralna* [Ethics and Moral Theology], Znak [Sign] 19 (1967) nr 9, pp. 1077+1082, *Problem doświadczenia w etyce* [The Problem of Experience in Ethics], *Roczniki Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Yearbooks] 17 (1969) fascicle 2, pp. 5-24; *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of Theory of Morality] in: B. Bejze (ed.), *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych* [In the Current of Postconciliar Issues], vol. III, Warsaw 1969, pp. 217-249.

⁶ K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn* [The Acting Person], Polish Edition, Lublin 1994, p. 355.

3. Phenomenological Experience

The whole philosophical work of Cardinal Wojtyła, and especially his deductions in his fundamental work, *The Acting Person*, gives rise to no doubt that the concept of „phenomenological experience” is the category that gives access to the secrets of his philosophical thinking. Both these terms need an explanation. The Author comes back to an understanding of experience – common in philosophy – as mental observation, exterior or interior, and he underlines that in phenomenology experience is understood in a broader meaning than in contemporary philosophy, especially in empiricist trends. „For phenomenologists ‘experience’ means immediate givenness or every cognitive act in which the object itself is given directly – ‘bodily’ [...]. There are, then, many different kinds of experience in which individual objects are given to be taken into account, for instance, the experience of the individual psychical facts of other selves, the aesthetic experience in which works of art are given, and so on”⁷. A characteristic of this experience is also the fact that it points out the directness of cognition itself, it points out a direct cognitive contact with the object⁸.

This description of experience presented by phenomenologists does not, however, grasp the essential meaning of the concept of „phenomenological experience”. But it does highlight an important conclusion in Cardinal Wojtyła’s thought: the person is the subject of experience. Experience brings to the forum different facts and among these facts – because of the capacity of direct contact with the object, that is proper to the person – a fact called „the person acts” is included. „The person acts” means, in another words, that „the person performs an action” and the word „action” in Polish philosophical literature is more often described with the word „act”. Therefore, if the principle „*agere sequitur esse*” [„action follows from being” or „action is determined by being”] is correct, this „*agere*”, this „*action*” becomes, in Cardinal Wojtyła’s own words, „a particular moment of apprehending – that is, of experiencing – the person”⁹. This means that „actions are the most adequate starting point for comprehending the dynamic nature of the person”¹⁰. In these ascertainties, which Father Wojtyła widely developed especially in „*The Acting Person*”, but also in his other publications, a fundamental methodological orientation of his ethics finds its explanation. He stresses it when he insists that ethics is the field of learning „which considers action that presupposes a person, that is, which pre-

⁷ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., p. 9, f. 1.

⁸ K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, op. cit., pp. 378-379.

⁹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 12.

supposes man as a person. In our study, on the other hand, the aim is to reverse this relation... For us action *reveals* the person, and we look at the person through his action"¹¹. In the light of this declaration it becomes clear that in the Cardinal's eyes the only useful tool for reversing this relation is phenomenological experience. This experience, because of its role in this task, becomes the subject of a more precise description. It is very interesting also for us because it leads our reflection to the field of the theory of value, indicated in the title.

Two principal concepts are in this context Adrienne's thread for further reading the Cardinal's thought: moral experience and experience of morality. How should they be understood? Let us start with the concept of moral experience. It is proper of all persons for the very fact of practicing morality. But this, according to father Wojtyła, does not exhaust the matter. „If we say that experience consists in an individual performing it, that it consists in an individual experiencing moral good and moral evil, we establish in this way that every normal person is an authentic doer and creator and that therefore he 'gains a proper experience in this field'”¹². In the final conclusion of this description Wojtyła stresses the creative character of this experience, when he states: „Moral experience embodies a double participation of person: he is the doer and he is a witness”¹³. This twofold function of moral experience can be taken as basis for distinguishing a twofold sense of this experience: an actual sense and a habitual sense.

On the other hand, „experience of morality” is, in comparison to „moral experience”, something like an experience of a second level. The author realizes that this statement is a truism and he explains it better in the footnote where he describes this experience of morality as „moral experience in an objective meaning”¹⁴. He continues saying that the experience of morality is, in some way, identified with moral experience but that it is also justified to say that this experience of morality should be recognized as a distinct form of experience. The principal factor of its diversity is in the „intuitive character” of morality itself. As the Cardinal says, „It is morality that determines the proper character of the moral facts. Morality is not an abstraction extracted from these facts but it is something that we experience in each of these facts in a proper way”¹⁵.

The Cardinal uses these two kinds of experience (of course in their proper correlation) as a philosophical tool (instrumentarium) with which

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹² *The Problem of Experience in Ethics*, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 18.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

he fulfills his primary project of building his concept of ethics. This has to be, as previously said, „a study of the action that reveals the person” and not, as until now, „a study of an action in which a person is presupposed”¹⁶. We can now understand perfectly well that the starting point of this explorative program can only be the data of the moral experience. Furthermore, our experience and also our intellectual apprehension of the person in and through his actions are derived in a particular way from the fact that actions have a moral value: they are good or bad”¹⁷. In the words that follow the Author strengthens this fact given in moral experience and says: „Morality constitutes an intrinsic feature of the actions in which the agent is assumed to be a person”¹⁸. The Cardinal comes back to these statements in the later parts of his work, but the main direction of his thought takes his reflection elsewhere. He writes: „We are not interested here in moral values as such, [...] but we are very much concerned with their actual participation in actions, with their dynamic *fieri*”. The consequence of this position in the ethical thought of father Wojtyła is that we can easily state a very characteristic fact. The Cardinal is so deeply engaged in the explorative study of the „dynamic *fieri*” of moral values that he skips the introductory explanation that is necessary for understanding his statements: he does not give a precise description of the moral value that he is taking into consideration and, moreover, he does not explain of which moral value he is thinking. This he really explains and describes in another source, mentioned in the previous chapters, which is the essay „The Problem of the Theory of Morality”. It is true that according to its title this essay is a general reflection on morality, but an integral part of this study is an outline of a general theory of value. So it is that we must take this work of the Cardinal into consideration.

4. What is „Moral Value”?

From what was already said we understand that the statements made in the description of the experience of morality are an introduction to the axiology of Cardinal Wojtyła. This experience, in fact, presents us with the elementary data in this field. Asked what moral value is, the Cardinal answers: „Moral value [...] in a generic sense (abstracting from the duality that is contained in moral good and moral evil) is something through which

¹⁶ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

a person becomes and is good or bad as a person"¹⁹. This „becoming” cannot be understood simplistically as an act of passing from one state to another. In many other contexts father Wojtyła emphasises the multidimensionality of this „becoming” and he emphasises, above all, its personal character. Value as a creative power of „becoming and being a good person” is made effective in an action, „in this particular *fieri*”²⁰. The Author speaks about this particular *fieri* in another context where he says that „actions provide the particular moments for apprehending and hence for experientially understanding the person”²¹. Indeed, this „becoming a good or a bad person” – as Cardinal Wojtyła emphasises – „gives us an even better and deeper insight into the person than into action itself”²² and in such a way it makes possible an adequate explanation of the process of constituting moral value. So when we say that „a person becomes good or bad because of his action” we manifest an aspect of subjectivity that is hidden in the person. An evident fact regarding the person emerges, namely that „the person and its action are subjects of moral value”²³. Following this line of thought, Father Wojtyła comes to the conclusion that something more is contained in „being a subject of a moral value”: „a causative aspect of the person [...] and in relation to this causative aspect of the person we find the *fieri*, we find that the subject [that is, the human being – TS] becomes good or bad”²⁴. The Author underlines that „this particular *fieri*, this becoming that brings morality to the person as being, this *fieri* brings moral good or moral evil” and in such a way becomes the premise for establishing what the „proper meaning of moral value”²⁵ is expressed in.

The Cardinal therefore states that moral good and also moral evil enter in the objective structure of value. Moral good ennobles the person making him „a good man”, moral evil degrades the person making him „a bad man”. We find this idea not only in the quoted study *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of the Theory of Morality] but also in other publications and especially in the Cardinal’s main work „The Acting Person”²⁶. Therefore this idea has to be treated as a category that in the universe of father Wojtyła’s ideas occupies an important place and has to receive proper attention. This attention can be easily justified by the fact that concept of

¹⁹ K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of the Theory of Morality], op. cit. p. 233.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., p. 12.

²² Ibidem.

²³ K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of the Theory of Morality], op. cit. p. 232.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 233.

²⁶ Ibidem.

moral value has some problems which the Author himself is aware of. In fact, he notes that while there are no doubts when in speaking of good as a moral value, it is not clear „in which sense we can speak about evil as a moral value”²⁷.

In answer to this question, he discards the proposition that in speaking about moral evil we should use the term „negative value”. This would be an ethical form of a logical mistake called „*contradictio in adiecto*” [contradiction in adjunction]. Value, in fact, „denotes something positive from its essence”²⁸. The Cardinal is not happy with the definition of evil as a „non-value”. This term does not fully correspond to the content of moral experience in which the morally bad „indicates the conflict with the principle of morality, with conscience, with a norm – in this sense the opposition of moral evil to moral good appears only secondarily”²⁹. The Author concludes by stating that „moral good in itself and moral evil in itself are a richer and a more complex reality than the term ‘moral value’ can show”³⁰.

This is the turning point in the reasoning of Cardinal Wojtyła. At this point he concentrates on explaining the parallel complexity of moral good and moral evil. As an introduction to his process of thinking we can quote the following statement: „moral good or moral evil are intrinsic to the person and his action”³¹. In this statement we „show the content of the experience of morality to a certain degree, but we do not show it fully”³². If we want to arrive to the fullness of this experience we have to consider the creative aspect that is related to the subjectivity of a value. On this basis we put forward „an interpretation that is able to objectify this particular *fieri* – this process of change that brings [...] moral good or moral evil into the person”³³. Using phenomenological experience we can grasp this link that provides the basis for admitting an element of evil into the content of the concept of moral value as a second element, besides the moral good, and for understanding both of these elements as constitutional elements of moral value. Moral value becomes in this way a generic concept that applied to an acting person manifests itself as good or bad, both of these particular elements constituting two qualitatively different factors. In this aspect, „moral value, both as good or bad, is something primordial and cannot be attributed to a further, more general category”. Moral value be-

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 229.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 230.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 231.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem, p. 233.

comes something manifest: „moral value *qua* moral is evident – the Cardinal continues – and it is evident that it cannot be transposed to any other category”³⁴. In conclusion, Cardinal Wojtyła replies that the questions ‘what is moral value?’ and ‘what are moral good and moral evil?’ can be answered in a twofold way. Firstly – enlightened by phenomenological intuition – we can say that it is something evident in itself, but we can also use an ordinary description: „moral good is something through which the person becomes and is good, moral evil is something through which the person becomes and is bad”³⁵.

5. Teleological Aspects of Moral Value

Father Wojtyła reflects deeply on the problem of what moral value is in itself, but in his publications we also find many statements in which he explores moral value as aim, as a goal of human action. It is important to stress that in this very point Wojtyła is in contrast with M. Scheler. This is because he (Wojtyła) is for a radically „teleological theory of morality”³⁶. Wojtyła, while making considerations about human will, uses a teleological formulation of value, and places particular stress on the will’s principal attribute: the freedom of the will realized in her absolutely free acts of choosing. Father Wojtyła starts from a general understanding of choice, which he defines with the following words: it is „the movement of the will toward the object that is being presented”³⁷. But it is not always a movement towards a determined object. In the conditions of „the variable intentionality of a person’s willing, the person has the possibility of attaching his or her act of will to different objects that present themselves as values”³⁸. This very important identification of „value” with „object” or „objects”, which consists in the identification of value with a concrete good or with concrete goods, can be found repeatedly in Wojtyła’s „The Acting Person”³⁹. This means that this idea is not a circumstantial element of Wojtyła’s deductions, but an integral part of the phenomenological theory of value that he developed. This can be seen in the fact that in the conclusion Father Wojtyła places moral value as a goal aimed at by the will: „The analysis of choice and decision with their own originality then led us to the conclusion that

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 237.

³⁷ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., p. 129.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem, pp. 129-132, 134-138.

the will consisted in the ability to respond independently to a value rather than in the ability to tend towards an object because of its value [...] Thus we see outlined the response-responsibility relation. When man agrees to be responsible for his own actions, he does so because he has the experience of responsibility and because he has the ability to respond with his will to values"⁴⁰. What is important in this conclusion is the fact that the analysis of the act of will, in which value clearly functions as a goal, provides premises for the anthropological dimension of the ethical category of moral responsibility.

Father Wojtyła develops this teleological dimension of moral value in his study „The Problem of the Theory of Morality”, especially in the chapter: „Możliwość interpretacji teleologicznej” [The Possibility of Teleological Interpretation]⁴¹. He states in the beginning that his task is not that of continuing „the great thought of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas” that spoke about „the eschatological aim to which man comes closer through moral good, through virtue, and from which he recedes through moral evil, through sin”. The Cardinal’s task is different and he asks whether and how „it is possible that moral value becomes an aim. [...] This is a question about the possibility of a teleological interpretation of morality”⁴².

Wojtyła explains that an aim is something „towards which we tend or something because of which we tend towards something”⁴³ and he proposes a solution to the problem by saying: „man not only wants good but he also wants to be good. He either wants or he does not want this: in this is contained the heart of morality”⁴⁴. The Author also considers the possible objection that „moral values considered only in this perspective appears only marginally in the tending towards various other objective values”⁴⁵. He therefore admits that „this opinion ... contains only a part of the truth”. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the principal thesis is undermined, because the moral value (though only in a circumstantial way) is still the object of the will and the person tends towards it in his choice. To conclude, Wojtyła confirms the position he previously took: that „in the theory of morality we cannot abandon the formulation of the moral value as an aim”⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 170.

⁴¹ K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of the Theory of Morality], op. cit. pp. 235-239.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 236.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

Wojtyła defends this thesis but also sees its limits. He writes: „we cannot place the specific purposefulness of moral values on the same level as the purposefulness of all other objective values”⁴⁷. This is not allowed because of the person’s anthropological dimension that tends towards moral value in its immanent character. In this requiring moral value we observe „not only an openness to value as an object but also evaluative objectification of its proper subject. In this sense we have to accept a specific teleology of morality”⁴⁸.

6. Moral Value and the Person’s Self-fulfilment

We saw that Cardinal Wojtyła proposes a solution to the problem that he put forward, a solution that is something more than the scrupulous removal of the obstacle in his reasoning that we sketched out in the last paragraph. Solving this problem is in fact the preparation of premises for building up a view that is something very important in Wojtyła’s theory of value and a conclusion to all his reasoning. This theory contains all the principal elements that constitute the philosophical distinctiveness of his understanding of ethics. So it is not surprising that in his major work „The Acting Person” Wojtyła dedicated a whole chapter – „Self-determination and Self-fulfilment”⁴⁹ – to this notion. In this essay it is important that we retrieve in Father Wojtyła’s reasoning only that which is essential for an adequate understanding of this notion but we must, at the same time undertake this task in a profound and exhaustive way.

The most important phrase of Wojtyła’s analysis is a sentence taken from colloquial talk that focuses on the essential idea in this chapter: „I perform an action”. These ordinary words, grammatically connected in a correct unity, are used by Wojtyła in his phenomenological intuition as a symbol of a link that we can observe in the world, a link between a person’s action and this action’s result. The person’s will, characterized by the power of self-determination, is the causative power for this creative „coming into being”, and therefore not all actions have an effect in the outside world. There are actions characterized by inner and intransitive effects. The effects of these actions are directed towards the acting person, they shape his spiritual form, they determine his inner profile. „In the inner dimension of the person, human action is at once both transitory and relatively perma-

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, op. cit., pp. 149-186.

nent, inasmuch as its effects, which are to be viewed in relation [...] to the person's engagement in freedom, last longer than the action itself. The engagement in freedom is objectified [...] in the person and not only in the action, which is the transitive effect. It is in the sphere of morality that this objectification becomes clearly apparent, when through an action that is either morally good or morally bad, man, as person, becomes himself either morally good or morally evil"⁵⁰. In other words: „due to being the performer of an action man also fulfils himself in the action"⁵¹. All this takes place because of the „moral value which constitutes an objective reality intrinsically linked with the person, and thus a reality that is also profoundly subjective. Being a person [as being, as subject – TŚ] man is 'somebody' [as opposed to 'something' – TŚ] and being somebody [i.e., in acting] he may be either good or bad"⁵².

In this way we have come to the end of our considerations on the notion of moral value developed by Cardinal Wojtyła in his pre-papal period of philosophical activity. The last phrase quoted shows how this concept is crucially important in his ethics, which he declared to be philosophy of morality. This notion of Cardinal Wojtyła, therefore deserves careful analytical reflection.

7. The Reception of the Ethical Thought of Karol Wojtyła in Polish Philosophy

We can see from our considerations so far that the principal, though not the only source for understanding Father Wojtyła's ideas on moral value is his work „The Acting Person”. Immediately after having been published this work was welcomed with particular interest: there even was a special discussion on it at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) in which the most illustrious representatives of contemporary Polish Christian philosophy took part. The statements of various participants, as well as the *Conclusion* of the Author himself, were published in the theological journal „Analecta Cracoviensia”⁵³ and also in some other journals⁵⁴. Though there

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 151.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Analecta Cracoviensia V-VI (1973-1974), pp. 243-263.

⁵⁴ A. Półtawski, *Czyn i świadomość, Logos i ethos* [Action and Consciousness, Logos and Ethos], Kraków 1971. S. Grygiel, *Czyn objawieniem osoby* [Action reveals the Person], *Znak* [Sign] 23 (1971) nr 2/3, pp. 200-208. P. Trzebiatowski, *Być i działać* [To be and to Act], *Życie i Myśl* [Life and Thought] 19 (1970), nr 6, pp. 142-144. Cfr. A. Boniecki MIC, *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły* [Curriculum Vitae of Karol Wojtyła], Kraków 2000, pp. 705-706.

have been many publications on Wojtyła's work, there are still some themes that have not yet been discussed and articulated sufficiently. One of these themes is the problem of value in general, and of moral value in particular. The participants discussed first of all the anthropological dimensions of the concept of person and of its acting, especially the personalistic vision of profound aspects of its individual ego. In the contents of „The Acting Person” are enclosed the major themes of scientific importance of Wojtyła's work, pointed out at the end of a critical statement about Wojtyła's work by professor J. Kalinowski: „the personalistic conception of man [...] developed by Father Wojtyła [...] corresponds to reality as it is [...] The analysis of the human person and of its acting, although almost entirely phenomenological, is original, rich, profound, detailed, instructive and, *last but not least*, it does not fail to reveal its organic connections with the metaphysics of the human person”⁵⁵.

I agree with the generally positive opinion regarding „The Acting Person” but it is impossible not to make some critical observations that we propose in connection with two important elements of Father Wojtyła's theory of value. The first of these two elements is the concept of theory of moral value, often repeated by Wojtyła. The second is the method used by Wojtyła that consisted in analysing the object under consideration in the light of phenomenological intuition. We will base our conclusion on these two themes.

In traditional Christian philosophy there have been situations in which someone has had to attack a philosophical statement whose Author was a recognized thinker with huge social authority. In such cases, the objections addressed to these philosophers were introduced by the clause „*salva reverentia*”, which means „with all due respect”. In our case, the Author in question is of the very most illustrious and he deserves the highest degree of reverence and respect. So we want to recall a proverb famous from Aristotle's times: „*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*” (I like Plato but I like the truth even more, or, Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth) and we want to mention that Father Wojtyła himself used to repeat this proverb with all his reverence addressing it to the participants of the above mentioned discussion in Lublin, also to those who criticized his „The Acting Person”⁵⁶. Because of this we want to follow the same path in our study.

⁵⁵ J. Kalinowski, *Metafizyka i fenomenologia osoby ludzkiej. Pytania wywołane przez „Osobę i czyn”* [*Metaphysics and Phenomenology of the Human Person. Questions raised by 'The Acting Person'*], *Analecta Cracoviensia V-VI* (1973-1974), p. 71.

⁵⁶ *Słowo końcowe* [*Conclusion*], *Analecta Cracoviensia V-VI* (1973-1974), pp. 243-263.

8. Final Remarks and Considerations

a. Problems with the Definition of „Moral Value”

The first critical observations arise when in the Cardinal's considerations of moral value we find this definition: „moral value is something through which person becomes morally good or morally bad”. Firstly, this formulation indicates the effect while the cause of this effect remains unknown. This definition could be compared to answering the question „What is light?” with the statement „Light is something that enlightens the room”. We could see here the attempt of evading the question rather than that of explaining with a proper answer.

Secondly, I object to the formulation in Wojtyła's statement that moral value is something through which man can become and becomes good or may become and becomes bad. Value, especially moral value, is, in the colloquial meaning of this word, but also in its philosophical use, something positive, something that ennobles the person. The Cardinal himself supports this view when he rejects the term „anti-value” for expressing the radical opposition of evil to good; he adds that the term „value” „indicates something positive in its very essence”⁵⁷ and that even though it be used with the prefix „anti” it does not lose this characteristic, it maintains its positive connotation. In saying this, Wojtyła rejects any possibility that „value” be a causative factor of moral evil, which would radically contradict its inner dynamic. This error here is so clear that it cannot be understood how it infiltrated the thought of such an undoubtedly brilliant philosopher as Cardinal Wojtyła.

Thirdly, the definition of moral value as something „through which a person becomes morally good or morally bad” leads to another problem that also Father Wojtyła notices. He states that in this formulation, moral value takes on the logical function of a „genus” to which two species belong: moral good and moral evil. It therefore seems that the Author gives moral evil the same status of real being that is proper of moral good. If this were so, we would have to deal with some metaphysics of evil, but what should this metaphysics of evil be? It is certain that the Cardinal would not agree to his philosophy being compared to the arbitrary and improbable speculations of J.-P. Sartre, due to his category of „value”. According to Sartre, value is man himself, who finds himself outside being and outside of any content, and who exists as lack of himself⁵⁸. But if we cannot even

⁵⁷ K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [*The Problem of the Theory of Morality*], op. cit., p. 230.

⁵⁸ S. Grygiel, *Zło w człowieku. Na marginesie filozofii egzystencjalistycznej* [*Evil in man. On the Margins of Existentialistic Philosophy*] in: B. Bejze (ed.), *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych* [*In the Current of Postconciliar Issues*], vol. III, Warsaw 1969, p. 79.

take into consideration such suppositions, the only explanations of a metaphysics of evil would be a thesis taken from Christian philosophy that reduces every kind of evil to a lack of good, good that is proper to being as one of the perfections of being. But this definition of evil does not give it any status of real being. It is therefore not possible to treat evil as a species opposite to good which participates with good in a common genus of „moral value”. It is possible that the Cardinal foresaw these problems and objections, difficult to refute, and that he turned the questions regarding the verifiability of the principles of his theory of value to a completely different area that is not the rational analysis of the content of this concept. He ends with the conclusion that „moral value, both good and bad, is something original and cannot be reduced to any other category. This originality appears at a phenomenological level as something certain and evident: moral value is evident as moral, and it is evident that it cannot be reduced to any other category”⁵⁹.

b. One-sidedness of the Method of „Phenomenological Intuition”

The words of the Cardinal quoted in the last phrase are an indirect critique of the methodological orientation of Father Wojtyła. According to this orientation – that agrees with a declaration quoted above⁶⁰ – the main tool of philosophical research is phenomenological intuition of the object in question. In our case this object is moral value. Without a doubt in the context of our present theme this intuition presents itself as a moral experience, and this „morality” is precisely the phenomenon of moral value. The question is not that of moral experience that consists in *living* moral value in acts of moral praxis. According to Father Wojtyła’s thought the experience of moral value is a kind of „experience of second level”, in comparison with the first level that is the actualisation of the moral value in „action”. This experience of moral value, however, possesses a certain „intuitive character” and the moral value appears in it not as „some mental abstraction” but as something „that we experience in every single moral fact”⁶¹. Due to this intuitive directness of the knowledge of value on both levels of phenomenological intuition, moral value imposes itself on the human mind with such boundless clarity that the possibility of other perspectives on this field of human activity is excluded.

The concept of intuitive cognition of moral value just described – while it can be used as a proof of the Author’s invention – does not provide any

⁵⁹ K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [The Problem of the Theory of Morality], op. cit. pp. 233.

⁶⁰ *The Problem of Experience in Ethics*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

premises for building a precise statement which would express the sense of this value in the categories of pure good without moral evil accompanying it. On the contrary, this concept poses new question.

These new questions focus around the concept of „phenomenological intuition”. It does not matter whether this intuition is examined with respect to the experience of morality or with respect to moral experience. In any case it cannot be taken as an innate cognitive capacity, and cannot therefore be taken as an attribute that works in the psychical structure of every normal grown person and which would enable the empirical verification of the sentences expressed by the philosophers of morality. This critical judgement applies also to the category of „empathy” (Edith Stein graduated with a thesis entitled „The Problem of Empathy”). The category of empathy is a product of the mind worked out by the followers of modern phenomenology to be used as a method for the philosophical examination of reality. According to these philosophers, reality appears in the consciousness of the subject in the process of knowing and it becomes object of the experiences that the subject feels. The phenomenologists emphasize with great satisfaction the unification – in the cognitive act – of the knowing subject, which is the person, with the object of this process of knowledge. This intentional unification conditions the immediateness and concreteness of the cognitive act, in other words, its authentically intuitive character. And the expression to indicate this idea is precisely the phrase „phenomenological intuition” that in the philosophical convention of the phenomenologists has the role of a *super-arbiter* in solving fundamental philosophical problems.

The reconstruction of the methodological orientation of the Cardinal does not give any guarantee that this method can bring to any results. The method of phenomenological intuition that he applied can be a basis for defending the thesis that moral value exists and that it is not only a product of philosophical speculation, because it makes its defence from the fact that it describes the phenomenon of moral value in its concrete, immediate configuration. But this method does not respond to other questions such as that of the difference between the moral value and any other category of good; or that of what determines its essential specificity and what determines its identity. In brief, we are still at the same point from which we started.

c. Inadequate Understanding of the Concept of „Abstraction”

It may be important to think about the reasons that made Cardinal Wojtyła consider the phenomenon of moral value, so appealing to his phenomenological orientation, without nevertheless making the effort of

going deeper into its essential meaning. We can be sure that father Wojtyła knew this kind of essential issue very well. If he considered something as not very important he surely was motivated by most important reasons. Where we can look for these reasons and what do they consist in?

In this study we explored several sources of the ethical thought of father Wojtyła, and we emphasised a phrase that we previously quoted: „Moral value is something through which a person becomes and is good or bad as a person”. Now we consider this phrase again: moral value, described by the act of phenomenological intuition, is something that „we experience” and not „some mental abstraction”. So what is this „mental abstraction” that the Author rejects *a limine*, from the start, from the beginning, as something so clear that it does not need any explorative reflection? We cannot find any broader statements on this problem in the publications of father Wojtyła quoted so far. In the analytical table of contents of „The Acting Person” the entry „abstraction” does not appear at all.

But we find much more elsewhere, developed in another context, in which father Wojtyła reflects on the issue of the objectification of moral good. Analysing this objective good he agrees that it is a result of „proper abstraction”. We deal with this abstraction when „we separate the good from any concrete acts of concrete people [...] and we grasp it in itself, *in se*. In this way we can consider *in se* the moral good of matrimonial faithfulness as opposed to the moral evil of adultery. The objectivity of moral value in the first and in the second case allows us to speak about an objective moral order [...]. In fact, this moral order that exists in the human mind as some abstractive idea, exists in them in strict relation [...] to the living human reality that is given in experience as morality”⁶².

It must however be said – *salva reverentia* – that the interpretation of the „abstractive” genesis of moral good just quoted, conceals a twofold simplification. First of all, one must confute the reduction of the category of „moral good” to the level of „some abstractive idea” that according to Author consists in a creation of the human mind that is apart from reality. The example of understanding the moral good of matrimonial faithfulness by means of its „opposition to the moral evil of adultery” is quite improbable. „Opposition” is not a form of abstraction. It consists in opposing in an abstractive way (i.e. in general way) „matrimonial faithfulness” to the evil of adultery that is situated on the same abstractive level. This does not constitute a case of „separating good” from „a concrete act” of „a concrete person”.

⁶² K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności* [*The Problem of the Theory of Morality*], op. cit., p. 243.

In the quotation that we mentioned above, however, we find another very important shortcoming: a certain superficiality in the treatment of a fact that is essential for the objective status of moral values. We are speaking about something that was first noticed by catholic missionaries and that is contemporarily upheld by the research of ethnologists; we speak here about the fact⁶³ that in the moral consciousness of both highly developed societies and very low and primitive social groups we find a set of extra-historical and invariably important moral values proper to humankind. Within this set we find values such as justice, veracity, respect of human life, and some imperatives related to these values: do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery and others, generally known from Decalogue. This real world of values and moral imperatives remains beyond the reach of phenomenological intuition, although those values and imperatives play the role of fundamental principles of an objective moral order that underlies the more specific characteristics and moral precepts that are derived from the fundamental principles, and that is also at the basis of the „positive law” constituted by the competent social authorities.

Let us summarize the last remarks we have made. The world of determined values and moral imperatives, accessible to ethical thought, constitutes a source of moral experience that is too rich to be omitted in any reflection about the essential sense of moral value. We notice, however, that in the large-scale work „The Acting Person” and also in other publications of the Cardinal, even though the word „value” appears quite often, its referents (*designata*) – so crucial for our problems – is a conspicuous shortcoming in Wojtyła’s work. He tries to explain this situation in a statement that is not even a part of the tractate, in a footnote, and that cannot be considered to be a sufficient justification: „If the ethnologists were interested in the morality of different societies, especially of primitive peoples, they were not interested in the existence of this morality in those peoples but in the peculiarities of this morality”⁶⁴. The intention that directed the ethnologists in their research is of no major significance for us, but the results of this research, on the other hand, are extremely important for ethical reflection on the world of moral values: they show that these values are present in every person, that they are present in the spiritual culture of all times and of all peoples. They direct our explorative reason to richer sources which allow us to penetrate the essential sense of these values. Cardinal Wojtyła did not make use of these possibilities. Because of this, his

⁶³ General theses concerning this matter were formulized in: T. Ślipko, *Zarys etyki ogólnej*, [Outlines of General Ethics], IVth edition, Kraków 2004, pp. 216-217.

⁶⁴ *The Problem of Experience in Ethics*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

thought has only slightly touched the surface of the problem of finding a satisfactory description of value as „something through which man becomes and is good or bad”. Wojtyła did not explore this statement further in his other considerations and because of this he did not grasp the essential nerve of moral value. This is the reason why the theory of value presented by Wojtyła, after having seen all his works in this field, gives one a feeling of insufficiency: one notices that the problem of what moral values are remains open, the problem of what their inner constitution is, the question of which category of objective being they belong to. At this point we should look for the causes of such an unexpected result of our study.

We can examine at least two causes of this situation. The first is to be found in the limitations of the method of phenomenological intuition that Cardinal Wojtyła makes use of. This method is so focused on analysing the intuitively and directly experienced moral facts that it leads to a lack of interest for the objective field of moral reality, of which an important sphere is the world of moral values as a component of the objective moral order. Instead of concentrating on a deep analysis of this moral experience, Cardinal Wojtyła turned his thoughts to the description of the manifestations of the person in the acts performed by this person.

This method, in its subjective-concrete orientation, is also dependant on an inadequate understanding of the operation proper to the human mind which is commonly known as „abstraction”. The Author paid attention to a stereotype, common in modern philosophy, that undermines „abstraction” by reducing – as we had possibility of seeing – its cognitive activity to the constitution of arbitrary speculations lacking direct contact with the reality grasped by the acting person in the intuitive vision of its direct experiencing. It seems that Cardinal Wojtyła is unfamiliar with Aristotle’s and Aquinas’ concept of „abstraction” as a capacity of the human mind to penetrate the essential structure of the known object, to reach the thing that constitutes the essential sense of the known „esse” and of the „agere” that derives from this „esse”. This limited theoretical and epistemological standpoint was an obstacle for Cardinal Wojtyła to see the world of moral values as central source in his explorative ethical research, with evident harm to its final result.

9. Conclusion

After all that has already been said in this study and with the totality of these statements before us, we now have to examine the declaration of father Wojtyła that he „would try to join two philosophical orientations,

Thomism and the phenomenological philosophy of being and consciousness". Taking into consideration all our critical reflections, can we say that this aim has been reached by Wojtyła? Without a doubt, the first condition for the realization of this project is the consideration of the ethics of Thomism in its contemporary version, often described as „traditional Christian ethics". Because the main subject of father Wojtyła's research was the theory of moral values, this „joining" of Thomism with phenomenology could be made on this ground. In the publications of Cardinal Wojtyła that we have used, however, as well as in other publications not quoted in the bibliographical lists of his works, the traditional Christian ethics appears neither under the thomistic nor under any other point of view. So, in order to fill this lack, an outline of this traditional Christian theory of moral values will be given in the following addendum, which will be slightly longer than usual.

10. Theory of Moral Values in Traditional Christian Ethics

The expression „moral value" was introduced in philosophical-ethical literature only in the first half of XIX century by a German philosopher, Herman Lotze, who undertook in depth research into it. Christian ethics has adopted this term and started to work on it only in the XX century. This does not mean that they saw only then the philosophical-ethical problems that were connected to this term. The history of philosophy shows that already in the Middle Ages these problems were spoken about in Christian philosophical circles. All this, however, took place in the context of examining the „inner difference between moral good and evil". The classical term that was used to indicate the „moral good" as „value" was the term „*bonum honestum*" that means „the honest good", which is the third category in the triad which also includes „the pleasurable good" (*bonum delectabile*) and „the useful good" (*bonum utile*). The principal nucleus of this doctrine can be expressed in a few statements. The objective contents of the honest good are to be found in the judgements and norms of „right reason" (*ratio recta*) that – according to the majority of authors – finds their content in „human nature integrally considered" (*natura humana complete spectata*). As justification for this thesis some examples from history are presented: those which register the existence of some elementary moral code in such acts as the worship of God, the respect towards parents, justice. All these acts are generally considered as morally honest acts, and others in opposition to these – e.g. blasphemy, murder, doing evil to parents – are morally bad. Such opinions are apparent when by an act of the mind we enter their inner moral sense that tells us that these acts are acts that in

themselves (in se) are morally good, while the opposite acts are bad, irreversibly, always and eternally bad⁶⁵.

This theory of value, which still in the XIX and XX centuries was commonly approved in Christian ethics, was elaborated with a metaphysical method of thinking and has been formulated in a language that corresponded to this method. Obviously, this is not a proof of the weakness of this method, since every philosophical system has to use a method and has to formulate a philosophical language that serves this method. But a reasonable objection is that this ethics – while limiting itself to safe objective foundations of the world of value – omits a problem that is strictly connected to these foundations: that of the process of formation and of the inner axiological specificity of moral values, a constitutive specificity that exists in „rational human nature integrally considered” and expressed by „right reason”, reason correctly employed. Meanwhile, the development of contemporary phenomenological trends of philosophy and the development of the solutions proposed by these trends or under their influence (one examples of these trends is the theory of father Wojtyła that we have seen in this study) has brought this problem to the foreground, a problem that became a challenge for further studies towards its solution. The results of what we have said to this point, indicate that this problem cannot be solved by joining the two orientations of traditional Thomism and contemporary phenomenology, even though these trends are close to each other. The idea of making a connection with traditional Christian ethics in its Augustinian and Thomistic versions is much more interesting and can lead to developments of the theory of moral good through a process of complementing what is still incomplete. This task is so complicated that we must dedicate another paragraph to it.

11. Proposal of a Solution

As an introduction to this new stage in our considerations we shall determine the source which we have to keep in mind while looking for the essential nucleus of moral values. This source, to say the truth, is already known to us. It is hidden in the world of moral values that are firmly present in the moral consciousness of individuals and of whole societies; this world was not appreciated and even left out altogether by Cardinal Wojtyła. As

⁶⁵ See: Th. Meyer SJ, *Institutiones iuris naturalis, seu philosophia moralis universalis*, Pars I, *Ius naturale generale*, Friburgi Brisgoviae 1885, pag. 101-114; V. Cathrein SJ, *Philosophia moralis in usum scholarum*, ed. 20, Friburgi-Brisgoviae, Barcinonae 1955, pag. 75-78; I. Gonzalez Moral SJ, *Philosophia moralis*, ed. 4, Santander 1955, pag. 133-152.

has already been said in the critical part of this study, these moral values are not insipid „abstractions” separated from concrete data of experience. An „abstraction” is, in this context, only the general concept of „value”. It is not an empty abstraction because its substantial contents are determined by the attributes that *unequivocally* describe some bringing together of qualitatively differential values, such as justice, honesty, veracity, love and many others. The unequivocal character of the determination of these different characteristics, which emerge experimentally in the above-mentioned sources, convinces us that in the attributes described the axiological nucleus, proper to structure of these values, is expressed. This nucleus is their essential „esse” and by which also the „agere” is conditioned, the „agere” which specifies the role of these values in the life of the acting person. In this way, we enter into the sphere of considerations that aim to show the direction that the above-mentioned development of the traditional theory of value in Christian ethics could take.

The first step along this road is that of making the distinction between moral values on one side and pleasurable goods (*bona delectabilia*) and the useful goods (*bona utilia*) on the other. The two latter categories of good exist in the surrounding world independently from man and they are useful and valuable to him in the measure that they are able to procure some pleasurable experience or satisfy people’s determined needs. They are also real aims, real goods to which man tends because when they are reached in their effect (pleasure, utility) they stop being an aim for the acting person but become, we could say, something in which the person takes part (pleasure) or that belongs to the person (utility). There is an aspect of the pleasurable and useful goods in which they are alike: their position in the existential status of man is determined by the fact that they are „consumed”, their being is to be an „object of consumption”.

Moral values such as veracity, justice, love or other, which we know from our own experiences, introduce us into a completely different human world. They are different from pleasurable goods and useful goods because, first of all, they have nothing to do with consumption. These values appear to us as much nobler. The reflection on their qualitative contents, made on the basis of their distinction from pleasurable and useful goods, leads us to the conclusion that in the sphere of human acts they have another, specific role. Man can see in these values some given standards of behaviour: while performing the categories of acts that correspond to these values, according to their perfect form, man improves himself as a person. An example for this can be found in human speech. When man speaks in truth, expressing a thought that corresponds to his opinions, he not only speaks out an understandable phrase of a given language but he also, in this act, fulfils the ideal form of veracity that corresponds to this category of acts; while

saying the truth he improves himself as a „truthful man”. We can observe the same thing when somebody gives back an amount of money that he owed to another person: performing an act concordant to the value of justice, he ennobles himself as a „just man”. That means that in each act of this kind man improves himself as a human being while repeating the standard of a certain value. This process of growth in perfection of man’s personality does not effect the values that are the creative power of this process. So we can see that moral values, while they are the integral factor of the moral consciousness of man, are, in the sphere of his actions, always „in the distance”, they unchangeably preserve their distinctive status of ideal standards of determined categories of acts. The effective causative power of the act performed according to this standard ideal of a given value penetrates the spiritual content of man as a person and it models his moral image. In this way an invisible but real process of improvement of man takes place, an improvement of man as subject of acts that – in man’s own moral consciousness – are carriers of models of perfection worthy of the human person. This process also determines the status of freedom that is operatively engaged. Moral value has, in this process, the status of a principle that orders all the act of freedom that man has to fulfil and this freedom, thanks to the power of good of the ideal of behaviour that the value contains, reaches the highest degree of the creative dynamics that are proper to it: it takes on the form of „true freedom”.

Summarizing our reflection on the objective status of moral values, we find ever more enlightening the idea of traditional Christian ethics that moral values find themselves in the category of exemplary ideals of determined acts, which are manifestation of primal moral ideal of improving the human person. This idea of „exemplary ideals” is this „further and therefore more generic category” whose existence was denied by Cardinal Wojtyła, who said that the concept of moral value is a concept that is evident in itself and therefore impossible to explain with any further interpretation. According to this we should stop at the definition of values as something „through which man becomes morally good or morally bad”. From the traditional Christian ethics’ point of view, this is only indicating the problem, not offering its solution. The solution can be found in the notion of „honest good” that has been known to moral philosophy for ages, and this notion should be further developed by placing it in the horizon of the exemplary ideal as a category that determines the axiological status of moral value. This statement allows us to bring this discussion about what moral value is in its most profound essence to a close. It also shows why this moral value makes it so that man becomes „a good person” and also what this „good” consists in: it consist in tending to the realization of the exemplary perfection of fulfilled humanity that is the task of human freedom.

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