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**FREEDOM FOR RESPONSIBILITY:
RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN NATURE IN
THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF
KAROL WOJTYLA**

Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.

– Pope John Paul II¹

The mission of John Paul was to be a witness . . . He is a witness that the human person was created for full freedom, a freedom that resides in the gift of being able to choose the good, of making choices of the highest grade of love, choices that transform his history and the history of the world in the history of salvation.

– Mother Adela Galindo, Foundress SCTJM²

Responsibility is a theme that particularly marked the pontifical magisterium of St. John Paul II, a theme presented always in a strict relationship with the very identity of the human person. This is evident

¹ Pope John Paul II, “Homily at Oriole Park at Camden Yard,” Baltimore (8 October, 1995), § 7 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19951008_baltimore.html, accessed on 15 December, 2016].

² Mother Adela Galindo, Foundress SCTJM, “Letter of Mother Adela at the Announcement of the Beatification of John Paul II” (24 January, 2011), 1–2 [http://www.piercedhearts.org/mother_adela/words_mag_beatific_jp2_1.pdf, accessed on 15 December, 2016].

from the very theme of his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*,³ in *Familiaris Consortio*,⁴ *Laborem Exercens*⁵ (to name just a few pertinent writings), and consistently throughout his magisterium. This wealth of teaching is imbued with a consistent philosophical perspective of the identity and dignity of the human person as closely bound up with, and finding particular expression in, responsibility. These philosophical assumptions can be traced to his earlier works, to the philosophical writing of the young Karol Wojtyła. The careful examination of responsibility within the thought of Wojtyła, therefore, illumines and enriches the understanding of the magisterium of Pope John Paul II, a wealth of teaching that has yet to be exhausted in its vital contribution to the fundamental questions of the human person in our modern age.

Responsibility is a central theme within the thought of Karol Wojtyła, so much so that it is included in the very title of one of his most lengthy works, *Love and Responsibility*. This work is a principle example of the importance Wojtyła places on responsibility, as a central philosophical theme that reaches beyond the realm of anthropology and ontology, also extending into the realm of ethics. The primary confirmation for the multiple applications of this theme is found within Wojtyła's characteristic method of experience. He defends this integration, stating, "[t]hese two experiences—the experience of the human being and the experience of morality—can really never be completely separated, although we can, in the context of the overall process of reflection, focus more on one or the other."⁶

³ The attention to the dignity of the human person is evident within the choice to consider Jesus precisely as the Redeemer of *man*, a theme developed throughout the Encyclical. See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Redeemer of Man *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March, 1979).

⁴ See especially §11 and 17, in Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November, 1981).

⁵ See especially §15–17, in Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on Human Work *Laborem Exercens* (14 September, 1981).

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1979), 189.

In order to understand the meaning of responsibility within the work of Wojtyła, the subject of freedom must first be considered. This study will seek to demonstrate that there is, within the philosophical thought of Karol Wojtyła, an essential connection between human nature and responsibility. To elucidate this claim, the present study will consider freedom as an essential part of human nature, then discuss Wojtyła's understanding of responsibility, and then consider the integration of responsibility and human nature within the human dynamism through freedom. Concerning method, the present study will follow the course pursued by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, incorporating the content of experience to gain a better vantage of this fundamentally ontological question. While focusing on his work *The Acting Person*, the study will also incorporate some of his other writings, particularly his article "The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism" and his book *Love and Responsibility*.

Freedom: Characteristic of the Human Person According to the Order of Being

Wojtyła assumes the Thomistic explanation of the hylomorphic structure of man, comprised of body and spiritual soul. The faculties of the soul that are particular to the human person are the intellect and will, which have as their proper function reason and volition, respectively. The will is first an ontological component of the person, but enters the realm of observation and experience in actions.⁷ Consistently applying his personalistic perspective,⁸ Wojtyła perceives the concrete act of willing as a singular communication of the person who wills. The will, as this claim demonstrates, is not strictly synonymous with the

⁷ Id., 106.

⁸ See Karol Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Lang, 1993), 165: "Personalism is not primarily a theory of the person or a theoretical science of the person. Its meaning is largely practical and ethical: it is concerned with the person as a subject and object of activity . . ."

person, but neither simply an appendage external to the subject, something a person merely has. The act of will, rather, expresses the ontological identity of the person, for action follows being, and is expressed in the experience of “I may, but I need not.”⁹

The concrete act of the will, however, not only expresses the being of the person, but also shapes the person. As Wojtyla states, “when I am directed by an act of will toward a particular value, I myself not only determine this directing, but through it I simultaneously determine myself as well.”¹⁰ This dynamic, which reaches beyond the intentionality of willing to the subject as “creator of myself”¹¹ is expressed in the term ‘self-determination’. Wojtyla apprehends self-determination as the key implication of authentically human acts of willing, for it indicates not only the experience of the willing subject’s efficacy in the act,¹² but precisely their experience of their own self as the *subject* of their willing, and at once the object of the same. Before proceeding to consider more fully the connection between efficacy, self-determination, and freedom, we must first consider the foundations for self-determinism with the human dynamism.

Self-determination is a feature of the human person that is built upon the more fundamental attributes of self-governance and self-possession. Self-possession, which Wojtyla alternately defines as self-ownership,¹³ is assumed in self-governance, and constitutes the necessary ground for self-determination. Self-governance concerns the reality that every person “actually exercises that specific power over himself which nobody else can exercise or execute.”¹⁴ It must be empha-

⁹ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 120.

¹⁰ Karol Wojtyla, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Lang, 1993), 191.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*, 189: “The first definition of self-determinism in the experience of human action involves a sense of efficacy on the part of the personal self: «I act» means «I am the efficient cause» of my action and of my self-actualization as a subject . . .”

¹³ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 106.

¹⁴ *Id.*, 107.

sized that ‘actually’ in this phrase does not refer to a current state of affairs, but rather emphasizes that the power of self-governance is exercised precisely through action. These two dynamisms are integral to the foundation of will as self-determinism, considered “within the framework of the whole dynamic structure that is constituted by the person.”¹⁵

Self-control, on the other hand, is not considered as fundamental to self-determination, as self-possession and self-governance are. For Wojtyła, the notion of self-control is not synonymous with the essential dynamism of the will, but rather constitutes a concrete act of the will.¹⁶ It remains an important virtue, a mode in which the will is expressed. As such, it assists in the ordering of one’s actions based on the truth, rather than being guided by the situations one may experience that more properly as what-happens-in-man and what-happens-with-man. Self-control is a virtue that assists the person to act in authentic freedom.

What, then, is the definition of freedom intended by Karol Wojtyła? We shall begin by observing the negative formulation. Freedom is not synonymous with license, and is not an indication of the number of possible objects of choice. As Wojtyła states, “[w]e discover the structure of freedom in volitions as intentional acts directed toward a value as their end.”¹⁷ Freedom is not a power of the soul, or alternately a characteristic of the human faculty, that opens to limitless possibility. Freedom is not something that one possesses, but rather one’s self-possession is indicated by means of freedom as expressed through acts. Freedom does not itself have ontological being, but is ordered toward something external to its proper subject, the subject of the human person. Freedom is never simply an unqualified freedom, but always freedom *for* a value. This is expressed in the fundamental formulation to which Wojtyła constantly returns when considering the human will

¹⁵ Id., 134.

¹⁶ Id., 106.

¹⁷ Id., 120.

within the human dynamism. He states, with frequent repetition through his work and overall corpus, that freedom is directly related to the will and its simple formula “I may, but I need not.”¹⁸

Freedom is a capacity rooted deeply within the human dynamism, and inherent to the person, one that does not admit of removal. Even in the extreme situations where external liberty to choose is violated and withheld from the human person, their ontological subjectivity remains intact, despite the fact that their somatic capability to act be impeded by some external factor. This is so because the very core of the human dynamism is characterized by inalienability, by a uniqueness and ontological internal freedom over oneself. Observed primordially in self-possession, and expressed in self-governance and the resulting acts of self-determination,¹⁹ the inviolability of the human person is such that not even God will interfere in this most personal core, which is thus radically free. This understanding of the personal core is of great importance because it preserves the authentic freedom of the human person, viewing the ontological identity of the person based on the potential for freedom, rather than the action of the same.²⁰ Thus, the human person is always, and in all circumstances, a free subject, characterized by self-determination.

The consideration of the definition of freedom leads to the question of the integration of the whole person. As Wojtyla states, “[i]t would be helpful . . . to have a basic notion of what it is about action that allows it somehow to reveal the wholeness originality, and unrepeatability of each human being.” He continues, in answer to the proposed need, “[a]n essential element for every action consciously per-

¹⁸ Id., 115.

¹⁹ Id., 107.

²⁰ See Karol Wojtyla, “The Will in the Analysis of the Ethical Act,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 20. Wojtyla’s explanation the Thomistic understanding of will as a “passage from potency” is helpful here.

formed by a concrete human being is self-determination.”²¹ Freedom, directly related to the ability for self-determination as shown, is integral to the expression of the person according to the decision of the person as subject. Wojtyla extends this understanding in *Love and Responsibility*, where he states:

Because a human being—a person—possesses free will, he is his own master, *sui juris* as the Latin phrase has it. This characteristic feature of the person goes with another distinctive attribute. The Latin of the philosophers defined it in the assertion that personality is *alteri incommunicabilis*—not capable of transmission, not transferable.²²

Thus, freedom closely relates to the inviolable personal core, the personal ego which is the seat of personal identity.

The freedom of the human person, as a characteristic that pertains according to nature, is a singular moment of the personal experience of the personal transcendence as subject and master of oneself. Tarasiewicz, emphasizing the importance of the philosophical concept of transcendence to personalism, attests that freedom is a primary expression of the transcendence of the human person “in relation to nature,”²³ that is, his analysis points to the essential bond between the accident of freedom and the substance that is the human person. As Wojtyla states:

[S]elf-determination is a property of the person, who, as the familiar definitions says, is a *naturae rationalis individua substantia*. This property is realized through the will, which is an accident. Self-determination—or, in other words, freedom—is not limited to the accidental dimension, but belongs to the substantial

²¹ Karol Wojtyla, “Participation or Alienation?” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 199.

²² Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), 24.

²³ Pawel Tarasiewicz, “The Common Sense Personalism of St. John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla),” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3:supplement (2014): 623.

dimension of the person; it is the person's freedom, and not just the will's freedom, although it is undeniably the person's freedom through the will.²⁴

Freedom is innate to the human person according to nature, such that Wojtyla even speaks of it in the metaphorical terms of "the instinct of freedom."²⁵ Though freedom is not an ontological structure *per se*, it is rooted in the very core of the person, where it exists as the self-determination that is actualized through the intentionality of the will. Kupczak affirms the importance of Wojtyla's theory of human volition, precisely in the new perspective it brings of these two dimensions of freedom natural to the human person.²⁶ Freedom is natural to man, and an expression of the full and unique dignity of the human person.

Responsibility: Freedom *for*

The transition from freedom to responsibility for Wojtyla passes by way of the will and values. "Man is conditioned in the broadest sense by the world of objects, in particular, by the domain of values."²⁷ This statement, at first reading, bears some contradiction with the description of freedom previously considered, a confusion that is furthered by the modern philosophical and social understanding of freedom. Wojtyla's discussion of this seeming contradiction is the key to unveiling the authentic meaning of responsibility as an ontological concept, rather than a rational construct of duty. This clarification leads to Wojtyla's definition of responsibility, and then into a deeper analysis of the internal structure.

In *The Acting Person*, Wojtyla identifies freedom as a characteristic that conditions choosing as an act that is indeterminate regarding

²⁴ Wojtyla, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism," 190.

²⁵ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 122.

²⁶ Jarosław Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 124–125.

²⁷ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 132.

its object.²⁸ Closely related to his self-determination, Wojtyła is attentive to the anthropological problem of determinism, which bears a narrow but deep distinction from his concept of self-determinism. To clarify the difference, he considers the theme of the motivation of various objects as factors that are subject to the human will, which remains always free to choose between them.²⁹ Though no object moves man by necessity, the objective value that each object bears determines the extent to which this object should move the human person to choose for it. As he states, “[i]n his responding [to values] there is that independence with regard to objects which does not abolish all the bonds and thus leaves a certain measure of dependence on objects.”³⁰ This dependence is founded on the dependence of the subject on truth, which Kupczak affirms is a necessary determinate of freedom.³¹ As Wojtyła states, “[i]t would be impossible to understand choice without referring the dynamism proper to the will to truth as the principle of willing.”³² The degree to which a value calls for a response in the intentionality of the subject is one sense in which Wojtyła employs the term ‘responsibility’—“it is the essential surrender of will to truth that seems finally to account for the person’s transcendence in action, ultimately for his ascendancy to his own dynamism.”³³

Responsibility is closely linked to the dual dimension of transcendence within the human dynamism. The intentionality of the will, the horizontal dimension of transcendence, is accompanied by the reminder that human choosing is also and concurrently an act of self-determination, which corresponds to vertical transcendence.³⁴ This dual dimension is important to the understanding of responsibility, for tran-

²⁸ Id.

²⁹ Id., 129.

³⁰ Id., 134–135.

³¹ Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 125.

³² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 137.

³³ Id., 138.

³⁴ Id., 132.

scendence illuminates the intended understanding of independence in relation to truth, in contradistinction with independence from objects. Speaking of this facet of the human dynamism, Wojtyła states:

His independence in the intentional sphere is to be explained by this inner reference to truth and dependence on truth inherent in the will. It is this dependence that makes will independent of objects and their presentation, and grants the person that ascendancy over his own dynamism which we have here described as the transcendence in action (as vertical transcendence).³⁵

Rostworowski confirms transcendence as “the motor and continuous source of his dynamicity,”³⁶ thus at the core of the human person and his authentic liberty.

Having considered the role of intentionality and motivation, the manner in which man is conditioned by values can be properly understood. As Wojtyła states, “[f]or his [referring to the human person] is not the freedom *from* objects or values, but, on the contrary, the freedom of, or rather *for* objects and values.”³⁷ Human indeterminism in the realm of intentionality is not the primary definition of freedom for Wojtyła, but rather “independence . . . is due to the fact of decision.”³⁸ Though freedom *for* is an affirmative choice, this one “yes” is necessarily accompanied by “no” to every other option by virtue of the demands of the principle of non-contradiction. (We assume here a choice that is absolute, though the same argument validly applies to any choice, applied in proportion to the amount of exclusivity inherent in a particular

³⁵ *Id.*, 138.

³⁶ Tadeusz Rostworowski, “Autodeterminazione nella Visione Personalistica di Karol Wojtyła,” *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy* 15:1 (2010): 228: “La dimensione trascendente della persona che svela la sua libertà costituisce il motore e la continua fonte della sua dinamicità. Una dinamicità che principalmente si svolge nel campo interno dell’uomo stesso per poi sfociare nell’atto, per tramite del quale si realizza oppure no.”

³⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 132. The emphasis of the author is maintained within all quoted citations.

³⁸ *Id.*

choice. For example, one may choose to eat more than one flavor of ice cream at the same time, but the fundamental choice of a vocation is one that is inherently exclusive to all other options.) This is quite distinct from indeterminate freedom, which would present freedom as always capable of responding affirmatively, even to the point of contradiction. Freedom in this sense of license is founded on a fundamental error in logic. Wojtyla, however, responds to this error by considering freedom *for* in the light of the whole person and the integrated human dynamism.

Responsibility is defined by Wojtyla in strict relation with transcendence, being primarily an “intrapersonal fact that man has the experience of in an intimate relation with his conscience.”³⁹ There is a parallel relationship between freedom and responsibility, both of which bear a distinct manner of expression and experience by the subject. Thus freedom is expressed in the act of choosing, though most fundamentally experienced by the subject in self-determinism. Responsibility, in a similar manner, is primarily expressed in choices for the other, but the human person experiences themselves as the subject of their responsibility within the conscience, a structure located within the most central core of the human dynamism. He continues to describe responsibility as, “most intimately connected with the action, because it is action that carries in it the response to values that is characteristic of the will.”⁴⁰ This response to values bears the inherent mark of human freedom characteristic of acts of willing, and also self-determination, which coincides with the dual dimension of transcendence in action.

Responsibility directs the human person, as a criterion operating within the depths of the human conscience, from the apprehension of the ontological being which is the object of willing, or simply the object with which the human person has come in contact, and transfers this truth through the obligation that the nature of the particular truth entails

³⁹ *Id.*, 170.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

into an action motivated by the sense of “I should.”⁴¹ While Wojtyla notes that responsibility finds its most elevated expression in the relationship of “betrothed love” between a man and woman, he defines its content as universally applicable, “a concern for the true good of the person—which is the quintessence of altruism in any form . . .”⁴²

The foundation of the experience of responsibility resides in the recognition of the other as a human person, and the recognition of the intrinsic and unique value that is afforded to each one as a result of this ontological reality.⁴³ This recognition involves the understanding that all that the subject experiences as ‘I’ are also experienced by the other within their own personal dynamism: all the intricate features of the human dynamism, and the inherent dignity afforded by self-determination, freedom and inalienability. That is, the other person always constitutes ‘another I’, though the degree to which this identification is applied to each particular relationship will vary. Still, the following explanation can be universally applied; the sense of responsibility is “an infallible sign of a broadening of one’s own existence in contact with that ‘other I’, that other existence, which are as near and dear as one’s own.”⁴⁴ Wojtyla notes that, while the responsibility of the person concerns the whole range of social relationships with others, it first concerns the “inner reality of the person.”⁴⁵

Responsibility flows from the personal experience of efficacy, the inner experience of oneself as the efficient cause of one’s own actions. The knowledge of subjectivity and self-determination constitute a natural obligation upon the act of will and the relationship of these processes within the human dynamism. As Wojtyla states, “[m]y sense

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 130.

⁴³ Id. Wojtyla distinguishes between the perception of the intrinsic and ontological value of the human person with mere acknowledgement of the sexual value, or any other utilitarian perception of value which reduces the person to a means.

⁴⁴ Id.

⁴⁵ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 168.

of efficacy as an acting subject in relation to my activity is intimately connected with a sense of responsibility for that activity; the latter refers mainly to the axiological and ethical content of the act.”⁴⁶ The awareness of the subject of their own subjectivity and efficacy at once develops within the person the sense of responsibility, and grounds the objective ethical duty to act in a responsible manner.

Responsibility is also foundational to the moral life of the human person, as Wojtyla explains:

Together with the responsibility for the value of intentional objects, the first and fundamental responsibility that arises in acting on the basis of self-determination and self-dependence is the responsibility for the subject, for the moral worth of the ego who is the agent performing the action.⁴⁷

Just as responsibility in the realm of intentional objects or persons can be simply expressed as freedom for the good, so too the moral responsibility of the subject for the development of the personal ego is expressed as freedom for the development of the moral good.

Conclusion

Wojtyla describes freedom as always oriented toward a value, and the proper expression of this aspect of the human dynamism, at least implicitly within each instance of its use, is freedom *for*. This freedom, a feature of the human life that flows from the ontological structure of the human dynamism, reaches out for values based on their objective claim on the will according to the truth. Freedom, at once dependent and independent of objects, forms the vital link between the ontological being of the person and the phenomenological experience of responsibility for and within one’s choices and acts. Kupczak emphasizes the importance of this philosophical elaboration of freedom as

⁴⁶ Wojtyla, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism,” 189.

⁴⁷ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 171.

a “coherent and realistic theory . . . which not only avoids the mistakes of moral relativism and subjectivism but clearly rejects any kind of determinism and totalitarianism. By doing this, the Pope preserves and saves for the next generations the essence of Western civilization.”⁴⁸

Responsibility is a natural aspect of an authentically human life. Wojtyla emphasizes this relationship through freedom, but not as a static reality. Rather, the natural aspect of responsibility is also central to authentic human development. As he states:

My sense of efficacy as an acting subject in relation to my activity is intimately connected with a sense of responsibility for that activity; the latter refers to the axiological and ethical content of the act. All of this in some way enters organically into the experience of self-determination, although it is disclosed in this experience in varying degrees, depending to some extent on the personal maturity of the action. The greater this maturity, the more vividly I experience self-determination. And the more vividly I experience self-determination, the more pronounced in my experience and awareness become my efficacy and responsibility.⁴⁹

The relationship of oneself as the subject and the responsibility that this elicits within the human person are expressed as an obligation, one internally determined by the integration of the various features involved. Thus, Wojtyla states that man “realizes himself neither by the intentionality of volitions nor through self-determination but through *his sense of obligation as the peculiar modification of self-determination and intentionality.*”⁵⁰

Thus, the obligation felt to employ the ‘freedom *for*’ of the subject in responsibility leads to the fulfillment of the human person.

⁴⁸ Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 125.

⁴⁹ Wojtyla, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism,” 189.

⁵⁰ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 169. Wojtyla supports this claim by referring to the fundamental structures of self-governance and self-possession within the human dynamism as considered within the previous section of the present study (Freedom: Characteristic of the Human Person According to the Order of Being).

Though the topic of fulfillment itself is beyond the scope of the present work, the achievement of the goal for which something was created, the purpose which is appropriate to it according to nature, clearly coincides with the goal of the human nature in responsibility. We must conclude with a final word from Karol Wojtyła, precisely regarding the relationship of human nature and responsibility in fulfillment:

The best and the most comprehensive example of obligation initiated by value in the positive sense is now and will always remain the evangelical commandment, “Thou shalt love.” Obligation is then directly released by value with all its intrinsic content and all its attractive power.⁵¹

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SUMMARY

This article considers the essential connection between human nature and responsibility within the philosophical thought of Karol Wojtyła, focusing on his works *The Acting Person* and *Love and Responsibility*. The study begins by examining the freedom as characteristic of the human person according to the order of being, and then turns its attention to the authentic understanding of freedom precisely as freedom *for* the good. The freedom of the human person is finally considered as the foundation of responsibility.

KEYWORDS: Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, personalism, philosophical anthropology, freedom, responsibility, ontology, *Acting Person*, *Love and Responsibility*, self-determination, human nature, human person, efficacy, intentionality.

⁵¹ *Id.*, 167.