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The problem of personalism in Karol Wojtyła's debate with Max Scheler

As Aristotle pointed out¹, ethics is a “practical” science, and so it should help guide our conduct. Can Karol Wojtyła's ethics provide such help in solving the moral problems of modern times? Can his critique of Max Scheler serve as such help?

Karol Wojtyła is known as an ethicist, especially as a leading representative of “ethical personalism”, which is currently somewhat forgotten in ethical discourse, since it is no longer included in the common division of ethical positions², and is classified as a “deontological” theory³, alongside the ethics of Kant and Thomas Aquinas, which already raises insurmountable doubts as to the correctness of this classification. But “ethical personalism” is one of the three positions on the essence of morality, which is defined in relation to the special ontic-axiological position of the

1 See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. F.H. Peters, London 1906. Hence, Karol Wojtyła points out that the fundamental question of ethics is not an essential question (the question about the essence of morality, the question “What is moral good?”), but a practical question (“What is morally good?”). See K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności*, ed. B. Bejze, Warszawa 1969, p. 222 (W Nurcie Zagadnień Posoborowych, 3); cf. K. Wojtyła, *Człowiek w polu odpowiedzialności*, Lublin–Rzym 1991, p. 65–66.

2 It is usually claimed that the main division of positions in ethics is between a teleological position, a deontological position and virtue ethics. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, “Philosophy” 33 (1958), p. 1–19; T. Pietrzykowski, *Etyczne problemy prawa*, Katowice 2005.

3 See A. M. Wierzbicki, *Osoba i moralność. Personalizm w etyce Karola Wojtyły i Tadeusza Stycznia*, Lublin 2021 (“Lubelska etyka personalistyczna jest etyką deontologiczną”, p. 248).

human person, as both the subject and the object of action⁴. This position resounded centrally in Wojtyła's work *Love and Responsibility*, as the so-called "personalist norm"⁵, but it has been present from the very beginning of his work in the field of ethics⁶, as I will try to demonstrate with regard to his habilitation dissertation on the ethics of Max Scheler⁷. We will also see that this reconstruction has important implications for discerning the situation of contemporary ethics, which in its mainstream has been following the path marked out by Scheler.

Personalism and moral value as the value of the human person as a person

It was Scheler himself who referred to his ethics — already in the title of his main work — as "ethical personalism"⁸, but, according to Wojtyła, the

4 See T. Styczeń, *ABC etyki*, Lublin 1981.

5 See K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, transl. H. T. Willetts, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1981, p. 27 ("This elementary truth — that a person [...] may not be an instrument of action, [...] is therefore an inherent component of the natural moral order"); cf. K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, p. 41 ("the personalistic principle and the personalistic norm [...] states that the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form the personalistic norm confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love"). This "love" is first and foremost "affirmation of the value of the person", i.e. "a proper attitude to the value of the person" (K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, p. 121, 123). The value of the person represents "intrinsic value" (p. 133), i.e. the value "to which all others are secondary" (p. 133).

6 In my opinion, the view that it is only in *Love and Responsibility* that K. Wojtyła is a personalist is wrong, which is what A. Wierzbicki claims (A. M. Wierzbicki, *Osoba i moralność*, p. 26).

7 In keeping with the methodology of the current works on K. Wojtyła's work, I will only focus on his habilitation dissertation: *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maxa Schelera* [An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing Christian Ethics Premised on Max Scheler's System], Lublin 1959. Reprinted in: K. Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie podmiotu moralności*, Lublin 1991, p. 11–128 (Człowiek i Moralność, 2). The results presented in this work are contained in the author's own summary: *System etyczny Maxa Schelera jako środek do opracowania etyki chrześcijańskiej* [Max Scheler's ethical system as a means of developing Christian ethics], in: K. Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie podmiotu moralności*, p. 129–180 (Człowiek i Moralność, 2).

8 M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus*, Halle 1921 (particularly the chapter: VI B4).

anthropological assumptions adopted preclude Scheler's consistent defence of the personalist position⁹. What is the understanding of "ethical personalism" here? Why is it excluded under Scheler's system?

Ethical personalism is defined by the German phenomenologist — and by Wojtyła — as a position that recognizes moral values as "personal values"¹⁰, i.e. values "that inhere only in the person as a subject"¹¹, which coincides with the tradition of classical ethics, which defines moral values as the values of man as man, i.e. the values of man's very essence¹².

Another element of "ethical personalism" is the recognition of the value of the person as higher than all other values¹³. For this reason, Scheler rejects various reductions of moral values to other, sub-personal values, which can be found, for example, in reducing moral values to vital values, or treating the moral value as a means to the good of society¹⁴. Therefore, the axiological superiority of the person — and by extension the superiority

9 K. Wojtyła, *System etyczny Maxa Schelera*, p. 133.

10 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 33 ("ethical values are inherently personal values"). Cf. K. Wojtyła, *System etyczny Maxa Schelera*, p. 132, 151.

11 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 39.

12 According to Aristotle "the proper excellence or [moral — M. Cz.] virtue of man will be the habit or trained faculty that makes a man good and makes him perform his function well" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6, p. 44). Cf. S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, cura et studio P. Caramello, Torino 1963, I–II, q. 56, art. 3; K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności*, p. 233–234 ("moral good is that through which the human being as a person is good (is a good person), and moral evil is that through which the human being as a person is evil (is a bad person)". The very humanity of man "is the only key to understanding those [moral — M. Cz.] values and the only possible basis for their explication" (K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności*, p. 234). According to Wojtyła, "that which is meant by «man» as a human being — that is exactly contained in the concept of person. And therefore it seems particularly justified to reduce the moral value to man as a person. Moral good is that by which man as a person is good (he is a good person) — and moral evil is that by which man as a person is evil (he is a bad person). This formulation could be considered the basic claim of personalism in ethics" (p. 235). Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Problem doświadczenia w etyce*, "Roczniki Filozoficzne KUL" 17 (1969) no. 2, p. 20; K. Wojtyła, *Człowiek w polu odpowiedzialności*, p. 31 ("The essence of «moralitas» lies in man as a human being becoming good or evil through the act he performs", p. 31).

13 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 39.

14 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Problem teorii moralności*, p. 244 ("no community — neither a state, nor a nation, nor a social class, nor even a family — wants to put itself in the position of the proper and substantialist subject of moral values in the place of the person").

of moral values as personal values — precludes any “instrumentalization” of the person, i.e. the reduction of *bonum morale* to some *bonum utile* or *bonum delectabile*, which, as is well known, troubles modern and contemporary ethics in particular. Thus, we have in Wojtyła’s habilitation dissertation those elements of ethical personalism that will later fully resound as the “personalistic norm”, the proper criterion for moral evaluation of human conduct.

The critique of Scheler’s ethics’ claim to “personalism” reveals another of its essential elements, which is the position of ethical objectivism, which, according to Wojtyła, Scheler failed to achieve¹⁵, because his system “is an «insufficient objectivism»”. This is because in Scheler, moral values (as well as all other elements of moral life, including duty, love, etc.) are reduced to the content of the lived experience. Meanwhile, in ethics, an objective criterion of moral good and evil must be defined — that is why ethics requires an analysis which Wojtyła called “metaphysical”¹⁶ — and in Scheler there can be no such objective criterion. The criterion of moral evaluation provided by him is only a determination of the conditions of moral experience and, in addition, an insufficient criterion¹⁷, as the simple examples used by Wojtyła show, because, by way of illustration, the moral obligation to care for health is justified in ways other than by merely referring to the position of health in the hierarchy of values. Scheler’s ethics cannot be considered objectivist, because in his system “it is a matter of man experiencing «good»”¹⁸, i.e. “good and evil as the content of lived experience”¹⁹,

15 According to Wojtyła, what we deal with in Scheler’s ethics is an “object-oriented tendency” whereby “the source of the ethical value of an act should be sought for in the object” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 13).

16 The thing is not about conducting, within the framework of ethics, analyses related to the realm of general metaphysics, i.e. analyses of being as being, but about analyses related to the realm of the philosophy of reality rather than the analysis of consciousness.

17 Roman Ingarden accused Scheler of the same thing (see R. Ingarden, *Wykłady z etyki*, Warszawa 1989).

18 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 93.

19 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 93–94.

and not of “the realization of ethical values”²⁰, i.e. “that the personal subject is the real author of ethical values, not that he merely feels them”²¹. It is primarily for this reason that Wojtyła excludes the recognition of Scheler's ethics as personalistic, which must be combined with ethical objectivism and realism.

Thus, Scheler diverges from the entire tradition of classical ethics, which recognizes the principle of realism²² — i.e. the obligation to reconcile the action taken with the real reality as interpreted by the human reason and thus binding the human will from within — as the supreme ethical precept²³. In his later works, Karol Wojtyła, as it were, derives the “principle of personalism” from the “principle of realism”, showing that the personalistic duty to affirm the non-instrumental value of the person is a particularization of precisely the principle of realism²⁴, which, however, was not usually expounded in the tradition of classical ethics²⁵. This is because an element the ontic-axiological reality, as read by the human reason, is the unique, superior axiological position of the human person, which excludes

20 K. Wojtyła, *System etyczny Maxa Schelera*, p. 139. In places he openly writes about “realist ethics” (p. 139).

21 K. Wojtyła, *System etyczny Maxa Schelera*, p. 140.

22 At the very beginning of *Love and Responsibility* Karol Wojtyła emphasizes the principle of realism: it is necessary “from the very first words to emphasize objectivism in this book, and with it realism” (K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, p. 23).

23 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Elementarz etyczny*, Lublin 1986 [particularly the chapter: *Zasada realizmu*].

24 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Człowiek w polu odpowiedzialności*, p. 84, 87. In the article *Zagadnienie katolickiej etyki seksualnej. Refleksje i postulatory*, Wojtyła claims that the lack of “an explication of the personalistic element [...] is a lack if only from the position of the law of nature and its traditional understanding”, and for this reason “this argumentation will be incomplete or even ONE-SIDED and PARTLY ERRONEOUS” [capitals — M. Cz.]. K. Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie katolickiej etyki seksualnej. Refleksje i postulatory* [The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics. Reflections and Postulates], p. 18. I show the relationship of the principle of realism to the principle of personalism in: M. Czachorowski, *Osoba a natura. Ujęcie Karola Wojtyły*, in: *Wokół antropologii Karola Wojtyły*, eds. A. Maryniarczyk, P. Sulenta, T. Duma, Lublin 2016, p. 307–352.

25 See K. Wojtyła, *Człowiek w polu odpowiedzialności*, p. 87. According to Wojtyła, the sexual ethics of Thomas Aquinas contains “implicit elements of the personalistic approach, but due to the lack of their explication they can sometimes arouse naturalistic associations or suspicions” (K. Wojtyła, *The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics*, p. 9).

his merely instrumental treatment, that is, it orders unconditional affirmation of his personal value.

As Wojtyła emphasizes, Scheler is led towards ethical subjectivism by the anti-substantialist, phenomenalist conception of “person” as pure consciousness, which was taken over from modernity²⁶. Wojtyła returns to this issue in his subsequent works, pointing out that the ethical consequences of the subjectivist conception of man/person is “situationism”²⁷. Today this term is rarely used, and it denotes an ethical theory that grants man the power to determine the boundary between good and evil. Underlying this thesis is a subjectivist conception of the person, because reducing it to the content of consciousness excludes the realistic postulate of aligning action with objective reality. Situationism, by attributing to man competence that he cannot possess as a contingent being, takes the field of morality beyond the personalistic level. Wojtyła points out that what we see in the German phenomenologist’s stance is a move beyond the position of personalism, since he recognized moral values as “a new kind of values that is essentially distinct, a kind of superhuman or “divine” values”²⁸, thereby moving to a position that can probably be termed one of the versions of “transhumanism”, which has been running through the history of philosophy since at least neoplatonism. This “superhumanity” is contained within a view of moral values in the typically modern assumption of Scheler’s anthropology, whereby a person is just a bundle of subjective lived experiences, as

26 Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 28 (a person constitutes “a unity of variegated acts given entirely in a lived experience”). Here he understands situationism as granting to persons “the right to decide what is good and what is bad in their mutual relationship”, p. 11).

27 K. Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie katolickiej etyki seksualnej*, p. 11–12. The issue of “situationism” is also addressed in *Love and Responsibility* (p. 119–120). Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Człowiek w polu odpowiedzialności*, p. 76 (situationism is a position whereby: “any objectification of what is subjective is impossible. [...] the subject would create good or evil outside any norms of morality. Situationism is also some new edition of autonomism — however, it goes much further when it comes to the negation of essential elements of ethics, anthropology, and indirectly human experience and morality”).

28 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 100; cf. M. Waldstein, *Three Kinds of Personalism: Kant, Scheler and John Paul II*, “Forum Teologiczne” 10 (2009), p. 151–171 (particularly p. 164).

a result of which he is attributed the power to determine the boundary between good and evil, thus granting him divine prerogatives. But here we have two possibilities: either the unattainable — for man as an accidental being — level of real divinity, or the level of... a demon (a kind of angelism). This issue is worth elaborating today, since throughout the entirety of the post-Kantian philosophy runs the thesis that man is “homo deus”²⁹, and this kind of transformation is supposed to be accommodated today by the technical advancements in biomedicine supported by digital technology, as announced by the modern current of transhumanism³⁰.

Personalism and emotionalism

In criticizing Scheler's claims to “ethical personalism”, however, Wojtyła places emphasis on that element of his concept of the person — and of morality — which he calls «emotionalism», which consists in “reducing the person to emotions”³¹, but — unlike other “emotionalists” — not sensual

29 Cf. Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London 2017.

30 This was an opinion already held by Kant. See E. Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1950, p. 239 (“old Kant was beginning to suspect that he himself might be God: «God is not a being outside me, but merely a thought in me. God is the morally practical self-legislative reason. Therefore, only a God in me, about me, and over me»”).

31 K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 85. Some of K. Wojtyła's statements might imply that also the phenomenological assumptions behind Scheler's philosophy lead him towards the position of ethical subjectivism. Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 56; p. 64: “There is no doubt that this insufficient objectivism is rooted in the phenomenological assumptions, and they are what makes “ethical values remain in an intentional and nevertheless subjective position”; p. 67 (“Phenomenology «cannot grasp and express the fact that the person is the agent»”). But the author's summary only points out that the phenomenological method does not “make it possible to determine the objective principle by which one act of a person is ethically good, while another is ethically bad” (K. Wojtyła, *System etyczny*, p. 144), because phenomenology states “the normative character of ethical values”, which “forces us, however, to seek objective reasons, that is, measures of the ethical good and evil of our acts”, i.e. to move to an analysis of the objective principle of moral good and evil. Then “we must, as it were, come out of the experience of ethical good or evil for the purpose of setting this good or evil in the objective order of good” (p. 144). He also points out that Scheler did not remain faithful to the phenomenological method, “he did not use all of its possibilities in the experiential study of ethical reality. Indeed, he abandoned it when examining the experience of conscience, succumbing to the influence of the emotionalist assumptions of his system”

feelings, but feelings considered by Scheler to be mental³². Why does this exclude ethical personalism?

The first reason for this, according to Wojtyła, is that emotionalism would exclude the efficacy of the person with regard to moral values³³, if the guiding role in moral life was to be exercised by some emotions. This is because the concept of person includes “personal efficacy”³⁴, which is absent from non-personal entities, and “efficacy” — as we find it elaborated in *Person and Act* — is the initiation of existence and the determination of the axiological-ontic content of one’s action³⁵. Two elements are therefore necessary for personal efficacy, which classical anthropology and ethics define as the contribution of reason and will, both essential to the person³⁶. One might get the impression that Wojtyła, in his accusation of Scheler’s “exclusion of efficacy”³⁷ (as manifested in various elements of his ethical-anthropological system), emphasizes the loss of will³⁸, because in Scheler

(p. 145). Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 126. According to Wojtyła, “the reasons for the intentional [...] character of moral values [...] must be sought in the epistemological assumptions of Scheler’s phenomenology, and especially in his emotionalist assumptions” (p. 69–70).

32 For classical philosophical anthropology, it is unacceptable to attribute a mental (spiritual) character to some feelings, because it blurs the distinction between acts of will and feelings (*appetitus sensitivus*).

33 “Personalistic assumptions prescribe the acceptance of this causative agency” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 70).

34 Sometimes Wojtyła speaks of the «practicality» of personalistic ethics (“the ideal of personal moral excellence has a practical character”, p. 65), i.e. “the human person is the agent of good and evil itself” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 66).

35 See K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, Kraków 1985.

36 See K. Wojtyła, *Personalizm tomistyczny*, in: K. Wojtyła, *Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*, Kraków 1979, p. 430–441.

37 “as a result of the emotionalist assumptions, the act of will and its purely objective content are, as it were, lost in emotional experience” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 69). Most precisely, Wojtyła argues that “we cannot maintain that Scheler denied this causative agency”, but he got this causative agency “entangled and, as it were, lost in emotional experience” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 70).

38 In Scheler “the will only passively succumbs to the pull exerted on it by the emotional sphere” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 74 (there is “no active participation of the will”, because Scheler got the central sphere of a person’s life “separated from the will” (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 76).

the person does not direct his actions, but is tossed around by inner dormant, spontaneous and emotional forces³⁹. In such a concept of the person, there is first a loss of the power of reason⁴⁰, i.e. a loss of recognition of the truth about good, without which there can be no question of directing one's moral action.

Does this diagnosis of Scheler's "ethical personalism" have relevance for contemporary ethical discourse?

Contemporary emotionalism in ethics

Max Scheler is a forgotten ethicist today, but "emotionalism" — in its various versions — has made itself at home in modern ethics, a manifestation of which can be seen in the rather frequent trouble with understanding Aristotle's ethics, since in the only Polish translation of *Nicomachean Ethics* to date, we, so to speak, struggle from page to page over the mysterious "passions" ("namiętności"). But how are we supposed to talk about "passions" with regard to, say, a wolf or an esteemed female friend who has just appeared in the doorway? It was Fr. Jacek Woroniecki who pointed out this defect in the translation, but until now we still have no new one⁴¹.

In contemporary ethics we have various currents and directions, but the central place is undoubtedly occupied by "posthumanist" postmodern ethics. Its representatives unanimously claim that ethical issues lie at the centre of their research⁴², which we can particularly see in "postmodern

39 Cf. T. Biesaga, *Karola Wojtyły krytyka koncepcji osoby Maxa Schelera*, "Logos i Ethos" 47 (2018) no. 1, p. 181–197.

40 "What we encounter in Scheler is a «primacy of emotion» because Scheler attributed to emotional experiences the greatest depth in man, and at the same time stated that these experiences reveal to us one of the elementary factors in the structure of the objective reality, i.e. value" (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 19). Hence, in Scheler, "representation [...] does not give wanting any bearings", as a result of which "these basic reins of a person's causative agency slip out of his hands" (K. Wojtyła, *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej*, p. 73).

41 See J. Woroniecki, *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*, t. 1–2, Lublin 1986.

42 See M. Czachorowski, *Ponowoczesność jako moralny rozwój?*, in: *Społeczno-humanistyczna wizja współczesnego świata*, ed. H. Czakowska, Bydgoszcz 2020.

ethics” of Z. Bauman⁴³. It converges with Scheler’s system as regards the assumed anti-substantialist concept of the person, i.e. reducing the person to a bundle of living experiences. The guiding principle of the procedure is to liberate the “principle of pleasure” from the demands of the “principle of realism”, i.e. to subject man to the spontaneous attraction of various pleasures. “The other” is merely a means serving one’s own consumption, who, however, is not to be reckoned with lest one’s own consumption be ruined⁴⁴.

We find the same kind of emotionalism in «ethics of sensitivity» by Richard Rorty⁴⁵, a neo-pragmatist who prefers to term his position — as well as that of postmodern philosophy as a whole — post-Nietzscheanism, or post-Darwinism, because, after all, Nietzsche’s premise is 19th century biology. Thus, Rorty proposes that one should read fiction (e.g., Uncle Tom’s Cabin) and by this means — rather than through morally impotent discourse — become sensitized to the suffering of the excluded and discriminated against. The same “emotionalism” can also be found in today’s fashionable “neuroethics”, based on the assumption that human action is necessarily controlled by brain processes, manifested in the form of experienced emotions⁴⁶.

43 See Z. Bauman, *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*, Warszawa 1994; cf. Z. Bauman, *Moralne obowiązki, etyczne zasady*, “Etyka” 27 (1994); Z. Bauman, *Etyka ponowoczesna*, transl. J. Bauman, J. Tokarska-Bakir, Warszawa 1996. For more on this subject see: G. Hołub, *Od antropologii do etyki postmodernistycznej: w stronę autentyczności czy dowolności?*, in: *W labiryntach wychowania. Wyzwania edukacyjne w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym*, eds. B. Stańkowski, M. Szpringer, Kraków 2013, p. 29–44; cf. M. Czachorowski, *Mitologizacja moralności w posthumanistycznej etyce*, “Człowiek w Kulturze” 32 (2022) part 1, p. 89–117.

44 Cf. Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc w obliczu ponowoczesności*, Toruń 1995, p. 67–109 (“Ponowoczesne przygody ciała”).

45 R. Rorty, *Etyka zasad a etyka wrażliwości*, “Teksty Drugie” (2002) no. 1–2, p. 51–63; cf. R. Rorty, *Etyka bez powszechnych powinności*, “Etyka” (1998) no. 31, p. 9–25.

46 See P.S. Churchland, *Moralność mózgu*, transl. M. Hohol, N. Marek, Kraków 2013.

Conclusion

I have shown that the core of ethical personalism can be found already in Karol Wojtyła's habilitation dissertation, and in his subsequent works it was only systemically specified and applied to various areas of ethical analysis, including sexual ethics, developed in *Love and Responsibility*. For Wojtyła, ethical personalism means a position on the essence of morality, which is defined in necessary connection with the personal, real ontic-axiological position of man — not only as the subject and agent of moral action, but also as its recipient — read by the human reason and capable of respect through the power of the human will. Nowhere, however, did the Author under discussion claim that his ethical personalism implies a rejection of the achievements of classical ethics, i.e. in the first place the ethics of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Wojtyła showed how this personalism is contained in their realist ethics — recognizing the principle of realism as the guiding principle of moral conduct — but in a way that requires full exposure, and which he himself specifically realized in his sexual ethics, showing, among other things, the personalistic meaning of the virtue of chastity⁴⁷.

In Wojtyła's habilitation dissertation — which is the focus of the discussion here — we find not only an apt critique of Scheler's claims to ethical personalism, but also an indirect critique of all those contemporary ethical positions which, like Scheler, exclude the causality of the human person in relation to moral values, recognizing submission to emotional spontaneity as the overriding principle of conduct, thus moving to positions of anti-personalism.

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47 See K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, p. 226; cf. p. 253.

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Abstract

The problem of personalism in Karol Wojtyła's debate with Max Scheler

The article shows that already in his habilitation dissertation on Max Scheler's ethics Karol Wojtyła defended the consistent ethical personalism, distorted by the German phenomenologist. However, the pertinent tying of moral values to the supreme, supra-instrumental value of the human person, involved its subjectivization, as a result of which Scheler's claims to ethical objectivism are unfounded. Besides, in a completely unfounded manner he considered spontaneous emotionality as the centre of the person, thereby losing the person's causative agency towards moral values, i.e. the central role of the human reason and free will in moral life, thus negating man's moral responsibility for his actions. This assessment of Scheler's ethics has relevance for discernment in contemporary posthumanist ethics, which — following Scheler's lead — attributes the guiding role in moral life to spontaneous emotions.

Keywords: ethics, Karol Wojtyła, Max Scheler, personalism, human person, objectivism, principle of realism, postmodernism, neuroethics

Abstrakt

Problem personalizmu w dyskusji Karola Wojtyła z Maksem Schelerem

Artykuł wykazuje, że już w pracy habilitacyjnej poświęconej etyce Maksa Schelera Karol Wojtyła bronił konsekwentnego personalizmu etycznego, wypaczonego przez niemieckiego fenomenologa. Trafne wiązanie wartości moralnych z nadrzędną, ponadinstrumentalną wartością osoby ludzkiej, wiązało się jednak z jej subiektywizacją, w wyniku czego roszczenia Schelera do obiektywizmu etycznego są bezpodstawne. Oprócz tego całkowicie bezpodstawnie uznał spontaniczną emocjonalność za centrum osoby, gubiąc w ten sposób sprawczość osoby wobec wartości moralnych, czyli centralną rolę ludzkiego rozumu i wolnej woli w życiu moralnym, zaprzepaszczając w ten sposób moralną odpowiedzialność człowieka za swoje czyny. Ta diagnoza etyki Schelera ma znaczenie dla rozeznania we współczesnej posthumanistycznej etyce, która — idąc tropem Schelera — rolę kierowniczą w życiu moralnym przypisuje spontanicznym emocjom.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka, Karol Wojtyła, Max Scheler, personalizm, osoba ludzka, obiektywizm, zasada realizmu, emocjonalizm, postmodernizm, neuroetyka