

**Pedro García Casas**

University of Murcia

Spain

## **WOJTYLIAN CRITIQUE OF KANTIAN MORALITY AND PROPOSAL OF THE UNCONDITIONAL PERSONALISTIC NORM**

The main subject of this inquiry is Karol Wojtyła’s final essay reformulation of Kant’s categorical imperative. First, we shall study how important the norm is to both Kant and Wojtyła, that a person is described as an end in itself, not reducible to a mere utilitarian means; however, Wojtyła emphasizes the personal nature of this “end in itself” to a greater degree, not seeing it as an “effect of the law upon the subject.” Wojtyła’s strongest criticism against Kant is twofold: on one hand, taking the very essence of an ethical life from the person’s field of empirical experience and transferring it to the extra-empirical domain of the noumena. While on the other hand, the entire ethical experience of the personal subject is crystallized in that single psychological element—the sense of respect for the law.

In second place, we shall study the practical assumptions of the categorical imperative. Here we can see that Wojtyła, like Kant, saw duty as something that established morality, but instead of seeing it as

---

The Spanish version of the article (“Crítica wojtyliana a la moral kantiana y propuesta de la norma personalista incondicionada”) has been accepted for publication in *Carthaginiensia* 33:65 (enero-junio de 2018), ISSN 0213-4381.

an a priori idea, he sees it as a manifestation of the corresponding experience, which at the same time encompasses understanding it as a truly lived experience and its persistence in actions, including the productivity of its external conditions: the Kantian proposal makes that experience inconceivable.

Finally, we shall study in greater detail the unconditionality of the categorical imperative and of the person. In this final section we will address whether or not Kant felt that the categorical imperative had a personalistic dimension and what is the Wojtylian position in that regard. Kant says that a person is a rational being because his nature already distinguishes him as an end in itself, as something that can never be used as a mere means, in essence limiting any arbitration in this regard. However, as with any phenomenal human achievement, it is both physically and mentally conditioned; the human person is not allowed in Kant's proposal to define itself as a self-generating object, in addition to ignoring the uniqueness of the person by viewing it as a generic aspect. It is at this point that Wojtyła introduces his own personalist perspective on a person's self-knowledge of the process of self-determination, an action that intentionally differs from Kant.

We conclude the article by clearly establishing how Wojtyła developed the personalistic norm in which the only appropriate attitude towards any human person is none other than love. This is proposal with which we agree completely, and one which has led us to believe that ethics should answer to the realities of the personal self.

### **Preliminary Notes**

The way in which Kant's ethics confronted utilitarianism, showing that the categorical imperative prevents a person from ever being treated as a mere means but rather as an end in itself, and that any other treatment regarding it is unfair, significantly influenced Wojtyła. However, since the methodological premisses used by Kant to develop this proposal are not entirely satisfactory—as they do not take experience

into account and always stem from an a-priori-and-an-ethics-of-duty that can be made universal—Wojtyła goes beyond that.

While studying Kantian morality, Wojtyła argues that to say that something is moral because it can be proposed as a universal duty means that the result may be taken for the cause, it is an inversion of immanence that does not establish a duty to do good, but rather the contrary, that it is good to do your duty. For Wojtyła, if there are universal norms that regulate human behavior at all times and in all situations, it is because such norms are the result of human nature made for a purpose. Unlike Kant, Wojtyła argues that moral law is universal and that it is law because it is good, as opposed to it being good because it is universal. In that sense, we can see that to be deprived of life is an example of something that is bad, because it presupposes disorder in the use of a given asset, in this case, life.

Wojtyła criticizes the fact that for Kant the *ethical act*, if such could be addressed in the strictest sense, is exclusively related to the categorical imperative. In order to understand this fundamental Kantian doctrine, its concept of the law must be kept in mind, since according to him the law would be created *a priori* by reason: it would not be based on the knowledge of the existing natural order, but rather reason itself would deduce an order that must be imposed upon man in his desire to acquire assets.<sup>1</sup> That is why the law always looks to the assets of the empirical world, since that is where man's will is directed by the maxims and hypothetical imperatives of practical reason. However, this feature of the law, being linked to the entire empirical sphere both within and without man, constitutes only the matter of law, whose form must now be determined. It is precisely this form of universal legislation, as yet empty of any material content, but born from the same prac-

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyła, "El problema de la separación de la experiencia y el acto en la ética de Kant y de Scheler" (1957), in *Mi visión del hombre* (Madrid: Palabra, 2005), 195f.

tical reason, that forms its content; and it alone provides, in the Kantian view, the foundation for an ethical life.

Therefore, if the will is compelled by a truly ethical action, then it must obey the form of moral law, not its matter. When the will is only concerned with the matter of the law, it addresses the assets. And since it does so by adhering to the requirements of the law, its actions are legitimate, although they may not yet be called truly moral actions. Let us say that only when the will fully and exclusively addresses the form of the law, only when it makes the law both its motive and its purpose, only when it carries out the law because it is the law, only then is it acting morally.<sup>2</sup>

For Wojtyła, these premisses mean that the moral expression of the will requires a total disinterest in assets. It is, therefore, a *categorical break with experience*, where no human action is subject to it. Since, Wojtyła believed, the purpose behind every specific action is to obtain some benefit, every wilful human action must be directed towards obtaining a benefit of some kind. However, for Kant, moral character has nothing to do with an asset as the purpose of the act of will. Ethical character comes entirely and exclusively from the form and in no way from the matter. So that the will must focus exclusively on the form and separate itself from the matter, thus assuming an ethical value.

In this sense, for Kant, the entire ethical act, including its premisses, may not be found within the empirical order and only remains within the domain of the noumena, where beyond all experience the will is bent entirely upon the form of the universal legislation, which is expressed in the categorical imperative. In this way, practical reason legislates the imperative through its form. And is thus completely independent of the “matter” of any empirical asset. When faced with this Kantian proposal, Wojtyła wondered: Could the categorical imperative,

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 198.

so conceived, be found, in any specific human action as perceived through experience?<sup>3</sup>

In the same line, Wojtyła says that the separation of what is properly ethical from the specific content of human experience, is not, according to Kant, absolute and total, since it recognizes feeling respect for the law. It is highly significant that any feeling (respect) can be given such value, since all sentimental actions are thought to be the vectors of eudemonism and hedonism in man's ethical life, and that in his system, that feeling, respect, is the only one that becomes an objective indicator for all ethical living. It is true that an ethical life lies within the domain of noumena; however, it is undeniable that every man lives the ethical contents empirically as well, and given that for Kant the law is the proper ethical "content," it follows that the empirical experience of that "content" can only assume the form of respect for the law. In that sense, the more man feeds this feeling, the deeper his sense of duty, which is none other than the subordination of the will to the law—to the extent that the law is the law. No other empirical measure exists to determine if the will is truly subordinate to the one law, that is, if the will truly "lives" ethically. A simple analysis of human actions reveals nothing about them. In contrast, a feeling of respect for the law is an undeniable sign of what is happening in the noumenic domains of the will.<sup>4</sup>

However, we must say in Kant's favour, that Wojtyła does not require too much from Kant's sense of respect. To do so, we quote this fairly eloquent text by Kant:

One could accuse me of merely taking refuge behind the word *respect* in an obscure feeling instead of giving a distinct reply to the question through a concept of reason. Yet even if respect is a feeling, it is not one *received* through influence but a feeling *self-effected* through a concept of reason and hence specifically distinguished from all feelings of the first kind, which may be re-

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 199.

duced to inclination or fear. What I immediately recognize as a law for me, I recognize with respect, which signifies merely the consciousness of the *subjection* of my will to a law without any mediation of other influences on my sense. The immediate determination of the will through the law and the consciousness of it is called *respect*, so that the latter is to be regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject and not as its *cause* . . . The *object* of respect is thus solely the law, and specifically that law that we *lay upon ourselves* and yet also as in itself necessary . . . All respect for a person is properly only respect for the law (of uprightness, etc.) of which the person gives us the example . . . All so-called moral *interest* consists solely in *respect* for the law.<sup>5</sup>

Bearing this Kantian vision in mind, Wojtyła wonders what it is in ethics that separates experience, which is essential to Kant's philosophical method, from action.<sup>6</sup> To do this, he provides us with two reasons:

- a) Kant has taken the very essence of an ethical life from the person's field of empirical experience and has transferred it to the extra-empirical domain of the noumena.
- b) The entire ethical experience of the personal subject has been crystallized in that single psychological element; the sense of respect for the law.

Indeed, in Wojtyła's opinion, there was no doubt that the experience of duty, which may be accompanied by a feeling of respect for the law, is contained in that empirical set defined as the ethical experience, on which the idea of the ethical act is based; however, the Kantian experience of duty, crystallized only in a sense of respect for the law, does not agree with the feeling of duty contained in the empirical set of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Bear in mind the pre-eminence in which Kant held duty and the law, to preclude even the person. The Wojtylian vision will be radically different, it is not the law, but rather the person what is above.

ethical experience. The experience of duty is one of the moments in this set:

It cannot be said, however, that Kant has only highlighted the moment of duty within the set of the ethical experience. According to Kant, duty is not only dominant in ethical life, but that it constitutes the human person's ethical life, entirely. The feeling of respect for the law is not apparent only in the integrity of the empirical ethical experience, in the integrity of the act, it is truly separate from the act. It is separate because human actions, when considered empirically, do not contain a true ethical experience within their set. Therefore, the feeling of respect for the law is not contained in human actions as an internal coefficient of their specific structures. Thus, the "act" disappears from ethics as a concept that reflects the empirical set of the ethical experience. Ethical life has been hidden behind the limits of experience, but since it cannot be denied that, in spite of everything, ethics has an empirical nature and is expressed through some experience, it is precisely because of this that it has been "empirically" subjectivized into a single psychological action, which is the feeling of respect for the law.<sup>7</sup>

The basis of this principle, Kant would say, lies in the fact that *rational nature exists as an end in itself*. Thus man's own existence is necessarily represented for him, and in that respect it is a subjective principle to human actions. The material statement of the categorical imperative implies the recognition that people *are ends in themselves to one another*, all of them comprising the kingdom of ends, in contrast to the mechanical laws that govern the world of nature. From here the categorical imperative, on which the second expression depends, is comprehensively determined, in which the universal validity of the first formula and the notion of the end, are jointly assumed: all maxims must agree by their own legislation in a possible kingdom of ends as they

---

<sup>7</sup> Wojtyła, "El problema de la separación de la experiencia . . .", 200.

would in a kingdom of nature, a nature that is not subject to causality laws of space-time.

In this regard, Ferrer explains that a possible kingdom of ends does not mean that you may cast the other person as the end or goal of your own actions, but rather to the contrary, that the person as an end in itself serves to exclude that which their actions should never pursue, so that the relationship of the end with the action becomes indirect, and not properly its directive. Which would presuppose that, if the goodness of the will lies within itself, as Kant says, and does not come to it from its transcendental association to goodness, neither can the end to be achieved be a guide and norm for the will, but that together with the action, the end itself is presented as a limit that must not be transgressed, and not so much as something that must be reached:<sup>8</sup>

But since, in the idea of a will that is absolutely good without a limiting condition (of the attainment of this or that end), every end to be *effected* has to be thoroughly abstracted from (as it would make every will only relatively good), the end here has to be thought of not as an end to be effected *but as a self-sufficient* end, hence only negatively, i.e., never to be acted against, which therefore has to be estimated in every volition never merely as means but always at the same time as end.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, there are three orders of issues described whose treatment allows us to see the points of convergence and divergence between the Kant and Wojtyła proposals. In the first place, which is the proper positive attitude to have towards the being that is an end in itself, once the answers that on principle do not do it justice are discarded. Although both authors clearly agree on this, their agreement on *the assimilation between respect and the universal law to love the person*, that each respectively proposes, however, is not as clear. In the second place, the

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Urbano Ferrer, “La conversión del imperativo categórico kantiano en norma personalista,” in *La filosofía personalista de Karol Wojtyła*, ed. J. M. Burgos (Madrid: Palabra, 2009), 57.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 55.



categorical imperative cannot be asserted without the participation of the will and the freedom that is necessary to propose it and to carry it out; in this, the formal a priori of practical reason proposed by Kant, and Wojtyła's experiential analysis of the wilful act, refer to opposing modes for establishing the practical assumptions of the ethical imperative. In the third place, the unconditionality of the categorical imperative is sufficient reason for it to be, and can only reside either in the insurmountable formal-logical implications of the practical use of reason or in the person, as an irreducible a priori to its individual dignity. As we shall see further on, the Wojtylian personalistic norm departs from the highest principles of pure practical reason, even though both cases are unconditional laws.

### **The Person as an End in Itself**

For both Wojtyła and Kant the ethical attitude that is consistent with the rational nature of the human being cannot possibly be derived from either utilitarianism or hedonism. The opposition to both lies in the same reasons, given their mutual involvement. Utilitarianism comes from the Latin verb *uti* ("to use," "to take advantage of") and the adjective *utilis* ("useful"). According to its etymology, utilitarianism emphasizes the usefulness of the action. Now, that which gives you pleasure and excludes sorrow is useful, because pleasure is the essential factor in human happiness. According to utilitarianism, being happy is to lead a pleasant life.<sup>10</sup> However, Wojtyła will continue to analyze the term to the point that he says that for a utilitarian the principle consists in obtaining: maximum pleasure and minimum sorrow for the greatest number of men.<sup>11</sup> Because of this, its great defect consists in recognizing pleasure as the greatest and only good, to which the individual as well as the social behavior of man must be subordinated. Likewise, pleasure

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Amor y responsabilidad* (Madrid: Palabra, 2008), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

is not the only good, and even less is it the essential purpose of human action.<sup>12</sup>

The Polish term *używać* (“to use”) expresses the proximity between the medial good and the enjoyment of the individual. For Kant, their empirical and contingent nature invalidates them as criteria for a universal morality. Kant says that treating the person as an end is not compatible with using them as a means or to reduce them to an object of enjoyment, since both cases fail to consider the person as an absolute with inherent value: in the kingdom of the ends everything either has a *price* or has *dignity*. That which has a price may be replaced by an *equivalent*; however, that which is above all price and, therefore, does not admit any equivalents, has dignity.<sup>13</sup> In another sense, Kant would say in *The Critique of Practical Reason*: when looking for the bases that determine desire and these are placed in the enjoyment expected from something, it does not matter at all where the *representation* of that object comes from, but only what amount of *pleasure it provides*.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, that which is useful and that which is pleasant agree to be conditioned, either by what is acquired from them or from the enjoyment they provide, while the person itself has value, in other words, dignity.

The person as an object of respect, Kant would say, cannot be a pure and simple means, even in those cases in which it intervenes as a means to provide services. And to assess its value on the basis of an enjoyment or entertainment continues to suppose the reduction of the person to a mere means.

As indicated above, when we talk about Kant’s respect, we can now understand how it is that for him, overcoming this medial attitude is only achieved through personal respect and love, respect as that

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 52–53.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Crítica de la razón práctica*, trans. Manuel García Morente (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1994), 39.

which safeguards that which is properly the person. This is why it will be significant for Kant to see how love is approached from respect, because, as stated above, this is the only morally reliable feeling since it is immediately determined by the Law of Practical Reason, such as compliance and subsequent subordination to its dictates. In this sense, within the limits of respect, love stops being a pathological inclination and is understood as the term for an ideal trend that is associated to the fulfilment of the duties to the one to whom these duties are related: So it is that its meaning can only refer to *practical love*: to joyfully fulfil their mandates; to love one another, which means to *joyfully* comply *with* all duties regarding them. But the mandate that makes this a rule cannot make you *have* said disposition (*Gesinnung*) in actions according to duty, but only *tend* toward it.<sup>15</sup> Let us say that Kantian uniqueness lies in the fact that the love for the person is mediated in its genesis and development by the respect generated by the law presenting the person as an end in itself and, being an end in itself, worthy of respect.

However, Wojtyła understands love in a completely different way. He also distinguishes the personal from the merely natural and from the psychological-emotional level, so that on these terms love is not quite personal, but is confined to the scope of the natural appetite or of the emotional appeal to the values of a human being of the opposite sex or of someone admired. Unlike Kant, Wojtyła's natural and psychological tendencies are integrated in the love of the person, once it assumes and channels such tendencies, not entirely determined by them.<sup>16</sup> In classical terms they may be referred to as the *love of benevolence* and the *love of concupiscence*. According to this, we have to say that not only is the drive to procreate not severable from the desire for voluptuousness that the sexual tendencies provide, but that even love for the person of the other spouse is awakened by sexual attraction, although it does not remain there. According to Wojtyła, love of benevo-

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, *Amor y responsabilidad*, 48–49.

lence is the only one that is proper to the person, although without excluding the love of concupiscence, which it incorporates and completes:

For the love of one person by another to be true, it has to be benevolent, otherwise it will not be love, only selfishness. By their nature, not only is there no incompatibility whatsoever between concupiscence and benevolence, but there is even a bond between them. When you want someone as something good for yourself, it is necessary to want the desired person to truly be something good, so that they can truly be good for the person who wants them, this is how the bond between concupiscence and benevolence appears.<sup>17</sup>

Benevolence, Wojtyła continues, is separate from all interest; in fact, it is the disinterest in love; it is not that “I want you as a something that is good for me,” but that “I want something good for you,” “I want what is good for you.” This way, a benevolent person wants this without thinking of himself, without taking himself into account. That is why the love of benevolence is love in a much more absolute sense than the love of concupiscence. It is the purest love.<sup>18</sup>

The personalistic norm, which is governed by love in its comprehensive form as the love of benevolence, has its own laws, which we can establish because the gift of self, where love is manifest, has no parallel in any other order. What from a natural perspective would imply the loss of something that is theirs, and from a psychological perspective, the abandonment of self-control or of oneself, acquires a new ethically positive meaning when transposed onto the personalist plane, by establishing the reciprocity of giving oneself to the other and its acceptance by the other, since it would be a loss that is at the same time a gain:

The nature of the person is opposed to giving itself. In fact, in the natural order there can be no talk of giving one person to another,

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 104.

especially in the physical sense of the word. The person within us is beyond any giving, in any sense, and beyond an appropriation in the physical sense of the word. The person cannot be the property of another, as if it were a thing. Therefore, being able to treat the person as an object of pleasure is also excluded. But that which may not be possible or in accordance with the rule in the natural order and in the physical sense, can take place in the love order and in the moral sense. There a person can give themselves to another—to humanity or God. This fact shows the particular dynamism of the person and the laws that govern his existence and development.<sup>19</sup>

In our view, the discrepancy between the two approaches comes from the antithesis, established in principle by Kant, between inclination and duty, which is in turn the translation of the most basic antithesis between sensibility and reason, either as principles of knowledge or as practical interactions. However, if they are elements which by themselves cannot be confused or exchanged, they may at least be combined from the perspective of the good as a common motive, so that it may be at once that which specifies an inclination and that which drives duty.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, this also requires freedom, as much to appropriate the inclination by giving it direction as to make duty the object duty “itself.” In this sense, we can say that for Kant and Wojtyła, the greatest good (*bonum consummatum*) and freedom are the two unavoidable practical assumptions of the categorical imperative, although freedom acquires an ethical reach under the personalistic norm. With that we approach the second of the questions that were raised previously.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ferrer, “La conversión del imperativo categórico kantiano en norma personalista,” 61.

## The Practical Assumptions of the Categorical Imperative

For Kant, the categorical imperative gives expression to the *factum a priori* of duty, and that makes pure reason become practical, since it directs the action. The point at which the direction of the action and itself are joined is causality, through which the person sees himself as the author of his actions. However, since for Kant, cause is a category of understanding, which is used both to bind the phenomena and to allocate to them an independent beginning from that of the subject, so that in this way, you cannot enforce the causal efficacy or actual productivity of the actions through their agent. It is for this reason that the way to access freedom is noumenic: duty and freedom are ideas that arise from reason, where neither of the two ideas is related to an experience that may be objectivized. Similarly, neither can the moral good fit within the representation of an object, nor is it given to the faculty of desiring as the term appointed by it, but is instead determined by the practical use of reason, beyond the forms of sensibility and the categories of understanding. In the same way he postulates the immortality of the soul and the existence of God as objects of rational belief.

Wojtyła, like Kant, saw duty as something that established morality, but instead of seeing it as an a priori idea, he sees it as a manifestation of the corresponding experience,<sup>21</sup> which at the same time encompasses understanding it as a truly lived experience and its persistence in actions, including the productivity of its external conditions: “I must” is equivalent to “I must act under such and such conditions,” guided by the good as it is judged to be so by conscience, which is not limited to the maxims or subjective principles of the action, but ends

---

<sup>21</sup> On Wojtyła’s non-empiricist notion of moral experience, see Urbano Ferrer, *Acción, deber, donación* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2015), 123–124. On experience as the basis of Wojtylian methodology, see Juan M. Burgos, *The integral experience* (Madrid: Word, 2015).

within the action itself.<sup>22</sup> With the added distinctiveness that this is not just in order to simply put in motion a series of causalities in space-time, but to reveal the person in his action and simultaneously to transcend this:

The *moment* of morality is contained in the *experience of duty*. This experience is closely linked to all concrete subjects that perform an act and have the experience of his doings. The experience of duty (“I must”) is always strictly personal, linked to an actual “I act,” also when the action is carried out “with others.”<sup>23</sup>

The categorical imperative as the universal law thus becomes the person’s ability to serve as the norm for his actions through moral judgement, given that it transcends them. Wojtyła would say that the path to understanding this experience leads to the subject, to the personal “I.” Here lies the great difference between Kant and Wojtyła, since, as far as Kant was concerned, morality is a universally applicable norm far removed from any phenomenal experience. However, for Wojtyła, man is the subject that experiences, and what he experiences is also a man. Which makes it appropriate for experience to be objective in nature; experience is always the experience of “something” or “someone” and takes place, precisely within man’s experience.<sup>24</sup>

It is this Wojtylian experience that also paves the way for the understanding of objective duty as that which constitutes morality: “What should I do?” and “why should I do what I must?” This is how the questions that are rooted in the experience of morality as “facts” over anything personal (“I must,” “the man acts”) and also “acted (the man acts) with others” are constructed, which also reveals the path to their

---

<sup>22</sup> On Wojtyła’s operational capacity of the will, as opposed to the immanence of pure will, see Miguel Acosta, Adrian J. Reimers, *Karol Wojtyła’s Personalist Philosophy. Understanding “Person and Act”* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 46ff.

<sup>23</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “El hombre y la responsabilidad,” in *El hombre y su destino* (Madrid: Palabra, 2014), 222.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyła, “La persona: sujeto y comunidad,” in *El hombre y su destino*, 45.

understanding. It is the understanding of duty, not only as experience, but also as an objective fact. This fact always relates to something, and it is precisely with regard to “that” which I must that the question “why” is born. The above questions, linked in some way to the individual fact of moral duty, may be replaced by another two questions “what is right and what is wrong; and why?” Unlike the previous two these questions are general in nature.<sup>25</sup>

As we were saying, for Kant, the disassociation between the action in space-time and its noumenical origins was precisely what prevented him from seeing the significance of the person in the action, and how it is qualified by it. For Wojtyła, unlike Kant, the question of specific duty becomes inseparable from the more general question regarding the moral good.<sup>26</sup>

It is an experience in which the dynamic structure of the experience of duty is involved. It is within the direct moral experience that man becomes the eyewitness, within the same outcome, of his achievements: When speaking of moral experience, we also highlight the moment of a given testimony—the fact that man is witness to the good or evil that was born with the causality of the person in action.<sup>27</sup>

Wojtyła agrees with Kant that moral experience is irreducible when ascribed to duty. Although, that experience also includes the person’s outcome, thus transcending himself through the moral action. In this way, the fact that the person is an end in itself is not only a negatively given principle, as in that which cannot be directly done or intended, the way that Kant understood it, but is rather the self-teleology of those who attempt, through their actions, to conform to duty. He clearly says so in the following text:

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, “El hombre y la responsabilidad,” 230.

<sup>26</sup> “What should I do and why?” forms the framework for any science that describes “morality” and requires a different, non-descriptive profile, of the science involved in the experience of morality. Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyła, “El problema de la experiencia ética,” in *Mi visión del hombre*, 342.



Desire, in itself, is not enough to define the ethical profile of the act, only moral duty defines it. However, rather than remove the dynamism of desire from the person's performance, from the act, moral duty conditions it. The conditioning comes from the fact that duty provides the desire of human actions with a specific desire, the desire for good against evil.<sup>28</sup>

In this way—and so we come to answer the third of the questions that have guided us, regarding the basis for the unconditionality of the Moral Imperative—we can say that the person's transcendence in the action is precisely what makes the unconditionality of the Moral Norm possible, since the unconditionality of the Moral Imperative could not be based on any external effect to the acts or psychological input. We will examine it in more detail in the next section.

### **The Unconditionality of the Categorical Imperative and of the Person**

In this final section we shall address whether or not Kant felt that the categorical imperative had a personalistic dimension and what is the Wojtylian position in that regard. In the first place, it must be stressed that Kant finds that the only association possible with the unconditionality of the mandate of practical reason is within the person as an end in itself. For practical reason, something is not unconditional when it is wanted by condition of another previous want, but when it is bound a priori to the act of wanting. In this situation the person is presented as the only being that is an objective end. Kant says that a person is a rational being because his nature already distinguishes him as an end in itself, as something that can never be used as a mere means, in essence limiting any arbitration in this regard. It is a valid principle to every rational being. To consider the person as an end in itself is the only way not to be conditioned by any objects of interest or inclination which hinder the practical mandate of reason. In other words, the categorical

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 240–241.

imperative commands that an action is good in itself, without placing it under any condition whatsoever that as an intended end would be satisfied with that action, and thus manifests the dignity of the person as an end in itself.

However, since any phenomenical human creation is both physically and psychically conditioned, the human person, a correlative of the unconditional categorical imperative, is not allowed in Kant's proposal to define itself as a self-generating object, in addition to ignoring the uniqueness of the person by viewing it as a generic aspect. It is at this point that Wojtyła introduces his own personalist perspective on a person's self-knowledge of the process of self-determination, an action that openly differs from Kant.

According to Kant, a categorical nature means the exclusion of the entire order of the purpose of the moral norm. However, his conception does not seem convincing. The categorical nature of the ethical norm only shows how absolute and peculiar moral value is, it shows that it is a value that must be carried out, which therefore *should be aspired toward* (as an end) at all costs, that is, irrespective of other values that may have concurrent ends.<sup>29</sup>

It is as if the critique of utilitarianism convinced Kant to reduce active purpose to the Sensory Order and the corresponding restriction of the end in itself to the noumenical plane. Wojtyła explains it this way:

In a way, by his denial Kant assumes the utilitarian concept of purpose (pleasure and pain as exclusive ends to the act, the desire of man). Within the world of phenomena and, therefore, he did not see in the context of experience a sense of purpose that was different from that used for the basis of the other concept of the man-person. He left this other concept in the purely noumenical, a prioristic order. It could be said that this is how Kant "hid" that

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, "El hombre y la responsabilidad," 252.

which is “apparent” more so than what his theory of knowledge could.<sup>30</sup>

Let us say that for Wojtyła, as a dimension of action, the personalist end is distinct from the intentional direction of the will, and expresses itself in self-determination: the person not only voluntarily chooses one or another good but at the same time chooses himself morally becoming that which he has chosen:

It confirms the correctness of the fundamental intuition by Saint Thomas. Duty is always closely related to the ontic reality of the person, their deepest reality: *to be good or bad. Man is good or else he is bad*, based on his actions; or better yet, he “becomes” such, because the act itself is not so much something that “is” as it is something it “becomes” in each occasion.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, we can say that in choosing what is good in the moral sense, the person itself becomes good. Thus, while wilful intentionality comes from the nature of the act, defining it or giving it specificity, the personal structure of the subject is revealed; however, with self-determination, it is not by the cognitive reflection mode but by transcending itself. In the “I want” the person is indirectly objectified by himself as that subject for whom he wants this or that outcome. Self-determination is expressed as the force that keeps human dynamism together and whole at the personal level.<sup>32</sup>

This way, in distinguishing between the natural and personal moments of the act, we also find the distinction between the intentional specification and the self-determination that subjectively comes with it. Let us say that both types of behavior are combined as one and the same in the personal subject. Said synthesis is described in the proper terms of an “I want” and inseparably so in an “I act wanting.” Thus, the

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 258–259.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Persona y acción*, trans. Rafael Mora (Madrid: Palabra, 2011), 135.

will in action has a twofold tempering effect on the identity of the personal subject (I who wants) and the natural tendency to want.

Wojtyła replaces what Kant saw as autonomy, as the independence of practical reason, with self-reliance, as opposed to the causal determinism of nature as it is to the indeterminism of those who lacked a defining purpose for their actions:

This internal independence of the *ego* from the intentional objects of volition (i.e., the end-value) is justified by self-reliance. Thus, in order to conform to reality, any interpretation of free will must be based on the *self-determinism* of man instead of floating in mid-air and insisting solely on indeterminism.<sup>33</sup>

From a substantialist metaphysical perspective the concept of self-reliance is contradictory. However, this is rather about that the personal self is not a passive assumption deduced as an unchanging substrate based on accidental changes, but that it depends on self-determination to acquire an explicit, objective consciousness of itself as an indirectly wanted reality, by wanting through it one or another outcome for himself. According to Wojtyła, a person's unconditionality is his permanent self-awareness and dynamism in all actions, which are not only carried out by the person in question, but at the same time fall upon and modify him.

It is interesting to highlight the point that Wojtyła makes regarding the traces that actions leave on the subject: good actions, once they are carried out, do not vanish without a trace; they leave their moral value, which constitutes an objective reality that is intrinsically related to the person. By being a person, man is someone and, by being someone, he could be good or bad.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 176.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we see a coincidence in terminology between Kant and Wojtyła, since they both place the person at the base of the unconditionality of the moral norm. However, there are differences in principle in the way that a person gets to know himself and the self-completion of his actions. Kant relegates these aspects, respectively, to the realm of the unobjectifiable and unknowable, and to a static objective purpose. For Kant, the person is beyond what is given to knowledge and lacks the capacity to function towards the end that establishes him. That is why it is from the personalist categories of the self-knowledge of the specific or from a certain transparency of its own, as well as from the internal completion of the act by the person, that Wojtyła overcomes these gaps in the Kantian approach to the person. We finish with a text by Wojtyła which helps us to see more clearly all that we have been saying:

Ever since Kant's analysis of the categorical imperative, the history of philosophy and ethics, contains a specific contribution to the personalist norm. The so-called second categorical imperative by Kant requires that the person is always the end of an action and never a means to an end. In this assumption, Kant had the premise of utilitarianism in mind. The personalist norm is the supreme principle behind human actions, according to which all acts of man in any field must be appropriate to its relationship with the person, which is fundamental to human actions. All moral sensibility consists in revealing the personal moment as a "purely human" moment that makes way and emerges through all schemes, entirely "thingified" by the content of our actions. In the final analysis, the acts of man are not primarily for the realization of the world, but for the realization of himself, of humanity and of individuals.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Wojtyła, "El hombre y la responsabilidad," 291.

In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła demonstrates how the love mandate establishes a personalist principle and norm, which in its negative view is formulated by stating that the person is an asset that does not agree with its use, since it cannot be treated as an object of pleasure, or as a means, and, in the positive view, claims that the person is such an asset that only love can dictate the proper and valid attitude towards it.

---

## WOJTYLIAN CRITIQUE OF KANTIAN MORALITY AND PROPOSAL OF THE UNCONDITIONAL PERSONALISTIC NORM

### SUMMARY

The main objective of this inquiry is to examine the reach and influence of the Unconditional Norm throughout Karol Wojtyła's thinking in order to understand the Wojtylian personalistic norm and to propose it as the basis for all social interactions. To this end, our primary method is obtained from the study of Kant's *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, which exposes the theory of imperatives and in a special way is able to show, as opposed to utilitarianism, how it is that a person can never be a mere means, but is rather an end in itself. This Kantian concept had a profound impact on Wojtyła, who was also critical of utilitarian ethics and thus found great inspiration in the Kantian proposal. However, Wojtyła goes beyond the Kantian proposal because, although they coincide in many points, Wojtyła felt that the subject of experience was not sufficiently addressed, given that it had an a priori, and therefore insufficient, perspective of the personal self. Wojtyła's Aristotelian-Thomist education, driven by the discovery of Max Scheler's phenomenology, gave substance to a very original doctrine in both method and projection.

### KEYWORDS

practical love, moral good, categorical imperative, unconditional norm, respect.

### REFERENCES

- Acosta, Miguel, and Adrian J. Reimers. *Karol Wojtyla's Personalist Philosophy. Understanding "Person and Act."* Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016.
- Burgos, Juan M. *The integral experience*. Madrid: Word, 2015.
- Ferrer, Urbano. *Acción, deber, donación*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2015.

- 
- Ferrer, Urbano. "La conversión del imperativo categórico kantiano en norma personalista." In *La filosofía personalista de Karol Wojtyła*. Ed. J. M. Burgos. Madrid: Palabra, 2009.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Crítica de la razón práctica*. Trans. Manuel García Morente. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1994.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *Amor y responsabilidad*. Madrid: Palabra, 2008.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "El hombre y la responsabilidad." In *El hombre y su destino*. Madrid: Palabra, 2014.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "El problema de la experiencia ética." In *Mi visión del hombre*. Madrid: Palabra, 2005.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "El problema de la separación de la experiencia y el acto en la ética de Kant y de Scheler." In *Mi visión del hombre*. Madrid: Palabra, 2005.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "La persona: sujeto y comunidad." In *El hombre y su destino*. Madrid: Palabra, 2014.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *Persona y acción*. Trans. Rafael Mora. Madrid: Palabra, 2011.