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Avoiding Slipko’s Slips: Karol Wojtyła’s Two Levels of Value

“Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth.”¹ Tadeusz Ślipko uses this quote in his paper, “The Concept of Value in the Ethical Thought of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła,” to convey that when we greatly admire a person, system of thought, or institution, we should always be willing to set this aside in order to align our sights with the higher calling to truth. Yet, there can be a failure to correctly apply this principle. If someone claimed, “I love the Catholic Church, but I love Christ even more,” one might point out that to love the Church is to love Christ and vice versa. Understanding the full implications contained in the content of the statement — reveals that there is an implicit denial of the connection between the two. Ślipko’s claim that we ought to love the truth more than the thought of Karol Wojtyła, necessarily intends to spell out that Wojtyła was not faithful to the truth. Based on this, we should reject his view of value. This paper’s intent is to bring into question the validity of Ślipko’s claim and to show that Karol Wojtyła can be embraced not

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¹ Tadeusz Ślipko, “The Concept of Value in the Ethical Thought of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła,” *Forum Philosophicum* 11 (2006): 18. This is Ślipko’s translation of the phrase “Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas” which is lightly attributed to Aristotle. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 6, 1096a15, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1732; hereafter cited as: *N.E.*, trans. Barnes.

only as an ambassador of the truth, but that such an acceptance allows us to embrace the truth itself.

The layout of the paper is as follows: after (1) framing the stage with a more developed showcase of Wojtyła's view of value within the bounds of morality as seen from antiquity, it will (2) summarize Ślipko's objections and reservations and (3) expand on Wojtyła's stance in relation to the objections and offer relevant solutions.

Wojtyła's Value in the Bounds of Morality

It is important to remember the heritage to which Wojtyła pays homage in order to see how his thoughts align with antiquity.

Thomas Aquinas relates that "[m]oral duty is twofold: because reason dictates that something must be done, either as being so necessary that without it the order of virtue would be destroyed; or as being useful for the better maintaining of the order of virtue."² A failure to act in a virtuous way is an act which falls short of the norm which is provided by a given virtue in this context and is a moral failure.

Peter Lombard supplies the following definition in *The Sentences*: "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us."³ Commenting on this, Aquinas notes:

This definition comprises perfectly the whole essential notion of virtue. . . . But the definition would be more suitable if for "quality" we substitute "habit," which is the proximate genus . . . "which God works in us without us." If we omit this phrase, the

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 99, a. 5, resp.; hereafter cited as: *S.Th.* Available online—see the section *References* for details.

³ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4, obj. 1.

remainder of the definition will apply to all virtues in general, whether acquired or infused.⁴

From this we gather that virtue is best called a habit of doing good acts. However, if we need the norm of virtue to tell us what acts are good or bad, how can we get to the state where we are virtuous enough to recognize the next right move in the here and now situation? There is an avenue.

Aristotle notes that moral virtue is not instilled in us by nature but is connatural to our nature such that we are responsible for its development through habituation: “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.”⁵ He later states that “they are means and that they are states of character, and that they tend, and by their own nature, to the doing of the acts by which they are produced, and that they are in our power and voluntary.”⁶ The word “means” in this case is not simply the fulcrum between excess and defect. Here, Aristotle is talking about the means of producing an end. This is indicated in the phrase: “the doing of the acts by which they are produced.”

Aristotle looks toward a possible solution:

For each state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and measure of them. In most things the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not. We therefore choose the pleasant as a good, and avoid pain as an evil.⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*, I–II, q.55, a 4, resp.

⁵ *N.E.*, II, 1, 1103a23ff, trans. Barnes, 1743.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 5, 1114b29–30, trans. Barnes, 1760.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 4, 1113a30ff, trans. Barnes, 1758.

There is something different about how the good or virtuous person is able to see the value of an action and it is produced by the actions that they do. Our state in relation to virtue shapes the very way we evaluate choices while it continues to be our moral duty to do things that further us in making better moral choices. This entails choosing the means that further the order of virtue as well as producing virtuous ends. Of how these means or ideas appear to us, Aristotle comments that “if each man is somehow responsible for his state of mind, he will also be himself somehow responsible for the appearance.”⁸

There emerge two separate kinds of values. The first value is the end which is sought. This is the remote end that is hoped for through the more proximate means. Both these, the means and the end, have their own value but they are seen in conjunction together. This value is the dynamism of the extrinsic effect in the world and in which everyone participates including the author of the action.

The second kind of value is the moral value which is the value of the act to the agent performing the action. This is intrinsic to the person and, as a subject, can become a different aim. It can be considered by reflecting upon the act: what kind of person does this act cause one to become?⁹ The choice says something about the agent, even to the agent themselves. This is a subjective value.

Objective values owe themselves to the nature of existing things as they operate within their normal scope of operation according to intention. Understood under Aristotle’s final cause, the end goal is tied back to the formal cause of a given thing which helps that existing thing attain that end. It is the nature of a wing to help a bird fly, for instance,

⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 5, 1114b1–5, trans. Barnes, 1759.

⁹ Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Theory of Morality,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Th. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 149: “Fulfillment can also be defined as self-realization. . . . The teleological interpretation refers directly to this becoming, this *fieri*, proper to the human being as a person.”

or the hardness and shape of a hammer's head that helps it drive various kinds of nails. This essential connection is the bedrock upon which a thing *is* what it *is*. Antiquity commonly looked at the rational aspect of the human being as the form which traced the objective value of the human person. Rationality was the specific difference in reference to personhood. The objective value of a human being comes from the fact that they are a person who has a rational nature. All the person's rights and responsibilities are based upon the core of what it means to be a person. Hence, it is accidental to the objective value of a human being whether they are a physician or choir member and regardless of race or gender. While some may argue that being a physician might make someone a better person, no one is apt to claim that they are better because they sing in a choir or that they are better because they are a certain gender. To claim, for instance, that a person is better because of their race would be making a constitutive difference out of something which is not determinative. It would be like trying to make the differentiation of persons based on grades of persons and a genus cannot be divided by itself in such a manner. The genus is divided by rationality in this objective view from antiquity.

On the other hand, to make such a claim seemingly ignores the subjective value of this individual which is also rooted in the fact that the human being is a person who is irreducible and unrepeatable. Even if a physician lost their skills, they would still have this fundamental personal value. Even if they were no longer able to help people, they would not become a worse person for it since this is accidental to their value as a human being. This abstracts from the teleological ends and focuses on if the action is right for this person. It asks, "Am I the right agent? Is this a good action for me?"

Karol Wojtyła has taken great care to point out that the subjective value can be a point of departure for discussing what it means to be human. It makes sense that we can speak of both extrinsic and intrinsic

values with reference to the subjective nature of the human being. Wojtyła keeps the idea that the human being is a value to others as an object in an extrinsic sense and also includes human acts as objects because they take on an existence in the world. He does not, however, remain on this level alone since then acts are seen as good or bad only based on their effect in the world and particularly on others. It is required to incorporate a view of existing natures, such as the rational nature of the human person, so that acts can also be seen to be good according to the expected behavior that should be observed according to that nature. In the moral theory of antiquity, the manner in which the action was performed served to condition the value of the action as the means.

Aristotle sees this in virtuous action as the prudence that “right reason prescribes.” Aquinas sees this as either a good “quality” or “habit” of mind. For Wojtyła, the focus is the transcendent subjective reflection that leads to the integration of the human person.

Wojtyła focuses on the intrinsic nature and value that the action has to the subject who performs them. In a subjective view, we have the value that the actor is creating outside as well as the value of how that goes on to shape the individual themselves.¹⁰

Although the person has their value from the fact that they are person, becoming morally good or bad does not take away from that basic dignity.¹¹ Likewise, an act in the world can have value as an object out there in the community, but it is not same value as that act has in relation to the character of the person performing the action. There is a value of the extrinsic object which hinges on if the act has been done

¹⁰ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 151: “Implied in the intentionality of willing and acting, in man’s reacting outside of himself toward objects that he is presented with as different goods—and thus values—there is his simultaneous moving back into his ego, the closest and the most essential object of self-determination.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*: “Being a person man is ‘somebody’ and being somebody he may be either good or bad.”

or not. The action has a value once performed but has no value until that point. The moral value, however, is further diversified once performed as either good or evil in relation to the agent.

For this reason, Wojtyła looks at the moral value of actions as a second level.¹² The reflection on the value which we are creating or participating in gives us an *experience of morality* which serves on a new kind of objective level since it is an abstraction of the intrinsic in relation to the existential dynamism of the extrinsic value.¹³ In this reflection, we experience and isolate the moral fact as a moral value which redounds to the person performing the act and develops their personhood.¹⁴ This, however, can take on either a good value which can make the person better or a bad value which can make the person worse. When we see this profile of the moral situation, we have a direct glimpse of morality itself.

Moral duty holds that each act is a chance for the moral agent to either affirm or deny the call of moral duty in which they either live up to that duty or they fail in one of the two ways mentioned by Aquinas. Living up to one's moral duty means acting virtuously, but requires being able to see the moral value correctly if we are going to be responsible to ourselves. Hence, Aristotle mentions that the virtuous have the ability to see the right manner in which to act and it is also virtue which makes this task easier. For the same reason, becoming vicious makes the right determining of moral values more difficult to grasp. Those

¹² Karol Wojtyła, "The Problem of Experience in Ethics," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Th. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 118–119.

¹³ Wojtyła, "Problem of the Theory of Morality," 136: "[T]he theory of morality develops not just a certain abstraction in relation to the living, existential reality of human morality . . . it goes straight to the dynamic core of moral facts and seeks to give them the form of an intellectual objectification." Cf. also *ibid.*, 134.

¹⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 151: "The performing of an action, through the fulfillment it brings, is coordinate with self-determination. It runs parallel to self-determination but as if it were directed in the opposite sense: for being the performer of an action man also fulfills himself in it."

who reaffirm their decisions for moral values which fail in their moral duty contribute to their own disintegration.

The process in which this habituation takes place is called by Wojtyła “moral experience” which takes on the functional sense. As Wojtyła mentions, we could have no “experience of morality” without actually performing moral acts in moral experience.¹⁵ Our perception of this value has a value of its own because we can be seeing the value sometimes waiver between its true nature and the value of the thing only in relation to our desired goals. The classic example used by Wojtyła is that a person is a value that can never be treated as a means to an end because their value is that they are an end in themselves. If someone in acting views another as a means to an end, then acting under this aspect of good (or value), the moral fact itself shows the action as flawed. The moral value to the actor becomes detrimental even if the external effect seems to be good. On the other hand, to recognize the value of the other properly, and to act in such a way that we respect that dignity is to act virtuously. This may be the case even if the desired end is not actually obtained. In this horizontal transcendence in which the person is aiming out past themselves for different ends, this right valuing carries a positive moral value which in turn develops and reaffirms the person. This is seen as the person’s fulfillment. Since, however, the intention is for the remote or external end, the person’s own development seems accidental or secondary. It is secondary only when viewing morality on the functional level of *moral experience*.

If we return to the second-order *experience of morality* itself, the significance is not accidental but absolutely essential to the context in which examination of conscience takes place.¹⁶ From here, we can catch

¹⁵ Wojtyła, “Problem of Experience in Ethics,” 119.

¹⁶ Wojtyła states that the conflict with the principle of morality as dividing the genus of morality into species as moral good or evil only arises on the second level. Cf. Wojtyła, “Problem of the Theory of Morality,” 140: “The opposition to moral good appears in it

the vertical transcendence in which the agent must come into contact with the truth that necessarily separates that which is a true good from a merely apparent good. This is the source of virtue on which Aristotle did not fully expound.

Wojtyła is concerned with a personalistic norm which is delivered by our experience as a human person since this is where we all begin. His special mission has been to expose the transcendence which a person has through their freedom and self-determination that allows them to shape themselves as a person. This either integrates and fulfills the person or disintegrates them.¹⁷ Wojtyła recognizes the value of persons as the subjective point of departure. This properly contextualizes both kinds of value as a feature of co-acting in relation to the moral value that we derive from interpersonal actions. This preserves the individual perspective on the action rather than only perceiving it as being due to human rationality which is evaluated on the general universal level of the species.

Ślipko's Objections and Reservations

Our intention has been to cross the intersection between Aristotle and Aquinas and introduce the thought of Wojtyła sparingly. Laying this thick groundwork from antiquity, we are prepared to answer Ślipko's objections from a Wojtylian view. Wojtyła defines moral value

in the generic sense (abstracting for the time being from the duality implied in moral good and evil) as that through which the human being as human being becomes and is good or evil . . .

only secondarily; it appears precisely in the context of a relation to a principle—to conscience or a law; it appears somehow through this realization.”

¹⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 151: “To fulfill oneself means to actualize, and in a way to bring the proper fullness, that structure in man which is characteristic for him because of his personality and also because his being somebody and something; it is the structure of *self-governance* and *self-possession*.”

moral good as that through which the human being becomes and is good and moral evil as that through which the human being becomes and is evil. Moral value, both good and evil, is something original and irreducible to any further more general category. This originality manifests itself in the phenomenological realm as a distinctive kind of self-evidence: moral value as moral is self-evident, and its irreducibility to any other category is self-evident.¹⁸

Ślipko claims that there are three basic problems with Wojtyła's understanding of value which are manifested in this passage as well as throughout the cardinal's work: (a) defining moral value as either good or evil, (b) making use of the phenomenological realm, and (c) a misunderstanding of the process of abstraction as seen by Aristotle and Aquinas.

Problems of Definition

Ślipko first claims that the definition is uninformative. He claims that the definition "indicates the effect while the cause of this effect remains unknown" which is akin to saying that light "is something that enlightens the room."¹⁹ This attempts to say that there is no substance to the definition as it evades the question. Wojtyła is actually pointing out that moral value is the cause of the effect of a person becoming either good or bad and that this effect follows the cause in one of these two ways.²⁰ This definition is a minor premise in the much fuller argument about a person's self-fulfillment. As such, it has rich content. It is not meant to stand alone as a response to the question: "What is moral value?"

¹⁸ Wojtyła, "Problem of Theory of Morality," 143–144.

¹⁹ Ślipko, "Concept of Value," 19.

²⁰ Cf. Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 37–38. Feser offers a more well-defined argument against modernity along similar lines.

Ślipko continues to complain that normally speaking the term “value” carries a positive connotation.²¹ Wojtyła does speak of “anti-values” that axiologists use to work out problems with what seem to be contradictory ways of expressing the fact that while good may have a moral value, it is hard to talk about and evil having a value at all. Since Wojtyła never overcomes this issue to Ślipko’s satisfaction, it presents the “metaphysics of evil.”²² It would be an error for evil to take on an existential quality as if it existed on its own and had its own kind of being.

Problems of Phenomenological Method

Ślipko also complains about Wojtyła’s use of phenomenology and phenomenological intuition. According to Ślipko:

It does not matter whether this intuition is examined with respect to the experience of morality or with respect to moral experience. In any case it cannot be taken as an innate cognitive capacity, and cannot therefore be taken as an attribute that works in the psychical structure of every normal grown person and which would enable the empirical verification of the sentences expressed by the philosophers of morality . . . the expression to indicate this idea is precisely the phrase “phenomenological intuition” that in the philosophical convention of the phenomenologists has the role of a *super-arbiter* in solving fundamental philosophical problems.²³

While Ślipko admits that such intuition “can be a basis for defending the thesis that moral value exists,” it only does so “from the fact that it describes the phenomenon of moral value in its concrete, immediate configuration.”²⁴ For Ślipko, this has not helped to show the

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

difference between moral value and any other good. The lack of grounding in metaphysics supposedly shows the one-sidedness of the method that Karol Wojtyła used in formulating his moral theory.

Lack of Proper Abstraction

Ślipko makes the fantastic claim that the cardinal who studied in Rome under the direction of the renowned Thomist Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange is unaware of the proper use of abstraction:

Cardinal Wojtyła is unfamiliar with Aristotle's and Aquinas' concept of "abstraction" as a capacity of the human mind to penetrate the essential structure of the known object, to reach the thing that constitutes the essential sense of the known "esse" and of the "agere" that derives from this "esse."²⁵

Ślipko also cites the case where Wojtyła attempts to show the basic intuitive understanding that one can obtain from lived experience: "[W]e can apprehend *in se* the moral good of marital fidelity by opposing it to the moral evil of adultery."²⁶ In Wojtyła's own words, he intends to illustrate that:

This lived experience not only provides a basis for objectifying moral duty in the form of the various norms of morality, but also provides—by means of an appropriate abstraction—a basis for objectifying moral value. We then, as it were, detach this value from all the concrete actions of concrete human beings, where it is moral value in the existential sense as moral good or evil, and we apprehend it somehow in itself, *in se*.²⁷

Ślipko takes issue with Wojtyła's use of opposition of abstraction in this case, and also in his use of abstraction in general. Ślipko offers that such examples only "consists in opposing in an abstractive way

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁶ Wojtyła, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," 153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

(i.e., in general way) 'matrimonial faithfulness' to the evil of adultery that is situated on the same abstractive level. This does not constitute a case of 'separating [a] good' from 'a concrete act' of [a] 'concrete person'.²⁸

Further to this, Ślipko does not like Wojtyła's statement that moral facts are not arrived at through the brand of abstraction that he thinks is necessary to penetrate the "problem of finding a satisfactory description of value."²⁹ For Wojtyła, "it is not an intellectual abstraction derived from those facts, but it is precisely that which we experience in each of them."³⁰ According to Ślipko, this seems to be a modern way of undermining abstraction by reducing "its cognitive activity to the constitution of arbitrary speculations lacking direct contact with the reality grasped by the acting person."³¹

These three areas outline the basic problems and reservations that Ślipko takes in reference to Wojtyła's concept of value within his ethical thought. Ślipko does not seem to object that moral value, if it were properly understood, is a partial cause of a person's becoming either morally good or bad. He believes that the method of arriving at the conclusion is not solid and it would have been better served by examining other methods.³²

²⁸ Ślipko, "Concept of Value," 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁰ Wojtyła, "Problem of Experience in Ethics," 119.

³¹ Ślipko, "Concept of Value," 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 23: "We find another very important shortcoming: a certain superficiality in the treatment of a fact that is essential for the objective status of moral values . . . we speak here about the fact that in the moral consciousness of both highly developed societies and very low and primitive social groups we find a set of extra historical and invariably important moral values proper to humankind. Within this set we find values such as justice, veracity, respect of human life, and some imperatives related to these values: do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery and others, generally known from Deca-

Wojtyła's Stance Revisited

Response to the Problems in Definition

Ślipko complains about Wojtyła's definition because it seems to create a space for the ontology of evil. While Wojtyła takes time to explain the difficulty of shifting from a basic understanding of value to a place where we can examine a wholly different sphere of value, he does not use the language of Aristotle and Aquinas. Wojtyła prefers to explain the problem in contemporary terms to modern readers who may not be familiar with this issue Ślipko points out. His language and description move through the stages of rejecting the ideas that have been produced by modern logic (i.e., the error of supposing an "anti-value"). Wojtyła's main objective is to bring the reader with him through the thought experience so that the reader can also identify with the solution to the problem of encountering value without direct or immediate recourse to metaphysics.³³

To answer Ślipko on his own terms, modern logic reframes Aristotle's square of opposition such that contraries no longer count as official opposition. Only contradictory statements can be used to exclude the truth of propositions. Thus, if we were to examine something such as intelligence, the only opposition would be non-intelligence. We can compare a person and a rock under this opposition. However, to compare two people, where we expect intelligence, we can speak of one as intelligent and another as unintelligent under the form of contrary opposition. The problem of existential import introduces itself to the system of Aristotelian logic when viewed in modern terms which is exactly what has happened in the examination provided by Ślipko. Moral

logue. This real world of values and moral imperatives remains beyond the reach of phenomenological intuition."

³³ Wojtyła, "Problem of the Theory of Morality," 131: "At the moment, I am not concerned with describing this form in detail."

value is either a moral good or moral evil, which are contraries. In this universe of discourse, it is perfectly fine to accept that the moral value only exists contingent on some other value happening in reality (i.e., moral value if and only if there is an action as a value). When examining action as a value simply speaking, on the other hand, there is no need to assume an anti-value in the contrary position. This means non-value is the contradictory. The important implication is that no matter if the action is absolutely neglected or improperly taken, it loses value. To suppose a contrary to value at this level, an un-value or anti-value, is to create something from nothing. This would be the error of existential import.

This, however, does not happen with moral value, because it already uses the existence of the value itself as its metaphysical basis. A neglected or improperly taken action does hold a moral value because of duty. That makes it immoral as opposed to moral. The shift in contexts explains all of Wojtyła's statements about second levels that are joined to moral value rather than just value. We can say that value, conditionally speaking under morality in this separate context, is divided into species.

This division is not Wojtyła's invention. As he points out, "Thomas Aquinas defined moral good and evil as two species of the same genus which is morality (*moralitas*)—or, one could also say, which is moral value."³⁴ To remove all doubt and to quote the Angelic doctor himself:

Good and evil are not constitutive differences except in morals, which receive their species from the end, which is the object of the will, the source of all morality. And because good has the nature of an end, therefore good and evil are specific differences in moral things; good in itself, but evil as the absence of the due end. *Yet neither does the absence of the due end by itself consti-*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

*tute a moral species, except as it is joined to the undue end; just as we do not find the privation of the substantial form in natural things, unless it is joined to another form. Thus, therefore, the evil which is a constitutive difference in morals is a certain good joined to the privation of another good; as the end proposed by the intemperate man is not the privation of the good of reason, but the delight of sense without the order of reason. Hence evil is not a constitutive difference as such, but by reason of the good that is annexed.*³⁵

This preserves the age old view of evil as a privation of good, but also attaches the moral good to the value that is the object of the will. We see Wojtyła echoing Aquinas when he says, “[m]oral evil basically consists in this: that a human being, in wanting some good, does not want to be good.”³⁶ This draws out the subjective difference between wanting a good as a context and the context of wanting to be good. This is the sense in which “we must accept a distinctive teleology of morality.”³⁷

Response to Method

Ślipko claims that the distinction between *moral experience* and the *experience of morality* do nothing to help explain how we come to understand morality and moral value. There is, however, a link back to the moral duty outlined by Aquinas. In its functional aspect, *moral experience* is the generator of virtue as it occurs in the practice of virtue, but it also becomes the object of the reflection that Aquinas has pointed out as an *experience of morality*. Aquinas has abstracted a two-fold relation of moral duty to virtue from the experience of morality. This abstraction does not make someone moral, but it does provide one profile of a norm of morality which can be used as a measure or rule.

³⁵ *S.Th.*, I, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 2. The emphasis, by italics, is mine.

³⁶ Wojtyła, “Problem of the Theory of Morality,” 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Wojtyła points out that “moral value is ultimately both the source and the outcome of duty.”³⁸ In the here and now lived experience, the moral value is made real by the action. This moment of truth is laden with content. It presents itself as evidence which can be viewed under different aspects and which can expose the presence or absence of certain elements. This evidence is the last to be analyzed in a teleological or cosmological perspective because in that analysis we look at what is first in the order of perfection, that is, to the ends: what is the ultimate goal. Experience, as the first in the order of generation, has a fresh and different perspective that can attest to realities that are not readily seen from the more objective teleological perspective as it moves toward the subjective (as a deduction from first principles would).

Beginning with the subjective evidence as Wojtyła has done, we can harvest the essence of the moral fact from the experience of lived reality. Far from being divorced from the truth, this reality presents itself in a raw and whole format. This is a kind of induction that “is not a method of generalizing a certain thesis, but simply a method of directly grasping a general truth in particular facts.”³⁹ Wojtyła is emphatic that “experience *must* form this basis if ethics is to be pursued as a science,” that “cognition does not in any way create ‘reality’ (cognition does not create its own content),” and that “morality is a form of reality.”⁴⁰ Only in response to the unceasing call of reality on our cognitive abilities do the distinctions arise from the content. This content creates the duty.

The direct apprehension of the content of experience is often referred to as philosophical intuition. The content, however, does not invoke an innate cognitive capacity; rather our cognitive capacity has a duty to respond to the content it is experiencing. To not respond is to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁹ Wojtyła, “Problem of Experience in Ethics,” 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

fail in moral duty and as Wojtyła points out, such a “person is also lacking in those attributes proper to humanity.”⁴¹ Ślipko must agree a person has an “innate cognitive capacity” in order to allow for abstraction at all, but to deny that “every normal grown person” has a structure which is aimed at examining such experiences is to remove the very measure against which any “empirical verification” could ever be leveled. This is an outright denial of the subjectivity of the human person as a constitutive part of morality.

Far from being a so-called “super-arbiter” as Ślipko claims, for Wojtyła, phenomenological intuition relies completely upon “the enormous richness and complexity of reality”⁴² that our lived experience naturally supplies us with. This is how Wojtyła is able to make the claim that “[m]oral experience always resides within the experience of a human being and in some sense even *is* this experience.”⁴³ The moral fact expressed to us in phenomenological intuition acts as a first principle since it is original, irreducible and self-evident (just as the first principles in any science must needs be).

Response to Problems of Abstraction

For Wojtyła, moral value is harvested from experience as “something original and irreducible to any further more general category,” whose “originality manifests itself in the phenomenological realm.” Previously quoted, Wojtyła terms this abstraction as the detachment of the value from all concrete actions of concrete human beings, “where it is moral value in the existential sense as moral good or evil, and we apprehend it somehow in itself.” The example given by Wojtyła was to

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 120.

abstract the moral fact that adultery has a negative moral value and is morally bad by examining the positive attribute of marital fidelity.

Aquinas used remotion to show how we can understand God from what he is not.⁴⁴ There is no reason why Wojtyła should be held to the standard that Ślipko is claiming. The Decalogue contains many “thou shall not” statements which point back to the moral norm. It would be hard to see how someone would be able to make any headway starting from these well-known examples unless we use abstraction in this same sense that Wojtyła and Aquinas have used it in remotion. In fact Ślipko later suggests this himself.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, Wojtyła is not looking for the kind of abstraction that Ślipko is advocating. The difference between intellectual virtues and moral virtues is that the intellectual virtues are aimed at the speculative and the moral virtues are aimed at practical matters of action. Hence, the moral virtues are concerned with means as Aristotle notes. The kind of abstraction required has an aim to lay hold of the facts and recognize things for what they are, not describe what they are or to create new categories. This is why conscience is not described as a method for deriving knowledge but referred to by Aquinas as a kind of practical or particular syllogism known as *synderesis*.⁴⁶

As Wojtyła notes, “the theory of morality develops not just as a certain abstraction in relation to the living, and existential reality of human morality . . . it goes straight to the dynamic core of moral facts and

⁴⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957), I, 14: “Now, in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotion. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable To apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able To have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not.” Available online—see the section *References* for details.

⁴⁵ Ślipko, “Concept of Value,” 23.

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, “On Conscience,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, trans. Ralph McInerney (New York: Penguin, 1998), 226–227.

seeks to give them the form of an intellectual objectification.”⁴⁷ For Aquinas as well as Wojtyła, this means coming into contact with the content of the natural law in consciousness. Natural law is the principle that one is confronted with in this moment of truth. “Conscience is simply the lived experience of the principles of moral good and evil. As long as we operate on the level of lived experience, principles take the form of conscience.”⁴⁸ Far from creating a “category” as a “product of the mind,”⁴⁹ this recognition is directly proportionate to both the person as an existing and operating being in keeping with their nature in relation to the truth of reality. “And that is why persons exist and act, actualizing their *esse* and their *operari*, not just on the level of values, but also on the level of principles. Morality is the dynamic and existential coordination of these levels.”⁵⁰

Aristotle does mention abstraction once in his ethics.⁵¹ Speaking of practical wisdom, he makes the differentiation that the principles of “mathematics exist by abstraction, while the first principles of these other subjects come from experience.”⁵² Abstraction is mentioned three times by Aquinas in connection with moral virtue in the *Summa Theologiae* (I–II and II–II). Strikingly, Aquinas mentions that “it is one thing to consider the universal man, and another to consider a man as man,” because in the first way “the universal is obtained by abstraction from individual matter,” while in the second “the sensitive powers, both of apprehension and of appetite, can tend to something universally,” and this is “by reason of its common nature, and not merely as an indi-

⁴⁷ Wojtyła, “Problem of the Theory of Morality,” 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁹ Ślipko, “Concept of Value,” 21.

⁵⁰ Wojtyła, “Problem of the Theory of Morality,” 139.

⁵¹ Ślipko, “Concept of Value,” 22. Ślipko takes care to mention exactly where Wojtyła has not mentioned abstraction so this comparison is congruent.

⁵² *N.E.*, VI, 8, 1142a16, trans. Barnes, 1803.

vidual.”⁵³ Moral facts present morality through the common nature of value or good seen in the experience of man as man rather than by the nature of the individual experiencing them.

Conclusion

At the outset, we approached morality through the virtue ethics of Aristotle and Aquinas. Understanding that the systems of antiquity agree that moral value, as a good, helps virtue while moral value as moral evil, when accepted by the person subjectively, hurts virtue, it is a moral duty to work for virtue. As demonstrated, this is also Wojtyła's stance. The supposed difficulties of the definition in regard to ontology are not a new problem and the solution that Aquinas supplies can be applied to Wojtyła's understanding of moral evil as a value. Wojtyła also follows the route of abstraction that Aquinas and Aristotle find viable for moral virtues. The method of Cardinal Wojtyła is to approach morality through the experiential avenue which can open up a more subjective element that antiquity only explored in a cursory way.⁵⁴

Ślipko recommends, in his final analysis, a solution that seems akin to the moral argument for God: “This source, to say the truth, is already known to us. It is hidden in the world of moral values that are firmly present in the moral consciousness of individuals and of whole societies; this world was not appreciated and even left out altogether by Cardinal Wojtyła.”⁵⁵ This, however, is nothing other than to point at the *experience of morality* that Wojtyła recommends. It is within this world of values that one confronts the moral facts of love and justice as well as abortion and even genocide.

⁵³ S.Th., I-II, q. 29, a. 6, resp.

⁵⁴ Aquinas largely left conscience as *synderesis* alone after his solitary treatise on the subject.

⁵⁵ Ślipko, “Concept of Value,” 26.

Having established the correctness of Wojtyła's understanding of moral value, it might be said that if one takes the words of Karol Wojtyła to heart and mind, then one has come in contact with this truth as a moral value and also becomes this truth once accepted. If one does not apprehend the moral value therein, then to their detriment they have ignored the truth and take on the negative moral value which shapes them negatively. In embracing such truth, we transcend the subjective and come into direct relationship with such eternal truths. This has ever been the aim of the perennial philosophy and there is good reason to count Wojtyła's thought as part of it.



**Avoiding Ślipko's Slips:
Karol Wojtyła's Two Levels of Value**

SUMMARY

In his paper, "The Concept of Value in the Ethical Thought of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła," Tadeusz Ślipko argues that the thought of Karol Wojtyła was not faithful to the truth. This paper attempts (1) to bring into question the validity of Tadeusz Ślipko's claim and (2) to show that Wojtyła can be embraced not only as an ambassador of the truth, but that such an acceptance allows us to embrace the truth itself. The paper consists of three parts. After (1) framing the stage with a more developed showcase of Wojtyła's view of value within the bounds of morality as seen from antiquity, it (2) summarizes Ślipko's objections and reservations and, then, (3) expands on Wojtyła's stance in relation to the objections and offers relevant solutions.

KEYWORDS

Tadeusz Ślipko, Karol Wojtyła, person, lived experience, duty, truth, virtue, moral value, good, evil, phenomenological method, abstraction.

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