

The Soul's Transcendence: *Veritatis Splendor* and Phenomenology

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“Phenomenology is neither a rebellion against antiquity and the Middle Ages nor a rejection of modernity, but a recovery of the true philosophical life, in a manner appropriate to our philosophical situation.”¹

IN 1970, the Polish Catholic Philosophical Association held a symposium on Cardinal Karol Wojtyła's book *Person and Act*.² It developed into a spirited debate about philosophical methodology. Both Thomists and phenomenologists expressed dissatisfaction with Wojtyła's work. Noted Thomist Mieczysław Albert Krapiec maintained that it focused excessively on morality and was insufficiently metaphysical. Phenomenologists argued that Wojtyła illegitimately mixed phenomenology and metaphysics. Some younger philosophers defended Wojtyła's work, arguing that it illuminates our experience of morality. This conference revealed philosophical tensions in Wojtyła's project of using phenomenology within a Thomistic metaphysic.³

¹ Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203.

² In English, this title has often been rendered *The Acting Person*.

³ For accounts of this conference, see Jarosław Kupczak, O.P., *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 76–81, and Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, trans. Paolo Guietti and Francesca Murphy (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 40–41. Wojtyła discusses the Polish Catholic Philosophical Association conference in the essays “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 187–95, and “The Person: Subject and Community,” in Karol

These tensions have vexed interpreters of Wojtyła's work for decades. To discover how he uses phenomenology, scholars have examined his habilitation thesis on Max Scheler. To trace developments in Wojtyła's thought, they have discussed his 1950s Lublin lectures. They have also examined the English translations of *Person and Act*, debating how it employs Thomistic concepts. Finally, they have linked Wojtyła's early work with his papal writings, considering how John Paul II's papacy reflected his philosophical vision. In these debates, philosophers and theologians sought to understand Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II's complex philosophical method.⁴

In these discussions, Thomists often approach phenomenology in a hostile and superficial manner. They misread Husserl and Scheler, and they mistakenly identify Scheler with the phenomenological movement as a whole. They claim that everything in phenomenology appears in Aristotle or St. Thomas. They uncritically accept Wojtyła's interpretation of Scheler and conclude that a Christian ethic cannot be a phenomenological one. They assert that phenomenology offers mere rhetorical cover for reaching moderns or post-moderns. Most frequently, Thomists charge that phenomenology constitutes a form of "idealism." We are then told that, unlike phenomenologists, Thomists heroically defend metaphysical realism. Yet, this idealism charge ignores serious debates within phenomenology. Students of Edmund Husserl vigorously dispute the definition of idealism. They discuss to what extent Husserl really is an idealist. Furthermore, many phenomenologists embrace a realist phenomenology. They either reject what they take to be Husserl's idealism or ignore the idealism debate altogether. The Thomistic charge of idealism thus reflects considerable ignorance of the phenomenological tradition.⁵

Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 220–75. In this essay, I refer to Karol Wojtyła and John Paul II interchangeably.

⁴ For discussions of the controversy over the English translation of *Person and Act*, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 58–63; Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 76–81; Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 117–20. Recently, Jameson Taylor has rejected criticisms of the English translation, arguing instead that the English text is in fact a different one than the original Polish work. He notes that years separate the Polish and the English texts, and suggests that Wojtyła may have developed his ideas over the years. Rather than a mistranslation, then, the English translation represents a text with new ideas. For this intriguing suggestion, see Jameson Taylor, "The Acting Person in Purgatory: A Note for Readers of the English Text," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 12 (Summer 2010): 77–104.

⁵ For the idealism charge, see Thomas D. Williams, *Who Is My Neighbor? Personalism and the Foundation of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of

The twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Veritatis Splendor* offers an opportunity to reexamine John Paul II's approach to phenomenology. Both critics and admirers of this encyclical see it as the archetypal Thomistic text. Its treatment of conscience, the moral act, and the body all reflect traditional Thomistic ideas. However, John Paul II also integrates phenomenology into the encyclical. To explore his approach, I first briefly describe how in general John Paul II uses Thomism and phenomenology. This story is a familiar one, but I suggest that it remains incomplete. Second, turning to *Veritatis Splendor*, I examine its account of the soul and body. Third, I emphasize how it includes phenomenological ideas like self-possession, transcendence, and the person's value. Fourth, I note how the vision of the person in *Veritatis Splendor* has recently come under attack: citing advances in neuroscience, popularizers and philosophers alike defend a naturalism that denies the soul's existence. Fifth, I maintain that considering identity and temporality, phenomenology develops a powerful criticism of naturalism. I end this essay by urging Catholics to embrace John Paul II's philosophical project.

Thomism and Phenomenology

Today, the story of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II's philosophical journey is well known. Initially trained in Thomistic thought with Reginald Garrigou-

America Press, 2005], 114–15; Adrian J. Reimers, *Truth about the Good: Moral Norms in the Thought of John Paul II* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2011), 90–91; Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 74–75. In his introductory essay to John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, Michael Waldstein uncritically accepts the young Karol Wojtyła's conclusion that “a Christian thinker cannot be a phenomenologist”; see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 75. For a more sophisticated treatment of Wojtyła and Scheler, see Peter J. Colosi, “The Uniqueness of Persons in the Life and Thought of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II with Emphasis on His Indebtedness to Max Scheler,” in *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 61–99. Colosi correctly notes that John Paul II cited Scheler frequently for years after he wrote his habilitation thesis. For a careful discussion of idealism and realism in Husserl, see Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives Which Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). For a sophisticated account of transcendental idealism in Husserl, see Dermot Moran, *Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 174–202. In his many works on Husserl, Robert Sokolowski resists simplistic understandings of Husserl as an idealist. Often, he proceeds without addressing the idealism debate. For one example, see Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]. Drawing on thinkers like Franz Brentano, Adolf Reinach and Roman Ingarden, Barry Smith develops a realist ontology. For his website that features excellent articles on ontology, see ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/.

Lagrange, O.P., he encountered phenomenology when writing a habilitation thesis on Max Scheler. Through Scheler, he learned that, if critically retrieved, phenomenology provides conceptual resources for understanding the person. The phenomenology he embraces comes not from Heidegger but is instead inspired by Edmund Husserl and his students. In John Paul II's writings, we find references to Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Roman Ingarden, and Edith Stein.

To defend the person's value, John Paul II locates phenomenology within a Thomistic metaphysics. He draws primarily (but not exclusively) on the existential Thomistic tradition of Etienne Gilson, Cornelio Fabro, and others. At Lublin in the 1950s, he taught in an intellectual environment shaped by the horrors of World War II. Thomists, phenomenologists, and others recognized the importance of affirming the person's value. Totalitarian attempts to eviscerate whole classes of people motivated Lublin philosophers to accentuate philosophical anthropology. They cultivated an exciting intellectual milieu in which Thomists and phenomenologists exchanged ideas.⁶

John Paul II articulates his philosophical methodology in a well-known essay called "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being."⁷ In it, he rejects a sharp dichotomy between "objective" and "subjective" accounts of the person. The objective stance, which Wojtyła calls the "cosmological" approach, treats the human being as an object. It sees the human as a rational animal and links humanity to the rest of nature.⁸ We study "one of the objects of the world to which the human being visibly and physically belongs." We understand the person by focusing on what she shares with other objects in the world.

Despite its power, the cosmological approach fails to capture important dimensions of the person. Often, it does little to illuminate the experience of our inner life. To complement the cosmological approach, we should use subjectivity to proclaim "that the human being's proper essence cannot be reduced to and explained by the proximate genus and specific difference."⁹

⁶ In this paragraph, I rely on the following sources: Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, 30–58; Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 76–81; and Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 44–88, 269–397.

⁷ Karol Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 209–19. I have learned much from John F. Crosby's analysis of this essay: see John F. Crosby, "The Estrangement of Persons from their Bodies," in John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 113–28.

⁸ All references in this paragraph are to Karol Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," 211.

⁹ *Ibid.*

John Paul II utilizes the phenomenological concept of “lived experience” to highlight the subject’s “acts and inner happenings.”¹⁰ The subject is a “concrete self, a self-experiencing subject.”¹¹ We experience both others and our inner life. John Paul II calls this focus on the subject a “personalistic” approach. It considers the “irreducible” in the person, those elements that we cannot reduce to general properties of the species.

My inner life fundamentally differs from yours, and we should value this difference. In “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” John Paul II suggests that we pay particular attention to the irreducible in persons. He notes that “we must always leave the greater space in this cognitive effort [to understand the person] for the irreducible; we must, as it were, give the irreducible the upper hand when thinking about the human being, both in theory and in practice.”¹² John Paul II returns to the idea of the irreducible in the person repeatedly in his pre-papal and papal writings.

In the “Subjectivity and Irreducible in the Human Being” essay, John Paul II displays the key elements of his philosophical work. He defends a Thomistic metaphysic, maintaining that without it, we risk falling into subjectivism and narcissism. However, Thomists can also selectively employ phenomenological ideas. Properly understood, the modern turn toward the subject can be deeply valuable. In a world that devalues the person, the personalistic approach reawakens us to the inner life of persons. It teaches us to appreciate the value of each individual.

An Unfinished Project

Like others, I have been inspired by John Paul II’s call to value each individual. However, I also think his philosophical project remains unfinished. At one level, this is simply because the late pope was not a full-time philosopher. He always had ecclesial and pastoral responsibilities that prevented him from devoting his full efforts to philosophical work. To many, his major philosophical work, *Person and Act*, seems more like an outline than a completed work. Those interested in his philosophy must comb John Paul II’s speeches and encyclicals for clues to his philosophical insights.

¹⁰ Ibid., 212. In phenomenology, the concept of lived experience is a complex one that appears often in Husserl’s work. For John Paul II’s detailed discussion of it, see Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 3–22, and Karol Wojtyła, *Persona e atto* (Milan: Bompiani, 2001), 35–79. Because of the controversy about the English translation of this text, in this essay I cite both the English and the Italian texts.

¹¹ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 212.

¹² Ibid., 214.

Additionally, John Paul II's links with other philosophers have yet to receive serious scholarly treatment. For example, scholars focus on his work on Scheler, emphasizing John Paul II's critical response to him. However, few thinkers evaluate its accuracy. Did the young Karol Wojtyła accurately understand Scheler? Interpreters also assume that his habilitation thesis remains his final word on Scheler. Few explore whether he changed his mind about Scheler. Additionally, John Paul II distinguishes his approach to action from Husserl's account of consciousness. He acknowledges that conscious acts are intentional, but he focuses on consciousness's mirroring function. He also refuses to accept Husserl's full *epoché* because it focuses excessively on consciousness.¹³ However, are these criticisms of Husserl or simply a different kind of phenomenology? If they are criticisms, does John Paul II accurately interpret Husserl? Finally, John Paul II cites the work of Edith Stein and Roman Ingarden, but we lack careful studies of how he uses their work. Unlike Wojtyła, Stein moved from phenomenology to Thomism. How does her approach differ from his? Ingarden exerted a powerful influence on Polish philosophy throughout the twentieth century. John Paul II mentions him occasionally and spoke at his memorial service. On topics like responsibility, John Paul II's work bears resemblance to Ingarden's discussion. Yet, we have few scholarly investigations of John Paul II and Ingarden. In sum, John Paul II grasped powerful ideas about Thomism and phenomenology, but we need to develop them in greater depth.

Phenomenology and the Young Man

Turning to *Veritatis Splendor*, commentators emphasize its Thomistic character. For example, Steven A. Long enthusiastically proclaims that *Veritatis Splendor* is "by my reckoning the single most Thomistic papal encyclical since *Aeterni Patris* over one hundred years ago."¹⁴ Charles Curran harshly criticizes the encyclical for embracing a narrow Neo-Thomistic legalism.¹⁵ Despite their differences, both thinkers agree that

¹³ For this discussion of Husserl and the *epoché*, see Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 10–16 (*Persona e atto*, 63–71). For the consideration of Husserl, intentionality, and consciousness, see Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 31–47 (*Persona e atto*, 99–133).

¹⁴ Steven A. Long, "The Thomistic Meta-Structure of Pope John Paul II's Doctrinal Initiatives," in *Reason and the Rule of Faith: Conversations in the Tradition with John Paul II*, ed. Christopher J. Thompson and Steven A. Long (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 26.

¹⁵ Charles E. Curran, "*Veritatis Splendor*: A Revisionist Perspective," in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses*, ed. Michael E. Allsop and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 224–44. I think Curran misreads *Veritatis Splendor* in multiple ways, but I will not make the case in this essay.

Veritatis Splendor is a Thomistic document. Others have expressed similar sentiments about the encyclical.

Occasionally, commentators note that John Paul II uses phenomenology in *Veritatis Splendor's* early sections. For example, they focus on the remarkable analysis of Jesus and the rich young man.¹⁶ Here, John Paul II begins his analysis of morality with an encounter between two persons. He analyzes Scripture to develop insights about the good. John Conley, S.J., remarks that John Paul II employs an "onion-peeling analysis common to phenomenological studies of literary texts."¹⁷ He "moves from the superficial to the deeper, from the empirical to the spiritual, as he progressively unveils the moral and theological essences of a brief conversation noted by Saint Matthew."¹⁸ Phenomenology guides John Paul II's reading of Scripture. However, Conley maintains that it sits uneasily with later Thomistic sections of *Veritatis Splendor*. Referring also to *Evangelium Vitae*, he writes, "If these two seminal encyclicals on moral controversies richly illustrate both the phenomenological and Thomistic strands of John Paul II's operative philosophy, they indicate the problem of finding a unified philosophical approach in John Paul II's major writings. Rather than complementing or building on each other, these two approaches often appear simply juxtaposed to each other. As many critics have argued, some major encyclicals appear to have several authors."¹⁹ For Conley, phenomenology's appearance in *Veritatis Splendor* undermines the encyclical's coherence.

Conley insightfully analyzes the early parts of *Veritatis Splendor*. However, he uses the term "phenomenology" vaguely, and he mistakenly claims that phenomenology gives way completely to Thomistic analysis. Undoubtedly, the account of Jesus and the young man reflects an attention to personal relations. It also reveals how one person affects another, the kind of analysis we find in Max Scheler.²⁰ Finally, by exploring the

¹⁶ This occurs in §§6–28. In this essay, I use the official Vatican translation of *Veritatis Splendor*, available on the Vatican website. For a good discussion of Jesus' encounter with the young man, see Livio Melina, "The Desire for Happiness and the Commandments in the First Chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*," in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, ed. J. A. DiNoia, O.P., and Romanus Cessario, O.P. (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1994), 143–60.

¹⁷ John J. Conley, S.J., "Philosophy and Anti-Philosophy: The Ambiguous Legacy of John Paul II," in *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*, 34.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38–39.

²⁰ Although I cannot demonstrate conclusively that John Paul II draws on Scheler in this section, his analysis bears striking similarities to some of Scheler's work. For example, Scheler discusses the idea of "exemplary persons" who influence us

encounter with the young man, John Paul II does seek essences. Nevertheless, Conley fails to identify specific phenomenological themes informing John Paul II's analysis.

Body and Soul

To gain a greater appreciation for phenomenology in *Veritatis Splendor*, I turn to the document's analysis of the soul and body. It occurs in the sections on natural law and human freedom. Here, John Paul II considers distorted conceptions of freedom that unlink it from the body. They treat the "human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design."²¹ On this account, the body has no moral significance. It is merely physical, gaining its moral meaning by a subject's free choices. The result, John Paul II argues, is a "division within man himself" between body and spirit.²² On this account, natural law gains no insight by considering the body. Instead, the locus of morality becomes a spirit disassociated from corporeality.

John Paul II responds to this conception of the body by using Thomistic concepts. The distorted conception of freedom overlooks the metaphysical truth that the soul is the form of the body. The soul is the body's principle of unity, and we therefore cannot decouple soul and body. The person has a "spiritual and bodily structure," a unity that we cannot sunder.²³ Natural law thus takes its guidance by reference to the entire person. To illustrate this point, John Paul II discusses homicide. The prohibition against taking innocent life acknowledges the value of physical life. However, it also recognizes the dignity of the human person as an embodied spirit. The human person as a whole elicits our deep moral respect.

This emphasis on the person's unity seems entirely Thomistic, but within the analysis, we find phenomenological themes. As Alasdair MacIntyre notes, the analysis of the body in *Veritatis Splendor* links "Aristotelean themes in the philosophy of mind and body with perspectives developed within Polish phenomenology by, among others, Karol Wojtyła and also of course by a variety of followers of Merleau-Ponty but also,

in personal encounters. For one of his discussions of this topic, see Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred Frings and Roger Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 572–95. For one analysis of Scheler on exemplary persons, see John R. White, "Exemplary Persons and Ethics: The Significance of St. Francis for the Philosophy of Max Scheler," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (Winter 2005): 57–90.

²¹ *Veritatis Splendor* §48.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* §47.

earlier and as strikingly by Edith Stein.”²⁴ Many phenomenologists reject the notion that the body is mere material to which we attach meaning. They insist that it contains hints of unity and signs of our spiritual nature. For example, in a work that John Paul II sometimes cites, Ingarden describes the dependence relation between the mind and body. Moral and creative acts are “ontically founded” on the body and are “co-determined by it in the progress of their occurrence.”²⁵ We thus look to the body for moral and spiritual meaning. This kind of analysis appears in many thinkers who are inspired by Husserl’s work.

In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II also connects the body to self-possession. He mentions that “the person, *including the body, is completely entrusted to himself*.”²⁶ Those familiar with John Paul II’s philosophical writings will immediately recognize the idea of self-possession here. Through his efficacy and free acts, the person relates to ends and values. He determines himself by defining his relationship to good and evil.²⁷ Self-determination “in some sense points to self-possession and self-governance as the structure proper to the person.”²⁸ Each person exercises a power over his character that no one else can exercise. He also bears responsibility for his acts and character. We thus see a close connection between self-determination and self-possession.

When exploring self-possession, John Paul II accentuates its relational elements. I demonstrate self-possession to others; it is not solipsistic, but instead enables me to give to others. The gift of self, so important in the late pope’s writings, must be grounded in a person with something to give. A spiritually disorganized person will experience difficulties giving to others.

Self-possession and Transcendence

John Paul II also links self-possession to transcendence. Transcendence means reaching or going beyond a limit. John Paul II distinguishes between *vertical* and *horizontal* transcendence. Horizontal transcendence denotes a subject going out to objects. Vertical transcendence refers to the acting subject’s freedom. Through free acts, he partly defines who he is.

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, “How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has to Teach?” In *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, 86.

²⁵ Roman Ingarden, “On Responsibility: Its Ontic Foundations,” in Roman Ingarden, *Man and Value*, trans. Arthur Szylewicz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 63–65. I will return to this essay shortly.

²⁶ *Veritatis Splendor* §48 (italics in the original).

²⁷ Woltyla, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 191.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 193.

He “transcends his structural boundaries through the capacity to exercise freedom.”²⁹ Vertical transcendence draws attention to the person’s inner structure. Vertical and horizontal transcendence complement each other. Historically, metaphysicians have emphasized horizontal transcendence. Yet, metaphysics loses nothing when “reference is made to experience.”³⁰ On the contrary, by considering vertical transcendence, we prevent horizontal transcendence from becoming excessively abstract.

Both kinds of transcendence appear in *Veritatis Splendor*. We see horizontal transcendence when John Paul II considers our relationship to truth and goodness. Because of our capacity to seek truth and goodness, we move beyond particular cultural norms to seek universal ones. John Paul II notes that “it must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture.”³¹ Our nature transcends any particular culture and serves as a ground for universal moral norms. Horizontal transcendence thus shows why cultural relativism must be false.

We find vertical transcendence in those parts of *Veritatis Splendor* that consider how the person relates to the natural law. Natural law is not a legalistic set of abstract demands that coerce the will. Instead, it guides the person who is seeking the good, and he actively embraces its teachings.³² The “acting subject personally assimilates the truth contained in the law. He appropriates this truth of his being and makes it his own by his acts and corresponding virtues.”³³ The person internalizes universal norms in a deeply personal way. Through action, he also dynamically displays his character and reveals the meaning of vertical transcendence.

Transcendence and the Soul

John Paul II uses vertical and horizontal transcendence to affirm the soul’s spiritual dimensions. Often, “spirituality” describes entities we cannot reduce to materiality. However, we should supplement this negative conception with a positive one. Transcendence provides positive content to the concept of spirituality. The “evidence of the spiritual nature of man stems in the first place from the experience of the person’s transcendence in action.”³⁴ We realize that “the personal unity of this material somebody”

²⁹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 119 (*Persona e atto*, 293).

³⁰ Ibid., 155 (*Persona e atto*, 371–73).

³¹ *Veritatis Splendor* §53.

³² Here, of course, I pass over the many complexities in John Paul II’s discussion of natural law. Scholars have considered them in great detail, and I leave this topic to others.

³³ *Veritatis Splendor* §52.

³⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 181 (*Persona e atto*, 429).

is “determined by the spirit, by his spiritual nature and spiritual life.”³⁵ Through free acts and self-possession, the person reveals a spiritual core.

In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II maintains that this spiritual core also discloses the person's inherent dignity. Immediately after affirming the soul's presence, he insists that “it is in the light of the dignity of the human person—a dignity which must be affirmed for its own sake—that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined.”³⁶ When we encounter a person we recognize her dignity. Her presence evokes a moral respect, an awareness that persons differ from things.³⁷ The person's dignity and value exist independently of our social constructions or legal infrastructure. Rather than creating value with exercises of freedom, we meet a pre-existing structure that makes moral demands of us.

To summarize, in *Veritatis Splendor* we see a Thomistic analysis of the soul enriched by phenomenological insights. Metaphysics defines the soul as the form of the body, while phenomenology highlights the soul's activities. Phenomenology brings “to prominence the unity of man as a person.”³⁸ Self-possession and transcendence reveal the person's spirituality. In turn, spirituality grounds the person's value and dignity. The result is a rich conception of the human person.

Neuroscience and the Soul

Although phenomenology illuminates our inner life, Thomists often question its value. Instead of analyzing lived experience, they ask, why not immediately commence with metaphysics? We can describe the concept of the soul in general, move to the human soul, and then demonstrate its immortality. This way, we arrive at the truth about the human person without engaging contemporary philosophical currents. If we want to understand our inner life, we can retrieve St. Augustine's writings or those of other pre-modern thinkers. On this account, phenomenology is either a mere rhetorical device or an unnecessary distraction.

³⁵ Ibid., 185 (*Persona e atto*, 435).

³⁶ *Veritatis Splendor* §48.

³⁷ In *Love and Responsibility*, John Paul II explores the person/thing distinction, developing the personalistic principle to highlight the person's dignity. This principle holds that we should never use a person merely as a means to an end. For a discussion of the personalistic principle, see Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), 21–44. I have written about values and the personalistic principle elsewhere: see Derek S. Jeffreys, *Defending Human Dignity: John Paul II and Political Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).

³⁸ *The Acting Person*, 185 (*Persona e atto*, 435).

This response ignores significant contemporary challenges to a Thomistic conception of the soul. Since *Veritatis Splendor* was published, the field of neuroscience has exploded. New technologies enable neuroscientists to map parts of the brain and to correlate them with thoughts and behavior. They also use the results of the Human Genome Project to link genetics and neuroscience. Finally, the last decade has seen extraordinary development in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. These scientific advances deeply illuminate aspects of the human person.

In popular writings, thinkers use these developments to support physicalism or the idea that only the physical exists. Sometimes, they use the word “naturalism” to emphasize that morality and religion have no spiritual ground. I will use both terms interchangeably. Repeatedly, scientists and science writers pen books pronouncing the death of the soul. For example, linguist Stephen Pinker proclaims that contemporary science undermines the idea of a soul. In his best-selling book, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Pinker launches a sustained attack on the concept of soul. Science, he declares “is showing that what we call the soul—the locus of sentience, reason, and will—consists of the information-processing activity of the brain, an organ governed by the laws of biology.”³⁹ At one point, Pinker even takes up John Paul II’s discussion of the soul in the 1996 letter “Truth cannot Contradict Truth.” Noting the pope’s defense of how God creates the individual soul, Pinker concludes “needless to say, debating the Pope is the ultimate exercise in futility.”⁴⁰ For him, the argument that the soul is the form of the body is an antiquated relic: today, no right-thinking person can take it seriously.

Similarly, neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga maintains that his discipline overturns thousands of years of wisdom about human nature. Gazzaniga insists that consciousness is entirely physical. He resists identifying it with the brain, and he maintains that consciousness emerges from but is not identical to brain activity.⁴¹ Emergence is not “a mystical ghost but the going from one level of organization to another.”⁴² To understand consciousness, we need not posit a soul, but instead must understand contemporary neuroscience.

³⁹ Stephen Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 226.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴¹ Analytic philosophers of mind often call this position “emergent physicalism” or “non-reductive physicalism.” It has become a popular position in the last several decades.

⁴² Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Who’s in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2011), 136.

Such popular celebrations of neuroscience and physicalism abound. They also receive support from analytic philosophers. In recent years, some have begun questioning what has been their dominant commitment to physicalism.⁴³ However, philosophical allegiance to it remains strong. For example, Patricia S. Churchland continues to publish books arguing against the soul's existence. In *Brain-Wise: Studies in Neurophilosophy*, she insists that "the weight of the evidence now implies that it is the *brain*, rather than some nonphysical stuff, that feels, thinks and decides."⁴⁴ Churchland derides dualism (the idea that the person is composed of soul and body) and seeks to demonstrate that it cannot explain consciousness. In a recent book, she uses neuroscience to explain morality. She addresses many of the topics that appear in *Veritatis Splendor*, including conscience, moral rules, and consequentialism. However, she explains them without recourse to the soul or our spiritual lives.⁴⁵

Physicalist philosophers thus raise serious challenges to the conception of the soul in *Veritatis Splendor*. For them, contemporary sciences eviscerate the idea of a soul. For many people fascinated with neuroscience, talk of the "form of the body" or a "spiritual" presence in the body seems nonsensical. In contrast, scientifically grounded conceptions of the person appear clear. For this reason, physicalism continues to take both popular and scholarly guises.

Phenomenology and Naturalism

In what remains of this essay, I want to argue that phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition is uniquely situated to engage contemporary naturalism. From his early years writing on mathematics and logic to his famous *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl critically discussed naturalism. He "continually identifies *naturalism* as the greatest threat to the possibility of a genuinely grounded science and of a genuine philosophy. Indeed, he believed that naturalism was not just a philosophical error, but even threatened the preservation of genuine human values and the possibility of living a fully rational, communal

⁴³ For a good discussion of this trend, see Benedikt Paul Göcke, *After Physicalism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). For a recent and detailed defense of physicalism, grounded in neuroscience, see Jesse J. Prinz, *The Conscious Brain: How Attention Engenders Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ Patricia Smith Churchland, *Brain-Wise: Studies in Neurophilosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 1, italics in the original.

⁴⁵ Patricia S. Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

life.”⁴⁶ Husserl and his students engaged in extended debates about whether psychology can explain consciousness. Famously, they attacked psychologism, the “claim that things like logic, truth, verification, evidence and reasoning are simply empirical activities of our psyche.”⁴⁷ By engaging psychology and other sciences, they mounted a sustained critique of naturalism.

Let’s take just one aspect of Husserl’s critique, to illustrate its power. Those in the Husserlian tradition often link temporality and cognition. They emphasize that what we know undergoes temporal change. To properly explain cognition, we must consider how the mind retains identity throughout temporal change. Husserl and his students explore this problematic in great detail. They insist that we cannot coherently deny identity through time or disregard temporality.⁴⁸

Many phenomenologists use identity and temporality to respond to naturalistic conceptions of cognition. Naturalists often identify consciousness with particular mental or brain events. Yet, these events are temporally and spatially indexed, and thus differ from one another. How, then, can we speak of the same cognition? In order to account for shared cognition, the naturalist must adopt some form of conventionalism or nominalism. These positions often uncritically presuppose a sense of the identity of objects of cognition. For example, they smuggle in universals like “resemblance” or “similarity” while simultaneously denying their existence. Ingarden carefully develops this argument against naturalism. Repeatedly, he employs it to criticize psychological and physicalist understandings of art, music, and architecture.⁴⁹ For example, we cannot

⁴⁶ Dermot Moran, “Husserl’s Transcendental Philosophy and the Critique of Naturalism,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 41.4 (2008): 402.

⁴⁷ Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 114. For discussions of psychologism, see *Perspectives on Psychologism*, ed. Mark A. Nottorno (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989) and Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴⁸ For an excellent presentation of this argument, see Aron Gurwitsch, “On the Intentionality of Consciousness,” in Aron Gurwitsch, *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 124–40. In *Person and Act*, John Paul II notes the importance of phenomenology’s analysis of time. He states that the “the traditional philosophy of man constructed on the ground of the philosophy of being did not occupy itself directly and explicitly with this [connecting the existential status of man with time problem]. It was however, implicitly contained in the concept of the ‘contingency’ of beings which referred to the human being as well as to all other derivative (i.e. created) beings.” Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 308, n. 36 (*Persona e atto*, 247, n. 35).

⁴⁹ For one example, see Roman Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art: The Musical Work, The Picture, The Architectural Work, The Film* (Athens, OH: Ohio University

identify a symphony with either sound vibrations or mental events in the minds of creators or composers. Such ontologies of the musical work fail to account for the musical work's identity through time.

To illustrate this criticism of naturalism further, let me return to Pinker's work. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II criticizes those who use the social sciences to ground moral norms. He holds that we cannot arrive at moral truth by surveying practices in diverse cultures.⁵⁰ Pinker takes just this approach to morality, arguing for the existence of cross-cultural universals. He insists that "universal mental mechanisms can underlie superficial variations across cultures."⁵¹ Despite cultural variation, we find a core of universal mental mechanisms throughout the world. Pinker endorses and adds to a list of such universals compiled by Donald Brown. The mechanisms include empathy and other moral concepts. Pinker attributes many of these universals to the brain, which he sees as a computational system. Empathy, for example, arises in the brain. It is an information-processing system that takes in information and produces bodily responses. Entirely physical, it appears in many cultures and requires no spiritual capacities whatsoever.

These confident pronouncements about human universals quickly crumble under critical scrutiny. For example, Pinker never considers the ontology of a universal, instead presenting universals in a philosophically naïve fashion. Ontologically, exactly what is the "information" the brain processes? Is information a brain event or a universal? Moreover, if universals like empathy originate in individual brains, how can we know they are identical? My brain differs from yours in multiple ways. Brains in different cultures also differ temporally. The computational processes (brains) functioning now in China differ from those operating in the U.S. In the face of this change, Pinker never provides a principle of identity to explain cross-cultural universals.

As I have already mentioned, thinkers like Pinker usually embrace some simplistic form of nominalism or conventionalism. Universals like empathy are concepts we use to identify similar computational systems. Perhaps they are similar sound vibrations or words we employ to reach

Press, 1989]. Gottlob Frege famously argued that mathematical objects cannot be mental events because mental events differ in their temporal and other properties. He uses the Pythagorean Theorem as an example: see Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry," *Mind* 65, no. 259 (July 1956): 289–311. Frege's philosophical commitments differ significantly from those of the Husserlian tradition, but they intersect at key points.

⁵⁰ *Veritatis Splendor* §33.

⁵¹ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 37, italics in the original. For the list of human universals, see the Appendix in Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 435–39.

agreement. However, this conceptual move confronts obvious difficulties. What does “similar” mean? How can we pick out similar computational systems without already possessing a concept of similarity? Husserl famously examines this problem in the *Logical Investigations*, where he demonstrates nominalism’s multiple weaknesses.⁵² In his brilliant discussion of the literary work of art, Ingarden, too, reveals difficulties in identifying universals with words. Such a position assumes we already possess a clear ontology of words and sentences. However, this is exactly what we need to explore.⁵³ In sum, popular presentations of naturalism demonstrate remarkable philosophical naïveté. In his later years, Husserl commented about how scientists of his day showed little wonder about scientific concepts. Years after his death, we can declare the same verdict about today’s champions of physicalism.⁵⁴

Obviously, philosophers understand the complexity of universals. However, many analytical philosophers show little awareness of phenomenological challenges to naturalism. Let me return to Churchland’s work on morality. She provides a fascinating look at the neuroscience of morality. For example, she often discusses values and, like John Paul II, she is preoccupied with them. In one chapter of her recent book she traces the origins of values to changes in the brain at key points in evolutionary history.⁵⁵ In another chapter, she maintains that moral rules stem from our perception of values. For her, values take “center stage,” and rules express and codify them.⁵⁶ To make her case, Churchland employs considerable evidence from evolutionary biology and contemporary neuroscience.

Throughout her intriguing presentation, however, Churchland never explains precisely what a value is. The ontology of values preoccupied Scheler, Ingarden, and John Paul II, yet we find little awareness of it in Churchland’s work.⁵⁷ For example, like Pinker she reflects on empathy.

⁵² See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume 1*, trans. J. N. Findley, ed. Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2001)) 239–313.

⁵³ For Ingarden’s most famous work on literature, see Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

⁵⁴ My comments here are informed by Dermot Moran’s outstanding book on Husserl’s later work: see Dermot Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ Churchland, *Braintrust*, 12–26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁷ Later in his life, Ingarden wrote several intriguing essays on values. In English, they appear in his wonderful book *Man and Value*. For one of these essays, see “What We Do Not Know about Values,” 131–64.

She discusses the “mirror neuron” hypothesis, which holds that neurons simulate or represent the intentions of others. This simulation makes empathy possible. Churchland questions the scientific evidence supporting the mirror neuron hypothesis. Yet, she never discusses empathy and the value of the person. Empathy, as Edith Stein notes, relates us to the person’s value.⁵⁸ What exactly is that value? Perhaps, as Churchland sometimes suggests, we can identify a value with activity in the brain’s prefrontal corpus. However, we again confront the Husserlian objection about identity and temporality. Neurons change almost instantaneously, and brains differ. The idea that neurons simulate or mirror values presupposes that they enjoy an enduring identity capable of representing. Yet, they lack the constancy necessary to represent intentions or values. Churchland’s discussions of genes and values fare no better than her consideration of brains. For example, if we identify values with genes, we must ask about the ontological status of genes. They are obviously universals, but what kind? Do genes retain sufficient constancy across time to represent or somehow relate to values?

Churchland adopts ideas about identity, temporality, and value without recognizing their ontological complexity. We find in her work an extraordinary naïveté about universals and time. Often, Churchland recognizes philosophical complexity, but she falls back on a simplistic pragmatism. She presupposes particular conceptions of universals or identity, and then shows their fruitfulness in supporting scientific hypotheses. Her pragmatism, however, convinces only those already committed to naturalism. It also arbitrarily halts inquiry about values by restricting this inquiry to what scientific practices reveal.⁵⁹

By itself, the phenomenological critique of philosophical naturalism cannot demonstrate the soul’s existence. In fact, it might provide support for several positions on the nature of the human person. However, by criticizing naturalism, phenomenologists open a richer dialogue about human cognition. The phenomenological perspective, as John Paul II

⁵⁸ Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989).

⁵⁹ When Leon Kass chaired the President’s Council on Bioethics, Churchland contributed an essay to the Council’s inquiry about human dignity. It contains remarkably superficial assertions about Plato and universals. With a few sentences about “Plato’s heaven,” Churchland dismisses Plato’s profound reflections about universals. For this essay, see Patricia S. Churchland, “Human Dignity from a Neurophilosophical Perspective,” in *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the Council on Bioethics* (March, 2008), chapter five, available at bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/index.html.

maintains in *Person and Act*, empowers us to begin a metaphysical analysis of the soul.⁶⁰ Through phenomenological analysis, we first establish the spirituality of the person, and we can then consider what kind of nature exercises this spirituality.

Conclusion

In his excellent *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Robert Sokolowski maintains that phenomenology complements Thomistic thought. It clarifies key epistemological assumption about everyday life. By responding to modern philosophical challenges, it also empowers Thomists to develop their metaphysic. Finally, phenomenology reawakens our wonder at everyday life. It draws attention to the complexity of words, sentences, scientific concepts, and cultural works. Husserl's early work attracted Catholics (and Protestants) who recognized its power to respond to modernity. They in turn influenced other Catholics, including the young Karol Wojtyla. In *Veritatis Splendor*, he defends a Thomistic conception of the soul and morality. However, phenomenology also appears in the encyclical's account of self-possession, transcendence, the soul, and the person's value. Throughout his career, John Paul II recognized that phenomenology helps us defend the person's value. Rather than rejecting phenomenology in a defensive and uninformed manner, Thomists should acknowledge its importance. It is a philosophical movement uniquely situated to respond to contemporary naturalism. Born in an era that celebrated psychology and other sciences, phenomenology carefully engages these disciplines. It provides a sustained critique of naturalism, one that supports Thomistic thought.

In its scientific sophistication, contemporary naturalism differs from its twentieth-century ancestors. Its drive to quantify, measure, and assess appears in many aspects of life. Educational institutions must assess learning, public policies must be "evidence-based," and biological approaches to the psyche dominate psychiatry. These tendencies stifle spiritual practices, undermine recognition of the soul, and stultify our natural wonder. John Paul II understood these negative aspects of modernity. By critically retrieving phenomenology within a Thomistic metaphysic, he discovered a way to highlight and defend the person's dignity. Although incomplete, his project is illuminating and inspiring. It offers Catholics valuable conceptual tools with which to engage contemporary culture. Most importantly, it reminds us to wonder at the person's value, a wonder that John Paul II retained throughout his remarkable life. N.V

⁶⁰ John Paul II details the move from phenomenology to metaphysics in *The Acting Person*, 182–83 (*Persona e atto*, 433). Roman Ingarden emphasizes the move from ontology to metaphysics in some of his works.