

## Was the Polish Pope a French Personalist?: An Indication from *Evangelium Vitae*

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ONE OBSERVES A GAP OPENING in the writing of Karol Wojtyła's intellectual biography. While recent scholarship has duly illustrated Thomism's impact on the late Pope's philosophy, it leaves the question of other influences underexamined.<sup>1</sup> Take French personalism,

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<sup>1</sup> For studies that examine the Thomistic character of Wojtyła's personalism, see: Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1993); Jarosław Kupczak, O.P., *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2000); Thomas D. Williams, L.C., "What is Thomist Personalism?," *Alpha Omega* 7, no. 2 (2004): 163–197; Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., "John Paul's Theology of Freedom and Truth: A Dissident Phenomenology in a Thomistic Anthropology," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 3, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 543–568; George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005); Pierre de Cointet, "À la racine du personnalisme de Karol Wojtyła," *Recherches philosophiques* 5 (2009): 5–20; Jove Jim S. Aguas, "The Notions of the Human Person and Human Dignity in Aquinas and Wojtyła," *Kritike* 3, no. 1 (June 2009): 40–60; Aude Suramy, *La voie de l'amour. Une interprétation de Personne et Acte de Karol Wojtyła, lecteur de Thomas d'Aquin*, Sentieri della Verità 10 (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II per Studi su Matrimonio e Famiglia; Sienna: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2014); Michele M. Schumacher, "A Plea for the traditional family: Situating marriage within John Paul II's realist, or personalist, perspective of human freedom," *The Linacre Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (November 2014): 314–342; and Thomas Petri, O.P., *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, forthcoming).

for example. What influence did it have on Wojtyła, the student and the professor? Given his self-identification as a personalist, as well as the sway French personalist writers like Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain held in mid-century Catholic Europe, it seems important to ask whether Wojtyła turned to them or their collaborators for instruction. Current literature, however, reports little as to whether Wojtyła developed his “adequate anthropology” in league with, in reaction to, or in ignorance of French personalist doctrines.<sup>2</sup> As Wojtyła’s intellectual history continues to be written, this gap in the narrative should be closed. The full telling of Wojtyła’s history requires some account of whether the Polish Pope cast his philosophy in the mold of the French personalists, or whether he sketched a theoretical picture of the human subject distinct from theirs. In what follows, we offer only a cursory glance at the question.

### I.

To one historian writing in the early 1980s, Wojtyła’s personalism—in which so much of his own public persona was rooted—appeared in essence to be that of Mounier. In *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left*, a monograph published shortly after Wojtyła’s election as Pope, John Hellman depicted the new pontiff as having adopted early in life Mounier’s unique ensemble of moral and intellectual qualities.<sup>3</sup> According to Hellman’s telling, the young Wojtyła breathed the spirit of Mounier as it was swirling in post-war Poland and, like the French philosopher before him,<sup>4</sup> became a reform-minded contemplative who was philosophically committed to personalism, pastorally engaged with youth, spiritually attracted to the Carmelite mystics, and politically skeptical of Anglo-American liberalism. The new Pope’s appropriation of Mounier’s disposition appeared so thorough to Hellman that he deemed Wojtyła’s election a global coup for Mounier’s personalist philosophy: “The election of Pope John Paul II, an intellectual who was an essayist and a poet in a milieu in Poland strongly influenced by Mounier, was an event that

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<sup>2</sup> For Wojtyła’s explanation of the term “adequate anthropology,” see the General Audience address he delivered on January 2, 1980 (“Creation as a Fundamental and Original Gift,” in John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997], 57–60).

<sup>3</sup> John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1981), 247.

<sup>4</sup> Mounier and Wojtyła were not quite contemporaries. Mounier, the bulk of whose personalist writings date from the 1930s, died in 1950 at the age of forty-five, just when the thirty-year-old Wojtyła was beginning his academic career in Cracow.

went beyond Mounier's most grandiose hopes for the influence of his ideas in the Church."<sup>5</sup> Though brief, Hellman's comment is suggestive. He expected Wojtyła, as Pope, to enshrine a personalism equivalent to Mounier's in the public thinking of the Church, such that future generations looking back upon Wojtyła's pontificate would naturally find an interpretive lens for his magisterium in Mounier's writings.

Hellman's description of Wojtyła's youth and as his predictions for Wojtyła's pontificate await the assessment of his fellow historians. There is one thing he appears to have correctly foreseen, however. For nearly thirty years reigning as John Paul II, Wojtyła did place a discernable personalist stamp on his papal teaching. But is it Mounier's personalism one finds impressed there? If it is as Hellman expected it would be, then, were the personalisms of the two men identical, both the praise and the criticism Mounier's thought has received through the years would fall uniformly on Wojtyła's. But do they? Case in point: Does Yves Simon's identification of Mounier's personalism with Enlightenment individualism perforce identify Wojtyła's personalism as individualistic? The question—which centers on whether Wojtyła shared Mounier's utilitarian notion of the common good—proves a useful test of Hellman's thesis. It tests also one's knowledge of Wojtyła's philosophy generally.

Ten years after Mounier's untimely death, Simon alleged that the late philosopher's brand of personalism, despite its promotion of man's sociability, perpetuates the individualism of Enlightenment philosophies:

The fortune of "personalism" in the ideologies of our time is clearly traceable to the promises held by the notion of person, as distinct from that of individual, in the working out of difficulties which, though of all times, have assumed extraordinary significance in the last generation. Indeed, the word personalism often stood for doctrines and attitudes that "individualism" would designate with equal or greater accuracy. . . . Many, who would have been satisfied with the language of individualism half a century ago, were necessitated by the spirit of the age to speak a personalistic language.<sup>6</sup>

According to Simon, personalism's distinction between man as a spiritual person and man as a material individual renders the doctrine nothing more than individualism cloaked in a rhetoric of the generous

<sup>5</sup> Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier*, 247.

<sup>6</sup> Yves Simon, "Common Good and Common Action," *The Review of Politics* 22, no. 2 (April 1960): 202–244, at 235.

person.<sup>7</sup> This is because the distinction, by identifying the common good as a good of man's material individuality,<sup>8</sup> instrumentalizes the common good to the flourishing of man's spiritual personality.<sup>9</sup> Thus, rendering the common good of the individual useful to the particular good of the person, personalism reveals its tendency to individualism, which appears for Simon in its regard for man's autonomy *qua* person as more dignifying of the individual than the common goods—that is, the family, the city, etc.—he *qua* individual helps to constitute.<sup>10</sup>

In this text Simon recapitulated, whether consciously or not, an argu-

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<sup>7</sup> For the personalist distinction between the spiritual person and the material individual, see Emmanuel Mounier's *A Personalist Manifesto*, trans. the Monks of St. John's Abbey (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1938), 70–73, at 71: “[T]he two marks of individuality are dispersion and avarice. The person on the contrary is characterized by self-possession and self-determination, by generosity. In their inner orientation the individual and the person are therefore opposite poles.”

<sup>8</sup> When describing personalism's linking of social relations to man's material individuality, Simon writes: “[W]hen the being which is an individual and a person is considered *as member of a set* . . . the concept of person restricts the character of part whereas the concept of individual expresses no such restriction. *As a member of a set* the individual is purely and simply a part. But because personality, in every possible connection, expresses a universe of reason and freedom, emphasis on the person implies emphasis on the privileges of this universe” (“Common Good,” 238).

<sup>9</sup> Simon (“Common Good,” 235–236) underscores what, for him, is the illogic of the personalists' maintaining a utilitarian notion of the common good: “To treat the common good as a thing merely useful becomes the *critical* periods, but as soon as the possibility of a new *organic* period is strongly felt, to represent the common good as sheer utility without any dignity of its own is unbearably paradoxical. Only the pressures and appeals of a critical period can make men blind to the character of the common good as autonomous good, *bonum honestum*, and to the primacy that it enjoys as long as the common and the particular are contained within the same order. When such pressures and appeals have become things of the past, the sense for the eternal worth of the human individual is not necessarily weakened, but why should we keep the language and the ways of a philosophy committed to treating the common good as a thing with no excellence of its own?” Simon acknowledges that the critical-organic distinction he employs is Henri Saint-Simon's.

<sup>10</sup> Simon, “Common Good,” 238–239: “[W]hen the individual man is precisely considered as a being possessed of integrity and rationality, when he is considered as an agent in control of his destiny, when he is considered as an agent which contains its own law not merely by way of natural constitution, but also and principally by way of understanding, voluntariness and freedom, the aspect brought forth is that of personality. On the level of individual existence, autonomy belongs to the person more properly than to the individual. Such greater propriety makes much difference both in terms of explanation and in terms of appeal.”

ment that Charles De Koninck had made twenty years earlier. In his work *The Primacy of the Common Good against the Personalists*, De Koninck first drew the link Simon later identified between the personalists' utilitarian notion of the common good and the individualism inherent to their notion of human dignity:

By their false notion of the common good, the personalists are, at bottom, in agreement with those whose errors they pretend to combat. To individualism, they oppose and recommend the generosity of the person and fraternity outside any common good, as if the common good had its principle in the generosity of persons, as if it were not above all that for the sake of which persons ought to act.<sup>11</sup>

Since the personalists hold that the principle of man's social interaction lies internally within the generosity of his spiritual personality, not externally within the wide diffusion of the common good as a final cause, De Koninck argues that the personalists' view of human sociability remains necessarily individualistic. De Koninck explains that when the person is prompted from within to relate to others, he acts "outside of any common good" and thus for his own sake. Outside of any common good, the person has no choice but to love all things, including other persons and the communities they create, as if they served his particular good. For De Koninck, love that seeks all goods for the self is vicious—he notes that Aquinas calls such love tyrannical—for which the natural antidote is to love the common good as the better, diffusive good that it is. As a good that diffuses more widely than one's particular good, the common good is to be loved according to its commonness.<sup>12</sup>

If we take Simon's and De Koninck's observations as legitimate criticisms of Mounier's personalism, Hellman's thesis prompts us to ask

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<sup>11</sup> Charles De Koninck, "The Primacy of the Common Good against the Personalists" in *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerny (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2009), 2:63–163, at 105–106.

<sup>12</sup> De Koninck, *Primacy of the Common Good*, 80: "A society made up of persons who love their private good above the common good, or who identify the common good with the private good, is a society not of free men, but of tyrants—'and thus the whole people become as it were one tyrant'—who would use force on one another and whose eventual chief would be the shrewdest and strongest of tyrants, his subjects being only frustrated tyrants." For De Koninck's citation of Aquinas, see *De regno*, bk. 1, ch. 1, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 42 (Rome: Editori di San Tomasso, 1979), 450, lines 136–137.

whether they apply equally to Wojtyła's personalism.<sup>13</sup> To answer this question, one must study Wojtyła's personalist writings to determine whether he, too, subordinates the common good to the person's particular good, and therefore imagines that the person appears more dignified when he sits alone above the common good rather than when standing among others within it. An examination of Wojtyła's philosophical essays, particularly those in which he expands on the themes he sets forth in *Osoba i Czyn* (*The Acting Person*),<sup>14</sup> reveals that, from its earliest expressions, Wojtyła's personalism distinguishes itself from Mounier's.<sup>15</sup> For the whole of his philosophical career, in fact, Wojtyła stood apart from Mounier and his school by guarding a Thomistic sense of the orientation of the person's particular good to the common good.

## II.

There is no denying, however, the passages in Wojtyła's essays where he adopts not only a perspective but also a language very close to Mounier's. For example, Wojtyła describes the "greatness," or dignity, of the person in terms of Mounier's person-individual distinction. For Wojtyła, the human creature *qua* person rises above not only his material individuality but also the whole of nature:

The assertion that the human being is a person has profound theoretical significance. . . . In a sense, it marks out the position proper to the human being in the world. It speaks of the human being's natural greatness. The human being holds a position superior to the whole of nature and stands above everything else in the visible world. This conviction is rooted in experience. . . . A being that continually transforms nature, raising it in some sense

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps we err in applying De Koninck's criticism of personalism directly to Mounier's thought. De Koninck himself, after all, declined to identify the personalists to whom he aimed his critique. Still, we agree with Sylvain Luquet that the critical net De Koninck cast in *Primacy* was wide enough to draw Mounier's writings within it. See "Introduction," in *Oeuvres de Charles De Koninck*, ed. Sylvain Luquet, Tome II, 2, *La primauté du bien commun* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010), 1–104, esp. 7–14.

<sup>14</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana* 10 (Boston: D. Reidel Pu. Co., 1979). Though controversy has attended this translation since its publication, a better one has yet to appear.

<sup>15</sup> We refer to the papers collected in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., *Catholic Thought from Lublin* 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993, 2008).

to that being's own level, must feel higher than nature—and must be higher than it.<sup>16</sup>

Wojtyła extrapolates man's metaphysical position in the world from the person's experience of his artistic prowess: because man's work gives him a sense of being higher than nature—man brings nature up “to his own level”—he *is* higher than nature. Apart from its suspicious logic—and its faint Marxist overtones—Wojtyła's argument here raises an important question: Is there a sense in which Wojtyła believes the person—*qua* person—to constitute a part of visible nature? If not, Wojtyła's notion of the person's relation to the common good would be essentially Mounier's. For, if man *qua* person sits higher than nature, not constituting one of its material parts, then *de facto* man *qua* person sits higher than the common good, too dignified—i.e., too naturally autonomous—to constitute a part of a common good with other persons.<sup>17</sup>

In another passage, where Wojtyła appears to turn decisively toward individualism, he describes the self as the end for which we desire and pursue the good:

In human activity, or action, I turn toward a variety of ends, objects, and values. In turning toward those ends, objects, and values, however, I cannot help but also in my conscious activity turn toward myself as an end, for I cannot relate to different objects of activity and choose different values without thereby determining myself (thus becoming the primary object for myself as a subject) and my own value. The structure of human action is autoteleological in a special dimension.<sup>18</sup>

Again, Wojtyła speaks from the point of view of experience, from which he draws a metaphysical conclusion. This time the experience of

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<sup>16</sup> Wojtyła, “On the Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Person and Community*, 177–180, at 178.

<sup>17</sup> This question presupposes several elements of personalist doctrine, including the conviction, alluded to by Simon (see n. 8 above), that the notion of part, while proper to the material individual, is repulsive to the spiritual person. Jacques Maritain (*Scholasticism and Politics* [New York: MacMillan, 1940], 61–71) articulates this conviction better than Mounier. By speaking of the person's superiority to nature, Wojtyła appears to share Mounier's and Maritain's aversion to calling the person a part of greater wholes.

<sup>18</sup> Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 219–261, at 230.

“self-determination” leads him to deduce that the “structure of human action” is “autoteleological,”—that is, one becomes the “primary object” for himself as a subject. Once more, this raises an important question. If all human action is autoteleological, how does the person escape, among other things, the tyrannical love of the common good denounced by Aquinas? In other words, how does Wojtyła conceive, within the autoteleological framework of moral action he constructs, the person to love the common good without rendering this love self-referential? Can the autoteleological love of Wojtyła’s person love any good as greater than the person’s particular good? If not, then Wojtyła’s personalism would espouse an individualism similar to Mounier’s.

Further, when Wojtyła describes his concept of participation (of personal subjects with other personal subjects, *qua* personal subjects), he notes that his idea carries within it a notion of the person’s priority over the community:

The first meaning of participation refers not to [the] positive relation to another’s humanity, but to the property of the person by virtue of which human beings, while existing and acting together with others, are nevertheless capable of fulfilling themselves in this activity and existence. Such a formulation of the problem points to the irrevocable primacy of the personal subject in relation to the community, a primacy in both the metaphysical (and hence factual) and the methodological sense. This means not only that people *de facto* exist and act together as a multiplicity of personal subjects, but also that we can say nothing essential about this coexistence and cooperation in the personalistic sense—we can say nothing essential about this multiplicity as a community—unless we proceed from the human being as a personal subject.<sup>19</sup>

For a third time, subjective experience appears as the rule of metaphysical judgment. Here, Wojtyła sees the person’s capacity for social flourishing as assuming a real priority over society itself, such that the person’s capacity for the social good determines our understanding of the social good. As a result, appreciation of society is based on its utilitarian value, or how it serves the person. Accordingly, Wojtyła argues that because society is made up of persons, nothing “essential” about the “multiplicity” of persons can be said unless drawn from the perspective

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 237.

of the person. Wojtyła appears to establish here, in league with Mounier and his personalist collaborators, a new starting point for social and political philosophy. He seems to eschew the classical regard for the common good as the principle of social life, preferring to locate the principle instead in the needs of the self.

Had Simon or De Koninck lived to read the young Wojtyła—each died before Wojtyła published the bulk of his corpus—they would probably have scratched their temples in misgiving, wondering over the path French personalism had taken into the Polish academy.

### III.

Alongside these texts, however, Simon and De Koninck would have found others treating the common good in ways they could applaud. For example, Wojtyła qualifies his argument in the last quotation above by recognizing the inherent value of the common good, a value he insists cannot be circumscribed by the person's subjective worth:

[The subjective starting point for social philosophy] in no way removes the need to investigate [the] community as an objective unity of a real multiplicity of personal subjects. Just as the personal subjectivity of the human being is an objective reality, so, too, is—in each given instance—the multiplicity of those subjects and their community or unity through the common good, primarily the relationships of the *we* type.<sup>20</sup>

Wojtyła clarifies elsewhere that the aim of philosophical reflection “proceeding from the human being as a personal subject” is not to undermine classical reflection on the person and the common good, but to reproduce its teaching from the viewpoint of the subject. For Wojtyła, therefore, classical metaphysics does not hinder personalist reflection, but rather serves as its foundation. “The Boethian definition,” he writes, “mainly marked out the ‘metaphysical terrain’—the dimension of being—in which personal human subjectivity is realized, creating, in a sense, a condition for ‘building upon’ this terrain on the basis of experience.”<sup>21</sup>

Evidence that Wojtyła builds his personalism on a strong classical sense of the common good can be found in his descriptions of the

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 261, n. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 209–217, at 211–212.

“relationships of the *we* type” mentioned above, which derive from and perfect more fundamental “I-thou” relationships. For Wojtyła, a “we” is a common good classically understood. Composed by the common activity of numerous persons, a “we” possesses a singular value as a whole whose parts are persons.

If a *we* is many human *I*s, or selves, then—like the *I*, or self—it may be conceived and understood through activity. A *we* is many human beings, many subjects, who in some way exist and act together. Acting “together” (i.e., “in common”) does not mean engaging in a number of activities that somehow go along side by side. Rather it means that these activities, along with the existence of those many *I*s, are related to a single value, which, therefore, deserves to be called the *common good*.<sup>22</sup>

Later in the same text, Wojtyła explains that the common good of “we” communities, once established, takes precedence over the particular goods of their component “I’s.” This is because the common good constitutes a greater, more actualized proper good of persons than their particular goods:

The privileged status of this good, the reason for its superiority in relation to individual goods, derives, as I said, from the fact that the good of each of the subjects of the community, which defines and experiences itself as a *we* on the basis of the common good, is more fully expressed and more fully actualized in that good. This also accounts for the fact of social community, the fact of the constitution of a *we* by many human *I*s. In itself, this fact is essentially free from utilitarianism; it lies within the realm of the objective and authentically experienced truth of the good.<sup>23</sup>

As a better and more actualized proper good of individuals, the common good defies instrumentalization; Wojtyła says it is “essentially free from all utilitarianism.” As such, the common good is not a tool for the person’s pursuit of his particular good, but rather the principle of unity and communication among persons; it “accounts for the fact of the social community.” When moving from an “I-thou” to a “we” commu-

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<sup>22</sup> Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 247–248.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

nity, Wojtyła says, the “direction is determined by the common good.”<sup>24</sup>

Simon and De Koninck would recognize in these and other passages the Thomistic notion of the common good’s ontological excellence. Conscious of this excellence, which he admits to have learned from Aquinas, Wojtyła is careful not to exclude it from his consideration of the person’s subjective experience, for it is this excellence present outside the subject that draws him into the natural communities of family and city. Thus, the Thomistic appreciation for the common good within which Wojtyła develops his personalism gives his thought, unlike Mounier’s, a pronounced anti-individualist character.

Thomistic personalism maintains that the individual good of persons should be by nature subordinate to the common good at which the collectivity, or society, aims—but this subordination may under no circumstances exclude and devalue the persons themselves. There are certain rights that every society must guarantee to persons for without these rights the life and development proper to persons is impossible. One of these basic rights is the right to freedom of conscience. This right is always violated by so-called objective totalitarianism, which holds that the human person should be completely subordinate to society in all things. In contrast, Thomistic personalism maintains that the person would be subordinate to society in all that is indispensable for the realization of the common good, but that the true common good never threatens the good of the person, even though it may demand considerable sacrifice of a person.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike Mounier and his collaborators, who elevated the person above the common good to defend him from totalitarian oppression, Wojtyła saw within St. Thomas’s doctrine of the common good, even with its notion of man as part, a better response to the totalitarian threat.

#### IV.

When we compare the two sets of texts above, however, Wojtyła’s claims for the primacy of the person in the first set appear to conflict with his claims for the primacy of the common good in the second. For example, how does Wojtyła’s assertion that all human action is autoteleological align with his affirmation of the common good’s priority over the partic-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>25</sup> Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 165–175, at 174.

ular good? There is a way to reconcile the two claims, to be sure, as St. Thomas illustrates when he identifies the common good as a *bonum suum*, a proper good of the person.<sup>26</sup> But how does Wojtyła reconcile them? Is his argument Aquinas's? If it is—and there is evidence it could be—then Wojtyła's personalism, with its stress on the common good as a proper though not particular good of the person, might offer a way forward to re-presenting Aquinas's doctrine to a post-modern audience.<sup>27</sup> For thinkers fearful that the common goods of family and city—to say nothing of God's common goodness—threaten personal autonomy, Wojtyła constructs an attractive argument:

It might seem as though transcendence toward a common good would lead us away from ourselves, or, more precisely, would lead us all away from the human being. A thorough analysis of this good, however, shows that the human being is deeply inscribed in the true meaning of the common good—the human being not as conceived in the species definition, but the human being as a person and subject.<sup>28</sup>

De Koninck himself could not have said it better. He, however, restated Aquinas's doctrine of the common good in opposition to personalist claims. By contrast, Wojtyła begins his restatement with them. Wojtyła's method raises the question of how he understood his metaphysical claims to align with Aquinas's metaphysical doctrines. The question is broad, but its answer remains fundamental to one's acquiring a comprehensive grasp of Wojtyła's philosophical anthropology.

To respond to our more limited question regarding Wojtyła's relation to French personalism, it remains for us to indicate that Wojtyła carried into his papal magisterium not only his personalist concern for human dignity but also his Thomistic sense of the common good. Examples abound in Wojtyła's magisterial texts where he speaks of the common good in terms not, like Mounier and his collaborators, of its usefulness, but rather, like Aquinas and his commentators, of its excellence. Two texts suffice to illustrate this point. First, in his 1994 *Letter to Families*, Wojtyła explains that a classical notion of the common good supplies the interpretive key to understanding what the Council Fathers meant when, in

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<sup>26</sup> See *Summa contra gentiles* III, ch. 24. This text provides the foundation of De Koninck's argument in *Primacy of the Common Good*.

<sup>27</sup> See Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 251.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

*Gaudium et Spes* §24, they identified the person's "gift of self" as the path to self-knowledge:

There is a shortage of people with whom to create and share the common good; and yet that good, by its nature, demands to be created and shared with others: *bonum est diffusivum sui*: "good is diffusive of itself." The more *common* the good, the *more properly one's own* it will also be: mine—yours—ours. This is the logic behind living according to the good, living in truth and charity. If man is able to accept and follow this logic, his life truly becomes a "sincere gift."<sup>29</sup>

Again, De Koninck himself could not have said this better. What is more, Wojtyła reveals—perhaps better here than in his earlier philosophical works—his sensitivity to the question raised above regarding the possibility of an autoteleological love for the common good: a common good that is *ours*, Wojtyła explains, is more mine than the particular good that is just *for me*.<sup>30</sup> Far from his holding any utilitarian notion of the common good or an individualistic notion of human flourishing, Wojtyła locates the conciliar teaching regarding the gift of self squarely within the moral universe described by St. Thomas, where moral order—and thus human happiness—follows upon, not a grouping of powers in the subject or a self-expressive (and hence self-serving) self-donation, but upon a hierarchical ordering of goods increasingly excellent according to the expansion of their self-diffusion.<sup>31</sup>

The second text is Wojtyła's 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the subject of the current symposium. In this letter dedicated to the sacred-

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<sup>29</sup> Pope John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §10. Russell Hittinger ("Toward an Adequate Anthropology: Aspects of *Imago Dei* in Catholic Theology," in *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. Thomas Albert Howard [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013], 39–78, at 72, n. 57) highlights the significance of this text for grasping the classical roots (in this case, the Dionysian roots) of Wojtyła's personalism.

<sup>30</sup> That is, auto-teleological action need not be for a particular good only. In loving the common good, one loves a good that is for him, but not for him alone. Auto-teleological action can thus embrace a good in view of its very ability to be shared with others.

<sup>31</sup> See *Letter to Families*, §§10–11 for Wojtyła's explicit discussion of the person—*qua* father, mother, and child—as constituting a part of the greater whole of the family. He also speaks of the human race—"man"—as a common good.

ness of life as a particular good, Wojtyła pays conspicuous attention to the common good of society.<sup>32</sup> Nowhere is this more striking than in his discussion of the death penalty. Just before Wojtyła confirms, through the use of a solemn formula, the grave immorality of the “direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being”—which confirmation he applies specifically to abortion and euthanasia—the Pope is careful to exclude from the grave immorality of killing the legitimate use of the death penalty.<sup>33</sup> His reasoning for this exclusion rests ultimately on Aquinas’s: the common good of the political community is more excellent than the particular good of the citizen, including the particular good of the citizen’s life, insofar as “every part is directed to the whole, as imperfect to perfect, wherefore every part is naturally for the sake of the whole.”<sup>34</sup> Neither Aquinas nor Wojtyła claims that this excellence gives the political community itself, through its legitimate authority, absolute control over the life of every citizen, but it does place upon political authority, Wojtyła explains, the “grave duty” to exercise “legitimate defense” when protecting “another’s life, [or] the common good of the family or of the State.”<sup>35</sup> “Unfortunately,” Wojtyła continues, “it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life.”<sup>36</sup>

It is nevertheless out of respect for the “value and inviolability of human life” that Wojtyła calls in *Evangelium Vitae* for the near abolition

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<sup>32</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Gospel of Life *Evangelium Vitae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995). See §§20, 92, and 101 for examples of the value the pope places on the common good for the promotion and defense of human life and human dignity.

<sup>33</sup> For his confirmations of the grave immorality of murder, abortion, and euthanasia, see §§57, 62, and 65. He discusses the death penalty in §§55–56.

<sup>34</sup> *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) II-II, q. 64, a. 2 corp (all citations from *ST* are made from the edition Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947]).

<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §55. The pope draws this quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), §2265, which reads in full: “Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another’s life. Preserving the common good requires rendering the unjust aggressor unable to inflict harm. To this end, those holding legitimate authority have the right to repel by armed force aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their charge.” As the authoritative source for its teaching, the *CCC* cites *ST* II-II, q. 64, a. 7, in which Aquinas builds on his arguments in aa. 2 and 3, where he orients the particular good of the person to the common good of the whole.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, §55.

of the death penalty.<sup>37</sup> We should not, however, misinterpret his appeal. Wojtyła's personalist concern to value the person's particular good does not override his Thomistic acknowledgment of the common good's primacy. As Pope, Wojtyła does not argue that capital punishment in itself is gravely immoral (as is the case with abortion or euthanasia), or that political leaders lack the authority to mete out capital sentences.<sup>38</sup> He urges, instead, the death penalty's use be prudent and justified, which justification he believes in modern times to be rare. Allowing for cases of "absolute necessity," Wojtyła observes that "steady improvements in the organization of the penal system" in most countries has rendered an authority's need for the death penalty "very rare, if not practically non-existent."<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that, even as the Pope dissuades countries from employing the death penalty, he does not, for that fact, regard the common good as subject to the particular good of one's life, but rather as a greater good in which the particular good of a person's life flourishes, and to which the person's life is subject should the person turn gravely vicious against it.

We return, then, to our opening question: Was the Polish Pope a French Personalist? A selective but representative examination of Wojtyła's writings indicates that he was not. Though Wojtyła shared many philosophical concerns with Mounier and his collaborators over the value of the human subject, his Thomistic sense of the primacy of the common good, which first emerges in his philosophical writings and then continues into his papal magisterium, distinguishes Wojtyła sufficiently from French personalist writers as to exclude him from their school. But what, then, is the nature of his personalism? Wojtyła himself tried to answer this question:

The thinker seeking the ultimate philosophical truth about the human being no longer moves in a "purely metaphysical terrain,"

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<sup>37</sup> The phrase is taken from the encyclical's title.

<sup>38</sup> Recent attempts have been made to declare capital punishment a *malum in se*. See Christopher O. Tollefsen, "God, Death, and Capital Punishment," *The Public Discourse* (March 20, 2015), <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/03/14652/>. For a response to Tollefsen in defense of the tradition, see Steven A. Long, "Intention, Death, and Doctrinal Mutation: Universal Tradition and the Death Penalty," *Thomistica* (April 12, 2015), <http://thomistica.net/commentary/2015/4/10/intention-death-and-doctrinal-mutation-universal-tradition-and-the-death-penalty>. Long treated this topic earlier in "'Evangelium Vitae,' St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Death Penalty," *The Thomist* 63, no. 4 (October 1999): 511–552.

<sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §56.

but finds elements in abundance testifying to both the materiality and the spirituality of the human being, elements that bring both of these aspects into sharper relief. These elements then form the building blocks for further philosophical construction.<sup>40</sup>

As a philosopher, Wojtyła sought to integrate the subjective concerns of personalism with the “purely metaphysical” anthropology of classical thought. What personalist concerns Wojtyła brought to this project, and whether he succeeded in aligning the content of both systems, ought to figure into the next chapter of Wojtyła’s intellectual biography. N&V

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<sup>40</sup> Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 216.