

## John Paul II and the Foundations of Ethics

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Although this lecture will recall some leading elements of the book *The Acting Person* where they illuminate a papal document, the lecture, with that exception, will scarcely touch upon the pre-papal writings of John Paul II. Instead it will focus on his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, and his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, with occasional mention of other statements he made as Pope. Those three encyclicals set forth a conception of the foundations of ethics that deserves and repays study.

They also illustrate one of the most important propositions of Christian teaching: the proposition, repeatedly affirmed by St. Thomas, that some important elements of Christian teaching restate and make more widely available the equivalent teachings of sound philosophy. One example is the truth that the universe is created *ex nihilo* by a transcendent act of reason, will and executive power effecting the transcendent choice to create and, specifically, to create *this* universe rather than any of the countless possible alternatives.

Another example is what sound philosophy affirms as the foundational moral principles and precepts, those that St. Paul had in mind in *Romans 2:14* when he taught that all those peoples to whom the Law revealed to Moses and Israel was not revealed are nevertheless able, by nature – by natural reason in the form of conscience – to make moral judgments which correspond to the revealed Law. Many passages in *Romans* and other epistles indicate that Paul is speaking about the Law set forth in the Decalogue, not the many other parts of the Mosaic Law, which in the tradition carried forward by St. Thomas have been called its “ceremonial and judicial precepts,” as opposed to its “moral” part. Considered philosophically, the precepts of the Decalogue – with the exception of the *determinatio* of the period of rest as one day in seven – are precepts of natural law. That is, they are standards which (as Paul is saying to the Roman Christians) are accessible to human reason unaided by revelation – accessible either in the form of conscience (see *Romans 2:15*) or of philosophy. Paul emphasizes this accessibility by saying that “Gentiles who do not have the Law do *by nature (physei)* what the Law requires, and so are a law unto themselves” because “the content [*ergon*] of the Law is written on their hearts (*kardiaï; cordibus*), while their conscience (*syneideseôs; conscientia*) also testifies [...]” (I will come back later to the words “heart” and “conscience.”)

Fundamental to ethics (or, to say the same thing: at the foundations of ethics) is the constitution, the make-up, the nature and essence of the human person who can be morally good

or morally bad. Ethics is founded on realities affirmed by metaphysics, ontology, and anthropology – on the given realities of human nature. But in the order of discovery, as St. Thomas says more than once, metaphysics comes last and, as he emphasizes countless times from his earliest to his latest works, the *nature* of a dynamic reality/being is *known* (discovered) by knowing the being's *capacities*, and these are known only by knowing its *activities*, its acts, its actuations of those capacities, and acts are known and understood only by knowing *their objects*. And as Aquinas makes clear in his formal discussion of the first principles of ethics in the *Prima Secundae*, the objects of human acts are intelligible goods, the goods that the first principle of practical reason directs us to and practical reason's other first principles identify.<sup>1</sup> But what is good or defective in the pursuit of goods is *the* subject-matter of ethics. Therefore: we know human nature adequately, philosophically, metaphysically, by first understanding it ethically.

This conclusion, if not – or not explicitly – all the reasoning towards it, inspires (I believe) all John Paul II's pre-papal philosophical work on the nature of the human person and of human acts.

So I will consider first some main elements and conclusions of his analysis of the acts of human persons. Then I will consider the implicit or perhaps explicit methodology deployed in that analysis: the adoption of the internal point of view, the self-understanding of the deliberating, intending and choosing person. After which, I will consider what was left underdeveloped in Karol Wojtyła's philosophical work on human nature, the study of intelligible human goods and of the good way of pursuing and actualizing them: the study that is properly called ethics.

Most of the following lecture will be philosophical, but I will not rigorously exclude the doctrinal and the theological – that is, propositions and reflections based on revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae*, q. 94, a. 2. Although *obiectum* does not appear in q. 94, this article, in speaking of *inclinaciones ad bona*, is speaking of their *obiecta* according to the axiom stated in *ST, I, q. 105, a. 4c*: "*Velle enim nihil aliud est quam inclinatio quaedam in obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum universale*" (where "*universal*" does not mean "in general or in the abstract" but "not a particular as such"; human life, for example, is a universal, but so is ice-cream or trumpet-playing). See also the discussion in *ST, I-II, q. 51, a. 1c* of the *obiecta* of *inclinaciones* and *potentiae*, with mention of *principia iuris communis* which are *seminalia virtutum*. See my *Aquinas: Moral, Political and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86-94.

## 1. *Laborem Exercens* (1981)

The original Polish edition of Karol Wojtyła's *The Acting Person* has, I gather, the subtitle: "An Attempt at Constructing Catholic Ethics on the Basis of Max Scheler's Philosophy" – a subtitle neither used nor mentioned in the English edition published ten years later, in 1979. Leaving aside all questions about the relationship between Scheler's philosophy and John Paul II's, on which much has been written, none of which am I concerned to assess, the point I wish to make is that the book was conceived not simply as a phenomenology or study of the personal experience of acting, of being an acting subject, but as at least a foundation for ethics – a study of one of the fundamentals of ethics. Here and throughout my lecture I take "ethics" to be a critical reflective understanding of the morality of choices, dispositions and actions, and thus of what it is for a person to be *morally* good or *morally* bad. There is only a nuance of difference between "ethics" and "morality," and I tend to use the terms "ethical" and "moral" interchangeably. That interchangeability is found also in, for example, *Laborem Exercens*.<sup>2</sup> A foundation of ethics is a foundation of morality because ethics is fundamentally a theoretical (though also practical, and so: *practical-theoretical*) study of morality, a study in which the decisive question is: what are the true standards by which I can assess my own actual or prospective choices as morally sound or unsound (immoral), and thus too assess, in like terms, my way of life, and indeed *myself*.

Leaving aside for a moment the question of the true standards, to which I will return, I focus in this first section on the relationship between choices, acts, ways of life, and "selves," that is, persons – in the first instance myself – as self-determining and self-shaping by choice. This is the matter or topic which the book *The Acting Person* takes as its main concern, and which is fundamental to the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. That was John Paul II's third encyclical, explicitly linked to his first, *Redemptor Hominis* (which we will consider in the next section) and is implicitly in close relation to the book. *Laborem Exercens*, published in September 1981 with the subtitle "on Human Work, on the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*," has as one of its primary themes the Catholic social teaching on property and thus on socialism and communism and exaggerated or normless capitalism and economism. Here I shall ignore all that, despite its value, in order to focus on the other primary theme: "human work."

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<sup>2</sup> See John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (Vatican City, 1981), para. 6: "human work has an ethical value of its own"; para. 9: "the dignity of human work [...] its specific *moral* value" (cf. Italian *morale* and Latin *ethica* [!]). Available online at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html).

The encyclical identifies with precision its own “guiding thread”: “the mystery of creation”.<sup>3</sup> For by work, human persons fulfil, develop or realize themselves, that is, we each share in God’s creation of us, even when the work – what we are working on, or working at – is humble in its “objective character” as work.<sup>4</sup> (One should recall here that in speaking of divine, transcendent creation we need not depart from the strictly philosophical. For strictly philosophical arguments show that the universe must have its explanation in such a transcendent act.)

The encyclical deploys, throughout, a distinction between “work in the subjective sense” and “work in the objective sense.” It has nothing to do with the distinction between “objective” truth and mere “subjective” opinion, opinion strongly held and affirmed but lacking in objectivity, that is, lacking in truth. The encyclical’s distinction reflects the fact that work has two aspects, two dimensions, two *rationes*. In the “objective sense,” work is directed towards an external object, for example, some part of the world’s resources; and it transforms that external object with another external object – for example, with some machine created by someone’s (perhaps by someone *else*’s, another person’s) work – and results in another external object, the finished product. Even when work is taken, as the encyclical intends, in a more generic sense, as including all forms of chosen activity in this world of time – including even (I believe) the activity and work of contemplation – there is an “objective” aspect: the chosen activity as an observable phenomenon in time and space.

Thus, I think, the idea of “external” objects is to be understood as including anything external to the will, to the act of deliberating and choosing: prayer and contemplation, as outcomes of an act of choice, are external to one’s will, even though they are observable only to the person who is praying or contemplating. I believe that this is the case (the fact of the matter) even though the observing is in a sense internal, and even though – as Elizabeth Anscombe brilliantly emphasized – *we know what we are doing* without having to “observe” what we are

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., para. 12; see also para. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Note the cautionary words at the end of *Laborem Exercens*, para. 4: “As man, through his work, becomes more and more the master [*dominus*] of the earth, he nevertheless, in every case and at every phase of this process [*progressionis*], remains within the Creator’s original ordering [*in via illius primigeniae ordinationis, a Creatore datae, manet constitutus*]. And this *ordinatio* remains necessarily and indissolubly linked with the fact that man was created, as male and female, ‘in the image of God’. This *ordo rerum* [the Italian, English, etc., here have, questionably, ‘process’] is at the same time universal [...] it embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development [*progressus*], and, at the same time, it is an *ordo efficitur* [again, questionably, ‘process takes place’] within each human being, in each conscious human subject [...].”

doing.<sup>5</sup> One *can* observe what one is doing, but one does not *need* to, for one already (before observing) knows what one is doing, because in doing it one is carrying out the plan (the proposal, the set of envisaged ends and means) that one shaped up in deliberating and adopted by choosing. In saying this, I have gone beyond what the encyclical says and *perhaps* even beyond what John Paul II thought, or thought out. Yet what I am saying is entirely in line with his thought, his “phenomenological” interest and “personalist” intent. Section 4 of *Laborem Exercens* introduces the “objective aspect” of work in these words:

Work understood as a “transitive” activity, that is to say, an activity beginning in a human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over “the earth” and, in its turn, it confirms and develops that dominion.<sup>6</sup>

The word “transitive” suggests, of course, its opposite, “intransitive.” Not wishing, however, to impose his own philosophical vocabulary on the Church, John Paul II abstains in the encyclical from using the term “intransitive,” even though it is a or even *the* key term in his own philosophical explanation of what the encyclical calls the “subjective” aspect of work. The subjective aspect or *ratio* of work is explained in section 6 of *Laborem Exercens*:

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate [i.e., have dominion over] it, because as the “image of God” he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself [*deliberandum de se*], and with a tendency to self-realization [*eoque contendem ut de se ipsum perficiat*]. *As a person, man is therefore the subject of work.* As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.<sup>7</sup>

And so this “dominion” spoken of in the biblical text being meditated upon here refers not only to the objective dimension of work but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself as the one who “dominates.” This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions the *ethical* nature of work. In fact there is no doubt that human work has an *ethical value* of its own (*in labore humano vis ethica insit*), which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself (*de se ipso deliberans*).

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<sup>5</sup> See my essay “On Hart’s Ways: Law as Reason and as Fact,” in J. Finnis, *Philosophy of Law: Collected Essays Volume IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 230-56, see particularly 235-9.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 6 (emphasis in original).

This truth, which in a sense constitutes the fundamental and perennial heart of Christian teaching on human work is made clear in the explanation of the good of work in section 9:

[...] as such, [work] is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity – because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but also *achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being.”<sup>8</sup>

This “perfecting, realizing, developing of oneself” (*se ipsum perficiens*) is a theme of the treatment of work in Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*:

Just as [human activity] proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he *goes outside of himself and beyond himself*. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered [...] Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan [*consilium*] and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race [*genuino humani generis bono*], and that it allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation [*integrae suae vocationis*] and fulfil it.<sup>9</sup>

It would be no surprise to learn that in 1964-65 Archbishop Wojtyła had an input into that part of *Gaudium et Spes*, and certainly it is a part that is reflected in the central chapter of his book *The Acting Person*, originally published in 1969. For that chapter begins with the proposition that “the performance of an action brings fulfillment,” and with the comment: “All the essential problems considered in this study seem to be focused and condensed in the simple assertion of fulfillment in an action.”<sup>10</sup> And at the same time the author invites us to notice that the idea of “fulfillment in an action” bears upon “our previous discussion of the person's transcendence in the doing of an action.”

What is this transcendence of the person by the person? It seems reminiscent of the statement in section 35 of *Gaudium et Spes* that in activity man goes outside of himself and beyond himself (*extra se* and *supra se*). Neither the statement nor the idea is mere poetry or metaphor. The transcendence that Wojtyła often has in view he regularly calls “vertical transcendence,” and his distinction between “horizontal” and “vertical” transcendence corresponds (is equivalent) to his distinction between “objective” and “subjective” *rationes* of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, para. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City, 1965), para. 35 (emphasis added). Available online at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). Note that this section of *Gaudium et Spes* is quoted in section 26 of *Laborem Exercens*.

<sup>10</sup> K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Boston & London: Reidel, 1979), 149.

work, and to his distinction between the “transitive” and “intransitive” aspects of action. To repeat: *horizontal transcendence is what the objective ratio of work seeks and the transitive aspect of action is intended to achieve*. Just as by perceiving and knowing objects we in a sense get outside ourselves, so too we get outside ourselves by intending and willing (choosing) objects (including events and states of affairs) beyond ourselves or, more strictly, beyond our willing.

Vertical transcendence, on the other hand, is the fact of self-determination. As a person, one transcends one’s structural boundaries by one’s capacity to exercise freedom.<sup>11</sup> This transcendence is “associated with self-government and self-possession.”<sup>12</sup> It is a matter of one’s “ascendancy over [one’s] own dynamisms,”<sup>13</sup> over all the natural dynamisms of body and mind (*soma* and *psyche*),<sup>14</sup> over all the natural dynamisms of emotion and desire and aversion that are in themselves merely things that happen in or happen to oneself (i.e., that *take place* in me) and are not *me acting* although they belong to me just as much as the dynamism of action itself belongs to me.<sup>15</sup> When I act, they are integrated into that superior type of dynamism and receive from it a new meaning and a new quality that is properly personal.<sup>16</sup>

Let me explain in my own words what I understand by “vertical transcendence” in *The Acting Person* (and therefore also by “subjective *ratio* of work” in *Laborem Exercens*). Free choice (what *The Acting Person* calls “free will”) is more, much more, than what the ancients and the post-Christian moderns understand by freedom of choice: freedom from compulsion and freedom to do as one pleases. What, instead, is presupposed in *Deuteronomy* 30:18 (“I set before you life or death, blessing or curse: *choose* life”) or in *Ecclesiasticus* (*Sirach*) 15:14 (“When God in the beginning created man he made him subject to his own free choice: if you wish you can keep the commandments”), and in the whole of the Gospel, as well as in John Paul II’s references to freedom, is the following: I can choose between alternative options/proposals that I have shaped up in deliberation, *open* alternatives in that there is *no factor save my choosing* that settles which alternative I choose – no factor, whether it is a system of desires or preferences (as the typical Anglo-American philosopher would have it), or “selfish genes,” or the superior reasonableness or moral rightness of one alternative and the wrongness of the other(s), or any other “sufficient reason.” So my free choices – precisely because they are not the product of what was there in my wants, preferences, habits, or other such dynamisms – *create*. This

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 197.

creativity of choice is the essence of what *Laborem Exercens* calls “transcendence,” a term we already find in the title of section 3 of Chapter Three of *The Acting Person*: “Free will as the basis of the transcendence of the acting person.”

In understanding this creativity, we also understand what *The Acting Person* calls the “intransitivity” of action. In my own words: one’s free choices establish, create one’s own identity or character – not, of course, one’s identity as male or female, or (somewhat differently) as slave or free, identities that are not within one’s power to choose for oneself. Thus one’s choices are not only transitive, i.e., transiting out from one’s will into one’s behavior and one’s efficacy in shaping things and events in the world. They are also intransitive: each free choice is an act by which I who am choosing constitute myself the person I will henceforth be, as the person I will remain unless and until (if ever) I repent of that choice, either formally by contrition and resolve to amend my ways, or informally by making a new choice incompatible with the former one.

Thus we have reached another distinctive theme of the analysis of action in *The Acting Person*, that is, what that book calls the *persistence* of actions:

In the inner dimension of the person, human action is at once both transitory and relatively lasting, inasmuch as its effects, which are to be viewed in relation to efficacy and self-determination, that is to say, to the person’s engagement in freedom, last longer than the action itself. The engagement in freedom is objectified [...] in the person and not only in the action, which is the transitive effect. [...] Human actions once performed do not vanish without trace: *they leave their moral value*, which constitutes an objective reality intrinsically cohesive with the person, and thus a reality also profoundly subjective.<sup>17</sup>

I interject to make two interpretative observations. First, I think “moral value” here is equivalent to “ethical value” in *Laborem Exercens* 6, quoted above. Second, I think the term “objective” in the just-quoted sentence of *The Acting Person* does not correspond to “objective” as we saw it in *Laborem Exercens* 4, but rather to the meaning of “objective” that simply intensifies the predicate “true,” “real,” “really,” etc., not merely imaginary. When, however, John Paul II goes on “also profoundly subjective” he *is* anticipating the language of *Laborem Exercens* 4. (So there was here, it seems, a sort of punning on “objective.”) In the same exposition in *The Acting Person* we read:

It is in the modality of morality that this objectification becomes clearly apparent, when through an action that is either morally good or morally bad, man, as the person, himself becomes either morally good or morally bad.

In this way we begin to glimpse the meaning of the assertion that “to perform the action brings fulfillment.” [...] Implied in the intentionality of willing and acting, in man’s reaching outside of himself towards objects that he is presented with as various goods – and thus values –

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 151 (emphasis added).

here is his simultaneous moving back into *his ego, the closest and most essential object of self-determination*.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas:

[...] because of self-determination, an action reaches and penetrates into the subject, into the ego, which is its primary and principal *object*.<sup>19</sup>

This explanation of what *Laborem Exercens* will call the subjective *ratio* of work and action (and the philosophical writings call the intransitive aspect of action) explains the subject (the chooser and doer) as the object, the intransitive object, of the choosing and doing (the choice and action). This corresponds to the sense in which, as *Laborem Exercens* repeatedly says, one deliberates about oneself, *deliberat de se ipso*. It is elaborated in Chapter Three of *The Acting Person*:

[...] the person is, owing to self-determination, an object for himself, in a peculiar way being the immanent target upon which man's exercise of all his powers concentrates, insofar as it is he whose determination is at stake. He is in this sense, the primary object or the nearest object of his action.

Every actual act of self-determination makes real the subjectiveness of self-governance and self-possession; in each of these interpersonal structural relations there is given to the person as the subject – as he who governs and possesses – the person as the object – as he who is governed and possessed. This objectiveness is, as may be seen, the correlate of the person's subjectiveness and, moreover, seems to bring out in a specific manner subjectiveness itself.<sup>20</sup>

And later he says that the subject is not only the primary and nearest object of his or her action but is also the basic, most direct and innermost object.

But these statements, like the talk of deliberating *de se ipso* (about oneself) are not to be taken as subscribing to any theory – call it a theory of fundamental option – which holds that one disposes of oneself only by a fundamental option which is not a choice to do this or do that particular act, but somehow a radical choice for self or for God, a “total disposal” of the self “in the depths of the self” where (these theorists say) the self is “totally present to itself,” so that no particular choice or act can be said to be of itself a mortal sin. John Paul II's theory of the intransitive object of action is in fact radically opposed to that theory of fundamental option. For, in the very midst of his insistence on the directness and immediacy of that intransitive object, and on the ego as that intransitive object, he makes the essential *caveat* (proviso):

Nevertheless, the objectification of the subject does not have an intentional character in the sense in which intentionality is to be found in every human willing. When I will, I always desire *something*. Willing indicates a turn toward an object, and this turn determines its intentional nature. In order to turn intentionally to an object we put the object, as it were, in front of us (or

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 150 (emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 108.

we accept its presence).[...] <sup>21</sup> in self-determination we do not turn to the ego as the object, we only impart actuality to the, so to speak, ready-made objectiveness of the ego which is contained in the intrapersonal relation of self-governance and self-possession. This imparting of actuality is of fundamental significance in morality, that specific dimension of the human, personal existence which is simultaneously both subjective and objective. It is there that the whole reality of morals, of moral values, has its roots. [...]

The objectification that is essential for self-determination takes place *together with* the intentionality of the particular acts of the will. When I will *anything*, then I am also determined by myself. Though the ego is *not* an intentional object of willing its objective being is contained in the nature of acts of willing. It is only thus that willing becomes self-determination. <sup>22</sup>

The references in *Laborem Exercens* to deliberating and deciding *de se ipso* have a similar implication: this deliberating is not some mysterious act of self-disposal in which the very objective intended is total self-disposal before God. <sup>23</sup> Rather, the deliberating *de se ipso* is the very same deliberating that precedes any free choice, for example, the choice to engage in this specific work or project – say, of my writing or your reading this text – and to do it well, for this or that purpose. The deliberating *de se ipso* is an implication of any serious choice; for any serious choice, however specific its topic, is a self-disposal, a formation of character, a (partial) creation (or reinforcement, or destruction) of character – and lasts beyond the time of the action and, being a spiritual reality, can last into eternity. Thus the whole section on the subjective *ratio* of work ends like this: <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Here there occurs the sentence: “Obviously it is possible to put in this position our own ego as the object and then to turn to it by a similar volitional act, the act of willing. But this kind of intentionality does not properly appertain to self-determination. For in self-determination ...” In a discussion of John Paul II and fundamental option theories, one would wish to provide an exegesis of this. But for present purposes it is enough that the context excludes every theory in which choices of particular actions are treated as not disposing of the self.

<sup>22</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 109 (emphases added); see also 309, last sentence of n. 40.

<sup>23</sup> The phrase “*deliberans de se ipso*” occurs in St. Thomas just once, in *ST*, I-II, q. 89, a. 6c, in the famous passage about the seven-year-old pagan whose first act of free will/choice is either a mortal sin or an act of conversion *ad debitum finem* and *ad Deum*. This is the passage to which supporters of fundamental option theory have appealed – mistakenly, however; for when Aquinas comes to describe that act of conversion, in q. 113, a. 7 ad 1 and aa. 4 and 6, he makes clear that this is not a matter of the total self-disposal imagined by fundamental-option theorists, but instead the down-to-earth reality of a free choice to “consent” to two particulars: faith in God and detestation of sin. As I say elsewhere (see my *Aquinas*, 41n): “Even though a single choice (Aquinas thinks) cannot form a habitual disposition in the strict sense (which is formed by reiteration of acts: I-II q. 51 a. 3), still a choice lasts in, and shapes, one’s will(ingness) until one repudiates or repents of it (see e.g. *De Veritate* q. 24 a. 12c). Although their emotional character and culture can be profoundly shaped before they reach the age of reason [...], children cannot make free choices until they reach that age; and when one does reach it, one is immediately {*statim*} confronted with the rational necessity of deliberating, so far as one can, about oneself {*de seipso*} and about the direction, the integrating point, of one’s whole life {*salus sua*}, so that one treats oneself as an end in oneself to which other things are related as quasi-means {*de seipso cogitet, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem*}, and either do or fail to do ‘what is in oneself {*quod in se est*}’: I-II q. 89 a. 6c & ad 3; II Sent. d. 42 q. 1 a. 5 ad 7; *De Malo* q. 7 a. 10 ad 8.”

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, para. 6.

in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man – even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest “service,” as the most monotonous, even the most [marginalizing]<sup>25</sup> work.

In “Human Acts,” a paper I gave in Rome, at a Congress on Moral Theology in 1986,<sup>26</sup> I devoted some pages to theologians (I mentioned Timothy O’Connell and Josef Fuchs) who:

[...] deny that one can know oneself in, and by reflection upon, one’s choices and actions. They propose an account of the person, and of knowledge, according to which the self is a reality radically unaffected by many fully free choices and actions, a reality which, unlike choice and action, remains inaccessible both to consciousness and even to reflective knowledge.

At the end of my exposition and critique I sum up by saying:<sup>27</sup>

By thus rejecting an epistemology dominated by the image of taking a look, or gazing, or confronting, we rejoin the perennial methodology: whatever is known is known insofar as it is in act; the character of soul is known by the soul’s capacities, but those capacities are known by and in their actuations. And, more specifically, [in the words of Wojtyła’s *The Acting Person*, p. 11] action constitutes the specific moment whereby the person is revealed. Action gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully.

## **2. *Redemptor Hominis* (1979)**

The first paragraph of this first encyclical of John Paul II, which opens with the words: “The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history,” closes by quoting that Redeemer: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>28</sup> Here I shall focus only on the encyclical’s anthropology of action, as it appears from the document’s repeated phrase “intellect, will, conscience and freedom,” as in: “[...] freedom’s root [is] in man’s soul, his heart, and his conscience;”<sup>29</sup> “we are speaking of each man [...] in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is

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<sup>25</sup> The Vatican’s English translation here has “alienating,” but the versions of this text in other languages more accurately say “marginalizing” (Italian *emarginante* or similar; Latin *opere [...] in societatis partes secundarias potissimum detrudente*). The whole burden of the analysis is that work in which man expresses his self-determination, self-governance and self-possession is not alienating, however menial. Work can only be degrading or alienating when all incentive to creativity and responsibility, and thus all personal satisfaction, is removed because one is in no way working “for oneself” (*in re propria*): see *Laborem Exercens*, para. 5.

<sup>26</sup> See my “Human Acts,” republished in J. Finnis, *Intention and Identity: Collected Essays Volume II*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-6.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Vatican City, 1979), para. 12. Available online at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart;”<sup>30</sup> and “man’s deepest sphere [...] the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events.”<sup>31</sup>

What are *intellect, will, conscience and heart*?

In the New Testament, in line with the Old, the term *kardía* (Latin *cor*) signifies the seat, center or source of physical, spiritual and mental life, of the whole “inner life” of thinking, feeling and volition, often taken inclusively, but in specific contexts indicating either (a) thought, understanding, doubting, and so forth, or (b) willing and deciding, being tempted, and so forth, especially morally significant decisions or choices and their aftermath, purity of heart or guilty hearts, or (c) desires, emotions, loves, resentments, and so forth.<sup>32</sup> St. Thomas surveys some strategic texts such as Psalm 84:2(3): *cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt*, and assigns *cor* to the intellectual appetite, *caro* (“flesh”) to the sensitive appetite.<sup>33</sup> However, when considering the variant lists in *Deuteronomy 6, Matthew 22, Mark 12 and Luke 10* on the call to *love* with “heart, soul, mind, strength/powers,” he unhesitatingly says that, since love (*dilectio*) is an act of will, *cor* corresponds to will, especially the intending of ends, above all the ultimate end; and that “mind” is a matter of intellect, moved by will, and “soul” is the lower appetite(s), while “strength” signifies the executive powers external to one’s inner willing, desiring, understanding and so forth.<sup>34</sup> He might have given more prominence to those fundamental sayings of the Lord, recounted in *Matthew 15 and Mark 7* – with interesting variations which illustrate the reliance of each on memory and apostolic [eye-witness] oral preaching, not on either of them redacting the other’s text – when he explains to his close disciples his controversy with Pharisees who were denouncing failure to wash before eating: it is from inside, from the heart, that immoral actions come, deeds shaped up in and by the heart.<sup>35</sup>

So I think we should understand *Redemptor Hominis* like this. Intellect and will are the essential elements in self-determining choices and actions, choosings and actings. “Heart” includes those but is not redundant, for it includes also the life of emotion and feeling which accompanies all human understanding and willing, somewhat as images accompany all human mathematical thinking even though the mathematician knows that they are not what is being considered and indeed partly misrepresent what is being considered – a line that can be seen or

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., para. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., para. 10.

<sup>32</sup> See W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago & Cambridge: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *kardía*.

<sup>33</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae*, q. 24, a. 3c.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., q. 44, a. 5c.

<sup>35</sup> *Matthew 15:1–20*, especially 18–19; *Mark 7:1–23*, especially 21.

imagined cannot be what a line is defined to be: length without breadth. Although section 54 of *Veritatis Splendor* will treat the term “heart” as a name for conscience, in *Redemptor Hominis* “conscience,” that important New Testament word put into circulation by Peter<sup>36</sup> and Paul,<sup>37</sup> is essentially, and more specifically, one’s *understanding* of the *proposals for action* that deliberative understanding shapes up as options, for choosing between. But conscience is a *specialized* understanding: an understanding that *measures* those proposals against the *standards* of honesty, justice and other elements of integral reasonableness (*prudencia*), and ultimately by reference to what orientations of one’s will are or are not open to integral human fulfillment.

For we cannot understand ethics, or a project like *The Acting Person*, or a more complete project like *Veritatis Splendor*, unless we enter into the viewpoint not of observers but of the deliberating and choosing person himself or herself – of oneself, one’s own thinking about what to do, and deciding/choosing what to do (whether one has judged it morally good or judged it morally bad, “in conscience”). This viewpoint has the academic name “the internal point of view.” It is what is referred to at a key point in *Veritatis Splendor*:

*The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the “object” rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas. In order to be able to grasp [understand] the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person. [...] that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision [delectionis; un choix] which determines [i.e., settles] the act of willing on the part of the acting person.*<sup>38</sup>

We can and should go so far as to say that as an acting person one has, in the act of choosing, infallible knowledge of the object, that is, of what one is choosing, though even a moment later one may have partly forgotten or begun misrepresenting to oneself what one chose.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 1 Peter 3:16, 21; cf. 2:19.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:7, 19; 10:29; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; Romans 2:15; 9:1; 13:5; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; Titus 1:15; 2 Timothy 1:3; Acts of the Apostles 23:1. Perhaps earliest, in (as it seems) Apollos’s sermon, Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:22; approved by Paul: 13:19(!), 22-24 (very probably: despatching the annotated sermon from Ephesus to Corinth); cf. Acts of the Apostles 18:24 – 19:1; 1 Corinthians 16:12.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Vatican City, 1993), para. 78 (italics in original). Available online at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html).

<sup>39</sup> You will have noticed that I always use the pronoun “one” in the English, not the American way: it is in the first-person, equivalent in meaning to “I”. This first-person usage is the best way – indeed the only safe way – to present, to understand and to analyze the acts of an acting person or generically of the acting person: as they are understood and created by that person (for good or ill) – “in the perspective of the acting person,” as *Veritatis Splendor* says.

### 3. *Veritatis Splendor* (1993)

This encyclical is significant above all as doctrinal, magisterial and apostolic. But it is also theological. And like all sound theology (as the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* will say five years later),<sup>40</sup> it consciously seeks to be also sound philosophy. It seems to me – but this is certainly open to discussion – that the original conceiving of *The Acting Person* as “an attempt at constructing Catholic ethics on the basis of Scheler’s philosophy” is evidence of two things. First, that Karol Wojtyła considered that the Neo-Scholastic Thomistic presentations of ethics with which he was familiar were *deficient* in not, or not sufficiently, adopting the *internal point of view* – the viewpoint of the acting person – in expounding the structure of the human person and human freely chosen action. So he turned elsewhere, to Scheler, in hope of finding more inwardness, thus at least implicitly conforming to the actual method of St. Thomas by acknowledging that adequate critical knowledge of actions precedes, in the epistemological order, an adequate critical knowledge of nature, in this case human nature and structure. Second, resort to Scheler’s philosophy was of little or no help – indeed, I venture to think, it was a distraction – in recovering what the Neo-Scholastics had lost: an accurate understanding of the truly intelligent and intelligible *human goods* that are what first principles of practical understanding and reason direct us to, as St. Thomas expounded, though not with unblemished clarity of exposition, in question 94 articles 2 and 3 of the *Prima Secundae*.<sup>41</sup> To speak of “fulfillment in our actions,” as *The Acting Person* does right from the outset, is implicitly to speak of human goods (as we saw in the passage quoted above<sup>42</sup>). But much remained to be made explicit and critically defended. The project of *Veritatis Splendor*, announced in 1987 and completed six years and six days later, but certainly meditated earlier and longer, summoned John Paul II to an articulated, albeit incompletely articulated, exposition of *those* fundamentals of ethics.

The second of the three chapters of *Veritatis Splendor* – the longest, running from section 28 through section 83 – deals in sequence with four main currents of thought converging on dissent from the Church’s constant moral teaching.

The first of the four currents broadly concerns notions of autonomy or liberty, in relation to Christian ideas of human freedom, divine and natural law, and human nature. One element in this current concerns:

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican City, 1998), para. 68: “moral theology requires a sound philosophical vision of human nature and society, as well as of the general principles of ethical decision-making.”

<sup>41</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae*, q. 94, a. 2, 3.

<sup>42</sup> See above note no. 18 to the passage from Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 151.

[the] denial that there exists, in Divine Revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent. The word of God would be limited to proposing an exhortation, a generic *paraenesis* [exhortatory preaching] which the autonomous reason alone would then have the task of completing with normative directives which are truly “objective,” that is, adapted to the concrete historical situation [...] [but which are not] part of the proper content of Revelation, and would not in themselves be relevant for salvation.<sup>43</sup>

Related to this is the notion that there is no divine and natural law, properly speaking, other than the law of love (of God and neighbor), beyond which the Church has nothing definite to teach about human conduct, and gives us just exhortations and orientations or ideals. Related sub-currents of dissent maintain that the Church’s moral teaching uses an outdated and false concept of nature, and is physicalist or biologicistic rather than truly human and reasonable. Against all these, the encyclical defends the humanity and reasonableness, as well as the divinely revealed character, ratified by Christ, of the *natural moral law demanding respect in every choice and act for the fundamental goods of human nature*.

These fundamental human goods were already referred to in the encyclical’s first chapter, in section 13’s meditation on Christ’s response to the man who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, a response recalling the man to the Commandments:

The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person, at the level of the many different goods which characterize his identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbour and with the material world [...] The commandments of which Jesus reminds the young man are meant to safeguard the good of the person, the image of God, by protecting his goods. “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness” are moral rules formulated in terms of prohibitions. These negative precepts express with particular force the ever urgent need to protect human life, the communion of persons in marriage, private property, truthfulness and people’s good name. The commandments thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbour [...].<sup>44</sup>

“Human life, the communion of persons in marriage, private property, truthfulness and people’s good name”: this is a list of fundamental human goods that is clearly neither fully clarified and stabilized philosophically, nor exhaustive. Yet it is a valuable pointer to the need for, and I would add the availability of, such a clarified and adequate list.

After alluding in section 44 to “the Thomistic doctrine of natural law” as something long “included in” the Church teaching on morality, in section 48 *Veritatis Splendor* returns to the fundamental goods that (although the encyclical does not say so) are the subject of Thomas’ teaching on the first principles of the natural law.<sup>45</sup> Here John Paul II is directly confronting that current of theological opinion which accuses the Christian doctrine on sex and marriage and

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<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 13.

<sup>45</sup> See once again St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae*, q. 94, a. 2.

human life of confusing biological laws with moral laws – physicalism, biologism, and so forth.<sup>46</sup>

Part of a complex response says:

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. And since the human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure, the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a mere means also implies, by its very nature, respect for certain fundamental goods [...].<sup>47</sup>

It is not the fact that we are naturally inclined to these goods that makes them morally normative, but rather the truth that the *objects* of such inclinations, objects such as life and marital communion (marriage), are intrinsic elements of one’s human dignity as a being – a person – inseparably both bodily and spiritual (*corpore et anima unus*):

[...]natural inclinations take on moral relevance only insofar as they refer to the human person and his authentic fulfilment, a fulfilment which for that matter can take place always and only in human nature.<sup>48</sup>

When question 94, article 2 of the *Prima Secundae* is text-critically transcribed and translated, we find that St Thomas already identified marriage – not sexual intercourse or procreation – as the basic human good that should be listed after life and health.<sup>49</sup>

I shall say here very little about the second and third of the four currents of erroneous theological opinion. The second concerns conscience, taken up in sections 54–64. No teacher who has identified a course of conduct or kind of action as truly wrong can then rationally add: “But if you judge it in your conscience not to be wrong for you, it is not wrong for you.” Such a bishop or other teacher merely contradicts himself, and in all probability is merely in bad faith, trying in vain to conceal the fact that he does not believe what he professes to teach. In view, however, of what is said about conscience in and in relation to section 303 of *Amoris Laetitia*,<sup>50</sup> – that an individual’s conscience confronting the divine and Gospel commandment against adultery can “recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it [understood: carrying on with the adultery in a civil purported second marriage] is what God himself is asking

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<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 47 and 48.2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., para. 48.3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., para. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 82, 97-8.

<sup>50</sup> See Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican City, 2016), para. 303, as well as para. 37, 298, and 304. Available online at:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf).

amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while not yet fully the objective ideal"<sup>51</sup> – it is right to notice Saint John Paul II's description of false teaching in *Veritatis Splendor*:

[...] some authors have proposed a kind of double status of moral truth. Beyond the doctrinal and abstract level, one would have to acknowledge the priority of a certain more concrete existential consideration [which], by taking account of circumstances and the situation, could legitimately be the basis of certain exceptions to the general rule and thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law. A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil. On this basis, an attempt is made to legitimize so called "pastoral" solutions contrary to the teaching of the Magisterium, and to justify a "creative" hermeneutic according to which the moral conscience is in no way obliged, in every case, by a particular negative precept. No one can fail to realize that these approaches pose a challenge to the very identity of the moral conscience in relation to human freedom and God's law.<sup>52</sup>

Sections 57–64 (and section 117) offer a long and careful refutation of this corrosive error.

The third current is the claim that nothing morally matters, or matters for salvation, other than a person's "fundamental option" for Good, or goodness in general, an option which is only imperfectly reflected, and never definitively, in one's specific or particular choices and acts. To this John Paul II replies (I paraphrase) that the real fundamental option is *faith*, a fundamental choice by which man is indeed:

capable of giving his life direction and of progressing, with the help of grace, towards his end, following God's call. But this capability is actually exercised in the particular choices of specific actions, through which man deliberately conforms himself to God's will, wisdom and law.<sup>53</sup>

So the fundamental option is "revoked when man engages his freedom in conscious decisions to the contrary, with regard to morally grave matter."<sup>54</sup>

The fourth current is the current most carefully identified and discussed, and specifically condemned formally and twice over, in *Veritatis Splendor*, where it is named "proportionalism" or "teleologism"; one might also call it consequentialism (to use the term successfully and helpfully minted by Elizabeth Anscombe). It was only in and after late 1968 that Catholic theologians began denying, publicly and with more or less philosophical arguments, that there is any moral precept (natural or revealed) that absolutely excludes a kind of action specifiable (identifiable) by reference only to its intentional-behavioral elements – a kind of action such as killing an innocent person, apostasy, sex acts with a person to whom one is not married, etc. – where the identification or specification does not depend upon a prior *moral* assessment of such

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<sup>51</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, para. 303.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 67.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

actions as unjust, unchaste, immoderate or the like.<sup>55</sup> The dissenting but numerous theologians and pastors confronted in *Veritatis Splendor* asserted that true and Christian morality's precepts do not prohibit such an action except when it is, in the circumstances (situation), *disproportionate*, that is, seems in those circumstances likely to cause, overall and in the medium or long term, *more* human (pre-moral) bad than human (pre-moral) good – and therefore is in the relevant particular circumstances unjust, unchaste, immoderate or the like. According to that line of thought, a particular action cannot be judged (or assessed in conscience) to be, in the circumstances, wrong until one has *weighed* all the particular acting person's motivations and circumstances (including the likely overall, long-term consequences) – and then its wrongness is simply its *disproportionate* harmfulness or likely harmfulness relative to the morally relevant "values" or human goods. Without such an individualized assessment of proportionality, no general precept or "commandment" can truly be more than a *reminder* of important values and *ideals* or orientations for considering what love of God and neighbor calls for *in the situation* in which the choice whether or not to engage in a particular act (of non-marital sex, abortion, euthanasia and so forth) is to be assessed. That assessment, to repeat, is to be made, said these theologians, *in the light of the proportions of good and bad, value and disvalue, foreseeable in the likely overall, long-term outcomes of the alternatives* – of engaging or alternatively not engaging in that act in that (kind of) situation.

So these theorists accepted the labels "proportionalist" or "teleological" because the "proportionate reason" for choosing an act – even an act of a kind hitherto judged intrinsically immoral – is that choosing and doing so has, and seems likely (in the circumstances) to attain, the *telos*, the purpose or goal, of doing greater good or at least lesser evil overall, net and in the

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<sup>55</sup> In dating the momentous change of mind by a majority of priest-scholar moral theologians, a key date is April 1966, when the theologians of Pope Paul VI's Commission on Population, Family and Birth-rate found that a majority of them thought that the Church's teaching that contraception is intrinsically immoral was reformable and mistaken, and went on to explain that opinion by a theory that particular acts of contracepted marital intercourse could be morally assessed only when considered in relation to a whole lifetime of marital relations between these spouses in question. As I say in *Finnis, Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision and Truth* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 89: in these 1966 documents "the contraceptive act and the contracepted sexual act constitute only one act, whose moral character is derived entirely from the moral character of the sexual act. This in turn attains its essential moral character from the 'totality' constituted of itself, the series of contracepted acts of which it forms a part, and the non-contracepted acts which there have been or may be in the course of a married lifetime. This theory, [...] – on which the church was meant to have reversed its teaching on contraception and promulgated a new teaching that contraception is often morally obligatory – could not withstand a touch of rational reflection and has rightly disappeared without trace. Or rather, it collapsed into the general proportionalist theory that the morality of a choice can be assessed only by taking into account *all* the circumstances, a totality far wider, of course, than the supposed 'totality' constituted by the couple's imagined series of marital acts past, present, and future."

long term.

Already in its response to the first current back in section 52, *Veritatis Splendor* had distinguished between negative and positive precepts, and reaffirmed St. Thomas' teaching that only *negative* moral precepts decisively or exceptionlessly direct us *semper et pro semper*, always and on every occasion, without exception. Affirmative precepts if true are always in play, but their application is always relative to circumstances – they direct us *semper sed non pro semper*, always but not on every occasion. The *negative* precepts identifying and prohibiting intrinsically evil acts do not say merely that it is wrong to act contrary to a virtue – for example, to kill *unjustly*, or to engage in an *unchaste or impure* sex act. Rather, these precepts exclude, without exception,<sup>56</sup> “specific,” “concrete,” and “particular” *kinds of behavior*.<sup>57</sup> These kinds of behavior are excluded by the relevant negative moral precepts (and are contrary to virtue) without first being identified by their opposition to virtues, and without consideration of particular circumstances, and without regard to the good intentions someone may have for choosing to engage in behavior of this kind.

In line with his philosophy of action, which in its essentials is also St. Thomas' philosophy of action, John Paul II here makes clear that in speaking of *behavior* he does not mean behavior that might be engaged in even by someone incapable of making a free choice – performances that might be recorded on a video-camera. Rather, in explaining what is meant by “the object of a given moral act,” he makes it clear that here, when we speak of *behavior* we mean precisely the possible object of deliberate or free choices, the behavior as envisaged by the choosing subject. I have already partly quoted the passage, and repeat it now:

In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself *in the perspective of the acting person*. The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour. [...] By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.<sup>58</sup>

In short: behavior is of a morally relevant kind in virtue of *the description it has in the deliberation of a person who could choose to do it*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 52, 67, 76, and 82.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 49, 52, 70, 77, and 79–82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 78.

<sup>59</sup> Of course, this description will be affected by what the acting person assesses as needed to bring about a desired/intended state of affairs in the world. Deliberation attends to (supposed/envisaged) causal efficacy.

These paragraphs of *Veritatis Splendor* deploy the classic terminology used, but also freely departed from, by St. Thomas: intention, object, and circumstances. The key to understanding this is that the terms “intention” and “object” correlate with the terms “end” and “means”: one intends to accomplish some deed or outcome X *by* doing Y, that is, by means of Y. Here “means” refers not to some instrument but to some action (perhaps using an instrument). And so we have the set of relationships already expounded by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* and by Aquinas in his *Commentary on the Sentences*: in short, all ends (except the most ultimate) are also means, and all means (except the most initial: beginning to flex one’s muscles) are also ends.<sup>60</sup> So there is only a relative distinction between *intention* (which is, by definition, “of ends”) and *object* (which in this context is, by definition, the “chosen means”). Sometimes “intention” is used broadly to include “objects,” as in St. Thomas’ famous discussion of self-defense, in which he launches the notion of the *duplex effectus* – results that are *intended* either as end *or as means*, and results that, in the acting person’s plan and proposal are *neither* ends nor means but are foreseen and accepted as *side-effects*. In this broad sense of “intention,” the objects of a chosen act are the *close-in* intentions of the person who chose it. And sometimes, as in *Veritatis Splendor* beginning with the third sentence of section 74, “intention” is used more narrowly and distinguished from “object,” just as “ends” are distinguished from “means” even though for almost all practical purposes ends are means and means are ends.<sup>61</sup> Intentions when thus distinguished from objects are of further-out, more ultimate, aims, ends, motives.

The requirement of reason is that *all* one’s broad-sense intentions – including those that in the narrow sense are object(s) rather than intention(s) – must be in line with reason, and none of them a willing (intending or choosing) of the destruction or damaging of a fundamental human good. In that sense, there are means that no end can justify, and evils one may not choose even for the sake of good, and it is not enough to have good intentions and a just concern for long-term consequences including side-effects. *Bonum* only *ex integra causa*, *malum* *ex quocumque defectu* – from wrongness of end *or* wrongness of means *or* injustice of side-effects.

The rightness or wrongness of the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki is settled not *merely* by establishing whether the intentions were free from hatred and were concerned only with long-

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<sup>60</sup> See my *Aquinas*, 31-2, 35, 142 n. 43, 165-6, etc.

<sup>61</sup> The terminology of sections 74–82 is established in section 74: “But on what does the moral assessment of man’s free acts depend? What is it that ensures this ordering of human acts to God? Is it the *intention* of the acting subject, the *circumstances* – and in particular the consequences – of his action, or the *object* itself of his act? This is what is traditionally called the problem of the ‘sources of morality.’ Precisely with regard to this problem there have emerged in the last few decades new or newly-revived theological and cultural trends which call for careful discernment on the part of the Church’s Magisterium.” See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 74.

term human wellbeing (including Japanese wellbeing) *and* whether the medium-term consequences were in many respects fairly likely to be good. One must ask not only about intentions and circumstances but also about object: did the planners of the operation need for its success the destruction of (lots of) non-combatants and therefore choose their destruction as a means, that is, have that killing as their object (that is, in the broad sense of intention, as one of their intentions)?

I have been summarizing in the language of the tradition – fully understood from a rigorously internal, moral, never *merely* physical or behavioral point of view – what John Paul II means by *kind of behavior*, by *human act*, and by *object of the human act* when he recalls in *Veritatis Splendor* that there are:

acts which in the Church’s moral tradition have been termed “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.<sup>62</sup>

The main conclusion and central teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* is set out in section 79 and repeated almost verbatim in section 82:

*One must therefore reject the thesis, characteristic of teleological and proportionalist theories, which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species – its “object” – the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behaviour or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned.*<sup>63</sup>

As a Magisterial act, this condemnation is rested *primarily* on the revealed scripture and tradition of Christian faith.<sup>64</sup> But the Encyclical also outlines (without expounding) a philosophical critique of the relevant proportionalist or teleologist theories. Such theories propose to determine “proportions” among the “pre-moral” goods and evils expected to result from a choice, but *Veritatis Splendor* points out “the impossibility of evaluating all the good and evil consequences and effects” by any *rational* “weighing” or “measuring”.<sup>65</sup>

We might put it like this: the goods and harms which are intrinsic to persons and their associations only begin in this life, and simply cannot be weighed against one another in the way the proportionalists proposed, that is, by using one’s reason but making no use of moral standards in the process of assessing. Human providence and assessment can never soundly conclude that a choice to kill an innocent person or to engage in adultery will result in less harm overall and in the long run than the choice to refrain. Among the reasons blocking such a conclusion is a fact,

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<sup>62</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 80 (emphases in original); see also para. 81.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 79 (emphases in original).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 49, 79, and 81; see especially *1 Corinthians* 6:9-10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 77.

a truth recalled more than once in *Veritatis Splendor*, and central to *The Acting Person*. The truth is that in choosing to do acts of the kinds identified by the Christian and central philosophical tradition as intrinsically evil, one is *not only* choosing to produce the changes that *Veritatis Splendor* in section 71 calls changes “in the state of affairs outside of” the will of the acting person – the choice’s “transitive” effects, achieved by the behavior one chose as a means. One is *also* making what *Veritatis Splendor* in section 65 calls “a *decision about oneself*” – creating thus an “intransitive” effect: constituting oneself the sort of person who does such things. Unless one repents, the consequences of such self-determination continue in this world indefinitely (that is, without limit of time), and into eternity, already now. Even the this-worldly implications and results of forming such a willingness, *and of other persons’ approving of it* (and so becoming themselves conditionally willing to act likewise), entirely elude all proportionalist or consequentialist efforts to weigh and – by reason and without decisive appeal to moral principles – assess the balance of “pre-moral” good and bad consequences of the choice.

That is the relevance of such choices and acts to eternal life. And I think that the person a fragment of whose work this lecture has been considering would think this a fitting place at which to finish.