Ethos. Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL
38(2025) nr 1(149) 93-109
DOI 10.12887/38-2025-1-149-08

Adam POTKAY*

WONDER, INTUITION, ROMANTICISM
Wojtyła, Scheler, Wordsworth

Wordsworth's "unremembered" pleasure anticipates our notions of unconscious motivation. It is the unremembered pleasure of natural and moral beauty, abiding in us, that motivates equally "unremembered"—that is to say, non-Pharisaical—ethical acts. As with Scheler, the attuned or happy man is the good man. For Scheler, Wojtyła writes, "contentment or even felicity is not so much the end of the act as rather located at its very roots."

For this issue in honor of Saint John Paul II, I would like to address an antinomy of modernity that extends from Wordsworth and the Romantic era through the phenomenological writings of Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyła, and into philosophical thought today. The differing claims I have in mind are those of emotionalism and rationalism; specifically, emotional intuitionism and discursive rationality as grounds for moral and theistic values. Is the ultimate ground of value reason, as the ancients maintained, or is it sentiment, as moderns often maintain? And if one chooses feeling as the basis of values, what keeps those values from charges of mere subjectivity, of a-rationality or irrationality? If one simply intuits—or not—the value of a person or deed, how can moral disagreements be settled? And on either grounds, emotional intuition or discursive reason, is a universal morality possible?

Wojtyła, in the lectures he delivered in Lublin between 1954 and 1957, argues against Scheler's ethical emotionalism, though not against his philosophy altogether.[1] Scheler was right, he maintains, in holding we may intuitively find not only objective values but indeed the Thomistic hierarchy of values from bodily pleasure to deep holiness. But he was not right that intuitionism is a sufficient basis for ethics. For how can the passive reception of value account for the person's willing the good, his self-conscious ethical action? And is this reception of value even possible without a prior, active judgment

* Prof. Adam Potkay – Department of English, The College of William & Mary, USA, e-mail: aspotk@wm.edu [pełna nota o Autorze na końcu numeru].

[1] See Karol W o j t y ł a, *"The Lublin Lectures" and Works on Max Scheler*, ed. Antonio López et al., trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023). The critique of emotionalism first appears in Chapter 1 of "Ethical Act and Lived-Experience," 8–12. Wojtyła continues the critique in his major treatise, *The Acting Person*. See Karol W o j t y ł a, *The Acting Person*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1979), Chapter 6, section 4, 232–40.

about what a value is? Wojtyła might have noted that these problems extend, in some sense, back to late-eighteenth-century English and German Romantic poets, from whom I shall concentrate here on William Wordsworth. But as a poet himself, Wojtyła knew that the reverential mysteries of poetry can disclose a different sphere than argumentative philosophy. As a philosophical phenomenologist, it is incumbent on Scheler to explain how one can get from knowing values (cognition) to actively *willing* those values (volition), and for Wojtyła Scheler's philosophy is unable to do so; it is the will, and the agent's self-actualization in willing as well as judging the good, that Wojtyła himself emphasizes in his early lectures through to his major treatise, *The Acting Person* (Polish edition, 1969).

What I suggest in this essay, however, is that Karol Wojtyła, as poet and philosopher, appreciates the power of moral and finally theistic intuition, and particularly the *wonder* or reverent amazement we may experience *in* the natural ordering of things and, from there, inferences *about* God's wisdom and grace in creating it. In this he concurs with Scheler—indeed, with Aquinas—and also with the Romantics who rooted moral value in intuition or intimation. However insufficient he may have found emotionalism's claims as a totalizing philosophy, he nonetheless entertains emotional intuition's more limited role as "creative and rich in consequences for cognition of human reality."[2] Or as he claims with open-ended suggestiveness, "the spontaneous ability to feel values is the basis for many human talents."[3]

Such a claim accords with the Thomism that anchors Wojtyła's thought. Wonder is key to Aquinas's picture of the contemplative life, which rises above the active life in offering a foretaste of the eternal beatitude. The twentieth-century Thomist Josef Pieper defines contemplation as "a form of knowing arrived at not by thinking but by seeing, intuition"[4]; it is a form of knowing accompanied, first and last, with "amazement,"[5] ultimately in the God who "can appear 'before the eyes' of one whose gaze is directed toward the depth of things."[6]

---

[2] The larger context for this claim involves "the cross currents of a certain passiveness and the proper activeness of the personal ego.... When judging, when formulating judgments, the ego has the experience of himself as an agent—of the one who acts—of the act itself of cognizing. But we may also cognitively experience directly the value of the object of cognition. The subject—the ego—then remains as if absorbing this value, 'contemplating' it and passive rather than active.... These occasions are of extreme importance: they are creative and rich in consequences for the cognition of human reality" (W o j t y ł a, *The Acting Person*, 147).

[3] Ibidem, 234.

[4] Josef P i e p e r, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 73–74.

[5] Ibidem, 75.

[6] Ibidem, 79.

And yet the relation of wonder to knowledge is variable. Wonder is, in the first place, an emotional attitude, an intuition. Descartes considered it a passion—that is, something in relation to which we (as rational agents) are passive—and differentiated it from other passions (such as love, hatred) in that it need involve no clear cognition or value judgment: it can "happen before we have any knowledge of whether the thing is beneficial to us or not."[7] Jeff Malpas aptly distinguishes two types of wondering: to wonder *at* and to wonder *about*.[8] The first of these may be called simple wonder; the second is a motive to knowledge. To wonder at, for Malpas, recalls the primordial experience of things shining forth into the world, parts or aspects of the world coming into presence—for example, our intuitive response to a rainbow. To wonder about is a form of questioning, the striving for an explanation, and as such the basis of philosophical curiosity (it is this utility of wonder that Descartes, and most philosophers, tend to approve).[9] But the two aspects of wonder are not mutually exclusive. Malpas argues that wonder about "does not exhaust the original wonder from which it may have arisen"[10]; "wonder is, in fact, consistent with both ignorance and understanding."[11] The wonder at home in non-understanding is dubbed "existential wonder"[12] in an earlier paper by R. W. Hepburn: the wonder that something should be, at being itself rather than nothingness. Hepburn writes, "the object [of this wonder] is the sheer existence of a world.... All reasons fall away: wondering is not a prelude to fuller knowledge, though the generalized interrogative attitude may persist."[13]

The dual senses of wonder go back, in the philosophical tradition, to Plato: in *Theaetetus*, Socrates says to the title character, "wonder [*thaumazein*] is the only beginning of philosophy, and he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumas made a good genealogy."[14] That is, wonder may lead us to seek philo-

---

[7] René Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul" (1649), Part 2, section 53, in René Descartes, *"The Passions of the Soul" and Other Late Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 220.

[8] Jeff Malpas, "Beginning in Wonder," typescript paper posted online by the author. See Jeff Malpas, https://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/Beginning-in-Wonder.pdf. I quote here from pp. 2–3.

[9] The usefulness of wonder is stressed from Descartes to, most recently, Helen De Cruz. See Helen De Cruz, *Wonderstruck: How Wonder and Awe Shape the Way We Think* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

[10] Malpas, "Beginning in Wonder," 3.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] R. W. Hepburn, "The Inaugural Address: Wonder," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 54, no. 1 (1980): 10.

[13] Ibidem. For a recent meditation on existential wonder, see Maria Balaska, *Anxiety and Wonder: On Being Human* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

[14] Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 55. Iris is the goddess of the rainbow and the messenger of heaven, and Plato interprets the name of her father (*thauma*) as "wonder".

sophical explanations (wonder about); but it may also prompt us to wonder *at* the rainbow (Iris) as it shines forth in the sky, the mythical daughter of simple wonder itself. It is this latter, existential wonder that is revived in Scheler's phenomenology of religious experience. Julian Young summarizes and quotes from Scheler's 1921 work *On the Eternal in Man*:

> Scheler takes what is fundamental to phenomenology to be an 'attitude' because he takes phenomenological seeing to presuppose an emotional, indeed moral, relation to the world. Only someone who stands in this relation is capable of phenomenological seeing. The Greeks called this attitude ... *thaumazein* ... [which] Scheler ... together with his [later admirer] Heidegger thinks of ... as a reverential kind of 'wonder.' What then is wonder? It consists, says Scheler, in "a willingness to be dominated rather than to dominate, to bathe in the richness of being rather than to impoverish being by seeking control of it for the sake of one's own subjective assurance." From "the emotional point of view" it consists in "a *surrender* of the self to the intuitional content of things as a profound trust in the unshakeableness of all that is simply *given*, as a courageous letting-go in intuition and in *the loving movement* towards the world in its capacity for being intuited. This philosophy faces the world with the out-stretched gesture of the open hand and the wide-eyed gaze of wonder."[15]

In these passages on intuition and wonder, Scheler writes far more like a poet than a positivist philosopher—a trait that his admirer Heidegger, in his later writings, will also adopt.[16] Karol Wojtyła engaged this wonder less in his philosophy than in his poetry proper, from his first published literary work ("Song of the Hidden God,"[17] 1946) through to his 2003 collection as John Paul II, *The Roman Triptych: Meditations*.[18] In that first collection, the poet expresses his "gratitude" to nature, to sea and sun, and to the Lord he fears he does not love warmly enough:

---

[15] Julian Young, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 134–35. See also Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. B. Noble (London: Routledge, 2017), 74–75, 98. Scheler's immense body of writing—Young estimates two million published words (see Young, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 129)—makes analytic summaries most welcome. The work of Scheler chiefly cited by Karol Wojtyła is *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*. See Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1916). Its English translation is *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*. See Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[16] See Martin Heidegger, "In Memoriam Max Scheler," in Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), 50–52.

[17] See Karol Wojtyła, "Pieśń o Bogu ukrytym" / "Song of the Hidden God," in Karol Wojtyła, *Poezje / Poems*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), 6–43.

[18] See *The Poetry of John Paul II: Roman Triptych; Meditations*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003).

But accept, Lord, the wonder that leaps from my heart—
as a brook leaps up from its source—
a sign that heat may yet burn.
So, Lord, do not spurn
even that cool wonderment.
One day you will nourish it with a burning stone:
a flame in my mouth.[19]

Published almost sixty years later, *The Roman Triptych* begins with a section titled "Wonderment":

The undulating wood slopes down
to the rhythm of mountain streams.
To me this rhythm is revealing You,
the Eternal Word.

How amazing is Your silence
in everything, in all that on every side
unveils the world of creation about us...
all that, like the undulating wood,
runs down every slope...
all that is carried along
by the stream's silvery cascade,
rhythmically falling from the mountain,
carried by its own current—
carried where?

What do you say to me, mountain stream?
Where do you encounter me?
as I wend my own way—
just like you...
But really like you?

(Here let me pause;
let me halt before a threshold,
the threshold of pure wonder).
The rushing stream cannot wonder,
as it descends, and the woods silently slope,
following its rhythm
—but man can wonder!
The threshold which the world crosses in him
is the threshold of wonder.
(Once this very wonder was given a name "Adam").[20]

[19] W o j t y ł a, "Pieśń o Bogu ukrytym" / "Song of the Hidden God," 40–42. "A burning stone" appears to be an allusion to Isaiah 6:6-7, where the prophet has a burning coal placed on his tongue to cleanse his lips.

[20] *The Poetry of John Paul II: Roman Triptych*, 7–8.

Wojtyła's "pure wonder" corresponds to Malpas's original wonder, wondering at. It is infused with the intuitive sense that natural objects are a good, harmonious parts of a stable, divinely-infused system: "To me this rhythm is revealing You." But original wonder for the poem's speaker is only a willed suspension of interrogative wonder ("but really like you?"), poised at the entry into morals and Christian eschatology. The poem continues, in the section "The First to See," on another threshold, that of the Sistine Chapel, where the speaker will wonder at the body and the artistic representation of the body, both of which we see or intuit as good:

> I stand at the entrance of the Sistine Chapel.
> Perhaps all this might have been said more simply
> in the language of the Book of Genesis.
> But the Book awaits its illustration.—And rightly
> It awaited its Michelangelo.
>
> The One who created "saw"—He saw that "it was good."[21]

"We enter [the chapel] in order to read it, / Passing from wonder to wonder"[22] on a teleological path to Michaelangelo's Final Judgment and then the Final Judgment itself. The progress of *The Roman Triptych* is from simple wonder in the world as the first threshold to the church, the antechapel being human art, and the full church Christian history—and the end of history.

This teleology is Scheler's too—until, in 1922, he renounced Catholicism and his earlier claims on its behalf as a potential unifying force for a renewed Europe. His final work, *Man's Place in Nature*[23] (1928), turns to an immanent God and pantheism that somewhat resembles Spinoza's but that is closer in its lack of philosophical rigor to the poet Wordsworth's.[24] Julian Young argues that Scheler here abandons philosophy proper for a subjective "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*) that he hopes his readers will accept as true, without offering arguments for why we should. He envisions a world spirit moving through nature and world-history and tending towards the realization of the objective hierarchy of values in which he continued to believe. Which is to say, Scheler ends back at Romanticism. And here I turn more completely to the value and limits of poetic, non-demonstrative evocation of moral values.

Wordsworth, who produced his most important writings between 1795 and 1805, was the preeminent poet of the country deemed by Scheler the most woe-

[21] Ibidem, 14.

[22] Ibidem, 15.

[23] See Max S c h e l e r, *Man's Place in Nature*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962). See also Max S c h e l e r, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Bern: A. Francke A.G., 1928).

[24] I am indebted here to Julian Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 154–63.

fully "disenchanted," to borrow Max Weber's phrase.[25] England, at the head of the first industrial revolution (coal, steam engines and steel), represented to many German philosophers of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the perilous forces of commercial, materialist, and scientistic modernity.[26] But Wordsworth, critics have long since seen, was the great English poet of re-enchantment, of wondering at.[27] He offers no moral science, but rather a moral art, a way of tutoring his reader's ethical intuitions through description of the contemplative mind in nature. For Wordsworth, as for Scheler, simple wonder in nature is less a threshold and more a part of the church; it is, as in Scheler, a moral response, or a response that may or ought to have moral consequences.

But what if someone else doesn't have such responses? In his ground-breaking 1798 collection *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth includes two companion poems, "Expostulation and Reply"[28] and "The Tables Turned,"[29] that dramatize the difficulties of moral agreement between different experiential values: rational-active life and emotional-contemplative life. "Expostulation and Reply" opens with an adversarial figure who criticizes the poet's ("William's") inactivity:

> "Why William, on that old grey stone,
> Thus for the length of half a day,
> Why William, sit you thus alone,
> And dream your time away?"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "You look round on your mother earth

[25] See Max W e b e r, "Science and Politics," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 138–39; on Weberian disenchantment see also Julian Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Weber to Heidegger* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 14–17. For Scheler's opposition to England as the locus of Benthamism or "hedonic utilitarianism," see Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 131, 140, 149–50.

[26] David Cannadine notes that the United Kingdom fell behind competitor nations during the second, petrochemical and electrical revolution of the early twentieth century: the age of combustible engines, manned flight, and wireless radio. See David C a n n a d i n e, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800-1906* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2018), 515–16.

[27] Wordsworth is the focal point of major studies of Romantics re-enchantment from M. H. Abrams to Charles Taylor. See, e.g., M. H. A b r a m s, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971); Charles T a y l o r, *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2024); Gavin H o p p s, *Enchantment in Romantic Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025).

[28] See William W o r d s w o r t h, "Expostulation and Reply," in Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (New York: Routledge, 1991), 104–105. My quotations are from this, reprinted, 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The poems I cite were revised by the poet for subsequent editions.

[29] See William W o r d s w o r t h, "The Tables Turned," in Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 105–106.

As if she for no purpose bore you;
As if you were her first-born birth,
And none had lived before you!"[30]

The active figure finds the poet's Adamic wonderment inappropriate for a man who is not Adam (recall Wojtyła's line, quoted above: "Once this very wonder was given a name 'Adam'"). He urges purposive activity: books to be read and things to be done. William responds in defense of his contemplative *otium*, deeming "that there are powers, / Which of themselves our minds impress, / That we can feed this mind of ours, / In a wise passiveness."[31] The adversarial figure does not reply. This conversation poem contains only point and counterpoint, two apparently incommensurable views, and any synthesis between them depends on the reader.

The Romantic-contemplative mode involves being in nature, typically in a natural terrain, with things (to anticipate Heidegger) "present at hand," available for disinterested contemplation, rather than "ready to hand," objects of practical use or purpose[32]. Receptive wonder prompts us, as Scheler put it, to "bathe in the richness of being rather than to impoverish being by seeking to control it."[33] In Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned," the sole speaker—the adversary is silenced—revels in the details of his natural setting (declining sun, mellow light, singing birds) and concludes with claims about wonder's moral effects that may or may not ring true:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
We murder to dissect.

Enough of science and of art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.[34]

[30] W o r d s w o r t h, "Expostulation and Reply," 104.
[31] Ibidem, 104.
[32] Quoted in Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 136.
[33] Quoted in Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 135.
[34] W o r d s w o r t h, "The Tables Turned," 106.

Wordsworth's ballad rhythm here is enchanting, but our "meddling intellect" may nonetheless ask: how can nature's "impulses" teach? What do they teach, and what follows from that teaching? Can emotional intuitionism serve as the basis of an ethics? Even if one posits our ability to absorb values from nature or the essences of things, how can these values lead to ethical activity—specifically, to willingly performing duties or fulfilling obligations?

Scheler, for his part, opposed his philosophy to the deontic philosophy of Kant with its centrality of duty, self-legislated categorical imperatives—a formally rational system built on "thou shall" and "thou shall not." Contra Kant, Scheler eschews an ethics of categorical commands, calling these "negativism in ethical life"[35]: prohibitions clearly refer to negative values, but even positive commands pertain to "the absence of that value in life."[36] "In ethical life, however, one ought to strive to experience positive values, and, therefore, he must remove commands and exclude duty and obligation. Values alone must suffice."[37] For Scheler, the good could be loved and absorbed on its own, without the negativity of evil. He considered unadulterated joy and love to be the deepest sources of moral value and also moral action.[38]

Scheler's assumptions are reflected in Wordsworth's poems. In a poem beginning "It is the first mild day of March,"[39] Wordsworth writes:

> Love, now a universal birth,
> From heart to heart is stealing,
> From earth to man, from man to earth:
> —It is the hour of feeling.
>
> One moment now may give us more
> Than fifty years of reason:
> Our minds shall drink at every pore
> The spirit of the season.
>
> Some silent laws our hearts may make,
> Which they shall long obey:
> We for the year to come may take
> Our temper from to-day.[40]

[35] W o j t y ł a, "The Lublin Lectures," in *"The Lublin Lectures" and Works on Max Scheler*, 13.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] Ibidem.

[38] See Y o u n g, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*, 138.

[39] The poem has different titles, neither of them very helpful: in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) it appeared as "Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed," and was later retitled "To My Sister." My reading of the poem here borrows from my book *Wordsworth's Ethics*. See Adam P o t k a y, *Wordsworth's Ethics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 157.

[40] William W o r d s w o r t h, "It is the first mild day of March," in Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 59.

"Laws" here emerge spontaneously, through love, from the heart, and it is the heart (not the person, not the will) that just as spontaneously obeys it. The heart, attuned to world-encompassing love, is unconstrained by anything outside itself or the yoke of any duty. Kant is, as it were, turned upside down.

Still, one might ask: how does one pass from feeling to any kind of act? Wordsworth makes such a passage feel possible, without having to offer specifics, in his great ode, "Lines written a few miles above [upstream of] Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." Upon revisiting an arresting landscape that he had first beheld five years earlier, he recalls the influence his earlier absorption of that natural beauty "may" have had on him:

> Though absent long,
> These forms of beauty have not been to me,
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind
> With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
> As may have had no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.[41]

Wordsworth's "unremembered" pleasure anticipates our notions of unconscious motivation. It is the unremembered pleasure of natural and moral beauty, abiding in us, that motivates equally "unremembered"—that is to say, non-Pharisaical—ethical acts. As with Scheler, the attuned or happy man is the good man. For Scheler, Wojtyła writes, "contentment or even felicity is not so much the end of the act as rather located at its very roots."[42]

Having staked out the roots of kind acts in the receptive heart, Wordsworth continues on to a theistic intuition in the first of his poem's pantheistic or panentheistic passages:

> Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,

[41] William W o r d s w o r t h, "Lines written a few miles above [upstream of] Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798," in Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 114.

[42] W o j t y ł a, "The Lublin Lectures," 250.

In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.[43]

His second and still more wonderous intuition of God's being all in all occurs in the poem's effective climax:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.[44]

Scheler, in his last years, turned to a similarly intuitive pantheism—"I have felt / A presence." But working in the opposite direction from Scheler, Wordsworth passed from his pantheistic phase to Christian communion in the Church of England. He did so because of a belated recognition of evil. Evil, Wojtyła argues, was Scheler's own blind spot: his exclusion of duty from ethical life, his avoiding feelings of negative values, "makes sense only when the person neither carries in himself such negative values nor tends to them in any way.

[43] W o r d s w o r t h, "Lines written a few miles above [upstream of] Tintern Abbey...," 114.
[44] Ibidem, 116.

Otherwise, one ought to strive to overcome them—that is, he ought to will that."[45] Similarly to Scheler, Wordsworth, in his autobiographical epic, *The Prelude*[46] (first version completed 1805), is prepared to see evil as illusory, a misnomer: his own development, he claims, has been based on "the adverse principles of pain and joy-- / Evil as one [pain] is rashly named by those / Who know not what they say"[47]. His epic is, he concludes, "Attempered to the sorrows of the earth-- / Yet centring all in love, and in the end / All gratulant [producing joy] if rightly understood."[48] After 1805, however, Wordsworth admitted that substantial evil exists, and his hope gradually became orthodox. In the last stage of composing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's ship-captain brother John died in a shipwreck, and the poet's correspondence reveals his grappling with the reality of natural evil and his struggle to accept Christian hope in God's justice and the eternal life granted to the righteous.[49] Wordsworth's hope shifts from the receding horizon of something evermore about to be to a determinate aim: eternal life in heaven, thanks to the grace of God. In 1807, Wordsworth published a very different sort of poem than those he had written before: his *Ode to Duty.*[50] Its title alone suffices. In 1822, he published *Ecclesiastical Sketches*,[51] a sonnet sequence on the history of Christianity in England.

Karol Wojtyła was early grounded in Catholicism and would ascend to a celebrated papacy and, in 2014, canonization. His status in the Church is indubitable and the value of his philosophical writings, some of them from seventy-five years ago, is reaffirmed by scholarly republication and by new readers—myself included. As a philosopher, Wojtyła engaged with and arguably improved on Scheler, whose emotionalism proved a stumbling block. Yet as a creative writer, he did not lose sight of the vivid irrationality of man, his non-comprehended actions, and the wonder of his emotional being.

---

[45] W o j t y ł a, "The Lublin Lectures," 13.

[46] See William W o r d s w o r t h, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979).

[47] Ibidem, 1805 text, Book 13, v. 147–49, 466.

[48] Ibidem, v. 383–85, 478.

[49] Subsequent to his brother's death, Wordsworth on 12 March 1805 wrote to Sir George Beaumont a heart-felt letter on the problem of evil and his acceptance of a Christian afterlife which is quoted, with useful commentary, in Stephen G i l l, *Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 239–41. I borrow here from materials in my article "Wordsworth's Hope." See Adam Potkay, "Wordsworth's Hope," *The Wordsworth Circle* 50, no. 3 (2019): 265–89. For a shorter version, see Adam P o t k a y, *Hope: A Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 170–86.

[50] See William W o r d s w o r t h, "Ode to Duty," in William Wordsworth, *"Poems, in Two Volumes," and Other Poems*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 303–09.

[51] See William W o r d s w o r t h, "Ecclesiastical Sketches," in William Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 127–304.

While the world and earth were for him thresholds of wonder, I think Wojtyła wondered most at the human person. In his dramatic poem *The Jeweler's Shop* (1960),[52] the voice of the pastor and theologian may be heard; but while the Love that surpasses all other loves is enjoined repeatedly (by a mysterious "Adam"), it never cancels the terrible wonder of the human for whom love and freedom are problems as well as promise.[53] "Numberless are the world's wonders, but none more wonderful than man"[54] begins a famous speech in Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Prince Hamlet counters with the no-less famous speech, "What a piece of work is a man!"[55]—which ends by deflating the wonders of human reason, faculties and form to an impression of dust. The Jeweler of Wojtyła's drama, who crafts marital destinies as well as wedding rings, marvels at human complexity and contrarieties in verse of reflexive complexity:

> Ah, the proper weight of man!
> This rift, this tangle, this ultimate depth—
> this clinging, when it is so hard
> to unstick heart and thought.
> And in all this—freedom,
> a freedom, and sometimes frenzy,
> the frenzy of freedom trapped in this tangle.
> And in all this—love,
> which springs from freedom,
> as water springs from an oblique rift in the earth.
> This is man! He is not transparent,
> not monumental,
> not simple,
> in fact he is poor.[56]

---

[52] See Karol W o j t y l a, *The Jeweler's Shop: A Meditation on the Sacrament of Matrimony, Passing on Occasion into a Drama*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980).

[53] It is the mysterious character Adam—partly priest, partly his Biblical namesake—who repeatedly urges higher Love (see ibidem, 63–66, 88). For the Jeweler's "proper weight of man" speech, see ibidem, 37–38. Its relation to the Ode on wonder in *Antigone* is suggested in Taborski's Introduction. See ibidem xiv–xv. For recent thoughts on *The Jeweler's Shop* in relation to contemporary cinema, see Kathleen Elizabeth U r d a, "Eros and Contemplation: The Catholic Vision of Terrence Malick's *To the Wonder*," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 19, no.1 (2016): 130–47.

[54] S o p h o c l e s, "Antigone," trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald, in Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), 199.

[55] William S h a k e s p e a r e, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 75.

[56] W o j t y l a, *The Jeweler's Shop*, 18–19.

Rift and tangle, heart and thought, freedom and frenzy, transparency and greatness—these latter both negated—the Jeweler shows us a wonder that is neither simple nor a joy. The speech is a final reminder that feeling and reason, ignorance and understanding are at the root not only of wonder, but of humanity, its arts, and its philosophy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / BIBLIOGRAFIA

Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: Norton, 1971.

Balaska, Maria. *Anxiety and Wonder: On Being Human*. London: Bloomsbury, 2024.

Cannadine, David. *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800-1906*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2018.

De Cruz, Helen. *Wonderstruck: How Wonder and Awe Shape the Way We Think*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024.

Descartes, René. "The Passions of the Soul." In René Descartes, *"The Passions of the Soul" and Other Late Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Gill, Stephen. *Wordsworth: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Hepburn, R. W. "The Inaugural Address: Wonder." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 54, no. 1 (1980): 1–23.

Hopps, Gavin. *Enchantment in Romantic Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025.

[John Paul II.] *The Poetry of John Paul II: Roman Triptych; Meditations*. Translated by Jerzy Peterkiewicz. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003.

Malpas, Jeff. "Beginning in Wonder." Jeff Malpass. https://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/Beginning-in-Wonder.pdf.

Pieper, Josef. *Happiness and Contemplation*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Pantheon, 1958.

Plato, *Theaetetus*. Translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921.

Potkay, Adam. *Hope: A Literary History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Potkay, Adam. *Wordsworth's Ethics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Potkay, Adam. "Wordsworth's Hope." *The Wordsworth Circle* 50, no. 3 (2019): 265–89.

Scheler, Max. *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*. Translated by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Scheler, Max. *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1916.
Scheler, Max. *Man's Place in Nature*. Translated by Hans Meyerhoff. New York: The Noonday Press, 1962.
Scheler, Max. *On the Eternal in Man*. Translated by Bernard Noble. London: Routledge, 2017.
Scheler, Max. *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. Bern: A. Francke A.G., 1928.
Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.
Sophocles. "Antigone." Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*. Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949.
Taylor, Charles. *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2024.
Urda, Kathleen Elizabeth. "Eros and Contemplation: The Catholic Vision of Terrence Malick's *To the Wonder*." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 19, no.1 (2016): 130–47.
Weber, Max. "Science and Politics." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited and translated by Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.
Wojtyła, Karol. *The Acting Person*. Edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: R. Reidel Publishing, 1979.
Wojtyla, Karol. *The Jeweler's Shop: A Meditation on the Sacrament of Matrimony, Passing on Occasion into a Drama*. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980.
Wojtyła, Karol. "The Lublin Lectures." In *"The Lublin Lectures" and Works on Max Scheler*. Edited by Antonio López et al. Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023.
Wojtyła, Karol. *"The Lublin Lectures" and Works on Max Scheler*. Edited by Antonio López et al. Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023.
Wojtyła, Karol. "Pieśń o Bogu ukrytym" / "Song of the Hidden God." In Wojtyła, *Poezje / Poems*. Translated by Jerzy Peterkiewicz. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998.
Wordsworth, William. "Expostulation and Reply." In Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Wordsworth, William. "It is the first mild day of March." In Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Wordsworth, William. "Lines written a few miles above [upstream of] Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." In Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Wordsworth, William. "Ode to Duty." In Wordsworth, *"Poems, in Two Volumes," and Other Poems*. Edited by Jared Curtis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*. Edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1979.
Wordsworth, William. *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*. Edited by Geoffrey Jackson. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
Wordsworth, William. "The Tables Turned." In Wordsworth & Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Young, Julian. *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss*. New York: Routledge, 2021.
Young, Julian. *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Weber to Heidegger*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Adam POTKAY, Wonder, Intuition, Romanticism: Wojtyła, Scheler, Wordsworth
DOI 10.12887/38-2025-1-149-08

This essay addresses an antinomy of modernity that extends from William Wordsworth and the Romantic era through the phenomenological writings of Max Scheler (1874–1928) and Karol Wojtyła, and into philosophical thought today: the differing claims of emotional intuitionism and discursive rationality as grounds for moral and theistic values. Although Wojtyła argues against Scheler's ethical emotionalism as a sufficient basis for ethics, as a poet as well as philosopher he appreciates the power of moral and finally theistic intuition and particularly the wonder or reverent amazement we may experience in the natural ordering of things. In this he concurs with Scheler—indeed, with Aquinas—and also with the Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, who rooted moral value in intuition or intimation. However insufficient he may have found emotionalism's claims as a totalizing philosophy, he entertains emotional intuition's more limited role as "creative and rich in consequences for cognition of human reality."

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, Max Scheler, William Wordsworth, wonder, Romanticism, ethical intuitionism, phenomenology

Contact: Department of English, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, The College of William & Mary, Tucker Hall 137, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185, USA
E.mail: aspotk@wm.edu
Phone: +1 757 2213914
http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/aspotk
https://wm.academia.edu/AdamPotkay

Adam POTKAY – Zdziwienie, intuicja, romantyzm. Wojtyła, Scheler, Wordsworth
DOI 10.12887/38-2025-1-149-08

W eseju podjęta została problematyka charakteryzującej nowoczesność antynomii, która rozwija się od czasów Williama Wordswortha oraz epoki romantyzmu, poprzez fenomenologiczną myśl Maxa Schelera (1874-1928), sięgając współczesnej myśli filozoficznej. Antynomia ta dotyczy stanowisk intuicjonizmu emocjonalnego i dyskursywnego racjonalizmu, które wysuwają wzajemnie przeciwstawne roszczenia w kwestii tego, co stanowi podstawę wartości moralnych oraz źródło poznania Boga. Chociaż Wojtyła dyskutuje z poglądem Schelera, według którego emotywizm etyczny stanowi wystarczającą podstawę etyki, jako poeta, a także jako filozof, docenia intuicję moralną oraz rolę intuicji w poznaniu Boga, w szczególności zaś doświadczenie zdziwienia czy też poczucia głębokiego szacunku dla naturalnego porządku rzeczy. Myśl Wojtyły zbiega się w tym punkcie z poglądem Schelera – a w istocie nawet z myślą Tomasza z Akwinu oraz z intuicjami poetów romantycznych, w tym Wordswortha, który wartość moralną wyprowadzał z intuicji i głosu wewnętrznego. Jeśli nawet – w przekonaniu Wojtyły – intuicjonizm emocjonalny nie jest stanowiskiem pozwalającym zbudować system filozoficzny jako taki, to dopuszcza on ograniczoną rolę momentów intuicji emocjonalnej jako „niezmiernie ważnych, twórczych i wzbogacających".

Tłumaczenie *Dorota Chabrajska*

Słowa kluczowe: Karol Wojtyła, Jan Paweł II, Max Scheler, William Wordsworth, zdziwienie, romantyzm, intuicjonizm etyczny, fenomenologia

Kontakt: Department of English, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, The College of William & Mary, Tucker Hall 137, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185, USA
E.mail: aspotk@wm.edu
Tel. +1 757 2213914
http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/aspotk
https://wm.academia.edu/AdamPotkay