



FROM THE EDITORS

MORALITY IS THE SOUL OF CULTURE

The present volume of *Ethos*, which we commend to our Readers, addresses the heart of the idea which inspired the founders of the journal. Their objective was to look critically at contemporary culture from the perspective of the thought of Karol Wojtyła, the philosopher, and Pope John Paul II. Culture was a recurrent theme in his works, and—one might say—central to his reflection. Tadeusz Styczeń, a disciple of Wojtyła's, aptly described him as “a philosopher of human concerns,”¹ since it is the human being—a being unique in the whole world—that creates culture. Indeed, throughout his philosophical oeuvre, Wojtyła strove to understand the specificity of human life and action. He asked: Who is a human being? What makes human beings become more and more human? What helps them actualize the potentialities inherent in their nature? It was not without a reason that Wojtyła entitled his main philosophical work *Person and Act*²; he wished to emphasize that what is called “act”, i.e., a specifically human activity, best expresses who the person is; as it were, an act provides a ‘window’ through which one can gain insight into her inner life.

Obviously, not all acts of a person contribute to her authentic fulfilment; some may lead even to her destruction. Consequently, another important issue in Wojtyła's philosophical and theological reflection was culture, the key theme of the present volume of *Ethos*. In his address to the UNESCO on June 2, 1980, John Paul II said: “Culture is specific way of man's ‘existing’ and ‘being.’ ... Culture is that through which man as man becomes more man, ‘is’ more, has more access to ‘being.’”³ If this is the case, morality, or, more precisely, moral goodness accomplished by man is the soul of culture. As Stanisław Judy-

¹ Tadeusz Styczeń, “Karol Kardynał Wojtyła: filozof spraw ludzkich; W 25-lecie objęcia wykładów etyki na KUL,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 38 (1600) (1979): 7.

² See Karol Wojtyła “Person and Act,” trans. Grzegorz Ignatik, in Wojtyła “*Person and Act*” and *Related Essays* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 94–416. See also: Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Boston and London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

³ John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, Paris, June 2, 1980, *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science*, <https://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>.

cki explained in his article “Moral Good and Evil as a Test for Human Souls” included in the present volume, by doing good, the person herself becomes good, which determines her self-fulfillment as person.

Thus the issue of morality lies at the very core of culture. Yet what makes an act performed by a person good? What makes a person herself good? Wojtyła addresses such questions in his theory of ethical personalism by showing that moral goodness results from the affirmation of the person—both of another person and of the acting subject as such—for the sake of the value inherent in the person; this value is also called personal dignity. Wojtyła writes: “The person is a kind of being such that only love constitutes the proper and fully-mature relation to it.”⁴ In the language of ethics one might say: to do justice to a person means to affirm her for her own sake.

The questions posed in the present volume of *Ethos* are the following: Is the person affirmed (in the sense explained above) in contemporary culture? Does modern culture encourage the person’s self-fulfillment or rather hinders such a process? Can one say that thanks to contemporary culture, as John Paul II would put it, man becomes more man?

Answers to these questions are complex. Above all, it is necessary to note that there is no homogenous contemporary culture. Obviously, in cultures of all times, one can find certain dominant motifs, but a culture necessarily embraces also foreign trends that may come to the fore in subsequent periods. In addition, the development of a culture cannot be represented as a steady linear progress. It is not the case that our contemporary culture is better than the cultures of the eras that preceded it. Undoubtedly, our Western culture has advanced science and technology and can be considered successful in this respect. But has this development contributed to man becoming more man? There are good reasons to doubt it. At times, as Rocco Buttiglione indicates in his paper “A Different Modernity,” technological control exercised by man over the world of objects has been, as it were, reversed and resulted in a reification of man, in reducing him to a mere object of manipulation. In other words, scientific and technological progress provides human beings with tools that may be used in various ways—to the advantage, but also to the detriment of man. Again, it becomes clear that it is the moral quality of human action that constitutes the very core of culture.

There is still another aspect of contemporary culture that must be kept in mind. When we speak of scientific, technological culture what we mean is mainly Western culture. However, despite the powerful influence the West has exerted on the world, there are other cultures which, one might rightly claim,

⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 26.

live by values different than those cherished by our Western world. While reflecting on contemporary culture, we must not forget those other cultures. For instance, in the present volume, Krzysztof Wiak discusses contemporary threats to the civilization of life, as seen in the light of the teaching of John Paul II. Indeed, the term the pope used in his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* to describe the culture of the contemporary West is a “culture of death.”⁵

In the scientific, technological culture, human life is threatened both at its beginning and at its end. Obviously, in non-Western cultures human life is also jeopardized in a variety of ways, yet phenomena such as abortion or euthanasia are characteristic of our Western culture, which, in fact, spares no effort in spreading them beyond its boundaries.

Regardless of all the discussions and dilemmas on which contemporary culture feeds, it is necessary to remember that culture cannot be seen as the ultimate criterion of good and evil. Every culture measures up to something else, and the measure in question is provided by the nature of things. The Western scientific, technological civilization has long neglected this measure, which led to the crisis we call ecological. To describe our contemporary culture Joseph Ratzinger used the strong expression “dictatorship of relativism,”⁶ where the only measure of things is the human being indulging in satisfying his or her whims. It turned out, however, that human beings cannot treat the world solely as an object being there for them to use. Following the thought of John Paul II, one might say that the world has its inherent primary form which one must respect while building up on it, as if on a foundation, a second, humanly made form.

Many of the dilemmas faced by contemporary Western culture take their root from the fact that it remains under the dictatorship of relativism, since its mainstream has rejected the idea that the human being has an inherent nature which needs to be cultivated (the word ‘culture’ comes from the Latin *colere*, meaning ‘to cultivate’), that only in this way can the authentic human good be attained, and that only in this way can man as man become more man human.

Jarosław Merecki

Translated by Patrycja Mikulska

⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, Sections 12, 19, 21, 24, 26, 28, 50, 64, 87, 95, 100, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, Homily during the Holy Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, Vatican, April 18, 2005, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

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With the present volume, we wish to bid farewell to Leszek Mądzik, who passed away this March 18. His commitment to fundamental, deeply human values made his work a great contribution to contemporary culture. To the very end, he was a faithful friend of quarterly *Ethos* and member of its Editorial Board. He was an irreplaceable designer of all the covers of our journal. As his demise prevented him from preparing the visual setting for the present volume, it is appearing in the cover designed by this outstanding artist for the first issue of *Ethos*. We will always remember Leszek Mądzik with gratitude.

We also wish to pay our tribute to Rev. Dr. Hubert Ordon, SDS, who left us this March 13. The demise of Father Ordon gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude for his conscientious work at the John Paul II Institute, where he acted as secretary in 1995–2000. We knew him as a faithful friend and a ‘guardian angel’ to the then Director and the founder of the John Paul II Institute, Fr. Prof. Tadeusz Styczeń, SDS. Having secured Father Ordon’s employment at the Institute, Father Styczeń found the support of his confrere invaluable. Father Ordon was in charge of organization, logistics, and economic issues, and looked after the members of the Institute as a father cares for his home. He remained a true friend of the John Paul II Institute also after his well-deserved retirement. He was committed heart and soul to *Ethos: Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL*. He appreciated its importance and the need to retain its original idea and form, according to the wishes of the Pope. We will keep Father Ordon in our grateful memory.

Editors