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## JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY REREAD IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

*Digital anthropology provided by AI systems is not necessarily opposed to the anthropology worked out by Wojtyła or the theology of the body developed against it; on the contrary, it can become one of the tools used in the search for answers to the question: Who is the human being, and who should the human being become? Digital anthropology can follow the example of Wojtyła's anthropology and thus be more formative than demonstrative.*

Olga Tokarczuk, the Polish psychologist and writer who was awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature, once wrote, "Whatever happens to you, happens to me."<sup>1</sup> This very thought of a person representing the liberal-atheistic trend resonates with the words of the Christian philosopher and theologian Karol Wojtyła: "For I do not have another access to the other man as an 'I' except through my own 'I'."<sup>2</sup> Not only are these two thoughts separated by forty years, but above all, they are also divided by the adopted methodology of the perception of human beings, often obscured by ideological, cultural, and religious preferences, sometimes simply by emotions, stereotypes, and the obsession with personal subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> Today, human vision is also determined by access to new technologies, including artificial intelligence. Classical anthropology has increasingly become dependent on digital anthropology, which is how modern man uses new technologies and, therefore, what views man thus develops. Man's history is the history of man's pursuit of himself (*Homo quaerens*), or more precisely, the story of man searching for himself (*Homo quaerens se*

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<sup>1</sup> Olga Tokarczuk, "Maski zwierząt," *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 15 (2008): <https://krytyka-polityczna.pl/kultura/maski-zwierzat/>.

<sup>2</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "Participation and Alienation," in Karol Wojtyła, "*Person and Act*" and *Related Essays*, eds. Antonio López et al., trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 523.

<sup>3</sup> See Deborah Sage, "When the Starting Place is Lived Experience: The Pastoral and Therapeutic Implications of John Paul II's Account of the Person," *Christian Bioethics Journal: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 26, no. 3 (2020): 269–97.

*ipsum*). In the past, questions about man have always aroused controversy and will probably always give rise to different answers, which does not mean that access to knowing the truth about man is denied. Although there is a plethora of views, still there is and must be a platform for discussion about man, because every “man is in a sense an eyewitness of himself, his humanity, and his person”<sup>4</sup>. This is the irreducible in man; on this level, we can reach what seems to differentiate, yet this is what unites us.

The intention of the author of this article is not to recall and explain what the theology of the body is, as presented during John Paul II’s pontificate (previously systematically taught by him at the Catholic University of Lublin). Such a presentation has been made available in scholarly literature, media discussions, and in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church many times since the world first heard reflections on the holistic vision of man (both male and female), man’s origins, history, and destiny. It is worth recalling that Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body was expressed in a series of a hundred and twenty-nine general audiences given by the Pope between September 1979 and November 1984. Grounded in biblical revelation, this vast reflection on the human person encompasses topics like sexuality, creation, redemption, eternal life, marriage, celibacy, and Christian morality. The essential point is this: By reflecting on sexual differences—male and female, and our desire for union with opposite sex—we discover the most profound reality of human identity, and we even penetrate to the mystery of the trinitarian God<sup>5</sup>. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*<sup>6</sup> is a multi-faceted and philosophically dense work. Still, the central themes John Paul II is concerned with are the personal experiences found within existence and sexual embodiment, the metaphysical structure of these specific experiences, and the proper ethical view of Christian marriage, love, and sexuality in light of both his personalist phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, the thesis that one’s body reveals our identity and that one’s gender is a gift from the Creator bestowed from the moment of conception sparked much controversy. Additionally, during the sexual revolu-

<sup>4</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man,” in Wojtyła, “*Person and Act*” and *Related Essays*, 542.

<sup>5</sup> See Teresa Pirola, “Theology of the Body,” *Landmarks*, no. 23 (2000): <https://teresapirola.net/files/landmarks/LM23.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See Mitchell Johnson, “John Paul II’s Theology of the Body: The Human Person, Self-gift, and the Sacramental Dimension of Human Love” (dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Graduation with Honors from the South Carolina Honors College, 2019), Scholar Commons: University Libraries; University of South Carolina, [https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/libraries\\_award/3/](https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/libraries_award/3/), 5.

tion, the opinion that the body is a “sacrament” of the person was perceived as highly conservative. John Paul II explained that the body can make visible what is invisible, spiritual and divine; thus, in his Letter to Families,<sup>8</sup> he emphasized that the body cannot be reduced to the dimensions of pure matter, as the body is spiritualized. The body has not been created to be shaped, manipulated, or mutilated. Masculinity and femininity are not cultural inventions but have their own destiny: marriage and parenthood<sup>9</sup>. This happened many years before today’s gender theory proponents successfully purport that a person’s true identity is not determined by her body.<sup>10</sup> However, today, John Paul II’s theology of the body gains increased understanding in the circles that reliably analyze the methodology developed by the philosopher Karol Wojtyła at the Catholic University of Lublin and consistently implemented by the theologian John Paul II. John Paul II did not begin by explaining what a person should do, but who she really is. The answer to this question is a fundamental assumption of Wojtyła’s phenomenological-Thomistic anthropology. The second question, one of the ethical-existential nature, is the following: Who should man become and what is man called to do? People will know how to live, what love, marriage, and sexuality are, when they are aware of who they are, when they discover that they are called to be a person, and how to fulfil this calling. Today, even ChatGPT makes a favorable reference to John Paul II’s theology of the body, but artificial intelligence will also provide us with abundant information that contradicts this theology. Artificial intelligence, as is the case also in many other areas of life, can bring us closer to the truth about man or, conversely, distance us from the truth. The fact is that AI, which is a collection of different views or worldviews about humans, is becoming the primary vehicle of the transmission of culture, science, religion, and faith.<sup>11</sup> As a result, digital anthropology is a research field where a dispute about humans, a “war of views,” is continued.

Wojtyła’s anthropology is “a philosophical and theological anthropology that is meant to compete in the modern philosophical arena, which John Paul II saw as a great and important contest surrounding the fundamental questions regarding the essence of man. What is at stake for John Paul II is much more than systematizing church doctrine on marriage and human sexuality, but he is

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<sup>8</sup> See Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II *Gratissimam Sane*, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_02021994\\_families.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html).

<sup>9</sup> See Jason Evert, *Theology of the Body in One Hour* (n.p.: Totus Tuus Press, 2017), EPUB. See also Beth Zagrobelny Lofgren, “The Ontological Priority of Being a Body,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 9, no. 1 (2020): 153–67.

<sup>10</sup> See Evert, *Theology of the Body in One Hour*.

<sup>11</sup> See Francisco Sorio, “Proposal for Mass Media Anthropology,” in *Media Anthropology*, eds. Eric W. Rothenbuhler and Mihai Coman (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 43.

concerned with positively responding to the particular worldviews that outline a particular metaphysics of personhood and, therefore, of the entire natural order.”<sup>12</sup>

Digital anthropology provided by AI systems is not necessarily opposed to the anthropology worked out by Wojtyła or the theology of the body developed against it; on the contrary, it can become one of the tools used in the search for answers to the question: Who is the human being, and who should the human being become? Digital anthropology can follow the example of Wojtyła’s anthropology and thus be more formative than demonstrative.<sup>13</sup> The article aims to point out the key to a new reading of John Paul II’s theology of the body or, even more, to discover the truth about man in every era, including the digital era. The research question, therefore, is how to reinterpret what initially divided us but what can unite us today in a common search for the truth through self-insight. As it is stated in the article’s title, this goal may be reached by a rereading of John Paul II’s theology of the body, which will be done here for a reason—this theology can be reread, rediscovered, and even considered as pioneering. Such was the case of the writer David Herbert Lawrence (1885–1930), whose reputation has been contested. Though the Pope and Lawrence do differ on some points, they do not differ substantially in their philosophical stances regarding the mind/body relationship or the absolute necessity of full reciprocity in sexual intercourse. Lawrence had made a clean break with Christianity. But as some of his late essays extol the virtues of the Catholic Church’s development of the sacrament of marriage, Lawrence might not have been surprised to see how thoroughly his thoughts on sex and marriage align with those of the late Pope.<sup>14</sup>

It turns out that people of different eras and views can be close to the truth. How is this accomplished?

#### EXPERIENCE: A SELF-INSIGHT

The modern obsession with personal “subjectivity” has contributed substantially to our public and private quandaries, including subjectivism and its

<sup>12</sup> See Johansson, “John Paul II’s Theology of the Body: The Human Person, Self-gift, and the Sacramental Dimension of Human Love,” 9.

<sup>13</sup> See Leah Claire Perrault, “The Formative Anthropology of Pope John Paul II in the Theology of the Body” (dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael’s College and the Department of Pastoral Theology of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael’s College, 2009), 7.

<sup>14</sup> See N. S. Boone, “D. H. Lawrence’s Theology of the Body: Intersections with John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them*,” *Religion and the Art* 18, no. 4 (2014): 498.

well-known twin, relativism, as well as the elevated status now afforded any individual point of view, no matter how ill informed. All this has resulted in the widespread view that the only “truth” that exists is the “truth” of one’s own experience. Claims about the existence of universal truth or an objective moral order often cannot find a foothold when confronted with the argument that such realities do not resonate with a particular individual’s personal “experience.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Cardinal Angelo Scola calls the human experience the genuine and real cross of philosophy and theology of all time.<sup>16</sup>

Also according to Wojtyła, lived experience is precisely the starting point in the search for the universal truth about man. This is the experience of the world and, at the same time, of oneself in the world—through contrast with it. This experience, this insight, precedes the view of both the world and man, precedes all worldviews.<sup>17</sup> Insight into and experience of oneself, here called self-awareness, go hand in hand with the contrasting awareness of the world. In a direct experience, man sees that, as a subject who remains in an unmediated contact with an actually existing world of objects, he is distinct from the world and absolutely irreducible to what is—and what can be—the object of his cognitive acts and what is itself incapable of such acts. What makes man different from the world of objects simultaneously distinguishes him from that world. It makes him separate and simultaneously makes him experience himself as infinitely transcending the world. As a separate being, he finds his nature different and higher than that of the objects that surround him. Therefore, his existence is marked by ontological aloneness and loneliness, and yet it is precisely due to this loneliness that he remains himself. Such is the starting point of and the basis for man’s further insights into himself and for his further reflection on his being.<sup>18</sup> For Karol Wojtyła, the direct, exclusive and personal cognitive contact of man with himself is the starting point of

<sup>15</sup> See Savage, “When the Starting Place is Lived Experience: The Pastoral and Therapeutic Implications of John Paul II’s Account of the Person.”

<sup>16</sup> See Angelo Scola, *L’esperienza elementare: La vena profonda del magistero di Giovanni Paolo II*, Bologna: Marietti 1820, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> “Self-insight is that which lies at the roots of what Bell and Leite ... describe as experiential self-understanding, a process of increasing articulate awareness of one’s psychic life. So conceived, self-insight has four key characteristics: (1) it is distinct from merely intellectual self-knowledge, (2) it arises directly out of first-person experience, (3) it encompasses a lived perspective, and (4) it often requires the overcoming of resistance.” Michael T. Michael, “Self-insight,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 100, no. 4 (2019): 693–710 (abstract). See also Daniel Bell and Abe Leite, “Experiential Self-understanding,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 97, no. 2 (2016): 305–32.

<sup>18</sup> See Tadeusz Styczeń, “Być sobą to przekraczać siebie – o antropologii Karola Wojtyły: Posłowie,” in Wojtyła, *“Osoba i czyn” oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL, 1994), 496.

anthropology, the only source of the knowledge of man and the only basis for recognizing it as valid. "The experience of everything that exists outside man is always linked with some experience of man himself, and man never experiences something outside himself without in some way experiencing himself in this experience."<sup>19</sup> Anthropology—according to the Kraków–Lublin philosopher and theologian—has its own source "in a just the right experience."<sup>20</sup> Wojtyła's concept is that of actual experience, which expresses his "sober empiricism."<sup>21</sup>

Man is the subject of experience and, at the same time, the object of experience. On the one hand, cognition of the external world happens in man; on the other hand, the subject recognizes himself as someone who exists in the world, understanding himself as a human being, i.e., as one of the beings of the world.<sup>22</sup> We refer to inner and external experience, although the experience itself is deeply homogeneous. "The external experience enlightens the internal experience and is enlightened by it. So also the experience which I have of the other man clarifies that which I have of myself and is also illuminated by it"<sup>23</sup>.

Wojtyła says: I have no other access to another person as "I" except through my "I" (I choose within myself, affirm her, accept her).<sup>24</sup> And then: By discovering myself within myself, I discover the truth about everyone else within myself, I simply discover everyone else within myself.<sup>25</sup> By being bound by the normative power of this truth, the person thus falls into the "ambush" of the truth about any other person: from then on, the person is unable to deny or disrespect it without disrespecting the truth about herself, without disregarding herself and others. What I deserve, the other person deserves, too. I owe the same to the other.

Man's experience in the world conceived this way precedes any theory of either man or the world; it is the exclusive source for constructing the theory of man, anthropology, and the exclusive basis of its legitimacy. At its starting point, anthropology is epistemologically independent of any philosophical system and

<sup>19</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "Pre-1969 Synopsis and Fragments," in Wojtyła, *"Person and Act" and Related Essays*, 44. See also "Person and Act," in Wojtyła, *"Person and Act" and Related Essays*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Jerzy Krzaniowski, "The Concept of the Personal and Axiological Experience in the Philosophy of K. Wojtyła—John Paul II: A Starting Point of Philosophical Anthropology," *The Person and the Challenges* 11, no. 2 (2021): 14.

<sup>21</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "The Problem of Experience in Ethics," in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 108.

<sup>22</sup> See Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope*, trans. Paolo Guetti and Francesca Murphy (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), EPUB (Chapter "Experience").

<sup>23</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> See Karol Wojtyła, "Participation and Alienation," 523.

<sup>25</sup> See Styczeń, "Być sobą to przekraczać siebie – o antropologii Karola Wojtyły: Posłowie," 507.



it is methodologically autonomous. This also means that, in principle, all people can meet on the plane of human experience, regardless of the philosophical or religious views they profess.<sup>26</sup> Wojtyła's 1969 study *Person and Act* exemplifies the construction of anthropology on such an experimental basis, where everything originates: both as the source of information and as the basis of the information validity, in direct cognitive contact with the reality of "I act" in opposition to "something is happening inside me."<sup>27</sup> "This study will concern the act that reveals the person; it will be a study of the person through the act. For such is the nature of the correlation inhering in experience, in the fact 'man acts': the act constitutes a particular moment of revealing the person.... We experience that man is a person, and we are convinced of this because he performs acts."<sup>28</sup>

By performing acts, a person experiences herself, who she is: her self-insight (a dynamic structure of cognition<sup>29</sup>) gives rise to the view.

#### INSIGHT AND VIEW

Introducing the dichotomy between "insight" and "view" is the author's deliberate methodological measure intended to enable dialogue and a rereading of John Paul II's theology of the body in a world which is, on the one hand, united (in its digital aspect) and, on the other, divided in the pursuit of the truth about man. The dichotomy between the aforementioned concepts may seem intuitive or even metaphorical to the readers.<sup>30</sup> Still, the author aims to remain within Karol Wojtyła's thought and propose "insight" as a hermeneutical principle. For Wojtyła, initially, experience alone counts, as does insight; this is the experience of the world and, at the same time, of oneself in the world, through contrast. This insight into oneself, known as self-awareness, goes hand in hand with world-awareness. Therefore, in Wojtyła's anthropology, the source of the knowledge about man is the direct, personal cognitive contact that man has with himself, which co-occurs with his direct cognitive contact with the existing and surrounding world. Man's experience in the world conceived this way precedes any theory of either man or the world.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See *ibidem*, 496–97.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibidem*, 498.

<sup>28</sup> Wojtyła, "Person and Act," 104.

<sup>29</sup> See Monika Walczak, "Wgląd jako element dynamicznej struktury poznania," *Analiza i Egzystencja*, no. 9 (2009): 105–9.

<sup>30</sup> See Stanisław Grygiel, "Hermeneutyka czynu oraz nowy model świadomości," *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6 (1973–1974): 139–51.

<sup>31</sup> See Styczeń, "Być sobą to przekraczać siebie – o antropologii Karola Wojtyły: Posłowie," 496.

However, we can critically examine this approach and ask whether anthropology built in this way may be limited to merely random information about humans drawn from experience. Such “chaos” is prevented by questions prompted and provoked by experiences and insights. In light of the questions, “experience data” (data) turns into “data to be explained” (*explananda*). The process of explaining the data of experience, therefore, involves logic, especially the logic of reduction, with its function of data ordering. Thus, based on the data of human experience (*juxta-positio*), the system is emerging (*compositio*), and a theory is created, a science about man, i.e., anthropology, which unites experience and logic.<sup>32</sup>

What distinguishes “insight” from “view” to such an extent that the dichotomy between these categories seems intuitive? Does Wojtyła, through this division, refer to some anthropological system, or does he build his own system? Wojtyła perceives his role as that of a midwife who wants to enable every person to discover self-knowledge and uncover the truth about herself within herself; in this way he wishes to prepare the person to choose the truth about herself, that is, to make her perform the act through which she is, in a sense, born as a human being, transcending herself by her choice of the truth about her. Wojtyła believes that anthropology must go beyond finding out the truth about man. Indeed, it reaches its ultimate goal in anthropo-praxis, that is, in man acknowledging and adopting in his life the truth about himself. Self-cognition and self-choice are the essence of insight. Man recognizes the truth about himself and simultaneously, with an act of free choice, affirms this truth. The moment of man’s affirmation of truth is what distinguishes an insight from a view. Moreover, no one is capable of making an insight (a self-acknowledged self-cognitive act) for another person; one can merely become an “intellectual midwife,” i.e., help another person in her acknowledgement of the truth about herself.<sup>33</sup>

Recalling such an “anthropological procedure” in this article is not intended to provide a critical reflection on digital modernity, but rather to propose a new, timeless (not only theological, but rather interdisciplinary) hermeneutics of man as a person.<sup>34</sup> Interdisciplinarity offers a platform for scientific and social dialogue. The author recognizes the need for methodological reflection not only in the field of classical anthropology, but also in that of digital anthropol-

<sup>32</sup> See *ibidem*, 499–500.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibidem*, 500.

<sup>34</sup> See Grzegorz Barth, *Hermeneutyka osoby* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 79–125. See also Czesław S. Bartnik, Review of Grzegorz Barth’s *Hermeneutyka osoby* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), *Roczniki Teologiczne* 61, no. 2. (2014): 217–20.



ogy, a subdiscipline of cultural anthropology,<sup>35</sup> or the cultural anthropology of human embodiment.

#### FREEDOM AND TRUTH: THE VIEW

While a recognition of the person's primacy results from her confrontation with nature, which our earlier analysis of Karol Wojtyła's thought demonstrates, the foundations of this primacy must be sought within her. While analyzing who the person is, we need to consider not only her primacy, or her relationship to the world of objects, but also, and above all, her interior, which is where the source of all her acts lies. It is here that we find the person's rationality (her allegiance to truth) and her freedom as the ultimate grounding for her actions. Reason and freedom are the person's essential faculties which provide the natural basis for her dignity. What must not be overlooked is that the goal of the person's life is by no means simply partaking of technology, artificial intelligence, civilization or even culture; rather, she is to act by virtue of her intrinsic finality, while all the technological advances and culture are to help her reach this objective. The ultimate goal any human person is to attain in her life is to follow truth and good and to achieve self-fulfillment by way of performing good acts in her relationships with others. Human persons are relational and dialogical beings, through which they fulfil themselves, realize themselves, reveal and manifest themselves in relation to other people by creating personal communities, which Wojtyła, in reference to marriage and family, calls *communio personarum* (personal communion).<sup>36</sup> The selfless gift of oneself, being "for the other" lies at the basis of this community. A reference to the gift of self is frequently found in John Paul II's theology of the body.<sup>37</sup>

Freedom and truth are two values that people constantly refer to in their statements, where they identify truth with their own views; freedom is a fundamental ontological property of man, rooted in him as the power to choose and decide (the will). The "I want" (not "I feel like") experience is present in the "I may—I need not" experience between "I may" and "I need not."<sup>38</sup> Wojtyła claims that man's sensitivity and his desire for true good is to be found at the foundations of his volition. The dynamism of the will is assigned to the truth,

<sup>35</sup> See Piotr Zawoj ski, *Cyberkultura: Syntopia sztuki, nauki i technologii* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2018), 113, 170, 229.

<sup>36</sup> See Karol Wojtyła, "The Family as a Community of Persons," in Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 315–27; Karol Wojtyła, "Parenthood as a Community of Persons," in Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 329–42.

<sup>37</sup> See John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, Section 6.

<sup>38</sup> See Wojtyła, "Person and Act," 203–204.

it is dependent on the truth. For human freedom is not accomplished in bypassing truth, but it finds its fulfilment by the person's realization and surrender to truth. The dependence upon truth marks out the borderlines of the autonomy appropriate to the human person. Wojtyła writes that "freedom belongs to the human person not as pure independence but as self-dependence, which entails dependence on truth."<sup>39</sup> Freedom constitutes the person's spiritual dynamism and indicates the dynamics of the person's fulfilment in the ethical sense. The person fulfils herself as a person through a morally good act, and, one can say, that through a morally evil act, the person does not fulfill herself as a person. The dividing line, the opposition between good and evil as a moral value and its counter-value, comes down to truth, and consequently, the dividing line in debates and in the practice of life comes down to the views. Man remains himself only and solely thanks to the truth which has been recognized and accepted by him with an act of his will as his own. We manifest the truth to ourselves through our own cognitive acts, in our experience, by looking into ourselves. And then the truth becomes a moral imperative for us, and thus even a moral auto-imperative. Having recognized any truth, man falls into a kind of ambush of its normative power and can remain himself, and remain on his own side, only when he declares himself as being on the side of truth as its witness, spokesman, and guarantor, even if, for this purpose, he must reach out of himself.<sup>40</sup> In the *Sign of Contradiction*,<sup>41</sup> the person-truth relation is summed up by Wojtyła in the following way: "Thus it is truth that makes man what he is. His relationship with truth is the deciding factor in his human nature (*humanum*) and it constitutes his dignity as a person."<sup>42</sup> "The dignity proper to man, the dignity that is held out to him both as a gift and as something to be striven for, is inextricably bound up with truth."<sup>43</sup> In any debate (including the debate on John Paul II's theology of the body), the dignity of the human person and respect for the truth (for opinions, views) are the starting point, but the objective of any debate is that the ones who participate in it can encounter each other on the plane of what we have termed as "insight," on the plane of experience, or what Wojtyła called "the irreducible."<sup>44</sup> Only by looking into ourselves can we begin to follow the path towards the views we share, towards the truth about who man is and what man has been destined for. It is only in an insight into ourselves that the path originates towards our shared beliefs,

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, 257.

<sup>40</sup> See S t y c z e ń, "Być sobą to przekraczać siebie – o antropologii Karola Wojtyły: Posłowie," 494.

<sup>41</sup> See Karol W o j t y ł a, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> See W o j t y ł a, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," 536–37.

towards the truth about who man is and about his final destiny. This aspiration for truth, reaching out towards truth, is man's primary task, because it is truth that constitutes him. It is in this context that Wojtyła refers to transcendence and calls it "the second name of the person."<sup>45</sup>

#### DIGITAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND WOJTYŁA'S ANTHROPOLOGY

"Digital anthropology, once literally unthinkable, at best a contradiction in terms, is well on its way to becoming a full-fledged subdiscipline, alongside formations like legal anthropology, medical anthropology, and economic anthropology,"<sup>46</sup> or theological and philosophical anthropologies—one might add.

There is an ongoing debate on the definition of digital anthropology; as of today, digital anthropology is assumed to be the study of the relationship between humans and digital technologies. Digital anthropology can only be a source of various philosophical, political, social, and religious views; it will not replace insight, i.e., human experience. Insight, indeed, develops when influenced by views, but it must be a personal experience of each person: knowledge plus acceptance of what has been known equals truth and freedom. Such is one of many, if not the most important, barriers to AI achieving all the capabilities that humans possess; the division into insights and views may never allow AI to stand on an equal footing with humans. AI is a tool in the hands of modern civilization. According to Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism, humans shape tools (including new technologies) and then human life.<sup>47</sup> This is conceived in a much broader sense than shaping the infrastructure of the rhythm of life and all kinds of amenities<sup>48</sup>; communication technologies, previously the press, radio, television, the Internet, and now AI, keep changing people's thinking about themselves, about who man is, and what man has been called to do. Today, these tools, i.e., technologies, may be said to replace humans. A question often appears in the media: Can AI completely replace humans? AI is certainly capable of acting on behalf of a person ("I act"), but is it capable of experiencing itself in action ("something is hap-

<sup>45</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in Wojtyła, *"Person and Act" and Related Essays*, 481.

<sup>46</sup> Tom Boellstorff, "Rethinking Digital Anthropology," in *Digital Anthropology*, eds. Haidy Geismar and Hannah Knox (New York: Routledge, 2021), 44.

<sup>47</sup> See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, eds. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003), 76–97. Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, eds. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1995), 151–61.

<sup>48</sup> See Heather A. Horst, "New Media Technologies in Everyday Life," in *Digital Anthropology*, eds. Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller (London & New York: Berg, 2012), 62.

pening within me”)? The problem with the future is that it cannot be explored; the present is that man as *Homo quaerens se ipsum* finds himself as a person called to dialogue with himself, with other people, with a world full of views (including AI views).<sup>49</sup> In dialogue, which is preceded by experience and insight into oneself, one discovers the truth about humanity and its vocation to experience the “nuptial meaning of the body.”<sup>50</sup> This expression is at the heart of John Paul II’s theology of the body<sup>51</sup> and means that the human body can “express love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and—by means of this gift—fulfils the meaning of his being and existence.”<sup>52</sup> In this way, one becomes a witness to a personal experience for oneself and for others. John Paul II says that the person “experiences the body,”<sup>53</sup> thus becoming a witness to her own personal experience both for herself and for others. By having a lived experience of her body, the person experiences herself in herself and by experiencing herself, experiences every other person through her own being. The phrase “witness of personal experience” offers a category of experience common to the experience of many persons, or even all persons.<sup>54</sup> The truth discovered constitutes the human being as someone who is constantly becoming “someone”: it constitutes him as a person. The root of this truth is the person’s insight into herself which is timeless and which transcends the person’s worldview, religion, and—as it appears—her immersion in the digital world. First the insight, then the view. Insight is the key to rereading everything that differentiates people’s views, and this is the case in relation both to John Paul II’s

<sup>49</sup> “We humans seek relationships because we have a sense of incompleteness and deep hunger for a kind of fulfilment that cannot be achieved solely within ourselves. Unlike the AI, we do not entirely understand our internal states and motivations, so we try to know ourselves better in relationships with others. That incompleteness drives us to seek the companionship of other humans, and it is arguably one of the main drivers of our religiosity, of why we seek God. This restlessness of our hearts, as Augustine called it, or what Wolfhart Pannenberg refers to as exocentricity, comes from deep within ourselves, from way below our rational minds. A purely rational being would not behave like this. Falling in love is certainly not a rational thing to do. However, it is such irrational things, from love to art to spirituality, that make human life enjoyable. Perhaps it is precisely because we are not as intelligent as AI that we can image God relationally.” Marius Dorobantu, “Imago Dei in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities for a Science-engaged Theology,” *Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology* 1 (2022): 192.

<sup>50</sup> See John Paul II, *The Nuptial Meaning of the Body*, General Audience, Vatican, January 9, 1980, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1980/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19800109.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19800109.html).

<sup>51</sup> See Evert, *Theology of the Body in One Hour*.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, “The Human Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love,” General Audience, Vatican, January 16, 1980, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1980/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19800116.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19800116.html).

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>54</sup> See John Corrigan, “The Meaning of ‘Witness’ in Wojtyła’s Works,” *Wojtyła Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 78–98.

theology of the body and to digital anthropology. It is insight that provides a return to the “beginning” encouraged by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 19:4–8). Precisely this kind of insight is proposed by John Paul II in his theology of the body in order to help us recover the integral image of man as a person not only within the framework of Christian thought or the Roman Catholic Church, but globally, beyond divisions.

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#### ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Jarosław JĘCZEŃ, John Paul II's Theology of the Body Reread in the Digital World  
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Whenever we have questions and doubts regarding the human body, do we seek answers in the digital world? Artificial intelligence is devoid of the body; however, it creates a living space for humans and families whose understanding of body and spirit keeps changing. Artificial intelligence has increasingly become a knowledge source about humans. Digital anthropology comes into existence before our eyes. The article discusses the opportunities and threats this kind of anthropology has brought about, with John Paul II's theology of the body as the reference point. We put forward the thesis that John Paul II's theology of the body, which raises a lot of controversy in the modern world, remains valid. However, we need a new understanding, a new key to understanding and applying John Paul II's theology. The theses proposed further in this article are

the following: (1) The comprehension of the person and the act is a fundamental onset for constructing the theology of the body, and, consequently, digital anthropology. (2) John Paul II's theology of the body is still valid. The article proposes a new key, built around the concepts of "insight" and "view," to the understanding of John Paul II's theology of the body.

Keywords: John Paul II, person, act, insight, view, theology of the body, anthropology, artificial intelligence

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Jarosław JĘCZEN, *Teologia ciała Jana Pawła II, odczytana na nowo w świecie cyfrowym*

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Czy w świecie cyfrowym poszukujemy odpowiedzi na pytania i wątpliwości dotyczące ciała ludzkiego? Sztuczna inteligencja nie ma ciała, ale tworzy przestrzeń życia dla człowieka i rodziny, w których rozumienie ciała i ducha ulega nieustannym przemianom. W coraz większym stopniu sztuczna inteligencja staje się źródłem wiedzy o człowieku, a na naszych oczach rodzi się swego rodzaju antropologia cyfrowa. Artykuł formułuje szanse i zagrożenia, jakie niesie owa antropologia, a punktem odniesienia jest teologia ciała Jana Pawła II. Stawiamy tezę, iż teologia ciała Jana Pawła II, budząca we współczesnym świecie wiele kontrowersji, pozostaje aktualna, a do jej zrozumienia i aplikacji potrzebne jest jej nowe rozumienie, nowy klucz. Tezy postawione w artykule to: (1) Zrozumienie osoby i czynu jest fundamentalnym punktem wyjścia dla konstrukcji teologii ciała, a w konsekwencji antropologii cyfrowej. (2) Teologia ciała Jana Pawła II jest nadal aktualna. Artykuł proponuje nowy klucz do zrozumienia teologii ciała Jana Pawła II, zbudowany wokół dwóch pojęć: „wgląd” i „pogląd”.

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Paweł II, osoba, czyn, wgląd, pogląd, teologia ciała, antropologia, sztuczna inteligencja

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