

The Forms of the Anthropological Mistake According to Major Works of Karol Wojtyła

Introduction

The anthropological mistake is one of the most important yet under researched terms in the thought of Karol Wojtyła. It is a term that is only referenced specifically in one of his works, this being *Centesimus Annus*, but serves as a thread that is found in the totality of his writing from his early years as a young priest, to the mature encyclicals of his pontificate. It is a term that concerns metaphysical anthropology, and provides a springboard from which one can both begin to understand the philosophical anthropology of Wojtyła and place this anthropology in discussion with the world. This is valuable, as the human person is of great concern to this philosopher pope and a correct understanding of the mistakes that individuals, groups, and philosophies make in providing their own anthropologies helps one in understanding both the views of the human person held by Karol Wojtyła, as well as the erroneous anthropologies present in the modern world.

This article provides an overview of the anthropological mistake as present in the canon of Karol Wojtyła. Through a reliance on his philosophical works and a nearly chronological presentation thereof, this work serves to provide both an overview of this term, as well as an introduction to the philosophical anthropological issues Wojtyła tackled throughout the entirety of his clerical life. In this one sees the development of this term as well as a focusing in on specific anthropological mistakes themselves. In other words, one can see the more general musings of Wojtyła the young priest, and the specific points and denouncements of Pope John Paul II. This should come as no surprise as, aside from the natural development of thought, after having ascended the papal throne John Paul II was required to tackle specific issues and provide direct explanations as to his reasoning in his guidance of the Catholic Church.

With this in mind, a few small, technical issues must be addressed. All names have been Anglicized so as to better serve the English reader. In addition to this, the names Karol Wojtyła and John Paul II are both used, but in reference to the clerical status of the author at the time of the publishing of a concerned work. As such, Karol Wojtyła refers to Wojtyła the priest, bishop, and cardinal while John Paul II refers to Wojtyła the pope. When speaking generally about this individual Wojtyła and Karol Wojtyła are used.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Destruction of Human Relations in *Love and Responsibility*

The first great work of Karol Wojtyła is *Love and Responsibility*. Being the comments of a young Wojtyła regarding the relationships between men and women, it deals with a personalistic explanation of human love and the interactions thereof. Particularly, the anthropological mistake as seen by Wojtyła in this early work deals with his critique of the use of persons, not seeing persons as ends, the incorrect human identity that arises when sexuality is purely instinctual, and the resentment and sexual egoism that follows these ideas. As such, this work is a mixture of a practical investigation between the actions of women and men while simultaneously bringing in issues of the anthropological nature of man.

The use of persons is particularly critiqued as having anthropological errors. When discussing the verb “to use” Wojtyła begins, in the vein of Kant’s categorical imperative, to discuss the “problem” that, “arises when we seek to apply them [the ideas of use] to relations with other human beings, other persons.”¹ This “use” of persons is problematic in the mind of Wojtyła because, “a person, unlike all other objects of action.... is therefore an inherent component of the natural moral order.”² The use of persons is wrong because man has a particular anthropological character that places him in a personalistic “natural moral order.”² Simply put, the use of persons is seen as wrong because it presents an anthropology that is in disunion with the proper anthropology of man, the man of natural and personalistic value.

Wojtyła continues from this starting point by critiquing the mistakes made after accepting the use of persons, this later conceived anthropological mistake being the lack of seeing people as ends. This is logical, as the acceptance of the use of persons necessitates the seeing of other entities as being the ends pursued. Wojtyła, recognizing this, states that we must, “act always in such a way that the other person is the end and not merely the instrument of your action.”³ Wojtyła claims that the error of this mistake arises from the fact that the concept of man as end is the foundation from which all human freedoms arise from, and without such a foundation, man cannot claim any aspect of his anthropological nature, thus facilitating a mistake.³

With his critique of the nature of man and his placement in the subject-object dynamic, Wojtyła critiques the idea of sexuality as *instinct* in a similar fashion. Wojtyła refrains from calling human sexuality an *instinct*, believing this to be open to an anthropological mistake. This

¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by H.T. Willetts. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993. Pp. 25-26.

² *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

mistake being that calling human sexuality an instinct makes sex, “the reflex mode of action, which is not dependent on conscious thought,”⁴ and something, “adopted without any conscious thought about their relation to the end in view.”⁵ This becomes problematic because according to Wojtyla, “Such a mode of action is not typical of man, who possesses the ability to reflect on the relation between means and ends,”⁵ and because of this, “is by nature capable of rising above instinct in his actions.”⁵

This makes, in Wojtyla’s mind, the idea of sex as instinct erroneous because it denies man his anthropological ability to reflect upon his action and place things in the substrata of either a means or an end. Man simply becomes a beast who acts due to circumstances outside of his control, with this diminishing his abilities, particularly the ability to reflect on action, and denying his anthropological identity; that identity being able to rise above instinct in actions.

The issues of sexuality and the anthropological mistake are touched upon later in *Love and Responsibility*, with Wojtyla returning to the issue in the 3rd chapter, with interest in the anthropological mistake being given to sexual resentment and egoism. This is interesting as it describes the anthropological mistake that is made present in a, “distorted sense of values.”⁶ As such, here Wojtyla discusses the anthropological mistakes that are made manifest in the values and the nature thereof found in individuals. This is the anthropological mistake found in the way in which people make sense of the world around them, and the proper conduct of individual life in that world.

Wojtyla begins by dissecting the anthropological mistake found in *sexual resentment*. Wojtyla sees resentment as creating an anthropological mistake because it, “devalues that which rightly deserves respect, so that man need not struggle to raise himself to the level of the true good.”⁷ With this we can see that resentment fundamentally is an anthropological mistake. It denies man the ability to “raise himself” to the “true good” and as such denies him a positive part of his identity. Man then is no longer able to improve, raise, and redeem himself once resentment perverts his nature; with this correct nature involving improvement, the raising of self, and redemption. The resulting resentment of chastity and egoism can only present more angles to the issue of the anthropological mistake and resentment generally.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 46. This “reflection” will be discussed in depth when analyzing *The Acting Person*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

Wojtyla claims that, “Chastity, more than any other, seems to be the virtue which resentment has tended to outlaw from the soul, the will and the heart of man,”⁷ and that this “outlawing” of chastity is made because some believe that chastity is the, “enemy of love”⁷ and harmful to the health, psychology, and wellbeing of the individual. Now Wojtyla argues this is not the case because it denies man a part of his nature. An invaluable part of man’s nature being his integrated self, those elements that, “must be correctly integrated both in each of the persons and between them so as to form a *personal and inter-personal whole*.”⁸ This lack of integration thus denies man part of his nature. Instead of there being integration between the body and soul, the various aspects of the soul, the various aspects of man’s psychology, and different people; this resentment of chastity rips these preceding aspects of man into a perilous disunion. The hatred of chastity places the desires of the flesh against the conscience and desires of the soul, the desire for pleasure against the will to love, and the sexuality of one person against the sexuality of others. Man is no longer an integrated being in the mind of the resentful man, with all his aspects and urges at war with one another, forgoing him his true, integrated nature, thus committing an anthropological mistake.

Now Wojtyla does not only see the anthropological mistake as present merely in the resentment of chastity, but also critiques the way in which egoism can make itself present in issues regarding sexuality. Wojtyla finds egoism’s anthropological mistake as being primarily found in its exclusion of the anthropological nature of other people and how it warps the sense of ‘I’ that we have of ourselves into a perverted concept outside ourselves. The egoist is, in Wojtyla’s mind, a man who is, “*preoccupied to the exclusion of all else with his own ‘I’, his ego, and so seeks the good of that ‘I’ alone, caring nothing for others.*”⁹ With this the egoist thus subserves all things to his concept of self, destroying the anthropology of both himself and those around him.

This destruction of self stems from an anthropological error made when, “One’s own ‘I’, considered primarily as a subject, becomes egoistic when we cease to see correctly its objective position amongst other beings, its connections and its interdependence with them.”⁹ In this we can see that the anthropological error of egoism arises from the changing of human nature from an acting subject, to an object that is experienced by any other “subject.” The ‘I’ simply becomes the means by which we experience pleasure. We become our physiological means of experiencing the world, and no less. We are vessels. This is of course an anthropological error in

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

that it, “precludes love, as it precludes any shared good, and hence also the possibility of reciprocity, which always presupposes the pursuit of a common good.”⁹ In this egoism man loses himself in a sea of sensual self-interest, with this severely limits his own anthropology and the anthropology of those around him.

The anthropological mistake of egoism is also present in how it views the anthropology of others. Because “reciprocity” is impossible there is only “bilateralism”¹⁰ or a “quantum of pleasure deriving from the association of two persons of different sex, which must be so skillfully shared between them that each obtains as much as possible [from the other].”¹⁰ This of course excludes the possibility of love and begins to slowly walk into the territory of the anthropological issue of the use of others seen earlier in this chapter. The difference here being that because of this egoism, Wojtyla claims that we cannot see others has having a deep anthropological nature. In a sense, we no longer see them as people, just as we no longer see ourselves as a person. Others are only objects; it is unsurprising that the use of objects follows from this and that because of this anthropological error we are unable to pursue any kind of “good” whose pursuit would entail a correct anthropology.

The anthropological mistake presented in *Love and Responsibility* is two things; a general introduction to Wojtyla’s concept of the anthropological mistake and the anthropological mistake found in the twisted inter-personal relationships we see in everyday life. It is the mistake made by the boss who wrings his employees out of every last bit of productivity they have, the old husband who marries his young wife for purely carnal reasons, the young wife who marries a bank account more than an older man, or young lovers who care more about exploring each other’s’ bodies than the depth of their personhoods. But this should come as no surprise. This is a work written by Wojtyla the young priest, and stems from his time spent caring for souls in the confessional. *Love and Responsibility* wasn’t meant to be a direct and pinpointed philosophical work, but rather a philosophical reflection on the pastoral experiences of one Polish priest. As such, this makes the work an introduction in that it is the first time Wojtyla tackles the anthropological mistake and allows him to take a much broader and less scientific approach to the issue of the incorrect views of the nature of man. Nonetheless, it does provide the foundation and primary viewpoint from which Wojtyla develops his more precise and mature thoughts regarding the anthropological mistake.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Destruction of Personal Life in *The Acting Person*

With *Love and Responsibility* being Wojtyła's first and perhaps least developed work, *The Acting Person* is the complete opposite. In this work, the reader is presented with Karol Wojtyła's fully developed anthropology and is presented with a complete analysis of the nature of man. With this Wojtyła, who at the time of publishing was a cardinal, presents some negative examples as well as positive examples and fully develops a system of metaphysical anthropology. With the focus being mainly on providing an anthropology of man that borrows from the thought of several thinkers, particularly Max Scheler, *The Acting Person* invests the lion's share of its energy into creating a system of anthropology, not simply listing errors found in the contemporary world. This comes as no surprise, as the contemporary world of Wojtyła was one that had dealt with the rise of the world's two greatest anti-human ideologies, fascism and communism. A correct and total metaphysical anthropology was of immediate need. This in no way means that *The Acting Person* does not touch upon the anthropological mistake, in fact when discussing his system of anthropology, Wojtyła specifically touches on the anthropological errors made in the destruction of man's personal life when there is a denial of man as an acting agent and in the systems of, subjectivism, disintegration, individualism, and anti-individualism.

The denial of man as an acting agent is the primary anthropological mistake discussed in *The Acting Person*, with it being the first mistake discussed. Wojtyła describes the denial of man as an acting agent as that which "interfere[s] with the actualization of the free will."¹¹ Basing his ideas on the concept of the *actus humanus* of classical scholasticism,¹¹ Wojtyła claims that to deny man his free will is to deny him a part of his nature, to deny him from being the "subject who acts,"¹² and from being able to actualize his potentiality. As such we can see that Wojtyła believes that free will and man's ability to act are an inherent part of his nature, and to deny man as an acting agent takes away from man an important part of his anthropology, thus facilitating a mistake. This comes as no surprise, as believing that man can truly *act* in the Catholic and scholastic sense *necessitates* that both man has a will and that this will is free.

This will-lacking anthropological mistake has, in Wojtyła's mind, two important secondary and dependent mistakes. Believing that man's ability to act allows man to both make

¹¹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979.

P. 25.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 26.

manifest his potentiality¹¹ and is the means by which consciousness emerges,¹³ a lack of believing that man can act creates an ideology where there is an anthropological mistake in the denial of the aforementioned things. In these anthropologically erroneous ideologies, action cannot be a, “source of knowledge of the person”¹² and consciousness is no longer contained in the human act, no longer is, “completely merged in the voluntarium, in the dynamism of the human will.”¹⁴ This makes sense as in Wojtyla’s thoughts both the potentiality and consciousness of man are inherently related to the will and action of man. To deny man his ability to act thus makes him unable to have a proper potentiality or consciousness, and with these both relating to man’s metaphysical nature, an anthropological mistake emerges in toe.

Wojtyla builds on this mistake of denying man his ability to act with a critique of the subjectivism that arises when there is, “a complete separation of experience from action,”¹⁵ and a reduction, “to the mere status of consciousness and moral values that, as we have figuratively put it, germinate in this action as well as the person.”¹⁵ As we can see, when subjectivism emerges, the metaphysical order of action giving rise to the nature of man is at best not acknowledged as having a relation to experience, or at worst is separated from experience.¹⁶ As such, the material experiences of human life are given precedence and are believed to be that which truly gives man his nature. While being a mistake this error naturally gives rise to the error of a “reduction”¹⁵ of the idea of the acting person and an “absolutization”¹⁵ of consciousness. If man’s action means little in the face of subjectivism, then experience, particularly one’s subjective experience, naturally becomes the absolute means of interpreting the nature of man, the world, and experience itself. This naturally leads to a mistake in the opposite direction. As opposed to the denial of will leading ultimately to subjectivism, we see here subjectivism leading to a denial of will and an improper ordering of experience. While perhaps starting from a different position, an anthropological mistake is nonetheless made when subjectivism is given dominance.

This subjectivism and erroneously high placement of experience leads, in Wojtyla’s mind, to another anthropological mistake. Somewhat ironically, consciousness itself here becomes nothing more than a misplaced subject and,

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹⁶ This “experience” is closely connected with consciousness (particularly the physiological input the body receives) and when discussing the anthropological mistakes regarding subjectivism, the words become interchangeable. Their use in this work coincides with the words used by Wojtyla as closely as possible.

“when consciousness is absolutized, it at once ceases to account for the objectivity of man, that is to say, his being a subject, or for his new actions; and it becomes a substitute for the subject. Subjectivism conceives consciousness itself as a total and exclusive subject – the subject of experiences and values, so far as the domain of moral experience is concerned.”¹⁵

As we can see, in subjectivism consciousness becomes a subject, and simply makes experience no different from the objects conceived in experience. This thus makes an anthropological mistake in that it restricts the relationship that consciousness and experience have with other parts of man’s anthropology. No longer does experience work in tandem with action to bring man’s potentiality into reality, no longer does consciousness raise man into a cognizing agent. The farthest we can go stops right before the Cartesian maxim and we simply *experience, therefore we experience*. Our experience is only an object found in experience, and we lose the reflective element Karol Wojtyla finds necessary. As such there is a smaller anthropological mistake wrapped in a larger anthropological mistake, and an overinvestment in experience destroys both experience and the identity of man. Wojtyla identifies this as an anthropological mistake.

This disunion between experience and the other parts of the anthropology of man begins to hint at the 3rd mistake presented in *The Acting Person*. This 3rd mistake being the disintegration of the person in action and the anthropological disintegration that follows. While this disintegration is similar to the denial of man as an acting agent, it is not the same. In the denial of man as an acting agent man is only denied his agency and ability to act, the mistake currently presented tackles the issue of, while admitting man as an acting agent, separating man from his action. It is the error of seeing man and his action as disunified and not contributing to a greater whole,¹⁷ of not seeing man and his action as being part of a transcendent, complex, and unified integration.¹⁸

Wojtyla separates this disunion of the person in action into two major parts, the disunion of man in his *soma*, and the disunion of man in his *psyche*. Here both *soma* and *psyche* have uncommon meanings; in Wojtyla’s mind, *soma* means, “the content of the concepts of “self-governance” and “self-possession,” which expose the dynamic reality of the person through and together with the action,”¹⁹ with *psyche* being, “that which makes man an integral being, indeed, to that which determines the integrity of his components without itself being of a bodily or

¹⁷ This *whole* being man himself.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

somatic nature.”²⁰ In essence, Wojtyla sees there being an anthropological mistake when a man separates his “self-governance”²⁰ and “self-possession”²⁰ from his actions and/or himself and when man separates the content of his integrity from his actions and/or himself.

There are specific reasons as to why Wojtyla identifies the disintegration of man in his soma as being an anthropological mistake. Most importantly, Wojtyla sees the disintegration of man from his self-governance and self-possession as a situation wherein man is, “completely destitute of the specifically “personal” structures manifested in and with the action.”²¹ As such, in this mistake man loses the self-building structures that create his identity, as integrated somatic aspects are, “connected with the dynamic structure of the person,”²¹ and, “essentially formed by self-determination.”²¹ What emerges from this general anthropological mistake is a specific, personal, and individual mistake in which man loses his, “deep-seated ability to govern, or to possess, oneself,”²¹ and as such no longer retains “the transcendent backbone of the human person.”²¹

This makes sense, as the lack of seeing a person and their action as being integrated somewhat degrades the anthropological metaphysics established upon seeing action as contributing to the identity and transcendence of the person, thus denying man an aspect of his nature and again creating a mistake. It also is logical that self-governance, self-possession, and transcendence are impossible without an integration of the soma. If actions are not seen as giving rise to identity, how exactly does one create the identity of a person? Without an integrated soma only non-transcendental, non-self-reflecting identities emerge. Ironically, in a practical sense, this is very much the case. People whose actions and soma are seen as being separated from their identity have non-transcendental identities. This can be seen in situations where individuals try to distance themselves from their actions through the claim of the existence of external forces influencing their behavior.²² In these situations an individual’s identity begins to be seen as one and the same with this external factor, with both the individual’s actions and transcendental identity falling into disregard.²³

A lack of somatic integration is not the only kind of disintegration Wojtyla sees as creating an anthropological mistake in *The Acting Person*. In this work Wojtyla also identifies

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 194.

²² Examples of external forces include class, upbringing, fate, etc.

²³ An example of this would be a criminal who claims that his upbringing led to his actions. In this his upbringing begins to define him more than anything else. The criminal is no longer an integrated individual but rather little more than “a person with a bad upbringing.”

the anthropological mistake made when there is a disintegration between the psyche, also known as the contents of the integrity of the person, and the actions or the identity of an individual. Now this “content of integrity” is defined by Wojtyla as being very close to emotivity, with emotivity concerning, “the whole wealth of the differentiated domain of human emotions, feelings, and sensations as well as with the related behaviors and attitudes.”²⁴ Now this erroneous separation of action-identity and emotivity is problematic because it creates a, “simplified compartmentalization in man”²⁵ and denies that fact that, “the body and consciousness are, as it were, bound together by feeling, which is the most elementary manifestation of the human psyche,”²⁶ with the disintegration of the emotive psyche being an, “anthropological apriorism,”²⁷ whose essence is to, “disregard the evidence of experience.”²⁷

As can be seen, this anthropological mistake has an important repercussion, and a mistaken apriorism from which it emerges.²⁸ In this, Wojtyla essentially inverts the order of most anthropological mistakes when this particular anthropological mistake occurs. In moving from a mistaken apriorism and coming to an anthropologically mistaken conclusion one can create this basic system of error. This anthropologically mistaken view sees man as *a priori* compartmentalized and denies man his ability to use feeling, whether emotional, psychological, religious, or other, in relation to experience and action, while, “advocating a rejection of emotions so as to allow man to act solely according to reason.”²⁷ Simply put, emotion is rejected and denied having any relation to action, with this being an apriorism in that it denies the natural emotive experience that happens simultaneously with and within experience and action. When an individual does things there is a simultaneous emotive response with these emotive states on the one extreme being the stimulus for an action,²⁶ and on the other extreme working with action in an individual’s experience of and conduct of an action, with the denial of this leading all actions to lose the glue-like factor holding all parts together; this factor of course being emotivity. As such, denying man his innate ability to have an emotive aspect to experience thus *a priori* presents an anthropologically mistaken view of experience, with the denial of the emotive aspect thus losing man his ability to bring all things together in emotion. If man cannot synthesize experience through the emotive, his nature and identity is then seen as necessarily

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

²⁸ With this erroneous apriorism being in some ways a smaller, twin mistake that is both closely related to and a subject of the greater mistake previously presented.

“compartmentalized,” with the composite elements lacking a relationship with one another. This of course is an anthropological mistake in Wojtyla’s mind. As said previously, in his writing these composite elements of the nature and identity of man are, “directly linked with what lies within the reach of sense; it is not divided from higher mental activities and their contents.”²⁵

After tackling these more general and philosophical anthropological mistakes Wojtyla continues in *The Acting Person* with listing, in finality, the example of two more specific ideological errors. These errors being the twin mistakes of individualism and anti-individualism. These two mistakes are listed in tandem due to their apparent relationship, both dealing with the identity and value of the individual, and for the fact that they both deal with what Wojtyla describes as *intersubjectivity* or the, “the dynamic correlation of the action with the person which issues from the fact that actions can be performed by human individuals together with others.”²⁹ In simplified terms, both individualism and anti-individualism are errors that stem from issues regarding the metaphysical anthropological nature of individuals and the actions of these individuals with other individuals.

Individualism is first tackled by Wojtyla from a personalistic perspective. The anthropological error hereof is that individualism, “isolates the person from others by conceiving him solely as an individual who concentrates on himself and his own good; this latter is also regarded in isolation from the good of others and of the community.”³⁰ This then leads, in Wojtyla’s mind, to a situation where, “The good of the individual is then treated as if it were opposed or in contradiction to other individuals and their good; at best, this good, in essence, may be considered as involving self-preservation and self-defense.”³¹ As such, one can see that this error revolves around two basic points, the isolation of the individual and, by extension, the conflict this isolation creates in relation to other individuals. This is the mistake of raising the self to such a point that nothing else matters and the mistake of then placing this elevated self in opposition to others; with a corollary of this second point being the view that communal actions are useful only in their benefit to this afore mentioned super-individual.

This mistake is an anthropological mistake in that the first point made by Wojtyla identifies how individualism limits the focus of action³² strictly to the self. It is impossible to truly conduct action “together with others”³¹ because the other is nothing more than a “source of

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 273-274.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 274.

³² This action being one and the same as the “concentration” mentioned in citation 30.

limitation.”³¹ In lay terms, in individualism, the self is raised to such a degree that the other, due to the denial of action going beyond the self, is inferior, and is, by extension, not a person. In individualism the only actor is the self, and with this the only person is the self. The denial of such a large segment of humanity their very anthropological nature is easily identifiable as an obvious anthropological mistake.

The second point of individualism that Wojtyla identifies as problematic is how it thus makes cooperation between individuals impossible. Others are in a kind of perpetual conflict with the individual, with their actions, not being the actions of the super-individual, thus being seen as contesting the warped anthropology of this super individual. In this mistake the very fact that others possibly “act” becomes detrimental to the self. A corollary of this is that all cooperative acts are done to, “protect the good of the individual.”³¹ All acts in which there is more than one actor are done, or at least interpreted to be, for the benefit of the super individual. No longer are there common aims at which a community can orient their action, there are only people who can be used for the end of promoting the self.³³ This conflict and use of others necessitates an anthropological mistake for reasons made apparent in *Love and Responsibility*.

Paired with this critique of individualism is an anthropological critique of anti-individualism, or as Wojtyla also names it, totalism. This totalism is erroneous for reasons similar to individualism but with totalism being a, “need to find protection *from* the individual.”³¹ In a strange irony, totalism agrees with individualism that man only works for an extreme super-personal good at the expense of others, but through this acknowledgement claims that because of this, “the “common good” can be attained only by limiting the individual.”³¹ As such, “the realization of the common good frequently presupposes the use of coercion.”³¹ This thus makes the erroneous claims of totalism identical to the erroneous claims of individualism, with totalism adding an additional idealism that sees the actions of individuals as inherently negative. In the mind of the anti-individualist, man can only act towards “evil”, and as such must be forced to act in accordance with a common³⁴ and greater “good.” This incorrect anthropological view thus forces man “to be capable of participation”³⁵ while seeing him as naturally unable to do so.

As is discernible, Wojtyla closely identifies both individualism and anti-individualism as being anthropological mistakes on personalistic grounds. While there are metaphysical

³³ This use of people is closely related to the anthropologically erroneous use of persons discussed in the section describing *Love and Responsibility*.

³⁴ The term “common” here is used in relation to whole of society and not in regards to the trivial or prevalent.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 275.

anthropological grounds by which these mistakes are identified, Wojtyla invests the majority of his effort in explaining the way in which people interact with, experience, and act upon one another. As such, Wojtyla by extension sees the true anthropology of man as having a thoroughly personalistic nature. It should also be said that the issue of individualism and anti-individualism is very important in the thought of Wojtyla. Having experienced both the horrors of totalitarian political regimes and the horrors of individualistic excess in the wake of the fall of those same regimes, it comes as no surprise that Wojtyla shows both care and diligence when tackling the aforementioned mistakes. After seeing the jack boots of totalitarian soldiers march into his country and force his people to act towards “communal” goals, and after having seen the degradation of free peoples into a materialistic individualism, Wojtyla learned through firsthand experience to speak on these issues. The anthropological mistakes of individualism and anti-individualism are the anthropological mistakes of the 20th century.

The Acting Person is by far the most complete and comprehensive philosophical work of Karol Wojtyla, covering nearly the entirety of the points this philosopher pope found interesting or valuable. This work presents an entire system of anthropology through which one can perceive a nearly complete conception of man. With this masterful conception, Wojtyla also presents certain mistakes with regards to the anthropology of man. The explanations of mistakes contained therein, while being philosophical in nature, are incredibly valuable for the church in the world and humanity in general. Like the time of *The Acting Person*'s authorship, the world of today is one in which politically motivated ideologies and the anthropologies that follow these ideologies are fighting for the soul of mankind. In the face of this, Wojtyla's presentation of a real anthropology that elaborates upon the true nature of man that exists irrespective of religion, culture, race, or class is nothing short of invaluable.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Destruction of Unity in the *Ethics Primer*

While Wojtyla is well known for his anthropology, he is perhaps better known for his early ethics work. While being a lecturer at the Catholic University of Lublin,³⁶ Wojtyla was also the head of the Chair of Ethics at the same university. During this time of employment in Lublin, Poland, Wojtyla penned a short primer on some general issues that the Christian ethicist must face. This primer, suitably titled *Ethics Primer*, can be seen as a general introduction that Wojtyla wrote in order to tackle certain broad issues he identified in his academic endeavors. In this work Wojtyla does not simply restrict himself to classical ethics or even strictly to the realm

³⁶ Now known as the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

of ethics alone. In this work Wojtyła also touches upon personalism, metaphysical anthropology, and, by extension, the anthropological mistake. This should come as no surprise. Wojtyła's conception of ethics also included a personalist approach and a penchant for German and French personalist thinkers.³⁷ More importantly, Wojtyła also had a strong interest in the person and understood that one cannot have ethics unless one has an established metaphysical anthropology. One cannot argue about how humans should act if one doesn't have a conception of what a human is. As such the *Ethics Primer* touches upon metaphysical anthropology and the anthropological mistake in two sections, particularly with regards to the problem of disinterestedness and the problem of conflict, with both mistakes leading to a particularly disunified and erroneous concept of man.

The problem of disinterestedness is identified by Wojtyła as being closely related to the issue of selflessness, with Wojtyła claiming that, "sometimes people accuse the religious ethics, and especially Christian ethics, of being interested (self-seeking). This accusation, in a way, calls into question its moral value, for moral value involves precisely disinterestedness (selflessness)."³⁸ Extending this ethic to people thus makes, "disinterestedness impossible by offering a reward for good actions, and threatening punishment for evil actions."³⁸ Simply put, Wojtyła has qualms with the idea that with regards to salvation ethics and justice, all people have a, "spirit of utilitarianism"³⁹ and simply obey justice so as not to burn, and after death enter the gates of heaven; with this idea, in Wojtyła's mind, restricting man from, "man's noblest aspirations which seek to be discharged in complete disinterestedness and thus range beyond all systems of sanctions."³⁸ Wojtyła sees this as being an anthropological mistake due to his idea, deeply rooted in classical ethics, that the man who acts in accordance with justice does so because he, "feels the need for it and recognizes its objective greatness,"⁴⁰ and by this, "stands beyond all interests and personal benefits on the ground of that which is objectively right and fitting."⁴⁰ What can be seen here is fundamentally an error that sees man's actions in relation to justice as being outside the self, and aimed at a particular end.⁴¹ Wojtyła sees this as in conflict with the anthropology of man that presents man's actions as done for the sake of the good and as such these actions thus affirm an identity as opposed to simply being in the service of a specific

³⁷ Particularly Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Jacques Maritain, and Emmanuel Mounier.

³⁸ Karol Wojtyła, *Ethics Primer*. Translated by Hugh McDonald. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2017. P. 119.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

⁴¹ This end being avoiding punishment and attaining the rewards of heaven.

end. If man takes a more utilitarian view of justice he loses his self-affirming nature, as well as, in Wojtyła's mind, his ability to truly love.⁴² This lack of a self-affirming nature thus separates the concept of good and justice from a man's personhood. No longer seen as affirming the self, these concepts now reside outside the self and are used as a tool for an end, thus leading to a disunified and erroneous anthropology.

Wojtyła continues in identifying improper views of man while discussing the problem of conflict. With regards to conflict Wojtyła means the conflict which is found in the struggles between different societies. The best example of this and the most ordinary form of this being war. The practice of war rests, according to Wojtyła, on two closely related errors. These errors being the suppression and destruction of the personhood of the other and the totalitarianism that arises in, "such a framework of collective life."⁴³ Now Wojtyła does not go into much detail about these mistakes in this work, but it can be assumed that the rejection of the personhood of the other is closely related to the error of seeing others as means as discussed in *Love and Responsibility*, and the totalitarianism that denies certain people their personhoods is similar if not identical to the totalism described in *The Acting Person*. The only difference would be the amount of people this error is seen as effecting. While *Love and Responsibility* deals with the rejection of the personhood and use of individuals as means, Wojtyła's *Ethics Primer* magnifies this and sees the denial of the personhood of other groups⁴⁴ and the means-based view of the destruction of a group by certain other groups as being an anthropological mistake. With this, the person denying totalism that sees the destruction of individual personhood as serving the common good written upon in *The Acting Person* is very close to the totalitarianism that denies the personhood of members of a particular group for the sake of the common good of another group discussed in the *Ethics Primer*. But in this latter case one sees the beginnings of the disunion of separate groups and the disunion of mankind as a whole.

While the *Ethics Primer* is a work that briefly touches upon two smaller anthropological mistakes, it is a work whose interest is primarily found in the realm of ethics. But, with Wojtyła's ethics having their basis in a particular metaphysical anthropology, it comes as no surprise that the anthropological mistake is touched upon in *Ethics Primer*. What is interesting is the fact that Wojtyła uses classical arguments to defend modern points, with him being able to transplant his ideas regarding individuals to situations and discussions regarding societies at

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 125.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

⁴⁴ This personhood denied group being the "enemy."

large. This is perhaps an overlooked area of investigation, the point at which metaphysical anthropology steps into the realm of discussing the nature and problems of groups of people, a metaphysical sociology if you will.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Denial of a Substantive Soul in *Considerations on the Essence of Man*

Considerations on the Essence of Man is a unique work in the canon of Karol Wojtyla. Being a collection of lectures given by Wojtyla at the age of 29, it can be seen as an early work that already shows the reader the anthropological interests of Karol Wojtyla, and ultimately produces a large discussion on the nature of man. Naturally included with this discussion on the nature of man is Wojtyla's critique of incorrect views regarding the nature thereof. Specific energy is invested in *Considerations on the Essence of Man* in critiquing the denial of the "substantive soul" of man, and the problem of the incorrect conceptions of the soul that follow.

Wojtyla finds the denial of man having a substantive soul as being an anthropological mistake because he finds the human soul as being a, "dynamic structure and thus as if the source of a specific concentration of cognitive (reason) and appetitive (will) spiritual energy."⁴⁵ Thus the soul is seen as a dynamic substantive object upon which crucial factors in the anthropology of the individual person reside. As such, the denial of the substantive aspect of the soul would thus effect other, non-preliminary aspects of the person and lead to a view of the soul as, "stiff, immobile, and inanimate."⁴⁶ Essentially, this non-substantive view of the soul would create a kind of monism by which the soul loses its ability to expose, "the unity and identity of the human "I" in time,"⁴⁷ and is simply one material, among other materials, in a strictly material world. If the soul is this sort of non-substantive specter, it simply becomes a kind of material aspect of man like the accidentals of the body or demeanor, with other important aspects of human nature⁴⁸ coming into question due to their reliance on a pre-existing, substantive soul. This lack of seeing the human soul as a complex substantive object is, by these previously stated reasons, an anthropological mistake.

Considerations on the Essence of Man, while being a work of great anthropological value, touches on the anthropological mistake minimally. This work looks to establish certain

⁴⁵ Karol Wojtyla, *Considerations on the Essence of Man*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979. P. 125.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ Such aspects would be the concept of the self, the concept of action, reason, will, etc.

aspects of metaphysical anthropology in only the positive sense. Even though it touches on the errors of denying the substantive soul, this work would rather describe what this substantive soul, and by extension the person, is. Perhaps this is the case due to the earliness which this book finds itself in the thought of Karol Wojtyla. In this work Wojtyla is developing his initial thought, so initial in fact that it perhaps hasn't yet been put into direct discussion with other views and is more interested in presenting the mind of Wojtyla as opposed to arguing with others.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Deformation of Socio-Political Systems in *Memory and Identity*

Memory and Identity is a beautiful transitional work. Dealing with the philosophical points that led to erroneous social and political systems, it can be seen as the work where Karol Wojtyla transitions into John Paul II. Unsurprisingly, in this work, John Paul II puts his previously conceived notions of man to work and, through a primarily human based approach, is able to point out the anthropological errors of several socio-political systems that were contemporary to his time. An effective way of understanding John Paul II's critiques is found in looking at how these mistakes are deformations. These errors are errors that take that which does exist, the person, and then warp this concept to such a degree that the subsequent conception of the person becomes erroneous. Due to this being a document coming from John Paul II and not Karol Wojtyla, its critiques are somewhat more direct and less speculative. Nonetheless, John Paul II critiques certain totalitarian ideological movements, their conceptions of man, their denial of the freedom and responsibility of man, as well as utilitarian political systems that seek only to maximize a common good as all being anthropological mistakes.

Early on in *Memory and Identity* John Paul II critiques certain anthropological mistakes made by certain totalitarian ideological conceptions of man that came about in the early to middle 20th century. These ideologies being, unsurprisingly, Marxism and Nazism. *Memory and Identity* finds a common mistake shared between these two ideologies that relates to the human person, specifically,

“the rejection of what ultimately constitutes us as human beings, that is, the notion of human nature as a ‘given reality’; its place has been taken by a ‘product of thought’ freely formed and freely changeable according to circumstances.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Memory and Identity*. E-Book: Phoenix, 2012. Pp. 15-16.

Here John Paul II critiques the fact that these totalitarian systems do not see man as a being which is real and outside of the self. This is a retreat to the same erroneous thinking of Descartes⁴⁹ and creates a space where, since it is our own decision as to what man is, one can, “determine that a group is to be annihilated.”⁴⁹

At first glance this mistake seems to be similar to the general mistake critiqued in *Love and Responsibility*, that being the mistake of seeing people as means. This is not the case in *Memory and Identity*, as the mistake dealt with in the previous paragraph is on a much more basic level. The fundamental error identified in *Memory and Identity* goes much deeper than just seeing people as beings to be used, it is the seeing of man as not a real being but rather as an “idea.” As such, there is no inherent value attributed to man, as he is only a concept that is conceived. It comes as no surprise that in ideologies that promote such a view the idea of who is a man and what man is easily, and for the sake of nefarious interests, changes. Quite often this change leads to the elimination of whole groups of people. It is the anthropology of the gulag and the concentration camp; the anthropology of genocide and oppression. As such John Paul II rightfully calls it a mistake and condemns it by claiming that if we do not see man as a real being, “we end up in a vacuum.”⁵⁰

John Paul II does not simply critique the pseudo-dualist belief that man is only an idea. In *Memory and Identity*, he also critiques improper views that promote an incorrect use of freedom. Citing the freedom-based societies that emerged from the totalitarian societies previously discussed,⁵¹ John Paul II sees a fundamental error existing when freedom is improperly used and thus when, “evil will take root and begin to spread both in me and around me.”⁵² This ultimately resides, according to *Memory and Identity*, in a particular concept of freedom that appeals to freedom alone.⁵² It is the “primitive liberalism”⁵² that sees action as meaningful only if it has recourse to or promotes the unbridling of man and his action in all directions. It is freedom for freedom’s sake, with a complete lack of a concept of the “good.” And a conception of man that lacks a will that is oriented towards the good is in John Paul II’s mind a mistake that is both, “metaphysical and anthropological.”⁵²

This anthropological mistake that sees man’s freedom as existing only for the sake of itself is rooted in a deeper anthropological mistake. John Paul II identifies this mistake as being utilitarianism. With regards to utilitarianism, *Memory and Identity* sees the anthropological

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵¹ These societies being Germany after the Third Reich and the post-Soviet states after the fall of the Soviet Union.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 33.

mistake as being the restrictive sense of good that utilitarianism creates. In utilitarianism, John Paul II claims that man is only able to follow either, “his own interest or that of the group to which he belongs,”⁵³ with the aim of human action being either, “personal or corporate advantage.”⁵³ As such there is no recourse to *bonum honestum*, the just good, with all goods being related to the *bonum delectabile*, the pleasurable good. Man is thus a servant of pleasure,⁵⁴ with good no longer being a part of the human person, and the actions, body, and identity of the individual being nothing more than a means to attain pleasure. This is the mistake of societies that see themselves as oriented only towards the happiness of their population, the hedonists, and the moral anarchists who believe that anybody should do anything. It is the anthropological mistake of the world we live in, this post-modern world of decadence in decay.

Memory and Identity is a work that takes the primordial thoughts of Karol Wojtyła and turns them into the indictments of John Paul II. In identifying specific anthropological mistakes and then denouncing them, John Paul II lays the foundation from which a critique of contemporary socio-political systems can be made. It should come as no surprise that John Paul II used his concept of the anthropological mistake when acting as Pope. Through his use of critiques of incorrect views of man, he was able to put philosophical merit behind his papal pronouncements. The statements of John Paul II don’t rely strictly on their infallible fiat, they have a very deep metaphysical anthropology behind them and are ready to call out the incorrect conceptions of man found in the modern world.

The Anthropological Mistake and the Denial of Man’s Active Ability in *Fides et Ratio*

John Paul II did not restrict his concept of the anthropological mistake to only his philosophical works. Particularly in his encyclicals, he critiqued specific ideologies and related erroneous philosophical, political, and social trends to their lack of a proper formulation of the human person. As such, after having developed the concept of the anthropological mistake in his previous works, John Paul II directly calls into question the metaphysical anthropological validity of certain trends that were contemporary to his pontificate in his papal works, particularly his encyclicals. *Fides et Ratio* is one such work. In this encyclical John Paul II deals with issues regarding the relationship between faith and reason.⁵⁵ With this he brings into

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵⁴ In the utilitarian sense pleasure isn’t restricted to solely physical pleasures, although a particular ideology may or may not include them.

⁵⁵ As the Latin title would suggest.

question philosophical views that have an incorrect view of man and are at odds with human action; with particular analysis being given to the problems of nihilism.

Nihilism is first critiqued by John Paul II on the grounds that it sees man as ultimately meaningless. In this ideology human, “life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place.”⁵⁶ As such, before anything else, there is no concept of real, being, or the human. Everything is nothing more than the sensory aspect of an individual experience. This is a paramount anthropological mistake in that it says man is not. Nihilism is a, “denial of the humanity and of the very identity of the human being.”⁵⁷ In a very basic way, it is a primary anthropological mistake because the human is denied completely, with there being absolutely no recourse to action, identity, or anything else that would require a real being in order to define. Nihilism, according to John Paul II, is an anthropological mistake in that it is a kind of negative anthropology that,

“leads to losing touch with objective truth and therefore with the very ground of human dignity. This in turn makes it possible to erase from the countenance of man and woman the marks of their likeness to God, and thus to lead them little by little either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free.”⁵⁷

Nihilism is a truly sad anthropological mistake in which everything that makes man unique is lost, the consequence of which being man either destroying his other man, or himself. This is the mistake of two extremes of human life, the violent tyrant and the lonely suicide.

The Anthropological Mistake Named, The Anthropological Errors Found in Specific Economic and Political Systems Identified in *Centesimus Annus*

Fides Et Ratio is not the only encyclical produced by John Paul II that dealt with the anthropological mistake. In fact, with regards to this concept, the most important work of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II is his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*. With this encyclical being written for the 100th year anniversary of *Rerarum Novarum*, it deals with Catholic social teaching, and as such discusses certain political and social systems and their morality and credibility. In this work, one finally sees the term “anthropological mistake” used. This work can

⁵⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*. The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998. Retrieved from:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.pdf, on November 15th, 2017. P.27.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

be seen as John Paul II's final push in this regard, with it being a direct crowning achievement in critiquing incorrect views of man. Due to this being a document on social teaching from the hands of a critical pope, it is direct when discussing why certain systems make certain anthropological mistakes. The systems critiqued anthropologically being both socialism and capitalism.

John Paul II first takes issue with the anthropology presented by socialism. Primarily the error that is found in the fact that, "Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism."⁵⁸ As such, man is then not the goal of society, or even an individual's action. There is only the good of this grand, total, "socio-economic" whole. As such persons no longer exist, with only groups or classes taking the place of forming the identity of people. This follows from the point that John Paul II identifies wherein, "Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil."⁵⁸ As such the anthropological mistake in socialism also sees man's actions as being only a series of social relationships, with the autonomy of an individual bleeding away.⁵⁸ With this, actions lose their reflective aspect and become nothing more than mechanical social interactions within a larger mechanical social system. Believing in a much higher view of the person and their action, and having seen this socio-economic system in practice in the People's Republic of Poland, John Paul II ultimately sees socialism as having an inherent anthropological mistake.

The fact that John Paul II saw there being an inherent anthropological mistake in socialism did not make him a proponent of capitalism. In *Centesimus Annus*, the pope also made an anthropological critique of the errors inherent in capitalist systems. In extreme capitalist systems, Wojtyla claims there is the problem of there being a, "domination of things over people."⁵⁹ It is a kind of glorified materialism which goes beyond the point of seeing people as a means, it is a seeing of people, including the self, as a means for the attainment of physical goods. A person's action is reduced as well, with it only having value if it is able to attain resources, with man serving the attainment of goods in a, "humiliating subjection."⁵⁹ What John

⁵⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*. The Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991. Retrieved from:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.pdf, on November, 15th, 2017. P.11.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Paul II presents here is a critique of how the anthropology of man is reduced, in capitalist systems, under a totalism of the elevation of consumer goods. As such man no longer matters, only the attainment of goods does. This devaluing of the person is what John Paul II finds to be an anthropological error, with this being the error found in the materialistic and consumerist West that Europe and America experienced after the fall of communism.

In *Centesimus Annus*, one sees the full development of John Paul II's anthropological mistake. It is the crowning work of this philosopher pope and is where he puts his highly developed anthropological views into application in the real world. Through the critique of actual economic ideologies present during his pontificate, John Paul II masterfully connects the heights of Catholic thinking to a practical critique of the world he saw. This is important as too often Catholic thinking, particularly when regarding metaphysical anthropology, stays in books and academic circles while not seeing the light of common thinking. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II brings his high-minded concepts regarding that nature of man into the issues he saw and the world in which he lived, a world split between liberal capitalism and totalitarian socialism. Pontiffs should follow this tradition and use the wealth of Catholic thinking and philosophy when discussing the problems contemporary to their times. This would guarantee two things, that Catholic thinking would not be restricted to certain classes of academics and that when discussing contemporary issues, pontiffs would be basing their arguments on properly developed thought, and not on trends currently abiding.

Conclusion

The anthropological mistake develops throughout the literature of Karol Wojtyla. Beginning as a general philosophical concept regarding an incorrect metaphysical anthropology, Wojtyla later employed it when discussing the errors of specific philosophies, political systems, and economic systems. This development reflects the life of Karol Wojtyla from his early student years, to his ascension to the papal throne. Throughout all his comments on the anthropological mistake one can begin to see Wojtyla developing a high-minded system of the metaphysical anthropology of man and warning the world as to the conclusions that anthropological errors would have on society at large. As such, the anthropological mistake of Wojtyla is both a philosophical concept used in relation to a particular personalistic conception of man, as well as a warning against actions and ideologies that are contrary to a positive anthropology.

This opens the door to investigations as to the consequences and repercussions of such anthropological mistakes. What happens when these errors are made, what ideologies and

systems can one identify as being part of or contributing to this error, and what effect do they have on society? The answers to these questions are of paramount importance given contemporary circumstances and will need to be tackled by the clergy in their service to the great commission, the academic in their pursuit of truth, and the common man in trying to make sense of his world and position. In any case, the work of Karol Wojtyła and the personalist, anthropological, and metaphysical position thereof serves all in identifying and remedying the anthropological mistakes that surround them.

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The Forms of the Anthropological Mistake According to Major Works of Karol Wojtyła Summary

The “anthropological mistake” is one of the most important yet under researched terms in the thought of Karol Wojtyła. It is a term that is only referenced specifically in one of his works, this being *Centesimus Annus*, but serves as a thread that is found in the totality of his writing from his early years as a young priest, to the mature encyclicals of his pontificate. This work functions as

an introduction to the “anthropological mistake” as presented by Karol Wojtyla through an analysis of the presence of this term in certain philosophical works of this philosopher pope. Through this analysis of the presence of this term in the canon of both the young and mature Wojtyla, this work presents both what the “anthropological mistake” means in philosophical anthropology, and lists examples thereof enumerated upon by Karol Wojtyla.

Keywords: metaphysics, metaphysical anthropology, the anthropological mistake, Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II