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REFLECTION ON THE MEANING OF *HUMANUM* AS WOJTYLA'S ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

INTRODUCTION

The “question about man,” central to the pontificate of John Paul II, has only grown more urgent in the intervening years. The “new stage of history” announced by *Gaudium et Spes*, “triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man” and threatening to “recoil upon him” can be fairly called the “biotechnical age” (Vatican Council II, 1965, section 4). Still in its infancy at the time of the Council and the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, the biotechnical age now presents us with a seemingly endless stream of heretofore unimaginable technical possibilities directed at the human person, from mood-altering to performance enhancing drugs, from easy pre-implantation genetic diagnosis and germline manipulation to gender reassignment drugs and surgeries, from cloning to other scarcely conceivable forms of human asexual reproduction, from human-animal chimeras to built-in human interfaces with artificial intelligence. Our power exceeds our knowledge, and cer-

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tainly our wisdom, to the point that even the “question about man” has become obscured, both inside and outside the Church.

Karol Wojtyła, as a philosopher, bishop and later as Pope John Paul II, Wojtyła saw that the truth of *Humanae Vitae* could not be apprehended and appreciated without a deepening of its anthropological basis². Not only did he seek to rectify that through his studies on personhood and human embodiment, but he also extended these insights to new bioethical problems as they emerged over the course of his pontificate.³

The purpose of this article is to answer a question how Wojtyła’s account of what is specifically human (*humanum*) is a counterpoint to the technological mentality. I will undertake the following discussion from the perspective of personalistic ethics, which I recognize to be the most appropriate for addressing the moral questions inherent in both the Christian and human traditions in general. The choice of Wojtyła’s views, against the background of other prominent figures addressing ethical issues in a technological context, is related to the personalistic perspective in which the article is written. The order of consideration is as follows: First, we will explain in what sense technology is an anthropological problem. In this part of the work, we will refer not only to Wojtyła, but also to other authors who, like him, have taken up the issue of man in the age of technology; and whose reflections are consistent with Wojtyła’s thought. Further on, we will focus on man: we will present Wojtyła’s reflection on the meaning of humanity, the specificity of which remains elusive through the categories of the technocratic paradigm. The axis of reasoning in this part of the article will be the issue of chemical contraception as an emblematic problem of this paradigm. In conclusion, we will point out how the “truth about man” confronts the logic of technology.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROBLEM

The scientific revolution, the driving force behind what *Gaudium et Spes* calls our “new stage of history,” is the visible face of a deeper and more comprehensive metaphysical revolution: a total transformation of our society’s conception

2 I wrote more extensively about the significance of Wojtyła’s personalism for technological in my doctoral dissertation, in which I juxtaposed the views of Leon Kass and Karol Wojtyła.

3 Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html; Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Donum Vitae* (3.03.2025). https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html; Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dignitas Personae* (3.03.2025). https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html (3.03.2025).

of being, nature, knowledge and truth which has radically altered (and reduced) man's own self-understanding (Hanby, 2019, pp.47-48). This new conception is premised historically and theoretically upon the overthrow of Aristotle and the renunciation of Aristotelian substantial form, with its inherent intelligibility and its attendant qualities of unity, interiority and finality. The modern conception of nature, it can be said, is essentially technological insofar as "manipulability" is built into its theoretical core and is its inevitable practical and epistemological outcome (Jonas, 2001, p.196).

The scientific "accounting of being" entails its objectification. For science, reality exists insofar as it sets itself before the "calculating man" in such a way that he can get *indubitable* knowledge about it. Kass elaborates on the revolutionary nature of this vision.

Indeed, the quest for *indubitable* knowledge, universally accessible and rationally expressible, was the radical new goal of modern science, rebelling against a two thousand-year history of intellectual controversy and disagreement on nearly all matters hitherto discussed by scholars. As Descartes put it, "There is nothing imaginable so strange or so little credible that it has not been maintained by one philosopher or other." . . . In order to gain knowledge as indubitable as mathematics, the founders of modern science had to reconceive nature in objectified (mathematical) terms and to change the questions being asked: no longer the big questions regarding the nature of things, pursued by rare wisdom seekers, but quantifiable problems regarding an objectified nature, soluble by ordinary mathematical problem solvers. If the history of modern science could be viewed not retrospectively from the present, but prospectively from its origins in the early seventeenth century, we would be absolutely astonished at what science has been able to learn about the workings of nature, objectively reconceived (Kass, 2017, p.298).

The scientific pursuit of certainty is modernity's metaphysical basis, according to which the essence of all being, including human beings, is transformable. Objectification "places" all beings in front of man by reducing them to measurable instances. By occupying this "position," man decides in what way he will relate to other beings and, thus, he determines the essence of the world's existence as "transformable" and therefore "usable," the ontological interphase between Cartesian certainty and the Baconian conflation of knowledge and power, truth

and utility.⁴ Consequently, everything that exists presents itself to man as a neutral and manipulable datum subject to man's influence. The result of this is that man becomes the measure for the understanding of external reality and determines the character of all beings. This essential role of man becomes "for reality" the most important point of reference.

If the essence of technology is not a technical problem, but also metaphysical and anthropological one, then the question about the essence of technology also turns out to be a question about man. Technology as an agent of mediation between man and the material world, becomes an area of man's self-representation: thinking and acting provide a platform for man to express and understand himself in relation to the external world.

The world in which man lives, dominated by the technological mentality, is not only subject to a process of "disenchantment," but it is also stripped of its inherent purpose and meaning. The modern project of the total mastery of nature, associated with liberation from all constraints, has a decisive impact on man's self-understanding. Modern man believes that what turns out to be manipulable in human nature also becomes legitimate, and what constitutes any limitation is destined to be overcome: "if something is technically possible it is therefore morally admissible" (John Paul II, 1998, section 88). In this way, the intrinsic dimension of man's relationship to nature was completely devalued, and, consequently, man is deprived of all criteria to decide what serves to preserve, develop, or even to respect his own nature.⁵ Modern man thus becomes the one to whom the identity of reality has been completely subordinated, but, at the same time, he risks reducing his own identity to his own biological

4 "For they caused me to see that it is possible to attain knowledge which is very useful in life, and that, instead of that speculative philosophy which is taught in the Schools, we may find a practical philosophy by means of which, knowing the force and the action of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens and all other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature" Rene Descartes, "Discourse on Method," in *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. S. Haldane, G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 41; "Current logic is good for establishing and fixing errors (which are themselves based on common notions) rather than for inquiring into truth; hence it is not useful, it is positively harmful." Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. L. Jardine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Book I, XII.

5 "Since Bacon's time it has been the other alternative that matters. To him and those after him, the use of knowledge consists in the 'fruits' it bears in our dealing with the common things. To bear that fruit the knowledge itself must be knowledge of common things—not derivatively so, as was classical theory, but primarily and even before becoming practical. This is indeed the case: the theory that is thus to be fruitful is knowledge of a universe which, in the absence of a hierarchy of being, consists of common things entirely. Since freedom can then no longer be located in a cognitive relation to the 'noblest objects,' knowledge must deliver man from the yoke of necessity by meeting necessity on its own ground, and achieves freedom for him by delivering the things into his power. A new vision of nature, not only of knowledge, is implied in Bacon's insistence that 'the mind may exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it. The nature of things is left with no dignity of its own'" (Jonas, 2001, 192).

environment or, to put it in the Pope's terms, "the man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces" (John Paul II, 1979, section 15).

Jonas is therefore right when he claims that the metaphysical character of man's existence in the world is weakened and, that, in a world devoid of form and finality, evacuated of ontological goodness, his ability to act in terms of a goodness that exceeds the order of mere utility is radically undermined. The "metaphysical permissiveness" that opens up in this meaningless, mechanical world manifests itself most clearly on the grounds of biotechnology, from whose vantage point life appears as mere biological functioning (Jonas, 1984, pp.18-20). Biotechnical rationality, in its *a priori* gaze upon life, places life at the service of procedures. As a result, nature subjected to biotechnology no longer presents itself as a creation, or even as a world that provokes questions about the meaning of its existence, but as mere matter which can be manipulated at will within the (unknown) bounds of possibility. Within this technical and ontological outlook, the human being becomes solely an epiphenomenon of the biological order, wholly subject to the principles of scientific knowledge (Wojtyla, 2013, p.40).⁶

Logically, the question of modern technology is essentially an anthropological question, pertaining to the foundations of the idea of man and human action. The anthropological meaning of the technological question becomes clear by grasping the difference between technology and technique. If we define technique only as a means to an end or an element of human action, we only touch upon its technical aspect, which obscures the specificity of human action as involving man's dependence on truth. The truth of technique, as Greek *poiesis*, consists in the extraction and uncovering of the essence of things (*aletheia*).⁷ Technique is closely related to discovering, and is not only an instrument causing specific effects. Its essence is to get to the truth of being, which technique discovers in the process of bringing being into existence. Technique includes handicraft skills and activities, not only in this or that field of craftsmanship, but also in the field of fine arts. Technique is inseparable from cognition (*episteme*) which leads to discovery. Technique and cognition are two modes of discovery that are distinguished by what and how they discover.

6 "The expression 'order of nature' (*porządek natury*) cannot be confused nor identified with the expression 'biological order' (*porządek przyrodniczy*), as the latter, even though also signifying the order of nature, denotes it only inasmuch as it is accessible for the empirical-descriptive methods of natural sciences, and not as a specific order of existence with a clear relation to the First Cause, to God the Creator." Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books&Media, 2013), 40.

7 Cf. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Granland Publishing Inc., 1977), 12-13.

When it comes to technology, it is also a way of discovery on the ground of cognition provided by the sciences. However, according to Heidegger, it is not a discovery in the sense of extraction associated with *poiesis*. Modern technology relies on discovery, which in essence consists of a challenge, of making demands on nature (that is, on the environment) to provide energy fit for storage and processing. Technology, unlike technique, no longer expresses a reliance on the forces of nature, which, under human care, would guarantee the development of natural biological processes. An apt example of this is agriculture, which has become a mechanized food industry. A cultivated field is not only given a seed so that it can, through the natural power of growth and human care, produce a crop, but it is challenged to produce a crop according to the wishes of man. Cultivating a field does not have much in common with tilling the soil, but it takes the form of challenging nature to give birth in this way and not in the other.⁸ Challenging nature consists of the continual grasping of things in the sense of making them available and exhibiting them in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit with a minimum of effort. In this way, nature is built into the technological processes that determine its meaning and purpose. In essence, modern technology is about controlling and manipulating nature, imposing on it a way of being that is subordinate to man.

In light of the above, the essence of technology, takes on a completely different character in modern technology than *poiesis* (as genuinely human action). Technology is no longer discovery in the sense of extraction of truth but of challenging nature. Discovery conceived in the sense of a challenge consists in making available, transforming, storing, distributing the energy hidden in nature, and controlling it. Nature becomes for modern technology a “storage” of man-adjustable possibilities, that is, mere objects which are used in order to fulfill certain functions. Moreover, man himself, including his bodiliness, is challenged and subject to be used as a human material. From within the “technocratic paradigm” and the mechanistic vision of nature underlying it, man is identified with the

8 Cf. Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 15; Leon Richard Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: The Free Press, 1999), 121-122.

composition of material to be challenged—that is, an object to be used and devoid of form, finality, inherent meaning and subjectivity.⁹

CHEMICAL CONTRACEPTION AS AN EMBLEMATIC PROBLEM OF TECHNOCRATIC PARADIGM

Karol Wojtyła, a keen observer of the technological revolution, was deeply concerned about the new and reductive understanding of man entailed in it.¹⁰ While he did not deny the great experimental and practical success or the great promise of this vision, he understood that man was not only its protagonist, but also its potential victim. Thus, he understands that in order to respond adequately to the ethical challenges posed by this powerful new vision, one needs to demand an anthropological turn in modern ethics. The truth about man exceeds what can be perceived in the technocratic paradigm and prevents both his reduction to a passive “use object” and his expansion to a “superhuman” cyborg. Against reductive tendencies, Wojtyła referred to man as a dynamic unity of human ontology and action when he spoke in the debate on chemical contraception underlying the Church’s moral teaching in the area of sexual ethics. In his arguments against the use of contraception, one can find inspiration for addressing other moral issues related to the application of technology to the human body.

9 Our understanding of the technocratic paradigm is synonymic with Pope Francis’s “technocratic paradigm,” which in *Laudato Si* he describes in the following words: “The basic problem goes even deeper: it is the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that ‘an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed.’” Francis, *Laudato Si*, section 106, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (3.03.2025).

10 Wojtyła calls the anthropology of countries dominated by a technological mentality as “pagan humanism,” of which utilitarianism, hedonism, and secularism are expressions. Wojtyła, *Paweł VI, Encyklika Humanae vitae oraz komentarz teologów moralistów środowiska krakowskiego pod kierunkiem Karola kardynała Wojtyły*. Cracow: Notificationes e curia Metropolitana Cracoviensi, 1969), 34.

As a bishop, Karol Wojtyła, was very active during Second Vatican Council. The Council's witness to the revolutionary nature of changes discussed here has already been noted.

Today's spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution. As a result of the latter, intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting importance . . . [T]he human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis (Vatican Council II, 1965, section 5).

In the immediate aftermath of the Council, Wojtyła saw the need to more deeply develop these observations. One can find the seeds of such a development in Wojtyła's interpretative essays of the Conciliar documents (*Sources of Renewal. On the Implementation of Vatican II*). Wojtyła indicates the necessity of not separating the objective facts of technological progress from their anthropological significance in the evaluation of science and technology's meaning. The future Pope draws attention to the necessity of not forgetting about the impact of technology on typically human spheres of life and involvement necessarily belonging to the practice of Christian faith:

The whole work of transforming the world and bringing it to man's level by means of science, technology and civilization—all this bears the imprint of man's kingship and his sharing in the *munus regale* of Christ. Vatican II sees one aspect of that participation in the skill and activity of the laity, 'interiorly raised up by grace.' The activity resulting from 'competence in secular disciplines' must not only express itself in works of technology and civilization but must also serve to strengthen justice, love and peace among men (Wojtyła, 1980, pp.265-266).

The nucleus of the problem consists in the eclipse of the full meaning of the *humanum* by the technological revolution, a theme of *Gaudium et Spes* that would later be repeated with force in *Evangelium Vitae*.¹¹ Therefore, the Church needs to approach "the progress of science and technology [together] with [a] cul-

11 Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 36, John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 22.

ture centered on spiritual values.” One can find the unity of these two elements by seeking a synthesis of human thought that will include “progress [and] tradition; the development of knowledge and the need for wisdom” (Wojtyla, 1980, pp.298-300) in such a way that it will “stimulate and advance human and civil culture” (Vatican Council II, 1965, section 58).

This account of the *humanum* is evident in Wojtyla’s reception of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Written shortly after the Council, in this document Pope Paul VI upholds in this document the doctrine of the goals of marriage and the conjugal act and warns against losing the personal meaning of human sexuality by relying on technical means to regulate fertility:

In preserving intact the whole moral law of marriage, the Church is convinced that she is contributing to the creation of a *truly human civilization*. She urges man not to betray his personal responsibilities by putting all his faith in *technical expedients*. In this way she defends the dignity of husband and wife. This course of action shows that the Church, loyal to the example and teaching of the divine Savior, is sincere and unselfish in her regard for men whom she strives to help even now during this earthly pilgrimage “to share God’s life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men” [emphasis added] (Paul VI, 1968, section 18).

Wojtyla was a part of the discussion surrounding the creation and reception of the document. However, for political reasons, he could not participate in the deliberations of the commission preparing the document. Therefore, together with Polish theologians, he prepared a report in which an argument against contraception focused on the specificity of human nature:

Dominion, by the use of reason, over the entire sphere of emotions and drives distinguishes man among living beings and gives his actions the dignity proper to man. Since resorting to contraceptive methods relieves a man of rational control of his action, therefore, the rationality that is undoubtedly manifested in such technical methods burdens man with guilt, because it stands in the service of moral disorder (Wojtyla, 1969, p.29).

It is clear that the meaning of the *humanum* is irreducible to the intention of human action; rather it pertains to the specificity of human nature that man should rationally control his actions. Wojtyla elaborates on this idea in his essay on the anthropological vision of *Humanae Vitae*:

This is particularly important in the present field in which there is such a great tendency to consider everything in the light of definite biological processes. . . . Precisely here is the field of the problematic directed at *Humanae vitae*. The vision of man under different partial aspects is the indirect fruit of particular sciences that, in order to know the same object, because of his complexity (therefore also because of his sovereign richness)—use different methods. With these methods we can surely succeed in reaching a richer knowledge, but indirectly this leads to the dividing and destruction of what is in itself the supreme unity of man... *In particular, there seems to weigh on the modern mentality the division of a Cartesian type that opposes in man his understanding, his consciousness, and his body. As a result of this division it is too easy to examine everything regarding the body as exclusively and solely in the light of somatic processes that, as the process of medical science shows, can be directed and dominated artificially.* It is precisely here, among other things that the problem of the practice and technique of contraception is situated [emphasis added] (Wojtyła, 2009, p. 746).

Wojtyła's observation that making control of the body easier by the use of contraception is contrary to what is typically human, namely, the unity of understanding, consciousness, and the body will eventually find its continuation in his Theology of the Body (henceforth TOB) which not only upholds the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* but also provides an in-depth, theological argument for the defense of "the good of man as man" in the technological context:

The rooting of the teaching proclaimed by the Church in the whole Tradition and in divine revelation itself is always open to the questions raised by people and also uses the instruments most in keeping with modern science and today's culture. It seems that in this area the intense development of philosophical anthropology (in particular the anthropology that stands at the basis of ethics) meets very closely with the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae* regarding theology and especially theological ethics.

The analysis of the personalistic aspects of the Church's teaching contained in Paul VI's encyclical highlights a resolute appeal to measure man's progress with the measure of the "person," that is, of that which is a good of man as man, which corresponds to his essential dignity. The analysis of the personalistic aspects leads to the conviction that the fundamental problem the encyclical presents is the viewpoint of the authentic de-

velopment of the human person; such development should be measured, as a matter of principle, by the measure of ethics and not only of “technology” (John Paul II, 2006, section 133:3).¹²

The defense of the personal quality of man presented in the TOB is rooted in Wojtyła’s personalism. In his philosophy the good of a person’s being (“*ens personae et bonum personae convertuntur*”) is inseparable from his ethical attitudes (“*persona est affirmanda propter se ipsam*”). This dynamization of the concept of the person, which is at the core of his anthropology, shows that a person is a subject of moral action as “someone,” rather than an object (that is, “something”). In this way, Wojtyła makes a close connection between anthropology and ethics (“*Primum anthropologicum et primum ethicum convertuntur!*”), which determines that the proper ethical evaluation of technology’s application has to appeal to the principle of “the authentic development of the human person.”¹³ Precisely, the affirmation of the person in the technological context needs to appeal to the experience of his own subjectivity, and the meaning of his embodiment, in a dynamic way. Wojtyła explains the importance of the dynamic character of man’s subjectivity when he claims that “[t]he *suppositum* not only statically dwells (‘lies’) under the entire dynamism of the man-person but also constitutes the dynamic source itself of this dynamism. The dynamism that originates from existence, from *esse*, entails the dynamism proper to *operari*” (Wojtyła, 2021, p.177).¹⁴ Consequently, “the dynamism of the person” is one of the focal points of Wojtyła’s thought linking anthropology and ethics: the existence of man simultaneously conditions his actions and determines the cosmological dimensions of his existence, that is, his belonging to the world due to his body—which is distorted in the technocratic paradigm. Consequently, man’s being is inseparable from the relationships and needs that constitute his being.

This inseparability is deeply consistent with the use of the phenomenological category of experience, which plays an important role in Wojtyła’s ethics, and which he refined while elaborating on Max Scheler’s thought in his habilitation thesis.

12 John Paul II.(2006). *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media. In the article I use the most recent translations of Wojtyła’s texts.

13 The Latin quotations are from Tadeusz Styczen, Wojtyła’s student and successor. They reflect the fundamentals of Wojtyła’s thought. Cf. Tadeusz Styczen, “Człowiek jako podmiot daru z samego siebie: Antropologia adhortacji *Familiaris consortio*,” in *Człowiek Darem*, ed. C. Ritter, (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2014), 74; Tadeusz Styczen, “Antropologiczne podstawy etyki czy etyczne podstawy antropologii?,” in *Objawić Osobę*, ed. C. Ritter (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2013), 165.

14 Karol Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” in *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. G. Ignatik (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 177.

Lived experience, irreducible to subjective feeling, is closely tied to the objective elements of moral action and, thus, plays an important role in Wojtyła's ethics. Nevertheless, this approach, including a reference to subjectivity, was new in Catholic ethical thought, which in previous centuries was deeply objective. With the advent of Wojtyła's ethics there comes a turning point which forces philosophers to answer several questions: what relations exist between individual experience and exact knowledge, between morality and ethics, and between the different layers of moral experience? The answers that Wojtyła gives to these questions are conditioned by placing personhood at the center of his reasoning. Ethical issues find their basis in anthropology. Since for Wojtyła man's consciousness and freedom are closely related to his subjectivity, they enable man to become morally good or evil, and thus to realize his own subjectivity—whose meaning is irrelevant in the technological mentality. Man is not indifferent to the world in which he lives. Through his conscience, which brings into his life the normative power of truth, man determines himself (Wojtyła, 2021, p.263). Man's whole life is deeply personal: the situations he encounters through his moral decisions are incorporated personally into who he becomes and, thus, the natural teleology of his body contributes to the auto-teleology of a person—that is, such a teleology in which the personal self of man, as a subject, constitutes itself by being both a subject and an object for itself.

This dynamic correlation between person and action, made possible due to the presence of truth, enables a person to live in community. Being in relationships with others belongs to the very essence of being human and is essential to personal fulfillment. Participating in the life of the community, cooperating with other people, and being in relationship with them are not incidental functions of man, but they result from the transcendent nature of his personhood (that is, the ability to reach truth among the material) and the specificity of his bodily existence: for Wojtyła, unlike in the technocratic paradigm, the body is not just an instrument used by a person. Conversely, a person simultaneously possesses the body and is the body. The capacity for relationships rooted in human bodiliness conditions and enables one to be with others: man transcends himself in action because his being and action are permeated by truth. These two (being and action) not only enable an attitude of participation but make it an authentically human attitude: "What is decisive [for social life] is the dynamic subordination to truth," which is absent in the technocratic paradigm, but is "essential for the transcendence of the person in the act. It is the definitive measure of the authenticity of human attitudes with regard to existing and acting 'together with others'" (Wojtyła, 2021, 404).

Wojtyła applies this dynamic entanglement of truth in human being, actions, and relations Wojtyła applies in his philosophy of marriage and family. In

Love and Responsibility he shows that biological facts do not exhaust the meaning of interpersonal interactions. For him, the theme of special interest is the unity of the two goals of marriage (union and procreation), which are intrinsically connected to personal love and, which, by the usage of chemical contraception is abolished. The appearance of personal love—within the personal dynamism—exceeds the order of mere utility to which, as we explained above, the logic of technology narrows the meaning of human action (Wojtyla, 2013, pp.227-228). It is through the chaste gift of self in exclusive and open-to-life spousal love that marriage becomes a *communio personarum* (communion of persons), expressing theological truths that surpass the biological order.

In the TOB, incorporating these elements, discussed above, the Pope describes the situation of man as a creature and as a participant in the history of salvation. The specificity of human sexuality—due to man’s belonging to the a “different ontological order”—takes on a special quality of sign: man, bodily expressing a spousal love is not just a mere element in the system of phenomena described by the language of science.¹⁵ Rather, as we will explain it later, through personal attitudes, man, in his body, becomes a sign of the theological truths about the mystery of God and the world. This ability to express the mystery of God and the world is what makes the role of man in relation to reality different, in Wojtyla’s thought, than in the technocratic paradigm: according to Wojtyla, it is not the unfettered will of man in shaping reality that is decisive for the meaning of reality. Conversely, the sign character of the human body, linking man’s supernatural capacity with his creaturely status, determines man’s role toward reality not as the one who decides about the meaning of reality but as the exponent of its meaning through his *humanum*. Importantly, although Wojtyla clearly assumes this understanding of man and his role in his TOB, his reflections give an in-depth argument against contraception.

To summarize, Wojtyla in answering the question of the meaning of man goes much further than their criticism of the technocratic paradigm as harmful. He draws attention to a truly human way of being and acting that belongs to human nature. For him, the body is not a passive element, secondary to personhood: the specific way in which man performs his activity, which is mediated by the body, realizes who man is and, thus, enables man to pursue what he really desires, that is, to reveal, through his life, the truth of the greater whole; which he is part of. In order to demonstrate this, Wojtyla develops a theological account of the body, which

15 Cf. John Paul II, *Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution* (October 22, 1996), [https://humanorigins.si.edu/sites/default/files/MESSAGE%20TO%20THE%20PONTIFICAL%20ACADEMY%20OF%20SCIENCES%20\(Pope%20John%20Paul%20II\).pdf](https://humanorigins.si.edu/sites/default/files/MESSAGE%20TO%20THE%20PONTIFICAL%20ACADEMY%20OF%20SCIENCES%20(Pope%20John%20Paul%20II).pdf) (3.03.2025).

stems naturally from his account of man and which he applies to marital relations as a part of his argument against contraception.

CONCLUSION: THE TRUTH ABOUT MAN CONFRONTS THE TECHNOCRATIC PARADIGM

Wojtyła thinks that the impact of science and technology on man and his self-understanding is not neutral. He regards modern science and technology as one integrated phenomenon, a phenomenon with great power and promise, but one which nevertheless reduces the meaning of man both subjectively and objectively. And he seeks throughout his work to make “the person,” or “the full truth about man,” the criterion of ethical judgment.¹⁶

The Pope aptly captures this point when he writes about the “crisis of meaning,” the consequence of which is that

the human spirit is often invaded by a kind of ambiguous thinking which leads it to an ever deepening introversion, locked within the confines of its own immanence without reference of any kind to the transcendent. [Man, who] no longer asks the question of the meaning of life, would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth (John Paul 2, 1998, section 81).¹⁷

Simply put, the crisis of meaning—provoked by the scientific worship of objectifiable instances and the suppression of truly humanistic thought—changes the way in which man thinks, lives, acts. This change results with a twofold reduction: objective and subjective. While the former consists in reducing things and others to

16 Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 112.

17 Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 81. Although John Paul II considers science as an ally of man, he criticizes a positivist and scientistic mentality “which not only abandoned the Christian vision of the world, but more especially rejected every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision.” This mentality treats “values as mere products of the emotions and rejects the notion of being in order to clear the way for pure and simple facticity.” The Pope notices an inner contradiction in the scientistic mentality: Fragmented, through modern science, knowledge has lost its meaning. The plethora of information and data provided by science without a key to interpret them casts doubt on whether they can make any sense at all. The “crisis of meaning,” mentioned above, determines man’s attitude toward technology, being at the same time “a whole set of instruments which man uses in his work” and an obstacle for authentic undertaking of the problem of one’s own existence. Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 46, 88; John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html, 3.03.2025; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 4, 22; John Paul II, *Message to the Participants at the National Conference on Culture in India* (March 11, 1986), 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860311_cultura-india.html (3.03.2025).

mere objects, the latter substitutes human virtues (that is, genuine human activity) with a chemical. This twofold reduction, underlying the crisis of meaning question the validity of the discourse undertaken by Wojtyła.

A man who lives in the logic of technology remains busy responding to the problems that inevitably arise in a technological society or are prompted by technological devices and processes. In other words, contact through the mediation of the body with technology “impairs” a person’s ability to interact with the truth. Narrowing the role of human consciousness to passively accepting stimulants in order to merely respond to them results with losing by man the causal character of his action and the transcendent perspective that enables him to pursue the truth: man does not “look towards . . . truth which would explain the meaning of life,” because his life is absorbed by technology, which demands his involvement (Wojtyła, 1993, section 33). Importantly, truth, which man pursues, by virtue of his nature is not to be equated with a knowledge of technological procedures—otherwise life would become a problem to be solved and, thus, would be dehumanized.

Man, because of his inherent way of existence, the “form,” whose existence is not acknowledged by the technocratic paradigm, establishes a deeper bond with reality. Man does not live neither because of the quantitative data that he can account nor because with their help one can describe him. If this were the case, man would be a static entity whose actions would not flow from who he is. According to Wojtyła, the opposite is true, to repeat, “[t]he *suppositum* not only statically dwells . . . under . . . the man-person but also . . . entails the dynamism proper to *operari*” (Wojtyła, 2021, p.177).

For Wojtyła, man’s self-understanding is intimately linked to how he exists in the world: his proper place in the totality of reality is intrinsically linked to who he is and how he experiences himself. The opposite is true for those with a technological mentality that does not take into account the inner purposes of things: the world devoid of inner purposes cannot contribute to man’s self-understanding. While according to Wojtyła, man is a unity of understanding, consciousness, and the body, in the technological (Cartesian) mindset, man remains torn between objective data describable by a coordinate system and consciousness (“I Think, therefore I am”).

Further, Wojtyła’s theory of body-sign overcomes the metaphysical permissiveness of technology. While according to Wojtyła, the human body, due to being human, is sign in nature, that is, it is an expression of supernatural layers of reality, technology condemns man for meaningless existence. Specifically, Wojtyła’s theory confronts the reduction of man to an epiphenomenon manifested in mere biology of the organism by showing how human body remains in contact with the very core of reality.

Last, Wojtyła's account of *humanum* rescues the genuine character of human actions. In contrast to technological operations, truly human actions rely on nature, rather than challenge it. The dynamic relationship between being and doing, that enables the transcendence of the person and is expressed in "touching the truth" in lived experience, stands at the heart of self-gift. This kind of action, that builds *communio personarum*, eludes the description of the action as a function of the technological process. Precisely, human action is not just a movement of matter definable in the biological order. The specificity of existence inherent in man elevates his action to contact with theological truths.

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REFLECTION ON THE MEANING OF *HUMANUM* AS WOJTYLA'S ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

SUMMARY

This article seeks to show the importance of Wojtyła's reflection on man as his answer to the question of technological mentality. While technological thought weakens or even eliminates the link between ethics and anthropology, Wojtyła's approach to moral issues essentially relates them. A critical analysis of Wojtyła's texts will show that at stake in deciding whether to weaken or eliminate this connection is the very idea of humanity.