

John Paul's Theology of Truth and Freedom: A Dissident Phenomenology in a Thomistic Anthropology

MICHAEL SHERWIN, OP
University of Fribourg
Fribourg, Switzerland

IN THE SUMMER OF 1940 during the brutal Nazi occupation of Poland, the twenty-year-old Karol Wojtyła penned a play titled *Jeremiah: A National Drama in Three Acts*. In the very first act, the young playwright proclaims that “One must throw truth across the path of lies. One must throw truth into the eye of a lie.” This is so, because “in truth are freedom and excellence,” while the betrayal of truth leads only to slavery.¹ Already at this early date, Karol Wojtyła was expressing a conviction that would become a principal refrain of his pontificate: Freedom depends on fidelity to the truth.² In this, he showed himself a faithful disciple of his theatrical

¹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, translated with introductions by Boleslaw Taborski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 109 and 103 respectively. Cited by Kenneth Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: the Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 7.

² The centrality of freedom's dependence on fidelity to the truth in the theology of John Paul has been recognized by a number of authors. See Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: the Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997 [first published in Italian in 1982]), 151–56; David Hollenbach, “Christian Social Ethics after the Cold War,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 94; Stanley Hauerwas, “In Praise of *Centesimus Annus*,” *Theology* 95 (1992): 419–28; Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the Truth about Freedom,” *First Things* 55 (1995): 36–41; George Weigel, *Soul of the World: Notes on the Future of Public Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 125–49; Michael Novak, “Truth and Liberty: the Present Crisis in Our Culture,” *Review of Politics* 59 (1997).

mentor, Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk. For Kotlarczyk and the Rhapsodic Theater he founded, the spoken word was a force for change. Deeply imbued with the Johannine spirituality of the Word made flesh, a Living Word that comes to bear witness to the truth, Kotlarczyk believed that truth publicly proclaimed was the most effective cultural resistance against the forces of violent oppression.³ This conviction and the experience of living it among his fellow artists, made an indelible impression on the young Wojtyła. As George Weigel suggests, Wojtyła would remember the power of bearing witness to the Living Word when called to act on another larger stage, in the face of other forms of oppression.⁴

But the poetic wellsprings of John Paul's theology of truth and freedom also point to the principal challenge confronting anyone attempting to understand this theology. Even after becoming pope, Karol Wojtyła retained the heart of a dramatist and poet. Faithful to the tradition of the Rhapsodic Theater, he preserved a love for the richness of words and a Johannine sense of their levels of meaning. Consequently, John Paul did not speak of truth and freedom in only one way, but followed the Gospel of John in applying the terms analogically.⁵ The primary burden of this essay will be to sketch these various analogous uses.

The goal of this sketch, however, is not merely to explain the meaning of these terms, but to suggest that John Paul's theology of truth and freedom contains an implicit anthropology, an anthropology intimated in his phenomenological analysis of freedom's dependence on truth. Moreover, I shall highlight the relevance of this anthropology by placing it in the context of the dissidents of Central and Eastern Europe, especially the thought of Vaclav Havel. This will enable us to see John Paul's theology as grounding the phenomenology of the dissidents upon the Gospel message and a broadly Thomistic anthropology.

Phenomenology means different things to different people. Here, however, I employ it in the broad sense and take it to mean a method

³ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: the Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 37–38, 65–66.

⁴ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 66.

⁵ For example, in John's Gospel, when Jesus says, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37b), does truth here mean the same thing as when he says "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6)? It would seem not, since Jesus himself says, "If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true" (Jn 5:31). Jesus is the truth, but he also bears witness to a truth that is somehow distinct from but related to him. Thus, in the Gospel of John, truth has several analogically related meanings. The same can be said of John Paul's theology: The pope did not have a univocal conception of truth and freedom, but employed these terms in several analogically related ways.

whereby one engages in an attentive openness to and an analysis of human experience, an experience that is always simultaneously an experience of concrete things and of the conscious self.⁶ In developing his theology of truth and freedom, John Paul employed terms drawn from John's Gospel and from contemporary philosophy. My contention, however, is that this papal theology only becomes intelligible when placed within a broadly Thomistic framework. Specifically, the several analogously related meanings of truth and freedom developed by John Paul become intelligible only from within a Thomistic understanding of nature, grace, and the human person's vocation in Christ. This further implies that if theologians want to help the faithful understand this aspect of papal teaching, they would do well to develop a renewed Thomistic anthropology.

John Paul's Fourfold Conception of Truth

An attentive reading of John Paul's encyclicals reveals that he applied truth in four distinct but related ways. Truth refers (1) to God as the beginning and end of all things, (2) to Christ as the Living Word (Logos) who is the pattern of all things, (3) to existential humanity as graced human nature, fallen but redeemed, and lastly, (4) to the Gospel as the proclamation of redemption. Following John Paul's own practice we shall begin with truth as the Living Word. We should note first, however, that by employing truth in this fourfold way, John Paul underlines an aspect of truth that is only secondary for Aquinas. For St. Thomas, who defines truth as the "conformity" between intellect and thing,⁷ truth is primarily in the mind and only secondarily in things.⁸ For John Paul, however, truth is primarily in things. It is the pattern or structure that gives reality its inner coherence. In other words, while Thomas's preferred word to express reality is "being," John Paul's preferred term is "truth." While for Thomas, God is most properly being or existence itself (the I-Am-Who-Am), for John Paul, God is most properly Truth. Although these two perspectives are not necessarily opposed, the emphasis is clearly different and this difference has consequences for how each author presents the mysteries of revelation.

⁶ For a concise presentation of John Paul's mature understanding of the phenomenological method, see Jaroslaw Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty, the Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 6676. Colin McGinn describes phenomenological analysis as "analysis of consciousness as it presents itself to the subject of consciousness." Colin McGinn, *The Making of a Philosopher: My Journey through Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 43.

⁷ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; *SCG I*, ch. 59.

⁸ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1.

Truth as Christ

At the very outset of his pontificate, John Paul established the Johannine tone of his theology by including in the opening paragraph of his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, the opening words of John's prologue: "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us."⁹ Later in the same encyclical the pope appeals to John to describe Christ as the truth:¹⁰ "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). As the eternal Word (Logos), the Son of God is the pattern of all creation, or what the pope elsewhere describes as the "intimate truth of being."¹¹ Yet, as the Word made flesh, he is the "prototype" of perfect humanity, or what the pope describes as the "intimate truth of human being."¹² When the Word becomes flesh, he not only fully reveals the Father—"he who has seen me, has seen the father" (Jn 14.9)—he reveals the full truth about the human person.¹³

In revealing the full truth about humanity, Christ not only reveals the perfect pattern of the human, he reveals the truth about historical humanity (its sinfulness, its need for forgiveness and the forgiving love held out to it by the Father). Thus, Jesus before Pilate proclaims: "[F]or this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37).¹⁴ One feature of this revelatory action that John Paul underlines is precisely freedom's dependence on truth. He explains:

Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8,32). These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, . . . every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world.¹⁵

Knowledge of the truth will set us free if we live in honest relationship with the truth. Yet, John Paul offers a further precision. The freedom to which we are called is only possible through the action of Truth itself. Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection sends the "Spirit of truth" who both guides us into full knowledge of the truth and empowers us to live in harmony with this truth. The Spirit sets us free in and for the truth.¹⁶

⁹ *Redemptor Hominis*, §1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §7

¹¹ *Dominum et Vivificantum*, §36.

¹² *Ibid.*, §59.

¹³ *Redemptor Hominis*, §7

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Redemptor Hominis*, §12. See also *Veritatis Splendor*, §34 and 87.

¹⁶ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §59.

Truth as Existential Human Nature

The pope's encyclical on moral theology famously begins with the words *Veritatis Splendor*: the splendor of truth. The context of this utterance, however, is much less well known. "The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God." On one level this truth is the Logos, the eternal Word shining forth in all creation, especially in the human intellect. On another level, for John Paul this truth is a created participation in the Logos. As existing in things, truth is the inner order or essence of the thing. It is what John Paul calls "the truth of creation."¹⁷ It is what enabled the pope elsewhere to describe human life as being "indelibly marked by a truth of its own."¹⁸

John Paul underlines the human person's unique way of participating in the Truth, which he describes as "the truth within humanity."¹⁹ This truth has several facets. On one level there is the truth of creation that John Paul portrays as the "law of reason."²⁰ This is "the truth about the moral good," which, John Paul tells us, "is a witness to the universal truth of the good" present in the mind of even the most hardened sinner.²¹ In other words, John Paul used the term "truth" as a synonym for what St. Thomas calls the first principles of practical reason and of the natural law.²²

But in relation to humanity, John Paul more frequently employed a broader sense of truth. Truth then refers to what we could call existential human nature. For John Paul the "truth about man" is that although he suffers many limitations, being subject to suffering and death, he has a deep and restless desire for something greater (both a desire for truth and for freedom). Moreover, he experiences an inner summons to a higher life.²³ For John Paul this truth (this human reality) is experienced by all people, even by non-Christians. Although they might not formulate it in these terms, all people experience their limitations, their aspirations to something greater, as well as a mysterious inner call to a higher life. As John Paul explains, "there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death."²⁴

¹⁷ *Veritatis Splendor*, §41.

¹⁸ *Evangelium Vitae*, §48.

¹⁹ *Redemptor Hominis*, §14.

²⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, §41, §61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §61.

²² *ST I*, q.79, a. 12; I-II, q. 94, a.2.

²³ *Redemptor Hominis*, §14.

²⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, §45.

Clearly, this “truth within humanity” signifies the existential state of fallen but graced human nature.

Lastly, John Paul refers to the “full truth” of the human person. This is the truth about the human person made known through revelation.²⁵ John Paul explains: “[W]e are not dealing with the ‘abstract’ man, but the real, ‘concrete,’ ‘historical’ man. We are dealing with ‘each’ man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption.”²⁶ Truth on this level leads us to see that our earthly limitations are somehow related to sin; that our aspirations for truth and freedom are fulfilled in union with the Trinity through the humanity of Christ; and that it is by means of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ through the gift of the “Spirit of truth” that we are able to know these things and to live them. The full truth leads us to see that it is through the missions of the Word and Spirit that we are able to attain the truth and freedom that comes from union with the Trinity; in short, the full truth enables us to recognize that it is through union with the Trinity that we are able to live in the truth.

Truth as the Gospel Message

John Paul recognized, however, that the full truth about the human person is something that must be revealed. He thus also refers to truth in a way that makes it synonymous with the Gospel message. Yet, in John Paul’s lexicon, even the word “Gospel” has analogous meanings. The Gospel we proclaim is Christ himself; but the Gospel is also the narrative of what Christ does for us and of how we are called to live in Christ.

John Paul emphasizes that acceptance of the Gospel requires the action of the Spirit leading us to conversion. The pope reminds us that in John’s Gospel (16:13) Jesus states that “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”²⁷ Initially this truth has a twofold aspect. It reveals our sinfulness and need for conversion, while at the same time revealing God’s unfailing mercy on our behalf. Through the action of the Spirit we discover that as beings who search for the truth, our freedom comes from living in harmony with the deepest truth about ourselves.

The beginning of this freedom is to live the commandments according to the truth about the good inscribed in our hearts. Most fully, however, to live in harmony with the truth is to live according the Truth who is Christ. Christ as Truth is the prototype of human freedom and fulfillment. To be free, therefore, we must live the life of Christ in a complete gift of self, which is only made possible by the action of the

²⁵ *Redemptoris Hominis*, §11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §13.

²⁷ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §6.

Holy Spirit. This gift of self ultimately leads us to perfect union with the Truth who is God. John Paul refers to this union in Trinitarian terms as resulting from the Trinitarian processions. He describes it as the “mysterious radiation of truth and love” (namely the processions of the Son and Spirit) that leads the human person “to become a sharer in the truth and love which is in God and proceeds from God.”²⁸

Truth as God

When John Paul described God as truth, he sometimes did so in the context of human fulfillment and happiness. As creatures whose very essence is to seek the truth, this restless search only finds its completion in the vision of God in heaven. Thus, in *Redemptor hominis*, John Paul quotes Augustine’s famous phrase, “you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”²⁹ Commenting on this passage, John Paul portrays it as expressing the human person’s restless search for truth and desire for the good, both of which are fulfilled only in God. God is the truth who alone satisfies our restless hearts.³⁰

Freedom’s Dependence on Truth

The Meanings of Freedom

When we turn our attention to freedom, we discover that John Paul also employed this term analogously. At times he spoke of it as something given to and radically present in all people.³¹ Indeed, the presence of this freedom is one of the truths about humanity that we are called to respect.³² At other times he referred to freedom as something we can lack,³³ and as something for which we search and long to attain.³⁴ Of course, most fundamentally for our current study, there are numerous references in John Paul’s encyclicals to freedom’s dependence on fidelity to the truth. There are clearly tensions here. For example, if freedom depends on fidelity to the truth that we are free, there seems to be a certain circularity in the argument.

Here again, however, a careful reading of John Paul’s descriptions of freedom reveals that they presuppose a broadly Thomistic anthropology. We can

²⁸ *Dives in Misericordia*, §6, §7.

²⁹ *Confessions*, I.1.

³⁰ *Redemptor Hominis*, §18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, §21; *Veritatis Splendor*, §86.

³² *Redemptor Hominis*, §16.

³³ *Centesimus Annus*, §39.

³⁴ *Redemptor Hominis*, §18.

discern three related meanings of freedom. Freedom signifies (1) the principle of free action; (2) the absence of constraint, whether internal or external; and (3) freedom as the capacity for excellence. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul distinguishes between freedom's origin and freedom's situation.³⁵ In its origin, freedom is a gift from God given to all humans. On this level it is like a seed. It exists in germ as something we must develop before it can become perfect. Here John Paul is merely describing the spiritual character of the intellect and will. These two powers are the spiritual principles that enable us to transcend the constraints of the material creation. They are what enable us to act from our own free decision (*liberum arbitrium*).

Yet, freedom's situation, which is another word for the experience of freedom, reveals that freedom is often limited. Human freedom can be constrained both by the interior disorder of our passions and inclinations or by exterior constraints on our actions imposed by society or the State.³⁶ As noted earlier, John Paul affirms that freedom begins by obeying the commandments, but only reaches perfection in the life of graced virtue that enables us to live according to the truth.³⁷ Here again there is a tension. Freedom depends on obedience to truth, while only when freedom is perfected in us can we fully live according to the truth. The tension is resolved when we recognize that the first assertion refers to freedom as freedom from constraint: External freedom depends on society respecting the truth about the human person, while internal freedom depends on our having ordered our passions to the true good. On this level we only become free from constraint when we have ordered our passions to the truth about ourselves and when society has ordered its institutions to this same human truth.

Freedom at this level, however, is only the beginning. Freedom from internal constraint is the necessary but not sufficient condition for perfect freedom.³⁸ Perfect freedom refers to the capacity for excellence.³⁹ It is the graced ability to live completely and creatively in the truth. It is the graced ability to bear witness to the Truth who is Christ and to the Gospel truth about our concrete vocation in Christ. Ultimately, for John Paul, the

³⁵ *Veritatis Splendor*, §86.

³⁶ *Centesimus Annus*, §38, §39.

³⁷ *Veritatis Splendor*, §11.

³⁸ *Evangelium Vitae*, §75.

³⁹ On freedom as the capacity to live a certain creative excellence see Servais Pinckaers, OP, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble, OP. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 354–78; for the implications of this notion of freedom in relation to fidelity to truth, see George Weigel, “A Better Concept of Freedom,” *First Things* 121 (2002): 14–20.

perfect freedom integral to living in the truth is a life configured to Christ's loving self-offering to the Father for the good of humanity.⁴⁰

Truth and Freedom in Secular Society

There is, however, another tension in John Paul's reflections on truth and freedom, a tension that some commentators find particularly troubling. On the one hand John Paul presented the Church as championing freedom of conscience and the freedom of the individual, especially religious freedom.⁴¹ He portrayed the practice of the Early Church as having recognized and respected the necessary link between freedom of conscience and the effective proclamation of the Gospel.⁴² He regarded this freedom as an essential feature of human dignity that must always be respected. On the other hand, as we have seen he vigorously affirmed freedom's dependence on fidelity to truth: "[F]reedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects its *essential link with the truth*."⁴³ Understanding this tension and John Paul's response to it will help situate the pope's theology of truth and freedom within the social and political context from which it emerged. It will allow us to see his theology as an attempt to place the insights of the dissidents from Central and Eastern Europe on a firmer theological foundation.⁴⁴

Free Society and the Fear of Totalitarianism

Many find the assertion that freedom depends on fidelity to truth deeply troubling in light of the totalitarian tendency to impose one's truth on others. This fear is well expressed by the economist and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman. In his brief commentary on *Centesimus Annus*, Professor Friedman states:

As a non-Catholic classical liberal, I find much to praise and to agree with in this letter, . . . But I must confess that one high-minded sentiment, passed off as if it were a self-evident proposition, sent shivers down my back: "*Obedience to the truth* about God and man is the first

⁴⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, §87.

⁴¹ *Redemptor Hominis*, §12.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Evangelium Vitae*, §19.

⁴⁴ The fact that John Paul's teaching has deep affinities with the teachings of other dissidents from Central and Eastern Europe was early noted by Rocco Buttiglione. See Buttiglione, *Karol Wójtyła: the Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, 152, n. 41. See also Allen White, "Magna est Veritas et praevalerebit," *New Blackfriars* 71 (1990): 196.

condition of freedom.” Whose “truth”? Decided by whom? Echoes of the Spanish Inquisition?⁴⁵

Friedman pinpoints a major concern, a concern eloquently formulated years before by Isaiah Berlin in his classic studies on the nature of liberty.⁴⁶ Berlin famously distinguishes between negative and positive liberty. Negative liberty is freedom *from* coercion (it is the unhindered ability to do as one pleases as long as this freedom does not infringe on the freedom of others), while positive liberty is freedom *for* excellence (it is a self-mastery that empowers a person to live according to a concrete conception of human fulfillment). Berlin argues that the positive conception of liberty is inherently dangerous, because those who believe that freedom depends on living according to a specific way of life sooner or later succumb to the temptation to “free” their fellows by imposing this way of life on them by force. At issue here, therefore, is the extent to which institutions such as the Catholic Church that regard freedom as dependent upon the acceptance of a certain conception of the human person are a danger to liberal institutions and the civil rights these institutions seek to preserve. In Berlin’s view, such institutions advance a view of freedom that leads to totalitarianism. Berlin regards this judgment as confirmed by the long and bloody history of Europe.

Berlin’s solution was to embrace a vigorous “pluralism of values,” where each citizen can without interference “choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them.”⁴⁷ A popularized version of this view has recently been paraphrased as follows: “Only openness guarantees freedom, and only one who believes in the relativity of truth can be genuinely open. The true believer is a threat to liberty.”⁴⁸ Berlin, however, also recognized the opposite peril of portraying individual freedom as the sole value in public life. Even liberal societies place limits on individual freedom, which, Berlin argues, we justify through a form of utilitarian calculus: “We justify them on the ground that ignorance, or a barbarian upbringing, or cruel pleasures and excitements are worse for us than the amount of restraint

⁴⁵ Milton Friedman, “Goods in Conflict?” in *A New Worldly Order: John Paul II and Human Freedom*, ed. George Weigel (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1991), 77.

⁴⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); see also the recent collection of his essays: *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

⁴⁷ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Proper Study of Mankind*, 242.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Vintage, 2000), 34. As we shall see, Sacks offers this paraphrase in order to critique it.

needed to repress them.”⁴⁹ Berlin acknowledges that this type of calculus presupposes judgments concerning good and evil, which in turn presuppose some conception of human flourishing. How, then, do the requirements of negative liberty differ from those of positive liberty? Berlin’s response is twofold: The conception of human flourishing proper to negative freedom is recognized as provisional and is rooted in a society’s emotional revulsion before violations of this conception. Berlin argues for this view from within the liberal tradition of rights.

[For] the liberal tradition . . . no society is free unless it is governed by at any rate two interrelated principles: first, that no power, but only rights, can be regarded as absolute, so that all men, whatever power governs them, have an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly; and, second, that there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable, these frontiers being defined in terms of rules so long and widely accepted that their observance has entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being, and, therefore, also of what it is to act inhumanly or insanely; rules of which it would be absurd to say, for example, that they could be abrogated by some formal procedure on the part of some court or sovereign body.⁵⁰

Rights are absolute and express the domain of noninterference in which each individual should be left alone. Rules delineate the frontiers of these rights and are based in a traditional conception of what it means to be “a normal human being,” and what it means to act “inhumanly or insanely.”

Berlin affirms unflinchingly that normality is determined according to a society’s emotional response to specific actions. A normal person is one who “could not break these rules easily, without a qualm of revulsion.”⁵¹ Berlin lists as examples the rules governing due process in courts of law, as well as an army’s conduct in war. Among the acts that violate these rules are torture, murder, and the massacre of innocent minorities. “Such acts, even if they are made legal by the sovereign, cause horror even in these days.”⁵² In essence, Berlin seeks to ground the rights that underpin negative liberty upon Humean emotivism. We protect negative liberty by outlawing actions that an educated gentleman would find emotionally repulsive. In Berlin’s view, therefore, the best defense against tyranny is to promote a collective recognition of the provisional and limited character of our understanding of the human good and to trust in the emotional

⁴⁹ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Proper Study of Mankind*, 240.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

good sense of an educated majority. In this, Berlin well expresses the dominant moral perspective in Europe and America. It is a view ably proclaimed by contemporary intellectuals such as Richard Rorty and popularly expressed by the major outlets of western art and culture.⁵³

Yet, is this view sufficient? Does trusting in the majority's emotional "horror" and "revulsion" before evil provide a sufficient foundation to protect even the negative freedom that our societies so cherish? A careful reading of recent history suggests otherwise. The fact that the Nazis succeeded in persuading lifelong public servants *voluntarily* to execute innocent women and children and very quickly to do so without any emotional horror or revulsion should cause defenders of liberty some pause.⁵⁴ Moreover, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has observed, the popularized version of Isaiah Berlin's perspective seems to have fostered a surprising result: a culture that is unable even to articulate rational objections to mass murder.⁵⁵ Rabbi Sacks offers the example of the Harvard professor who discovered to his dismay that among his students "there was no general agreement that those guilty of the Holocaust itself were guilty of a moral horror. 'It all depends on your perspective,' one said. 'I'd first have to see those events through the eyes of people affected by them,' another remarked."⁵⁶ If civil servants can murder the innocent without feeling "horror" and if sixty years later students at Harvard can feel no "moral horror" over those functionaries' actions, then something is deeply amiss in the defense of negative liberty proposed by Isaiah Berlin. As Rabbi Sacks notes, contemporary moral relativism appears to be the product of a "sincere determination of a post-war, post-Holocaust generation to avoid the possibility of any future 'final solution.'"⁵⁷ In fact, however, this moral perspective is possibly preparing the groundwork for just such solutions in the future.

Berlin based his utilitarian emotivism on something he believed to be empirically demonstrable: Humans pursue a plurality of ends that are essentially irreconcilable. These ends are irreconcilable because there is no one conception of the human person that all people are able rationally to

⁵³ See especially Berlin's conclusion at the end of "Two Conceptions of Liberty" (242) which expresses a view virtually identical to the one advanced by Rorty in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44–95, 189–98.

⁵⁴ See Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

⁵⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *Politics of Hope*, 34–35.

⁵⁶ James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 8; cited by Jonathan Sacks, *Politics of Hope*, 35.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Sacks, *Politics of Hope*, 34.

discover and embrace. One might agree with Berlin in rejecting a version of Enlightenment rationalism that sought to impose its type of “rationality” on whole societies.⁵⁸ Yet, might it be possible to make lesser claims for reason without falling into moral relativism or moral authoritarianism? In other words, might it be possible to defend the area of non-interference proper to negative freedom by advancing a non-Enlightenment view of practical reasoning? It is here that the experiences of the dissidents from Central and Eastern Europe acquire unique importance, especially for our efforts to understand John Paul’s theology of truth and freedom.

Truth and the Dissidents from Central Europe

If the dominant attitude in the west toward freedom’s relationship to truth can be paraphrased as “only belief in the relativity of truth guarantees freedom,” a very different view has developed in Central and Eastern Europe. For thinkers such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vaclav Havel, freedom depends on “living within the truth.”⁵⁹ Indeed, as the Czech philosopher Erazim Kohák noted at the time, “The entire tenor of Czech dissent . . . has been on *life in the truth*. . . . In word and deed, Czech dissidents have demonstrated their conviction that there is truth, that there is good and evil—and that the difference is not reducible to cultural preference.”⁶⁰ This was also true in Poland and even earlier for the dissidents in Russia. Thinkers throughout Central and Eastern Europe have each in their own way recognized that freedom—as an individual as well as a social/political reality—depends on fidelity to certain basic truths about what it means to be human.⁶¹

In his now-classic study of political resistance to repression, penned while he was still under house arrest, Vaclav Havel offers his reflections on

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Centesimus Annus* 46, where John Paul recognizes “the danger of fanaticism or fundamentalism among those who, in the name of an ideology which purports to be scientific or religious, claim the right to impose on others their own concept of what is true and good.”

⁵⁹ Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” trans. Paul Wilson, in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), 23–96; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

⁶⁰ Erazim Kohák, “Can There Be a Central Europe?” *Dissent* 37 (1990): 195–96; cited by David Hollenbach, “Christian Social Ethics after the Cold War,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 94.

⁶¹ For the role of this insight in the transformations that occurred in central and eastern Europe, see George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: the Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially pages 37–57, 125–58, 174–90 and 199–209.

the role of truth in emancipating a society from oppression.⁶² Havel explains that the totalitarian regimes of Central Europe developed a system of control that forced their members to participate in a vast network of deception, so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies that virtually everything became described by its opposite:

[T]he complete degradation of the individual is presented as his or her ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; . . . the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom.⁶³

The rules of this game of make-believe required that every member of society, from the greengrocer to the president, perpetuate the illusion. They were all pushed to participate daily in the many tiny public rituals that validated the ideology of the regime. Havel notes that it was not necessary to believe the lies. Few in fact did. It was only necessary to act as if the lies were true, or at least to remain silent about them. Havel describes this as “living within the lie” and emphasizes human receptivity to living a lie as a necessary component of a totalitarian regime’s success: “[H]uman beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way.”⁶⁴ Modern totalitarianism is able to function as it does, because of the human capacity—whether from fear of pain or the desire for comfort—to adapt itself to living a lie. This accommodation comes at a price. Living within a lie alienates the person from himself, and leads to a “profound crisis of human identity.”⁶⁵

Havel affirms, however, that the experience of human alienation has a curious result. It points beyond itself. “Individuals can be alienated from

⁶² Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 23–96. Havel draws here on the work of his philosophical mentor, the Czech philosopher and signer of Charter 77, Jan Patočka, whose death under police interrogation was one of the catalysts that led to Prague’s velvet revolution. Patočka had labored since the 1930s to find a synthesis between Husserl’s (and later Heidegger’s) theoretical insights into the crisis of European society and the ethical activism of Thomas Masaryk, Czechoslovakia’s first philosopher president. For Patočka, the solution was to rediscover philosophy’s essential character as a “life in truth.” See Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press). For Rorty’s perspective on Jan Patočka and the Czech dissidents, see Richard Rorty, “The Seer of Prague,” *The New Republic* (July 1, 1991): 35–40.

⁶³ Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

themselves only because there is *something* in them to alienate.” The violence of human alienation reveals “living within a lie” to be the distorted image of another way of living.

Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response. Only against this background does living a lie make any sense: it exists *because* of that background. In its excusatory, chimerical rootedness in the human order, it is a response to nothing other than the human predisposition to truth. Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth.⁶⁶

The pain of alienation points to the “hidden sphere” of human life. Havel describes this hidden sphere in various ways. It is the reality underlying the deepest desires of the human heart, desires that are naturally ordered toward certain specific ends. “The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity’s rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existences.”⁶⁷ In essence, Havel is asserting that there exists in all people an inclination toward something more than the mere satisfaction of their material needs. First, there is an inner urge to pursue life’s needs in a free, responsible, and creative way. Second, rooted in the human recognition of something within us that transcends the material world, there is the urge to pursue the truth about this hidden reality and the human person’s place in it. Third, there is the urge to pursue these creative aims and this openness to truth *with others* from within a network of responsibility and social solidarity. Those who are true to the promptings of this hidden sphere of life and attempt to live in harmony with its aims, are attempting to “live within the truth.”

Havel sees the inner human urge to live according to the truth, to live according to the “real aims of life,” as the authentic source of resistance to oppression. Reacting against the widely held view that resistance movements are largely the work of elite groups of artists and intellectuals, Havel portrays these movements as springing from all parts of society.⁶⁸ The greengrocer who stops placing propaganda posters among his vegetables or the master brewer who tries to improve his product are both responding to the same human urge: the urge to act freely and responsibly before values they recognize to be higher than the State and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

not subject to its ideology. These citizens do not necessarily seek to become dissidents, but are thrown into it by circumstances that bring out their sense of personal responsibility before the truth of things. “It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends with being branded an enemy of society.”⁶⁹

Havel views living within the truth as multidimensional. It has an existential dimension (“returning humanity to its inherent nature”), a cognitive dimension (“revealing reality as it is”), a moral dimension (“setting an example for others”), and an “unambiguous *political* dimension.”⁷⁰ Since living within the lie is essential to an oppressive regime’s ability to maintain itself in power, living within the truth becomes a deadly threat to it. Havel explains that once individuals start to live within the truth in concrete ways there arises within oppressed societies “the independent spiritual, social and political life of society.”⁷¹ Gradually, individuals living within the truth begin to work together to develop “parallel structures” or even a “parallel polis,” where the members of society can together pursue the real ends of human life. Havel has in mind here underground universities, theatres, trade unions, and any other free association that provides space for the collective pursuit of the authentic aims of human life. Writing in 1978, Havel judged that this was as far as the resistance movements had gotten. “These parallel structures, it may be said, represent the most articulated expressions so far of ‘living within the truth.’”⁷² He predicted, however, that one possible outcome would be for these efforts to lead to the peaceful collapse of the regime and a collective commitment to protect the “independent life of society” and every individual’s ability to pursue with others a life within the truth. In essence, Havel sketched the features of the velvet revolution that would erupt ten years later.

Living within the Truth and the Protection of Negative Liberty

Vaclav Havel presents the defense of human rights as a core aspect of any movement to resist oppression. “As we have seen, the ‘dissident movement’ grows out of the principle of equality, founded on the notion that human rights and freedoms are indivisible.”⁷³ The parallel structures created by communal efforts to live within the truth act as “a defence of the individual and his or her right to a free and truthful life (that is, a

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 60.

defence of human rights and a struggle to see the laws respected).⁷⁴ In short, Havel affirms that the goal of all resistance to oppression is to preserve a realm within which individuals are able “to live freely in dignity and partnership.”⁷⁵ In this respect, Havel’s goal does not differ greatly from Isaiah Berlin’s. Like Berlin, Havel sees his position as expressing “humanity’s revolt against an enforced position.”⁷⁶ Like Berlin, Havel views his efforts as “an attempt to regain control over one’s own sense of responsibility.”⁷⁷ Indeed, in the final analysis, Berlin and Havel are both defending the classical liberal position that the role of government is to create and protect a private realm where individuals are free to pursue their own goals without interference.

There is, however, an important difference between them. They seek to protect negative liberty in vastly different ways. As we have seen, Isaiah Berlin wants to protect liberty by promoting a vigorous pluralism of values, whose only unifying principle is society’s present collective sentiment concerning which acts are “normal” and which “abnormal,” or “repulsive.” Vaclav Havel, on the other hand, although he recognizes the importance of allowing individuals to pursue a variety of disparate aims, nevertheless sees these ends as rooted in a common humanity, having common characteristics. While Berlin affirmed that there is no one bedrock conception of the human person into which the plurality of human ends can be reconciled, Havel affirms the absolute necessity of recognizing such a bedrock conception for the defense of liberty. Indeed, for Havel, experience shows that we share a common humanity.

Historical experience teaches us that any genuinely meaningful point of departure in an individual’s life usually has an element of universality about it. In other words, it is not something partial, accessible only to a restricted community, and not transferable to any other. On the contrary, it must be potentially accessible to everyone; it must foreshadow a general solution and, thus, it is not just the expression of an introverted, self-contained responsibility that individuals have to and for themselves alone, but responsibility to and for the *world*.⁷⁸

Thus, while for Berlin moral pluralism flowing from a relative agnosticism concerning what it means to be human offers the only real defense of civil rights and negative liberty, Havel holds that lasting liberty can

⁷⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 80.

only exist from within a collective recognition of the foundational aims of human life, aims that are not subject to the sentiment of a manipulated majority nor the ideology of a regime. By contrast, Berlin embraces a resigned relativism.

It may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilization: an ideal which remote ages and primitive societies have not recognised, and one which posterity will regard with curiosity, even sympathy, but little comprehension.⁷⁹

With serenity Berlin even affirms that “principles are not less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of childhood or the absolute values of our primitive past.”⁸⁰ Havel displays no such insouciance concerning the permanence of human values. He recognizes that the discovery of truths that transcend any given culture or regime is the foundation of any attempt to live freely and with dignity. Far from being a childish or primitive craving for certainties, the affirmation that “there is truth, that there is good and evil—and that the difference is not reducible to cultural preference” (as Kohák so well expresses it) is the only sure defense of civil rights and human liberty. Stated in Berlin’s terms, the dissidents from Central and Eastern Europe discovered that some measure of positive liberty (the freedom to live according to the real aims of human life) is needed to promote and protect negative liberty (the political freedom not to be interfered with in one’s pursuit of one’s freely chosen aims). It is here that John Paul’s theology of freedom’s dependence on truth comes into historical focus.

Living within the Truth and John Paul’s Theology of Truth

As we have seen, the aspect of John Paul’s teaching with which Milton Friedman objects is the pope’s assertion that “*obedience to the truth* about God and man is the first condition of freedom.”⁸¹ Friedman asks, “Whose ‘truth’? Decided by whom?” This is a legitimate question. If the pope means here that political freedom depends on society embracing and imposing on its members the fullness of Catholic doctrine, then this

⁷⁹ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Proper Study of Mankind*, 242.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Centesimus Annus*, §41.

would indeed be problematic for supporters of negative liberty and a free society. The pope would then be supporting a theocratic view of the State with totalitarian features not unlike those exhibited by the now defunct repressive regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, the fact that the dissidents who helped topple those regimes regard a similar fidelity to truth as an integral component of their success suggests that there is another way to read the pope's assertion. Once again, to understand John Paul's teaching, we must remember that he regards freedom's dependence on truth as a reality existing on several concentric levels.

John Paul does indeed affirm that the fullness of human freedom is properly a Christian reality: It belongs to those who participate in some-way in the life of Christ and his Church. The pope, however, also affirms that this fullness cannot be forced upon another. An essential component of the "truth about man," obedience to which is a prerequisite of freedom, is that each person's freedom of conscience must be respected: "[T]otal recognition must be given to *the rights of the human conscience*."⁸² Although the human conscience is bound to obey the truth,⁸³ this obedience is lived by means of one's inner freedom. It cannot be imposed upon us by others. Thus, among the human rights defended by the Church are "the right to religious freedom together with the right to freedom of conscience."⁸⁴ Indeed, John Paul adds that, "the curtailment of the religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed or of the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have."⁸⁵ As if responding to Friedman's concern, John Paul describes "obedience to truth" as entailing, among other things, "the duty to respect the rights of others."⁸⁶ Knowing the truth will set us free, but only if that truth is accepted freely. The pope argues, therefore, that the primary function of the State is to protect and promote its citizens' ability, individually and collectively through free associations, to seek the truth and to live creatively according to the truth. Echoing Havel's teachings concerning the "independent life of society," John Paul affirms that the State must respect and promote the "subjectivity of society."⁸⁷ For John Paul, as for Havel, this level of social life exists between the individual and the State and is the level at

⁸² Ibid., §29.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Redemptor Hominis*, §17.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Centesimus Annus*, §17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., §46.

which we learn to live within the truth. John Paul portrays the Church as functioning on this level. In relation to the State, the Church is a free association of individuals that seeks to help its members and all people of good will to know the full truth about themselves and attain full freedom in Christ. In essence, the pope is arguing that one of the functions of the State is to promote social conditions that enable intermediate institutions like the Catholic Church to exist and pursue their ends.

It is in the context of the Church's role in society that John Paul responds directly to the type of objection advanced by Milton Friedman, characterizing it as follows:

Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends.⁸⁸

John Paul responds to this objection in two ways. First, he argues that unless some truths about the human person transcend society and the State, then we have no way of defending ourselves from the arbitrary use of power: "[I]f there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power."⁸⁹ Indeed, freedom itself (the negative liberty proper to political life) depends on respect for basic truths about human nature that are not subject to society: "In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden."⁹⁰ The pope affirms tirelessly, therefore, that the experiment of democratic government and free society will collapse and become an "open or thinly disguised totalitarianism"⁹¹ unless the members of a free society protect several basic truths about the human person.

Among the most important of these rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality; the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

share in the work which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and the right freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.⁹²

John Paul offered this list of rights from within his view that the basic unit of culture—the basic unit of a society's subjectivity—is the family.⁹³ Like Havel, John Paul described the individual and communal search for truth and the capacity to live in harmony with this truth as fundamental rights that society and the State must respect. The pope, however, went far beyond Havel by offering a concrete list of human rights that must be protected if society is to remain free. The challenge that John Paul placed before classical liberals such as Milton Friedman and Isaiah Berlin was simply this: Can the political freedoms you cherish be preserved without ensuring the fundamental right to life—especially among the most vulnerable members of society: the unborn, the elderly and the disabled—and the social conditions for the integral development of human life? Throughout his encyclicals, the pope affirmed that the experience of the twentieth century revealed that freedom cannot be preserved unless these rights are protected.

Note, however, that John Paul did not seek to impose even this crucial truth upon society. It is a truth that can only be lived by being freely accepted. Thus, in relation to secular society and the secular State, John Paul claimed for the Church only the freedom to bear witness to the truth. In essence, John Paul recognized and respected man's freedom to destroy himself and his society; the human person's freedom to embrace slavery instead of liberty. Nonetheless, he reserved the right for the Church and for all Christians to bear witness to the truth.⁹⁴ With confidence in the inherent attractiveness of the truth about the human person, a truth that is animated by *the* Truth with a capital T (the mysterious radiation of truth and love), John Paul was confident that Christians and all people of good will who bear witness to the truth by how they live their lives can move whole populations to live differently, to change their form of government, to change their scale of values.⁹⁵

⁹² *Ibid.*, §47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, §39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, §5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, §23.

John Paul further responded to the view that “true believers” are a danger to democracy by affirming that in fact the opposite is the case. Looking back over the remarkable events of 1989, the pope described the changes as in great part due to “the non-violent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth.”⁹⁶ In this context, “the Christian upholds freedom and serves it,”⁹⁷ while working in dialogue with others to build a society that respects basic human rights.

In John Paul’s view, only those who recognize freedom as integral to human dignity will work to ensure negative liberty in society. Moreover, for labors on behalf of negative liberty to succeed, one must have an accurate understanding of what freedom means. Only those who recognize that human freedom means more than merely the ability to choose between material goods, that it signifies the capacity to live according to the truth about the human person (according to the real aims of life), will be able to promote a society that protects its members’ ability to pursue their goals without interference. This insight is also present in thinkers from Central Europe. John Paul went beyond thinkers like Havel, however, in showing how the Christian is doubly able to promote negative liberty and civil rights: A Christian inspired by the true aims of the Gospel will promote civil rights because he or she recognizes freedom of conscience as a necessary component of any individual response to the grace of Christ and the Gospel message. Moreover, the Christian will be animated by such a zeal to bear witness to these values that at times it will even move him to shed his blood for them.

In this context, one way of interpreting John Paul’s teaching on truth and freedom is to regard it as an extended effort to give a theological foundation (a largely Johannine foundation) to the insights of the dissidents of Central and Eastern Europe. They learned from bitter experience the importance of fidelity to truth. They learned as well the interior joy and liberating power of this fidelity.⁹⁸ John Paul’s theology can partly be viewed as an effort to show how this truth ultimately finds its foundation in the mystery of the Living Word of God, the Truth become human in the humanity of Christ and acting among us in the love of the Spirit. In the final analysis, therefore, John Paul remained faithful to the Johannine insights of the Rhapsodic Theater. He remained faithful to the power of the Living Word as a force for cultural liberation.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, §46.

⁹⁸ *Dives in Misericordia*, §6.

Toward a Thomistic Anthropology of Truth and Freedom

In these pages I have outlined the various meanings of truth and freedom in John Paul's theology and have tried to place them in their social and political context. I have argued at key points that the pope's theology of truth and freedom becomes most fully intelligible within a broadly Thomistic anthropology. This fact, however, presents us with a problem. Many would argue that Thomistic anthropology is outmoded because the philosophy of nature underpinning it has been proved false by modern science. Thus, any theology that rests upon Thomistic principles is doomed to failure. Some, therefore, try to ground freedom's dependence on truth upon a phenomenological analysis not easily reconcilable with Aquinas's thought.⁹⁹ Others, enthralled by the apparent power of Hume's critique of the "Is/Ought fallacy" or G. E. Moore's critique of the "naturalistic fallacy," try to ground morality on a neo-Kantian version of Aquinas.¹⁰⁰ Yet, is St. Thomas's anthropology in fact outmoded? Has modern science truly disproved the philosophy of nature that underlies Aquinas's Christian anthropology? My own contention is no: On the level of its principles, Thomas's anthropology is not outmoded, because modern science has not, in fact, disproved the basic insights of Aquinas's philosophy of nature. Indeed, as several recent studies suggest, a growing number of scientists are beginning to pose questions about the philosophical underpinnings of their own methods and are offering answers to these questions that have affinities with Aquinas's philosophy of nature.¹⁰¹ To my knowledge, however, no one has yet drawn together in one monograph the insights of these studies nor placed them in conversation with the views of contemporary analytic philosophers who draw similar conclusions. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that John Paul's theology of truth and freedom will become more accessible to the faithful by being grounded in a renewed Thomistic anthropology and philosophy of nature. Although these concluding remarks are not the place to develop

⁹⁹ See for example Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

¹⁰¹ John Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995); Mariano Artigas, *The Mind of the Universe: Understanding Science and Religion* (Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000); William E. Carroll, *La Creación y las Ciencias Naturales: Actualidad de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, trans. Oscar Velásquez (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile).

such a perspective, I would like to end by sketching what I believe to be the key elements of such a renewal.¹⁰²

When St. Augustine expresses his longing for God in the *Confessions*, he famously does so in the plural: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”¹⁰³ Although we may be tempted to view spiritual longing or the experience of human alienation as solitary events, they both have profoundly social dimensions. To live within the truth or within a lie both require socialization. Even though, from the Thomistic perspective, each of us is born with the spiritual powers of intellect and will, both of which contain principles orienting us toward the true and the good, we only learn to know the truth and to love the good through a community. In other words, although the primary precepts of the natural law and the inclinations of the will are present in everyone, we learn to act according to these principles in and through a moral apprenticeship whereby we are initiated into the life of a community. Freedom’s dependence on truth is a community-based dependence. We grow in freedom in and through communities that have a greater or lesser grasp of the truth. A renewed Thomistic anthropology, therefore, will be one that has a deeper understanding of the communal aspects of moral development.

The social character of moral development, however, is only one component of renewal. Humans are not just social, they are animal. As we have seen, Vaclav Havel suggests that the experience of human alienation reveals “living within the lie” to be the distorted image of something richer: It points to the authentic human joy of “living within the truth.” Similarly, we can view the effects of Enlightenment attempts to remove animality from the definition of Man as equally revelatory. Once humans were no longer “rational animals” and became “thinking beings,” the last thread linking morality with nature was severed. This history is complex. It is linked to a changed understanding of “nature” and of the place of the “spiritual” within nature. The change in definition was part of an effort to save human freedom from the perceived determinism of nature and the physical. Yet, it contradicts what is most evident about us: We are primates, members of the animal kingdom, sharing characteristics present

¹⁰² In what follows I am deeply influenced by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, especially *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

¹⁰³ *Confesiones* 1.1: “fecisti nos, domine, ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.”

in other primates and in other animals. This does not mean, however, that we are merely primates. St. Thomas recognized that we are strange amphibians: made to breathe the air of the spiritual while living in the waters of the material. A renewed Thomistic anthropology will thus also take seriously what we share developmentally with other animals, while identifying our unique way of living these common aspects. Such an approach will require that we address squarely the concerns of those who are persuaded that no moral “ought” can be discerned from an “is.” In other words, any effort to return animality to the definition of the human would require a clear explanation of how knowing what a thing is also implies knowing something about how it ought to act. As noted earlier, this also implies a renewed understanding of practical rationality, one that shows how knowledge of what constitutes human flourishing shapes our practical judgments concerning what we should do here and now.

An approach that takes more seriously human animality and the social dimensions of moral development will also provide a renewed context for understanding the mystery of sin. While Havel speaks of the human capacity freely for reasons of fear or comfort to live within the lie, John Paul squarely places these actions in the context of sin: the human person’s capacity to act contrary to what he or she knows to be right, and to do so even while retaining an awareness that such actions are contrary to the wisdom and will of God. A moral theology that grasps the role of the emotions and of one’s social context in shaping our moral judgments will better explain the dynamics of sin and the means of freeing ourselves from it. In other words, the deeper we understand the social and animal components of human nature, the better we will be able to explain (a) why “living within the lie” can be so appealing, (b) why living within the lie brings such sorrow and confusion, and (c) how “living within the Truth” both liberates us from the sorrowful confusion of sin and empowers us to live the joy of virtue.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle to centering more clearly John Paul’s theology of truth and freedom in a Thomistic anthropology is the obstacle posed by the philosophy of nature. Thomistic anthropology will continue to have limited appeal as long as it fails to show that the philosophy of nature upon which it depends is compatible with the discoveries and methods of contemporary science. The standard narrative of the emergence of modern science portrays the scientific method as born from the defeat of Aristotelian science. Indeed, many of the early discoveries of modern science were discoveries that overturned time-honored assumptions of the Aristotelians. Disciples of Aquinas, therefore, will have to show how the principles of the philosophy of nature differ from the outmoded

science of Aristotle. Specifically, they need to show convincingly how the natural world has qualitative as well as quantitative aspects, and that these qualitative aspects can be known and studied.¹⁰⁴ The time seems ripe for such an undertaking because scientists themselves are turning to questions that transcend the merely quantitative aspects of nature. Indeed, some are even searching for a holistic approach that will help them understand the human community's place in creation, and the role of the scientist as a member of that community.¹⁰⁵

The challenge, therefore, for those who wish to give John Paul's theology of truth and freedom a deeper grounding in Thomistic anthropology is threefold. It calls for an anthropology that underlines the social dimensions of moral development, returns animality to the definition of the human, and springs from a renewed philosophy of nature. Responding to this threefold challenge will facilitate our understanding of the Johannine proclamation that "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8,32). It will help us convince our contemporaries that what the young Karol Wojtyla asserted in *Jeremiah: A National Drama* is equally true today during our own national dramas: "One must throw truth across the path of lies" because "in truth are freedom and excellence," while the betrayal of truth leads only to slavery. N&V

¹⁰⁴ William E. Carroll, "The Scientific Revolution and Contemporary Discourse in the Relationship between Faith and Reason," in *Faith and Reason*, ed. Timothy L. Smith (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2001): 195–216.

¹⁰⁵ See Dominique Lambert, *Sciences et théologie: Les figures d'un dialogue* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 1999); Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* (Boston: National Bioethics Center, 1995).