

Natural Law and Personalism in Veritatis Splendor

by

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For centuries natural law was the backbone of the Church's teaching on moral issues but in the mid-part of this century it began to be mixed with natural rights language. Then with the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, a new language, the language of personalism, already in evidence in the documents of Vatican II, particularly Gaudium et Spes, dominated magisterial documents, to the point where natural law language nearly disappeared. Now, in the Universal Catechism and in Veritatis Splendor we encounter a knitting together of the language and concepts of personalism, natural law^[1] and natural rights.

Those trained in natural law and in Thomism (and others!) have been a bit befuddled by "personalism" and "phenomenology", not knowing exactly what they mean and what their principles are. This essay will attempt to offer a brief explanation of personalism while contrasting it with natural law. It will also attempt to show how personalism and natural law are compatible and skillfully integrated into Veritatis Splendor (a consideration of the place of natural rights language is beyond the scope of this essay).

Although for most of the English speaking world, Veritatis Splendor was available prior to the Universal Catechism, the issuance of Veritatis Splendor was delayed so that it would follow and be seen as building upon the Catechism. Thus, it seems appropriate to consult the Catechism to contextualize some of the elements of Veritatis Splendor. The first part of this essay will highlight the personalistic approach of the moral section of the Universal Catechism by comparing it with the Roman Catechism of the sixteenth century, a catechism entirely steeped in the natural law tradition. The second part of this essay will draw upon John Paul II's own explanations of how his phenomenological personalism draws upon but supplements the Thomistic metaphysical understanding of the person. He makes it clear that his anthropology and ethics are in no way incompatible with Thomism and indeed depend upon Thomistic metaphysics. The third and final portion of the essay will draw together the thematic concepts that distinguish a natural law approach to ethics and a personalist approach to ethics and show how they are integrated into Veritatis Splendor.

A comparison of the Roman Catechism with the Universal Catechism

A useful way to illustrate the difference between a natural law approach to ethics and a personalist approach to ethics, is to compare the treatment of morality in the Universal Catechism with its treatment in the Roman Catechism. Such a comparison illuminates certain shifts of emphasis that the Church has made over the centuries, especially as a result of the second Vatican Council.

Cosmology vs. Christology

The new catechism expresses the Christological and personalistic emphasis of the Council

rather than the cosmological and natural law emphasis of the past. To oversimplify matters, one could say that the Church has shifted from an emphasis on God the father as Lawgiver who has written his will into the laws of nature, to an emphasis on Christ as our model of perfection and human dignity as the grounding of morality. The new catechism does not reject or abandon a view of the cosmos as ordered by God or of natural law as a guide to morality but it incorporates them in a secondary way in its presentation of morality. Furthermore, the dignity of the human person is seen as rooted not so much in his status as a rational creature whose mind is able to grasp reality but in his status as a free and self-determining creature who must shape himself in accord with the truth. (I shall develop these observations below).

Ten Commandments vs. Dignity of the Human Person

The shift in emphasis from natural law to a Christological and personalist emphasis is immediately apparent upon comparing the old and new catechisms. For instance, whereas the Roman Catechism began its moral section with the ten commandments, the Universal Catechism calls upon the Christian to "recognize your dignity" (1691) and calls him to a life in Christ. Whereas the Roman Catechism focussed almost exclusively on the commandments and the law, the Universal Catechism sketches a Christian anthropology, begins with the beatitudes, and touches upon such topics as freedom, and the conscience and includes a long section on man as a member of a community. Again, these new emphases and starting points are not to be taken as a rejection of the old. The natural law themes of the moral act, virtue, sin and grace and, of course, the natural law itself, are also covered in the new catechism but they are imbued with a personalist cast -- that is with a focus on man's dignity as manifested in his power to determine himself freely in accord with the truth. Whereas the Roman Catechism stressed God as the author of nature and the author of all moral laws, the Universal Catechism stresses that all moral law is in accord with the dignity of the human person. These are emphases that began to emerge in the documents of Vatican II and come to a fuller flower in the Universal Catechism.

The moral section of the Universal Catechism begins with this passage:

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God (*article 1*); it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude (*article 2*). It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfillment (*article 3*). By his deliberate actions (*article 4*), the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience (*article 5*). Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth (*article 6*). With the help of grace they grow in virtue (*article 7*), avoid sin, and if they sin they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son to the mercy of our Father in heaven (*article 8*). In this way they attain to the perfection of charity. (1700)^[2]

In this passage we can see several of the main concepts that inform a personalist approach to ethics: man as made in the image and likeness of God, man as determining himself by his deliberate and free actions, a concern with the interior life, the need of conforming our actions to the good that is made known to us by our conscience, and the goal being attainment of perfect charity. These themes play a major role in both the Universal Catechism and in Veritatis Splendor. These concepts, of course, are also central to natural law ethics, but it is often the emphasis that is placed upon identical themes that distinguish the two approaches.

John Paul II's Explanation of His Own Views

John Paul II, when he was the philosopher Karol Wojtyla, wrote several essays explaining the compatibility between personalism and natural law and the differences between them. In one essay "The Human Person and Natural Law",^[3] he asserts that any incompatibility between them is illusory and that any notion that they are incompatible stems from a faulty view either of what nature is or of what the person is.

Nature as Mechanistic vs Nature as Rationality

The erroneous view of nature that he combats is that held by phenomenologists and phenomenologists^[4] (and, may I add, of many non-phenomenological critics of natural law), that nature has nothing to do with rationality and freedom; that it simply refers to the rather mechanistic laws of nature, that is, to the natural impulses and responses of man's somatic and psychic nature; to what "happens in or to man" rather than what he himself does. Whereas nature seems deterministic or mechanistic to some extent, the person is free and thus it would seem that the person should be above nature and perhaps even in conflict with nature.^[5] (This is similar to the charge of biologism that is addressed in Veritatis Splendor). Wojtyla notes that this view of nature is not that held by Aquinas. Rather he states that Thomistic philosophy speaks of "nature" in the metaphysical sense: "which is more or less equivalent to the essence of a thing taken as the basis of all the actualization of the thing."^[6] Wojtyla notes that the phrase "all the actualization of the thing" is important, for he ever has his focus on man's self-actualization by his free and deliberate choices. Wojtyla does grant that on the somatic and psychic level, man is dominated by nature as something "happening" to him and exercises little creative control over these happenings. But he also draws upon the Thomistic distinction of the actus humanum (human action) and the actus hominis (act of a man); the former being acts that engage the rational and free powers of the human person; the later being such acts as breathing. Natural law pertains not to acts of man but to human action.

Wojtyla insists that Aquinas' view of natural law rests upon his understanding of the person as "an individual substance of a rational nature." He notes that Aquinas defines law as "an ordinance of reason for the common good, promulgated by one who has care of the community" and that Aquinas defines natural law as "the participation of the eternal law in a rational creature."^[7] From this he extrapolates that man's rational nature, which defines his personhood, intimately links man with the "ordinance of reason" that defines natural law. He contrasts Aquinas's view of reason with that of Kant,

who would have subjective reason "impose its own categories on reality."^[8] (Wojtyla's interest in subjectivity is not the same as Kant's subjectivism). Aquinas's reason, has a "completely different orientation and attitude: that attitude of reason discerning, grasping, defining, and affirming, in relation to an order that is objective and prior to human reason itself."^[9] This objective order, this ordinance of reason, is no other than the eternal law; thus man through natural law, through his rational nature, participates in God's reason. With a proper understanding of nature, there should be no conflict between natural law and personalism. The person is not confined by natural law but indeed freely participates in God's governance; whatever subordination there is, is to God. It is man's nature to be free and in that sense to transcend "nature"; he is not determined by any "natural law" to do the good; he may freely choose to do the good or not to do it.

The Person as Consciousness vs. the Person as Rational and Free

The definition of person that conflicts with natural law is the definition that elevates man's freedom unduly; it sees man as "some sort of pure consciousness," that makes the human being "a kind of absolute affirmed on the intellectual plane,"^[10] subordinate to nothing. This definition of the person leads to the erroneous view of freedom that is rejected in Veritatis Splendor; this person is not subject to the "ordinances of reason" that point the way to objective, universal truths but is free to form his own reality.

From this essay, we can discern what Wojtyla's understanding of the natural law is: it is the understanding that man's reason enables him to discover the "ordinances of reason" that govern the universe and is able to live in accord with it. Nature here does not have the mechanistic, determinative sense given to it by some modern philosophers. He also makes clear that his notion of person as a rational, self-determining creature does not entail that man's consciousness and subjective state is superior to objective truth; this notion is elaborated upon in other essays.

In the essay, "Thomistic Personalism," Wojtyla situates his own understanding of person vis-a-vis Aquinas and vis-a-vis the understanding of personalism devised by moderns such as Descartes and Kant. He accepts Aquinas' definition of the person but integrates this definition into his ethics in a way significantly different from Aquinas. He notes that Aquinas develops his notion of the person largely in the theological context of an analysis of the Trinity and the Incarnation; as he notes, Aquinas's use of the term "person" is "all but absent from his treatise on the human being."^[11] In a theological context the person is spoken of as being perfectissimum ens, the most perfect being, because it is a rational and free being. Despite its theological context, the definition of person used by Aquinas, taken from Boethius, is a philosophical one; it is that stated above, the person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Wojtyla restates the definition: "The person ... is always a rational and free concrete being, capable of all those activities that reason and freedom alone make possible."^[12] Wojtyla notes that whereas A. makes much use of the term "person" in his theological treatises, in his treatise on the human being, he adopts a hylomorphic view that sees man as a composite of form and matter. This definition does not, of course, conflict with the definition of man as a person, for man's form is a spiritual

soul which is characterized by its rationality and freedom.^[13]

Wojtyla compares Aquinas's definition with that of Descartes, a definition which, like that of Kant mentioned above, tends to identify the person with consciousness^[14] and sees the body as a kind of mechanistic adjunct to the person. This view elevates freedom to a level of almost total independence. He observes that subjectivism is the most characteristic feature of such philosophy: "the person is not a substance, an objective being with its own proper subsistence -- subsistence in a rational nature. The person is merely a certain property of lived experiences and can be distinguished by means of those experiences, for they are conscious and self-conscious experiences; hence, consciousness and self-consciousness constitute the essence of the person." Wojtyla notes that this is not the view of Aquinas, that he sees consciousness as something derivative of rationality.

Aquinas' Objectivity and Wojtyla's Subjectivity

While Wojtyla accepts Aquinas' view of the person, he supplements it. He summarizes Aquinas's view in this way:

We can see here how very objectivistic St. Thomas' view of the person is. It almost seems as though there is no place in it for an analysis of consciousness and self-consciousness as a totally unique manifestation of the person as a subject. For St. Thomas, the person, is, of course, a subject -- a very distinctive subject of existence and activity -- because the person has subsistence in a rational nature, and this is what makes the person capable of consciousness and self-consciousness. St. Thomas, however, mainly presents this disposition of the human person to consciousness and self-consciousness. On the other hand, when it comes to analyzing consciousness and self-consciousness -- which is what chiefly interested modern philosophy and psychology -- there seems to be no place for it in St. Thomas' objectivistic view of reality. In any case, that in which the person's subjectivity is most apparent is presented by St. Thomas in an exclusively -- or almost exclusively -- objective way. He shows us the particular faculties, both spiritual and sensory, thanks to which the whole of human consciousness and self-consciousness -- the human personality in the psychological and moral sense -- takes shape, but that is also where he stops. Thus St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person, but it would be difficult to speak in his view of the lived experiences of the person.^[15]

Here is where Wojtyla moves beyond Aquinas. He shares the modern interest in consciousness and self-consciousness, though he does not share the modern view that the person is consciousness. Rather, in the Acting Person he uses an analysis of consciousness to unfold his notion of man as being free and self-determining. For it is his consciousness of himself as one who is an efficient cause of his own action and of his self-actualization that allows the human being to have a sense of responsibility for his actions and his character.^[16] In the Acting Person, particularly in chapters 3 and 4, Wojtyla

maintains that to actualize himself properly the human person must have an authentic grasp of values or goods and must work to determine himself in accord with objective goods; only thus is his freedom truly exercised. (This, of course, is a major theme of Veritatis Splendor.) The dignity of the human person, for Wojtyla lies in this determination of the self through the free choice of what is good.

Indeed, one of the chief differences between Wojtyla's interest in the human person and Aquinas is that Wojtyla begins with and returns to subjectivity and Aquinas focuses largely on objective truths. One might say that Aquinas' chief interest is in determining what acts are good and evil; for Wojtyla the chief interest is in showing that man's very subjectivity and freedom requires that he be concerned with the truth. For instance, in the Acting Person he states:

For human freedom is not accomplished nor exercised in bypassing truth but, on the contrary, by the person's realization and surrender to truth. The dependence upon truth marks out the borderlines of the autonomy appropriate to the human person.^[17]

Aquinas' Metaphysical Interests and Wojtyla's Phenomenological Interests

Another difference between Aquinas and Wojtyla emerges from the above comparison. Whereas Aquinas is interested in developing a metaphysical description of man, a description in terms of form and matter, and rationality and animality, Wojtyla is interested in using man's experience of himself, of his self-determining powers, to lead him to an awareness of his dignity. Ultimately Wojtyla draws upon a Thomistic metaphysics, for Wojtyla finds Aquinas's appropriation of the Aristotelian concepts "potentiality" and "actuality" (metaphysical terms) to be essential to a proper description of man's power to determine himself; man's life is a process of bringing into actualization various potencies that he has. But the fact remains that Aquinas aims at a metaphysical description (one ultimately rooted in experience, but one which seeks to arrive at ultimate principles, described in terms of universal categories), whereas Wojtyla aims at a phenomenological one, one that remains as closely linked as possible to the lived experience of the concrete human being of his own consciousness of himself as a self-determining person. A metaphysical analysis would lead one to see that man is capable of being self-determining because he is a person, that is because he is rational and free, but for Wojtyla this metaphysical analysis is of secondary interest.

Man as a Social Animal vs. Man as Self-Giver

Wojtyla also emphasizes another feature of the human person that links his view more closely with the documents of Vat. II than with that of Aquinas, and this is the portrait of man as a "self-giver". Wojtyla cites the lines of Vat. II that express concepts and use terms that were characteristic of Wojtyla's thought before the council and that have played a major role in his work after the council. He notes how these lines are in accord with the tradition and with Thomism but in a way moves beyond them both:

In Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, we read that "the human being,

who is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself or herself except through a disinterested gift of himself or herself" (24). The document of the last Council seems in these words to sum up the age-old traditions and inquiries of Christian anthropology, for which divine revelation became a liberating light. The anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas is deeply rooted in these traditions, while also being open to all the achievements of human thought that in various ways supplement the Thomistic view of the person and confirm its realistic character. The words of Vatican II cited above seem chiefly to accentuate the axiological aspect, speaking of the person as a being of special intrinsic worth, who is, therefore, specially qualified to make a gift of self.

In the tradition man was defined as a social animal; much was made of his need to write human laws in accord with natural law to achieve harmony in the state. The Wojtylan view of man as one who must give of himself to perfect himself gives a much profounder cast to the traditional notion and approaches a more theological understanding of the person who can only perfect himself by imitating the total self-giving of Christ.

Natural Law and Personalism in Veritatis Splendor

Now from the above analysis, let us draw together a list of the differences between natural law and personalism and see how the themes distinctive of each are integrated in Veritatis Splendor.

The universal vs. the concrete; the objective vs. the subjective

Natural law is interested in the abstract universal norm, whereas Veritatis Splendor is interested in the choices of the concrete individual. Natural law is interested in the objectivity of moral norms; personalism is interested in the subjectivity of the concrete individual, a subjectivity characteristic of all human beings.

The presentation of Veritatis Splendor begins with what might be characterized as a dramatization of a personalist moment; it is the encounter of one concrete individual, of one young man, with Christ, a young man who conscious of his own faithfulness to the commandments, further seeks the truth about human action. Veritatis Splendor observes: "For the young man, the *question* is not so much about rules to be followed, but *about the full meaning of life*. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life." (sec. 7)^[18] The emphasis here on the human heart and human interiority and its need for absolute truth for freedom are true to the emphases of personalism. In section 8, Veritatis Splendor invites us to enter into the question asked by the young man "allowing ourselves to be guided by [Jesus]." Here, in sense, we are invited, as concrete individuals to have our own personalistic moment.

Natural law is not left far behind. Christ is first interested in the young man's allegiance to the commandments, to the Law, which laws are considered to be the precepts of the natural law. (sec. 12)

The person must not be guided by his own subjectivistic understandings of what is good and evil, but must submit to the objective truth. Throughout Veritatis Splendor the universality of natural law is stressed, while care is taken to acknowledge the dignity of the individual. A passage from section 51 speaks especially to this point:

... the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history. ... inasmuch as the natural law expresses the dignity of the human person and lays the foundation for his fundamental rights and duties, it is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all mankind. *This universality does not ignore the individuality of human beings*, nor is it opposed to the absolute uniqueness of each person. On the contrary, it embraces at its root each person's free acts, which are meant to bear witness to the universality of the true good.

In this passage we see the parallel consideration of universality of natural law with the dignity of the human person and his individuality and uniqueness.

Refutation of Modern Interpretation of Natural law as Biologistic

The rejection of natural law ethics because it is "biologistic" is handled in a distinctively personalistic way in the Veritatis Splendor.

As we saw, Wojtyla was concerned to refute interpretations of natural law, that portrayed man as slavishly subject to the mechanistic laws of nature. This view of natural law is addressed in section 47 of Veritatis Splendor. Veritatis Splendor mentions that modern theologians tend to reject many of the Church's teachings on sexual issues as based on a "naturalistic" understanding of natural law. They hold that man should be free to determine the meaning of his behavior and not be constrained by "natural inclinations." In section 48, Veritatis Splendor argues that such an objection to natural law fails to correspond to the Church's teaching of the human being as unity of body and soul. Indeed, Veritatis Splendor holds the view that man's very subjectivity is dependent upon his bodily state:

... reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of the body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts. The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body, the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. It is in the light of the dignity of the human person -- a dignity which must be affirmed for its own sake -- that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined. And since the human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure, the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a means also implies, by its very nature, respect

for certain fundamental goods, without which one would fall into relativism and arbitrariness. (sec. 48)

In other writings, most notably in Love and Responsibility, Familiaris Consortio and his series of teachings on the theology of the body, John Paul II has laid out the connection between the dignity of the human person, the self-as-gift and the need to respect the life-giving power of the sexual act. In those writings, he holds that to reject the life-giving power of the sexual act is to reject a fundamental part of human dignity and to treat one's beloved as an object or a means rather than as an end. Here, he simply states in general terms his observation that natural law is not tied so much to the mechanistic laws of nature as it is to certain fundamental human goods that are embedded in certain natural inclinations.

God as Lawgiver vs. the Good as Perfective of Human Dignity

Natural law stresses that God is the source of what is Good and that we ought to seek the good and obey the law because of God's authority. Sections 10 and 11 of Veritatis Splendor speak of the decalogue as having been delivered by God who declares, "I am the Lord your God" and Veritatis Splendor asserts that "*Acknowledging the Lord as God is the very core, the heart of the Law*, from which the particular precepts flow and towards which they are ordered." (sec. 11) The personalistic emphasis on morality as perfective of the dignity of the human person is seen in the comment on the commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*Mt 19:19; cf. Mk 12:31*). Veritatis Splendor states; "In this command we find a precise expression of *the singular dignity of the human person*, 'the only creature that God has wanted for its own sake'. The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person, at the level of the man different goods which characterize his identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbour and with the material world." (sec. 13) Throughout the document, it is stated that acts ordained to God are also acts that bring about the perfection of the person. For instance, in section 78 we read:

The reason why a good intention is not itself sufficient, but a correct choice of actions is also needed, is that the human act depends on its object, whether that object is *capable or not of being ordered* to God, to the One who "alone is good", and thus brings about the perfection of the person. An act is therefore good if its object is in conformity with the good of the person with respect for the goods morally relevant for him. Christian ethics, which pays particular attention to the moral object, does not refuse to consider the inner "teleology" of acting, inasmuch as it is directed to promoting the true good of the person, but it recognizes that it is really pursued only when the essential elements of human nature are respected.

Man as Rational Creature vs. Man as Self-Determined

It could be said that whereas natural law ethics emphasizes the objective goodness or evil of exterior acts and man's ability as rational creature to discern that objective goodness, personalism is concerned with subjectivity and the effect that one's choices have on the self that one is forming with

one's choices. This statement of the difference between the two approaches to ethics is certainly fair to neither one, for natural law ethics has as its proximate end the formation of man in virtue so that he can achieve his ultimate end of salvation. And personalist ethics certainly does not downplay the necessity for man to act in accord with objective truths. Nonetheless with natural law's emphasis on the rationality of man's personhood and its rootedness in the "ordinances of reason" that govern the world, and with personalism emphasis on man's responsibility for his free determination, such a contrast can be pushed to some extent. A passage very true to a natural law emphasis is the following:

The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality. Hence human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject's intention is good. Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the voluntary ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. (sec. 72)

A passage from section 71 reflects the personalist emphasis is the following:

Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man, but to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits.

Man as Social Animal vs. Man as Self-Giver

The Aristotelian definition of man adopted by Aquinas, defined man not only as a rational animal, but also as a social animal. His individual good was dependent upon the common good. Thus, in keeping with this view of man, Veritatis Splendor states: "The commandments of the second table of the Decalogue in particular -- those which Jesus quoted to the young man of the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 19:19) - - constitute the indispensable rules of all social life." (sec. 97) The portion of Veritatis Splendor in which this statement appears speaks much of the state and civil authorities. Veritatis Splendor makes it clear that the good of society requires the recognition of absolute moral norms. The personalistic emphasis of Veritatis Splendor, goes beyond this notion of obedience to the law being necessary for "social life"; it portrays man in his deepest ontological core as being one who should make a "gift of himself". Talk of "gift of self" is nearly always linked to the imitation of Christ: "*Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God...*" (Sec. 19, cf. sec. 85, 87, 89). Indeed, Christ himself is the ultimate integration of the law and the gift of self: as Veritatis Splendor states: "*Jesus himself is the living "fulfillment" of the Law* inasmuch as he fulfils its authentic meaning by the total gift of himself: *he himself becomes a living and personal Law*, who invites people to follow him; through the Spirit, he gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions (cf. *Jn* 13:34-35)." (sec. 15)

The Centrality of Conscience to both Natural Law and Personalism

Again, it would be a distortion to say that natural law is concerned with rationality and truth whereas personalism is concerned with freedom, but such an assertion allows us to discern certain distinctive concerns and emphases of these two approaches to ethics. The point at which these two approaches most manifestly overlap is in their understanding of the centrality of conscience to the moral life. Both natural law and personalism find truth and freedom meeting in the human conscience. Conscience and its relation to truth and freedom is a major theme both in the writings of Pope John Paul II and in Veritatis Splendor. Because the natural law is perfective of the human person, and because it is through his free choices that man perfects himself, conscience is central to the moral life. In "obeying" his conscience (a rightly formed conscience), which is indeed, his inner self, man is simultaneously living in accord with the truth and freely determining himself. Section 52 of Veritatis Splendor states: "... universal and permanent laws correspond to things known by the practical reason and are applied to particular acts through the judgment of conscience. The acting subject personally assimilates the truth contained in the law. He appropriates this truth of his being and makes it his own by his acts and the corresponding virtues." Section 54 states "The relationship between man's freedom and God's law is most deeply lived out in the "heart" of the person, in his moral conscience." Sections 57 and 58 make powerful statements of the subjectivity of the conscience combined with its link with God himself:

According to Saint Paul, conscience in a certain sense confronts man with the law, and thus becomes a "*witness*" for man: a witness of his own faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law, of his essential moral rectitude or iniquity. Conscience is the *only* witness, since what takes place in the heart of the person is hidden from the eyes of everyone outside. Conscience makes its witness known only to the person himself. And, in turn, only the person knows that his own response is to the voice of conscience. (Sec. 57)

The importance of this interior *dialogue of man with himself* can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a *dialogue of man with God*, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of man. ... Thus it can be said that conscience bears witness to man's own rectitude or iniquity to man himself but, together with this and indeed even beforehand, conscience is *the witness of God himself*, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man's soul, calling him *fortiter et suaviter* to obedience. "Moral conscience does not close man within an insurmountable and impenetrable solitude, but opens him to the call, to the voice of God. In this, and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man".

The creativity of man, the freedom of man, is expressed not in inventing law, but in living out the law "written on his heart", conscious that in doing so he is either living in accord with his dignity or not, he is

either forming himself in accord with his innate dignity or not.

Conclusion

Perhaps the passage of Veritatis Splendor that best bring together the themes of the encyclical while showing the overlap of natural law and personalism is the first paragraph of section 90:

The relationship between faith and morality shines forth with all its brilliance in the *unconditional respect due to the insistent demands of the personal dignity of every man*, demands protected by those moral norms which prohibit without exception actions which are intrinsically evil. The universality and the immutability of the moral norm make manifest and at the same time serve to protect the personal dignity and inviolability of man, on whose face is reflected the splendour of God (cf. *Gen. 9:5-6*).

In all written by Pope John Paul II, the theme of the dignity of the human person, freedom, subjectivity, and self-determination are prominent. The above analysis has attempted to show that in the most recent publications of the magisterium, particularly in the Universal Catechism and in Veritatis Splendor, we begin to see a blending of natural law themes with those of personalism. One can only think the Church is so much the richer for both approaches to ethics, approaches that are ultimately thoroughly compatible.

Endnotes

[1]. That part of the purpose of Veritatis Splendor was to reassert the centrality of natural law to Catholic moral teaching is clear from the introduction, section

[2]. Catechism of the Catholic Church (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

[3]. In Karol Wojtyla, Person and Community: Selected Essays, trans. by Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York; Peter Lang, 1993); hereafter PC.

[4]. Wojtyla refers to followers of Kant as "phenomenalists" and to those who use the philosophic method of phenomenology as "phenomenologists". See PC p. 32-3.

[5]. PC, p. 182.

[6]. PC, p. 182.

[7]. PC, p. 183

[8]. PC, p. 184.

[9]. PC, p. 184.

[10]. PC, p. 185.

[11]. PC, p. 166.

[12]. PC, p. 167.

[13]. PC. p. 168.

[14]. PC, p. 169.

[15]. PC, 170-1.

[16]. PC, p. 189.

[17]. Karol Wojtyla, The Acting Person, (Boston, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979), p. 154.

[18]. Passages from Veritatis Splendor are taken from the edition published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana. All italicization in this passage and others is not mine, but is found in the original text.