

Introduction

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Matt 6:25¹

Arguing for the theological significance of the body

THIS BOOK ADDS TO a litany of works in recent years that argue for a theological significance of the body. It shares the sentiment of Matthew's gospel that the theological meaning of the body exceeds outer apparel, even the language used to describe it or the metaphors with which it is dressed. It is indeed "more than clothes." However, this book resists the temptation to merely propose a carnivalesque or reductionist postmodern account of the human person in which goodness and truth are tied to the pleasures of the body. Rather, the approaches of two notable twentieth-century thinkers are teased out and considered carefully; one a Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian and the other a Jewish philosopher and Talmudic commentator. Something altogether more radical, and paradoxically more traditional, is proffered in the work of these scholars, although their differences are profoundly important. For Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II, 1920–2005) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), the body offers a signification—a language—that concerns questions of anthropology and of God. With Wojtyła's canonization in the Roman Catholic calendar (now commonly known as St. John Paul II), Catholics will be interested to explore the various conversations he conducted with those of other traditions. It will be established that a dialogue had already begun between Wojtyła and Levinas

1. Unless stated otherwise, Scripture references in this book are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

that has been overlooked in secondary literature, but that further work is needed to develop it fruitfully. It will be seen that their common formation in phenomenological method provides a foray into embodied human experience at both intellectual and historical tangential points. Furthermore, their approaches to God and religion shapes their understanding of the body, but with varying results. Indeed, the key points of divergence between their positions will be critically evaluated in the final chapters. Finally, the body shall be understood in light of what is *desired* in the body (including *eros* and sexuality) and what is *given* in the body, thus opening the way for a theology of embodied alterity.

Background to the question

To date, no substantive comparative study of the relationship between Levinas' and Wojtyła's thought has been published. This book makes a contribution to that endeavor, with particular focus on the topic of the body. Wojtyła encouraged philosophers to read Levinas and, as pope, welcomed him to Castel Gandolfo more than once, alongside other scholars.² Along with the French philosopher Paul Ricœur, Levinas became friends with Wojtyła. One incident is worth retelling. It is said that Ricœur was meeting with Wojtyła for one of these gatherings at the time of Levinas' wife's death. Upon traveling back to Paris and meeting Levinas, Ricœur recounted to him a message from Wojtyła to pass on to Levinas his "respect and admiration."³ Even in a state of immediate mourning, Levinas had the presence of mind to comment, "[I]n the end, a Protestant is needed for a Catholic to speak to a Jew." This short story tells something of the human side to a man who was often in the shadows of other public French intellectuals. In struggling with Levinas' writings (to read Levinas is to wrestle with his overbearing perspicacity about the other) his philosophy can appear humorless and lacking a sense of joy. Its austere focus was for some a turn-off, but for others, such as Ricœur, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Paul Sartre, a significant contribution that cannot be overlooked. Levinas' radical appropriation of post-Husserlian phenomenology owes much to German and French antecedents, but also relies on insights from his Talmudic tradition. Nevertheless, his thought has not gained a wide theological reception. This might be changing, but theologians have been hesitant to receive his emphasis upon the other.

2. Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, 466–67.

3. This story is recounted by Ricœur in an interview with Levinas' biographer Salomon Malka. See Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, 193–94.

Indeed, an uncritical reception of Levinas would be foolish, but a measure of careful reading provides profound insight into the incarnate reality of ethical living, upon which Levinas' philosophy insists. Wojtyła noticed this and refers to Levinas three times in an interview he published as Bishop of Rome, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.⁴ Wojtyła encouraged others to read Levinas and his name is mentioned with solemn esteem in contexts such as Wojtyła's first visit to Paris at a delegation of French Jewish intellectuals or during his first visit to the United States of America, when referring to the importance of contemporary Jewish thinkers.⁵ For his part, Levinas published early thoughts on Wojtyła's philosophy after his papal election and concurrent threads of interest united the two men for the rest of their lives. Both were concerned with relating any notion of the divine and ethics to the embodied human subject, whose face is both a revelation and concealment. The face is a common, and yet rarely commented upon reference point between Wojtyła and Levinas. Upon reading George Weigel's biography of John Paul II, James Schall comments:

The pope often spoke of the "face" of Christ, of the face as a philosophical insight. Weigel is amused that Wojtyła may be the only man in the world who read for pleasure the French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophy is based on the human face.⁶

This indicates the complexity of Levinas' writings; they are neither whimsical nor straightforward. There is no doubt that his texts are an example of that French phenomenological approach, which is both dense and subtle, rich in nuance, and which issues a demand upon its readers.⁷ Jokes about Wojtyła's own writing have also abounded. It was said among his clergy in the Archdiocese of Kraków that purgatory would consist of having to read Wojtyła's central phenomenological text, *The Acting Person*.⁸ There also is a book that is long and demanding. But in this and other texts, there is present a phenomenological interest in the revelatory nature of the

4. See John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 35, 36, 210–11.

5. John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of Jewish Organizations," *Apostolic Journey to the United States of American and Canada*.

6. Schall, "The Greatest of Men."

7. Derrida likens reading Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* to the ocean waves: "It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself. Because of all these challenges to the commentator and the critic, *Totality and Infinity* is a work of art and not a treatise." From footnote 7, chapter 4, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, 398.

8. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 196.

human that shares much with Levinas. The face is a central motif in both Wojtyła and Levinas' major works.

The emphasis upon the face in Wojtyła's thought is subtle, but even for a thinker who produced more writings than any other pope in history, he did not make reference to such a theme without an attentive sense of its importance and its hermeneutical value in proclaiming the gospel. Furthermore, the papacy of John Paul II was deeply invested in healing old wounds, especially those between Christians and Jews. For Wojtyła, Levinas was a Jewish thinker who spoke both from *beyond* Christianity, and yet profoundly *to* Christianity, for his thought flowed creatively from within the Hebrew and Talmudic tradition.

Yet Wojtyła is also a controversial figure; a Polish priest, poet, actor, playwright, and philosopher who not only lived, thought, and prayed more publicly than perhaps anyone else in his century, but who died in a profoundly public manner. His elevation to the episcopate, the College of Cardinals, and finally the papacy surprised the world and his church, and with such an extended service at the Barque of Peter, his contribution will have a long-lasting effect upon the Christian world. He has both unwavering supporters and campaigning adversaries, even years after his death. In a life of public service his thought is already of historic interest, and his canonization is not uncontested amongst some Christians. Yet it remains true that his intellectual project, especially as wrought in an early interest in Thomistic metaphysics, Husserlian phenomenology, and mysticism, remains open to new discoveries. Critical attention is needed, especially in those areas of his thought—theological and philosophical—that seem to develop Christian thought in new ways.

This is acutely true of the “theology of the body,” which has its detractors and disciples.⁹ It was originally produced as a book-length manuscript and was unpublished at the time of Wojtyła's papal election, but was edited and presented in the form of weekly catechesis for the next five years and after some years translated into English directly from the original manuscripts. In a sense, it has not made more than a superficial impression on much of the Catholic world. One commentator, John Cornwell, describes it as lacking in influence: “[t]his work, which constitutes, in the view of some keen papal supporters, John Paul's vital legacy to the world, has been

9. All references to this text will be cited first as the numbered presentation in general audience (for example “40”) and second its section number within that presentation (for example “1”), hence a reference to the first part of the fortieth general audience presentation on the body is rendered “40:1.” See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*.

perhaps his least influential.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the ingenuity of Wojtyła's positive appreciation of the human body in describing God's presence is to be welcomed and is worthy of critical attention. Such attention cannot be achieved without consideration of the postmodern context in which it is relevant. The manifestation of the body in attesting to truths of the incarnation has resonances with postmodern thought.

Equally, the influence of Emmanuel Levinas on the complex thought of Wojtyła deserves further critical attention. According to Adriaan Peperzak:

The pope read him, and I suspect that he probably took him to be the best Jewish thinker. I cannot prove this, and undoubtedly he met with other Jews. But knowing a bit of what the pope wrote, there is no doubt to my mind that Levinas was, for him, the model of a great Jewish thinker.¹¹

Wojtyła was indeed familiar with Levinas' thought and influenced by him. Further to their dialogue, the place of the body in their thought will be considered, especially in terms of theological anthropology. Wojtyła's theology of the body places it at a pivotal point both in human experience as well as revelation. Levinas' approach is, however, less equivocal: he denies an incarnational avatar in describing the human person. He insists on an infinite responsibility for the other but lacks a clear commitment to the body in its fullness. This is made problematic in that his use of metaphor and ethical appeal is bound always to language that is theological and embodied.

The place of the body in Wojtyła and Levinas' thought remains an understudied site of interest, especially as it might further develop theological anthropology and dialogue with postmodern thought.

Communio and altérité

In facing each other's work, the approaches given by Wojtyła and Levinas to the body might be described as *communio* and *altérité*, which summarize the primary modes of ethical sociality proffered by each thinker. *Communio* is the Latin derivation of the Greek *koinonia* and refers to the spiritual fellowship shared by Christians. It denotes the unity of difference within the body of Christ and emphasizes love rather than a hierarchical, legal, or formal unity, finding its bearings within the nascent church described in the New Testament. That is, it does not exclude hierarchy or a canonical framework, but situates these things in their correct proportion. On the

10. Cornwell, *The Pontiff in Winter*, 139.

11. Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 209.

other hand, *altérité* is the French term (from the Latin *alter*, meaning the other of two) common to postmodern writers and of central importance in Levinas' philosophy. Its meaning is found in the simple concept of that which is other, or rendered in Levinas primarily as *the* other. Its English equivalent, which will be used hereafter, is alterity. For Wojtyla and Levinas, their philosophy considers the question of the other and of difference in a conflicted and post-Holocaust world. They are not only concerned with the question of otherness, but with alterity as a designation of the otherness of the particular other person, or indeed of the second or third person and of the alternative subject in intersubjectivity. Appraising Wojtyla in terms of *communio* and Levinas in terms of alterity provides an appropriate lens through which to interpret their work and their dialogue.

For Wojtyla, the ultimate objective of the body and embodied personhood is *communio* in the life of the church and with God. For Levinas, it is in an ethical responsibility that flows nonreciprocally from the experience of alterity. It is for this reason that the human person might be seen as a subject who uniquely exists between the two objectives, critically subverting impositions from without and ethically seeking after the sacramental relationship of the divine Other within. *Communio* is always the lived communion of persons, the concrete complexity of intersubjectivity. It means more than a community or a society or even a family, for it relies on what Wojtyla calls the "personalistic norm," in which persons recognize in their human counterparts an irreducible value; one that cannot be taken from them and that affirms their essential freedom to act.¹² Moreover, it relies on the notion that it is Christ who holds the communion of disciples together in the fellowship of his body. *Communio* is therefore a subversive concept, because it counters any cultural imposition that is caught up in the logic of violence, whether it be ideological, political, statist, or even ecclesiastical. This is important, because the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council embraced a commitment to *communio* as a principle of the church's unity.¹³ It finds its origin and its logic within the Trinity, whose tripersonal communion is the preeminent order of self-giving love. For Wojtyla, *communio* is both personal and interpersonal because of its Christian meaning:

12. Wojtyla provides a definition of the "personalistic norm" in these terms, especially the "affirmation of the value of the person," in John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 121–25.

13. The term "*communio*" does not feature extensively in the Council's documents as such, however the theme of communion is strengthened repeatedly. This is noted in the 1985 report of that year's extraordinary synod of bishops from around the world: "The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents." See Catholic Church, *The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod*, 2.C.I.

For Christians in general, the concept of *communio* itself has a primarily *religious and sacral meaning, one connected with the Eucharist*, which is a *sacramentum communionis* between Christ and his disciples—between God and human beings.¹⁴

It is here argued that Wojtyła's use of *communio* to describe human relationships is his ethical answer to the problem of alterity. Furthermore, his notion of the nuptial mystery serves as his principle paradigm of alterity. As a philosopher whose early interest was in the work of Husserl's student, Max Scheler, and whose doctoral research in theology was on St. John of the Cross, Wojtyła understood the many possible ways of dealing with the challenge of otherness, especially human otherness. His phenomenology was shaped by Husserl's early works, so its methodology conforms to Husserl's phenomenological structure in the *Logical Investigations*, rather than Husserl's later transcendental turn. Wojtyła's priestly years, like his intellectual interests, were constantly attuned to the pastoral dimensions of the various social contexts he was involved in. Under Communist surveillance, the Polish church was undergoing its own dark night of the soul, and Wojtyła wished to minister meaningfully to the young men and women he encountered. Like countless other young pastors, he discovered both the richness of spiritual life present in these young adults, as well as the restless anxiety of a thousand questions concerning social ethics, sexuality, politics, and the body. Relationships were dynamic and emotionally complex and a lingering Manichean tendency throughout much of the church was an obstacle to understanding themselves in the context of the beauty, coherence, and the giftedness of their own human bodies. A tendency in Catholic life to denigrate or undervalue the body was an obstacle to many. Wojtyła could not respond openly on the university campus, so he took his students for walks in one of Wojtyła's favorite destinations, the mountains. There, he could speak openly with these other embodied creatures, without condemnation and with openness to the other. This is the pastoral background to what, years later, would become his theology of the body, originally as a book-length manuscript and then, interrupted by his papal election, via his weekly public catechesis. Wojtyła's early formation in the incarnate moments of face-to-face encounters with the other, and his desire to affirm the gifts of sexuality, marriage, and the body without recourse to the church's historic failings in these regards, found a general pulpit from 1978 onwards. The structure of *communio* between two spouses became Wojtyła's response to the problem of alterity.

14. "The Family as a Community of Persons," in John Paul II, *Person and Community*, 320.

Adventurously, Levinas comments that the “bare fact of life is never bare.”¹⁵ In the appearing of the other’s body, meaning and significance are not naked to one’s perception, but must be sought out within what nourishes the body’s presence and existence. It is the same with embodied relationships. In Wojtyła’s account of the nuptial encounter, two persons are never laid bare in all their signification, although they may offer themselves without actively hiding aspects of themselves. Why is it that after sixty years of marriage two people might still have something new to say to each other? Even after such a length of time—as habits intertwine and sentences are mutually completed, as memories of one become the memories of two, and as the lives of two ever more show themselves publicly as one—there remains something new to be said, some surprise in the appearance of the other. Indeed, the other *remains* the other. Yet, while Wojtyła takes up this mystery and gives his answer in *communio*, the embodied other is problematical for Levinas. For him, no name or category or imposition can be placed upon the other. The other is located at a point of infinite distance from one’s own intentionality and may not be enfolded within one’s own desires, categories, or impositions. His or her welfare is one’s own responsibility and the self is responsible for everyone, all of the time. In this way, the suffering of the other becomes one’s own suffering, and in the gleam of the face the measure of glory reveals the immensity of an ethical and nonreciprocal correlation to the other’s presence. In Levinas’ thought, there remains a disparity between absolute alterity and his account of the body.

On the one hand, the other has no incarnate avatar, for the self has no authority to determine the other. Describing the particular features of one body in opposition to any other body is too prescriptive, determining the other’s body in what Levinas calls “the same.”¹⁶ This is a difficult *lacuna* in Levinas.

On the other hand, Levinas’ language relentlessly recurses to the language of the body; of the face, flesh, blood, tears, heart, hunger, and thirst. His examples of ethical intersubjectivity, such as the tearing of bread from one’s mouth to give to the hungry face of the other, concern almost nothing but the body (although, it has to be said, concrete examples are rare in Levinas). This is the problem of alterity in Levinas: his insistence on its absolute infinity limits it from the possibilities of incarnation and embodiment.

15. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 112.

16. *Ibid.*, 289.

Names and titles

This book follows standard English writing practice regarding the names of the two chief interlocutors, Wojtyła and Levinas. For both of them, historical circumstances have some bearing upon the meaning of their names.

Karol Józef Wojtyła

Wojtyła was born on May 18th, 1920 in the town of Wadowice, during the Second Polish Republic, at a time when Russian military forces were again engaged in war with Poland. Wojtyła was baptized on June 20th with the names of Karol (Anglicized “Charles”), after Emperor Charles of Austria (whose army Wojtyła’s father had served in) and Józef, after the dominating figure of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who led the Polish Republic.¹⁷ Within two months of his birth, during August 16th–17th, the Red Army invasion of Europe came to an end in what the Polish people came to call the “Miracle on the Vistula,” a decisive battle, but not one remembered as a major victory for much of continental Europe.¹⁸ In the face of every expectation to the contrary, and with the diplomatic corps having fled Warsaw (with the exception of the papal representative, Archbishop Achille Ratti), Polish forces issued a surprise attack on the Red Cavalry of General Semën Budënyi, successfully turning the Trótsky army away from its Western European objectives. Through these events, Wojtyła’s name is forever associated with Polish national identity and its complex Christian, political, and military history. During his early years, Wojtyła used occasional pseudonyms, which are referred to later in this book. Upon his papal election on October 16th 1978, Wojtyła took the title Ioannes Paulus PP. II, the same combined name of his immediate predecessor and in continuity with John XXIII (convenor of the Second Vatican Council) and Paul VI (whose papacy saw the completion of the Council). When Wojtyła took the name John Paul II it became customary to rebrand all his previous publications as authored by John Paul II rather than his baptismal name. In this book, publications are therefore all listed under John Paul II. However, because these texts were written over the course of a lifetime that spans both prepapal and papal time periods, it is appropriate to refer to writings generally as written by, or according to the thought of, Wojtyła. Where specific works were first published after his papal election, authorship will be referred to as John Paul II. Occasional references will be made to Wojtyła/John Paul II, for the sake of emphasizing

17. Emperor Charles of Austria was beatified by John Paul II on 3rd October 2004.

18. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 2.

both aspects of his authorship. The standard nonuse of Polish accents in English scholarly works is adhered to.

Emanuelis Levinas

Levinas was born on December 30th, 1905 according to the Julian calendar, which was in use by the Russian Empire at that time (January 12th, 1906 according to the Gregorian calendar) in Kaunas, Lithuania.¹⁹ The city is situated at the meeting of the Neman and Neris rivers at the border of Latvia and Russia, intersecting at the extreme occident and the beginning of the orient, and as biographer Salomon Malka observes, it lies under the shadow of Vilna, once known as the “Jerusalem of the East.”²⁰ Part of a practicing Jewish family and educated early in Hebrew and the Torah, Levinas was raised in a context that experienced German National Socialism and Soviet Communism. Following his adoption of French citizenship and culture, he altered the spelling of his name in accordance with French orthography to “Emmanuel.” While his surname was commonly published according to the French “Lévinas,” it is standard practice in English texts to use the Anglicized Levinas, which will be used here.

A note on sources: Wojtyła and Levinas

Primary sources in Wojtyła

The primary text for Wojtyła’s theology of the body is the collection of his catechesis on the subject, *Man and Woman He Created Them*.²¹ The English translation published in 2006 is the first direct translation in any language of the original Polish documents. His reflections on Levinas in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* and *Memory and Identity* are also relevant.²² These works were simultaneously published in multiple languages, including English, although it is assumed by biographers that the original texts were handwritten in Polish. Wojtyła’s early philosophical works, *Love and Responsibility*, *The Acting Person*, and his essays in *Person and Community* are of direct relevance to his phenomenological analysis of the person in the

19. Levinas’ hometown of Kaunas (called Kovno at his birth) is approximately 466 miles (750km) from Wojtyła’s home town of Wadowice.

20. Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 3.

21. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*.

22. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*; John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*.

field of action.²³ His sermons to the papal household, *Sign of Contradiction*, clarify his theology in addition to his Trinitarian and Marian catechesis, *The Trinity's Embrace: God's Saving Plan* and *Redemptoris Mater*.²⁴ Of his fourteen encyclicals, the following are of most interest to this book, especially for their clarification on matters related to postmodernity, rationality, Thomism, and matters concerning the body: *Redemptor Hominis*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae*, *Fides et Ratio* and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.²⁵ Of course, other documents also have much to say on the topic of the body, but the present focus has been limited to what relates most directly to the *theology* of the body, and not to other moral or philosophical issues Wojtyła elsewhere addresses.²⁶

Primary sources in Levinas

Of Levinas' entire published corpus, his two most influential works are *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*.²⁷ In the first, he outlines his unique contribution to philosophy, a phenomenological interruption of the Western philosophical tradition of being, with new awareness of alterity and of the other. In the second, he extends his project to thinking comprehensively outside the tradition to describe ethics beyond being. The body is a major reference point in both texts and for this reason a focus will remain on them. However, other texts will be referred to as they are relevant, such as interviews, collected philosophical papers, and his Talmudic commentaries, the two most significant having been collected in English translation as *Beyond the Verse* and *In the Time of the Nations*.²⁸ French editions have been consulted and, where appropriate, French words and phrases will be

23. John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*; John Paul II, *The Acting Person*; John Paul II, *Person and Community*.

24. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*; John Paul II, *The Trinity's Embrace, God's Saving Plan*; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*.

25. Encyclicals are referenced according to section number rather than page number. See John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis: The Redeemer of Man*; John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor: The Splendor of Truth*; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life*; John Paul II, *Fides Et Ratio: Encyclical Letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason*; John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia: Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church*.

26. To avoid the controversy concerning the English translation of Wojtyła's *Osoba i Czyn*, the French edition has also been consulted. See: John Paul II, *Personne Et Acte*.

27. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*; Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*.

28. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*; Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*.

included to clarify Levinas' meaning.²⁹ There are other texts that have been consulted, such as his final lectures at the Sorbonne, *God, Death, and Time*, and works such as *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, *Existence and Existents*, and *Of God Who Comes to Mind*.³⁰

Scripture, the body, and a point of departure in theological anthropology

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the term *bâsâr* is commonly used for what in English is termed "flesh."³¹ It is common to see it in reference to the materiality of human bodies, pertaining especially to the skin and the substance of which bodies are made.³² However, there is no direct and obvious term consistently used for the English word, "body." Instead, *bâsâr* is used in a cluster of other terms to indicate a body. This is apparent in the Old Testament narratives that deal specifically with the distinctions between human bodies that denote relationship and good order, such as the Genesis accounts of creation (see Gen 1:23, in which the man and the woman are one "flesh"). Yet flesh—*bâsâr*—is altered in relation to human choices as the scriptural narrative unfolds. The original goodness of the shape and form of the flesh (see Gen 1:31) declines after the eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, resulting in dire consequences. In the time of Noah, it is precisely *bâsâr*, and indeed *all* flesh, which God looks upon and finds corrupt (Gen 6:12).³³ The human body in the Old Testament, in relation always to the

29. French editions consulted: Levinas, *Théorie De L'intuition Dans La Phénoménologie De Husserl*; Levinas, *De L'existence À L'existant*; Levinas, *Totalité Et Infini; Essai Sur L'extériorité*; Levinas, *Difficile Liberté: Essais Sur Le Judaïsme*; Levinas, *Noms Propres: Agnon, Buber, Celan, Delhomme, Derrida, Jabès, Kierkegaard, Lacroix, Laporte, Picard, Proust, Van Breda, Wahl*; Levinas, *Autrement Qu'ère Ou Au-Dela De L'essence*; Levinas, *Le Temps Et L'autre*; Levinas, *Altérité Et Transcendance*.

30. Levinas, *God, Death and Time*; Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*; Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*.

31. The term is used in a variety of contexts such as in Job 19:26, translated in English as: "And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God." "Flesh" is translated from "*bâsâr*."

32. The body relies on God as the source of holiness and likewise requires the state of holiness before it can be in proximity to God. See Lipka, "Profaning the Body: ךך and the Concept of Loss of Personal Holiness in H," in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 90.

33. For a detailed account of how the biblical development of the terms flesh and body relate to a renewed philosophical account of bodily ethics and metaphysics see Welton, *The Body*. Welton emphasizes the way the Hebrew Scriptures present the body (of flesh) as caught up in life and death struggles in a profoundly moral way, highlighted by the religious and symbolic connotations of the Old Covenant ritual laws.

flesh, is treated as an integrated whole. There is no absolute distinction between body, mind, soul, and spirit. Where there is reference to the life or spirit (*nephesh*) of the enfleshed person, it remains a reference to the whole person and not to one aspect of the person.

As Donn Whelton puts it, “[i]n these texts the whole person is constantly in view and the difference between body and soul is treated like two variations on a single theme.”³⁴ The emphasis in such texts, at least as far as it pertains to the body, is upon its action in a moral field, with close attention to the body’s choices in difficult circumstances, or its danger and loss against the horizons of sin and death. To speak of the spirit or the flesh of the body in this context as if they are somehow markedly distinct does a disservice to the texts. A *soft* distinction between spirit and body might be spoken of in the Old Testament, emphasizing as they do the integrated wholeness of the human person, even in the midst of travail and moral brokenness, but certainly not a *hard* distinction.³⁵

Distinctions become more important in the New Testament, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, in which an integrated wholeness is still clear, but with new emphasis upon features such as the heart, the eye, the ear, and the hand.³⁶ Inner conflicts become more apparent, such as Jesus’ admonition against hypocrisy (Matt 23:27–28), in which he distinguishes between the outer self (appearing as “whitewashed tombs”) and the inner self (“full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness”). It is as if through the scrutiny of Christ’s preaching, the brokenness of the human condition becomes clear. These inner distinctions, which show forth an ontological frailty, are made apparent in the parables (for example, Matt 6:2–4: “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret . . .”). Welton notes the predominance of the Greek term “*soma*” [σῶμα] for the body in the Synoptic Gospels, while the term “*sarx*” [σάρξ] for flesh predominates in John’s gospel.³⁷ Crucially however, human bodies may find new theological impetus in the resurrected order instigated in the risen Christ.³⁸ Janet Martin Soskice has argued for the inseparability

34. Welton, *The Body*, 247.

35. Even Ezekiel, anguished in the valley of the dry bones, highlights the flesh by its absence. The bones signify death and the decay of the body, which remind us of the essential goodness of the living body, which is a union of flesh and spirit. Its loss is the cause of agony and disarray.

36. See, for example, the heart in Matt 5:8; 6:20–22; 12:34; the eye in Mark 12:11; Luke 19:42; 24:31; the ear in Matt 30:16; Mark 4:9; Luke 22:51; and the hand in Matt 8:15; Mark 5:41; and Luke 5:13.

37. Welton, *The Body*.

38. New vistas of theological thinking have been opened up by the renewal of

of the call to holiness from the resurrected body as the new temple in which Christians dwell. She writes: “The body of the Christian individual, as well as the ‘body’ of Christians together, is the Temple—the pre-eminent dwelling-place of God with men and women—and this dwelling-place is the body of Christ.”³⁹

The call to holiness and its relationship to embodied life is a vocational concern. To what extent is the body integral to a divine call to live a holy life? And in what way does the body speak the language of discipleship, of redemption, of love? It is impossible to ask these questions without some reference to further questions of sexuality and gender. For example, Sarah Coakley laments the hesitation in recent thought about the resurrection to probe beneath the normative “generic male” vision of selfhood she identifies on the surface of that thinking.⁴⁰ Coakley is seeking out a fuller account of the transformation that occurs interiorly in the human recognition of the risen Christ; that the “spiritual senses” may play a fuller part in the perception of Christ’s resurrected body than what is normally accounted for.⁴¹ As Coakley puts it:

What levels of the self—what affective or intuitive depths, what interpersonal mysteries of human response, what dimensions of bodily existence (themes normally downplayed in “masculinist” philosophical discussion)—are unavoidable in their epistemic implications if the true *richesse* of encounter with the risen Christ chartered in the New Testament is to be grasped?⁴²

Such a *richesse* located in the encounter with Christ denotes a role for sexual difference and gender. This is a search for an account of Christ and the human person that accentuates the fullness of embodied life. Another example is that of John Caputo, who believes that the body of philosophical description, even in phenomenology, all too often remains an athletic,

vigorous thought concerning the resurrection. Consequences for ethics, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, and many others are now being considered and developed. See for example, O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*; D’Costa, *Resurrection Reconsidered*; O’Collins, *Easter Faith*; Moltmann, “The Resurrection of Nature: An Aspect of Cosmic Christology”; Schärtl, “Metaphysical Aspects of the Concept of Resurrection”; Scola and McCarthy, “Jesus Christ, Our Resurrection and Life: On the Question of Eschatology.”

39. Soskice, “Resurrection and the New Jerusalem,” in Davis et al. (eds.), *The Resurrection*.

40. Coakley, “Response” to William P. Alston, “Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection,” in Davis et al. (eds.), *The Resurrection*.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

upright, healthy, whole body, one that expresses its agency in the world freely and without reduction to itself.⁴³ This is problematic, for in the world bodies remain experiences of personal flesh, of suffering in the substance of embodiment. Scholars of the body ought to beware the temptation to bracket out bodies as they are lived, what Caputo calls the “Jewgreek” body who experiences in his flesh disease, blindness, and all the sensuous frailties of incarnate existence.⁴⁴ For Caputo, the suffering body is the location of the weakness of flesh. The flesh is “the body’s palpable, living, sensuous, feeling stuff, the site of a purely immanent, nonintentional feeling. The suffering is situated in the reduction to flesh.”⁴⁵ In the body, flesh is the experienced *locus* of intentionality, while maintaining the means by which the body directs itself to others. Yet, the scriptural witness to the body and to Christ’s resurrection is already an account of a full-bodied, incarnate anthropology. The sensory anticipation of future glory glimpsed in the present is very much one in which flesh and bodies play a formative role. The vision of the Son of Man in the book of Revelation signifies a certain *gravitas* upon the resurrected body in its commanding glory:

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Rev 1:14–16)

Now, this vision is one in which all the senses are ultimately touched; they each share in a bodily experience of the eschaton. Nevertheless, theological anthropology cannot dwell completely on eschatological visions of the body, for in the current moment bodies are present in their suffering and their torment.

Levinas notes this truth of existence and out of that suffering alterity he develops a philosophy of responsibility that precedes every conscious thought, act, or commitment.⁴⁶ The self’s binding to others is made manifest in bodily suffering. This manifestation of the other’s suffering has been linked by some thinkers to the manifestation of God. For example, Max Scheler, a major influence on Wojtyła, believed that the binding of the self with others is made possible by the prior act of God, rather than upon one’s

43. Caputo, *Against Ethics*.

44. *Ibid.*, 206–8.

45. *Ibid.*, 206.

46. See for example: Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 138.

own initiative.⁴⁷ For him, the fragile responsibility held for others finds its first orientation in God who acts as the primary giver of all embodied experience. In this way, phenomenological accounts of embodied responsibility find some scriptural correlates for the emphasis upon responsible action for the embodied other. The description of a theological basis for an approach to the body finds warrant in Scripture as well as in the phenomenological language taken up by Levinas and Wojtyła.

The excesses of the body

A theology of the body, scripturally informed, would hold in tension an eschatological hope for a full share in the resurrected life as well as an acute sensitivity to contemporary privations in the bodies of others. Because of this incarnate dimension, it is important to consider the body as a *desiring* as well as a *given* enterprise, an erotic and receptive experience received within a logic of the gift. This requires attentiveness to the body in its alterity, both theologically and ethically. In other words, an embodied alterity is required. And rather than looking beyond the body for its deferred meaning, or only within the body for an interior presence, it must be the human person in its somatic whole which is considered. As Levinas puts it, the body “does not express an event; it is itself this event.”⁴⁸ As an integrated whole, the embodied person is eventful to excess, revealing a givenness of meaning that exceeds the embellishments and descriptive language it is clothed with. This echoes the New Testament text in Matt 6:25, Christ’s rhetorical question in the midst of preaching: “is not the body more than clothes?” The suffering body receives and gives, desires and speaks. Wojtyła and Levinas identify this excess and describe a phenomenality of the body open to phenomenology and theology.

47. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 375.

48. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 72.