

*Educational Receptivity: Karol Wojtyla's Philosophy of Community as a Means
Towards Embracing Differences*

Blaise D. Ringor, University of Santo Tomas, Philippines

The European Conference on Education 2020
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Karol Wojtyla is one of the 20th Century philosophers who personally witnessed the tragedy of World War II in the hands of the Totalitarian Regime: Nazism and Communism. These experiences lead Wojtyla to philosophize on the value of the person. Wojtyla did not stop simply on rediscovering the meaning of what it is to be human; more than that, he also highlights the importance of community and participation. There, he shows that dialogue is one of the authentic attitudes to participate in a community. This philosophy of Wojtyla continues until he became Pope John Paul II, particularly in his encyclical letters (qualitative method). Nevertheless, the central theme of these writings is receptivity. Which, for Pope John Paul II, is the means towards engaging differences insofar as it calls both sides to participate in meaningful dialogue through intellectual humility. By "Differences," Wojtyla means diversity of knowledge as having a unitive aspect as long as it aims to contribute to learning the truth. "Educational receptivity" in this sense, is therefore framed within the context of teaching-learning because without receptivity, there can be no learning. Without this, a student can never learn from his/her teacher/s regardless of what is being taught to them, and teacher/s can never learn from their students once they are being corrected or questioned by them. Thus, this theory can be applied in any field of education, for it is universally applicable in character, for instance, in interdisciplinary education where positive sciences are engaging dialogue with humanities.

Keywords: Attitude Of Opposition, Education, Participation, Receptivity

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Introduction

One of the hardest things that man can accept is the reality that he is, by nature, a *limited being*—a being who is not flawless and perfect. Therefore, it is normal for man to experience pain whenever his mistakes are being pointed out. Yet, the most important thing is how he will react to this *pain* of being corrected. In most cases, the person being corrected may lose his/her temper or may have a grudge or a feeling of resentment against the one who corrects him/her. We can see this through the examples of some world leaders who shun their critics and deny the criticisms being made against their leadership. Worse than that, they prevent *truth tellers* to prevail in their midst, because these kinds of leaders are narcissistic in a sense that they do not want their *faults* to be exposed before the people that they serve. They thought that doing so will make them better leaders and improve their method of leadership. Truth be told, the acceptance of mistake is not an easy thing to do, because it reveals to yourself the *truth* that you need to improve and you can do better than what you are doing now.

In the field of education, both the teacher and the learners need to possess a positive attitude whenever they are being corrected. In most cases, the learners are the ones who are being corrected for their mistakes. But the teachers must also be corrected whenever they commit mistakes in the topic that they are trying to explain. The responsibility is, therefore, greater to the one who teaches, for it is his/her duty to teach what is right and be accurate about what he/she is talking. The challenge is far greater whenever he/she commits a mistake. For it needs *humility*, or in this case, *receptivity* to the learners who are trying to correct him/her. In this picture, one can realize what does it mean by educational receptivity. It means that the *teacher* and the *learners* are ready to be humble *before the truth*, which both of them are trying to seek. Besides, an arrogant person never accepts the truth for he can never reach it since he/she is full of himself thinking that he/she is the measure of truth. With this in mind, this study seeks to explore this theme of education through philosophy.

In the ancient history of philosophy, at least in its Greek foundation, Plato reports that Socrates insists that *all that Socrates knows is that he knows nothing*. (Plato *Apology*, 21a-e) This advocacy of Socrates serves as one of the foundations of philosophy and indicates a characteristic that a philosopher must possess. The implication of this *Socratic ignorance* means for the philosophers to become *humble* before knowledge and wisdom. Otherwise, they are not true lovers of wisdom. Indeed, this remains true in the field of education. As educators, we were once a student, and in the process of learning, we all testified to the vital role of *humility*. Especially whenever our researches are being criticized in order to create a greater outcome.

History also proves that the field of philosophy and the field of education are effective allies. In fact, many notable philosophers are also great educators: Alfred North Whitehead, Bernard Lonergan, John Dewey, and Rudolf Steiner, to name a few. Thus, it is not surprising to see a philosophical teaching being employed in the realms of education. This time it is not about the principles of education rather, it is about a philosophical theory being applied in the field of education. Not only that, this article will also explore the field of education in light of Karol Wojtyla's philosophy of community, who is widely known as Pope John Paul II (now St. John Paul II).

On top of that, Wojtyla is not known as a philosopher of education like that of Whitehead and others. He is renowned in the field of philosophy as a *Thomist-Phenomenologist*, or precisely a *personalist* who wrote extensively on the topics under the *philosophy of the human person* and *moral philosophy*. Hence, it is necessary to pose the question (1) how can his philosophy of community become a valid theory in the field of education? And (2) how can *embracing differences* become possible through Wojtyla's philosophy of community?

Wojtyla's Philosophy of Community

Wojtyla's philosophy of the *community* is an aspect of his philosophical teachings that garnered the interest of many scholars in different parts of the world. But how did Wojtyla launch this theory? He did this when he was discussing the human person, he taught that the concept of community is an indispensable part of human existence. Wojtyla, therefore, recalls the lesson from the traditional philosophy of man: "the nature of man is supposed to be rational and he is the person in virtue of the function of reason; but at the same time he has the 'social' nature." (Wojtyla 1979, 267) Wojtyla remarks that his philosophical discussion on human action and the human person will never be complete if he will disregard the importance of man's intersubjectivity. (Wojtyla 1979, 261) Since for Wojtyla, the human person, reveals his *interior realities* through his actions, it follows that his *participation* "together-with-others" in his community unveils also his personality.

Wojtyla starts his philosophy of the community by distinguishing its two types namely, the *community of being* and the *community of acting*. *The former* refers to "the communal existence of human beings and the *bonds* that are formed among them on account of their communal existence." (Wojtyla 1979, 278) An example of this can be seen in the relationship between the teachers and the school administrators. The bond between them is a type of *communal existence*. *The latter* pertains to "the aim that brings men to act together." (Wojtyla 1979, 279) For instance, in a teachers' association, all teachers belonging in that association have a specific goal that brings them together, that is, to educate the learners. Following this, Wojtyla asserts that any person who belongs in a *community of acting* "is in a position in his communal acting to perform real actions and fulfill himself in them; the possibility of this performance and the fulfillment it brings about are determined by participation." (Wojtyla 1979, 279) In other words, man has a duty to participate in the community, especially in a community of acting, which has a common goal.

Participation and Alienation

The community is formed by means of participation. Participation means "more or less equivalent to having a share or a part in something." (Wojtyla 1979, 268) All members in the community should have a share in their community. As such, Wojtyla remarks that "participation as an essential of the person is a constitutive factor of any human community." (Wojtyla 1979, 276) Also, Wojtyla reminds us that the community is the sphere where intersubjectivity happens. The interaction between the person and his neighbor forms the community through their shared goal in contributing to the common good. Besides, Wojtyla claims that "participation emerges as a dynamic factor of the person and the action and also as the basis of every authentic human community." (Wojtyla 1979, 283). Yet, no matter how great

are the goals of participation, its primary enemies are *individualism* and *objective totalism*. The former "sees the individual [as] the supreme and fundamental good, to which all interests of the community or the society have to be subordinated." (Wojtyla 1979, 273). In effect, individualism "limits participation, since it isolates the person from others by conceiving him solely as an individual who concentrates on himself and on his own good." (Wojtyla 1979, 273-274) While the latter, which is the reverse of individualism, is *objective totalism*, which "relies on the opposite principle, and unconditionally subordinates the individual to the community or the society." (Wojtyla 1979, 273) In individualism, we see selfishness as the internal principle dominating the community, while in *objective totalism* is a tool of *oppression* against the person, since the community in this sense, becomes the *sole important* goal that must be achieved even at the expense of the well-being and welfare of the people belonging to it. These two results to *alienation* which "becomes imminent when participation in the community itself sets constraints and overshadows participation in the humanness of others, when that fundamental subordination of my own good to that of my fellowman which imparts the specifically human quality to any community of men becomes defective." (Wojtyla 1979, 297)

Common Good

Participation can never be separated from the common good. But what does Wojtyla mean by common good? The common good may be understood as the good of the community; however, this is an open-ended understanding since it may imply a single-sidedness of the common good. Hence, Wojtyla asserts that the common good must be taken in both subjective and objective dimensions of it. "Its subjective sense is strictly related to participation as a property of the acting person; it is in this sense that it is possible to say that the common good corresponds to the social nature of man." (Wojtyla 1979, 281-282) In other words, the common good affirms both the contribution of man as an *individual* subject and their *collective* contribution in the community. However, the common good must always have the priority in participation since it is the common goal of all persons belonging in that community. Nevertheless, "the priority of the common good, its superiority over the partial or individual goods, does not result solely from the quantitative aspect of the society; it does not follow from the fact that the common good concerns a great number or the majority while the individual good concerns only individuals or a minority." (Wojtyla 1979, 282) Recall that for the person who is willing to participate, "the awareness of the common good makes him look beyond his own share; and this intentional reference allows him to realize essentially his own share." (Wojtyla 1979, 285)

Authentic and Non-Authentic Attitudes

Wojtyla notices that there are factors which affect man's participation. These are identified as *authentic attitudes* that forms the individual to participate in the common good of the community, while there are also *non-authentic attitudes* that hinders man to participate in the common good of the community. In *authentic attitudes* one can find the ***Attitude of Solidarity***. According to Wojtyla this attitude is "the natural consequence of the fact that human beings live and act together; it is the attitude of a community, in which the common good properly conditions and initiates participation, and participation in turn properly serves the common good, fosters it, and furthers its realization." (Wojtyla 1979, 284-285) He explains that this attitude

boosts the person's confidence with what he can contribute to the community. Hence it "means a constant readiness to accept and to realize one's share in the community because of one's membership within that particular community." (Wojtyla 1979, 285) Also, this reveals to man that he is duty-bound in the community where he lives. Thus, Wojtyla notes that "in accepting the attitude of solidarity man does what he is supposed to do not only because of his membership in the group but because he has the benefit of the whole' in view: he does it for the 'common good.'" (Wojtyla 1979, 285) Nevertheless, having this attitude does not mean that the person will take all the responsibilities and obligations of every member in the community. The equal distribution of tasks according to expertise is highly encouraged by Wojtyla, as he points out "the attitude of solidarity means respect for all parts that are the share of every member of the community. To take over a part of the duties and obligations that are not mine is intrinsically contrary to the participation and to the essence of the community." (Wojtyla 1979, 285)

Coupled with this is the *attitude of opposition*, which "does not contradict the attitude of solidarity, by contrast, it complements it. Wojtyla emphasizes this point by saying that "opposition is not inconsistent with solidarity. The one who voices his opposition to the general or particular rules or regulations of the community does not thereby reject his membership; he does not withdraw his readiness to act and to work for the common good." (Wojtyla 1979, 286) In short, for Wojtyla, to oppose is a condition of the right participation. Without it, participation can never be realized, and the common good can never be the aim in a community. Hence, Wojtyla stresses that "this opposition aims then at an adequate understanding and, to an even greater degree, the means employed to achieve the common good, especially from the point of view of the possibility of participation." (Wojtyla 1979, 286) That is why one should never silence someone who opposes because doing so is counterintuitive to the goal of the community. Thus, Wojtyla reminds that "those who in this way stand up in opposition do not intend thereby to cut themselves off from their community. On the contrary, they seek their own place and a constructive role within the community; they seek for *that* participation and *that* attitude to the common good, which would allow them a better, a fuller, and a more effective share of the communal life." (Wojtyla 1979, 286) Nevertheless, one may think that this opposition seems to be self-serving and *totally subjective*. Wojtyla admits that it is relative, but it can never be *totally subjective*. He clarifies that "the attitude of opposition is *relative* on the hand, to that particular view one takes of the community and of what is good for it, and on the other, it expresses the *strong need* to participate in the common existing with other men and even more so in the common acting." (Wojtyla 1979, 286) Besides, if this community is not fascist nor hegemonic, it will always allow opposition and criticism from all sides and all aspects, seeing it as an opportunity towards better governance of the people that is why "the structure of a human community is *correct only* if it admits not just the presence of a justified opposition but also that practical effectiveness of opposition required by the common good and the right of participation" (Wojtyla 1979, 287)

Now that it is clear what Wojtyla means by *attitude of solidarity* and *attitude of opposition*, it must be asked what is the end of these two? The goal of these two attitudes is to arrive at the third authentic attitude which is the *Sense of Dialogue*. Wojtyla believes that *dialogue is* "operative in the formation and the strengthening of interhuman solidarity also through the *attitude of opposition*" (Wojtyla 1979, 287) For

him, without dialogue, the community is bound to destroy its own personalistic principles. He explains that “this principle of dialogue allows us to select and bring to light what in controversial situations is right and true, and helps to eliminate any partial, preconceived or subjective views and trends. Such views and inclinations may become the seed of strife and conflict between men, while what is right and true always favors the development of the person and enriches the community.” (Wojtyla 1979, 287) In this way, the community can negotiate their concerns with the goal of respecting the truth and dismiss any taint of self-serving goals.

If there are authentic attitudes that pave the way towards participation, there are also non-authentic attitudes that hinder participation. The first is **conformism**, which “denotes a tendency to comply with the accepted custom and to resemble others, a tendency that in itself is neutral, in many respects positive and constructive or even creative.” (Wojtyla 1979, 289) It is a type of pseudo-participation because the conformist exhibits “an attitude of compliance or resignation, in a specific form of passivity that makes the man-person to be but the subject of *what happens* instead of being the *actor* or *agent* responsible for building his own attitudes and his own commitment in the community. Man then fails to accept his share in constructing the community and allows himself to be carried with and by the anonymous majority.” (Wojtyla 1979, 289) This is unacceptable for Wojtyla, because what happens is that the person only shows a “a mere semblance of participation, a superficial compliance with others, which lacks conviction and authentic engagement, is substituted for real participation.” (Wojtyla 1979, 289) Obviously, this must be rejected because it allows *injustice* in the community to happen since it is also a form of tolerating evil by conspiring through mediocrity. Without a doubt, the conformist “favors situations marked by indifference toward the common good.” (Wojtyla 1979, 290) One must be reminded that conformity “brings *uniformity* rather than *unity*. Beneath the uniform surface, however, there lies latent differentiation, and it is the task of the community to provide for the necessary conditions of turning it into personal participation.” (Wojtyla 1979, 290) As a matter of fact, “when people adapt themselves to the demands of the community *only superficially* and when they do so only to gain some immediate *advantages* or to avoid trouble, the person as well as the community incur irremediable losses” (Wojtyla 1979, 290)

The second is the worse form of conformism which is **non-involvement** an attitude that is “characterized by a disregard for those appearances of concern for the common good which also characterizes conformism” (Wojtyla 1979, 290) It is a total apathy towards the common good since in this attitude is “a kind of substitute or compensatory attitude for those who find solidarity too difficult and who do not believe in the sense of opposition.” (Wojtyla 1979, 291) Hence, Wojtyla points out that “in the case of *conformism* he attempts to maintain appearances, but in that of non-involvement he no longer seems to care about them.” (Wojtyla 1979, 291)

Educational Receptivity

Educational receptivity is a term that I personally draw from the lessons of Wojtyla’s philosophy of community, specifically in its goal towards dialogue that is made possible through the *attitude of solidarity* and *attitude of opposition*. Also, I took the term *receptivity* from his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* which he written as Pope John Paul II. In that letter, Wojtyla made Mary as the model of *receptivity* for

philosophers because of her *exemplar humility*. Wojtyla says that "...just as in giving her assent to Gabriel's word, Mary lost nothing of her true humanity and freedom, so too when philosophy heeds the summons of the Gospel's truth its autonomy is in no way impaired." (John Paul II, 1998, §108). Thus, every philosopher in Wojtyla's mind can only be so if they follow the footsteps of Mary's humility. Applying this in education and pedagogy: educators and learners can only *know the truth* if they first become *humble before knowledge* besides, "the human knower has no immediate access to self-knowledge; rather, one comes to know through an honest and *humble* 'encounter and arrangement'" (Meconi 2002, 72) Indeed, "Mary's reception of reality is a reminder that philosophy is not for the proud." (Meconi 2002, 72) So too, *education* can never be realized by someone who is full of himself and arrogant before knowledge we must therefore remind ourselves that "open to receiving Wisdom, Mary perfectly accepts the Divine's visitation...This feminine *receptivity* acts to highlight the first role of the philosopher: the openness of the soul to truth not yet its own." (Meconi 2002, 74) This is not exclusive only to philosophers as degree holders, since anyone can be called a philosopher so long as they are open to truth and exhibit *receptivity*. Hence, educational receptivity simply means an attitude of *being humble in order to receive knowledge through education*. With this, it can allow one discipline to participate and make a dialogue to another. Since a *receptive educator* is also a philosopher, and the philosopher "is not a self-satisfied possessor of knowledge, but a *seeker* of it." (Schindler 2016, 84) His vocation is to have "the wisdom to remain always open to better understanding, the knowledge that one's knowledge is never so definitive and comprehensive that there would no longer be a need for fundamental inquiry." (Schindler 2016, 84) For this, an *educator* remains open to the reality that he does not monopolize knowledge and that his specific discipline is co-equal with other disciplines for "genuine intellectual simplicity, being truly poor in spirit, manifests itself not in the a priori rejection of all knowledge or its possibility, but in the recognition that there is always more to know, that one's knowledge can always grow and deepen." (Schindler 2016, 84) With this in mind, the philosopher, who in this case is being represented by an *educator*, "resembles a child, who is especially characterized by a kind of innocence with respect to knowledge, a spontaneous lack of presumption regarding what he knows, and so a desire to find out, more and more." (Schindler 2016, 84)

Conclusion

A class, whether virtual or actual, is considered as a community. (see Wojtyla 1979, 281) The community for Wojtyla must be an acting *together-with-others* and not acting only for the sake of self-serving ends. Hence, Wojtyla requires that a person in a community must have the *attitude of solidarity* and *attitude of opposition* that paves the way towards the *sense of dialogue*. Through these authentic attitudes, the person can participate in a community and prevent alienation. These attitudes are attainable only by a person who is *receptive* and humble. Otherwise, that person will end up in non-authentic attitudes like *conformism* and *non-involvement* since these two are products of self-exaltation. In other words, correct participation is a product of *receptivity*. Receptivity is an idea of Wojtyla in his work *fides et ratio*, wherein he made Mary as the model of *receptivity* because of her humility before Truth. It, therefore, implies that for Wojtyla, the people are called into receptivity for them to know. Thus, applying this in the field of education, I coined the term *educational receptivity* that pertains to an *attitude of humility*, which results from the *desire to*

learn. Philosophers are called into humility, but being a philosopher is not limited to degree holders of philosophy. Hence, educators are also philosophers, for that they are also called into receptivity—educational receptivity. Through this, educators are able to break barriers and embrace the differences of their fellow scholars from other disciplines. Indeed, this allows the sharing of knowledge and learnings of one discipline to another so that they come up with an innovative step to further develop their fields, whose beneficiaries are the learners. Besides, they are learners too, and without *humility*, they will never be able to trust the teachings of other disciplines. In short, *educational receptivity* allows *embracing differences* by virtue of humility that developed from the principles of Wojtyła’s philosophy of community applied in the field of education.

In the actual field, this is also vital, take for instance in the recent article here in the Philippines, an experienced Human Resources (H.R.) officer responded to a series of *rants* in the social media from fresh graduates of *Ateneo de Manila University*, one of the top universities here in our country. These fresh graduates are *ranting* about not getting hired despite being a graduate of a well-known university. The H.R. officer narrated his experience from graduates of this university and the rest of other universities included in the the top four in our country. He stated that “Truth be told, when I was new, I told myself that I will only hire applicants from the ‘Big Four’ schools. I thought that I knew the values that they taught.” Bergantin (2002) At first, his preferences in hiring are only those coming from the top four universities in our country, he admitted that he has a bias that time in terms of hiring. Yet as years go by he realized that he was wrong, he revealed that, “Suffice to say, I ate my words day in, day out. I was a tad disappointed with a number of applicants who walked in our office reeking of self-entitlement. Some were borderline arrogant.” Bergantin (2002) learning from this, the H.R. officer concluded that what he prefers to hire now, are those who are *humble enough* because they are the ones who are *open to learning* instead of those who are *arrogant* who thought that they do not need any more knowledge since what they have learned from the classroom are already sufficient for them to work greatly. Hence, the H.R. officer remarks that

“As I interviewed and worked with more and more applicants, I have grown to like and prefer those fresh graduates from lesser-known universities. I'd even look forward to interviewing those who came from the provinces. The difference lies in their attitude. These kids who did not have the privilege of going to prestigious schools are out to prove themselves, they have a drive and sincerity like no other. They are humble, patient, and hungry for knowledge and recognition. They want to make a name in the industry but they know that it's a tough climb to the top. Their humility makes them believe that there are no handouts in life, hence, they complain a lot less and have reasonable demands. They have the grit without the ego. Whatever they supposedly lacked in college, they make up with enthusiasm and the desire to learn.” Bergantin (2002)

This article proves the importance of *educational receptivity*, it shows that even after graduation, it demands the learners to remain *humble* and to have an unending *desire to know*. Otherwise, they are bound to destroy the foundation which their educators inculcated into their character. Hence, the world demands now a learner who did not only earned high grades, but more important than that is that they were formed to

have a great attitude. In this case, humility, which is acclaimed as “the mother of all virtues.”

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Contact email: blaiseringor2397@gmail.com
bdringor@ust.edu.ph