



KAROL WOJTYLA'S PERSONALIST ANTHROPOLOGY: THE RELATIONAL HUMAN PERSON

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore the philosophical ideas of Karol Wojtyla, focusing on his anthropology rooted in personalism. Wojtyla emphasized the interconnectedness of individuals, drawing attention to themes like participation, solidarity, and self-giving. His philosophy underscores the complexity of the human person and their inherent relational nature. I analyze his thoughts on the experience of actions and events, the relationship between person and action, and the person's transcendence through truth and self-gift. This study highlights the inherent dignity of each individual and argues that Wojtyla's philosophy offers a coherent personalist perspective that merits further exploration.

Keywords: *Wojtyla, personalism, person, transcendence, relationality*

Abstrak

Dalam esai ini, saya mendalami tulisan filosofis Karol Wojtyla dan fokus pada antropologi berbasis personalismenya. Wojtyla percaya pada keterhubungan individu, menyoroti konsep-konsep seperti partisipasi, solidaritas, dan donasi. Filsafatnya menekankan keberagaman pribadi dan sifat relasional intrinsiknya. Saya mengkaji gagasannya tentang pengalaman terhadap peristiwa dan tindakan, struktur pribadi dan tindakan, serta transendensi pribadi melalui kebenaran dan donasi. Melalui analisis ini, saya menyoroti martabat unik setiap pribadi. Esai ini berpendapat bahwa filosofi Wojtyla merupakan bentuk personalisme konsisten yang menekankan keterhubungan dan nilai setiap pribadi. Ini adalah perspektif yang perlu dieksplorasi lebih jauh.

Katakunci: *Wojtyla. Personalisme. Pribadi Manusia. Transendensi. Relasionalitas.*



A. Introduction

Karol Wojtyla's work predominantly centers around man and his dignity. Despite there being only one book that focuses solely on anthropology in his philosophical production, the theme of man is a recurring topic in all of his writings.¹

Wojtyla's anthropological focus has gained considerable attention, perhaps due to its centrality in his philosophy and its ability to offer a comprehensive perspective on his intricate concepts. Nevertheless, there exists varying viewpoints in regard to the precise nature of the anthropology at the foundation of Wojtyla's works, as well as its complete extent and profundity.

Numerous studies have delved into the concepts of person and action in Karol Wojtyla's Anthropology. Juan Manuel Burgos (2023) examined the social aspects of *The Acting Person*, while Casas (2023) explored normative ethics, Espartinez (2023) focused on Participation and alienation, and Holub (2017) discussed the validity of Wojtyla's philosophy. In addition, Efficacy (2023) by Holub, foundation for psychology (2023) by Houde, quest for integral personalism in the crisis of truth (2023) by Isanbor, and ontology and experience (2023) by Radziechowski all confirmed that Wojtyla seeks to avoid the symptomatic body-mind dualism of modern rationalist philosophy by conceiving of the person as an irreducible triplicity: body, mind, and spirit.²

In this context, we tend to believe that the acting person is not only the method and consciousness of action but also the subject of study and the ultimate goal – understanding and realizing the unique dignity of the person.

To help in the work of rethinking the intellectual testament left to us by Karol. Wojtyla, we will try in this short essay to indicate some of the hermeneutic keys which, in addition to introducing the reader to the complex thought of our author, also serve to shed some light on the questions just mentioned.

B. Method

The research methodology used in this study entails a precise examination of Wojtyla's concept of the human person, highlighting its importance in the field of contemporary anthropology. The analysis meticulously gathers data from Wojtyla's seminal works, including "The Acting Person" and "Love and Responsibility," as well as relevant secondary sources. Through an exploration of Wojtyla's metaphysical and phenomenological perspective on the human person, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the broader field of anthropology. By illuminating the intricacies of human nature, this study offers a meaningful pathway to enhance our understanding of anthropological dimensions in the present age.

¹ The book in question is *Person and Act*. The quotes are taken from the first volume of the critical English edition of *The Collected Works of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II*, Karol Wojtyla, "*Person and Act*" and *Related Essays*, ed. Grzegorz Ignatik and Carl A. Anderson (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021). Although its content is fundamentally ethical, *Love and Responsibility* could also be considered an anthropological essay

² Grzegorz Holub, *Understanding the Person Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyla*, New edition, 1 online resource vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition Frankfurt am Main, 2021), <https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9783631857960>.

C. Result and Discussions

1. Wojtylian Anthropology's Foundation: Experience Analysis

As commonly understood, Wojtyła's approach to anthropology centers on the individual's lived experience. A natural inquiry for scholars is to elucidate the nature of this starting point. As we shall discover, the response to this query is closely linked to another: why does our author choose to begin from this particular experience?

It seems to us that the answer to these two questions is found in the Cartesian principle of the cogito; certainly, not because Wojtyła accepts it, but because he takes it into account. Here we observe a constant characteristic of our author's philosophy, that is, the dialogue with every form of thought in the attempt to grasp those elements of truth that allow us to go beyond school disputes and sterile debates, positively fertilizing people's culture and life.

Cartesian doubt and the cogito ergo sum, to which it gives rise, are the basis of so-called modernity. There are thousands of essays that attempt to demonstrate how it is precisely there, that is, in the Cartesian cogito, that the roots of relativism, subjectivism, the development of science and technology, the process of secularization, etc. are found.³ However, works in able to propose alternatives to the cogito. Wojtyła's writings are to be counted among these few.

Both in Descartes and in classical thinkers the central question is that of truth, especially that concerning man⁴. However, the way to deal with it is different. According to the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas, for example, the method for knowing the essence of man requires a series of mediations: the objects specify the acts, these in turn the powers, and the latter the nature, or rather the essence as a principle of operations; for example, the phonemes of human language refer to the acts of speaking-understanding, which are a realization of the movements of the phonatory organs and of the sensitive and intellectual powers, so their subject is a being endowed with an essence composed of animality and rationality. Through the cogito, Descartes shows that the way we know ourselves is different from the way we know any other reality, only that in the end, when he makes the clarity and distinction found in the first principle or cogito the absolute criterion of truth, the author himself ends up erasing this difference⁵.

Wojtyła agrees with the distinction between experience of self and experience of otherness, but the experience of self is not that of pure cogito nor does it exclude that of otherness, because it is consciousness of action; it is an experience that is simultaneously internal — of oneself as an agent — and external — of the actions of others. However, there is an incommensurability between internal and external experience, because the internal experience is its own, that is, it is experienced by the agent in an incommunicable way. According to Wojtyła, the experience of acting does not presuppose the different mediations (objects, acts, powers, essence) nor the person, because it is

³ Taylor, for example, considers that Descartes gives a completely new direction to Augustinian interiority, placing the sources of morality within us. See Ruth Abbey, "Charles Taylor: Sources of the Self," in *Central Works of Philosophy*, ed. John Editor Shand, vol. 5 (Acumen Publishing, 2006), 268–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781844653621.015>.

⁴ The shift of interest from the truth of nature or ideal essences to that of the truth of man is a typically modern characteristic, in which the influence of Christianity can be discovered, which in Jesus Christ places humanity at the top of the ontological hierarchy, in the hypostatic union with the Son of God. Some scholars of modernity therefore speak of an anthropological turning point in philosophy and theology. (See M. Fazio and D. Gamarra, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (Scepter Publishers, 2017), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=SXM2vgAACAAJ>.)

⁵ On the value of experience in the Cartesian theory of action, see Grzegorz Holub, "Karol Wojtyła and René Descartes. A Comparison of the Anthropological Positions," 2015.

precisely the act that reveals the person in his existential dynamism; said in other words: the person reveals himself in his actions⁶.

How can a person reveal himself, and why precisely in acting?

First of all, it must be said that the context in which the person reveals himself is not so much action, but the awareness of action. In fact, it is not any action nor any experience of which we are aware that reveals to us who we are, but only that action in which we are aware of our own causality⁷.

Through the use of phenomenology, particularly suitable for the analysis of experience, Wojtyła distinguishes two types of experiences of subjectivity: the experience of something that happens in me and that of something that I do. The first experience captures the moment of passivity, that is, the physiological dynamisms (such as heartbeats, digestion, breathing, etc.) and the inclinations and emotions that are produced in man. Even if it allows us to be aware of our own subjectivity, the happening does not offer knowledge of what is its foundation, since in the happening the attention moves away from everything that constitutes the core of the person: his freedom to act.

The second experience, however, captures the person's moment of freedom, that is, personal acts (eating, talking, working, praying, etc.). In acting, the person experiences herself as the author and efficient cause of the act: she feels, for example, that the action of working belongs to her as something of her own, because she is aware that that work depends on her in its intention and execution: with that job, good from a technical and ethical point of view, he wants to serve others, support his family, develop his own qualities, etc.⁸ And it is the experience of one's own causality that establishes the responsibility that the person has towards his actions. We understand why - according to Wojtyła - in the experience of action, which is always the experience of moral values, the person is fully revealed⁹.

2. The Transphenomenal Method

The originality of Wojtyła's anthropology does not depend only on his starting point, but also on his method, indicated by himself as transphenomenal¹⁰. Despite the name given by the author, the discussion around his method continues to be an open question. For some scholars,

⁶ Cfr. Wojtyła, *“Person and Act” and Related Essays*, 55–56.

⁷ “The term *actus* is not phenomenologically determined in the same way as “action” or, even more so, “act”. The latter concerns not any actualization, any dynamization of the subject “man”, but only that in which man as “I” is active, that is to say that man as “I” internally lives himself as an agent. According to what integral experience demonstrates, it is then and only then that man performs an act” Wojtyła, 187.

⁸ For the understanding of person as the author and efficient cause of the act see Jove Jim Sanchez Aguas, *Person, Action, and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II)* (UST Publishing House, 2014). See also Aguas Lectures: *Wojtyła Person and Human Act - Part 1 (Human Act, Self Possession and Self Governance)*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJghZSe8pxE>.

⁹ As Wierzbicki states, «for Wojtyła man is realized in the act, in acting: the primary moment of moral value (“good” or “evil”) is not theory but praxis, because it is real only in acting of the person. In this sense, the ontological aspect of axiology would be primary compared to the epistemological one”, Karol Wojtyła and Alfred Wierzbicki, *Man in the Field of Responsibility* (St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), 39.

¹⁰ This method consists, as Wojtyła himself explains, in moving from phenomenal experience to the metaphysical foundation. «Metaphysical objectivity, i.e. the suppositum as a transphenomenal and therefore fundamental expression of man's experience, is at the same time the guarantee of the identity of this man in existing and acting» Karol Wojtyła and Serretti Massimo, *Perché l'uomo*: (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1995), 64, <http://digilib.pusc.it/handle/123456789/6789>.

Wojtyła would be a phenomenologist, which is linked to Thomistic metaphysics¹¹; for others he would be a Thomist who uses phenomenology as a method¹²; There is no shortage of those who speak of the Wojtylian method, especially the one used in *Persona and Act*, as an organic union between phenomenology and Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics¹³.

We think that the attempt to classify the type of method is less relevant than trying to examine what it consists of, while indicating the differences with some authors of classical phenomenology and metaphysics.

One of the most important texts to understand Wojtyła's thoughts regarding the method is a passage from the introduction of *Persona and Act*. Although a little long, we think it is worth reporting in full. «However, when we talk about the experience of man, we mean first of all that man approaches himself, and therefore establishes a cognitive contact with himself. This contact has an experimental nature, somewhat continuous, and takes place every time it is established. In fact, it does not last uninterruptedly, not even when it refers to one's own "I": on the level of consciousness, it is interrupted at least during sleep. Nonetheless, man is always himself, and therefore the experience of himself also persists in some way. There are in it the clearest moments, as well as a series of less clear moments which nevertheless constitute a specific totality of experiences of the man that I am. It is composed of multiple experiences and constitutes in a certain way their sum or, better yet, their resultant"¹⁴.

We saw previously that the starting point was the experience of action. Now we can delve deeper into the meaning that the term experience has in Wojtyła. As is known, both phenomenology and Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics use the term experience, but with a different meaning. Aristotle, for example, considers that to arrive at intelligible knowledge, a fundamental constituent of human experience, there is a need to grasp the essence of reality through abstraction, or through the formation of the universal¹⁵.

Wojtyła also accepts the induction of the universal starting from a multiplicity of experiences, but - unlike Aristotle - the Wojtylian universal, far from losing all the richness of the particulars, structures it better and better; for example, in the experience of human action, the different human experiences of oneself and others are not forgotten or excluded from the universal, but rather contained as elements and moments of the manifestation of that fullness.

Ultimately, it is a unitary but multiple experience, of which man is the subject (the experience always has the person as its subject) and also the object (the experience concerns man). On the other hand, experience has an internal side, which is only partially communicable through the different types of human language (bodily, affective, symbolic, etc.), and an external side, which can be known by any observer and, therefore, fully communicated.

¹¹ Keith A. Houde, "Karol Wojtyła's 'Thomistic Personalism': Philosophical Foundations for a Psychology of the Person," *Studia Gilsoniana* 12, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.26385/SG.120208>.

¹² Miguel Acosta and Adrian J. Reimers, *Karol Wojtyła's Personalist Philosophy* (Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

¹³ Buttiglione, for example, states that Wojtyła's method is not - as in Ingarden - a phenomenology that develops in a realistic sense, but an attempt to grasp reality in its richness: «For Wojtyła it is rather not a question of demonstrating phenomenologically that the man is a person but to see with the help of phenomenology how man is a person, how the metaphysical structures of his personal being are reflected in his conscious being. — Thomistic metaphysical anthropology is therefore like a great fundamental hypothesis, which is verified through phenomenological analysis and which on the other hand, guides this analysis allowing it to achieve greater depth" Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 359.

¹⁴ Cfr. Wojtyła, "*Persona and Act*" and *Related Essays*, 35.

¹⁵ Cfr. Aristoteles, *Analitici Secundi*, n.d., 100a 1-100b 5.

The need for induction separates Wojtyła from the phenomenological method in which there is no need to arrive at a universal starting from a multiplicity of particular data, because the essence is grasped immediately in an intentional way: the subject has as its intention the object, or that which corresponds to the laws of necessity, not to particular and contingent cases. Hence, as is known, the importance of the phenomenological reduction which brackets the empirical existence of the object and also of the subject (epistemological reduction), and the flow of phenomena in consciousness, up to bracketing of everything that is absolutely not given in the pure intuition of essence (eidetic reduction)¹⁶.

Even if in Wojtyła induction is followed by reduction, it does not bracket either existence in structuring or the enrichment of experience. How then should Wojtyła's reduction be understood? The answer is clear: the reduction consists in the description of the basic structures of experience; for example, the structure of happening and that of acting, or - as we will see later - that of self-possession, self-determination, and self-donation.

The transphenomenal method used by Wojtyła therefore means starting from a multiplicity of human experiences to arrive at a description of the basic structures of the person, which allow him to be known in his duplicity of subject-object.

3. Overcoming Subjectivism and Objectivism

The term of overcoming (*Aufhebung*) is of Hegelian origin, but what we are talking about has nothing to do with the dialectics of concepts, but with the particular character of the reality of the human person which cannot be reduced either to a pure subject or to a pure object.

Cartesian philosophy, as we have indicated, introduces the question of the truth of man in a new and, above all, more pressing way: what am I? Descartes' answer leaves no room for doubt: I am *res cogitans* or thinking substance, which consists in nothing other than thinking or, better yet, being conscious¹⁷. The person thus appears solely as a conscious subject.

However, as Wojtyła indicates, it is enough to start from the analysis of the experience of action to discover the Cartesian error and, in general, of subjectivism: the reduction of the person to the ego and of the ego to self-consciousness. The structures found in the experience of action through reduction are three: being the subject of an action, being aware of oneself as the subject of an action and knowing oneself as the subject of an action. Although these three experiences may apparently seem the same thing, in reality they are not; they are irreducible experiences¹⁸. In fact, being the subject of working is not the same as being aware of being working, nor is the awareness of being working the same as the objectification of oneself as a worker or of this working (what am I doing? How do I do it? Why do I do it? etc., are questions that imply the objectification of my work).

Does this mean that there are three subjects? No, there is only one subject of these three experiences: the real subject, which Wojtyła therefore calls ontic subjectivity. In fact, while ontic subjectivity is necessary in all three experiences, the other types of subjectivity are not; at work I

¹⁶ On the way of understanding the phenomenological reduction, see the explanation of Rudolf Bernet, "The Phenomenological Reduction: From Natural Life to Philosophical Thought," *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy* Volume 4 (December 2016): 311–33, <https://doi.org/10.19079/metodo.4.2.311>.

¹⁷ "Descartes, Rene - Meditations on First Philosophy," accessed November 15, 2023, <http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/meditations/1.htm>.

¹⁸ In Descartes, an example of a rationalist and modern thinker, there is no distinction between these moments, so thinking is identified with ontological subjectivity (*Cogito ergo sum*). To the question: what am I? Descartes responds in accordance with this lack of distinction: "I am a thing that thinks" "Descartes, Rene - Meditations on First Philosophy."

may at certain times not realize that I am working, for example, when I have to resolve a difficult issue that occupies my entire attention, or when I am completely occupied with work, etc.; on the other hand, only occasionally I objectify myself as a worker, when, for example, I ask myself how I can improve my work, change certain wrong attitudes, help others with my activity, etc. Ontic subjectivity cannot stop being present in the three experiences, because it is its foundation. Which does not mean that awareness of oneself as an agent adds nothing to ontic subjectivity, since through it one is aware not only of oneself or of the action, but above all of the act and the person in their dynamic correlation¹⁹.

This is why, although it is possible to reduce the consciousness of action to three basic experiences thus allowing us to grasp ontic subjectivity, the consciousness of action constitutes a unitary experience not only because the subject is one, but also because the person and the Action through consciousness constitute a unitary dynamic structure.

4. The Person-Act Structure

Let us now try to delve deeper, following Wojtyła, into the content of the person-act structure. Previously we said that, through the consciousness of the act, the person knows himself as an agent because he realizes his own causality, that is, he realizes that the act depends on him: he places it in being, he can modify it, suppress it, etc. However, the person who acts knows not only his cause, but above all himself through the action, since in the act he discovers ends with which he identifies, recognizing them as his own.

4.1. Intentionality and Transcendence

The intentionality of one's actions is an essential part of the person's self-knowledge, because in his acts the person manifests what he wants, and what he wants is what she becomes.

In the concept of intentionality, we once again find a certain originality with respect to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and also to phenomenology.

In analyzing the act of will, we discover - according to Wojtyła - a type of intentionality that is different from that of knowledge. In agreement with St. Thomas, our author maintains that, while in knowledge there is almost an introduction of the object into the subject so that the object begins to exist in a new way (precisely, intentionally), in wanting it takes place instead it is almost the opening of the subject to the object, so that the subject begins through the will almost to exist in the object, certainly not really but intentionally²⁰.

Wojtyła takes up the Thomistic sense of the intentionality of the will, but at the same time introduces a new aspect into it: that of transcendence. The concept of transcendence, characteristic of Kantian philosophy, was taken up above all by phenomenology²¹. The latter understands transcendence as the ability that one's subjectivity has to go beyond itself. This is possible through intentional acts, in which the subject, in addressing the object, transcends itself²².

¹⁹ Wojtyła, *“Person and Act” and Related Essays*, 197–203. See also *Aguas Lectures: Wojtyła Person and Human Act Part 2 (Freedom and Self-Determination)*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHj4vLH6IVU>.

²⁰ “The term *intentionio* also indicates in St. Thomas one of the main moments of the actualization of the will” (ibid Wojtyła, *“Person and Act” and Related Essays*, 309.)

²¹ On how to understand the dynamic structure of *volitum-cognitum* in the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas and Kant, see Pedro García Casas, “Wojtylian Critique of Kantian Morality and Proposal of the Unconditional Personalist Norm,” *Carthaginensia* 34 (January 2018): 29–48.

²² The intentional act that grasps the essences is called by Scheler the act of ideation, an act completely foreign to any technical intelligence, to any mediated, consequential thought, which «consists in grasping the eidetic structures constitutive of the world, starting from that one example of the field in question, and independently of the number and

The will in Wojtyła therefore has a complex structure, in which the transcendence of one's own person is added to the intention towards the object. However, this structure is not made up of two distinct acts, but of two moments of the same experience: horizontal transcendence or intention towards the object (every act of the will always has an object; I want this or that), vertical transcendence or self-decision (in every act of the will I decide about myself). If the first moment refers to the will as a faculty, the second instead refers to the will as a property of the person: the person can decide about himself because he belongs to himself and is able to possess himself through his will. Through the I want, each person currently dominates himself, exercising that specific power that only he has. In this way Wojtyła manages to overcome the still open debate between voluntarism and intellectualism, since he makes it clear that the difference between will and reason is not found only in the area of faculties, but above all in the area of essence, as will is a property of the person, through which he can achieve self-control²³.

On the other hand, the vertical transcendence of the will corrects the error of Schelerian ethical emotionalism, since - according to Wojtyła - the moral perfection or imperfection of the person does not depend on an emotional intuition, but on a voluntary act in conformity with the truth²⁴.

4.2. The Person as a Dynamic Hypostasis

Even if through the analysis of self-possession Wojtyła reaches the core of subjectivity - the hypostasis or ontic subjectivity -, the latter nevertheless does not lose its dynamic character²⁵. This appears clearly in the self-transcendence of the person in the act, in which a certain paradox arises, as the act is simultaneously contingent and necessary; in fact, as it depends on the person in his being, it is contingent, but as the person needs it to be able to transcend himself, it is necessary. Ultimately, there is a relationship of mutual dependence between person and act.

It seems to us that Wojtyła, in addition to taking inspiration from the thesis of the act of being as the nucleus of the person, takes into account the Schelerian concept of person and, in general, an anti-metaphysical personalism, which in realizing the dependence of the person on the act denies the existence of a stable substratum.

As is well known, according to Scheler, the person is not a substance (unlike the body and the soul), nor an empirical subject, nor a transcendental subject, but is spirit. The spirit does not

importance of our observations and the inductive reasoning of intelligence" (Max. Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, München 1949, p. 155). The evident knowledge thus obtained has a validity that surpasses the limits of our sensitive experiences. See Pedro García Casas, "Wojtyła's Normative Ethic vs. Scheler's Emotionalization of the A Priori," *Studia Gilsoniana* 8, no. 3 (2019): 569–92.

²³ "If instead we conduct the analysis of the will within the limits of the entire dynamic structure that the person constitutes, on the basis of self-mastery and self-possession, then the will reveals itself as self-determination, and its relationship with intentional objects stands out as an active response" (Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 329.)

²⁴ According to Scheler, the intentional act that captures values is not an act of ideation, but an emotional act or an emotional intuition. Values are thus a priori, objective, unmistakable with things, with goods and with ends, inaccessible to the intellect, free from any metaphysical foundation (see Max Scheler, "Der Formalismus in Der Ethik Und Die Materiale Wertethik : Neuer Versuch Der Grundlegung Eines Ethischen Personalismus [Scan Des Eintrags]," [Http://Elib.Suub.Uni-Bremen.de/Ip/Docs/00010477.Pdf](http://Elib.Suub.Uni-Bremen.de/Ip/Docs/00010477.Pdf), January 2005.

²⁵ "Man as a person, as someone, is - maintaining the metaphysical analogy - identifiable with the suppositum. The suppositum is the subject or foundation and at the same time the source of two different forms of dynamism. It has its roots in it and from it finally, the dynamism of everything that happens in man originates, but also the total dynamism of action with the conscious operation that constitutes it. The unity of the human suppositum cannot at all obscure the profound differences that decide the real richness of the dynamism of man" Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 203.

originally possess any type of energy: neither physical nor psychic; it borrows it from the vital instincts. However, this energy must be transformed through the passage from a necessary inclination to a free one. Through the will, which acts as a steering, the spirit, guided by ideas and values, hinders the instinctive impulse or removes it. The purpose of the spirit is not only to regulate instincts, but above all to become free and self-sufficient through intentional acts, which absolutely transcend the necessity of nature. The spirit is realized and modified through its own actions²⁶.

The person therefore appears, in Schelerian anthropology, as the source of all intentional acts and at the same time as constituted by them. This relationship of dependence towards intentional acts means that, in Scheler, the term person is reserved for the being who carries out intentional acts, since the person exists only in his acts²⁷.

Although he accepts the Schelerian theory of the one-to-one relationship between person and acts, Wojtyła introduces two important changes: first, the person's acts are not only spiritual, but also have a corporal and psychic component; secondly, the person does not identify with his acts, nor with their dynamic structure, but transcends them.

In fact, the experience of acting, in addition to allowing us to know the person as an author or efficient cause, allows us to discover the complexity of the structure of the act. Thanks to the awareness of our actions, we perceive physiological and emotional dynamisms as something which, although it does not fully depend on us in its actualization, is integrated into the human act to the point of constituting a single reality. Human acts cannot therefore be reduced to something purely physical (against behaviorism) nor to a purely spiritual element (against spiritualistic personalism): they participate to a greater or lesser extent in corporeity, the human psyche and spirituality. However, not all elements of the act have the same value, since what makes the act personal, and not simply characteristic of the human species, is its intentionality, understood in the double sense of intentional and transcendent. Intentionality allows the integration of the physiological and psychic aspects of the act.

On the other hand, the person does not identify with the human act, not even with the totality of his acts, because the person always transcends his own actions. The person is not exhausted by his action, because, despite being essentially modified by human acts, he is beyond them: the action depends completely on the person in his being (it is the person who makes it become real or not) and in its essence (the intentionality of the person gives rise to the way of being of the action, above all to its ethical quality), while the being of the person is independent of his action (when one sleeps or when one completely loses consciousness, for example in a vegetative coma, one does not stop being a person).

The complex unity of the structure of the act reveals a unitary being that acts in a unitary way. In fact, the somatic-psychic-spiritual character of the act reveals a fundamental unity that

²⁶ "Die Person ist nur 'in' ihren Akten und 'durch' sie" Scheler Max Ferdinand, "Zur Phänomenologie Und Metaphysik Der Freiheit," 1957, <https://open.org/pub-131593>.

²⁷ As Schutz claims, this conception of the person is at the basis of Schelerian permissiveness towards abortion. «That Scheler, finally, can arrive at the thesis according to which abortion does not entail the annihilation of the being and value of the person, but only of the biological human being, through a phenomenological analysis, seems to us at least free. In our opinion, this and the previous positions tending to deny the aforementioned cases characterization of murder as such, find their explanation in the peculiar Schelerian conception of the person and in the fundamental lack of metaphysical character underlying therein, ultimately in the spirit-body dualism, which characterizes the person exclusively as a "spiritual" being and as a "unity" current" of intentional acts, and consequently relegates the corporeal element to the non-essential constitutive part of it" Alfred Schutz, "Max Scheler's Epistemology and Ethics, I," *The Review of Metaphysics* 11, no. 2 (1957): 304–14.

gives rise to these differences, transcending them. The awareness of the differences experienced in the act is not, therefore, an obstacle to discovering the unity of the agent. In actualizing its own potential (physiological and emotional dynamisms, thought, volition, etc.), the subject, which is one, experiences itself internally as a unitary reality²⁸.

In Wojtyła, the person is no longer the simple correlate of intentional acts, but has an identity of its own. What is this unitary reality, the root of all differences and all actions? Wojtyła's answer, based on Thomistic ontology, is precise: this reality is the person or hypostasis or suppositum, that is, ontic subjectivity. The phenomenological distinction between the experience of happening and that of acting, that is, between the ego understood only as a patient subject and the ego seen as an acting subject, is transcendently overcome by the consideration of the subject as a person, that is, by the suppositum. The suppositum is the stable foundation in every change and at the same time it is the source of the different forms of dynamism (spontaneous and free): the origin of the total dynamism that is integrated into the action²⁹.

Wojtyła's approach, in addition to overcoming modern subjectivism, tends to complete the classical metaphysics of the person, highlighting the direct and one-to-one relationship between action and the person who acts. In fact, the agent is not the I that appears in consciousness, but rather a foundation that transcends the totality of human dynamisms and acts, without however ceasing to be someone; that is, it is a suppositum that exists, knows itself as a subject, and acts³⁰. Here is the synthesis created by Wojtyła between the metaphysics of being and phenomenology: the person is not relative to his acts, because he is a suppositum; it is the acts, however, that are relative to the person, as he is their origin; nevertheless, the person is in a close relationship with his acts, indeed without them he cannot know himself as a subject nor perfect himself as a person.³¹

In this way, Wojtyła resolves the paradox of the Schelerian concept of person, according to which acts depend on the person in their essentiality and the person depends on the acts in self-realization. Scheler, in not wanting to consider the spirit and the center of him as having their own being, must think of them in a dialectical relationship with intentional acts. Wojtyła demonstrates how the reality of the person cannot depend on his possibility, concretely, on the actions he can do, since the possibilities are not real before becoming an act. The reason on which Wojtyła seems to base himself to explain the relationship between person and act is this: the person is the origin of dynamisms, of consciousness, and of acts, and at the same time it can be realized by acts, because its nucleus is act, concretely a spiritual act, which allows her to communicate with the world and above all with other people³².

²⁸ "Through his acts, in fact, in a certain way man creates himself, his own interiority and moral personality. We see here how in understanding the human act, phenomenology describes a human experience which, to be understood and explained adequately, needs a penetration that goes beyond simple description." Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, 167.

²⁹ Wojtyła, "Person and Act" and Related Essays, 203.

³⁰ Wojtyła and Serretti, *Perché l'uomo*: 64.

³¹ Tomasz Duma, "The Foundations of the Human Person's Dynamism in Karol Wojtyła's Anthropology. A Study in Light of 'The Acting Person,'" *Verbum Vitae* 38 (December 20, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.8944>.

³² "The person is precisely that objective being who, as a defined subject, communicates most closely with the (external) world and is deeply engaged in it thanks to his own interiority and his own spiritual life. It must be added that he communicates in this way not only with the visible world, but also with the invisible world and above all with God. This is another symptom of the specificity of the person in the visible world" (Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, Revised edition, 1993, 492.) The highest degrees of perfection of personal being (unity, activity or immanence, and transcendence) depend on the fact that person has a spiritual being. Taking up the words of St. Thomas, the person is "id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura" (S. Th., I, q. 29, a. 3).

5. The Perfection of The Person

So far, we have talked about the transformation of the person through the act, without however explaining exactly what the content of this change is. A wrong way of conceiving it is to consider change according to the scheme of physical causality: the person would change, according to this point of view, as it would give rise to effects; it would therefore be an external modification, which would internally involve the person only to the extent that certain potentialities have been realized.

The experience of being the cause of one's own actions, however, is not the same as that of physical causality, since one realizes that whether or not to carry out the action depends on one's will, not on the impulse necessary to implement certain powers. As we have examined, our willing always implies, alongside the existence of a horizontal transcendence through which we unite with the object of our volition, a reflection on our person, so it can be said that in wanting something we love ourselves in a determined way, precisely according to the nature of this will³³. The reflexivity of the act of willing means that the causality of our actions is not only external, but above all internal: in addition to the actualization of certain powers, there is the determination of ourselves or self-determination; the person essentially determines himself without this self-determination leading to the loss of the ability to self-determine. From this perspective, action appears to be a second birth; the ability to go beyond oneself, transcending the limits of the current way of being³⁴.

This ability depends - according to Wojtyła - on the fact that when the person acts he always turns to the truth, which is absolutely transcendent. In fact, the act is in the power of the person not only because it is the source of dynamisms, of consciousness and of the act itself, but also and above all because the act is an expression of the response that the person must give to the truth, that is, to truth of the good, or even the truth about the good³⁵.

The truth about good is not external to the person, because it is not an abstract good, but rather one's own good, that is, the good of the person or his truth. The person's truth indicates what the person must do. The acts that correspond to the truth of the person perfect him, making him go beyond his current perfection, which is always limited. The reference to truth thus explains why human acts, in addition to giving rise to an integration of the constitutive differences of the person (physiological, psychic, and spiritual aspects), are capable of intimately modifying the person: good acts, that is, acts suited to truth, they make the person good and vice versa. The person,

³³ Even if Wojtyła does not like to speak of the will as an appetite, it seems to us that in horizontal transcendence the will appears as an appetite, since what leads us to want something is the inclination we have towards the good, grasped as such; what St. Thomas calls *voluntas ut natura*. For further information on this point we refer the reader to Arkadiusz Gudaniec, "Karol Wojtyła's Concept of Personal Transcendence," *Verbum Vitae* 40 (May 16, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.13573>.

³⁴ In the essential value that the act has in the transformation of the person, there is a point of contact with the theme of action in Arendt: «its impulses springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative» Hannah Arendt, Margaret Canovan, and Danielle Allen, *The Human Condition*, Second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Chicago, 2018), 176. Despite this similarity, in Wojtyła action goes beyond the meaning of Arendtian active life (life in the public sphere), since any act of the person, regardless of his belonging to the private or public sphere, is essentially ethical.

³⁵ The reference to truth constitutes what Wojtyła calls vertical transcendence, to distinguish it from the horizontal transcendence typical of the choices or volitions of a specific value: «The reference to truth, which in the sphere of conscience is above all the truth of the good (or also the truth about the good) indicates another dimension of the person's own transcendence, different from that which finds expression in going beyond the horizontal boundaries of the subject, when it turns towards objective values independently of the judgment of conscience". Wojtyła and Serretti, *Perché l'uomo* :, 144.

therefore, does not waste himself in acting, but becomes richer or poorer depending on the goodness or wickedness of his actions. And it is precisely by transcending himself, that is, by becoming good, that the person manages to integrate personally, and not simply currently, the different levels that constitute him. When the subject chooses this truth with his own act of freedom, "he exhausts the capacity of his being to the full, while by doing this, with the strength of his own act par excellence, he fulfills himself, fills himself with himself, gives himself the its fullness"³⁶.

The instances of classical ethics and modern ethics, that is, virtue, duty and authenticity, find a happy synthesis in self-transcendence in truth. The perfection of the person does not consist in pure duty nor in the spontaneous manifestation of oneself, but in having to be oneself, which is achieved every time our acts correspond to the truth of the person, that is, of ourselves. Virtue ceases to be seen as extrinsic perfection, since it arises from the duty to be oneself or to be authentic in a profound sense. The debate between a heteronomous ethic and an autonomous ethic thus seems fully overcome: the truth obliges because it is the truth of the person, of each of us. In the separation that occurs in every act between the actual being of the person and the duty to be, we discover the reason for the ethical quality of human acts: the person must always act in accordance with the truth, that is, he is obliged to fulfill the duty not to reject itself.³⁷ The person has power over himself, because he must perfect himself, since, as Kant states, duty necessarily implies a special type of power.

6. Donation as The Ultimate Goal

Through the truth, the person not only transcends himself towards his unrepeatability, but also transcends himself towards the community of people. In fact, as soon as the person knows the existence of his truth which obliges him and at the same time frees him from what he is not, he recognizes that to affirm himself he must affirm the truth of every other self, since the truth of himself contains the truth of the other, since the other is also a person. Being yourself is therefore choosing affirmation towards everyone else, it is going beyond yourself towards everyone else³⁸.

The truth of the person has as its essential content the so-called personalistic norm, or the principle of affirmation of the person for himself: the person must always be treated as an end, never as a means. The truth of the person therefore has practical consequences regarding any human life. First of all, the knowledge of oneself as a person contains the personal recognition of every other human life, which therefore participates in the same rights that we have. According to Wojtyła, however, this norm does not end with the recognition of the other as a person, since the obligation of the personalist norm goes beyond the level of conscience, good feelings and desires, as it must be fulfilled by the person who acts. Others must therefore not only be recognized and affirmed as people, but must also be made participants in our actions. It is what Wojtyła defines participation, that is, the action that each man carries out in union with other men: society thus appears as a fabric made up of different types of participation. With participation, the subject, in

³⁶ Tadeusz Styczeń, "O Metodzie Antropologii Filozoficznej," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 21, no. 2 (1973): 105–14.

³⁷ Holub, *Understanding the Person Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła*.

³⁸ Wojtyła, "Person and Act" and Related Essays, 631. On the anthropology which is the basis of the idea of participation, by which man realizes himself through others, see Juan Manuel Burgos, "The Social Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła. I. Person, Participation, Alienation, Interpersonal Relationship," *Quien* 2023, no. 17 (2023). See also Alma S. Espartinez, "Karol Wojtyła on Participation and Alienation," *Studia Gilsoniana* 12, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.26385/SG.120102>.

addition to obtaining goals that can only be achieved through action in common with others, perfects himself as a person³⁹.

Secondly, participation does not exhaust the ability to enter into relationships with others through acts. In fact, connected to the concept of participation is, according to Wojtyła, that of solidarity: the person, for the common good, is willing not only to play the part that falls within a community, but also to take on, in certain circumstances, tasks that go beyond his usual responsibilities.⁴⁰ In solidarity the maximum transcendence of the person is manifested, as the good of other people is loved beyond the obligations of the law and the benefits that can be obtained. By highlighting the phenomenon of solidarity, Wojtyła seems to indicate that the goal of the person cannot be pure self-possession nor even participation alone, since solidarity seems to be an area in which the person is more fulfilled.

Although Wojtyła concludes his analysis of the consciousness of action with the phenomenon of solidarity, we believe that, following the guidelines of his research, it is possible to go further, up to donation, as the ultimate goal of the person who acts.

There are two lines in Wojtyła's thought that converge in donation as the realization of the person: that of personal corporeality as a promise of donation, of fatherhood and motherhood⁴¹, and that of the relationship of implication between self-possession and self-donation. For reasons of rigor and space we will briefly mention this second guideline. Even if Wojtyła does not explicitly state it, it seems that in him there is an overcoming of the ethics of pure self-possession and self-domination, because they cannot be sought for themselves, but only insofar as they allow donation. Self-possession and self-mastery thus appear as the condition of possibility of personal donation, since only when the person possesses and dominates himself can he make a gift of himself. In other words: self-donation implies self-possession, since no one can give what he does not possess.

The theme of self-donation is consistent both with the way of understanding the intentionality of the will and with the personalist norm. In fact, the other is made the object of the same intentionality of wanting, when we love him. Naturally, the other, according to the personalist norm, must not be loved as an object or as an instrument, but as a person, otherwise the way in which we love the other and, conversely, ourselves is not personal. Donation to another goes beyond solidarity, as it is not something to be experienced in certain circumstances, but always. However, self-donation must not be confused with benevolence, since it is experienced in exchange, that is, in the mutual donation of two people: the reception of another's donation is donation; for this reason, according to Wojtyła, it is accomplished in a paradigmatic way in the spousal union, which in turn is an image of God's donation to man.

As can be seen in these notes, donation allows us not only to overcome the individualistic ethics of Greek origin, especially Stoic, but also the modern utilitarian, Kantian formalistic and emotionalistic one. The aim of man's life is not pleasure or utility, nor self-possession or the intellectual contemplation of the Good, but it is love: man, born from love, is called to love. Wojtyła's anthropology opens up here to theology, in particular to Christology, since in Christ God gives himself totally.

D. Conclusions

³⁹ Wojtyła, *“Person and Act” and Related Essays*, 631.

⁴⁰ Espartinez, “Karol Wojtyła on Participation and Alienation.”

⁴¹ This approach to donation is found, for example, in .Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*.

After this long journey through the basic structures of Wojtyła's anthropology, we are able to make a brief final assessment. First of all, it seems to us that the theme around which our author's philosophical work revolves is the person, so one could speak of Wojtyła's philosophy as a coherent personalism. This coherence does not depend on the continuity of the theme but on the convergence between method, object of study and aim or purpose of the research. In fact, the person who acts is not only the method (the consciousness of the action), but also the object of study (the acting subject), and above all the goal (knowing and making the person aware of his or her special dignity).

Secondly, action manifests itself, alongside the singularity of the acting subject, the multiplicity of people who are involved in one way or another. The person is not a person in the singular but in the plural, since each person communicates with all the others. This is observed both in the fact that the truth of the person contains the good of all people (the personalistic norm), and in its openness to other people, as can be seen from the phenomena of participation, solidarity and, above all, donation.

The multiple character of the person and his original relationality, even if they are underlined by Karol Wojtyła, have not been thematized nor studied from an ontological point of view. Wojtyła preferred to take the Thomistic ontology as a metaphysical basis, without investigating whether this multiplicity and relationality, highlighted by his anthropology, can be fully traced back to the Boethian and Thomasian definition of person.

It therefore remains to clarify the way of ontologically understanding this multiplicity and relationality. Wojtyła seems to believe in the possibility of understanding them with the classical categories of substance and accidents. Perhaps this is one of the points of his anthropology that would be worth exploring further.

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