

Karol Wojtyla's Philosophy of the Acting Person

I have no pretensions about making this presentation an exhaustive and a detailed evaluation and reaction to the anthropological reflections of Karol Wojtyla in his now-famous work, "The Acting Person". I do hope, however, to bring to the attention of the students, lecturers and readers of philosophy of this circle his philosophical approach and his book.

As it comes to us, "The Acting Person" is the tenth in the *Analecta Husserliana* series; a translation from the Polish original, it has been published after thorough editorial revision, thanks to the efforts of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Editor of the series. It is by no means an easily-read book not only because it is a translation but also because of the author's style itself. One book reviewer did mention that when the book first appeared at the windows of American book-shops many who saw on it the picture of John Paul II bought themselves copies thinking that it was a book of pious meditations. I am sure they were severely disappointed. I must confess that I had to go over several of the chapters more than once to grasp the trend of philosophizing.

Wojtyla acknowledges Max Scheler to be a major figure in the development of his own philosophical thought and throughout the discussions it becomes indubitably clear that Wojtyla aligns himself with the phenomenological movement, writing, however with the sense of respect and appreciation for the Aristotelico-

Scholastic tradition that characterize a serious student of man's philosophical heritage.

Wojtyla considers his reflections as attempts at objectifying man's self-experience. Experience, as he sees it, is man's cognitive relation to himself. This experience is enriched but not substituted by one's experience of other subjects. It is the stabilizing role of the intellect that accounts for the sameness in the "experience of man" issuing from both the experience of oneself and the experience of others. Our cognition of man, therefore, constitutes a totality and there is no reason for bifurcating man into man-interior and man-exterior.

The primitive fact with which Wojtyla starts is the "man-acts" conjugate. This datum is phenomenologically given. The acting of man therefore starts the process of the unfolding of man himself. Action becomes a moment in the revelation of the person. This can be the case only however, if experience is also understanding, i.e., if man is present to himself in action.

At once the novelty of Wojtyla's approach comes to the fore. We are familiar with attempts to exfoliate the human essence through consciousness. Wojtyla's point of departure distinguishes itself. His is therefore a phenomenology of acting with the end in view of anthropology.

Moral value is the specific property of human action and a study of this dimension is to provide an insight into man as a person, for the person stands both at the origin and at the end or outcome of moral values.

The procedure of study involves *induction* and *reduction*, and it would be well to pay attention to Wojtyla's understanding of these commonly-used concepts. Induction consists in grasping the unity of meaning from the abundance of factual multiplicity. Reduction is, quite simply, conversion to suitable arguments and items of evidence. It involves reasoning, explanation and interpretation. The movement from induction to reduction, therefore, consists in what we may almost call a "homogenous expansion" of the original apprehension of the person in action.

The Scholastics had the concept "actus humanus" (and the freshman studying ethics had to distinguish this from "actus ho-

minis"). What was presupposed in this concept is the personal subject himself. Wojtyla then considers his approach to move in the opposite direction: from action to understanding of the person.

Since the approach itself draws from the consciousness man has of acting, Wojtyla starts by exploring the acting person in the aspect of consciousness.

Besides *conscious acting* there is *consciousness of acting*. Conscious acting is action in its constitutive feature as proceeding from cognition and hence from the will. Man, however, is also aware that he is acting consciously. This awareness has a continuity independent of any particular action. In fact, Wojtyla pictures consciousness as the backdrop against which actions develop and come to pass. This is consciousness in its *mirroring function* — a mirroring of what man encounters, does and undergoes in the interiority of man. To avoid the pitfalls of idealism consciousness must not be absolutized; it is not an isolated, self-sufficient "substance". It is a state of the person. It should not be very difficult to note that Wojtyla's concept of consciousness does not exactly coincide with that of other contemporary philosophers for whom consciousness plays also an apprehending or a cognitive function. In other words, consciousness does not constitute objects; it does not possess the intentionality of cognition.

Self-knowledge, from which any philosophizing on human acting must draw, is actually a result of cognitive intentionality directed to oneself. With the "ego" that is the object of self-knowledge, consciousness is intimately connected but does not, of itself, "objectify" the ego. This "ego" the object of self-knowledge, is not asymptotically reached as a Transcendental Ego, nor deduced as a monadic existence, but is grasped as the Ego in its different domains of involvement in the world.

We are then now ready to distinguish between: *being the subject*, which is the very act of existing of the person, *being cognized as the subject*, which is a result of objectification in self-knowledge, and *experiencing oneself as the subject*. The latter, we owe to consciousness, this time, no longer in its mirroring

function alone but in its interiorizing and subjectifying role. Consciousness, by interiorizing experience, accounts for the experience of subjectivity — self-hood. Due to this reflexivity of consciousness man experiences himself as the ground of the relation between himself and action. It is also consciousness in its reflexivity that accounts for the experience of moral value, man's experience of being good or bad.

The range of consciousness, both in its mirroring and reflexive functions, is not co-extensive with the range of human dynamism which has both an active moment (man-acts) and a passive moment (something happens in man). Man is the dynamic center that grounds what he does and what happens to him. At once the opposition between active and passive moments in human dynamism introduces us into the complexity of the human structure: the result of an act-potency conjunction.

Where lies the difference between "acting" and "happening", between "action" and "activation"? Wojtyla identifies the **MOMENT OF EFFICACY** as the anthropological fulcrum. When a man acts, he experiences himself as the agent and the source of an action. He experiences his causality over the action, i.e., he brings it into being and sustains it. Because man experiences himself as the cause of the action he transcends the action while being completely involved in, and therefore immanent to it!

This experience of man as cause of his action — the experience of the moment of efficacy — leads us to find the foundation of action, the ontological root, we may say, in the person. Here, Wojtyla capitalizes on the contrast between a "somebody" and a "something". Person is therefore not merely individualized nature. Personal existence is the existence that belongs to the subject, man. In the person is synthesized the conjunction of efficacy (doing) and subjectiveness (happening). There is an experiential difference between nature and person, for nature has causations of its own that are not from the efficacy of the person.

Personhood is therefore the very mode of being that pertains to being-human.

Of great importance for the discussion of morals is the fact that in dynamization, the subject does not only participate but also formed and transformed. Action does not only have its source in the person; action results in a transformation of the ego, even when the object of the action is something outside the ego itself. The conscious acts of a person therefore make a person either good or bad. In this case morality is the effect of the causation of the personal ego. Whenever a man acts, the action and its moral modalities are imprinted in the man who acts. The man who experiences his freedom. Freedom and efficacy therefore are determinants not only of action but of moral modality.

There are some things that man *can* do, but *need not to do*. I can — I need not — and then the person says: I want: herein lies the moment of freedom and the moment of efficacy, the moment of the WILL. When man acts there is always present the dynamic transcendence of the person in freedom. The ability to move from "I can" and "I need not" to I WANT is what we call self-determination.

In all self-determination it is presupposed that man possesses himself, for only then can he direct himself. Self-possession and governance these are features of personhood that allowed the ancients to say "*Persona est sui juris*" — a person is inalienable and incommunicable in his personhood because of self-governance as realized by the will!

Because of the structure of self-determination, every action of man is simultaneously a transformation of the ego, an actualization or a fulfillment of the person. By acting or desiring an object the subject is formed in one way or another, and becomes "someone" or "somebody".

In this light we see the richness of human freedom. Freedom is self-determination, but there can be self-determination only when there is efficacy. Freedom is there not unstructured, ungrounded freedom of the disembodied spirit, as in idealism, but is dependent on the ego. Transcendence in action is both horizontal — towards objects, and vertical — marked by the ascendancy of the ego.

Free-will then does not consist in indeterminism but in autodeterminism. It is neither to be confined to choice, for even when the threshold of choice is passed the person continues determining himself. This fact, freedom even when there is no choice, has been discussed by Louis Lavelle quite ably. The fact that there is no more choice does not exclude the possibility that the act is self-determined and consequently free. Because of freedom, man is not bound to objects which is not to say that he is indifferent to them. There is, in man, a constant readiness to respond to value and so human freedom is freedom not *from* but *for* value. Yet, value does not absorb the subject and thereby cancel out freedom for even value itself must be subject to the *moment of decision* which is nothing other than the dynamism of autodetermination.

The readiness of man to respond to value is rooted in his inner commitment to truth. Essential to the exercise of the will is what Wojtyla calls "the moment of truth," i.e., the choice of a value according to the principle of its validity as cognized. The truth referred to is not that with which epistemology is concerned primarily, i.e., the truth of statements. Neither should it be a cause of concern for the student with a Scholastic orientation that truth should be referred to the will, and not to the intellect. The "moment of truth", the truth to which man is innerly committed is AXIOLOGICAL TRUTH, the truth of the value of an object.

Transcendence then acquires a new depth. Man transcends his actions and the objects of his actions because of his surrender to truth. It is his orientation towards truth then that allows him to "see" the truth (or the untruth) in the multiplicity of objects. In fact there would be no such thing as an experience of moral worth or guilt without the dependence of the will on truth. Objects then motivate but do not compel because man is dependent not on them but on truth.

Seeing that there is an orientation of the will in its surrender to truth, we are ready to examine the question of *fulfillment*. That actions fulfill a person is an indication of the cohesion between person and action. Every action is both transitive and

intransitive (and this distinction is not to be confused with the way St. Thomas used these terms). The transitivity consists in man's transcendence (=moving out of himself) towards objects; there is intransitivity because of the effect every action on the agent himself. The first, we call *horizontal transcendence*, the second, *vertical transcendence*. It is the latter that provides a clue to the fulfillment of man in action. Every act, insofar as it actualizes a potency of man, insofar as it is a dynamization of the person is a fulfillment; however, because of the moment of truth it is only the morally good act that truly fulfills. It is then the moral modality of an action that fulfills, rather than the performance of the action itself.

The existentialist movement has highlighted man's dynamism by asking of man's being as becoming. Wojtyla is in accord on this score. Morality underscores the fact that man is not *fait accompli*; he is a being striving to attain fullness and in the morally good act he moves ever closer to his goal. Morality punctuates the contingency of man. When the striving of man for truth, goodness and beauty is met by a morally good action, there is authentic fulfillment of the person.

A necessary condition for the fulfillment of the person in action is the *role of existence*. It is conscience that relates man's striving for the absolutes of truth, goodness and beauty with the concreteness of man's act. It is to conscience that the fulfillment of man in action by the crystalization of moral value is due. Is the inference from an "is" statement to an "ought" statement valid? The debate rages on even today. Wojtyla however asserts that it is in conscience that man experiences the transition. "This is truly good", therefore "This ought to be done". What is essential, after all in human striving is that efficacy correspond to the true value of an object.

When the actualization of a person is in accord with the norm of truth (conscience) then fulfillment is felicity! Because it is only in persons that the ego is fulfilled in action, felicity is the exclusive prerogative of persons.

We have seen efficacy to be an expression of freedom which is rooted in surrender to truth and the key role of conscience that

brings together the act and the rootedness in truth. This is what we understand by *spirituality*: that the dynamization of man that is proper to the person cannot be attributed to *nature* (as opposed to the efficacy of the ego) but to the efficacy of the person in orientation to the absolute points of reference in truth, goodness and beauty. It is in this sense that the spirituality of man is accessible to phenomenology.

From the wealth of insight contained in Wojtyla's discussion of psycho-somatic integration in action, I will single out a couple: one of the soma, the other on the psyche. With Gabriel Marcel, Wojtyla sees in the body the territory of the expression of the person and thus also the means of the self-fulfillment of the person. However, the ego is not to be identified with the body. In fact, Wojtyla does so far as to say that man "has" his body (of course, in a very qualified use of the word "to have"). In the experience man's control of his body, there is the experience of self-possession. Man's response to value has, furthermore, a psychic base, an emotivity connected to it (in no wise as a mere appendage); this psychic sensitivity supplies the will with the "raw" material for the moment of decision. Authenticity, however, corresponds to a response to the truth of values that may sometimes demand of a person decisions against his feelings or about what he does not feel at all.

One of the most beautiful chapters in "The Acting Person" is the last — Participation: Intersubjectivity by Participation. I will not deal on it at length because one has to be selective about points of emphasis. A few remarks will suffice. When a person acts with others, the results of his acting with others endure in the person provided that the acting is not merely acting in concert but participative. It is participation that is the key to the personalistic value of all cooperation. Participation has for its theme the common good. Forms of cooperation or working with others then that are not participative are deprived of their personalistic value. Solidarity means one's constant readiness to accept and to realize one's share in the community for the common good. Opposition is not contra-

dictory to solidarity; it is rather a struggle for solidarity and so should not only be allowed to express itself but to operate for the benefit of the community.**

S U M M A R Y

1. In Wojtyla anthropology the phenomenologically given datum of man-acts is the point of departure, the primitive fact in an understanding of the person together with the moral dimension of action.
2. The acting person reveals himself to be conscious of his acting. His consciousness mirrors within interiority his action, his activation as well as the world which he encounters and the objects of his knowledge. It does not belong to consciousness, however, to constitute objects.
3. The self-knowledge of man arises from the intentionality of cognition directed to the ego. This ego is grasped in the concreteness of its involvement in the world.
4. The experience of subjectivity is attributed to consciousness that allows me to experience myself in relation to action, and to experience moral value in my actions.
5. In acting, as distinguished from what happens in man, the person experiences himself as the source of action. The experience of efficacy is what allows him to transcend the action while being immanently involved in it.
6. The distinction between nature and person is experientially founded: while in the moment of efficacy a person experiences himself as the cause of action, nature has causations of its own that are not accounted for by the person.
7. The mode of existence of being human is personal existence.
8. The action of a person transforms the person himself. Efficacy and its moral modality therefore leave an imprint on the acting person.

** It has become apparent, throughout this introductory study of Wojtyla's anthropology, that the phenomenological approach to the problem does not excuse him from treating of issues with metaphysical import. We also see a line of continuity between the traditions of Scholasticism and contemporary axiological and anthropological theory.

This introductory essay serves only one purpose: to see in Wojtyla "The Acting Person" a possible way of doing a philosophy of man.

9. Freedom reveals itself as self-determination which is consequential to man's self-possession and self-governance. It is because of freedom as autodeterminism that morality pertains to the concrete acting person.
10. The freedom from determination by objects and his readiness for value are rooted in man's inner orientation to truth. The moment of truth (axiological truth) is a feature of the acting person that accounts of his experience of moral worth or guilt.
11. It is conscience that relates man's striving for truth with the concreteness of an object and of action. It is the conscience of man that releases the experience of obligation.
12. Felicity pertains to the person who fulfills himself in action that is in accordance with the norm of truth.
13. In the transcendence of man over his action, in the insufficiency of nature as explanation of the dynamism of man and his reference to the absolute goals of truth, goodness and beauty, the spirituality of man is accessible to phenomenology.

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