

Thomistic Personalism: An Investigation, Explication, and Defense

Author: Michael Camacho

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/666>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2009

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

Thomistic Personalism

An Investigation, Explication and Defense

by

Michael Camacho

Senior Thesis
Boston College
Philosophy Department
Scholar of the College Project

Advisor:
Dr. Marina McCoy

Second Reviewer:
Dr. Peter Kreeft

1 May 2009

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1. What is Thomistic Personalism? | 6 |
| a. History of the Concept of “Person” | 6 |
| b. The Method and Direction of Wojtyła’s Creative Synthesis | 23 |
| 2. Why is Thomistic Personalism Necessary, and Is It Possible? | 36 |
| a. The Need for a Synthesis | 39 |
| b. Is Thomistic Personalism Possible? | 46 |
| 3. Essential Aspects of Wojtyła’s Philosophy of the Acting Person | 52 |
| a. Consciousness | 53 |
| b. Efficacy | 57 |
| c. Fulfillment | 62 |
| d. Integration | 64 |
| e. Participation | 70 |
| Conclusion: Application and Development | 73 |
| Works Cited | 84 |

Introduction

*Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature; but he is a thinking reed.
Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp it.*¹

Man is a paradox to himself, a living oxymoron, a being “in but not of the world.”² Each of us finds ourselves in this strange middling position. I am *in* the world insofar as I am a real, material object, an organism, an animal, a *something*. I can be studied and known as an empirical object: my body can be put under a microscope, my feelings interpreted by psychoanalysis, my actions and interactions explained by the latest social theory. And yet, something in us revolts against such a neat and tidy explanation of the self. “That doesn’t explain *who* I am,” we insist. For we are also not of the world. Each of us is able somehow to transcend the universe, stepping beyond or outside it in order to grasp it with our minds and experience it in our consciousness. Moreover, we know that we are not *determined* by the world but able to choose freely for ourselves, and thereby make ourselves be who we are. I am not just an object but a subject, *someone* as well as something.

Reflections such as these are really nothing new. Man’s two-fold experience of himself as both subject and object is a fact as old as man himself, and it appears that from the very

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 29.

² In using the word ‘man’ (along with the pronoun ‘he’) in this context, I am, of course, referring to both men and women. My decision to use this term in place of the other alternatives (namely, ‘human being’ and ‘person’) is strictly for purposes of terminological clarity and precision. The English language is so structured that we do not at this time possess another word to indicate a concrete subject of being and action. ‘Human being’ seems far too abstract for this purpose, while the term ‘person’ has very specific meanings which differ from those of ‘man.’ One of the chief purposes of this study, in fact, is to demonstrate these differences.

If we look at the Polish language, we find that it has four distinct words for ‘man,’ broadly understood: 1) biological man, i.e. male (*mężczyzna*), 2) man as I am using the term, i.e. concrete man or woman (*człowiek*), 3) human being, i.e. abstract man (*istota ludzka*), and 4) man-as-person (*osoba*). In English, conversely, we must use the same word, ‘man,’ for meanings 1) and 2).

One example of the accuracy such diversity in the Polish language allows for is the phrase “człowiek czynu,” which means a man/woman of action. Depending on the context, this would have to be translated into English as “man of action,” since we would not say “human being of action.”

beginning he has been trying to offer an explanation for this fact. More often than not this explanation takes the form of a one-sided emphasis which excludes the whole. We find among the pre-Socratics, for example, both materialist reduction of man to the world (Democritus' atomism) and idealistic exaltation of man through reason beyond the world (Parmenides' doctrine of the One). In his theory of the soul as the form of the body, Aristotle offered the beginnings of a way beyond this either/or dilemma, in which man could properly understand himself as an embodied spirit (or rather, for Aristotle, an en-spirited body). Out of this theory of hylomorphism came Aristotle's still-enduring definition of man as rational animal.

Taking up this theme of embodied spirit, medieval philosophers and theologians often referred to the human being as a *microcosmos* (literally, a little world), by which they meant a being which imaged in itself the whole vast nature of reality. These thinkers understood man as a nexus or meeting place of the material and spiritual realms, a being which shared in both physical nature (along with the animals) and intellectual-spiritual life (along with the angels), joining the two in one entity. Thus St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, states that "the human soul abounds in a variety of powers . . . because it is on the confines of spiritual and corporeal creatures; and therefore the powers of both meet together in the soul."³

In this way, classical (that is, ancient and medieval) Western philosophy came to offer an explanation of man which attempted to do justice to both his materiality and spirituality. Appropriating Aristotle's hylomorphic understanding of man, Aquinas held that the human soul is the substantial form of the body, and enumerated a number of distinct faculties or powers of the soul as such: the sensory faculties of cognition (sense-knowledge) and appetite, and the spiritual faculties of intellect and will. Since the human being is one united whole of body and

³ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 77, art. 2.

mind, all of these faculties work to perfect this whole, which is the human being itself. If Aquinas gave special weight and attention to the faculties of reason and will, it was because he believed the spiritual realm to be objectively (and self-evidently) greater than the material.

Beginning with the philosophy of Descartes, however, we notice a symptomatic shift of focus when it comes to man. Disenchanted by the contradictions and lack of clarity he found in the scholastic teachings of his time, and intent to found a philosophy based upon the model of the newly-(re)discovered geometric sciences, Descartes resolved to “[remain] for an entire day shut up by myself in a stove-heated room, . . . completely free to converse with myself about my thoughts.”⁴ In the process of these meditations, he came to the conclusion that the *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is the necessary starting point and ground for any further systematic philosophical inquiry. Under the rubric of thought (*cogitationes*), he included “all that of which we are conscious as operating in us. And that is why not only understanding, willing and imagining but also feeling are here the same thing as thought.”⁵

In this way, Descartes instituted a radical shift in philosophical perspective. This shift was a movement away from an *exterior* perspective, in which man is understood chiefly as an object in the world, to an *interior* perspective, in which man is viewed from the standpoint of his subjectivity or subject-hood, and precisely thus not reducible to the world. In the subsequent centuries, man as a *res cogitans*, or thinking, conscious subject, became the distinctive focus of post-Cartesian philosophy. One result of this change was a large-scale increase in epistemology and a rise in interest in “the critical question” (how do we escape from consciousness into knowledge of the world, that is, how do we pass from what is perceived to what is?). More

⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 6-7.

⁵ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* 1, 9. Cited in Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume IV: Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Leibniz* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 92.

generally, post-Cartesian philosophers tended to focus their attention on the inner or “lived” experience of man. This thematization of experience came to the fore at the turn of the 20th century with Husserl’s development of phenomenology, a trend which continued in the existentialism of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (to name but a few thinkers in this wide-ranging tradition).

One way of understanding the turning point which Descartes brought about is as instituting a division in the history of philosophy between two broad periods, “the philosophy of being” (ancient and medieval philosophy) and “the philosophy of consciousness” (modern and contemporary philosophy).⁶ While this is obviously an oversimplification of the facts—most ancients and medievals devoted themselves to epistemological questions, while many contemporary philosophers are still interested in metaphysics—it is nonetheless useful for highlighting a general difference of theme and approach between pre-Cartesian and post-Cartesian philosophy. On the whole, classical philosophy addressed itself to questions about the objective nature of reality as a whole, and understood man within this context, while modern philosophy addresses itself to questions about the subjectivity of man, and attempts to understand the world from this vantage point. Thus, these two periods generally answer to the two aspects of man identified above, the classical to man as object (*something*), the modern to man as subject (*someone*).

It should be noted, however, that the ancient and medieval philosophers were of course not ignorant of the fact that man is in possession of a specific interiority, an interior dimension which sets him apart from all the other creatures in the world. Indeed, this is precisely what Aristotle attempted to pinpoint in his designation of man as a being of the genus “animal”

⁶ Cf. Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 210-211.

possessing the specific-difference “rational,” and what Aquinas developed to the greatest extent in his anthropological writings (i.e. the notions of intellect and will). Nonetheless, it seems that there is a distinctive difference between the traditional and the modern treatment of man-as-subject; and it is only in investigating and understanding this difference that we can hope to understand not only what Thomistic Personalism is, but also why it is necessary.

1. What is Thomistic Personalism?

In February 17, 1961, Karol Wojtyła presented an original paper entitled “Thomistic Personalism” at the Fourth Annual Philosophy Week of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). In this short, ten-page essay, the then-chair of ethics at KUL laid out in a concise but clear manner his proposal for a personalism founded in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. The idea of Thomistic Personalism as outlined in this paper is to integrate the insights of both classical and modern philosophy into a cohesive whole which is able to offer a more full and true account of man and his situation than either philosophy is able to do alone. This synthesis is geared particularly toward an investigation of man as *person*.

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT OF “PERSON”

As Wojtyła notes in the opening of the paper, “the concept of person...has a history of its own going back many centuries.”⁷ The term originally referred to the particular role an actor would play in Greco-Roman drama (the Greek word *prósopa*, from which the Latin word *persona* comes, literally means “mask”). From there it made its way into Roman legal parlance, as a means of distinguishing between an individual who possessed full legal rights as a Roman citizen and a slave who lacked such rights.⁸ The meaning of the word developed most, however, in a Christian theological context. In response to heretical understandings of the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, theologians of the patristic period employed the word ‘person’ in

⁷ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 166.

⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the concept of person,” *Communio* 13 (Spring, 1986), 18-26; W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006), 25-26.

contradistinction to the word ‘nature’ in their attempts to clarify these truths and demonstrate their inherent compatibility with the laws of reason: thus, God can be said to be truly three-in-one insofar as He is one divine nature owned by three distinct persons; while Christ can be said to be fully God and fully man insofar as He is one divine person owning two distinct natures. This linguistic development in the meaning of the word was as significant for philosophy as it was for theology. As W. Norris Clarke, S.J., indicates, “the distinction between person and nature now had to take on more than a merely social or legal meaning, that is, [it had to take on] an ontological one in the order of being itself.”⁹

As the Christian theological and philosophical tradition continued to develop, so too did the meaning of the word ‘person.’ In the early sixth century, Boethius supplied what was to become the classic definition for the medieval period: *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia* (a person is an individual substance of a rational nature). Similar to Aristotle, Boethius emphasized rationality as the distinguishing characteristic of personhood. By “reason,” Boethius and the medievals meant something greater and more encompassing than we moderns tend to connote. As they understood it, reason is not merely, or even primarily, the performance of mathematical calculations or logical syllogisms, but rather the ability to be aware of and to know the whole of reality. In this way, it includes not only calculation and logic but also intuition, understanding, wisdom, consciousness, freedom and imagination. Its meaning is intended to be wide enough to encompass the whole rich variety of powers which separate us from the animals.

While the rational element certainly plays a key role in Boethius’ account of what it means to be a person, we should not overlook the importance of the second half of his definition.

⁹ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 26.

In contrast to some contemporary philosophers who define the person exclusively in terms of consciousness, freedom or relationality, thereby threatening to absolutize these elements, Boethius recognized that the person's rational nature has to be understood as a *power* or *faculty* of a really existing being (*individua substantia*), and not something which can exist in its own right. This fact has important implications for an objectivistic ethics, implications which we will examine at a later point.¹⁰ It also serves as a useful and necessary complement to current empiricist-analytic accounts of personhood which admit only of those characteristics which can be empirically verified. Peter Simpson pinpoints the flaw in these theories:

A discrete sense-content, because it is not successive, cannot on [empiricist] premises be in time or temporally extended. It exists, if it exists, in a single moment; which is to say it does not exist at all. So if person is explained as a succession of conscious states in this sense, then it will be dissolved into nothingness. It does not help either to posit the body as the locus of these contents, because body too is analyzed into a collection of ideas and impressions that are just as fleeting. If person is to be at all (or indeed if anything is to be) it must be something that is not such a collection. It must be something or a collection of somethings that endures through time.¹¹

But to endure through time—and thus to endure through change—is precisely what it means to be a substance, for a substance is that entity which stands under (*sub-stare*) all the (potentially changeable) attributes it possesses. These attributes depend on the substance for their existence (the color of a tree, for example, cannot exist independently of the tree itself), while the existence of the substance itself does not depend upon the attributes. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that it is only *through* its powers and attributes that a substance reveals and completes itself; as Simpson says, these accidents are “in a sense the flowering flourishing of substance, that for which substance is, by which it is formed and in which it is completed.”¹²

¹⁰ See pp. 41-43.

¹¹ Peter Simpson, “The Definition of Person: Boethius Revisited,” *New Scholasticism* 62 (1988), 215.

¹² *Ibid.*, 217.

Aquinas was familiar with Boethius' definition of the person and had frequent recourse to it throughout his works.¹³ In true Thomistic fashion, however, he tended to emphasize the *existential* dimension of personhood over the essential. In his take on the classic definition, *persona significat quid . . . per se subsistens in natura rationali* (person signifies that which is self-subsisting in a rational nature).¹⁴ To put it another way, 'person' signifies for Aquinas "an intellectual nature possessing its own act of existence."¹⁵

The idea that a person must be an *existing* entity is, I think, implicit in Boethius' use of the term *substantia*.¹⁶ What Aquinas really adds to the mix is the notion that this entity must somehow exist in and for itself, must "possess its own act of existence" (*per se subsistens*). In other words, for Aquinas, "a really existing substance in possession of a rational nature" does not fully capture the essence of what it means to be a person. A person is also *dominus sui*, master of itself, or self-possessing.¹⁷ This self-possession manifests itself primarily through the faculties of the intellect and the will: in the order of knowledge through self-consciousness, and in the order of will through self-determination.¹⁸ According to Aquinas, it is precisely within this capacity for self-possession that we find the key to each person's unique and unrepeatable individuality.

The individuality of each person *qua* person differs markedly from the individuality of other things in the world. In his understanding of the latter, Aquinas accepted from Aristotle the

¹³ Cf. *Super Sent.* I, d. 23, q. 1, art. 3; I, d. 25, q. 1, art. 1; II, d. 3, q. 1, art. 2; III, d. 6, q. 1, art. 1; *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, ch. 38; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, art. 1; I, q. 34, art. 3; I, q. 40, art. 3; III, q. 2, art. 2, 3; *De potentia*, q. 9, art. 2; *De unione Verbi*, art. 1.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 16, art. 12.

¹⁵ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 28.

¹⁶ As *The Catholic Encyclopedia* points out, the term *substantia* could refer to either 1) a concrete existing individual (*substantia prima*), or 2) an abstract essence (*substantia secunda*). Boethius' use of the adjective *individua* would seem to indicate that he intended the former. Cf. Leonard Geddes, "Person," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm> (accessed March 17, 2009).

¹⁷ Cf. *Summa contra Gentiles* III, ch. 155; *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 6, art. 2; II-II, q. 64, art. 5; II-II, q. 158, art. 4.

¹⁸ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 27-28.

idea that matter is the principle of individuation.¹⁹ If there are two material beings, each having the same intelligible organizing principle, or *form*, then the thing which separates the first from the second is its *matter*, the physical “stuff” from which it is made. This is a relatively common-sense notion, when we stop to think about it. The thing which most essentially distinguishes this rocking chair from that one is the fact that, while both have the exact same structure or form (chair-ness, or, more specifically, rocking-chair-ness), each is made out of its own particular matter. Even if both were made out of wood which came from the exact same tree, we still would recognize that *this* wood is not the same as *that* wood. Each is materially distinct.

This notion of matter as the principle of individuation works fine when dealing in the realm of non-personal being. Once we enter the world of persons, though, we begin to run into trouble. Surely one of the things which separate me from you is the fact that you are materially distinct from me, composed of different cells and molecules which occupy their own place in space and time, separate and apart from those of my body. But as we alluded to in the introduction, this is not the whole story. After all, I’m a unique individual. I have my own thoughts, my own plans, my own history which I have shaped through the decisions I have made. I am a *self*, an “I,” not just another material organism in the species *Homo sapiens*.

How are we to account for this uniqueness in persons, the fact that we are more than just material instantiations of an immaterial form? The answer, according to Aquinas, lies in our capacity for self-possession. This ability that we have as persons to be self-conscious and self-determining allows us to individualize ourselves in ways that no other material being can. Thus Aquinas says, “Further still, in a more special and perfect way, the particular and the individual are found in the rational substances which have dominion over their own actions; and which are

¹⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1034a5-8; Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, ch. 1, §3.

not only made to act, like others; but which can act of themselves . . . Therefore also the individuals of the rational nature have a special name even among other substances; and this name is ‘person.’”²⁰ The ideas of self-determination and action emphasized here by Aquinas play a key role in Wojtyła’s own philosophy of Thomistic Personalism.

His insights into self-possession notwithstanding, Aquinas’ investigations into what it means to be a person are limited primarily to theology rather than to philosophical anthropology. According to Wojtyła, “we encounter the word *persona* mainly in his treatises on the Trinity and the Incarnation, whereas it is all but absent from his treatise on the human being.”²¹ In turning to this latter aspect of his thought, we find that Aquinas emphasizes above all the hylomorphic nature of man, the fact that he is composed of both body and soul.

Unlike Plato before him and Descartes after him, Aquinas, following Aristotle, understood man as an integral spiritual-material whole, a natural unity of body and soul.²² The human soul, which is the primary source of man’s life and activity, is at the same time the organizing principle (substantial form) of the body. Because the soul is capable of performing purely spiritual acts of intellection and volition, it follows that it must possess an act of spiritual existence separate and apart from the body. Nonetheless, the soul is also naturally conjoined to the body, “lending” its existence to the body and drawing it into the soul’s higher mode of being.²³ In this way, the body forms a natural instrument for the soul, and also serves as its

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, art. 1.

²¹ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 166.

²² Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76, art. 1.

²³ This statement depends upon the commonly held medieval proposition that the spiritual is intrinsically “higher” or qualitatively better than the material. The ancients believed there was a natural hierarchy in the order of things which could be readily discovered by human reason. Non-animate beings were at the bottom, followed by plants, then animals, then humans. Thus, in addition to a rational soul, Aristotle also spoke of a “vegetative soul,” which includes the powers of growth, nutrition and reproduction, and a sensitive or “animal soul,” which includes the powers of locomotion, sensation, desire and perception (*On the Soul* 413^a11-413^b13). While some medievals believed that each of these souls had its own existence within man (i.e. that a human being is alive by the vegetative

primary, if not only, means of expression in this world. While the soul is qualitatively greater than and ontologically prior to the body, *both* form essential aspects of what it means to be a human being, and thus what it means to be a person.²⁴

Aquinas distinguishes a number of different powers or faculties which man possesses as a spiritual-material being. First among these are the spiritual faculties of reason and will. As Wojtyła says, these are “the principal means, so to speak, whereby the human person is actualized; based on their activity, the whole psychological and moral personality takes shape.”²⁵ These powers play the primary role in shaping the human person because they are those which are unique to man as a rational being in the world, those which belong to him alone and not to any other animal. Nonetheless, these are not the only faculties of the human soul. Because the soul is the substantial form of the body, it also possesses sensory faculties of cognition (sensory-knowledge) and appetite. These too have their place within the person for Aquinas:

St. Thomas is well aware of this [corporeal] reality and formulates his characterization of the spirituality of the human being accordingly. This spiritual aspect, he says, is eminently suited to unite into a substantial whole with the corporeal, and thus also with the sensory. This union must, therefore, also play a special role in shaping the human personality. According to St. Thomas, all the faculties of the human soul work to perfect the human being, and so they all contribute to the development of the person.²⁶

Thus, for example, it is only by means of our senses, particularly the senses of touch and sight, that we come to intellectual knowledge of things. Aquinas highlights such characteristics as our “upright stature” as evidence of the perfect complementarity of mind and matter in man: unlike most other animals, our faces are “erect, in order that by the senses, and chiefly by sight, . . .

soul, animal by the sensitive soul, and man by the rational soul), Aquinas was convinced that man’s substantial form comes from the highest soul, which contains virtually all the powers of those below it. This means that these powers are not the same in man as they would be in plants or animals, but rather are transformed and elevated by their participation in man’s rationality. Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76, art. 4.

²⁴ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 35.

²⁵ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

[we] may freely survey the sensible objects around [us], both heavenly and earthly, so as to gather intelligible truth from all things.”²⁷

If we turn now to Descartes’ conception of the person, we find that his understanding of the body and its relationship to the mind is far different from Aquinas’ view. As noted in the introduction, Descartes believed that the necessary starting point for modern philosophy was to be the *Cogito, ergo sum*. He arrived at this conclusion through a process of systematic doubt, as described in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*:

Once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. . . . Yet to bring this about I will not need to show that all my opinions are false, which is perhaps something I could never accomplish. But reason now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false. For this reason, it will suffice for the rejection of all of these opinions, if I find in each of them some reason for doubt.²⁸

The influence of the recent advances in mathematics, particularly geometry, doubtless inspired Descartes’ demand for “certain and indubitable” truth. In searching for such a truth, however, Descartes was forced to set aside the whole material world as something open to doubt. It is, after all, quite possible to be deceived about the real existence of any spatial-temporal object, as the phenomena of misperception and hallucination indicate. What it is *not* possible to doubt, however, according to Descartes, is the fact that I am the one who is thinking (in this case, doubting). Thus, “after everything has been most carefully weighted, it must finally be established that this pronouncement ‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind.”²⁹ In other words, every time I am conscious of something (and *a*

²⁷ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, art. 3.

²⁸ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

fortiori conscious of my own thinking), I am also self-conscious in such a way that the “I” of this self-consciousness is indubitably given. I think, therefore I am.

It is a short step from this proposition to the next, the sharp distinction between the “I” of self, which is an essentially immaterial, thinking thing (*res cogitans*), and the body I happen to possess, which is a material, extended thing (*res extensa*). Descartes recognizes these as two distinct substances with two parallel but distinct modes of being; although they causally interact with one another, the body and the mind form no unity and are not naturally conjoined. This splitting of the human being into two separate substances will eventually come to result in what Wojtyła calls the “hypostatization of consciousness: consciousness becomes an independent subject of activity, and indirectly of existence, occurring somehow alongside the body, which is a material structure subject to the laws of nature.”³⁰

Descartes’ understanding of the mind *vis-à-vis* the body has significant repercussions for the idea of what it means to be a person. The result of following out this train of thought is not only a profound inattention to the role of the body, but also the gradual absolutizing of consciousness to the point that it becomes an autonomous subject of meaning and truth disconnected from human nature and the rest of reality. The Enlightenment philosophers who came after Descartes came to understand the person precisely in this way, culminating in the radical intellectual autonomism of Emmanuel Kant. Wojtyła was certainly critical of these changes, and sought to correct them through recourse to the realist metaphysics and anthropology he found in Aquinas’ thought. At the same time, however, Wojtyła was also not afraid to recognize the positive contributions of Descartes his followers, and to make use of these in the development of his philosophy of the person.

³⁰ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 169.

From a post-Cartesian point of view, the old Aristotelian definition of man as rational animal misses precisely what is most important and defining about the human person, namely his *inwardness*, the fact that as a subject he has a specific interior life shaped by consciousness and self-consciousness. This claim cannot be made about any other known entity in the world. No other thing or animal is aware or self-aware in the way that a human being is. As Wojtyła says, “Speaking figuratively, we can say that the person as a subject is distinguished from even the most advanced animals by a specific inner self, an inner life, characteristic only of persons. It is impossible to speak of the inner life of animals, although physiological processes more or less similar to those in man take place within their organisms.”³¹

Although Descartes can thus be credited with the discovery (or perhaps recovery) of the subjectivity of the person, he and those following him did not do much to appropriate this new-found subject matter. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the main thread of philosophy split two ways along the lines of the mind-body problem Descartes created. Both sides brought to this debate certain presuppositions about the nature of man and reality which hindered a true account of personhood. As philosophers are sometimes apt to do, too much emphasis was given to one aspect or the other, mind or matter, instead of to the whole: the rationalists focused in on the mind and the *a priori*, self-evident principles of reason, and tried to deduce from these the whole material world; the empiricists, on the other hand, limited knowledge to sense-experience alone, and proceeded to explain the workings of the mind by reference to material causes. Thus neither of these philosophies really attended to the “lived experience” of the self which Descartes had disclosed; instead, they became caught up in the epistemological problems Descartes had created by his sharp division of mind and body.

³¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 22.

Partially in response to this faulty mind-matter distinction, Edmund Husserl founded at the turn of the 20th century a philosophical movement which came to be known as phenomenology, with the goal of returning to the experience of the person. As its etymology indicates, phenomenology is the scientific study (*logos*) of appearances (*phainomena*), or the investigation of how things are given to us in experience. While the epistemologies of the 17th and 18th centuries focused primarily on how it is that we *know*, phenomenology asks instead how it is that we *experience*. In this way, Husserl brought about a return to the conscious experience of the person which Descartes had first uncovered. As Wojtyła says, “In the phenomenological perspective the conception of experience received its full meaning.”³²

According to Husserl, the theme of phenomenology is “the essence of consciousness.”³³ Following Descartes’ lead, Husserl understands consciousness in a very broad sense: “We take consciousness in a pregnant sense . . . which we can designate most simply by the Cartesian term *cogito*, by the phrase ‘I think.’ As is well known, *cogito* was understood so broadly by Descartes that it comprised every ‘I perceive, I remember, I phantasy, I judge, I feel, I desire, I will.’”³⁴ Phenomenology thus attends to any and every experience a person may have. What is really unique about this philosophy, however, is the manner in which it goes about this investigation. As Husserl says, “We consider mental processes of consciousness *in the entire fullness of the concreteness* within which they present themselves in their concrete context.”³⁵ In other words, phenomenology attempts to study conscious experience *exactly as it is experienced* by the subject.

³² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 301.

³³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (Book I)*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The phenomenologist thus works “from the inside,” so to speak, investigating the structures of consciousness from the first-person point of view. This differs radically from, e.g., a modern psychological approach, which attempts to give a causal explanation for mental occurrences based upon the natural-scientific method. It also differs from the more traditional Thomistic approach, which focuses on the objective faculties of the intellect and will. As Wojtyła notes of Aquinas, “when it comes to analyzing consciousness and self-consciousness . . . there seems to be no place for it in St. Thomas’ objectivistic view of reality. In any case, that in which the person’s subjectivity is most apparent is presented by St. Thomas in an exclusively—or almost exclusively—objective way.”³⁶ While Aquinas describes in detail the intellectual structure which forms the necessary foundation for conscious experience, he does not really investigate conscious experience as such. In order to do so adequately, Wojtyła believes, a different kind of approach is needed, one that can reveal what it means to be a person from the inside. What is needed, in other words, is the phenomenological method.

Fundamental to this method is its insistence on attending to the whole totality of a given experience, rather than working from a limited or constricted point of view. Husserl conceived of phenomenology as a philosophy without any presuppositions, whether of an idealist, rationalist or empiricist sort. To achieve this level of presuppositionlessness, the philosopher needs to return to “the things themselves,” and give to these things the last word. Instead of imposing preconceptions on our experience, “paying attention to some features and not others [or] privileging some features and downplaying others,” we must let the whole of our experience speak for itself.³⁷

³⁶ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 170.

³⁷ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), 11.

When we do so, Husserl found, we discover that consciousness is always inherently intentional, that is, that consciousness is always consciousness *of*. Careful examination of experience shows that all of our conscious acts (thinking, perceiving, imagining, etc.) display a necessary directedness toward an object. This means that consciousness is not essentially focused on itself but rather on some object which transcends (goes beyond) the conscious act. We find this to be true even of ideal, imaginary or abstract objects; while they may not have real being outside the mind, they are nevertheless transcendent to the act of thinking them. For Husserl, then, every conscious experience is made up of a necessary correlation between subject and object, knower and known; in phenomenological terminology, consciousness and the world are but two inseparable moments of the whole.

The end result of this discovery is a way out of the self-enclosed subject created by Descartes' mind-body dualism. Phenomenology insists that an unbiased look at experience reveals that the mind is not essentially separated from the material world, as Descartes had thought, but rather that the two are necessarily correlated one to the other. Although starting with the self, the stance of the phenomenologist ends up being quite similar to the ancient Aristotelian position, which states that the mind "is what it is by virtue of becoming all things," and that "actual knowledge is identical with its object."³⁸ Husserl thus offers the possibility of overcoming modern philosophy's absolutization of consciousness from within the experience of consciousness itself.³⁹

³⁸ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 430a14-15, 20.

³⁹ According to Simpson, "There is some doubt as to whether Husserl firmly took the step to realism, or whether he took it and then stepped back again into subjectivism and idealism; but it is certain that several of his students did. At all events the phenomenology that Wojtyła adopts in his investigations of the human person is realist phenomenology, a phenomenology that does not construct or constitute everything out of an absolute and free-standing consciousness, but that discovers in consciousness, or conscious experience, the objective reality of real things and real people." *Cf. On Karol Wojtyła*, 11-12.

To a large degree, Husserl's discovery of phenomenology set the stage for the rest of 20th century continental philosophy. While Husserl used his new-found method to focus primarily on the structure of consciousness itself (elucidating the experiences of perception or categorical judgment, for example), later phenomenologists used the same method toward a variety of different ends. Existential-phenomenologists in particular played an important role in bringing this method to bear on "lived experience" in a more concrete manner than Husserl had done. These thinkers critiqued Husserl for being too concerned with cognitive questions and too removed from our everyday practical engagement with the world. For the existentialist, philosophy is not a matter of abstract theoretical discourse but an intense personal concern about what it means for me to be in the world. These thinkers accordingly directed Husserl's general phenomenological approach to concrete questions about our capacity for freedom and self-creation (Sartre), our embodiment in the world (Merleau-Ponty), and the fundamental *I-thou* relationship we have with others and with God (Buber, Levinas). By examining briefly the thought of one Christian existentialist in particular, Gabriel Marcel, we can hopefully arrive at a clearer idea of what the existentialist movement as a whole contributed to the question of what it means to be a person.

Similar to Merleau-Ponty, one of the key insights which Marcel has about the person is the essential inseparability of self and body. In sharp contrast to Descartes, Marcel goes so far as to assert that I *am* my body: "My body is *my* body just in so far as I do *not* consider it in [a] detached fashion, do not put a gap between myself and it. To put this point in another way, my body is mine in so far as for me my body is not an object but, rather, I *am* my body."⁴⁰ The self always manifests itself through the body, which in turn mediates the world to the self; it is

⁴⁰ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1, trans. G.S. Fraser (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 100.

through the body that I am present to the world and the world present to me. Proof of the inseparability of the two is the fact that I can in no way conceive of myself, of who I am or will be, following the death of my body. The situation in which I find myself in the world is as an essentially incarnate being, “the situation of a being who appears to himself to be linked fundamentally and not accidentally to *his* or *her* body.”⁴¹

In addition to participating in the spatial-material world through my body, I also necessarily participate in the personal world of intersubjectivity. According to Marcel, the self experiences itself not as an autonomous or self-contained individual, but as a being already fundamentally open to the world and others. As Marcelian scholar Kenneth Gallagher puts it, “My presence to the world is *by* spatiality, but it is *for* communion . . . My body is given to me as presence-in-the-world; my person is given to me as presence-in-communion.”⁴² Communion occurs when two persons encounter one another precisely as persons, as unique individuals. In doing so, we meet the other as a ‘thou.’ More often than not, however, the other is for us simply a ‘he,’ or even an ‘it,’ another object among many in the world:

By and large, my fellow man is a mere ‘he’ for me—not a ‘thou,’ but a third in an ideal dialogue I conduct with myself, an absent party who serves various useful and even interesting purposes but who is hardly *present* to me in the true sense. The faces that hurry by me on the street, the dismal fellow-travelers in the subway, the stereotyped co-workers with whom I engage in perfunctory and tedious conversation—their very ‘being-there’ is hardly to be distinguished from an absence.⁴³

In contrast, a true encounter with another person, the type that results in true communion, is only possible if we are open (*disponible*) to the authentic individual presence of the other. The other then presents himself as a ‘thou,’ the reality of which cannot be grasped in a series of predicates. The person encountered in this way is a *someone*, a subject whose self extends far beyond any

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴² Timothy Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

attempt at categorization as *something*. It is in this way that we can understand Marcel's somewhat paradoxical statement that it is the essence of the self to be more than an essence.⁴⁴

It is not simply the case, however, that such communion between persons is a real possibility, an end towards which we should strive in our interactions with others; for Marcel, this very communion in some way *founds* each person *qua* person. "Apart from the presence of an other, I am not a unified center at all; I am either a universal content of thought or a succession of empirical states. What makes me to be a singular 'I'? The presence of the thou."⁴⁵ In this assertion Marcel's thought follows in the vein of his contemporary Martin Buber, who held that "persons appear by entering into relation to other persons," or in other words, "man becomes an I through a You."⁴⁶ As far as the existentialists are concerned, then, in so far as man is a person, he is so through his relations with others. In the same way that, as a concrete individual, I can say that I *am* my body, I can also say that in some way I *am* my relationships. For Marcel, the "we" creates and founds the "I."

This particular way of understanding what it means to be a person is certainly far from the initial definition provided by Boethius. Having traced the concept of 'person' throughout the history of Western thought, we are now in a better position to understand the distinction Wojtyła makes between "the philosophy of being" and "the philosophy of consciousness." Boethius and Aquinas, and the medievals in general, understood the person as an individual substance, akin to other substances in the world but differentiated by his particular rational nature. Wojtyła characterizes this as a primarily cosmological understanding of man: "The definition is constructed in such a way that it excludes—when taken simply and directly—the possibility of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 112, 80.

accentuating the irreducible in the human being. It implies—at least at first glance—a belief in the reducibility of the human being to the world.”⁴⁷ While Aquinas has important insights into the person’s capacity for self-possession, and thus his ability to be self-determining, man is still understood by him in a primarily objective way.

In contrast to this medieval approach, Descartes opened up a way of thinking about the person primarily in terms of his subjectivity, which is revealed to us through conscious experience. “Subjectivity,” Wojtyła writes, “is, as it were, a term proclaiming that the human being’s proper essence cannot be totally reduced to and explained by the proximate genus and specific difference. *Subjectivity is, then, a kind of synonym for the irreducible in the human being.*”⁴⁸ As we saw, Husserl developed a method for investigating this irreducible lived experience of the subject, which later phenomenologists and existentialists put to use in describing in depth the interior dimensions of the self, as well as the self’s relation to the body and to others.

As the heir to this rich history of thought about man as person, Wojtyła recognized the fundamental need to address both the objective metaphysical aspect and the subjective experiential aspect of the person in constructing his philosophical anthropology. As he writes in his essay on “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,”

I am convinced that *the line of demarcation between the subjectivistic (idealistic) and objectivistic (realistic) views in anthropology and ethics must break down and is in fact breaking down on the basis of the experience of the human being . . .* With all the phenomenological analyses in the realm of that assumed subject (pure consciousness) now at our disposal, we can no longer go on treating the human being exclusively as an objective being, but we must also somehow treat the human being as a subject in the dimension in which the specifically human subjectivity of the human being is determined

⁴⁷ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 211.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

by consciousness. And that dimension would seem to be none other than *personal* subjectivity.⁴⁹

By appropriating the best that the tradition has to offer on this topic and bringing it together in a fruitful synthesis, Wojtyła hoped to offer a fuller answer to what he deemed was the most important question of our times, the question *what is man*.⁵⁰ Deeply grounded in the metaphysical and ethical thought of Aquinas, but also intimately familiar with phenomenology through the work of Max Scheler, Wojtyła was able to bring these two strands of thought together into one creative synthesis which he called Thomistic Personalism.

THE METHOD AND DIRECTION OF WOJTYŁA'S CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

If the theme of Thomistic Personalism is the person, the starting point and method for this philosophy is experience. As Wojtyła says, “The basis for understanding the human being must be sought in experience—in experience that is complete and comprehensive and free of all systematic *a priories*.”⁵¹ In this Wojtyła is obviously right in line with the phenomenological tradition; at the same time, though, he is also very much in line with classical Aristotelian and Thomistic thought.

While Aquinas employs many syllogistic arguments in his writings, the premises of these arguments are often grounded in experience, albeit in an indirect way.⁵² Aristotle, who first discovered the syllogism, taught that “All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from pre-existent knowledge,” since “not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the

⁴⁹ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 210.

⁵⁰ Cf. Stefan Swiezawski’s introduction to *Person and Community*, ix-xvi; Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?” in *Person and Community*, 206.

⁵¹ Wojtyła, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in *Person and Community*, 189.

⁵² Propositions can also be grounded in revelation, but revelation itself must be revealed somehow through experience, even if that experience is not *direct* experience (e.g. literally hearing the good news of the Gospel).

contrary, knowledge of the immediate premises is independent of demonstration.”⁵³ A syllogism works by arguing from two starting premises, the truth of which is accepted, to a conclusion whose truth *must* be accepted if the argument is valid and the terms are clear. The way that we come to these initial premises, according to Aristotle, is through experience, and first of all sense-experience. Aquinas also held this position.⁵⁴

This is not to say, however, that our knowledge is made up *merely* of experience or sense-experience. Experience yields knowledge of individuals, but we are also capable of knowing universals. As Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics*, “experience seems pretty much like science and art, but really science and art come to men *through* experience . . . Now art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgment about a class of objects is produced.”⁵⁵ Most basically, this type of scientific understanding is knowledge of the essence or *form* of a thing, knowledge of its intelligible organizing structure. According to Aquinas, it is proper for us as embodied intellects to come to such knowledge through the experience of our senses:

It is proper to [the human intellect] to know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter. But to know what is in individual matter, yet not as existing in such matter, is to abstract the form from individual matter which is represented by the phantasms. Therefore we must needs say that our intellect understands material things by abstracting from phantasms; and that through material things thus considered we acquire some knowledge of immaterial things.⁵⁶

While the language here is somewhat technical, the point Aquinas is making is that our knowledge of things in general comes by way of our knowledge of particular things, which in

⁵³ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 71a1-2, 72b18-20.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, art. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981a1-7.

⁵⁶ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 85, art. 1.

turn comes first through sense-experience. For Aquinas, even the most abstract of metaphysical claims has some basis in an individual's experience of particulars.⁵⁷

Like Aquinas, Wojtyła also believes that we can make metaphysical claims on the basis of our experience. He is less inclined than Aquinas, however, to argue in a formal way toward these claims, preferring instead to reflect deeply and carefully on our common experience, elucidating it through description in such a way that the very heart of the matter appears, already given in the experience itself. He states, for example, that we can begin to discern the fact that we are persons, and not simply complex animals, on the basis of our experience of creativity and dominion over the world: “A being that continually transforms nature, raising it in some sense to that being's own level, must feel higher than nature—and must *be* higher than it. In this way, the constant confrontation of our own being with nature leads us to the threshold of understanding the person.”⁵⁸

According to Wojtyła, not only reason but our experience itself teaches us that we are real existing beings in the world. If I truly attend to my experience, Wojtyła holds, I discover, *through experience*, that I am not simply “pure consciousness” but rather an *individua substantia*, a metaphysical *suppositum*. This is a critical insight when dealing with the subjectivity of the human person, because it keeps the focus on subjectivity from turning into *subjectivism*, which is the primary danger in modern philosophy's treatment of the self:

This is perhaps the most characteristic feature of such philosophy: its subjectivism, its absolutizing of the subjective element, namely, lived experience, together with consciousness as a permanent component of such experience. The person is not a

⁵⁷ As Peter Kreeft notes in his *Summa of the Summa*, Aquinas' famous proofs for the existence of God all follow the same approach, arguing from particular empirical data about the cosmos (motion, causality, possibility, degrees of perfection, order) to the existence of God as exemplary cause. Cf. also Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 59-83. Gilson notes that “An essential feature of a Thomistic way to the knowledge of the existence of God is that it should start from sense experience.”

⁵⁸ Wojtyła, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Person and Community*, 178.

substance, an objective being with its own proper subsistence—subsistence in a rational nature. The person is merely a certain property of lived experiences.⁵⁹

While Wojtyła recognizes that lived experience is an essential part of what it means to be a person, he also recognizes that the person must be more than just his lived experience. As we saw when examining Boethius' definition of the person, I cannot simply be reduced to my experiences or relations. There must be a real existing human nature upon which these experiences can be built up, a real being which can be related to other real beings. According to Wojtyła, our experience itself reveals this fact: "The whole experience of the human being, which reveals the human being to us as someone who exists and acts, both allows and legitimately requires us to conceive the human being as the subject of that existence and activity. And this is precisely what is contained in the concept *suppositum*."⁶⁰

Once this fundamental realism of the human *suppositum* is accepted, Wojtyła believes, we can confidently turn our attention to the subjective aspects of the person with the help of the phenomenological method.⁶¹ As we have stressed time and again, Wojtyła does not believe such a procedure is fundamentally in conflict with the traditional objective, cosmological-metaphysical approach to man, but rather that the two essentially complement one another: "The personalistic type of understanding the human being is not the antinomy of the cosmological type

⁵⁹ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," in *Person and Community*, 170. Cf. also "The Human Person and Natural Law" in *Person and Community*, 185: "If we regard the human being as some sort of pure consciousness, such a philosophical stance immediately presents us with an image of the human being as a kind of absolute affirmed on the intellectual plane, and we then proceed to all the consequences of this initial intellectual act. The same applies, though even more so, to the concept of human freedom."

⁶⁰ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community*, 222.

⁶¹ In "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," Wojtyła speculates as to the reason why philosophers within the Thomistic tradition have thus far failed to really investigate the interior dimension of man. Ultimately, he concludes, the reason comes down to a fear of subjectivism: "The antinomy of subjectivism vs. objectivism, along with the underlying antinomy of idealism vs. realism, created conditions that discouraged dealing with human subjectivity—for fear that this would lead inevitably to subjectivism." Cf. *Person and Community*, 209.

but its complement.”⁶² For this reason, Wojtyła describes his approach as “pausing at the irreducible” in man, by which he means that we must pause during the process of Aristotelian-Thomistic reduction to pay attention also to man’s interiority: “We must pause at the irreducible, at that which is unique and unrepeatable in each human being, by virtue of which he or she is not just *a particular human being*—an individual of a certain species—but a *personal subject*. Only then do we get a true and complete picture of the human being.”⁶³

In order to do so, however, we are in need of a different kind of method than that provided by traditional philosophy, since this philosophy relies on abstracting the universal form from particulars. While such an approach is useful in its own right, it does not give us the whole picture of man-as-person, that is, man as unique individual. In order to grasp man as a totality, Wojtyła believes, we must also make use of the phenomenological method:

The traditions of philosophical anthropology would have us believe that we can, so to speak, pass right over this [interior] dimension, that we can cognitively omit it by means of an abstraction that provides us with a species definition of the human being as a being, or, in other words, with a cosmological type of reduction (*homo = animal rationale*) . . . [But] the irreducible signifies that which is essentially incapable of reduction, that which cannot be reduced but can only be disclosed or revealed. Lived experience essentially defies reduction. This does not mean, however, that it eludes our knowledge; it only means that we must arrive at the knowledge of it differently, namely, by a method or means of analysis that merely reveals and discloses its essence. The method of phenomenological analysis allows us to pause at lived experience as the irreducible.⁶⁴

In pausing at the irreducible in this manner and describing in-depth the lived experience of the person, Wojtyła is simply building upon the metaphysical terrain which Boethius’ traditional definition of the person provides. This is because “the *suppositum humanum* and the human self are but two poles of one and the same experience of the human being.”⁶⁵ The metaphysical

⁶² Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 213.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁵ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 232.

subject, the being in possession of a rational nature with faculties of intellect and will, must and always in fact does manifest itself as a personal subject. The metaphysical subject is always the foundation, the personal subject the flowering.

If we are able to understand the self in this way, as the manifestation or flowering of man as metaphysical *suppositum* (Boethius' "individual substance of a rational nature"), we are in a much better position to understand what Wojtyła means when he says that "by 'metaphysical' I mean not so much 'beyond-the-phenomenal' [Kant's "thing in itself"] as 'through-the-phenomenal,' or 'trans-phenomenal.'" Phenomenological analysis of our experience of ourselves leads each of us back to the metaphysical being which grounds this experience. We experience ourselves as real beings in the world, beings with a particular human nature. "Through all the phenomena that in experience go to make up the whole human being as someone who exists and acts, we perceive—somehow we must perceive—the [metaphysical] subject of that existence and activity. Or better, we perceive that the human being is—must be—that 'sub-ject.'"⁶⁶

The emphasis which Wojtyła gives to existence and activity in this passage is really something we find throughout his writings. Time and again he has reference to the medieval maxim *operari sequitur esse* (activity follows existence). This is a metaphysical claim about beings in the world which, at first glance, states a fairly obvious truth, namely that things act in a way that is in accord with their nature. A dog acts like a dog and a cat like a cat. In fact, it is

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 222. Wojtyła is not alone in this assertion. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2008), x-xi: "The demand for a pure description excludes equally the procedure of analytical reflection [idealism] on the one hand, and that of scientific explanation [materialism] on the other . . . The world is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses which link, in the first place sensations, then aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality . . . When I begin to reflect my reflection bears upon an unreflective experience; moreover my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event, and so it appears to itself in the light of a truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness, and yet it has to recognize, as having priority over its own operations, the world which is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real has to be described, not constructed or formed."

primarily by examining the way a thing acts that we are able to determine its nature, or form. By their actions things communicate to the world what *kind* of things they are. As Clarke puts it, “To know another being . . . is to know it as *this kind of actor*.”⁶⁷

We can take this connection between acting and existing a step further, however, and say that the action of a being is not only *in accord with* what the being is but actually *flows directly from* the being of the thing. To understand this fact, we must investigate briefly Aquinas’ metaphysical understanding of God as “pure act” or “fullness of existence,” which insight was brought to light by Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain and other existential Thomists during the course of the 20th century. Wojtyła encountered the works of Gilson and Maritain while teaching philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin in the 1950s and 60s, and it appears that this encounter greatly influenced his understanding of Thomistic metaphysics, and thus also his development of Thomistic Personalism.⁶⁸

To begin with, we must recognize with Aquinas that the very existence of a thing is itself an act, something active and dynamic. Aquinas states that “From the very fact that something exists in act [i.e. has actual existence], it is active.”⁶⁹ In other words, being is not simply something static, like a state, but rather something active, like a happening. To put it in a somewhat paradoxical way, existence is not something we *are* but something we *do*. We find this fact reflected in the very language we use, “being” being a gerund formed from the verb “to be.” As Gerald Phelan says, “The act of existence (*esse*) is not a state, it is an act, the act of all acts, and therefore must be understood as act and not as a static definable object of conception.

⁶⁷ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 13.

⁶⁸ After being elected to the Chair of Peter in 1978, Wojtyła proceeded to commend Aquinas’ philosophy in 1980 as “a philosophy of ‘the act of existing,’” and urged a return to the study of Aquinas in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, stating that the philosophy of being is “strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being itself.” Cf. John Paul II, “Perennial philosophy of St. Thomas for the youth of our times,” *Angelicum* 57 (1980): 139, *Fides et Ratio* §97.

⁶⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 43.

Esse is dynamic impulse, energy, act—the first, the most persistent and enduring of all dynamisms, all energies, all acts.”⁷⁰ Or as Gilson puts it, “Not: to be, then to act, but: to be is to act.”⁷¹

According to Aquinas, we can trace this connection between being and activity all the way back to God. One of Aquinas’ great metaphysical insights, inspired perhaps by God’s self-revelation to Moses on Mount Horeb (*cf.* Exodus 3:14), is that God himself is the fullness of existence, the perfection of Being without limitation.⁷² Creatures, on the other hand, *are* limited: as essentially contingent beings, we are dependent upon God for our very existence. According to Aquinas, this dependence takes the form of participation-through-limitation.

As really existing beings, we both *are* (we are alive, we exist) and *are something* (human beings, beings with a human nature). The same is true of every created being. Real things in the world are made up of a necessary joining of existence and essence. It would be wrong, however, to think of existence as the first minimum base-level of a thing, and essence as a subsequent perfection added on top, so to speak. The reason why, Clarke indicates, is that “Nothing real or positive can be added on to existence from without. For what is added must already be real, have existence within it; otherwise, it is adding on nothing real.”⁷³ Everything that is real, exists. Outside of existence there is literally nothing. Therefore “the principle of existence must be a *maximum*, an all-encompassing plenitude,” and essence must be understood as a limiting principle, something which restricts the fullness of existence in such a way as to form a limited

⁷⁰ Gerald Phelan, “The Existentialism of St. Thomas,” *Selected Papers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 77.

⁷¹ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 184.

⁷² *Cf.* Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 93.

⁷³ W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 83.

being with a particular nature.⁷⁴ Existence thus forms the central core of any being, and from this first limited act (the act of being, which is simultaneously the act of being a particular thing with a particular nature) stem all other actions. As Aquinas says, “every agent acts according as it exists in actuality.”⁷⁵

God himself, as both the fullness of existence and the efficient cause of all contingent beings, holds all created things in existence. But if God is the fullness of existence, or pure act, and existence is what is most central to every being, the source of all its actions, then God must somehow exist in every created thing as the innermost source of its perfection. Aquinas does not hesitate to draw this conclusion: “As long as one thing is, God must be present in it in that it is. Now to be is that which is most intimate in each thing, and it is that which is most profound in it, because the act-of-being is formal with respect to all that there is in it. God must, therefore, be in all things, and that intimately.”⁷⁶ Ultimately, then, God is the source of the existence of all things, which are differentiated by means of their limiting modes of existence, i.e. their essences. In this way, all created things participate in God’s very existence, albeit in a limited (particularized) way.

Existence, then, is the first act of any being, including God himself, the Being of all beings.⁷⁷ In creatures, however, we find that this first act is always limited. The first act of a contingent being is always a *particularized* act of existence, one conditioned by the particular essence (or form, or nature) of the given creature. It is from this first particularized act that all other actions stem. Which means that beings communicate themselves, who or what they are, precisely *through their actions*. Thus, it is only by investigating how something acts that we can

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁵ *De potentia*, q. 2, art. 1.

⁷⁶ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 8, art. 1.

⁷⁷ The “first act” of a being is *ontologically* prior, not temporally so.

come to know what it is. As Wojtyła says, “If *operari* results from *esse*, then *operari* is also—proceeding in the opposite direction—the most proper avenue to knowledge of that *esse*.”⁷⁸ This metaphysical link between action and existence plays a central role in Wojtyła’s investigation of man as person. By looking at human actions, Wojtyła believes, we can better grasp the reality of the person:

From human *operari*, then, we discover not only that the human being is its ‘sub-ject,’ but also who the human being is as the subject of his or her activity. *Operari*, taken as the total dynamism of the human being, enables us to arrive at a more precise and proper understanding of the subjectivity of the human being. By subjectivity here, I am no longer referring to just the *suppositum* as the subject in the metaphysical sense; I am also referring to everything that, based upon this *suppositum*, makes the human being an individual, personal subject.⁷⁹

In contrast to Descartes, then, Wojtyła believes that a true understanding of the person should not begin with consciousness but with concrete human action. Consciousness is, of course, important to personhood; the very idea of self betokens self-awareness. Nonetheless, consciousness is not the whole of the person, nor even, for Wojtyła, the greatest part. Conscious *action*, rather, “gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person must fully.”⁸⁰ For this reason, Wojtyła attempts in his philosophy to “revers[e] the post-Cartesian attitude toward man . . . by approaching him through action.”⁸¹ After all, he asks, “in reality, does man reveal himself in *thinking* or, rather, in the actual *enacting* of his existence?”⁸²

⁷⁸ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 223.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, vii. On page 303 of the appendix to *The Acting Person*, there is a note provided concerning the specific meaning of the Polish word *czyn* which is here translated “act”: “The original Polish term here used is *czyn*, which as the author himself stresses, is not the exact equivalent of the Latin *actus*; nor is it the equivalent of the English *act* since its connotations stress deliberateness and purpose in human acting.” As the note indicates, *czyn* refers specifically to human action, action that necessarily involves authorship and self-determination.

As a result of this focus on human action, Wojtyła places a much greater emphasis on freedom and self-determination in his philosophy than he does on cognition and consciousness.⁸³ This move has the benefit of still retaining acts of consciousness as important to the person by encompassing them within a wider genus of human acts in general; it also allows greater room for emphasis on the bodily and emotional aspects of man. In addition, it would seem to allow for a more adequate account of the unique nature of the human being across the whole spectrum of humanity, including not only the scholar and the professor, but the farmer, the artisan and the businessman as well.

By attending primarily to human action, we can also gain access to a better understanding of relationality. No being in the world is ever found in complete isolation from other beings. Therefore, it is not enough to say that each thing is known as *this kind of actor*; we must also say that each thing is known as this kind of actor on *me* (or on you, or on other things in the universe). Every being acts *on* or *towards* or *for* other beings, which in their turn receive this action in being acted upon. The correlative of action, then, is reception (although even reception may be thought of as a special kind of action, namely an allowing, or even welcoming, of action on oneself). Thus action and reception together form the fabric of relation. Beings are by their very nature oriented towards other beings. As Wojtyła says, “The formed being brings with it a certain inclination to action, and action is oriented toward other beings as ends . . . The inner nature and perfection of a being entails a relation (*comparatio*) of it to other beings.”⁸⁴ The same idea is expressed by Clarke in his work on metaphysics: “All being, therefore, is, by its very nature as being, *dyadic*, with an ‘introverted,’ or *in-itself* dimension, as substance, and an

⁸³ In this, Wojtyła is in line with a number of thinkers in the existentialist tradition, including Sartre, Marcel and Camus.

⁸⁴ Karol Wojtyła, “On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm,” in *Person and Community*, 75-76.

‘extraverted,’ or *towards-others* dimension, as related through action.”⁸⁵ This understanding of relationality plays a central role in Wojtyła’s investigations of love and sexuality.⁸⁶

Wojtyła’s Thomistic Personalism is, as we have said, a philosophy that attempts to integrate the insights of classical and modern philosophy in order better to understand the reality of man-as-person. We have seen that this philosophy focuses specifically on the human *suppositum* as agent or actor, and endeavors to examine the person’s actions through careful attention to lived experience. By attending to human actions, Wojtyła hopes to be able to get at the essence of what makes a person a person. In order to do so, however, he must make use of both traditional metaphysics and modern phenomenology. As Simpson says,

He is forced to combine the reality of substance and act from the traditional philosophy of being with the subjectivity of the personal self from the modern philosophy of consciousness. One of them alone will not do. He has to have them both, and he has to have them both *together*, that is, as combined into a creative and mutually reinforcing unity. He has to have, in other words, the phenomenology of agency on the basis of the human suppositum.⁸⁷

It comes as no surprise, then, that Wojtyła gives to his central work of philosophical anthropology the name *The Acting Person*. It is here where he works out in detail the philosophy he has begun to develop in the articles we have examined.

Before turning our attention to this study, however, we would perhaps do best to look further into exactly *why* the synthesis Wojtyła has created is necessary, and indeed whether it is even possible. After all, there is always a danger in bringing together diverse ideas from vastly different backgrounds. After he was elected pope, Wojtyła, now John Paul II, spoke on this problem in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: “[This danger] goes by the name of *eclecticism*, by which is meant the approach of those who, in research, teaching and argumentation . . . tend to

⁸⁵ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 16.

⁸⁶ See pp. 73-83.

⁸⁷ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 22.

use individual ideas drawn from different philosophies, without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical context.”⁸⁸ If Wojtyła’s integration of Thomism and phenomenology is to be a true *synthesis*, and not simply an eclectic mix of ideas lacking internal coherence, we will have to demonstrate how it is that these different traditions are able to be held together in creative tension, and why such a joining is in fact necessary and fruitful.

⁸⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, § 86.

2. Why is Thomistic Personalism Necessary, and is it Possible?

Wojtyła's project of bringing together the medieval, object-focused philosophy of Aquinas and the modern, subject-focused philosophy of phenomenology was not met without criticism, stemming from both sides. As far as many traditional Thomists are concerned, Aquinas' philosophy is the finest intellectual product of any Christian thinker, not to be excelled, much less found in need of supplementation. In their view, anything not already present in the writings of the master himself is not worthy of time or attention. In the face of this sort of opposition, it is not surprising that Clarke refers to Wojtyła's synthesis as a "courageous move," and commends him for "showing how Thomistic metaphysics by itself is not adequate to give a full philosophical explanation of the human person."⁸⁹ As Clarke indicates, "Many conservative Thomists were not too happy with this exposing of the limitations of the great St. Thomas."⁹⁰

Many phenomenologists, also, do not really understand the need Wojtyła sees for supplementing phenomenological description with Aquinas' realistic metaphysics. Having read Wojtyła's *The Acting Person*, one professor at Boston College told me that he did not think Wojtyła really understood what the purpose or method of phenomenology is. If he *had*, it was implied, he would understand that metaphysics of the Thomistic sort is a rather archaic and outdated practice; questions about "being" are much better handled from the standpoint of consciousness and its constitution of the world.

⁸⁹ Clarke, "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in 20th Century Thomism" (personal manuscript from a lecture presented during philosophy colloquium at Fordham University, New York, January 19, 2007), 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

The question then arises why both aspects of this synthesis are necessary for understanding the human person. The Thomists wonder why it is not enough to stick to Aquinas' objective account of man, which he sets forth very clearly in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, among other places. This account, as we have seen, covers such central topics as the hylomorphic union of body soul and the powers of the intellect, will and senses. As Wojtyła himself acknowledges, "St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person."⁹¹ What else is needed?

The phenomenologists, for their part, do not want anything to do with metaphysical presuppositions about the reality of the world or how it is structured. The starting point for phenomenology has to be the conscious lived experience of the self, which means that its method, as Marcel puts it, must be "essentially a concrete rather than an abstract approach."⁹² For this reason, Marcel and other phenomenologist-existentialists have no patience for the kind of systematic thought they believe Aquinas proposes. As Marcel says, "the philosopher who first discovers certain truths and then sets out to expound them in their dialectical or systematic interconnections always runs the risk of profoundly altering the nature of the truths he has discovered."⁹³

To begin with, we might answer to both sides that the kind of system which Aquinas presents is of a fundamentally different nature than that of other abstract systems in the history of philosophy. We have already noted, for example, Aquinas' insistence that knowledge is to begin with (sensory) experience.⁹⁴ Aquinas is not a rationalist; he does not propose a rational system of truths perfectly deduced from logically prior axioms. Neither does he pretend to speak

⁹¹ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism" in *Person and Community*, 171.

⁹² Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 116.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁴ See pp. 23-24.

exhaustively on any topic or fix definitively any term. As Josef Pieper points out, “Thomas was convinced that an absolutely adequate name, completely and exhaustively defining a given subject or situation so that all alternatives are excluded and that name alone can be employed, simply cannot exist.”⁹⁵ For Aquinas, the existence not only of God but of every created thing is invested with so much ontological depth that it can never be completely known.

Ultimately, then, Aquinas’ system is a fundamentally *open* system, as opposed to the closed systems of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Hegel. While his philosophy is certainly well-ordered, it makes no claim to definitive knowledge, precisely because it recognizes the inexhaustible nature of being itself. For this reason, Aquinas is never afraid to supplement his own understanding with truth gleaned from other sources—even sources as unlikely as the pagan philosopher Aristotle, who during Aquinas’ time seemed in many ways to be in fundamental contradiction with the teachings of the faith. In answer to those Thomists who do not believe anything can or should be added to Aquinas’ teachings, then, I would urge them to look at the example of Aquinas himself, who was never satisfied with his current understanding but rather continually sought after truth, wherever it was to be found. In answer to phenomenologists wary of abstract, dead, closed-in systematic philosophies, I would respond that Aquinas never conceived of philosophy in this way; if the structure of the *Summa* articles is any indication, Aquinas rather believed that philosophy is a necessary, urgent, living *dialogue*, a communal search for truth to which all of us have access.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that for Aquinas, not only the approach but the very subject matter is different from that of modern phenomenology. As Pieper says, “at bottom Thomas wishes to communicate . . . not his own inner state, but his insight into a given

⁹⁵ Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 113.

subject.”⁹⁶ And the way that he does so is through systematic argument, not elucidation of experience.

It is this very difference of subject matter and approach, however, that Wojtyła hopes to make use of in his synthesis. It is *because* Thomism and phenomenology are so different that Wojtyła believes they can truly complement one another. As we noted in the last chapter, it is his conviction that we cannot truly understand the human person, who is always simultaneously both subject and object in the world, with the help of Thomism alone or phenomenology alone. Thomism has developed a solid metaphysics, but it does not give adequate attention to the personal subject as such. Phenomenology, on the other hand, perhaps, pays *too* much attention to the subject, losing its grounding in reality. By bringing both together, Wojtyła believes, the shortcomings of each can be overcome.

THE NEED FOR A SYNTHESIS

Following somewhat the division we established earlier between “the philosophy of being” and “the philosophy of consciousness,” we can look at the need for Thomistic Personalism in the light of two different themes: 1) in so far as it is necessary for the study of metaphysics, and 2) in so far as it is necessary for understanding the human person. We will examine each of these from the point of view of both classical Thomism and modern phenomenology.

Beginning with metaphysics, we can make the following observations about why Aquinas’ account needs to be supplemented by modern thought on the person. The first point is perhaps the most obvious. According to Aquinas, metaphysics is the study of “being-in-general”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

or “being *qua* being.”⁹⁷ The person-as-subject, however, is part of all that is. As such, this aspect of reality needs to be taken into account when constructing a metaphysics.

Moreover, Aquinas actually recognizes the person as “that which is most perfect in all of nature.”⁹⁸ God himself, in fact, is essentially personal. If, therefore, all beings are participations in God, who is the fullness of existence to their limiting essences (as we have shown above), then any understanding that we gain about the person has important implications for what we know about being in general. As Clarke says,

[The person] is not some special mode of being, added on from the outside, so to speak. It is really nothing but the fullness of being itself, existence come into its own, allowed to be fully what it is by ‘nature’ when not restricted by the limitations proper to the material mode of being . . . To *be* fully, without restriction, therefore, is to be personal.⁹⁹

If we are to truly understand being, then, we must strive to understand what it means to be a person. And we cannot do this without understanding also the interior self, for which purpose we need the phenomenological method.

Finally, we should recognize that it is often easiest to start our investigation from familiar ground, from where we already stand, so to speak. In other words, we should start from our own experience. Surely we are more familiar with ourselves than we are with rocks, trees or other material beings, and certainly more so than we are with God or his angels. At the very least, we should recognize that the personal self is the *de facto* starting point for modern man’s investigation of the world; for pedagogical and dialogical purposes alone, then, we need to keep in mind personal experience when dealing in metaphysics.

On the other hand, while personal experience may be a *necessary* part of metaphysical investigation, it is certainly not *sufficient*. Modern philosophy could stand to gain as much from

⁹⁷ Cf. *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, introduction.

⁹⁸ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, art. 3.

⁹⁹ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 25.

Aquinas' metaphysical approach as Aquinas' metaphysics could stand to gain from modern philosophy. It is part of human experience, after all, to desire an overall unifying vision of the world, to understand the meaning of life and why the universe exists. This sort of human desire points to the need for a traditional metaphysics that can explain the world (what is) in terms of God (existence itself). Marcel recognizes this basic human need in his notion of "ontological exigence," which is the demand present in each of us for coherence in the cosmos rather than chaos, and for understanding our place within this coherent structure. As he says, "Being is—or should be—necessary. It is impossible that everything should be reduced to a play of successive appearances which are inconsistent with each other . . . or, in the words of Shakespeare, to 'a tale told by an idiot.'"¹⁰⁰

Along the same lines, we should keep in mind that the careful description of experience, so central to the phenomenological project, is simply not enough when it comes to doing philosophy. We cannot be content to simply describe our experience, but must also analyze, ground and universalize it. After all, description in and of itself is not philosophy. As Aristotle realized long ago, true understanding must include knowledge of *causes*. Wojtyła is very much in agreement with Aristotle on this point. As John Paul II, he stated the issue thus: "We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises."¹⁰¹

This need to penetrate to "the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises" is especially acute in the realm of ethics. Ethics is a fundamentally practical discipline about how it

¹⁰⁰ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 14.

¹⁰¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, § 83.

is that we should live and act. While it is focused on *praxis*, however, it has its foundation in a theoretical understanding of the human being, which in turn has its basis in an understanding of reality as a whole. Ethics is grounded in anthropology, which is grounded in metaphysics. Without a realistic metaphysical foundation, ethics is in serious danger of falling into subjective relativism.

Moral relativism is essentially the idea that in moral action, anything goes. According to the relativist, morality is changeable or *relative* not only to specific time-periods and cultures, but even to specific individuals. In this way it is often tied to subjectivism, which holds that an individual's feelings are the grounds on which moral decisions are to be made: if it feels good or makes you (psychologically, subjectively, superficially) "happy," then you should do it. If it doesn't, you shouldn't. Relativism thus leads to the conclusion that our passions should be followed virtually unchecked, and that we should be free to create our own values in this pursuit. On the other hand, we must be tolerant of others' decisions, even if we disagree with them. Above all, we should avoid feelings of guilt.

In many ways, relativism is so seductive because it comes close to the truth. We are, after all, conditioned to some extent by the culture in which we live; few would deny that our time and place in history has a role in shaping our moral views. We all want to feel happy rather than sad, and experience pleasure rather than pain. Most of us recognize that there are many situations in our increasingly globalized world in which tolerance is a good and necessary thing. And no one likes the experience of feeling guilty.

A near-truth, however, can be as bad as an outright lie, and even more dangerous due to its dissembling character. As an ethical theory, relativism is ultimately self-refuting, insofar as it makes the absolute, objective moral claim that there can be no absolute, objective moral claims.

More importantly, however, such a philosophy can never really make us happy. If we follow the path of the relativist, we may experience feelings of pleasure and contentment, but we will never be truly happy, never *fulfilled*. For we can only be fulfilled if we have an objective nature to which we can live up to, an unchanging goal (to be truly human) toward which we can strive in all our actions. We can never attain our end if we keep changing it to suit the needs or feelings of the moment.

A realistic metaphysics and anthropology of the kind Aquinas espouses supplies the necessary antidote to the relativism so prevalent in our culture. We cannot speak meaningfully of what we should or should not do if we remain simply within the realm of personal experience or believe that the whole of reality is constituted by consciousness. Only if we recognize that there are other real existing beings that bear within themselves real values and make upon us real demands can we make objective moral claims. And only if we ourselves as human beings have a real, objective, unchanging nature can we say how it is that we should act in order to attain true fulfillment as persons.¹⁰²

In this discussion of relativism and ethics, we have already started to shift ground from examining the necessity of Thomistic Personalism when treating of metaphysics to its necessity when dealing with the human person. In many ways, the main thrust of this thesis thus far has been to demonstrate the importance of drawing on both the Thomistic tradition and the phenomenological method in order to gain a full understanding of man-as-person. Although we have attempted to indicate this necessity throughout, however, it has nonetheless been in a

¹⁰² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger makes a point similar to this in the preface to his *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 26: "If the world and man do not come from a creative intelligence, which stores within itself their measures and plots the path of human existence, then all that is left are traffic rules for human behavior, which can be discarded or maintained according to their usefulness."

somewhat inchoate and indirect manner. For this reason, it may prove helpful to examine the argument again here.

Essentially, the argument for the necessity of Thomistic Personalism stems from the basic premise that we stated in the introduction, namely that the human being is always simultaneously both an object and a subject, a something and a someone. As an object in the world, the person is a real subsistent being of a particular sort, defined by its human nature with all its faculties and structures. Aristotle classified this nature in terms of genus and specific difference, defining man as “rational animal.” As we have seen, this is a “cosmological” understanding of man which in some ways reduces him to the world. Because he is, in fact, a being in the world, such an understanding is not incorrect. Nevertheless, it is also not complete.

In addition to the “objective” aspect of the person, there is also an interior, subjective aspect. We are not simply beings in the world but are *conscious* of being so. This awareness, coupled with our ability for self-determination, constitutes the necessary foundation for the self. Consciousness creates the possibility for each individual’s “lived experience” and for the development of a true interior life. Self-determination, meanwhile, grants us the capacity to will freely and to act upon our choices, thereby determining who we are. Wojtyła recognizes these aspects as essentially “irreducible” and “incommunicable” to each individual; as such, they cannot be captured in Aristotle’s reduction of man to the world.

Aquinas, following Aristotle, understands man as a being with a particular nature, that of a rational animal. As a rational animal, man has both an immaterial dimension (the mind) and a material dimension (the body). Aquinas demonstrates how the immaterial dimension is best understood as the form of the material dimension; in this way, he shows that the body is intimately joined with the soul. As a body-soul union, man possesses powers specific to the body

(e.g. sensation), as well as powers specific to the soul (e.g. intellection). Even when examining these immaterial or “interior” faculties, however, Aquinas maintains a very objective, exterior point of view, similar to that of a natural scientist today. While he may *arrive* at his understanding of the structure of man’s intellect and emotions through personal experience, Aquinas does not describe or dwell on that experience: as we quoted above, “Thomas wishes to communicate . . . not his own inner state, but his insight into a given subject.”¹⁰³ Or as Wojtyła puts it, “That in which the person’s subjectivity is most apparent is presented by St. Thomas in an exclusively—or almost exclusively—objective way.”¹⁰⁴ The Thomistic approach, then, can indeed provide us with an excellent account of the objective existence, nature and activity of the person, but it cannot really get at the “lived experience” of the subject. For this, a phenomenological approach is needed.

On the other hand, a phenomenological approach is also not adequate in and of itself, precisely because it leaves out what the Thomistic approach supplies. Phenomenology is simply concerned with how things are given to us in experience, and not with questions of objective being or nature. While the phenomenological method can give us access to the interior life of the person, it cannot in and of itself ground the experiences and relations which constitute this life. In order for there to be continuity in time, there must be a real existing entity which holds within it, so to speak, all its many experiences. Likewise, in order for two persons to be in relation with one another, they must exist as two objective, *related* things which form the poles of the relation. Finally, in order to account for the integral role of the body in the person, philosophy must move beyond pure experiential consciousness.

¹⁰³ Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 171.

Thus, in order to really do justice to the human person, we must make use of both Thomism and phenomenology. Clarke summarizes our conclusion as follows:

The interpersonal phenomenologies need the ontological grounding of dynamic substance or nature as a unified center for its many relations and its self-identity through time; Thomistic metaphysics needs to enrich the data it is seeking to explain by the more detailed concrete descriptions of the actual life of real persons provided so richly by phenomenology. A creative synthesis [is] needed.”¹⁰⁵

Wojtyła attempts to provide just such a synthesis. Having examined why such a conjoining is necessary, we must now turn our attention to the question of whether it is possible.

IS THOMISTIC PERSONALISM POSSIBLE?

While the bringing together of the medieval understanding of man as object and the modern understanding of man as subject seems to be a *necessary* enterprise, there still exists the further question of whether or not such an undertaking is actually possible. Even though we may very much want to join these two philosophies, wishing does not make it so. For this reason, we need to be very careful in examining whether a real synthesis can be made, one in which these two lines of thought actually converge in a true and fruitful way.

Fortunately for us, Wojtyła is very much aware of this issue. We have already seen at the close of the last chapter his firm stance against the practice of eclecticism, the “use [of] individual ideas drawn from different philosophies, without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical context.”¹⁰⁶ In his philosophical essays on Thomistic Personalism, also, he has indicated that there are “certain questions [which] always remain: Are these two types of understanding the human being—the cosmological and the personalistic—ultimately mutually exclusive? Where, if at all, do reduction and the disclosure of

¹⁰⁵ Clark, “Philosophical Journey.” <http://www.fordham.edu/philosophy/faculty/clarke.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, § 86.

the irreducible in the human being converge? How is the philosophy of the subject to disclose the *objectivity* of the human being in the personal *subjectivity* of this being?”¹⁰⁷ We can gather from these passages that Wojtyła was not ignorant of the potential problems posed by his particular synthetic approach.

To begin to answer the question of the possibility of Thomistic Personalism, we can first of all specify the particular kinds of philosophy we are attempting to unite. There are a number of different schools of thought that exist in both the Thomistic tradition and in phenomenology. Concerning the former, the two primary schools of the 20th century were transcendental Thomism and existential Thomism. The difference between these two is largely a matter of their stance toward the modern epistemological turn toward the subject, as inaugurated especially by Kant. According to Brian Shanley, O.P., the existential Thomists “were all in agreement that Thomistic realism entailed an absolute repudiation of the modern starting point of immanent consciousness; there could be no compromise with modernity on this point. Any epistemology that began in subjectivity was doomed to end up as some form of idealism.”¹⁰⁸ The transcendental Thomists, on the other hand, “shared [the] conviction that the contemporary relevance of Thomism required it to accept the modern turn to the subject as its starting point. The transcendental task was to show how one could begin with the immanent realm of subjectivity and still conclude to some form of epistemological and metaphysical realism that could lay claim to continuity with Aquinas.”¹⁰⁹ Transcendental Thomists accordingly focused on the a priori features of human subjectivity, which, they argued, included a spiritual dynamism towards the Absolute that required for its existence a realistic metaphysics; the existential

¹⁰⁷ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 216.

¹⁰⁸ Brian J Shanley, O.P., *The Thomist Tradition* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Thomists, on the other hand, essentially took the reality of the world for granted and focused their attention on the primacy of the act of existence in the thought of Aquinas.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Wojtyła takes his stand with the existential Thomists. One of the four pillars of the Lublin philosophical school Wojtyła helped to found is a commitment to metaphysical realism: “The most basic point of agreement among [the founders] was that we all saw realistic metaphysics, the metaphysics of concretely existing beings, as having primacy among the philosophical disciplines.”¹¹⁰ In order to avoid the dangers of an overly-subjective approach, Wojtyła does not want to begin metaphysically with the subject, but rather with the objective world. As he says at the beginning of *Love and Responsibility*,

The intention [is] to put the emphasis right at the beginning . . . [on] objectivism . . . For if we begin with a ‘subject’, especially when that subject is man, it is easy to treat everything which is outside the subject, i.e. the whole world of objects, in a purely subjective way, to deal with it only as it enters into the consciousness of a subject, establishes itself and dwells in that consciousness.”¹¹¹

This metaphysical emphasis on real existing beings is especially key to Wojtyła’s account of human action, since action flows directly from the existence of a being.¹¹²

Although he is a staunch realist, Wojtyła is nevertheless very much concerned with the irreducible interior dimensions of man-as-person. Thus, while he does not want to argue for the real existence of the world from the starting point of the experience of the subject (as the transcendental Thomists do), Wojtyła *does* want to examine the experiences of the subject, in order to incorporate them into a full account of the human being. For this purpose, Wojtyła turns to the phenomenological method.

¹¹⁰ Stefan Swiezawski, introduction to *Person and Community*, xii.

¹¹¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 21.

¹¹² See pp. 29-32.

It is important to recognize that Wojtyła treats phenomenology as a *cognitive method* for getting at the “lived experience” of the person, and not primarily as a philosophy in its own right. He certainly does not want to take the step Husserl did of separating the conscious self from reality by means of the phenomenological *epoche*, since he believes such a move leads ultimately to idealism.¹¹³ Instead, he makes use of phenomenology simply as a means of better approaching the experiences of the subject:

As long as this type of analysis of consciousness retains the character of a cognitive method, it can and does bear excellent fruit. And yet because this method is based on the exclusion (*epoche*) of consciousness from reality, from really existing being, it cannot be regarded as a philosophy of that reality, and it certainly cannot be regarded as a philosophy of the human being, the human person. At the same time, however, there can be no doubt that this method should be used extensively in the philosophy of the human being.¹¹⁴

The phenomenology that Wojtyła employs, then, is not an idealistic phenomenology in which consciousness somehow constitutes the world. It may in some ways be compared to the realistic phenomenologies of Max Scheler and Roman Ingarden, but if anything it bears closer resemblance to Husserl’s original conception of philosophy as expressed in the 1900-1901 *Logical Investigations*, in which he describes phenomenology as a “descriptive psychology.”¹¹⁵

Provided, then, that phenomenology is understood by Wojtyła in this way, namely as a method of seeing or a particular way of investigating the interior dimension of man, it does not seem that there is any inherent contradiction between his use of the phenomenological method and his commitment to existential Thomism. Granted, Thomism and phenomenology differ

¹¹³ Cf. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 301: “The aim [of *The Acting Person*] is to exclude the essentially ethical problems in favor of the anthropological ones. It is to be stressed, however, that this does not entail that the essence is distilled and separated from actual existence, so characteristic for Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological *epoche*. Thus this study does not follow the principles of a strictly eidetic method; and yet, throughout these investigations the author’s intention has been to understand man as the person, that is, to define the ‘eidos’ of the human being.”

¹¹⁴ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 226.

¹¹⁵ Cf. also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, ix: “[Phenomenology] is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing. Husserl’s first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, [was] to be a ‘descriptive psychology’, or to return to the ‘things themselves’.”

widely in emphasis, method and terminology: Thomism focuses on the objective world of real existing beings, while phenomenology focuses on the subjective world of lived experience; Thomism more readily employs deductive and inductive arguments, while phenomenology often relies upon careful description leading to insight; Thomism speaks of forms and being in an abstract way, while phenomenology uses concrete language and anecdotes drawn from life experience. Nevertheless, when used in the manner that Wojtyła proposes, these two philosophies essentially complement one another by addressing themselves to two different, though interrelated, aspects of reality, the objective and the subjective, which are joined in the human person.

It is important to remember that for Wojtyła, the subjective, conscious aspect of the person has its grounding in the really existing object that is man. Our experience itself teaches us that we are not disembodied, absolute consciousnesses, but rather *conscious beings*. It is for this reason that Wojtyła is so adamant that “phenomenological analyses . . . in the interests of the objectivity of experience, must in some way be transposed from the plane of consciousness and integrated into the full reality of the person.”¹¹⁶ Such a transposition can occur only if consciousness is recognized as one aspect (albeit an essential one) of the whole human person. If this is recognized, then we need not fear an irreparable conflict between phenomenology’s investigation of the subject and Thomism’s account of real being, since we understand that “this personal human subjectivity is a determinate *reality*: it is a reality when we strive to understand it within the *objective totality* that goes by the name *human being*.”¹¹⁷

Ultimately, Wojtyła’s synthesis is possible because the metaphysical subject and the personal subject are but two different ways of understanding one and the same human being. As

¹¹⁶ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 222.

¹¹⁷ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 216.

we stated the matter above, in man, the metaphysical always manifests itself in the personal; the first serves as the foundation, the second the flowering. We must examine the interior lived experiences of the person with the help of phenomenology, since the irreducible “can only be disclosed or revealed. *Lived experience essentially defies reduction.*”¹¹⁸ Doing so, however, leads us beyond or through phenomena to real metaphysical structures: “We thus apprehend both the essentially subjective structure of lived experience and its structural relation to the subjectivity of the human being. Phenomenological analysis thus contributes to trans-phenomenal understanding.”¹¹⁹ In the end, then, we can agree with the assessment of Stefan Swiezawski when he says that “[Wojtyła’s] aim was not to replace metaphysics with phenomenology, but to supplement metaphysical reflection with phenomenological description as a way of gaining access to the processes of knowing and acting.”¹²⁰ If nothing else, we can let the evidence speak for itself by taking a look at some of the essential insights into the human person Wojtyła achieved in his work *The Acting Person*. In this way, we can see not only that Wojtyła’s synthesis is necessary and possible, but how it is that it has been actually achieved.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹²⁰ Stefan Swiezawski, introduction to *Person and Community*, xiv.

3. Essential Aspects of Wojtyła's Philosophy of the Acting Person

We began this thesis seeking an answer to the question, *who or what is the human person*. We have seen that the concept of person has a long history in Western thought, a history that Wojtyła draws upon in his attempt to formulate an adequate philosophical anthropology. In working through his philosophy of man, we have seen that Wojtyła gives special weight to the role of human action in revealing who it is that man is. Investigation of the experience *man-acts* reveals that the person is not only a self-conscious individual but above all a self-determining individual, one who is capable of freely determining how it is that he will act, and thus of deciding who it is that he will be. The person is capable of authoring his life in this way because he is fundamentally in possession of himself. We will explore the concepts of consciousness and self-determination in more depth as we continue. At this point, however, we can give the following preliminary definition of the person according to Wojtyła:

The self is nothing other than the concrete *suppositum humanum*, which, when given to itself by consciousness (self-consciousness) in the lived experience of action, is identical with the self-possession and self-governance that comes to light as a result of the dynamics of the personal efficacy that is self-determination. The self, then, is not just self-consciousness, but it is also the self-possession and self-governance proper to a concrete human *suppositum*. These latter aspects of the self are manifested primarily through action.¹²¹

By freely acting in a way that is morally good or bad, the person actually becomes good or evil, and in this way fulfills himself, or fails to do so. Part of this process of self-fulfillment inevitably involves integrating the somewhat independent physical and emotional aspects of oneself into one's conscious actions, thereby raising these aspects to the level of the person. In addition, such action, in order to be truly fulfilling, most often involves striving together with

¹²¹ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community*, 231.

others towards a common good, a striving which Wojtyła refers to as *participation*. Together, these five concepts—consciousness, efficacy, fulfillment, integration and participation—form the core around which Wojtyła builds up his account of man. We will examine each in turn in order better to understand his philosophy of the acting person.

CONSCIOUSNESS

A proper understanding of consciousness is essential to understanding who man is as a person, for it is only through consciousness that the human being becomes a human self, a being that can say “I.” Consciousness is essentially equivalent to awareness. It is that which “interiorizes all that the human being cognizes . . . and makes it all a content of the subject’s lived experience,” thereby “endow[ing] this objectified content with the subjective dimension proper to the human being as a subject.”¹²² We are able to be aware and to experience on account of consciousness, which Wojtyła describes as having a two-fold function: mirroring and reflexivity. These functions are in turn dependent upon cognition, which Wojtyła understands as something separate and apart from consciousness itself.

In part because of his Thomistic roots, and unlike many phenomenologists, Wojtyła recognizes that consciousness is not something absolute, but rather one specific aspect of man as a rational being. According to the ancients and medievals, it is primarily through his rationality, specifically through cognition, that man is able to encounter the world. As they understand it, it is objective knowledge of things, not conscious awareness, that forms the bridge connecting the

¹²² *Ibid.*, 227.

self to other beings. For this reason, “in the Scholastic approach, the aspect of consciousness was . . . only implied and, as it were, hidden in ‘rationality.’”¹²³

Perhaps taking a page from the medieval codex, Wojtyła holds that consciousness is always dependent upon prior cognition. Cognition occurs first and provides objective knowledge of things: “it lies in the essence of a cognitive acts performed by man to investigate a thing, to objectivize it intentionally, and in this way to comprehend it.”¹²⁴ Through intellectual comprehension and “objectification,” the person is able to acquire real knowledge of the world, and not simply come to awareness of his own subjective states. In this way, prior cognition ensures that the person will not remained trapped within himself in some form of absolute consciousness, since “the meanings of things and of their relations are given to consciousness, as it were, from outside, as the product of knowledge, which in turn results from the active constitution and comprehension of the objective reality.”¹²⁵ Even knowledge of oneself is attained, according to Wojtyła, through objectivizing cognition. It is indeed one of the peculiar aspects of the human mind that it can be simultaneously both inquirer and subject of inquiry.

Once we have attained knowledge of something, consciousness then kicks in its two-fold functionality of reflection and reflexion. By reflection, Wojtyła has in mind the ‘mirroring’ function of consciousness, by which man becomes aware of the contents objectivized by cognition. Consciousness is a reflection not only “of what happens in man and of his acting,” but also “of everything that man meets with in an external relation by means of any and all of his doings . . . ‘Contained’ in [consciousness], so to speak, there is the whole man, as well as the

¹²³ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 30.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

whole world accessible to this concrete man.”¹²⁶ In this way, consciousness can be said to “illuminate” objects, in the sense of “keeping objects and their cognitive meanings ‘in the light,’ or ‘in the actual field of consciousness.’”¹²⁷ In its mirroring function, then, consciousness is essentially a “being aware.”¹²⁸ Wojtyla emphasizes, however, that, as mirroring, consciousness does not rid the cognized objects of their objectivity. This is especially important when it comes to the cognizing of the self, or self-knowledge: “The reflection or mirroring by consciousness . . . does not abolish the objective meaningful constituents of the ego or of its actions; rather, it derives them continuously from self-knowledge.”¹²⁹

According to Wojtyla, then, mirroring as the first function of consciousness provides us self-awareness, an “inner view of our actions [as well as of objects, etc.]”¹³⁰ The second function of consciousness, reflexiveness, goes beyond this in allowing us not only to have an awareness of our actions but to *experience them as our own*. The term ‘reflexiveness’ indicates a turning back to the subject so as to become aware of the subject’s experiences *as they are experienced*. The purpose of this function is made clear when we recognize that “it is one thing to *be* the subject, another to be *cognized* (that is, objectivized) as the subject, and a still different thing to *experience* one’s self as the subject of one’s own acts and experiences. (The last distinction we owe to the reflexive function of consciousness.)”¹³¹ While we are made aware of the second distinction, the cognized subject, through the function of mirroring, the third distinction, the experienced subject, is the result of reflexivity. Hence, “not only am I *conscious* of my ego (on the ground of self-knowledge [and mirroring]) but owing to my consciousness in

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

its reflexive function I also *experience* my ego, I have the experience of myself as the concrete subject of the ego's very subjectiveness."¹³² It is this reflexiveness which allows me, as a real objective being, a *humanum suppositum*, to appear before myself as an "I," a personal subject.

We can see, then, that there are three essential aspects to Wojtyła's account of how we understand and experience ourselves. The first is cognition, which provides the objects which consciousness reflects. The second is reflection or mirroring, which makes us constantly aware of these objects. The third is reflexion, which allows us to experience this awareness as our own. Simpson summarizes our account of consciousness as follows.

Self-cognition brings the self and the acts of the self to objective focus for the self (so that they are recognized as ontological realities); consciousness in its mirroring function keeps these acts, including self-cognition, present to the self or retains them in the self's own being, as it were; and consciousness in its reflexive function brings to light for the self that it is this very self.¹³³

As we alluded to above, the two-fold function of consciousness, together with cognition, allows us to maintain a foothold in reality while simultaneously being aware of ourselves as subjects, thereby fulfilling the basic premise of Thomistic Personalism. The first function of consciousness, that of mirroring, presents to the self objective contents, since it merely reflects the things which are known cognitively: "Consciousness, as long as it only mirrors and is but a reflected image, remains objectively aloof from the ego."¹³⁴ Consciousness in its second function, as reflexive, introduces the subjective experience of the self as experiencing itself. This means, then, that "the functional duality in consciousness allows us to remain within the limits of

¹³² *Ibid.*, 46 (italics mine).

¹³³ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 25.

¹³⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 47.

our subjectiveness [on account of reflexivity] without losing the actual objectiveness in the awareness of our being [on account of mirroring].”¹³⁵

While consciousness is essential to what it means to be a self, it is still not, in Wojtyła’s estimation, the most defining feature of personhood. For Wojtyła, it is the person’s capacity for self-determination that is most important. As he says, “Consciousness, and especially self-consciousness, is an indispensable condition for the constitution of the human self. Nevertheless, the real constitution of this self within the framework of the human *suppositum* ultimately takes place as a result of acts of self-determination.”¹³⁶ This priority which Wojtyła allots to self-determination flows naturally from the priority he gives to human *action* as revealing the personal subject.

EFFICACY

The starting point for Wojtyła’s reflections on efficacy and self-determination is the distinction between “man acts” and “something happens in man.” This distinction is based upon the experiential difference between consciously acting (“man acts”) and having something occur within us, usually of a physical or emotional nature (“something happens in man”). While both have the same *metaphysical* subject as their source, namely the human being as a whole totality, the first includes an element of personal efficacy or authorship that the second does not. As Wojtyła says, “When acting I have the experience of myself as the agent responsible for this particular form of the dynamization of myself as the subject. When there is something happening in me, then the dynamism is imparted without the efficacious participation of my ego.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 231.

¹³⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 66.

Wojtyła believes this distinction is directly confirmed by our experience. When I act (versus when something happens in me), I myself bring about the action as the cause, or in other words cause myself to be an actor. When the person realizes himself in this way, he is the “conscious cause of his own causation.”¹³⁸

We might note briefly at this point the way in which Wojtyła moves from the experience “I act” to its metaphysical grounding in the personal subject. He first notes that there must be a connection between the ‘I’ that manifests itself as a personal subject in action and the whole totality of the human being that forms the ontological source of that action. The first is given to us in experience directly, while the second is given more or less indirectly: “When man acts and when anything happens in him, it is first of all this concrete form of the dynamization of the man-subject that is given us experientially, whereas its [metaphysical] basis and its source are given us only indirectly, as if they came at secondhand.”¹³⁹ According to Wojtyła, the noticeable difference between these two experiences (“I act” versus “something happens in me”) indicates that they must stem from two different sources within the human being: “We may venture to guess that if the difference in the forms of the dynamism itself is so striking, then there has to be a corresponding difference in the potentialities, which means that different faculties must lie at the dynamic roots of acting and happening, of action and activation.”¹⁴⁰ In this way, Wojtyła moves by way of experience to the metaphysical distinction between the psycho-somatic dynamism of the body and the conscious dynamism of the will.

What is unique about Wojtyła’s investigation of self-determination is not only the way in which he arrives at these traditional distinctions (i.e. from the inner experience of the acting self),

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

but even more so the weight he gives to the will in determining who the person is. In freely choosing and in acting upon our choice, we demonstrate a two-fold transcendence. On the one hand, we transcend (go beyond or outside) ourselves towards real existing goods or values, which present themselves to us as desirable. This is *horizontal transcendence* which, as Simpson points out, “is to the fore in the traditional, metaphysical analysis of willing which views willing primarily as some desiring or appetite of something.”¹⁴¹

While this directedness towards objective values is an essential part of willful action, what is even more important, from the point of view of personal self-determination, is the second form of transcendence, which Wojtyła calls *vertical transcendence*. When we act in a free manner appropriate to the human person, we transcend ourselves not only in striving outwards towards other real beings, but also in standing somehow outside ourselves so as to determine what it is that we will choose. Our actions are not determined by the values set before us; rather, we freely choose which values to pursue, thereby becoming the efficacious cause or agent of our actions: “The person transcends his structural boundaries through the capacity to exercise freedom; [by] being free in the process of *acting*, and not only in the intentional [horizontal] direction of willings toward an external object.”¹⁴²

It is important to recognize that in self-determination, I am not only determining the direction of my action, but simultaneously determining myself as well. As Wojtyła says, “I am not only the efficient cause of my acts, but through them I am also in some sense the ‘creator of myself.’”¹⁴³ If I choose values which are good, i.e. values which are truly commensurate with who I am as a human being, then I myself become good. Likewise, if I choose to do evil, I

¹⁴¹ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 27.

¹⁴² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 119.

¹⁴³ Wojtyła, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in *Person and Community*, 191.

myself become evil. This capacity to freely shape our very selves is, Wojtyła believes, the defining aspect of personhood:

Human actions thus display a transcendence that is as if another name for the person. This transcendence is what brings to light the subjectivity proper to the human being. If this subjectivity is revealed through self-determination, it is because self-determination expresses the transcendent dimension of essentially human activity . . . In every action, choice and decision, [the efficacy of the person] somehow brings this subjectivity out of the dark and makes it a distinct “phenomenon” of human experience.¹⁴⁴

Our experience, it would seem, confirms Wojtyła’s insight that it is our capacity for self-determination which truly makes us persons. The essential difference between persons and all other entities is captured in the distinction between the pronouns “who” and “what.” As human beings, all of us have a determinate nature, and in this sense we are all “whats,” things in the world with a particular essence or form. As we noted in the introduction, however, each person is not simply one particular organism of the general species *homo sapiens*, or one material instantiation of the form “rational animal.” When it comes to rocks or plants, even animals (to some extent), each individual entity can be understood as simply one thing among many: for all intents and purposes, one rock is as good as the next. This does not hold for human persons, however. Each person is an utterly unique individual.

In seeking the source of this uniqueness, we must realize that it is not enough to say that each of us has our own personal history. Surely what happens to us throughout our lives plays a large role in shaping our specific personalities, as any psychologist will tell you. Nonetheless, other non-personal material things also have their own unique history of occurrences happening to them. What really distinguishes us as persons is not so much that we are part of a story, but rather that *we are active actors in this story*. We are able to freely choose what we will do, and

¹⁴⁴ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community*, 230.

by so choosing we determine who we are. In a very real way, who I am today as a unique individual is determined by the series of choices I have made throughout my life.

This does not mean, of course, that I am condemned to my past. Even though my past decisions indelibly shape who I am as a person, I still have the capacity to further change myself by choosing differently in the future. This is because I am fundamentally *free* in my decisions. As Wojtyła says, “freedom is present and manifests itself in the ability to choose . . . In choosing, the will is not cramped by the object, by the value as its end; it is the will and only the will that determines the object.”¹⁴⁵ Freedom, then, is ultimately convertible with self-determination. We are not determined to act in a certain way by the values set before us, but rather determine which values we will pursue. In doing so, however, we do not decide or determine the good of these values, but rather freely choose to pursue it.

Unlike some existentialist philosophers, then, Wojtyła does not consider freedom to be a negative indeterminism. We are not, as Sartre holds, “*condemned to be free*.”¹⁴⁶ Rather, freedom is a gift: “For [man’s] is not the freedom *from* objects or values, but, on the contrary, the freedom of, or rather *for* objects or values.”¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, we are free in order to be able to pursue what is truly good. Moreover, it is precisely because we have access to truth, because we can know objectively the value of things, that we are free to deliberately choose. As Simpson says,

Truth . . . is what releases the will from determinism by the object and enables the person precisely to be self-determining in his acts with respect to all possible objects . . . Objects of choice thus do not come to me as forces or impulses that push me into action, as it were (for that would be to bypass the will and to make my choice to be determined by the object and not to be self-determined by me); they come to me as things with a determinate known value that can be compared with other things according to that same

¹⁴⁵ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 132.

¹⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 186 (italics mine).

¹⁴⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 132.

known value. Truth, the cognized truth of the object, mediates the object and the will so that values do not compel but are freely responded to by the will.¹⁴⁸

This human capacity to know the truth and thus to freely choose—or not choose—the good puts us in the paradoxical position of being the only entities in the world capable of not being what we are. Every other created thing acts strictly according to its nature. Only we human beings, because of our ability to be self-determining, can act in ways fundamentally opposed to our nature. Conversely, we can choose to act in ways that are in keeping with the kind of beings we are. It is only when we do so that we find true happiness, or fulfillment.¹⁴⁹

FULFILLMENT

Following Aquinas, Wojtyła holds that there exist real objective goods which correspond to our nature as rational animals. In one sense, all things which I desire are good, since I desire them precisely because they are good. Nonetheless, there is a definite hierarchy to the goods which I desire: while food is a real good for man (who is a rational *animal*), knowledge is an even greater good, both objectively and for man himself (who is a *rational* animal). Generally speaking, everything which we pursue in action we pursue because we believe it to be something good. Just because we *think* it is good, however, does not mean that it really is. For this reason, we must make the distinction between real goods and apparent goods. As Ralph McInerny puts it, “A real good is something I pursue as perfective or fulfilling of me and that really would perfect or fulfill me if I had it. An apparent good, by contrast, is an end pursued as perfective or fulfilling of me that, if had, really would not perfect or fulfill me.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Clarke captures this notion well in *Person and Being*, 51: “It is as though the basic moral law were ‘*Be* fully what you in fact *are*,’ or better: “*Become* fully what you already *are*, in the deepest, most authentic longing of your nature.”

¹⁵⁰ Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 2.

We come to knowledge of what is truly good through experience, in particular through conscience. We discover in conscience the existence of moral norms, which are objective laws about how it is that we should act. According to Wojtyła, “The function of the conscience consists in distinguishing the element of moral good in the action and in releasing and forming a sense of duty with respect to this good. The *sense of duty is the experiential form of the reference to (or dependence on) the moral truth*, to which the freedom of the person is subordinate.”¹⁵¹ In our conscience, in other words, we experience a certain movement of the will to act or not act in a certain way. This is the experiential correlative of the objective value of certain goods which we know to be true goods. Norms express the truth about these goods in the form of a command or prohibition. In this way, “In each of his actions the human person is eyewitness [to] the transition from the ‘is’ to the ‘should’—the transition from ‘X is truly good’ to ‘I should do X.’”¹⁵²

We should not think of these moral norms as being somehow external or foreign to conscience. It is true that conscience does not create norms but rather discovers them. Nonetheless, because the person is fundamentally oriented toward truth, once conscience discovers that the norms are themselves true (i.e. correspond to the real good of the person), it accepts them as its own. As Simpson says, “Once the norms are acknowledged as true by conscience, they are no longer external. They become internal and form and create personal freedom. The hostile pressure of rules forcibly imposed is dissolved when these rules are seen by the self through conscience as true and good.”¹⁵³

The fact that man is in possession of himself, as evidenced by his ability for self-determination, means that ultimately he is morally responsible for what he does. If it is truly I

¹⁵¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 156.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁵³ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 31.

who act, than it is I who am responsible for my actions. Given the capacity we have to know the truth of moral norms through conscience, we are fundamentally responsible also for the truth of our actions, that is, we are responsible for whether or not our actions correspond to values that are truly good for us. Moreover, as the ones who act, we are responsible for this truthfulness not to some external authority but above all to ourselves. We are thus both responsible *for* ourselves and *to* ourselves: “Conscience judges this truthfulness and so stands as judge over my acting—condemning if the action is not truthful and approving if it is. Thus, just as a person is the one who . . . possesses and is possessed by himself, so also is he the one who answers to himself in responsibility for himself. His actions are his own and as his own he judges them.”¹⁵⁴

Wojtyła’s account of the internalization of moral norms through conscience cuts a middle path between an overly subjective and an overly objective ethics, thereby fulfilling the basic program of Thomistic Personalism. Wojtyła demonstrates that the person needs objective truth in order to be a responsible subject. Autonomous freedom alone is not enough, nor is objective truth not yet made our own. If we are to be truly happy, i.e. truly fulfilled, then we must unite freedom with truth: “Freedom alone, as expressed in the simple ‘I may but I need not,’ does not seem to be rendering man happy in itself . . . Thus felicity has to be identified not with the availability of freedom as such but *with the fulfillment of freedom through truth.*”¹⁵⁵

INTEGRATION

As we demonstrated at length in the first chapter, the human person is a being composed of body and soul. The central aspects of personhood we have examined thus far, namely self-consciousness and self-determination, are essentially spiritual qualities. In addition to the

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 175.

spiritual, however, there also exist in man material and quasi-material qualities which are related to the body, namely the physical and the emotional. If we are to have a holistic understanding of the person, these elements need to be given their place within the structure of personal self-determination.

While the somatic and the psychical have their own dynamisms which operate separate and apart from that of the will, they can and must nevertheless be integrated into the whole person. This occurs when they are “brought within the scope of, and subordinated to, self-determination. This is what is meant by integration and only in integration do these powers take on the meaning and quality proper to personal existence.”¹⁵⁶ Through integration, the “I act” is harmonized with the “something happens in me,” such that the second aids, rather than opposes, the first. It is only by developing virtue that such integration can occur.

We can think of integration as the natural corollary of the vertical transcendence which is proper to the person. Man both possesses himself and is possessed, determines himself and is determined. The first is the work of transcendence, the second of integration. According to Wojtyła, “without integration transcendence remains, as it were, suspended in a kind of structural void . . . For there is no governing of oneself without subjecting and subordinating oneself to this governance; neither is it possible to have *active* possession of oneself without a *passive* response in the dynamic structure of the person.”¹⁵⁷ The need for integration demonstrates once again, then, that man is both a personal subject (efficacious actor) and metaphysical subject (source of various dynamizations). If he is to be fully whole rather than disintegrated or disjointed, he must harmonize these two poles within himself.

¹⁵⁶ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 33.

¹⁵⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 190.

When examining the role of the body and the emotions in the life and actions of the person, it is perhaps better to use the terms ‘somatic’ and ‘psychical’ rather than physical and emotional. These terms refer specifically to the bodily functions and feelings as they enter into the lived experience of the person. These two aspects are, in fact, interrelated, in as much as “the psychical functions are conditioned by the sum total of the somatic functions.”¹⁵⁸ While psychical occurrences are “not in themselves bodily or material . . . at the same time [they] show some dependence on the body, some somatic conditioning.”¹⁵⁹

To begin first with the somatic, we may note with Wojtyła that it is the body which gives man his concreteness and places him among the rest of created nature. The body is also the means of the person’s manifestation or expression, as well as “the territory and means for the performance of action.”¹⁶⁰ Somatic dynamizations are primarily vegetative and reproductive, and occur in an instinctual and often unconscious manner. As Wojtyła says, “The body activates itself according to the inner design and purpose of vegetation and reproduction; the character of this activation of the human body is reactive.”¹⁶¹ As such, bodily occurrences are not in and of themselves dependent upon the self-determination of the person (digestion occurs, for example, whether we will it or not).

While these functions operate on their own, so to speak, they are nonetheless related to the person: “Obviously, the human body does not constitute a separate subject standing apart from the subject that is the man-person.”¹⁶² These bodily operations make possible the person’s acts of bodily self-determination. As such, it remains possible for us to train and develop them to

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 34.

¹⁶¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 210.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 211.

some extent. For this reason, “We may say that at the moment of self-determination man puts into operation the reactive dynamism of the body and in this way makes use of it, or, putting it differently, that at the moment of self-determination he consciously uses it by taking part in its operations.”¹⁶³ Over the course of our lives and through the acquisition of habit, we learn to use or work with our bodies in order to achieve our own ends.

Often times, however, the body seems to have its own specific ends, separate and apart from our own, toward which it directs us by way of the instincts. These instincts indicate the implicit goals of human nature, which are in and of themselves basically good. The instinct for self-preservation, for example, points to the basic good of existence. This does not mean, however, that our instincts cannot be distorted, or weigh upon us in a manner disproportionate to their true importance. It often happens, in fact, that we are forced to consciously will against our instincts in order to pursue a greater good (e.g. putting our own life in danger in order to save the life of another). Nonetheless, the important point to realize in this matter is that “the significance of instincts in the person derives first of all from . . . the outcome of the objective value of the ends, to which man is urged and directed by instincts.”¹⁶⁴ Instincts thus often point the way toward objective values, although it is up to us to determine the true worth of those values in the context of the situation and our greatest good.

Shifting our attention now to the psyche, we may note that the emotions also are essentially related to values. Drawing on his study of Scheler’s phenomenology, Wojtyła holds that emotions have a certain “spontaneous sensitivity to values,” which is indicated by our spontaneous feelings of attraction toward good and repulsion from evil.¹⁶⁵ The very etymology

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

of the word emotion, in fact, indicates this sense of being moved by external values (from the Latin *ex-movere*, to be moved from outside). In addition to this sensitivity to values, the emotions also play a role in concentrating or heightening our experiences. While they are essentially related to the body, they simultaneously transcend the material: “If we ascertain in man not only a feeling of his body or of bodies in general . . . but also some aesthetic, religious, or moral feelings, then we also have evidence that the emotive element in him somehow corresponds to what is spiritual and not merely sensual.”¹⁶⁶

It is important to realize that, just as with instincts, emotive responses to values are not enough. As rational beings, we have the ability not only to feel but to actively discern truth, including the truthfulness of certain values (is this really good for me?). If we were simply to follow our feelings, we would not be truly self-determining. In order to be true to who we are as persons, then, we cannot simply give ourselves over to instinct or emotion. These aspects of ourselves must instead be understood as “raw material” for the will, to be integrated into the whole person.

Even though the claims of emotion must be evaluated in terms of truthfulness, this does not mean that feelings do not have their own special role to play in the life of the person. Because of their intensity, it can often be difficult to integrate them into the self. As Simpson says, “This synthesis can require effort and it can fail. Emotion can take over from the will and freedom in the determination of action and can lead to subjectivism, the dominance of subjectivity over efficacy. In extreme cases there can be a loss of responsibility, whether partial or even total, for what is done.”¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the very intensity or concentration of experience which emotions bring can and should be brought to the aid of the acting person. Efficacy and

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

¹⁶⁷ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 36.

emotion should go together. To quote Simpson again, “emotions, with all their richness and vividness, should enhance the experience of value and the exercise of self-determination. The person in his acting should be [not only] an actor, but a full-blooded actor.”¹⁶⁸

The process of integrating our somatic urges and psychical responses requires the practice of virtue. The emotions, especially, must be subordinated to the conscious acting of the person. This does not mean that we should suppress our feelings. Rather, we should make use of natural emotive energy to aid us in choosing the good, for “when properly assimilated this energy adds considerably to the energy of the will itself, [which] is precisely the task of proficiency.”¹⁶⁹ By choosing to follow our conscience and freely choose the good, we develop a disposition or readiness to continue to do so in the future. Our emotions, also, are caught up in this general habit of proclivity toward the good: “For, as this integration with truth and self-determination progresses, emotions in their spontaneous moves of attraction and repulsion becomes sources for a spontaneous movement of the will itself toward real good and away from real bad.”¹⁷⁰

Incidentally, this capacity of ours for integration, for taking up the material and quasi-material elements of the body and the emotions into the spiritual movements of the soul, indicates that we are not only material but also immaterial beings. As Simpson says, “something purely material could not spiritualize the material like this.”¹⁷¹ This is a fine example of Wojtyła’s efforts at ‘trans-phenomenalism,’ his attempt to move from and by way of personal experience to metaphysical insight.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 253.

¹⁷⁰ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 36.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

PARTICIPATION

Up until this point, we have focused primarily upon the structure and actions of the individual subject. The investigation of the individual person makes up the bulk of Wojtyła's reflections in *The Acting Person*. The human being, however, is by nature a social animal, as Aristotle recognized long ago. Each of us is born into a community of persons, and virtually all of us spend our lives in constant interaction with others. An adequate account of the acting person, therefore, must also take into account the person's acting together with others, or what Wojtyła calls *participation*.

Participation is based upon the basic premise that man should always act in a way that is in accordance with who he is as a person, i.e. a self-possessing being capable of self-determination. Man's acting in this way is a fundamental good which Wojtyła refers to as the *personalistic value*. While moral value stems from whether or not an action is in accord with the governing moral norm (as internalized through conscience, of course), "the personalistic value, on the other hand, inheres in the performance of the action by the person, in the very fact that man acts in a manner appropriate to him, that self-determination thus authentically inheres in the nature of his acting and the transcendence of the person is realized through his acting."¹⁷² According to Wojtyła, this value is the basic manifestation of the intrinsic worth of the person himself.

When acting together with others, man only achieves true participation if he retains the personalistic value of his own action while also fully entering into the communal action he is participating in. As Simpson says, "His acting with others should be both a sharing in the realization and results of this acting together and, at the same time, should be his own acting and

¹⁷² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 264.

should really be an actualizing of his own self-determination.”¹⁷³ In acting together with others, then, man must choose what is also chosen by others, but must do so in an authentic manner by making the action truly his own. In this way he is not coerced or determined in his acting with others but freely chooses to participate in the pursuit of a common good.

The theory of participation has important implications for the way that communities and societies are structured. One way of understanding the goal of participation is as attempting to simultaneously maintain the value of both the individual and the community. As Wojtyła puts it, the question is “how to create a system of relations between the individual and society that results in the fullest possible correlation between the person’s true good and the common good that society naturally seeks.”¹⁷⁴

Wojtyła’s statements about participation are clearly born out of his experience of living under a Communist system. He is very much concerned to protect the value and rights of the individual over and against that of a threatening collective. At the same time, however, he also recognizes that true community is a good, one which not only should be pursued, but which actually has the right to make demands upon the individual. The dangers of failing to act in a participatory way, then, are two-fold: on the one hand, the individual can be inordinately subordinated to the community, which results in what Wojtyła calls totalism; on the other hand, the community can be inordinately subordinated to the individual, which results in individualism. Both are extremes to the mean of participation. Totalism limits the individual in such a way as to prevent him from choosing the good within his own act of freedom, thereby making him less than fully self-determining. Individualism, conversely, prevents man from truly acting together with others, for the others are understood as preventing him from pursuing his own good. Thus,

¹⁷³ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community*, 174.

“each of the two systems or trends . . . tends in different ways to limit participation either directly, as a possibility or an ability to be actualized in acting ‘together with others’ [as in individualism] or indirectly, as that feature which is of the essence of the person and which corresponds to his existing ‘together with others,’ his living in a community [as in totalism].”¹⁷⁵

What is lacking in these systems is true community, and *a fortiori*, true *communio*. True community exists when people actually act in a participatory way. *Communio*, meanwhile, occurs when the other with whom I act ceases to be simply an other and becomes a thou: “*Communio* . . . is essentially an *I-other* relationship inwardly maturing into an interpersonal *I-thou* relationship.”¹⁷⁶ This *I-thou* relationship comes into being through a mutual revelation or gift of self, a gift which can only occur within a true community. By means of such self-revelation, community naturally deepens into *communio*.

It is only by forming a *communio personarum* that man can attain his fullest fulfillment. According to Wojtyła, “In interpersonal *I-thou* relationships, the partners . . . not only unveil themselves before one another in the truth of their personal reality, but they . . . also accept and affirm one another in that truth.”¹⁷⁷ *Communio* thus becomes another name for love, and Wojtyła does not hesitate to say that this is the highest goal and good of man, that for which both the individual and the community exist. In the words of *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in a passage Wojtyła was to quote time and again as pope, “Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 273.

¹⁷⁶ Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?” in *Person and Community*, 204.

¹⁷⁷ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community” in *Person and Community*, 245.

¹⁷⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 24.

Conclusion: Application and Development

*Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it . . . In this dimension [the dimension of love] man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity.*¹⁷⁹

As we bring our investigation of Thomistic Personalism to a close, we ought to take a moment to note some of the ways in which Wojtyła applies and develops his account of the acting person in the sphere of love and sexuality. Throughout his life, Wojtyła found himself deeply drawn to the beauty of human love, in particular to the love which arises between man and woman. As he says in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, “As a young priest, I learned to love human love. This has been one of the fundamental themes of my priesthood . . . If one loves human love, there naturally arises the need to commit oneself completely to the service of ‘fair love,’ because love is fair, it is beautiful.”¹⁸⁰ Among countless other ways, Wojtyła committed himself intellectually to this task in his important work on Catholic sexual ethics, *Love and Responsibility*, in which he presents a holistic vision of love and sexuality based upon a personalist framework.

Love cannot exist but between two persons, two self-possessing and self-determining beings; for only if one is in possession of himself can he give himself away. For this reason, in committing himself to “the service of fair love,” Wojtyła simultaneously committed himself anew to the study of the person, albeit in another, different, further dimension. Ultimately, Wojtyła believed, we must attempt to understand the human person in terms of love, because it is love alone which reveals the meaning of the person.

¹⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, § 10.

¹⁸⁰ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994), 123.

This phrase, “love reveals the meaning of the person,” can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, we can *begin* with the experience of love and investigate it in all its fullness, and thereby come to know, by means of this investigation, all those aspects of man which are truly defining of his personhood. According to Wojtyła, “the experience of love, properly understood, remains a simple and universal gateway through which everyone can pass in order to gain an awareness of what makes a person a human being: reason, affection and freedom.”¹⁸¹ In this way, love can serve as the basis for coming to understand the full meaning of the person. On the other hand, we can instead first endeavor to develop a comprehensive philosophical anthropology of man as both metaphysical and personal subject (as we have attempted to do in this thesis), and from there work our way up, so to speak, to the level of love as the highest end and good of man, that which most perfectly fulfills him and in this sense most fully reveals who he is. As Wojtyła states elsewhere, “Love is the fullest realization of the possibilities inherent in man . . . The person finds in love the greatest possible fullness of being, of objective existence. Love is an activity, a deed which develops the existence of the person to its fullest.”¹⁸² Love can and does serve, then, in a double capacity, as both the source and summit of our understanding of the human person.

If we take a look at Wojtyła’s work *Love and Responsibility*, we can see a number of different ways that he applies his general philosophy of Thomistic Personalism to the specific field of sexual morality. To begin with, we can observe with Wojtyła that, “In dealings between persons of different sexes, and especially in the sexual relationship, the woman is always the object of activity on the part of a man, and the man the object of activity on the part of the

¹⁸¹ John Paul II, Address to Members of the Pontifical John Paul Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, May 31, 2001, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010531_istituto-jp-ii_en.html, § 2 (accessed April 28, 2009).

¹⁸² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 82.

woman.”¹⁸³ In one sense, of course, this is right and proper; we cannot help but interact with others in our lives, and when we do so these others become the focus or object of our actions, either directly or indirectly. There is a danger in this, however, inasmuch as the person cannot ever be reduced to a pure object of use. As we have demonstrated at length above, man-as-person is not simply an object in the world but above all a subject, and as such is *dominus sui*, or master of himself. Each of us is in possession of free will and therefore capable of self-determination. This makes us essentially “*alteri incommunicabilis* – not capable of transmission, not transferable . . . The incommunicable, the *inalienable*, in a person is intrinsic to that person’s inner self, to the power of self determination, free will. *No one else can want for me*. No one can substitute his act of will for mine.”¹⁸⁴ The incommunicable is thus another name for *personalistic value*, the intrinsic worth each of us possesses as a personal being.

Because man is essentially self-determining, he can never be used as a mere means to another’s end. As Wojtyła says, “This is precluded by the very nature of personhood, by what any person is.”¹⁸⁵ We have already seen a similar claim made by Wojtyła in light of the danger of totalism: according to the principle of participation, when acting together with others, man must always be permitted to act in a freely self-determining manner. In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła applies this same principle to the situation in which one person is the object of another’s actions. According to Wojtyła, the personalistic value intrinsic in each of us reveals a deeper personalistic norm which should always govern our actions with others: “This norm, in its negative aspect, states that the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form the

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

personalistic norm confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.”¹⁸⁶ One preliminary way in which we might understand love, then, is as the opposite of use. Conversely, we might say that love is the affirmation of the value of the person: “love for a person must consist in affirmation that the person has a value higher than that of an object for consumption or use.”¹⁸⁷

In the sphere of sexuality, however, the tendency to treat another person as an object of use is much greater than it is in other situations. This doubtless stems from the fact that physical and emotional pleasure is often at its most intense during interactions between the two sexes.¹⁸⁸ At any rate, we can safely say that “the sexual relationship presents more opportunities than most other activities for treating a person – sometimes even without realizing it – as an object of use.”¹⁸⁹ In order to prevent such objectification, Wojtyła believes, the individuals involved must seek joint fulfillment in a common good; for “when two different people consciously choose a common aim this puts them on a footing of equality, and precludes the possibility that one of them might be subordinated to the other,” since both are “subordinated to that good which constitutes their common end.”¹⁹⁰

For a man and a woman, the common good to which they must subordinate themselves is the good of marriage, which includes not only the family they bring into being in and through their love but also the continual deepening of their own relationship. While in spousal love the other person is “the proper source of various forms of pleasure, or even of delight,” each person

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁸⁸ *Cf. ibid.*, 32: “It is necessary here to call attention to the particular richness, variety and intensity of those emotional-affective experiences and states which occur when the object of activity is a person of the opposite sex. They then color this activity in a specific way and make it an extraordinarily vivid experience . . . This is why the second meaning of the verb ‘to use’ [= enjoy] looms particularly large in this area of activity.”

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

involved in this love must not act in such a way as to isolate such pleasure (for that would be to turn the other into an object of use), but must rather constantly direct themselves toward the two-fold objective good of procreation and unity.¹⁹¹ We can see here the influence of Thomism on Wojtyła's thought in the strict objectivism of his ethics: we are to pursue real goods as fulfilling of us and not simply subjective pleasures, which will never make us truly happy. We can see also the influence of personalism insofar as Wojtyła recognizes the unity of persons as a legitimate good on equal par with procreation and the continuation of the species: there is thus both a cosmological and a personal value to the sexual act.

The role of integration which we addressed in the previous chapter is especially important in the realm of sexuality. As we noted above, the physical drives and emotional experiences tied up with the interaction between man and woman are particularly strong; as such, there arises a greater need than usual to integrate them into the self-determining actions of the persons. According to Wojtyła, sexual attraction manifests itself in us in such a powerful way because it directs us to objective values which are in themselves very good. One of the primary values toward which the sexual instinct or urge points us is the basic good of existence:

The proper end of the urge, the end *per se*, is something supra-personal, the existence of the species *Homo*, the constant prolongation of its existence . . . Existence is the first and basic good for every creature. The existence of the species *Homo* is the first and basic good for that species. All other goods derive from this basic good.¹⁹²

In addition, sexual attraction points to the value of unity and complementarity: "Sexual attraction makes obvious the fact that the attributes of the two sexes are complementary, so that a man and a woman can complete each other . . . The urge to mutual completion which accompanies this division [of the sexes] indicates that the attributes of each sex possess some specific value for the

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 51.

other.”¹⁹³ As with other physical instincts and emotions, then, the sexual urge and sexual attraction manifest a sensitivity and directedness toward values. It is up to the person, however, to realize the truth of these values and to make them his or her own.

Integration in the sexual realm can be a difficult process. For most of us there exists a greater tendency in this area to simply “let ourselves go,” to hand ourselves over to our drives and emotions, so to speak, and thereby relinquish responsibility for our actions. To do so, however, is to act as less than what we are: “A subject endowed with an ‘inner self’ as man is, a subject who is a person, cannot abandon to instinct the whole responsibility for the use of the sexual urge, and make enjoyment his sole aim – but must assume full responsibility for the way in which the sexual urge is used.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, as persons, we cannot simply remain within the (sensual and sentimental) experience of love, but must endeavor to go further so as to develop virtue: “love as experience should be subordinated to love as virtue – so much so that without love as virtue there can be no fullness in the experience of love.”¹⁹⁵ As we have seen in the last chapter, the development of virtue is the goal of integration. Through virtue, the sexual urge and the emotions connected with it become the raw material for truly personal love, that is, for the love which properly arises between two *persons*.

What is it that comprises true personal love? We have already discovered two aspects Wojtyła believes are essential to this kind of love, namely the willingness to never make the other an object of use, and the affirmation of the essential value of the other. We might add, to begin with, that love contains also an essential element of attraction, which is a certain spontaneous response to the values another person presents. In attraction, we experience the

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

feeling of being drawn outside ourselves toward the good we encounter in another. Wojtyła is careful to note, however, that this attraction, to be authentic, must be an attraction to the whole person:

The attraction must never be limited to partial values, to something which is inherent in the person but is not the person as a whole. There must be a direct attraction to the person: in other words, response to particular qualities inherent in a person must go with a simultaneous response to the qualities of the person as such, an awareness that a person as such is a value, and not merely attractive because of certain qualities which he or she possesses.¹⁹⁶

In this way, attraction is connected with the affirmation of the personalistic value of the other. Only when it is joined to personal affirmation does attraction do justice to the other as a holistic totality which cannot be reduced to a mere collection of attributes.

In addition to being essentially connected to affirmation, love as attraction is also somewhat related to love as desire. Desire stems from the fact that, as creatures, we are essentially contingent beings: “the human person is a limited being, not self sufficient and therefore – putting it in the most objective way – needs other beings.”¹⁹⁷ Love as desire “originates in a need and aims at finding a good which it lacks. For a man, that good is a woman, for a woman, it is a man.”¹⁹⁸ Desire thus serves as the opposite of attraction: in attraction the object draws us out of ourselves by its inherent value; in desire, conversely, we attempt to draw the object to us as fulfilling a real need. In love between man and woman, desire manifests itself primarily in the sexual urge, which, as we have seen, must be integrated into personal love: “The subject in love is conscious of [desire’s] presence, knows that it is there at his or her disposal so

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

to speak, but working to perfect this love, will see to it that desire does not dominate, does not overwhelm all else that love comprises.”¹⁹⁹

In *Person and Being*, Clarke makes the insightful observation that we interact with others not only because we are limited and contingent, and so in need of the goods which others possess, but also because we have our own goods which we naturally desire to share:

For Aquinas, finite, created being pours over naturally into action for *two* reasons: (1) because it is *poor*, i.e., lacking the fullness of existence, and so strives to enrich itself as much as its nature allows from the richness of those around it; but (2) even more profoundly because it is *rich*, endowed with its own richness of existence, however slight this may be, which it tends naturally to communicate and share with others.²⁰⁰

At the level of the person, this desire to communicate the good manifests itself as good will, which is an essential aspect of personal love. As Wojtyła says, “It is not enough to long for a person as a good for oneself, one must also, and above all, long for that person’s good.”²⁰¹ Love as desire is simply not enough, for true love between persons cannot be purely self-interested (as this will inevitably lead to the degradation of the person as an object of use) but must be selfless: “not [only] ‘I long for you as a good’ but [also] ‘I long for your good.’”²⁰²

Goodwill forms the basis for the development of friendship, and it is only in friendship that love can develop into a true reciprocal relationship. As Wojtyła points out, love as attraction or desire, and even love as affirmation, still remains essentially internalized within one person, albeit as directed outward toward another. Yet personal love is love *between* two persons: it is a ‘we’ and not simply two separate ‘I’s. For this reason, reciprocity “requires us to consider the love of man and woman not so much as the love of each for the other but rather as something which exists *between* them . . . Love is not just something *in* the man and something *in* the

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

²⁰⁰ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 10.

²⁰¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 83.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

woman – for in that case there would properly speaking be two loves – but is something common to them.”²⁰³

Reciprocity is achieved through the characteristic “doubling of the self” which occurs in true friendship. If I desire a good for you just as I desire it for myself, and you desire the same for me, then there comes to be in our relationship virtually no distinction between our separate selves: we become, as it were, a single subject of action. As Wojtyła says, “my ‘I’ and your ‘I’ form a moral unity, for the will is equally well inclined to both of them, so that *ipso facto* your ‘I’ necessarily becomes in some sense mine, lives within my ‘I’ as well as within itself.”²⁰⁴ On the basis of goodwill, then, there is brought about a union of wills such that two ‘I’s become a single ‘we’.

Based upon these reflections, it is clear that the will, or self-determination, is the most essential aspect not only of the person but also of personal love. At the same time, however, we must remember that man is not a disembodied will, but a concrete body-soul totality, a metaphysical whole which includes the physical and the emotional. We have demonstrated that from this hylomorphic constitution stems the need for integration, the need to elevate and sublimate the somatic and psychical dynamisms into the actions of the persons. Yet it is not simply the case that our bodily drives and emotions must be subordinated to the good of the will. The will itself is also in some sense in need of these elements, especially of emotion. In man, who is both subject and object, the subjective warmth of the emotions must complement the objective determinations of the will:

Friendship, however, needs to be thrown into relief in a subject, needs so to speak a subjective accent . . . A mere bilateral and reciprocal ‘I want what is good for you’, although it is the nucleus of friendship, remains so to speak suspended in a vacuum if it is

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

deprived of the emotional warmth which sympathy supplies. Emotion by itself is no substitute for this 'I want what is good for you', but divorced from emotion that wish is cold and incommunicable.²⁰⁵

Like the person, then, true personal love must include both an objective and a subjective dimension. It needs to be grounded in the practice of virtue and the choosing of real goods; yet it must also be grounded in the concrete subject-hood of the person with all his physical and emotional aspects. Experience teaches us that if either dimension is lacking, so too is love, for love must be an integrated whole.

As worthy a love as integrated friendship is, according to Wojtyła, it is still not the highest form of love. True love between a man and a woman must include elements of affirmation, attraction, desire and goodwill. Yet there exists a level of love beyond all these which Wojtyła refers to as *betrothed love*. The defining characteristic of this love is self-donation:

Betrothed love differs from all the aspects or forms of love analyzed hitherto. Its decisive character is the giving of one's own person (to another). The essence of betrothed love is self-giving, the surrender of one's 'I'. This is something different from and more than attraction, desire or even goodwill . . . When betrothed love enters into [an] interpersonal relationship something more than friendship results: two people give themselves each to the other.²⁰⁶

At first glance, this notion of self-donation or self-gift seems rather incomprehensible in light of the inalienable, incommunicable nature of the person we have elucidated above. As we have stressed time and again, the person, as an intrinsically self-possessing being, cannot be reduced to an object for another. For this reason, "in the natural order it makes no sense to speak of a person giving himself or herself to another . . . The person as such cannot be someone else's property, as though it were a thing."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Yet, “what is impossible and illegitimate in the natural order . . . can come about in the order of love.”²⁰⁸ We are dealing here with a real mystery in the order of being, but one which each of us has nonetheless experienced firsthand. Christ gave voice to this great paradox when he said, “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will gain it.”²⁰⁹ Christ indicates here the mysterious nature of the gift of self: it is mysterious not only in that it is a real *possibility* for the human person, but even more so in that it is a *necessity* in order to attain the fullness of life. Self-donation is thus “doubly paradoxical: firstly in that it is possible to step outside one’s own ‘I’ in this way, and secondly in that the ‘I’ far from being destroyed or impaired as a result is enlarged and enriched.”²¹⁰ Wojtyła refers to this mystery as “the law of *ekstasis*,” according to which the lover “‘goes outside’ the self to find a fuller existence in another.”²¹¹ While this law is not limited to the love which arises between husband and wife, the nuptial love of spouses nonetheless makes manifest in the most integrated way the gift of self that is proper to this highest form of personal love.

Ultimately, then, what we have identified as the essence of both the person and personal love – namely, self-determination – gives way to, or better yet, is transcended by, self-gift. In the final analysis, we are given the capacity of self-possession in order to be able to truly give ourselves away. Only in doing so can we achieve the highest form of love, and only in doing so can we be truly fulfilled. What is the essence of the self? To transcend the self in love of another.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Luke 17:33.

²¹⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 97.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. ed. G.P. Goold. trans. Hugh Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library ed. London: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Aristotle. *On the Soul*. trans. Hippocrates Apostle. Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1981.
- Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*. trans. Jonathon Barnes. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Aquinas. *De ente et essentia*. trans. Armand Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968.
- Aquinas. *De potentia*. London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, Ltd., 1932.
- Aquinas. *Quaestiones disputatae De unione Verbi Incarnati*. Ed. E. Alarcón. Electronically published at www.corpusthomisticum.org.
- Aquinas. *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*. ed. E. Alarcón. Electronically published at www.corpusthomisticum.org.
- Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Trans. Anton C. Pegis. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947.
- Aquinas. *Scriptum super Sententiis*. Electronically published at www.corpusthomisticum.org.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Touchstone, 1996.
- Clarke, W. Norris. "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in 20th Century Thomism." Paper presented at the Fordham Philosophy Colloquium, New York, January 19, 2007.
- Clarke, W. Norris. *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- Clarke, W. Norris. *Person and Being*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006.
- Clark, W. Norris. "Philosophical Journey."
<http://www.fordham.edu/philosophy/faculty/clarke.htm>

- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Volume IV: Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Leibniz*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method*. trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998
- Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- Gallagher, Timothy. *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966.
- Geddes, Leonard. "Person." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm>.
- Gilson, Etienne. *Being and Some Philosophers*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952.
- Gilson, Etienne. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (Book I)*. trans. F. Kersten. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.
- John Paul II, Address to Members of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, May 31, 2001.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010531_istituto-jp-ii_en.html.
- John Paul II. *Fides et Ratio*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998.
- John Paul II. "Perennial philosophy of St. Thomas for the youth of our times." *Angelicum* 57 (1980): 139.
- John Paul II. *Redemptor Hominis*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1979.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Summa of the Summa*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990.
- Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1. trans. G.S. Fraser. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001.
- Marcel, Gabriel. *The Philosophy of Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press, 2002.
- McInerny, Ralph. *Ethica Thomistica*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. Colin Smith. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. trans. A.L Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Phelan, Gerard. "The Existentialism of St. Thomas." In *Selected Papers*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967.
- Pieper, Josef. *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. *Introduction to Christianity*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.
- Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1965.
- Shanley, Brian. *The Thomist Tradition*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.
- Simpson, Peter. "The Definition of Person: Boethius Revisited." *New Scholasticism* 62 (1988): 210-220.
- Simpson, Peter. *On Karol Wojtyła*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001.
- Swiezawski, Stefan. Introduction to *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: ix-xvi.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. "On the concept of person." *Communio* 13 (Spring, 1986): 18-26.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *The Acting Person*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *Love and Responsibility*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "The Human Person and Natural Law." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 181-185.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "On The Dignity of the Human Person." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 177-179.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 73-92.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "Participation or Alienation?" In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 197-207.

Wojtyła, Karol. "The Person: Subject and Community." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 219-261.

Wojtyła, Karol. "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 187-195.

Wojtyła, Karol. "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 209-217.

Wojtyła, Karol. "Thomistic Personalism." In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*. trans. Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: 165-175.