

The Place of Thomism in the Anthropology of K. Wojtyła

The philosophical work of K. Wojtyła, presently Pope John Paul II, which has appeared in books and articles (including those still awaiting publication) has and continues to evoke discussion. Among other things, these discussions concern the problem of how his work should be placed within the context of the various trends of philosophy. The scientific activity of Card. K. Wojtyła in the field of philosophy was concentrated in two areas: ethics (for more than 25 years the Author was the director of the Chair of Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin) and philosophical anthropology.

Generally considered, there are three positions sketched out in this article, but it must be emphasized that the adherents of these philosophical positions have, in the course of time, altered them. These positions designate the thought of Card. K. Wojtyła as belonging to: a) Thomism, b) phenomenology, c) a synthesis of both of these currents.

For me there is no doubt that the core of K. Wojtyła's philosophy, without taking into account its later modifications, is based upon the foundations of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. It began with a youthful fascination with the philosophy of St. Thomas, to which he gave expression, for example, in a letter from Rome where he was studying: « I think that there are many things which can be said about Thomistic studies... This entire system is not only something immensely wise, but also something immensely beautiful, which enraptures the mind. In addition, it speaks simplicity. It is readily apparent that thought and depth do not stand in need of many words. One

could even say that the deeper something is, the less it will require words »⁽¹⁾.

This is not only a fascination of his youth which he got over later. His later scientific works, published and unpublished, bear powerful witness to this. In these works he repeatedly declares the value of Thomism and that he is making this system the basis for his own work. Such declarations are repeated throughout the whole period of Card. K. Wojtyła's creative activity, although at the same time there appears in his works, constantly more frequently and clearly, the opinion that Thomism is not enough (at least in its present form). At the same time he says that Thomism is open to at least some analyses of modern and contemporary philosophy. This permits the Author to propose that Thomism be completed by subjective analyses, which in turn led to his attempt to synthesize Thomism and phenomenology. The Author does not rest upon this proposal, but from the beginning of his scientific and didactic work at KUL he worked at bringing about this completion and synthesis in the area of the philosophy of man, and of ethics. If we are going to speak of the Thomism of Card. K. Wojtyła, we should keep the above remarks in mind, since they will help us to place the entire philosophical activity of the Author in the proper perspective. We should add that Card. K. Wojtyła studied not only the philosophy of Saint Thomas and Max Scheler, but also Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hume, Bentham and, in particular, Kant. The analyses of the will carried out in a certain current of contemporary psychology (Ach, Michotte, Dybowski, Reutt) were also an important inspiration.

It often happens that the declarations of authors are not in accordance with the analyses which they actually carry out. I would like to point out here that with K. Wojtyła this is not the case. It should be added here that in the course of many years his philosophical thought underwent an evolution. This evolution can be seen both in the fact that he turned his attention

⁽¹⁾ Letter to Sophia Poźniakowa on the 27th of March, 1947, quoted in T. KAROLAK, *Jan Paweł II*. Warsaw, 1979, p. 68.

to new subject matter and that to a certain extent he changed his philosophical stand. These changes occurred primarily between the two poles of the philosophy of being (Thomism) and the philosophy of consciousness (phenomenology).

1. *The Problem of Experience*. As to the first problem, I would like to take up the concept of experience and what it means for philosophy. K. Wojtyła was occupied with this problem in his book *The Acting Person* (2) and in his article *The Problem of Experience in Ethics* (3).

K. Wojtyła first touched upon the problem of experience in his still unpublished (except in German) study, *Act and Experience* (4). In his analysis, in this work, of the problem of experience in the philosophy of, among others, Kant, and in phenomenology, Card. K. Wojtyła writes that although experience is given much attention by Kant and Scheler, their views do not suffice. For Kant, experience does not penetrate to the essence of things; in phenomenology (eg. particularly in Scheler), experience does penetrate to the essence of things, although it is to the phenomenological, not the metaphysical aspect of the essence. Both the one and the other were unsatisfactory for K. Wojtyła, who wanted to penetrate immediately to the object of knowledge (i.e. experience), and to the very essences of things, to the essence which was spoken of by traditional metaphysics.

In his article, *The Problem of Experience in Ethics*, K. Wojtyła writes of the deep split in contemporary philosophy as regards the conception of experience. On the one hand there is the « empirical » position, which limits experience « strictly to the senses »; on the other hand there is aprioristic rationalism which negates (in a certain sense) the cognitive value of experience. Here, as if between Scylla and Charybdis, the Author would like to find the way to « realistic empiricism » (5).

(2) Kraków 1969, esp. pp. 5-23.

(3) *Roczniki Filozoficzne KUL* » 17:1969 v. 2, pp. 5-24.

(4) K. WOJTYŁA. *Akt i przeżycie* Lublin 1955 /typewritten manuscript Dept. of Ethics, KUL/.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 6.

I would here like to demonstrate that K. Wojtyła's conception of experience has basically grown out of the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception and is in agreement with it, although it is not identical with it, since it transcends and develops it. This transcendence approaches the phenomenological analyses of man's subjectivity.

Immediacy penetrates to the object of knowledge; we obtain immediate cognitive contact with the object through the senses⁽⁶⁾. However, as Wojtyła states, it is not only the act of the senses which grasps facts in an immediate manner. In this immediate contact of the senses we find that an intellectual act is also a participant. Thus human experience is not limited to strictly sensible contents. In experience we arrive at a « multi-*aspective intuition* » (*Anschauung*) which Wojtyła calls the « very core of experience »⁽⁷⁾. There is contained in this *Anschauung* both sense cognition and intellectual understanding. Thus we can call this experience: understanding experience. Such an experience does not touch merely a single moment of the given object, but rather touches some whole (e.g. man, morality), just as it is not merely a singular act of contact, but rather the sum of many of these acts. This concept of experience corresponds with St. Thomas: « Ratio autem non sistit in experimento particularium, sed ex multis particularibus in quibus expertus est, accipit unum commune... »⁽⁸⁾. Such a position, opposed to phenomenalism, is close to both the Aristotelian-Thomistic and also to the phenomenological conception of experience.

This concept leads to the problem of induction. Thus, just as the wholistic experience of an object is the total or vector sum of many individual experiences (contacts), so also the wholistic understanding of an object is the total or vector sum of individual acts of understanding. This « process » by which a certain experience and understanding are « composed out of

(6) *Osoba i czyn/The Acting Person/* p. 12, 21; *Problem doświadczenia w etyce/ The Problem of Experience in Ethics/* pp. 12-13.

(7) *Problem doświadczenia w etyce*, p. 12.

(8) *In Anal. Post. II*, lect. 20, n. 11.

many individual facts leads through multiplicity and complexity to a grasp of their unity of meaning, to the stabilization of the object of experience. Wojtyła called this process induction. This is not induction in the meaning of Mill, but of Aristotle. It is not a question here of generalizing the data of individual experiences, that is to say, of a certain kind of proof or discursive reasoning, but of directly grasping « a general truth in particular facts »⁽⁹⁾. We can here add that the concept of induction thus understood corresponds also with the phenomenological conception of « Wesensschau ».

Experience understood both as an individual fact and as a sum of facts does not, thanks to induction thus understood, lose the multiplicity of individual data. This does not mean that we make some « generality » at the expense of the multiplicity, wealth, and variety of the data, but rather that we preserve multiplicity, through and in which the unity of the facts is grasped. Although this is an intellectual grasp of a unity of meaning, it is still a grasp of objective contents, it is an objective grasp. At the same time, however, and above all, induction has a subjective and, to be precise, an intersubjective, meaning.

A closer and fuller elucidation of this last fact (and not only this fact but others) requires that we make further precisions. Wojtyła's conception of experience is constructed « in the anthropological and moral field » (i.e. the point of departure is human praxis): it is built upon the requirements of anthropology and ethics. The experience, then, in which man is able not only immediately to come into contact with praxis, but also to grasp and understand its very core, and through these activities to understand man, is the experience of his own praxis and his own « I ». Thus it is an internal, subjective experience. This experience, then, takes place primarily within the framework of practical reason, to adopt Aristotle's terminology. As Wojtyła writes: « Human praxis is accompanied by "practical" understanding — that is, understanding which is sufficient and necessary for man to live and act consciously »⁽¹⁰⁾. Induction opens the

⁽⁹⁾ *Problem doświadczenia w etyce*, p. 20.

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Osoba i czyn*, p. 20.

way to another level of understanding — from the level of « how to live and act consciously » to the level in which we can raise the question: « ...what is this conscious activity or act, and how can this act reveal the person to us and help us to understand him in full and in all his aspects » (11). Thus it is an attempt « to experience and understand activity and the person independently from subjective entanglement » (12), and for this reason the Author writes: « We are indebted to induction rather for basic inter-subjectivization, perhaps more than for objectivization » (13).

The theoreticalization, which takes place through induction, of the problem of action and of the person (« I ») in order that these be fully understood, requires a certain interpretation and explanation, in which it is a question of showing the proper reasons and foundations of the data of experience (14). In addition, intellectual acts of reduction (interpretation and explanation) do not depart from the field of the data of experience. The process of reduction does not depend upon any kind of external data, upon any preconceptions or conceptions outside of experience — « Explanation, reductive understanding, constitutes as it were an exploitation of experience » (15).

According to the Author, the reasons which explain a given fact are contained in experience itself. We must understand this thought well. It does not matter here, that in experience we come immediately into contact with both « phenomena » and the reasons for them. If the Author writes about the reasons for phenomena being contained in experience, then it is in this sense that intellectual investigations of them must be carried out in the framework of the field of experience, and not beyond it. The explanatory reasons are not external in regard to experience; they are contained in it, although they are at the same

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) *Ibid.*

(13) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

(14) *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

time, as it were, concealed in it. For this reason also K. Wojtyła writes that reduction (just as induction) is immanent to human experience. At the same time, however, since the reasons included in experience are not given to man immediately and in an evident manner, the investigation of them *in* and *through* the data of experience is an intellectual act and process. For this reason also, reduction (as well as induction) is transcendent in regard to experience. Reduction is here understood as a process of reaching to the deepest, ultimate strata of being, as a searching for ultimate explanations. One of the fundamental senses (senses somewhat programmed, posited *explicite*) of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy is included in this. Nevertheless, in this article we are not concerned merely about presenting a certain program which, at any rate, could be realized in various ways, but also about the manner in which it is realized. In this also we can see clearly the Aristotelian-Thomistic inspiration and that this reduction is based upon the conceptions of being which have been elaborated in this philosophy. What is more, K. Wojtyła thinks (and he gives this expression frequently in his publications), that the forms elaborated in this stream of philosophy are the deepest and the best, and for this reason he bases his thought upon them⁽¹⁶⁾.

Nevertheless we cannot leave the above remarks without comment if we want to explain the full conception of the Author. If what is important here is the method of realizing the above program, then the Aristotelian-Thomistic inspiration constitutes only a part of this conception. Without doubt, the process of understanding and explaining man and morality is based upon Thomistic metaphysics, and properly speaking it reaches to the ontic structures which are grasped by Thomism. The way, however, of reaching to these structures, the way in which we come to know them, is different in the classical philosophy of being (for the Author makes use of this term and not of the word

⁽¹⁶⁾ E.g. the analyses of a human act and virtues, carried out by J. Woroniecki, O.P... In his lectures on metaphysics K. Wojtyła frequently turned to these and went even further.

« Thomism »). It is important here namely that we turn our attention to and place the accent upon the subjective approach. This way is, to be sure, derived from phenomenology, or to speak in broader terms, from the philosophy of consciousness. The ultimate explanation of the world as well as the method of philosophizing in these two currents of philosophy are fundamentally different. However, if it is a question of the method of philosophizing, difference does not mean strangeness. One of these methods, however, turns its attention towards objectivity, and the second towards subjectivity, in regard to both the object of philosophy and the way of approaching it; Wojtyła, however, is convinced that these two types of philosophizing can be synthesized. Both of these approaches have sprung together from one stem of human knowledge as a knowledge which is organically one, and both together constitute one image of man and morality. It is not only valuable and enriching, but indeed necessary to show a certain kind of community of such approaches in the case of the philosophy of man and of morality. Hence, to be sure, on the basis of our experience of man and moral experience (and our experience of morality) there emerges the idea of synthesizing these two types of philosophy⁽¹⁷⁾. It is also completely understandable that such a synthesis not only has enriched the traditional concept of the philosophy of being, but also invested it with a new meaning, and has brought about certain changes in understanding the object of investigations.

This is the place to show certain of the more important moments in K. Wojtyła's philosophy, in which he returns to the philosophy of being.

2. *The Philosophy of Man* It is not possible here to take in all the moments in Wojtyła's philosophy where he refers to Thomism. Only some of the particularly important ones will be presented.

One of the most basic moments is the pair of concepts adopt-

(17) *Osoba i czyn*, p. 23.

ed from the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy: *potentia-actus*. Wojtyła regards these as an adequate grasp of each and every dynamism⁽¹⁸⁾. Because he carries out the analyses of man through act, through the dynamism proper to man, the concepts of « potency-act » are found in the center of his analyses. Notions of this kind, such as act and potency, substance and accidents, *esse* and *fieri*, do not constitute a point of departure nor are they the object of immediate experience, but rather they make up the background of these analyses and a final approach to the « exploitation of experience ». In the mind of the Author, the pair of concepts constitutes not only a proper grasp of dynamism, but also possesses, above all, an existential meaning, since the passage from potency to act is a passage in the order of existence: *potentia* and *actus* are two states of being which correspond to two different forms of existence. This passage indicates that change concerns an already existing being; it is the « becoming » of an existing being, and so it occurs on the level of *fieri* and not of *esse*⁽¹⁹⁾.

The analysis of human dynamism and the explanation of it depend upon man's immediate internal experience. The full human dynamism grasped in experience is explained in a two-fold manner: « man acts » and « something is acted out in man » (*agere* and *pati*)⁽²⁰⁾. This duality of dynamism means that man is on the one hand the source, the subject and the director of certain powers (« man acts »); on the other hand, he is the source, subject, and the passive observer of powers which are not under his domination (« something is acted out in man »). The experiential grasp of these two different powers, which are united by dynamic unity, has an essential meaning for Wojtyła in his construction of anthropology.

Both kinds of dynamism, despite their difference « come together, as it were, in a common root. This root is man as the dynamic subject »⁽²¹⁾. This is the place where the realistic grasp

⁽¹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁽¹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁽²¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

of the problem of man and of his activity is seen particularly clearly, a grasp most clearly linked to the conception of Thomas Aquinas, although Thomas' conception is in large measure modified. Being (*ens*) is the subject (*suppositum*) of these dynamisms. *Esse* is the first act, which is at the same time the source of every dynamism. Act (*esse*) constitutes the subject (*suppositum*). However, *esse* not only calls a being into existence, it not only creates a concrete (*individua substantia*), but in this case the concrete is the person — a unique and unrepeatable being, somebody, and not something. If then it is a question of the person, the *esse* which constitutes him is also personal and because *operari sequitur esse*, the entire human dynamism (« man acts » and « something is acted out in man ») is personal⁽²²⁾.

In his considerations the Author employs a two-fold concept of the person: metaphysical and phenomenological. This distinction is not made in order that one or the other would be negated, but in order that we may grasp in full the reality of the person. The person, from the metaphysical point of view, is the subject of existence and activity; however from the phenomenological point of view « person » is a synthesis of efficacy (the power to bring something about) and subjectivity (*suppositum*). The distinction between the metaphysical and the phenomenological level has here a very essential meaning. Thanks to it Wojtyła builds a theory of man which is modified in relation to the Thomistic theory, more developed and richer.

The traditional definition of the person which was given by Boethius and adopted by Thomas Aquinas — *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia* — was broadened by the Author by means of phenomenological analysis; this analysis, however, was built into the first conception, enriching it.

In Scheler's phenomenology, as opposed to the traditional philosophy of being, nature is opposed to the person. Nature is conceived as the subject of that which « is acted out in man »; the person, however, is the concrete « I », the self-conscious cause of activity (« man acts »). Phenomenology, then, empha-

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 77.

sizes the difference between human dynamisms; metaphysics, rather, demonstrates their common subject. Nonetheless, the experiential approach, whose impulse originates indubitably from the contemporary philosophy of consciousness, leads the Author to a synthesis of both of these concepts, to his own special philosophical ecumenism. According to him man experiences the unity and the entirety of the person and also experiences the identity of each of his own dynamisms with his very self. Experience shows that dynamism belongs to « me myself » and that this dynamism has a causal dependence upon « me myself »⁽²³⁾. Then on the basis of this unity there arises the experience of distinguishing these dynamisms. In this way then subjective multiplicity springs from the foundation of ontic, objective unity.

In the above aspect of phenomenology, man is conceived of as a composite, as it were, of two substances: nature and person. However, according to the Author, such a vision of man follows from the inconsequential exploitation of experience or, in other words, from phenomenology's failure to reach to the deepest level of experience, the level of ontic unity.

The Author does not negate the difference between these two kinds of human dynamism — this difference results, after all, from experience. Experience revealed such a great ontic richness in man and such a great complexity that the traditional description of the person in terms of substance and nature proved to be insufficient. Hence precisely the distinction between nature and person in man arises, a distinction derived from phenomenology. « Nature » and « person » in phenomenology are above all the descriptions of various aspects or ways of acting. Such definitions, however, are also insufficient because they fail to consider this basic experience, which is the experience of unity and the experience of each dynamism's causal dependence upon my own « I ». If the Author agrees with the distinction between nature (« something is acted out in man ») and person (« man acts »), he goes yet a step further in the

(23) *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

direction of the substantial unity of man. This distinction functions rather on the subjective level; however, on the objective, metaphysical level it takes in nature as a base and source of every dynamism. Nonetheless, man's dynamism has a completely different character from the dynamism of all other beings. Above all, in man there is a specific and unrepeatable relation of dynamism to its subject and source. This relation is delineated by the concept of transcendence. The essence of transcendence is self-possession, self-governance, and self-determination. This precisely describes the person: « In this experience man is shown as person, that is to say, a completely unique structure of self-possession and self-governance »⁽²⁴⁾. The concept of the person thus describes man's unique precedence in relation to his own self and his dynamism.

The distinction between nature and person in man in regard to the basic experiential fact of unity requires and leads to the integration of nature and person. It takes place by way of metaphysical reduction. The Author writes: « Metaphysical reduction ... tends towards the full integration of nature in the person »⁽²⁵⁾. The expression « integration of nature in the person » is not used accidentally. The broad analyses made in *The Acting Person* of self-possession and the person's transcendence in regard to his own self and his dynamism clearly show the superiority of the person in regard to himself while at the same time the unity of man is preserved. For this reason man's self-dependence is that which constitutes the person (on the level of *fieri* and not *esse*). Nature, on the other hand delineates humanity (essence) conceived of dynamically, as the basis for man's entire dynamism. The integration of nature in the person is based not merely upon the individualization of nature through the person, which is to say, the separation of the « individual » out from « entirety of humanity » or « entirety of nature »; this integration is based rather upon investing this humanity with a mode of individual existence. If thus *esse* calls the human being

⁽²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁽²⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

into existence and invests him with dynamism, then this is not some « *esse* in general », but the *esse* of this here being, personal *esse*. For this reason man's *esse* is personal *esse*, and each one of his dynamisms is human — in him there is not a separate vegetative, sensitive, or other, dynamism which would be common also with the nature of subhuman being. For this reason too, the integration of nature in the person is possible, and this integration takes place through nature (conceived of metaphysically).

Thus, as we see in the above descriptions (which are after all, abbreviated) K. Wojtyła's analyses of man have been made upon the basis of the traditional philosophy of being, and in this case, Thomism. Obviously this is not only an exegesis of Thomism, but the creative development of it through an organic synthesis with contemporary philosophy, particularly with phenomenology, although the accent upon the personal character of the human *esse* constitutes a step in the direction of existential thought.

Even this short presentation of the philosophical thought of K. Wojtyła permits a sketch of his philosophical position. Without doubt, the foundation of his thought is the traditional current of the philosophy of being — Aristotelianism and Thomism. This is not, however, an inviolable canon for the Author. He does not assume an apologetic and exegetical attitude towards it. That which should be sought after and defended is the truth — the truth about man and the truth about the good. For this reason he broadens the traditional plan of philosophy to take in the prize of the modern philosophy of consciousness which provides us with new and effective tools of knowledge. He connects these two different methods of philosophizing in a critical manner both in regard to the « old » and the « new ». In K. Wojtyła's synthesis, either of these two currents fulfill the same function. The traditional philosophy of being is rather a base and point of reference; the philosophy of consciousness is rather a tool and means of knowledge. The application of these new methods does not leave the traditional theses untouched. The carrying out of the synthesis leads to change and enrichment

in both the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness. Most of all, however, man himself is enriched in it by knowing himself better, his good, his rights and responsibilities. In order to fully understand K. Wojtyła's philosophy we must go down two roads, each of which is important, and neither of which can be rejected without losing its proper sense: the road of the traditional philosophy of being and the road of the modern philosophy of consciousness.

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