

Karol Wojtyła's Concept of Personal Transcendence

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Abstract: The article presents the understanding of the transcendence of the person in Wojtyła's philosophy. The text discusses in turn: the role of the experience of the person; the concept of transcendence in relation to other concepts used by Wojtyła; the reference to the truth as the basis of personal transcendence; the integration of the person; the transcendence in the personal existence. The analyses conducted in the article show that transcendence of the person in the proper sense reveals the spiritual dimension of his existence as being superior to the material dimension. The presented text draws attention to the richness of threads showing the transcendence of the person in action on the basis of an analysis of lived experience. This approach not only illuminates or presents from another side the traditional concept of transcendence, based on the essential distinction between person and nature, but also adds new and revealing aspects to it. The person as an autonomous subjectivity not only freely determines himself/herself, but moreover transcends humanity as a general human nature – in virtue of an individual, unique personal existence. As a crowning achievement of the concept of the transcendence of the person, the metaphysical aspect of anthropology, which is strongly present in Wojtyła's thought, is proposed here, which is somewhat new in the treatment of the topic of transcendence. According to this approach, transcendence experienced in action reveals its deeper level: transcendence in existence, which reveals the deepest foundation of being a person.

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła, transcendence, person, philosophical anthropology, human being, human experience, freedom, truth, spirituality, integration of the person, personal existence

Karol Wojtyła's (1920–2005) philosophical anthropology is a unique theory of the human person, developed as a result of combining the tradition of Aristotelian-Thomistic realism with selected elements of contemporary philosophy, particularly phenomenology. This anthropology is one of the greatest achievements of the Lublin Philosophical School¹ to which Wojtyła belonged during his academic work at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin, where he conducted research on ethics and philosophical anthropology until being appointed bishop of Rome as John Paul II. Numerous discussions and philosophical disputes taking place at the Lublin School in the 1960s–1970s became the foundation of Wojtyła's original method of philosophical reflection on the human being: gaining knowledge about

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¹ On the Lublin Philosophical School see: Krąpiec – Maryniarczyk, *Lublin School*, translated by Hugh McDonald.

the essence of the person occurs through a phenomenological analysis of the experience lived by the individual.

The reflection conducted in this paper will guide us through Wojtyła's concept of experience and the most important aspects of the person's transcendence, including a reference to the truth, as well as spirituality and fulfillment. Since transcendence expresses and embraces the experience of the person as such, it will be necessary to enter the areas of deeper anthropological analyses, which sometimes may lead to terminologically confusing and perceptually difficult to comprehend argumentation.

The present paper is founded on Wojtyła's philosophical writings alone, although the issue of the relation to truth, crucial for his concept of transcendence, was addressed by him on numerous occasions in theological publications from the papal period.² The topic of the person's transcendence is present in all of Wojtyła's works, although directly it was presented in two philosophical writings which will serve here as basic source texts: (1) the monograph *The Acting Person*, which presents a multi-stage process of revealing what, in a man/woman, is irreducible to determined structures, that is, the person, and (2) the article "The Transcendence of the Person in Action and Man's Self-Teleology," which summarizes the issue of the person's transcendence and shows an important relationship between transcendence and the problem of happiness and the purpose of life.

1. Anthropology as Experiential Knowledge

Wojtyła's anthropology can be described as experiential knowledge, that is knowledge obtained from the experience we are living. Its starting point is not a previously constructed notion or system from which subsequent theses are deduced. On the contrary: at each stage of a reflection on a man/woman, a phenomenological analysis of some aspect of human experience is applied – the experience understood as a common-sense experienced a man's/woman's contact with the world and with oneself. From phenomenology Wojtyła borrows the concept of direct viewing of

² These include chiefly the encyclicals *Fides et Ratio* (1998) and *Veritatis Splendor* (1993). Since Wojtyła respected the principle of the autonomy of philosophy and theology, the Polish philosophical literature usually makes a distinction between his proper names and 'Karol Wojtyła' is used in reference to his philosophical views from the time of his academic work, whereas 'John Paul II' is used in relation to his theological papal thought (although in fact, all his writings present a synthesis of reason and faith as complementary). Outside Poland this distinction is rarely applied which, in my opinion, may lead to the suggestion that Wojtyła himself, known to all as John Paul II, did not attach importance to the autonomy of philosophy and theology and therefore, according to some, cannot be considered a partner in a strictly rational discussion. Such a suggestion is highly unjust and, what is more, distorts the image of Wojtyła's philosophical output and in a sense deprives the world of it.

an object and, on the grounds of anthropology, he transforms it into the concept of understanding experience which includes both sensory observation and intellectual understanding.³ For experience grasps certain separating structures which allow an initial understanding of the experience itself, followed by a subsequent understanding of its subject: a man/woman. However, Wojtyła is aware that this understanding is neither complete nor sufficient.⁴ It is rather basic, 'source', and its main function is to enable men/women to achieve self-knowledge, to discover the truth about themselves (Wojtyła's concept at this point resembles Socrates' conduct). Moreover, the anthropological aspects in Wojtyła's thought are necessarily connected with ethical aspects, because the person fulfills themselves in moral acts,⁵ for a man's/woman's experience is in fact internally consistent with the experience of morality in its existential aspect.⁶

Wojtyła is convinced that men/women are available to themselves in a basic experience of insight that should be reflected upon. Thus, it is not an abstract experience, presented in definitions as a result of discursive analyses, but lived experience, that is alive, not detached from the person's 'here and now.'⁷ Subjectiveness thus becomes the starting point of an anthropological reflection, because only at the level of the lived subjectiveness is it possible to get to know the dynamic relation of the person to the act, or in other words, to get to know the personal efficacy, that is a causative relation of the person to the act. The priority, which in Wojtyła's philosophy is given to the subjective aspect of human experience, therefore stems from the very nature of the person experiencing themselves – thus, it is both methodological and substantive a requirement of anthropology as a theory of the person.⁸

Despite placing the inner experience of subjectiveness ('I') in the center of the reflection, Wojtyła strongly rejects the accusation of subjectivism, which would be justified only if the experience was completely separated from the action and the moral values were reduced to the content of consciousness.⁹ However, consciousness is not an independent subject, but only an aspect of the person, and a man/woman is given also in the context of the objective reality: "the person, the action, and their dynamic union are more than merely an enactment of consciousness; indeed, they are a reality that exists also apart from consciousness."¹⁰

³ Wojtyła, "Problem of Experience," 113; Wojtyła, "Personal Structure," 188; Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 6–10.

⁴ Wojtyła, "Słowo końcowe," 353.

⁵ As an ethicist, Wojtyła focuses primarily on the field of practical knowledge (*praxis*) (*Acting Person*, 16–17).

⁶ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 13.

⁷ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 3–8. Since the fact of being a person is, according to Wojtyła ("Subjectivity and the Irreducible," 210–215), given in the experience, he uses the terms 'the person' and 'the human being (a man/woman)' interchangeably, explaining 'the person' as 'what is irreducible in the human being.'

⁸ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 57.

⁹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 58.

¹⁰ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 153.

At the same time, applying the subjective aspect of the person's experience at the starting point of anthropology is a response to the object-oriented approach towards the phenomenon of the person, dominant in the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, favoring mainly speculative methods.¹¹

Wojtyła fits into the classical model of philosophizing, even though he focuses essentially on the phenomenological description of data provided in experience. A strong emphasis on the subjective perspective in his philosophy does not lead to the subjectivization of anthropology nor to the breaking of its ties with metaphysics. Wojtyła's solution is a realistic interpretation of the human being, with a significant deepening of his subjective dimension.¹² He never departed from epistemological realism nor from the realistic concept of being and truth.

Wojtyła's notion of experience contains all distinguishable sides of cognition, such as perception and reasoning, observation and insight. At the same time, he assumes there is only one human cognition (from the point of view of its function), though we may distinguish separate structural elements in it. The experience must therefore include both the sensory and intellectual side.¹³ Wojtyła also believes that the internal and external experience must be integrated; they must be understood adequately, that is in their mutual relationship. The experience is fundamentally uniform, and its simplicity is more primary and obvious than its complexity. For this reason, the experience is not the sum total of its constituent acts, but it concerns a certain whole, for example a human being.¹⁴

The main subject of the analysis is the human act bearing a personal mark. The act is a special moment of insight into the person: it is a fact which reveals the acting man/woman, for this is how men/women are given to themselves. The fact that 'a man/woman acts' ('I act') at the level of the experience can be understood as 'the act of the person' – it allows to conceive the person as the subject of the act. That is why Wojtyła called *The Acting Person* a study in which "action reveals the person, and we look at the person through his action."¹⁵

11 The important links between Wojtyła's work and the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics are also expressed in the intention not only to complement traditional anthropology with the subjective aspects, but also to highlight the object-oriented aspects, present in it, showing that they also come from the experience (see Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 256–257; Wojtyła, "Personal Structure," 194–195).

12 Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible," 213, 215–216; Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 56–58. On this topic see also: Savage, "The Centrality," 19–51.

13 Wojtyła, "Problem of Experience," 108–109; Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 3–11.

14 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 3–4, 8, 79–80.

15 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 11.

2. The Notion of Transcendence

The sense of the person's transcendence, which is most often used in the tradition of the classical realistic philosophy, points to such properties as consciousness, freedom, responsibility, etc., which distinguish the person from other subjects. The person's transcendence means what is important for being a person. By virtue of these properties, the persons transcend the world of nature with which they are also significantly connected, thus demonstrating that their existence goes beyond earthly life. Wojtyła, as a creative continuator of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, undoubtedly refers to this concept and, just as he does with many elements of this tradition, he introduces his own modifications. So, we will be able to take a look at this issue and examine what is new and important in Wojtyła's interpretation, to what extent it is an attempt to show more deeply and more clearly the basics present in the traditional approach, as well as how lived experience can be a way to discover the person's transcendence.

First, it will be necessary to introduce several key terms used by Wojtyła in a specific sense.¹⁶ Men/women experience themselves as dynamic realities, because they act and change, while remaining themselves. Two directions of elementary human dynamism are revealed in two fundamental facts: 'a man/woman acts' and 'something happens in a man/woman.' The difference between these dynamisms is determined by the experience of efficacy which leads to the acceptance of the opposition between the act in which men/ women experience themselves as agents ('a man/woman acts'), and activations which involve realization that an action is present in a man/woman ('something is happening in a man/woman'). In the first case there is a causal link between the person and the act, while in the second case the person is only a passive subject, perceiving the fact that a certain activity is taking place in them.¹⁷ This distinction plays a key role in revealing the personal subject and is also crucial in interpreting the person's transcendence.

The above mentioned dynamisms: (1) differ in terms of the scope of consciousness: the experience of performing an act is fully conscious (the consciousness of the act), while activations occur spontaneously and may be, at best, registered by consciousness;¹⁸ (2) they remain in an 'active-passive' opposition to each other in terms of becoming human, whereby activations, as being passive, can determine only

¹⁶ Due to space limitation I am omitting here quite an important problem of how Wojtyła used philosophical terms, how redefined them and attempted to modify traditional and contemporary concepts etc., as well as the related difficulties regarding the translation of these terms from Polish into English. On this subject see, e.g. Taylor, "The Acting Person in Purgatory."

¹⁷ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 66–69.

¹⁸ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 88–90.

the self-shaping of the organic elements and the nature's causation, while "it is man's actions, his conscious acting, that make of him what and who he actually is."¹⁹

The notion of efficacy is complemented by freedom which is the root of the former. The experience evidencing freedom has the form of 'I may but I need not,' which in turn is the basis of the experience of 'I will,' identical with self-determination²⁰ [this will be discussed later]. If we are gaining knowledge about the person primarily from the perspective of the action that expresses them most fully, then the very fact of a free action in which the person constitutes themselves ('self-determination')²¹ can, for a start, be considered the basis for the person's transcendence in relation to the dynamisms of nature.

Let us now turn to the explanation of the term 'transcendence,' which we find in Wojtyła's arguments. Based on the Latin etymology of the word (*trans-cendere* 'crossing a threshold or border'), Wojtyła makes an important distinction, based on which, to some extent, he will indicate the essential content of the person's transcendence.²² The first area of crossing borderlines of the subject are the so-called intentional acts, that is cognitive acts and the acts of willing, which are directed (although each of them in a different way) towards the objects outside the subject itself. It is only intentional directing of the subject towards various goals of aspiration, with a clear emphasis on crossing the subject's borderlines, that is a kind of 'going out towards the objects.' This type of transcendence Wojtyła calls horizontal transcendence and he does not assign to it the essential role when uncovering the depths of the person. It is worth noting that intentionality, in the most general sense, is also present in animals which direct their actions towards certain goals. Thus, this type of transcendence could be ascribed to all cognizing beings, which means that this feature is not characteristic only of persons and therefore cannot constitute their essence.

The type of transcendence that is specific to the person – called vertical transcendence and, more properly, the transcendence of the person in the action – is the dominance of 'I' over one's own dynamisms, based on freedom understood as self-determination (this term is supposed to indicate the experiential dimension of freedom, related to the experience of being determined by one's self): "This dominance serves as a kind of guideline. In contrast, there is no such domination in an individual who is but the subject of activations coordinated by instinct. Acting, the action, in the strict sense cannot occur where there are no means to make one's

¹⁹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 98.

²⁰ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 99–101.

²¹ The Polish term *samostanowienie* is typically translated into English as *self-determination*. It seems to us that the English equivalent does not fully render the Polish meaning of this word, as Wojtyła points to two important aspects of this issue: firstly, the autonomy in deciding about one's life, and secondly, the fact that with every act a human being forms and shapes their 'self.'

²² The explanation of the term 'transcendence' can be found in Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 119, 179–181, and in Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 207–208.

dynamization depend on the ego.”²³ This dominance is the essence of the personal transcendence: “transcendence determines that special structural trait of man as the person which consists in his specific domination of himself and his dynamism.”²⁴

Striving to grasp the essence of the above-mentioned dominance, Wojtyła first states that freedom, according to the common or ‘abstract’ understanding, means independence. However, if we transfer this issue to the area of experience of the subject fulfilling the action, we will notice, as Wojtyła shows, something quite opposite: “the lack of the relational concatenations of numerous factors [...] in its dependence on the ego in the dynamization of the subject precludes the freedom of human action.”²⁵ Therefore “it is the dependence of acting on the ego that serves as the basis of freedom.”²⁶ The person as a subject experiencing consciousness and self-determination introduces a different type of conditionality to the dynamism inherent to the individual. And it is in the act, which Wojtyła calls *actus personae*, that the moment of dependence on one’s own ‘self’ is experienced, the moment which is the foundation of freedom. Freedom, on the other hand, defines transcendence: “the person ‘transcends’ his actions because he is free and only so far as he is free.”²⁷

Speaking of the person’s self-dependence, Wojtyła introduces the concept of the objectification of own’s ‘self’: “The precondition of freedom is the concrete ego, which while it is the subject is also the object determined by the acts of will.”²⁸ Again, this objectiveness of the subject is brought about by the efficacy in which the subject constitutes themselves, but this objectiveness is absent at the level of the nature itself. Such binding of dominance with self-determination allows us to speak of the objectification of oneself in a positive sense. Since men/women in their own acts, constitute themselves, that is they make themselves such and such by fulfilling a free action, then in the action they are dependent only on themselves. This means that the subject is at the same time the object of their own action: a man/woman is for themselves both the subject (‘I constitute...’) and the object (‘... myself’). What follows from the objectification of oneself is: (1) no one, except for me, objectifies me; the source of my free action is within me; (2) I make myself someone, I am the object of shaping myself, in every free action I take; (3) the experiential discovering of the subject takes place in the process of making myself the object, which is the property of self-determination.²⁹

²³ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 119.

²⁴ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 180.

²⁵ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 118.

²⁶ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 117.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 138.

²⁸ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 120.

²⁹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 111–114, 120–124. At the level of a deeper analysis of the subject’s objectiveness, Wojtyła (*ibidem*, 106–108) discloses two structural properties of the human person: possessing oneself and being capable of governing oneself, which both explain self-determination.

The dominance of the human subject over one's own dynamism, that is transcendence in the action (vertical), means both dependence on one's self and the independence of the objects of willing.³⁰ This independence, however, must not be understood as the person's detachment from the world of values (the objects of willing). The person's freedom is, as Wojtyła explains, 'freedom for' values,³¹ whereas the basis of transcendence, as we will soon see, is a reference to the truth. Every choice of the good and every decision about the good is a reference to the truth about the good, and self-determination is nothing more than the answer of the human 'I will' to the value.³²

3. The Reference to the Truth as a Basis for Transcendence

Being subjects of the action, men/women exceed themselves in the action as they direct themselves towards the objects (values) and they choose them. The experience of values is crucial for understanding the person and their transcendence: "included in the experience of value there is the knowledge of the truth about the objects that the will turns to by the power of its specific intentionality."³³ Wojtyła does not speak here of the truth in the ontological sense (what a thing is), but axiological (what value a thing has) – the truth determines the transition from 'to know' into 'to will'.³⁴ The willing has the form of a decision, and the resulting choice is based on the known truth about the object as a certain good. However, it is not the will, as the will itself, that moves in the direction of objects, but it is the person who moves in the direction of values that they choose. In control of their decisions and in the acts of the autonomous recognition of the values in relation to the truth, the person experiences something that is an evidence of the reference to the truth, present in them: the responsibility for their actions.³⁵

In revealing the relationship between freedom and the truth, it is important to understand a man/woman primarily as a moral subject, that is someone who makes themselves good or bad. The discernment between good and evil is made in the person's conscience whose foundation is the relationship to the truth: "the human person has the 'right' to freedom, not in the sense of unconditioned existential independence, but insofar as freedom is the core of a person's self-reliance that essentially

30 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 138.

31 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 132.

32 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 134–135.

33 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 142.

34 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 143.

35 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 169–174.

relates to the surrender to 'truth.'³⁶ It is the conscience that seeks the truth and aspires to grasp it in the field of values, that reveals the dependence of human freedom on the truth, while "the sense of duty is the experiential form of [...] the dependence on the moral truth, to which the freedom of the person is subordinate."³⁷ This is why, as Wojtyła explains, "it is in the conscience that there is achieved the peculiar union of moral truthfulness and duty that manifests itself as the normative power of truth."³⁸ Hence there is an important emphasis on the drama of freedom and the duty occurring in the human person: "outside of the drama man cannot fulfill himself as a person."³⁹ This drama is a sign of the person's transcendence.

It follows from the above that "the transcendence of the person through freedom is realized in the quest after the value of truth or truthfulness."⁴⁰ In this way, Wojtyła aims to show that the dependence on the truth constitutes the person in their transcendence. The transcendence of the person in the action thus reveals the fundamental significance of truth for the person as the truth about the good. The analyses of cognition, will or human values reveal the person only when they bring out their transcendence as a reference to the truth (the 'true' good):⁴¹

The transcendence of the person in action does not consist solely either in the ontological autonomy, or self-centered dependence on the ego. It includes also the [...] moment of reference to 'truth,' and it is this moment that ultimately determines freedom. For human freedom is not accomplished nor exercised in bypassing truth but, on the contrary, by the person's realization and surrender to truth. The dependence upon truth marks out the borderlines of the autonomy appropriate to the human person.⁴²

The limits of human autonomy addressed here are a safeguard against the degradation of freedom to self-will which disregards any truth.

Thus, it is not the intentional directing of the will towards values that is decisive for the understanding of transcendence ('the horizontal transcendence' as mentioned before), but the structure of self-determination: a mature choice ('I will') implies the subject's reference to the truth. In this way, a higher dimension of transcendence is revealed in the human experience, which is inherent to the person (vertical transcendence): in fact, it is only by virtue of the reference to the truth that men/women obtain this dominance, this specific governing over their actions and willing.⁴³

³⁶ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 154–155.

³⁷ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 156.

³⁸ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 162.

³⁹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 168.

⁴⁰ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 166.

⁴¹ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 286; Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 141.

⁴² Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 154.

⁴³ Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 207–208.

Wojtyła points to one more important issue. In the dynamics of efficacy, the effect of the action is external to the person and, at the same time, internal (intransitive), because men/women, as the agents of the act, simultaneously fulfill themselves in it, and “to fulfill oneself means to actualize, and in a way to bring to the proper fullness, that structure in man which is characteristic for him because of his personality.”⁴⁴ This is an extremely important moment in Wojtyła’s anthropology, leading to the uncovering of a deeper meaning of the personal structures (I will develop this topic in the last section). Analyzing the nature of willing, Wojtyła emphasizes this unusual phenomenon and presents the willing of anything as an act always directed to the subjects themselves: their own ‘self’ “in some respects is the ultimate object of the will,”⁴⁵ present in every willing and in every performing an act. Consequently, we need to say that the effort of conscience is not about the values per se, detached from willing, but it is about the fundamental value of the person as the agent of the action; it is about the fulfillment of the person in truth:⁴⁶ “the person ... fulfills himself through reference to ... a real good and not otherwise.”⁴⁷

Let’s summarize this important step in the reflection: “freedom [...] carries within itself the surrender to truth,”⁴⁸ which is specific only to the human person. This dependence on truth: (1) is dynamic, since it is realized in actions in which the person expresses themselves; (2) introduces the transcendence of the person, that is the distance to the objects of their own willing;⁴⁹ (3) does not refer only to the intentional objects of willing (values), but it is more concerned with the very subject, their own ‘self’. The person thus fulfills themselves by self-determination and by the reference to the truth, since they fulfill themselves as a good or a bad person. In this sense, self-determination is occurring parallel to self-fulfillment.⁵⁰ Moreover, since men/women fulfill themselves in action, it means that they are ‘not yet done’, incomplete, that is contingent. Freedom can, therefore, be used by a man/woman well or badly, that is either as an accomplishment on the path to fulfillment, or in the opposite direction: “Thus, he cannot be sure of his freedom. It is precisely in this conditionality and this uncertainty that the ethical aspect in the contingency of the person consists, and on it rests the significance of the conscience.”⁵¹

At this point of our reflection the significance of transcendence can be summarized in the words of Karol Wojtyła: “Our decisions of conscience at each step reveal us as persons who fulfill ourselves by going beyond ourselves toward values accepted

44 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 151.

45 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 161.

46 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 161.

47 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 155.

48 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 156.

49 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 159.

50 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 161.

51 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 154.

in truth and realized, therefore, with a deep sense of responsibility.⁵² The truth experienced by the person becomes somehow personal, and through it the person becomes 'I'. The personal dimension of truth discovered in this way shows us that truth is not something abstract, but an existential factor linked with the self-fulfillment of each person.

The human person in Wojtyła's mind is someone who experiences their subjectiveness and freedom, and is striving for fulfillment. This whole area of self-experience draws its power from the relationship to the truth, which is inscribed in human nature. Men/women strive for the truth about themselves, about their good, by virtue of their natural pursuit of fulfillment. The origin of the person's transcendence, therefore, is not self-awareness or even freedom as such, but the reference to the truth, since a man/woman is fulfilled through action, and this fulfillment depends on the truth about the good.

4. Transcendence and the Integration of the Person

It is now time to show the importance of transcendence in the entirety of the person as the subject of diverse dynamisms. In a man/woman there is a constant tension between the will – as the power of self-determination – and the potentiality of the human body, emotions and drives, showing natural spontaneity. It is this tension that constitutes the possibility of transcendence, which means the dominance of the person and, consequently, a certain subordination of nature. For men/women are immanent in relation to the material reality of their body and, at the same time, they transcend it – they give personal meaning to the body's dynamisms. This unity can be understood only from the point of view of the person's transcendence.⁵³

The person integrates all their dynamisms by transcending them. The dynamisms of the human body and the psyche, belonging to the person's various activations, undergo thus personal integration, or in other words, they are inserted into the process of the person's autorealization.⁵⁴ The basis of integration is the act, which reveals the person's efficacy and freedom. It is for this reason that the human act, by integrating the person's numerous and diverse dynamisms, is not their sum, but a new, dominant dynamism that gives these dynamisms a new significance and quality: they become personal. In this way the person's transcendence is the basis of integration of the person in the action.

⁵² Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible," 215.

⁵³ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 68, 191–192.

⁵⁴ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 189–258.

This means that the dynamisms specific to the human soma and psyche do not simply merge, but they “take an active part in integration, not at their own levels but at the level of the person.”⁵⁵ Without the participation in the action of the person, these dynamisms only happen in a man/woman, and as the result of integration they are drawn into the unity of the person.⁵⁶ All the dynamisms visible in a man/woman are included in relation to the person as the agent of the action. The integration ‘makes’ these dynamisms personal and thus assigns them to the transcendence of the person in the action.⁵⁷ Due to human activity (different from the determinisms of nature), that is efficacy, a man/woman makes use of the innate dynamics of the living being, modifying the original character of this dynamics and subordinating it to a new, more perfect form of life.

Transcendence thus reveals the spiritual aspect of being a person.⁵⁸ The conviction about human spirituality is identified with the experience of freedom, responsibility and loyalty to truth. Thanks to the availability of viewing these experiences, Wojtyła’s phenomenological analyses reach a certain positive notion of spirituality, besides the notion developed solely through the negation of materiality. The spiritual element, as a source of human dynamism and the principle of human unity, is at least indirectly ontological.⁵⁹ Moreover, it is dynamic in nature, that is it assumes the existence of spiritual potentiality in the form of the powers of reason and will, bearing a clear personal mark and enabling the dynamic union of the person with their action.⁶⁰

The analysis of the integration and a man’s/woman’s dynamic layers, subject to the integration, leads to the conclusion that the spiritual element, which is revealed in the experience of transcendence, evidences both a man’s/woman’s complexity and their unity. The linking of transcendence with spirituality comes close to the transcendence of the person in a metaphysical sense. The phenomenological description revealing spirituality in the experience of manifestations of the person’s transcendence provides knowledge of how spirituality manifests itself in the experience, thus enriching the ontological sense of spirituality, including the old-time concept of classical metaphysics.

Transcendence, therefore, allows a deeper understanding of the nature of the relationship between the person’s unity and the person’s complexity. While the analysis

55 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 198. The antipersonalistic reduction is a consequence of analyzing these dynamisms at their original level without the consideration of this qualitative leap.

56 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 196–199.

57 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 256.

58 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 159. Wojtyła (*ibidem*, 47–48) understands spirituality as a property that cannot be directly accessible to experience, but observable in certain manifestations, such as self-consciousness and the interiority of being and acting. Spirituality in a less specific sense is equivalent to experiencing transcendence.

59 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 182.

60 Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 184–185.

of the experience indicates a distinctiveness between spirituality and corporeality, the experience of efficacy and freedom reveals a man's/woman's spiritual nature, as not entirely separate from the psycho-emotive nature, but as capable of governing it and creating a dynamic unity with it. The experience therefore shows that: (1) there is an integration between the person and nature, between freedom and what is innate; (2) spirituality (ontologically different from the human body) exists in the body and through the body; (3) nature is an integral part of the person and it exists really only within the person. Transcendence together with the integration thus reveals the person as a special kind of unity, in which exceeding oneself is combined with the integration of all the spheres of the experience. Consequently, the individual can no longer be understood as an average specimen of their species, but as a unique personal subject.

5. Transcendence in Personal Existence

So far, I have been dealing with transcendence in the action, about which Wojtyła speaks directly in his anthropological writings. However, as the crowning touch to the concept of the person's transcendence, I will now address the metaphysical aspect of anthropology strongly present in Wojtyła's thought. A man/woman is a subject (*suppositum*) understood as a really existing and functioning being.⁶¹ Thus, it is worth noting that Wojtyła's considerations assume yet another plane of understanding transcendence, and the metaphysical principle which he applies, leads directly to this plane. I mean the scholastic principle of "*operari sequitur esse*" (action is a consequence of existence),⁶² thanks to which transcendence experienced in the action (the area of *operari*) reveals its deeper level: transcendence in existence (*esse*). Although Wojtyła emphasizes that he is particularly interested in the field of *praxis* and he focuses directly on it, at the same time he implies the plane of *theoria* and the need to move from *operari* to *esse*.⁶³ This became the basis for the recognition of the personal act of existence (*esse*) as the factor lying at the root of all the person's dynamisms. The action reveals the origin of human dynamism, which is existence, and this means that it allows us know the foundation of being a person.⁶⁴ Thus, by

⁶¹ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 273–277; Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 72–74.

⁶² Wojtyła employs this principle as the basis for the transition from *operari* to *esse*, i.e. from the analysis of the action (the act) to the understanding of the person. Therefore, it also lies at the methodological basis of the very concept of *The Acting Person*. For the explanation of this principle see: Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 73–75, 82–85; Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 275–277.

⁶³ Wojtyła, "Teoria – *praxis*," 468.

⁶⁴ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 83–85.

analyzing the act we know a man/woman not only as the subject of the action, but also as someone who has a determined ontological profile.

In Wojtyła's analysis, the subjective aspects captured in phenomenological descriptions of the experience, correspond to the objective states of being, whereas subjective structures reflect the objective reality of the person as a being. Wojtyła also claims that "efficacy itself [...] leads us to the objective order of being and existence."⁶⁵ We can therefore acknowledge that the person's transcendence is rooted in the objective reality. Let us therefore look at the concept of the person's transcendence at the level of *theoria*: from the point of view of the existence of the person, which plays a key role in this interpretation.⁶⁶

Since the person is the subject (*suppositum*) of existence and action, their proper existence (*esse*) – as Wojtyła claims – is personal, not just individual, in the sense of individual nature. Thus, the notion of the person is fully expressed by uniqueness and unrepeatability, rather than concreteness. This entails a turn from the understanding of personal actions, as realizing an individual rational nature, to the understanding of these actions as being fulfilled by unrepeatably and unique person.⁶⁷ A man/woman is therefore not an individuated essence of humanhood, but a unique personal being with their own particular personal existence. Therefore, it is not enough for men/women to satisfy their natural needs and actualize the good of their species, but to actualize them in a personal way. This means that the area in which personal existence is revealed is human nature, as a set of dynamisms that are at the person's service in developing their own initiative of freedom.⁶⁸ And this is the first aspect of the transcendence of the person in existence.

Since the personal *esse* is at the beginning of every dynamism that is characteristic of a man/woman, as well as of everything that happens in a man/woman, it must be acknowledged that this very *esse* (existence) is not something else but the primary human dynamism, the principle of all the man's/woman's dynamisms. And it is by virtue of personal existence that every human dynamism, and even what is only happening in a man/woman, bears a personal mark.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is only by virtue of personal existence that the integration of the person is accomplished, and transcendence turns out to be an observational sign of that existence. This is another aspect of the transcendence of the person in existence.

⁶⁵ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 68.

⁶⁶ Although the considerations regarding the dependency of the domain of action on the domain of existence precede those on the person's transcendence in Wojtyła's *Acting Person*, yet assigning the notion of transcendence to the former required reversing the order.

⁶⁷ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 111–112.

⁶⁸ Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 138.

⁶⁹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 72–74, 83–85. Wojtyła (*ibidem*, 73) points out here *explicite* to the concept of *esse* by St. Thomas Aquinas, the concept whose continuation, and maybe a modification, is supposed to be the theory of the person's act rooted in the personal existence.

Moreover, the necessary link between going beyond oneself towards values, and the self-fulfillment, leads to the thesis of integrating truth and freedom in fulfillment: “the fulfillment of the person in action depends on the active and inwardly creative union of truth with freedom.”⁷⁰ Such an amalgamation is happiness-bearing. In the totality of human experience, loyalty to the truth is also one’s loyalty to one’s own fulfillment as a person, and therefore constitutes one’s basic existential vocation.⁷¹ Here, Wojtyła sees a point of convergence between the person’s axiology and their eudaemonology: to fulfill oneself means to actualize the good through which a man/woman becomes good, which in turn is almost the same as being happy.⁷²

Wojtyła presented this convergence in the form of the relation between ‘the self-teleology of the limit,’ that is self-fulfillment in a free action in reference to the truth, and ‘the self-teleology of aim,’ that is the final fulfillment of oneself as a person. Wojtyła says: “the ‘self-teleology of the limit’ is first of all existentially proper to the man who exists and acts in the world. It is this limit which is the truth of human acts.”⁷³ But under this necessity, resulting from a man’s/woman’s existence and action in the world, “there is constantly being revealed as it were a second dimension, ‘the self-teleology of aim,’ which the ancient and medieval thinkers had connected with the concept of happiness.”⁷⁴ It is this auto-teleology of aim that turns out to be the crowning of the concept of transcendence of the person in action.

Self-fulfillment, as Wojtyła points out, does not mean shutting off within oneself, but it shows an exceptional openness to other persons, to the pursuit of a certain type of community of personal existences, in which the person’s life reveals its transcendent qualities: “man fulfills himself ‘through others’ and realizes his own self by living ‘for others.’”⁷⁵ The pursuit of fulfillment gives the person’s life a specific direction, leading to the union with other persons in a community which is based on a mutual participation in humanness. This participation is an essential dimension of the person’s realization.⁷⁶ It is another facet of the person’s transcendence in the perspective of the auto-teleology of aim: the person not only goes beyond themselves towards others, but also outgrows themselves, as Wojtyła states.⁷⁷

The person constitutes themselves, which makes them radically distinct from objects and it means that the person cannot be reduced to the world of nature.⁷⁸ Human being transcends nature primarily in its mode of personal existence. By going deeper

⁷⁰ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 175.

⁷¹ Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 167–168.

⁷² Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, 174.

⁷³ Wojtyła, “Transcendence,” 210.

⁷⁴ Wojtyła, “Transcendence,” 211.

⁷⁵ Wojtyła, “Transcendence,” 210.

⁷⁶ The issue of participation, in its fairly specific sense, is discussed by Wojtyła in *Acting Person*, 261–299.

⁷⁷ Wojtyła, “Transcendence,” 210.

⁷⁸ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible,” 210–215.

into the essence of the person, we see that the person is directed towards what is absolute, final,⁷⁹ and what has already become somehow present in the person's experience at the level of the transcendent reference to the truth. The conscience directs men/women towards 'outgrowing themselves' and thus achieving full conformity with themselves.⁸⁰ The reference to the truth, therefore, binds the whole person, because men/women are for themselves the aim of their actions: when they reach the end, which is the truth, they fulfill themselves. Therefore, the search for the truth remains an ever-present sign of a man's/woman's openness to the transcendent and the absolute, and the man's/woman's conscience is called the voice of God, because it is the conscience which reveals the transcendent level of human life.⁸¹

This peculiar and highly important relationship between the truth present in the human experience of freedom, and the absolute truth, reveals a deeper meaning of the person's transcendence. This relation, according to Wojtyła, reaches the peak of human cognitive activity, and also reveals inherent in the human nature openness to a response that transcends the natural sphere of life: "the opening of human *praxis* to God [...] allows this *humanum* to find himself in the full dimension of transcendence, which is deeply rooted in the personal structure of human being."⁸² Already as John Paul II, he referred to this issue in his 'most philosophical' encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: "men and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable [...]; their search looks towards an ulterior truth which would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute."⁸³ Wojtyła's effort was leading towards a thesis that the person's transcendence cannot be fully understood without a reference to the final dimension of human existence. This is why transcendence speaks so much about the specificity of being a man/woman, about who the person is, and what personal existence is, as well as about the fact that in search of a personal fulfillment, the man/woman inevitably reaches the absolute.

Conclusion

The human subject, striving for fulfillment in truth, reveals both its imperfection and transcendence: "he does not take a stand, by virtue of the transcendence proper to him 'beyond good and evil' – but only, as is expressly confirmed by experience,

⁷⁹ Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 208.

⁸⁰ Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 208.

⁸¹ Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 207–209.

⁸² Wojtyła, "Teoria – *praxis*," 475.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 33. In this search reason finally opens up to faith, because: "the religious impulse is the highest expression of the human person, because it is the highpoint of his rational nature. It springs from the profound human aspiration for the truth" (*ibidem*, no. 33, n. 28).

'outgrows himself' through his relations to truth (and therefore spirituality), in order to possess himself in the field of his willing, and thus also to fulfill himself."⁸⁴ It can therefore be said that each person is imposed upon themselves as a task, and in every action this task is imposed anew as a challenge to freedom.

This paper presents the understanding and significance of the person's transcendence in Wojtyła's philosophy, starting with his concept of experience. While remaining within the framework of classical realistic philosophy, Wojtyła reached for an advanced phenomenological analysis of experiencing subjectiveness, which was quite controversial in his environment at that time. In the course of the above-mentioned arguments, the person's transcendence in the action first was revealed as the dominance of the person through freedom (self-determination). This dominance is possible because of a reference to the truth in its existential dimension. The above analyses also showed that the person's transcendence is the basis of their integration and reveals the spiritual dimension of the person's being as superior to the material dimension. Finally, the transcendence was presented as an experiential expression of the personal existence. The latter disclosed the deeper aspects of transcendence, demonstrating the person's uniqueness and unrepeatability, their pursuit of fulfillment through the union with other persons and by seeking the ultimate truth.

In relation to the initial understanding of transcendence, founded on the essential distinction between the person and nature, we saw a wealth of threads that show the person's transcendence in the action based on the analysis of lived experience. This approach not only highlights or displays the traditional concept of transcendence from a different perspective, but also completes it to considerably with new and creative aspects. Although Wojtyła does mean transcendence as exceeding nature, when he speaks of efficacy and self-determination, he intends to draw attention to a more internal dimension of transcendence, connected with the relation of freedom to the truth. The person as an autonomous subjectiveness not only constitutes themselves in freedom, but also transcends humanness as a general human nature – by virtue of their individual, unique personal existence.

In his concept of transcendence, Wojtyła showed what men/women are able to achieve by making a deeper reflection on the way of living their own experience. He saw that a man/woman is, first of all, a witness of their being a person: hence the personal experience of each one is the closest testimony of the transcendence.⁸⁵ In this way he expressed the hope that men/women would always be able to recognize the truth about who they really are. He appealed to each person's loyalty to their own experience, assuming at the same time the person's maturation, that is perfecting their freedom and discovering their 'self' in relation to the truth – a path that everyone must follow personally. This message is just as pertinent today: now

⁸⁴ Wojtyła, "Transcendence," 209.

⁸⁵ Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible," 214.

when what has been previously clear and obvious is losing their meaning, the value of the personal experience of a man/woman turns out to be priceless.

Practice does not deviate from theory: Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II himself testified to the person's transcendence through his own life and teaching. If this is true that in our times the rational argumentation and factual discussion do not suffice, and many people need the testimony of someone genuinely experiencing their humanity, then this thinker and spiritual leader gives the best testimony which has become well known to many people of our times.

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