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A review of the doctoral dissertation

by Antonius Alex Lesomar

THE PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN PERSON'S SUBJECTIVITY

IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF KAROL WOJTYŁA

written under the supervision of Rev. Dr. Tomasz Duma

at the Faculty of Philosophy of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

(Lublin 2023, pp. 229)

Antonius Alex Lemar's doctoral dissertation is devoted to the problem of the subjectivity of the human person in the anthropological thought of Karol Wojtyła. The very subject of the human person and his subjectivity is taken up in various currents of modern philosophy. It can be noted that reductionist approaches prevail in it, rejecting the metaphysical understanding of the person, and identifying being a person with a number of empirical characteristics. In this way, the subjectivity of the human person is also reduced; it ceases to differ in any significant way from the subjectivity of other entities, such as the subjectivity of animals. Against this background, Karol Wojtyła's thought proves interesting to all those who are convinced of the unique status of the human person in the visible world and who wish to justify the specific subjectivity of man. Wojtyła's philosophy of

the person also turns out to be noteworthy because it combines a traditional metaphysical approach (referring to the thought of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) with a phenomenological approach that refers to the data of consciousness; in other words, it combines an object-oriented approach with a subject-oriented approach. It is worth noting that it is this aspect of Wojtyla's anthropological thought that the author repeatedly draws attention to in his dissertation.

There is no shortage of English publications devoted to the anthropology of Karol Wojtyla, as evidenced by the bibliography cited by the author. However, as far as I know, there is no dissertation so far dedicated to the problem of the subjectivity of the human person. In this sense, the dissertation reviewed here fills a gap, and the dissertation's significance is all the greater because the subjectivity of the person is undoubtedly one of the most important themes in Wojtyla's anthropological thought.

## 1. Structure of the dissertation

The author places the discussion of the question of the subjectivity of the human person in the history of philosophical thought, beginning with Greek philosophy. The first chapter contains a terminological investigation on the term "subjectivity," where the author points out that Wojtyla's philosophy is concerned with unveiling and analyzing the objective structure of human subjectivity. In the following sections of this chapter, the author discusses the various concepts of subjectivity that have appeared in the history of philosophy. The author groups these concepts into four categories: naturalistic concepts, spiritualistic concepts, existentialistic concepts and metaphysical concepts. The author notes that some of these concepts reduce subjectivity from the objective (material) dimension of human being, while others emphasize the subjective (spiritual) aspect. As can easily be seen, the metaphysical conception is the closest to the author. Its



representatives in the dissertation are Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Mieczyslaw A. Krąpiec, although the author sees a shortcoming in them as well, which, according to him, consists in the lack of analysis of the subjective dimension of the experience of subjectivity. Such an analysis, combined in synthesis with the metaphysical concept of subjectivity, is what the author sees in Wojtyła's philosophy.

This conclusion leads to the second chapter, in which the author analyzes the manifestation of subjectivity in the experiences of reflection, decision and act. For Wojtyła, the experience of the person's causality, which manifests itself in acting (contrasted with what Wojtyła calls "activations"), is fundamental. In this way, the person's consciousness manifests the structure fundamental to the person, which Wojtyła calls the transcendence of the person. In the second chapter, the author analyzes the transcendence of the person in acting, showing it in juxtaposition with two other concepts through which Wojtyła describes the specificity of the human person: integration and participation.

In the third chapter, from describing the peculiarities of human subjectivity, the author moves to its metaphysical justification. In this chapter, the author analyzes the specificity of human being taken from the metaphysical side, and expressed in the concept of *suppositum humanum*. In the case of man, being *suppositum humanum* is expressed in the concept of person, which implies a specific relation to nature, different from that of other entities, which the author analyzes in the second section of this chapter. This specific relation is the possession of human nature (I can say that I possess human nature, I am not totally immersed in it). In Wojtyła's anthropology, this leads to the problem of the relation of person and nature, which the Polish philosopher solves by introducing the concept of integration of nature in the person. The author discusses this problem in the third section of this chapter.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the relevance of Wojtyla's concept of subjectivity for various fields of philosophy: for anthropology, ethics, social philosophy and philosophy of culture. The author notes that Wojtyla's approach, which seeks to synthesize the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness, opens up the possibility of creating an integral anthropology or, as Wojtyla expresses it, an "adequate anthropology." In ethics, this approach leads to the development of an original form of ethical personalism. At the same time, it has its momentous consequences for the understanding of social life, in which the person participates as a subject, rather than being merely an object in it. In turn, in the last section of the chapter, the author shows the person as the subject and goal of culture.

The dissertation ends with the general conclusion, the bibliography and an abstract in Polish.

## 2. Evaluation

The dissertation has a clear structure, in which the concepts and problems present in the philosophy of the person developed by Wojtyla that are relevant to the topic are included. The author repeatedly draws attention - recognizing this as Wojtyla's momentous contribution to the philosophy of person - to the synthesis of the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness that Wojtyla developed in his anthropology. The dissertation is provided with an extensive bibliography - mainly in English, although studies in Polish also appear. What is missing, however, are references to studies, quite numerous, in other languages.

The author uses the English translation of Wojtyla's main work, which was published under the title *The Acting Person*. As is known, a number of objections were raised against this translation, which eventually led to the publication of a new translation of the text entitled *Person and Act*. Admittedly, on p. 185 the author quotes this title, but it seems to me that this



is rather by mistake. In any case, it would have been good if the author's point of reference had been this new translation.

The English of the dissertation is generally correct, although there are quite a few errors, including grammatical ones, which I believe are due to the author's inattention rather than lack of knowledge of English grammar. From this side, the text of the dissertation would require careful revision.

The text of the dissertation testifies to the author's good understanding of Wojtyla's philosophy. However, there is a certain shortcoming: the author limits himself to its presentation of Wojtyla's anthropology and avoids problematizing it. Another shortcoming is this: Wojtyla's philosophy is presented only from a synchronic perspective, while the diachronic dimension is omitted. It would undoubtedly be interesting to show the development of Wojtyla's thought, especially since the author refers repeatedly to his early text entitled *Reflections on the Essence of Man*, which clearly differs in the distribution of accents from his late texts, such as the article "Subjectivity and what is irreducible in man." Some aspects of interest to the topic of subjectivity can also be found in John Paul II's so-called "Theology of the Body," a text which, while theological in nature, also contains various philosophical elements (moreover, it should be remembered that its first part - the most important from the point of view of the issue of subjectivity - was prepared even before Wojtyla was elected to the See of Peter. Although the author cites this work in his bibliography, it does not play a significant role in the text of the dissertation itself.

In the chapter on historical perspective in considering subjectivity I missed a reference to the empiricist tradition, primarily to David Hume. Of course, this tradition is present to varying degrees in the other conceptions of philosophy discussed by the author, but the importance of Hume and the authors inspired by him in the philosophy of the person is difficult to ignore. It is in Hume that we find, perhaps for the first time, a denial of the objective

dimension given in the experience of the Self, or, as we might say in Wojtyla's language, a denial of human subjectivity.

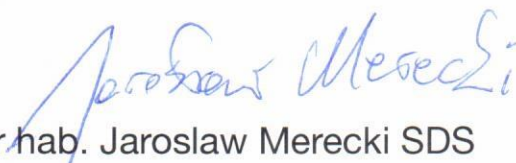
More generally, the historical chapter is, on the one hand, too restricted (due to the omission of the empiricist tradition) and, on the other hand, too rich for the reason that the author discusses a great many thinkers in it, which necessarily results in a certain superficiality.

Some doubts may be raised by the title of the third chapter: "Person as the ultimate cause of subjectivity" - for it seems that being a person is not so much a cause of subjectivity as another way of conceptualizing it. It would have been worthwhile if the author had used in this chapter the findings of Robert Spaemann in his book *Persons. The Difference between "Someone" and "Something"* (Oxford 2006).

On p. 161, speaking of the metaphysical understanding of the human person, the author refers to a certain John Macmurray, briefly discussing his views. However, he does not cite any of his writings (in a footnote we have a reference to Wojtyla's *Person and Act*), and what is more, Macmurray's name does not appear in the bibliography either.

### 3. Conclusion

The dissertation of Antonius Alex Lesomar is a valuable presentation of the understanding of the subjectivity of the human person in the thought of Karol Wojtyla. I conclude that the dissertation meets all the requirements for doctoral dissertations, and I petition the Faculty Council that Antonius Alex Lesomar be admitted to the further stages of the procedure for obtaining the title of Phd.

  
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