

# MAN'S PERSONAL SELF-DETERMINATION ACCORDING TO K. WOJTYŁA

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On a Thomistic Congress (Rome–Naples) in 1974 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła held a lecture, in which he shortly presented his book entitled "The Acting Person", Krakow, 1969. The translation of his lecture was published five years later in "Obnovljen život" (34/1979/5–13). We will first present here the main thoughts of this lecture, and then we will discuss Wojtyła's picture of man's "self-determination". We will conclude with a critical review, which, as such, should be criticized itself — in order not to remain one sided...

## *1. Lecture from 1974*

In the introduction to his speech, Wojtyła goes after a practical goal, which is: "captatio benevolentiae". That is to say, if a speaker is "quality goods", he should recommend himself to the audience. Thus Wojtyła points out that his book "The Acting Person" brought him huge publicity in Poland. Some twenty contemplative discussions on the content of this book have been held in Warsaw, Lubin and Krakow. Some liked the author's attempt of "aggiornamento" of scholastics, while others were probing the possibility of connecting phenomenology with Thomism. The philosophers — Marxists did not remain silent either. All of them, the lecturer says, expressed their willingness to create an autochthonous Polish philosophy.

After this introduction, which revealed that the Poles are no alphabets when it comes to philosophizing, systematic thoughts of the lecture itself follow. Here, as well as in his book, Wojtyła takes as a starting point "man's experience", that is "complete experience" — which means: Descartes's "Cogito" (I think) is not enough; rather he wants to encompass the whole of consciousness with the phrase: "I act!" In this way, in addition to what "happens" inside us, a dynamic element of volition is emphasized. Wojtyła does not cite the French saying: "Faire et, en faisant, se faire", but completely in its spirit, he is warning that a man by acting becomes both the *subject* and *object* of his

own acts. This shifts the accent from the volition to man's person, which is, as the lecturer emphasizes, the origin of all action, so that on the basis of intended values it becomes good or bad itself... In all this there is an obvious vertical of moral decision making in the conscience and, as well, the horizontal of personal possessing of oneself in the consciousness. To this last element Wojtyła adds dialogical views of the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 24) which do not allow a person to remain "systema clausum", but ask for a person to open towards a society. Thus the evangelical view of "self-giving" is the culmination of the phenomenological analysis of human experience. The Croatian translator writes that the newly elected Pope Wojtyła expressed the main characteristic of his own "image" with this reference to self-giving.

## *2. Wojtyła's concept of self-determination*

Even before the Thomistic Congress in 1974 and before the book "The Acting Person" was published in 1969, the European tradition knew that a man *personally builds himself* with his moral acts. In this sense, in a way, M. Blondel preceded Wojtyła. In his thesis: "L'Action" (Paris, 1893) he investigates in a phenomenological way a vital force of a human heart. Systematically valuing auto-realizations of a man's will, Blondel concludes that, in the end, by *personal option* we make a decision about a sense or senselessness of our own survival... On the other hand, Marxists of a more recent time were attempting to modernize their movement, saying that man is a "creative being of praxis" which by autocreation rushes towards a classless humanism... Opposed to them, the teachers of Christian asceticism defended the view that after falling into a sin, mankind lost its gift of integrity. For this reason, in the state of "fallen nature" it would be our duty to revive the "lost paradise", at least in our souls, by *personal autointegration*, and to be able to love the God integrally, i. e. to love Him with "all our hearts"... Wojtyła ignores these predecessors. He mentions neither Blondel's autorealisation nor Marxist autocreation nor Ascetic autointegration, but promotes his view of "autodetermination". Primary meaning of this term would be derived from the fact that a man by a free choice of will passes from the alternative of indefiniteness to a clearly definite attitude, by which he morally defines himself. He does not waver between pro and contra, but stands resolutely either in good or in bad...

In his reasoning, Wojtyła uses the method of phenomenologists, but he greatly differs from them in content. Namely, his analysis of human experi-

ence is, methodologically, strictly *described*: it is not argumentative, but descriptive. Like Husserl, he says that he will not take notice to any opinions formulized beforehand, derived from systems taken over from the past. He wants to be a consistent phenomenologist. But, concerning the content, Wojtyła is not satisfied with the Husserl's thesis: "Ego cogito cogitatum", but accepts a *dynamic* supposition: "I act!" He even goes further, all the way to the area of morality when he says: "Man's experience of activity in himself includes *the empiric of the moral good or evil* as an important and very significant moment". (page 7). Such a direct transition from the experience of activity to the experience of morality would probably be approved by J. H. Newman in the XIX century. But it would be ignored by J. P. Sartre and numerous like-minded persons in the XX. century, who avoid any mention of a moral duty in an unprofessional way, stigmatizing it as "Sklavenmoral"...

In addition, Wojtyła differs from phenomenologists in the fact that, inside consciousness, he attains the experience of material causality. He said: "The formulation — I act — means that I am an acting cause (*causa efficiens*) of my act, and in this sense, I am a material cause of actualization of myself as a subject..." (p. 9) As far as we know, Husserl has not reached material causality inside consciousness with phenomenologic analysis, but he considered our immanent acts as "leistungen", that is: as vital shoots and runlets of man's inner self. Wojtyła, on the other hand, claims that acts of the intellect and volition are true "effects" produced by material causality, in the same way as in Thomism, he says, a substance materially causes its accidents (!). Nevertheless, he differentiates between two types of these volition acts: on one hand so called desires which originate spontaneously, and on the other hand self-determination as a result of a free engagement of will. The former are only "taking place" in a man so they do not exceed the level of superficial accidents. Self-determination, nevertheless, "constitutes the essence of man's freedom itself, Wojtyła says, and stretches to the original core of a person..." It is directed inwards, towards the subject. This is why Wojtyła appreciates it more than so called "intention" with which consciousness sights outside objects. Actually, a man with self-determination becomes really "somebody" in personal and ethical sense, although he has not been mere "something" since he was born... It is obvious that with the above mentioned affirmation of material causality inside consciousness and emphasizing a personal maturation of a subject in conscience Wojtyła stands out and above the horizon of Husserl's usual meditations...

### 3. *Critical revision*

We believe that the term "critique" connotes "*love of truth*". Thus we agree with the preface of the English edition of the book "The Acting Person" in the evaluation that Wojtyła's document is a real contribution to classic scholastic anthropology. The preface was signed by the author himself and dated (and maybe dated in advance!) in 1977. It says there that a self-determination theory is "the first attempt of its kind" in the atmosphere of Aristotelian — Thomistic and that it involves a reinterpretation of a whole range of notions taken over from the past...

We will point out a thing which others tend to overlook. During his studies, Wojtyła was not too familiar neither with phenomenology nor with personalism. We can see this in his doctoral thesis defended in Rome in 1948. Indeed, it is not clear how he, a Catholic clergyman, soon after the World War II managed to obtain a Communist regime permission to stay in Western Europe. In Croatia, we had to wait for such a "blessing" for fifteen years. Nevertheless, regardless of the way in which he managed to arrange that with the Polish authorities, he addressed the Act of Belief according to Saint John of the Cross in his doctoral thesis as early as in 1948 in Rome. As a doctoral candidate, he designated contact points between Carmelite mysticism and Aquinas's metaphysics in this paper, but he did not mention either phenomenology or personalism. In those times Husserl was already dead for ten years († 1938), but his influence was very much alive... On the other hand, E. Mounier was leading a powerful movement, for which he had made the foundations in a "Personal Manifesto" in 1930'. In these years J. Moroux published the studies on personal structure of the act of belief and crowned them with a successful book: "Je crois en Toi" (Paris 1949). Nevertheless, none of these contemplative streams addressed Wojtyła's doctoral thesis... We may conclude that he started studying phenomenology and personalism once he had finished his studies. He did not deem himself learned enough, but was diligently acquiring new knowledge, which would later find its place in John Paul II's Encyclicals... Surely, a question remains: why a young doctoral candidate in Rome acted like some kind of a "color-blind man" concerning some documents which were relevant for his thematic? Maybe Wojtyła's mentor on his doctoral thesis, Reginaldo Garrigou-Lagrange was partly responsible for this. The famous Dominican, namely, followed the "letter" of St. Thomas very strictly and disassociated himself from more recent trends in Catholicism. Who knows? It was probably under the influence of his mentor that Wojtyła remained distant from M. Blondel as well. He did not mention Blondel either

in Rome in 1948, no in Krakow in 1969. Nevertheless, the book "The Acting Person" was initially meant for Polish readers. But Karol Wojtyła soon met with Roman Ingarden, and the Krakow publication went towards Western Europe. In its translation into English, the book was revised. It was the work of Ana T. Tymieniecka. Wojtyła himself said that the English version entitled "The Acting Person" would be a relevant text. For this reason translations into German, French and Italian were done on the basis on this authorized publication. (Por NRTh 103 /1981/ 103. and NRTh 106 1984/ 731...) It is evident from the revised text that Wojtyła is attempting to view Christian moral theology through the prism of the phenomenology represented by the converted (and reconverted!) half-Jew Max Scheler (1874-1928). Blondel, a true Catholic, did not have that honor! To say the truth, in the German translation of the Wojtyła's book, on page 350, there is a short Blondel's quotation. It was taken from the so called "Trilogies", Volume 5, which the gray-haired "philosopher from Aix" in his eighties, having lost his sight, dictated to his associates. Wojtyła notes that this small quotation was irrelevant for him. He does not mention the initial Blondel's thesis "L'Action" from 1893, which, actually in accordance with Thomas Aquinas concludes that a man by his nature (!) aims at the final Purpose, although it is unreachable for him by nature (!)... The Wojtyła's version of "The Acting Person" as well, speaks of transcendence of man's will, but not in such a dramatic way as Blondel works it out in detail. It is interesting that in the revised work the term Self-determination (auto-determination) does not dominate any more, but the rise over the Husserl's "egology" is entrusted to man's autointegration... We cannot investigate here the extent of this terminological change.

In the end we will add one strictly scholastic note. Wojtyła, nevertheless, states that man's intellect and will as material causes ("causae efficientes") produce their acts. None of the Thomists attending the 1974 Congress contradicted this statement. After all, most neoscholastics gladly accept the opinion that the principles of material causality are justified inside a man's conscience, which enables them to easily defeat Kant's criticism concerning causality. Similarly, professors W. Keilbach and I. Kozelj at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University in Zagreb, followed the same direction in the theory of comprehension, taking as "liber textus" the manual by J. de Vries from Munich... The writer of this article attempted to end with this "tradition" at the Zagreb Catholic Theological Faculty. It is worth knowing that the leaders of scholastic ideas, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scot, were not regarding man's conscious acts as products of *material causality* of mind, or will. Of

course, for them as well, intellect was an active element of reasoning. In the same way, the will was an active element of volition. But in the original Thomism and Scotism, the element may act as "causa Formalis" as well, and not always as "causa Efficiens"! If man's conscious acts originate by material causality, they would belong to Aristotelian category: "actio-passio". Nevertheless, they originate in consciousness "per causalitatem formalem" and they belong to the category of "qualitas". This fine difference is not hair-splitting, but an important element in the systematization of classic philosophy and theology...

In his Commentary of the I. book of Maxims (Opus oxoniense 3, 6), Duns Scot, for example, deemed ludicrous for immanent acts of soul to be originated by material causality. He claimed that "causalitas efficiens" existed either among realistically different beings or among realistically different parts of one material being. (In this way a hand may materially hit a leg!) Concerning Aquinas, he systematically claimed that there is no "essentia" which may efficiently cause its "esse". In the same way, no "intellectus" may efficiently produce its "intelligere", and no "voluntas" its own "velle". We would get a more complete interpretation of this opinion in the texts where the saint speaks "de processione potentiarum ab essentia animae". Namely, in Thomism intellect and volition are streaming out of the core of the soul as an explication of actual fullness, which is primordially banked up in it. According to the same key of emanence, individual acts of intellect and volition would be born with mere transition "de virtute ad actum"... This opinion enables Aquinas to, by monitoring our conscious acts, analogically speak "de processionibus in Deo". Actually, in the Ancient Christianity, they claimed that the everlasting Logos is born in the Father's lap "per modum intellectionis". If "intellectio" as such would be a result of material causality, the above mentioned analogy would lead us to the Arian's mistake: Godly Logos would be materially caused by the Father. This would mean: it would be made, and not born... This turning back to medieval reasoning should save us from easily showing off with material causality in meanders of human conscience.

### *Conclusion*

We have pointed out that "critique" connotes *love of truth*. So, as critics, we do not want to destroy anybody's work, but we would like to come as close to the Truth, which always surpasses us, as possible... Of course, a search for "proximity" may result in shortsightedness. As with the shoemaker who has

found himself in Venice in front of the magnificent Tizian's painting. Looking at the work of art in his shoemaker's way, he cried out: Behold! The painter has made a serious mistake. On this shoe he painted the seam which cannot be sawn in this way! Maybe we also tried to get close to Wojtyła's concept of self-determination in a similar, "shoemaker's" way. And maybe we did not.