

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF KAROL WOJTYLA HAS TWO MAIN FEATURES

ROCCO BUTTIGLIONE

1. First of all, it is based upon the classical philosophy of being and on the aristotelian/thomistic notion of substance. The word substance comes from Latin and means what lies under something else (*sub stare*). It gives us the idea that reality has a multiplicity of layers (at least two). Something stands at the surface and something stands at a deeper level. On the surface, we encounter many elements that are so, but might also be different. This is what Aristotle calls circumstances. Circumstances may easily change in time. In the perpetual change of the ways in which reality presents itself to us there is however something that does not change, or at least does not change at the same pace and in the same way. This is the deeper layer that we call substance. Let us provide an example. Imagine that you have a friend. She has long beautiful blond hair. One day you see her with a short, dark to violet haircut. The usual reaction of a male friend would be at first not to recognize her. Of course, after a while you became conscious that the fashion has changed but she is the same. The hair cut is an accident, but the substance of the person remains. The substance is what remains equal to itself while the circumstances change.

It is perhaps worthwhile remembering that the word substance is a literal translation of the greek word *hypokeimenon* (*hypo* = under; *keimenon* = what lays; *hypokeimenon* = what lays under).

Even more: the persistence of the substance is the condition for the existence of the circumstances. They enjoy real existence only in so far as they are inherent to a substance.

You can interpret this notion of substance in two different senses. If you interpret it absolutely, you will demand that substance never changes under any circumstances. In this sense, substance would coincide with the being (to on) of Parmenides or with the substance of Spinoza. In this sense, there

can be only one substance and that substance is God. This is not, however, the notion of substance that you find either in Aristotle or in St. Thomas. The meaning of substance here has a more methodological sense.

The substance has a movement in itself. It is implied in human substance that each man should be born out of the love of a man and a woman, that he should grow in time and then decay and die. Substances may be modified through the action of other substances and enter in relation with them. To understand this point better, we need to introduce another couple of categories that are decisive in classical aristotelian/thomistic philosophy. They are the categories of potency and act. In human substance, there is a potential to grow in many different directions. A child may become a computer expert, a priest or even a university professor. Some of these qualifications may be united in the same person, although some of them may exclude each other, and in one human life there is room only for a certain number of them. What interests us more is the fact that a child may become a good man or an evil man. Some elements of the evolution of human substance are predetermined. That a child should grow is something quite independent of her or his will. That she or he should become a good or an evil person is largely dependent upon her or his will. To a large extent, we create ourselves through our actions. To become an athlete, you need a certain predisposition, but even more important is willpower and how you train. The Greeks had discovered what we today call body building: the shape of one's body may be influenced through exercise. Socrates and Plato thought that the form and content of the soul may be influenced in the same way. St. Augustine expressed the same concept saying that God, who created you without your consent, will not save you without your consent.

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln that may help us to illustrate this point better. The story tells us that one day Lincoln dismissed his gardener. His family and his friends asked him why he had done that. Lincoln replied: I do not like his face. All his friends replied: he is not responsible for the face he has got. But Lincoln insisted: everybody who is over forty is responsible for the face he has got. Let us set aside the violation of the rights of labour and the naïve acceptance of the (Greek) principle of the correspondence between the traits of the body and those of the soul (the principle: *kalos kai agathos*. The beautiful is also good). What is really valuable in the example is the idea that we change because of our actions, that what we do remains in us and changes the moral substance of our souls.

Aristotle explains that all human action has a double effect. One effect regards the exterior environment, the other modifies the person itself. When

we lift a weight, we change the position of that object, but at the same time, we exercise our muscles and make them stronger. In the same way, if one kills an innocent human being, he changes the world outside himself and, at the same time, changes the moral character of his soul: he becomes a murderer.

There is a beautiful tale by Oscar Wilde that illustrates this point (it is worthwhile remembering that Oscar Wilde studied with the Jesuits and seems to often have a keen understanding of theology). A young man makes a pact with the devil. He is, and will remain forever, exceedingly beautiful and the effects of his evil deeds will be transposed upon a painting of him, a portrait. One day, he looks at the painting and is terrified by what he has become. He destroys the portrait, dies and saves his soul. The portrait is, of course, the soul, the substance of man in which all what he has done of good or of evil is recorded and contained.

Our actions make us what we really are. Although they may not be recorded on our face, as A. Lincoln seems to have believed according to the story I told, they are surely recorded in our inner being that we may call heart or soul.

This principle has been attacked in modern philosophy for different reasons.

To make a long story short, we may say that after Spinoza, some accepted his notion of substance that does not do justice to the substance of the many real existing beings, and others criticized the notion of substance in general. The result was a great uncertainty about the human substance. Leibniz has developed the notion of *mens momentanea* to describe a human conscience that is not rooted in a moral substance in which what I was yesterday bears no relation to what I am today. In this kind of human being, no moral responsibility is possible. Why should I be held responsible for the actions of my *ego* of yesterday that has no essential link to my *ego* of today? No community of law is possible because the experience of the promise, that lies at the basis of all law of contracts, becomes rigorously unthinkable. Man is reduced to a system of loosely connected impressions and passions that are no longer unified in any coherent way. In his *Treatise on human understanding*, D. Hume recognizes this difficulty, but does not provide us with any acceptable solution.

The great difficulty for the foundation of morals in modern philosophy is largely dependent upon the loss of the notion of substance.

Wojtyla learned about this notion in the Angelicum of Rome at the school of great Dominicans like Garrigou Lagrange and Philippe, and this

concept has remained a cornerstone of his anthropology throughout his whole philosophical career.

In the continental philosophical tradition, the widespread acceptance of the spinozist concept of the unique substance has led to the loss of the concept of individual responsibility and to the development of an idea of social or collective responsibility. The real moral subject, then, becomes Man capitalised, mankind as such. What is really important is to be part of the collective progressive movement of the human race towards its accomplishment. K. Marx drew the last conclusions of this spiritual attitude: individual human rights have no real meaning.

Crimes committed by those who struggle for world revolution are deprived of their moral negativity and become even positive.

Political judgement substituted for moral judgement that loses its autonomy.

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, this conclusion has been partly avoided because the spinozist notion of substance has not been accepted and has been strongly criticized; here another danger arises. In this philosophical tradition, we do not miss only the spinozist notion of substance; we lose the notion of substance in general, also in the more methodological, aristotelian and thomistic version. Against Spinoza, the Anglo-Saxon philosophy defended the rights of the individual against their submersion in an absolute substance. On the other hand, this philosophy did not succeed in giving an adequate foundation to the individual who runs the risk of being reduced to a loose connection of states of mind or of circumstances not linked to any underlying substance. The classical definition of the person 'intellectualis naturae individua substantia' seems to Wojtyla to better preserve and express the essence of man as a moral subject.

2. The second main feature of Wojtyla's anthropology regards the way in which we become aware of the nature of our moral substance. Although Wojtyla, as we have seen, is completely aware of the classical philosophy of substance and the philosophy of potency and act, and adheres without doubts or reserves to this philosophical tradition, it would not correspond to his thought to say that he deduces, in any form, the living experience of the person from a metaphysics of the person.

What we have described is an account of the classical thomist anthropology with which Wojtyla became familiar in the Angelicum in Rome and stood with slight modifications in the centre of the teaching of the personalist school of Lublin. What is new in Wojtyla's thought is that he has, in one sense, reread these metaphysical characteristics of the human

person in the actual living experience of the human subject. For this reason, and in this sense, Wojtyła is a phenomenologist. It is important that we grasp the reason why this is so important. In one sense, the philosophical method does not change one iota in the classical understanding of the human person: Wojtyła is as much of a thomist as Garrigou Lagrange, Philippe or Krapiec. On the other hand, reading Wojtyła's philosophy, we find ourselves in a completely different spiritual atmosphere. Thomistic principles are not presupposed but, in a certain sense, rediscovered through a thorough analysis of human experience as it is immediately given to each one of us. This gives us evidence of the truth of the metaphysical principles of the philosophy of being because they are confirmed by our immediate experience. On the other hand, a certain knowledge of those principles may be useful to orient our phenomenological research in the interpretation of the given. This previous knowledge of the metaphysics of the substance and of the metaphysics of potency and act is not properly presupposed. It is rather an euristic hypothesis that leads our research and is confirmed by its outcome.

Phenomenology deals with what is immediately given in consciousness. The purpose of Wojtyła is to better understand man in his actions and through his actions. He wants to know how the metaphysical structures effectively function in the everyday life of the human being. The classical philosophy of the person gives us, in a certain sense, a static definition of human essence. Here, we enter into the dynamism of existence. This allows us better to understand not only the anthropological principles but the way in which they are true for us, the way in which their truth can be experienced in our life experience. In one sense, all this is aimed at the individual appropriation of truth, to the discovery of how the objective truth on man is accomplished in my personal and particular form as a human being, and becomes the truth of my own life. Only through this process, abstract universal truth becomes personalized and becomes a living interest for us. Objective truth must become subjective to be lived from within. Only then does it enlighten our action and move us to action.

The phenomenological method deals with consciousness. In Wojtyła's interpretation, this does not mean that this method must be subjectivist and cannot reach being in itself. There is at least one kind of being that is immediately given in consciousness and this is the being of the subject and of consciousness itself. Human consciousness has a structure of its own, and the human spirit is an objective reality that we experience in this structure and through this structure.

This is what characterizes Wojtyla's thought. Our author accepts, in one sense, the great discovery of Descartes: the research on the human subject and human consciousness starts exactly with the immediate human experience as it is given in consciousness. This allows him to study the human act from within, in how it is immediately experienced by the subject and not only in how it can be deduced from the general metaphysical structure of the human being. Wojtyla's philosophy of the subject does not enter into the trap of subjectivity. Wojtyla's subject is real; it is objective subject. The dominating stream of existentialist philosophy has imagined that the subject created a world of its own completely disconnected from human nature. Jean Paul Sartre has considered liberty as the essence of human nature, liberty of being or becoming what anyone wants to be.

As a matter of fact, we always start with something that is pregiven to us and we have to take a stand in front of it. Our first and fundamental anthropological choice that conditions any subsequent moral choice is the decision we make on the basis of what is pregiven to us. The pregiven is what classical philosophy calls nature. Nature derives from the Latin word *nascor; natus*. Nature is what is given to us because of the fact of having been born. Since it is pregiven, we can consider it a gift. As all lovers know, a gift carries a meaning, according to the intention for which it was given to you. Let us give the example of a girl that receives an engagement ring. She is supposed to wear it on her finger as a sign of a loving relationship. If she sells the ring to buy herself a fashionable dress, this means that she has not accepted the gift. Regarding the gift, another attitude is also possible. The attitude of one that considers the ring a hostile act and tries to destroy the gift. These are exactly the two stands that we can take in front of our nature and in front of our freedom. We can make use of our freedom to further develop our nature that is entrusted to our liberty, or we can try to destroy our nature. The first is a creative attitude: we participate in God's act who wants our cooperation in order to complete the work of art that human life is. When you accept 'with gratitude' the fact that you are, for instance, a male or female, an American or an African, and all the other determinations of your existential condition, it is still uncertain whether (by exercising your freedom) you will become the father or mother of a large family, a lawyer, an engineer or anything else. The attitude of refusing the first gift of being can be called, if I may use a neologism of the English language, *discreative*. I try to destroy the preconditions of my being to substitute them with completely other determinations. I want to be just a product of my action. This seems to be, to a large extent, the meaning of mod-

ern atheism. To accept the idea of nature and of human nature as something originally pregiven means, at the same time, to imply that somebody has given us a nature. The gift has a meaning that is worthwhile searching for because the original benefactor of the gift has put meaning in it or has that intention in giving it to us. Our intention is to discover the intention of the benefactor and to enter into a dialogue with it.

In one sense, this redefines the conditions and the meaning of phenomenological intentionality, or perhaps it leads us back to the first formulation of the intentions in the work of Edmund Husserl in his period of Goettingen, before his famous transcendental turn.

The phenomenological analysis shows man as a being that discovers himself in action and through action. The action is therefore the key to understanding the human being as much as the metaphysical vision of the human person as contained in classical philosophy is a general research hypothesis in our attempt to adequately understand the structure of the human person. Classical philosophy and phenomenology both contribute in a delicate balance to the specific form of Wojtyła's anthropology. The phenomenological enquiry shows man as a moral subject. The fundamental experience in which a man becomes conscious of his nature as a moral subject is that of choice. In this experience, the starting point is a state of conscience of the form 'I can, but I'm not obliged to do it'. Here, one can choose not to do what he could have done, and he also discovers that he may resist the instinctive drives that are a part of his experience. The instinctive drives may be satisfied in various forms, and in a choice between different forms, the subject is led by an inherent pre-occupation to preserve his personal dignity. We all carry a sexual drive and we all choose different alternatives to satisfy it. We are led (or ought to be led) in this choice by an immanent idea of dignity that experiences some forms of satisfaction as unworthy and some are worthy of the human person. This experience does not contain a metaphysical concept as such, but we can say that the metaphysical concept of person does not contradict, but confirms what is immediately given in human experience. We can even say that the metaphysics of substance, potency and act gives us the best possible hypothesis to adequately understand the experience of man when we try to understand the underlying structure that makes moral experience, in general, possible. Addressing the specifics of moral experience, Wojtyła finds the link between phenomenological description and metaphysics. In moral experience, the human being is given in one sense as the cause of his action.

Through classical metaphysics and phenomenology, we have been trying to understand human essence better. It is now necessary to deal with the specific relationship of man with another. This requires an analysis of two fundamental experiences: that of friendship and that of conjugal love. There is a short poem that stands at the beginning of German literature which describes the experience of love.

Translation:

You are mine and I'm yours,
of this you can be sure.
You are contained in my heart,
The key was lost,
forever you will stay there.

In this poem, the person is represented as something that is void in its interior in which another being may live. The relation to this other is constitutive to the being of the person because without it, we cannot exist. Without denying the metaphysical subjectivity of the person, Wojtyla tells us that the relation to the other is not an accident, but fundamental to the fulfilment of human beings. There is one specific experience that is reserved to women that shows us this dynamism in the human flesh. It is the experience of child bearing. Here, the presence of one human being in the other is so immediately given that it cannot be denied. Males do not have this experience, and it is easier for them to develop a form of self consciousness centred only upon themselves. It remains, however, true that in the spiritual dimension, the capacity of opening oneself to the presence of another in oneself is a distinctive character of the human being as such, male or female. As a rule, in the development of human culture, women help men to become conscious of this essential determination. We learn what it means to be a father through the education given to us by our wives. The substance that man is determined in its interiority through the capacity of becoming a member of a community, of becoming part of a life in common with others, and through the act of carrying other human beings in ourselves. All this can be expressed with the word love. Here, the anthropology of Karol Wojtyla moves from a philosophical to a theological dimension. The idea of a person as a being whose substance is essentially affected through the relation to another, so much so that the relation constitutes the substance, can be justified through a phenomenological analysis of the specific human form of being in the world. This idea, however, was born in theology in order to understand, firstly, the relation of Jesus to His Father and, then, the relation of

the Christian to Christ. Becoming part of Him through love, we enter into his divine nature and are adopted as children of God.

In this perspective, we understand better the profound devotion of the Pope to the Mother of God. In her being mother, she gives us not the model of Christian femininity, but of being a person in general. To be a person means to love other human beings so much that you can only determine your identity in relation to them, that you carry them in your heart to generate them in eternal life. A true love wants for the beloved that truth and fullness of life are indicated with the words 'eternal life'.

If we consider the defence of the substantiality of the human being, we understand the reasons of the opposition of the Pope both to Communism, western agnosticism and moral relativism.

Communism believes in a universal human substance, in Man written in capital letters, but not in the substantiality of the individual human beings, and that is the reason why it thinks that their individual rights can be violated.

Western agnosticism and moral relativism do not believe that man has any substance or any nature, and therefore each human being creates himself in an arbitrary way without having to recognize an original gift of sense and of being given by God. This creation easily becomes a discreation, a self destruction, because the inherent laws of the human being are violated.

If we consider the phenomenological method used by Wojtyla, we understand his relation to the Vatican Council better. The major philosophical work of Wojtyla was written on the benches of the Council and is, in one sense, a great philosophical commentary to the Council. The Council has not changed anything in the catholic doctrine. It was not a dogmatic Council, convened to define a new doctrine. It was a pastoral Council, to express the same truth in the context of a new historical age and of a new human form of life. The old truth has to be rediscovered from a new starting point. The Council fathers wanted to build a path leading from the immediate life experience of the man of today to the eternal truth. Phenomenology is the tool of this voyage. Here, we see how much this Pope owes to the Council and is a man of the Council without ceasing, in any way, to be a man of Christian tradition.

If we consider his anthropology of communion, we understand why the family and the role of women is so important to him. In the family, we learn the logics of self giving and love, and women (mothers) have a fundamental role in teaching us this logic. It is true that males have very often abused

this and exploited women, denying them their rights in many areas of social action. It remains, nevertheless, true that mothers have a right to become mothers, and a society without mothers must perish before being destroyed in a pit of violence and fear.

Moreover, the anthropology of communion introduces us to Wojtyla's understanding of the life of the Church. The Church is the community of those who, through an act of love, accept the gift of the life of Christ for their salvation and, at the same time, offer their own lives entering into the life of Jesus and becoming a part of the others.