

Grzegorz Hołub, *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła* (European Studies in Theology, Philosophy and History of Religions 29), Peter Lang, Berlin–New York–Warszawa 2021, pp. 193.

The most difficult problems of the present world are rooted in the understanding of the human person. According to Benedict XVI, the main problem of modern civilization is a weak vision of the person. “A reductive vision of the person” (*Caritas in veritate*, 29) considers the individual dimension of the person but does not consider the relational dimension of the person; it considers the economic development of the person but does not consider that person’s moral development; and it considers the rights of the human person but does not take into consideration the responsibilities of the person. Therefore, the philosophy of the human person as presented by Karol Wojtyła is an important contribution to the contemporary personalism.

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Personalism as a system is discovering and understanding all reality from the fact of the person. Person is the key to reality according to Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910), the father of American Personalism. In his philosophical compendium entitled *The Philosophy of Personalism* (New York 1927) Albert Cornelius Knudson (1873–1953) wrote that personalism “represents one of the oldest and broadest currents in the history of human thought; it

stands organically and structurally related to the spiritual philosophy of all the ages. It is the ripe fruit of more than two millenniums of intellectual toil, the apex of a pyramid whose base was laid by Plato and Aristotle” (A.C. Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism*, Abingdon, New York 1927, p. 434).

*Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła* by Grzegorz Hołub is a collection of six chapters. They are preceded by a general *Introduction* (pp. 9–12) and concluded by rather brief *Final Conclusions* (pp. 177–179). In his *Introduction* the Author notices that the majority of his chapters have already been published in various philosophical periodicals (p.12): Chapter 2: “The Experience of Human Being in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła” (co-author: P.S. Mazur), *Filosofija. Sociologija* 28/1 (2017), pp. 73–83; chapter 3: “Karol Wojtyła and René Descartes. A Comparison of the Anthropological Positions,” *Anuario Filosófico* 48/2 (2015), pp. 341–358, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, ISSN: 0066-5215; “Karol Wojtyła on the Metaphysics of the Person,” *Logos i Ethos*, Vol 2 (2015), pp. 97–115; chapter 4: “The Human Subject and Its Interiority. Karol Wojtyła and the Crisis in Philosophical Anthropology,” *Quién. Revista de Filosofía Personalista* 4 (2016), pp. 47–66; “Wojtyła on Persons and Consciousness,” *Forum Philosophicum* 19/1 (2014), pp. 43–60; “The Relation between Consciousness and Emotions in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła,” *The Person and the Challenges* 5/2 (2015), pp. 149–164; chapter 5: “Persons as the Cause of Their Own Action: Karol Wojtyła on Efficacy,” *Ethical Perspectives* 23/2 (2016), pp. 259–275; “The Person in Dialogue, the Person through Dialogue,” *Filosofija. Sociologija* 27/1 (2016), pp. 3–13.

Many philosophers have tried to study Karol Wojtyła’s understanding of the human person, as for example: K.L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/ John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994); R. Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*, trans. P. Guietti, F. Murphy (Grand Rapids – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/ John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); J.F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Paul II* (Steubenville: Hildebrand Press, 2019). But Grzegorz Hołub states in his book that “we still need to investigate in-depth what original had Wojtyła contributed to the personalistic philosophy” (p. 10). And he explains that “the method applied in the book consists in detailed analyses of Wojtyła’s ideas as well as in looking for other ideas complementing his thinking about the person” (p. 11).

Therefore, the Author is deeply convinced that Karol Wojtyła himself would have preferred not to be only admired and praised but “actively engaged in contemporary problems and dilemmas” (p. 10).

The first chapter, entitled *Towards the Philosophy of the Human Person* (pp. 13–23), presents Wojtyła’s move from the philosophy of the human being to the philosophy of the human person. Hołub undertakes man in Wojtyła’s realist approach to philosophy on the threshold of Personalist thinking. According to Prof. John F. Crosby an essay, entitled “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man” by Card. Karol Wojtyła is the best introduction to his personalism, and is one of the best introductions to personalism in general. Wojtyła explains that there are two types of understanding the human being: cosmological and personalistic. The cosmological type concentrates on the objectivity of the human being which is connected with the general assumption of the reducibility of the human being. The personalistic type is concerned with subjectivity of the human being which is a kind of synonym for the irreducible in the human being. Wojtyła makes it clear that the personalistic type of understanding the human being is not the antinomy of the cosmological type but its complement (cf. p. 22).

The second chapter presents Wojtyła’s epistemological approach to the human person and it is entitled *How to know the Person?* (pp. 25–41). The centrality of the so-called lived experience is a cornerstone in Wojtyła’s epistemology. The Author examines a preliminary approach and a unity of experience, generally, and then he is focused on the human experience where Karol Wojtyła makes “a distinction between his approach to experience and an approach typical for naturalism” (p. 32). In the naturalistic thinking there is a tendency to introduce distinction between human biological life and existence of the human person, but the human person is a unity of body and soul, *corpore et anima unus* (*Gaudium et spes*, 14). Hence Hołub ponders on the phenomenological approach versus the phenomenistic one in the human experience. His concluding remarks of this chapter are close to a personalist epistemology prepared by Prof. Juan Manuel Burgos, Spain. Based on Wojtyła’s epistemology, Burgos proposed the concept of comprehensive experience. Main theses of his project are following: 1) experience is a primary action of the person with a cognitive dimension; 2) experience is both objective and subjective; 3) the cognitive dimension of experience is a unitary process performed by intelligence and sensitivity; 4) experience objectifies itself in understanding (see J.M. Burgos, “Comprehensive Experience (*experientia integral*): A New Proposal on the Beginning of Knowledge,” International Conference on Persons, Boston University, 3–7 August 2015).

In the third chapter G. Hołub describes *The Structure of the Person* (pp. 43–75). There are two parts of this chapter: against dualism (pp. 43–58) and metaphysics of the person (pp. 58–75). The first part presents René Descartes (1596–1650) and his thinking about the human being (the distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*). According to Karol Wojtyła, “Man as a person is a *suppositum*, that is a subject of existence and action. However, its existence (*esse*) is personal but not only individual like in a case of individuated nature. Following this, *operari*-understood as a whole dynamism of the man (including actions and occurrences which obtain in him) is also personal” (*Osoba i czyn*, Lublin 1994, p.123). In the adage *operari sequitur esse* it means that in the human person any personal *operari* follows (*sequitur*) a personal *esse*. According to Wojtyła also the person and the nature are two integrated faces of human existence (pp. 53–57).

The second part discusses metaphysics of the person. In his Encyclical letter *Fides et ratio* (1998) John Paul II underlines the need for a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, and he states that “the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being and hence with metaphysical enquiry” (no. 83). Hołub tries to explain personhood and *suppositum* (pp. 63–69) in Wojtyła’s metaphysics. Summing up the metaphysical structure of the person the Author discovers “two pillars in the mature understanding of the human being: substantiality and relationality” (p. 75).

The fourth chapter, entitled *The Person and His Faculties* (pp. 77–130), concentrates on the person understood by Karol Wojtyła as a real, existing subject, who possesses his or her interiority and exteriority. This chapter has three subchapters: (1) To rescue the interiority of the person (pp. 77–96); (2) What is consciousness? (pp. 96–116); and (3) Consciousness and emotions (pp. 116–130). Thus, in the last part of the chapter Hołub analyses two spheres of personal activities, namely consciousness and emotions. Thinking on the subject he presents the Cartesian subject under siege and Wojtyła’s position on the human subject. Especially he is focused on Wojtyła’s brilliant essay “The Person: Subject and Community.” Hołub noticed that Karol Wojtyła expressed his interest in the relation between the human person and society, but “Wojtyła did not pay too much attention to language philosophy. He rather operated within the phenomenological and Aristotelian traditions” (p. 94). Delivering the person and consciousness Wojtyła is against the idealistic approach to consciousness. He claims that the line of demarcation between the subjectivistic (idealistic) and objectivistic (realistic) views in anthropology and ethics is breaking down on the basis of *the experience* of the human person. Thus, a fundamental role of consciousness is to form experience because consciousness is not an

independent realm producing its own content but a reality of personal being. In his essay “Thomistic Personalism” he analysed the Boethian definition of the person and its inadequacy. Generally, “in the personalistic position of Karol Wojtyła the perfectness of the person is revealed, advanced, and consequently strengthened thanks to mature consciousness” (p. 116).

For Wojtyła emotions are in a relation to the mind and they can be grasped by self-knowledge and mirrored by consciousness. Self-knowledge is, then, the main factor responsible for objectifying any emotional facts, and Wojtyła is convinced that the “I” plays a central role in all acts of the subject, including the emotional ones. Therefore, Hołub presents consciousness under the influence of emotions and consciousness overwhelmed by emotions.

The fifth chapter, entitled *The Person in Action* (pp. 131–163), presents personal causation (pp. 131–146) and the person in dialogue (pp. 146–163). For Karol Wojtyła the analysis of the human action is a starting point for disclosing the person or a window to the human person. Hołub especially describes causation in the ethical thinking of Max Scheler (1874–1928) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In his book *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value. A New Attempt towards the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) Scheler rejected a metaphysical understanding of the person as a substance and he defined that “the person is, rather, the immediately coexperienced unity of experiencing” (p. 371). Thus, the person is a subject enduring in his or her existence, and according to Scheler the human person is attuned to *values*. The whole person is contained in every concrete act. Wojtyła appreciates the category of value, promoted by Max Scheler, but he corrects him explaining that values are important in human efficacy, but more important is *the subject* who discovers and realizes them (personal causation in ethics, p. 137).

Morality is a pure derivative of reason in Kant’s conception of morality. Particularly the reason and the will manifest the subject in moral causation, namely in efficacy. Hence the subject is presented as the cause of his moral actions. In his Lublin lectures, Wojtyła corrects Kant’s teaching that the act of the will has a rational character and what is typical for the will (*motio*, understood as a tendency to act) is somehow present in the act of the reason (personal agency). Wojtyła introduced the distinction between acts and happenings. As the ethicist he emphasized a personal efficacy because it has a bearing on a moral assessment of action. Wojtyła summarized that *suppositum* as the metaphysical subject is “multidimensional but at the same time remains an integrated and dynamic entity” (p. 145).

The person in dialogue is presented by Grzegorz Hołub in relations to the philosophies of Martin Buber (1878–1965), John Macmurray (1891–1976) and Calvin Schrag. He tries to make a short comparison between Wojtyła and their positions. From the philosophy of dialogue to the social face of the person in Wojtyła's thought (pp. 152–159) the Author concludes that “discovering a person in dialogue also allows us to explore his or her richness and complexity, and to find out that he or she is a communal creature: i.e., someone called to relation, and consequently to love as the fulfillment of relation” (p. 163). The philosophers of dialogue are really a part of Relational Personalism representatives.

Finally, the sixth chapter is entitled *Dignity of the Person* (pp. 165–179) and sketches Wojtyła's thinking about dignity (pp. 166–172) and clarifies the problem of personal dignity (pp. 172–179). Karol Wojtyła prepared his essay “On the Dignity of the Human Person” in *Person and Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993, pp. 177–180). In revealing the dignity of the person, Karol Wojtyła realizes a twofold strategy: a comparison of the human person to his or her surrounding world and a comparison of the person himself or herself to his or her works. The human person performs acts, and their transitive effects introduce real changes to the world (history, culture, production, technology, mass media). These effects of human activity testify to personal dignity, and the particular values in the person stand for all of the values present in the human person's activities at all levels of his or her existence. The person is always above what he or she does and makes. Therefore, the value of the person means primarily the value of the person as a person. Dignity of the person is then of top value in comparison to other values (axiology). According to Wojtyła “the disposition to listen to the Truth (that is, obedience), and the readiness to act in the Truth constitute the true dignity of the human person” (*Teachings for an Unbelieving World*, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2020, p. 36). The personal dignity is the value, which reflects as well the objective good of the person. Hence the main leading purposes of the human person are about pursuing *truth* and the *good*.

Generally, the philosophy of the human person presented by Karol Wojtyła is a great contribution to the contemporary personalism. Thus, Hołub's book *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła* is very important. Bibliography (pp. 181–189) is well prepared, but I will suggest adding to it the volume *Ethical Personalism* edited by Cheikh Mbacké Gueye (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2011).