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A REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS WRITTEN BY ANTONIUS ALEX LESOMAR ENTITLED
THE PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN PERSON'S SUBJECTIVITY IN THE ANTROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF
KAROL WOJTYŁA

WRITTEN UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR TOMASZ DUMA

Father Lesomar's doctoral thesis deals with a somewhat outdated philosophical problem, which is the idea of subjectivity. I must admit that I have not come across a serious work devoted to this topic for many years. Today, attention is paid rather to issues related to the implementation of subjectivity in social life (the idea of citizenship), the subjectivity of animals in the context of the so-called "animal rights", or the subjectivity of machines (widely discussed legal responsibility of the autonomous cars or the AI chats).

Nevertheless, the problem of human subjectivity is not a trivial problem, as evidenced by the literature on this subject, from ancient times, through Descartes, to e.g. Charles Taylor. Karol Wojtyła's philosophy – although containing interesting works in the field of anthropology – is not publicly associated with any significant solutions to the issue of human subjectivity. Therefore, the decision to pursue this topic by a Ph.D. Candidate should be praised. Unfortunately, despite the ambitious and broad title of his dissertation, Fr. Lesomar rather pointed out lack of Wojtyła's deeper analyzes on this (*nomen omen*) subject.

However, I would like to start with the advantages of the dissertation presented to me for evaluation. First of all, I should notice and appreciate the clear and logical structure of the thesis: the author begins by discussing historical theories of subjectivity (first chapter), and then he devotes the remaining three chapters exclusively to Wojtyła's Philosophy. The second chapter is intended to show the "manifestation" of subjectivity in various areas of human life. And here we also have a clear list of three basic fields arranged chronologically: reflection on a reality (2.1), making decisions in the light of this reflection (2.2), and implementing these decisions in action (2.3).

The third chapter is devoted to the main elements of human subjectivity (unfortunately called "causes of subjectivity"). At this point, Author vaguely introduces a rather risky (and,

in my opinion, incorrect) thesis about causality of subjectivity in the personal status (the title of this chapter is: *Person as the Ultimate Cause of Subjectivity*). I will address this issue below, here I just want to mention the three main elements of the subjectivity of the person: man as *suppositum* (3.1), man as a personal being (3.2), and the role of “person” in integrating human nature (3.3).

I consider the fourth chapter to be the most interesting and valuable. It is trying to demonstrate the importance of Wojtyła’s concept of subjectivity for the four spheres of reflection and practice of human life. Namely, it is about the significance of subjectivity for philosophical anthropology (4.1) and ethics (4.2), as well as for social life (4.3) and culture (4.4).

It is worth adding that the dissertation begins with a short biography of Karol Wojtyła and an extensive *Introduction* (consisting of as many as 13 pages) and consisting of six parts (*Object and Aim of Investigation, The State of Research, Research Structure, Methodology, Scope and Sources of Literature, A Note of Terminology*). Moreover, each chapter ends with a short summaries (2-3 pages), and the entire dissertation is concluded with a four-page summary (*Conclusion*). As I said, the structure of the thesis is its stronger aspect.

The chapter summaries mentioned above are definitely the best parts of the dissertation. They recapitulate the analyses made in a given chapter in a quite clear and transparent way. In fact, one could even argue that all the relevant knowledge is contained in these summaries themselves. The text of the chapters is richer in quotations, but it does not provide more extensive knowledge than their synthetic summaries. The other part of the thesis worth emphasizing and appreciating is the second chapter, where Author connects Wojtyła’s idea of subjectivity with his concepts of the three main acts of the human person, which are reflection, decision and action. This is quite a successful and – unfortunately, only one in the entire work – original research attempt by a Ph.D. Candidate. However, this element of the dissertation also evokes mixed feelings: on the one hand, it accurately shows how subjectivity/personality is manifested in human intellectual and moral activity, and on the other, it proves quite poignantly that in Wojtyła’s subjectivity is only an epiphenomenon, built on the fundamental for a future pope concept of “a person”.

And here we come to my main objection to the reviewed dissertation: it reveals a very superficial approach to the analyzed topic. It can even be said that the Author limited himself to give a simple synopsis of Wojtyła’s most popular anthropological works, without attempting any critical analysis – both internal (to highlight at least the most important advantages and disadvantages of Wojtyła’s concept of subjectivity) and external (placing

Wojtyła and his “subject” in discussion with the most important historical and contemporary theorists of subjectivity). The work is an almost exclusive presentation of Wojtyła’s views on specific topics, without any attempt at scientific analysis, evaluation or discussion with it.

I consider the biggest problem of the dissertation to be the failure to perform the most important task, which – given the assumed topic and structure – should be to precisely distinguish the concepts of “subject/subjectivity”, “person/personhood” and “man/humanity” (of course in the light of how Karol Wojtyła used these ideas and how he distinguished them). The Author uses all three of them (as in the sentence on page 179: „considerations about the subjectivity of the human person”), but he probably treats them as interchangeable or simply trivial. At the end of his *Introduction*, on page 22, Ph.D. Candidate shortly explains the relationship between the terms “man” and “human being”, but does not present his own opinion on a much more important relationship, often discussed in contemporary anthropology: the relationship between “man” / “human being” and “person” or “human person”.

Without a precise definition of Wojtyła’s use of the notion of “subject” or “subjectivity”, “the significance of Karol Wojtyła’s conception of subjectivity” (as the Author titled the key chapter of his dissertation) cannot be demonstrated. Wojtyła is generally considered one of the most important representatives of personalism (i.e. the theorist of the idea of a person), but so far he has not been associated with the philosophy of the subject. If a Doctoral Candidate wants to convince his readers that it is worth noticing and appreciating Wojtyła’s analyses of subjectivity, he must clearly demonstrate that this concept and this idea (of “subject” and “subjectivity”) were important to Wojtyła himself! Otherwise, it will remain with the groundless reinterpretation of Wojtyła’s personalism as a theory of the subject.

What is significant for me, is that all his valuable definitions of the subject and subjectivity can be found in footnotes, and not in the main text. Take these two examples:

- “Here the «ego» means the subject having the experience of his subjectiveness and in this aspect it also means the person.” (note no. 17).
- “The question may well be asked whether apart from experience – that is, experience of subjectivity, which we have here related to the reflexive function of consciousness – it is at all possible to know that it is the ego who is the subject. In view of what was said before about experience, the answer should be that while the experience of man (as an outer experience) allows us to some extent to ascertain him as the subject of existing and acting, it is the experience of one’s own ego – an inner experience – that gives that special manifestation to this conviction and at the same time establishes its new dimension, that is,

the dimension of the experienced subjectivity.” (note no. 20 – both quotes according to Andrzej Potocki's translation).

The analysis of both of these fragments would constitute a valuable reflection on Wojtyła's understanding of the subject and subjectivity – not to mention comparing them with the relevant fragments of e.g. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Unfortunately, nowhere in the dissertation I was able to find either these quotes or any decent philosophical reflections on Wojtyła's understanding of the subject.

Therefore, in my opinion, the inability of the Author to answer the title question of the fourth chapter is a direct result of the insufficient analysis in the first chapter. He did not explain Wojtyła's understanding of the relationship between “subject” – “man” – “person” (or “subjectivity” – “humanity” – “personhood”), along with showing the differences and similarities between these three notions.

Similarly, sporadic (apart from the first chapter) references to other philosophers do not lead to real critical reflection on Wojtyła's anthropology. Showing the genetic relationship between Wojtyła and Aristotle and Thomas does not, unfortunately, lead the Author to reach more seriously into the sources and show where Wojtyła follows the thought of the classics and where he departs from it or even distorts it.

At this point, let me make two serious criticisms of the first chapter. Firstly, what I consider to be a very grave failing of a Ph.D. Candidate in philosophy, in the first chapter, almost 50 pages long, devoted to the idea of a subjectivity (in its various editions), Fr. Lesomar cites the sources only a few times (Hegel p. 28, de Chardin p. 34-35, Levi Strauss p. 37-38, Skinner p. 39-40, St. Augustine p. 44, Descartes p. 46, Scheler p. 51). But even in these cases, I am not sure if the Author really reached this sources and did not simply copy fragments from widely used – by the way: low value (except for Copleston's *History of Philosophy*) – commentaries. Therefore, it seems that he has not acquired the necessary skills for a philosopher. This is maybe tolerable for a bachelor's thesis, but not for a doctoral one.

Secondly, the Ph.D. Candidate shows a deep misunderstanding of the meaning of “metaphysics”, which is particularly visible in the incorrect use of the phrase “metaphysical concepts”. Isn't Plato's theory of the soul metaphysical? Or Descartes' “res cogitans”? Or Feuerbach's materialism? And Fr. Lesomar reserves the term “metaphysics” exclusively for the systems of Aristotle, Aquinas and Krapiec. This is a very serious mistake, which may indicate significant deficiencies in philosophical education.

In addition to the above objections regarding the philosophical nature of the dissertation submitted to me for evaluation, I would like to point out a few minor errors that I noticed.

On the page 70 the Author considers the Boethian idea of “an individual substance of rational nature” as the definition of man, and not the definition of a person. Boethius established his definition primarily in the context of theological, not anthropological, disputes, and applied the term “person” only analogously to a human being. Ph. D Candidate does not seem to know about it.

On page 100, the Author writes that in the Polish language *czyn* “refers to action that is specifically human person property”. This sentence is incorrect for two reasons. First, humans are not the only ones who perform *czyn*. In Polish, we can talk about both divine or angelic action (“*I rzekł Zasiadający na tronie: «Oto czynię wszystko nowe»*” – Ap 21,5) and “social action” (*czyn społeczny*), i.e. coordinated joint actions of many people. Secondly, we will not call every human action “czyn”. Therefore, it is better to talk about action (*czyn*) with the adjective: “human”, “conscious”, “individual”, etc.

On pages 166-169, Fr. Lesomar writes several times about “the substantial spiritual soul”, “the spiritual soul of person” or “our spiritual soul”. This is a very vague term, which may suggest either that, according to Wojtyła, there is also a “non-spiritual/material” soul, or that for Ph.D. Candidate it is not obvious that the soul is, by its nature, immaterial. The third possibility is that Lesomar accepts anthropological dualism, but it seems that throughout his work he advocates substance monism. Such passages lead me to wonder whether the Ph.D. Candidate really has control over the philosophical language and scientific apparatus.

In section 4.4.1 the Author begins to mix Wojtyła’s writings with the documents of John Paul II, and in 4.4.2 he quotes only John Paul II, completely omitting the texts of Karol Wojtyła! This is contrary to the well-established practice of distinguishing Wojtyła’s philosophical achievements (as it is written in the title of the discussed dissertation) from the theological magisterium of John Paul II (when only the name “John Paul II” appears in the title or text), from the third possibility, when someone analyses the entire achievements of Karol Wojtyła, both from his Kraków or Lublin period and from his Vatican period (then the notation Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II is used). Perhaps Fr. Lesomar was not familiar with this distinction, but it seems to me very useful, considering the radically different nature of his work before and after 1978.

Nevertheless, despite the mistakes mentioned above – some of them are very serious from the point of view of the main thesis and the means adopted to implement it – the dissertation presented to me for evaluation can be considered an interesting and well-ordered guide to Karol Wojtyła's anthropological thought. The work has a very clear structure, the language is quite understandable, the Author tries to go beyond the famous *The Acting Person*. Therefore, I believe that, despite everything mentioned above, the dissertation has some basic scientific value.

Conclusion: the reviewed doctoral dissertation titled *The Problem of the Human Person's Subjectivity in the Anthropological Thought of Karol Wojtyła* presented by Antonius Alex Lesomar, despite certain reservations, meets the basic statutory requirements. Therefore, I state that he should be allowed to move on to the subsequent stages of the doctoral degree program.

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