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THOMAS AQUINAS' PHILOSOPHY OF BEING AS THE BASIS FOR WOJTYŁA'S CONCEPT AND COGNITION OF HUMAN PERSON

The purpose of this article is to show the crucial role of Thomas Aquinas' theory of being in Wojtyła's philosophy of person as presented in his major anthropological work, *Person and His Action*¹ (*Osoba i czyn*² known in English under a misleading title *The Acting Person*³). This task needs to be undertaken not only for the sake of fair analysis of a chief philosophical enterprise by Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), but also in order to balance some overemphasis on the influence of phenomenology on Wojtyła's study of human person⁴ which seems to be largely caused by some

¹ We suggest translating the title *Osoba i czyn* as *Person and His Action*, or *Person and Act*. To decide which English version of the title is better would need longer discussion. Undoubtedly, the word "Act" in *Person and Act* demonstrates a strong connection between Wojtyła's conception of person's acting with classical *actus–potentia* theory. However, we have decided to stay with *Person and His Action*, because the Polish word "czyn" is more common much like the English word "action" and it means, more or less, the same. Also, it seems important for us to put the word "His" for the reasons which will become obvious after reading the whole article (it is a specific person who is the source and cause of *his own* actions). Another reason for including "His" in the English title is of linguistic nature: while in Polish a possessive adjective is usually omitted as being self-evident from the context, in English it is commonly used. For example, a Polish teacher would say "show homework" ("pokaż pracę domową") whereas an English teacher says "show me *your* homework."

² Kardynał Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969).

³ Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

⁴ Unlike the translator of *The Acting Person*, Andrzej Potocki (further mentioned as A.P.), we deliberately do not use a definite article "the" before "human person" when using the notion in a general sense, because there is no such being as "the human person" (existing in the same way as "the sun", "the moon," etc.). There are only specific, concrete persons:

inadequacies, omissions⁵ and unjustified additions⁶ in the English translation of *Osoba i czyn*. The most visible and thus most suggestive inade-

John, Mary, Tom, etc. We think that putting “the” in front of “human person” would suggest the “essentialistic” approach to being—i.e., treating the essence of person as some autonomous existence—which we want to avoid, since it is incompatible with Wojtyła’s Thomistic approach to the fact of *being* (existence, *esse*).

⁵ Obviously, this short paper is not meant to be a thorough analysis of the English translation, but let us have a look at just one very important example of omission: the words “Pozostając na gruncie filozofii bytu” (“Staying on the ground of the philosophy of being”) are missing in the English translation (compare Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, 25, to Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P.). These words (“Staying on the ground of the philosophy of being”) sum up the passage about the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness. Wojtyła declares there that he appreciates and he wants to make use of some achievements of the philosophy of consciousness, but it is the philosophy of being that will be the fundament of his conception and analysis of human person. Here is the whole sentence expressing this conclusion: “Pozostając na gruncie filozofii bytu, skorzystamy z tego wzbogacenia [o pewne odkrycia filozofii świadomości]” (“Staying on the ground of the philosophy, we will make use of this enrichment [contributed by the philosophy of consciousness]”). In the English translation (*The Acting Person*, trans. A.P.) there are subtle shifts in the meaning of the whole passage so as to suggest that Wojtyła treats the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness just as the expression of the two aspects of human experience (the inner and the outer). These subtle changes in the translation of the passage, together with the omission of its final crucial words “Pozostając na gruncie filozofii bytu” (“Staying on the ground of the philosophy of being”) depart far away from its original meaning. Treating the philosophy of consciousness and the philosophy of being as the two aspects of human experience actually puts the whole philosophy in the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness whose sole object is (conscious) experience. This paradigm is totally different from the paradigm of the philosophy of being whose object are whole specific, really existing beings (together with consciousness if any particular kind of being has it).

⁶ In the English translation of *Osoba i czyn* (*The Acting Person*, trans. A.P.), there are many subheadings added which do not appear in the original Polish text. Some of them do not match the content of the subheaded passage even in the English translation, not to mention the original Polish version. One example: “The Argument Begins with the Assumption that ‘Man-Acts’ Is Phenomenologically Given” (*The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 9). First, there is no such subheading in the Polish original. Second, for Wojtyła a whole “Man-Acts” is not an “assumption,” but a *fact*. This is blurred in the first sentence of the passage where the Polish word “facts” (fakty) is translated as “data” (of consciousness); again the paradigm of an objective being-fact is changed into the paradigm of subjective human consciousness and the data appearing in it! Third, in the whole passage there is no reference to “phenomenology” or “being phenomenologically given;” actually, in the whole first methodological chapter, in which there is the mentioned passage, the word “phenomenology” appears just once to point out that, unlike modern empiricism, phenomenology is very empirical in treating experience as a sensual-intellectual whole. Encountering such added subheadings and the crucial changes in terminology (“data” instead of “facts”) in the very first sentence under a subheading, one cannot help recalling the rule that subheadings and the first sentences strike readers

quacy in translation is the English title *The Acting Person*. As indicated above, the adequate translation of the Polish title *Osoba i czyn* would be *Person and His Action*. Placing the word “Acting” as the first and the word “person” as the second distorts, at the very beginning, the whole content and meaning of Wojtyła’s work. In this work a person, unquestionably, holds the first place—he or she is a substantial being (*individua substantia*) who is the real cause and the real source of his or her actions. Without a real human being—that is without a real concrete person (i.e., John, Mary, Zosia, Martin)—there is no his or her human actions. Being precedes acting or, more precisely, *being (esse)* proceeds *act*. *Being (esse)* is not empty (as existentialists imagine). Every *being (esse, existence)* is filled with some definite content—the essence (*essentia*). As Thomas Aquinas points out, every real being, including human beings, is composed of existence (*being, esse*) and essence (*essentia*).⁷ Wojtyła studies human person within this framework of the basic structure of being—*esse* and *essentia*—discovered by Thomas Aquinas. This has far-reaching consequences for Wojtyła’s conception of human person. We are going to mention some of them: man’s contingency, his transcendence over his actions and society, etc. In the second part of this sketch we are going to talk about the theory of act and potency in the terms by which Wojtyła analyzes human person. This theory testifies to actual-potential character of all beings of the world and in the view of some thinkers “leads us at once to the heart of Thomistic philosophy,”⁸ so Wojtyła’s use of it as the fundament of his method of cognizing and analyzing human person is another evidence for the strong impact of Aquinas on the Cracowian Cardinal’s anthropological thought.

most and have the greatest influence on how they interpret the text, so greater importance is attached to them by those who want to suggest a certain interpretation of facts or texts.

⁷ See Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., *Realistyczna interpretacja rzeczywistości (Realistic Interpretation of Reality)* (Lublin: PTTA, 2005). See also Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., *Odkrycie wewnętrznej struktury bytów (The Discovery of the Inner Structure of Beings)* (Lublin: PTTA, 2006). I am greatly indebted to those two books as well as Fr. prof. A. Maryniarczyk’s lectures given at CUL (the Catholic University of Lublin). They were for me the main source of knowledge and understanding of Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy of being.

⁸ Edith Stein, *Potency and Act*, trans. Walter Redmond (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2009).

Composition of Being from Existence and Essence as the Framework for Wojtyła's Concept of Human Person

Existence (Esse)

1. *The Primacy of Existence (esse)*. To emphasize the primacy of existence (*esse*) Wojtyła quotes four times an old scholastic maxim, *operari sequitur esse*,⁹ and translates it like this: “first something must exist and only then it can act,” or like that: “in order to act, something must first exist.”¹⁰ The maxim applies to all really existing concrete substantial beings, especially those which are alive. It points out to the most basic fact that all beings’ dynamism (*operari*) is preceded by its real existence (*esse*). What is true about all beings is also true about human beings: “*Esse* itself . . . stands in the beginning of the whole dynamism, proper to man”¹¹—continues Wojtyła after quoting the maxim (*operari sequitur esse*). Talking about *esse* preceding *operari*, Wojtyła refers to Thomas Aquinas and his concept of existence (*esse*) as “the basic constitutive aspect of every being.”¹² Thus the author of *Person and His Action* draws our attention to the philosophical roots of his anthropology.

Esse is in the centre of Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy of being (which is always important to remember, even in a Gilsonian journal, at our time of the prevailing *cogito* philosophy and the “forgetfulness” of *esse* philosophy¹³). Aquinas was the one who discovered *esse* as the constitutive

⁹ *Osoba i czyn*, 75, 85, 86, 157. Wojtyła calls a maxim *operari sequitur esse* “our great sentence” (“nasze kapitalne zdanie *operari sequitur esse*”); see id., 86. This “great [Latin] sentence,” quoted four times by Wojtyła, is omitted in *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P.

¹⁰ *Osoba i czyn*, 75, 85, trans. Małgorzata Jalocho-Palicka (further mentioned as M.J.-P.).

¹¹ Id., 75, trans. M.J.-P. In *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., the respective quotation (with some added words at the beginning which we put in *italics*) goes like this: “*And yet it seems that in the perspective of our investigations existence lies at the origin itself . . . of all dynamism proper to man.*” No comment as to the words added at the beginning of the sentence! What interests us here is that the Latin term *esse* is not used in the English translation (in this quotation and elsewhere), though Wojtyła uses it quite often, especially when discussing person as a substantial being and an objectively existing subject (*suppositum*). *Esse* is the key term to mean (and to be immediately associated with) the whole paradigm of Thomistic philosophizing where *esse* (*being*, existence) plays the central role, connecting the Absolute Being (*Ipsum Esse*, the Giver of *esse*) with contingent beings (the receivers of *esse*). To exclude the Latin word *esse* from the translation is to cut off Wojtyła’s anthropology from its roots—from the tradition it belongs to and from the paradigm it is built within.

¹² *Osoba i czyn*, 76, trans. M.J.-P.

¹³ For the distinction between the two paradigms of philosophizing: *esse* philosophy and *cogito* philosophy, see John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), 8–9. The term “*cogito* philosophy” is, more or less, an

component of every real being as being. His ancient predecessors, Aristotle among them, considered the world—or, more precisely, some element in it (water, fire, first matter, form, idea)—to be ever-lasting; thus the very existence (*esse*) of the world did not pose any problem to them. Thomas Aquinas noticed that with no being of the world is existence (*being, esse*) necessarily connected. All beings in our world stop existing: they die or perish, or get destroyed. So why does the world exist if it does not have to exist? The Aquinas' answer is that there must be *Ipsum Esse*—the Absolute Being whose existence is necessary, who exists by itself. He is the cause and the *ratio* of all existence; without Him existence would be incomprehensible. He is the Giver of existence to all beings of the world who are contingent, because they do not “possess” existence—they received it from the Absolute Being.¹⁴ In theology the Absolute Being is called God—He explained that He is *Ipsum Esse* when He said to Moses that His name is “I AM.”¹⁵

2. *A Human Person as a Contingent Being Called to Existence by the Absolute Being (Ipsum Esse)*. Wojtyła, following Aquinas in the emphasis on the primacy of *esse* (existence), puts his whole concept of human person and his action within the horizon of the Giver of existence: the Absolute Being who is the source of existence to a contingent human being. Wojtyła does not expand on this, because he is not a metaphysicist; the field of his detailed study is philosophical anthropology. Yet, here and there, he reminds us in some clear statement, maxim or comment that he philosophizes about man as a contingent being existing thanks to the Absolute Being. Without having this in mind we are not able to fully comprehend what it means for Wojtyła to be, to be human and to act in a human way. Accusations made by some, who ignore the Thomistic background of Wojtyła's anthropology—for example, Michael Baker writes that “[a]ccording to Cardinal Wojtyła's philosophy . . . *be follows do*”¹⁶ and

equivalent to “the philosophy of consciousness,” while *esse* philosophy is much more accurate name for what Wojtyła means by “the philosophy of being”—it is not any philosophy of being but *esse* philosophy in which *esse* (*being, existence*) is the central category and the central object of cognition. We will discuss briefly the difference between the two paradigms in later parts of the article.

¹⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 2, 3.

¹⁵ *Exodus* 3,14: “God said to Moses . . . «Thus you shall say to the Israelites ‘I AM has sent me to you.’»” *The Holy Bible*, Catholic Edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005).

¹⁶ Michael Baker, *The Loss of Metaphysics*, 13 [http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/metaphysics.pdf, accessed on 20.10.2014].

therefore “a man is the product of his own actions”¹⁷—are totally ungrounded. However, such accusations become understandable when we consider a strange case of the English translation of *Osoba i czyn*. Certainly, to a Polish-speaking reader of the original Cracow 1969 edition of *Osoba i czyn (Person and His Action)*, it would never occur that “[a]ccording to Cardinal Wojtyła’s philosophy . . . *be follows do*” and thus “a man is a product of his own actions.” It is perfectly clear (for such a reader) that, according to the author of *Osoba i czyn*, *be proceeds do* (or, in other words, *do follows be: operari sequitur esse*). This implies that a human person is a contingent being who does not owe his *being* (i.e. his existence) to himself and to his actions but to the Absolute Being.

A human person’s contingency, springing from the contingency of his existence, affects all aspects of his being, including the essential ones: his free will and his reason. Except for “not possessing existence,” contingency means “not being perfect,” “not being fully actualized,” “having inherent shortcomings.” As a contingent being, man has imperfect will and imperfect reason. Although man’s will always aims at the good, it may not want the good strongly enough to be determined to perform good actions; another possibility is that a man’s will may not want the true good, but the false good, because the guide of man’s will—namely man’s reason—is imperfect, too, and it may not recognize what is truly good for a person. So a human person, instead of fulfilling (actualizing) himself through performing morally good actions may destroy himself as a human being through acting in a morally evil way. Such a threat of not doing the good and therefore not fulfilling oneself is called by Wojtyła “an ethical aspect of [man’s] contingency.”¹⁸ He introduces this concept (“ethical aspect of contingency”) after stating clearly and straightforwardly that “man is a contingent being.”¹⁹ And here we are: we would not know the meaning of the notion “contingent being” without knowing the notion “the Absolute Being.” Both concepts are inseparable: one assumes the other and one explains the other. Both of them are the key concepts in Thomas Aquinas’ *esse* philosophy. With the statement that “man is a contingent being” Wojtyła brings us to the whole metaphysical tradition of Thomas Aquinas’ *esse* philosophy which notes that all contingent beings received existence from

¹⁷ Id., 13.

¹⁸ *Osoba i czyn*, 161, trans. M.J.-P.

¹⁹ *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 154.

the Absolute Being who, unlike them, is perfect and fully exists in every aspect, conceivable and inconceivable to man.²⁰

3. *Existence and a Human Person as an Individua Substantia*. Exploring further the problem of existence (*esse*), we must stop for a while at Wojtyła's starting point for his conception of human person: a classical Boethian definition of person, adopted and developed by Thomas Aquinas, who never hesitated to draw on other philosophers' achievements if he found even a "grain" of truth in them.²¹ The definition states that *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*. Let us follow Wojtyła and leave out for a moment the words *rationalis naturae* to reflect on the remaining part of the definition: *persona est . . . individua substantia*²² (a person is an individual substance). These few words mean so much. Behind them there is a whole realistic, substantialist conception of being, according to which every being is an individual, concrete substance: John, Mary, dog-Fido, etc. The fundamental characteristic of an individual substance (*individua substantia*) is that it exists in itself with its own existence and not with the existence of someone or something else.

Accidents of a being-substance, its various aspects, qualities and parts, exist in a totally different manner: they do not exist with their own existence, but with the existence of the substance they belong to. Such accident, for example, as a relationship between people, does not exist on its own, but with the existences of the people making the relationship. The marriage of John and Mary exists by John's and Mary's existences—without them their marriage would not exist. Such relational entities as a state, society, a nation, would not exist either, but for substantial, real existences of the people of whom those entities consist of. Also numerous aspects or parts of a specific person—e.g., John's consciousness, John's

²⁰ From the fact that the Absolute Being is the *ratio* for the existence of contingent beings does not follow that we know who He is.

²¹ Karol Wojtyła's approach to philosophy reminds us very much of Thomas Aquinas' openness to every "grain" of the truth in the achievements of other philosophers. A good example here is phenomenology. Though Wojtyła rejected the basic assumptions of phenomenology (see not only his *Osoba i czyn*, but also his second doctoral dissertation on Scheler, etc.), he nevertheless tried to find a good side of it and use it for the enrichment of his own philosophy of person.

²² See *Osoba i czyn*, 76: "Osobą jest konkretny człowiek – *individua substantia*, jak głosi w pierwszej części swej klasycznej definicji Boecjusz" ("A person is a concrete human being—*individua substantia*, as Boetius proclaims in the first part of his classical definition." Trans. M.J.-P.).

will, John's head, John's leg—do not exist separately in themselves, but with John's existence.

Talking about the primacy of existence over a human person's action we must specify that it is a *substantial* and *real* existence of a specific, concrete human person that precedes his or her specifically human actions. This is not to say that human actions do not exist—they do but not in the same way as a substantial human being (*individua substantia*). Human action is one of the accidents of a substantial, individual human being, and as such it exists only with the existence of its doer.²³ Human action does not have any autonomous existence and therefore cannot be analyzed separately from a substantial, real human being. “The Acting Person” is not some kind of independent entity to be distinguished from a really existing substantial human person who is the real source and the real cause of his actions.

4. *The Substantialist Conception of Person and a Person's Transcendence over Society and His Actions.* The substantialist conception of human person, adopted and confirmed by Wojtyła, stands apart from many modern non-substantialist conceptions of man. Marx, for example, and his followers, whose ideology was well-known to the Cracowian Cardinal in Communist Poland, conceived of man as the aggregation of socio-economic relations. Thus a relation which, in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, is just one of the accidents of a substance, in Marxism becomes the key to defining man. Consequently, a man, deprived of his own independent, substantial existence, loses all his transcendence over society, over a state and over his socio-economic class—he becomes totally conditioned by the web of social and economic interdependencies. John Paul II called such a non-substantialist conception of man an “anthropological error.”²⁴

²³ See *Osoba i czyn*, 86: “Istnienie działania jest zależne od istnienia człowieka – właśnie tu tkwi właściwy moment przyczynowości i przyczynowania. Istnienie działania jest przyporządkowane i zarazem podporządkowane istnieniu człowieka w sposób przypadłościowy, jako *accidens*” (“The existence of action is dependent on the existence of man—it is here that the proper moment of causing and causation resides. The existence of action is pre-ordinated by and subordinated to the existence of a man in an accidental manner, as *accidens*.” Trans. M.J.-P.).

²⁴ See his *Centessimus Annus*, 13. See also *Osoba i czyn*, 303, where Wojtyła, in a chapter about a person's living and acting with others in communities, says that, talking about human communities, we must not forget that it is not a community, but a concrete, specific person who is a proper substantial subject of being and acting.

Wojtyła, a Catholic priest and future Pope, was always exceptionally sensitive to a human person's transcendence in all its dimensions. In *Person and His Action (Osoba i czyn)*, while making us aware of the importance of our human morally good actions for our self-realization and self-fulfillment, Wojtyła never allows us to forget that a substantially existing human being, as a being, infinitely transcends his actions; thus his human dignity comes, first of all, from his superior ontic position in the world and from having his ontic origin in the Absolute Being. What, or rather who, a human person *is* transcends by far everything he *does*.

5. *The Substantialist Conception of Person and the Primacy of a Person's Whole Being over His Parts and Aspects.* Another consequence of adopting the classical substantialist conception of human person is acknowledging the primacy of his whole being over his parts and aspects. As we said, John's leg, for example, exists only with the existence of John and it is absurd (nonsensical) even to talk about John's leg without John. Also John's will does not have any existence independent and separate from John. The same is true about all the physical parts and the immaterial aspects of John. Parts and aspects are subordinated to a whole substance-being both in an ontological and epistemological order. Their *cause* and *ratio* is a whole substance-being. As we know, in classical, Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, the cause of causes is the final cause. The final cause of the parts and the aspects of a whole specific substance-being is to serve the goodness of the *whole* substance-being (John, Mary, dog-Fido, etc.). As Aristotle observed, the existence and non-conflicting, concerted acting of heterogeneous physical parts of an organism (such as heart, liver, eyes, etc.) can only be explained by the final cause—that is the goodness of a *whole* organism. So, according to the substantialist conception of being, a whole being-substance builds itself, so to speak, “from above:” it exists as a whole from the beginning together with all of its parts and aspects whose purpose is to develop and to enhance the goodness of the whole being. This is a totally different conception of being from the evolutionary one where beings develop “from the bottom” in the mode of successively adding material parts, by means of natural selection through trial and error (not for the final cause), so that the end product is the sum of its material parts. The final and formal causes are eliminated from the philosophy of evolution.

Wojtyła never allows us to forget that the object of his study is a whole, really existing human person. Only the nature of human cognition makes us “divide” the object of anthropological study into aspects and

investigate them one by one. While reading *Osoba i czyn* one cannot help feeling of admiration for Wojtyła's exceptional ability to keep a reader's attention on a human person as a whole being. One of his ways to do this is his warning against the absolutization²⁵ of any aspect of a human person. He especially alerts a reader against the absolutization and "substantialization" of a human consciousness, i.e., against making it into a sort of autonomous, "substantial" subject.²⁶ The absolutization and substantialization of a human consciousness is particularly dangerous, because this leads to replacing the analysis of a real whole human being with the analysis of a human consciousness and its content. In other words, absolutization and "substantialization" of a human consciousness is the source of different forms of idealism:²⁷ instead of really existing beings, it is a human consciousness and its content—its structure, its ideas, its constructs, beliefs—that become the object of cognition. Then a real, objective being is either considered to be unknowable (agnosticism) or it is identified with the content of a subjective human consciousness (*esse est percipi*).²⁸ Wojtyła rejects idealism and, following Thomas Aquinas, takes the realistic stance. Hence he puts us on our guard not to absolutize or "substantialize" a human consciousness. A human consciousness cannot become the only object of cognition (like in the epistemological philosophy of consciousness) to the exclusion of a whole human being, neither can it be mistaken for him. A human consciousness, however essential, is just one of a human being's aspects.

²⁵ See *Osoba i czyn*, 33: "Aspekt nie może zastąpić całości ani też nie może jej wyprzeć z naszego pola widzenia. Gdyby tak się stało, mielibyśmy do czynienia z absolutyzacją aspektu, co zawsze jest błędem w poznaniu złożonej rzeczywistości" ("An aspect may never replace a whole nor can it push the whole out of our sight. If that happened, we would have to do with the absolutization of the aspect, which is always an error in the cognition of any composite reality." Trans. M.J.-P.).

²⁶ See id., 37: "Świadomość sama nie istnieje jako 'substancjalny' podmiot aktów świadomościowych . . ." ("Consciousness does not exist by itself as a 'substantial' subject of consciousness acts . . ." Trans. M.J.-P.).

²⁷ See id., 40.

²⁸ See id., 48: "Świadomość jest związana z bytem, tzn. z konkretnym człowiekiem . . . Tego bytu świadomość nie przesłania ani też nie absorbuje sobą, jakby wynikało z podstawowej przesłanki myślenia idealistycznego *esse=percipi* . . ." ("Consciousness is connected with being that is with a concrete man . . . This being is not veiled by consciousness neither is it absorbed by it, as it follows from the basic presumption of the idealistic thinking: *esse=percipi* . . ." Trans. M.J.-P.).

Essence (Essentia)

Thomas Aquinas discovered that every being-substance, including every personal human being, is composed of the existence (*esse*) and the essence (*essentia*). Substantial existence, though constitutive for every real being as being, never exists without substantial essence, i.e., without some substantial content. The existence as such is inseparable from the existence of some substantial definite content: the dogness of a dog, the catness of a cat, the humanness of a human being. This substantial definite content which makes a dog a dog, a cat a cat, a human being a human being, etc., is called essence. Aquinas' pierced much deeper than Aristotle into the structure of being: not only did he discover the existence as such but he also looked more profoundly than the Stagirite into the question of essence. For Aristotle only the form of a being-substance constituted its essence. Thomas placed also matter on the side of essence,²⁹ so in his theory of being both form and matter constitute the essences of the worldly, contingent beings. This has important implications for a conception of human person: with such a profound view on essence a person is realistically seen as the unity of the substantial spiritual soul³⁰ and the material body. In every person a specific substantial spiritual soul is a form of the body of the person. In an analogical, imperfect way, we may say that each substantial spiritual soul when called into existence immediately forms for itself the substantial body proper for fulfilling on the earth both general (essential) and the specific vocation of this person. We can compare the forming "work" done by a concrete spiritual soul to the work of an artist whose invisible project gets materialized on the picture.

1. *The Essence of Man as the Object of Wojtyła's Lifelong Investigation. The Human Person's Essence Revealed Best by His Actions.* The essence of human person—investigating it and living it—was Woj-

²⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, II, in Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., *Odkrycie wewnętrznej struktury bytów (The Discovery of the Inner Structure of Beings)*, 172.

³⁰ It is important to note that for Wojtyła (the embodied) spirituality (i.e., the essence) of man is not any abstract, airy phenomenon connected with another enigmatic phenomenon called "spiritual-self." A person's spirituality comes from a substantial spiritual soul. Thomas describes a person's soul as an incomplete substance which completes itself the moment it is called into existence and comes to the womb to form the person's body. Of course, we can express it only in an imperfect metaphorical analogy: in fact there is no time gap between creating a soul and creating the respective body. Together with a body a spiritual soul constitutes a complete substance-person. See *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 186: "It is to metaphysical analysis that we owe the knowledge of . . . human soul as the principle underlying the unity of the being and the life of a concrete person."

tyła's (John Paul II's) lifelong passion. The very title of the first book by a young Cracow priest—*Rozważania o istocie człowieka*³¹ (*Reflections on the Essence of Man*)—bears testimony to this. And so it was until his last anthropological opus magnum *Mężczyznę i niewiastą stworzył ich* (*Man and Woman He Created Them*) where he proposes a project of an “adequate anthropology” and realizes the project himself.³² The adequate anthropology, he says, “seeks to understand and interpret man in what is essentially human.”³³ In this spirit of studying the essence of man, Wojtyła also wrote *Person and His Action* (*Osoba i czyn*). The author observes there that the rational, moral and dynamic essence of a human person is best revealed by his actions.³⁴ That is why the author of *Person and His Action* analyzes human person through his specifically human actions.

To show the essence of man a Cracow Cardinal chooses human action and not human consciousness as Cartesius and his followers do. In a human person's acting all his essential aspects—his consciousness, his (self-)cognition, his free will, his emotions (psyche) and his human body—are united and thus the ontic unity of soul and body discloses itself most prominently. Wojtyła was an ardent defender of this ontic unity of a human person and, consequently, an opponent against dualistic Cartesian anthropology. Cartesian exclusion of the human body from the essentially human moral laws inscribed in man's soul—and, at the same time, submitting the body merely to mechanistic laws of matter—leads to

³¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Rozważania o istocie człowieka* (*Reflections on the Essence of Man*) (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2003). This book consists of the lectures given at church by a young Fr. Wojtyła to Cracow students in 1949—the darkest period of Stalinist terror in Poland due, in part, to the forbidding of teaching anything at universities but a Marxist, purely materialistic conception of man. Wojtyła proves there that the essence of man is a spiritual soul. In his reasoning he uses a classical principle of causality with its basic claim that the effects (i.e., immaterial free will and reason) must be caused by something of a higher ontic order than themselves. So immaterial free will and reason cannot be caused by matter but by spiritual soul.

³² Actually, Wojtyła realizes his own project of building an adequate anthropology not only in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, but in all his anthropological writings.

³³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 178. There is also a chapter *Man in Search of His Own Essence* in which John Paul II observes that “*the created man* finds himself from the first moment of his existence *before God* in search of his own being . . .” (id., 149).

³⁴ See *Osoba i czyn*, 14: “[C]zyn stanowi szczególny moment ujawnienia się osoby. Pozwala nam najwłaściwiej wglądać w jej *istotę* i najpełniej ją zrozumieć” (“Action is a key moment whereby a person is revealed. Action gives us the best insight into the *essence* of person and allows us to understand it most fully.” Trans. M.J.-P.).

body merely to mechanistic laws of matter—leads to degradation, reification and, eventually, destruction of a whole human being. For a person to fulfill himself through specifically human, morally good actions, his human body and emotions should be lifted to the level of immaterial human reason and reasonable will—the manifestations of spiritual soul and its essentially moral character. This moral obligation (to lift the body and emotions to the level of the soul) springs from the very essence of man who is an embodied spiritual soul and a spiritualized soul-full body. Wojtyła (John Paul II) did a lot to expel from our culture the demon of Cartesian (and Manicheistic) dualistic anthropology³⁵ and to bring back Thomas Aquinas' vision of an internally and externally unified human person manifesting his integration through morally good actions.

2. *The Essence of Man Is Not Comprehended by Particular Sciences but by Philosophy.* As we indicated, viewing man through his essence is seeing him as an integrated³⁶ unity of soul and body. Generally, it is the essence that penetrates, integrates and constitutes the recognizable, specific identity of every contingent being, also a human being. Particular sciences—whether the sciences of man or natural sciences—do not reach the essence of Being as such (*Ipsium Esse*, the Absolute Being) or the essences of contingent beings, especially the essence of human being. Anatomy, for example, may exactly describe all the muscles of man, but in this description there is not a word about the *essence* of man. To say so is not to blame the sciences—such is their nature: they have to make a methodological assumption that a studied object is made only from matter so that they are able to divide it into their respective “parts” (formal objects of scientific research) and examine those “parts” in empirical, sensually perceivable, repeatable experiments in terms of their natural functions or quantitative (not qualitative) mathematically expressible natural laws. By their nature, sciences divide and fragment the objects of their scientific research. This is especially dangerous in the case of man. A fragmented man becomes sort

³⁵ Most prominent and best-known expression of this anti-Cartesian and anti-Manicheistic spirit is John Paul II's theology of the body presented in *Man And Woman He Created Them*.

³⁶ Wojtyła, being himself, an exceptionally integrated person, wanted such integrity for all people. George Weigel, Wojtyła's biographer, was one of those who were struck by Wojtyła's (John Paul II's) integrity. In his post-mortem memory *The Pope in Private*, Weigel writes: “In an age in which personalities are often assembled from bits and pieces of conviction (politics here, religion there; morals from here, artistic interests from there) Wojtyła could be startling. He was the most integrated personality I have ever met . . .” *Newsweek* (April 5, 2005): 37.

of a “sack” for unconnected, material parts each of which is governed by its own laws and functions. As a result, he loses his inner integrity; he is swayed here and there by innumerable bits and pieces of scientific information, media news, his own disordered psychosomatic emotions and drives. Not knowing his essence he does not know what is most important (essential) for him and therefore he is not able to find the ultimate goal and the direction of his life.

Wojtyła appreciates the great contribution of the sciences to the knowledge of man, but he points out that, by their nature, they are not able to grasp the essence and thus the *integrum* of man.³⁷ The task of seeking and investigating the essence of man belongs to philosophy.³⁸ However, it is not any philosophy that can perform this task. It must be the philosophy that does not “[a]bandon . . . the investigation of being,”³⁹ but “dare[s] to rise to the truth of being.”⁴⁰ Such philosophy is not afraid to “ask radical questions” about the ultimate foundations of the existence and the identity of a human person and his place in the hierarchy of beings. Such philosophy “is strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being [i.e., existence, *esse*], which allows full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfillment.”⁴¹ In such philosophy “metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature [i.e., essence].”⁴² Let those words from the encyclical *Fides et ratio* suffice for explaining what kind of philosophy was consid-

³⁷ See Wojtyła, *Rozważania o istocie człowieka (The Reflections on the Essence of Man)*, 19. The example with the anatomical description of man’s muscles is taken from there.

³⁸ See id., 20.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 5.

⁴⁰ Id.

⁴¹ Id., 97. I added the words in brackets because in Polish (the language John Paul II used when writing encyclicals) there is the word “istnienie” which means “existence, esse” and not the word “być” (“being”); so the exact counterpart of the Polish words “akt istnienia” is “the act of existence” rather than “the act of being.” By observing that philosophy “based upon the very act of existence is open to all reality,” John Paul II refers to a realistic concept of reality, shared by him with the Lublin Philosophical School (LPS). According to the LPS, to be real is to exist. The first act of cognition concerns the act of existence, and it is expressed in existential propositions such as: “John exists,” “a thought exists,” “an action exists.” Only after such basic existential statements can we go further in cognition and seek answer to such questions as: Why does this exist? How does this exist? What is this? (the question about essence), etc.

⁴² Id., 83.

ered by Wojtyła (John Paul II) to be suitable for investigating the real essence of man. Those words undoubtedly refer to the philosophy of being developed by Thomas Aquinas whom John Paul II gives unstinted praise in the encyclical.⁴³

3. *Essence Really Existing under a Real Existence.* So much interested in the essence of man, Wojtyła commends phenomenology for its pursuit of essence (*eidōs*). However, he makes a very important reservation: while admitting that in *Osoba i czyn* he wants to adequately describe the *eidōs* (i.e., the essence) of human person, he clearly states that “[i]t is out of the question [for him] to follow Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological method of excluding essence from an actual existence (*epoche*).”⁴⁴ This idealistic Husserlian method stands in total contradiction to Wojtyła’s realistic approach to essence (*eidōs*) according to which a specific essence exists only under a specific existence of a specific being-substance: the dogness exists only under a specific existence of a specific dog (Lessie, Fido, etc.), and the humanness exists only under a specific existence of a specific human being (John, Mary, Kate, etc.). Essence is not some abstraction dwelling only in human consciousness neither can it be “substantialized” and treated like some autonomous being. Essence does not exist without existence and vice versa. They are both inseparable components of every being-substance. This fact is obvious for a realistic tradition of philosophy started by Aristotle, fully developed by Thomas Aquinas and creatively continued by The Lublin Philosophical School⁴⁵ of which Wojtyła was a framer⁴⁶ as a CUL professor of 24 years. Phenomenology, proposing to “suspend” existence in the procedure of *epoche* (transcendental reduction) and to deal only with the *eidōs* of the phenomenon appearing in human consciousness, enters the Platonic tradition of idealism where the content of human consciousness—ideas, notions, essences—is separated from real existence, substantialized, absolutized, and then mistaken for being (e.g. Berkeley’s idealism) or else considered to be the only realm

⁴³ See *id.*, 43–44.

⁴⁴ Wojtyła’s words quoted here come from the footnote added in the CUL edition of *Osoba i czyn*: see Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: TN KUL, 2000), 62, trans. M.J.-P. There are the Polish words: “[N]ie ma mowy o znamionym dla metody fenomenologicznej Edmunda Husserla wyłączeniu istoty spod aktualnego istnienia (*epoche*).”

⁴⁵ See Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, O.P., Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., *The Lublin Philosophical School*, trans. Hugh McDonald (Lublin: PTTA, 2010).

⁴⁶ See *id.*, 45, 50, 57.

accessible to cognition (e.g. phenomenology, agnosticism, philosophy as the analysis of language).

4. *The Essences of Beings Are Grasped by Their Names. Wojtyła's Cognitive Realism.* Part of the problem of the ungrounded separation of existence from essence might be caused by the fact that existence itself is not grasped by language, i.e., by names and notions. Though the existence of something is the first and the fundamental object of cognition (see footnote 38), we cannot say much about it. We just acknowledge it in existential propositions: I exist, John exists, etc. Much more can be said about essence because it is grasped by names and therefore by definitions and descriptions. Philosophy whose proper medium is language can forget or "suspend" existence and get "essentialized." On the other hand in some modern and postmodern trends of philosophy we encounter something like "existentialization" of philosophy which denies essence, especially the essence of man (Sartre and other existentialists), and treats philosophy as the expression of subjective, individual experiences, moods and feelings.

Wojtyła avoids both extremes: he neither "essentializes" nor "existentializes" his philosophy of man. His balanced attitude towards the existence and the essence of a human person is strictly connected with a realistic, Thomistic conviction that names and their respective meanings refer to really existing beings and they grasp the really existing essence under the existence of each specific being. By calling a specific, really existing being "human" (e.g. "John is a human being"), we indicate that this being (e.g. John) is, in his essence, human⁴⁷—he is not an animal or a stone. We, obviously, touch here upon the basic philosophical problem—the problem of universals; there is no need to go deeper into this problem here. What we want to stress is Wojtyła's cognitive realism which goes together with his metaphysical realism. Out of the three positions in the discussion of the problem of universals—nominalism, idealism and realism—Wojtyła is definitely a representative of realism. By the way, in the realistic approach towards essence grasped by names, to state that one is going to study "the essence of human person through his actions" is the same as to declare the intention to examine "human person through his actions." Taking, realistically, their identical meaning for granted, Wojtyła uses both expressions—"the essence of human person" and "human person"—interchangeably. In fact the latter one (i.e., "human person") is used by him much more, perhaps for the sake of simplicity, but considering the whole context of his

⁴⁷ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 13, 1.

metaphysical and cognitive realism, we must remember that examining “human person” (through his actions) means, for him, the same as examining “the essence of human person” really existing under a specific, real existence of a specific person: John, Mary, etc. (so we must keep in mind that the object of his study is *not* some abstract phenomenon inhabiting consciousness, conventionally called “human person;” having that in mind does not cause any difficulty when we read the original Cracow 1969 version of *Osoba i czyn*). In a similar way, a flamboyant question often associated with Wojtyła’s (John Paul II’s) adequate anthropology—what does it mean to be human?⁴⁸—amounts to a more modest but more adequate question: what is *essentially* human?

Act and Potency Theory as the Ground for Cognition and Analysis of Human Person

1. *Act and Potency as Existence–Act and Essence–Potency.* Act and potency theory embraces all being—the Absolute Being and all contingent beings. The Absolute Being is the Pure Act (*Actus Purus*): there is nothing potential in Him, He is fully actualized; He is full and absolute Existence in all aspects (conceivable and inconceivable for man): Existence is His Essence. Unlike Him, all contingent beings are composed of act and potency: they are not fully actualized,⁴⁹ their contingency involves constant actualization of their inherent potentialities. The condition for all those actualizations is the first and basic act: coming into existence, starting to be (*esse*). The existence-act—i.e., the act of coming into existence—is, in a way, perfect and complete: there is nothing to be added to this act of existence of a specific, concrete being—John, Mary, etc.—i.e., there is no potential left out as far as the very existence is concerned; there is one

⁴⁸ See, for example, Rev. Benjamin P. Bradshaw, *The Theology of the Body according to Pope John II* (http://www.frben.com/documents/Theology_of_the_Body_Conference_Hand_out_Number_4_of_4.pdf, accessed on 20.10.2014). By the way, the term “the theology of the body”—given to a whole and comprehensive conception of man presented in *Man and Woman He Created Them*—seems to me a bit reductionist. The term “adequate anthropology” is much more adequate. However, I can see the merits of the former term: it stresses the elevation of the human body, makes it attractive and catchy for people; and most importantly, it is used by John Paul II himself.

⁴⁹ See *Osoba i czyn*, 161. The immense ontological gap between the Absolute Being as *Actus Purus* and contingent beings having always potential-actual character is implied by this sentence: “Każdy byt, który musi dochodzić do własnej pełni, który podlega aktualizacji – jest przygodny” (“Every being who has to go a long way to reach his fulfillment, who is the subject of actualization—is contingent”).

actual existence⁵⁰ of one John—no other substantial existence can be added to this one actual existence of this one John throughout all his one life, John cannot have two or three actual existences. This sort of complete actuality does not take place in the case of a being's essence: the essence of a human being, for example, especially at the beginning of his life, is almost wholly potential.⁵¹ So, while a new-born baby-John (or, earlier, a baby-John in his mother's womb) already exists and will exist with the same actual existence all his life, the baby-John's essence is not actualized yet: it is, so to speak, almost all hidden in the state of potency. John's essence will be getting actualized, and thus revealed to (self-)cognition through his countless acts during all his life. Gradually John himself and other people, observing him, will learn who he is, how (and whether) he realizes his essential potency, namely his humanness, how (and whether) he subordinates his other potentialities—physical, emotional, intellectual—to the development of his humanness.

2. *Act and Potency Theory as the Key to Cognition and Analysis of any Being.* Act and potency theory—explaining all dynamism of all beings: from their coming into existence to constant actualization of all their essential and accidental potentialities—is, at the same time, the key to cognition of every being. This is because, first, only being (something that exists) can be cognized; non-being equals non-cognition.⁵² Secondly, every being is knowable and actually cognized through its acts.⁵³ The way a plant grows

⁵⁰ See *id.*, 101. Wojtyła points out here that a concrete specific person “[only] once came into a substantial existence.”

⁵¹ For a comprehensive discussion of existence as act and essence as potency, see Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec, *Struktura bytu (The Structure of Being)* (Lublin: RW KUL, 2000), 303–328.

⁵² See footnote 38 where we say that the first and fundamental act of cognition is to state that something exists (“Mom exists,” “action exists,” etc.) and only then we can go further in cognition, answering questions about the cause of existence, the essence of an existing being, etc. See also Thomas Aquinas’ great sentence: “knowledge can be concerned only with being, for nothing can be known, save what is true; and all that is, is true” (*Summa Theologiae* I, 1, 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province).

⁵³ See *Osoba i czyn*, 91. Wojtyła here points out that any act happening within a man or consciously caused by a man is directly and experientially given to cognition whereas the basis and the source of those acts (i.e., a man himself) is given only indirectly. In other words, we can only cognize a man (and any other being) through his acts. This is one of the axioms of the classical philosophy of being. Contrary to this, in the philosophy of consciousness, there is an idea that man can have a direct cognitive access to himself, without any mediation of his acts (which actually means that a man can cognize himself without the mediation of the body—the proper site of human direct experience).

from a seed, the course of an animal's development and behavior, shows to a botanist or a biologist what kind of plant or animal it is, what are its essential properties. The inner and outer movements (acts) of matter enable a physicist to discover the structure and the laws governing matter, and so on and so forth. Let us imagine the unimaginable—that all beings are completely static, devoid of any kind of dynamism (acts): let us imagine that there is no movement, no behavior, no growth, no change—then we would not be able to gather any knowledge of any being, ourselves included. All beings not only realize their potentialities through their acts, but, at the same time, through those very acts they sort of come out of hiding and make themselves known, observable, available to experiential cognition. Needless to say that in the chronological order of realization *potentia* comes first while in the order of cognition *actus* (as a medium of cognition) comes before *potentia*.⁵⁴ Wojtyła expresses appreciation for act and potency theory both as an adequate description of the dynamic character of beings and as the key to gaining knowledge about them. Here are his enthusiastic words about act and potency:

We may with justice say that at this point [of act and potency theory] metaphysics turns out to be the intellectual soil wherein all the domains of knowledge have their roots. Indeed we do not know and we do not have as yet any other conceptions and any other language which would adequately render the dynamic essence of change—of all change whatever occurring in any being—apart from this only conception and this only language that has been given to us by the philosophy of *potentia-actus*. By means of this conception and with the help of this language we can adequately grasp any dynamism that occurs in any being. It is to them we also have to revert when discussing the dynamism proper to man.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Since we talk in this part mainly about cognition, we usually put “act” first (“act and potency” and not “potency and act”). Additionally, in the order of existence (which is so important in this article) the act (of coming into existence) comes first, so the sequence “act–potency” is proper in this context as well.

⁵⁵ See *Osoba i czyn*, 65–66, trans. M.J.-P. See also the respective words in *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 64. The translation by A.P. was of some help to me; however, I had to change a lot. In this one longer quotation I preserved the original graphic emphasis. Wojtyła by emphasizing that the conception of *actus–potentia* grasps *all* dynamism of any being

And so Wojtyła does: he reverts to *potentia-actus* when discussing the dynamism proper to man.

3. *Actus Humanus as the Way to Cognizing (the Essence of) Human Person.* The Polish word “czyn” (“action”), used by Wojtyła in *Osoba i czyn*, has the same meaning as the Latin *actus humanus* (human act),⁵⁶ called also *actus personae* (person’s act). Both Latin terms mean specifically human (or human person’s) action—that is the action that is voluntary and conscious (i.e., rational). The concept of *actus humanus* is rooted in Christian and Thomistic personalism which holds it as an axiom that every human person is endowed with free will and reason (rational consciousness, the ability to cognize and act rationally, i.e., according to the cognized truth). As we said, the dynamic essence of person—and here we mean his free will and rational consciousness (the manifestations of soul)—is best disclosed by his, inner and outer, free and rational actions. A person’s action, freely chosen and caused consciously by the person, opens his inner ontic structure to insight. Through specifically human action Wojtyła studies (the essence of) person and discovers such specifically human structures as reflective consciousness, intentional cognition, self-cognition and self-knowledge (which is not the same as self-consciousness), self-owning and self-ruling. A person is someone who is both cognizing and cognized, both owning and owned, both ruling and ruled. Thus a person is both a subject and an object of cognition, ownership, ruling. Self-knowledge, self-owning and self-ruling make the ontic⁵⁷ basis for self-

means also what he calls “the first dynamization” (“pierwsze zdynamizowanie”) of any being—i.e., its coming into existence. Considering Wojtyła’s emphatic praise for *potentia-actus* theory, we must remember that in Communist Poland an obligatory theory of dynamism was Hegelian–Marxist dialectics. According to this dialectics the principle of all being’s (matter’s, man’s, history’s etc.) dynamism is contradiction and extreme conflict: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Also some other theories of being’s dynamism, mentioned below, were not accepted by Wojtyła.

⁵⁶ See *Osoba i czyn*, 31: “[C]zyn jest tym samym, co *actus humanus* . . .” (“Action is exactly what *actus humanus* is . . .” Trans. M.J.-P.).

⁵⁷ The person owns himself and rules himself whether he wants it or not—these are his ontic structures: self-owning means that, as a whole substantial being, a person cannot be another substantial being; self-ruling means that a person decides about who he becomes through his actions even if he does not devote any conscious attention to what he does; also self-knowledge is here an ontic structure meaning that every being knows something about himself even if this knowledge is “limited” to non-conceptualized knowledge that “I am I.” These fundamental ontic structures of person make the basis for conscious, rational choices in the acts of self-governance.

governance⁵⁸ in which a person is also someone who governs and who is governed—he is a subject and an object of self-governance.

The ability to objectivize⁵⁹ oneself (in self-cognition, self-owning, self-ruling and self-governance) is essentially human; other beings are, so to speak, imprisoned in their subjectivity; they cannot stand apart and look at themselves in an objective way. As such they are closed only in horizontal transcendence while a person, thanks to his potential for self-objectivization, is inherently capable of vertical transcendence. An animal transcending itself only horizontally is merely interested in reaching outside (horizontally) for the object of his instinctual desire whereas a person can also “look down” upon himself and his future actions from a higher perspective of true values and ultimate ends (vertical transcendence). Actually, in the case of a person, vertical transcendence precedes horizontal transcendence—a person first decides who and what he wants to be (e.g., a teacher, a good father, a saint) and then he directs himself horizontally towards the goals that will enable him to be the person he wants to be (e.g., he goes to university, he cares for his child, he decides not to deny his faith in Christ though he knows he is going to be tortured and killed for that). These are some of Wojtyła's interesting insights into (the essence of) person, based on inner and outer experience of one's own and other people's actions. It is worth noting that, unlike philosophers of consciousness, Wojtyła stresses this unique ability of a person to see himself as an objectively existing being among other objectively existing beings—this is possible thanks to a person's unique potential for self-objectivization and for vertical transcendence both in the aspect of reason (self-cognition, self-knowledge) and in the aspect of will (self-owning, self-ruling and self-governance).

4. *Potency and Act as the Two States of Being. Wojtyła's Opposition to Some Other Theories of Human Dynamism.* Potency should not be identified with nothingness or non-being. Potency is an objectively real state of every contingent being which is different from the state of act;⁶⁰ potency

⁵⁸ I suggest a different translation of the terms than A.P. I would use “self-owning” instead of “self-possession,” “self-ruling” instead of “self-governance,” and “self-governance” instead of “self-determination.”

⁵⁹ We use this neologism to distinguish “objectivization” from “objectifying” or “objectification.”

⁶⁰ See *Osoba i czyn*, 65. Wojtyła defines here potency and act as “dwa zróżnicowane, a zarazem wzajemnie do siebie przylegające stany bytu” (“two differentiated, but at the same time mutually adjacent states of being,” trans. M.J.-P.).

may be described as non-act. The two states are inseparable and correlated; each state of an act assumes the state of a correlated potency and vice versa; some definite potency is indispensable “material” out of which a specific act is (and can be) made. Aristotle, who was the first philosopher to note actual-potential character of being and to conceptualize it into the act and potency theory, gives an illustrative example of the realness of those two states, especially of the less obvious realness of potency—the example is known as the *oikodomos* argument against the Megarian school.⁶¹ The Megarians, following Plato, believed that real being is fully actual and therefore unchangeable (like Platonic ideas); they rejected change and therefore potentiality, mistaking the latter for non-being. Aristotle observed that the expression “house-builder” (Gr. *oikodomos*) implies not merely the act in which the house is built but also the possibility of building a house; otherwise we would be forced to accept an absurd statement that someone is a house-builder only at the moments of actually building a house, but when he eats or sleeps he stops being a house builder altogether, which is tantamount to saying that while doing something else or sleeping he somehow loses all his ability (potency) to build houses. The “house-builder” argument shows that denying the realness of the state of potency leads to denying real human abilities (potentials) to create buildings, art, science, culture; also natural potencies are denied in such actualistic conceptions: for example, the potency of a seed to become some specific plant. After all, according to these conceptions, what is potential *is not*: so there is no future plant in the seed (and there is no human being in an embryo).

Wojtyła’s draws our special attention to the fact that *potentia-actus* are the two inseparable correlated states of a human being. This means that a person does not create himself through his actions out of nothingness; a person creates himself, in a certain relative way, through his actions, from his essence-potency which already exists but not in the same way as act. Creating oneself out of nothingness is what Sartre preaches and believes. Sartre, the guru of many existentialists, claims that a human person does not have any inborn essence-(nature)-potency; in the opinion of this French philosopher, having any essence-potency would limit man’s absolute, unlimited freedom, and such “empty” freedom is considered by him

⁶¹ See Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, O.P., “Act and Potency,” in *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* (Lublin: PTTA, 2001–2009): www.ptta.pl/pef/haslaen/a/actpotency.pdf, accessed on 15.10.2014.

the only characteristics of man. Consequently, Sartre ascribes to man a god-like prerogative of creating himself out of nothingness in any way man wishes; the absolute freedom is the only measure of man's actions and his human self. Wojtyła implicitly opposes Sartre⁶²—the Polish philosopher admits that a human person creates himself in some relative sense, but not *ex nihilo*; a human person creates himself through his actions from his essence-potency given to him together with his existence.

Another philosopher who seems to be implicitly opposed by Wojtyła is Max Scheler. Scheler's philosophy was well-known to Wojtyła who wrote his habilitation thesis about the German phenomenologist. Wojtyła observes in his thesis that “for Scheler a person is not a substance or a subject in a metaphysical or physical sense of the word.”⁶³ So Scheler, like most of modern and post-modern *cogito*-philosophers, rejects the traditional, substantialist theory of person. As a result, “he adopts the actualistic theory of person.”⁶⁴ In this theory, “person” is defined as some entity who is all in an act of conscious experience of some phenomenon or phenomena flowing through consciousness and who experiences oneself as the subject of this act. When the act of conscious experience disappears then the experienced subject of it called a “person” disappears as well and only some purely carnal, animal-like creature remains. A dangerous consequence of such actualistic conception of person (as a “stream of consciousness”) is that someone who does not have actual conscious experiences, who is not actually in a state of consciousness—a baby, a man in coma, or someone who sleeps—is not regarded as a person (just like a house-builder was not regarded by the Megarians as a house-builder when he slept). In contrast to actualistic conception of person, the unquestionable advantage of the *potentia-actus* approach of *esse* philosophy is that the dignity of a human person stems from his *being* a person (which we have already mentioned above); so someone must be treated as a person, equal to all

⁶² See *Osoba i czyn*, 15, where Wojtyła mentions Sartre and his book *L'etre et neant (Being and Nothingness)*, and then, id. 66, Wojtyła says that a being “doesn't become out of nothingness, but in some relative sense, i.e., on the basis of a being already existing, within the limits of its inner structure.”

⁶³ Karol Wojtyła, “Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maxa Schelera” (“An Evaluation of the Possibility of Building a Christian Ethics on the Principles of the System of Max Scheler”), in Karol Wojtyła, *Zagadnienie podmiotu moralności (The Question of the Subject of Morality)* (Lublin: TN KUL, 2001), 28, trans. M.J.-P.

⁶⁴ Id., trans. M.J.-P.

other persons, independently of the actual state and level of his consciousness, just because he *is* a person. As far as consciousness is concerned, according to actualistic-potentialistic *esse* philosophy, it is always present in every really existing human being at each stage of his life, even if it is hidden in the state of potency and never actualized (at least in visible external acts) due to some severe psychosomatic disorders like coma or mental retardation.⁶⁵

5. *Potency-Act and Becoming (Fieri)*. Until now we have dealt with the structure of a human being who, like every contingent being, is composed from *esse* and *essentia*. Then we have mentioned actual-potential character of being which first manifests itself in the very coming into being as *actus-esse* and *potentia-essentia*. After the act of coming into existence, the human essence-potency is constantly actualized in every specifically human action (*actus humanus*). *Actus humanus*—free and conscious human action—does not only actualize the essence of human person, but also opens him to cognition and analysis. Therefore, *actus-potentia* conception is both a theory of being and a method of cognition. Besides showing us the structure of a contingent being and its two states (potency and act), the *actus-potentia* method gives us access to another dimension of being, namely, becoming (*fieri*). In becoming we accentuate not a finished act as a result of some potency but the dynamic moment of transition from potency to act. A human person, drawing on his innumerable potencies, constantly becomes on all levels: somato-vegetative, emotional, intellectual. However, a specifically human becoming, integrating psychosomatic level, is of a moral⁶⁶ nature: through morally good actions a man becomes good as a man, through bad actions man becomes bad as a man.⁶⁷

In the course of the history of philosophy the fundamental difference between *being (esse)* and *becoming (fieri)* got blurred to the point that *esse* and *fieri* were treated identically. Hegel is a good example here—for him the Absolute is not the One Who *Is (Ipsum Esse)* but some abstract

⁶⁵ See Wojtyła's interesting conception of subconsciousness as a person's potency for being conscious: *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 90–99.

⁶⁶ Man's moral essence-nature embraces his freedom (free will) and rationality. As St. Augustine put it, "No one does good when forced, even though good is what he does" (*Confessions*, I–XII, trans. M.J.-P.). Action must be freely chosen to be morally good. Second, a morally good action is an action which agrees with reason (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, 1, where he defines ethics as the science of the agreement of our actions with our rational essence-nature).

⁶⁷ See *The Acting Person*, trans. A.P., 98–99.

“absolute spirit” that *becomes*, that constantly changes and develops through thesis-antithesis-synthesis; then the synthesis becomes new thesis and so on. Other evolutionary theories, whether spiritualistic or materialistic, identify being with becoming as well. Karol Wojtyła, for whom Thomas Aquinas was the master of the philosophy of being, would never equate *being* (*esse*) with *becoming* (*fieri*). It is clear from his *Osoba i czyn* (*Person and His Action*) that, ontologically, becoming is connected with essence (*essentia*) rather than existence as such (*esse*).⁶⁸ Specifically, human becoming is the realization of person's moral and rational essence. What we have just said implies that from a metaphysical perspective a person is always a person, a human being is always a human being. But from moral perspective a human being might not be human at all: he might not act in a human way, he might not realize his inborn essence, namely, his humanness. In other words, a human being is never bad in the aspect of being, but he may be bad in the aspect of human doing and therefore becoming. That is why Thou Shalt Not Kill—you can never ever destroy a human being, even if he is bad as a human-doing-and-becoming. No reason, no ideology can even try to justify the destruction of any human being (i.e., any human *esse*). Wojtyła who experienced two totalitarian systems, like all Poles of his time, was exceptionally sensitive to the fifth commandment (*Thou Shalt Not Kill*), so he could not overlook the fundamental difference between man's *esse* and man's *fieri*, i.e., between a human being and a human becoming.⁶⁹

Conclusion

In our analyses we emphasized that Thomas Aquinas' philosophy of being played a fundamental role in Karol Wojtyła's concept of person presented in his major anthropological work *Osoba i czyn* (known in English as *The Acting person*). Aquinas discovered that every being is composed of existence (*being, esse*) and essence (*essentia*). Wojtyła builds his philosophy of personhood within this framework of *esse* (being, existence)

⁶⁸ It is true that in *Osoba i czyn* Wojtyła writes, here and there, about an “existential” dimension or meaning of morality (i.e., of becoming morally good or bad), but he uses the word “existential” in a modern sense of something being essential for man's existence. Existentialism contributed considerably to changing the original classical meaning of such words as “exist” and “existence.” This is another reason why the Latin term *esse*, used by Wojtyła quite often, should be preserved in a translation of *Osoba i czyn* into any language.

⁶⁹ Nevertheless, implicitly or explicitly, Wojtyła is accused of this (of identifying being with becoming): see, for example, Baker, *The Loss of Metaphysics*, 2, 13.

and *essentia* (essence). The moral and rational essence of human person, according to Wojtyła, is best revealed by specifically human, free and conscious, actions. That is why Wojtyła analyzes human person through his actions and discovers such essential structures of human reason and free will as self-cognition, self-knowledge, self-owning, self-ruling which make the ontic basis for self-governance. The immediate ground for Wojtyła's analysis of person through his actions is the act and potency theory, developed by Aristotle and redefined by Thomas Aquinas in the light of the composition of being from *esse* and *essentia*. Every act reveals a correlated potency which otherwise would remain hidden and unknown. Potency-act theory characterizes not only two real states of every being, but also it is the adequate tool to describe every being's becoming. It is not becoming out of nothingness, but on the ground and within the limits of already existing potency. A specifically human action (*actus humanus*) discloses a specifically human potency-essence. Through his actions a man becomes good or bad as a man, depending on the moral quality of the actions. Having all those insights into man's essence presented by Wojtyła, we are once in a while emphatically reminded of the absolute primacy of a man's existence (*being, esse*) over his actions and over his becoming. *Being (esse)* precedes *acting* and *becoming*. Without *being (esse)* there would be no acting and no becoming (*operari sequitur esse*—first something must exist and only then it can act). Thus we are reminded that we are contingent beings and as such we do not owe our existence to ourselves but to the Absolute Being (*Ipsium Esse*). Our human dignity stems, first of all, from our being, not from our doing. This obliges us even more to discover the essential truth about ourselves and to act according to our true human essence we were given together with our existence. As contingent, imperfect beings we must make every effort to become worthy of such incredible gifts. Philosophizing about man on the fundament of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy of being means viewing and analyzing man within the horizon of the Giver of those amazing gifts: man's *esse* and man's *essentia*.

**THOMAS AQUINAS' PHILOSOPHY OF BEING
AS THE BASIS FOR WOJTYŁA'S CONCEPT AND COGNITION
OF HUMAN PERSON**

SUMMARY

The article makes a claim that Thomas Aquinas' philosophy of being plays a fundamental role in Karol Wojtyła's concept of person presented in his major anthropological work *Osoba i czyn* (known in English as *The Acting person*). Aquinas discovered that every being is composed of existence (*being, esse*) and essence (*essentia*). Wojtyła builds his philosophy of personhood within this framework of *esse* (being, existence) and *essentia* (essence). The moral and rational essence of human person, according to Wojtyła, is best revealed by specifically human, free and conscious, actions. That is why Wojtyła analyzes human person through his actions and discovers such essential structures of human reason and free will as self-cognition, self-knowledge, self-owning, self-ruling which make the ontic basis for self-governance. The immediate ground for Wojtyła's analysis of person through his actions is the act and potency theory, developed by Aristotle and redefined by Thomas Aquinas in the light of the composition of being from *esse* and *essentia*. Every act reveals a correlated potency which otherwise would remain hidden and unknown. Potency-act theory characterizes not only two real states of every being, but also it is the adequate tool to describe every being's becoming. It is not becoming out of nothingness, but on the ground and within the limits of already existing potency. A specifically human action (*actus humanus*) discloses a specifically human potency-essence. Through his actions a man becomes good or bad as a man, depending on the moral quality of the actions. All these insights into man's essence presented by Wojtyła emphasize the absolute primacy of a man's existence (*being, esse*) over his actions and over his becoming. *Being (esse)* precedes *acting* and *becoming*. Without *being (esse)* there would be no acting and no becoming (*operari sequitur esse*—first something must exist and only then it can act). Thus, as a contingent being, a man does not owe his existence to himself but to the Absolute Being (*Ipsum Esse*); and his human dignity stems, first of all, from his being, not from his doing.

KEYWORDS: esse, being, existence, essentia, essence, Absolute, contingency, individua substantia, act, potency, *actus humanus*, human action, *fieri*.