

Gabriel Ragan

## The Structure of a Person as the Basis for Determining the Common Good as Understood by Mieczysław A. Krąpiec

Relying on the tradition of classical philosophy, Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec<sup>1</sup> lists the essential properties of the human person as follows: intellectual knowledge, free will, love, religiosity, subjectivity of law, completeness, and dignity. These properties highlight the spiritual aspect of a human being. The first four properties point to the irreducibility of the person to nature, whereas the last three to his irreducibility to society. It is thus possible to say that the person transcends both nature and society.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the spiritual dimension of man is integrated with his corporeal life as a result of the fact that the human person is constituted of a spiritual soul and a material body.

This article makes an attempt to analyze Krąpiec’s anthropological views in order to show the reasons why some elements of the structure of man as a person—resulting from the human mode of access to truth, goodness, beauty and religion—are essentially significant for de-

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<sup>1</sup> See Wojciech Chudy, “Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 4 (October–December 2018): 549–566.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *Człowiek i prawo naturalne* [*Person and the Natural Law*] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 1999), 133.

termining the common good that lies at the foundation of all forms of human social life.<sup>3</sup>

### **Knowing, Willing, Loving and Believing: A Natural Basis for the Common Good**

#### *Intellectual Knowledge*

Since earliest recorded time, the philosophers have noticed that man is different from all other natural creatures. They have concluded from the fact that the results of human knowledge are universal terms which are timeless, without place, constant and immaterial. Since man routinely gains and demonstrates knowledge, he has to have a certain power that is also timeless, unchangeable and immaterial. This unique power of the human person is referred to by different terms: mind, ratio, intellect, cognitive ability. The human knowledge of generalities and species is obviously different from the sensory knowledge proper to animals. The human ability of accessing general knowledge has been interpreted differently. Some explain it as resulting from a simple reason that understands similarly to how the eye sees. Others notice that we do not recognize immaterial things directly—that is why they talk about active and passive intellects. Still others deny the immateriality of knowledge and claim that what we declare to be immaterial is, in fact, a very complex empirical knowledge. Differences in knowledge, however, between humans and animals are striking, especially with regard to other activities which result from knowledge: morality, creativity, free communities (not just herds or masses), art, science, the transformation of the environment, the development of societies and individuals, etc. We do not find anything parallel in animals. The first basic characteris-

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<sup>3</sup> This article is a revised version of a chapter originally published in the book: Gabriel Ragan, *The Common Good for Contemporary Society* (Ružomberok: VERBUM – Vydavateľstvo KU, 2018), 32–41.

tic of ours is knowledge. Knowledge, however, does not mean operating on the content of consciousness (i.e., thinking), but understanding a particular thing in the aspect of its abstract essence.<sup>4</sup>

Animals always perceive in a particular time and space. They have only a sensory knowledge. Man, in turn, has also a knowledge other than that which comes from senses.<sup>5</sup> The meaning (essence) of things is something suprasensory (transcendent, metaphysical). Essential characteristics of beings are thus unchangeable, timeless and immaterial.<sup>6</sup>

While the philosophical system of innate ideas or a priori categories accentuates rational knowledge and empiricism emphasizes sensory knowledge,<sup>7</sup> empirical rationalism reconciles them both by showing the path to escape their absurd consequences. It was first presented by Aristotle and then supplemented by St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>8</sup>

In empirical rationalism, we point out that human knowledge has its origin in a real thing which, at the same time, is an object of cognition. A man who is getting to know something knows it in his own way: even a material thing is known by him immaterially (i.e., intellectually). The immaterialism of human knowledge is first guaranteed by the thing itself, as it consists not only of a matter, but also of a form knowable to the knowing person. Secondly, it is guaranteed by the immateriality of the cognitive power of the knowing person. Man thus knows in a complex way. His knowing starts with his senses being exposed to an object. In sensory perceptions and images, he discerns and recognizes objective properties which are immaterial; he grasps the meaning (essence) of a thing and can then think about it. The result of human cog-

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<sup>4</sup> Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *Ja – człowiek [I—Man]* (Lublin: RW KUL, 2005), 180.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 188.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 182.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 199.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 206.

nitive process is an immaterial image (notion, representation) of an object (its essence). Explaining human knowledge this way results in escaping empiricism (for it confirms the immateriality of knowledge) and idealism (for it affirms the real thing as an origin and source of knowledge). Consequently, the knowledge of an object (a real thing) can go extremely deep—i.e., it can continuously gain deeper and deeper insight into the comprehension of the object’s being.

The image of a real being has also its cultural consequences. Since every thing in the world has its own inner property called “a truth,” the image—being a picture of the inside of a being—exercises its influence on the inside of a knowing man by actualizing his cognitive ability and enriching his rationality.<sup>9</sup>

### *Will for the Good*

Man’s intellectual knowledge is correlated with his ability to will. Knowing something as a good entails willing it, trying to achieve it or unite with it. Food, for example, is a good for those who seek to satisfy their hunger; health and friendship are goods for those who look for means of living, etc. What one wants has its consequences, because obtaining or receiving goods is that which enriches us. Therefore, goods are related to man’s ability to make decision. For the latter is actually combined with the activity of the will which is naturally inclined to the good. Through making decisions, the person not only seeks to gain some good, but also undergoes inner formation: it is through repeated choosing what is truly good that the person is made perfect in his action. The choosing of true goods makes man’s actions more firm, his will stronger, and his decisions more mature. Man’s intellectual knowledge and desire for the good culminate in love.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See also Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, “Man in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 4 (October–December 2018): 618–622.

<sup>10</sup> See also *ibid.*, 622–625.

### *Love*

Love is much more than a desire. It manifests itself especially in man's ability to sacrifice for the sake of others. Love is thus one of the most important characteristics of a person. It places him at the highest level of the hierarchy of being. It is based on man's ability to recognize the dignity of the other person (*bonum honestum*): the person should be treated never as a means, but always as an end in himself. The more a man loves, the more he becomes a person.<sup>11</sup>

### *Religion*

In philosophy, the ability to believe in God is understood as seeking the fullness of truth, goodness and beauty. In religion, it is described as holiness. Every man, in his own life, encounters imperfections—especially when he realizes that his knowledge is not unlimited, his actions are not perfect, his works are unable to be absolutely beautiful, or that his life is temporary and fragile. It all drives him to seek help and support which could reinforce him and give a new meaning to his life. Such a reinforcement and meaning is found in religion. Man finds there a relationship with Absolute Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, which not only supports him as a contingent being, but also develops him as a person.<sup>12</sup>

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The importance of intellectual knowledge, will for the good, love and religion in the life of man consists in the fact that they justify his transcendence over nature and constitute the pillars of his culture. Addi-

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<sup>11</sup> See also Arkadiusz Gudaniec, Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, "Miłość" ["Love"], in *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* [*The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*], vol. 7, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2006), 237–251.

<sup>12</sup> See also Zofia J. Zdybicka, "Human Experience: A Ground for the Affirmation of God," trans. Artur Wojtowicz, *Studia Gilsoniana* 5, no. 1 (January–March 2016): 283–296.

tionally, they are essential elements of the common good. This is because the common good is based on the good of man. All the forms of social organization—the family, society, the state, etc.—if they are to assist their members to develop, they need to respect those four factors of the life of men as persons. The realization of the common good then consists in fostering the search for truth, the pursuit of good, the inspiration for love, and the practice of religion. The state is thus to promote—beside peace and economic prosperity—scientific research, moral education, unselfish love and religious freedom. Moreover, the reverse is also true: the concern for the common good includes efforts to prevent falsehood, evil deeds, hatred, and religious fundamentalism. Since the common good is ordered to the fulfillment of the human person, the action of the state and other forms of social life is assigned to the development of truth, goodness, love and religion in the life of their members.

### **Dignity, Completeness and Subjectivity: Social Expressions of the Common Good**

#### *Personal Dignity*

It is an obvious fact that lifeless things cannot give an ultimate sense to man's life. Though people often cling to technology, wealth, and comfort, their lives are eventually given a meaning not by things, but rather by persons. This is because people are placed higher in the hierarchy of beings than things. Each man is a *bonum honestum*, a worthy being, that is, a being endowed with a special value. Thus, only persons—including God, the Absolute Person—are those who can give sense to the life of other persons. This being someone else's sense of life defines dignity: possessing dignity means being worthy of someone

else's life.<sup>13</sup> The dignity of a person is that which makes others treat him in a special way. It finds its expression in one of the Kantian categorical imperatives that reads: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."<sup>14</sup> This transfers to society which also has to "treat humanity" as an end, not a means.<sup>15</sup>

### *Ontic Completeness*

In the structure of man's being, there is everything that makes him human, there is no lack of any existential or essential. That is why it can be truly said that the person is complete: man is not a person (substance) in potency, but a person (substance) with potentials. From the outside (society), man's essence needs nothing to maintain its identity. This property (i.e., ontic completeness) is decisive in answering the question of the relation between individual and society. Which of the two is sovereign as a being: society or the person? The answer cannot be other than that: since the person is a substantial being, he has to be recognized as prior to and higher than society which is merely a relational being. For this reason, society serves an auxiliary function in the life of man. Man does not need society to be human in an ontic sense, but he needs society to actualize his potentials (i.e., gain the fullness of his humanity).

The relationship between man (the person) and society is two-fold. First, due to his ontic completeness ("first act"), man is a sover-

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *Kim jest człowiek? [Who Is Man?]* (Warszawa: Kuria Metropolitalna Warszawska, 1987), 319.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1993), 429.

<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Základy metafyziky mravů [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals]*, trans. Ladislav Menzel (Praha: Svoboda, 1990), 92.

eign being: although he is not an absolute being, man maintains his identity (i.e., is human) even without society—although he is a contingent being, man does not need any recognition from a society to be human, nor does he need any inclusion in a society to become human. Man is himself from the very moment of his conception. Second, although he is ontically complete, man is a being with potentials: he needs assistance from other persons (a society) to develop his “second act.”<sup>16</sup> The assistance of society is indispensable for man both in material and spiritual aspects, because only living together with others enables man not only to overcome different existential threats and difficulties and multiply the effects of his own work, but also to progress in acquiring intellectual and moral virtues and thus building his own character (personality). Nevertheless, it is not so much that society makes man, but that society cooperates—as a necessary correlate—in man’s development.

Following the distinction between man’s ontic independence (owing to his “first act”) and his potentiality (ordered to his “second act”) makes it possible to avoid two well-known distortions: collectivism and individualism. While the former insists on the entire subordination of man to society, the latter gives absolute primacy in determining society to man.<sup>17</sup> Neither of these two extremes, however, adequately explains reality, for man, at the same time, transcends society in one respect and depends on it in another. Again, while transcending society by being complete in his substance, man depends on society by being limited in possessing the means to realize his personal potentials.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the relationship between the first and second acts, see Krapiec, “Man in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” 607–608: “The action of a being is this being’s ‘second act’, which is rationally justified in ontic terms by its ‘first act’, which is its form.”

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Arno Anzenbacher, *Úvod do filozofie [Introduction to Philosophy]*, trans. Karel Šprunk (Praha: SPN, 1991), 206.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Krapiec, *Ja – człowiek [I—Man]*, 423.

### *Legal Subjectivity*

What is the very first source of positive law? Krąpiec holds that positive law arises neither from itself, nor any procedure, authority or social contract. It is an expression of the fundamental right of a man to his own good—law is to promote and facilitate the realization of man’s good, and to protect it from evil. The basic good of a man is his development, since each person has a natural disposition to develop. Just because of his development, a man can demand others to carry out some beneficial action or order them to cease some harmful action.<sup>19</sup> This principle is applied by positive law to specific conditions and circumstances. Thus, one man is for another a source of positive law.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, a man is a subject of positive law. Man’s legal subjectivity is based on the existence of human rights—the latter, though unwritten, are a prerequisite for written law. Human rights include, for example, the right to life, health, rest, marriage, and true information. Many of them are rightly covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948.<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that the good of man is the purpose of both written (positive) law and human rights. Since positive law is then to protect man’s good, any form of legal act that violates this good (e.g., laws permitting abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, same-sex *marriage* or *parenthood*) cannot be recognized as just and binding in conscience.

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The personal dignity, ontic completeness and legal subjectivity of man thus ground the fact of his enjoying a special status in society. They also play a fundamental role in determining the common good.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 422.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 138.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, *O ludzką politykę!* [*On a Human Politics!*] (Lublin: KUL, 1998), 37.

Personal dignity requires the state to take actions which aim only at the good of man. Ontic completeness grounds man's sovereignty and explains the reason for protecting him against the acts of humiliation and manipulation. Legal subjectivity reveals the ultimate goal of law and defines the extent of its binding power. All these properties of man determine essentials for discerning and achieving the common good—the full development of man as a person.

### **Conclusion: The Common Good as a Good of the Person**

It is natural for men to associate.<sup>22</sup> They are not self-sufficient, so when they live together, they can meet their needs and do it efficiently. Men are not self-sufficient not only physically, but spiritually as well. Social bonds help develop (actualize the potentials of) the human person. Society is unified by achieving a chosen goal which is called the common good.<sup>23</sup> A good, however, that a society is trying to achieve but that divides the society, cannot be recognized as a really common good. The really common good is that which does not exclude any member of society.

It is noteworthy that man is able to achieve together with others not only material goods, but also spiritual goods. This is because man is open both to the world of things and that of persons. The life of persons, however, radically differs from that of other beings which are

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<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno* 1, 1: “Nam unus homo per se sufficienter vitam transigere non posset. Est igitur homini naturale quod in societate multorum vivat.” Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum* 1, 1, 2: “Omnis communitas est instituta gratia alicuius boni. . . . Omnes homines omnia quae faciunt operantur gratia eius quod videtur bonum; sive sit vere bonum, sive non. Sed omnis communitas est instituta aliquo operante. Ergo omnes communitates coniectant aliquod bonum, idest intendunt aliquod bonum, sicut finem.” Available online—see the section *References* for details.

fully subject to natural law. The knowledge of natural law allows to predict the behavior of non-humans. This does not apply entirely to man whose special properties (being manifested in intellectual knowledge, will for the good, love and religion) place him beyond the predictable world of nature.

Though different from the life of natural beings, the life of man is open to those natural beings. Man can even communicate with them.<sup>24</sup> Communication, however, is most effective only among persons, since lower beings (e.g., animals) are not equal partners for dialogue. For communication is not just an exchange of words, but it also brings about a change in the sphere of existence. It can be a mutual gifting in a friendly relationship when one gives oneself and receives another.<sup>25</sup> Or, more clearly, it can be a reciprocal gifting in love whereby one acquires a new way of existence: being for another (leading to a unification of persons who love one another). When communication based on such a gifting is no longer only between “I” and “thou” but occurs in a group, it creates a community, a social “we.” Krapiec underscores that the “I–thou” relationship is the foundation of the family, whereas the “we” relationship is the basis of the state. He regards the family and the state as natural forms of social life—while serving the family, however, the state surpasses it in terms of self-sufficiency.<sup>26</sup>

The development of man as a person in society is realized when one improves one’s intellect, will, and creative abilities. The intellect is developed by knowing the truth, the will (and emotions)—by striving for the good, and the creative abilities—by engaging intellect and will (and emotions) in the production of new works. Such a development is to be supported by society as a whole and its members individually.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Krapiec, *Ja – człowiek [I–Man]*, 321–323.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 324.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 328.

For society to become a favorable environment for the development of human persons, it is not enough that its members participate in producing material or spiritual aspects of the common good, nor is it sufficient for them to act fairly toward each other; what is also needed is their commitment to creating a “cultural ecological niche” in which a person can grow.<sup>28</sup>

It is noteworthy that the common good understood as a promotion of the development of man as a person is not antagonistic—i.e., it does not lead to conflicts, divide society, or cause injustice among members of society.<sup>29</sup> It is not antagonistic also because—unlike in the case of material goods—it provides benefits to everyone in society. For example, one’s acquisition of virtues does not deprive another of anything but, on the contrary, contributes to strengthening their relationship—the more virtuous persons, the more perfect friendship (love) between them, and, consequently, the more perfectly united, educated, organized and co-ordinated society.

In the light of M. A. Krapiec’s anthropological considerations then, the properties of man as a person give clear evidence that the development of human spiritual potentials should be recognized as the common good of all forms of human social life.



**The Structure of a Person as the Basis for Determining the Common Good  
as Understood by Mieczysław A. Krapiec**

SUMMARY

The author makes an attempt to analyze the anthropological views of Mieczysław A. Krapiec in order to show the reasons why some elements of the structure of man as a

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 328, 332.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 328, 338.

person—resulting from the human mode of access to truth, goodness, beauty and religion—are essentially significant for determining the common good that lies at the foundation of all forms of human social life. He analyzes such parts of the human person's structure as intellectual knowledge, will for the good, love, religion, personal dignity, ontic completeness and legal subjectivity.

#### KEYWORDS

Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, man, person, common good, intellectual knowledge, will, good, love, religion, personal dignity, ontic completeness, legal subjectivity.

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