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THE PERSON AS A BEING CALLED TO TRIPLE TRANSCENDENCE
IN THE LIGHT OF THE PERSONALISM
BY KAROL WOJTYŁA/JOHN PAUL II

Abstract

The paper studies the problem of the transcendence of the person suggested by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. It originates in the philosophical thought of this Polish personalist and is complemented in his theological works. According to Wojtyła transcendence can be described as “another name for the person” as it is closely related to the fulfilment of man as a personal being. The paper contains analyses of three dimensions of transcendence, and these are: 1) transcendence in action; 2) transcendence towards another “I”; and 3) transcendence towards personal God.

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, transcendence, personalism, person

OSOBA JAKO ISTOTA POWOŁANA DO POTRÓJNEJ TRANSCENDENCJI
W ŚWIELE PERSONALIZMU KAROLA WOJTYŁY/JANA PAWŁA II

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje problematykę transcendencji osoby zaproponowaną przez Karola Wojtyłę/Jana Pawła II. Bierze ona swój początek w filozoficznej myśli wielkiego Polaka, uzyskując swoje dopełnienie w jego teologicznej twórczości. Dla Wojtyły transcendencję można określić jako „drugie imię osoby”, ponieważ jest ona ściśle związana ze spełnianiem się człowieka jako bytu osobowego. Tekst zawiera analizy trzech wymiarów transcendencji, którymi są: 1) transcendencja w czynię; 2) transcendencja ku drugiemu „ja” oraz 3) transcendencja w kierunku osobowego Boga.

Słowa kluczowe: Karol Wojtyła, Jan Paweł II, transcendencja, personalizm, osoba

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INTRODUCTION

The question of transcendence is one of the central domains for reflection in many contemporary philosophical trends. The problem has been abundantly analysed within the frameworks of existential philosophy, phenomenology and personalism. Despite varied concepts and models describing the mechanism of transcendence, philosophers investigating this issue claim that man is such a being who is fulfilled indeed through transcendence. One of the most interesting understandings of the role of transcendence in the life of the person is suggested by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. It originates in the philosophical thought of this great Pole and is complemented in his theological works. For Wojtyła transcendence is such an essential element of his personalism that he describes it with no hesitation as “another name for the person” (Wojtyła 1993a, 230). It is closely related to the fulfilment of man as a personal being.

The aim of this paper is to present the concept of transcendence in the thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. Although the topic has been studied in numerous works, many of these concentrate only on the philosophical output of the Polish personalist, disregarding the theological dimension. Moreover, philosophical analyses do not always dedicate sufficient attention to the interpersonal and social dimension of transcendence. Yet it is worth viewing the question of the transcendence of the person in a broader perspective distinguishing three semantic areas of the said notion: 1) transcendence in action; 2) transcendence towards another “I”; and 3) transcendence towards personal God. Only such a widely shaped consideration can reveal the richness and complexity of Karol Wojtyła’s/John Paul II’s teachings on the transcendence of the person.

1. THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE PERSON IN ACTION

Wojtyła presented his concept of the transcendence of the person through action in his work entitled *Osoba i czyn* (later translated into English and entitled *Person in Action*) and thus made it the central category in his philosophical thought. The meaning of transcendence is strictly connected with the Polish philosopher’s understanding of the consciousness of the personal “I” and the concept of self-knowledge. According to Wojtyła, consciousness has two fundamental functions: the reflecting one and the reflexive one. Consciousness in its primary function reflects all that has already been cognised by a human being. It cannot be considered equal to cognition, as it does not have the value of intentionality attributed to cognitive acts. Nevertheless, consciousness mirrors all that was cognitively given to a human being. The other function of consciousness – the so called reflexive one – is directed not so much towards the external world of objects but rather towards the subject itself. This reflexive orientation of consciousness causes the person, ontologically the subject experiencing his own ego, to experience himself as the subject and the actor (Wojtyła 1979, 43-45).

Besides consciousness, also the category of self-knowledge helps explain better the internal world of the person. Owing to it, the person is able to approach his own "I" as the subject of cognition (Wojtyła 1979, 35-43). It cannot take place in the consciousness itself as the consciousness is not a cognitive act, whereas self-knowledge is an act where the person objectivises cognitively himself and his acts. According to Wojtyła, both these attributes (consciousness and self-knowledge) interpenetrate each other in a human being. On one hand they constitute a harmonious whole, on the other hand they do not reciprocally reduce to each other, keeping their separateness (Buttiglione 2010, 188-192).

By distinguishing two functions of consciousness and self-knowledge in the personal ego, Wojtyła makes a discovery of fundamental importance to anthropology. He claims that being the subject is different from being cognised (objectivised) as the subject and this is still different from experiencing one's self as the subject of one's own acts and experiences, which is possible owing to the reflexive function of consciousness (Wojtyła 1979, 44).

This conclusion is of major significance to the understanding of transcendence of the person through action. For Wojtyła, consciousness is not merely a reality relating to the subjective aspect of the person, resembling in fact a mirror reflecting infinitely itself. Through the consciousness the person experiences himself as someone real existing and acting. He experiences his actions as acts of his own creation and himself as the cause, the actor. And this human experience of being the actor, the cause of actions, is essential. Owing to it, it is impossible to separate (as it happens in subjectivism) the experience relating to the essence of an action from the experience of being the actor and the subject of the action as well as the experience of responsibility for the action and its consequences. In an act, immanence and transcendence interpenetrate each other, thus an act is a special "hermeneutic locus", where the person manifests himself fully and completely, reveals his unity and complexity, in his existential wholeness (Buttiglione 2010, 193-198).

However, not all that is reflected in human consciousness can be classified as the experience of one's own actions ("I act"). Wojtyła explains that experiencing the fact "I act" differs from all other facts which only "happen" in the personal subject. This distinction between "happening" and "acting" enables one to extract from the human experience this moment which differentiates an act from everything else which only happens in man. This moment is described as self-determination (Wojtyła 1993b, 187-188). Self-determination is a concept of crucial importance if one wishes to understand the mechanism of the transcendence of the person in action (Szostek 2005, 38-40). It is closely related to the becoming of the person and human freedom. According to Wojtyła, only such an act of volition which engages the whole person in action (*actus personae*) can be possibly named the act of transcendence. Thus all dynamisms which emerge from human nature cannot be considered acts of self-determination, although in some way the mechanism of

transgressing the border from the subject to the object also takes place in them. Wojtyła decided to differentiate between these two types of transcendence and named one the horizontal transcendence, and the other – the one which is only possible owing to self-determination – the vertical transcendence (or the proper one) (Wojtyła 1979, 119).

In vertical transcendence, the personal being not only transcends himself towards external objects but simultaneously turns inwards, towards his own self. This inward orientation is possible owing to the “objectivising” function of self-determination. As Wojtyła emphasises, the fact that the person in action turns himself towards an object does not explain the personal character of a human being, which would remain inexplicable if it was not for self-determination understood as the inward movement, owing to which a human being choosing values in an act at the same time self-determines himself as “evil” or “good” (Wojtyła 1993b, 190-193).

Summarising current analyses, it should be stated that the transcendence of the person is closely related to the actualization of the personalistic value of the action. It is embedded in the very fact of performing an action as the most appropriate manner of personal self-expression. If a human being performs an action, that is: acts in a way proper for the person, the action becomes an authentic self-determination and through that action the transcendence of the person takes place.

However, the Polish philosopher does not abort his inquiry after pointing to the crucial role that the personalistic value of the action plays in the transcendence of the person. The transcendence of the person in action depends also on the subordination of man to the truth about the good, which consciousness turns to in the act of cognition and volition (Szostek 2005, 40-44). The truth is so essential to man that rejecting it means that a human being cannot actualise himself as the person, and therefore there is no authentic transcendence through action. Authentic transcendence can only take place when the person experiences in his conscience the truth about the good (Doran 1996, 133-136). Thus, as Wojtyła understands it, transcendence requires not only self-determination connected with human freedom (or the power of volition in the classic understanding), but also the reference to the truth which the person must subordinate to.

There is then a close connection between the personalistic value of the action and the moral value of that action. Wojtyła, analysing the structure of a human act, notices that the personalistic value manifests itself in the actualisation of the person in action through the structures of self-possession and self-governance proper for the person, whereas the ethical value is rooted in the substratum of this actualisation. Therefore, it is justifiable to claim that the moral value of an act emerges from the base surface of the personalistic value, the latter value being primordial to the former one. What is even more important, the ethical value permeates the personalistic value, although it is not to be identified with it (Wojtyła 1979, 264-265).

2. INTERPERSONAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION OF TRANSCENDENCE

Analysing the philosophical works of Wojtyła, one can see how the concept of transcendence of the person in action is further amplified by the idea of transcending oneself towards another “I” and towards the “we” relationship. Wojtyła describes this type of transcendence as “participation”. He explains it as the person’s transcendence in action when the action is being performed “together with others” (Wojtyła 1979, 268-269). Participation can be considered such a trait of the person which enables man to transcend himself and find more fulfilment through acting with and for others. Wojtyła believes that relations with others are a special space where man can “actualise himself”. When a human being turns to “others”, when he goes beyond his own self towards another “I”, he transcends himself and experiences this transcendence in a special way (Wojtyła 2000, 487).

Wojtyła distinguishes two types of participation depending on two types of relationship: the “I-You” relationship and the “we” relationship. The first and basic type of participation manifests itself in a relationship between “I” and “you”. For the Polish personalist the relationship towards a neighbour in its most profound form means subjective participation in the humanity of another person, which is possible owing to the awareness that another human being is “another I” (Wojtyła 1993c, 199-201). The interpersonal relationship becomes the moment of mutual revelation of each ego’s subjectivity (Wojtyła 1993a, 244-245).

The structure of the mutual revelation of subjectivity through experience can be understood as “hermeneutics of the person”. The person, willing to experience another person, to recognise the truth that “the other” is “someone”, is “another I”, experiences himself as an “I”, as the subject, as the person. Experiences of the neighbour contain experiences of himself. Recognising the subjectivity, the dignity of „another I” is simultaneously the affirmation of one’s own subjectivity and dignity. Therefore participation is a category crucial to the understanding of a human being as the person. Wojtyła clearly explains that a human being finds his ultimate fulfilment as the person through relation towards other people. Authentic transcendence thus means going beyond one’s own “I” towards “another I” in order to return to oneself enriched by the experience of another person.

Participation as a homogeneous feature of human existence is given to man in the form of potentiality which must be then positively verified through action. The very fact of having the intrinsic ability to participate does not mean that a given person will enter into a relation with another person. Wojtyła usually uses this term in the context of an action, that is in such situations where the potential quality of the person is verified positively. Nevertheless, man, being free, can verify his possibility of participation negatively. This however leads to alienation which is an antithesis of participation.

Alienation hinders or makes it completely impossible to experience another person as „another I”. Setting aside numerous negative consequences of such

attitude for the life of an individual as well as social communities, it needs to be mentioned that a human being experiencing alienation is not able to actualise the personalistic value of his actions in the social and interpersonal sphere. Therefore, he cannot achieve transcendence or actualise himself as the person. Wojtyła explains that alienation as an antithesis of participation does not dehumanise a human being as an individual member of the species but threatens the person as the subject. Participation as an antithesis of alienation confirms and emphasises the person as the subject and in that form can be accepted as the specific property of the person. It enables self-actualisation in both interpersonal and social relations, and also protect transcendence proper for the person (Wojtyła 1993a, 256-257).

Alienation leads to degradation of one's own humanity because the ability to participate in the humanity of "another I" influences directly the ability to experience one's own subjectivity. A person not able to form a bond with "another I" is deprived of the possibility to experience both someone else's and his own humanity. Therefore one cannot experience affirmation of one's own self. This leads directly to the feeling that life lacks sense and to depression. Alienation can be overcome only through participation which, according to the Polish personalist, should be described as the antithesis of alienation.

The second form of participation discloses when one looks at the social dimension of the person's existence and actions through the prism of "we" relationships. By using the term "we", Wojtyła wishes to point at such a community which consists of many members. In his understanding, the pronoun "we" also indicates a peculiar subjectivity of the community, characterised by collective action in the pursuit of a common value described as the common good. However the common good alone is not the most essential element of the "we" community. According to Wojtyła the relation of numerous "I's" towards the common good seems to constitute the very core of a social community (Wojtyła 1993a, 247). The common good is a call for participation in a given community. Different "I's" are united around it, considering it a collective value, a motif for participation in a community. However, it is the person who collectively with other people participates in the relation towards the common good that remains the most important element of a community.

As mentioned earlier, Wojtyła notes that human transcendence is secured in a situation when a human being in action fulfils personalistic value of that action. Therefore, also in the context of "we" relationships, participation should be understood as something that is equal to transcendence of the person in action when that action is performed "together with others" in various social relationships. Owing to this homogenous property, a human being, acting together with others, retains the personalistic value of his own action, and at the same time shares in the realization and the results of communal acting). Participation is a special form of action performed together with others. It is special because it engages human subjectivity. It is the way in which a human being, keeping the personalistic value

of an action, can act collectively with others and thus participate in communal actions (Wojtyła 1979, 268-269).

In order to enable participation, a community must meet two fundamental conditions: it must secure access to the common good and facilitate the possibility of self-determination for each single "I". When both these conditions are met, a human being is able to actualise the personalistic value of his act, that is transcendence, through actions leading to active participation in a community. This conclusion may seem somewhat paradoxical. Wojtyła is fully aware of it and therefore he emphasises the fact that participation (in case of both interpersonal dimension of "I-You" relationships and social dimension of "we" relationships) is an authentic expression of personal transcendence and its subjective confirmation. Although it may seem that transcendence towards the common good somehow dissuades a human being away from his own self, a thorough analysis of this good leads one to the conviction that a human being as the person and the subject is embedded in the true sense of the common good (Wojtyła 1993a, 254).

Summarising the deliberation on two types of participation presented above, it needs to be emphasised that only owing to this homogenous trait, a human being, existing and acting together with others, is able to actualise his own authentic transcendence. R. Buttiglione is right claiming that the concept of participation is the destination point of the whole Wojtyła's philosophical system and at the same times is a starting point for human *praxis*, pointing at its different realisations (Buttiglione 2010, 247). Philosophical analyses of participation are also the starting point for John Paul II's reflection on community understood as *communio personarum*. The personalist from Poland saw it clearly that in the „I-You" relationship an authentic interpersonal community is formed provided that "I" and "You" remain in the mutual affirmation of the transcendental value of the person, which is confirmed by their actions. Only such a relationship deserves to be named *communio personarum* (Wojtyła 1993a, 246). Nevertheless, the category of *communio personarum*, when considered against the anthropological background as a special kind of interpersonal relationship, stems from the very heart of theology, a study of the internal constitution of God who is a community – *communio* – of Three Persons. Therefore, this type of community, described by Wojtyła as *communio personarum*, is always to some extent a participation in the communion between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3. TRANSCENDENCE TOWARDS THE COMMUNION WITH PERSONAL GOD

Besides the above described dimensions of personal transcendence, Wojtyła's works present yet another – probably the most important – dimension of transcendence. It is the transcendence towards the communion with the Triune God. In some way it constitutes the sense of each human life. Man cannot find himself without the truth about his creation, redemption and sanctification, which

expresses itself in the most beautiful way through the person of Christ. The motif of the transcendence of man towards God is present in all works by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. In its most fundamental form it manifests itself as the call to the communion with the Triune God present in the Mystical Body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The participation in the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit assumes two levels, which implies two dimensions for relationships. The first is the vertical communion, that is the relationship with Personal God. The other is the horizontal communion, that is the relationship with other people built upon the vertical communion.

Wojtyła presented the concept of transcendence toward God for the first time in his work entitled *Znak, któremu sprzeciwić się będą*, which was the record of retreat sermons he delivered in 1976 in Vatican after being specially invited by Pope Paul VI. There the Cardinal of Cracow presented transcending oneself towards God as the way of the mind and as the way of the whole man. The Polish personalist began in the Thomistic way by pointing at the contingency of a human being. He claimed that in this perspective God manifests Himself as the guarantor of human existence because of the fact that only He is the self-existent subsistence (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*). This however does not explain completely the phenomenon of human transcendence towards God. Human experience reveals that the person desires to transcend himself towards the Absolute because He is personal, He is the divine “you”, in the light of which the ultimate constitution of human “I” takes place (John Paul II 2005, 24-37).

Analysing the works of Wojtyła/John Paul II in search for what he says about the transcendence of man towards God, one can notice that he uses most often the bottom-up perspective. The Polish personalist starts at the level of human reality; from the interpersonal relationship and analyses it in the light of the Divine prototype against the background of the communion of the Divine Persons. Therefore, ultimately the criterion of understanding what is human transcendence in its deepest meaning does not lie in the anthropology alone, but in the heart of theology – in trinitology, understood as the study on Divine Persons so closely unified that They constitute one Being, a perfect community of love, to which all personal beings are invited in Christ by the Holy Spirit of the eternal will of the Father. According to the Pope, man becomes the image and similarity of God not only through his humanity, but also through the communion of persons which is constituted from the very beginning by a man and a woman (John Paul II 2006, 163). The direct archetype for the communion of human persons is the communion of the Holy Trinity (May 1998, 135-136). This conclusion not only stems from the speculative deduction, but is also included in the Yahwist creation story (John Paul II 2006, 164).

The Pope explains transcendence through deification. He notes that deification should be understood as a penetration and permeation of what is essentially human by what is essentially Divine, as shaping the whole personal subjectivity a new in order to union with God in His Trinitarian Mystery and of intimacy with God

in the perfect communion of persons. Deification in the deepest sense means the participation in the Divine nature, in the inner life of God Himself. It can be grasped as a new formation of person's whole subjectivity according to the measure of union with God (John Paul II 2006, 392-392). Although *Theosis* will reach its fullness in the eschatological times, it may to some extent be actualised through sacraments still on Earth. In this sign and through that sign God reveals and gives himself to man in His transcendent love. From the sacramental perspective, grace become part of man to realize and fulfil in him the work of salvation, eternally intended by God, and fully revealed in Christ (John Paul II 2006, 468).

The participation in the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which each person is called to, may be destroyed by human sin. It is perfectly visible in the analysis of what happened to the first parents when they decided to oppose Yahwe. The first parents' sin became the reason for the lack of mutual entrustment, which directly points to the collapse of the original relationship of communion between a man and a woman (John Paul II 2006, 249). The hermeneutics of gift is replaced by lust and desire to dominate, whereas the marriage itself assumes deceptive, utilitarian character (Pokrywka 2005, 54).

Nevertheless, the state of sin is not the last chapter in the economy of salvation. Banishing the first parents from the Garden of Eden was the preparation for the time of redemption, which was actualised by the coming of Jesus Christ. The incarnated Logos enables man, crushed by sin, to enter again a relationship in the form of the communion intended by God in the act of creation (John Paul II 1981, 3). On his way to the eternal communion of Holy Trinity man needs to be strengthened by the Person-Gift, by the Giver of gifts, that is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is present in the Eucharist. The Sacred Sacrifice, as emphasised by John Paul II following the thought of Eastern Fathers of the Church, is a joint action of the Son and the Holy Spirit (John Paul II 2003, 23). The sacramental perspective therefore reveals the perspective of the Trinitarian communion, and the participation in the sacrament, as understood in its deepest meaning, is the participation in the unity of love between Three Divine Persons, which spreads abundantly over humankind.

The *communio* hermeneutics reinterprets the affirmation of the person taking into account the perspective of the "gift of oneself". In relation to the marriage communion, the Polish personalist stresses that the affirmation of the person means acceptance of the gift which through reciprocity constitutes the communion of persons. On one hand it constitutes it internally, on the other hand it covers the whole externality, corporeality of man. Transcendence through "the gift of oneself" engages the whole person with his spiritual and corporeal world. The whole person expresses himself by offering himself as a gift to another person and by accepting the gift of another person. At source of this person-forming process of hermeneutics through the gift there is God who, in the form of the communion of Persons incessantly exchanging gifts, enables man to make himself a gift and to accept another person as a gift.

Communio personarum of a marriage similarly to the Divine one is characterised by being open to another person who enriches the “I-Tyou” relationship, and in a way becomes its extension and fruit (John Paul II 1981, 14). The Pope understood parenthood as the natural consequence of reciprocal bestowal of gifts of oneself between two people (John Paul II 1994, 11). Owing to parenthood, the transcendence of “I” towards “Tyou” becomes completely new and unique, and this is because it finds its embodiment, if one may say so, in offspring. Thus a family is formed which is a community of persons whose proper way to exist is *communio personarum*. At the same time such a way of life, taking into account the whole existential disparity, shows the likeness of a human family community to the Divine “We” (John Paul II 1994, 7).

Summarising the above analyses, it can be said that Wojtyła/John Paul II presents the transcendence of the person towards personal God by means of *communio personarum*. The Polish personalist views the communion of persons primarily in the context of a sincere gift of himself. The source of *communio personarum* is the Triune God who, by His grace (both natural, expressed through the act of creation and supernatural), invites people to participate in His unity. A complete interpersonal communion is possible only in the context of grace, understood above all as the personal Love-Gift, that is the Spirit of The Father and the Son who bestows upon people the gift of unity and sacrifice following the example of Christ.

4. CONCLUSION: TRANSCENDENCE IS ANOTHER NAME FOR THE PERSON

A perfect summary for the above analyses is a phrase by Wojtyła quoted at the beginning of this work stating that transcendence is another name for the person. Man, insofar as he wishes to find fulfilment as a personal being, must perform his own selftranscendence. The Polish personalist proved that it could be achieved through action in which the person not only transcends himself towards the good but also turns inwards, towards his own self. This inward orientation is possible owing to the objectivising function of self-determination. Transcendence in action is possible only through such a human act where the personalistic value of the action is actualised. This pre-ethical value manifests itself through the fact that man, being the subject of an action in its full sense, fulfils himself as the very subject-person who actualizes himself, creates himself as a self-governing being. The personalistic value of an action is succeeded by its moral value. Due to it, self-determination contains the inward movement, owing to which a human being choosing values in an act at the same time self-determines himself as “good” or “evil”.

A special kind of an act, which actualises man as the person is participation. Owing to it, it is possible to experience one’s own humanity in the hermeneutics of the humanity of “another I”. The above analyses emphasise the particularly important role of a community on the way to the full transcendence of a human person. In his study Wojtyła managed to reconcile two, seemingly contradictory,

movements – the one towards self-actualisation and the other towards the neighbour. The personalism of the Polish thinker allows no room for hesitation that the transcendence of a human person leads through relations with other people, and the self-actualisation of man as the person is possible in its fullest form through participation in the humanity of other.

The ultimate aim of human transcendence is however God who invites a person to participate in His Trinitarian Communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Participation in this communion is also the highest form of transcendence and the only one which can satisfy a hidden human desire to transcend one's own self towards someone else.

According to the entirety of the analyses conducted above, it can be stated that the issue of the transcendence has a significant position in the work of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. The Polish personalist elucidates them from numerous points of view which reciprocally complement each other showing a person as a being who fulfils himself through the transcendence on many dimensions of his existence. The manifestation of the complementarity of understanding the transcendence in the subjective dimension – as the action performed by personal "I" – with the transcendence of the person which is understood as the participation when the action is being performed "together with others", constitutes an indisputable achievement of the Polish thinker. From the theological analyses of the transcendence conducted by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, it can be concluded that the complementarity appears also between the philosophical and theological view on the transcendence. Theology benefits from discoveries of philosophical anthropology, although it subordinates them to the truth that the ultimate aim of the person is to surpass the delimitation of his own being by the participation in the communion of the Triune God.

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