

The Hermeneutical Implications of Karol Wojtyla’s concept of the “Experience of Man”

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Abstract: The ancient philosophical adage “know thyself” has stood the test of time and this self-knowledge is best attained through experience. This experience is a kind of an encounter where one can experience the self as a subject but also as an object as well. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to think that escaping from the self is the source of happiness as we see with some people who are addicted to drugs and a hedonistic lifestyle, and some even go as far as harbouring suicidal tendencies and acting on them. Instead of happiness, such choices have instead brought about anxieties, mental illnesses, frustrations, alienation and loneliness among others. In reclaiming the importance of experience in the existential mystery of life that faces man we are well disposed to create an environment that will transform each individual by enabling him or her achieve the fulfilment they seek and desire in life. There will most certainly be a shift in identity, an intensified contact with reality, a simultaneous growth in both participation and detachment, a simultaneous amelioration in freedom and ability to surrender, a unification of the whole experience, an increased sense of self-acceptance and an enhancement of consciousness. This transformation and fulfilment will most certainly lead to the goal and desire of each human person and that is what is discussed in this article as we reflect on the concept of the “Experience of Man” developed by Karol Wojtyla

Keywords: Experience, Man, Subject, Object

Introduction

In the domain and quality of experiencing the self, much can be deduced that has the power to lead man to his innate desire for happiness. I would like to highlight from the start that in proposing Wojtyla’s concept as a constitutive element that will lead the human person to happiness is not an implication that there are no differences in the individual experiences, in emphasis and suitability. And secondly, that such a common ground from the point of view of different issues does not mean that they are basically different, for they overlap and may be comprehended as aspects of a single process and facets of single expression. For this reason, the hermeneutical implications discussed here below could be thought of as a longer or shorter, just as a greater or smaller number of views maybe chosen by a researcher. Granted this measure of arbitrariness, we shall now delve into an eight-fold phenomenological analysis which will be a tearing into parts our substance into its basic constituent parts to make the synthesis possible—the synthesis that we are and are meant to be.

Meaning of experience

Wojtyla states that one of “the richest and apparently complex of all experiences accessible”¹ to man is the experience of himself. It is complex because it involves the whole human person who cannot be limited in his existential reality and yet rich enough to reveal to him who he is. Wojtyla characterizes the experience of man as a “great cognitive process.”² This is a pointer to the fact that the mind is an important tool in this concept since it is the engine of cognition.

Wojtyla conceives the experience of man as an encounter. Primarily, in this experience man has to face himself; that is, he has to come into a cognitive relation with himself. This experience is not just intermittent but, in a sense, continuous by nature. There are in experience “some vividly expressive moments and also whole, dull sequences,

¹Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 3

²Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 3

but they all sum up to make the specific totality of experience of that individual man who is myself.”³ The totality is composed of a multitude of experiences and is, as it were, their resultant.

In his description, Wojtyla points out the object of experience as “the man emerging from all the moments and at the same time present in every one of them.”⁴ The experience of man lasts as long as there is maintained that cognitive relation in which I am both the subject and the object. Intimately associated with the relation is the process of comprehension that also has its own distinctive moments and its continuity. Ultimately, our comprehension of ourselves is composed of many separate moments of understanding, somewhat analogous to experience, which is also composed of many distinctive experiences; it thus seems that every experience is also a kind of understanding.

For Wojtyla, the experience of man is the starting point of the knowledge of the human person. He argues that “man’s experience of anything outside of himself is always associated with the experience of himself, and he never experiences anything external without having at the same time the experience of himself.”⁵

We have seen how experience is described by Wojtyla as a cognitive process that is twofold by nature, continuous, personal and multitudinous. More so it all combines to form a concrete revelatory aspect on man himself and other men. This now gives us an opportunity to discuss the different aspects of man’s existence that experience penetrates and interacts with to bring about the total concept of the “experience of man.”

4.1 Shift in Identity

Wojtyla’s definition of the person found in his work, *Love and Responsibility* is of a revelatory essence. He defines the person as “an objective entity, which as a definite subject has the closest contacts with the whole (external) world and is most intimately involved with it precisely because of its inwardness, its interior life.”⁶

There is a reference here to a person as a definite subject that spells out the characteristics of an inner self and life. The subject is one that “exists and acts in a certain way.”⁷ For a person, life, intelligence and rationality define his way of acting. Wojtyla gives much attention to human subjectivity.

This is seen in the incessant pursuing within one’s self the enquiry, “who am I?” where you come to the knowledge of your true self. Self-image is a central aspect in understanding one’s personality. Many people experience themselves in their everyday lives rather than out of the unlabeled totality of their being. The self is the center of gravity for one’s life. Once one’s consciousness identifies with the core of the self then he is disposed at the center of his being, having all aspects of life but being his totality. Through an honest self-analysis, one easily lets the very inner person come to the fore, not necessary in action, which is already a consequence, but emergence into consciousness, which amounts to waking up of the self, a person’s knowing himself as he is, rather than believing or deceiving himself to be what he “should” be.

This identification with the self-image is the experiencing of the self, a direct contact with one’s reality rather than a substitution of a “better” self-image for the older one. Self-acceptance leads to increased self-expression and self-expression to self-discovery and the tasting of one’s identity. A shift in identity is involved in the change of self-image. Openness to experience is a doorway into the freedom of the person where one is able to experience himself as he is and, in the process, come to know, moment after moment one’s adequacy.

Our reality at the moment is always our experience. Our experience of ourselves and the world is something we can either accept (experience consciously) or reject, repress or disown. Rebirth is true to the quality of the experience, but its nature is more that of awakening to the realization of the nature of the self. The idea of change in identity, expressed in terms of rebirth, vanishing of the ego, merging with the deeper self, becoming one with the common identity of all experience is a vital aspect to one’s happiness.

Allan Watts sums it up like this;

³Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 3

⁴Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 4

⁵Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 3

⁶ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, translated. H. T. Willets, Williams Collins Sons and Co. Ltd, (London: 1981), 23

⁷ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 21

Most of us have the sensation that “I myself” is a separate center of feeling and action, living inside and bounded by the physical body—a center which “confronts” an “external” world of people and things, making contact through the senses with the universe both alien and strange. Everyday figures of speech reflect this illusion. “I came into this world.” “You must face reality.” “The conquest of nature.”⁸

He thus describes our modern existence as people who “suffer from hallucination, from a false and distorted sensation of our existence as living organisms.”⁹ We do not come into this world; we come out of it. Every individual realizes himself as an expression of the whole realm of nature, a unique action of the total universe. This fact is rarely, if ever, experienced by most individuals. Even those, who know it to be true in theory, do not sense or feel it, but continue to be aware of themselves as isolated egos inside a body.

“The first result of this illusion is that our attitude to the world outside us is largely hostile. We are forever conquering nature, space, mountains, deserts, bacteria, and insects instead of learning to cooperate with them in a harmonious order.”¹⁰ There is dissolution of boundaries between subject and object, self and not self.

In advancing his description of the human subjectivity, Wojtyla reacts to a number of philosophers whom he feels do not give much attention to this. These include Nietzsche who supposed that the decentred human subject could never possess himself or rationally control his actions. It was also a confrontation of the anthropological teachings of Marx who reduced a person to mere matter: man is a material being who satisfies his basic human needs by physical activity that in turn determines his political and social life. Sartre on the other hand claimed that man is existence or pure freedom: “There is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature... there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom”¹¹ Man’s authenticity here is seen to lie in his ability to free himself of all his determinations. All these viewpoints do not accommodate the full depth of personal subjectivity. This makes him turn to metaphysics and phenomenology.

He does not adopt each of them fully but adopts a part of them and contributes to their presentation of man’s subjectivity. In metaphysical subjectivity, “a rational *supposit* is called a person, a distinct, and individual subsistent of rational nature.”¹² This describes a person as something that exists and acts. Wojtyla feels that this does not cover the personal subjectivity unique to the human dynamism which can only be brought to light through a thematic investigation of action. This investigation leads him to the philosophy of personalism and phenomenology. These are to help him explore the nature of action that reveals the unique interior life of the person. Through phenomenology, Wojtyla hopes to engage himself into the study of the interior depth of the person. This is because phenomenology has a descriptive method that through philosophical reflection gives proper attention to a given phenomenon or experience in order to grasp its essence. Phenomenology allows us to enrich our metaphysical knowledge of the person along with the relations between persons through a description of lived experience. Both metaphysics and phenomenology have certain limitations that are overcome in the collaborative synthesis.

Metaphysics offers Wojtyla a starting point in his conception of person as the human *suppositum* or substance, the dynamic center of all action, experience and relations. The *suppositum* which we shall refer to now as metaphysical subjectivity “guarantees the identity of the human being in existence and activity.”¹³ Then the role of phenomenology comes in as a better way of understanding the human being as a personal subject. The profoundly dynamic nature of the person is brought to light through investigating the features of personhood which include consciousness and freedom. So, subjectivity includes consciousness, self-awareness, freedom, self-determination and conscience. The person is now understood as a responsible active agent as well as a subject of experience due to the involvement of the concept of consciousness which was virtually ignored in the medieval tradition of defining the person.

Let us now look at the advantages that will most likely be born out of the identity shift we are discussing. It dissolves and lowers the ego to its proper place in the functioning of the total personality. It may come through moral injunctions like humility, lifestyles required for a specific way of life.

⁸ Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, Jonathan Cape LTD, (London: 1969), 5

⁹ Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, 5

¹⁰ Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, 6

¹¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. H. Barnes, Citadel (New York: 1957), 22-23

¹² Martin O. Vaske, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (Nebraska: 1963), 221

¹³ Martin O. Vaske, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 223

It develops the spiritual exercise of meditation. This involves a twofold effort: (1) the cultivation of an “inner silence” or temporary stopping of the ego-controlled activities (mainly categorizing and judging) and (2) the attaining of a state of receptivity to aspects of reality that might be called subtle in that they do not fit with the pre-established categories. Both movements of the mind allow the ego to step out of the way so that selfhood may be manifested and the person’s activity contacted from within.

So in referring to person as a definite subject, Wojtyla means a person is a substance in the ontological sense and also a personal subject who experiences himself, a subject who can be an active agent, and a self-conscious efficient cause that deliberately brings about certain effects that are also constitutive of that subjectivity. The fear to be oneself is here addressed and one is moved to deal with this situation directly. One is here rewarded with a state of rest and relaxation

4.2 Intensified contact with Reality

In his description of a person, Wojtyla described him as an objective entity. He further asserts that “every subject exists as an object, an objective something or somebody.”¹⁴ So as an object, man is not something but somebody; thus, attributing to him a status that is above all other objects which are referred to as something. A person is an entity or somebody and not something. Here we understand a person as a subject living alongside other objects of which some are also subjects like him. He interacts with them in his life. So, there is interaction between him and the rest of the world; between him and reality as a whole.

One of the most acute manifestations of unhappiness is the delusional quality of life that marks a number of people’s lives. In the spheres of thinking and perception many display a feeble grasp of reality. It is obvious and as well implicit in feelings or behavior. One’s appreciations and expectations concerning the self and others are not realistic but tinged. Experience is an art of reunion with reality. The stress on reality here goes hand in hand with the concern with contemplation, self-knowledge, and the development of attention and consciousness.

We can here talk of objective consciousness and cosmic consciousness which refers to a state of the real ‘I’, when one receives and understands the cosmos as it really is. Illusion here is understood as a shadow of reality as seen in Plato’s myth of the cave man that sees chained with his back to the real objects. One needs to be open to experience, a concept that links our discussion of identity with the grasp of reality. “Our range of experience is limited and substituted by an inferential contact with the world.”¹⁵

We usually interpret the world on two levels, rational versus irrational, conscious versus unconscious and our experience must be informed by this dichotomy. Both intellectual insight and emotional insight are of paramount importance for all thinking and imagining and sensing and feeling contribute greatly as well. We need to look at all these as ways towards fuller contact with reality, so that we are able to see at once that all the important ones are paths to experiencing, without which reality can only be a concept or a fantasy.

Through experience one is able to focus which can be conceived as a self-reflecting, a pointing out of one’s self, made possible by an exceptional effort of attention. Our experience at times occurs unconsciously to the extent that we are not directing our attention to it. It must be brought into focus which can be either through attending to feelings throughout the day or in meditations periods or by having it directed by another.

This contact with reality has a receptive quality. A reflexive and concentrative quality is also seen in the struggle to bring one to awareness of the self. Deepening our contact with reality is a shift from conceptualization to experience, from illusion to reality, from assumptions and distorted images of reality to true contact. We are therefore able to outgrow ourselves through reflective awareness and choice. Self-expression then proves to be itself constructive because one discovers that contact with reality is the deepest need of a human person that should be left to its natural course, then one develops a concern for the central issues of existence and the expression from within becomes self-perfecting.

¹⁴ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 21

¹⁵ Claudio Naranjo, *The One Quest, Wildwood House*, (London:1974), 159

As an avenue into reality, one is able to draw out every drop of true understanding which is experiential knowledge that kills out all fantasies of life and opens up a way into the real, where one may find further understanding. Our experience is brought into focus, experience that is at the core of our being and is inseparable from our reality.

4.3 Simultaneous growth in both Participation and Detachment

In connection to the discussion of the connection between the person and reality we cannot fail to highlight the uniqueness of the person. The quality of uniqueness can be seen clearly with a good look at reality and a clear perception of some dimension of reality. The first part of a clear good look at reality seems to be easy for only an observation is needed but the second part of formulating assertions that accurately express that dimension of reality which has been identified is not an easy task. One of the themes that Wojtyla embraced is that of the uniqueness of persons. Finding words that capture the uniqueness of a person is not an easy task but we will begin with inquiring into what uniqueness is not.

The term uniqueness here is used in reference to incommunicability, “a word that points to something by negating its opposite”¹⁶ just like it is used in the word immortal. So, the most fitting use of the word is in reference to that which is not common. There should be care in using it for it can be seen as that which is unable to be communicated, for the incommunicable is rather that which actually makes possible the deepest and most meaningful forms of communication. To clarify on this, we shall look at the three possible meanings of the word incommunicable in which we shall find that two are correct but one leads straight into error.

First is to refer to “that which is not common where other persons cannot have this in their being also.”¹⁷ For example, I have an intellect and a will and so does any other person thus make those common. But I am unique in my person and unrepeated, so is every other person. No one can ever be me. This is a good interpretation.

The second case is to mean “that which cannot be expressed in words and sentences.”¹⁸ For example, a person who loves can be able to know, grasp and love another in his or her very uniqueness. But you can find that they can never utter a sentence which would capture or express that uniqueness. This is also true but in a narrow sense which is not with words.

The last one is that of “being unable to be known by anyone else or communicated to anyone else.”¹⁹ The mere fact that no words can express the uniqueness of a person does not imply that you don’t know and love their uniqueness. It just means that that which you know and love in them is ineffable or unutterable. It would be absurd to claim that that which words cannot explain is not known.

As Miller puts it, “coming to know the unique person is at the same time a gaining of insight into her individual value essence” in other words uniqueness. This comes to us as a distinct feeling in the heart by a person impressing her or himself on our heart in a way that no one else does.

We have managed to establish the uniqueness of a person but have not delved into those components that set man apart as a unique existent in the universe that is as a species and as an individual in the species. So we shall now look at each separately.

As already seen in the previous writings, all the definitions of man point to his possession of a special quality, which is rationality. It is this rational nature that stands out as the source of worth of persons for any being possessing a rational nature is deemed to be worthy of absolute respect. Note should be taken that the rational nature of the human beings has been a debate in line with what really constitutes it. So, it would be better if key features are chosen and all these are founded on the ability of man to transcend himself in such a way as to relate meaningfully to the world; we perform these acts of self-transcendence through our intellect, will and affections. For example, it is only human beings that can follow a class, make judgments about and even ask questions. It is still only human beings whose actions stand to be judged as morally good or evil. Animals cannot engage in discussion and neither

¹⁶ John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, (Washington: 1996), 54-58

¹⁷ *Karol Wojtyla's Philosophical Legacy*, edited. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, George F. Mclean, (USA: 2008), 66

¹⁸ *Karol Wojtyla's Philosophical Legacy*, 66

¹⁹ *Karol Wojtyla's Philosophical Legacy*, 66

can their actions be judged as morally good or evil and lack an aesthetic perception of beauty. So, any being that exhibits the rational qualities holds a higher rank among others which lack these capabilities. So, the human species stands out as a species of more worth compared to all species like of plants, dogs, cows, lions and many others.

Having established that the human species is of great worth compared to others, one is left to wonder whether there is any other difference that can be traced in the individual members of the special species and this leads us to the next quality which is uniqueness.

“Personal uniqueness is a real dimension of personal being and a deep source of the dignity of persons.” This is John Paul’s main emphasis as we have already seen before. If all human beings possess rationality that is; the intellect, the will and affections does it lead to a conclusion that all are the same in that each person is a repetition of the other? Isn’t there individuality in persons? The man in question for us in our study contends that there exists a fundamental uniqueness that is evident in each individual. For example, when a loved one dies, we do not mourn that we have lost the intelligence will and affection that all other people have too but we mourn that that one unrepeatable person is gone. Yes, we have lost the intelligence, will and affection but that would be negligible since a number of those still live but you find that the loss is so great just as if the only person in existence is gone. “This is why people who have lost a loved one are in a sense inconsolable for the rest of their lives. Of course, we miss the intellect, will and laugh of this person, and the reason for that is because these common features (intellect, will, and risibility) of persons “appear in their full individuality...on the basis of their being rooted in the person. We can say that this is the person who in a certain sense communicates full individuality to the qualities.”

Having established the uniqueness of the person which is born of Wojtyła’s understanding, that through experience man is able to come to terms with his uniqueness, we now discuss how then that uniqueness does not alienate him from reality but rather enhances and enriches his participation. This is because quite distinct issues of body versus mind, selfhood versus selflessness, doing versus non-doing arise. Differences between these issues are greatest when we treat them as concepts. Instead, in terms of experience, being one’s body, being the doer of one’s actions, and perceiving one’s self as substantially existing which highlight one’s uniqueness, constitute aspects of a single state, opposed to having a body, witnessing natural processes rather than doing them, seeing one’s self as empty of any substantial being.

All the states above may appear as theoretical speculation rather than anything that can be experienced; for we do not usually experience ourselves as being our body, but living in it, or having one. Our true being regardless of our possible materialistic outlook in theory feels more like that of a mind, consciousness, or soul in the body. Nor do we experience ourselves as doers of all our actions. Many things happen to us, and we are not our ultimate masters; we may do what we want, but we cannot want what we want. The very word passion—denoting the root of our actions—implies passivity; our impulses lead us, we do not feel that they stem from us. It is truer that we see ourselves as wanting; but not as wanting all our wants. In much of our lives we are aware of having wants that we do not want; our self and our urges are dissociated, just as self and body are. What is it in us that says “I” and it is not the body, or the passions, or what we do? Whoever pursues this meditation discovers that this “I” lacks substantial existence.

But we do not experience ourselves at the other end of the range either. If we fully experienced ourselves as not-the-body we would see our existence as independent of our body and feel invulnerable to any physical threat, particularly death. If we experienced everything as happening to us or happening through us, instead of it being our doing and choice, we would be able to surrender to the unavoidable stream of happening and cease our frantic striving to alter its course. If we felt completely detached from the string of events in us, and around us, too, we would hold no preference for this or that, and we would allow it to be as it is. As to the experience of being non-existent, this may be hard to imagine or conceive, so remote does it seem from our ordinary state of consciousness. Both extremes are equally represented in many areas of life; that of cultivating a sense of identity or oneness with the body, and that of developing the perception of self as mind, spirit, or consciousness transcending the physical, for which the body is a mere outer garment or shell; that of promoting the realization that all our actions, even the automatic ones, are our doing and responsibility, and stressing that everything happens to us or through us and that we are unable to do anything; that of saying that we are one with everything, and that of saying that there is no such thing as an “I”; that of stressing that we are one with our impulses, and that of stressing that our true self or essence is above ephemeral wants, filled by itself.

These antinomic experiences either stress a full participation of the person and the world or a detachment or dis-identification from the self and the world. These are more of apparent opposites and could easily be understood as not contradictories. If not, we disintegrate into blind tolerance or alienation.

All that happens in us we do, but we do not acknowledge or experience this as such, for we dis-identify ourselves from our processes; we create a fictitious barrier between “I” and “it,” calling non-ego everything for which we do not want to take responsibility. We do not normally acknowledge, not in full measure at least. We stand outside of ourselves, identifying with a fictitious “I” to whom all happens. A shift in the point of view is born inviting the person to experience himself as if he were the responsible doer of his actions and the locus of his perceptions.

The experience of the self as nothing can be expressed as a salient feature of this goal. A kind of central emptiness of our nature is depicted as the feeling of emptiness. One experiences the self-as-nothingness standing aside from desires as not an expression of the core self. This attitude amounts to a non-doing, a transparency and a letting do to what is—a state of indifference.

The ideas of self as everything or nothing, though antithetical, may be only alternative translations of a single experience into the medium of concepts and words. Whether the “I” is experienced as the all or as nothing, one consequence is the same: the distinction between the self and other disappears. This seems a paradox and it is the ultimate that reason can apprehend. In all experience we can see our doing or non-doing, our selfhood or selflessness, our responsible choice or total irresponsibility.

Self-knowledge, in the form of direct experience of the self gives one control. And so, one identifies with his being, enters into his processes, and at the same time rises above himself, feels free from his processes and detached. It becomes a way of ascent to the domain of consciousness and freedom.

4.5 Simultaneous amelioration in Freedom and ability to Surrender

There are issues that are only apparently distinct: freedom versus necessity, control versus expression, and desire versus needlessness. All these issues are intimately related among themselves. The question of freedom is another way of formulating the question of who is the doer of the actions, and the issue of freedom is inseparable from that of identity.

Freedom is not only a means to happiness but also a goal in more than one way. It involves the attainment of an experience of freedom in which the individual perceives himself as unobstructed by himself and as an active force in the shaping of his life. This offers a solution to anxiety. The roots of anxiety are seen in the unrealistic perception of self and the environment and the conflicts established in life.

Lack of freedom is stressed by some as a result of one’s exaggerated dependency upon others, an inability to stand on his own, investing external sources of authority with sacrosanct powers while relinquishing his own sense of responsibility.

In Wojtyla’s conception of positive freedom which is referred to as a “freedom for,” we view an authentic path to happiness. If we turn to it now and ask what is left to man once his obstacles are removed, the answer is that it is not chaos or random behavior, but quite the opposite: the person’s essential stream of choices and preferences (his being true to himself) is most coherent and articulate, and bears the mark of his unique style. In this sense our freedom is that of being who we are—a giving in to the necessity of our being.

Not delving into all the speculation about determinism-indeterminism, we can say that the experiential characteristic of human inner attainment may be described as one of freedom or of surrender. Every precise course of action is worth in as much one is free for it. “The spirit is freedom,”²⁰ said Hegel, but he conceived freedom as the acceptance of necessity; and Buber said of the free man that he “believes in his destiny.”²¹ Fully aware of this

²⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press, (Oxford: 1977), 361

²¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, T and T Clark, (Edinburgh: 1937), 59

paradox, Carl Rogers writes: “Freedom, rightly understood, is a fulfilment, by the person, of the ordered sequence of his life.”²²

What follows from this discussion is the clear understanding that the issue of freedom is no other than that of being one’s self. It is once more the issue of identity, but from a different perspective that take into account the pressure of the forces of inauthenticity and the need of what Paul Tillich called a “courage to be.” Also being or living the truth presupposes the knowing of the truth: having that direct self-knowledge that was discussed earlier. To surrender is in the first place surrendering to one’s experience rather than repressing it or distorting it: being open. The quality of freedom also distinguishes voluntary acts from actions that are involuntary. Since voluntary actions are carried out consciously, this issue is inseparable from that of consciousness. In similar fashion, the freedom to be one’s self is inseparable from an attitude of self-acceptance. In the words of Thomas Merton, we can describe it as the person’s “freedom from concern that goes with being simply what he is and accepting things as they are in order to work with them as he can.”²³

An issue related to freedom is that of ease and its counterpart, difficulty, work. Letting go of our essential nature, surrendering to the stream of our experience may be considered as the position of least effort; in fact, such experience of being carried or being one with the flow of life events is at times depicted as non-doing. Yet spontaneity involves the contradiction of the whole of our conditioned personality—a going against the grain of inner obstacles. And in that sense, it is hard work. What is of the greatest ease from the point of view of the essence is also the greatest difficulty for the ego-centered personality. Literally, it means sacrifice and surrender. And what may seem as a simultaneous process of “letting go” and “working against” from the contrasting points of view of the self and the programmed robot in us, may also be seen as a course of personal growth in which one process follows the other.

Lack of freedom is equated to with the experience of viewing one’s self as the moved rather than the mover, that is, as removed, dissociated from one’s self. A complete merging of the processes involves identification with the mover—an experience of will.

There is an issue that usually comes up in relation to freedom and objective reality. This can be seen in structuring of life after universal models, that is, indications of how to act, think, and feel which allow for one’s individuality to partake in the general qualities of life as lived by those who have attained their goal. Life is patterned after rules or precepts, sentiments are shaped with prayer or with the deliberate suppression of negative feelings, and with the cultivation of love; thinking is patterned after symbols expressive of universal truths. It is experienced that all such crutches may sustain the person until he can walk by himself, and he will eventually find that the images or rules (provided from without) anticipated the preferences and perceptions of his deeper being. The risk should not be discarded here as at times the truth is replaced with symbols. In conclusion, we can say that freedom is freedom to know and freedom to do. Its fruits are in the cognitive side, the Delphic “know thyself” and on the active side, the Shakespearean “to thine own self be true.”

4.6 Unification of the whole

Hitherto, we have come to establish a uniqueness of person. The description we have sets the person apart in quite a remarkable manner. So, our next efforts are going to be about looking into the uniqueness of a person in relation to the reality outside him and inside and how they can be in tandem. Man is described in terms of his involvement in the external world grounded in his inwardness, interior life. The person is therefore in contact with the world not only on the sensory level like animals but also through the inner self for the communication between the person and the world is “given its proper form to man only in the sphere of his interior life.”²⁴

As we discuss the concept of unity it is paramount that the reality that surrounds man is considered, that is, the world. Unification of the experiences is an essential path that leads to the finding of the existence that gives one their very substance. Wojtyla calls this integration. A unity of subject and object, Man and the world, is also implied;

²² Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens, *Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human*, Real People Press, (Lafayette: 1967), 46

²³ Thomas Merton, *The Spiritual Father in the Desert Tradition*, The Burke Memorial Society Newsletter-Review, Vol.3, No. I (1968), 27

²⁴ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, pg.23

there is a state, which seems to be the limit of what we regard as development, where this boundary is lost without loss of self-awareness. This is an aspect of cosmic consciousness. Finally, the distinction between man and God is also reabsorbed into unity, whether this is expressed in theistic or non-theistic language. In the former case it is expressed as being one with God or being part of God, and in the later the feelings that are usually projected in a God image or concept are reincorporated in the world and in man. In this way, too, Man is God, the experience of self becomes endowed with the quality of sanctity, profoundness, ineffability, and especially with that of being an end in itself.

There seems to be a movement toward the perception of unity and integration in the world. The experience of unity with the object underlies all true aesthetic experiences and the experience of unity with another human being underlies the feelings of true love. Our focus here is going to be a unity that seems to be a precondition to all others. Union like so many other things begin at home.

The coincidence of metaphysical opposites highlighted above and the integration of the self may be said to be aspects of a single experience, and yet one or the other aspect may predominate in the awareness of an individual describing it or trying to interpret it. Because of this, perhaps, it sometimes seems that a realization in the nature of philosophical insight leads to psychological integration, while at other times a resolution of psychological conflicts leads to feelings of unity with other aspects of the world, beings, or reality at large—maybe in form of experiences. The person himself tends to move toward fusion, integration, and unity and away from splitting, conflicts, and oppositions. This involves two aspects of unification; transpersonal and intrapersonal. The integration of personality is grounded in the recognition the ordinary state of the human being, and to much extent the pathological, are marked by conflict, splits, dissociation and contradiction in the person. These are evident in the conflicts between the internalized norms of civilization, the demands of reality and the innate urges. We can state it differently as in the different functions of the “I” like thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting or the conflict between the real self and the idealized self or false personality.

The approach to these issues varies; either in terms of conciliation of opposites, transcendence of opposites, seeking the golden mean but all aim at the wholeness of the human being. Through the experience of the self, one comes to an enlightened view of these conflicts in a form of mutual recognition, respect and collaboration. One is able to identify what is at stake for him in a very conscious manner thus leading to a refinement and adjustment of both values and feelings.

This movement that leads to the wholeness of the person, also brings to the fore the development of undeveloped functions or attitudes, the reinforcement of suppressed or repressed aspects of the personality. For this unity to be achieved, the pseudo-unity consisting in the supremacy of a part must give way to a polarity. This is something that takes place naturally in an attempt at self-exploration or self-expression.

Once the opposing tendencies in conflict are exposed, we can conceive of two alternative approaches toward a possible unification: one, a deepening in understanding of each, until a common ground may be discovered that allows for their collaboration; the other, the orientation of both toward a third, extrinsically given possibility—a higher purpose. So either one merges the dissenting voices or detaches from them or subordinates both to an ultimate purpose. By the logic of his own experience man is driven to find the true center of experience and reorganize his life in the truth.

4.7 Increased sense of Self-acceptance

What has been the object of our discussion in the preceding sections may also be examined from the point of view of self-acceptance. We may see in self-rejection what separates man from his experience, deprives him of knowledge of what or who he is, creates conflicts, and takes away the freedom to be himself in the surrendering to his own being and destiny.

Through the experience of man, we are able to undo the self-rejection in order to bring about self-acceptance, self-appreciation and self-love. One is better disposed to rediscover his co-substantiality with the divine nature and come close to seeing the world and himself as God did. Self-rejection is behind all symptoms of unhappiness particularly anxiety and depression just as self-acceptance is the basis for happiness and joy. Our ego in recognition of its unity with the essential oneness with existence is grounded to its destiny which is happiness.

There is a close connection between the question of non-acceptance and that of coercion. This lack of unity and of inner freedom is only another aspect of the fact that the person is not living “from within,” unfolding his potential, but according to an ideal image that he believes he is or should be. Self-rejection proceeds from a fantasy of “what I should be” and is directed to a phantom of “what I really am” which never becomes known as it is non-existent, covered up as it is by the self-image. For this reason, there is an indissoluble relationship between self-acceptance and true self-knowledge. Since what is rejected is only a fantasy, expectation, or biased interpretation of one’s actions, direct non-interpretive contact with the experience of the self is a natural corrective. True self-knowledge stirs true self-love and conversely, only the known can be loved.

There can be little question to the value of acceptance, appreciation, and love in an individual’s life. Acceptance and love entail a subject-to-subject relationship, in addition to freedom and a personal appreciation. Instrumental knowledge is meant to lead to self-transformation. By perceiving, accepting, and actually loving a fellow man, one can bring out an enhancement of life. The central importance of love, support, and true appreciation for an individual resultantly leads to his growth in self-support, self-appreciation, and self-love. This becomes a touchstone of a genuine personal relationship.

The importance of self-expression in the development of self-acceptance lies partly in the interpersonal situation, in the context of which this expression takes place. One has to experience the self as the target of either acceptance or rejection. On the other hand, self-expression even outside of the interpersonal context is a step towards self-acceptance because of its link with the act of consciousness for we can feel ourselves in our actions, outer or inner. In expressing or realizing ourselves, we step from the state of potentiality that of substantiality through which we disclose ourselves to ourselves.

Self-acceptance is not different from our experience of moment after moment, as discussed in connection with the issues of self-experience and the experience of reality. We might say that the openness to experience, the expression of self-acceptance at a given moment, is the step in an attitude that can lead to happiness which will be experiencing an action of self-love, a love of existence as given in that moment.

Love is an indispensable outcome of experience of the self. Self-acceptance can also be referred to as love. Wojtyła proclaims love to be the ultimate source of human dignity as seen in his work, *Love and Responsibility*. He argues that, “love is concerned with persons directly and immediately: affirmation of the value of the person as such is of its essence”²⁵

In his definition of love, he asserts that love is “always a mutual relationship between persons”²⁶ and that “man’s capacity for love depends on his willingness consciously to seek a good with others, and to subordinate himself to that good for the sake of others, or to others for the sake of that good. Love is exclusively the portion of human persons.”²⁷ This gives us the two-way movement of love; the love of the self which also results in the love of others. Love is also a form of justice to self and to others. He writes that love is “a requirement for justice”²⁸ or fairness and following in the footsteps of his predecessors like Aquinas describes justice as, “giving others what is rightly due to them.”²⁹ So self-acceptance expressed through love of the self and others will be giving or administering justice and fairness.

Following Aquinas, he also places love in the category of the will. He says that, “Love is given its definite shape by acts of will at the level of the person”³⁰ because man has a power of self-determination, a power to determine his acts of will independent of any external force. Man’s natural desires must be evaluated on the plane of love thus forming a chain of responsibility. So self-acceptance is a form of self-actualization.

In his metaphysical analysis of love Wojtyła focuses on the basic elements in any form of human interpersonal love that is, attraction, desire and goodwill. Attraction is one of the basic elements of human love that involves

²⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 42

²⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 73

²⁷ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 29

²⁸ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 42

²⁹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 42

³⁰ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 49

cognition, the will and emotions. Wojtyla calls attraction “the essence of love and in some sense love.”³¹ Desire too is of the very essence of love due to the limitedness of the human person. Man has never been self-sufficient; he is always in need of other beings. The love of desire “originates in a need and aims at finding a good which it lacks,”³² thus complementarity is the goal to satisfy a longing or a lack. The aspect of goodwill directs us to the unselfish quality of love. Goodwill must be free of self-interest in other words unconditional.

4.8 Enhancement of Consciousness

William James reiterated that, “compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources.”³³ Another way of looking at the experience we are discussing is in terms of consciousness. Becoming conscious of the unconscious, consciousness expansion or heightened states of consciousness and awareness is an indubitable outcome of experience. We need to consider the limits of our consciousness and to what extent our actions are guided by it because consciousness brings about a kind of enlightenment.

What we examined as a search for true identity (the experience of being one’s self rather than living up to and identifying with an image) requires contact with self, a contact which is consciousness. The relinquishing a false identity in the process of contacting the reality of experience, is part of the shift to proper awareness. The apparent opposites of empathetic identification and detachment are part of the phenomenology of consciousness.

The relationship between the experience of freedom and that of consciousness is obvious enough since freedom means voluntary action, while unconscious action is involuntary. Consciousness reveals “the truth that sets free.” We have already commented upon the connection between consciousness and self-acceptance in terms of how we can only love what we know, knowing being an act of consciousness.

The connection between consciousness and unity derives from the fact that it is the split between conscious and unconscious aspects of personality that underlie most of our conflicts. Just as it may be possible to achieve unity of purpose or action in a group of persons unless their different views are voiced and their points of agreement discovered, it is not possible to attain unity among our inner “I’s” unless they make themselves evident. When we are fully conscious of their wants, we may be surprised to discover that they are all much the same. Unity, therefore, is not so much something that may be achieved as something that is realized—in an act of consciousness.

On the aspect of understanding reality intellectually, consciousness according to Wojtyla involves the realization of the importance of sensing and feeling. The physical aspects of experience are stressed and the stress on the feelings and the interpersonal relationship are some of the evidences to this. This adds to real knowledge of the self and reality at large born of the act of simple awareness and attention to the immediacy of experience.

Because consciousness is consciousness of something revealed in enlightenment, it is inseparable from wisdom, understood as knowledge that transcends the intellect. The knower and the unknown, consciousness and being may be viewed from the point of view of what they contribute to the development of consciousness and of the knower, or what they do in terms of pointing to the unknown.

It is important to note that Wojtyla’s philosophical enterprise is not overly intellectualistic and rationalistic for it appeals to practical philosophy. He takes the sphere of activity seriously and therefore connects action with the person. He does not reduce the person to pure consciousness like Descartes, Heidegger and Husserl.

Wojtyla conceives a person as an acting subject thus addressing the anthropological crisis that besets modern society: a loss of identity and the risk that “man is in danger of becoming usual and common place.” We can define Wojtyla’s theory of action as follows: human action is the conscious and voluntary exercise of a person’s efficacious causal power whereby that person acts through himself to intentionally achieve a certain end.

³¹ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 76

³² Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 81

³³ William James, “*The Energies of Men*,” Moffat, Yard and Company, (New York: 1914), 15

Conclusion

We have discussed experiential realities: the attitude of freedom, inner and outer stance of participation without which the most authentic action would be that of automation; the state of surrender, which is possible even in the absence of external pressures. The implications discussed above might also be taken to stand for goals, and that would be legitimate: the complete human being described as more himself, more in contact with reality, more able both to participate and maintain detachment, more free and yet more able to surrender, more accepting of his nature and limitations, and more conscious. To surrender to something, to accept an aspect of ourselves, or to become aware of an experience are things that we can do. Some of the widely recognized aspects of a practical life or of a philosophy geared to self-possession may be hard to grasp but we reassert that the end-state sought by each person is one that is characterized by the experience of openness to the reality of every moment, freedom from mechanical ties to the past, and surrender to the laws of man's being, one of living in the body and yet in control of the body, in the world and yet in control of circumstances by means of the power of both awareness and independence. It is also an experience of self-acceptance, where "self" does not stand for a preconceived notion or image but is the experiential self-reality moment after moment. Above all, it is an experience of experiencing. For this is what consciousness means, what openness means, what surrendering leads into, what remains after the veils of conditioned perception are raised, and what the aim of acceptance is.

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