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PERSON AND SOCIETY

John Paul II on Substance and Relation

The human being is not a person, on the one hand, and a member of society on the other. The human being as a person is simultaneously a member of society. The concept of person is neither opposed to this membership nor places a human being beyond it. At most one could say that what is opposed to society, understood as a certain multiplicity of people, is the human individual. But this is purely quantitative opposition. And so in thinking of moral value as that through which the human being as a person is good or bad, we do not in the human being separate individuality and membership in a society, but we think them both together.¹

-- Karol Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," 1969.

By community I understand not the multiplicity of subjects itself, but always the specific *unity* of this multiplicity. This unity is accidental with respect to each subject individually and to all of them together. It arises as the relation or sum of relations existing between them. These relations can be investigated as an objective reality that qualifies everyone jointly and singly in a particular multiplicity of people. We then speak of a society.... Only the individual people -- the personal subjects -- who are the members of this society are substantial subjects (*supposita*), each of these separately, whereas the society itself is simply a set of relations, and therefore an accidental being.²

-- Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 1976.

I.

¹Karol Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, Translated by T. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 146.

²Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," *ibid.*, p. 238.

Leo Strauss, in a famous essay, remarked that we are lucky if we are ourselves alive during the time when one or two of the great thinkers who ever lived were alive.³ We thus have to encounter most of the great deeds and thoughts of our kind, if we are to encounter them at all, by reading books or by hearing of them through witnesses. For Strauss this meant, not the curious skepticism that we often encounter in academic deconstructionism, but the careful, accurate attention to what was said. We too, if we are persistent, can think as the writer of a given text taught us to think. At the same time we need not forget the principles of logic or philosophy itself that each of us can discover from our own given resources. These are the norms by which we ultimately test what was said or heard. These resources of intellect and nature we did not ourselves create but discover to be constitutive of the kind of rational substantial being we find ourselves to be.

I have had, I think, several quite gifted and extraordinary teachers in my day -- I think of Clifford Kossel, S. J, at Gonzaga University, of Father Charles N. R. McCoy while he was at Catholic University, of Professors Heinrich Rommen and Rudolf Allers whom I had at Georgetown, and of Gertrude Himmelfarb whom I used to know at the National Endowment for the Humanities. One hardly knows what to make of those great teachers we have encountered but whom we never personally knew -- I think of Plato and Aristotle, of Cicero and Augustine, and, of course, for me, of Samuel Johnson, Chesterton, and Josef Pieper. Certainly, as I have read so much of him over the years, I would consider John Paul II himself a great teacher whom I never met. Someone told me recently that John Paul II has already written more in his pontificate than all the other popes from

³Leo Strauss, "What Is Liberal Education?" *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 3.

Leo XIII to his time, some of whom were also quite prolific. John Paul II's academic and intellectual output both as a professor and as pontiff are of a very high order.

What strikes me in retrospect, when I recall hearing what I thought at the time to be a particularly good lecture or discussion from those whom I actually knew, was the eagerness with which I wanted also to read what I had just heard. It was fortunate that most of these men and women that I actually knew had written something or would write something that I could go back to or come across in later years. And yet the book itself, we cannot forget, is not more real than the thought it presents. One of the things that strikes me most about John Paul II is his awareness of the importance of consciousness and of that inner illumination within each of us that constitutes our own unique reality. Our inner light is grounded in our own particular being, thoughts, and actions. We are aware, furthermore, of the being and consciousness of others and seek to communicate to and receive from what is the inner self of others -- these are the great realities of dialogue, debate, friendship, prayer, and communication.

Thinking in particular of those writers who lived before my time, or whom I did not know and about whom I had to read if I were to know them at all, I frequently recall C. S. Lewis' insightful remark that if we have only read a great book once, we have not read it at all. Thus it is both humility and possibility that make us aware of the vast things we shall never know. Yet, of the most important things, however difficult, we seek and should seek to know at least something -- of whether God exists, of how we ought to live, of what is our final destiny. We recall those famous words of Aristotle from the last book of *The Ethics* (1177b30-78a8) in which he told us that even the little we could know of the highest things is be worth more than the most exhaustive knowledge of those things about which we could know almost everything.

We have all lived our lives, moreover, in a culture that has more and more presumed that knowledge of the highest things is either dangerous, utterly private, relatively impossible, or socially unimportant. It requires almost an act of bravery to maintain that tolerance, however useful at some level, is not itself the highest virtue and that, when it is made so, it is a form of theoretic skepticism. At no other point is Catholicism more counter-cultural or, paradoxically, more true than when it assures us that the highest things are indeed precisely worth attentive devotion. This is the sort of lifetime devotion for which the religious and philosophical lives at their best stand. And the highest things are not merely abstractions but, as we are made aware in revelation, they are realities of being that are based in the Incarnation of precisely the Word.

II.

In an address he gave at the Angelicum in Rome (November 17, 1979), just after he became Pope, speaking of the importance of St. Thomas, John Paul II remarked, in a lovely reflection:

Openness is also a significant and distinctive mark of the Christian faith, whose specific countermark is its catholicity. The basis and source of this openness lie in the fact that the philosophy of St. Thomas is a philosophy of being, that is, of the "act of existing" (*actus essendi*), whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. On account of this we can even call this philosophy: the philosophy of the proclamation of being, a chant in praise of what exists.⁴

⁴John Paul II, "Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times," *The Whole Truth about Man: John Paul II to University Faculties and Students*, Edited by James V. Schall (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981), pp. 218-19.

We can detect in these moving lines a kind of impatience with systems or philosophies that do not so "directly" enable us to reach the highest things.

In addition, in these words we find a sense of awe that anything at all exists in the first place. John Paul II is not merely aware of the relation of *what is* to our own minds which begin in openness to what is not themselves. He is also concerned, once we know "what exists", that we still have a proper human function left to complete, a completion even of ourselves, a completion we must freely choose. Yet, when we are most complete, we are also most incomplete. So John Paul II points to a further completion, beyond ourselves, yet involving our own act, namely, the proclamation, the praise, the sense of gratitude for *what is*, the intimations of which we can already find in *The Symposium* of Plato. It is on this basis that John Paul II has a constant place for the notions of gift and gracious return to describe the good *that is*, so that we might add to existence its free acceptance by the free and rational creature.⁵

⁵Wojtyla, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," *ibid.*, pp. 193-94.

The title and subject matter of this particular reflection about person, society, substance, and relation have both an immediate and a remote origin. The immediate origin was the chance opportunity I had to review the new translation of Karol Wojtyla's philosophic essays concerning the basis of ethics, particularly in the light of my reading of *Veritatis Splendor*.⁶ The remote origin goes back to an essay I published in the Italian journal *Divus Thomas* in 1980, entitled, "The Reality of Society according to St. Thomas."⁷ Needless to say, such an apparently obscure topic was related to earlier studies, to those of Rommen, McCoy, and particularly to the work of Kossel. Kossel, in his own studies, was very much concerned with the meaning of the Aristotelian category of "relation" with its curious pertinence to the doctrine of the Trinity as well as to relational nature of human political society. The aberrations about community that came up in modern philosophy, particularly about the ultimate destiny of the human person, often related precisely to the different ways relation manifest themselves in the Trinity and in society.⁸ The last time I saw Kossel, a couple of months ago, I remember especially the force of his voice when he warned about tampering with the doctrine

⁶See James V. Schall, "The Secular Meaning of *Veritatis Splendor*," *Seminarium*, (Rome), XXXIV (#1, 1994), 151-62.

⁷James V. Schall, "The Reality of Society according to St. Thomas," *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza)83 #1, 1980), 13-23.

⁸See the four essays on relations by Clifford G. Kossel, S. J. in *The Modern Schoolman*, January, 1946, pp. 61-81; November, 1946, pp. 19-30; January, 1947, pp. 93-107, and March, 1948, pp. 151-72. See also Kossel's essay, "Some Limits of Politics," *Essays on Christianity and Political Philosophy*, Edited by George W. Carey and James V. Schall (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 31-40.

See also Heinrich Rommen, "Organic View of the State," *The State in Catholic Thought* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1945); Charles N. R. McCoy, *The Structure of Political Thought* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963); *On the Intelligibility of Political Philosophy: Essays of Charles N. R. McCoy*, Edited by James V. Schall and John J. Schrems (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), and Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987).

of the Trinity and with the philosophical understanding necessary properly to understand, defend, and explain its meaning, as if to say that the proper understanding of the Trinity lies at the root of all sane moral and societal life, which it does.

III.

"What has all of this to do with John Paul II?" we might ask. Let me begin by formulating the question in what will perhaps be a surprising manner. Nothing has more confused modern intellectual life than the rigid requirement that the only division that needs to be attended to is that between liberal and conservative, however much the boundaries between the two may shift and shake in different times and places. If we take the normal American press, at least, it will seem that, in the minds of most articulated public opinion which judges everything in its own political terms, John Paul II is said to be a conservative.

On the other hand, many perceptive conservatives worry about him rather because he seems much too liberal to them. Both are right and both are wrong; that is to say, John Paul II is something other than what is allowed by the narrow modern intellectual framework that insists such a bipolar division of philosophical, political, and moral life is a complete one. Philosophically, John Paul II identifies himself as a follower of St. Thomas and carefully seeks to relate his studies in modernity to him. This position is why both modern liberal and modern conservative thought, which often have the same intellectual roots, come under his criticism.

The collapse of Marxism and of John Paul's special relation to this collapse, furthermore, has put something of a damper on the view that he is a conservative, however much conservatism contributed to this collapse. But if anything in retrospect seems clear about the death of Marxism, it is that it has made little intellectual impact on western liberal culture, as John Paul II, along with Solzhenitsyn, suspected would be the case. Both John Paul II and Solzhenitsyn saw that the ultimate

intellectual disorder behind Marxism was also, in slightly different forms, behind much of the active thought in the West. This intellectual acumen about the history and nature of contemporary culture and philosophy, I suspect, is the real reason for so much academic and political antagonism towards John Paul II. Somehow he stands for the position that, however much of value is in modern society, something of a deep and fundamental nature is wrong at its heart such that the collapse of Marxism has not and cannot lead to improvement without a clear understanding of man's nature and his relation to God and the world.

As *Centesimus Annus* in particular shows, this Marxist collapse had a tremendous effect on John Paul II himself, much more than it has apparently had on most of the intellectual elite of the West. Margaret Thatcher, in a recent address in Canada, obviously referring to *Centesimus Annus*, said this of the work of the present Holy Father:

Now, I'm not a Roman Catholic, but the Pope, in one of his encyclicals, pointed out that the creative capacity that man has is noble. It should be respected, encouraged, and used. He said this: "In short, besides the earth, man's principal resource is man himself. His intelligence enables him to discover the earth's productive potential, of the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied." He went on to point out they can only be satisfied in a community of effort in a vast company, and gave really the best theological justification of capitalism that we've ever known.⁹

Indeed, I think it fair to say that the most coherent and, yes, exciting alternative to Marxism or liberalism or conservatism in contemporary society is precisely located in the thought of John Paul II, a thought that uniquely is able to combine faith and politics, metaphysics, ethics, and history

⁹Margaret Thatcher, "The New World Order," *Fraser Forum* (June, 1994), 22.

without forgetting man's highest destiny and the centrality of that romance of "orthodoxy" about which Chesterton so famously spoke.

IV.

In John Paul II's thought, we find both a serious endeavor to come to terms with modernity and a simultaneous effort to retain a critical stance to it in the clear light of the abiding truths of the philosophical and theological traditions represented by Aristotle and St. Thomas. What is at issue in this discussion, as I shall try to elaborate, is the position of precisely Catholicism in modernity. What John Paul II has realized, better than anyone perhaps, is precisely the widespread confusions and distortions of the meaning of Catholicism itself. His systematic efforts in works like his many encyclicals and in *The General Catechism of the Catholic Church* are to be sure initially that the correct and clear statement of this teaching and practice is in fact available to those who would read and know it, whether they believed it or not.¹⁰ Vatican II, for its part, deliberately eschewing any but the most obvious aberrations, made every effort to accommodate itself with what it perceived to be best in modernity. But Marxism and the moral dangers in contemporary democratic regimes, among other things, have made it clear that something more specific must be said about what is wrong in the modern world. Indeed, the Pope notes the peculiar fascination with evil and error that seems to characterize us. "The Thomistic theory of evil is quite a revelation," John Paul II wrote,

¹⁰See James V. Schall, *Does Catholicism Still Exist?* (Staten Island, N. Y.: Alba House, 1994).

because it views evil as the lack of an appropriate good, and not just its opposite. Good is something ordinary and natural because it conforms to the nature of the human being and the world; evil, on the other hand, is always baffling because it conflicts with this nature. Perhaps this also explains why in literature and moral instruction more attention is paid to evil than to good. At any rate, it would be hard to deny that in the experience of morality as a distinctive and central dimension of human life moral evil tends to be more emphatic.¹¹

Today, it seems, we are not so much fascinated with evil as unwilling to admit that anything that we do can be so categorized. Much of John Paul II's philosophic work addresses itself to this claim.

It is of some importance in what I have to say that the dimensions of Catholicism in its claim to be true, even in the modern world, be understood. John Paul II, in his own philosophical studies, obviously made great efforts to understand and agree with positions in modern philosophical thought that were, in his view, capable of continuing the perennial philosophical effort that arose out of the original challenge of revelation. What I would suggest, initially, is that John Paul II has carved out a unique position, a position that could be fully described as both Thomist and also modern, without forgetting Margaret Thatcher's encomium which would be considered by many as "conservative". It is in fact a liberal positions by standards of historic liberalism, but insists in constantly adding to the idea of freedom, responsibility, truth, and common good so that liberty does not stand by itself with no justification but itself..

Let me approach the matter in this way. It is quite clear that John Paul II sees that there is a clear and dangerous tendency in modern liberalism taken not so much as the economics of a responsible capitalism but as the social policies of the modern liberal state. Moreover, there does

¹¹Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," *ibid.*, p. 137.

not seem to be today, as there was during most of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th Centuries, much disagreement about the formal political institutions of the civil order, institutions that the Church in its modern documents has no trouble in accepting -- parliaments, constitutions, elections, federalism, and majority rule. Unlike the 19th Century, this area of institutional order is not where the problem of the Church with civil society lies.

The Holy Father's positions on human life and the family might thus be called "conservative" but they are radical indeed since they are the most counter-cultural ideas now being advocated in practice in the public order. And there is a consistent, coherent, and solidly based rationale behind them. They cannot be written off, as they so often are, as grounded only in "faith." They are grounded in reason and increasingly in the empirical record of what happens when this reasonableness is rejected. Indeed, John Paul II's position on the beginnings of human life as well as on its end is based simply in science, in truth. John Paul II teaches that human life begins "from conception" because this is the scientific fact, even though in some ways the Church seemed to know this fact before science did, and, as we now know, seems to know it even after politics has rejected its scientific truth.

V.

Readers of Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Russell Kirk, Paul Johnson, and many others will be aware that the intellectual structure of modern conservatism is formidable. Moreover, it is not to be identified at every point with Catholicism. What is not so clear is the relation of Roman Catholicism and the thought of John Paul II to this modern thought, conservative or liberal. In general, Voegelin and Strauss are acutely aware, as is the Pope, that the disorders of modern western culture have roots that go back to the very foundations of modernity in Descartes and Machiavelli

and their immediate predecessors.¹² Strauss and Voegelin maintained in general that modernity or "gnosticism", as Voegelin preferred to call it, is a coherent series of steps designed to rid ourselves both in personal life and in the civil community of any norms or standards which do not find their complete origins in the human will, either individually or collectively. Both Strauss and Voegelin have traced this path out meticulously through classical, medieval, and modern thought and their successors follow it into post-modernism especially through Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Though both Strauss and Voegelin showed great respect for St. Thomas and for revelation, neither were Catholic and both dealt gingerly with Christian revelation. Strauss is almost completely silent about it. Voegelin separates himself from any definite dogmatic or definable meaning to revelation. On the other hand, both thinkers recognized a fundamental place for revelation, Jewish revelation in the case of Strauss, Christianity in the case of Voegelin.

In general, both recognized that some fundamental return to the Greek classics, to metaphysics and virtue, is a necessary initial step to save the civilization itself from the relativist principles of modernity which have now largely undermined all western civil, moral, and academic institutions. St. Thomas, for instance, is looked upon by Strauss not so much for what he did with his whole system, but for his efforts to save Aristotle, that is, philosophy. Voegelin seems more open to Christianity but he is very cautious about the particulars of this revelation. He seems to have place for some sort of ongoing and multiple world-wide revelation, and he maintains that dogma as it

¹²See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: Regnery/Gateway, 1953); Paul Johnson, *Modern Times* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1983).

is understood in Catholicism is something that stands between the ground or source of this revelation and the human beings who are to receive it in their own uniqueness.

In any case, both are aware that the disorders we see coming to the fore, typified by the political history of the twentieth century and by the even more explicit rejection of natural law and reason in the later part of the century, are part of a long term decline that will remove all of the standards and norms by which human dignity was gradually been defined and established in the public order. From a Catholic point of view, Voegelin and Strauss are of particular importance, however, both because of their critique of modernity and because of their respect for human intelligence as such. Needless to say, this awareness is very similar to that of St. Thomas. Indeed, Strauss in particular was concerned about what happens to pious, believing Christian, Jewish, and Muslim thinkers, when they are confronted, suddenly, as they were in the Middle Ages, by the curious completeness of philosophy as represented by Plato and Aristotle who seemed to have explained everything without revelation.

The focus of John Paul II's own academic work was ethics, that is, human action. "Ethical topics are always in lively demand," John Paul II remarked in 1959, "perhaps of all philosophical disciplines, ethics is the most intriguing to people in general."¹³ While this popularity is true as a matter of ordinary experience, Pope Wojtyla himself did not forget that ethics needed a solid metaphysics and revelation if it were to be able to complete what it was designed to do, namely, to lead us to a life of true happiness. Again and again he returns to St. Thomas, through him to Aristotle, then to Kant and Scheler.¹⁴ The Pope distinguishes himself from modern neo-Thomism

¹³Karol Wojtyla, "Human Nature as the Basis of Ethical Formation," *Person and Community*, *ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁴Wojtyla, *ibid.*, Chapters I-III.

primarily because of his effort to draw something original and good from this oftentimes very intellectually dangerous modernity. What he sees in modernity is not, however, conceived as something contradictory to or even different from Aristotle or St. Thomas.

John Paul II was not arguing that there is something wrong about St. Thomas but he holds that there is needed a certain completion that centers around the idea of consciousness, a word that is very much present in Voegelin also.

Kant's ethics of the imperative and duty met with vigorous opposition on the part of Scheler. Consciousness does not have a basically subjectivistic orientation toward some *a priori* form, from which it would then derive the whole content of its moral experience, but has a basically objectivistic orientation towards various kinds of values.... The good, understood as a valuable thing, stands beyond the consciousness. Scheler, however, does not concern himself with it, but throughout his philosophy and ethics deals only with values. In effect, then, just as in Kant, we again find ourselves exclusively in the realm of consciousness.¹⁵

Pope Wojtyla, in his works in theoretic ethics, sought to show the relationship of consciousness to the objective order of *what is* and in particular to the human understanding of man's own internal acts precisely in their reality of good or evil acts of a human person acting.

VI.

What distinguishes the Holy Father then is precisely his refusal to let consciousness find its own autonomy, for that would betray both its origins and its content. What I want to do here is to suggest how the Pope's thought relates to that of St. Thomas and modernity. In passing, however, I

¹⁵Wojtyla, "In Search of the Basis of Perfectionism in Ethics," *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

might call attention to a book addressing itself to modernity in a way not unlike that of John Paul II, namely, to Hadley Arkes' *First Things: An Inquiry in to the First Principles of Morals and Justice*.¹⁶

Neither Arkes nor John Paul II are interested so much in "reconciling" Kant and St. Thomas or Aristotle. What is valuable in Kant, none the less, must be elaborated in the light of Aristotle and St. Thomas to be fully appreciated.

The metaphysical tradition stands as the background to human action and to the logic of morals. The uniqueness of thought that constitutes the vivid inner awareness of the human being is accounted for in the work of John Paul II not as if it were cut off from *what is*, nor as if it was some necessary response to "values" that did not pass through our judgment and will. What happens to this being when its thought and actions are not in correspondence with *what is*, moreover, becomes itself a kind of empirical evidence for the validity or invalidity of our conscious inner lives.

A passage near the end of *Veritatis Splendor* (#96) will serve, I think, to illustrate why John Paul II's reflections on person, society, relation, and substance are of such fundamental interest in the light of his own attention to consciousness and the awareness we have of our own being precisely as good or bad. "The Church's firmness in defending the universal and unchanging moral norms is ... to serve man's true freedom....," John Paul II carefully remarked.

This service is directed to *every man*, considered in the uniqueness and singularity of his being and existence; only by obedience to universal moral norms does man find full confirmation of his personal uniqueness and the possibility of authentic moral growth....

This service is also directed to *all mankind*: it is not for the individual but also for the

¹⁶Hadley Arkes, *First Things: An Inquiry into the First Principles of Morals and Justice* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

community, for society as such. These norms in fact represent the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of genuine democracy.... *When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone.* It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the "poorest of the poor" on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal (#96).

We can meditate long and hard on such a passage.

In this reflection, we find a response to the long and controverted question in political philosophy, associated in modernity with Machiavelli, and constantly recurring, even in the works of Strauss and Voegelin, about whether there are exceptions to the prohibition of evil because of the good of the polity or of necessity. Moreover, here is found the charter for the ultimate dignity of every life, no matter what its worldly status or condition. For in its essential outlines, human worthiness begins with the rejection of intrinsic evil in all its forms. Modernity and modern politics have been increasingly strident efforts to reject this conclusion.

In John Paul II's earlier studies in the philosophy behind ethics, behind human action, he carefully went through the metaphysical side of ethics. Man is the being that can freely act such that his actions, while not changing the substantial goodness of his being, can, even by a single act, make this being in its will and reality evil. What is of interest to the Pope, if I read him correctly, is not so much to establish the validity of most of St. Thomas' analysis of the human supposit, the human person, of the nature of will and intellect in relation to each other, of the relation of truth to good.

John Paul II sees this effort to know and present the position of St. Thomas to be a necessary and worthy one. if we are to understand ourselves as acting persons. But in a sense, this metaphysical analysis of the being of human action is looking at its reality from the outside, even

when we deal with human action and recognize that its origins are in being, intellect, will, and their operations. What interests the Pope in particular is rather "how does it look from the inside?" Here is where man as a mystery and man as a social being meet each other. Moreover, the Pope wants to know whether the elements found in revelation do in fact fit perfectly into what we know and understand in reason.

One of the Holy Father's most oft cited phrases is that from Vatican II which remarked that man is the only creature in the universe that God willed for himself. In how own earlier essays, Pope Wojtyla put this principle in this way:

The assertion that the human being is a person has profound theoretical significance.... The human being holds a position superior to the whole of nature and stands above everything else in the visible world. ... Our distinctiveness and superiority as human beings in relation to other creatures is constantly verified by each one of us... The effects of human activity in various communities testify to this dignity. A being that continually transforms nature, raising it in some sense to that being's own level, must feel higher than nature -- and must *be* higher than it.¹⁷

Each person has a transcendent end and achieves it through his own spiritual powers within the wholeness, body and soul, of a human supposit. This reflection on our being reaffirms the Aristotelian and revelational premises that the physical creation is ordered to each man who has himself his own personal end that transcends the whole of creation itself. And here, we deal not just with the collectivity of mankind but with each individual person. This is where some attention to the meaning of person, substance, relation come into John Paul II's thought.

¹⁷Wojtyla, "The Dignity of the Human Person," *ibid.*, p. 178.

VII.

John Paul II is, in conclusion, not willing to oversimplify and he systematically wants to look at what the classical authors have said and compare their positions with modern research. He has been particularly interested in the specific nature of the will as a unique human power. He finds that many of St. Thomas' positions on the will are confirmed in recent psychological studies.¹⁸ But it is important that neither the will nor consciousness be seen as some sort of being or reality completely independent of individual human supposita. "We can observe in philosophy a gradual process of a kind of hypostatization of consciousness," the Pope remarked.

Consciousness becomes an independent subject of activity, and indirectly of existence, occurring somehow alongside the body, which is a material structure subject to the laws of nature, to natural determinism. Against the background of such parallelism, combined with a simultaneous hypostatization of consciousness, the tendency arises to identify the person with consciousness.¹⁹

The attention the Holy Father has given to the notion of person, "an individual substance of a rational nature", the classical definition he constantly cites from Boethius, is precisely to counteract any temptation to make a collective inner-worldly being or purpose superior to the destiny of each person. He asserts this highest destiny of each person, however, without in the least forgetting that man is a social animal even in his salvation.

¹⁸Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Will in the Analysis of the Ethical Act," *ibid*, pp. 3-22.

¹⁹Wojtyla, "Thomist Personalism," *ibid.*, p. 169.

We can obtain some sense of what concerns John Paul II when he distinguishes the *I-Thou* relationship from the *we* relationship. "I believe it is extremely important to distinguish the social dimension of community from the interpersonal dimension," he wrote.

... *I* and *thou* refer only indirectly to the multiplicity of persons joined by the relation (one + one), whereas directly they refer to the persons themselves. *We*, on the other hand, refers directly to the multiplicity and indirectly to the persons belonging to this multiplicity. *We* primarily signifies a set -- a set, of course, made up of people, of persons. This set, which may be called a society, a group, etc., is not itself a substantial being, and yet ... what results from accidents, from the relations between human persons, in some sense comes to the fore here, providing a basis for predication primarily with respect to all and secondarily with respect to each one in the set. This is precisely what is signified by the pronoun *we*.²⁰

John Paul II has taken care specifically to point out that no "we" made up of a multiplicity of human persons is a substance but an accident under the category of relation.

This metaphysical accuracy shows, in my judgment, how aware he has shown himself to be of the dangers that can come into social philosophy by attributing substance, not relation, to society. Any collective and independent "we" can claim a kind of independence for its own acts based on a new "substance". Likewise, by contrast, absolute individual autonomy in which every I transcends in end or purpose the "we" of the social or political group as well as any transcendent purpose for itself denies the twofold notion of human suppositum or purpose that John Paul II, as I pointed out in the beginning (footnote #1), saw as the twofold reality of the human person as first itself with its own faculties and ends that confront the objective distinction of good and evil in almost every

²⁰Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," *ibid.*, p. 246.

chosen act and secondly as being itself with a relation to society in which these same distinctions continue and are multiplied because of the intimate relation of everyone to every one else.

"We can speak meaningfully of community only in the light of persons," the Pope affirmed, which means only in the context of the person as the proper subject of existence and activity, both personal and communal, and only in relation to the personal subjectivity of the human being, because only this aspect allows us to grasp the essential property of human I's and their relationships, both interpersonal and social.²¹

The essential property of human I's includes its own proper understanding of its own existence and activity along with the very subjective self-awareness of what this being and its activity means objectively, as precisely good or evil.

What is remarkable about the Holy Father's thought, in the end, is not that these positions and issues need to be worked out carefully by the philosophic mind. What is remarkable is that the future Holy Father himself thought them through. Karol Wojtyla as a young academic did precisely this pondering, this thinking through, and this in a part of the world that we all thought at the time to be most obscure and totally oppressed. His "chant in the praise of what exists", as we now read through the works of this remarkable man, does reflect an astonishing openness to the "act of existing", the transcendental value of which, as we realize in our own souls if we but listen to this chant of praise, does pave "the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of substantial Being and pure Act, namely to God."

No one else in our time, I think, teaches us these highest things in so direct a way. What characterizes us, we sometimes fear, as Allan Bloom intimated, is not that we do not possess great

²¹Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," *ibid.*, p. 253.

teachers, if we would but find them, but rather that we have "souls without longing," souls not prepared to listen to the chants of praise that are in fact all about us, as John Paul II teaches us.