

The Role of Consciousness in Karol Wojtyła's Philosophy of the Human Person

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Abstract

The text places Karol Wojtyła's concept of consciousness in the context of the development of the modern philosophy of consciousness. This development – from Descartes to Husserl – led to its opposition to the classical philosophy of being, so that eventually being itself was considered a product of consciousness. In this article, I present the rationale for Wojtyła's belief that the theme of consciousness – and, more broadly, the dialogue with the philosophy of consciousness – is worth addressing within the framework of what is known as classical philosophy, i.e., the philosophy of being derived from ancient and medieval sources. After presenting an understanding of the essence and functions of consciousness in the philosophy of person developed by Wojtyła, I point out the implications of this approach for epistemological and moral issues.

Keywords

consciousness, phenomenology, metaphysics, transcendence, person

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In Karol Wojtyła's philosophy, the analysis of the role of consciousness in the structure of the human person is mainly found in his anthropological *opus magnum*, the book *Person and Act*. Nonetheless, important observations are scattered in other texts as well, among which the essay *Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man* is of special interest to our topic.

The Cartesian Turn

Wojtyła's analysis takes place in the context – and in critical discussion – of a certain current of modern philosophy, which has been defined as the philosophy of conscience. Even what Pope John Paul II says on the subject of consciousness in his work *Theology of the Body* possesses a specific importance in comparison with the philosophy of consciousness and the vision of man implied by it (firstly, because of the way in which the epistemological question is posed). The philosophy of consciousness is rooted in Cartesian doubt – in Descartes' methodical doubting – which (with the test of doubt) seeks to identify the sphere of the indubitable and the absolutely certain. Ultimately, it finds this sphere in the content of consciousness: *cogito-sum*. It is worth noting that Descartes' doubt was methodical, that is, it did not arise from skepticism regarding man's ability to arrive at the knowledge of truth. Rather, Descartes sought to counter the skepticism of his time with an argument that was irrefutable. This endeavor was a matter of finding a point in human knowledge where no rational doubt was possible. However, this methodical procedure implied a number of relevant consequences – not only with regard to the epistemological question, but also in connection to the very ontology of the person. Among these consequences was the division of man into two different substances (body and soul). The connection between them ultimately became mysterious. On the one hand, we have consciousness, which is identified with that which is specifically human. On the other, there is the body, which was regarded as an element of the material world. From this view, which says that man is composed of two substances, there arose what we may call “anthropological dualism.”

The Cartesian vision is loaded with epistemological consequences, including those that relate to the function of consciousness in the cognitive process. With it, in fact, the meaning of knowledge changes – it will no longer be understood as contact with an existing reality that is independent of consciousness, but rather will be identified with thinking about what is given in consciousness (prof. Tadeusz Styczeń wrote that in the Cartesian turn, “*cognosco*” is replaced

by “*cogito*”²). Before Descartes, in ancient and medieval philosophy, the first philosophy was identified with metaphysics; now epistemology has taken its place. However, it is epistemology understood in a particular way; it is different from how it was viewed before Descartes. Its starting point is the self-consciousness of the subject. Wojciech Chudy, a Polish scholar and collaborator of Tadeusz Styczeń (who, in turn, was Wojtyła’s successor to the chair of ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin), wrote in his study on the genesis of the modern philosophy of consciousness:

The indubitable character of the act “I think” induces the author of the *Discourse on the Method* to the adventure that takes its model in Archimedes. Descartes wants to epistemologically base the whole edifice of the philosophical system [...] on the reflexivity of consciousness connected with the individual structure of the self.³

Using the mirror metaphor (which will also be useful to us in the analysis of consciousness in Wojtyła’s thought), Chudy thus describes the Cartesian turn in the way of understanding the nature of knowledge: “In analyzing the space between two mirrors facing each other, [Descartes] focuses not on what constitutes the efficient cause and initial object of the mirroring, but on the mirroring itself and on the process of mirroring.”⁴

Beginning with Descartes, the perspective of subjective consciousness, the consciousness of the self (*cogito*), and what is given in consciousness (*cogitationes*) will increasingly mark how epistemological, ethical, anthropological, and metaphysical problems will be set. For our topic, i.e., the way in which Wojtyła approached the problem of consciousness, what is important is the point that this perspective had been adopted by the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Whereas in his philosophy of the person, Wojtyła had proposed to enrich the metaphysical approach to anthropology with the results of the phenomenological method, he did not want to follow Husserl in the idealistic turn that had led him toward a form of transcendental idealism. The phenomenological method can help in describing the way phenomena present themselves in consciousness, but in itself, it still does not determine their metaphysical status. Phenomena could represent real objects, independent

² Cf. T. Styczeń, *Essere se stessi è trascendere se stessi. Sull’etica di Karol Wojtyła come antropologia normativa [To be oneself is to transcend oneself. On Karol Wojtyła’s Ethics as Normative Anthropology]*, in: *Metafisica della persona*, (Milano, Bompiani, 2003), 808-809.

³ W. Chudy, *Rozwój filozofowania a „pułapka refleksji” [The Development of Philosophy and the “Reflection Trap”]*, (Lublin, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1995), 125.

⁴ *Ibid.*

of consciousness, but they could also be understood as being constituted by consciousness itself. When confronting this problem, Husserl ultimately gave an idealistic answer – phenomena are “produced” by pure consciousness. Andrzej Póltawski, a student of Roman Ingarden, who was a renowned connoisseur of Husserl’s philosophy and, at the same time, a friend and collaborator of Wojtyła, characterized Husserlian epistemology as follows:

The conception of knowledge as a synthesis of the object from impressions had ultimately led to transcendental idealism. In fact, for Husserl the fundamental structure of knowledge is given in the schema: the immanent content of perception – it takes in the intention (supposition) as a possible real transcendent object in front of consciousness in a sense particular to Husserl’s conception. Accordingly, knowledge of reality is only “the constituting” of the objective senses as intentional correlations of the acts of “pure consciousness.” Such a conception excludes from the outset any authentic, concrete contact of man with the surrounding world – it excludes it as an original fact of both experience and man’s being. Originally and in itself, man is a “pure consciousness.”⁵

We know that, historically, this idealistic turn of Husserl caused a rupture in the bosom of the phenomenological movement. Some of Husserl’s disciples – such as Roman Ingarden, Edith Stein, or Max Scheler – did not share their master’s choice, choosing instead the path of realist phenomenology. In this context, the title of the work Ingarden devoted to the discussion with his master is significant: *Controversy over the Existence of the World*.⁶ Wojtyła, who encountered phenomenology in its realist version through Scheler’s work, was also convinced that Husserl ultimately did not remain faithful to his methodological postulate of “returning to things in themselves” and that he did not fully exhaust the potential of the phenomenological method. That is to say, Wojtyła did not think that Husserl’s idealistic turn logically followed from the use of this method; to the contrary, he was convinced that its proper application and the appropriate metaphysical interpretation of its results led to another, realistic version of phenomenological philosophy. It was precisely in the analysis of the essence and functions of consciousness that Wojtyła disassociated himself from the founder of phenomenology. Moreover, the problem of consciousness turned out to be the key point – not only for the epistemological question, but for the entire philosophy of the person.

It is worth noting that John Paul II returned to this problem in his address given at the

⁵ A. Póltawski, *Po co filozofować* [Why Philosophise], (Warszawa, Oficyna Naukowa, 2011), 242. According to Husserl, consciousness is an absolute being in the sense that “*nulla ‘re’ indiget ad existendum*,” while all transcendent *res* are dependent on consciousness.

⁶ Cf. R. Ingarden, *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt*, (Tübingen, De Gruyter, 1965).

Catholic University of Lublin to the representatives of the academic world during his pilgrimage to Poland in 1987. In referring to the text of the Book of Genesis, the Pope sought to reveal what constitutes the “*differentia specifica humana*” by reflecting on man’s original solitude. Realizing his solitude – at the beginning, man is alone – man discovers his “diversity and superiority” (Tadeusz Styczeń’s expression) in front of the world.

How does man come to have consciousness of his otherness and superiority? How does he become a being that not only is conscious but is also self-conscious? If our interpretation is right, for John Paul II, the decisive point in this process is constituted by the moment of specifically human knowledge. Man begins to experience himself as a subject, and we can say that, on the experimental level, he is born as a person, in the act of knowledge. Let us try to deepen the meaning of this decisive moment.

The Person as Transcendence

In *Person and Act*, Wojtyła proposed a succinct definition of the personal being: “Transcendence is another name of the person.” Person means transcendence. Of course, this is not transcendence in the sense of the philosophy of religion. Transcendence here refers to the fundamental structure of a personal being. A similar definition was given by German author Hermann Krings, who described the personal being as “reflexive transcendence,” while Polish author Stanisław Judycki suggested that an even better definition would read: the personal subject is a retro-transcendence.⁷ As we shall see, these definitions explicitly indicate what is present in Wojtyła’s analysis of the person, since for him, too, the essential trait of transcendence that constitutes personal being is its reflexivity (however, with an important distinction found in reflexivity itself that will assist in grasping the nature of consciousness).

What do we mean by characterizing the person as transcendence? In Wojtyła’s sense, transcendence (or rather “horizontal transcendence,” since he also speaks of vertical transcendence) consists in the subject’s going out of himself toward what is different from himself, in “the crossing of the boundary of a subject toward an object.”⁸ The object of knowledge is reflected in consciousness, but it is also – at the same time – internalized by the subject. It is precisely through this process that the metaphysical subject takes the form of the

⁷ Cf. H. Krings, *Transzendente Logik*, (München, Kösel Verlag, 1964), 46-76. Krings’ book is cited by S. Judycki in *Bóg i inne osoby. Próba z zakresu teologii filozoficznej* [God and Other Persons. An Essay on Philosophical Theology], (Poznań, W drodze, 2010), 87.

⁸ K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. by G. Ignatik, (Washington, CUA Press, 2021), 221.

concrete and unrepeatable “I.” Thus, personal subjectivity is born on the plane of lived experience.

Judycki calls this the “metaphysical birth,” a birth that is different from biological birth, although it has its foundation in the physical event. The subject who is born in this way is able to distinguish himself, to maintain a detachment from the three spheres: from the sphere of matter marked by mutability, from the sphere of immutable logical or mathematical principles, and finally also from the content of his consciousness (even in this case, when the person can say that he possesses his own consciousness, he is not completely identified with it).⁹

How does this birth take place? In his analysis of the original solitude in the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II wrote, “Self-knowledge goes hand in hand with knowledge of the world.”¹⁰ But in the genesis of the person, there is a chronological order: it is through the knowledge of the world that consciousness and self-consciousness “click.” In the beginning, we find what medieval authors call *simplex apprehensio*, simple contact with reality and the first assimilation of its content. At this moment, man assimilates the content of the act of knowledge and at the same time, detaches himself from it. He experiences his irreducible subjectivity: this is *his* knowledge. However, before knowledge and consciousness, there is already being, which now becomes the object of knowledge and enters the person’s interiority as the content of his consciousness. Thus, consciousness and self-consciousness also come into being through this first contact with being. Judycki writes:

Simplex apprehensio leads to the constitution of the middle sphere that is between the subject and what exists (being). [...] Consciousness, understood as a flow of mental states, is a mode of realization of this middle sphere. [...] Consciousness is neither the subject – although, paradoxically, the subject is a conscious being – nor one of the objects, but it is a relation constituted from this fundamental relation that is actualized at the moment of grasping its first content.¹¹

What is also important here is the subject’s distance regarding the content of his cognitive act. Without the ability to distance himself from the objects of his intentional acts, man cannot experience himself as a subject, and so he cannot experience himself as a person. An animal, that does not possess this capacity, is totally immersed in its natural habitat and is unable to

⁹ Cf. Judycki, *Bóg i inne osoby*, 110.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, (Boston, Pauline, 2006), 150.

¹¹ Judycki, *Bóg i inne osoby*, 119.

detach either from matter or from the contents of its consciousness. Therefore, it lives in – as Helmuth Plessner called it – the “centric position.” For an animal, everything gains importance as it relates to its needs, which are rooted in its instincts – it is the center of its world. Man, on the other hand (again according to Plessner) lives in an “eccentric position,” because he is able to relativize himself. He is able to not only see everything from his point of view, but also ask the question about the objective truth of his knowledge. Wojtyła, on the other hand, writes that it is this dependence on the objective truth that makes free decisions possible:

It is this dependence that makes the will independent from objects and their presentation while giving the person superiority over his own dynamism, a superiority that we call transcendence in the act (vertical transcendence). The person is independent from the objects of his own action through the moment of truth contained in every authentic decision or choice.¹²

In John Paul II’s analysis, this process of making oneself dependent on the objective truth precisely takes place in the original solitude. Through the act of knowledge, in which man begins to experience himself (in the self-awareness that accompanies the knowledge of anything) as different from the world around him, man “wakes up” as a person, and from this moment he can say “I.”¹³ According to Wojtyła, this is also the decisive point for the understanding of human freedom.

In the metaphysical dimension, self-consciousness does not constitute personhood, but rather reveals it and makes it present on the level of experience. This point is important, especially in the context of contemporary discussions of the concept of the person. Self-consciousness has its foundation in ontic subjectivity, in the particular structure of that being in which the potentiality of self-consciousness is inscribed. This order is structural and chronological – again, being precedes consciousness. As Robert Spaemann rightly noted, none of us remembers the moment we became self-conscious. When we say that we were born on a particular day, we do not mean that a subject of self-consciousness was born then – a crying child was born who would become self-conscious at some point. On the other hand, however, without a real potentiality inscribed in his being, the child could never reach the moment when

¹² Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 241.

¹³ “With this knowledge, which makes him go in some way outside of his own being, man at the same time reveals himself to himself in all the distinctiveness of his being,” John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, 150.

he is capable of developing a conscious relation with his own being. After all, in discussions with Descartes, his opponents noted that the description of the stream of consciousness only allows us to assert that there are *cogitationes*; the Cartesian step from *cogito* to *sum* already contains in itself a metaphysical thesis, that is, one moves from consciousness to the subject of consciousness.

Consequently, we can speak of two horizons on which the experience of the person unfolds: the horizon of being and the horizon of the self. Man, in his knowledge and desires, is naturally turned toward *being*, which fills his consciousness and, at the same time, leads him to the experience of the self as the subject of knowledge and desire. Instead, the separation of the two horizons leads either to theories in which the world is seen as somehow “produced” by consciousness (as occurs in various types of philosophical idealism), or to the reduction of the act of knowing of the organism’s particular mode of adaptation to the environment (as occurs in epistemological evolutionism). As Wojciech Chudy noted:

Man’s turning in the reflective act toward himself possesses its ‘background’ in the consciousness of the horizon of the self, realized *in statu fieri*, which constitutes the particular limit of this act that guarantees the integrity of the subject of experience and the act itself. On the other hand, this turning toward the self is accompanied by the horizon of being, which ensures that the whole cognitive process is rooted in objective reality.¹⁴

Man’s cognitive relation to the world – as the moment in which the person’s subjectivity is constituted – contains within itself a moment as a place. In Wojtyła’s analysis, this is revealed as essential. The cognitive contact with being includes in itself the moment of judgment, the moment of assertion: this is the case (or this is not the case). Man, who in the act of knowing-as it were – comes out of himself, objectifies the world, and asks a question about its truth.¹⁵ It is precisely this moment of transcendence and the reference to a truth that does not depend on the man that differentiates the person from all other non-personal beings. This moment places him on a “higher” level in relation to all beings in the world and explains his “different” position. In John Paul II’s analysis, conducted in his speech in Lublin, the Pope sees this “self-revelation” of man as occurring precisely in the moment of reflection on the act of knowledge. The Pope said:

¹⁴ Chudy, *Rozwój filozofowania a „pulapka refleksji”*, 86-87.

¹⁵ We find ourselves here at the antipodes of a large part of modern philosophy, which is summed up well in David Hume’s phrase: “We never really advance one step beyond ourselves.”

The source of man's transcendence in front of the universe, in which he lives, is found in truth. Through *reflection on his own knowledge* (italic: J.M.) man reveals himself to himself as the only being in the world, who sees himself "from within" obligated by the known truth and therefore also obligated to its recognition, in the serious case also by the acts of his free choice, by the acts of witnessing the truth. This is the ability to transcend oneself towards the truth.¹⁶

We see how, in man's reflection on his knowledge (remember: the person is a reflective transcendence), the person's logos and ethos are constituted together. The person spontaneously begins to experience herself as a witness to truth. In this experience, she discovers her diversity from the visible world and, at the same time, experiences the duty to affirm the truth she has encountered in the act of knowing. In *Person and Act*, Wojtyła speaks of the "normative power of truth," which lies at the root of moral experience. This whole process, during which the person's logos and ethos are constituted, takes place in the consciousness. At the same time, however, by its very nature, it transcends consciousness. As Wojtyła said, in the act of knowing, the person experiences her transcendence in truth. This is the point that allows Wojtyła to escape the "reflection trap" (W. Chudy's expression), that is, the closing of the consciousness in itself. This is quite characteristic for post-Cartesian philosophy, the concentration of reflection "only on the mirrored images and the activity of mirroring" without reference to the being which generated these images. According to Wojtyła, however, we cannot understand the existence and essence of consciousness apart from the being, which exists independently of it; rather, consciousness is possible only because of its relation to what transcends it.

The Problem of Intentionality

The point where Wojtyła differs from most phenomenologists is the problem of intentionality. It is precisely here that the Polish philosopher surpasses the transcendental idealism of the father of phenomenology. According to Husserl, in the intentional act, consciousness refers to the object. However, its object always remains an intentional object, it is constituted in consciousness and does not exist independently. Wojtyła, on the other hand, distinguished between knowledge and consciousness, denying consciousness the property of intentionality.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Address to the World of Culture*, Catholic University of Lublin, 9.06.1987. I include the text of this address in in appendix.

Only knowledge, characterized by transcendence, is intentional. The act of knowledge is directed toward the object that is external to it, it touches something that – in its existence – does not depend on it. It is so also in the situation in which the subject turns toward itself – in which case, we are then dealing with self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge is not identical to self-consciousness, although self-consciousness accompanies and internalizes it. However, – as Wojtyła writes – “For an act (or anything else) can be ‘made conscious’ not in a consciousness-related manner but only intentionally, thus by an act of self-knowledge.”¹⁷ Knowledge is a dynamism involving the whole person, her senses, emotions, and rationality. The subject of knowledge, however, is not – we can say with St. Thomas – senses, emotions, or even consciousness, but the person through her capacities. In Wojtyła, consciousness is not intentional and therefore cannot be the subject of knowledge. Its role is very important, but remains different.

Wojtyła distinguished two functions of consciousness, which we can call: the function of mirroring and the function of internalization (or subjectification). On the one hand, consciousness reflects within itself the content of the act of knowledge (man “reflects on his own knowledge,” as John Paul II said in his speech in Lublin). In this function, consciousness is *reflective*, it is in the act of mirroring. On the other hand, consciousness is *reflexive*, and the reflexivity of it means that: “This turning toward the subject as a function of consciousness is something different from the mirroring. In the mirroring (thanks to self-knowledge), this man, who is a subject and his own ‘I,’ is still present as an object. The reflexive turning of consciousness causes this object, precisely because it is ontologically a subject, to experience himself as a subject while experiencing his own ‘I.’”¹⁸

In its reflexive function, consciousness does not consist in the act of turning toward one’s own knowledge (such an act would be an act of self-knowledge), but instead accompanies knowledge, interpenetrates it, internalizes it, and causes the subject to experience it as one’s own (without any need for a separate reflection). Insofar as reflectivity makes the process in which man comes to the knowledge of truth (I can always question if what has been reflected in my consciousness corresponds to the reality of things) possible, the reflective function of consciousness is fundamental – not only to the constitution of the “I,” but also to the experience of its moral connection with the known truth. Consciousness is more than a mirror, but mirroring it internalizes the known truth. It makes the truth “mine” in the sense that “I” identify with it, takes responsibility for it, so that – to recall the words of John Paul II’s speech in Lublin

¹⁷ Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 143.

– the subject feels “obliged to its recognition, in the serious case even with the acts of its free choice, with the acts of witnessing to the truth.” According to Tadeusz Styczeń, only if – in our theory of the person – we take into account this whole process of mirroring and subjectification of the person’s transcendence toward the objective truth and the experience of moral duty that arises in the act of knowing the truth, can we really grasp the identity of the person.¹⁹

In John Paul II’s analysis of the original solitude in the *Theology of the Body*, consciousness is rooted in the corporeality of the subject. It is aroused by contact with the world and through it, on the experimental level, subjectivity is constituted. From the very beginning, the consciousness of the human person is not a pure, disembodied consciousness, but it is a consciousness of the embodied subject experiencing his corporeality. In light of the above considerations, we can say that the person lives his corporeality reflectively, accompanying his consciousness; he is conscious of his embodiment without the need for explicit reflection. In the text of the Book of Genesis, we see how man acquires this consciousness as it were, on the occasion of his comparing himself with the world and how it leads him to the discovery of his diversity. John Paul II writes:

The analysis of the Jahvist text will allow us, further, to *link man’s original solitude with the awareness of the body*, through which man distinguishes himself from all the *animalia* and “separates himself” from them, and *through which* he is a *person*. One can affirm with certainty that that man thus formed has at the same time the awareness and consciousness of the meaning of his own body. Moreover, [he has] this based on the experience of original solitude.²⁰

John Paul II speaks simply here of the “consciousness of the body,” that is, the reflexive consciousness of it. Man spontaneously begins to experience the body as a means of expression of his personality and therefore distinguishes and separates himself from animals.

In the situation of the original loneliness, man does not yet experience sexual difference (for John Paul II, this fact also possesses its anthropological significance), which will be revealed with the creation of the second man (woman). This idea would need a more detailed analysis, but we can point out here that the sexual determination of the body is also a part of the content of reflexive consciousness. Man experiences himself as man-woman and man-male.

¹⁹ Cf. T. Styczeń, *Essere se stessi è trascendere se stessi*, 793-797.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 152. In the English edition the word “text” was mistakenly translated as “test.”

Consciousness (or even the soul as such, as spiritual beings exist beyond sexual difference) as such is not sexually determined and acquires its male or female dimension precisely through its relation to the body. The fact that this relation is, in the first moment, not reflective, but reflexive (in the sense explained above), has its significance in the context of contemporary discussions regarding the origin and meaning of sexual difference. Here, too, being precedes consciousness.

Appendix

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE WORLD OF CULTURE
AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN**

Tuesday, 9 June 1987

1. I cordially greet all those who have gathered today in the main hall of the Catholic University of Lublin. The visit of a former professor of this University has given the organizers the opportunity to invite *representatives of the world of culture from all over Poland, and even from abroad*. I am truly honored, ladies and gentlemen, by this invitation and by your presence here today.

I know that in addition to representatives of the country's universities and the Polish Academy of Sciences, there are also representatives of foreign universities, closely linked to the Catholic University of Lublin: from Louvain and Louvain-la-Neuve to Milan, Paris, Washington, Eichstätt, Nijmegen and Tilburg.

In you I meet and greet all the universities and faculties in the homeland, beginning with the oldest university, *the Jagiellonian University in Krakow*, to which I owe my studies and first academic experiences. These experiences have left *deep marks on my consciousness and on my entire personality*. Perhaps this is because they are linked first of all to the period preceding the Second World War, then – above all – to the period of foreign occupation, and finally to the first years of the post-war period. The memory of what the University – Alma Mater – is always alive in me. Not only the memory, but *the awareness of the debt* incurred for life.

2. This is why I feel the need to begin my discourse by referring *to the University as a particular environment, a community* in which teachers and students, professors and students, representatives of different generations, meet, united by a common purpose and task. This is a task of primary importance in the life of man and in that of a society, a nation and a State.

As I speak to you, illustrious ladies and gentlemen, I have before the eyes of my soul *all these environments*, these communities, in which *the service of knowledge – that is, the service of truth* – becomes the foundation of man's formation. We know that Someone said: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (*John 8:32*). During the Eucharistic Congress in

Poland, to which I am invited and in which I am taking part, these words of Christ resonate with special force precisely here, in the university hall, in the context of the encounter with the Polish world of culture and science.

These words echo and at the same time complement those of St. Paul: “Speak the truth in love” (cf. *Eph* 4:15). By serving the truth for the love of the truth and for the love of those to whom we transmit it, we build a community of men free in the truth, we form a community of men united by love of the truth and by reciprocal love in the truth, a community of men for whom love of the truth constitutes the principle of the bond that unites them.

3. I have the opportunity to approach the *basic problems of your environment*. In various reports by scientists that I have been able to read in recent years, I have found expressions of profound commitment to the truth known and transmitted, from which can be deduced just demands for themselves and for students, in a climate *permeated by a “note” of profound concern*. We have so many gifted young people; in the generation of today’s students and young scientists who populate our institutes, there is no shortage of talent!

Do they have all the necessary facilities for their studies to bear full fruit? Here, in their homeland?

This question concerns *the present*, university work environments, contacts with the cutting-edge centres of world science. This question also *concerns the future*. What are the prospects of this generation? Job prospects! This problem also exists in many Western European countries. *Life prospects*, first of all: housing! The need for a roof for young married couples and for families!

We need to ask ourselves these questions. They are purely and exclusively *an expression of concern for man*. The university has always been the place of this *caring concern*. In the past it was called “fraternal help.”

In the spirit of this request for solidarity, I allow myself to repeat the question to you, because the *university*, by its very nature, *serves the future of man and of the nation*. Its task is to constantly awaken in the social conscience the problem of this future. And it must do so tirelessly and uncompromisingly. We have *so many promising young people*. We cannot allow them not to see *a future for themselves in their own country*.

Therefore, as a son of this country, I dare to express the opinion that we must reflect on the many problems of social life, structures, and the organization of work, right down to the very foundations of the current state system, *from the point of view of the future of the Polish young generation*.

Universities and institutes cannot afford to back down from the need to bear witness in this sector that is essential and fundamental to the very existence of Poland.

4. If I have begun with the environment – that is, with the university understood as a special community – I have done so *in consideration of the question of subjectivity*: a very essential problem for the whole nation. This subjectivity is formed everywhere, in the various workplaces of our homeland. The work environments of industry and agriculture are called to this. All families and every man are called to this. Subjectivity is born from the very nature of personal being: *it corresponds above all to the dignity of the human person*. It is the confirmation, the verification and at the same time the demand for this dignity, both in personal life and in that of *the athenaeums*; universities, which operate according to a varied methodology, *are especially called to this*. And they are called “from within,” by reason of their own constitution, which is indispensable for the service of truth. They are also called, in a certain sense, “from without”: in consideration of the society in which they live and for which they work. Society expects its universities *to consolidate its own subjectivity*, to demonstrate the reasons that underlie it, and the motives and initiatives that serve it. Closely linked to this is *the demand for academic freedom*, or rather for a just autonomy of universities and institutes. This autonomy in the service of the truth known and transmitted is, in a certain sense, a basic condition of the subjectivity of the whole society, within which universities carry out their mission.

Was this not *the goal* that shone before the eyes of our rulers, in the Piast dynasty and later the Jagiellonian dynasty, when they founded and rebuilt the first university in Poland? I dare say *yes*.

5. This question is linked to the problem – perhaps even more fundamental – that concerns *the “constitution” of man: man’s place in the world*. In the cosmos. To deal with it, it is essential *to return “to the beginning,”* to the “arché.”

This is a problem of enormous importance for the various disciplines that deal with man and the world, for example, palaeontology, history, ethnology. *Sciences* of this kind develop on the basis of *empirical methods*. They seek the clues and proofs that can be extracted from the examination of the remains that bear witness to the oldest traces of man in the heart of the earth. Allow me, at this point, to bring in *a biblical text*. It certainly has no value from the point of view of the principles and methods of empirical science. It has, however, *a symbolic importance*. We know that “symbol” means a sign of convergence, of encounter and of reciprocal adhesion of elementary data. I think that the text of the Book of Genesis, which I will quote – without any pretensions of exactness from the point of view of empirical science – also has its own and specific meaning *for the intellect* itself that *seeks* the truth about man.

Here is the passage: “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found *a helper fit for him*” (Gen 2:19-20).

So, whatever we learn from the empirical method (or rather, from many methods) on the subject of the “beginning,” the text just cited seems to possess a formidable “symbolic” importance. Indeed, *it goes to the very roots of the problem*: “man’s place in the cosmos.” One could also say that it constitutes a certain *expression of the convergence* of all that is contained in the investigations carried out with the methods of empirical sciences. In fact, all of them, in their search for the original traces of man, are guided by a certain fundamental concept of man. They possess an answer, at least elementary, to the question: How is man distinguished from the other beings of the visible cosmos?

Man, “from the beginning,” distinguishes himself from the entire visible cosmos, especially from the world of beings that are, to a certain extent, closest to him. All of them are *an object for him*. He alone remains *the subject* in their midst. The Book of Genesis itself speaks of man as a being created in the image of God and in his likeness. Moreover, in the light of the passage cited, it is clear at the same time that man’s *subjectivity* is essentially associated *with knowledge*. Man is a subject in the midst of the world of objects, because he is capable of cognitively objectifying everything around him. In fact, through his own intelligence *he is “by nature” oriented* toward truth. Truth contains the source of man’s transcendence with respect to the cosmos in which he lives.

It is precisely through reflection on his own knowledge that man reveals himself to be the only being in the world who “from within” sees himself bound to the known truth: bound and therefore also “obliged” to recognize it, if necessary, *through free choice*, with acts of testimony in favor of the truth. This is the capacity to transcend himself in truth. Through reflection on his own knowledge, man discovers that the way he exists in the world is not only totally different from every other, but even distinct from – and superior to – every other in his own sphere. Man is simply aware of being *a personal subject, a person*. He is confronted with his own dignity.

The biblical text speaks, in a certain sense, of the first and elementary truths (he imposed “names”), through which man has established and affirmed his own subjectivity in the midst of the world. At the same time, it can be said that this description announces, *in a certain way “in advance,”* the entire *cognitive process* that decides the history of human culture. I would not

hesitate to say that the first book of the Bible *opens the perspective of every science and of all sciences*. Reality – all reality, all its aspects and elements – will constitute from then an incessant challenge for man, for his intellect. *All* modern and contemporary gigantic development of science is already announced and begins in this description. And no new era of scientific knowledge goes substantially “beyond” what has been outlined in this description, in a figurative and elementary way.

6. The *biblical paradigm* of “man in the midst of the world” contains, as we see, a set of elements that do not cease to determine our thinking about man. They do not cease to touch upon the very *foundations of his subjectivity*, and also – at least in perspective – that relationship that is established, on the one hand, between the “naming” of objects and the cognitive process that develops gradually, even in the form of the multiplicity of sciences, and, on the other, *the consolidation of man’s place in the cosmos* as subject. The further the effort to know, that is, the discovery of the truth about objective reality, goes, the more the reason for human subjectivity deepens. This reason concerns not only and not so much man in the midst of the world, as *man among men*, man in society.

It can be said paradoxically that, as the progress of knowledge about the world grows (in the macro and microscopic dimensions), man must increasingly *defend, in the field of progress of scientific-technical civilization, the truth about himself*.

In the name of the truth about himself man must also resist a *double temptation*, namely, that of *subordinating the truth about himself to his own freedom* and that of submitting to the world of things. He must resist both the temptation of self-deification and the temptation of self-deprecation. According to the expression of a medieval author: “*Positus est in medio homo: nec bestia, nec Deus!*” This, moreover, belongs to the biblical paradigm of the Book of Genesis. Already “from the beginning” man is seduced by the temptation to subject the truth about himself to his own will, and thus to place himself “beyond good and evil.” He is tempted by the illusion of knowing the truth about good and evil only when he himself decides about it.” Your eyes would be opened, and you would be like God, knowing good and evil” (*Gen 3:5*).

At the same time, man is called “from the beginning” to “subdue the earth” (cf. *Gen 1:28*), which naturally constitutes the “natural” fruit and, at the same time, the practical “prolongation” of knowledge, that is, of “dominion” through the truth over the rest of the creatures.

Here I would like to touch at least on the problem of protecting the natural environment, which is so urgent today throughout the world. This is, as far as I know, an extremely important problem in Poland as well. To master the earth also means to respect its laws, the laws of nature.

In this field, as you well know, science has a great task before it, through the efforts of wise control over the forces of nature and careful management of its resources.

However, “subduing the earth” also means: *not subordinating oneself to the earth!* Not allowing man to be “reduced” either cognitively or practically to the order of objects: preserving the subjectivity of the person in the sphere of all human “praxis,” *ensuring this subjectivity also in the human community*: in society, in the State, in the various work environments and even in collective recreation.

I think that this is the ultimate reason and the meaning of what are today called: *human rights*. On the basis of methodical knowledge, therefore, of science, we find here the meeting point with philosophy and, in particular, with ethics and, in a certain sense, also with theology. 7. The period of the Enlightenment, and even more so the 19th century, developed the thesis *of the antinomy between science and religion*. This antinomy has also given rise to the opinion (especially in Marxism) of the alienating character of all religion. The reduction of “man to the world”, *to the dimensions of absolute immanence*, contained in this conception, carries with it not only Nietzsche’s problem of the “death of God,” but also – as has been progressively noted – *the perspective of the “death of man,”* who, in such an essentially “materialist” vision of reality, does not have a definitive, eschatological orientation, nor any other transcendent possibilities, and is thus equated with the rest of the objects of the visible cosmos.

The aforementioned position was proclaimed with determination and taken for granted and even “postulated” in various circles as synonymous with the sole scientific method, even more so, with the “scientific concept” of the world.

Today, a less absolute conviction can be seen in this field. The paradigm of the “man-subject” (which, as has been said, has its roots in the Book of Genesis) seems to be *appearing again* – through a side door, not always through the main entrance – *in the consciousness* of men and societies, including the world of science. Nor is religion any longer seen as the adversary of the intellect and its cognitive possibilities. Rather, *another kind of expression of the truth about man in the world is being rediscovered in it*. There is no doubt that this goes hand in hand with a new way of perceiving the dimension of transcendence, which is exclusively proper to man as subject. It is – in a certain way, according to the first impression – a question *of transcendence through truth*.

It also seems that modern man is becoming increasingly aware of the fact that *God* (and therefore also religion), and especially the God-Person of the Bible and the Gospel, the God of Jesus Christ, remains the ultimate (and definitive) *guarantor of human subjectivity, of the freedom of the human spirit*, especially in conditions where this freedom and subjectivity are

threatened not only theoretically but also practically by a system and a scale of values, by a one-sided technocratic “ethos” (or rather, anti-ethos), by the spread of the model of consumerist civilization, by various forms of systemic totalitarianism.

In this way, we return to the ancient paradigm of the Bible: God the Creator, but also *the Ally of man. God of the Covenant! Father!*

8. Finally, I would like to express my special joy that such an eloquent encounter with the world of Polish science took place *in Lublin*. This city has a historical eloquence. I am not referring only to the eloquence of the “Union of Lublin,” but to everything that constitutes the historical, cultural, ethical and religious context of this “*union*.” The whole great historical process of the encounter between *the West* and *the East*. The mutual attraction and repulsion. Repulsion, but also attraction. This process belongs to our entire history. Perhaps “yesterday” more than “today”; however, it is not possible to separate “today” from “yesterday.” The nation is constantly living its entire history. And the Church of the nation, too. And this process is not over.

No one will deprive the people living here, especially the scientists, of the responsibility for the ultimate success of such a historical process in this place of Europe! And of the world! In the place of a “difficult challenge.”

Thus, the question symbolically represented by this city – Lublin – (and perhaps also by this University: the Catholic University of Lublin) *has not only a Polish dimension, but a European* and even a universal one. I had this dimension in mind when, following the example of Paul VI, who proclaimed *Saint Benedict* Patron of Europe, I saw the need to extend this “Patronage” to two other figures: the apostles of the Slavs, the *holy brothers of Salonica Cyril and Methodius*.

All three of them lived before the historical time of Poland, our homeland. But *they have also prepared* – in a certain way – this time and our past millennium. May heaven grant that we may faithfully, authentically and creatively continue this *great heritage!*

“To the eternal King of the ages, honour and glory for ever and ever” (*1 Timothy* 1:17). “*Soli Deo*”: I conclude with these words which were the episcopal emblem of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Grand *Primate of the Millennium*, who here, in Lublin, began his episcopal service to the Church in Poland.

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