Cognition of the Human Person as a Complex and Unified Reality. The Problem of Induction

Grzegorz Hołub[1]

Abstract

Karol Wojtyła as a personalist was interested in an approach to the human person which allows for its entirety and complexity. He drew on the Aristotelian method of induction, which leads to seeing the whole in particulars – *epagoge*. However, this understanding of induction is in tension with the modern concept, particularly employed by empiricist philosophy. In this article, this Aristotelian stance is presented and contrasted with the position typical for the modern philosophy and then with the method devised within phenomenology. It turns out that Aristotelian proposal has something in common with the attempt by phenomenologists but offers a more realist and comprehensive tool to investigate the wholeness and complexity of the human person. Karol Wojtyła sticks to a phenomenological approach to the human person but he enriches it with the achievements of the ancient philosopher and in this way contributes to realist personalism. All in all, we need both particular and general knowledge on the person, although the latter is demanding and requires a strong reference not only to the description of the human person and its phenomenology but to the metaphysics of the person.

Keyword

induction, human person, Karol Wojtyła, Aristotle, empiricism, phenomenology, personalism

[1] Grzegorz Hołub – The Pontifical University of John Paul II, Poland
e-mail: grzegorz.holub@upjp2.edu.pl • ORCID: 0000-0002-0312-3693

Introduction

In his article on methodology in Karol Wojtyła's anthropology, Tadeusz Styczeń starts from a basic postulate: to gain a holistic view of the person.[2] This is not only the intention that guided Wojtyła's research efforts, but it is deeply inscribed in virtually every type of philosophy of man, and e'ven more so in the expectations of every thinking individual. This desire has been known since antiquity, as can already be traced in the formula of the oracle from the temple at Delphi, repeated by Socrates - "know thyself." Know not only the principle of the world *arché*, but, above all, yourself, in your integrity encompassing the interiority – *psyche* and *areté*. With this approach, however, we have a growing problem, and in the face of this fact it is impossible to be indifferent. Karol Wojtyła, in his major anthropological treatise - *Person and Act* - presented a certain pattern of thinking that can be helpful in this regard. This pattern is connected with the possibility of using the method of induction to learn about the human person. This issue we will now try to look at here.

A Person in General, a Person in Particular

Continuing with Tadeusz Styczeń's reflections, it is worth noting his valuable observations. He notes that the exact sciences provide us with more and more detailed knowledge about man; we know more and more about specific elements that make up the complex puzzle of the image of man, but nevertheless at the expense of seeing the whole. What is more – this multitude of cognitive data makes it increasingly difficult to see man as a human being. This leads to a kind of cognitive insufficiency and, as a consequence, the exact sciences, as Tadeusz Styczeń puts it, "arouse cognitive demand for a comprehensive vision of man."[3]

This cognitive situation seems to be some kind of paradox and can be illustrated by describing the relationships in the structure of a triangle. If we were to assume that we are considering the fixed area of the triangle, then its shape can take different forms. However, the ratio of the base of the triangle to its height will be decisive here: the greater the height, the smaller

[2] T. Styczeń, "Metoda antropologii filozoficznej w „Osobie i czynie" kardynała Karola Wojtyły," *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5(1973), 107-115.
[3] *Ibid.*, 107.

the base, and vice versa. If in our analyses we assume that the base of the triangle is the overall knowledge of a person, and its height is the detailed knowledge of his individual aspects – then the relationship here is inversely proportional. The more detailed knowledge, the more modest the vision of the whole; a better vision of the whole, in turn, comes at the expense of distancing oneself from the details. Is it possible to solve this differently? Within the framework of thinking about mathematical dependencies, it is impossible, but this possibility should not be excluded in philosophical cognition, especially concerning the human person.

Karol Wojtyla's Proposal

In the introduction to *Person and Act*, Wojtyła reflects on cognition of the human person, typical of philosophy – that is, as holistic as possible. He is aware that it is not only the exact sciences that make statements on this subject, but also various philosophical currents and schools. As a personalist rooted in classical philosophy and phenomenological thought, he has, as his adversaries, positivist and nominalist philosophies; both question if there is such a thing as a human being, a human person, who would be given as a whole beyond or above their particular qualities, and that would still be of an empirical nature. Wojtyła distinguishes his position and contrasts it with phenomenalism. Regarding the latter, he argues that "the phenomenalistic position seems to exclude this unity of many experiences, seeing in the individual's experience only a group of impressions or emotional stirrings that are in turn ordered by the mind."[4] Wojtyła suggests that phenomenalism, in its inability to grasp the totality of the person, explores at most some "surface of being."[5]

Wojtyła assumes that acts reveal a person, and these acts are infinite in number. But do these acts prove that a person is a person? Does their observation and analysis allow one to move to the thesis that their perpetrator is a person? If this were the case, then from the particulars there would be a transition to the general; the more of these particulars, the better the starting point for formulating the general thesis. Thus, this would be some type of induction, even when one assumes

[4] K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. G. Ignatik (Catholic University Press: Washington, D.C., 2021), 95.

[5] The Polish philosopher puts it this way, "for if we adopt the phenomenalistic position, we must pose the question to ourselves: what is given to me in an indirect way? Is it only a "surface" of the being I call man that falls under the senses, or is it man himself?" See Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 101.

that the object of observation, the act is not only something made up of strictly empirical qualities, but includes ideas and intentions of the acting subject. In a sense, this would be a position close to Karol Wojtyła, who advocates empiricism, in the broad sense, as an attitude of openness to experience, but opposes empiricism, which is limited only to data of a certain type, that is, positive data obtained by experimental means. However, can induction of this type be effective in knowing the human person?

Traditionally, at least two objections are brought against induction understood in this way. First, it is always incomplete: we never have data on all the acts of a person, which would be the starting point for the formulation of a general thesis. For example, we have no access to future acts. Second, there is serious doubt whether there is really a transition from the quantitative accumulation of particulars to the general thesis. In philosophy, this problem is well-known, and Karl Popper and others gave a negative answer here.[6] Concepts in general must accompany facts in order to identify them at all, hence they are, in a way, what constantly accompanies observation. In a way, this would follow the line of Wojtyła, who excludes the separation of empirical perception from the work of the mind; the mind constantly accompanies this perception, constantly participates in it, hence for him there is no such a thing as raw empirical-observational material, which is only later "processed" by the mind.[7]

At any rate, induction in the modern understanding of the term is not a great support for knowing a person in his integrity and complexity. One can recall the understanding of induction as presented by John Stuart Mill, who dedicated to this problem some of his philosophical investigations. Among a complex set of his thesis concerning induction some deserve particular attention. For example, Mill claims that "… induction may be defined, the operation of discovering and proving general propositions"; "… it consists in inferring from some individual instances in which a phenomenon is observed to occur, that it occurs in all instances of a certain class."[8]

[6] For example, Popper put it this way: "now it is far from obvious, from a logical point of view, that we are justified in inferring a universal statement from singular ones, no matter how numerous; for any conclusion drawn in this way may always turn out to be false: no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that all swans are white." K. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

[7] Wojtyła is convinced about "the human mind's participation in the acts of human experience." See Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 98.

[8] J. S. Mill, *System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, vol. I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 347, 370.

Two objections arise here. The first is that unknown cases are inferred from known cases, insofar as they belong to the same class. Hence, on the basis of the known phenomena of a person one would adjudicate about the unknown ones, which – in the case of the study of a person – is not the purpose of the investigation. The person as a whole is still unknown, since the operation only concerns certain elements of personal life. Moreover, Mill sees induction as a form of proof, and Karol Wojtyła – following the line of Aristotle's thinking – clearly questions this, especially with regard to the totality of personal life.[9]

Karol Wojtyła, however, accepts the inductive method as a useful tool in cognition of the person, but it is drawn much more from the position of Aristotle himself. In "Posterior Analytics," the ancient philosopher defined an understanding of induction that went hand in hand with rational intuition. For example, the ancient philosopher states that "when one of the number of logically indiscriminable particulars has made a stand, the earliest universal is present in the soul: for though the act of sense-perception is of the particular, its content is universal – is man, for example, not the man-Kallias."[10] Thus, we can see in Aristotle a similar a research approach, through which it is possible to see the general principle in and through specific cases. William David Ross, an Oxford scholar and translator of Aristotle, used the term "intuitive induction" to name the method applied.[11] The cognitive process thus understood is also referred to as *epagoge*,[12] and it seems promising for metaphysical investigations, including the metaphysics of the person; the same cannot be said of the method of induction devised by modern thought.

Karol Wojtyła refers to Aristotelian thinking when he asks how to move from the multiplicity of human facts and their complexity to their identity, i.e. the apprehension of meaningful unity. Induction as a helpful research strategy, according to this thinker, will involve "a mental grasp of semantic unity in phenomenal plurality and complexity. (…) That induction leads to the simplicity of the experience of man that we ascertain along with all its complexity."[13] The problem will remain to determine how this complexity of the person relates to the simplicity

[9] Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 107.
[10] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, in: *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), Bk. II, ch. 19.
[11] William D. Ross understood Aristotelian intuitive induction as a process not so much associated with reasoning but with direct insight into first principles "mediated psychologically by a review of particular instances." See: W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (New York: Meridian, 1959), 44, cf. 211.
[12] David W. Hamlyn provides a short summary of Aristotle's idea in this way: "This is a seeing of the general principle from and in particular cases, and the process of getting to the insight in this way is *epagoge* or induction." See D.W. Hamlyn, "Aristotle's Epagoge," *Phronesis* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1976), 167.
[13] Wojtyła, Person and Act *and Related Essays*, 107.

of perception as a whole. For it seems that the perception of the complexity of the person stands in tension with the perception of unity and coherent wholeness.

Karol Wojtyła notes that a person's experience is rich and contains many elements, both important and less important, both essential and accidental. The mind, on the other hand, apprehends through intuitive induction a mere unity of meaning. In short: experience tells us more about the person than the mental grasp of the whole, which must necessarily focus on the essential elements. However, Wojtyła does ascribe greater competence to the mind; for he claims that it still relates intelligibly to the richness and diversity of the person – or at least does not cancel them. This thinker notes that the distancing from the richness and diversity of a given reality has sometimes been understood as an abstraction – but this was an erroneous understanding. The human person in its holistic and integral view is not some abstracted individual. If this were the case, the question would arise whether we are still talking about the person, which is precisely the individual, a unique and "separate" realization of man. Here it is worth recalling the author's remarks from the first pages of his work *Love and Responsibility*, where he states that "the term 'person' has been coined to signify that a man cannot be wholly contained within the concept 'individual member of the species,' but that there is something more to him, a particular richness and perfection in the manner of his being, which can only be brought out by the use of the word 'person.'"[14] Consistently, Wojtyła says that "[g]rasping the person and the act – for instance, on the basis of the experience of man, on the basis of all instances of the fact "man acts" – the mind in this fundamental understanding still remains open to the full wealth and diversity of the data of experience."[15]

A good example of the application of intuitive induction is shown when Wojtyła puts under analysis, on the one hand, what is typical for man, namely the dynamism called "something happens in me" and, on the other, the dynamism of a strictly personal character, namely the act. Both of them refer to the whole person and what is more important, they reveal the person himself but in different ways. In other words, the insight into each of them opens up a horizon of the wholeness of the person. Thus, through their lenses, first, the person can be known as an acting subject manifesting his personal efficacy, incorporated in his acts. This acting subject is manifested as an integrated and dynamic "I." Second is when the person, who does not act but experiences

[14] K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 22.
[15] Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 108.

non-intentional occurrences taking place in him, is led to discover his complex unity encompassing the elements of "what happens in me." The latter reveal the wholeness of the person from the side of his passive or semi-passive occurrences, which are beyond his control but not beyond his personal constitution and existence. Karol Wojtyła presents such investigations within a wider set of analyses concerning the relation between nature and the person.[16]

Induction vs. phenomenological method

One may ask how this reference to intuitive induction relates to the phenomenological method. It seems that they may play a similar role and thus a kind of clarification is needed. Karol Wojtyła, in his work *Person and Act*, refers to both: they are applied in various parts of this book. Does one lead to the other or are they two separate methods? Preliminarily it should be observed that Wojtyła was not a philosophical eclectic, and the various methodological strategies he invokes are related. He used various philosophical methods but it was done not at random but was guided by a specific investigative attitude, which animated this thinker.[17]

It should be noted that although Wojtyła learned the phenomenological method mainly in his encounter with Max Scheler's thought, he was not a typical phenomenologist. Perhaps this remark is somewhat obvious for the reason that, after Edmund Husserl, virtually every one of his disciples or followers applied the phenomenological method in a peculiar way. Wojtyła appreciated how phenomenology allowed him to approach the reality he studied, especially the study of human reality, but he was not "trapped" in this way of philosophizing.[18] We see this, for example, in his questioning of one of phenomenology's basic claims about the intentionality of consciousness. Consciousness is understood by Wojtyła not as a power going out to external or internal objects to

[16] In *Person and Act* Wojtyła puts it as follows, "the experience of man culminates, so to speak, in the experience of his own "I." This "I" is the agent of the acts. When man acts, this "I" experiences its efficacy in action. However, when something happens in man, the "I" does not experience efficacy and *is not the agent, but it experiences the interior identity between itself and what happens and at the same time the dependence of what happens exclusively on itself*. What happens in the form of various "actuations" belongs to my "I" and, moreover, proceeds from it as from the only proper substratum and cause, although the "I" does not experience here its causation, its efficacious commitment, the way it does in acts." *Ibid*., 182.

[17] See e.g. G. Hołub, "Struggling with the Reality of the Person and Its Interpretation. On the Method of Karol Wojtyła's Philosophy," *Forum Philosophicum* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2023), 385-397.

[18] It is worth noting that some definitions of phenomenology fit perfectly with how Wojtyła developed his philosophizing. For example, Robert Sokolowski defined phenomenology in the following way: "Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience." See R. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2. But one more qualification is important: Wojtyła in his investigations goes further, beyond experience and that is why he cannot be called a phenomenologist only.

objectify them and imbue itself with knowledge of them. Consciousness exercises in the active function of knowledge and self-knowledge in this regard. This position of Karol Wojtyła was in a sense a reaction to the absolutization of consciousness, the manifestations of which he saw in some instances of idealist philosophy.[19]

But does this peculiar approach to the phenomenological method have other manifestations? There seems to be another important point where Wojtyła departs from classical phenomenology; this is the *epoché*. In his study of the human person, this thinker does not suspend existence; he does not bracket it, only to return to it at further stages of research. From the beginning, Wojtyła analyzes the person through the prism of his act, but the person not only given in the act of representation, in the act of consciousness, but the person as he really is – that is, the person who exists (i.e. endowed with the act of existence). This fact is understandable when one pays attention to the fact that this thinker extremely emphasizes the importance of experience, especially the experience of the person. The person is primarily given in the stream of living experience. Wojtyła does not want to limit this experience that is, to select only certain elements of it. As we quoted above: the mind is constantly open to the richness of experience. An essential element of this experience is the existence of the person – this cannot be omitted, bracketed, or delegated for later analysis.

Intuitive induction as a legacy of Aristotelian thought plays an important role here. Within this function, the person is given as a whole, and this wholeness is somehow revealed in the details. Here it manifests above all that the person exists. Although existence is difficult to conceptualize, it is given within the framework of experience – not limited by any dogmatic assumptions. Wojtyła, who advocates this approach, distances himself from so many elements of other methods that could limit this. Thus, the use of the phenomenological method seems to be modified by Aristotelian induction.

This can be interpreted, more broadly, to mean that there are in fact two ways of doing phenomenology, which are manifest here. The classical approach, pioneered by Husserl, and the broader approach that Wojtyła seems to use. In the latter position, what matters is the description of phenomena and insight into their essence, while preserving the richness and multifacetedness of these phenomena. Moreover, this insight does not exclude or suspend existence, but takes place, as

[19] Wojtyła claims as follows, "according to this conception, man exists and acts 'consciously,' yet his existence and action do not have a specific source in consciousness. Let us not forget here that in our presentation we are as far as possible from the tendency to 'absolutize' consciousness." (Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 127.)

it were, against its background. This, of course, raises questions about the nature of phenomenology itself, that is, whether it can be reduced to the model developed in the phenomenological school in the twentieth century, or whether its achievements merely clarified and concretized – in a specific way – a certain long-standing descriptive trend present in philosophy.[20] This is an interesting problem but it is not a part of present investigations and it should be undertaken elsewhere.

There is a debate as to how much phenomenology, particularly at its early stage, is a form of return to realist philosophy. For example, there are some controversies whether Husserl's slogan "back to the things themselves" was a de facto call for a break with idealist tendency in European philosophy. On the first reading, it seems that this is the case. However, on a closer inspection, the topic is more complex and supplies a rather unequivocal picture. It turns out that Husserl meant "things" in a broad sense, which may be at odds with expectations of realist philosophy.[21] Polish phenomenologist Andrzej Półtawski argues that phenomenology in its origins was still entangled with post-Cartesian philosophy; by the time Wojtyła became interested in phenomenology, while studying Scheler, this condition was still rather prevalent. Półtawski even claims that it was Wojtyła himself who "made the application of phenomenology more realistic."[22] It is difficult not to see the role of the philosophy of Stagirite and Aquinas in this realist turn.

Thus, the relationship between Aristotelian induction and the phenomenological method is interesting and worthy of deeper study. Here only preliminary remarks on the subject have been expressed.

Conclusion

Karol Wojtyła was a thinker deeply interested in man. His philosophical research on the human person was preceded by reflection on this subject within the framework of his interest in literature, poetry, theater and theology. The experience of man himself played a fundamental role. As Pope

[20] I am indebted to Dr. Kazimierz Krajewski from John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin for his suggestions and comments on a possible broader approach to phenomenology.

[21] A close collaborator of Edmund Husserl, Eugen Fink claimed that "if the real sense of the call 'to the things themselves' is to be understood, the concept of the 'things' has to be understood *formally*, all and everything that may itself be brought to the view, be it something real, something ideal, a horizon, a sense, an indication of a sense, the nothingness, etc., all this can be a thing in the sense of the phenomenological maxim of research." Quote for: A.Q. Zirión, "The Call 'Back to the Things Themselves' and the Notion of Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 22 (2006), 42.

[22] A. Półtawski, *Filozofia dla życia. Rozmawiają Krzysztof Ziemiec i Marek Maciejczak*, (Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Paweł, 2013), 119.

John Paul II, Wojtyła spoke of it as follows, "the gradual centering of attention on the human being, on the 'uniqueness' of the person, was born more from experience and the sharing of experiences with others than from reading alone."[23] Here, too, was the seed of the method that Wojtyła later developed and used within philosophical anthropology. For he said that "reading, study, in turn, reflection and discussion [...], helped me to seek and find expression for what I found in experience in the broadest sense."[24] In this experience a person in his integrity is given, hence Wojtyła sought such methods to cognitively capture, name and theorize this. The method of intuitive induction, *epagoge* was a good means for this. It still seems to be a promising tool especially in view of the progressing fragmentation of knowledge about the human person.

However, it is important to take into account the difference between particular knowledge and general knowledge of the human-person. The former concerns only some aspects and a good part of that is usually gained through empirical experience. The level of its certainty can be high, although it must constantly be reckoned with the fact that it will be falsified at some stage, consequently – one cannot speak of absolutely certain knowledge here. As for holistic knowledge (general knowledge), it is the type that goes beyond the canon of empirical knowledge in a strict sense; it takes into account what the empirical sciences say but is nevertheless based on broader experience. The level of certainty of this knowledge is different from particular knowledge; not so much lower, but different. The holistic view, although it may be less clear, is at the same time not subject to easy questioning; it cannot apply the falsification procedure here, because this view goes well beyond the validity of this procedure. What we know about the human person in his integrity is acquired with greater cognitive difficulty, but nevertheless forms a canon of knowledge that has greater permanence and validity.

It ought to be emphasized that there should not be a kind of equalization of the two types of knowledge; differences between them exist and will remain. The principle given by Aristotle as to the certainty of knowledge seems to apply here. As he put it, "precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the craft… For it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject

[23] A. Frossard, *"Nie lękajcie się!" Rozmowy z Janem Pawłem II*, trans. A. Turowiczowa (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 19. English edition: *"Be Not Afraid!" Conversations with John Paul II*, trans. J. R. Foster (New York: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1984).
[24] A. Frossard, *"Nie lękajcie się!"*, 19.

admits."[25] Because of the complexity of the human person, knowledge of his holistic existence should not be demanded to the same extent as knowledge of his individual aspects, especially empirical ones. The reason is simple: the human person in its entirety is a much more complex object of investigation than his particular aspects.

Karol Wojtyła certainly advocated the position of acquiring integral knowledge of the human person. Accordingly, he supported activities aimed at acquiring these two types of cognition.[26] He was aware that, in fact, detailed knowledge about the human person can, to a certain extent, correct integral knowledge; integral knowledge, in turn, sets the horizon of how to understand the particulars: it allows them to be placed in this horizon and clearly define their place and role. However, it should be noted that today there is a greater problem with the pursuit of holistic and general knowledge about the human person. Consequently, the metaphysical approach to the person – which is its fully-fledged embodiment – seems to be on the defensive, particularly as presented by classical philosophy. Hence, the personalist call "back to the person himself" – which in the case of Wojtyła is more appropriate than the Husserlian "back to the things themselves" – is also an appeal to solicit and cultivate cognition, which is part of the new metaphysics of the person. We need to know not only how the person presents himself in multiple phenomena but who the person really is. However, the project of such metaphysics was only signaled by Wojtyła as John Paul II.[27] It requires more philosophical attention and its fuller elaboration goes beyond the present discussion.

[25] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Basic Books of Aristotle*, 1094b.

[26] For example, Wojtyła while analyzing the act of the will and self-determination draws on achievements of the twentieth century school of psychology of the will as represented by Narziss Ach, Albert Michotte, Emile Prüm and Mieczysław Dybowski. See: Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, 229.

[27] In series of interviews gathered in the book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II elaborates on the modern and contemporary philosophy of God and religion. He notes that "we are witnesses of a symptomatic return to metaphysics (the philosophy of being) through an integral anthropology." The contemporary philosophy of religion draws heavily on "anthropological experience." See: John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), Ch. "Proof: Is it Still Valid?" The theses which were formulated by medieval speculative philosophers on the basis of being and existence today can and should be reformulated starting from human experience. This leads us to a new starting point as far as metaphysics is concerned and a resulting project can acquire a more personalistic character.

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