

## Thomistic Phenomenology in the Book *Person and Act*<sup>1</sup>\*

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translated by Sydney Sadowski<sup>2</sup>

The book *Person and Act* — as quoted here several times on page 22 — is an attempt to merge two philosophies: the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness. It is a place of encounter, which is not accidental and not external, between Thomism and phenomenology. It is a book on the philosophy of man. Contrary to the opinion of Professor Kalinowski quoted here, I believe that this is indeed, a book on the philosophy of man. And the orientation presented in it can be characterized as, I would say, a Thomistic phenomenology. Why?

Because what we actually have here is a certain description of what is directly given; a description which, although it is presented somewhat theoretically, and in some places abstractly, in its basic form does not go beyond the meaning of what is directly given. Nevertheless, in certain formulations this description is supplemented by a theory taken from elsewhere; for example, on pages 40, 52, 62, there are formulations in which the phenomenological description is exceeded. It is exceeded by following a certain theory, which is a theory of Thomistic metaphysics. Yes, it is essentially phenomenology, although it is brought under a certain metaphysics, and what is more, in some formulations it uses, although this is not always *explicitly* stated, certain conceptual schemes taken from Thomistic metaphysics. For this reason, I would describe this book as a book on Thomistic phenomenology.

In this book we find outlined, in a way that revives and makes visible certain old intuitions, the structure of the person. I think that what is shown is shown with descriptive intent. Parts that

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This text was originally published as: “Feomenologia tomizująca w książce „Osoba i czyn,” *Analecta Cracoviensia* Vol. 5 (1973), 153-157. The original article can be found at:

<https://czasopisma.upjp2.edu.pl/analectacracoviensia/article/view/2673>. The text used by author was the 1969 Polish edition: K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969). The translation used for this text were taken from Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*. “The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II,” Vol. I, ed. Antonio Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

\* The text comes from a tape recording and therefore retains certain stylistic features of a verbal discussion.

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are particularly fruitful and particularly stimulating for the reader include the description of the encounter between the subjectivity and agency in man, and the merging of diverse elements and aspects into a unity within the internal structure. We read on page (95) 194 that: “‘man’ ... *is first of all the unity of life, and only secondarily and in a sense collaterally the unity of lived-experience.*” And this is somehow partially shown, this merging of potentiality, consciousness and objectivity, intentionality, cognition of will...

In connection with the statement of one of the previous speakers (Fr. Kłósak), I would like to draw attention to the fact that the act of experience is understood here, rightly in my opinion, as a sensory-intellectual activity, and therefore the division into sensory and intellectual activities in this concept has been questioned. Every act of human perception is a sensory-intellectual activity and the traditional (sharp) division between sensory and intellectual activities does not fit the act of human perception. And the sharp division between direct and indirect cognition does not correspond to the division into sensory and intellectual cognition (because it seems to me that here these two divisions are somehow connected). So, it is not necessarily that, what is sensory is direct and what is intellectual is indirect. I believe that intellectual cognition can be both direct and indirect. The act of perception, the human act of experience, is a sensory-intellectual activity and can be characterized as direct cognition, not indirect cognition.

Hence, the issue of indirect realism, direct realism, etc., would look completely different, but this is a digression in relation to Fr. Kłósak's comment. Indeed, here, I would not see a problem with the concept of experience in *Person and Act*. For me, there's another problem, a problem with the very concept of consciousness! I simply have certain questions, and I simply cannot answer these questions in relation to reading *Person and Act*, and this “prevents” me from establishing a certain epistemological basis for what I find. Because what I find and what I can briefly characterize is simply acceptable and developable, simply fruitful. However, certain issues related to Chapter I, which, it seems to me, are not integrally related to the others, raise certain questions for discussion. I am referring to the concept of consciousness and the relationship between cognition and knowledge.

Although the origin of these views will be clear to many of you, I will explain how I would like to understand this matter and why, in this regard, I have certain questions concerning *Person and Act*.

Undoubtedly, the term “consciousness” is ambiguous, so let us distinguish between the following: stream of consciousness, individual lived-experiences, conscious acts and states, and consciousness itself.

The term “consciousness” is an undefinable term; it is a foundational term whose meaning can be made clear by some examples and comparisons. However, it is possible to point to various forms of consciousness. I now would like to recall the basic phenomenological distinction, that is, the distinction between acting consciousness and non-acting consciousness, positional and non-positional consciousness, intentional and non-intentional, objectifying and non-objectifying consciousness.

The experience of the act is intentional, that means, it is always directed towards the object that transcends it, and at the same time it is being experienced. That means it is revealed in the stream of consciousness as occurring by the very fact of experiencing it. So, consciousness of the perceived object is accompanied by consciousness of the perception of the object, consciousness of the experience occurring as a way of perceiving the object. And here we must immediately distinguish between these two forms of consciousness (because that is all that interests us at the moment). Objectively directed consciousness, organized in an act, and consciousness consisting in experiencing, reveals the very occurrence of the state of consciousness.

Because there are these two basic forms of consciousness, there are also two basic forms of self-consciousness. This simple, elementary form of self-consciousness is experiencing: the fact that the act of consciousness, by its very occurrence, somehow marks itself in the stream of consciousness. And in addition, as we know, in certain acts of reflection (immanent perception, internal perception, or recollection) we can make our state or act of consciousness the object of self-consciousness, and then we are dealing with reflective self-consciousness. So, we distinguish between: the act of consciousness, non-act of consciousness (here we are interested only in the form of the non-act of consciousness which we call experiencing) and therefore a lived-experience as simple self-consciousness and, in addition, reflective self-consciousness in the form of internal, immanent perception or recollection. This is the model and typology of consciousness of known provenance that I accept, and the terminology used here accordingly.

I will only briefly mention the relationship of consciousness to cognition and knowledge. It is known that cognition and knowledge can be understood in various ways. However, I do not think that we can speak of unconscious cognition, of unconscious knowledge, so that we can

literally speak of unconscious knowledge or cognition. Unless we treat obtaining information (because cognition is primarily about obtaining information) about an object as a natural process, consisting in the appearance of a certain change or feature in the cognizing subject, the cognitive role of which as a factor in the subject's orientation in the environment is necessarily related to the awareness of this factor by the cognizing subject. Only with this concept of cognition, which is perhaps "alien" throughout the book *Person and Act*, could we say that cognition and consciousness are things that do not have to be in a certain, non-accidental relationship with each other. In any case, if we were to accept such concepts of cognition, including those based on extreme behaviorism, then from the point of view of the theory of cognition (this separation of cognition and consciousness) it would be a secondary, theoretical procedure, and not empirically given. Empirically, within the framework of phenomenological description, a necessary condition for cognition, is always the experiencing of the act of cognition. Only through some theoretical process does one arrive at a model of cognition that separates cognition from consciousness.

How, then, should consciousness be understood? It seems to me that consciousness can be understood either as experiencing, or as reflection, or as self-knowledge. Now, consciousness cannot be understood here as reflection, since it is sometimes said in the book that consciousness is something non-intentional, something that does not objectify. Most reflection returns to that upon which it is reflecting, it objectifies. So, if consciousness does not objectify, it is not intentional, and therefore it cannot be reflection; it can be an experience.

But if here experiencing were to come into play, it would have to occur together with that of which it is conscious. However, if it is said in the book, that sometimes consciousness does not have to occur together with that of which it is conscious, then it cannot be treated as experience, because there constitutional connection between experiencing and the experience, consciousness of the occurrence and the very fact of the occurrence.

It is also not self-knowledge. The book's relationship to self-knowledge is somewhat particular. It is said that consciousness is not self-knowledge, but at the same time it is said that self-knowledge is the limit of conscious reflection. How could we know that self-knowledge constitutes the limit of conscious reflection when consciousness does not co-constitute self-knowledge?

One final troubling point. It is stated that consciousness is intellectual in nature. Such a remark, without comment, raises the question: Does this mean that animal consciousness is rejected outright?

These are the questions related to the reading of *Person and Act* that are troubling in relation with the understanding of the concept of consciousness. Is consciousness treated as experiencing, as reflection, or as self-knowledge? Someone might say that my questions come from my model of consciousness, which I briefly presented earlier. Perhaps the author of *Person and Act* has a different model of consciousness. In that case, it should be noted that the reader may feel somewhat lost here and fail to grasp this concept of self-consciousness. I note this issue by emphasizing that all my reservations concerning consciousness and its relation to cognition are not essentially related to the remaining content in *Person and Act*. And perhaps some conclusion should be drawn from this. That is to say, that the conclusion is that the issue of consciousness is simply a separate matter from the assessment of the rest of the book's content, in which, as I said, certain issues, especially those related to the concept of conscience, duty and responsibility, are very intellectually intriguing and, it seems to me, very fruitful.

*Postscript:* During this discussion, I forgot to point out that in the text *Person and Act*, another concept of consciousness is strongly outlined, namely that of reflection. Consciousness as a reflection, a reflection of being, the object of consciousness. But even accepting this concept as fundamental does not eliminate the ambiguity in this respect in the text of *Person and Act*, and it also brings with it new difficulties. The concept of consciousness in the book requires revision.