

EXPERIENTIAL METHOD

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Most of the research in psychology comes from two schools of thought with definitions of the nature of the human person which are in opposition. These differences have led to conflicting interpretations of the human person. The scientific method uses mathematical analysis which relies upon the objective principles found in the laws of physical science in order to evaluate and predict human behavior. Phenomenological method emphasizes the subjective, experiential description of human existence in an attempt to redefine psychology as a human science.

The scientific method has been critiqued for losing sight of the human person by relying upon its mathematical analysis which seeks to interpret meaning by looking for those laws which are found in the physical sciences. But the human person cannot be dragged out of the connection with life as isolated experimental perspectives attempt. Phenomenological method has been critiqued for idealism, in that, it describes only the content of consciousness.

Although progress has been made in psychology using phenomenological thought and methods, serious limits and deficiencies are evident if we are to rely upon them *in toto* for interpreting the meaning of the human person. As a philosophy of consciousness, phenomenology provides a methodological tool to describe human factuality. Yet with the reduction of experience to structural terms, to interpret one's personal meaning of being, human subjectivity is lost.

The gap which exists indicates that these two methods come from different philosophical presuppositions regarding the nature of the human person upon which they are founded. This calls for a realistic philosophical anthropology in order to provide an adequate foundation for doing psychological research that will do justice to the meaning of the human person. We can see that the call for a new method in psychology is also the call for a new interpretation of what it means to be a human person.

This Experiential Method¹ uses phenomenological description yet rests upon the philosophical anthropology of Existential Personalism described by Andrew N. Woznicki.² Although an adequate philosophical anthropology from phenomenology is not possible, as a method for describing the fullness of human existence and thereby unveiling root meanings of the human being, it can be of value.

Woznicki's presentation of Karol Wojtyla's philosophy depends upon a realist metaphysics to locate the essential objective principles which are

embedded in human experience as value. The limited use of phenomenology has been shown by Woznicki:

Since phenomenology is solely a philosophy of consciousness, which captures the experience of a human being, it affords us only a preliminary description of facts. Its usefulness, however, terminates at this point. A realist metaphysics must now step in to present us with the essential objective principles, i.e., man as a substantial being and an objective value system.³

A phenomenological description of experience provides direct access to questions regarding the meaning of human experience yet falls short of the values which are discovered in personal action, “Phenomenology performs an ancillary function: in experiencing his actions, man discovers values—he neither fashions nor invents them.”⁴

In the philosophy of Existential Personalism metaphysical tenets are presupposed regarding the nature of the human being. The human being is seen as a substantial, actually existing person who, through experience, makes choices. One discovers values-in-action. Whereas, experimental research methodology does not provide adequate access to the human person. Not only is it inadequate but questions arise regarding the philosophical foundations for understanding the human person. For Hans-Georg Gadamer:

...it is useless to restrict the elucidation of the nature of the human sciences to a purely methodological question; it is not simply a question of defining a specific method, but rather, of recognizing an entirely different notion of knowledge and truth.⁵

Gadamer continues, “*the object itself* must determine the method of its own access.”⁶ For psychology, the human person as the object for study is first revealed by a philosophy of the human person. Wojtyla’s *approach* begins with the basic dynamization of the personal subject by use of the medieval term *suppositum*:

Suppositum itself does not denote a static foundation but the first, basic level of dynamization of that being which is a personal subject. It is a dynamization through *esse*, through existence.⁷

Beginning with this dynamization as the foundation for the human person introduces a way to reveal the inner dynamic structures that constitute the concrete “I” of the person through the meaning of personal existence. Rather than rejecting a specific definition of the human being this

signifies a methodological *approach* of, “*dwelling upon the irreducible.*”⁸ Wojtyla re-orientes the object of study by staying with the integral meaning of experience. This *approach* is complementary to the procedure of reduction, thereby ultimately describing a purely structural conception of the person within the world. Wojtyla is quite clear in this regard:

...*to be able to understand man in himself. This second type of understanding might be called “personalistic”. This personalistic type of conceiving man is not an antinomy to the cosmological type, it is its complement.*⁹

By re-orienting the object of study toward a personalistic understanding, the meaning of experience as it is lived through is grasped, revealing structures as they are tied to subjectivity.¹⁰ It is this relationship of structure and subjectivity (dynamic structure) which has been lacking in the field of psychology. Taking up this view, it is possible to describe and understand how meaning is constituted as self through one’s experience of living through a particular situation. Here the cognitive constituent is not lost but instead (*suppositum*) is cognized by the subject in another way, “*by such a method and through such an analysis as reveals and shows its essence.*”¹¹

To achieve what is, in essence, the nature of the human person not only as being but as a person, a metaphysical interpretation becomes fundamental for any understanding of the integral experience of the personal subject. For Wojtyla:

...adhering sufficiently strongly to the integral experience of man, we are not only not being condemned to subjectivistic and idealistic conceptions but *we safeguard the authentic subjectivity of man, that is, his personal subjectivity thanks to a realistic interpretation of his being.*¹²

Beginning with the subject (*suppositum*) for study in psychological research means that it becomes necessary for one to bring to the forefront and reveal the full significance of personal meaning and its relation to one’s own choices and actions. This presumes that there is a dynamic constituent involved. That is, if a person is revealed to be one’s own self through one’s own experience of one’s own actions, then these dynamic constituents of choice are revealed as an integral component of personal experience.

In Woznicki’s presentation of Wojtyla’s philosophy, the subject (*suppositum*) provides a foundation for understanding what it means to be a human person. This first dynamization describes the person as a subject, one who both constitutes and reveals oneself as *what* and *who* one is through action. Wojtyla’s work provides a way to re-orient the object of study for

psychology toward the human person and is founded upon the meaning of human subjectivity in the metaphysical sense.¹³

One outcome of beginning with a metaphysical interpretation of human subjectivity is that it is viewed as transphenomenal rather than extraphenomenal. This means that the existence and action of the human person is revealed by the integral aspects of experience which constitute the totality of the human being.¹⁴ Specifically Wojtyla says:

Although I acknowledge the specificity and distinctness of metaphysical cognition, I deny that it can be separated from the rest of human cognition, for all cognition is metaphysical through its roots inasmuch as it reaches being.¹⁵

The dynamism of human action then opens the way to the psychological meaning and understanding of one's own self as one constitutes oneself and simultaneously reveals oneself in action. By and through one's activities a person not only defines one's own meaning in a way which can be understood by oneself but is also revealed to others in a personalistic view.

For psychological understanding, this describes a set of conditions necessary for the occurrence of what is directly given in experience.¹⁶ When Wojtyla defines the use of phenomenological description as a tool to describe (in a preliminary fashion) the dynamic constituents in the emergence of personal meaning through choice and action, there is a presupposed metaphysical reference which reveals how self-constitution through action is rooted in being.¹⁷ For Pierre Thévenaz:

...metaphysics itself is born of questioning the everyday and original experience of the world, the experience which it invites us precisely to transcend in the direction of a beyond.¹⁸

It is this transcending toward the beyond that Thévenaz has described as metaphysics itself which is fundamental to our own personal experiences. The human person is not static nor understood once and for all but is consistently moving and acting in light of further understanding.

Conceiving the human person in metaphysical terms allows the psychological researcher to unveil the transcendence which identifies it with the experience of the person.¹⁹ This is possible by moving beyond one's own boundaries in experience to discover the integral meaning of self. By this movement the person is found rooted in intersubjective experience and the beingness of others.

Wojtyla utilizes a distinction made by Gabriel Marcel when he describes transcendence beyond one's own being to the beingness of others as horizontal transcendence, while personal aspects of transcendence are characterized by their verticality. Not only does the constitution of a personal self grow through one's relations with others but through the nature and quality of personal meaning which is described in one's relation to the beyond. According to Wojtyla, vertical transcendence is found in the experienced relationship of *humanum* and *divinum*.

In this light, it represents *actus humanus*, acting fully human. It is within this personal relation, the human and the divine, that the option for choosing one's way is revealed as self-determination. Wojtyla brings this to clarity, "Subjectivity is revealed through self-determination because self-determination expresses the transcendental dimension of essentially human action."²⁰

Thinkers such as Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyla accept transcendence as a constitutive aspect of human existence. This way of thinking offers access to the actuality of human experience yet reveals the double movement in experience which shows how personal self-meaning is constituted through one's own choice to act. This double movement of choice reveals in a simultaneous way *what* one is and *who* one is, both in actuality and in potentiality.

One outcome of this way of thinking about the double movement of transcendence is that it provides a foundation for theories of morality. This dimension of experience is not necessarily revealed in one's transcendence toward others. Theories of morality guide and reflect values which inhabit human experience and point beyond the human to the divine.

For Wojtyla, the classical philosophies of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrate that in order to understand the meaning of experience as something which is irreducible one must in some way formulate the constitutive nature of experience. This means that a person is not only *what* one is but is *who* one can become. For Woznicki:

The complexity of demonstration is the primary philosophy of Aristotle (*prote philosophia*) or St. Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics shows that philosophical wisdom understood as science and understanding is based on a specific deitic method of reasoning. The reason for this is that the central conception of metaphysical meaning of being *qua* being is taken neither in distributive nor collective sense but in its formal and constitutive element which makes a being *being* (*esse*). Consequently, the conception of being so understood cannot be elaborated either in a *posteriori* or a *priori* way, but only by

pointing to such processes of thinking which would elicit the formal aspect which constitutes being in its beingness.²¹

For Wojtyla, it is necessary to understand the meaning found in personal experience since:

The experiencing of one's own personal subjectivity is nothing other than a full actualization of everything contained virtually in the human subject, in metaphysical subjectivity.²²

This is most evident in moments of self-fulfillment when the personal self is revealed in clarity by an act of self-constitution. Psychological method which does not include reference to the double direction of transcendence does violence to the meaning of human experience and distorts the meanings which are constitutive of the human person. Transcendence, viewed as a constitutive element of personalistic meaning in human experience, provides a psychological comprehension of human reality in the fullest sense.

Through experiences of transcendence, the values which inhabit, guide and support choices inherent in action are revealed. This is, "an ultimate explanation, 'an understanding to the end' of a given subject may facilitate its 'vision' and its correct and adequate description."²³ An ultimate description of the human person serves as a corrective to the prevailing preference of laws that govern the physical sciences. The person, as *humanus personae*, described by Wojtyla, the integral nature of personal experience as subjectivity is revealed, that is, that which constitutes being in its human beingness, "Acting, then, as well as doing, indicates that I as a person, have both an objective and subjective reality of my own."²⁴

From the psychological view, one's value may be derived from examining the meanings of chosen actions by a particular person. As Wojtyla has pointed out this can be seen by looking to the subjective and objective dimensions of an experienced reality. A person discovers oneself through the immediacy of one's own actions and the realization that those actions are guided by values. Although values are in many ways discovered through reflection upon their adequacy or inadequacy in terms of satisfying one's intention, there is another constituent (reflexiveness) which does not become apparent through reflection but which is present at the moment of the act.

What is present as one acts is an expression of the reflexive function of consciousness. What is lived through at the moment is later put into the perspective of integrated meaning by the reflective function of consciousness. Insistence on the primacy of the reflective function of consciousness in phenomenological methods for psychology have resulted in

a cosmological interpretation of the human person rather than remaining with the personalistic and subjective reality.

The authentic subjectivity of the human person can be revealed only by a deepened and broadened comprehension of the complementary dialectics which occur with a cosmological and personalistic view, which in reality mutually affirm one another. The irreducibility of experience shows that what a person experiences is given to that person as meaning and becomes integral to one's own being.

The irreducibility of one's own being is what is experienced prior to the reflective function and as a result, indicates that there is an element of non-transferability in one's own being.²⁵ The primacy of the reflexive function of consciousness to the reflective function of consciousness reveals the immediacy and uniqueness of experience when considering the primacy of the intransitive component to the transitive.²⁶

At first glimpse this appears contradictory. But when realizing that the "lasting" effects of experience are interdetermined with the values which are found in and guide immediate experience, it is possible to see that what is transitive and only temporary in influence gives way to meaning that remains through time. Speaking of experience in terms of temporality, the reflexive function of consciousness intuitively puts a person in contact with what is valued. Transcendence is natural to the personalistic view of being and reveals a person in the act of intellectually turning toward meaning in an openness which guides one's search of understanding. Besides becoming aware of the immediate meaning of experience through an effort of attention, the reversal in thinking required by the reflexiveness of consciousness brings about a perpetual revision and recasting of reality.

In terms of psychological method, it is possible to describe this immediate contact: one can be present to a moment of action through which the personal meaning of self is *being* constituted. Thévenaz and Wojtyla call for the priority of the intuitive, reflexive function of consciousness. For Wojtyla, in order for one to begin to understand the nature of the human person by looking at experience, one must reverse many of the accepted ways of thinking. Wojtyla says, "Consciousness is based on reflexiveness and not on reflectiveness."²⁷ Agreeing that an effort of attention is required in order to expand the reflexive, Thévenaz says, "attention renders an adequation of consciousness with itself immediately."²⁸

Going further into this distinction, Thévenaz describes the reflexive function as centripetal in movement, a constitutive power more primitive than intentionality, while reflection is a centrifugal function. The reflexive function describes how meaning is brought toward the subject from experiences undergone and how the person is present to the world. The

recuperative movement of consciousness reintegrates and clarifies just what meanings are to become one's own, as *what* and *who* one is and can be.

These distinct functions of consciousness describe meaning and at the same time the act of self-constitution as it happens, that is, the human being in its beingness. This is a dialectical relationship which occurs in experience when the person turns toward the world and the meanings in the world move toward the experiencing person.

In reflection, the subject relives meaning, integrating the experience into an already-existing framework of understanding. Knowledge changes and becomes the further basis for the ongoing reflexive function. One has both the subjective consciousness of one's own actions through the reflexive and the objective understanding of one's own being through the reflective.

Intentionality and the reflective function of consciousness are based upon the reflexive function. The objective consciousness of one's own action and its meaning is available through a reflective synthesis, while the subjective, personal consciousness of self in its own act of self-constitution is available through the reflexive function. Wojtyla uses the concept of self-cognition²⁹ to demonstrate how this works in experience:

“Self-cognition”, therefore, is the ontic foundation of human consciousness, thereby making it an objective human reality for the “person-act.” As an ontic principle of human consciousness, the “self-cognition” of man not only precedes it, but it is also its ultimate source of reflection and its final limitation.³⁰

For doing qualitative research, this means that the personal meaning of experience as lived subjectivity is available in the immediate grasp of meaning:

Thus, the reflexiveness of consciousness is something different from reflection as cognizing our own acts of thinking. Its turning to the subject is of a quite different sort: it makes the subjectiveness of the experiencing ego appear, it directs everything back to the subject, and it makes the ego experience himself as the subject.³¹

The irreducible nature of experience is not only what the person reveals oneself to be but what experience means in terms of one's understanding of self in relation to the objective order of reality, that is, the *who* of one's own being. This displays the subjective and objective character of personal experience. Thereby, two opposing principles are transcended by a direct conception of reality.³² The meaning of human experience moves within its own *durée Inbetween*³³ these two poles. To fix its location at any

one given point seems an impossibility. Distinctions can be made although they are impossible to separate. Each is essential in order for the other to exist. The complementary functions of consciousness, the reflexive/reflective, allow questions proper to meaning of experience and the human person to arise.

What Thévenaz has described as the complementary, centripetal movement of reflexiveness is fundamental to achieve an understanding in regard to the nature of the human person. Presenting Wojtyla's formulations, Woznicki shows this to be, "the basic intellectual principle through which man not only reveals himself as a person, but also experiences himself as an 'acting person.'"³⁴

In this mode values are recognized as integral to what has been subjectively experienced. In experience, values inhabit meaning and tie subjectivity into the objective, arrangement of value by choice, demonstrating each person's potential for transcendence.

Woznicki's exegesis of Wojtyla's thought shows how values come not from the contents of consciousness as professed by the idealistic expressions of phenomenological tradition but from meanings experienced by a substantial, actually existing and sentient being:

Human experience, then, is value-oriented through one's own feelings and stimulated by one's emotions. In other words, in experiencing his own self, man realizes that his emotional feelings reveal to him something which is felt as a value.³⁵

The distinction of sensation and emotion comes from the content of sensation, as the image of the object, which is a reflection. Sensation shows a person's action in terms of content while emotion demonstrates one's reaction to value. For Wojtyla, "Sensation by itself is sensual; moreover, it contains also a 'body-factor.' The value which it evokes, however, need not be a material one only."³⁶ Valued meanings are that toward which one strives in personal action. Wojtyla calls this, "value-feeling"³⁷ showing how a person opens toward one's interior life, consequently orienting oneself toward that same value-feeling in one's daily actions. Value in both the personal and objective sense, is at the root of human action. Referring to St. Thomas, John Paul II says, "True philosophy should faithfully mirror the order of things themselves, otherwise it ends by being reduced to an arbitrary subjective opinion."³⁸

Notes

- 1) Sunnie D. Kidd and James W. Kidd, "On the Concept of the Human Person", *Migrant Echo*, X, no. 3 (September-December 1981), p. 192.
- 2) Andrew N. Woznicki, *A Christian Humanism: Karol Wojtyla's Existential Personalism* (New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1980).
- 3) *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 5) Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness", *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 5, no. 1 (Fall 1975), p. 10.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 7) Wojtyla, as quoted by Woznicki, *Existential Personalism, op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 8) Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man", *Analecta Husserliana*, VII (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1978), p. 111.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 12) *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
- 13) Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community", *The Review of Metaphysics*, XXXIII, no. 2 (December 1979), p. 274.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 16) Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, "The Structure of Self-Determination as the Core of the Theory of the Person", *Atti del congresso internazionale (Roma-Napoli, 17-24 aprile 1974) Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario* (Naples: Edizioni domenicane italiane, 1975), p. 42.

- 17) Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, "Osoba: Podmiot i Wspolnota", (Person: Subject and Community), *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, 24, fasc. 2 (1976), pp. 5-39.
- 18) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, trans. James M. Edie, Charles Courtney and Paul Brockelman, ed., intro. James M. Edie, preface John Wild (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), p. 135.
- 19) Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *Osoba i Czyn*, (Person and Act) (Krakow: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969), p. 129. Personal translation by Andrew N. Woznicki, October 1980.
- 20) Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community", *op. cit.*, p. 282.
- 21) Andrew N. Woznicki, "St. Thomas on Wisdom, Order, and God: Via Ascensionis et Descensionis". Paper presented at the Sixteenth International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo at the Western Michigan University, 2 May 1980, pp. 20-21. Elaborating upon the importance of the classical thought represented by the Lublin School in the formation of Wojtyla's system of thought, Woznicki describes this cooperative effort: "Independently of any other scholarly studies in St. Thomas' philosophy of being, the Lublin School of Thomism is perhaps best represented by Stefan Swiezawski, Stanislaw Kaminski, and Albert Krapiec. In mutual cooperation they re-examined St. Thomas' metaphysics from the historical, methodological, and systematical philosophical aspects, respectively." Andrew N. Woznicki, "Dialogistic Thomism and Dialectical Marxism", *The New Scholasticism*, LII, no. 2 (Spring 1978), p. 219.
- 22) Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community", *op. cit.*, pp. 283-284.
- 23) Tadeusz Styczen, intro. to Cardinal Karol Wojtyla's "The Problem of the Theory of Morality", *Theory of Being to Understand Reality* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1980), p. 162.
- 24) Woznicki, *Existential Personalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- 25) *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 26) Wojtyla, as quoted by Woznicki, *Existential Personalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 27) *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 28) Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

- 29) Although Wojtyla speaks of “self-cognition” we prefer “self-knowledge” to describe this reflexive function.
- 30) Woznicki, *Existential Personalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- 31) Andrzej Poltawski, “Ethical Action and Consciousness: Philosophical and Psychiatric Perspectives”, *Analecta Husserliana*, VII (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1978), p. 120.
- 32) Styczen, “The Problem of the Theory of Morality”, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
- 33) Sunnie D. Kidd, “Music: An Intersubjective Durée”, *Migrant Echo*, IX, no. 3 (September-December 1980).
- 34) Woznicki, *Existential Personalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- 35) *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 36) Wojtyla, as quoted by Woznicki, *Existential Personalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- 37) *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 38) John Paul II, “Method and Doctrine of St. Thomas in Dialogue with Modern Culture”, General Audience of 20 October 1980, *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 42 (654) (20 October 1980), p. 9.