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# *Karol Wojtyla and René Descartes. A comparison of the anthropological positions*

Karol Wojtyla y René Descartes.  
Comparación de sus posturas antropológicas

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**Abstract:** This article takes up the problem of whether Karol Wojtyla can be called a dualist, as René Descartes is widely held to be. Detailed analyses of Wojtyla's works lead us to the conclusion that he cannot be classified in this way, although he is aware of a duality that marks human existence. Wojtyla presents us with an integrated and coherent understanding of the human person drawing upon the metaphysical concept of *suppositum* and a wide exploration of basic human experience as grasped by a phenomenological method.

**Keywords:** Wojtyla, Descartes, person, dualism.

**Resumen:** Este artículo aborda el problema de si Karol Wojtyla puede ser considerado dualista, cosa que es ampliamente aceptada de René Descartes. Análisis detallados de las obras de Wojtyla nos llevan a la conclusión de que no se le puede clasificar de este modo, aunque sí es consciente de una dualidad que marca la existencia humana. Wojtyla nos presenta una comprensión integrada y coherente de la persona humana a partir del concepto metafísico de *suppositum* y una amplia exploración de la experiencia humana básica, que es captada por un método fenomenológico.

**Palabras clave:** Wojtyla, Descartes, persona, dualismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to penetrate the motivational background of a philosopher. It is not easy to establish with a high precision what prompted a thinker to formulate a particular theory or what resources have been drawn upon. Occasionally we meet someone who straightforwardly gives us a glimpse of his inspirations, intellectual adherences and preferences. Then we can relatively smoothly classify the person into this or that philosophical school or set of ideas. What about Karol Wojtyła, a former pope John Paul II? Do we really know what kind of philosophy he was involved in? In Poland, the country of his birth and the place of his philosophical activity, a discussion took place on whether he was a Thomist or a phenomenologist. The conclusion was far from clear: he had drawn upon both philosophical traditions. Thus some commentators consider him a phenomenologically-oriented Thomist but others just an original phenomenologist accepting some parts of the Thomistic doctrine. In his writings we can find reasons for both interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

Along this line of inquiry, we can ask other questions concerning his philosophical adherences. We can for instance inquire: was he Cartesian? Or more broadly, was he a thinker operating in the

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1. This dispute was taken up and advanced by many philosophers and Wojtyła's commentators, not only Polish ones. Among them we can point to: J. Galkowski, J. Kalinowski, Ph. Jobert, J. P. Dougherty, J. de Finance, A. Reimers, to name only a few. See P. GUIETTI, F. MURPHY, *Translator's Afterword*, in R. BUTTIGLIONE, *Karol Wojtyła. The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids (MI)/ Cambridge (U.K.), 1997) 323ff. Also, one of the first interpretations of the issue, in the international arena, was put forward by Rocco Buttiglione in the mentioned-above book. This issue is still important and returns in recent publications on Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. E.g. see A. REIMERS, *Truth about the Good. Moral Norms in the Thought of John Paul II* (Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, Florida, 2011) 44ff. Recently, this topic was also undertaken by a Spanish philosopher Juan M. Burgos. He points out that "what Wojtyła is searching is a re-elaboration of Thomistic gnoseology that considers the advances of Modernity and mostly the possibility offered by the phenomenology of directly accessing to the subjectivity of the person." See J. M. BURGOS, *The Method of Karol Wojtyła: A Way Between Phenomenology, Personalism and Metaphysics*, "Analecta Husserilana" vol. 104 (2009), 110, in A.-T. TYMIENIECKA (ed.).

Cartesian tradition? As far as we know from his declarations he did not describe himself in this fashion, nor did he entertain a special sympathetic attitude toward the works by René Descartes. We know this from reading his work. Thus we can say, without committing a major error, that our philosopher was not *a* Cartesian. Nonetheless, we can still ask: was he ‘Cartesian’? There are some premises allowing us to make such an investigation and they will be spelled out below. Additionally, we want to establish how strongly Descartes influenced Wojtyła’s philosophical activity. Maybe, without full realization, our thinker was a covert ‘Cartesian’ or someone who was unable to detach himself from the philosophical legacy of the French philosopher? Answering this question, or at least trying to do that, we can pave a firmer way to establishing Wojtyła’s philosophical originality. All in all, this paper is an attempt to compare the anthropological positions of these two philosophers.

René Descartes is considered the father of the Modern philosophy. He inspired many thinkers but also caused great opposition in philosophical circles. We can even venture into a thesis that he “produced” as many followers as adversaries. In a sense he influenced many other philosophers, even if only in an indirect way. I do not intend to pursue this line of investigation. My goal is much more modest. I want to investigate, on a limited scale, a similarity, a vicinity and finally a divergence of two thinkers: René Descartes and Karol Wojtyła. There is a good reason for doing this: both were involved in the philosophy of the human person and were attempting to shed some light on the complexities of human nature. They faithfully tried to read out a fundamental human condition and give it a coherent interpretation. In this paper I will be trying to prove that despite similar starting points, they differ substantially. At the end of their investigations, they present us with two various pictures of the human person and consequently the human being.

## 2. DESCARTES AND HIS THINKING ABOUT THE HUMAN BEING

The French thinker employed in his philosophical activity a method different from what had been used at that time. As it is widely known

his was a method of critical doubting. Applied to the human being it yielded important results. Even if the human being was commonly perceived as a complex entity, Descartes cast doubt on its basic coherence and inner integration. His objection was centered on a dilemma: Does the material component of human existence get along well with the spiritual existence and is it really complementary to it? What struck the French philosopher was the fundamental difference between the two as far as their “morthologies” are concerned. The extended thing—the body—is comprised of particular organs and parts. They can not only be distinguished but also separated from each other and “taken” as such. In short, the body is divisible even if it makes up a whole biological organism. The thinking thing—the mind—exists differently. It cannot be treated and perceived as the former. As Descartes puts it very clearly, “when I consider the mind, [...] I can distinguish in myself no parts, but I very clearly discern that I am somewhat absolutely one and entire.”<sup>2</sup> The mind is a unified reality and has nothing in common with the space and operations typical for it.

The extended thing and thinking one look like two separate realms of human life. Descartes was not at ease when he tried to describe the relationship between them. Actually, his major problem concerning the human being was to put forth a credible interpretation of how the body interacts with the mind. On the one hand, he declared that what is going on with the body and in the body has a slight or almost nonexistent impact on the mind. In this approach we hear him say, “although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet, when a foot, an arm, or any other part is cut off, I am conscious that nothing has been taken from my mind.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, there is a kind of unity and interaction between them. For example the mind is associated with the body and somehow influences it. Descartes acknowledges that saying, “the soul must be more closely united with the body than the helmsman is with his ship, because if it is to make up a real man it must have not only the

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2. R. DESCARTES, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Med. 6, no. 19.

3. Ibidem.

power to move the body but also feelings and appetites like ours.”<sup>4</sup> The mind and the body constitute a human being but a kind of duality is manifest in it all the time.

How did Descartes interpret that duality? Was he able “to get out” of it in the long run? He tried some strategies to reconcile these two various realms of human existence. But he was unable to find an inner connection between the extended thing and the thinking one. They accompany each other, somehow influence each other, and even make up a real man, this we know from our practical experience and insight, but the substantial connection is beyond us: it is somehow incomprehensible for us. The body is murky and how it relates to the mind is far from clear.<sup>5</sup> What we know definitely is the thinking thing with its ideas. Descartes stresses this point so decisively that finally from an epistemological stance he moves to a strong metaphysical thesis. He builds up on what is cognitively obvious for him, has clear representations in his thinking, and declares, “I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, understanding, or reason.”<sup>6</sup> Or:

This taught me that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which doesn’t need any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly this me—this soul that makes me what I am—is entirely distinct from the body, and would still be just what it is even if the body didn’t exist.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* seems to be a lasting legacy of Descartes’ thinking about the human being. Of course, we cannot exclude or play down his further and original contributions to philosophical investigations but the dualistic outlook does constitute his hallmark. As a consequence, to carry out a philo-

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4. R. DESCARTES, *Discourse on the Method*, ch. 5.

5. Of course, we can always say that the only concept of the body, or to be precise the idea of extension is distinct and clear.

6. R. DESCARTES, *Meditations* cit., meditation 2, no. 6.

7. R. DESCARTES, *Discourse* cit., chapter 4.

sophical reflection on a human individual, we must take this or that stand toward Descartes' project. That stand can be either utterly critical and dismissive or positive and creative. A third way seems to be less plausible. Of course, there are some thinkers, involved in the philosophy of the human person, who do not make any direct reference to the French philosopher. But because of the important position of the latter, the former will probably be read and interpreted through the lenses of Descartes. Especially when a structure of the human being is the center of attention, and a relationship between the body and soul is a subject of philosophical investigation. This seems to be the case of Karol Wojtyła.

### 3. KAROL WOJTYŁA'S UNDERSTANDING OF MAN

When we embark on Wojtyła's understanding of man we cannot skip at least some essential differences between him and René Descartes. First, they lived in different times and had different scientific knowledge regarding the human being. It goes without saying that it gives an edge to the former. Second, they were involved in philosophy with different "professional sympathies": Descartes was unwilling to engage in scholastic philosophy and through his own method intended to find new insights into the human being;<sup>8</sup> Wojtyła accepted some Thomistic and scholastic principles (metaphysical, anthropological) but wanted to enrich and modify them. Third, Wojtyła was better positioned epistemologically due to a phenomenological method he had mastered; Descartes was a talented rationalistic thinker<sup>9</sup> but understandably had no idea about

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8. Some of Descartes' commentators suggest that he was unable to detach himself completely from scholastic thinking. However, the French philosopher was personally opposed to the latter and criticized some important segments of it, e.g. the concept of substantial form. His correspondence with Henricus Regius reveals this attitude. See *The Correspondence between Descartes and Henricus Regius*, E.-J. Bos (ed.) (The Leiden-Utrecht Research Institute of Philosophy, Utrecht, 2002) AT III, 505, 115.

9. Wojtyła as John Paul II acknowledges that Rene Descartes is at the beginning of Modern rationalism. He even stresses that "all rationalism of the last century—as much in its Anglo-Saxon as in its Continental expression in Kantianism, Hege-

phenomenology.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the basic philosophical methods they employed were also different: Descartes, as we already mentioned, drew upon critical doubting, whereas Wojtyla represents an attitude of wonder toward the human being.<sup>11</sup> Despite these and other differences, they were determined to inquire into the human being and the human person, and shed some light on the intricacies of human existence.

At the beginning of his investigation concerning the human being, Karol Wojtyla notices a duality underpinning any human existence. There is something active and passive in us; something which engages us as persons, and something which seems to take place beyond our personhood. The Polish philosopher considers that distinction using two fundamental expressions: “man acts” which in my personal experience is given as “I act,” and “something happens in man” which in my personal reception is made into “something happens in me.” The former is marked by my clear personal involvement in a sense that I do know that I initiate an act, I am actively present while carrying it out, and I can take all consequences stemming from the act. The latter is less connected with my “I.” I experience the act as a kind of activity that takes place in me or with me but I have no power over it or this power is very limited. We can easily refer the expression “I act” to a conscious and

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lianism, and the German philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to Husserl and Heidegger—can be considered a continuation and an expansion of Cartesian position.” See JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2005) 51.

10. Of course, we can point to different concepts of phenomenology and Descartes as a phenomenologist or a non-phenomenologist. In a broader sense, we can claim that analysis of the content of consciousness as a starting point for philosophical activity is a kind of phenomenology. In this sense, the French philosopher closely resembles a phenomenologist. However, in a strict sense, phenomenology is connected with Edmund Husserl and his specific method of cognition. Here we have no basis to call Descartes phenomenologist, whereas this is the case of Karol Wojtyla.
11. K. WOJTYLA, *Osoba i czyn* in K. WOJTYLA, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin, Poland, 1994) 70. I am drawing on a Polish original of *The Acting Person* because my intention is to grasp Wojtyla’s analyses and remarks in their exactness. As far as the English translation of *Osoba i czyn* is concerned, there are some doubts concerning its adequacy. See TH. SANDOK (translator’s remarks), in K. WOJTYLA, *Person and Community. Selected Essays* (Peter Lang, New York, 2008) 207.

free center of my being, namely to my person; whereas the reality of “something happens in me” to my body and all physiological and biology-based processes in it. In short, the latter seems to belong utterly to a bodily causation.

This duality, which is manifest with these various dynamisms shows that in a human being there are two realms, which can hardly be reconciled with each other. When we measure them by a depth of personal involvement, only “I act,” is it something which engages me as a person. “Something happens in me” seems to belong to a non-personal objectivity that merely accompanies that of the personal. Wojtyła even concedes that “human being acting’ structure and ‘something happens in man’ one seem to divide the human being into two worlds.”<sup>12</sup> However, the philosopher does avoid a dualistic interpretation and goes in the opposite direction. He makes it clear that although they are different and even diverse, they explain each other.<sup>13</sup> How to understand that position?

Let us first concentrate on preliminary similarities between them. The Polish philosopher underlines that “I act” and “something happens in me” stem from within, from an inner sphere of the human being. Putting aside an occurrence “something happens with me” which is usually caused by an outer factor, “I act”—my doing—and “something happens in me” stem—as put it Wojtyła—from the same dynamic subject.<sup>14</sup> They are examples of “dynamic activity” and “dynamic passivity” pertinent to any human being.<sup>15</sup> Our philosopher provides us additionally with a reference to a couple of Aristotelian notions: *agere - pati*. “I act” is an example of *agere* but “something is happening in me”, *pati*.

Wojtyła points to a source of unity, which enables us to treat the human being as one ontological entity. He employs the notion of “dynamic subject” which has its origin in the Latin concept of “suppositum.” It was used both by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and etymologically points to something, which is put “under” (*sub-*

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12. K. WOJTYŁA, *Osoba* cit., 121.

13. Ibidem, 112.

14. Ibidem, 114.

15. Ibidem, 115.



*ponere*). The Polish philosopher draws an analogy to man saying, “thus ‘under’ any action and ‘under’ anything happening in him ‘lies’ the human being. *Suppositum* points to being subject itself or points to a subject as a being.”<sup>16</sup> This subject then is common ground for various dynamic structures be it the “I act” structure or “something happens in me” one, and therefore calls for further clarification.

Wojtyla undertakes some additional efforts to spell out the notion of *suppositum*. He does that with a question: What is the relation between the latter and the notion of *esse*? They seem to play a similar role: they just constitute a very fundamental dimension of the human being. In the Thomistic philosophical tradition there is an adage saying, “operari sequitur esse.” It points to a precedence of being over action. In short, in order to act (*operari*) something must first exist (*esse*). The latter then is at the very outset of any act of the person as well as any occurrence taking place in him. Nevertheless, the Polish philosopher is cautious about identifying one with the other. The *esse* is an aspect of the *suppositum*, even if a constitutive one. But the *suppositum* itself should be considered as a broader “platform”: it plays the role of subject as for existence (*esse*) as for various activities (*operari*).<sup>17</sup>

These metaphysical distinctions and clarifications are necessary but at the same time insufficient to capture the reality of the person. Thus on the one hand, we can reasonably claim that to be a person is to be the *suppositum*. But on the other, to be a person contains something more. Wojtyla, as a thinker operating between the Thomistic metaphysical tradition and the phenomenological personalistic approach, is fully aware of that complexity. Thus without any hesitation he claims that the person should be identified with the metaphysical subject. It is coherent with the Boethian definition of the person (“*persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*”) and underlines that the latter always exists as a subject of existence and action. In other words, the reality of the person ‘embraces’, in a sense, an ‘in-built’ metaphysical structure, and as a consequence

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16. Ibidem, 122.

17. Ibidem.

that “metaphysical subjectivity (*suppositum*) must manifest itself as personal subjectivity.”<sup>18</sup> But that approach, sometimes also called “cosmological,” is insufficient to spell out the fullness of personal existence. That is why Wojtyła declares straightforwardly, “the Boethian definition mainly marked out the ‘metaphysical terrain’—the dimension of being—in which personal human subjectivity is realized, creating, in a sense, a condition for ‘building upon’ this terrain on the basis of experience.”<sup>19</sup>

Wojtyła decidedly stresses that to be the person is something more than to be individuated nature. The former then stands for something that goes beyond a meaning of ‘individual of the human kind’. As he puts it emphatically,

The term ‘person’ has been coined to signify that a man cannot be wholly contained within a 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’.<sup>20</sup>

The person does possess in itself a kind of fullness, which goes beyond an attribute of human nature namely its specificity. It rather embraces uniqueness and unrepeatable as its constitutive elements. Our philosopher makes a reference to a Polish word “osoba” (the person), which takes its roots from a Polish adjective “osobny,” (in rough translation into English it is close to the word “separate”). The “osoba” is someone but not something.<sup>21</sup> That is why the understanding of the person’s *suppositum* must bring out that difference between someone and something. Wojtyła claims that “the person is a *suppositum* but so different from others which surround man in

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18. K. WOJTYŁA, *The Person: Subject and Community*, in K. WOJTYŁA, *Person and Community* cit., 225.

19. K. WOJTYŁA, *Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being*, in K. WOJTYŁA, *Person and Community* cit., 212.

20. K. WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1981) 22.

21. In *Love and Responsibility*, our author puts it this way: “As an object, a man is ‘somebody’—and this sets him apart from every other entity in the visible world, which as an object is always only ‘something’.” See K. WOJTYŁA, *Love* cit., 21.

the perceptible world. That difference [...] permeates into a root of being itself.”<sup>22</sup> This root of being, as we already indicated, consists in its *esse*. If then constitutive elements of the person are rooted in its *esse*, it means that the latter must be understood analogously in each case. Thus any human individual has a different *esse*. It does not only introduce numerical differences into the world of persons, as some philosophers suggested<sup>23</sup> but brings about something more. Wojtyla puts it this way:

The person, man as a person, is a *suppositum*, that is a subject of existence and action. However, its existence (*esse*) is personal but not only individual like in a case of individuated nature. Following this, *operari*—understood as a whole dynamism of the man (including actions and occurrences which obtain in him)—is also personal.<sup>24</sup>

The question that arises when we read Wojtyla’s analyses is: What is the exact difference between individuated human nature and the person who is characterized by uniqueness and unrepeatability? Reasonably we can say that it is a difference of degree: a personal existence puts a deeper mark on human existence than individuated nature. Or it can be a difference of kind: to be a person is a new quality of existence. If we accept the latter, then we have resources to explain why there are various kinds of persons: human, angelic, divine (maybe animal). The person assumes this or that nature as a metaphysical terrain—a domain where it comes to be and fulfills himself. Of course, such answers have a metaphysical character. Wojtyla does not avoid or play down the metaphysics, as it is already obvious for us, but nonetheless it seems that his reply to our ques-

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22. K. WOJTYLA, *Osoba* cit., 123.

23. If we do not introduce a difference on this very fundamental level of existence, we can be prone to accusation expressed by John Macmurray. From the side of the philosophy of dialog, he claimed that “there is a multiplicity of individual thinkers. Each is ‘I’, an Ego, a Self. But their distinctness is purely numerical; qualitatively they are identical.” See J. MACMURRAY, *Persons in Relation* (Humanity Books, Amherst, 1999) 23.

24. K. WOJTYLA, *Osoba* cit., 123.

tion would have a more phenomenological character. He stresses quite often in his writings that what reveals a uniqueness of the person is his interiority (the sphere of spiritual and mental life).<sup>25</sup> What is strictly associated with that is lived experience.<sup>26</sup> This in turn introduces us to a great variety of human individuals because everyone experiences himself uniquely and in a way, which cannot be repeated by anyone else. Moreover, the uniqueness of any person is guaranteed by his actions. In *Love and Responsibility* Wojtyła stresses that what is typical for that interiority is “the power of self-determination, free will.” Hence “no one else can want for me. No one can substitute his act of will for mine.”<sup>27</sup> As an acting individual entity, the person is someone who experiences himself uniquely, and so acquires his knowledge, including self-knowledge. He carries out his acts of will in specific, unrepeatable ways and as a result of that can be accredited with a title of the incommunicable and the inalienable reality.<sup>28</sup> Thus answering our question, we can say that individuated human nature is not yet the person, although it participates in its structure. The former is a terrain, which with its resources creates a favorable sphere for personal reality. But to be a person means to transcend the mere domain of human nature, even individuated one.

#### 4. THE PERSON AND THE NATURE. TWO INTEGRATED FACES OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Similar to Rene Descartes, Karol Wojtyła was aware of the tension and even the opposition between the person and its nature. He considers that topic within a so-called phenomenological reduction. “Reduction” is understood by him as an attempt to make evident a

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25. For instance, in one place our philosopher claims: “who man is in himself is over all associated with his interiority.” See K. WOJTYŁA, *Człowiek jest osobą*, in K. WOJTYŁA, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia* cit., 418.

26. K. WOJTYŁA, *Subjectivity and the Irreducible* cit., 212.

27. K. WOJTYŁA, *Love* cit., 24.

28. Ibidem.

given content.<sup>29</sup> In this approach the man is perceived as a dynamic wholeness. "Nature" encompasses that dynamic wholeness because it is given as a result of being born. Its features are established by belonging to a human family, hence, they are given but not chosen by an agent. As the Polish philosopher observes in this context, "nature points to the dynamism of subject, that is, it points to this kind of activity which is entirely included in the dynamic readiness of this subject."<sup>30</sup> Such dynamism is not in need of a personal causation because it works through an actualization of its own, non-personal "potentiality." Thus Wojtyla concludes that nature, in such an understanding, reveals itself through the structure of "something happens in me."<sup>31</sup> As we already mentioned, this sphere of human existence is not only beyond our human causation but also, to a considerable extent, beyond our control. In this sense it is opposed to the human person who reveals himself chiefly through purposeful and intentional actions, in which operativity/efficacy plays an essential role.<sup>32</sup> Hence, only about the person can we say that he is an author of these actions and because of that can take a responsibility for his deeds.

Nevertheless, Wojtyla is convinced that we can say something more about man. The presented above grasp of nature is justified in its own right but in a broader picture is one-sided. It underlines a manner of operation (*modus*) but not a subject of that operation. The Polish philosopher points out that we have a stronger experience concerning the human being. The experience consists in a simple and fundamental grasp of man where what is given is the subject "man" marked out by unity and identity. Together with that we can carry out a synthesis of action and occurrence, the structures of "I act" and "something happens in me," a synthesis of causation and a subject of causation on the ground of one and the same *suppositum*<sup>33</sup>. How is it possible?

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29. K. WOJTYLA, *Osoba* cit., 127.

30. Ibidem.

31. Ibidem.

32. Ibidem., 115ff.

33. Ibidem, 128.

The Polish philosopher points out that the sole idea of *suppositum* introduces us to thinking in terms of the unity and identity of man. All our intentional and purposeful doings, as well as, occurrences taking place in us belong to a personal subject. Wojtyła uses here the word “ownership”: a personal “someone” does have them. Despite differences in causation, as the former so the latter have a personal subject at their beginnings. What is interesting in this context is a distinction, introduced by our philosopher, between an experience of personal causation and an experience of inner identity.<sup>34</sup> Within the structure “something happens in me” I do not go through a feeling that I am a cause of what is going on, and I am indeed not a cause of it, but nevertheless I do experience a kind of inner identity of the happening within myself, and that it is dependent exclusively on me. The experience of identity is justified by the same source as all strictly personal acts. That source then—a personal subject—must have a different character than a Cartesian mind. *Suppositum* is definitely a diverse and more complex “platform” for various human phenomena than the mind.

The distinction between the person and human nature is sustained in this philosophical position but it does not mean any separation and exclusion from each other. Thus an attempt to integrate one into another is not meant by our philosopher as a reduction of one into another or a deduction of the person from nature (as we already suggested, the person is not an instance of individuated human nature), or vice versa. The distinction can be something novel in English-speaking philosophy because there is a tendency (e.g. in naturalism) to mix one with another and to consider man rather within a category of personhood. Wojtyła underlines that this distinction is justified by the moment of causation. To be the person is to be a cause of action where the essential role is played by such factors like deliberation, rational intention, free will, and personal responsibility. To be a person, in short, is to manifest operativity/efficacy. To have human nature, perceived within a phenomenological reduction, is to be dependent on physiological and emotional

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34. Ibidem.

elements. In a literal sense these two faces of any human being are distant from each other, and we can even classify them into two various categories (adequately into mind and body).

Nevertheless, we have strong reasons to capture them within a unified theoretical scheme. A hylomorphic concept of man, which seems to underpin Wojtyła's thinking, provides us with such a conceptual space. Our philosopher, though familiar with this metaphysical orientation, keeps it for a next stage of his analyses and at this one tries to provide us with a phenomenological justification. He points to an experience of man as a tool of the final confirmation of his unity. He declares, "the experience of unity and identity of my "I" is objectively prior, and at the same time more fundamental, to the experiential differentiation between action and occurrence, causation and non-contradiction of the 'I'."<sup>35</sup> Thus, although we have plenty of experiences given, we have at the same time an ability to discriminate between them: some of them strike us as more fundamental than others. The experience of the unity of man seems to be of this former sort.

At a further stage of his analyses, Wojtyła undertakes a second attempt to integrate the person with nature within a so-called metaphysical reduction. Here a vital role is played not by a phenomenological insight but by metaphysical thinking. First, the Polish philosopher offers a different understanding of human nature: for him its meaning is close to an essence of humanhood. He advances that topic saying, "nature in a metaphysical grasp is somehow the same as an essence. Thus the nature amounts to the whole "humanness," however understood not statically but dynamically; that is, humanness as a foundation of all dynamism typical for the human being."<sup>36</sup>

Second, at this stage Wojtyła reemploys a medieval adage "operari sequitur esse." It contains a couple of important meanings some of which were mentioned above. It says that in order to act, something must first exist. But action is comprehended here as something different to existence, although both can be reconciled in

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35. Ibidem, 129.

36. Ibidem, 130.

the same man who exists and acts. Furthermore, *operari* can be referred as to “I act” as well as to “something happens in me.” In a sole adage there is no clear distinction between these two dynamisms. However, such a broadly conceived action is associated with human existence per accidens; the former is just an accidens of the latter. But what arouses a special interest in Wojtyła is the relationship between action and an acting subject in the order of essence (whereas previous relations belong rather to the order of existence).<sup>37</sup>

Our philosopher stresses in the adage the word *sequitur*, which is an expression pointing to a coherence between action and a doer. This coherence can only be grasped and set out by the nature. Wojtyła asserts, “nature is a foundation of essential coherence between a subject of dynamism and a whole dynamism of this subject.”<sup>38</sup> What is excluded here is a grasp of nature as only one aspect of man, or more precisely, as one manner of making him dynamic. It means that here we are far from an identification of the nature with the human body and its biological mechanisms. The nature concerns the whole human being, namely as his strictly personal center as well as his bodily constitution. Our philosopher points out that “coherence obtains always and everywhere when any *operari* follows (*sequitur*) a human *esse*. Foundation of this coherence is human nature, that is humanness permeating into a whole dynamism of man, and dynamically shaping this dynamism as human.”<sup>39</sup>

As we mentioned above, to be the person is something more than to have individuated human nature. In the adage “*operari sequitur esse*,” the *esse* must be a source of various human dynamisms, including these strictly personal ones. Wojtyła puts it even stronger pointing to *esse* as a factor responsible for personal existence (“a sole subject is the person because he possesses personal existence [*esse*]”<sup>40</sup>). It means that although the *esse* contains different potentialities, it is chiefly marked by a unique way of existence. Nature then is something that joins and enriches the subject and its various

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37. Ibidem.

38. Ibidem, 131.

39. Ibidem.

40. Ibidem, 132.



dynamisms. Our philosopher goes even further claiming that if any dynamism is associated with humanness, by the same token it is indeed personal.<sup>41</sup> It leads to two conclusions. On the one hand, if the personal in the *esse* is the “highest” dynamism of the human being, it also encompasses the “lower” ones and makes them all into the one integrated being—the human person. On the other hand, to exist as a person is enabled by the “terrain” which is humanness. As the Polish thinker puts it, “humanness, human nature, is equipped with such properties which enable a given human being to be the person: exists and acts as the person.”<sup>42</sup> If we accept such a perspective, then to be a person is neither a human mind (the Cartesian approach) nor a bundle of personal characteristics (a naturalistic approach) but a human being who is integrated in himself to such an extent that he is simultaneously bodily and spiritual.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Answering the preliminary questions from the introduction, we can say that Karol Wojtyła must be somehow perceived as a post-Cartesian philosopher. He conducted his analyses as a thinker who operated between a medieval paradigm of philosophy and a Modern one.<sup>43</sup> That means that he must have mustered a good deal of the latter, especially a phenomenological approach which has its share in post-Cartesian rationalism. Nevertheless, it does not mean that he was Descartes’ follower. The truth is indeed the opposite. Both inquired into the basic structures of human existence strug-

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41. Ibidem.

42. Ibidem. Such a connection between human nature and the person paves a way to an expression “the body expresses the person” which in turn brings a vital support when we ponder a special status of the former. See JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 2006) 26.

43. Wojtyła described himself as someone whose philosophical activity takes place between the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness. He compared himself to a translator who is between two languages. Consequently he tended to uncover (explain) one way of philosophizing through the other, and not to cover, that is not to exclude any of them. See K. WOJTYŁA, *Słowo końcowe w dyskusji nad ‘Osoba i czynem’*, “Analecta Cracoviensia” 5-6 (1974-1974) 258.

gling with the duality that marks man's condition. But only one of them can be depicted as a dualist, and that is the case of René Descartes. Wojtyła undertook an effort to prove that factors such as the fundamental experience of the human being, and the concept of *suppositum* inform us about a unity and integrity of man. Of course, he was far from any monistic positions and his proposal must be understood as an exposition of the unity in complexity. Thus to our main question, 'was Karol Wojtyła Cartesian?', we must answer negatively. He was not a 'Cartesian' of any sort despite some similarities with the French philosopher. The Polish thinker was interested in understanding of reality, especially the human reality. In order to do that, he drew upon various ideas and methods. Thus we can call him a man of dialog open to a creative exchange of ideas, especially when they served a better exploration of the human person. In such an investigative attitude we can also perceive the philosophical originality of Karol Wojtyła.