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TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE ANTHROPOLOGY

Wojtyła's anthropology contains an exceptional methodological potential. This should not be repeated but rather developed further and it should enter the debate which is taking place today concerning the method adopted by the Humanities, Law, Economics, Sociology [...] Indeed, a correct understanding of the nature of the human subject is of necessity reflected in the method of understanding the different aspects of human behaviour and the motivating structures which are connected with it.

1. Your Honour, The Rector of the Catholic University of Lublin, Dear Professors, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is not without a sense of excitement that I begin to speak on this occasion, in which I find myself standing before you to receive an Honorary Doctorate from the Faculty of Philosophy of the Catholic University of Lublin. The granting of an Honorary Doctorate always brings with it a unique sense of excitement into the life of a scholar, all the more so considering that this distinction is being conferred by such a prestigious faculty as the one of this University, famous for the works of great scholars such as M. Krapiec, S. Swieżawski, J. Kalinowski, J. Z. Zdybicka and many others, to whom I apologise for not being able to name personally. This faculty played a role of exceptional importance in remembering, reaffirming and defending the rights of man and the truth about the human person in a period difficult and at the same time glorious for the history of Poland and the world. However, the sense of excitement which I feel somehow takes on a new and completely different dimension because I was, albeit at a distance, a pupil of this University and it was here that I was given a decisive stimulus in the development of my personal vocation as a philosopher by one of its masters. I am referring to Prof. Karol Wojtyła who held the Chair of Ethics at this faculty. As all men of our age, I admired and followed the great testimony which he bore to the truth about God and man and to the presence of God in the history of man. As a Catholic I am grateful for the firmness he demonstrates in defending and spreading the faith in Christ. Furthermore, I owe, together with many of those present in this hall, a debt of gratitude to Wojtyła the philosopher for the new avenues which his thought has opened for the investigation of man. In joining his school of thought, I met others who had begun to follow him as his pupils

before I did and who were a source of guidance for me. My special thanks go to them. In this context I also remember Mons. Francesco Ricci, a remarkable promoter of cultural life who, fascinated by Polish culture, translated and made known K. Wojtyła's texts together with other works of the free culture of this land towards the end of the sixties in Italy. It is to him that I owe the first stimulus that enabled me to get to know your culture, as a part of this the Catholic University of Lublin, and finally, in Lublin, Wojtyła. Mons. Ricci was the first to encourage me to write a study about the then Cardinal of Cracow. Next, I must say of a word of thanks to Prof. Stanislaus and Mrs. Ludmiła Grygiel, whom I met in those years and who introduced me to the ethos of that friendship of free and faithful men which had grown around the philosopher Wojtyła and which spreads as an ideal, as happens in every friendship based on the Christian communion, so much that it somehow includes all men. Finally, I am particularly indebted to Father Tadeusz Styczeń who played the part of the elder assistant to his younger colleague, guiding me with discretion towards an ever deeper understanding of that mystery of man around which the whole of Wojtyła's philosophy is developed.

It is for this reason that today's situation is a little paradoxical: those conferring this degree on me are people from whom I have truly learnt much, and so I have real reason to turn my eyes to this *Alma Mater Lubliniensis* as a source from which I have drawn considerably. Therefore, my situation is similar to that of an ordinary student who, coming to the end of the course of his studies, is told by his professors, "Now that you have learnt enough, you are one of us," rather than to that of a famous foreign scholar about to receive an honorary title.

For this reason I am similar to a student of this faculty and yet different, something which certainly none of you can fail to notice, as you listen to the strange and slightly barbaric manner in which I pronounce the words of your most beautiful language: a Westerner, an Italian who comes to take lessons from Poles. What is the meaning of this? At that time I adopted the conviction of the unity of European culture and, even more so, the idea that fundamental values which we were forgetting in the West were being rediscovered in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe under the burden of Communist oppression.

2. What could have driven a young Italian scholar in about the mid seventies to become interested in Polish philosophy, and that of Lublin in particular? There were two philosophical options which were most often open to those beginning to study philosophy at that time: one of these was Marxism, the other Nihilism. Marxism was the final product of Western Rationalism, i.e. the conviction that man is capable of changing the world completely through his own efforts in such a way that the brand of original sin, death and the alien-

ation of one man from the next and of man from nature, could be done away with forever. History would then be read as a process of the progressive self-revelation and self-realization of the truth. I dedicated a large part of my first years as a philosopher to the study of the Frankfurt School, considered by us as the critically most advanced form of Marxism. The conclusion which I reached was that the Frankfurt School should rather be considered as the great self-critic of Marxism and Rationalism in general. There exists no guarantee that history can bring man closer to the Ideal. The history of man has always run along the edge of the abyss, and any acquired value, any good which finds expression in this, is always temporary, is always in danger. W. Benjamin once wrote that redemption could manifest itself at any point in history. However, the manifestation of an absolute regression is just as possible. What are the totalitarian ideologies of our century if not the clear manifestation of the possibility of such a regression which has always accompanied history? If there is no positive sense which can be ascribed to history, then it does not suffice to agree with the sense of history in order to be on the side of good. Philosophy cannot be swallowed up in a general science dealing with the sense of history, as Marx would have wanted. If the flow of history can turn in the direction of evil, then we need men who know how to put up resistance to the flow of history, to oppose it and try to guide it. But where will we find the criteria which will enable us to oppose the flow of history if this flow turns towards evil? Where will we find a criterion to distinguish between good and evil? Modern Rationalism has replaced the transcendent criterion for determining the truth about man with an immanent criterion. Now, if this immanent criterion incorporated in the ambiguous word "progress" fails as well, the simplest conclusion we reach seems to be that man is left without truth.

It is not by chance that for the youth of my generation, the true, great alternative to Marxism was Nihilism and the criticism of all values. I remember that among the first things which I discovered in Polish literature, were two verses by Jan Lechoń:

There is no heaven, no earth, no abyss nor any hell.

There is only Beatrice, and she actually does not exist.

Who is Beatrice? Beatrice, as is known, is theology, the knowledge of divine matters, the guide to plumb the depths of the truth. And at the same time, Beatrice is a woman, love, that existential encounter in which a passion for ourselves and for the truth is inflamed. Indeed, the first truth that has to be discovered is the one that we ourselves were created for the truth. This truth however manifests itself in the other. And it is by discovering ourselves reflected in the gaze of the other who loves us that we become profoundly interested in the truth.

Is it possible to dispense with the "sense of history" without falling into Nihilism? If so, we would then require a true idea of man according to which

the progress and regression of history could be measured. Nevertheless, there exists an obstacle deeply rooted in the whole of the Enlightenment tradition which leads us to reject such a positive idea about man. Here we are dealing with the fear that starting from a positive definition of man, a claim could arise to impose those obligations deriving from a positive theory about man on the historical, concrete, real man. It is a fear that a metaphysical vision of reality could define the position of man in the cosmos without leaving anything out, reducing him to being simply one of the elements in the cosmos and denying that what constitutes him most essentially: his freedom, his capacity to transcend any definition or limit which is imposed on him from the outside. It is not by chance that Th. W. Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectic*, speaks of a "negative anthropology," i.e. of such a way of describing man which contains, on the one hand, a sufficient degree of positivity to protest against any progress which destroys man, but which on the other hand, does not contain enough positivity that man could be reified by being incorporated into nature – thereby turning him into a possible object of possession. Classical anthropology is weighed down by the conjecture of conceiving man simply as an object in the world, placing him in a hierarchy of created beings within which – no matter how high the position granted to man may be – that which characterizes him most deeply, i.e. his capacity to be himself, to be his own creator to a certain extent, is cancelled out. Here we are touching upon the axiological roots of modern atheism: God cannot exist because if God existed, man could not be free – he would be swallowed up by the natural world. If, on the other hand, one accepts the assumption that man himself creates his own essence because his existence, i.e. the act of his choosing precedes, essence and determines it, it then becomes difficult to protect him from others or even to speak of a common human essence in a strictly logical sense. If every subject creates its own essence freely, one cannot exclude a multitude of human essences incompatible and at conflict with each other, each of which will be the bearer of duties in relation to the others which cannot be determined *a priori*. At this point it appears necessary either to accept a multitude of human essences, or to maintain that it is not the individual but the human species which determines its own essence by virtue of its own existence. But the existence of the human species is history and if one chooses this option, existentialism, which arises as a protest against Marxism, ends up by returning to the latter, as was indeed the case in Sartre's philosophy.

3. The problem facing us can now be formulated in the following terms: is it possible to conceive of man without reducing him by reifying him, and at the same time without allowing his freedom to establish itself in such a way that it can threaten the rights of other men? And then why should we be interested in the other? Only for fear of reprisals that he could avenge himself for the

injustice committed against him? If this is the root of our interest in the other, then it may be possible to establish a domain of justice among men, but this justice will only be for the powerful. This form of justice will be based on a utilitarian calculation and everybody will have, in effect, as much right as he has power. Justice will then limit itself to anticipating the result of the fight between the powerful; in this way it will enable them to reap the benefits of that which everybody else would have gained by means of a hard struggle without bearing the costs which a struggle would have entailed. This type of justice is certainly compatible with Nihilism; moreover it provides it with a socio-political expression. It is probably not inappropriate to connect a certain apologetic ideology of Capitalism with this form of Nihilism. Capitalism is seen here as a system in which every man pursues his own aims, considering other men exclusively as a means to realize his own aims. The market is a place which firstly gives no qualitative judgement as far as these aims are concerned; secondly it guarantees a set of conditions so that anything that is done by those involved in order to achieve their aims is not in contradiction to, but compatible with the activities of every other member of society. The Sophist Trasimaco already affirmed something not very different from this in Plato's Book I of the *Republic* and gave expression to the basic idea of a theory of justice as a convention. What is suitable to the powerful, is just. It suits the powerful to oppress the weak and reach an agreement so as not to be oppressed by others who are powerful. Since no human being and no group in society is absolutely powerful, and on the other hand, no human being and no group in society is absolutely powerless, the life of such a society is characterized by a continuous and trying conflict between groups and individuals who try to take advantage of each other to reach their own aims. But is it really true that nobody is absolutely powerful and nobody absolutely powerless?

Let us see. In Books 8 and 9 of the *Republic*, Plato presents a cyclic theory of political regimes which includes some very sharp criticism of democracy, or at least of that type of democracy which has united with ethical Relativism – Sophism being the most complete expression of this during Plato's lifetime. Citizens no longer care for their institutions and institutions no longer have any prestige attached to them. The logic of the market goes beyond the confines of the domain where it is legitimate, i.e. of the production and exchange of vendable goods, and consequently invades all areas of life. Love and honour, contracts and court verdicts are all sold then. Paradoxically, the market economy itself also enters a state of crisis at this point. The market requires goods and services which have to be produced outside the market, which should not be "bought and sold freely." For example, the market needs the security of justice and thus also of judges who cannot be bought or sold. But the security of justice is not guaranteed by judges alone. What could an honest judge do in a system in which there were no honest witnesses, in which the duty of being

loyal towards the truth were not written into the conscience of at least the vast majority of citizens and those running the economy? The market needs Law and Ethics as well, and not only in the limited domain from which we have taken our examples. Put in more general terms, we could say that no society is conceivable without at least an element of selfless recognition of the truth and a minimum dedication to the common good. A system which destroys this and allows a Nihilistic principle to triumph in an absolute manner, ends up being unable to function. People suffer under the burden of the never-ending struggle between the different interest groups, which recommences as soon as one of the social groups believes that it is capable of obtaining better conditions for itself. Moreover, the discord between social subjects enables a group with a minimum of internal cohesion or with a leader who succeeds in arousing a minimum of personal loyalty among his followers to seize control over society, and thus gain a position of absolute power. In particular, the spread of the Nihilistic mentality leads to the situation that differences in power within society arise, thus opening the way for the transition from democracy without any values to tyranny. And it is this aspect which is not considered in a certain popular version of Popper's political philosophy (which does not coincide with Popper's authentic thought), or in certain forms of Liberalism which see in the market the sole regulator of social processes.

We have seen that it is not impossible for there to be a qualitative difference in power between one individual or social group and all the others. The individual or group having absolute power would then enjoy the privilege of possessing absolute rights and would be above good or evil. In a conventional system good and evil should always be bargained over, and bargaining can only exist if there is a relative balance of power.

But is it then true, if we go to the other extreme of the social scale, that there exists no-one who is completely without power, who is also excluded from the sphere of justice because he finds himself in this case not above but below the level of justice? Our thoughts are directed almost automatically to the child, and in particular to the unborn child in this case. Here we come across the clear model of a subject who is completely powerless and thus excluded from any form of bargaining. Apart from its objective, moral gravity, the question of abortion is also a measure of the anthropology and the self-consciousness of a nation, of the quality of the concept of justice on which a nation would like to build its existence. This is however not the only example. The example of the elderly is similar. They, too, gradually lose their power and with this, according to a conventional concept of justice, also their rights. In the final stage of life they end up stripped of both of these. Furthermore, we can compare the sick and the handicapped to the elderly.

If we do not want to accept these consequences we must take a second look at the Nihilistic model of understanding human relationships, acknowledging its

antinomic character and the fact that in the end it contradicts itself. We can see this in a similar way in *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, as described by Horkheimer and Adorno. Extreme individualism triggers off a reaction which in the end swallows up the subject within an indifferent community, reducing him to one of many elements in the human mass governed by a power which imposes itself from the outside onto the subjectivity of every member.

4. If we want to avoid these consequences, if we want to take into consideration the immanent self-criticism of both Marxism and Nihilism, we have to return to the problem of negative anthropology. Does there exist an anthropology which, on the one hand, is capable of establishing the transcendent dignity of the human person, and on the other hand, does not reduce man to being simply an element in the cosmos, irrespective of how great his value and dignity are? I came across Wojtyła's way of thinking exactly at that moment when I was asking myself these questions together with so many other young philosophers of my generation. We were then fascinated by the idea of a "critical theory of society," i.e. a concrete philosophy which is capable of intervening in the course of history of man and of society, criticising the present injustice and showing the way for a more human and more authentic way of life. This had to be an interdisciplinary philosophy capable of maintaining a dialogue with the Humanities and capable of re-uniting their contributions to the service of man. But how can this be achieved if the idea of man is missing, if the concrete form of the human person who should serve as a regulatory criterion in the task of social criticism is absent?

It seemed to me then, and it stills seems to me, that I found in Wojtyła's anthropology exactly that "negative anthropology" which we were looking for. I could try to summarize in the following way what struck me most about this and what I consider to be crucial: the recognition of being, the acceptance of truth is not a limit to human creativity, whereby this is only relative and different from the creativity of God which is absolute. On the contrary, receiving oneself through the mediation of another, existing as a result of a pure gift, and obedience to the truth which is present in the other, are all part of the deepest rhythm of divine life itself. There is here, I think, a hidden theological tendency which runs through the whole of Wojtyła's personalism and renders it fully understandable only from a perspective that is at the same time both Christological and Trinitarian. The Christian God is not an absolute and arbitrary freedom. The Christian God is love, and before being this in His relationship to man, He is this in Himself, in the relationship of one person to the other in the Holy Trinity. The construction of one's own self-awareness, starting from the presence of the other, from the recognition of the gift of the other, is the fundamental law of personal existence; it is the law of freedom. Man's creativity is always set in motion by the gift of the other. The gift of the other,

on the other hand, does not define man in such a way that it limits him, but rather it opens his subjectivity towards the outside, it frees his creativity. Man is creative in as much as he is concerned with his neighbour, with his being in general, with himself, since his own being is a gift. Being concerned means going beyond what has been given, but at the same time it means accepting and respecting it. Seen in this way, the philosophy of *The Acting Person* is really an exposition of the anthropology of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council. This anthropology is negative in the sense that it does not pretend to define with one concept what the good and what the truth about man is. The truth of each man is defined in his lifetime in an endless and unforeseen dialogue with other men, with the natural world and with divine providence. Nevertheless, one can define negatively certain obstacles which have to be removed so that this dialogue can take place, so that the person can begin to be himself by opening himself up to the other and discovering the richness of the other. Although it is not possible to give a definitive definition of what good is (this stems from the personal character of Goodness), it is however possible to say what evil is and to define the dynamism of the recognition of the other in the truth which guides the development, growth and self-understanding of human freedom. It then becomes impossible to oppose obedience to truth to freedom. Man discovers himself in that relationship to the other in which the other is recognised and accepted as a value which deserves to be affirmed for itself. For this reason, it is quite unthinkable that a person can freely create himself and deny this recognition of the other. This is then seen rather as a non-creation, a move in the direction of nothingness.

Thus, the person is simultaneously and indivisibly both an individual and a community. The affirmation of justice towards the other corresponds to the truest interest of the person as a person, an interest which is not based on defending one's own personal benefits, but rather on the affirmation of the world of values, which the person discovers in his relationship with the other and within which he also discovers himself as a value. Such a view of justice takes us beyond the opposition between conventional concepts and metaphysical concepts, in which the primary source of justice is to be found in a system imposed on man from the outside. Here the existential experience of the encounter with the other is indeed the place in which the metaphysical force of the concept of justice manifests itself. The existential order is recognised because it is lived and experienced, thereby revealing itself as a personal way of life. Is this perhaps not also the intention of St. Thomas when he speaks of the natural law as *participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura*? The *lex aeterna* is in fact the divine plan over the world which manifests itself in the natural order, but which is then developed in history in an infinite dialogue with every single human freedom. Respect for this original, natural gift does not exhaust the way of the human search for good, but rather stands at its beginning and guides it.

The understanding of the person as an individual and as a community takes us beyond the opposition between the collective and individual dimension of human existence and beyond the possible absolutism of one or the other. If we consider this from the point of view of social philosophy, we can see that society cannot exist without a market, i.e. without the individual moment; in such a society the subject would be swallowed up in an amorphous collectivity. But at the same time a society cannot function if all that it has is only the market. The market is an institution which is rendered possible by virtue of the fact that it is surrounded and sustained by other institutions which support and limit it. Without the moment of self-determination of freedom which decides for itself, the gift of the person himself would be impossible. But a form of freedom which rejects this gift and condemns itself to infinite solitude destroys itself. Social responsibility and individual self-determination interconnect with each other again and again, and in a way that must be rethought and redesigned continuously in the construction of every human society.

The philosopher Karol Wojtyła studied this reciprocal connection particularly within the first human community, within the family. Moreover, as we have already said, the deepest inspiration of Wojtyła's anthropology is Christological and Trinitarian in nature, but his method is strictly philosophical. In the natural order, the truth surrounding the communal nature of the human person reveals itself most clearly if we take a look at the dynamism of falling in love and then at marital love. Falling in love means discovering the other and discovering oneself in the other; furthermore, it means finding the whole world reflected and rendered clearer in this love. Moreover, pregnancy is the human experience in which one man is carried within another human being and is entirely dependent on him. It is not too difficult to see in this a symbol of the dynamism of every form of love and of every true human relationship, which means taking on the responsibility of carrying the other in one's own heart to give birth to him for the truth and good, and at the same time to accept that one is carried in the heart of another in order to be born from him. As a philosopher of the person, Wojtyła was at the same time a philosopher of marital love and the family. As we have seen, there is a need for a method in this: sexual inclination is the natural place in which the dynamism of interhuman relationships is undertaken with the utmost clarity. At the same time however, the philosophy of the family is the starting point for the philosophy of society. Every person is indeed created spiritually out of love, and if in the name of the freedom of the person we weaken that primary structure in which this creation-process has its origin, we contribute to the construction of a society of incomplete individuals, for whom it is inevitably difficult to become aware of the nature of their own freedom. If we direct our thoughts attentively to this fact, then it becomes possible to understand the connection existing between the crisis of the family and the spread of Nihilistic philosophy: the Nihilistic world view is similar to an incomplete personality which had no possibility of learning the dynamism

of the self-conscience and the self-realization in an existential way. In this context, the essential function of the family as a community which passes on culture and plays an educational role according to a measure of the truth can be understood even better.

5. All these things which I am repeating to you today, I learnt at the school of a Polish philosopher, from a professor of this University. Through him I became the pupil of many of those who were his masters and colleagues and whose way of thinking is interconnected with his. As I mentioned earlier, I am a pupil as you are, but still I am a little different from you. Different because I am an Italian, a citizen of a country which has had a different history and a different cultural and philosophical tradition. It is this very difference which enables me – having learnt so much from you Poles – to say something to you which my different historical/cultural perspective perhaps allows me to see more easily. Wojtyła's anthropology contains an exceptional methodological potential. This should not be repeated, but rather developed further, and it should enter the debate which is taking place today concerning the method adopted by the Humanities, Law, Economics, Sociology. Indeed a correct understanding of the nature of the human subject is of necessity reflected in the method of understanding the different aspects of human behaviour and the motivating structures which are connected with it. The problem which the Frankfurt School exposed but left unsolved is that of a concrete philosophy, of a philosophy which can explain the decisions man makes – and not only in the private sphere but also in the case of a collective decision, a political decision. The philosophers of the Frankfurt School distinguished various links at the level of an attempt to connect the different Humanities. Their undertaking came to a halt because they lacked an adequate anthropology which could supply the language necessary for the different Humanities to be able to communicate with each other, and to come together on the practical level of rendering a service to the human person. Wojtyła, who drew from and then in an original way reinterpreted the philosophy of the person elaborated right here in Lublin, offered in a certain sense the very methodological basis which could go beyond the failure of the Frankfurt School and enable the construction of an authentic "critical theory of society." This enables man to resist becoming a mere slave to social mechanisms and guides him towards the construction of a society in which – in as far as this is possible – each man's way towards his own destiny is facilitated. Such a concrete philosophy or political philosophy, which would allow us to consider the market and solidarity in a common context, is what the nations of Europe and the world urgently need today.

Translated from Italian by *John Buczak*