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Integration in the Supposit: Thomistic Personalism’s Answer to Identitarianism

Introduction

Karol Wojtyła developed Thomistic personalism as a means of acknowledging the significance of the modern turn to the subject while avoiding the seemingly inevitable subjectivism to which it had given rise. In order to preserve the objectivity of human nature, Wojtyła insists on Thomistic metaphysics as the necessary foundation for his investigations. On top of this metaphysical structure of objective being, though, Wojtyła adds a nuanced phenomenological analysis of the uniqueness of the individual person. His method, then, balances the objectivity of human nature with the subjectivity of each person. This project is especially relevant today, in ways which Wojtyła could not anticipate, for we have seen a dramatic rise in the idea that people can reject any objective human nature and instead define themselves according to purely subjective criteria. This preference for a wholly

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subjective identity disassociated from all objective reality may be called identitarianism. As the rancorous debates of contemporary politics demonstrates, the presumption that one can choose their own identity has deleterious consequences not only in philosophy but also for society.¹

This degeneration to pure subjectivity can be refuted both in terms of Thomistic metaphysics as well as personalist phenomenology. Indeed, although the two replies use different methods and vocabularies, they point to the same reality and so offer a compelling instance of Wojtyła's appropriation of Thomistic metaphysics. In this paper, I will argue that one of the most fundamental aspects of Thomistic metaphysics—the analogical nature of being—helpfully illuminates Wojtyła's understanding of the critical role that integration plays in his phenomenological analysis of the unique individual. In particular, I will show that the problem of identitarianism arises only if one obscures the foundational reality of the substance/subject in favor of some arbitrary property. This happens when one neglects the analogical dependence of properties on the independently existing substance. This error is reflected in the phenomenological reification of those subordinate properties, which impedes integration in the subject. This reification of mere properties—things like race, or sex, or ideology—is the cause of identitarianism. Accordingly, to protect the truth of human existence, we must recover the analogy of being as the basis for personalist integration.

¹ Some of these consequences have been insightfully analyzed by Charles Taylor who invokes ideas like “excarination” and the “buffered self” to connote the loss of a common metaphysical nature, and which Taylor sees as central to the modern worldview; see *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). A more direct critique of identitarianism, building on Taylor and others, is in Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

To elucidate the dependence of Wojtyła's analysis of integration on Thomistic metaphysics, I will begin by noting how Wojtyła uses the notion of the supposit as the metaphysical basis for his personalist phenomenology. Then I will outline the metaphysical notion of the analogy of being to show how the supposit must be given precedence over any of the modes of being dependent on it. Then I will argue that Wojtyła's idea of integration can be understood as a phenomenological application of that distinction between an independent supposit and dependent properties. As a corollary, failure to integrate can lead one to conceive of himself in terms of one of those properties instead of a person who exercises self-possession in ordering those properties. This disintegration of the person is, in the end, an ethical failure reflecting a metaphysical error.

The Supposit

A clear statement of the relation of Wojtyła's personalism to Thomistic metaphysics is presented at the start of his essay "The Person: Subject and Community."² Wojtyła is interested in the person as a subject; yet, as Kenneth Schmitz points out, Wojtyła's use of subject has a dual connotation: following scholastic philosophy, it is to be a subject of being, a metaphysically subsistent entity, while for modern philosophy it implies a conscious self possessing an inward awareness.³ This

² Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community" in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 219–61. (It was originally published in *Review of Metaphysics* 33 (1979), 273–308.) This essay is a recapitulation of the argument from *The Acting Person*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979).

³ Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła / Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 131.

same dual connotation should be read into Wojtyła's emphasis on the importance of the person as a supposit in this essay. A supposit can be defined as "that which underlies all the accidents of a thing, i.e., the individual substance of a certain kind which is the subject of existence and all accidental modifications which constitute the individual."⁴ Wojtyła begins with this because a supposit, as an instance of a nature, can be considered either in terms of its universal nature or in terms of its individuality. Since Wojtyła's primary concern is to explore the individuality of the subject in terms of a phenomenology of action, he somewhat briefly acknowledges the foundational metaphysics required to grasp the supposit in terms of its nature. But his phenomenological analysis never implies that he is leaving the metaphysics behind him.⁵ Indeed, since the nature establishes the parameters for the acts of any supposit, the metaphysical truth of the nature must continually inform our assessment of actions as manifesting the subjectivity of the supposit. In the absence of those metaphysical parameters, it is in fact impossible to meaningfully assess the actions of any subject.

Nevertheless, Wojtyła does not merely want to restate the metaphysical tradition. Rather, he wants to employ phenomenological analysis to discover personal subjectivity, the way in which the agent experiences himself not just as an instance of a nature, but a "concrete self, in every instance unique and unrepeatable."⁶ Indeed, it is the privilege of human nature that "our own subjective being and the existence proper to it (that of a *suppositum*) appear to us in experience precisely as a self-experiencing subject."⁷ This experience of the self, though, is

⁴ Roy J. DeFerrari and M. Inviolata Barry, *A Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), s.v. *suppono*.

⁵ A particularly clear assertion of this is in *The Acting Person*, 80–83.

⁶ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 223–224.

⁷ Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in *Person and Community*, 209–217, at 213.

not one of “pure consciousness.” That is the error of many modern thinkers, including Husserl, who end up with a Cartesian ego, an utterly subjective reality with no objective foundation whatsoever, thereby creating problems of personal identity. In reply to this, Wojtyła argues that “the experience of the human being (and especially the experience of my own self) clearly reveals that consciousness is always subjectified in the self and that its roots are always the *suppositum humanum*. Consciousness is not an independent subject, although by means of a certain abstraction [...] which in Husserlian terminology is called *epoche*, consciousness could be treated as though it were a subject.”⁸ Phenomenology can help expose the subjectivity of the person; however, Wojtyła also sees that if it is not correctly grounded in the ontological unity of the supposit, phenomenology has a tendency to isolate the subject from the nature. This isolation of consciousness would make it impossible to recognize our common humanity.

By contrast, Wojtyła locates the experience of consciousness as simply one moment or aspect of how each agent experiences “both others and myself in the whole process of understanding the human being.”⁹ Consciousness is that particular operation of the person by which we become aware of our subjectivity. Nevertheless, that operation must be grounded or integrated into the objective nature of the supposit. Thus, Wojtyła argues that the person knows himself as object and subject simultaneously: “Consciousness is the ‘ground’ on which the ego manifests itself in all its peculiar objectiveness (being the object of self-knowledge) and at the same time fully experiences its own subjectiveness [...]. Consciousness allows us to have an inner view of our actions, and of their dynamic dependence on the ego, but also to experience these actions as actions and as our own.”¹⁰

⁸ Wojtyła, “Person: Subject and Community,” 226.

⁹ Wojtyła, “Person: Subject and Community,” 221.

¹⁰ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 42; emphasis in original.

Consciousness, then, not only acts as a cognitive mirror reflecting to our self-awareness everything we do; it also is a reflexive knowledge of our peculiar agency by which “the subjectiveness of the subject is brought into prominence in experience.”¹¹ Consciousness brings out the subjectivity of supposit, while simultaneously making us aware of its objective metaphysical grounding. This self-awareness conditions our experience, for in seeing the subjectivity of the self in light of human nature, I can exercise governance over the sort of person I become. Conversely, to reify consciousness, or any particular aspect of the self made known to us in it, would be to implicitly repudiate the necessary unity and grounding of those moments in the supposit as an instance of human nature. This problem, then, points us in two directions: the metaphysical unity of the supposit, and the phenomenological unity of act in personal governance. We now turn to those questions.

The Analogy of Being

The necessity of an analogical approach to being becomes evident once we concede that everything must be conceived of in terms of being. As Thomas puts it, “That which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being. Consequently, all the other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being. But nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being—in the way that a difference is added to a genus or an accident to a subject—for every reality is essentially a being.”¹² Thomas’s point here is that the only thing other than being is non-being; but non-being is in fact nothing, and so is not only

¹¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 43.

¹² *De veritate* 1.1; translation from *Truth*, trans. by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., James V. McGlynn, S.J., and Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954).

inconceivable, but also irrelevant to any rational analysis. Thus, every thing we conceive of in any fashion must be conceived in terms of being. Now, as Thomas shows, very few concepts are convertible with being, properties that are ontologically identical with being but notionally distinct. These are the transcendental properties (one, true, good) which add some logical perspective to being, and so belong to every being simply as a consequence of its existence. Everything else we can conceive of must be a determinate mode or kind of being. Therefore, we must see how being can be divided into discrete kinds.¹³

Thomas will frequently note that the first distinction we make in being is that between real beings and beings of reason: “The term ‘a being’ in itself has two meanings. Taken one way it is divided by the ten categories; taken in the other way it signifies the truth of propositions. The difference between the two is that in the second sense anything can be called a being if an affirmative proposition can be formed about it, even though it is nothing positive in reality [...]. In the first way nothing can be called a being unless it is something positive in reality.”¹⁴ This distinction is based on the obvious fact that we can make true statements about things which do not exist. For example, “Harry Potter is a wizard” or, “That hole is big” or, “Man is a species.” The first is an instance of a fiction—things that do not exist in the world of real supposits, but which are an integral aspect of our cultural heritage. The second is a negation or privation; it is recognizing the absence of being that is parasitic on the reality of the supposit of which it is a privation.¹⁵ The third is an example of a logical predica-

¹³ The following paragraphs expand on the argument in the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* IV.1.539–543.

¹⁴ *On Being and Essence* c. 1, trans. Armand Maurer. 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968).

¹⁵ The most significant instance of this is evil as a privation of being (*Summa Theologiae* I.48.1).

tion: while only individual supposits subsiSumma Theologiae in the real world, universal natures are said of them in order to make scientific arguments. What is clear is that each of these ways of speaking is utterly dependent on the real existence of the supposit; beings of reason require real minds to make intellective judgments of predication or negation, or to imagine a fictional world. In other words, these modes of being are mind-dependent.

In distinction to these beings of reason, which “posit nothing in reality,” there are real beings, things present in the world. A standard Thomistic dictum is that the first division of real being is between act and potency.¹⁶ Actual being is that which exists now; it obviously follows that it is real. Conversely, potency is that which is not now but which can be. But what can be is utterly dependent on the current state of affairs; the causal principle of sufficient reason demands that there are metaphysical limits to what can be in the future according to what is now. Thus, if something does not currently exist, it is real only to the extent that lies within the potential of that which does currently exist. So, all potential being is (like beings of reason) dependent on the real, actual being of the supposits. While we can conceive metaphysically impossible things—pigs might fly and rainwater might be beer!—in reality that which can come to be is severely constricted according to the actual beings upon which potency is parasitic.

Actual being is that which is actively present in the world. But again, we find a distinction. Every supposit exists in an absolute way; but its accidents exist *secundum quid*, or in a dependent fashion.¹⁷ That is, the supposit is the subject which underlies the continually changing properties like quantity, quality, relation, and so on. My weight certainly exists; my talents exist; but they exist only because I

¹⁶ This is the first of the “Twenty-four Thomistic Theses.”

¹⁷ *Summa Theologiae* I.5.1.ad 1.

exist. Thus, these accidental qualities are existentially dependent on the supposit.

From this analysis of the analogy of being, we can conclude that the supposit is the only independently existent thing; the others are diminishing modes of existence that are all completely dependent on the supposit.¹⁸ This metaphysical structure has significant ethical implications: if the other modes of being are dependent on the supposit, then they must be considered in subordination to that supposit and its nature. In other words, while I can think of myself in terms of accidents, or unrealized potentials, or theoretical predications and imaginations, I cannot let these displace the primary reality that is the supposit: a unique person, but one defined by the metaphysical conditions of human nature.

Nevertheless, this fundamental unity of the human person can be obscured by the sheer complexity of human nature. Indeed, Thomas affirms that human beings are the most complex things in creation:

Things which are below man acquire a certain limited goodness; and so they have a few determinate operations and powers. But man can acquire universal and perfect goodness, because he can acquire beatitude. Yet he is in the last degree, according to his nature, of those to whom beatitude is possible; therefore the human soul requires many and various operations and powers. But to angels a smaller variety of powers is sufficient. In God there is no power or action beyond His own Essence.¹⁹

¹⁸ In the same way, among supposits, creatures are diversely dependent on other things for their activity, generating a ladder of being; only God exists independent of all other things, and so alone exists in an absolute sense. See *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV.11.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae* I.77.2; translation from *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1948. Reprint, Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics, 1981). See also *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.68.6 and II.81.12.

Because of this ontological complexity, there are more accidents and more potencies that might be mistaken as somehow defining us.

Furthermore, this underlying ontological complexity is matched by a psychical complexity. Man's relation to being is mediated by the intellect and the will: the intellect seeks to know all being in terms of its truth, and the will seeks to possess all beings in terms of the perfective nature of the good.²⁰ Thus, our mind and our appetite are continually informed by the breadth of creations. For example, reflecting on the traditional neo-Platonic triad of being, living, and knowing, Thomas notes that the higher powers have greater extension. Thus, being can be defined as what a substance has in itself, life is defined as a substance tending in activity toward others, but reason is defined by its ability to possess other beings intentionally, to bring other beings into itself.²¹ Therefore, as rational, man can assimilate the order of the universe and so virtually become all reality. For this reason, man is a microcosm, with the entire universe virtually present to him in his intellect and the goodness of each of these exercising an attraction on him.²² This men-

²⁰ *De veritate* 1.1. See also *De veritate* 21.1, which presents this double orientation to being in terms of the real distinction between essence and existence: "The true and the good must therefore add to the concept of being, a relationship of that which perfects. But in any being there are two aspects to be considered, the formal character of its species and the act of being by which it subsists in that species. And so a being can be perfective in two ways. (1) It can be so just according to its specific character. In this way the intellect is perfected by a being, for it perceives the formal character of the being [...]. (2) A being is perfective of another not only according to its specific character but also according to the existence which it has in reality. In this fashion the good is perfective [...]. Inasmuch as one being by reason of its act of existing is such as to perfect and complete another, it stands to that other as an end."

²¹ *Commentary on the "Book of Causes,"* Propositions 18–19, trans. by Vincent A. Guagliardo, OP, Charles O. Hess, OP, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

²² *De veritate* 2.2: "[The highest perfection of a creature] consists in this, that the perfection belonging to one thing is found in another. This is the perfection of a knower in

tal realm may present a particular temptation in the process of self-understanding: since the mind holds a universe of possibilities for us, if we suppress the primacy of the supposit, we may grasp at one of those merely intentional realities. Thus, we might take as a surrogate identity a mere being or reason, even a pure fiction, confusing what is in the mind with its existential foundation.

The metaphysical unity of the person is evident in the analogy of being. Let us now turn to Wojtyła's personalism, for his insistence on integration presents the personalist manifestation of this ontological fact.

Integration

Integration is the phenomenological-moral corollary to the primacy of the supposit in relation to its ontologically dependent modes of being. Here, Wojtyła is concerned with the subject as active and dynamic, a point he emphasizes by citing the scholastic adage *operare sequitur esse* (action follows from being). These operations include the whole complexity that we have noted above. However, while Thomistic metaphysics begins with *esse*, phenomenologically *operari* is "the most proper avenue to knowledge of that *esse*. [...] From human *operari*, then, we discover not only that the human being is its 'sub-ject' [sic, implying supposit], but also who the human being is as the subject [implying agency] of his or her activity."²³ Thus, in analyzing the

so far as he knows [...]. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing. The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe."

²³ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 223. In footnote 6 to this (260), Wojtyła acknowledges that "the whole of *The Acting Person* is grounded on the premise

whole spectrum of actions, distinguishing those we undergo as instances of a nature (which are often referred to somatic and psychic activations) from those we initiate as subjects (actions properly so-called), we reveal not only what is typical of human nature (by the former), but also what is unique in any individual subject's mode of acting (by the latter). In this sense, the supposit is not just "the subject in a metaphysical sense [...] [but] everything that, based upon this *suppositum*, makes the human being an individual, personal subject."²⁴

Actions are the critical point of focus for Wojtyła because persons attain a mode of uniqueness through free action in which the subject exercises self-determination:

The form of human *operari* that has the most basic and essential significance for grasping the subjectivity of the human being is action: conscious human activity in which the freedom proper to the human person is simultaneously expressed and concretized. Thus, remaining always within the context of the *suppositum* (the *suppositum humanum*, of course), or subjectivity in the metaphysical and fundamental sense, we can arrive at a knowledge and explanation of the subjectivity in the sense proper to the human being, namely, subjectivity in the personal sense.²⁵

Again, he immediately qualifies this subjectivity and freedom as not that of a pure consciousness. Rather, as argued above, consciousness is a mirror uniting all the various acts of the subject. This reflexive awareness allows us to integrate all these moments and aspects of

that *operari sequitur esse*: the act of personal existence has its direct consequences in the activity of the person. And so action, in turn, is the basis for disclosing and understanding the person."

²⁴ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 223.

²⁵ Wojtyła, "Person: Subject and Community," 224.

personal being into a coherent personhood: “The spiritual elements of cognition and consciousness, along with freedom and self-determination, gradually gain mastery over the somatic and rudimentary psychic dimensions of humanity [...]. In this way, somehow on the basis of this *suppositum*, the human self gradually both discloses itself and constitutes itself—and it discloses itself by constituting itself.”²⁶

Each human subject is unique and unrepeatable (thus defying metaphysical analysis of universal natures) because of the self-determination exercised through free action. A corollary to self-determination, then, is integration, which is the conscious ordering of all the parts of the supposit. Echoing the traditional Aristotelian division of the soul into vegetative, sensitive, and rational powers, but using distinctive phenomenological terminology based on reflexive experience, Wojtyła emphasizes the complex nature of human acting in the world as an organism, as a conscious and affective individual, and as a spiritual being ordered to transcendent union with other persons. A prerequisite for this spiritual transcendence is that the supposit control and order those somatic and affective activations. The alternative is disintegration: the person lacking in self-possession fails to have a united personhood. This means, ultimately, that that person fails to exercise true self-determination because he is controlled by instincts or feelings or ideas, instead of being in control of them and ordering them to man’s proper end. In other words, disintegration is a failure to recognize the unity inherent in the supposit as subject.

Integration occurs when the subject knows he is the source of the various operations by which man exercises self-determination, a “synthesis of actions and activations, of efficacy and subjectiveness.”²⁷ Of course, the ontological basis for this notion of integration of the person is the supposit:

²⁶ Wojtyła, “Person: Subject and Community,” 225.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 79.

These considerations have already brought us on the road leading to integration, regardless of whether or not we keep to the basic distinction between nature and person. Even if nature is to be identified only with the moment of activation, as opposed to the moment of action, which reveals the person in the human being, then the former moment at any rate is not external to the unity and identity of the ego. The experience of the unity and identity of the ego is objectively precedent to and also more fundamental than the experiential separation of acting from happening, of the efficacy from the nonefficacy of the self. The experience of unity and identity extends into the other experience constituting thereby the experiential basis for the integration of nature in the person, in the structural center of its ontological foundation. In this way nature still denotes that form of dynamism as its derivative, which is different from that of the person. The integration does not abolish the differences in the manner the very structural core of a being is dynamized, but simply prevents any tendency to treat person and nature as two separate and independent subjects of acting. In this way nature, conceived as that unique type of support of being which is man and hence the person, still indicates its different causations.²⁸

Here is the phenomenological parallel with the ontological idea of dependent modes of being. Each act, each operation of the human person is a phenomenological moment, an aspect and expression of the subject. However, all of these moments must be united to grasp the whole of the person. If we fail to grasp the wholeness of the person, we inherently violate that person's dignity; when we objectify a single aspect, we thereby miss the person who is only partially expressed in that one aspect.²⁹

²⁸ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 81.

²⁹ This is clearly exemplified in acts of sexual lust where the other person is used merely for pleasure; indeed, in commenting on *Humanae vitae*, he says, "The ethical

This thesis is developed at length in the third part of *The Acting Person*, an analysis of “the integration of the person in action.”³⁰ “Integration” is etymologically derived from the Latin *integer*, meaning “whole, complete, unimpaired.”³¹ Man is a complex psycho-physical unity, composed of subjective passions which we undergo and the efficacious operations of personal self-determination. But “human action is more than a sum of those other dynamisms; it is a new and superior type of dynamism, from which the others receive a new meaning and a new quality that is properly personal.”³² This means that the person should consider himself neither merely as an instance of nature nor as a pure transcendent ego, a person whose unique self-determination cannot be reduced to a mere metaphysical nature. On the contrary, a person is a dynamic unity of both, a unity of a transcendent ego with the underlying supposit as an instance of a nature. In this way alone is the wholeness of the person, the full panoply of act and operations, fully grasped. And this, in turn, is the morally necessary act of the person ordering all actions and operations to his proper end. He thus concludes that:

Man’s complexity appears to be most clearly revealed by the reality of integration. Integration not only brings into view the unity of various dynamisms in the action of the person but also discloses the structures and layers of the complexity of the human being [...]. Integration—pre-

aspect and the psychological aspect [of the conjugal act] appear in this view as two meanings that need to be mutually integrated within the same subject.” This is critical, for only an act that embraces both the biological and psychological reality of love embodies “the value of a true union of persons.” (Citations from “The Teaching of *Humanae vitae* on Love” in Sandok, 310–314, at 311. Cf. *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by H.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 143–173.)

³⁰ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 189–258.

³¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 191.

³² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 197.

cisely because it is the complementary aspect of the transcendence of the person in the action—tells us that the soul-body relation cuts across all the boundaries we find in experience and that it goes deeper and is more fundamental than they are.³³

Wojtyła again illustrates this by contrasting integration with “disintegration.” This occurs when a person fails to exercise self-governance. This failure—as in the Aristotelian incontinent and vicious man—is manifested in moral aberration. “An incapacity to correctly associate does not allow one to make correct choices and decisions; also, the self-determination of the person will be defective in one way or another, and the more serious this defect is the more strongly will it affect the person himself and the harder will it bear on the person's structures of self-governance and self-possession.”³⁴ Thus, integrating all the somatic and psychical processes (that is, bodily and emotional reactions) is necessary for the person to truly exercise efficacy, since only in governing these powers can the subject fully express his subjectivity through self-determination.

The Problem of Identitarianism

In light of this relationship between the analogy of being and integration, I now want to extend Wojtyła's argument. While Wojtyła reflects on integration and disintegration primarily in terms of ethical issues, I would like to show their epistemological and ontological implications.

Wojtyła established how consciousness as a mirror allows us to reflect on our actions and by this come to see how operations constitute the self. A disintegrated person will not be able to reflect on this

³³ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 256, 258.

³⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 195.

correctly, and so will not exercise self-determination in constituting his subjectivity. The moral failure of disintegration arises because the person fails to appreciate the primacy of his ontological unity over those acts. This, I argue, is the source of identitarianism.

We can illuminate this by recalling a point that Thomas makes in discussing how we form concepts from intelligible species presented by the active intellect. The problem is that since being is the proper object of the intellect, implicit in any impressed species is the totality of intelligible being contained in that object. Thus, Thomas asserts, “From one species which the intellect has within itself, many distinct thoughts arise—just as we can think many different things about man from the one species we have of man.”³⁵ Yves Simon interprets this point: “The thing and the object [of thought] do not necessarily coincide totally. Total coincidence of object and thing is found only in an exhaustive knowledge, in which the entire thing is constituted as an object. The object is always identical with the thing, but this identity may be only partial, and in every knowledge that is not exhaustive, there is more in the thing than in the object.”³⁶ Since the intellect can only hold one intelligible aspect in mind, in thinking about things we need to thematize the precise aspect of our cognition.³⁷ For this reason, a rose can elicit concepts as varied as scientific classification for a botanist, a vibrant red for an artist, or a symbol of devotion for a young lover.

³⁵ *De veritate* q. 8, a. 13, ad 2.

³⁶ Yves Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 142.

³⁷ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 85, a. 4: “The reason of this is that it is impossible for one and the same subject to be perfected at the same time by many forms of one genus and diverse species, just as it is impossible for one and the same body at the same time to have different colors or different shapes. Now all intelligible species belong to one genus, because they are the perfections of one intellectual faculty [...]. Therefore it is impossible for one and the same intellect to be perfected at the same time by different intelligible species so as actually to understand different things.”

The problem is that it is necessary for man to direct his attention to a particular intelligible aspect of the object and make that the object of his awareness. We can now turn back to a phenomenology of a disintegrated subject. In reflexive knowledge of the self, a disintegrative personality will obscure the unifying structure of the supposit. This opens the door to identifying oneself with certain actions or even activations: I become, in my mind, just those things. Ontologically, this is to identify oneself wholly with a merely dependent mode of being.

But this displacement of the supposit implies a suppression of common humanity. We can see this in the various ways dependent modes of being come to be given precedence over the substance. Persons will variously come to identify themselves with a peculiar mode of action or particular accident, as when ethnicity or some other superficial quality is taken to be one's identity. Or it may be a particular mode of acting or activation, so that people identify their being with, for example, their sexual orientation. It may be a potency, so that people ignore the reality of their actions and instead emphasize what they could possibly do. Worst of all, they might identify with a mere being of reason, some cultural product or fiction that is popular in society, as we see with "transgender" ideology.³⁸

In any of these cases, to identify with a dependent mode of being, with a mere action, fails to recognize the ontological unity of the supposit. And since the supposit is the basis for conscious integration

³⁸ This tendency to focus on dependent modes of being in exclusion from the central reality of the substance is characteristic of various aspects of modern philosophy as a whole once the analogy of being is forgotten. Without substance, some focus on accidental properties as ontologically independent in themselves, as in Russell's theory of descriptions. Others focus on pure logical possibility instead of ontologically delimited potency, as in the metaphysics of "possible worlds." And some will insist that all reality is mere social constructs, beings of reason with no ontological force, as in much post-modern thought.

which grounds the uniqueness of each person in human nature, suppressing the supposit will also obscure the common humanity that unites all persons. From this arises the noxious identitarianism, the triumph of subjectivity over objectivity. If each person defines himself according to purely contingent dependent modes of being or subjective feelings, we are unable to recognize the other as a thou. As a result, we are destined to be alienated from one another, making mutual participation impossible. In the end, identitarianism will erode society and make the attainment of true happiness impossible.

Conclusion

Many of today's most disconcerting social problems arise because people suffer from the illusion that they can define themselves. This can be shown to be erroneous metaphysically, in the analogy of being in which any instance of human nature differs from others only accidentally, in potency, or in one's thoughts. It can also be shown to be an error morally, in the phenomenological need to exercise self-determination through personal integration. Saint John Paul II clearly warned that subjectivist relativism is the greatest challenge of contemporary liberalism;³⁹ we must heed his warning and insist on the foundational unity of being and truth against those who want to create their own identity in defiance of reality.

³⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), 32.



**Integration in the Supposit:
Thomistic Personalism's Answer to Identitarianism**

SUMMARY

Karol Wojtyła understood that the turn to the subject had beneficially augmented traditional metaphysics by revealing the uniqueness of each person. Nevertheless, he also knew that for those investigations into personhood to resist devolving into mere relativism, the analysis had to be grounded in the metaphysical principles of Thomism. One contemporary illustration of an ungrounded subjectivism is the rise of identitarianism; that is, the idea that people can choose their own identity based on a peculiar property as distinct from our common human nature. In this paper, I will examine both the Thomistic metaphysical and phenomenological personalist bases for critiquing identitarianism. I will argue that the analogy of being, distinguishing substance from dependent modes of being, is the necessary metaphysical foundation for the personalist integration of actions in a subject who, while unique, must be recognized primarily as an instance of a common human nature.

Keywords: Thomistic personalism, Aquinas, Wojtyła, supposit, analogy of being, self-consciousness, reflexivity, integration, identity

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