REALIST TRADITION AND WOJTYLA

When Karol Wojtyla begins his work "Love and Responsibility" with the words "The world in which we live consists of many objects," he also tells us that he is trying to emphasize "objectivity" from the first words of his book even if properly speaking the word "object" refers to something "perceived" by a subject, or person perceiving an "object." For example, I see the desk in front of me. The desk is, for me, an object.

In so doing he is alerting us to his support of the Aristotelian/Aquinian tradition and his approach to the debates between "idealists" and "realists." He is signifying that he comes down more on the side of the realist while appreciating certain contributions about consciousness which we can gain from the philosophies of consciousness, even idealist ones.

"Realist" philosophy, particularly in the tradition of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, refers to a metaphysical perspective that asserts the existence of an objective reality independent of human perception or belief. Idealists, on the other hand, are uncertain about the objective reality and feel more comfortable talking about "perception". Some go so far as to deny our access to objective reality. This latter group is one Wojtyla believes he can overcome by a rerunning of the experiment of Descartes which takes into account certain data he seemed to ignore or miss.[1] The realist philosophical point of view effects the following areas of philosophy accordingly:

Ontology and Metaphysics[2]

• **Aristotle**: Aristotle's realism is grounded in his metaphysical framework, which posits that substances (individual entities) are the fundamental reality. Substances are composed of form and matter. Form refers to the essence or nature of a thing, while matter is the potentiality that, when combined with form, constitutes a concrete individual. For example, a tree is a

[1] See: Corrigan, John, (2020) "The Problem of the Idea of Culture in John Paul II" Roman & Littlefield Lexington Books, Lanham, MD., pgs. 55-58

[2] For supporting documents see: Aristotle's Metaphysics: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.1.i.html; Aquinas: De Ente et Essentia: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://faculty.fordham.edu/klima/aquinas/dee7.pdf

substance with the form (its specific nature as a tree) and matter (the physical material it is made of).

• **Aquinas**: Thomas Aquinas builds on Aristotle's ideas and integrates them with Christian theology. For Aquinas, reality is structured hierarchically, with God as the ultimate source of being. All created beings participate in existence through their essence (what they are) and existence (that they are). Aquinas emphasizes that God's essence is identical to His existence, unlike created beings where essence and existence are distinct.

2. Epistemology[3]

• **Aristotle**: Aristotle's epistemology is empirical; he believes that knowledge begins with sensory experience. Through a process he calls "abstraction", the intellect derives universal concepts from particular experiences. For instance, by observing multiple trees, the mind abstracts the concept of "tree-ness", or what a tree is. In other words, once you have the abstraction you know what someone is talking about when they talk about "trees" in general. If you did not have this abstraction worked out you would have to ask: "what thing are you talking about?" "Can you point to one or give me an example?" But, if you know what "trees" are it is because you have already formed the "abstraction" of trees or "tree-ness."

• **Aquinas**: Aquinas adopts Aristotle's empirical approach but incorporates a theological dimension to explain how we can know things higher than what is normally available to us through natural knowledge. He argues that human knowledge starts with sensory experience but is ultimately completed by God's gift of illumination which helps us understand natural things. Our knowledge is further aided by a special kind of illumination called "divine illumination" which is a grace or series of graces which help us understand divine revelation. Divine revelation can reinforce knowledge of natural things such as in the admonition "Thou shalt not murder." Here divine illumination reinforces what we could already know from reason. However, divine illumination is absolutely necessary when coming to understand revealed mysteries such as the Trinity or the Incarnation. Aquinas maintains that while human reason can attain knowledge of the natural world, certain truths (e.g., the nature of God) require revelation.

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[3] For supporting documents see: Aristotle: *Nichomachean Ethics* Bk 6: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.6.vi.html
Aristotle: *Posterior Analytics*: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/posterior.html
Aristotle: *On the Soul*: https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.html
Aquinas: Summa Theologica: Questions 84,85,86 https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1084.htm

3. Ethics and Natural Law

• **Aristotle**: Aristotle's ethics are teleological, meaning they are oriented towards an ultimate purpose or end (telos). This does not mean that the end justifies the means but rather that acting in a manner which is ethically good is actually woven into the fabric of my being and ultimate happiness. He posits that the highest good for humans is eudaimonia (often translated as happiness or flourishing), which is achieved by living a life of virtue in accordance with reason.

• **Aquinas**: Aquinas synthesizes Aristotle's ethical framework with Christian doctrine. He develops the concept of natural law, which is based on the idea that moral principles are grounded in the nature of human beings, human beings which are a unique kind of "object." Natural law about how to act in relation to myself and other human beings can be discovered through reason. Natural law, according to Aquinas, is part of the divine law and directs humans to their ultimate end, which is union with God. This is echoed in the first words of "Love and Responsibility" "The world in which we live consists of many objects." Especially important are the objects which have the subjective dimension of "human person," – ourselves and others. We need to understand the objects in the world in order to interact with them and use them more effectively to our good and we need to understand the human person, ourselves and others in order to interact with this unique "object" correctly, ethically and to our lasting, ultimate benefit.

4. Realism in Contrast to Nominalism

• **Realism**: In the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, realism asserts that universals (e.g., the concept of "tree") exist in reality and not merely as names or mental constructs. Realists believe that universal concepts correspond to real features of the world.

• **Nominalism**: In contrast, nominalism argues that universals are merely names (nomina) we use to group similar individual entities. According to nominalists, universals do not have any independent existence outside the mind.

5. Theological Integration

• **Aristotle**: While Aristotle's philosophy is primarily naturalistic, focusing on the physical world and human nature, his ideas on the Prime Mover (the first cause of motion) have theological implications.

• **Aquinas**: Aquinas fully integrates Aristotle's philosophy with Christian theology. He uses Aristotelian concepts to articulate and defend theological doctrines, such as the existence of God, creation, and the nature of the human soul.

Realist philosophy in the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition emphasizes the existence of an objective reality that can be known through sensory experience and reason. This philosophical perspective upholds the reality of universal concepts, the hierarchical structure of being, and the integration of ethical and theological principles grounded in the nature of human beings and the divine order.

6. How to consider the meaning of "personalist principle"

The "personalist principle" in the context of personalist philosophy, and specifically in the philosophy of Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of the human person. This principle asserts that every person should be treated as an end in themselves, never merely as a means to an end. It is a foundational concept in personalism, a philosophical approach that prioritizes the value and dignity of the human individual in ethical and social considerations.

Personalist Philosophy in General:

1. **Intrinsic Value of Persons**: Personalism holds that every person has intrinsic worth and dignity that must be respected. This value is not contingent on any external factors such as social status, abilities, or contributions.

2. **Interpersonal Relationships**: It emphasizes the importance of authentic interpersonal relationships, where individuals engage with one another in mutual respect and love rather than manipulation or exploitation.

3. **Ethical Implications**: The personalist principle has profound ethical implications, guiding moral behavior towards respect, empathy, and care for others. It calls for recognizing the individuality and subjectivity of each person.

Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla:

1. **Human Dignity**: Wojtyla's personalist principle underscores the inviolable dignity of the human person. He argues that every person should be acknowledged and valued for who they are, not for what they can do or provide.

2. **Love and Responsibility**: In "Love and Responsibility," Wojtyla explores the dynamics of human relationships through the lens of personalism. He contends that genuine love respects the personalist principle by seeing the other person as a subject to be loved, not an object to be used.

3. **Ethical Framework**: Wojtyla's philosophy integrates the personalist principle into a broader ethical framework that influences his views on social, marital, and sexual ethics. He emphasizes that ethical actions must always consider the person's inherent worth and never reduce them to mere utility.

4. **Communion of Persons**: Wojtyla extends the personalist principle to the idea of a "communion of persons," where human relationships are seen as a communion of equal, dignified individuals who engage in mutual self-giving and respect.

Overall, the personalist principle in Wojtyla's philosophy calls for a profound respect for human dignity in all interactions, advocating for love and responsibility as the guiding forces in personal and social ethics.