



Alma S. Espartinez

Karol Wojtyła on Participation and Alienation

The Acting Person

A clear understanding of the philosophical thoughts of Karol Wojtyła in his magnum opus, *Osoba i czyn*, translated into English as *The Acting Person*, is a vital factor in securing a firm grasp of his writings on the meaning of self-fulfillment in and through self-determining acts, providing us with a working principle for the mutual self-fulfillment of the human persons “in which the person never fully communicable to the other most fully realizes his or her existence in the trusting and accepting presence of the other.”¹ Wojtyła’s philosophy of the acting person is rooted in the structure “man-acts,” an immediate datum in the “experience of man,” which, as it were, forms the only basis of any reflections on the genuine nature of man. The person’s actions give us a more profound understanding of his unique, unrepeatable personal subjectivity.

Alma S. Espartinez, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Manila, Philippines; Providence College, Providence, RI, USA, 02918
alma.espartinez@benilde.edu.ph • ORCID: 0000-0002-4620-1305

¹ George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul. Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 160.



The performance itself of an action by the person and the self-fulfillment in such action is called the *personalistic* value of the action, which inheres in the person's mere performance itself of the action, in the very fact that we act in a manner that is appropriate to our human nature, in that in the performance of the action we determine and fulfill ourselves in it.² Here, Wojtyła showed the inherent relation between the person and action. Self-fulfillment is not solely identified with the mere performance of the act. Every human act implies self-fulfillment in the ontological sense. Axiologically, self-fulfillment depends on the moral value of the act; the subject becomes good in the performance of the act insofar as the act is morally good. Self-fulfillment reveals the reality that the human person is a potential being that strives to reach fullness, and every morally good act moves the person closer to the goal. When a morally good action meets the striving for truth, goodness and beauty, there is authentic self-fulfillment.

Acting Together with Others

Participation, Wojtyła claimed, is one of the basic channels of the dynamic correlation of the action with the person whenever acting is performed "together with others." He emphasized that participation requires an understanding of human actions which, when performed with others, form part of that aspect of the action and the dynamic correlation of action with the person. It is only on the basis of this dynamic correlation that acting together with others can be correctly interpreted.

The human person is regarded as relational as expressed through the body by discovering his being alone "in the visible world." There is an attempt here to say more than the traditional "man is social by

² Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. 1st edition. Vol. 10 of the *Analecta Husserliana* (Dordrecht; Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), 264–267.

nature.” Wojtyła approached participation in a unique way, highlighting the experience of a deeper meaning of subjectivity precisely by acting together with others. He mentioned in his *The Acting Person* that,

the dynamic correlation of the action with the person is in itself a fundamental human reality and it remains such also in any action performed together with others. In point of fact, only on the basis of this fundamental relation can any fact of acting together with other people assume its appropriate human significance.³

Wojtyła defined the *other* as anyone in the aggregate of all people, as someone who remains in an experienced relation to the ‘I.’ He mentioned, “the other is always one of those I’s, another individual I, related experientially in some way to my own I.”⁴ Participation aims “to specify and express what it is that safeguards us as persons along with the personalistic nature and value of our activity as we exist and act together with others in different systems of social life.”⁵ Due to our capacity to participate in the very humanity of another person, every human being can be our neighbor. Wojtyła argued that the meaning of the other is not a result of categorial knowledge or a product of thematization. Rather, it comes:

from an even richer lived experience, one in which I as though transfer what is given to me as my own *I* beyond myself to one of the others, who, as a result, appears primarily as a different I, another I, my neighbor. Another person is a neighbor to me not just because we share alike humanity, but chiefly because the other is another I.⁶

³ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 262–263.

⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*. Trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (USA: Peter Lang, 1993), 200.

⁵ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 200.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

My awareness of the humanity of a specific human being apart from myself is, according to Wojtyła, the first requirement for my experience of the other. The actualization of this relationship “takes place by my experiencing the other I as a person.”⁷ Because my own I is non-transferable, I cannot experience the other as I experience myself; I can only “come as close as I can to what determines the other’s I as the unique and unrepeatable reality of that human being.”⁸ Moral responsibility produced by my insight into the subjectivity of the *other* allows me to see in the *other* a share in the same personal dignity I recognize in myself.

Here we see that the concept of the other is arrived at not only ontologically but also consciously and experientially. This means that it is not in the understanding of the human person in general that we grasp the I-other structure; rather, it is in the conscious experience of my own *I*, “always concrete, each time unique and unrepeatable, and that, likewise when we take under consideration its mutual character—for, “the ‘other’ is defined as ‘I’ as well, for whom I can rightly be the ‘other.’”⁹

Participation and Community

In its current usage, participation means “having a share or a part in something.”¹⁰ For Wojtyła, we can best understand it in a double sense. First, it is the capacity or ability of the person, rooted in and stemming from, the specific structure of the person, which makes possible his acting together with others and thereby fulfills himself in it. Wojtyła believed that:

⁷ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 202.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁹ Karol Wojtyła, Karol. “Participation or Alienation?” (Springer: Netherlands, 1977), 65.

¹⁰ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 268.

[P]articipation corresponds to the person's transcendence and integration in the action, because... it allows man, when he acts together with others, to realize thereby and at once the authentically personalistic value—the performance of the action and the fulfillment of himself in the action.¹¹

Second, participation is the property of the person expressed in actualizing his ability to realize himself in his existing and “acting together with others.” It is the “actual moment” of the person's acting together with others. The concept of participation, therefore, includes both the ability and its realization.¹² As a property of the person, participation deals only with the fundamental condition under which the person, while existing and acting together with others, is nevertheless capable of fulfilling himself in this existence and activity, thereby realizing the personalistic value of the action. Wojtyła's meaning of participation emphasizes the “irrevocable primacy of the personal subject in relation to community, a primacy in both the metaphysical (and hence factual) and the methodological sense,”¹³ thereby confirming the subject's priority in the I-other relation.

Wojtyła's analysis of the person who fulfills himself in his “acting together with others” leads us to the normative significance of participation, thereby calling us to this task of relating to the humanity of other persons and, in so doing, fulfilling ourselves in it,

for if in acting “together with others” man can fulfill himself according to this principle, then, on the other hand, everyone ought to strive for

¹¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 270; Cf. also Karol Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community.” *The Review of Metaphysics* (1979): 273–308.

¹² Cf. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 271.

¹³ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 271.

that kind of participation which would allow him in acting together with others to realize the personalistic value of his own action.¹⁴

Man's self-fulfillment in his existing and "acting together with others" is made possible through the community. Human life is accurately described as life in the community and the reasons for this are fundamental. As man needs many things for his life which, if living in isolation, he cannot provide for himself, his needs compel him to depend on others. The community, therefore, is rooted in human nature and, in this sense, inherently natural. It also follows that man is naturally a member of a community through which his fulfillment is made available. The community must be seen "from the perspective of the consciousness and lived experience of all the members and also in some sense each of them."¹⁵ It should not be understood merely as the multiplicity of subjects but always as the specific unity of this diversity perceived and experienced by the individual subjects.¹⁶

To strengthen the important relationship between the person and community in the fulfillment of the person in and through participation, Wojtyła made a distinction between a community of being and a community of acting. A community of being is one whose members are grouped because of the natural bonds that exist among the members. He mentioned the family, the nation, and the state as examples of this community. A community of acting, on the other hand, is one whose members are grouped because of the common goal of the group that provides the bond of union. Examples of this community are workers digging a trench together and students cooperating in memorizing lectures. It is this latter form of community that Wojtyła is primarily interested in, for this has to do with the dynamic action-

¹⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 271.

¹⁵ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 238–239.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 239; Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 289.

-person correlate. The community of being conditions the community of acting and so the latter cannot be considered apart from the former.¹⁷

Wojtyła further clarified that mere membership in a community does not constitute participation. Existing and acting “in common with others” does not speak of community in its proper sense. In speaking of community, Wojtyła insisted that “one must not attribute basic meaning to the given or ‘material’ fact that man exists and acts ‘in common’ with others. This fact says nothing of community, but only of the plurality of beings, of the acting subjects who are people.”¹⁸ There is something more in the community than merely existing and acting “in common” with others. This leads us to the concept of the common good that authenticates the existence of the community.

The common good, conceived as the goal of acting, can be seen in a two-fold, interrelated manner. Objectively, it refers to the “good of the community,”¹⁹ the objective goal, which is why people act together to realize a good that individuals cannot achieve in isolation. Subjectively, the objective common good is subjectively chosen by the individual as his own good.²⁰ Here, the moment of participation inheres among others in choice. The person chooses, as his own, the common good. Wojtyła explained:

Each of its members expects to be allowed to choose what others choose and because they choose, and that his choice will be his own good that serves the fulfillment of his own person. At the same time, owing

¹⁷ Cf. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 278–279.

¹⁸ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 289.

¹⁹ “The common good,” Wojtyła declares, “becomes the good of the community inasmuch as it creates in the axiological sense the conditions for the common existence, which is then followed by acting.” Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 282. For a lucid discussion on the common good, refer to Kevin Doran, *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

²⁰ Cf. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 277.

to the same ability of participation, man expects that in communities founded on the common good his own actions will serve the community and help to maintain and enrich it.²¹

It is this subjective appropriation of the common good with which participation is identified. Due to participation, the community acquires a “quasi-subjectiveness”²² because each community member subjectively chooses the common good as their own, bringing out the axiological or moral significance of the common good. The individual’s choice of the common good as one’s own constitutes the subjective or “personalistic” aspect of the common good. The choice of or for the common good, owing to participation, brings the subject self-fulfillment. In the context of marriage, for example, husband and wife should subordinate themselves to the common good, that is,

procreation, the future generation, a family, and at the same time, the continual ripening of the relationship between two people, in all the areas of activity which conjugal life includes.²³

Willingly and consciously choosing the common good puts them both on equal footing. In this case, no one possesses a higher value than the other; both are in the same measure and, to the same extent, subordinated to the good which constitutes their common end.

Having established the axiological or moral significance of the common good, we can say that the individual good must be subordinated to the demands of the common good. The individual good, if need be, has to be sacrificed for the good of the community. The sac-

²¹ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 283.

²² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 277.

²³ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*. Transl. H.T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 30.

rifice demanded of its members does not, however, destroy the social nature of man because “such a sacrifice corresponds to the ability of participation inherent in man, and because this ability allows him to fulfill himself, it is not ‘contrary to his nature.’”²⁴ It shows that the true common good cannot be opposed to the real good of any individual within the community.

Now, there are extremes in the interpretation of the common good which cause its distortion. These are its virtual denial in individualism and its deification in objective totalism. These two distortions deform the meaning of the common good and prevent its realization. Let us examine them.

In individualism, people act together to protect themselves from each other. The individual is regarded as the supreme and fundamental good to which all interests of the community are subordinated. At this point, let Wojtyła speak on the ills of individualism:

Individualism limits participation, since it isolates the person from others by conceiving him solely as an individual who concentrates on himself and on his own good; this latter is also regarded in isolation from the good of others and of the community... For the individual the “others” are a source of limitation... If a community is formed, its purpose is to protect the good of the individual from the ‘others.’²⁵

From the individualistic point of view, participation, which is an essentially constituent human property that allows the person to fulfill himself in “acting together with others,” is denied of him. Some kind of authority, then, which will be vigilant in the protection of the common good is a requisite of the community. However, this necessity can,

²⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 283.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 273–274.

in turn, lead to another distortion: totalism. Totalism²⁶ completely absorbs the individual into the community. In totalism, the individual is regarded as the chief enemy of society and of the common good. Wojtyła asserted:

Since totalism assumes that inherent in the individual there is only the striving for the individual good, that any tendency toward participation or fulfillment in acting and living together with others is totally alien to him, it follows that the ‘common good’ can be attained only by limiting the individual. The good thus advocated by totalism can never correspond to the wishes of the individual, to the good he is capable of choosing independently and freely according to the principles of participation.²⁷

As presented above, the real community, therefore, will strive to avoid the danger of either individualism or totalism, reconciling in a living and sensitive balance both the rights of the individual and the just claims of the common good. The succeeding sections provide two directions the *I* takes in realizing the personalistic value of his action and his self-fulfillment in his existing and acting together with others: the I-You and the We-dimension of participation.

I–You Dimension ²⁸

The experience of my own “I” makes me aware that a “You” exists, which is a different *I*. This “You” lives alongside me and exists and acts

²⁶ Totalism is also referred to as anti-individualism or reversed individualism. Cf. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 274.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Wojtyła used the term “dimension” because, in each of the patterns to be analyzed, the community is not merely a different fact. He added that each pattern possess-

in common with me. According to Wojtyła, “You” not only indicates “separateness” but also signifies “contact.”²⁹ The consciousness that the “You” is a “different I” points to our capacity to participate in the humanity of the other, and to make participation fundamentally possible. This possibility leads us not only to the ontological but also to the conscious and experiential structure of the I-You.³⁰ Wojtyła put it this way:

The subject “I” experiences the relation to the “You” in the action whose object is “You,” and vice versa. Through the action directed objectively toward the “you,” the subject “I” not only experiences himself in relation to the “you,” but also experiences his own self in a new way in his own subjectivity.³¹

At this juncture, it should be made clear that the actualization of this participation in the humanity of the “You” is always a matter of choice. Wojtyła explains:

It is the choice of that very human being among others, which after all resolves itself in the fact that this very human being among others is *hic et nunc* given to me, or also ‘assigned’ to me. The choice of which we speak consists in that I accept ‘I’, that is, I affirm the person—and in that way to some extent ‘I choose him for myself,’ that is, in my ‘self,’ for I do not have any other approach to another human being as an ‘I,’ but only through myself.³²

es an axiological and normative sense and, thus, a different standard. “These patterns,” he says, “arise owing to the fact of the co-existence and cooperation of the people.” Karol Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 291.

²⁹ Cf. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 292.

³⁰ The “I-You” relation connects me with the other person. The “I-You” expressed here is a one-to-one relation; the “You” is taken in the singular sense.

³¹ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 295.

³² Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?” 67.

The moment when the relation directed from the “I” to the “You” returns to the “I” from whom it had proceeded shows the reflexivity of the “I-You” dimension. Wojtyła explains that the “You” is another “I” different from my “I.” Thinking and saying “You,” I express at the same time the relation which extends beyond me but at the same time returns to me.³³ Through the reflexive character of the “I-You relation,” I am specifically constituted through my relation to the “You.”³⁴ I acquire “a fuller experience of myself, of my own I, and in some sense for the verification of myself ‘in the light of another self.’”³⁵ Wojtyła further explained:

The thou assists me in more fully discovering and even confirming my own *I*: the thou contributes to my self-affirmation. In its basic form, the I-thou relationship, far from leading me away from my subjectivity, in some sense more firmly grounds me in it. The structure of the relation is to some degree a confirmation of the structure of the subject and of the subject’s priority with respect to the relation.³⁶

The significance of the reflexivity of the “I-You” scheme lies in the fact that I come to a complete experience of my own I as tested, to some extent, “in the light of another I.”³⁷ You help me to affirm my own. This relation strengthens the structure of the subject and his priority in the “I-You” scheme.³⁸ It is in this “I-You” relation that there

³³ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 292.

³⁴ Cf. Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 242.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

³⁶ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 242–243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

³⁸ Special note ought to be taken here. The “openness to the ‘other’ with which the ‘I’ appears is not such that the ‘I’ simply is unintelligible except in terms of its relation to the ‘you.’” Alfred Wilder, O.P. “Community of Persons in the Thought of Karol

occurs the mutual revelation of the person in his personal subjectivity.

The relation of the “I” to the “You,” Wojtyła explained, does not constitute, although it is already considered a real experience of the interpersonal “I-You” pattern, the full experience of this pattern unless it acquires a reciprocal character.³⁹ To Wojtyła, there could only be the realization of this scheme to the fullest,

when the “you,” whom a definite other person has become for my “I,” makes me his or her “you,” that is, when two people become for each other reciprocally “I” and “you,” and thus experience their mutual reference. It seems that only then may we find the full specificity of the community which is proper to the interpersonal pattern “I-you.”⁴⁰

The distinct reciprocal interaction between “I” and “You” allows a personal “I” to turn to a personal “You” as the object of his action. At the same time, the “You” relates back to the “I” so that the personal “I” becomes an object in the action directed objectively to the “You.” In this action, both the “I” and the “You” retain the personalistic value of their acts and are mutually confirmed in their unique personal subjectivity. Such is the relationship that exists in friendship and love. In the relation between husband and wife, for instance, each spouse participates in the humanness of the other. In love, the husband and wife participate so intimately and deeply in each other’s subjective humanity as to constitute a true *communio personarum*. In their mutual self-donation expressed in and through the conjugal act, each one confides and gives themselves to the other, confirms each other’s unique per-

Wojtyła,” in *Angelicum*, 1979, p. 228. ” Wojtyła’s point here is simply that the “I” is never given in isolation or in opposition to the “other.” Cf. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 293–294.

³⁹ Cf. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 294.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 294.

sonal subjectivity, and fulfills themselves in it.⁴¹ In the reflexive character of “I-You,” there is a clear surrender of the self in that the husband/wife experiences their “I” in their relation to the “You.” In its reciprocal character, there is the surrender of each to the other in which both the husband and wife experience mutual reference. Only when the “I” and “You” remain in the mutual confirmation of the transcendent value of each person can this “I-You” dimension deserve the name *communio personarum*. And this is the very core of participation.

This basic dimension of “I-You” relationship, Wojtyła argues, is both a fact and a demand. It carries a metaphysical and a normative (ethical) meaning. As a fact, or in its metaphysical sense, the “I-You” relation is a mutual relation of two subjects that involves the mutual revelation of the partners in their human subjectivity. Wojtyła declared:

The thou stands before my self as a true and complete ‘other self,’ which, like my own self, is characterized not only by self-determination, but also and above all by self-possession and self-governance. In this subjective structure, the thou as “another self” represents its own transcendence and its own tendency toward self-fulfillment.⁴²

The mutual revelation of the two persons in the “I-You” relationship confirms their subjectivity. As such, they ought to disclose themselves to each other in their personal subjectivity and reveal themselves in their striving for self-fulfillment, expressed in acts of conscience, which testifies to the transcendence proper to the human being as a person.⁴³ Wojtyła explained that by the reciprocal character of the “I-You” relation:

⁴¹ Cf. Alma Espartinez, “Karol Wojtyła on Self-Fulfillment in and through the Marital Act.” *Studia Gilsoniana* 11, no. 2 (2022): 197.

⁴² Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 245.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*

There arises the mutual responsibility of the person for the person. This responsibility is the reflection of conscience and transcendence which, both on the side of the ‘I’ and the ‘you,’ accompanies the self-fulfillment and conditions the correct or authentically personal dimension of the community.⁴⁴

As we have seen from the above discussion, the reciprocal character of the “I-You” relation truly marks the whole experience of personal subjectivity. Wojtyła unfolded yet another dimension through which the “I” and the “You” find themselves in a reciprocal reference. This relation is the We-dimension.

“We”–Dimension

In the preceding discussion, the “I-You” dimension speaks of interhuman or interpersonal relations in a community of being and acting. In contrast, the “We” pattern pertains to a societal dimension or plurality of acting and being with others. The “We” connotes plurality or a set composed of persons. The set referred to does not, however, mean a substantial being. The “We” points to many subjects or “I’s” and to the peculiar subjectivity of this plurality. The action that each “I” performs is related to the realization of the common good, which is the very core of the social community. On how the “We” differs from the “I-You,” Wojtyła explained,

It (“We”) differs from that of the “I-you” for the direction of the dimension is changed and is indicated by the common good. In this relation

⁴⁴ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 297.

the “I” and “you” find their reciprocal reference in a new dimension: they discover their “I-you” through the common good which constitutes a new entity among them.⁴⁵

The “We” as many human “I’s” is understood as many subjects existing and acting together. Their “acting together” should not be understood merely as engaging in some activities that somehow go along side by side; rather, these activities are geared towards a single value—the common good. The relation of many “I’s” to the common good shapes the social dimension of the “We” community. In the “We” relation,

the people involved in it, while experiencing their personal subjectivity—the factual multiplicity of human *I’s*—are aware that they form a specific we, and they experience themselves in this new dimension. This is the social dimension different from the I-thou dimension, although in it the persons remain themselves (they remain an I and a thou), but the direction of the relation is fundamentally changed. This direction is determined by the common good. In this relation the I and the thou also find their mutual relationship in a new dimension: they find their I-thou through the common good, which establishes a new union between them.⁴⁶

There is a further suggestion in this note. The “We” is objectively formed by its relation to the common good, and tends to create the true subjectivity of all who enter the social community. The many “I’s” acting together with others experience their subjectivity in a new way while simultaneously realizing their transcendence in the action, thereby fulfilling themselves in it. Again, as our example, the relationship

⁴⁵ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community, 298.

⁴⁶ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 247.

between the husband and the wife exhibits this new dimension. This happens, according to Wojtyła, “when the husband and wife, accept that complex of values which may be defined as the common good of marriage, and potentially at least, the common good of the family.”⁴⁷ As these two unique and irreducible “I’s” participate in the humanness of each other as “I” and “You” reciprocally, thereby fulfilling themselves in it, they enter into a new social dimension—a married couple—a “We” and not merely one-plus-one. This new dimension does not, in any way, deform their interpersonal “I-You relation”; on the contrary, it is enriched by it. In view of participation as a property of the person through which the person fulfills himself and retains the personalistic value of his action in existing and “acting together with others,” this participation presents itself as a task. Every personal “I,” therefore, must constantly relate to a personal “You” and together create a “We,” bringing into prominence, through these actions, his unique personal subjectivity. In the “I-You” and “We” interpersonal relations, the person is confirmed in his unique subjectivity and is fulfilled in them. Owing to participation, the person can relate to a “You” (as the husband relates to the wife, and the wife to the husband, for example), and to stand together and affirm the “We.”

Now we raise this question: How is the “I” constituted by “We” in a social relationship similar to how the “I” is constituted by the “You” in the interpersonal dimension? Wojtyła noted here that the constitution of the “I” does not refer to its constitution in the metaphysical sense, for in that sense, every “I” is constituted in its own *suppositum*.⁴⁸ Rather, the constitution we want to bring to the fore here is the constitution of the concrete “I” in its personal subjectivity in his existing and “acting together with others” to show the compatibility between personal subjectivity and community.

⁴⁷ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 247.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 248.

The relation of the common good to “We” relation is an expression of the transcendence proper to the human being as a person. The common good, understood essentially as the good of many and in its fullest dimension as the good of all these “I’s,” forms the objective basis for their constitution as a social community—as a “We.” The relation to the common good should be grounded in relation to truth and the ‘true’ good, just as the transcendence of the person is objectively realized in relation to truth and the good as ‘true.’ Such is the relation that exists in the case of a married couple, a family, a nation, or humankind.

Far from entailing a diminution or distortion of the “I,” the “We” relation, Wojtyła clarified, is compatible with the person’s self-fulfillment. He emphasized the proper dimension of the common good by saying:

[t]he common good, as the objective basis of this dimension, represents a greater fullness of value than the individual good of each separate *I* in a particular community. It, therefore, has a superior character—and in this character it corresponds to the subjective transcendence of the person. The common good’s superior character and the greater fullness of value it represents derive ultimately from the fact that the good of each of the subjects of a community that calls itself a we is more fully expressed and more fully actualized in the common good. Through the common good, therefore, the human *I* more fully and more profoundly discovers itself precisely in a human we.⁴⁹

The individual good, as shown in our discussion, is subordinated to the true common good⁵⁰ because this personal good is more fully

⁴⁹ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 250.

⁵⁰ The true common good, according to Wojtyła, refers “to the essence of both the social community proper to the human we and the personal transcendence proper to the human I.” Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 250.

expressed and more fully actualized in the realization of the common good. We, therefore, ought to display a readiness “not only to think of themselves in categories of “*we*” but also to realize whatever is essential for the *we*.”⁵¹ Only in this way can we acquire an authentic *communio personarum*.

Participative Attitudes

The person’s actions undertaken in common with others must have the same qualities of transcendence and integration which characterize his actions as an individual: he must participate as a person in freedom, thereby realizing or perfecting himself while contributing to the community through his actions.

To enhance the human person’s unique, personal subjectivity and to be able to accurately interpret the appropriate dynamism within the framework of different communities of acting and being, we present in the following sections the personalistic value of man’s existing and “acting with others.”

Authentic Social Attitudes

In his being and “acting with others,” the human person retains the personalistic value of his action while simultaneously sharing in the realization and the results of communal acting. Only where these conditions are verified and where the common good, which demands sacrifices of its members, is directed towards fulfilling all its members, can one find true community.

⁵¹ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 251.

As the relation between participation and the common good is adequately established, Wojtyła delineated three “authentic” social attitudes contributing to the actualization of participation and the transcendence of the person in action. These are solidarity, opposition and dialogue. Let us briefly discuss each authentic attitude.

Since human beings act and live together with others and are in one way or another in need of help and depend on one another, solidarity is a necessary condition for realizing their common good. Wojtyła described solidarity as:

a constant readiness to accept and to realize one’s share in the community because of one’s membership within that particular community. In accepting the attitude of solidarity, man does what he is supposed to do not only because of his membership in the group, but because he has the “benefit of the whole” in view; he does it for the “common good.” The awareness of the common good makes him look beyond his own share; and this intentional reference essentially is his own share.⁵²

The second authentic attitude is seemingly a contradiction of, and in opposition to, the attitude of solidarity. Paradoxically, it is named opposition. Wojtyła maintained that “far from rejecting the common good and the need of participation, opposition consists in their confirmation.”⁵³ Elaborating on the meaning of opposition, Wojtyła explained:

Those who in this way stand up in opposition do not intend thereby to cut themselves off from their community. On the contrary, they seek their own place in a constructive role within the community; they seek

⁵² Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 285.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 286.

for that participation and that attitude to the common good which will allow them a better, a fuller, and a more effective share of the communal life.⁵⁴

Following Wojtyła's line of thinking, such opposition is essentially constructive. An adequately organized community must both allow for its expression and permit it to acquire the means necessary for making itself effective—all in the interests of participation and the common good.

Dialogue, the last authentic attitude, seeks to make opposition and solidarity meet halfway. It is the proper attitude that will reinforce solidarity and promote participation among members who are in opposition to one another. It will “bring to light what in controversial situations is right and true, and helps to eliminate any partial, preconceived or subjective views and trends.”⁵⁵

Inauthentic Attitudes

Proper discernment as to the “dynamic subordination of action to truth”⁵⁶ reflected in the moral conscience retains the authenticity of the attitudes as mentioned earlier. Lack of it distorts solidarity and opposition, “depriving them of those inherent elements which are the condition of participation and the personalistic value.”⁵⁷ With this condition missing, solidarity changes (in concrete situations) to servile conformism, and opposition to non-involvement. These two inauthentic attitudes alienate the human person from his community, thereby fail-

⁵⁴ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 286.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

ing to realize himself in his existing and “acting together with others.” Once the person fails to see the “You” as a neighbor, the “You” as another “I” disappears. What remains instead is a stranger, an outsider or, worst, an enemy.

On the surface, servile conformism shows man’s confirmation and manifestation of solidarity; underneath, it denies solidarity and evades opposition. Servile conformism speaks of,

an attitude of compliance or resignation, in a specific form of passivity that makes the man-person to be but the subject of what happens instead of being the actor or agent responsible for building his own attitudes and his own commitment in the community. Man then fails to accept to share in constructing the community and allows himself to be carried with and by the anonymous majority.⁵⁸

The inauthenticity of servile conformism is due to its indifference toward the common good as it gives a mere semblance of participation, and passive compliance with others, which lacks conviction and authentic engagement.⁵⁹ What, then, is the effect of such an inauthentic attitude on the person and the community? According to Wojtyła:

when people adapt themselves to the demands of the community only superficially and when they do so only to gain some immediate advantages or to avoid trouble, the person as well as the community incur irremediable loss.⁶⁰

In non-involvement, withdrawal becomes the main form of relatedness to others, a negative relatedness, as it were. Non-involvement, as

⁵⁸ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 289.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 290.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

a non-authentic attitude, becomes a “substitute or compensatory attitude for those who find solidarity too difficult and who do not believe in the sense of opposition.”⁶¹ By his refusal to be socially involved, the person invalidates the “menacing” contact with the community and makes his absence felt.

The passive attitude of servile conformism and the ‘I-don’t-care’ attitude of non-involvement deprive the person of “that dynamic strain of participation unique to the person from which stem actions leading to his authentic fulfillment in the community of being and acting together with others.”⁶²

The Problem of Alienation

Participation, which is the attribute of each human person on the strength of which that I fulfill myself by existing and “acting together with others” and that I am, and remain, myself amid social community—conditions the authentic *communio personarum* in the “We” and “I-You” dimensions. This participation brings out and safeguards, as it were, the personal value of my existence and activity among the many human persons existing and acting.⁶³ The disregard for, the contradiction of, and non-involvement in, participation results in alienation.

Alienation is the opposite of the person’s voluntary interaction in either pattern of “I-You” or “We.” It deprives the human person of the possibility of fulfilling oneself in the community of acting and being. Moreover, the plurality of human subjects, in which each is a definite “I,” cannot develop properly in the direction of an authentic “We” because,

⁶¹ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 291.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Cf. Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?” 71.

the social processes, which should lead to a true subjectivity of all are then checked or even turned back, for man cannot retrieve himself as subject in this process. The social life is, so to speak, beyond him; it is not only against him, but even “at his expense.”⁶⁴

The human person fails to fulfill himself while existing and “acting together with others” either because he alienates himself (as in “non-involvement” and “servile conformism”) or the society does not give him the necessary basis for self-fulfillment or even refuses to grant the rights he possessed before.⁶⁵ This way, existing and acting “together with others” on the basis of experiencing the other and his “I” is either restricted or annihilated. “This undermines,” Wojtyła mentioned,

the experience of the truth of humanity and the essential value of the person in the human “you.” The “I” remains cut off, without contact, and consequently not fully revealed to its own self. In such interhuman relations the “neighbor” vanishes, and there remains the “other one,” a “stranger,” or perhaps even an outright “enemy.”⁶⁶

In this condition, “community becomes deformed and disappears in proportion to the decay of experiencing humanity.”⁶⁷ Alienation as a contradiction of participation “does not so much ‘dehumanize’ man as an individual of the species, as strike at the person as subject.”⁶⁸ The person’s unique personal subjectivity is denied confirmation and enhancement. Such is the problem of alienation: the human person as

⁶⁴ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 306.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 306.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the subject is stripped of his capacity to experience “his own humanity in proportion to his ability of participation in the humanity of others, of experiencing it as the ‘other I.’”⁶⁹

Conclusion

Our discussion focused on Wojtyła’s concept of participation which allows the person to share in the humanity of the other, thereby fulfilling himself in his actions, precisely in his existing and acting together with others. Wojtyła’s analysis of the structure of participation shows three crucial points: first, the structure of participation is a structure of, and appropriate only to, the person; second, in choosing the other, it is actually choosing myself in the other, and the other in myself; and third, failure to participate in the humanity of the other is a failure to fulfill myself, leading to the diminution of my own subjectivity.



Karol Wojtyła on Participation and Alienation

SUMMARY

This article examines Karol Wojtyła’s concept of participation and alienation by starting the discussion on his personalist anthropology, leading to his structure of the human community. Wojtyła’s personalist anthropology reveals to us the nature of the human person as a unique, unrepeatable personal subjectivity. According to Wojtyła, the human act takes us to the knowledge and understanding of the person’s interiority and simultaneously allows us to have a

⁶⁹ Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?,” 70.

glimpse of the human person's specific complexity. Then, I analyze the correlation between person-action in living and acting with other persons. Here, I attempt to demonstrate that if our existence has to acquire any human significance, it is that, rather than alienation, which makes such a unique experience possible. Finally, I explored the impact of the failure to grasp a genuine understanding of the human person and the capacity to participate in the humanity of other persons, setting a profound sense of alienation that dehumanizes us to our very core.

This paper aims to answer the following questions: Given the actions that can be performed 'together with others,' how does the person's acting with others affect the dynamic correlation of the action with the person? What is the significance of this participation for the personalistic value of the action? Why is alienation antithetical to participation?

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła, human person, self-fulfillment, participation, I-You, We-dimension, alienation

REFERENCES

- Doran, Kevin. *Solidarity: A Synthesis of Personalism and Communalism in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.
- Espartinez, Alma. "Karol Wojtyła on Self-Fulfillment in and through the Marital Act." *Studia Gilsoniana* 11, no. 2 (2022): 181–206.
- Hogan, Richard, Richard M. Hogan, and John M. LeVoir. *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985.
- John Paul II. "Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Family. *L'Osservatore Romano*, (English Edition)," 14, no. 51–52 (November 22, 1981). https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.
- John Paul II. *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979.

- Pope John Paul II. *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis*. Pauline Books & Media, 1981.
- Pope Paul VI. "Humanae Vitae." *Dicastero per La Comunicazione – Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, July 25, 1968.
- Pope Paul VI. "Vatican II. Gaudium et Spes. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," December 7, 1965. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.
- Wilder, Alfred, O.P. "Community of Person in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła." *Angelicum. Studia in Honorem Caroli Wojtyła*. Vol. 56, Fasc. 2–3. Rome: Pontifica Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 1979.
- Williams, George Huntston. *The Mind of John Paul. Origins of his Thought and Action*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1981.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by H.T. Willets. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. 1st edition. Vol. 10 of the *Annalecta Husserliana*. Dordrecht; Boston: D. Reidel, 1979.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "The Person: Subject and Community." *The Review of Metaphysics* (1979): 273–308.
- Wojtyła, Karol. *Person and Community. Selected Essays*. Translated by Theresa Sandok, OSM. USA: Peter Lang, 1993.
- Wojtyła, Karol. "Participation or Alienation?" *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. 6. Ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht, Holland/Boston, USA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977.