

The Primal We

Person and Community as Co-Constitutive in Karol Wojtyła's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT Studies of Karol Wojtyła's personalism have consistently kept to his theme of understanding the person in a way that begins with the individual, prior to addressing the community. Following the paradigm of Person and Act, the I is seen as the ground for understanding the We, as it is through experience that one has contact with reality, and the community is itself composed of individual subjects. This article, however, inverts the question. Can a Community-First approach strengthen personalism without falling into the trap of collectivism? I argue that the community is not merely a result of individual participation, but also the primordial soil that allows the subject to emerge as a person.

KEYWORDS Community; Co-Constitutive; Individual; Subjectivity; Wojtyła, Karol

I. INTRODUCTION

Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy is best known for its comprehensive account of the human person that seeks to overcome radical conceptions of the latter (Hołub et al. 2019, 33). What influenced him in his decision to embark on such a task was the character of the era he was living in. Drawing on the thought of modern and contemporary philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler, harmonizing them with the classical Aristotelean-Thomistic Christian philosophical tradition, the end product of his philosophizing is an original personalist account, rooted in Thomistic metaphysics, that employs phenomenology within a realist framework. Such a methodology enables one to arrive at truths about the human person otherwise inadequately grasped in both pre-modern and modern ways of thinking (Hołub et al. 2019, 29–36).

The method of inquiry he employed always starts with the individual and their experience of action (person-act), and then proceeds to examine interpersonal and intersocial relations (person-person) and the meaning of community. This means that the social or communal character of human acts is rooted in their personal character, not vice versa. The individual person (I) is the ontological anchor, a self-contained suppositum from which the communal We eventually emerges through the exercise of participation. This methodological priority suggests that human sociality is a secondary, almost accidental property—the fruit of individual efficacy rather than its condition. As Ignatik explains:

Only a thorough cognition of the subject in himself, especially in the correlation between himself and his action, opens a path to understanding human intersubjectivity fully. Presupposing the concepts of community and relation in anthropological interpretation may result in a failure to grasp both what is constitutive for the person and what fundamentally determines community and relation precisely as the community and relation of persons. (Ignatik 2021, 47; see also Wojtyła 2021)

However, a rigorous re-examination of Wojtyła's primary texts, bolstered by their more critically nuanced translations, allows for a daring methodological reversal. This reversal posits that community is not simply a by-product of human participation, but rather is the primordial soil in which the individual can develop, achieve agency, and fulfil their potential as a person. The study of the conditions of possibility for human action (*czyn*) reveals that the personal I already exists within the boundary of a communal horizon, and that this internalized communal horizon is the foundation for the person's understanding of self-determination.

Thus, in this work, I will explore the possibility of studying the subjectivity of the community first, as prior to the individual, with a view to going beyond what is already established and daring to interrogate a new possibility that may show up on the horizon—given that our aim is to arrive at truth. The end goal is to deepen discussion of the already robust personalist system that the Polish philosopher-cum-pope created in his works, while simultaneously avoiding the trap of collectivism.

The foundational points of reference for this project will be *Person and Act* (*Osoba i czyn*) and *Love and Responsibility* (*Miłość i odpowiedzialność*), both of them as translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. The latter fact is essential to the present analysis, as it rectifies significant unauthorized editorial interventions found in earlier translations, such as the 1979 version edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. It also compensates for the limitations of the present author as someone unable to speak Polish at the present time.

II. SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS

Works dealing with the thought of Karol Wojtyła mostly continue his project of reconciling classical Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics with modern phenomenology. This attempt at fostering subjectivity is a response to the twentieth-century crises of totalitarianism and materialism. The scholarly consensus is that Wojtyła's goal was to uphold the irreducible uniqueness of the person in the face of its being swallowed up by collective ideologies.

For example, in his book *At the Center of the Human Drama*, Kenneth Schmitz provides an existential analysis of the human drama through an articulation of the ontological anchor found in the scholastic notion of the suppositum, thereby establishing a basis for determining that the person as an objective being must be established before analysing the person as a subject of experience (Schmitz 1993, 142). In the same vein, Rocco Buttiglione identifies the substantial subjectivity of the person as an essential bridge connecting being to consciousness (Buttiglione 1997, 131). Meanwhile, Jarosław Kupczak, in *Destined for Liberty*, calls self-determination the defining characteristic of the person, such that the individual's freedom to act provides the foundation for establishing moral value and personhood. These authors also provide a consistent view of the individual's ability and capacity to participate, and to decide whether doing so will preserve their personal transcendence and integration while acting together with others (Kupczak 2000, 115–17). Hence, the community is an accidental structure—more precisely, a *quasi-subjectivity*—wherein its members are directed towards the common good, since “the proper (substantial) subject of existing and acting, even when existing and acting are realized together

with others, is always the man-person” (Wojtyła 2021, 384). In itself, the community “does not constitute a new subject of action but only introduces new relations between people, who are the real subjects of action” (Wojtyła 2021, 384).

Nevertheless, some researchers have taken a different approach to reading Wojtyła’s works. One such scholar is Rev. Grzegorz Hołub. He believes that in order to reach mature comprehension about the nature of humans, it must be understood as having two essential pillars: substantiality and relationality (Hołub 2021, 57). Citing Norris Clarke, he posits his concept of *substance-in-relation*, arguing that the relational character is inherent in the human person’s dynamic nature, rather than an additional factor. Fr. Leszek Kuc affirms this by asserting that philosophical anthropology should tackle the relation of persons rather than the *co-relation of person and act* (Kuc 1974, 135). Although Wojtyła was adamant about maintaining his chosen methodology, he did acknowledge the validity of Kuc’s method (Wojtyła 1974, 244).

Furthermore, the discussions among scholars which took place during the Lublin Symposium (1970/1971) in the wake of the publication of Wojtyła’s *Person and Act* also provided several reasons to call for a more relational approach. As many participants pointed out, although Wojtyła’s research was based on individual acts, the direction of his thought continually pointed outward toward fulfillment within a community (Szostek 1974, 50).

Fr. Marian Jaworski, a close collaborator of Wojtyła, emphasized that “the human person must . . . be given visually in experience” and that “this experience is always an experience of being ‘together with others’” (Jaworski 1974, 91). Prof. Antoni Stępień and Dr. Andrzej Półtawski explored the “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions of having lived experience, noting that the *I* is the ultimate basis of the stream of consciousness, but that this stream always “surfaces” in dialogue with the other (Stępień 1974, 111; Półtawski 1974, 121). Even the methodological critiques offered by Fr. Stanisław Kamiński, who found the project of unifying Thomism and phenomenology “maximalistic,” underscore the central problem: if we want a realistic anthropology, we must account for the person in their full social reality (Kamiński 1974, 63).¹

1. Despite these issues relating to individualism that reflect his phenomenological starting point, I argue that this remains a thinly veiled concern. The reality is that throughout his works Wojtyła emphasizes the truth of action and stresses that the person is inextricably formed by culture, education and the nation. Accordingly, these are not mere sociological backdrops, but the necessary communal inheritance through which the individual realizes their personhood (see Ringor 2025).

For this reason, even if it is the method adopted by the original author himself, the concern persists that an Individual-First approach to anthropology could run the risk of isolating the person in their own substantiality. Whereas Schmitz advocates the view that the *suppositum* is the necessary anchor for participation, I would argue that the *suppositum* itself is dynamic, in that its nature, qua its being rational, makes it inherently social. If the person is *destined for liberty*, as Kupczak asserts, then that destiny cannot be fulfilled in solitude, but rather only via the discovery of the neighbor (*bliźni*) as a co-constitutive presence (Kupczak 2000, 142). The polemic here is not against the existence of the *suppositum*, but against the methodological assumption that it can be adequately studied in isolation from the *communal soil* that nurtures it

Taking my cue from these scholars, I seek to advance this discussion concerning the possibility of a framework providing for a Community-First perspective. We will thus investigate whether the community, as the social feature impressed upon human existence itself, can serve as the *primordial beginning* from which the personal *I* germinates. The premise here is that *experience of oneself as a person is mediated by the experience of others*. We do not first find ourselves, and then look for neighbors: we find ourselves because we are already in the neighborhood of *others*. Hence, the social reality of the person is not an afterthought but a foundational principle.

III. LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE AND THE COMMUNITY-FIRST ANTHROPOLOGY IN PERSON AND ACT

Throughout *Person and Act*, Wojtyła makes it clear that how a person acts reveals who they are as a person (Wojtyła 2021, 104). The epistemological inversion is very important, because it indicates that we should begin from the experience of what men and women do, rather than from a definition of what they are. From that experience, we can then derive definitions of what it means to have a uniquely human character.

Wojtyła distinguishes between *man acts* (*działanie*) and *something happens in man* (*dzianie się*). The former refers to conscious and willed actions, while the latter are spontaneous and not a result of the willing of the subject who experiences these happenings automatically. Only the former are characterized as authentic human action, for they are characterized by efficacy (*sprawczość*), the lived experience that the *I* is the agent of his or her actions (Wojtyła 2021, 168). Efficacy is rooted in self-determination (*samostanowienie*), which Wojtyła identifies as the “vertical transcendence” of the person—the ability to stand above one’s own impulses and decide one’s own direction.

While all of this appears straightforward, a closer inspection of the original Polish terminology reveals that Wojtyła's anthropology is not merely an analysis of individual agency: in fact, it already contains the structural seeds of participation (Hořub 2021, 101–02). These can be found in the choice of terms such as *czyn*, *akt*, *suppositum*, *bliźni*, and *świadomość*. Each of these terms illustrates how action ultimately occurs within a relational framework. These definitions highlight the way in which individuals fulfil themselves not in isolation but through participation, which depends upon the existence of other persons.

A Metalinguistic Analysis of Selected Key Polish Terms

A prime example of this is the distinction between *czyn* and *akt*. *Czyn* refers to a human action that carries moral value and personal responsibility. *Akt*, on the other hand, refers to the metaphysical principle of *actus*, which points to the actualization of a potency (Wojtyła 2021, 71–74).² By identifying his work as *Osoba i czyn* and not *Osoba i akt*, Wojtyła signals that his concern is not with abstract metaphysical activation but lived, morally accountable agency (Wojtyła 2021, 4).³

Czyn is intelligible only within a horizon of responsibility, and therefore presupposes other persons. Hence, moral acts are never solipsistic: they are always directed to another, and so are answerable to authority, communicable, and socially legible. This alone reveals that the person is not a self-enclosed monad but an efficacious agent whose self-determination unfolds within the field of intersubjectivity. The emphasis on *czyn* over and above *akt* subtly, but decisively, orients personal identity towards relationality.

To further strengthen this argument from efficacy, we can also point to Wojtyła's treatment of consciousness. Distinguishing between *conscious action* (*działanie świadome*) and the *consciousness of action* (*świadomość działania*), Wojtyła uses the adjective *świadomościowy* (*consciousness-related*)

2. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 2.

3. At this point, the matter of the title of the work can also be considered. Wojtyła's work was originally rendered in English as *The Acting Person*. The latter title emphasizes the unity of the subject as the agent of action. Even granting that such a construal can be to some extent justified philosophically, the fact remains that the literal structure of the original Polish *Osoba i czyn* retains an explicit distinction between the person and the act. More than just a linguistic choice, it is methodologically apt as it allows for an analytical examination of the relation between person and action without dissolving either into the other. Hence, the newer translation is a more accurate rendering of the original work as reflected in other languages, such as the Italian *Persona e atto*. Nonetheless, the insight we can take from the original title is an important one, showing as it does that action ultimately belongs to the acting subject as an irreducible *suppositum*.

in describing the two-fold functions of consciousness (Wojtyła 2021, 139–40). Consciousness is not the same as the action, but rather reflects (*odzwierciedlanie*) and internalizes (*uwewnętrznienie*) the actions of conscious beings (Wojtyła 2021, 142–43). The trans-illuminating consciousness provides the means for efficacy, and consequently the realization of moral responsibility and relational consequences. Therefore, efficacy (*sprawczość*) has an inherent moral quality, as the very existence of consciousness indicates the manner in which one's actions have an impact on another. Consequently, consciousness manifests both autonomy and participation within oneself.

Moreover, this reflexive function of consciousness that makes individuals aware of their own actions enables the individual to attain self-knowledge through self-awareness. The *I* can objectify itself as an object of self-knowledge while remaining a subject itself (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 118). The reflexive function therefore cannot be exclusively biological, as it presupposes a conceptual and linguistic framework which allows the self to be named and interpreted.

Such a framework cannot be generated in isolation. To talk about concepts such as *I*, *act*, *good*, or *responsible* requires other individuals to establish the structures of these semantic categories, which are inherited and continue to be shared through time. Hence, as Rocco Buttiglione points out, Wojtyła's phenomenology can only ever unfold within the horizon of a given culture and tradition (Buttiglione 1997, 148–49). Therefore, the community is not added as something optional, but rather necessary if one is to be aware of oneself and fulfilled. In short, to objectify the *I* requires communal language that serves to enable such objectification.

This orientation towards relationality, however, is safeguarded by Wojtyła's use of the term *suppositum* to denote the ontological subject of existence. The *suppositum* guarantees that the person remains a subject (someone, not something) and therefore supports the premise that the person cannot be reduced to just being a functional role within the collective (Kupczak 2000, xxii). The *I (Ja)* is an embodiment of the lived experience of the support provided by the ontological foundation. As noted by those who have commented on it, the *suppositum* anchors the subjectivity of each person by preventing the individual from being reduced to a mere stream of consciousness or a social construct. Thus, the metaphysical foundation provides additional support for authentic participation and ensures that only an irreducible subject can participate, because only a subject (as opposed to a mere thing) can be a part of a communion (i.e., participate) without being absorbed into that communion. Thus, community does not eliminate individuality, and in fact assumes and affirms it.

When speaking of community, Wojtyła utilizes the expression *bliźni*, which is commonly translated into English as *neighbor*. Grounded in the commandment to love, to call someone a *neighbor* (*bliźni*) goes beyond spatial proximity or social affiliation, meaning much more than just being geographically or socially connected. It designates the other as *another I* (a *Thou*) (Buttiglione 1997, 182; see also Wojtyła 2013, 24). Thus, it further resists both individualism and collectivism by emphasizing the sense of the personal identity and subjectivity of the other person. The *Thou* is neither a mere part of the social order nor an abstract member of the human race. They are a unique subject who, like the *I*, cannot be reduced to anything else. Participation, therefore, is not externally imposed, but rather arises from the fundamental structure of personal recognition. Encountering the *Thou* as *bliźni* goes beyond existing as a separate individual.

Collectively, these linguistic clarifications demonstrate that Wojtyła's anthropological model does not entail individualism, and resists collectivism. The moral act (*czyn*), which is based upon an irreducible *suppositum* experienced through reflective consciousness and directed toward other people (*bliźni*), shows that self-determination is structurally binding. The individual is not an isolated monad who eventually joins the community: rather, they are part of a larger community from birth, in virtue of how their actions reflect the true essence of their being. Participation is not just an "add-on" to our identity as individuals: it is a vital ingredient in helping us reach self-fulfillment. In this way, Wojtyła's careful use of terms in the Polish language confirms what this *Co-Constitutive Theory* advocates—that any individual can only fully be themselves by way of participation in the community.

IV. COMMUNITY AS THE CONDITION OF POSSIBILITY FOR ACTION

As was stated in the first section, the majority of *Person and Act* deals with the individual and their actions, culminating in a discussion of the theory of participation. Community thus appears as a secondary horizon within which an already constituted person subsequently chooses to act. Inasmuch as this construal defends the metaphysical irreducibility of the person, it risks obscuring a deeper simultaneity already operative in Wojtyła's thought—as noted by scholars.

For this reason, I propose a *Co-Constitutive* way of understanding the person and the community. Instead of arguing over which comes first, I claim that the person and the communal horizon emerge together *simultaneously* within lived experience. The two are distinct yet inseparable dimensions of one and the same anthropological reality—like two sides of a single coin. There is no *I* without a *Thou* and no *Thou* without a *We*.

To be clear, this argument in no way denies Wojtyła's emphasis on the metaphysical primacy of the *suppositum*. When discussing community Wojtyła emphasizes the "irrevocable primacy of the personal subject in relation to community" in both metaphysical and methodological terms (Wojtyła 2021, 289). It is precisely because of the *suppositum* that the individuality of the person remains intact and safeguarded from collectivism.

At the same time, however, he also states that "the feature of community—the social feature—is impressed upon human existence itself" (Wojtyła 2021, 378). By using the term *impressed*, it is clear that sociality, for Wojtyła, is not an external reality added to an already complete subject, but something inscribed into the very structure of existence. This means that the personal capacity for participation does not arise in a vacuum. Participation may be a capacity of the person, but the soil in which this capacity develops is already communal. Thus, the tension in Wojtyła's text—between the primacy of the subject and the imprinted social feature—invites a deeper synthesis. What is metaphysically prior (the person as *suppositum*) is experientially inseparable from what is socially given. The order of being and the order of lived emergence must not be collapsed into one another, much as the cosmological and personalist views of the human person complete and enrich one another (Wojtyła 2021, 537–38).

The community is thus no longer a secondary environment that the individual finds themselves in. It becomes a condition of possibility for authentic human action (*czyn*). Without this primordial horizon, the human person remains at the level of biological functioning, incapable of the transcendence and integration that fulfils them as a person. To better understand this vision, I would like to present two cases where this dynamic is best illustrated: the encounter with the *Thou*, and the dynamic of participation.

The Thou as the Catalyst for the I

The interplay between subjectivity and community shows that individuals and communities together shape the experiential articulation of personal identity. Wojtyła's theory of participation explains that the *I-Thou* relationship offers opportunities for self-fulfillment while maintaining the uniqueness of each person. Recognizing the *Thou* as an equally dignified subject means that the *I* comes to know who it is through its relationship with others.

These ideas have been echoed by many personalist thinkers. One example is John Crosby, who says that an individual's recognition of his or her own dignity cannot be separated from recognizing the dignity of other individuals (Crosby 2019, 12). The *Thou* functions as both mirror and resistance: in

encountering another freedom, the *I* discovers that its own desires are not identical with its freedom. In this way, the encounter with the *Thou* reveals the limitations of one's self. One cannot simply reduce the *Thou* to an object of use: one must respect the *Thou* as a subject (Crosby 2019, 12). Therefore, the *Thou* serves as a catalyst for awakening the moral dimension of the *I*.

If an individual recognizes the dignity of another person through their relationship, then the community is not secondary but primordial at the experiential level. An individual becomes truly self-aware as a person in their relationship with another person. Therefore, intersubjectivity is not a secondary but a primary catalyst for the *I* to fully emerge.

The Structure of Participation

Wojtyła defines participation as “that which corresponds to the transcendence of the person in the act when this act is performed ‘together with others,’ in various social or inter-human relations” (Wojtyła 2021, 385). Many scholars view participation as a moral choice made by an already constituted person (Hołub et al. 2019, 77). The *Co-Constitutive Theory* refines this articulation: participation is not only a capacity exercised by the person, but also the very mode through which personhood is actualized.

If the moral act (*czyn*) reveals the person, and if the personalistic value of the act lies in the affirmation of the humanity of others, then the social aspect of personal action is woven into the act of revealing oneself. To act as a person implies that the acting subject acknowledges the existence of another person. Therefore, participation is not simply cooperative behavior. It provides the structure by which an individual integrates their freedom and responsibility.

In this aspect of participation, the concept of transcendence takes on a relationship-oriented nature. In *Person and Act*, Wojtyła identifies self-determination as *vertical transcendence*, which indicates a person's ability to rise above immediate emotion and determine one's self in the truth (Wojtyła 2021, 241–42). However, transcendence presupposes resistance—the presence of another freedom that cannot be reduced to one's own projects. This confrontation comes from those persons with whom we interact through community. By virtue of being exposed to the freedoms of individuals, we come to understand the limits of our individual freedoms and find ourselves bound to these limits by virtue of our responsibilities to one another in community. Through our experiences of confronting one another, transcendence becomes intelligible.

Simultaneity and the Emergence of the Person

At this point, the *Co-Constitutive Theory* makes it clear that the individual is not negated but reframed in the context of the unfolding of their experience. Ontologically, the *I* exists as a *suppositum*. As such, he or she cannot be reduced to, identified with, or created by the community. However, phenomenologically and axiologically, the idea of personhood can only take effect in the community, since that trait is impressed upon existence. It is through the co-existence of the *I* and the *We* that both emerge simultaneously.

When one says that the individual *I* and communal *We* emerge simultaneously, one does not mean to validate a collective sense of self or an individualistic sense of a collective. All it means is that when the *I* transcends itself in a mutual encounter with a *Thou*, the *I* has the opportunity to actualize an understanding of itself as freedom through confrontation with another's freedom. Consequently, the act of self-determination is made intelligible by the *Thou's* mirroring and resistance.⁴

As such, the inherent communicative nature of individual (*I*) and community (*We*) should not be viewed as sequential levels, but as co-implicative. This co-implicative nature leads both the *I* and the *Thou* to self-determination, and this co-determination provides the community with a framework for participation. It is in this sense that we can say that there is no *I* without a *Thou*, and no *Thou* without a *We*.

In sum, in the context of personal experience, both the subject and their relations are given simultaneously. In participation, the *I* genuinely partakes in the humanity of others, and others partake in the *I's* humanity. Yet this experience does not relativize the ontological weight of one's own humanity. Rather, in common action, it brings one's individuality into sharper relief. Unlike alienation, true participation allows the individual person to fully manifest their subjective self-determination, fulfil themselves through action, and, consequently, bear a distinct moral responsibility for that action.

V. AGAINST TOTALITARIANISM

At first glance, any proposal that puts methodological emphasis on the community will raise concerns about its falling into what Wojtyła himself

4. To be clear, self-determination, realized through action, is fundamentally an act having an individual character. It is the essence of human freedom and an expression of the "individualization of nature." While acting together manifests our shared humanity, Wojtyła insists that communality does not come at the expense of individuality. Rather, it incorporates and complements the picture of human individuality by ensuring that action fundamentally belongs to a singular, responsible subject.

repeatedly condemned: collectivism, totalism, or the absorption of the person into an impersonal whole. Many will argue that this methodical reversal is going to invert personalism into its opposite. This concern is especially important when one takes into account Wojtyła's personal experience with two totalitarian regimes—National Socialism and Soviet Marxism—both of which subordinated the person to an abstract system. He repeatedly warns that alienation arises wherever social structures negate self-determination or reduce personal fulfillment to the service of systemic goals. Whenever the individual becomes subordinate to a so-called “greater whole,” the system becomes inhuman. Therefore, any Community-First thesis must demonstrate a continuity with Wojtyła's opposition to totalitarianism.

The present proposal avoids this pitfall by keeping clear a decisive distinction made by Wojtyła himself: the difference between “society” as an objective network of relationships, and “community” as the experienced, lived, and subjective unity of persons (Wojtyła 2021, 394–95). Society can exist as structure; however, the community exists only via the person's participation. The Methodological Reversal will not consider the community to be an impersonal entity. Instead, it is the primordial soil within which persons encounter one another as subjects.

Therefore, the community is not just an entity. It is not a vast individual-based compound of people. The community is a collection of people working together for the betterment and growth of all individual members. To give an example of this idea: the community is the “ground,” and the individuals the “plants.” Although the “plant” possesses an ontologically higher status and dignity than the “ground,” the “plant” cannot exist and grow independently of the “ground.” (The “ground” contributes to the existence and growth of the “plant.”) Likewise, in order to truly comprehend why the plant is a “higher” form of ontological being than the “ground,” we must first study the “ground” to gain a better understanding of the conditions in which the plant thrives.

In this regard, one must rigorously distinguish between the metaphysical and epistemological (or personalist) aspects of the person. Metaphysically, substance always possesses primacy over relation (an accident). Relations are either necessary or contingent. Communality is a necessary relation for human flourishing in Wojtyła's thought. Nevertheless, substance ontologically precedes it, and this is why Wojtyła calls the subject *suppositum* and not *relatio*. *Ergo*, the communal aspect of personal existence never replaces the individual one. Ontologically, there is no *We* without an *I* and a *Thou*, yet the *Thou* is also an *I*—a someone—which gives the *We* its irreducible

dimension. The *Co-Constitutive Theory* operates primarily at the personalist level, maintaining the ontological priority of substance over relation.

The Common Good

An illuminating way to clarify this proper articulation of the community is through Wojtyła's account of the common good. As mentioned above, individuals are directed toward a common good that they all strive towards in participation. The definition of "common good" here is simply the good of the community. One can understand this in two senses.

On the one hand, it is the objective goal that the community of acting aims towards. For example, in a school context the common good of teachers and students is the fostering of good model citizens through character-formation. This shared objective provides direction and unity to communal action.

Nevertheless, what conditions that goal is the subjective understanding of the common good, which is what conditions participation. It is the principle of correct participation that corresponds to the social nature of the human person, and that enables the common action of persons to be performed authentically in a manner directed towards self-fulfillment (Ignatik 2021, 45–46). In this sense, the common good conditions participation not as coercion, but as personal realization. This understanding strengthens personalism by rearticulating the common good in subjective terms. Because participation is the capacity to share in the humanity of others while acting together for a common good, the common good will be irreducible to a collective output or social efficiency. It is a set of conditions that enables persons to fulfil themselves through responsible action.

Here, Buttiglione's observation is crucial: "there is no common good without participation" (1997, 172). The common good does not exist apart from people; it exists and can be maintained only when people actively participate in the good. In participating in the common good, an individual may give up a part of their own private good; they do not do this because they are forced to by a totalitarian system, but because they understand that self-realization often happens through self-giving. Sacrifice can only come from a person's own freedom, not compulsion.

Wojtyła makes clear that achieving the common good is not easy. Participation is voluntary and cannot be forced. The good must always be the true/genuine good; thus, it has to include both its objective content and the subjective way one relates to it. When the common good is understood in this way, it is not seen as something externally imposed. Instead, it is seen as our actual good. Consequently, the common good is not only the

orienting priority for action within a community, but also validates each individual's contribution to the community and the collective contribution of the community as a whole.

The Role of the I–Thou and the We in Personal Emergence

Another perspective that prevents collectivist misreadings of community can be found in Wojtyła's distinction between two dimensions of sociality: the inter-human relation (*I–Thou*) and the properly social dimension (*We*). This distinction ensures that the communal horizon remains grounded in personal encounter rather than in abstract structure.

The *I–Thou* relationship serves as the elementary building block of every community; it is an interaction between individuals where, according to Wojtyła, both the *I* and *Thou* are revealed as human subjects through being able to encounter one another as the center of freedom rather than an object of use (Wojtyła 2021, 493). This experience reaffirms and develops one's individuality. Rather than breaking down the sense of self, the *I–Thou* relationship provides a stronger basis for identity. When I am with another person, I can relate to them and know myself as an agent making moral decisions, because that other person cannot be converted into me or my completed self. This idea is supported by John F. Crosby when he explains that when one affirms the other's human worth, they can simultaneously have an increased awareness of their own worth (2019, 12). Thus, this is not only a sociological encounter, but also carries ontological significance.

When a plurality of persons act together for a common good, such as a team of scientists working on a cure for cancer, the *We*-Relationship emerges. Wojtyła teaches that the *We* does not destroy the *I*, but instead gives a different aspect and dimension to the *I*'s fulfillment. In the *We*-relationship, the *I* comes to understand that their own growth is inseparable from the growth of the other persons.

The subjective unity of the *We* is the natural outcome of the mature form of living together in a community. This is not the same as a group of unconscious people acting entirely without any awareness—i.e., mass psychology or anonymous crowds—nor is it simply acting together as non-persons or individuals. The *We* continues to comprise and constitute several *I*s who are complete and cannot be reduced. Therefore, the *We* as a community is not a collective or a mass: rather, it is a communion with one another.

In this sense, a community is not simply an abstract collection of people who have to conform. It provides a relational field in which the *I* can overcome its individual existence and experience; in this space, the *I* does not exist first, separate from the *Thou*; rather the realization of the *I* as a person

occurs inside the relational field or horizon. As the *I* learns or discovers its own *I-ness* by being addressed from the other *I* or *Thou*, the same is true concerning the *We*. As a result, each *I* can retain its identity as a distinct *I* and maintain its individuality.

Integration and Transcendence within the Communal Horizon

The foregoing analysis of the nature of community carries significant implications for the two pillars of Wojtyła's anthropology: integration and transcendence.

Integration is the process of unifying two inner experiences (somatic-vegetative dynamics and psycho-emotive dynamics) with personal freedom, leading to a single effective self (coherent identity) in order to allow for the possibility of individual acts with individual responsibility (Hołub et al. 2019, 140–41). This integration occurs in the context of community, and is either supported by a healthy community or hindered by an alienating/oppressive one. Supportive communities provide shared meanings, models of moral conduct, and stable relationships to help individuals integrate the spontaneity of their impulses into their integrated identity. Alienating/oppressive communities do not provide the supports needed in order to allow for integration of the subjective totality of the individual and, therefore, disrupt their ability to take effective action. Wojtyła argues that the extent to which communities provide the supports required by individuals to allow for integration is determined by how much support for self-determining activity the community provides through the ways in which it distorts conditions for individuals' participation in community activity (Ignatik 2021, 47). Another way of putting this is to say that integration is not the same as isolated internal psychology, but is dependent upon the supportive context of community, out of which the individual develops.

In a similar manner, the person's natural ability to transcend is realized through participation; without a community that provides meaning, the individual has no adequate expression of that ability (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 123)—so there can be no expression of transcendence in either the horizontal (intentionality/comparison towards objects) or vertical (self-determination/difference with regard to truth and/or self-values) dimensions. This is particularly important with vertical transcendence, which constitutes freedom in its fullest sense, guided by the truth about the good.

Such truth is never discovered in isolation. It is mediated through culture, tradition, and shared ethical inheritance (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 79–92). The communal horizon transmits the moral language, symbols, and

narratives through which the individual recognizes values. Self-determination thus becomes a response to a truth encountered within history, rather than an invention *ex nihilo*.

From this vantage point, transcendence itself presupposes community. The person transcends impulses not by creating values independently, but by responding to a good disclosed within a shared world. Community provides both resistance and a mirror for self-recognition: the presence of other freedoms exposes the limits of one's own freedom and calls it to responsibility. Without this encounter, transcendence would lack direction.

In the end, as Buttiglione says, one must avoid approaches that downplay the irreducibility, transcendence, or intersubjective dimension of the person (1997, 177). Taking note of this, the Co-Constitutive Theory does not put emphasis on the community over the individual. Rather, it clarifies how the lived, relational experiences of persons—their encounters, actions, and mutual recognition—are the very arena in which self-conscious subjectivity becomes fully actualized.

VI. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A STRONGER PERSONALISM

To look at the community first is not to lose the individual. It is to locate the person precisely where he or she lives: in encounter, in dialogue, and within the heart of a shared world. This investigation reaffirms the human being as a relational substance—not in the sense that relation replaces substance, but in the sense that subjectivity is catalyzed, mediated, and fulfilled within a communal horizon. The *I* remains the ontological foundation of action, yet it finds its concrete realization only within the lived reality of the *We*.

When properly articulated, a Community-First approach does not generate a monster or collapse into collectivism. The community is not an idol demanding absorption: it is the soil in which the plant—the human person—grows and bears fruit in self-fulfillment. Wojtyła himself affirms this orientation linguistically and conceptually through terms that highlight the person's inherent relational structure and ultimate orientation toward *communio personarum*. The drama of freedom, integration and transcendence does not culminate in solitary self-possession, but in communion.

By embracing a Community-First methodological horizon, contemporary scholarship may move beyond a merely cosmological framing of the person and recover a fully personalistic vision of the human subject-in-relation. Such a shift does not weaken Wojtyła's personalism: it deepens it. It articulates more explicitly what his thought already intimates: that there is no *I* without a *Thou* and no *Thou* without a *We*—yet, equally, there is no *We* without the irreducible *I* and *Thou*, each of whom remains a someone

and never a mere function of the whole. In recognizing this simultaneity, personalism becomes not less protective of the person, but more profoundly attuned to the concrete drama of human existence in the modern world.

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