

While Morrow's book is at times repetitive, overall it is a stimulating reflection on a major cultural and spiritual change within the Church. It will prove a valuable resource for any theological reflection on the virtue and sacrament of penance today.

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KAROL WOJTYLA'S PERSONALIST PHILOSOPHY: UNDERSTANDING PERSON & ACT by Miguel Acosta and Adrian J. Reimers, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2016, pp. ix + 260, \$57.28, hbk*

Every desire depends on the desirer's understanding of its object and is therefore correctable with an improvement of that understanding. If I desire, on a Friday, to avoid eating meat and am enjoying an egg wrap but subsequently find it stuffed with bacon, I have done what I desire (eaten an egg wrap) but not what I desired at a deeper level. And while not all desires are so easily correctable we can say that desires and actions that are not based on the real truths about their objects are simply not deeply grounded responses of the desirers to those objects.

Some thinkers, and Karol Wojtyla was clearly one of them, take a particular interest in the nature of desire and seek to reach the truth about the human person by reflecting on desire as well as on more 'external' matters. It is no surprise that philosophers who have devoted much time to work in sexual ethics take this approach to the discovery of moral truths. In his classic work *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyla produced a rich account of sexual ethics influenced by, of course, Thomas Aquinas, but also 'realist phenomenologists' such as Max Scheler. This approach to the subject is little known in England, though interestingly Roger Scruton, in his *Sexual Desire*, fruitfully and refreshingly adopted a similar approach in his defence of a broadly traditional sexual ethic. The attention to sexual desire certainly helped Wojtyla to account for the 'specialness' of this area of ethics, a 'specialness' perhaps not well captured by some of the older moral theology manuals.

Of course, while Wojtyla is especially known for his work in sexual ethics his central philosophical work is *Person and Act* (often confusingly rendered from the Polish as *The Acting Person*). This difficult and challenging work is lucidly explained in a number of engaging chapters by Acosta and Reimers, who do a valuable service in drawing out lines of thought from the man who would go on to become Pope John Paul II. While there is some mention of later encyclicals such as *Fides et Ratio*, one disappointment is the lack of mention of what is arguably John Paul II's most important encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, which demonstrates an extraordinary depth of understanding and originality concerning Thomas Aquinas's moral thought.

For Wojtyła the experience of the human being is where we should start, particularly the experience of the human act. As Acosta puts it:

‘The act arises within human consciousness from an experience of need or desire, in response to which the person envisions a plan to meet that need . . . To fulfil that desire he undertakes certain actions . . . The agent seeks effectively to change something in the world, to bring something new into being. Wojtyła calls this capacity to effect change, or effective causality, *operativity* . . . the acting person needs to accomplish something.’

The act has a twofold character as subjective and objective and so too is the person both subject and object. The person is subjectively conscious of the world and consciously present to him or herself. And Wojtyła, avoiding the tendency of some philosophers to give epistemological primacy to consciousness (a besetting sin of both Cartesians and Humeans), gives a metaphysical analysis which he believes is necessary for comprehension of the human person. Acosta puts it well:

‘If the person is both subject and object, that is, if he is both a self-aware center of consciousness and an agent of change within the nexus of physical bodies in the world, then he cannot simply be reduced either to the one or the other. He is not simply a center of consciousness. Neither is he merely one object among many in the world, a ‘something’ that is not ‘someone’. The human person exists as a *suppositum*, by which is expressed “the being as subjective foundation of existence and action.” The *suppositum* or “metaphysical subjectivity” is not directly accessible to experience; it is “transphenomenal”, by which Wojtyła means that, although it is not itself phenomenal, it is grasped through phenomena and therefore must be known only through reason.’

From here we can move to the concept of ‘horizontal transcendence’ which involves the subject transcending his subjective limits towards an object – in other words, directing himself toward a value – an experience that ordinarily takes the form of a desire. We human beings cannot understand our consciousness of values without reference to the body, the very means of our interaction with the world which our experience shows to be an objectively existing world outside the subjectivity of consciousness. Such considerations allow Wojtyła, in his work *Love and Responsibility*, to reflect on desire and its fulfilment, when he writes,

‘Love as desire cannot be reduced to desire itself. It is simply the crystallization of the objective need of one being directed towards another being which is for it a good and object of longing. In the *mind of the subject*, *love-as-desire* is not felt as mere desire.’

While horizontal transcendence concerns the transcendence of the person toward values outside himself, vertical transcendence is that kind of transcendence which allows a person to direct himself towards the truth about the good. It is a consequence of the spiritual nature of the person, that he is centred or focused on goodness and truth. In this way the person can, in some sense, stand above the realm of his experiences and evaluate them according to the truth of the values represented to them. And when it comes to acts, we must remember that Wojtyła

sees in the thought of Thomas Aquinas the insight that human action is both transitive and intransitive – transitive insofar as it goes beyond the person and expresses itself and effects the world, ‘produces’ the world in some sense, and intransitive in that it remains in the subject and forms the subject’s immanent value. Such an understanding protects against utilitarian approaches to ethics (less popular in the academy but dominant in public policy decision-making) and takes account of just how profound human acts are.

From here we are able to approach the spiritual nature of man, also explored in this clear and well-organised book. There are useful discussions of Wojtyła’s philosophical anthropology, a kind of multi-disciplinary approach that Anglo-American philosophers can learn from, as well as valuable chapters on Transcendence, Integration and Participation. This is exactly the kind of book that students eager to learn more about Wojtyła should really get hold of. It is a good starting point and I hope that it introduces Wojtyła’s thought (in depth and not just through vulgarisations of his *Theology of the Body*) to a new generation who did not grow up with John Paul II as Pope.

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THE THEOLOGY OF LOUIS MASSIGNON: ISLAM, CHRIST, AND THE CHURCH
by Christian S. Krokus, Foreword by Sidney H. Griffith, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2017, pp. xvii + 245, \$65.00, hbk*

Writing about Louis Massignon (1883–1962) is no easy task, and the book under review bears witness to both the complexities of his character as well as of the multi-layered meaning of some of his controversial statements.

The author’s method is that of letting Massignon speak for himself thereby allowing the reader to know precisely what he said. In doing so, however, quite a few readers are in for some shock therapy. Massignon is an orthodox and sincere believer in the articulation of his personal faith. But the presentation of this faith could at times turn out to be very nuanced especially when the issue revolves around the relationship between the Church and Islam. Consequently, it could easily be subjected to misinterpretations – if not also extrapolations – of his teachings to the detriment of genuine and honest interreligious dialogue. His ‘interiorist method’ (p. 44), as Krokus describes it, is one case in point. Massignon is neither clear nor systematic in the presentation of his ideas. Here, perhaps, the author might have been better advised to place footnote 135 of Chapter Five (which clarifies this issue) in the text itself and in an earlier part of the book than on page 165. This would spare quite a few readers much anxiety and anguish.