

# Karol Wojtyla and Logotherapy

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In June 1977 I organized an all-Polish colloquium on logotherapy in Lublin, Poland. Participating were psychology theoreticians and practitioners who, in addition to their training in psychology, had also studied biology, philosophy, medicine, sociology, or theology.

The colloquium compared Viktor Frankl's ideas with those of other therapists, (such as Perls, Rogers, Wolfe) and with the philosophical-ethical thoughts of theologians. Among the latter were those of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, at that time professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin, the present Pope John Paul II.

Although both scholars arrived at their thoughts by different routes (philosophy and psychotherapy), their ideas concurred on what essentially it means to be human - on such areas as freedom, responsibility, self-transcendence, but also alienation.

Both scholars see human beings as deciding subjects rather than manipulable objects - free, responsible, in continuous develop-

ment, and reaching beyond themselves. These characteristics, and the human capacity to function in the three dimensions of body, mind, and spirit, make for their uniqueness of being human. Because many scientific studies tend to neglect these characteristics, such studies often produce a reductionistic picture of the person, diminished by a truly important human dimension - the spirit.

Wojtyla analyzes the concept of the human person in *Love and Responsibility*<sup>1</sup> and *The Person and His Acts*<sup>2</sup>, and in a series of articles including "Person and Community".<sup>3</sup> In these works he develops a truly personalistic concept of the human being. The real function of philosophy, he says, is a basic understanding of human nature, of human actions and interactions. "Philosophy must help us with basic understandings and ultimate explanations" (p. 6).<sup>3</sup> The need for such understandings and explanations, writes Wojtyla, accompanies human existence during everyone's life. In some moments of history, as in crises and confrontations, the need becomes especially strong. Our contemporary situation is such a time - a time of great conflict about the meaning of personal and human existence.

As shown by Frankl, this conflict has more than theoretical-scientific implications. It also plays an important part in the existence of the individual who, feeling isolated spiritually, reacts to the reality of present-day life with a neurosis which characterizes our times and which Frankl calls "noogenic," originating in the spirit. This neurosis may enter a person's "existential vacuum" when he or she has lost direction and cannot find values and meanings. Such patients bring to the psychiatric consulting room not only a philosophical but also a theological-ethical problem. They



*The First Colloquium on logotherapy in Lublin, Poland, in 1977.*

"function" properly but "feel" bad. Both Wojtyla and Frankl see human nature in more than physical functions and psychological reactions. They see human essence only insufficiently explained by facts and the intuitions of philosophers. Both scholars believe that human beings not only "function" on a physio-psychological level but also aspire to fulfill themselves as individuals in the dimension of the spirit. Human beings are seen as more than the sum of their parts: Only by considering the totality of all three dimensions can the human being be understood philosophically and ethically (Wojtyla) but also made and kept healthy (Frankl).

### The Dual Ethical Principle

Wojtyla formulates a dual ethical principle which is the base of human dignity. The positive principle says, "An individual is of such high value that his proper treatment is only through love"<sup>(p. 31)</sup>.<sup>1</sup> The negative principle states, "An individual is of such a high quality that he must not be used and cannot be treated as an object of use and as a means to an end"<sup>(p. 31)</sup>.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a person cannot be an object of use but only an object of love.

Frankl formulates the same idea somewhat differently by regarding it the truly distinctive characteristic of love that it does not take a human being as an object but recognizes - and fully respects - the subject quality of the human person. On the basis of such a personalistic view - which unites Wojtyla's and Frankl's understanding of humanness - is Frankl's call for a "rehumanization of psychotherapy" understandable.

Wojtyla sees the human being as an individual with the full capacity of self-determination. This capacity forms the basis for both managing oneself and giving oneself to others. On these grounds also, the I-Thou relationship in the sense of Martin Buber can establish itself. The ability to give of oneself contributes to the discovery of meaning in human existence.

All this is in perfect accordance with Frankl's contention that self-actualization is a by-product of self-transcendence. Since fulfillment cannot occur directly but only through involving oneself in behalf of another person, the dialogical structure of human existence is disclosed - the relationship among

human beings, and the relationship between humans and God. In fact, "participation" in the Thou is an essential part of human nature. The "we" is created on the basis of participation. On the other hand, isolation from the "we" deprives a person of self-fulfillment and makes him or her the victim of alienation, the antithesis of participation. This concept also elucidates the kinship between "alienation" and the logotherapeutic idea of the existential vacuum.

Human beings not only exist but act. And acting conversely influences their existence. Or, as Frankl puts it, human beings not only act according to their existence (in the words of Thomas Aquinas: *agere sequitur esse* - acting follows being) but they also "become" according to how they act. In therapy, Frankl uses this insight through "the defiant power of the human spirit" which enables patients to take a stand against limitations in the physio-psychological dimension - to act within, and often even against, unavoidable handicaps. Similarly, Wojtyla writes, "Human consciousness and freedom, the essence of the human spirit, give human beings, as they grow up, the strength to conquer their somatic and psychic dimensions"<sup>(p. 10)</sup>.<sup>3</sup>

Both scholars, then, define humans through what they think but primarily through how they act. In their acts they reveal themselves in their truest and deepest reality. When people think, they can lie. When they feel, they can change. But in their acts they show their unique truth about themselves. In their acts they show how they express their freedom, responsibly or irresponsibly, according to their true self or for the sake of achieving an end.

*Translated from the Polish by John Tworek*

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