

THOMISTIC THEORY OF PERSON AND THE FOUNDATIONS  
OF MIECZYŚLAW GOGACZ'S PEDAGOGY

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**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is an attempt to show that the Thomistic theory of person and the original idea of personal relations built on it become the basis for decisions in the field of pedagogy in the view of consistent Thomism. Mieczysław Gogacz, the founder of this version of Thomism, treating pedagogy as a philosophical science, points to the necessary dependence of upbringing and education on theses resulting from human philosophy, ethics and social security. A properly formulated theory of person is the basis for pedagogy in the current of realist philosophy. This version of Thomism continually emphasises the close dependence of all subsequent assertions on the recognition of existence as an act of individual being which is the basis of all further actualities and manifestations of being. In the case of the human being, the personal act of existence and its manifestations subject the personal relations that result from the coherence of the approaches to metaphysics, philosophy of man and, consequently, ethics. In consistent Thomism, it is the concept of the person and personal relations that define pedagogy.

**Key words:** consistent Thomism, person, social security, Mieczysław Gogacz

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## 1. Introduction

The analyses presented fall within the current of realist philosophy known in the history of philosophy as consistent Thomism. What is characteristic in the metaphysical and ethical approaches, as well as in the concept of politics, for consistent Thomism is that it always gives priority to man over his products, and to real relations over mental relations and constructs. It gives priority to natural communities such as the family and the nation over society or the state. What is denied in the order of being – which is characteristic of the idealistic current of philosophy – is the primacy of thought over real being, of the whole or the process over the part, or the blurring of the distinction between the subject and its feature (Lipski, 2020b, 84-85).

Mieczysław Gogacz, the founder of consistent Thomism, in his philosophical approach proposes an original theory of person and the resulting concept of personal relations. These relations build directly on the properties of a transcendent being, that is, the manifestation of his existence. This development of the thought of Thomas Aquinas is an interesting proposal for building pedagogy. In this view, it is a philosophical discipline, and is closely related to theses in metaphysics and philosophy of man. The consequence of this approach is a solid foundation in the form of the theses of realist philosophy. Man, as a person in a world of being pluralism, communes with entities that realistically interact. Such an approach protects pedagogy from the influence of irrationalism, voluntarism, idealism or perfectionism.

The term 'person' itself – expressed in Latin *persona* – goes back to the Greek term *prosopon*, the mask worn by an actor in the ancient theatre to impersonate a given character. In the Old Testament, the Greek *prosopon* was used to describe the human as well as the divine face. From the turn of the 5th/6th century, the term person or hypostasis was used in theology to explain the being nature of Jesus Christ. The first definition of the notion of person proposed by Boethius is precisely an attempt to answer how his two natures, human and divine, can be reconciled in Christ (Krapiec). Nevertheless, the very notion of person belongs not only to man, but also to angels (spiritual form and capacity) or to God himself (intrinsic act of existence).

The theory of person is thus an achievement of Christian thought. However, Thomas Aquinas himself does not make much use of the term *persona* when referring to his moral philosophy. The reason for this caution may be the fear of immediate connotations of the term 'person' with Trinitarian issues. This does not change the fact that in Thomism the understanding of man as a person and the very term 'person' must be made the first, initial theme of moral philosophy - and consequently of pedagogy - placing the person in the position of the subject of ethics (Andrzejuk, 2000, 214).

It should be noted that the Thomistic theory of person, the exemplification of which is shown in the paper, should not be identified with the view of the person in the philosophy of personalism. In the case of the latter, there is an equating of (personalist) ethics with the theory of man as a person. According to Gogacz, the consequence of Emmanuel Mounier's views is to treat the person not as an individual being, but rather as a process or reference to society. In this concept, each person is expected to call on another to relate to them in a necessarily responsible manner. That response is to be the affirmation of man. The person's issues and needs are the criterion for action. However, as Gogacz notes, there is an equivocation between responsibility and love, which ultimately makes it difficult for man to understand this love as such (Gogacz, 1998, 24-25 et 39).

## **2. Metaphysics and philosophy of man as a starting point for pedagogy**

The goal of metaphysics is the correct identification of the principia of being. Philosophy of man accordingly will attempt to define the principia of man as a particular kind of being. All subsequent fields of philosophy should in their investigations build on the theses developed within metaphysics and philosophy of man. The cultivation of the latter must, as Gogacz (1998, 35-36) points out, necessarily lead to issues of ethics as the structure of a person's actions.

Thus, for example, ethics consists in identifying the principia of conduct, that is, the choice of actions that protect the good of persons and personal relations previously identified precisely by metaphysics and anthropology. In turn, the theses of ethics become the basis for pedagogy. Consistent Thomism is interested in the interactions of real entities, manifestations of their existence and essence which produce certain specific effects in the intellect of the knower. In turn, the encounter with real beings opens the way to their identification. Beings – including, of course, man as a person – become accessible in cognition through transcendentals. Truth as a transcendental property enables the knower intellect to grasp the principals of the essence and existence of the being that is being known. This knowledge in the intellect induces in man the desire to relate to the known being with respect as a result of the principia discovered. Communing with real beings improves the intellect in making right decisions. The action prompted by the word of the heart (*verbum cordis*), called forth by the essential principia of the being encountered, moves from the encounter into the order of presence which takes the form of a relationship of love, faith and hope (Lipski, 2020a, 212-214).

In the context of relations that occur between persons, Gogacz formulates an original theory of existential personal relations that are based on transcendental properties. These relations are bidirectional, as one person is both their subject and their end. Three personal relations are recognised, namely those which are built on the transcendental property of reality, truth and the good. A person with his or her transcendental property interacts with the similar transcendental property of another person. This impact is independent of our cognition and decisions. Cognition and decisions only tend to exploit these relations, protect them or destroy them. Through personal relations we bind ourselves to the transcendental properties of the other person and relate with awe to

the person-initiating act of existence and its manifestations. The transcendental property of reality in two persons is the basis of the relationship of love. The deepest essence of this relation is simply benevolent cohabitation, 'mutual acceptance called liking'. The transcendental property of truth builds a relation of faith between persons, to which Gogacz gives a specific meaning. The relation of faith here is 'the opening up of persons and making themselves available to each other which is fulfilled in trust'. The transcendental property of the good, on the other hand, constitutes a relation of hope, which in this view is a benevolent and trusting reason for persons' need to abide in love and faith. It is the hope that 'each person will be accepted and trusted'. These three relations constitute the basic, primary and irreplaceable environment of persons. The world and nature are, in relation to persons and their relations, a secondary environment which ultimately has to protect the good of persons (Gogacz 1996, 46-48).

Pedagogy, which aims at the principles of selection of educative activities, is also a philosophical science. However, pedagogy – in the view of consistent Thomism – as the science of man, does not identify with the philosophy of being, the philosophy of man or ethics. It is not concerned with identifying the principia of being or human structure. Nor does it establish a principle for choosing actions that protect persons and personal relations, which is the competence of ethics. Pedagogy deals with 'the principles of selecting activities through which actions that protect individuals and their relations are realised'. Philosophy of being, philosophical anthropology and ethics define 'what' as the object of their study. Pedagogy is concerned with the principles of determining the most appropriate 'how', arriving at fidelity to truth and the good as wisdom. This "how" is also the pupil's ability not to succumb to the falsehood and evil present in their culture of today. Pedagogy is therefore a way of obtaining the improvements recommended by ethics (Gogacz, 1997, 64-65).

Ethics therefore remains in the immediate vicinity of pedagogy. Ethics defines the aims of upbringing, while pedagogy itself becomes a theory of the principles of upbringing, which are the search for ways of influencing people so that they want to implement the indications of ethics (Andrzejuk, 2000, 222).

The norms of such a pedagogy are the faculties of the intellect, the virtues of the will, personal relations and attitudes as 'multifaceted referrals to persons'. This is achieved by gifting man's spiritual powers and 'orienting' him towards persons and their communities (Gogacz, 1997, 78).

### 3. Theory of person in consistent Thomism

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, called the Last Roman, formulated the first definition of a person. A person is an individual substance with a rational nature (*Persona rationalis naturae individua substantia est*). This definition sets out two constitutives for defining a person. First, the person is an individual substance, namely a real, concrete subject of action. Moreover, rationality is a distinguishing feature of his nature, or essence, which manifests itself in action. Thomas Aquinas seeks to clarify these terms: person is the name of that which is most perfect in the whole of nature, namely, independent existence (*subsistens*) in rational nature (Summa Theologiae I, q. 29, a. 3). He adds that this self-existence is of great dignity, which is why every individual of rational nature is referred to by the name 'person' (Summa Theologiae I, q. 29, a. 3, ad 2).

It can be seen, then, that for Aquinas it is not dignity that derives from the concept of person, but the concept of person from the concept of dignity as a certain perfection of being that rational beings are entitled to. What initiates this dignity – and thus the person – is the act of being, which is the act for all further perfections, including rationality. Thomas Aquinas clearly emphasises that the emergence of the person is linked to his or her existence, the most perfect factor in being. It is the rationality that man as a person is real and true. Existence manifests itself in man as reality, separateness, unity, as well as openness to truth and the good. Reality in the form of manifestations of truth and the good liberates personal references. The human person exists as a being in its own right, as personal being himself or herself, and personal subjectivity is at the very centre of his or her life (Wolska 2015, 206).

Thus, in the development of the theory of person, Boethius' definition can be classified as an essentialist ac-

count of the person (essence identical with substance). His or her existential version would be, in Thomism, to point, in addition to rationality, to the act of existence (existence being the cause of substance) which, among other things, gives rise to this rationality. Existence for Thomas Aquinas is therefore the second *constitutivum* of the person, as fundamental as rationality. Mieczysław Gogacz expresses this approach in his definition: ‘a person is an autonomous individual being in whose essence, permeated by reality, the act of existing triggers intellectuality’ (Gogacz 1997, 69-70). In order to leave no doubt that rationality is not an effect of causes external to man as in the case of Aristotle’s views, Gogacz also replaces the term nature with substance (Gogacz 1991, 27-28).

Consistent Thomism pays attention not only to the essential and existential properties of persons. The former are associated with the creation of knowledge (cognition – intellect) and freedom of choice (decision – will), the latter based on a concrete, unique act of existence. The person – according to Gogacz – manifests itself primarily in personal relationships. The fundamental relations are love, faith and hope that are given special terms by Gogacz. It is the continuance of personal relations that makes it possible to identify a given being as a person in which existence and intellectuality are revealed. The knowledge and maintenance of these fundamental relations of love, faith and hope, which are based on transcendental properties, have the effect of revealing the intellectuality and decisiveness of persons in personal relations. Personal relations reveal the reasonableness and free will of persons, just as reality, truth and the good revealed their existence (Lipski, 2020b, 89-90).

Mieczysław Gogacz thus defines a person as a rational being who also loves. Such an approach points to three aspects of the person: the establishment of a relation, rationality and the freedom resulting from this rationality for which the subject in the person is his or her will as the rational power to decide (Andrzejuk, 2014).

In such a view of the person, dignity would be his or her privileged status among other substances that would result from the very comparison of beings. Dignity is called here the axiological property of a person, a certain position among beings, resulting from the accumulation – in the metaphysical sense – of the good. Dignity is the result of ‘ontic grandeur’ arising from the principia that constitute the person. Dignity is not the essence, casualness, a relation or a transcendental or physical property of a person. Rather, it is a ‘situation of persons’ resulting from the fact that existence actualises their intellectuality. It is thus external to the internal principia of the person, a consequence that elevates persons and their communities above other beings. The dignity of persons is, in this view, the result of recognising (Gogacz, 1989, 195-197). Moreover, dignity in Gogacz’s perspective is not – as is assumed in the personalist view – the starting point for ethics, since we discover it in moral experience. In the view of consistent Thomism, it is the philosophical heuresis of the person that reveals his or her dignity, not ethics. The dignity of persons alone does not trigger action to protect persons and their dignity. Nor does it have the nature of an obligation to accept persons, since acceptance is the result of a relation of love as ‘the gift of abiding in benevolent references’ (Gogacz, 1989, 201-206). Rather, the identification of dignity with duty is the result of equating metaphysics with ethics.

In the context of person theory, it is also worth mentioning the distinction between the concept of person and personality. For the latter is in man a certain ‘system of his casual properties and relations’. This system – apart from the nature itself – consists of the psychological, moral, artistic, intellectual life, as well as cultural and social activities of a person (Gogacz, 1985, 148-149).

#### **4. Upbringing and education**

The main task of pedagogy in the view of consistent Thomism will be to improve man’s ability to relate to truth and the good as manifestations of real beings. Pedagogy therefore has as its object the principles of choice of actions that improve the intellect and the will. It is necessary to improve the intellect in such a way that, recognising the truth, it does not recommend the will to every being, but only that which produces good effects. Gogacz points to three such norms for general pedagogy that become principles of education and upbringing. The most important is wisdom ‘as the orientation towards truth and the good’, then the relationship of faith as the real link of the person with truth and the good by ‘trusting in these manifestations of existence’, furthermore

patience as 'the capacity to repeat actions that improve in fidelity to existence, truth and the good of persons'. In contrast, the norms of specific pedagogy are the principles that facilitate the protection of persons from the effects of the influence of falsehood and evil in culture. This occurs when interacting cultural products induce the intellect and will to overlook truth and the good. Gogacz points to four basic principles. Firstly, humility as 'the acceptance and choice of truth and the good' which are the result of obedience to the wishes of the loved one, mainly to the educator. Mortification which is the undertaking of toil in the omission of falsehood, evil, error and imperfection and a readiness to renounce. Obedience as the ability to trust the person of the educator, and the last, poverty, in this view, is to be directed first to persons and to establish relations with them, and only secondarily to the world of things and products (Gogacz, 1997, 78; Gondek, 2016, 102-107).

Pedagogy deals with the selection of such activities through which it is possible to protect individuals and their relations. It must therefore indicate activities that facilitate the subordination of sensory actions to those of the intellect. Pedagogy defines the activities of protecting and improving the intellect and the will, at the same time training the sensory powers in attentive receptions and reactions to the physical good of beings. Man, through upbringing and education, learns to control his drives and feelings, as well as to avoid falsehood and evil in culture. He becomes rational and free. On the other hand, connections with other people build his unique personality and integrate all his activities. Pedagogy seeks to harmonise mental and spiritual actions with ideas and feelings as a result of the sensory powers (Lipski, 2019, 81).

Consistent Thomism points out that upbringing and education are the two irreplaceable pillars of pedagogy. Without proper education of the intellect, the will, which operates on the information provided by the intellect, cannot be properly educated. The latter, in turn, works properly when, together with the will, they harmonise the activities of man's sensual cognitive and desiring powers. Separating education from upbringing most often leads, according to Gogacz (1993, 27) to a voluntarist vision of pedagogy.

Wisdom is both the goal and the principium of education. A wise man leads his pupil to wisdom. It is a continuous improvement of the intellect so that it always directs man to a better understanding of the world of beings. Education is thus always a deepening of understanding and abiding in personal relations. The end of such improvement of the intellect will be wisdom which we can define as humanistic wisdom. Education and upbringing is supposed to result in humanism in culture. However, Gogacz gives this notion a specific meaning. Humanism is not understood here as the absolutisation of man, his needs and activity, but is the result of actions that protect personal relations and the existence of persons. This manifests itself in the works produced, which are manifestations of the inner spiritual life of man. Humanism understood in this way constitutes fidelity to the recognised truth and the good, i.e. the manifestations of the existence of beings. Pedagogy framed in this way is an indication that wisdom is not taught by institutions or programmes, but always by human beings. Education itself is always philosophical in nature. The educator streamlined in wisdom wants to develop wisdom in the pupils in a relation of trust. What is important here is obedience which is taking up the indications of those endowed with benevolence and trust. The educator, that is, the real person, is always the *raison d'être* of education, even when he or she educates themselves to wisdom (Lipski, 2020a, 217-218).

Obtaining this wisdom requires specific activities of education and upbringing. The first object of the activities of education and upbringing are the sensory cognitive and desiring powers in man. Among the cognitive powers, attention should be paid to the sensory power of a specific judgement (*vis cogitativa*) which mechanically combines the contents of the cognised objects into holistic images. However, this is just 'imitation thinking' without understanding the combined content. Mastering the dominance in man of this power gives opportunity to the intellect in prudently choosing what is true and good. The second object of attention must become the power of imagination which 'from sensations and fascinations of the senses creates compositions, peculiar and attractive syntheses of the nature of images'. As with the power of a particular judgement, images are deluded by the fact that they are a complete account and perception of the world. On the other hand, Gogacz sees threats to wisdom, and thus to this proposal of practising pedagogy, in the dominant role of dreams, among other things: 'It seems that various contemporary versions of pedagogy tend to bring up personalities in which dreaming dominates. It is the personality attributed to actors who make imagined situations and characters into

real objects of experience for their audiences. Often they themselves do not distinguish between imagination and reality. They situate themselves in a dream. This is not about an ensemble of people who are in the acting profession. It is about a personality in which the dream is dominant. A nation that is a set of individuals driven mainly by dreams cannot achieve the common good. And the good of the nation is the personal wisdom obtained by all the people who make up the nation. It can be obtained from childhood by every person regardless of his or her world-view, ideological or religious options' (Gogacz, 1997, 65-66).

The means to improve the intellect in knowledge and wisdom, and the will in righteousness, is persuasion. However, it should always refer to 'love liberating free obedience as recognition of the loved one's wishes, which relieves compulsion and fear' (Gogacz, 1998, 84). Unlike the law which uses sanctions to achieve its aims.

## Conclusion

Consistent Thomism points to the difference in the view of man as a human being and the view of him as a person. For ethics and pedagogy the basis is the theory of man as a person. The correct identification of the person's principia, and consequently the attempt to identify their needs is the starting point for pedagogy. Linking upbringing and education with the theory of persons and personal relations, and thus with metaphysics, philosophy of man and ethics, seems an unfortunately niche proposition these days.

As Gogacz (1997, 78-79) concludes, platonism (idealism) and all its varieties dominate in pedagogy, as in philosophy as a whole. In idealistic pedagogy, it manifests itself in the fact that the norm of education and upbringing becomes goals which, by combining a notion with an evaluation, are called values. This often leads to the pupil being confronted with specific goals whose achievement will be a measure of the effectiveness of a given pedagogical concept. The rationale of pedagogy must be sought in the real capacities of man as a person, not in metaphilosophy.

Defining man as a person solely by relating him to values also exposes pedagogy – and ethics itself – to a form of voluntarism. This view originates in Max Scheler's concept of the hierarchy of values. He saw values as objectified ideal qualities that become moral norms. Access to the world of values ultimately takes place in emotional acts because values here interact directly with the will and not with the intellect. Ethics is then founded on decisions of the will. The will evokes given feelings that are supposed to motivate a human being to appropriate 'moral requirements' towards himself and others. The role of the intellect in moral matters is diminished or ignored. Values become a goal that is recognised as a real cause (Gogacz, 1997; 1998). On the consistent Thomist view, values are not independent or relational entities of any kind. The very continuation of personal relations, when these are recognised as valuable and a person wants to remain in them, is of value (Gogacz, 1996). In upbringing, we need to be able to distinguish the bond with reality, truth and the good from the tactlessness and vanity of the educator who breaks the basic personal bonds in pedagogy with the pupil. This happens in the case of the so-called functionalist pedagogy, which emphasises goals and tasks in the first place, leading to the omission of essential relations such as love, faith and hope (Wójcik, 2014, 155).

It is also worth pointing out Gogacz's remarks on man's relationship with God in the context of the development of the person. When discussing the personal relation, it is important to remember that it is analysed from a philosophical rather than a theological perspective. According to Gogacz, it is possible to analyse this relation without entering into the territory of individual religions and mixing the philosophical and theological order. In turn, man's relationship with God itself can cause spiritual transformation in man (Horowski, 2017, 57). Ultimately, Gogacz (e.g. 1996) defines religion itself as a set of personal relations connecting man with God.

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