

Unveiling the Human Person: Leonardo Polo's Epistemological Proposal for a Transcendental Anthropology

*Desvelando a la persona humana: la propuesta epistemológica de Leonardo Polo
para una antropología trascendental*

MERCEDES RUBIO

Universidad Internacional Villanueva (Madrid)
ORCID: 0000-0001-9221-3393
mercedes.rubio@villanueva.edu

RECIBIDO: 1 DE ABRIL DE 2023
VERSIÓN DEFINITIVA: 25 DE JUNIO DE 2024

Abstract: There have been two major revolutions in the history of philosophy. The first, when Aristotle formalized philosophical language and metaphysics. The second, when modern philosophers turned to the thinking subject. The modern project is stalled due to the inability of classical anthropological notions to provide answers to key questions, like the nature and scope of human knowledge, freedom, and interpersonal relations. L. Polo proposes a theory of knowledge that adds the missing links, enabling him to develop a fully-fledged transcendental anthropology that completes the picture of the human person.

Keywords: Classical Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, Metaphysics, Anthropology, Theory of Knowledge, Act and Potency, Act of Being, Extra-Mental Being, Mental Being, Active Intellect, Real Distinction.

Resumen: Se pueden observar dos revoluciones centrales en la historia de la filosofía. La primera, cuando Aristóteles formalizó el lenguaje filosófico y la metafísica. La segunda, cuando los filósofos modernos centraron su atención en el sujeto cognoscente. El proyecto moderno está estancado debido a la insuficiencia de las nociones antropológicas clásicas para dar respuestas a cuestiones clave como la naturaleza y el alcance del conocimiento humano, la libertad y las relaciones interpersonales. L. Polo propone una teoría del conocimiento que aporta las piezas que faltaban, permitiéndole desarrollar una antropología trascendental que completa el retrato de la persona humana.

Palabras clave: Filosofía clásica, Filosofía moderna, Metafísica, Antropología, Teoría del conocimiento, Acto y potencia, Acto de ser, Ser extramental, Ser intramental, Intellecto agente, Distinción real.

Cómo citar este artículo: M. RUBIO, "Unveiling the Human Person: Leonardo Polo's Epistemological Proposal for a Transcendental Anthropology", en *Studia Poliana*, 27 (2027), 115-135
<https://doi.org/10.15581/013.27.115-135>

1. THE TURN FROM METAPHYSICS TO ANTHROPOLOGY

The history of philosophy can be divided into various periods according to different major events, which caused a significant development in philosophical thought¹. If we look into the inner dynamics of the philosophical quest, however, we might say that there have been only two major revolutions in the history of philosophy.

The first took place when Aristotle formalized philosophical language for describing reality – the Presocratic philosophers used poetry, Plato used dialogues – and discovered the proper *theme* of metaphysics: The first principles of extra-mental reality. Aristotle also discovered syllogistic logic, which was henceforth the preferred training tool for philosophical reflection. Towards the end of the 13th century, syllogistic logic and dialectics were the philosophical *method* ‘*par excellence*’, fully established and universally applied in all formal university teaching².

However, signs of skepticism on the ability to know the extra-mental reality begin to appear at the beginning of the 14th century. Ockham and – later – Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche... are aware of the inconsistencies and contradictions of the preceding philosophical schools (Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, and everything in between). Perplexed due to the inability of the logical method of inquiry to break through the barrier of the mental object, they all question the human ability to negotiate the boundaries of the mind-apprehended object of knowledge³.

The passage into modernity is characterized by a turn of attention to the knowing subject. This question takes centerstage as philosophy’s theme *par*

¹ One such event, for instance, were the successive translations of the whole Aristotelian corpus into Latin, first from Arabic in the 12th century and then directly from Greek in the 13th century. That was a plain historical and technical revolution, and therefore accidental to the inner development of philosophical thought.

² As Polo noted, Aristotle uses several types of logic: Syllogistic, dialectic, rhetoric, poetic, analogic, inductive, and symbolic or mathematical. Cfr. L. POLO, *Introducción a la Filosofía*, in *Obras Completas*, Serie A, vol. XII, Eunsá, Pamplona, 2015, 53-68. However, only the two first were adopted subsequently as the formal philosophical method of inquiry, while the others received less attention. The extraordinary development of syllogistic and dialectic logic throughout the end of the classical period until the end of the Middle Ages is reflected in the transmission of the books of the Aristotelian *Organon* into Latin. The history of this transmission shows that the first books, *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and – to a lesser degree – *Prior Analytics*, were the best known and most copied. Cfr. M. CAMERON, J. MARENBOON, “Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500-1500: On Interpretation and Prior Analytics in Two Traditions”, in *Vivarium*, 48 (2010), 1-6.

³ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, in *Obras Completas*, Serie A, vol. XV, Eunsá, Pamplona, 2015, 128.

excellence, beginning a new age of philosophical inquiry. It seems that the attempts of modern and contemporary philosophy to answer the question about the character of the knowing subject and the extent of its knowledge are inconclusive so far.

The thesis I would like to defend in this paper is double: First, that a fully developed theory of the human person is the way out of the stagnation of philosophy experienced during the past six hundred years. Second, that a complete theory of knowledge, built on relevant findings of classical philosophy and in dialogue with modern and contemporary philosophy, leads to a fully developed theory of the human person. I will try to do so following the proposal of Leonardo Polo's Transcendental Anthropology⁴.

2. SYMMETRY BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY

As Polo rightly noted, there is a kind of symmetry between the modern quest and the classical one. Classical philosophy considered extra-mental being as its proper object of study. Aristotle called this science "First philosophy", a name that later philosophers understood as synonym with metaphysics, the study of what is beyond physics, to wit the first principles of the natural world. Modern philosophy then turned to the knowing subject as its proper object. This focus on the thinking person would require accounting for the human traits that cannot be found in any other existent in the natural world, like the strictly spiritual nature of the human intelligence, or freedom. In short, it would require developing a fully-fledged philosophical anthropology. But before the modern era, philosophers barely investigated the theme of the knowing subject and never considered it deserving of a discipline of its own. It rather became a corollary or special case within metaphysics. When they examined related questions like the soul or human knowledge, they did so as part of the surrounding natural world that was the object of metaphysics⁵.

⁴ For a background explanation on this proposal, cfr. L. POLO, *Why a Transcendental Anthropology?*, G. CHAFUEN, R. ESCLANDA, A. I. VARGAS (Trans.), Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophy Press, 2015. The original text, "Por qué una Antropología Transcendental", was published as the final chapter of *Presente y futuro del hombre*, 1993. Cfr. *Obras Completas*, Serie A, vol. X, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2016.

⁵ The forging of the notion of *person* is historically connected to that of Christianity, with the early Christian debates on the mystery of a Trinity of persons in the one and only God. The Cappadocian Fathers of the Church attempted an explanation by shifting through the terms *ousía*, *hypostasis*, and *prosopon*, discovering that person is in the order of being. However, this development

In line with this assumption, modern philosophers approached their newly found object of inquiry as one more among other existing beings and applied to it the notions they had inherited from classical philosophy. If classical philosophy had forged the notion of *subiectum*, that is the substance as the substratum of accidents, modern philosophy turned the knowing subject into the substratum of reality, into the foundation of all extra-mental being. With it, the human person became the paradigm and source of the truth and goodness of everything that fell within human knowledge. However, the modern project seems to be stalled because this approach is aporetic, not accounting for all personal characteristics, such as interpersonal relations and freedom. Related notions like spontaneity and choice play a role in the modern understanding of the thinking subject, but personal freedom is a more complex reality that cannot be explained with the parameters of either metaphysics or psychology.

3. REVIEWING THE MAIN FINDINGS OF CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

The first step in the Transcendental Anthropology project is to retrieve the relevant achievements of classical philosophy – magnificent in themselves – which are buried amid much confusion. When recovered, these discoveries are like pieces of a puzzle that need to be put together and ensembled in their right place so that they can show the full picture. That is, that the human person is more than soul and body, more than reason and will, and that its being is something neatly distinct and far more perfect than the extra-mental being discovered by metaphysical thinking. Reviewing the findings of classical philosophy in light of the dead ends encountered by modern philosophers can lead to a complete description of the human person. Only then can the full scope of personal beings emerge.

This revision requires a careful examination of the human knowing and thinking abilities, that is, acquiring a comprehensive theory of knowledge, compatible yet clearly distinct from metaphysics. It so happens that we often take the mental object for the reality outside the mind. Many premature conclusions that we find in the history of philosophy can be clarified if we are

remained in the theological realm, while philosophy followed its own course. For more on this development, cfr. B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “The Notion of Person and a Transcendental Anthropology, from Boethius to Polo”, en *Journal of Polian Studies*, 4 (2017), 81-117.

aware of the distinct nature of being inside and outside the mind and find a way to overcome the limits of the mental object, to reach what lies beyond.

Understanding the human person and its intellective nature requires a reexamination of the notions of act and potency, of the active intellect, the act of being, and the real distinction between being and essence. Polo's project involves: (1) Reviewing the Aristotelian notions of act and potency to make them fully coherent with Aristotle's own principles, because he is not always sticking to them; (2) Taking the active intellect, which is probably the greatest Aristotelian discovery on the human person, out of the closet of archived philosophical items, to be put back firmly in its proper place; (3) Applying Aquinas' discoveries of the act of being and the real distinction between being and essence to human personal beings; (4) Examining the nature of intellectual habits, which were paid little attention in the past or understood along the lines of moral habits, to put them in their proper place in the intellective structure of the human person.

I will first offer a review of the classical themes relevant for understanding the human person along the lines of the four points listed above, with a succinct assessment of the revision they should undergo in order to fully bring the human person to light. Next, I will briefly describe the gnoseological method proposed by L. Polo for retrieving these themes and restoring them at the service of a transcendental anthropology⁶.

3.1. *Man According to Classical Anthropology*

It is commonplace to assert that Aristotle defined man as a rational animal, yet nowhere in his extant works it is possible to find this precise quote. This definition was gradually forged over time by generations of Aristotelian commentators⁷.

Aristotle did consider intelligence and will to be the highest human powers. In addition, he identified lower faculties at their service: imagination, memory, cogitative. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he asserts that the human being

⁶ The term transcendental as used by Polo differs from that coined by Kant. In the context of Polo's anthropology, *transcendental* refers to the list of metaphysical transcendentals attempted by medieval philosophers. Polo reexamines this list, proposes removing some of the classical ones and expanding it to include a set of anthropological transcendentals. Cfr. *Antropología trascendental*, 68 and ff.

⁷ I use the word "man" inclusively – meaning both male and female – throughout this paper.

has a rational principle (λόγον ἔχον) in addition to the nutritive and reproductive life shared with plants and to the sentient and locomotive life shared with other animals⁸. In *On the Soul*, Aristotle examines this rational nature, noting that while sense perception is common to all the animal kingdom, *practical and speculative thought is only found in human beings*: “Thought is found only where there is discourse of reason as well as sensibility”⁹.

Thought enables us to make judgments. It allows us to perceive right and wrong but – unlike sense perception –, human judgment is not free from error. We are thinking beings, but – as Aristotle noted – *we can make mistakes*. This is what troubled Ockham at the turn of the 14th century and prompted the *Copernican* turn to the subject in philosophy¹⁰. The *auctoritates* that held much of the philosophical discourse of the preceding centuries alive no longer take hold in the modern mind. A firm foundation for our knowledge is needed and we need to find it in ourselves.

3.2. *Being as Trans-Categorical and as Transcendental*

Many errors in philosophy can be traced back to a lack of proper distinction between being outside the mind (extra-mental being) and being in the mind (mental being, mental object). This confusion can be found in the attempt to turn the knowing or thinking subject itself into an object of knowledge, for instance. But the human person is in fact what is not and cannot possibly become a mental object. Why? Because “the ‘I’ thought does not think”¹¹. Since the person is most characterized by her thinking ability, a personal being must be beyond its intellectual operations and beyond its objective – in the sense of mental – thoughts. A person is a “who” individually, outside the mind, while a mental object is a “what” universally. This means that to think of the person we must abandon the mental limit.

One example of such confusion is the fate of the notion of being itself, as explained by Aristotle and as understood by later philosophers. According to the Aristotelian conception, metaphysics is the science of being. When discussing the proper subject of metaphysics, Aristotle had said that *ens* – what

⁸ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13.

⁹ ARISTOTLE, *On the Soul*, III, 3.

¹⁰ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 41.

¹¹ L. POLO, *Persona y libertad*, in *Obras Completas*, Serie A, Euns, Pamplona, 2017, 250.

there is – is transcendental, meaning that it is beyond the categories of substance and accidents, which are the supreme genera. But this notion – *ens* – is in fact a universal or most general idea, encompassing all ideas falling within our intellect without distinction. As such, it remains a logical notion. It does not overcome the limits of mental objects, and it does not exist outside the mind. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to call it trans-categorical than transcendental. In addition, a transcendental notion cannot be simply what can be predicated of everything, because the theory of predication does not go beyond the categorial order.

Later philosophers kept searching for what is properly transcendental and put together a list of transcendental notions, or common properties of being that would run through all the Aristotelian categories. These properties should encompass both what is inside the mind and what remains outside of it. However, deep as they were in logical discourse by training, and unaware of the strictly logical nature of the categories and of the universal *ens*, they failed to clearly distinguish between extra-mental and mental realities. Their so-called transcendental notions were also produced according to logical parameters and remained in the realm of the mind, foreign to extra-mental being¹². In-depth research on the nature of being to distinguish both realms is therefore required.

3.3. *Real Distinction between Extra-Mental and Mental Being*

Extra-mental realities are in existence, and therefore what we could call a persistent act of being. Instead, each human thought and each apprehended object (i.e., object in the mind) is an intellectual act in itself. This means that while an extra-mental act is continuous, intellectual acts are discontinuous. This distinction illustrates the diverse nature of each of them.

In fact, Aristotle uses two different Greek words for act: *énéргеia* and *entelécheia*. He uses *énéргеia* only when discussing the nature of knowledge and when discussing God's nature. *Enérgeia* is pure act, separated from all things – χωριστὸς – so that it can become all by apprehending them. It is the

¹² This assertion becomes clearer after studying L. Polo theory of knowledge, which proposes a gnoseological method or access to extra-mental being and another way to know and develop general ideas. The latter are objects studied by disciplines that are fully developed within the mental realm, like logic and mathematics.

most perfect type of act, having the ability to perfect itself through action, as is the case of immanent operations. Examples of immanent operations are intellectual operations and habits. *Entelécheia* would be the act that makes substances separated from one another, persisting in time and perfectible¹³.

Aristotle wonders which one of these two distinct acts takes precedence, which is the first one or foundation of reality. He tackles the question by inquiring into the role of predication. When we think “musician” and “white”, What is the natural connection between these two mental notions? According to *Metaphysics* book 4, predication cannot be an accidental or merely logical connection between words and mental objects. If we predicated everything from everything indistinctly, we would lose all meaning; we would lose *logos*. There must be a criterion of priority provided by reality, according to which we can predicate something of something else. This is the origin of the Aristotelian notion of substance: Something in extramental reality underlying all accidents¹⁴.

Aristotle maintained all along that, in absolute terms, act takes precedence over potency because the lesser cannot bring about the more. Without an act, it is not possible for potency to occur. If this *suppositum* called substance exists it must be in act. But then, when examining the nature of movement, he asserts that movement is the act (*entelécheia*) of an *ens* in potency inasmuch as it is in potency. To explain how potency could be prior to act in this case, Aristotle reexamines the notion of substance. An existing substance would be in act, but this act would be perfectible, thus involving a certain potency and allowing for change to occur. This would be the case of substances that are principles of operations, i.e., natural substances. To distinguish the act of the substance from the act which perfects the substance, causing it to pass from potency to act under a certain aspect, Aristotle calls the former a first act or substance, and the latter a second act.

It seems that, for Aristotle, the notion of substance was rather a hypothesis, for want of a better explanation of the unity and individuality of natural beings as apprehended by the intellect. In fact, Aristotle maintains all along that the connection between subject and predicate is just logical, not real. He

¹³ For an overview of the complex Aristotelian use of these two notions, cfr. R. YEPES STORK, *Los sentidos del acto en Aristóteles*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1993.

¹⁴ Cfr. L. POLO, *El conocimiento del universo físico*, in *Obras Completas*, Serie A, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2015, 17-18. The *hypokeimenon* would be the presupposed substance or substratum of accidents with its proper act.

acknowledges that substances as they are in reality cannot be thought or said. When he discusses substance, he is looking for the substratum of reality, but reality is made of individuals, not of universal notions¹⁵. The question remains how we can know extramental reality in itself, not through the intentional knowledge of a mental object.

Most of the Aristotelian commentators took substances to be real and considered the act of a substance to be primary, while the act of accidents would be secondary¹⁶. The distinction between primary and secondary substances, however, proves that the Aristotelian notion of substance is still unintelligible. As Polo noted, if we have a universal knowledge of substance but assert that substances must be individual, that knowledge only causes confusion. We are simply extrapolating the traits of a mental object to extra-mental reality.

Thomas Aquinas notices the inconsistency and, in his search for clarification, discovers another sense of act: The act of being (*actus essendi*). What there is must be an act, and this act cannot be mixed with potency. But if the substance is in act, what is the relation between them? If act is predicated of substance, it would be an accident. How can act be primary in substances and yet have secondary acts attributed to them? By asking this question, Aquinas discovered the real distinction between being and essence in created entities. The limitation of being in the natural world is due to its being created, and this perspective originates a new idea of potency. Aristotle did not know this sense of potency because – unlike Aquinas – he ignored the act of creation. To try and answer the question of the origin of being, Aquinas ventures that all created beings participate in the being of the Creator. Created being would be a way or mode of being. Participation thus means that there is an *analogy* between beings, a greater or lesser *intensity* of being¹⁷.

However, Aquinas' solution was still too close to Neoplatonic emanationism. Aquinas' is one possible solution, but it is neither the only distinction among beings nor the sharpest one. If we fully apply the Aristotelian distinction between act and potency to Thomas' discovery of the act of being as really distinct from essence, we must conclude that essence is what is potential in the cre-

¹⁵ L. POLO, *Persona y libertad*, 18-19.

¹⁶ This interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics was universal among his Arabic and Jewish commentators, and the confusion was widespread among Latin philosophers as well.

¹⁷ Cfr. the comprehensive study on this complex issue by R. A. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, Band XLVI, Brill, Leiden-New York-Köln, 1995.

ature with no trace of act in it. Essence signifies merely what limits being in a creature, the limited manifestation of its – likewise limited – being, which is subject to progressive perfecting according to its nature. If created being is thus understood, the Aristotelian idea of substance seems to be a premature solution or – more likely – a working hypothesis. Extramental reality is an act of being: Infinite in the case of the Creator, limited in the case of creatures. If we apply the distinction act-potency and that of being-essence to explore the human person – Polo proposes – we must conclude that the person should be found in the upper element of this double hierarchy, namely her act of being.

This act of being is cognoscitive, *énérgēia*, and therefore it is not to be confused with the act of being discovered by Aristotelian metaphysics. The great intuition of Modernity was to try to find a way into the thinking subject. Modern philosophy discovered that there is more to the knowing subject that meets the eye and tried to clarify it. This is the Cartesian project and Kant's project. Later philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, or Kierkegaard, expanded the exploration to the inner self by focusing on freedom and love, or to feelings and emotions like the second Scheler. However, the classical theory of knowledge that they inherited was not developed enough to enable exploring the knowing subject at the depth required. What follows is a succinct view of Leonardo Polo's project to respond to this need: Developing a fully-fledged theory of knowledge at the service of a transcendental anthropology.

4. DEVELOPING A FULLY-FLEDGED THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE...

The unsolved metaphysical issues left by our predecessors require an in-depth exploration of the nature of our knowledge and of our cognitive methodological access to the world. Philosophy has so far been busy with *themes* (e.g.: being, causes, matter, movement, God...). Descartes proposed a *method*, but he did so from a perspective heavily influenced by Ockham's nominalism and after three centuries of skepticism on the very possibility of knowing extra-mental reality. A complete theory of knowledge should account both for the metaphysical knowledge of the world and its themes, and for the anthropological knowledge of the human person and its themes. While both require abandoning the limits of the mental object, the way to each one is methodologically diverse. Polo's proposal of a Transcendental Anthropology involves therefore developing a gnoseological *method* capable of overcoming the limits of the mental object and of accounting for the human person.

What follows are a few clarifications on classical discoveries that are needed to enable this gnoseological method to work: (a) Eradicating the confusion between ‘act’ and ‘actuality’ at the cognoscitive level; (b) Clarifying the nature and role of the active intellect; and (c) Exposing the nature of intellectual habits. I will end this presentation of Leonardo Polo’s contribution by outlining the achievements of a theory of knowledge based on the abandonment of the limits of the mental object.

4.1. *Solving the Confusion between Act and Actuality*

We already know that syllogistic and dialectic logic are good tools for producing mental objects. The remarkable scientific and technological development of the past centuries is mostly due to the fixation of the ancient and medieval scholars with what one can do in the mental realm. This fixation has proven very fruitful, producing – among others – the cybernetic revolution. But syllogisms and dialectic are clearly insufficient if what we want is understanding the extra-mental reality, the nature of thought, and the nature of the thinking person herself¹⁸.

Philosophers traditionally considered reason as the most distinctive trait of human beings. However, reason proves insufficient for accounting for the knowledge of being *qua* being¹⁹. The question arises: How can we acquire knowledge of an existing being as such, without confusing it with the mental object that stands for it when we apprehend it? According to Polo, only if we distinguish between ‘act’ and ‘actuality’²⁰.

¹⁸ Even if modern sciences are experimental, they work according to models or paradigms, which are mental constructs. A paradigm is not a necessary law (axiom) but rather like a strong hypothesis, that is then probed through experimentation.

¹⁹ For more on the differences between rational and personal knowledge according to Polo, cfr. J. I. MURILLO, “Conocimiento personal y conocimiento racional en la antropología transcendental de Leonardo Polo”, in *Studia Poliana*, 13 (2011), 69-84.

²⁰ The history of philosophy abounds in instances of confusion between the Thomistic act of being, understood as an existing extra-mental entity, with the actuality that is proper to a mental object, which is an intellectual operation. Some have tried to explain the relation between the intellectual operation and the extra-mental act as a matter of more or less intensity in being. According to this view, the mental object *produced* by the mental operation would have a certain being, but not enough to grant it extra-mental existence. The act of being would be a matter of analogy or participation in being according to diverse proportions. When applied to man, this interpretation would produce an ontology in which man occupies an intermediate position between God and the rest of creation. The idea of a participation in being, however, can be easily confused with a certain emanationism and it does not explain the act of creation sufficiently. Cfr. L. POLO, *Antropología transcendental*, 118-120.

We know through intellectual operations, which are acts of thinking. Each operation is commensurate with a mental object, while the latter is illuminated by the intellectual faculty, not built by the thinking subject. The intellectual act is actual, with an actuality that is only in the mind. The act of being, instead, is trans-objective; extra-mental²¹.

Actuality is the peculiar nature that only mental objects have owing to the articulation of time that takes place in the abstractive operation, as follows: The act that is proper to the person's intellective power illuminates the data provided by the senses (*phantasma*), articulating the intentions of memory, the formalities of imagination, and the intentions of the cogitative²². The distinction among these three faculties is temporal: The intentions of memory point to the past and the intentions of the cogitative are projective, referring to the future, while the imagination works with no relation to time. Abstracting is the operation that recaps all that, and this recapitulation is an articulation of time in the present. The intellective illumination of the mental object by the abstractive operation, which Polo calls *mental presence*, is actual but its time is different from the one affecting extra-mental realities and they should not be confused²³. Extra-mental being is act in the sense of pure activity, while the mental object is 'actual' but not 'active'. The notion of *present* is brought about by our abstractive ability²⁴.

According to Polo, the Greek notion of act is prior to potency, while potency is finite, only accounting for changes that perfect nature, like growth and other manifestations of natural life. As he noted, this is a rather narrow understanding of potency²⁵. The modern position, instead, conceives potency as infinite power, to account for the self-realization and complete autonomy of the thinking subject. But this understanding is aporetic, because the notion of potency as the principle or source of existence is incompatible with the priority of act²⁶.

These two positions, while opposed, are symmetrical. The Greeks conceive act as a first or beginning and potency as secondary to act, while the mo-

²¹ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 122-123.

²² L. POLO, *El conocimiento del universo físico*, 149.

²³ For more on the nature of time and its relation with knowledge, cfr. J. J. SANGUINETI, "Presencia y temporalidad: Aristóteles, Heidegger, Polo", in *Studia Poliana*, 3 (2001), 103-126.

²⁴ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 121.

²⁵ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 116.

²⁶ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 161.

derns conceive it as the end or result of a process that begins with potency. In both cases, act is understood as ‘actuality’. This is the trait proper to the mental presence that is commensurate with an intellectual operation. However, this is not the only possible way of understanding act.

5. ...AT THE SERVICE OF A TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

If – as Polo proposes – act is understood as something diverse from actuality, there is room for a third way: If man’s act of being is understood as a peculiar knowing, loving and free act of being, really distinct from the being discovered by metaphysics in the natural world. If man’s being is really distinct from his essence – which is man’s potential dimension – it also means that each individual human being is infinitely potential. This is – for Polo – the human person²⁷.

How can we know this personal being? By transcending intellectual operations, going beyond them through man’s very intellectual structure. This requires revisiting the classical notions of active intellect and intellectual habits.

5.1. *Revisiting the Notion of Active Intellect*

Aristotle noted that while some operations are transitive (e.g., building a house), others are immanent, because they perfect the same subject that performs them (e.g., sight, moral virtues). According to classical anthropology, habits reinforce the intellect and the will, opening these faculties to higher operations. This means that these two spiritual faculties are open to growth²⁸.

According to Aristotle, if intellectual operations are intermittent or discontinuous it means that they depend on a ‘passive intellect’²⁹. In addition, there must exist an ‘active intellect’, always in act (*enérgeia*) and therefore most perfect, which is the source of our intellectual activity³⁰. Aristotle discusses the

²⁷ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 117.

²⁸ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 119.

²⁹ The passive intellect would account for all rational activity. If man is endowed with a higher intellect, the latter should be the one characterizing the human person, and not the former. Cfr. M. VEGA, “What is the Mark of the Mental. Leonardo Polo’s Retrieval of Aristotle’s *Energeia*”, in *Journal of Polian Studies*, 1 (2014), 25-45.

³⁰ For an in-depth study on the active intellect, cfr. excellent three-volume study on the active intellect, Aristotle’s greatest discovery, and its fate throughout the history of philosophy. J. F. SELLES DAUDER, *El intelecto agente y los filósofos*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2012-2018.

active intellect in two central texts, a more extensive one in *On the Soul*, where he describes the characteristics of this intellect³¹, and a shorter text in *De generatione animalium*³².

Aristotle describes this intellect as “separated (χωριστός)”, “impassible (ἀπαθής)”, “inmixed (ἀμιγής)”, “coming from outside”, “divine”, and “eternal”. Much ink has been spilled on these descriptions. They led noted medieval commentators to understand the active intellect as exterior to man; some identified it with an angelic creature or with God. However, these interpretations did not take Aristotle’s notion of act into account. He was trying to describe the active intellect as unrelated to the material world, unaffected by the four physical causes, beyond time, not falling under any of the categories. In short, most similar to the divinity. Significantly, he also compared the active intellect to doing, to light, and to habit³³.

The active intellect is a pure source of activity, being in act by its own essence (οὐσίᾳ ὧν ἐέργεια). Since we are not always knowing or thinking, it is clear that not all its activity is invested in performing intellectual operations. It is reasonable to think that the role of the active intellect goes beyond setting the passive intellect to work. If we discover where the rest of this activity goes, we will have transcended the mental operation. According to Polo, the active intellect invests some of its unceasing activity in powering the *intellectual habits*. I will now describe the nature and role of these habits, known to classical philosophy but often overlooked or misunderstood and explained along the lines of moral habits.

5.2. *Understanding the Nature of Intellective Habits*

The Latin word for habit means “having” or “to have”. There are different levels of possession: We can have something extrinsic like a ring (categorical habit) or something theoretical, like science. Having intrinsically is more perfect than having extrinsically, and the ability to have is more perfect than whatever is had, because it encompasses all possessions plus the ability to increase them. Therefore, a habit is superior to the result of its activity.

In the case of intellectual habits, the habit must be more perfect than the mental objects possessed and more perfect than the intellectual operation that

³¹ ARISTOTLE, *On the Soul*, III, 5 (Bk 430 a 10-24).

³² ARISTOTLE, *On the Generation of Animals*, I, II, cap. 3 (Bk 736 b 27).

³³ J. F. SELLÉS DAUDER, *El intelecto agente y los filósofos*, I, 44-45.

brings about that object, because it is the ability to carry out an operation, being the operation's condition of possibility. This means that it must be distinct from all mental objects, unlike the passive intellect, which cannot be explained without them. Habits are also distinct from the active intellect. Intellectual habits could be described as 'instruments' (*habilitas*, as Aquinas said) of the active intellect, playing a key role in the intellective structure³⁴. I will try to describe this structure summarily:

We have seen that the human intellect is an act, but diverse from the act of being of extra-mental reality. We are aware of our intellectual operations, which illuminate mental objects through the abstractive process. However, these are only the tip of the iceberg, the lowest cognoscitive act. If we are aware of the limitations of a mental object, which we know is nothing like the extra-mental reality it presupposes and intentionally points to, that can only be owing to a higher cognoscitive act, because the intellectual operation is commensurate with its object and therefore there is no act "left" for the operation to know itself.

Moreover, an intellective act capable of illuminating the intellectual operation cannot be another intellectual operation. It should be higher than the operation and of a distinct nature, because it does not illuminate an object but an intellective operation. According to Polo, this is the role of intellectual habits, which function as cybernetics do (cybernetics actually mirror the human intellective ability). By illuminating the mental operation, we learn about it and improve it, producing a more perfect, higher one.

If the extra-mental reality is beyond the mental object outwards, intra-mental reality is beyond the mental operation inwards and upwards. The first way – that of extra-mental reality – is that of metaphysics; the second is the way of transcendental anthropology³⁵. By looking into the nature of habits, which are immaterial and immanent acts, we are looking into the human spirit, into the very structure of the human person. This structure involves ac-

³⁴ Later philosophers like John DUNS SCOTUS (13th century) and William of OCKHAM (14th century) denied the real distinction between act and potency in the human intellect, thus confusing the active and the passive intellects. They identified human intelligence with reason, which is in fact just one of its activities or functions, causing the active intellect – the greatest Aristotelian anthropological discovery – to fall into oblivion.

³⁵ L. POLO, *Antropología trascendental*, 36.

quired habits, both related to the will (moral habits) and to the intelligence (intellectual habits)³⁶. But there are also native or innate habits:

- (1) Synderesis, a medieval discovery, is the habit that unifies the acts and operations of intellect and will and those of the inner and external senses³⁷. This habit is the apex or summit of the human essence and *has* or *handles* the human body.
- (2) The habit of the first principles, discovered by Aristotle, enables us to know the principles of extra-mental being, which are the theme of metaphysics.

We saw earlier that, by applying Aquinas' real distinction between being and essence to the human person, we must conclude that the human essence is man's potentiality. The human body with its external and internal senses belongs to this sphere, and the soul with its spiritual powers, intelligence and will, is its apex. Where is being in this scheme? It must be in the order of act as *enérgeia*, and the highest act of this kind in man is the active intellect, which Polo calls *transcendental knowing*. If the human being is cognoscitive, we must conclude that this being is really distinct from the extra-mental being that is the theme of metaphysics³⁸. The being peculiar to the human person is therefore *added* to the being proper of the physical universe. It co-exists with it and is open to the universe, because it has the ability to become virtually all things through intellectual apprehension. It is not possible to say the same of the being proper of the universe because the latter is not cognoscitive, it only persists in time.

If cognoscitive being is proper to all human beings, characterizing them as human persons, we should call it transcendental just like classical philosophy qualified the being proper to extra-mental realities. But the human person not only knows, she also wills. Now we saw that the will belongs to the essential sphere of man, being the other element of a duality made of intelligence and will, discovered and managed by the synderetical habit³⁹.

³⁶ Intellectual habits include the abstractive habit, generalizing habits (e. g. those responsible for logical, dialectical, rhetorical, sophistical, or mathematical operations), conceptual habit, habit of judgment, reasoning, science, prudence...

³⁷ Polo identifies the habit of synderesis with the soul.

³⁸ The potential or passive intellect would be on the side of man's essence as well, and it is what we commonly call discursive intelligence or reason, the other of the two powers of the soul.

³⁹ For more on the dual character of the structure of the human person according to L. Polo, cfr. the study by S. PIÁ-TARAZONA, *El hombre como ser dual*, Eunsá, Pamplona, 2001.

Will power is intermittent just like our reasoning or intellective power, so it must depend on the being of the human person, which should account for the will's setting in act as well. The active source of all willing activity, which is found at the level of personal being as well, is what Polo calls *transcendental loving*. The structure of the human person is made for donating itself to another. The receiver of human love can only be another person. It is coherent with this created structure that its Creator be also a personal God, because it is a matter of profound human experience that it is possible – and highly recommended, at least in the monotheistic traditions – to love God.

Lastly, personal freedom must be found at the transcendental level of personal being as well. This can be gathered from the nature of human knowledge and love, which are boundless and can grow unrestrictedly owing to the habitual nature of personal being. A habit illuminates each intellectual and practical operation, thus enabling personal growth in both realms. This growth is strictly free, depending on a personal search for perfection, and can be turned down or ignored⁴⁰.

Practical habits (traditionally called moral habits) are related to the essential dimension of man. The human person, co-existing with the universe both practically and theoretically, also co-exists with other personal beings and is open to them. Human persons (the personal 'act of being') co-exist through their personal 'essence', which is the instrument of interpersonal relations and the manifestation of their personal being in the physical world⁴¹.

Another way for interpersonal relation stems from the fact that the human person is created, as the real distinction between its being and its essence accounts for. Unlike non-personal created beings, this unique created being found in the physical world that we call the human person is openness out-

⁴⁰ Hence Polo has called for expanding the traditional list of transcendental notions by adding the anthropological transcendentals: Co-existence, transcendental knowing, transcendental loving and transcendental freedom (the latter actually runs through the other three, so it is not clear that it is a fourth one). This kind of being is a novelty, a plain addition to the being of metaphysics, which has none of these traits. If the being of metaphysics is transcendental, encompassing all of nature, but it cannot fully explain the human person, we must conclude that an amplification of the classical transcendentals is in order. Another reason for calling this anthropology transcendental is that it points to themes that transcend the human person itself upwards, like the search for a personal God.

⁴¹ L. POLO, *Antropologia trascendental*, 110.

wardly, inwardly, and upwards. This inward and upwards openness is what we call intimacy⁴². By being open inwards, the personal being turns into a search for its origin and ultimate end, which must be likewise a personal being of which the created one is image and likeness⁴³.

The innate habit that reaches for and acknowledges personal beings is the *habit of wisdom*, just as the innate habit that discovers or finds extra-mental being is the *habit of first principles* (traditionally called *intellectus ut habitus*). The habit of wisdom must be also in charge of searching for the Origin and final End of the created person endowed with this habit. Since this search cannot end in the current life, which is *essentially* led (i.e., led by the essence), it must reach its final destination in the afterlife. Since the search itself is led by freedom, this search is at the same time hopeful and uncertain.

6. ABANDONING THE MENTAL LIMIT. CONCLUSIONS

Polo has already produced the theory of knowledge needed to undertake the project of a transcendental anthropology that I briefly outlined above, but offering an overview here exceeds by far the scope of this presentation due to the extension and sheer richness of Polo's magnificent *Teoría del Conocimiento* in four volumes⁴⁴.

This theory of knowledge is based on the notion of knowledge as an act (*enérgeia*), takes into account the mental limit of the objects of knowledge, and proposes four different ways to overcome this limit. Each one of these ways – Polo calls them *dimensions* – of abandoning the mental limit is a different method, and each one leads to a different theme of philosophy: (1) The first *finds* the being proper to extra-mental realities, which is the theme of *metaphysics*; (2) The second *advert*s the essence proper to extra-mental realities,

⁴² For a study on the hierarchical dimensions found on man according to Polo, cfr. J. F. SELLÉS, C. IFFLAND, "Who is Man? Polo and Personhood", in *Journal of Polian Studies*, 4 (2017), 27-44.

⁴³ For more on the dynamics of the free relation of the human person with her origin and final end according to Polo, cfr. A. I. VARGAS PÉREZ, *Genealogía del miedo. Un estudio antropológico de la modernidad desde Leonardo Polo*, Cuadernos de Pensamiento Español, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, 2017. Cfr. *Ser y don. Una teoría antropológica del juego*, Colección Investigaciones sobre Leonardo Polo, Sínderesis, Madrid, 2020. J. F. SELLES DAUDER, *Antropología de la intimidad*, Rialp, Madrid, 2012.

⁴⁴ L. POLO, *Curso de teoría del conocimiento*, in *Obras Completas*, Serie A, vols. IV-VII, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2015-2018.

the theme of *physics*; (3) The third *attains* the being proper to the human person, the theme of *transcendental anthropology*; (4) The fourth *lingers* in the essence proper to the human person, which is its manifestation, and includes the anthropological themes of human *essentia*: language, ethics, society, economy, law and so on.

Each philosophical theme listed above involves a specific intellectual habit. There is a hierarchy among them and a dual structure all along this edifice. If followed from bottom to top or vice-versa, we obtain the whole picture of what is a human person. The results of this project are surprising in scope, and I believe that they have enough in them to keep philosophers busy for the coming centuries.

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