

Leonardo Polo and the Beauty Personal Transcendental

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ABSTRACT: The notion of personal transcendental used in the present paper has been taken from a contemporary philosopher Leonardo Polo. I will aim at stating the Deep scope it has for the future of Philosophical Anthropology; particularly for Aesthetics, topic which I have researched for the last years, and which I have presented in the Congresses: in Rome in 2010, in Málaga in 2013 and in Loja in 2015.

I believe that despite the numerous doctoral thesis published and others which are currently being written at the school of Philosophy at the Universidad de Navarra, as well as the vast studies about the thinking of Leonardo Polo in journals such as *Studia Poliana*, edited by the mentioned University, or the digital *Miscelánea Poliana*, diffusion entity from the Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophical studies, in Málaga, it is convenient to present the thesis background to the transcendental anthropology of this philosopher, who continued the Aristotelian Thomist tradition, but who was also an original and acute critic of the personal being in such legacy, as I have had the opportunity of learning from him in various Doctoral Seminars delivered at Universidad de Piura during the nineties.

1. POLO'S TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The first thesis says: “anthropology is neither a regional ontology nor a chapter of metaphysics, because it deals with the personal being, which cannot be reduced to the scope of being studied by metaphysics”¹. The meaning is as follows: “One of the central chapters of the first philosophy, especially in the Middle Ages, is the theory of transcendentals; there are transcendentals which also correspond to the personal being, which have to be discovered to those discovered by traditional philosophy”².

The aggrandizement of transcendentals is the second background idea, the “nuclear part” of the book I quote and would consist on “the exposure of the transcendentals which do not appear in the classic cast”³. Polo has been conscious of the risks he ran by using such terminology for his findings, since the “transcendental approach of freedom

¹ L. Polo, *Antropología Trascendental I (AT)*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1999, p. 11. The internet site for Miscellaneous on Polo is: www.leonardopolo.net/revista/filosofia.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*. The author states that this has demanded long years of work on his part.

appears in various modern thinkers, for instance in Kant and in Jaspers. I was therefore exposing myself to falling into equivocations –he states- or being misinterpreted, since, regardless of the terminological coincidence, my way of understanding freedom is differs from modern speculations”⁴.

He settles another issue, -the risk of appearing as an original thinker who exposes some particular occurrences -: “I must sincerely state that such pretension is bizarre. The righteousness of what I support depends on its thematic richness and on the validity of the method with which it is reached. I will insist on this point. Pursuing truth implies trying to move in research. Insofar as one can, he must do it if one happens to be a philosopher or a scientist. Being original, or not, falls into second place. On the other hand in these disciplines one should not propose novelties without finding a point of support in previous statements, which deserve comment or continuation”⁵.

The third thesis refers to the real distinction of the being and the essence formulated by Thomas Aquinas. Polo states: “my approach starts from the distinction between being and essence ...which is the last important finding made by traditional philosophy”, however, this distinction “is not entirely compatible with other notions that Aquinas gathers from the previous philosophy”⁶. Also, “the mentioned Thomist research might be extended, or better used, if it is studied *in recto* in man, that is, if we really distinguish the act of a human being, who is a person, from the essence of man”⁷. In effect, given that man “is a very special creature, sufficiently different from others, when researching the sense reached in him by the real distinction we avoid treating it in

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.12.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.13.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

general terms. When generalizing, the real distinction loses its explicative of the reality created”⁸.

Finally, the fourth thesis states that transcendental Anthropology is not a regression to the 13th century, but on the contrary, it allows one to “confront himself with what modern philosophy has tried to bring out to the light, (however) understanding it in the right terms, that is, without limiting metaphysics to proceeding to the extension of the transcendentals”⁹. Polo regards this form of studying the human being as *historical height*, because “the road to profess is also indicated by the context, and it lies especially on insisting on anthropology, since the human being has not been sufficiently studied”¹⁰.

2. PERSONAL TRANSCENDENTALS.

Polo states that anthropological transcendentals are reached as thematic value of the *furthermore* character, and have to do with one of the dimensions of the philosophical method he regards as *abandonment of the mental limit*¹¹. Such transcendentals are as follows: “the act of personal beings which he called co-existence, intimacy or second beings; intellectual transparency, which he called intellectus ut co-actus; loving which accepts, that is, the person’s giving structure; and freedom”¹².

As regards the first transcendental Polo states: “Human co-existence as a topic susceptible of being reached, does not appear in the

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Polo states that the being is *furthermore* that knowing, and noticing this, implies being situated in one of the dimensions of the *abandonment of the mental limit*.

¹² *Ibidem*. p. 203. For an appropriate knowledge of each of these personal transcendental I regard as indispensable a paused and direct reading of the corresponding texts by Polo, which can be found in the third part of the book I have quoted, from pp. 203 to 241.

philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. It is not due to a distraction from such great metaphysicist and Christian theologian; it is not a mere omission either which can be corrected by adding a new chapter to his Works, because the reason for such omission is deeper: it has to do with the fact that the impulse which feeds Thomist philosophy does not reach the subject; I mean it falls short, or better, it is refrained by Aristotelian inheritance and the influence from Averroes”¹³.

Polo opens a new perspective to penetrate in the person’s intimacy, that which dominates the second being. He cleverly states that it is possible to withdraw the refrains from Aristotelian and Averroes inheritance which were exercised on Thomas Aquinas: “Thomist philosophy is still centered in the study of man as substance and nature. Even when Thomas Aquinas surpasses the Greek perspective on metaphysics, he does not extend his findings to human beings. That is why he understands the passage from the natural to the supernatural according to a change of attention. Substance as the fundament of natural operations is not unified with the consideration of man as an elevated creature¹⁴. This can be dealt with on our historical context, and therefore Thomism “is not a philosophy which can be surpassed, but *continued*, which in anthropology does not contain superficial confusions, but valid thesis susceptible of in-depth study, of insistence, that is, truths which are not worn out but which are opened to new revisions. The wearing down of historical Thomism can be justified, concretely, in the fact that the understanding of the being is weakened by the mental limit. Thomism in a synthesis of Christian philosophy in which the mental limits has not yet been detected and in which therefore the impulse towards transcendental anthropology is refrained”¹⁵.

Even when Thomist philosophy can be continued with transcendental anthropology, this is not possible from the postulates of modern philosophy. Polo is radical when stating that: “modern philosophy is

¹³ *Ibidem*. p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁵ *Ibidem*

surmountable, he says. I understand by surmountable here the accounting of an inane identification of the human subject with thought of objectivity. Understanding that identity as a link between the subject and the object implies, on the one hand, that the object is built and, on the other, that the subject recognizes itself in it, that is, that it recovers itself in the way of being again as an object. This version of identity can only be explained if the pretention of itself is elevated to absolute postulate”¹⁶.

The way of surpassing idealism is achieved by opposing to the de-traction of freedom implied by the pretention of oneself. “As the pretention of oneself advances, freedom is submerged into thought. The imprisonment of freedom in the building of the subject’s identity with the object is a philosophical deviation which happens at the expense of freedom. Therefore, surpassing modern philosophy is to rescue freedom”¹⁷. Idealism does not achieve its purpose, because the object is simply, the mental limit. He states: “idealism marks the loss of the transcendental value of the human being, because it constitutes as a pretention of oneself. The binomial subject-object is the flooding of human co-existence in thought, not the authentic openness of transcendental anthropology. Centering the attention in the *being* to interpret it as identical to the person is an arbitrariness. Idealism is not simply a thematic error, but a decay of human co-existence as freedom”¹⁸.

It is necessary for traditional philosophy to take advantage of the errors of idealism. Polo states that the thematic error which eliminates co-existence as freedom offers an immediate utility to realism, which can be taken advantage of. What is useful in this case is to notice, “to detect the mental limit and its abandonment in anthropology. Such usefulness remains unused in the horrified rejection of the idealist proposal because of fear of losing reality or faith. Such use demands discarding the fear of being captured in the intuition of oneself when

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*. p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

studying it. Idealism brings to light, in a specific way, the issue of mental limit whose detection is indispensable for the continuation of traditional philosophy.”¹⁹. Then reaching human co-existence demands a resignation of the pretention of thinking it, that is, of finding it in the object or as an object.

The second of the personal transcendentals: *intellectus ut co-actus*, is regarded as *personal intellect* or also *transparency*. That is, the personal being is converted with two dimensions of the person, the transparency of personal intellect and the transcendental loving. This last one would be another personal transcendental. What Polo states when referring to personal intellect is that it does not manage to reach its topic. In other words, it is not only *furthermore* of the human persona, but the topic transcends it. When can foresee that the personal intellect shows loyalty to its nature of created intellect. Therefore “the *intellectus ut co-actus* is solidary with the habit of wisdom”²⁰, but also, in accordance to its topic, even when it is true that the personal intellect is not reached, it is nonetheless *sought*²¹. This seeking confirms that the person lacks replica, but also goes beyond isolation. Insofar as the seeking goes beyond, it has been called orientation. Trading finding in seeking is equivalent to turning into it, that is, to “orient or, the fidelity of the human personal intellect to its nature of creature”²². Then, seeking is entirely compatible with transparency: the search for replica: is orientation. “The transparency created is described as clarity. What I regard as clarity is the *through* of transparency, *the light traversed by light*. This means that transparency does not host any intelligible, that is, it is not an acquired intellectual habit. Its character of co-act is the clarity of its *through*, and not what Aristotle calls *nóesis noéseos nóesis*, or what Hegel regards as synthesis”²³. For all this, Polo calls the

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*. p. 213.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

personal being converted into personal intellect “the nucleus of knowledge, the light in the light, that is, transparency. Without intellectual transparency it is not possible to speak of intimacy as openness towards the inside”²⁴.

The third personal transcendental has been slightly mentioned: it is transcendental loving as *structure of giving*²⁵. He states that giving is to be accepted. In effect, “the created gift, which is the human person, appeals to being accepted by his Creator. Man does not exist, but co-exists, because he is the giving creature”²⁶. He points out that Thomas Aquinas “frequently interprets creation as an efficient and final causation, but in other occasions describes it as *donatio essendi*. This second meaning is pertinent in the case of the creation of the person. The act of human personal co-being is a created gift. Now, if creation is the donation of the being, the created being doubles himself in giving and accepting. Without this doubling co-existence would not be radical. Among other things this accepting is an accepting oneself by the person. “If being created is a gift, it corresponds to the creature, above all, to accept it, that is to accept being. It is inadmissible that the giving being is to accepting, since, in that case, the divine gift would be paralyzed: it would not be given. Now, self-acceptance is immediately translated into giving, since, if giving one’s self –whose acceptance we are– was not immediate giving as being, the paralyzing of divine donation would take place in the creature, which is an absurd. It must be added that, at the same time, the created giving, remits itself, seeking it, to divine acceptation”²⁷.

The person’s giving character, “highlights loving. It is said that loving is transcendental or that it converts with the personal being, because the highest sense of being is giving”²⁸. The person is co-act of

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*. p. 217.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*. p. 218.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

being because it is equivalent to giving and because giving without accepting has no sense. We have to take into account that human loving, in its way, is deficiency and the giving structure of the person must be completed by going to its essence, that is, its actions. This does not happen with intellectual search, since it does not require to be completed at the essence level. Nonetheless, the *intellectus ut co-actus* converts with transcendental loving into transparency. Polo explains: “The *intellectus ut co-actus* is the elevation to the transcendental level to what tradition regards as agent intellect. It is usually said that the agent intellect does not know itself, but that it is a light which allows knowing the first intelligibles. According to my proposal, it is the radical act on which the other intellectual acts depend on, which, because of their inferiority in terms of it does not know it in any way. However, in the personal order, the intellectual act converts with the person. The *intellectus ut co-actus* is the nucleus of knowledge, from which –radically– operations and habits are exercised; but it is not strictly any of them, because it is a superior intellectual act. The fact that the person is the superior intellectual act does not imply intellectual identity, since identity is exclusive of God”²⁹.

The fourth personal transcendental is freedom: “to state that freedom is an anthropological transcendental is equivalent to declaring any interpretation of man which does not include freedom, as incomplete, and even incorrect. But it is not so much about trying to prove the existence of freedom in the various manifestations of that which is human, but to point out that none of such manifestations is possible without personal freedom or putting it aside. An indirect proof is granted by man’s featuring capacity of projection. All in all, proving the thesis proposed on freedom is equivalent to *reaching* freedom, insofar as there is an intrinsic dependency of man’s essence regarded as *disposing*³⁰. Let us ask ourselves now about the possibility of adding a fifth personal transcendental, beauty.

²⁹ *Ibidem.* p. 224.

³⁰ *Ibidem.* p. 229.

3. THE CONVERSION OF PERSONAL BEING INTO BEAUTY.

After repeated reading of Polo's descriptions of the personal transcendentals, it is my opinion that we can perceive *pulchrum* beating behind each one of them. I would say that in the first of the personal transcendentals –the second act of being or what Polo regards as intimacy - resides, to say it in some way, the featuring scope of artistic creation³¹. In effect, in that openness which is internal and towards the inside that Polo mentions, resides the scope in which the artist discovers beauty, or rather, it presents itself in the form of lack of replica. This is the conversion from which artistic inspiration will always Bloom, co-existence.

In the second personal transcendental, the furthermore character of the person, “trades into *sought*, that is, personal intellect and transcendental loving³². Seeking will be intellectual activity in search of light. The personal intellect, which is light that illuminates from the inside, will lead the artist through an internal itinerary in which the creator *pre-senses* the work of art. Immediately afterwards there will be an unfolding of the artist in the work whose spirit has been gestating³³. The vertigo experienced by the creator in this period, as well-noted by Plato, and he referred that poets when possessed by the uses act in a crazy manner. Some of this happens, in effect, to artists, when they have been touched by beauty.

³¹ I make this statement regarding the process of artistic creation from thoughts on this matter. Also from studies and conferences by Jacques and Raissa Maritain on the genesis of the work of art and aesthetics. Of course, they do not manage the notion of personal transcendental. They take what is beautiful as a metaphysical transcendental, but lucidly penetrate in the central and collateral phases of the artistic creation phenomena in man.

³² L. Polo, AT, p. 204.

³³ *Ibidem*. I refer to the study made by professor Piero Viotto entitled “Fruizione e creazione della bellezza” in Maritain, In. A. Molinaro (coord.), *Filosofia e arte*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 2006, pp. 23-44.

The third personal transcendental turns into search as transcendental loving. I believe that in the giving structure, as it has been mentioned, giving is what moves the loving process of search – for what is beautiful. In a certain way we would be referring to finding the clothing for “the tree never seen by the artist before”, that is, the intimate tree, the beautiful tree, in which intimacy is overturned and reflected. The work already seen by the intellectus ut co-actus, is loved by the creating artist, who tenaciously pursues the poietic work wrapped in the loving process of giving it shape. Therefore, both the configuration process of the tree as well as the shape constitutes a gift.

Freedom, fourth personal transcendental, exercised in duality with co-existence, will act in all facets of the conversion of the personal being into beauty. Freedom, in Polo’s glossary is disposing, and it is clear that the creation of a work of art is the result of disposing of one’s own freedom and this in all steps of the internal itinerary. I wonder, is not because of these reasons and others that the personal beings turns into beauty, and that in such conversion lies the key to the work of art? Therefore, in beauty, freedom reaches itself, that is, the method reaches its topic. The topic of freedom is God. Thus, reaching the topic is achieving to grasp a gleam of the Light which is above all light. And such gleam is the *pulchrum*.