

## Book Reviews

*Jacek Woroniecki*. *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*. Edited by Piotr S. Mazur, Barbara Kiereś, Ryszard Skrzyński, and Agata Płazińska. Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2019.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in various strands of Thomism among Catholic philosophers in the English-speaking world. Numerous books and articles have been published delving into and defending many versions of Thomism—for example, many recent works have reconsidered the Thomism of the Baroque and Neo-Scholastic periods, River Forest and Laval Thomism, Existential, Transcendental, and Analytic Thomism, and various kinds of broadly Thomistic natural law theory. One unique strand of Thomism that often receives little attention in the English-speaking world is the personalistically-influenced tradition that flourished in Poland in the mid-twentieth century. While most English-speaking Catholic philosophers are at least passingly aware of this tradition due to the influence of Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), knowledge even of his pre-papal philosophical work among those philosophers remains rare. While some other Polish Thomists have been translated and received a little attention—such as Piotr Jaroszynski, Mieczysław Krąpiec, Andrew Woznicki, and Zofia Zdybicka, each of whose works were published in Peter Lang’s *Catholic Thought from Lublin* series—the tradition has enjoyed little widespread exposure.

Into this gap in the literature has stepped Ignatianum University Press’ series on *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Each of the thirteen volumes in the series will cover a distinct thinker in the Polish Christian philosophical tradition. Some volumes cover thinkers already translated into English, such as Wojtyła and Krąpiec; others, like

the volume being reviewed here, on Polish Dominican Jacek Woroniecki, deal with thinkers never before translated into English or considered in Anglo-American philosophical literature. This tradition is notable for its blending of the perennial tradition of Christian philosophy with resources from modern philosophical currents, especially phenomenology and personalism, all in the context of resistance to the dominant political ideologies of the twentieth century, especially the totalitarianisms of Soviet Communism and National Socialism. The current moment is an excellent one for a series like this. Not only can it build on the current resurgence in interest in the many strands of Thomism, but it can also build on the currently growing literature on and interest in Personalism. Numerous books and articles have appeared over the last few years on thinkers like Edith Stein and Dietrich von Hildebrand, whose work has great affinity to many of the philosophers covered in this series. The moment is right for Polish Christian philosophy to make a major impact on English speaking Catholic Thomists and Personalists.

As I have said, the present volume concerns the Dominican philosopher and professor, Jacek Woroniecki, whose work up until now has been almost entirely unknown outside Poland (118). The first half of the book consists of a study of his life and the major themes of his work; the second half consists of translations of five of his articles, representing some of the most significant issues that he considered. Woroniecki covered a wide range of themes in his writing, from fairly standard considerations of Thomistic theology of grace to original contributions to philosophical anthropology. In what follows, I first situate Woroniecki's work in the context of Thomism more broadly. I then present three claims of Woroniecki's for which he deserves to be known much more widely.

Before I turn to those points, it is worth noting that, for all its merits and timeliness, the book suffers from the difficulty that its word choices are often obscure. This is likely a result of the fact that it was produced by writers who, while experts on Woroniecki, are not native speakers of English. The reader must, at times, exert some effort to figure out what a word means. For example, the authors and translators often speak of Woroniecki's and Aquinas' "universalism" (e.g. 14, 17, 131). By this, they do not mean (as the word is generally used in English-speaking Catholic philosophy) the view that all persons will attain salvation. Rather, by "universalism," they mean the holistic or catholic quality of the Thomistic system, its status of being open to incorporating the insights of all other philosophical systems. Contextual clues can generally be used to figure what is meant by an unusual word usage, and the authors have also provided a very helpful

glossary of Woroniecki's main terms halfway through the book (119–28). Having completed the book, I am convinced that Woroniecki provides important insights that deserve to be taken up more widely, but the book would accomplish this task better were its wording more standard.

In this and the following paragraph, I seek to situate Woroniecki's work in the context of Thomism more broadly. This Dominican thinker takes up personalist concerns, but in a decidedly Thomist framework. Like his fellow Polish Thomist, Karol Wojtyła, he thinks that anthropological errors stand at the root of many modern errors (47)—totalitarianism, individualism, and so forth. Likewise, he thinks that an analysis of our willed acts is crucial for understanding ourselves. His thought joins that of the personalists insofar as he argues that our free actions cannot be fully explained by intellectual or external causes (154–5), he emphasizes our openness to transcending ourselves and the ways in which we have been previously actualized, and he defends the claim that we are only fully actualized in relation to others in society and culture (41). But unlike Wojtyła, he does not take up the phenomenological method of rigorously considering the structure of subjectivity and of acts from the subject's point of view. Unlike Wojtyła, Woroniecki seems to have wrongly thought that that method provides no way to rationally analyze subjectivity (51), and so he preferred the more object-focused approach of a more traditional Thomism. Indeed, this may account in part for his lack of exposure outside of Poland: unlike his countryman, the “universality” of Woroniecki's thought does not seem to have quite extended to the mainstream of modern thought. Indeed, he often takes up a rather unnuanced view of thinkers like Duns Scotus, Descartes, Bacon, and Rousseau, seeing in them only narrow reductionism, in contrast to the luminous openness of Aquinas' thought. This is, I think, unfair to each of these thinkers; it lacks the insight of Wojtyła's into how modern philosophers' thought could be positively incorporated into a broadly Thomistic framework.

Woroniecki's *prima facie* lack of apparent original insight on political thinking may further explain why those outside of Poland did not take up his philosophy. (I say *prima facie* because I think that he actually does provide some important political insights, which other Thomists would do well to consider.) His political philosophy is, at first glance, fairly similar to the widely held views of Thomistic personalism and Christian democracy. In the famous Thomistic political debate between personalists (like Jacques Maritain) and integralists (like Charles de Koninck), he would clearly have been on the side of Maritain. His account of the nature of (and difference between) “nations” and “states” seems to match much of Maritain says in

*Man and the State*. Nations are natural communities that foster citizens for a more perfect life, which is achieved through the mediation of customary actions; states are natural communities that aim at providing citizens with the material and moral means they need to live their best lives, which is achieved through the mediation of law and power (197–200). He grants that both human persons and communities are ordered to common goods both in earthly communities and ultimately to the common good that is God (163–4). But, much as on the teaching of the Catholic magisterium since Pope John XXIII, he holds a view on which political communities' contribution to the common good largely consists of providing free individual persons with the means to become virtuous.

Woroniciecki's emphasis on the freedom and virtue of individual persons brings us to the first of his most important contributions. More than any other Thomistic thinker whom I have read, Woroniciecki emphasizes the centrality of pedagogy and human formation to ethics and to the philosophical life. Human potential can only be actualized and completed by proper formation in and by a community. He gives careful analyses of how, in ethical formation, we should form not only our intellects and our beliefs, but we must strengthen and form our wills as well. Indeed, he takes great pains to argue against psychologists and educators who contend that the will cannot be strengthened; against such views, Woroniciecki argues that virtue does indeed strengthen the will so that by it, we can more readily choose the good, but without free imposing necessity upon our free choices. Against intellectualists who hold that our beliefs determine our choices, Woroniciecki takes up the libertarian view that we can always choose otherwise (178). The educator must remember this freedom of the student, and always take as one of his or her main goals the formation of that freedom, so that it can be more skillfully exercised. The only pedagogy that can form the whole person is one that addresses the whole person of the student. Such a pedagogy must be rooted in realism (that is, in our epistemic openness to the whole of reality) but also recognize that our wills are most often formed through customs, especially those learned from our families and nations. Fideism, sentimentalism, materialistic naturalism, individualism, and egalitarianism are errors not only because they are reductionistic anthropologies, but because they pervert education—that is, if teacher and student are guided by these ideologies, the student cannot be formed as a whole person (101–7). Ethicists would do well to take up Woroniciecki's preoccupation with pedagogy; we must always consider the impact that an ethical theory is going to have on the formation of young people before we adopt it. While some of Woroniciecki's suggestions seem unnecessarily

nationalistic—for example, his emphasis on using the national language in schooling (82–3)—most of them are timely and relevant advice for teachers. He is also aware of the need to distinguish a harmful nationalism from a truly patriotic love for one’s nation and state, which is necessary for full human and Christian formation (83–4).

Furthermore, Woroniecki is not only concerned with how all of philosophy and theology impact the formation of young people. A pedagogically engaged virtue ethic considers the formation of adults as well. One of the essays included in this volume is his “The Skill of Governing and Giving Orders.” While the authors have chosen to use the word “governance” in this article, the article is not so much about the governing of a state as it is about the virtues needed by a superior (like a manager) for dealing with subordinates, especially in an office or other workplace setting. Rarely have I seen the ethics of the internal workings of business dealt with in such personalistic terms! The focus here is on the full human formation of the subordinate and the superior. In order to form subordinates as whole persons, the superior must be able to give direct orders and apply penalties for disobedience, but more often virtuously provide space for fostering subordinates’ freedom by not giving direct orders. In Woroniecki’s vision, even an office in a business or a bureaucracy is a school for human freedom and virtue.

This emphasis on virtue in human pedagogy brings us to his second significant contribution to Thomistic philosophy, his enormously helpful distinction between “habit” and “skill.” Too often virtues are thought of, even by Thomists, as habits in the modern, post-Humean sense: as mechanizations of action, such that we do what is right in a rote, unthinking way. But Woroniecki deftly shows that spiritual persons and powers cannot be perfected mechanistically, in the way that material things are perfected. Rather, in our spiritual powers, we must take on “skills,” not “habits.” A true virtue is a “skill,” that is, a fixed disposition to a freely chosen goal, on the basis of which we immediately decide what to do when situations arise in which the skill is relevant. On this definition, freedom is not suppressed by virtue, but rendered very quick, focused, and active (177). This quickness of decision making is necessary if we are going to act well, and so reach the goal of freedom, which Woroniecki sees as, in part, performing great deeds. Proper pedagogy and skill formation transform us into complete, self-reliant, self-controlled personalities.

With this, we come to what, in my opinion, is Woroniecki’s most important contribution to Thomistic thought, his distinction between “personality” and “personance.” With his analysis of the nature of personality,

he comes closest to the fullness of Personalistic thought, as it is seen, for example, in the accounts of personality in Edith Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being* or Dietrich von Hildebrand's *Liturgy and Personality*. Unlike animals, whose "potentialities" are actualized by certain limited acts dictated by their biology, persons have "potentialization." By this, he means that we have an openness in our spiritual powers—we are open, for example, to any thought and any choice—that is unspecified by our nature or biology. It is up to us what we think and how we act. Because of this open-endedness, human formation is much more difficult than animal formation. Human formation and education requires the development of skills like virtues though free self-governance. Furthermore, like personalists such as Stein, Woroniecki emphasizes the ineffable distinctiveness of each person's spiritual powers. On his view, Aquinas and other medievals did not fully grasp the distinctiveness of each human soul. We see this distinctiveness in the way that some persons have a stronger intellectual light than others, some have a stronger will than others (149–50), and some are more disposed to world-changing deeds than others (160). Through our world-openness, we must freely take up our own natures and those of the things around us and form ourselves into fully actualized persons. One who develops his or her "potentialized" spiritual powers through free choice becomes not only a "person" but a "personality." (Incidentally, I think that this distinction is helpful for bioethical debates: to be a person is something ontologically given, but what we often call a person—which is an achievement, not a given—is better called a personality; distinctive moral norms apply to each of these.) A personality displays his or her intellectual and volitional formation to the world; we can see that unique formation on his or her distinctive face (145). (Woroniecki makes much of the connection between the words for "personality" and "face" in various Slavic languages, a point that puts him in intellectual proximity to other Personalists who have emphasized the importance of the human face, like Emmanuel Levinas.) But merely having a distinctive, recognizable, self-actualized personality is not the goal of human life, for personality too must be perfected. He calls a truly virtuous, skillful, pedagogically formed personality a "personalence" (18, 43–4). It is not enough to be free and self-perfected; rather, one must be good as well, and this occurs only through proper upbringing and a virtuous national environment.

Jacek Woroniecki introduces crucial distinctions and prescribes key ethical and pedagogical norms. This book, which introduces his thought to an English-speaking audience for the first time, deserves a wide reading, despite its occasional defects. Historically, it helps to fill in a chapter in the

history of Thomism that is often overlooked outside of Eastern Europe. It also helps us better understand Aquinas' thought and its application today, and most importantly, it helps us better understand ourselves and our lives together in community.

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