

Mieczysław Gogacz. The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century. Edited by Artur Andrzejuk, Dawid Lipski, Magdalena Płotka, and Michał Zembrzuski. Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2019.

As Thomistic thought intersects with the contemporary problems of modern philosophy, there have arisen several schools within what is commonly referred to as Neo-Thomism in the twentieth and twentieth-first century with their own particular method for advancing Thomistic thought. For example, “Analytical Thomism” (Geach and Anscombe being the primary representatives) attempts to merge the philosophical methodology of analytic philosophy with Thomistic thought, “Transcendental Thomism” (Fr. Bernard Lonergan being the most well-known) imports the Kantian notions of the *a priori* and *a posteriori*, “Semiotic Thomism” (a slightly more recent effort beginning with the work of John Deely) combines the insights of semioticians starting with Charles Pearce with Thomistic thought, continuing also the work laid out in the Renaissance by John of St. Thomas. Likewise, “Thomistic Personalism” emerged as a way to address contemporary philosophy with Thomistic thought without ignoring the challenges of modernity. This school of thought is centered generally on the work of Polish philosophers at the Catholic University of Lublin, with Pope St. John Paul II as the most renowned. Given the influence and importance of St. John Paul II, there has been greater interest given to Thomistic Personalist thought more generally, at least to understand the philosophical world that St. John Paul II emerged from. The book we are reviewing currently is an introduction to the thought of Mieczysław Gogacz, a contemporary of St. John Paul II at Lublin, and we consider it to be a significant work for contemporary Thomistic scholars, especially those with an interest in Thomistic Personalism. Although Gogacz himself considered his thought as to be situated more within the sphere of Existential Thomism (following Etienne Gilson) with his own particular twist, he has several ideas which broadly speaking intersect with that of Thomistic Personalism.¹

1. Gogacz labeled his own particular philosophy “Consequential Thomism”: “Consequential Thomism, hence, makes the statements of existential Thomism more precise—we do not

This book is organized into two major components: secondary accounts of Gogacz and his work, and selections from Gogacz' own works. Structurally, the book is well organized, giving the reader a brief understanding of his thought as a unified whole spanning from speculative to practical philosophy. The first part (i.e., secondary sources on Gogacz) accomplishes this by providing a short intellectual biography of Gogacz himself (which helps to understand the background of his philosophical endeavors), a summary of his overall philosophy (which helps the reader understand where Gogacz was similar to other Thomists of the twentieth century and where he differed; by-and-large, Glison's influence is clearly felt), a more detailed summary of each aspect of Gogacz' philosophy (e.g. metaphysics, politics, ethics, etc.), and a glossary of philosophical terms in line with Gogacz's understanding (always an important reference for any philosopher). The second part (primary source material) is likewise divided into the different areas of Gogacz's philosophy highlighted in the first part of book. In the end, the book itself provides for the reader an introductory resource into Gogacz's work, providing a general account of his philosophy in such a way that those unfamiliar with Gogacz can walk away with a broad sense of who he is, what he thought, and what distinguishes him from other Thomists of the day. Given the short length of the book (in relation to the body of Gogacz work), however, one cannot expect to see his positions treated in full detail. Rather, the majority of his ideas are presented more as aphorisms with a brief presentation of the underlying argument at best. As stated before, however, this is understandable given that it is clearly meant as more of an introduction to Gogacz's thought.

While the secondary source portion of the book is mostly helpful, it comprises the majority of the book. It would have been preferable to have a larger collection of primary works in the second part of the book so that Gogacz's own words would have been in greater focus. Moreover, while its brevity makes the book useful as a general survey, it seems unfortunately too brief for a detailed philosophical understanding of any one issue. This is an ongoing issue within the work, and it is an inevitable one when trying to cover so much ground in so small a space. As it stands, therefore, while the scope of the book is helpful as a resource for further research, it is not enough as a stand-alone work on each particular topic. Simply put, the book progresses too quickly to allow the reader to pause sufficiently on larger points.

realize the necessity of that act in a being, but we rather assume that what (act of existence) is in a being already is, moreover, it initiates the being to be a real one." (39).

Let us illustrate this critique with a few cases in the book that give rise to further questions. In the glossary of philosophical terms, for example, God is defined as “the subsistent act of being, constituted of only one principle, though it is its own cause of existence” (138). This, of course, is immediately confusing, given that the traditional understanding of God is that He is an “uncaused cause.” This has to be the case because the notion that something could be the cause of itself is a metaphysical absurdity (as the cause must exist prior to the effect, so for something to be the cause of its own existence, it must pre-exist itself which is an impossibility).² However, given the remaining explanation, we presume that this was not what the author meant to suggest, and that perhaps something was lost in translation. The provided definition of “cause” does not help very much to clarify this: “being or principle, which brings about being or principles of being. Effects, which are not beings, are assigned only to principles, not to causes. Thus, a cause is the being or principles which brings about being. In consequence, a cause is a being grasped in its function of bring about an effect” (136). This explanation is confusing, and it needs to be restructured to some extent. For instance, one could say that a cause is a being which brings about another being. Furthermore, the third sentence simply restates the first verbatim, and it is unclear how it follows as a conclusion from the previous sentences. The statement that “effects are not beings” is also unclear. Now, it is presumed that this glossary is a reflection of Gogacz’s own understanding of these terms, but no citations are provided to substantiate this. Moreover, as a Thomist, it is presumed that Gogacz’s understanding of these terms would simply follow the traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic framework. With this being the case, it seems to us that it would have made more sense to provide the standard definition of terms instead. For instance, returning to “cause,” one would expect the standard explanation relating back to the four senses of “cause” (i.e., efficient, material, formal, final). Perhaps Gogacz’s understanding differed from the tradition, but there is no explanation given on this point.

Another instance in the work which gave rise to further questions was Gogacz’s understanding of the role of angels in causing the human soul:

Reflecting on the issue of human causes, Gogacz points to the final causes of the essence of the soul and the essence of the body. Since the non-subsistent existence of a dependent man is causally related to external self-existence, the

2. Consider the well-known “Five Ways” passage from St. Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae* (ST I, q. 2, a. 3c).

essence also has its source in external causes. However, subsistent existence cannot become the cause of essence, because one cannot be the cause of what one is not. Existence cannot differentiate an essence and make it a form in which rationality and materiality appear. Existence causes only acts of existence. Gogacz further explains that neither the body nor the parents can be the causes of the essential composition of the soul, because the independence of the soul from the body requires a proportional dependence on the existence of an exclusively spiritual being. The external causes of the human soul are, therefore, beings that have both non-subsistent existence and essence. It must therefore be assumed that only angels, as purely spiritual creatures and beings composed of existence and essence, can determine the essential constitution of the human soul. The angels—final causes—indicate the identity of essence. (65)

This is a controversial point within Thomism to say the least. First, this seems to be closer to Avicenna's logic of emanation, even though Gogacz rejects emanation explicitly (171). Moreover, this does not seem to be St. Thomas' understanding of the matter, as he did appear to argue that God was causally linked with natural beings.³ Finally, there seems to be a misuse of technical terms here that, being unfamiliar with the untranslated source, may or may not be another issue in translation. Angels being "final causes" does not make any sense in this context; the logic appears to be suggesting efficient cause instead. To be clear, a "final cause" is understood as "that for the sake of which" something comes to be, while the efficient (or agent) cause refers to the being that brought about the existence of the effect. If an angel were the "final cause" of a particular human soul, that would imply that the human soul exists teleologically for the sake of the angel. This is clearly not the argument. Unfortunately, this terminological issue is also present in Gogacz's own translated work, using "final cause" in this sense as well—that is, as "efficient cause" (177). But with all this being said, this position and the provided argument are simply stated too quickly without reference to the possible contentions contained therein. We suppose that these further considerations would be present in Gogacz's unabridged work, however, without those details, the presentation contained here in the book falls short. Here are some of the further considerations of importance: how does Gogacz understand St. Thomas' position on this matter? Does he find it consistent with St. Thomas' thought? Is he consciously departing from

3. See, for example, ST I, q. 105, a. 5 as well as SCG III, 65–70. Here, St. Thomas distinguished between primary and secondary cause to maintain both natural and divine causality in the natural order.

St. Thomas' position? What are the theological implications for this position in Catholic thought?

With regard to these moments of critiques, however, these instances are the exception, not the rule. More importantly, there are several ideas of note presented in the work that are especially pertinent to the confusions of our time. For example, Gogacz's philosophy of "metanoia" (change in thinking that advances toward truth/reality)⁴ and culture is a good contrast to the prevailing idea of cultural relativism in the West. While cultural relativism denies the possibility of supracultural judgment and thinking, Gogacz considered how philosophy ("real" philosophy, both "real" in the sense of "realism" and "truth")⁵ goes beyond our cultural thinking (which is our natural default). Thus, philosophy in education allows for metanoia with individuals, as it is precisely philosophy itself which allows for us to think beyond our culture. Moreover, philosophy also serves as the primary foundation of culture. This follows from what was stated prior, as philosophy allows for thinking beyond culture, thereby allowing for the change and creation of culture.⁶ Culture is built around a way of perceiving reality, of understanding the world around you, and as philosophy seeks the same, it follows that a particular philosophy (as a way of understanding reality) gives rise to a worldview which forms the basis of a particular culture.

As a Thomist, Gogacz also understands how being and the good are coextensive, thus, as metanoia involves an advancing toward the truth (which is grounded in being itself), it is also simultaneously an advancement toward the good. A good culture, then, is one in which its foundational worldview is indeed a true perception of reality. Finally, true philosophy (as supracultural thinking) is needed to make this judgment. Here, we see a parallel with St. John Paul II's thoughts on culture, especially as both Gogacz and St. John Paul II speak of a truly "humanistic" or good culture as the only "true" culture. In other words, "bad" culture is not true culture. Let us begin first with a passage from St. John Paul II:

4. "*Metanoia*, understood as a transformation of thinking and actions, is—according to Gogacz—a combination of 'moving to truth' and 'moving to good.' As a result of education and upbringing, it is a transformation of the intellect as well as the will. It often involves ending relations with objects that do not serve wisdom" (85).

5. "Philosophy is an apprehension, a result of the cognition of actual reality, and can never replace existence alone" (36).

6. "Gogacz attributes a special culture-creating role to philosophy. Philosophy occupies a special place in culture because it becomes a way of thinking for people and has the power to contribute cultural facts. In addition, the shape of culture depends on philosophy, which is the basic understanding of reality" (101).

True culture is humanization, whereas non-culture and false cultures are dehumanizing. In the choice of culture it is man's destiny that is at stake. Humanization, namely, man's development, is carried out in all fields of reality in which man takes his place: in his spirituality and corporeity, in the universe, in human and divine society ... Culture does not concern solely the spirit or solely the body, just as it is not limited merely to individuality, or merely to sociality, or only to universality. Reduction *ad unum* always means dehumanizing culture; man is spiritualized or materialized, deprived of his social aspects or depersonalized. Culture must cultivate man and every man in the extension of an integral humanism, in which the whole man and all men are helped to advance in the fullness of every human dimension.⁷

A "good" culture is one which elevates man, which achieves the purpose of attaining the actual good, whereas a "bad" culture does the opposite, missing the mark and bringing man lower. This is what allowed John Paul II to distinguish between "authentic culture" from "non-culture," as he argued that a "bad" culture is no true culture, and that such a false culture would only lead to the "dehumanization of man." Now let us compare this with Gogacz's position:

For Gogacz, humanism is an effort to maintain personal relations. Such a culture is a humanistic culture. It evokes in a human the ability to connect and form existential relations with other beings. The principle of humanism is therefore the protection of persons and all beings. Such humanism "protects realistic culture" against giving the appearances of real existence to products as well as against the domination of axiology. (85)

Like St. John Paul II, notice the sense that there exists "realistic culture" and that this is intrinsically linked with humanistic culture. Moreover, Gogacz argued that since reality precedes culture, culture itself ceases to

7. John Paul II, "Humanization in Freedom," Homily given in Rio de Janeiro, on July 1, 1980. See also Mirosław Nowaczyk, "John Paul II's Concept of Culture," 171, in: *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 1 (1983), 169–82: "From the point of view of normative concept of culture John Paul II distinguishes 'authentic culture' from 'non-culture,' or 'false culture' which leads to dehumanization of man. The stigma of 'inauthentic culture' is its reduction *ad unum*—to spirit alone, or to matter alone, to individualism, or to collectivism alone. At the foundations of inauthentic culture there always lies the vision of 'one-dimensional man.'" Finally, notice that, arguably following Maritain's lead, John Paul II speaks here of the need for an "integral humanism." This is central to Jacques Maritain's philosophy of culture, as this concept of dehumanizing culture will be vital to understanding his diagnosis of the modern problem along with his proposed solution of integral humanism.

act as culture once there is a separation between reality (and the good, by coextension) and the culture itself.⁸ Such a culture would also be anti-humanistic. This, of course, is parallel to what we explained above with St. John Paul II's position on the matter.

As culture itself frames our way of perceiving the world, it is important then to have a culture based in truth. If this is not the case, then culture leads us to error, and from an ethical standpoint, away from our fulfilment as human beings (this is the antithesis of metanoia). Practically, however, culture also directly affects politics (and the inverse is also true), such that bad culture will inevitably produce a bad state of politics: "Politicians have a direct impact on the formation of culture. Therefore, a politician, like every human being, is obliged to gain wisdom so as to create a humanist culture through the tasks entrusted to them" (93). Finally, the *raison d'être* of both politics and culture is to serve man, that is, the end of politics and culture is the true common good; they should create the conditions to facilitate and lead toward the true human good: "Reasons of state and political programs should be determined by culture. Culture and politics should serve the well-being of humans, that well-being that is identified in their structure" (93). Now, just as reality precedes culture, this is also true for politics, and as Gogacz identifies a problem with modern culture being created in isolation from reality, so too does he identify this same issue with modern politics. Given the modern separation between faith and reason in culture, we have seen in modern times the rise of the secular state which attempts to bar religion from every aspect of public life. What we have seen instead are the rise of political religions as politics itself fills the void left behind by religion: "We have got used to the fact that politics neglects the problems of God, man, religion and humanism. Politics was situated above particular individuals, above God and human beings, and has become the basis for defining relations of reality" (207).

To conclude, let us say in summation that this book serves as a good introduction for scholars to the life and work of Mieczysław Gogacz. Sadly, the majority of his works are still untranslated, so there is a barrier for those unfamiliar with Polish to do further research with Gogacz's own writings when compelled to do so. Fortunately, this work is part of a series of books published by Ignatianum University that feature other Polish

8. "Gogacz sees serious consequences to building a culture in isolation from real beings: when culture in the objective sense—i.e., scientific, philosophical, or theological theories, or works of literature, architecture, art, technology, etc.—turns against man, it ceases to be humanistic and compatible with the world of nature. Moreover, culture understood as such stops being culture (it does not fulfill its tasks)" (100).

Christian philosophers. As stated in the beginning, these works serve to illustrate the particular school of Thomism and Christian Philosophy that rose from the Catholic University of Lublin in the twentieth century. Any scholar interested in Thomistic Personalism or the thought of St. John Paul II in particular would be well-served by this work as an addendum to their studies.

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