

Work as Key to the Social Question

The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work



Alienated Leisure

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Abstract:

In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981), Pope John Paul II applies his phenomenological theory of action to the issue of human work. He claims that, as a type of action, work is both objective and subjective, and that its subjectivity is prior. He explains the implications and possible distortions of this view. However, I believe that an application of his theory of action to the issue of *leisure* is also needed. Thus, my aim in this paper is to show that, like work, leisure can be evaluated based on whether it is appropriate to its subject, to the dignity of the person.

“It is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself.” [1]

Introduction

In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981), John Paul II applies his phenomenological theory of action to the issue of human work. He claims that, as a type of action, work is both objective and subjective, and that its subjectivity is prior. [2] He explains the implications and possible distortions of this view. In this paper, I extend the application of his phenomenological insights to the issue of leisure. First (I), I explicate the philosophy of person and action found in *The Acting Person* (1969). Secondly (II-III), I examine the way in which the pope uses this theory to evaluate human work. Finally (IV-V), I apply these insights to the issue of leisure. The aim of the paper is to show that, like work, leisure can be evaluated based on whether it is appropriate to its subject, to the dignity of the person. Through Wojtyla’s phenomenological analysis of the person and action we are able to gain a sense of what it means to “leisure well” in addition to what it means to “work well”.

I. Human Action as Objective and Subjective

In order to explain the sense in which work and leisure are both objective and subjective, the meaning of objectivity and subjectivity, and their significance in human action generally, should first be established.

An object is that which impresses itself upon us or is “thrown before” us; the objective is that which pertains to the world and the entities of the world. [3] A subject, on the other hand, is a person, capable of relating internally to other subjects; the subjective is whatever has its source or ultimate purpose in the human being as a person. [4]

Human action can be said to have both an objective and subjective aspect, with the subjective aspect itself having two parts. In the objective sense, action changes the features of the world, it displaces and transforms exterior reality. Such modifications in turn condition the possibilities of future action. Taken subjectively, however, all action is personal. This means that (i) it has its source in human volition, that it proceeds from the person, and (ii) also returns to the person, integrating his various faculties and reinforcing his capacity for authentic action. That is, human action leaves an imprint on the human being himself as well as on the world, intangibly accreting in the form of habits, both moral and intellectual, and bringing him, more or less, to his full stature as a human being. The subjective sense of action may be characterized, then, as both “*exitus*” and “*reditus*”. [5]

In *The Acting Person* (1969) Karol Wojtyla construes the objective and subjective aspects of action phenomenologically, using terms such as “transcendence”, “integration”, and “disintegration” or “alienation”.

Objectively, every human action involves what Wojtyla calls “horizontal transcendence”. Horizontal transcendence, strictly speaking, is just intentionality. It is the ability of the agent to move outside himself, to encounter something (a value or end) by containing it as an object of cognition or by desiring it as an object of will. The “terminus” of horizontal transcendence is just the object, and so it does not return in any modifying or developing way to the subject. That is, it is type of “going beyond” the subject which is discerned on account of something in the agent which is not-*object* or not-yet-*object*. (This may be contrasted with transcendence which is discerned on account of something in the agent which is not-*himself*. As we shall see, horizontal transcendence is different from the transcendence which characterizes the subjective aspect of action. [6]) From the objective standpoint, willing does not “return” to the person in the sense of developing his capacities; therefore horizontal transcendence manifests the will as a *power* of the human being, but not yet as a *personal* structure. [7]

Horizontal transcendence or intentionality is most clearly *manifested*, however, by concrete changes in the world. It is evidenced in something with which the agent has to do,

in substantial and accidental changes which things in the world undergo. That is, an object announces the imposition of the agent as an efficient cause.

Subjectively, an authentic human action first requires that the agent be (in the language of *The Acting Person*) structurally or potentially self-possessed, self-determining, and self-governing. These three “structures” of freedom are presupposed, Wojtyla thinks, by traditional analyses of action which examine almost exclusively the relationship between the will, the intellect and the passions. [8]

One who is self-possessed is conscious of the activities of his various faculties and their influence upon one another. He does not just “react” to his environment but is purposive and deliberate in his actions; he has ownership of himself and is fully present to himself. He is not so immersed in the present that he loses his sense of history and foresight; and yet he is not so reflective and distant from his situation that he loses a sense of his facticity. [9]

Self-governance is one’s ability, it seems, to direct his own operations in a way that renders his life “incommunicable” or irreducibly unique. It is an aspect of the person by virtue of which he is “closed within his own ‘reasons’”. However, self-governance is *just* the capacity for this “enclosure” and does not, yet, refer to the moral quality of those reasons. [10]

The concept of self-determination, however, captures most essentially what it means to say that action is “personal”. [11] It is by means of the structure of self-determination that “*the person—that is, that which in itself is subjective—becomes his own first object.*” [12] There are ambiguities in this definition. But self-determination seems to mean, not one’s capability of determining *some thing or other*, that is, his *control* of any particular inner operation or of any external change, but the capacity of freely determining *himself*. The person makes himself to be somebody, he concretely objectifies himself. While capable of intending objects outside of himself and of changing the world, the person is also capable of developing himself. [13]

It is by virtue of the mere intentionality of the will, or the will as a power, that I move (say) a pencil, or plant flowers. Since I have willed these changes, they have not just “happened”. But it is by virtue of *self-determination*, or the will as a personal property, that I become someone, a “whom”. *I do not just “happen”*. The “innermost personal reality” of action is that “*by forming his ego in one way or another man becomes someone or someone else*. This shows how deeply rooted is the objectification referred to here, [i.e.] the objectiveness of self-determination”. [14]

There is a special kind of transcendence which corresponds to the subjective aspect of action. Whereas horizontal transcendence is a manifestation of the will as a *power*, through its efficacy upon external objects, vertical transcendence is a manifestation of the will as a *personal property*, through its efficacy on oneself. That is, whereas horizontal transcendence manifests the *intentionality* of the agent through his efficacy with respect to *some thing or*

other, some object or value, vertical transcendence manifests his *self-determination* through his efficacy in developing (or disintegrating) *himself*. “For the experience of ‘I will’ contains also self-determination and not only intentionality”. [15] Both sorts of transcendence are found in any human action, but only vertical transcendence is *proper* to human action. In other beings, action “results from the subject, but it does not, so to speak, enter it, return to itself, or refer to itself in the first place”. [16]

From the perspective of vertical transcendence, in every action the subject surpasses himself inasmuch as he is “*not-himself*”. [17] Thus Wojtyla emphasizes that vertical transcendence “is not transcendence ‘toward something’, transcendence directed toward an object (value or end), but one in which the subject confirms himself by transgressing (and in a way outgrowing) himself”, [18] and that “the transcendence of the person in the action is thus ultimately constituted as the ‘transgressing of oneself *in truth*’ rather than ‘toward truth’”. [19]

Wojtyla calls the condition or habit which results from vertical transcendence “integration”. Integration refers to a condition of one’s *personal structures*. [20] The integrated person has strengthened and reinforced his own ability to remain in possession of himself, and so is better able to determine himself. “Being in possession of himself man can determine himself”. [21] He has developed an ability to invest his entire self in his actions, and his actions in turn have an objective effect on that self, an effect for which he knows he is responsible. He has become more able to experience his will as a self-determining faculty. “When [transcendence] is accompanied by the subjective unity and wholeness of the structure of self-governance and self-possession, then it manifests the integration about which we are speaking”. [22]

Since it is a strengthening of the personal structures, integration also increases one’s freedom to “create himself” and therefore an increase in his irreducibility, in the degree to which he cannot metaphysically “share” himself. [23] Thus, though integration may analogously be called a “condition”, a *habitus*, or a “virtue” by reference to moral or intellectual virtue, it does not strictly denote the conditioning of a *faculty* in such a way that in its operation it aims more and more exclusively at its proper object. If integration is a condition at all, it is a *pre-condition* of moral virtue (or vice). It reinforces one’s capacity to freely determine himself, and so provides for the possibility of authentic action, which in turn is that by which a person may grow in virtue.

However, it must be noted that in Wojtyla there is another kind of freedom, “moral” or ethical freedom, that should develop alongside the purely personal condition of integration. This is the freedom to become not just *somebody* but a *good* somebody.

The transcendence of the person in the action does not consist solely either in the ontological autonomy, or self-centered dependence on the ego. It includes also the indispensable and essential moment of reference to “truth”, and it is this moment that ultimately determines freedom. For human freedom is not

accomplished nor exercised in bypassing truth but, on the contrary, by the person's realization and surrender to truth. The dependence upon truth marks out the borderlines of the autonomy appropriate to the human person...the human person has the "right" to freedom, not in the sense of unconditioned existential independence, but insofar as *freedom is the core of a person's self-reliance that essentially relates to the surrender to "truth"*. [24]

Freedom, in the fullest sense, is the freedom to pursue truth and *to not be able* to pursue evil. It is a matter of having all of one's desires uniformly aimed at goodness. It does not consist in "having alternative possibilities". Neither does freedom mean "being free to do whatever I want", the negative freedom of unrestraint. [25]

Moreover, Wojtyla thinks that moral freedom reaches its highest expression in the act of self-giving. Self-determination reveals our personhood, but this personhood is most *fully* revealed when we make ourselves, when we determine ourselves, into a *gift* for others. This giving might seem to conflict with the idea that, in every performance of an action, one is "self-possessed". However, Wojtyla notes that "Neither [self-possession nor self-governance]...implies being closed in on oneself. On the contrary, both self-possession and self-governance imply a special disposition to make a 'gift of oneself', and this a 'disinterested' gift. Only if one possesses oneself can one give oneself..." [26]

That we, like God, are able to "give ourselves freely" to others means that we are not only human beings but also persons. Personhood implies a certain "superabundance", that we need not act because of material or emotional exigencies, but that we are able to act because of an overflow of spiritual goods, most especially love. [27] Wojtyla has often stated that this "law of the gift" is inscribed deep within the human person. *The Acting Person*, in fact, could be seen as an analysis of how the gift of self is to be made "sincerely".

Disintegration, on the other hand, is a developed condition characterized by a loss of self-possession, and in general a loss of awareness of one's self in one's actions. For example, one suffering from an addiction has lost a sense of himself; he no longer experiences himself as present or in control. Wojtyla notes that there are *degrees* to disintegration, moving from the actual to the habitual, and then to a habitual disintegration which is like a "second nature" and seems to remove the possibility of self-determination altogether. In "the lower limit of disintegration" a man "is, or at least appears to be, completely destitute of the specifically 'personal' structures manifested in and with the action". [28]

Action in general, then, may be seen as both objective and subjective, i.e. as capable of effecting changes in the world, and as an expression and development of personality. Moreover, action may either have an integrative or a disintegrative effect upon the person.

II. Objective Work

In sections 5 and 6 of *Laborem Exercens* (1981), John Paul II applies this analysis of action to work. As a type of action, work has both an objective and a subjective sense. We are most familiar with speaking of the objective sense of work, that is, the sense in which it changes the world, what it *does* to the world, what it brings into being. It is through human work that the earth is built up and effaced in various ways. Land is fertilized and depleted; the products of the land are processed into food and clothing, and innumerable other goods. Also included in the objective aspect of work are the technology and tools which have been created as sophisticated extensions of human power.

III. Subjective Work

The pope argues that in addition to the objective sense of work there is a “subjective” sense of work. “There is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say, a subject that decides about himself”. [29] This confirms our intuitions about there being an aspect of work beyond *what* is done, that there is a sense in which work has a positive or negative effect on the worker, apart from considerations of (say) efficiency and production.

Moreover, the pope claims that this subjective sense of work is prior in importance to the objective sense of work. “The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one”. [30] Work has intrinsic value (i) because it is *personal* action, or proceeds from the person, and (ii) because its purpose is to *develop* the person.

(i) That work is a *personal* means that it engages the structures of self-determination, the powers by which a person experiences himself as an authentic actor ordered toward self-realization. Since it is leisure, and not work, that is the primary concern of this paper, I will mention only briefly some of the ways in which the experience of work can fall short of being personal. Work and working conditions should be such that the structures of freedom within the person are preserved, enabling him to give himself fully to whatever task he is about, and to his fellow workers in the community of work. However, it is often the case that the worker is, to some degree, not in fact “self-possessed” and so his capacity for transcendence and integration (i.e., authentic action) is weakened. The pope also calls this situation one of “alienation”, or a situation in which it is difficult for the person to offer the gift of self. [31] The worker is not able to be aware of himself as the cause of his own actions; he loses “authority” over himself and is left with the experience of being acted *upon* or acted through.

The inability of the worker to “offer himself” occurs in a number of ways. First, he may not see clearly how his work differs from another person’s in the same occupation, i.e. what makes it his own. He may lose sight of his vocation. When his tasks in the workplace

demand from him only a very trivial amount of “foresight”, e.g. when he is involved in repetitive, monotonous work on an assembly line or work in which he defers to another person too frequently and is forced to mindlessly assent to commands (this may occur when the worker has not been properly educated about his job, or when he is actually being conditioned to obey), he is also dehumanized. In these cases one of the worker’s highest abilities, the ability to plan and order, is atrophied. The worker cannot get a “long view” of the projects in which he is involved; he is conditioned only to “respond” to certain appearances (visual or aural imperatives) and becomes, in a sense, a machine or the extension of a machine. He is merely acted *through*. On the other hand, when one’s work has *no* uniformity whatsoever the worker is also dehumanized, in that there is no special skill or *techne* that he is exercising. [32]

In still other cases, the working environment can be *socially* dysfunctional. Persons intrinsically need others in order to complete themselves, but often work relationships are competitive, isolating, and shallow.

(ii) That the purpose of work is to *develop* the person means that it is ordered, first, to the full realization and ultimate well-being of the one who works. [33] Wojtyla calls this “spiritual” remuneration of work “integration”. The interrelation between transcendence and integration is captured well in *Centesimus Annus*: “it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself”. [34] Work that is personal results in personal development, in the sense of strengthening those capacities of freedom that are commensurate to him as a human being.

Efficiency and production, then, are not the primary purposes of work; such things are useful only inasmuch as they help man on his way toward his transcendent vocation, that is, inasmuch as they make him what he *is* and as a consequence bring him closer to his final end or destination. Even in the most monotonous and alienating types of work, “it is always man who is the purpose of the work”. [35] Man is the final as well as the principal efficient cause of work.

Thus, one’s work can be better or worse depending on how much or how little it brings him toward the fullness of his own humanity. Thus, considered subjectively, one’s work can be better or worse.

IV. Objective Leisure

Leisure, like work, is a human activity or involves activity, and therefore has an objective and subjective sense. [36] Though the concept of “leisure” has changed from one time period to the next, and tends to differ along the lines of various social and cultural groups, let us for the moment define leisure very inclusively as a condition (a condition of soul or of exterior circumstances) *by virtue of which* a person is free from practical

concerns, i.e. concerns related to producing things, to providing for one's needs, and so forth.

Objectively, the world shows the traces of "leisure", taken in this broad sense. Among the images of the ancient world most familiar to us are the Coliseum in Rome and the temples of the Acropolis in Athens. Nowadays the objective aspect of leisure shows, more and more, the importance that has been assigned to essentially secular activities such as entertainment and sports. Golf courses, resorts, ski slopes, and miniature cities, in the U.S. and abroad, evidence the activity of humans in the service of leisure. On the shores of South Carolina, for example, there are hundreds of miniature golf "islands" which, like "magic kingdoms", seem to simulate the sort of otherworldliness that characterizes traditional activities of leisure.

Leisure activities have also changed the objective character of the home. Cables, modems, wires, speakers, and monitors abound. In many homes furniture and lights are arranged around televisions. We find, then, in today's home different sorts of sounds, sensations, and ways of ordering than were found two hundred years ago. Such objective features of leisure, like those of work, are just various sorts of changes that human action, in leisure or in the service of leisure, has effected.

V. Subjective Leisure

We have seen that John Paul argues, in *LE* and elsewhere, that there is a subjective sense of work, that is, that human work "has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person...". But, as a human activity, *leisure* also seems to have a normative element which is grounded in the concept of the person. That is, leisure may bring one closer to or farther away from experiencing who he *is* as a unique, free being, capable of transcendence. Just as work may manifest (or fail to manifest) a person's structures of self-possession and self-determination, and may leave him either integrated or disintegrated, so it is with leisure.

A good way to approach the deficiencies of what we call "leisure" activity today is to describe the condition of *alienation*, mentioned above with respect to work. We may then explore the extent to which, today, leisure activity is alienated. The pope defines alienation, on both the personal and the societal level, in *Centesimus Annus* (1991):

...it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself. This gift is made possible by the human person's essential "capacity for transcendence"...A man is alienated *if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented toward his final destiny, which is God.* [37]

In this text, we see that alienation is a condition wherein a person is not able to offer “the free gift of self”, he is alienated from his own true self by a lack of self-possession, and from the community as a whole by a refusal of participation. He declines to act in a self-determined way, and so does not take responsibility for himself and his actions. Alienation results, I think, from a refusal or from repeated refusals to acknowledge one’s freedom as a self-determining agent.

Alienation is evident in leisure activity today, and especially in leisure that is essentially passive entertainment. We intuitively see that there is something deficient in activities where a person is not “all there”. We say, “Oh, he’s not with us” or “He’s lost in X” if he is absorbed, for example, in a video game or in television.

When one becomes absorbed like this others may listen to what he is saying but do not fully trust it as coming from *him*. Now when we talk with someone and are fully present to them, when we are engaged in what they are saying, our speech has the character of a “pronouncement”, that is, it is *deliberate* speech. But if a person is lost in some sort of electronic program, what he says seems lacking in authority, disengaged, as if he were under the influence of strong passions. Likewise with his actions: his movements are voluntary, but nonetheless non-authoritative and unpurposive.

A loss of self-possession, or alienation from oneself, is also evident in leisure activity involving excessive consumption of alcohol. Such activity does not promote creativity, responsibility, and in general a *personal* community. Rather, it causes a diminishment of practical, productive, and theoretical abilities, a weakening of self-possession, and a lack of presence to oneself and to others.

Unfortunately, alienated leisure is encouraged by the habits of society: “A *society* is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and *consumption* make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people”. [38] Many products that are designed for use in leisure actually have the effect of making a person *less* present to himself and to others, less in possession of himself and so less able to give himself. The most conspicuous of these, again, are electronic games that isolate oneself from other people; the player is oftentimes unaware both of himself and of those around him; he loses his natural sense of time. [39] When we want to speak with “him” we must “catch him at a commercial”. In such situations the disengaged person has refused to act and speak authentically; one who is not self-possessed in a way *refuses* the experience of his own unity in action. He invites disintegration and alienation by, in one way or another, allowing himself to be reduced to “reacting” internally to various entertaining and amusing stimuli. This is not to say, of course, that in some situations we must merely “respond” and “react”--such as moving to dodge a falling object. But the alienated person has developed a set of *artificial* reactions. A person may become, through repeated refusals of this kind, incapable of giving himself, because he has no “self” to give. [40]

The alienated person most likely does not realize that he is not truly free when he

experiences leisure as “happening” to him, as it were. Most likely he thinks that he *is* free, because he is free in the sense of not being coerced into doing anything by an extrinsic agent; for most of us, it is likely that freedom does not imply responsibility to oneself and others. We think that we are acting freely, during our “free” time, when we can “do whatever we want”, when we are *radically* free; and we indulge in products and services that restrict us as little as possible and allow us maximum, open-ended gratification. Freedom with responsibility is paradoxical to us.

For instance, in electronic “communities” such as chat rooms it is reported that certain “traditions” and “histories” develop, just as in a normal community. However no one in these communities needs to disclose their real name, gender, occupation, or in fact, anything true about themselves. If I am a member of such a community, there is no sense that “I” will be held accountable for anything I say, because I am writing under a “screen name”. Again, I do not “profess” anything but am, in a way, merely talking without authority. I need not speak responsibly because no one is expecting to be able to trust what I am saying.

Those concerned to implement in their own lives Christian truth and the moral teachings of the Church have a special mandate to reform their leisure activity. In a recent message, John Paul II warned “Let no one succumb to the temptation of making free time a period of ‘rest from values’”. [41] How may we correct and improve our habits of leisure, so that they are more human, more appropriate to the dignity of persons? I will offer just a few suggestions as to how we might restore a culture of authentic or integrated leisure.

First, we must refashion ourselves. We must be converted, in such a way that we are more present in our leisure time, not only to ourselves and to others, but primarily to God. Leisure is not meant to be time in which one loses one’s self-possession, but rather time in which one becomes as present as possible to the One Who is already Present to us in an infinite way. It is in leisure that we are most free to make ourselves a “gift” for God, and so find ourselves in the truest sense.

Second, leisure time is well spent in the re-creation of family bonds and in the correction of personal mistakes which we have made within the family. The Church teaches that prior in importance to any other common good is the common good of our own families. In 1986 the Pope addressed workers in Columbia: “Bear in mind that Sunday ought to contribute to the unity of the family, not to its breakup...live in loving fidelity in your homes”. [42] Especially if one’s work takes him from his family for long periods of time, leisure should be spent restoring unity and trust among family members.

Third, the creation of and participation in various associations enhances our freedom and responsibility as persons. Beyond the family, examples of associations include religious sodalities and fraternities, sports leagues and political groups, and reading circles. Such groups enable the person to develop his foresight, his freedom, and allow him to communicate with others his own knowledge and love.

Fourth, leisure time could be used to discover and create culture. It is in time that is free from material exigencies that we develop various artistic talents, that we become more skillful (say) in painting, in theatre, in musical performance. Such creative activity complements and furthers God's own creation, for "the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design". [43] Moreover, such activities should reflect a Christian optimism about the integrity and goodness of creation, should be spiritually invigorating rather than apathetic, should help us rest our gaze in the Infinite rather than making us cynical about our own transcendence.

Fifth, in leisure we are better able to become involved in the global community through travel. In a 1985 address John Paul II noted that tourism, when purified of exploitation and dehumanization, can be a truly authentic leisure activity. It helps to overcome prejudices, to generate an appreciation of the dignity of each human being; it can "foster new bonds of fraternity"; it is a catalyst of world peace. A revival of the traditional practice of making pilgrimages, visiting shrines and outdoor Stations of the Cross which still exist in many countries, could especially help to restore the authenticity and integrity of leisure.

The Church... appreciates the complex reality of tourism as a means of furthering certain religious values. A clear example of this is the common practice of making a pilgrimage, that is, a journey to a sacred place or sanctuary for a religious motive. This practice is not restricted to any one people or religion. The spiritual value of going on pilgrimage has long been present in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is found to penetrate all aspects of the pilgrim's life. [44]

Travel and tourism can indeed be anonymous, alienating, and hedonistic. In traveling we can certainly focus on *acquiring* more for ourselves, on *having* more: more souvenirs, more ski paraphernalia, the latest kite-surfing equipment. But if the traveler reaches out to other persons during his sojourn, and honestly seeks new knowledge about them and about their culture, his activity can truly be enriching and serve to realize the potentialities which are proper to him as a human being. That is, he can focus on *being* more, and not only for his sake, but for the sake of the common good.

These are only a few suggestions as to how we might make true progress in the reform of leisure in today's culture. I think that, in each particular leisure opportunity we encounter, applying the "personalistic norm" in an evaluation of that activity will help us to determine its subjective worth.

VI. Conclusions

Pope John Paul II believes that human beings become what they are only through action in which they freely transcend themselves, and are able to offer themselves to other people. Philosophers in the ancient and medieval tradition realized that it is through *action* that that human beings either develop or corrupt themselves. The pope, however, in his

phenomenology of action aims to “pause” praxeology precisely at the point where the human must act in freedom and must be enabled to act in freedom, for this is the condition without which moral and intellectual formation is impossible.

This “moment of truth” or authenticity has both ontological and axiological significance. “If action fails to be actually performed or if it betrays in some respects the authenticity of self-determination, then its moral value loses its foundations or at any rate partly loses them” [45] One’s actions must be authentic, before one can be perfected by them. However, “the performance of the action by the person should not be should not be seen as having a purely ontological significance...we should attribute to it also an axiological significance, since...the performance itself of the action by the person is a value”. [46]

John Paul II’s phenomenological analysis of person and action, when applied to leisure, is enlightening and challenging not only for individuals but for society as a whole. That leisure should be ordered to the person, in the sense of enabling him to act authentically and so provide him with the possibility of realizing himself, puts obligations on both individual activity and social conditions of consumption.

Appendix

Aristotle on Leisure vs. Entertainment

In his discussion of education and leisure in the *Politics*, Aristotle states that “nature requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but to use leisure well”. Contemporary philosophers, most notably Joseph Pieper, have drawn attention to the importance of this insight.

The ancient Greeks distinguished leisure (*scholē*) and the intellectual “passing of time” (*diagoge*) from childish pastimes, amusements and sports (*paidia*), and rest or repose (*anapausis*). Moreover, the Greeks considered amusements and pastimes to be essentially cathartic; they relieved one’s tension in order that one could do something else. The Greek verb *kathairein* means “to cleanse”, and is derived from *katharos*, meaning “pure”. Cathartic entertainment, then, served the purpose of cleansing and purifying one for true leisure. From its ancient purpose the aesthetic sense of “cathartic” has developed, i.e. as the effect certain sorts of tragedy and music have in “purging” the emotions. In psychiatry one of the meanings of catharsis is “psychotherapy that encourages or permits the discharge of pent-up, socially unacceptable, effects”.

The Greeks considered entertainment and rest to be *for the sake* of leisure, in order that one might “leisure well”. In this class of non-leisurely and yet non-laborious activity would fall, nowadays, “recess” from school, the “work break”, and, oddly enough, most of what

we consider to be “leisure” activity today. According to Aristotle, most of this activity would be a mere cathartic *preparation* for true leisure, preparation that is, moreover, rarely consummated or brought to fruition in meaningful activity. Recreational activities may supply a physical and emotional catharsis, will only lead to physical satisfaction but they will always leave us, in other ways, restless because they do not satisfy our desire for the good and the true. [47]

Contrast the activities of most modern vacation resorts with those of the ancient Greek *symposium*, a truly leisurely event in which one *practiced* temperance. The essential emotional and physical frenzy and expurgation associated with resorts such as “Hedonism”, taken as an end in itself, seems pathetic precisely because, as persons, we are not completed and brought to fruition, emotionally and intellectually, by merely cathartic pursuits. By their very nature they are for the purposes of some higher activity, so that the higher activities of which the human being is capable (e.g., contemplation) will be as uninterrupted as possible. It is true freedom, i.e. responsible, positive freedom that is the goal of entertainment; we should be “free from constraints” for a time, negatively free, *in order that* we are able to be free and responsible, to be cleansed, able to give ourselves fully to other people without somatic and psychical distractions and “excesses”. The radical freedom, the “all you can eat” motto of certain modern resorts is *for the sake of* the temperance of the symposium.

Notes

[1] *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 41, from the collection *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, by David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (2000). Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24: “Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself”. This statement was probably written by Wojtyła.

[2] See especially sections 5-6 of this encyclical. John Paul II’s complete theory of person and action is found in his work *The Acting Person* (D. Reidel, 1979), first published in 1969.

[3] The first lines of Karol Wojtyła’s *Love and Responsibility* (Ignatius Press, 1981) capture the relationship between “object” and “subject”; they also capture Wojtyła’s concern for realism and for a metaphysical analysis of the person: “The world in which we live is composed of many objects. The word ‘object’ here means more or less the same as ‘entity’. This is not the proper meaning of the word, since an ‘object, strictly speaking, is something related to a ‘subject’. A ‘subject’ is also an ‘entity’—an entity which exists and acts in a certain way. It is then possible to say that the world in which we live is composed of many ‘subjects’. It would indeed be proper to speak of ‘subjects’ before ‘objects’. If the order has been reversed here, the intention was to put the emphasis right at the beginning of this book on its objectivism, its realism”. Wojtyła understands the human “subject” or person to be a *suppositum*, a relatively autonomous center of existence and action. However, he adds to this metaphysical understanding of the subject a concern for “everything that makes man and individual and personal subject” (cf. Wojtyła, K. “The Person: Subject and Community”. *Review of Metaphysics* 23 (2) Dec. 1979, pp. 275-76). “Viewing subjectivity solely from the metaphysical standpoint, and stating that man as a type of being constitutes the true subject of existing and acting, autonomous individual being, we abstract to a large extent from what is the source of our visualizations, the

source of experience. It is far better, therefore, to try to coordinate and join together the two aspects, the aspect of being (man, person) with the aspect of consciousness; the aspect of acts (acting and action) with the aspect of experience” (*The Acting Person*, 1979, ed. Anna Teresa Tymieniecka, p. 57. Henceforth *AP*).

[4] I identify the subject with the person only because this identification is made by the pope in *LE*, 6: “...each sort [of work] is judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say the person, the individual who carries it out”. However, though the pope identifies the subjective aspect of work with the personal aspect in this encyclical, we should not take this to mean that, in work, there is no objective, concrete development of the human being, or that there is nothing concrete or objective about the human being himself. “At the moment when we begin to accept ‘pure consciousness’ or the ‘pure subject’, we no longer are interpreting the real subjectivity of man” (Wojtyła, K. “The Person: Subject and Community”. *Review of Metaphysics* 23 (2) Dec. 1979, pp. 274). The human person includes materiality as well as spirituality, and he concretely realizes himself through bodily operations. Real development occurs within him (and yet he is in no sense *reified*--see Wojtyła’s essay “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination”, in *Person and Community*, ed. Teresa Sandok, p. 192). Accordingly, work that is personal is entirely objective *in the sense that* the worker is objectively “realized” through it: “As a person [man] works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity” (*LE*, 6). Thus, where the pope uses the term “subject” in this encyclical we should read “person” (and not, say, “consciousness” or “mind”).

[5] To gain another, preliminary perspective on the objective and subjective senses of action, which concurs with Wojtyła’s project, it may be helpful to recall the Aristotelian distinction between two types of alteration (*alloiosis*). Alteration is (i) either a change (*metabolē*) in which one form is replaced by its contrary, or (ii) a development or perfecting (*epidosis*) of a potentiality, power, or faculty. “We must recognize two sense of alteration, viz. (i) the substitution of one quality for another, the first being the contrary of the second, or (ii) the development of an existent quality from potentiality in the direction of fixity or nature” (*DeAn* 2.5 417b 10-18).

Alteration in the sense of “change” could be said to constitute the “objective” sense of action. Objectively, human action is capable of effecting every sort of change, i.e. changes of quality and quantity, the “rearrangement” of the world, or change of place, and substantial change. The condition of integration, on the other hand, is an example of alteration in the second sense, a development or even “habit” of self-possession, and in part characterizes what we have called the “subjective” sense of action. Action *proceeds* from the person (*exitus*), and also *integrates* the person, in the sense that it directs his powers of self-determination “toward fixity or nature” (*reditus*).

I think that the term *reditus* or “returning” is appropriate here because it is suggestive (1) of the revolution of celestial bodies, i.e., a return that is *naturally* and intrinsically joined with its *exitus*, and (2) of a “return” in the sense of “profit” or “yield”.

[6] Unlike horizontal transcendence, in vertical transcendence “the subject confirms himself by transgressing (and in a way outgrowing) himself”; in it one is “not (yet) fully *oneself*”. Cf. *AP*, p. 119 ff. and esp. p. 309, n. 41.

[7] “Transgressing the subject’s limits in the direction of an object—and this is intentionality in the ‘external’ perception or volition of external objects—may be defined as ‘horizontal transcendence’. But it is not the kind of transcendence we are concerned with when speaking of the transcendence of the person in the action” (p. 119). As we shall see, a mark of the “personal” structures is that they enable one to be aware of his intentional powers (both cognitive and conative) as referring primordially to the self as their first object.

[8] The power of the will, for instance, presupposes the personal structure of self-determination: “The turning to any external object that is seen as an end or a value [horizontal transcendence] implies a simultaneous

fundamental turn toward the ego as the object” (110).

[9] I owe this insight to Gregory R. Beabout (personal conversation).

[10] In *The Acting Person*, an account of these personal structures is found primarily within pp. 105-107. The most concise presentation of them is found, however, in Wojtyła’s essay “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination”, in *Person and Community*.

[11] “Self-possession” and “self-governance” can be loosely correlated with what Aristotle or St. Thomas call the “faculties” of the soul, although they are “personal” faculties. “Self-determination”, on the other hand, *could be* interpreted as the “actualization” or activity of these personal faculties. This interpretation is suggested by the statement on p. 191 that “A certain complexity in the structure of self-governance and self-possession manifested in and through the action, or, strictly speaking, in self-determination, is a characteristic and noteworthy trait of the person”. Also, “Both [self-possession and self-governance] are realized in an act of self-determination, which is constituted by every real human ‘I will’. Because of self-determination every man actually governs himself; he actually exercises that specific power over himself...” (p. 107) Moreover, self-possession and self-governance are sometimes almost identified (pp. 194 and 266). On the other hand, by taking this interpretation I see little conceptual difference between self-determination and vertical transcendence. Cf. n. 33, p. 308. Also, what is said about self-determination on p. 140 seems to suggest that it is *both* a structure and an activity (in Wojtyła’s words, a “mechanism” and an “exercise”).

[12] *AP*, p. 309, n. 40.

[13] For the difference between the will as a property of the person and the will as a power, see *AP*, pp. 107-108 and 121-122.

[14] *AP*, p. 110.

[15] *AP*, p. 110.

[16] Wojtyła, K. “The Person: Subject and Community”. *Review of Metaphysics* 23 (2) Dec. 1979, p. 281.

[17] My emphasis. See *AP*, p. 309, n. 41.

[18] *AP*, p. 309, n. 41.

[19] *AP*, p. 310, n. 48, my emphasis. Though vertical transcendence is not transcendence “toward an object” or “toward a value”, Wojtyła states elsewhere that “Our decisions of conscience at each step reveal us as persons who fulfill ourselves by going beyond ourselves *toward values accepted in truth* and realized, therefore, with a deep sense of responsibility” (Wojtyła, K. “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being”, in *Person and Community*, p. 215, my emphasis). Likewise, *the true good* “is the fundamental direction of the transcendence which is the property or characteristic of the human person... Without this transcendence, without as it were outgrowing oneself in the direction of truth and good, willed and chosen in the light of truth, the personal subject would not be entirely himself” (Wojtyła, K. “The Person: Subject and Community”. *Review of Metaphysics* 23 (2) Dec. 1979, pp. 274). We might reconcile these texts with notes 41 and 48 of *The Acting Person* by suggesting that, though the personalistic value and the moral value of an action are distinct, they cannot really be separated, and that the former is ordered to the latter. Something similar might be said of the concept of integration (cf. my n. 19 below).

[20] “*The fundamental significance* of ‘integration’ ...is strictly connected with the person’s intrinsic structure of self-governance and self-possession. The structure is essential for the very being of the person as actualized

in the action; it is its manifestation. What we call the ‘psychological’ or the ‘moral (ethical)’ personality is derivative, something secondary with respect to being a person as such; in a sense, it is but an aspect of ‘being a person’. ‘Integration’ *in its principal sense*—and this applies also to ‘disintegration’—has to be considered with respect to the fundamental structure and not only as concerning the derivative structures. Indeed, it is only so far as they relate to the fundamental structure that they apply also to the particular manifestations in the psycho-ethical dimension or psychosomatic dimension of man. ‘Disintegration’ *in its fundamental sense* signifies what in the structure of self-governance and self-possession of the person appears as a defect or failing” (AP, p. 193).

Integration, therefore, is not the condition of being refined (say) affectively; rather it is the condition of being able to acknowledge the possibility of such refinement. “Owing to integration these [psycho-somatic] dynamisms play an active role in self-determination, that is, in making the human person’s freedom emerge” (p. 199). Integration is a sort of completion or perfection, but it is prior to *moral* completion—for it makes authentic action possible. We are developed or brought to perfection through action, but Wojtyła wants to emphasize the authenticity and uniqueness of that action: that there are actually separate “structures” aside from the traditional faculties of the soul but related to them, that specifically underpin and are manifested in authentic action. Therefore, what Wojtyła calls “man-acts” are not (as Thomists might tend to think) just acts of a distinguished faculty (acts expressive of intellect and will) but acts characterized by a primordial awareness and an experience of self-ownership.

[21] AP, p. 106.

[22] AP, p. 191.

[23] “When we act in a manner proper to a person, we always create something: we create something either outside ourselves in the surrounding world or within ourselves—or outside and within ourselves at the same time”; creating is “an infallible sign of a person, a proof of a person’s existence or presence” (“Thomistic Personalism”, in *Person and Community*, p. 171). Though personality is a metaphysical status of the human *suppositum* which cannot be erased, there is a sense in which personality is nonetheless *achieved* and must be actively *maintained*. It is worth quoting Maritain at length on this point: “Every man has a personality, is a person, endowed with free will. But for subjects that are corporeal as well as spiritual and who share the same specific nature so that the personality of each supposes its individuation by matter, and who are obscure to themselves, and for whom change is the proper condition, this metaphysical root, hidden in the depth of being, is only manifested by a progressive conquest of the self by the self accomplished in time. Man must win his personality as he wins his liberty; he pays dearly for it. He is a person in the order of acting, he is *causa sui* only if rational energies and virtues, and love—and the Spirit of God—gather his soul into their hands—*anima mea in manibus meis semper*—and into the hands of God, and give a face to the turbulent multiplicity that dwells within him, freely seal it with the seal of his radical ontological unity. In this sense, one knows personality and true liberty; another knows them not. Personality, while metaphysically inalienable, suffers many a check in the psychological and moral register. There it runs the risk of contamination by the miseries of material individuality, by its meanness, its vanities, its bad habits, its narrowness, its hereditary predispositions, by its natural regime of rivalry and opposition. For that same man who is a person, and subsists in his entirety with the subsistence of his soul, is also an individual in a species and dust before the wind” (*The Degrees of Knowledge*, 1959, p. 232)._

[24] AP, pp. 154-155, my emphasis. Cf. my n. 18 above.

[25] Indeed, prior even to an assessment of the moral freedom with which an action is performed, freedom is seen to be a *positive* power. Wojtyła explains this by pointing to its source in the human will. The will is an appetitive faculty, a power by which we move towards things outside of ourselves, on account of desire. Therefore, man’s freedom “is not the freedom *from* objects or values, but, on the contrary, the freedom of, or rather *for* objects or values” (p. 132). When moral freedom is developed, we experience this positive tendency

as a tendency toward *goodness*.

[26] p. 194, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination”, in *Person and Community*.

[27] In *The Person and the Common Good* (U of Notre Dame, 1977), Jacques Maritain offers an explanation of the subsistence and dignity of the human person which, I think, encapsulates Wojtyła’s ontology and the ethical implications of that ontology: “*To bestow oneself*, one must first exist; not indeed, as a sound, which passes through the air, or an idea, which crosses the mind, but as a thing, which subsists and exercises existence for itself. Such a being must exist not only as other things do, but eminently, in self-possession, holding itself in hand, master of itself. In short, it must be endowed with a spiritual existence, capable of containing itself thanks to the operations of the intellect and freedom, capable of super-existing by way of knowledge and love” (pp. 39-40, my emphasis).

[28] p. 193-194.

[29] *LE*, 6.

[30] *LE*, 6.

[31] *Centesimus Annus*, 41.

[32] A *techne* is what Aristotle would call a second-grade active potentiality. Exercising some *teche* seems to me to be the perfect kind of work. For, although it does not produce just one effect and its results will vary depending on the demands of the circumstances and the ingenuity of the worker, it is also a *uniform* skill, an acquired capacity “to do something at some time, in some way” (cf. *Meta*. IX.5). If there is no uniformity at *all* to his work, the worker may become a lackey, a “factotum”, i.e., “one who does everything”. This term implies, not the “Renaissance Man” who is actually “poly-technical” or educated in various *artes liberales* but “the head servant of a household”.

[33] The dignity of work, I think, is acknowledged most fully by religious communities that focus on labor. Once, while visiting one of these communities, I helped a Benedictine sister plant flowers around a “contemplative”, cross-legged statue of Our Lady. When it was time to stop working I said, “Well, I got five planted”. She said to me, “Don’t worry about that. It’s not about numbers. It’s really not”.

[34] *Catholic Social Thought*, p. 470.

[35] *LE*, 6.

[36] *Praxis* and *energeia* are sometimes both translated as “activity”. Leisure may involve some *energeia* (such as the activity of contemplation), and so should not be considered as mere “inactivity” or “inertness”, even though the person thus “resting” might not be “moving around”. Leisure essentially involves freedom from practical concerns, not lack of movement. There is therefore no contradiction, in human beings, between being “at leisure” and being “active”.

However, since what we know of Wojtyła’s anthropology is based primarily in the experience of the “acting” person, in *praxis*, my discussion of authentic leisure in this paper will be more or less confined to *praxis* in leisure and not to “activities” such as contemplation; that is, it will be confined to deliberate action (*praxis*) rather than theoretical actualization (*energeia*).

[37] *Centesimus Annus*, 41, my emphasis. See Luke 17:33.

[38] *Centesimus Annus*, 41, my emphasis.

[39] Two enormously popular products come to mind: the “Play Station” and the “Game Boy”.

[40] Cf. *AP*, pp. 296-97.

[41] Message of John Paul II for the 22nd World Day of Tourism, 2001, 4.

[42] From *Dignity of Work: John Paul II Speaks To Managers and Workers*, ed. Robert G. Kennedy, 1994, p. 236.

[43] *LE*, 25.

[44] From an address to members of the American Society of Travel Agents in Rome, entitled “Tourism Fosters Important Social, Spiritual, and Religious Values” (Nov. 14, 1985), from *Dignity of Work*, p. 23.

[45] *AP* p. 265.

[46] p. 265.

[47] For Aristotle, music has three purposes: leisurely or diagogic enjoyment, moral education, and catharsis. At its best, music is not cathartic, or for the purpose of “refreshing” one for more work (cf. *Pol.* 8.5). I think it is worth mentioning Aristotle’s views on the moral function of music, however, just because so much leisure time today is spent in listening to it. It was only certain sorts of rhythms that he considered to be suitable, because of their moral effects:

When men hear imitations, even apart from the rhythms and melodies themselves, their feelings move in sympathy (*sumpatheia*). Since music is pleasure, and *virtue consists in rejoicing and loving and hating aright*, there is clearly nothing which we are so much concerned to acquire and to cultivate as the power of forming right judgments and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions. Rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character, which hardly fall short of actual affections, as we know from our own experience, *for in listening to such strains our souls undergo a change. The habit of feeling pleasure and pain at mere representations is not far removed from the same feeling about realities*; for example, if anyone delights in the sight of a statue for its beauty only, it necessarily follows that the sight of the original will be pleasant to him (*Pol.* 8.5 1340a6-29).

Dorian music, Aristotle thought, imitates the noble character and action. On the other hand, Aristotle condemns Phrygian music: it lends itself to imitations of “Bacchic frenzy”, which is lustful and violent (*Pol.* 8.7 1342b1-10). So music, depending on what character, action or emotion it imitates, has the potential to either perfect or corrupt a person, when it is imitated within the soul itself. The same sort of thing is true, he thought, for theatre; because of this capacity of “infusing virtue” or corrupting, among the Greeks theatre was actually a religious festivity. The idea that such things have moral effects has obvious applications today; to “leisure well” we must choose to enjoy just those things which are worthy of emulation.

I owe many of these references and insights on the Aristotelian notion of leisure to Dr. William C. Charron’s unpublished manuscript “Aristotle and T.S. Eliot” (Saint Louis University, 1999).

