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## *The Acting Person* and “Inactivity”: Sociological Attractiveness of Realism in Constructivist Times

**Abstract:** The article presents the analysis of some chosen arguments from Karol Wojtyła’s *The Acting Person* in consideration of the opposition between the realist and constructivist theoretical standpoints. It ponders the attractiveness of the realist position both for the social and personal dimension of human existence by considering such issues as freedom, autonomy, alienation, truth, receptivity, and community. Finally, it points to the ecological problem of the rightly understood “inactivity,” which is contrasted with the late modern hyperactivity of social constructivism.

**Keywords:** “inactivity,” participation, alienation, realism, constructivism, social theories

Sociology is nowadays widely perceived as dealing with the social creation of reality. While it may not rightly describe the outlook of the early sociologists (or the outlook of all sociologists even today), it is, nevertheless, now widely accepted that Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s book (*The Social Construction of Reality*)<sup>1</sup> correctly expressed the core of contemporary sociological stance towards the social world. The phenomenologically inspired sociological standpoints like ethnomethodology, social interactionism, or social constructivism presented the view of reality as socially constructed, that is, *constructed* rather than *given*. The philosophical expression of the social constructivism was

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966).

provided by such authors as John Austin, John Searle, or Richard Rorty, to name just a few of the most important and most famous contributors to this trend. When one looks for the earlier predecessors or rather the roots of the socio-philosophical constructivist standpoint, one may go back to Karl Marx's definition of the individual as the totality of social relations or, to delve deeper in the history of early modernity, to Descartes or even Ockham's emphasis put on free will. However, it was Descartes who deeply reoriented the modern thinking, far before phenomenology, towards the importance of the human consciousness.

Karol Wojtyła appreciated the advantages of discovering the value of human consciousness and the unique personal experience. He esteemed and contributed to the modern attempts at complementing the philosophy of being with the philosophy of consciousness. He also accurately diagnosed the essence of this paradigm transformation of thinking undertaken long time ago in his papal reflections *Memory and Identity*:

The *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) radically changed the way of doing philosophy. In the pre-Cartesian period, philosophy, that is to say the *cogito*, or rather the *cognosco*, was subordinate to *esse*, which was considered prior. To Descartes, however, the *esse* seemed secondary, and he judged the *cogito* to be prior. [...] After Descartes, philosophy became a science of pure thought: all *esse*—both the created world and the Creator—remained within the ambit of the *cogito* as the content of human consciousness. Philosophy now concerned itself with beings *qua* content of consciousness and not *qua* existing independently of it.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, Wojtyła also appealed for the need to notice a vital link between the old and new tradition of perceiving the reality. In his book *The Acting Person*,<sup>3</sup> Wojtyła showed how strongly and indispensably a person expresses oneself in acts. He thus introduced the Christian philosophical and socio-philosophical alternative to (and the *answer* to) the Marxist treatment of the problem of alienation of the human being within the process of production. After all, if the expression in the act is possible, as Wojtyła claimed, the acting person cannot be totally alienated... Does this mean that Marx was incorrect? Speaking briefly and bravely, one may venture the opinion that he was not correct *enough*... It seems that not only the particular (e.g., capitalistic) production system causes alienation (from the production process and from the community of workers) but a variety of factors contribute to the multifaceted alienation. Within

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity. Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 8–9.

<sup>3</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. X (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979).

the theological perspective the primary root of the problem is constituted by the self-alienation from the community with God, while within the social and historical dimension, it is both the alienation and self-alienation from the human/social community, that is, from the area of participation.

One may thus say that as long as a person expresses oneself in acts, he or she is not (totally) alienated. However, alienation need not be caused by others or by the social structures like the production system. It may also be the effect of the self-alienating act of the person. Thus, the act may express the personal will of self-exclusion from some kind of community relations. The exemplary case in mind is the theological description of the primary self-alienation of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. What it represents is the self-alienation from the area of the logic of the gift. The human being doubts the good will of God who establishes norms. Adam and Eve question these norms and, therefore, they question the good will of the Giver of creation, nature, and norms. By questioning this, they alienate themselves from this given perspective.<sup>4</sup> But they have the power to do this because they are persons, that is, beings who have inner lives, and who can thus decide about themselves, determine themselves, and transcend themselves in acts.

However, the person acts freely, independently from the objects of decisions, only because he or she *is dependent on the truth*, which *is independent* of the person and its objects of choice. The person is free and transcends oneself only when he or she chooses the truth (including the truth about oneself). Only then does the person avoid alienation or self-alienation. Even more can be said concerning this issue, according to Wojtyła: “The transcendence of the person in the action is thus ultimately constituted as the ‘transgressing of oneself in truth’ rather than ‘toward truth.’”<sup>5</sup> The act is not only free when it remains within the area of truth; it is *constituted* as free and thus truly human by being true. As Wojtyła claims, the act of the person is constituted by the moment of truth about the good.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we may deduce that one needs to open oneself to accepting truth as given in order to be able to do anything, to express oneself in the act. This opening and acceptance seems to be more than just acceptance of “activations,”<sup>7</sup> which happen in us by themselves, as they are described by Wojtyła, though accepting the truth as the foundation of one’s acts probably includes also accepting these “activations.” After all, the definition of the person also includes the human body, as John Paul II explains in his theology of the body.<sup>8</sup> Already in *The Acting Person* Wojtyła explains that the statement

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<sup>4</sup> More on this can be found in: John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 236–240.

<sup>5</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 310 (footnote 48).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*.

“man *is not* the body, he only has it” is “the consequence of the belief that man ‘is’ his own self (i.e., the person) only insofar as he possesses himself; and, in the same sense, if he *has* his body.”<sup>9</sup> So, the body is personal, as the person expresses oneself through the body. The so-called theology of the body developed by John Paul II (referred to in footnote 4) is the development of the deep meaning of human sexual body as containing the natural message of humans as social beings, as beings destined to relations of love. It seems that in contemporary times this meaning of the human body is particularly needed to be rediscovered. The acceptance of the social message written down in the very nature of human bodies seems to me as the grossly needed “inactivity” nowadays, when we live in the time of the often misdirected genetic experiments, artistic transformation ventures with the human body or attempts of achieving the transhumanistic “morphological freedom,” “abandoning” the body and creating the so-called artificial intelligence. Roughly speaking, there may be good or bad acts, just as there may be good or bad inactivity. The “inactivity” I have in mind in this analysis is definitely not laziness, idleness, or sloth. However, it may mean passivity in the positive way of understanding it as keeping oneself from unnecessary or destructive activity. So, it really is connected with the *affirmation of being*. That is why I use inverted commas with the word “inactivity”—it is not just the opposition to being active; it is rather a *different type of activity*: what is common for both the good act and the good “inactivity” is the *acceptance of being, of reality as a gift and as the basis for acts*. In order to act properly (or to act in general, to be exact), one needs to open oneself up to reality. Is cognition an example of active or passive attitude? Wojtyła writes as follows:

When judging, when formulating judgments, the ego has the experience of himself as the agent—the one who acts—of the act itself of cognizing. But we may also cognitively experience directly the value of the object of cognition. The subject—the ego—then remains as if absorbing this value, ‘contemplating’ it and passive rather than active. It remains then in the passive role of the subject more than in that of the agent. These occasions are of extreme importance: they are creative and rich in consequences for cognition of human reality.<sup>10</sup>

It seems to me that Wojtyła precisely notices the moment of combination of activity and passivity, which I call “inactivity,” and which seems so much needed for being truly active. It concerns the recognition of the value of the given reality by the subject/agent. This cognition process has very practical effects because of the status of reality: “The person’s transcendence in the action seems

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<sup>9</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 314 (footnote 65).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

much more connected with the praxis—that is, the truth of the objective reality, in which man continuously strives to make right choices and decisions—than with the intellectual function of judging.”<sup>11</sup> The free agent is not free beyond the framework of truth, as “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.’”<sup>12</sup> However, freedom is not limited or annihilated by truth: “Far from abolishing freedom, truth liberates it. The tension arising between the objective order of norms and the inner freedom of the subject-person is relieved by truth, by the conviction of the truthfulness of good.”<sup>13</sup> The final quote from this collection of citations concerning the reality of truth and its link with freedom expresses a very strong conviction: “There can be no doubt that man has the freedom of acting; he has the right of action, but he has not the right to do wrong.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the future pope may be understood as expressing his realistic standpoint. Hereby he indirectly criticized all social systems based on relativistic assumptions of human autonomy understood as the liberty to construct values according to one’s will rather than discover and accept them as given. The constructivist autonomy (linked with relativism) can be identified as the basis of both liberalism and collectivism, provided that both of them accept such meaning of autonomy (of an individual or collectivity) which is related with relativism of values stemming from either the denial of the pre-existent reality or its non-existence. The assumed void of pre-existent values is then perceived as calling for their social creation (or individual creations, for that matter). I realize that it is not commonly agreed that liberalism needs to be based on relativism of values or on the autonomous creation of values stemming from basic skepticism. However, I follow my assumptions and argumentation from the book published earlier, which was devoted to this topic.<sup>15</sup>

No matter if there is or is not a consensus on the link between liberalism, collectivism, and autonomy based on relativism, the perspective of socially (or, to be exact, humanly) created values is nowadays definitely predominant. What needs to be noticed is also the fact that the socially (or individually) constructed values are not based on participation within the community of truth which is given. (Truth as socially created may always be changed, so it cannot provide a stable basis of community.) Participation was defined by Wojtyła as “that essential of the person which enables him to exist and act ‘together with

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 154–155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>15</sup> Aneta Gawkowska, *Taking Community Seriously? Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2011).

others' and thus to reach his own fulfillment."<sup>16</sup> Participation is the basis of community, which "develops [...] if the *I* and the *thou* abide in a mutual affirmation of the transcendent value of the person [...] and confirm this by their acts,"<sup>17</sup> as Wojtyła claimed in his essay "The Person: Subject and Community." If the value of the person is transcendent, then it abides within the given reality of truth beyond the area constructed by humans (both individually or socially). It seems to me that if this value is shared because it is recognized as given and independent of individual or social decisions, then it is both safeguarded and forming the solid basis of the real community and real participation.

Wojtyła criticized both individualism and anti-individualism, claiming that both of them have the same concept of the person, which is anticomunitarian and antipersonalistic. As such, this concept constitutes a denial of participation<sup>18</sup> and becomes the source of alienation. "Alienation basically means the negation of participation, for it renders participation difficult or even impossible. It devastates the *I-other* relationship, weakens the ability to experience another human being as another *I*, and inhibits the possibility of friendship and the spontaneous powers of community (*communio personarum*)"<sup>19</sup>—as Wojtyła stated in his essay entitled "Participation or Alienation?". In the Polish version of his article, he expressly claimed: "Both individualism and totalism are sources of alienation."<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński also criticized the two economic systems based on the above-mentioned ideologies, explaining that both capitalism and collectivism are individualistic doctrines, which just sometimes use social concepts, while in fact they lack the element of community or the common good.<sup>21</sup> It may seem questionable at first sight, but it can actually be understandable if it relies on the link between truth as given and the common good: without accepting such concept of truth we lack the basis of any real and solid community, while totalism is then just the artificially created conglomerate of individuals.

<sup>16</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 276.

<sup>17</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM [Series: Catholic Thought from Lublin, Andrew N. Woznicki, General Editor], vol. 4 (New York–Berlin–Bern–Frankfurt/M.–Paris–Wien: Peter Lang, 1993), 246.

<sup>18</sup> Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 272–276.

<sup>19</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?" in Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, 206.

<sup>20</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "Uczestnictwo czy alienacja?" in Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne* [Series: Człowiek i moralność, vol. IV, Tadeusz Styczeń et al. ed.], (Lublin: TN KUL, 2000), 459. I use the Polish publication as a source here because the English version of the article "Participation or Alienation?" comes from a different paper by Wojtyła and as such does not include this quote [trans. A.G.].

<sup>21</sup> Card. Stefan Wyszyński, "Nasze dezyderaty. Do profesorów katolickiej nauki społecznej," *Jasna Góra* 22.01.1963, in Stefan kardynał Wyszyński, Prymas Polski, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946–1981* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych, 1990), 197–198.

One may thus conclude that alienation is not only the inability to act (freely) but it also is the inability to participate in a community, that is, the inability to be linked with others in the relations of personal giving and receiving, in other words, the inability to love and be loved. Such a case of alienation is actually the autoalienation from the interpersonal area which forms the basis for being able to be free and act freely (including, of course, loving), because it is the alienation from truth about oneself and others as beings endowed with independent dignity, freedom, reason, and nature fulfilled by loving. Alienation is thus the effect of an individualistic concept of the human being and such autonomy which necessarily results in constructivism.

We may ask if it is at all possible to construct values, reality, or create oneself? Is it not more adequate to speak of one's free acts on the basis of creation independent from us? Whatever we create, we are rather *re-creators*, fulfilling ourselves by free acts of creating anything on the basis of what we receive from others, mostly from earlier generations, especially our very being... Being the receivers of the world and our very existence, we naturally need some dose of “inactivity” before we actively join the creative process of humanity and its development. It seems we need to recognize that within “inactivity,” there is also a decent portion of our humanity or personhood. The contemporary hyperactive times are even more in need of this “inactivity” which is based on accepting nature, including human nature, rather than fighting nature. We are in need of such ecology as was described by John Paul II and has recently been taken up and developed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*:

Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. (*Laudato Si'*, n. 106)

A lot of popular ecological voices now express this malaise of modern times either without providing a good diagnosis of this situation or by criticizing the human activity altogether. The pope does not join the radical critics of the human progress but only the critics of the human pride: “Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (*Laudato Si'*, n. 114).

What could the pope mean by the “unrestrained delusions of grandeur”? Could he mean the constructivist ambitions of humanity believing in its ability to create its own rules of running the world? In his ecological teaching Pope Francis often refers to John Paul II, who in 1991 wrote as follows:

At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God’s prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man’s outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them. (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 37)

Human arbitrary activity, disrespectful of nature and truth about reality as given, represents the wrong constructivist activity. Its wrongfulness comes precisely from not being based on the “inactive” reception of reality as given.

The primacy of being before acting (*operari sequitur esse*) is ignored because the receptive and passive part of our existence is not considered valuable. Only activity is recognized as deserving respect and confirming our autonomy. Accepting one’s nature and status of being human seems degrading and opposite to freedom from being determined. Cartesian and post-Cartesian humanity undervalues receptivity and it has lost the right proportion of receptivity and productivity. The autonomous human is skeptical about anything coming from outside himself/herself, even if this comes as a gift of one’s nature. Accepting the gift seems too risky and too degrading. Interestingly enough, Cartesian attitude has negative consequences for... femininity, and later on, for humanity in general. Why? Because woman by nature more clearly represents receptivity: her body invites the male to be active inside her and it invites the new human being to be created and developed also within herself. Yet, this receptivity is just clearly represented by women, while in fact it is present in all humans, both male and female. We experience the reality (both material and immaterial) by receiving and giving, by accepting and recreating. It is just that we tend to undervalue whatever we do not produce ourselves. However, the female receptivity in Catholic tradition is upgraded to the highest position because the most praised



“purely human” activity was the female (Mary’s) reception of God’s gift of An-nunciation. The reception of God within the female body represented the female decision which perfectly reconciled activity and passivity, perfect “inactivity” and perfect activity, or in other words, the most free (and active!) reception. In a sense, then, it is the woman who shows the man how to be receptive, how to live in the perspective of the gift, before one is able to respond by giving oneself. This dynamic of difference and similarity between men and women is not restricted to the intimate relations. In his apostolic letter devoted to women, John Paul II states:

When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons—men and women. (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 29)

Reception is a kind of act but it is an act presupposing the reality given before the act takes place. Hence it is based on the acceptance of a balanced view of activity and “inactivity.” This highly ecological standpoint (in a broad sense of the word “ecological”) seems very attractive nowadays, because it is respectful of what is given and puts necessary limits on the hyperactive social trends which stem from the vision of unbridled individual autonomy and social constructivism. Starting from the early modernity and developed later by Immanuel Kant, autonomy became the most cherished value understood as the license to create one’s own norms. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., and W. Norris Clarke, S.J., described the misguided route of modern thinking which wanted to be self-sufficient and ended up being concentrated on human productivity while ignoring the primary aspect of receptivity and inspiration by the goods which exist independently of the human activity.<sup>22</sup> This led to undervaluing women, as Fr. Francis Martin claimed: “Since women literally embody receptivity, a loss of esteem for this dimension of humanity as a whole led to a loss of esteem for women.”<sup>23</sup> Pia Francesca de Solenni analogically argued: “Prior to Descartes’ radical break from the passive intellect, there were both the active and the pas-sive powers working together to understand, to know. With Descartes’ split, not only does woman lose her identification with the mind, but man also loses

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995); Gerald McCool (ed.), *The Universe as Journey: Conversations with W. Norris Clarke, S.J.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question. Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 197.

the identity with the receptive which is necessary for advance in knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> Modernity thus brought the radical break from the body, the given, and the receptive. It pushed for overvaluing activity and productivity of the so-called self-made men. Maybe that is why it is the women who now call for a forgotten value. Of course not all women and with a great support from men. Some of the women I have in mind are the Catholic new feminists like Michele Schumacher. She suggests to reverse the trend of the dominant productivity by somehow compensating the long ignored side: “Great is the challenge of developing a new feminist ethic [...] [M]ore practical concerns [...] are, however, best discerned in a properly contemplative fashion, which is to say that priority is awarded to receptivity over activity [...]”<sup>25</sup>

Receptivity is necessary for a proper productivity. That is why, although receptivity requires the *active acceptance* of the reality, it may be closer to what I call “inactivity” because it is deprived of the hubris of the autonomous creation of the world from nothing and exclusively by oneself. Along this line goes the argumentation of Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* from 2009:

Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift. Their ultimate source is not, and cannot be, mankind, but only God, who is himself Truth and Love. This principle is extremely important for society and for development, since neither can be a purely human product; the vocation to development on the part of individuals and peoples is not based simply on human choice, but is an intrinsic part of a plan that is prior to us and constitutes for all of us a duty to be freely accepted. That which is prior to us and constitutes us—subsistent Love and Truth—shows us what goodness is, and in what our true happiness consists. *It shows us the road to true development.* (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 52)

Accepting one’s status as a creature who is loved is not degrading but rather energizing for it empowers the subject for the ensuing activity based on gratitude. In fact, this may actually be the only solid condition for healthy and fully integrated human activity, as some well-known psychiatrists claim.<sup>26</sup>

Receptivity is not only needed for a balanced or sustainable growth. It is also necessary for relationality and community, as it was argued earlier that

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<sup>24</sup> Pia Francesca de Solenni, *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas’s Mens Through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology. Towards and Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei* (Romae: Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, 2000), 159.

<sup>25</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “An Introduction to a New Feminism,” in *Women in Christ. Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele M. Schumacher (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars, *Loving and Curing the Neurotic: A New Look at Emotional Illness* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1972); Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1981).

the given context of truth independent from individuals is needed as the basis to be accepted by particular community members. Community needs to have a certain *given* component of what is shared and independent by not having been constructed. Mary Rousseau, a new feminist author, claimed that the basis of community is located in our objective relation to the common standard of Truth, while our personal recognition of its existence is the condition of conscious building of association (which in sociology is traditionally called society). The common recognition of the existence of Truth as a standard obliges everyone to be sincere in trying to discover its content (which turns out to be love itself) and live according to it in interpersonal relations.<sup>27</sup> Karol Wojtyła earlier argued that man is not dominated by the realistic standpoint but rather that “by virtue of the reference to truth, by virtue of the conscience in which this reference is expressed and made concrete, the man as person achieves a peculiar domination over his action, his choosing and his willing. He takes his position as it were ‘above them.’”<sup>28</sup> Instead of being deprived of freedom within the paradigm of the given, the human being safeguards his/her freedom as being independent from the arbitrary will of others, protected from being constructed(!) and safeguarded as being real.

The properly understood “inactivity” is an act of accepting truth as given and thus the conscious constituting of the area of personal and social freedom rather than slavery. This seems to be the greatest value of the content of *The Acting Person* for contemporary societies, where the constant efforts to safeguard individual and social freedom are most often located in the autonomous constructivist enterprises, while the lack of recognition of what is given (also given from other human beings) deprives the modern people of the ability to be thankful, satisfied, and solidaristic. The words of John Paul II from his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ring true better than ever by stating that

we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook. [...] It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person his living image (cf. Gen 1:27; Ps 8:5). This outlook does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death’s door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning, and precisely in these circumstances it is open to perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity. (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 83)

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<sup>27</sup> Mary F. Rousseau, *Community. The Tie That Binds* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1991), 90–93, 102, 111–112, 153–156.

<sup>28</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “The Transcendence of the Person in Action and Man’s Self-Teleology,” *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. IX (1979): 207–208.

Our activity, even when it is best intentioned and turned towards helping others, may be counterproductive, if it does not stem from the receptive contemplation of what is given, including nature itself. It may even bring our self-destruction, if we do not respect in others or in ourselves the need for a proper amount of rest. Very instructive in this context is the Apostolic letter devoted to celebrating Sunday, where John Paul II suggested that

rest is something ‘sacred,’ because it is man’s way of withdrawing from the sometimes excessively demanding cycle of earthly tasks in order to renew his awareness that everything is the work of God. There is a risk that the prodigious power over creation which God gives to man can lead him to forget that God is the Creator upon whom everything depends. It is all the more urgent to recognize this dependence in our own time, when science and technology have so incredibly increased the power which man exercises through his work. (*Dies Domini*, n. 65)

In contemporary times we often delude ourselves by our hyperactivity which is supposed to bring us more and more control over nature. The truth is that such level of control is illusory because we too often experience the negative effects of our constructivist efforts like the uncontrolled viruses spreading danger on a global scale unknown to us before. The acceptance of the realist standpoint seems now to be the highly needed ecological attitude, which links in a balanced way activity and inactivity, work and rest, contemplation and action. This balance may produce the longed for dynamic harmony of our personal and social existence. Realism seems now to be the solution to the problems created by the social constructivism of all modernity (including the late modern or postmodern phase of humanity). If we abandon the perspective of realism, of human beings as creatures having nature which is given, we fall into the trap of relativism or autonomous individualistic or collectivistic creation of definitions of what is good or bad. Such an attitude was responsible for post-Enlightenment ideologies, according to John Paul II. He suggested as follows:

If we wish to speak rationally about good and evil, we have to return to Saint Thomas Aquinas, that is, to the philosophy of being. With the phenomenological method, for example, we can study experiences of morality, religion, or simply what it is to be human, and draw from them a significant enrichment of our knowledge. Yet we must not forget that all these analyses implicitly presuppose the reality of the Absolute Being and also the reality of being human, that is, being a creature. If we do not set out from such “realist” presuppositions, we end up in a vacuum.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 12.

In all our ventures, both personal and societal, we want to be winners, not losers. But when we lose after being hyperactive, we may agree with John Paul II, who thus gave the prescription for victory: “Who will win? The one who welcomes the gift” (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 55).

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Aneta Gawkowska

## *Persona, azione e «inazione»: l’attrattiva sociologica del realismo nei tempi di costruttivismo*

### Sommarío

L’articolo presenta un’analisi di argomenti selezionati da *Persona e atto* di Karol Wojtyła nel contesto dell’opposizione tra le posizioni realistica e costruttivista. L’autore considera l’attrattiva del realismo sia per la dimensione sociale che per quella personale dell’esistenza umana, analizzando questioni come libertà, autonomia, alienazione, verità, ricettività e comunità. Indica anche il problema ecologico dell’«inazione» correttamente inteso che contrasta con l’iperattività tardo moderna del costruttivismo sociale.

Parole chiave: «inazione», partecipazione, alienazione, realismo, costruttivismo, teorie sociali

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## *Personne, action et «inaction»: l’attractivité sociologique du réalisme à l’heure du constructivisme*

### Résumé

L’article présente une analyse d’arguments sélectionnés de *Personne et Acte* de Karol Wojtyła dans le contexte de l’opposition entre les positions réaliste et constructiviste. En analy-

sant des questions, telles que la liberté, l'autonomie, l'aliénation, la vérité, la réceptivité et la communauté, l'auteur considère l'intérêt du réalisme pour les dimensions sociales et personnelles de l'existence humaine. Elle pointe également la question écologique de l'«inaction» bien comprise qui contraste avec l'hyperactivité moderne tardive du constructivisme social.

Mots-clés: «inaction», participation, aliénation, réalisme, constructivisme, théories sociales

