

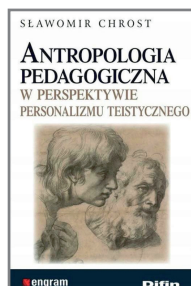
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# Anthropology, Personalism and the Pedagogical Creed: The Meaning of the Pedagogy of the Person in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Antropologia, personalizm i pedagogiczne credo.  
Znaczenie pedagogiki osoby w XXI wieku

Sławomir Chrost, *Antropologia pedagogiczna  
w perspektywie personalizmu teistycznego*, Difin,  
Warszawa 2020, pp. 292.

In the recent discourse concerning the state that we find our modern world to be in, one of many justified positions—and quite a popular one, too—claims that humanity in general, and Western civilization in particular, is now facing numerous new challenges and dangers, such as transhumanism, the crisis of human subjectivity or postmetaphysical ideas. A response to such dangers can be found in the book *Antropologia pedagogiczna w perspektywie personalizmu teistycznego* [Pedagogical anthropology in the perspective of theistic personalism], where Sławomir Chrost presents a distinctive way of understanding human nature and the process of



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education that comes in equal part from both titular fields of science and philosophy: pedagogical anthropology (*antropologia pedagogiczna*) and theistic personalism (*personalizm teistyczny*). As if at the intersection of these fields, he brings up a consistent, expanded view of the development of a human being that results from advanced reflection on the proper pedagogy that could be considered adequate to the challenges of modern times.

Rev. Sławomir Chrost Ph.D, Sc.D. is a professor of pedagogy at Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland, with research interests in the theory of education, the pedagogy of family and gerontology and others. His book about pedagogical anthropology is a continuation of his earlier published studies: *Koncepcja człowieka a teleologia wychowania* [The concept of human being and the theology of education], WDS, Sandomierz, 2008), "*Homo capax Dei*" jako ideał wychowania [*Homo capax Dei* as an ideal of education], Impuls, Krakow, 2013) and *Ojcowie Kościoła a pedagogika. Studium antropologiczne* [Fathers of the Church and pedagogy: An anthropological study], Difin, Warsaw, 2018).

The aim of this book is stated by the author very precisely at its very beginning: It is an attempt at "rethinking anew pedagogical anthropology in the perspective of the theistic personalism built on the foundation of the theory of person as well as his/her inalienable dignity" (p. 15; all quotes translated by the reviewer), undertaken in view of the questions about the identity of human beings in theistic personalism and the meaning of their development to the process of their education. General philosophical and pedagogical reflection is the main method of this book, and the reflection itself is based here on numerous sources as well as earlier works by the author himself. One can also find that the text is characterized by a clear structure that is described at its start. Apart from the introduction, conclusions and bibliography, the book is divided into three chapters, the first of which is devoted to an introductory presentation of the issues that are crucial in this book, such as the meaning of anthropology and its relation to pedagogy, as well as the fundamentals of personalism as a philosophical school of thought. The remaining two chapters, in turn, deal with the author's holistic concepts of the nature of human beings (as multidimensional entities) and the process of their multidirectional development (from a pedagogical perspective).

In addition to the subject, aim and method of the study, the introduction concerns itself also in large part with outlining its motivation: an intention to renew the scholarly reflection on the pedagogy of the person in the face of the dangers of modern times. The author briefly yet competently summarizes views of such key transhumanist thinkers as Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom or Max More. After that he continues with detailed description of the many dangers that in the opinion of many scholars are a direct consequence of such a way of thinking. It is in this place in the text that Chrost determines the position which he will hold in every single consideration undertaken in this book. It is a deeply personalistic position of a theist/Catholic who consistently emphasizes the inherent value of such ideas as the dignity of every individual human as a person and his/her freedom towards moral good. It is these ideas that the author identifies as rebuffed by the postmetaphysical worldview that he opposes. The critique of posthumanism built on Christian thought is here elaborated convincingly and suggestively, though it is not altogether clear why the author aims it not only at transhumanism and the like, but also at the unrelated multiculturalism. It is important to note, however, that in later parts of his work Chrost does not limit his reflections only to the negation of posthumanism, as it is for him only a starting point and the motivation to write about the main themes of this book.

The first chapter—the one dealing with the introductory issues—serves as a textbook presentation mainly of two concepts: the field of science that is anthropology and the field of philosophy that is personalism. Starting with the question about what anthropology actually is, the author outlines for the reader the history of the notion of anthropology. He then continues with a description of the four basic types of anthropology: physical, cultural, philosophical and theological. Physical anthropology is here discussed in a very detailed way, with a precise classification of many of its subfields, such as palaeopathology, anthropometry or didactic taxonomy. This classification certainly proves the expertise of the author in this field of knowledge, although one can determine that such in-depth distinctions are unnecessary in a book about the pedagogy of the person. Comprehensive meta-scientific analysis (completed with a historical outline), however, describe not only physical anthropology, but philosophical as well as theological anthropology. The latter, according

to the author, follows from the former, and is especially significant, as it is a foundation upon which pedagogical anthropology is based. Development of this pedagogical anthropology is now, as the author puts it, exceptionally important because its way of thinking about human beings as simultaneously being objects and subjects of education should be viewed as a kind of “antidote” (p. 47) to posthuman postulates.

The very same thing, according to the author, can be said about personalism. He presents this school of thought to the reader in the context of a small slice of the history of twentieth-century philosophy, in which it is seen as a response to the challenges and threats posed by the technological advances and cultural changes of the last hundred years. This allows him to emphasize continuity between personalism and his own way of thinking that can be considered an extension of personalism into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The dangers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the sexual revolution and the disintegration of values in Western societies, is here described analogously to the transhumanism and postmetaphysical worldview, and this is why the author states that anthropology as well as personalism are still currently relevant. Another of Chrost’s major considerations is to present personalism as being strictly related with the most important idea of this philosophical current—the idea of a person. As the reader can surmise from his writings, he considers this idea to arise directly from Christianity and to be closest to Christianity. The nature of human beings as persons is also correlated here to the nature of God as a person, although the latter is only mentioned in the book and does not constitute the basis for separate reflection.

As a conclusion of his meta-scientific enquiries conducted in the first chapter of the book, the author presents to the reader an overview of the personalistic pedagogy that he also calls the pedagogy of the person. It is, in its essence, a composition derived in equal manner from pedagogical anthropology and theistic personalism, and the way he describes it is built directly upon his descriptions of anthropology, pedagogy and personalism. He rightly points out to the reader that one should distinguish between personalistic and Christian pedagogy, especially since the former can also be undertaken in a completely secular manner. The next subchapter is a very clear summary of the methodology of Christian personalistic pedagogy.

There Chrost describes to the reader one after the other the three most important methods in this field of knowledge—metaphysical, phenomenological and hermeneutical. At the same time, he relates these three methods to the schools of philosophy that they are based on (the first one relates to classical Aristotelian metaphysics), but his descriptions are not limited to this, as he also names the advantages and shortcomings of each method—especially when it comes to the hermeneutical one, as the author accurately presents the dangers of an excessive dependence on hermeneutics in pedagogical studies.

After the detailed meta-scientific considerations concerning anthropology, pedagogy, personalism, theism and the pedagogy of the person that is derived from them, the author continues with the next part of his book that is strictly anthropological in nature. The second chapter of the book, titled *Człowiek – wielowymiarowy byt* [Human being – A multidimensional entity] is in its essence a presentation of the author's original anthropological conception, one based on the notion that certain layers or "dimensions" can be distinguished in human beings. It is not, however, a simple concept based on reductionism that brings human nature down to the numerous functions of human beings. This kind of reductionism the author identifies in modern worldviews that dehumanize human beings, but he himself rejects such simplifications. On the contrary: he respects the nature of human beings as persons and the unquestionable unity of them (as subjects) that follows from it. But even though this is the case, Chrost still claims that certain aspects of human beings can be distinguished that constitute "fundamental potentialities and possibilities of human beings (sometimes hidden from them), attributes constitutive and distinctive to a person that educate what should/can be made real and developed by (self-)education" (p. 114).

His conception is not entirely original, though, since this would be exceptionally difficult when it comes to such fundamental facts of human nature as having a body or a psyche. Therefore, Chrost here relies partially on anthropological theories conceived by such thinkers as Victor Frankl, Bogdan Nawroczyński or Stefan Kunowski, but this work is a reformulation of theirs as well as a substantial expansion. In it, the author takes into consideration not only these main theories, but also a wide selection of less systemic thought by many other current-day scholars, who are not always connected directly to

the field of philosophical anthropology. By skilfully drawing on this wealth of knowledge, the author presents consequent dimensions of humanity in an order that is a gradation, as one can put it, from human carnality to transcendence. These dimensions are as follows: carnal/biological, aware and self-aware, rational, volitional, social/relational and of openness to transcendence.

Even though each of those aspects of human beings is highlighted here and separately described, the author strongly emphasizes the existence of continuous transitions between them that is also reflected in the very structure of the text. This allows the author to stress the importance of not thinking about human beings as aggregates built from individual pieces—that humans are more than a mere sum of their parts, to put it metaphorically. The critique of this kind of reductionism is particularly pronounced in the description of the carnal/biological layer of human beings, where the author presents a detailed survey of the many benefits and drawbacks of having a body. Not only that, but he also describes the importance of carnality as subject of self-reflection in the history of philosophy, administering a great deal of attention to the discord between evolutionism and creationism. It is there, where Chrost presents an interesting way of approaching creationism: as a justifiable philosophical view. Nevertheless, he avoids compromising to creationism, as the whole status of creationist views on the natural history of humankind has been completely discredited by modern-day natural science.

The awareness layer is described very briefly and can be considered only as a quick mention in this book. And when it comes to the rational dimension, the author turns to the anthropocentric view that is grounded in the once popular way of thinking about human rational abilities as separating us from other animals. Both classical and modern Christian thought is invoked here as a basis for such a position, and the author supplements it with ample description of four internal senses of a human being—consciousness, memory, imagination and instinct—but first and foremost of three basic forms of intellectual cognizance, through ideas, judgements and reasoning.

The most extensive section from this chapter of the book is devoted to the last two aspects of human beings listed by the author: to relationality. This relationality is understood twofold: firstly, in reference to other human beings, and secondly, in reference to God.

The description of the first of those two in the book is particularly interesting, as the author uses an original (at least in comparison to the rest of the text) method of study. When it comes to an analysis of the idea of love and how it can be misshapen in human perception, Chrost presents his own interpretation of one of the most important segments of *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, namely, the one in which the prince journeys on from the asteroid B612 to Earth via many other planets. To use such a literary interpretation as a method in an otherwise anthropological work is a welcome addition, especially since the reader is very likely to be familiar with the novella that the author refers to. Still, what is more important is that this interpretation does not replace anthropological reflection, since it is conducted here as well, but it constitutes a refreshing inclusion and even serves as a kind of distraction.

In the subchapter of the book that deals with human openness to transcendence, Chrost stresses numerous problems that many young modern-day people face, such as an overwhelming uncertainty and a lack of clear direction in life. He considers these problems to be of great importance, and at the same time he claims that the foundations of any real solutions to them can only be found in a proper concept of human beings as persons. While discussing the meanings of such categories as soul, spirituality or transcendence, he draws from the interpretation of Christianity laid out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and it is this fact that ultimately factors into his thesis that Christianity is the most basic source of the idea of person and the pedagogy of the person. At the same time, though, he is constantly aware that the distinctions that he presents in this book are academic in nature, which shows his proper distance to his own reflections. This is why he finally postulates that one should treat humans as rational beings, or having will, or being open to transcendence rather than thinking in an abstract category of human “dimensions.”

The third chapter of the book is also anthropological in nature, although it is much more expressly connected with the titular issue of pedagogical anthropology than the second one, since it is based on a way of thinking about human beings in a processual perspective, not in passive structures. The passive, static view of humans that characterized the second chapter is now complemented by an active one, and this opens the possibility of human development and, in

turn, education. As the author puts it, those can take many different directions. Before he continues with descriptions of all of those directions (he lists six of them), Chrost delineates the connection between human development and the concept of education that lies at the basis of pedagogy. It is of uppermost importance for the meaning of this book, as at the centre of this concept is the process of the “maieutic of the person,” or “arousing the person in the subject of education” (p. 198). At the same time, the author stresses the need for limited anthropology, in opposition to the unlimited one, in which human beings are treated as a project that is radically open to even the most far-reaching modifications. It is not difficult to conclude that this unlimited anthropology can be, according to the author, found not only in the older schools of thought, such as Cartesianism or Hegelianism, but also in trans- and posthumanism.

According to Chrost the process of humans developing their God-given predispositions is a progression in depth (in their inner reality), width (in relation to other humans) and height (in relation to God), as well as in several directions: towards the truth, moral good, freedom, beauty, subjectivity in community and towards God as purpose. As one can quickly gather, the majority of these directions involve the sphere of values. Although the author himself avoids direct parallels between the second and third chapters (assigning one direction of development to every dimension of human beings), this hardly means that there are no clear similarities between them at all.

In his reflections on the development towards the truth, the author rightly states that it should be considered a key aspect in the process of education, because to fail in caring for the truth is really to negate the very possibility of education. This issue is connected here with the discord between science and religion that is now as relevant as ever. Chrost very precisely analyzes this matter and pays a great deal of attention to the historical aspect of it. He then proceeds with the description of moral good and distinguishes three basic ways of understanding it (phenomenological, ontological and axiomatic/psychological), and he discusses the crisis of this understanding in contemporary philosophy. Despite the fact that he stresses the importance of the moral good, he sees the most important direction of human development and the purpose of human existence to be not moral good, but God himself. The very possibility of development



towards God is, according to him, a result of the final dimension of human beings—openness to transcendence. The description of this direction is the crowning achievement of the reflections undertaken in this book and includes their most important themes, such as the theology of human beings as existing because of God as their *causa finalis*, the reconciliation of anthropocentrism and theocentrism (accomplished by Pope John Paul II), St Thomas of Aquinas' concept of *homo capax Dei* and the stoic principle of *homo homini res sacra*. This variety of grand thoughts on the subject of human nature and his/her calling to be in a relationship with God, the author deftly combines into a unified vision, but also a challenge for the reader, as those reflections involve every living human being.

The conclusions of this book are of special importance, as in the final part the author does not limit himself only to summarizing his reflections. The last part of the book starts not with a summary, but rather with a statement of faith—"pedagogical creed" (p. 273)—that includes truths considered to be fundamental to the pedagogy of the person, and is formulated as follows:

I believe that every human being is a person, that they have their beginning (*causa efficiens*) in one Triune God and that they have inalienable dignity and a privileged place between the visible and invisible world because they are created in God's own image and likeness.

I believe that every human person is a living being, a body with form and matter, a multidimensional entity that is carnal/biological, aware and self-aware, rational, volitional, social-relational and open to transcendence.

I believe that every human person has a calling to lead a full life and that it develops in multiple directions—towards the truth, moral good, freedom, subjectivity in community and beauty.

I believe that every human person has their purpose (*causa finalis*) in one Triune God and that their life can only be full when they rest in Him (p. 273).

This is not a mere stylistic artifice, as this statement can without a doubt be considered an authentic declaration of the author himself, and all readers of this book are encouraged to accept it as their own, especially if they engage in educational processes, be it as students or as teachers. The authenticity of the author's faith can also influence the reception of this book, as in the light of it the reader may view it

not only as a collection of thoughts, but also as a testimony of a specific attitude towards life and as a call to share this attitude. The fact that this book ends not only with summary of knowledge but also with statement of faith does not decrease its scholarly credibility, but can be seen as a welcome addition in the form of a personal contribution from the author himself.

In summary, the book concerns itself with four fields of science and philosophy—anthropology, pedagogy, personalism and theism—and involves meta-scientific issues. If one were to ascertain how strongly these particular fields are pronounced here and what their relations are in this book, one could state that this text is mostly anthropological and meta-scientific in nature, but is also based on the fundament of theistic personalism and the perspective of the pedagogy of the person that is treated as a key theme. It is not, therefore, a collection of disorganized thoughts derived from those fields of knowledge without any order. On the contrary, it is an analysis of what can be found at the intersection of those fields and it is achieved thanks to the contemplation that is skilfully carried out by the author. The reflections of a meta-scientific nature allow the author to create a consistent vision of human beings as multidimensional entities orientated in certain directions of development.

About the use of the language in this book, it should be stated that Chrost's work is characterized by great clarity and readability and that the text is written in a comprehensible and organized manner. The same can also be stated about the whole structure of the publication, as it appears to be well thought-out and contains many summaries that allow for smooth transitions between different chapters and subchapters, helping the reader to consolidate the knowledge gained from them. Nothing bad can be said about the consistency of the considerations either, as the author is always very careful and self-aware, although for obvious reasons some topics (e.g. concerning the history of philosophy) are presented in a somewhat simplified manner. Apart from the already mentioned detailed description of the divisions within physical anthropology, there are no unnecessary side digressions, since the author is always focussed on the main subject of his considerations, even when he references various scientific sources.

A related issue is that of the literature that this book is based on. Although Chrost declares in the introduction to the book (p. 17)

that he intends to use sources mainly in Polish and Italian, as those languages are the most strongly connected to theistic personalism, in later parts of the work he ignores this self-specified limitation. Many of the books he quotes are neither Polish nor Italian, such as works by classical thinkers like Aristotle or St Thomas of Aquinas, as well as by many modern scholars. But even though he does that (to his credit), the main inspiration of his considerations—e.g. the ideas of Carlo Nanni or Chantal Delsol or the most prominent personalists—appears in the text many times in many shapes and forms and can be easily noticed.

Some doubts may arise from the way in which Chrost uses these sources, since he often relies on lengthy (frequently nearly a page long), expanded direct quotes that constitute a large portion of the text as a whole. However, this cannot really be viewed as simple repetition, since each and every time these long quotes are justified by the author's own additions that also inscribe them in the broader vision of human nature that the author tries to present.

This review can be concluded only by stating that the book by Sławomir Chrost titled *Antropologia pedagogiczna w perspektywie personalizmu teistycznego* undoubtedly constitutes an important instalment in the present-day debate on the many dangers arising from philosophical theories of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Reflection on the pedagogy of the person, as the author convincingly tries to prove, was never before as important as now, so it is better that interested readers have now in their reach the opportunity to read through a publication that presents this topic in a clear, comprehensible and holistic manner. Equally valuable is fact that said book can also encourage its readers to make their own statement of faith—pedagogical creed. That is, of course, if they are convinced by the argumentation on which this creed rests.

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