Beyond Personalist Virtue Ethics: Transcendental Anthropology and its Implications for Interpersonal Communication

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There is a need of deeper understanding of what human beings are for facing adequately global challenges. The aim of this article is to point to the possible contributions that transcendental anthropology would represent for complementing and expanding the valuable, but still incomplete solutions put forward by personalist virtue ethics to face these challenges. In particular, the question of the moral motivation and the complex relations between virtue and freedom are addressed, taking as a starting point the understanding of the uniqueness of the personal act-of-being and the transcendentality of human freedom, which is in dialogue with human nature and society, but ultimately not subdued to none of them. Some implications of the transcendental anthropology in the field of interpersonal communication ethics are put forward.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, freedom, personal act-of-being, personalism, virtue ethics, transcendental anthropology

INTRODUCTION

Presently, deep and intertwined ecological, economic, social, demographic, health, and wider humanitarian and justice-fairness crises make the sustainability and happiness of current and future generations highly uncertain. A deep reflection on human beings' potentialities for action is urgently needed for strengthening the link between ethics, economic and social-behavioral and communication theories, and revealing how these theories can be applied in education and the professions. This need is being felt throughout educational, political, academic, and economic fields of intellectual exploration and practice, and is a call to action from society at large.

Modernist conceptions of human beings and action have addressed this endeavor with some success, in particular the ones centered on the promotion of human dignity and well-being (e.g., Wankel and Stoner 2009; Stead and Stead 2010; Dierksmeier 2016; Pirson 2017, 2019). In addition, humanistic, people-oriented approaches rooted in humanistic philosophy (e.g., Grassl and Habisch 2011; Melé 2016; Rocha and Miles 2009 for such approaches in organizations) are now more than ever recognized to be crucial for our collective flourishing. It would seem reasonable to think that these efforts are enhancing global awareness of what it means to be human, and how to lead a good life that does not damage the earth.

However, in face to the urgency, intensity, insistence, and irreversibility of the current life and societal challenges we face, there is a crucial need to go further in terms of understanding how human beings can fully realize their capabilities and orientation to the common good wisely. To accomplish this vision, we

suggest that ethics and communication are essential fields of study, because humans are deeply ethical and communicative beings who engage in communicative ethical relationships, which express their profound being most fundamentally.

Sound philosophical and anthropological frameworks are needed for providing a comprehensive understanding of human beings that integrates selfhood, morality, action theory, and social concern toward a new humanistic sense of human action and relations. The philosophical-anthropological tradition of personalism points to a particular innovative direction to address those challenges. While this tradition includes different versions (idealist, phenomenological, existentialist, and Thomist), all personalist strains coincide in considering the human person as the ultimate ontological and axiological principle of all reality, and as an end in herself, called to growing and flourishing with others. In personalism, the person is addressed in her full richness, complexity, and potentiality as the grounding center of all action.

The direction taken in this article is to continue the dialogue and the efforts to truly understand human beings and their action, by looking for consistent approaches and proposals in anthropological philosophy which offer a fuller and more profound regard of the human person as the center of reality, which would allow understanding more profoundly human communication and human beings' potentiality for realization of human actions radically oriented to "the good."

To engage the dialogue in this direction, we will move from the initial general philosophical questions ("what does it mean to be human," "truly understand human beings and their action") to the more limited study of the moral life and communication. As regards ethics, we will first look to the invaluable contributions of virtue ethics and of the personalist approach in this field, and then we will address the relation those issues bear to the narrower study of freedom and "virtuous actions," which is the main focus of the first section of the article. Methodologically, the study of this last issue follows a process "in crescendo," moving from a classical conception of human freedom as mastery over one's actions, to the personalist virtue ethics free involvement of others in one's good, and finally addressing the expansion of the personalist virtue ethics approach from the perspective of the transcendental anthropology of Leonardo Polo (1986, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) and his understanding of transcendental freedom. As regards the communication theme, in the last section of the article we will discuss transcendental anthropology as a privileged access gate to the understanding of communicative acts at a deeper level, putting forward some of the implications of the transcendental anthropology approach in the field of communication both in organizations and more broadly, as a human and social tool.

VIRTUE ETHICS, PERSONALISM, AND THE QUESTION OF HUMAN FREEDOM

Virtue Ethics and its Challenges

Virtue ethics has succeeded in becoming a revived tradition with widespread appreciation in the current broader philosophical, psychological, and management literature, offering a deep level of knowledge and understanding about human beings and human action. An increasing number of social and organizational scientists and ethicists are moving forward toward a new virtue ethics "science" (e.g., Alzola 2015; Sison et al., 2012; Sison et al., 2018). This new "science of virtue" comprises distinct conceptions of virtue (e.g., reductive and non-reductive accounts of virtue. See Alzola 2015), and also distinct emphasis on the cognitive and emotional components of virtue and wisdom. As an example of this movement, the work of Kristjánsson (2018) advances a Neo-Aristotelian theory of virtuous emotions that enriches an Aristotelian account of character education (Snow 2019). The renewal of virtue ethics as a science for human beings (Alzola 2015) integrated the Aristotelian thesis of the "unity of virtue," which assumed that virtues mutually rely on one another, acting as a coherent whole, in unity (Sison and Hühn 2018), systemically, as a system of virtues. But this new science of virtues also brought about realist and deeper teleological and metaphysical insights in the discussion about the essence of human beings and human action. Based on integrated normative and empirical foundations, virtue ethics demonstrates how virtuous knowledge and action are possible. Virtue ethics restores practical wisdom at the heart of human action, drawing attention to its possibility and importance for reaching the unity of ethical, cognitive, affective, and practical aspects in human life (Akrivou and Scalzo 2020).

Recent academic literature in the field of moral philosophy has also highlighted some limitations to the virtue ethics approach. Because of their historical relevance, we present briefly below the problematizations put forward by Alasdair MacIntyre and Kristján Kristjánsson. Among a large number of other significant virtue ethicists seeking to revitalize this tradition, MacIntyre's (2007) work is among the finest. His proposal arose partly within a concern that the notion of virtue was being washed out by the increasing neo-liberalization of the late modern life and work in organizations, whereby institutions "were increasingly concerned with (...) external goods" (MacIntyre 2007), disregarding the importance of (social) practices where virtues are being located. According to him, when practices lose the essential orientation to virtue (which happens in this late modern era we are witnessing), they cannot anymore "resist the corrupting power of institutions" (MacIntyre 2007). MacIntyre's proposal on how to restore virtue did not just stay at the level of connecting again the virtues-goods-practices-institutions schema (Moore and Beadle 2006): his contribution went further to emphasize the essential interconnectedness we share as dependent rational animals (MacIntyre 1999). This contribution has been further problematized by Bernacchio (2018), who emphasized the acts of "giving and receiving," "the virtues of acknowledged dependence," and the notion of non-calculative relationships that enable humans to copy with vulnerability within practices. MacIntyre's (1999, 2007) successful attempt to reorient organizational scholarship, philosophy, and practice back toward Aristotle's classical philosophy applied to the context of late modernity has been important within a personalist virtue ethics, in particular because of his emphasis on social practices and on the profound and humanizing role of work.

If MacIntyre's problematization of virtue ethics regarded its relationship with practices, goods, and institutions, the work of Kristjánsson (2016, 2018, 2020) addressed more directly the subdiscipline of moral education, and in particular the relation between virtue and emotions. Kristjánsson (2018) has reflected on the centrality of virtuous emotions (reason-responsive; morally evaluable; educable and worthy of education; and constitutive of moral selfhood/identity) in the good life, restoring Aristotle's concern that virtuous emotional experience is an essential ingredient of virtue. The acknowledgment of the role of emotions in moral life allows capturing human life in a fuller, truer way that corresponds to the empirical, real human experience. Unfortunately, this was lost in modern philosophy's reductionist problematization of reason and, to some extent, also in other modern virtue ethics attempts. In addition, Kristjánsson (2016) also argued that the original Aristotelian virtue ethics' approach to human flourishing (Aristotle's eudemonic well-being) is not sufficient to conclude a well-rounded moral philosophy, because it suffers from a kind of "flatness" in failing to address certain impulses that give fullness to our lives, and which have to do with awe-inspiring emotional attachments to transpersonal ideals. Although the centrality of emotions in a virtuous life is present in Aristotle's theorization, it is falling short to account for important emotions and impulses we share as human beings, and which give fullness to our lives. These emotional attachments need to be integrated in personal moral development if we are to live as virtuous human beings and lead a life where flourishing is realistically possible (Kristjánsson 2018). Summarizing, Kristjánsson suggested a return to Aristotle's emphasis on the moral value of virtuous emotions for eudaimonia and pointed to the need of an "enchanted version" of virtue ethics which could strengthen and recontextualize the possibility of flourishing (Kristjánsson 2016, 2020). These are very relevant proposals to bring virtue ethics to a deeper appreciation of the richness of the notion of human person and her potentialities in a way that allows for a better integration of emotion in character and virtue theory and in education and socialization, especially considering the paramount importance of flourishing as the aim of education in the 21st century.

The Complex Relations Between Virtue and Freedom and the Contribution of Personalism

In this work, we concentrate on another specific challenge that virtue ethics posits: the question of the moral motivation and the complex relations between virtuous actions and freedom. For presenting our argument, we used a didactical metaphor: virtue as a vector. Virtuous actions, like vectors, can be considered to have two components: an orientation or goal (the direction the vector points to), and a strength or magnitude (represented by the length of the vector). Virtues, as vectors, dispose the person to act in a certain direction (the teleological dimension of virtue, or final cause in Aristotle theory of causality), and they do so with a certain strength (in Latin—*virtus*), depending on how deeply the virtuous habits are enrooted in the person (the motivational dimension of virtue, or efficient cause).

The goal for virtuous action is given by the values, which are the light that orientates it, and whose understanding has historically changed in different periods since their apparition in Greek culture till now. As regards virtue strength (or virtue "motivational power"), its conceptualization is much less univocal, and the understanding of what activates a virtuous life has also evolved in time, but in a different fashion. For the needs of the general purpose of this work, without pretending to be exhaustive, we will shortly overview some historical aspects of these two "vectoral" components of a virtuous life (motivating values and motivational power), and how personalism posits itself in the discussion of the values guiding (motivating) virtue and the strength activating it.

At the time of Aristotle, the Greek polis had a common set of unquestionable values that guided virtuous action (MacIntyre, 2007). In Aristotelian virtue ethics the direction for virtuous action is given by *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which was theorized by Aristotle as the *auriga virtutum*, "the charioteer" that guides and "a mother" that begets the other virtues (Sison and Hühn 2018). This leading "cardinal virtue" is a moral virtue that is displayed in concrete situations we face in interpersonal social interaction (Aristotle, NE: 1139a). Practical wisdom's directional role lies in its reason-based moral-practical power. It can be said that it acts in two domains, a teleological one and a practical one: 1) it wisely sets the ends of human life and action by a process of deliberative selection between possible teleological goals (the values); and 2) it deliberates about the appropriate means to reach them, orientating the reflective choices between practical alternatives (Kristjánsson 2018), in particular when the intrinsic demands of two different virtues collide (problem-solving role).

If phronesis is generally accepted in its role as a referee among other virtues and as the practical wisdom in the choice of the best means for a given goal, its teleological (value-defining) function has often been questioned through the history of moral philosophy. For the needs of this work, and acknowledging the risk of oversimplification, we point further to some key historical milestones of this questioning. In Christian society, a new set of common values was widely spread. God's love revealed in Christ gave a clear direction to the moral life, which was conceived as a human answer to God's love, following Jesus as the example of all virtues. The love of God and others was the goal of virtuous life, and prudence was to be at its service, as a virtue among other virtues, at the risk of becoming a "prudence of the flesh," which is not a virtue anymore, but a vice (St. Paul to Romans 8, 7). Later, the secularizing modernism progressively replaced God and Christian teaching as a supreme value with other values: first, the Reason and its Kantian categorical imperatives as the supreme value guiding the practical moral life; more recently, the teleological value-defining role of phronesis has been replaced by the different values of "new natural religions, such as liberalism, Communism, capitalism, nationalism and Nazism. These creeds do not like to be called religions, and refer to themselves as ideologies, but this is a semantic exercise. If a religion is a system of human norms and values that is founded on belief in a superhuman order, then

Soviet Communism was no less a religion than Islam" (Harari 2011). In post-totalitarian and democratic societies, the quest for values guiding a virtuous life is still going on.

As regards the power or "strength" of virtue, the literature is unanimous that a clear definition of values does not suffice for explaining the richness of moral life. The issue of what activates human will for actual moral behavior, and its relation to human freedom, has also been addressed from different perspectives in different times (see Lapsley (2016) for a detailed historical account of this evolution). Summarizing, in classical moral philosophy, phronesis traditionally included not only consideration of goals and means, but also "decision making" and "implementation." However, practical wisdom is not in itself an explanatory "efficient cause" of moral action, because it is an intellectual virtue that does not act directly on the free will but in the intellect. In the scholastic philosophy informing Christian society, the "good" (the values proposed by a reason enlightened by faith) was often conceptualized as an irresistible force attracting the will to a virtuous life guided by Charity, which is the "form" of all virtues that vivifies and "activates" them. In modernity, the moral imperative imposed by the practical Reason was supposed to enforce necessarily (not freely) a voluntaristic virtuous life of enlightened human beings. Moreover, for Kant, the moral imperative is precisely the "ratio cognoscendi" of freedom: In other words, we know we are free (in the Kantian sense) because we experience moral obligation. More recently, moral philosophy and psychology have "interiorized" the efficient cause of moral and virtuous life, placing it at deeper levels of human beings: the initial interest for Kohlbergian moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1981) gave way to an increasing appreciation of moral emotions, particularly enhanced by the positive psychology trend (Peterson and Seligman 2004; Seligman et al., 2005). Further on, the moral psychologist Blasi argued that the "moral self" was even more important for understanding moral behavior than moral emotions and moral understanding (Blasi 1980, 1984, 2005). The problem we perceive in all these approaches is that, while freedom is decisive in modern thought, perhaps this notion is frequently poor or disoriented, and therefore its place in moral life is not clearly understood. This is an ongoing debate in which personalism has also made its contribution, as we will see further in this article.

The challenging anthropological aspects of virtue ethics, summarily reviewed above, point to the necessity of going deeper into the realm of philosophical anthropology for expanding Aristotle's metaphysics. In this context, realist personalist philosophy (Mounier 1936; Maritain 1947; Merleau-Ponty 1964; Spaemann, 2006; Burgos 2018 for an introduction), whose intellectual roots date as early as Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, has proposed important directions for addressing some of the challenges of virtue ethics, and in most cases, personalist insights enrich and harmoniously complement the understanding of virtue ethics regarding human beings' nature and action (Melé 2009; Alford 2010).

The contribution of personalism, which treats the human person as an inalienable value and end in herself and stresses the centrality on the person and of human relations, can be discussed in the context of the two dimensions of virtue highlighted above (teleological values and efficient strength). As regards the values, the philosophy of personalism posits itself as a realist alternative where the person is the absolute value guiding moral life and virtuous action. This position contrasts with the modernist immanentist relativization of values, as can be seen, for example, in the "value clarification" approach to educational interventions (Raths, Harmin and Simon 1966), where there are not right or wrong values, and any value a student chose is "correct" as long as he or she could provide a rationale. Personalism posits relationships between human beings (how we live in our relations) as something as deep and central as human metaphysical nature itself (and its perfection, which is the realm of virtue ethics). As regards the effective activation of moral life, the personalist perspective is rather in continuity with the historic interiorization and humanization of the efficient cause of moral and virtuous life: the person itself is posited as a free moral agent who self-activates her own moral life. Personalist practical wisdom relies on a "personalized" character orientation to life in a community and in action, instead of relying on internalized abstract "rules" expressed as moral minimums or absolutes. A moral psychology of practical wisdom within personalist virtue ethics sees the virtuous person as capable of virtuous actions that are teleologically oriented to the flourishing of self and others in their interpersonal relations (Akrivou and Scalzo 2020).

Personalist Virtue Ethics and the Challenges of Human Freedom and Virtuous Actions

When reflecting of the personalist proposals regarding the two dimensions of virtuous actions highlighted above (orientation and strength), it appeared that, if the question of what is the value that gives a direction to virtuous actions is well settled (the person is the absolute value that gives meaning to the exercise of virtues), the question regarding the relation of the efficient causality of moral life with human freedom is not fully addressed within a virtue ethics personalist account, despite its going so much farther than any other more recent philosophies.

The question is: in a personalist perspective, what is the relation between human freedom and virtuous actions? Modernism had answer to this challenge by conceiving freedom as absolute autonomous freedom, independent of human nature. The personalism, in reaction against modernist immanentism, is a return to reality. As Mounier (1936) put it, "I am not the understanding I have of my person." Thereby, he recognizes a level of the person that is outside the limits of one's understanding, at the bases of it, distinguishing "selfhood" (which constitutes our personal intimacy) and "identity" (the understanding we have of ourselves). However, like the Greeks, personalism sees freedom as a component of the spiritual human nature, enrooted in human essence at the level of the will; and therefore freedom, understood in such a way, is still enclosed into, and limited by, human nature. The

question is: does this conceptualization of freedom correspond to our experience of it? Does it account for real freedom?

In addition, in personalism, human beings are understood as essentially relational beings, and therefore personalist freedom remains also embedded in a network of social relations. Charles Taylor has well described this position of freedom and its limits in a realistic personalist framework. Taylor's anthropology of identity (Taylor 1989) is based on the concept of "significance": according to him, each person defines his or her identity with reference to "meaningful" values, some of which can be taken as a life goal and thus orient the concrete lifestyle. Taylor acknowledges that identity-building value-defining conditions are socio-cultural (Taylor, 1991), because, through contact with others, each person learns about other persons' "systems of significance." However, Taylor argues that personal freedom is crucial, as it allows the person to critically assess his or her assumptions, transform them, and hence, reconfigure his or her own identity. This "socially situated freedom" (Taylor, 1989) allows one to determine autonomously and responsibly what important values will guide one's life and how one should be. Taylor, stressing the social dimension of freedom, situated it at the interface between the person and society.

So, the unsolved questions are: 1) if freedom is defined metaphysically, as a part of the human essence, a capacity of the will, then: is it real freedom? In other words: to what extent the human essence limits human freedom? And 2) if the specific condition of human beings is relationality, then how human freedom can escape the determinant influence of society in its action? These concerns became more salient when looking at them from the perspective of everyday human experience. We experience the possibility we have of challenging and opposing any social norm. Human beings can also transform their personal lives against their own natural psychological and even biological constitution. It seems that human freedom reaches further than nature and society. But how this differentiation can be conceptualized without falling into an absolutization of freedom and the consequent relativization of the moral realm proposed by modernist immanent philosophy? Here is the point where the proposal of the transcendental anthropology of Leonardo Polo can come into play.

The problem of the relation between freedom and virtuous action, we suggest, has not been sufficiently answered by personalist virtue ethics and, in our view, it still remains open. We suggest that answering this question is important: it is not just a theoretical quest in philosophy (metaphysics and anthropology), but a practically oriented one and hence, it is useful for real life. Answering this problem is required more than ever today for recovering a sense of a shared and yet "personalized" purpose and freedom. Providing a more profound basis to address limitations of personalist virtue ethics will help to provide evidence for the personalist philosophy's claim of trust in the human person as the core root for the (common) good. The proposal we put forward in the next section does precisely this: going deeper in the direction of personalism, exploring the answer of

transcendental anthropology to the question: *What is our most profound reality as human beings?*

BEYOND PERSONALIST VIRTUE ETHICS: TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND TRANSCENDENTAL FREEDOM

The Transcendental Anthropology of Leonardo Polo

Leonardo Polo (1926–2013) is a prolific Spanish philosopher (45 published works and a large number of still unpublished works), best known for his proposal of a transcendental anthropology. On a first reading, it seems that he is a personalist philosopher: his work builds on Aristotelian philosophy and is congruent with realist personalist philosophy, which sees the human being as an end in itself and considers the relational dimension of human beings as important as their nature (which can be improved through virtuous personal growth). Importantly however, his proposal is more global than the personalist one, and this wider focus makes that Polo's philosophy cannot be seen as just fitting into personalism. In a philosophical sense, Polo's most relevant insight to both personalism and virtue ethics is his answer to the question "What is the most profound reality (that characterizes us) as human beings? Polo's philosophical anthropology transcends personalism and profoundly enriches it.

Polo addressed themes of classical philosophy and expanded them. In Polo's view, the peak of classical philosophy is the Thomistic discovering of the real distinction (in finite entities, i.e., apart from God) between the act-of-being (i.e., the act of existence or *actus essendi*) and the essence (i.e., the definable nature of the thing that exists), and the doctrine of the metaphysical transcendentals or properties of the being (*unum, verum, bonum, pulchrum*, i.e., unity, truth, goodness, and beauty). However, he clearly differentiates the notion of being human as something apart from the rest of the physical universe. In his opinion, this distinction is at the deepest level, the level of the act-of-being, but so far "the irreducible intimacy of the personal act-of-being of the human person, is... not studied in any developed way by classical philosophy" (Polo, 2015). According to him, the act-of-being of humans is irreducible to the act-of-being of the rest of the cosmos: it is a *personal* act-of-being, which also possesses its own specific "transcendentals" or properties, namely, personal co-existence, transcendental freedom, personal intellection, and personal giving and acceptance (personal love). Polo also stresses the real distinction between human *essence* and human *being*: there are two different levels in the person (the personal act-of-being and the personal essence), and therefore being a human person is something *additionally* to human nature or essence (note: we used the translation of Polo's specific term "*además*" as *additionally* because it was done so in the still rare existing translations of Polo's works into English (Polo 2015; Polo and Bernardus 2020). Alternative translations are "beyond," "furthermore," "being more," and "besides"). Polo suggests

that anthropology cannot be conceived just as a part of metaphysics dealing with human beings: while metaphysics deals with the act-of-being of the physical universe, philosophical anthropology as a separate discipline should deal with a distinct object: the personal act-of-being.

It is out of the scope of this work to deal in detail with the question of the "intellectual access" to the personal act-of-being. For the needs of the subsequent discussion, it can be just noted that the starting point of Leonardo Polo's contribution is his proposal of the philosophical method of "the abandonment of the mental limit" (Polo 1999, 2015): an abandonment of the limits of knowing as delineated by "objective thought" (knowledge of the object thought) and purely mental operations (which does not mean that there is not at all intellectual "activity," because, according to Polo, there are intellectual activities that are not "operative," such as, for example, intellectual perception and discovering). This method admits different ways of implementation: Polo developed four ways or "dimensions of the abandonment of the mental limit," each one revealing to our intellect a different aspect of reality: the act-of-being of the world, the essence of the world, the act-of-being of the human being, and the essence of the human being. This philosophical method is not opposed or in contradiction with the epistemology proposed by classical metaphysics but adds to the understanding we can access through it. In fact, Polo also explains that there are precedents to his conception of the personal act-of-being and to the method leading to its discovery (Polo, 2015:35–39), and acknowledges that the distinction between human existence and human essence (or nature) has antecedents in the history of philosophical anthropology and in general human understanding.

In this article, we focused on two fields (ethics and communication) that are related to Polo's study of the last theme accessed through the method of the "abandonment of the mental limit," namely, the essence of human beings (Polo, 2011). First, Polo's transcendental anthropology theory allows for an innovative improvement of human thinking about ethical behavior: his triple Ethics proposal (Polo, 2018) accounts for and harmonizes the Aristotelian virtue ethics, the (Christian) ethics of goods and the (Kantian) normative ethics, helping to overcome the limitations of modern and contemporary philosophy. In addition, as we will discuss later in the article, Polo's transcendental anthropology theory also allows for improvement of human thinking about communication: the personal being, since it is intrinsically communicative, is a privileged "access gate" to gain understanding of the communicative acts: the "intrinsic communicativeness" of the human being gives reason of the (essential) human communicative relationships, through which the different human beings accept and give their respective communicative initiatives.

The exposition in detail of the four anthropologic transcendentals is also out of the scope of this work. Because of its implications for the main argument of this article, we will only explain more in detail his understanding of transcendental freedom and, as far as it is closely related to it, of the transcendental "personal giving and acceptance."

Transcendental Personal Freedom and Transcendental Personal Giving and Acceptance

The real distinction between the personal act-of-being and the human metaphysical nature is at the roots of this transcendental understanding of human freedom. This means that human freedom is not conceived exclusively as a capacity or characteristic of the human essence enrooted in the spiritual will that masters the acts of the persons, as in personalist virtue ethics. In addition to this *essential* freedom, according to Polo, human beings have a *transcendental* freedom that is posited at the level of their personal act-of-being (it is one of anthropological transcendentals) and enables the personal self-giving and acceptance of others' gift (another anthropological transcendental, close related to transcendental freedom). Certainly, transcendental freedom has implications at the level of the human nature, which is consequently also endowed with a certain "self-mastering freedom" and "freedom of choice"; but human freedom at its deepest level is something "additional," transcendental to the (essential) freedom that human nature possesses as a capacity of the spiritual will.

Polo argues that the modernist understanding freedom as indetermination and as a freedom of choice, "is not completely satisfying" (Polo and Corazón, 2005). Moreover, according to him, freedom in its classical sense, as mastering one's acts through the acquisition of character and virtues, is *not freedom enough*: "to be free does not mean only to be the master of one's acts. To see the things in this way is maybe metaphysically correct, but this is not a personalist understanding" (Polo and Corazón, 2005). It may be useful to clarify that the Aristotelian tradition speaks of "*liberum arbitrium*" as "*dominium sui actus*," that is being "*causa sibi*" in acting; but, in addition to this kind of self-mastering that is proper to the human nature as such, self-mastery is also a consequence of the acquisition of virtues. The transcendental anthropology of Polo sees transcendental freedom as "assignability": the capacity of self-giving, of self-destination for someone. This "freedom for" is the person's ability of destinating herself to others (and of accepting others) as an answer to a radical vocation to personal self-giving and acceptance, which gives sense to life and meaning to freedom. This view of freedom assumes both the modern "freedom of choice" and the Greek "freedom as self-mastering" given by the virtues, albeit giving them a transcendental direction: the criteria guiding a personal freedom of choice is others' flourishing, taming wild or egotistical sense of self; and the self-mastery reached through classical virtues is assumed and oriented as means to a personal end: of loving others better. The person's transcendental freedom implies a call for destinating herself to others and being open to others (transcendental giving and acceptance). Transcendental personalist freedom-for also assumes Berlin's (1966) "freedom to" or positive freedom (opposed to negative freedom or "freedom-from-that-which-hinders-one's-development"). Positive freedom is conceptually close to the

Aristotelian freedom as "self-mastery," and transcendental personalist freedom-for elevates it teleologically toward the establishment of interpersonal self-giving relationships.

How Transcendental Anthropology Addresses the Challenge of Freedom and Virtue?

The first question we wished to answer (see *The complex relations between virtue and freedom and the contribution of personalism*: "To what extent human nature limits human freedom?") could be reformulated as follows from the perspective of the transcendental anthropology: "To what extent human *metaphysical* nature limits human *transcendental* freedom?" As we have seen, the profound theorization of Polo's transcendental anthropology distinguished the "self-mastery freedom" given by the virtues from the transcendental freedom of the personal being. According to Polo, the virtuous actions belong to the level of the essence, which is the realm of Aristotelian metaphysics, not the level of personal being. However, while both levels are really distinct, they are also interconnected. Polo argues that human essence is "available" to the person. Transcendental freedom can dispose of the potentialities of human essence, including the virtues, without being limited or tied by them. In transcendental anthropology the person herself gives direction and meaning to the virtuous actions. Virtue growth and virtue activation are so to say directed purposefully by the transcendental freedom enrooted in the personal act-of-being of the acting person(s). We suggest that this purposeful directedness should be seen as an act at the level of personal being. The orientation given here involves transcendental "freedom *for*," i.e., freely self-giving in loving acts that are oriented by each acting person toward improving growth in interpersonal relations (self and other). Virtues (as habits) are the condition of possibility of "disposing" of (or activating) our nature, because transcendental freedom connects with nature through habits. But, in addition, transcendental freedom to some extent "disposes" of the virtues that are available to her at the level of the essence and manage their activation in virtuous actions. This activation is also related to the three other "anthropologic transcendentals": transcendental personal knowledge enlightens virtuous action; personal love-donation gives a motivation for virtue growth; and personal co-existence situates the exercise of virtue(s) at its proper place (virtuous actions within interpersonal relations).

The role of transcendental freedom in the activation of the virtuous life is worth developing in some detail, because it includes a novel and more personalizing conceptualization of the virtue of practical wisdom, compared to its treatment in Aristotelian and personalist virtue ethics. But before addressing this point, for avoiding terminological confusions, it is necessary to clarify that Polo uses the term "habit" in two different senses, distinguishing two radically different kinds of habits: the "innate habits," which are at the level of human being, and the earned or "acquired habits," which are at the level of the human essence. Polo argues that there are three "innate habits": the habit of wisdom, the habit of first principles, and the habit of synderesis;

they are inherent to human beings since their inception and cannot be perfected through the activity of the essence. On the other side, "acquired habits" fall into three categories: habits of the intellect (e.g., practical wisdom), habits of the will (e.g., courage, temperance), and technical habits; they are called virtues—predispositions that the human essence acquires and that facilitate its proper operation to implement the "virtuous action." In this sense, Leonardo Polo's "habit of wisdom" is innate, is not perfected through human action, and does not correspond to the Aristotelian "practical wisdom."

How does the person's transcendental freedom relate to practical wisdom (at the level of human essence)? And what does the perspective of transcendental freedom add to the understanding of practical wisdom? Aristotelian understanding of phronesis as the leading intellectual virtue, viewed this virtue as a disposition facilitating the intellectual-moral choices for solving conflicts among virtues and making the best means-ends choices. The personalist understanding of wisdom completed this view, giving a "personalized" character orientation to life in a community and in action. What we argue is that transcendental freedom (for self-giving and acceptance), given its purposeful directedness, activates practical wisdom for inspiring the person wise and loving ways of relating to oneself and the others. In addition, practical wisdom, directed by transcendental freedom, gives a deeper personal and interpersonal sense of direction and purpose to the whole fabric of virtues, which enables personal and interpersonal growth and originates a personal, really human way of leading one's life, relating to, and working with others and for others.

Regarding the second question presented in *The complex Relations Between Virtue and Freedom and the Contribution of Personalism* ("How human freedom can exist within the determinant influence of society in human life?"), transcendental anthropology argues that the person is more fundamental than the society. For Polo, all the manifestations of the person are social, and society is "the status of the person's manifestation" (*el estatuto de la manifestación*), not a product of human activity. Because of their personal act-of-being, human beings not only "exist" in a society, but "co-exist" to it. They are "additionally" to society because their act-of-being is related to, but not dependent on, society: human person transcend social relations. Accordingly, transcendental human freedom is not only "socially situated" (Taylor, 1989), but also "additionally to society," not limited by it. Human relations are certainly necessary for perfectioning the human essence at the level of language, shared knowledge, systems of significance, and virtue growth, but transcendental human freedom is not limited by the social intercourse.

In this context, it can be seen how Polo's transcendental anthropology takes personalism itself at a profounder level and provides a philosophically grounded extension to the personalist virtue ethics approach. His philosophical anthropology offers a strong internal explanation to the ultimate central normative concern for relations as community of persons for the (common) good (Melé, 2009): the question how/why the human person is able to orientate action to "the good" of all involved, acting "for others" in their specific and

unique singularity as human beings. The explanation to this question is that the human person is able to do so because the very act of being (human) has a transcendental property: transcendental freedom-for, which enables the person to self-giving, to acting "for others" and perhaps "for the good of all others" who are involved. This personal act-of-being allows human beings to fully be who they are called to be. Indeed, Polo's work, as we show in this section, is emphasizing human personal love as being associated with free acts of self-giving and the acknowledgement of having received something one then can offer/give to others in return, in an ongoing chain of giving and receiving through relational acts that are based on internal freedom rather than guided by rules and norms associated with obligation or other moral rules.

Hence, the problem of the relation between freedom and virtuous actions associated with personalist virtue ethics is being resolved through a transcendental philosophical interpretation in which the person, as a higher transcendental being, from the stance of her personal act-of-being and by the exercise of her transcendental freedom, chooses how and for the benefit of whom to direct the virtuous actions from that deeper personal level. In this sense, each (virtuous) act can also be a transcendental personal act: it is the person who freely leads the virtuous actions with her transcendental freedom enrooted in her personal act-of-being.

DISCUSSION: TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY AS A PRIVILEGED ACCESS GATE TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTS

We have suggested that Polo's transcendental anthropology expands the philosophy of personalism, by enriching personalist virtue ethics with an anthropology which provides a sound answer to the question "what is our most profound reality (characterizing us) as human beings?" Among the different fields of human life in which transcendental anthropology has practical implications, this section focusses on the field of communication. Now, looking to the contribution we seek to make in this essay, we propose some reflections that could serve to stimulate further dialogue in the field of communication. Following Polo's (1986) work, we argue that the personal being, since it is intrinsically communicative, is a privileged "access gate" to gain understanding of the communicative acts.

Levels of Human Connection in Communicative Acts

Human communication is framed by the language, but it is not limited by it, because human beings can communicate even deeper without words. This kind of communication at a profoundest level goes often further than a cognitive transmission of information or shared values, reaching the realm of self-giving, vocation, meaning of life, intuition… Some examples of deeper access to the other human being and of the reaction that this deep communication provokes can be mentioned: love, deep "connection," understanding, common life project, mutual commitment and self-giving in the family, etc.

If we think about human (interpersonal, social) communication, its aim is, we could assume, to establish connections at interpersonal and broader social levels of human association. In the field of the discipline of communication, it is worthwhile asking: At which level are such human connections being established via communicative acts? There are surely proponents of the modernist idea of communication as a cognitive act. Examples of this level of understanding communication are the rhetorical approach to communication centered on uses of argument and deductive reasoning (see Toulmin's (2003) argumentation theory), and Habermas' modernist "two-level" theory of communication. This two-level theory aims to combine two sociological perspectives, i.e., the "action" and "systems" theoretical ones (Baxter 1987) and proposes a modern liberal communicative ethics approach, which accordingly emphasizes autonomy and solidarity and professes a "discourse ethics" whereby normative claims can be impartially judged (Habermas 1990). These approaches would then pay more attention to communication's cognitive, discursive, and mere linguistic aspects. We can call this the "first level" of communication as act.

In a next level, scholars may associate communication with the attempt to make connections through a more normative level of human reality, which reflects about action pathways. Such an answer would situate human communication in the realm of values and virtues. At this second level, communication is a tool which has a normative and realist potentiality to help improve our human nature and society through virtuous communication. Such communication would aim to self-mastery and virtuous growth through communicative acts which are being deliberately crafted as human products, and which integrate ethos, pathos, and logos as per Aristotle's works; and would intentionally combine virtues such as friendship, justice, and generosity, imbued with a prosocial orientation (Meyer et al., 2019). This approach is guided by higher-level communicative ethics, with a motivation to grow in virtue (Fernández González, 2019). It is directed by phronesis and is prosocial, aiming to virtuous growth in interpersonal and social relations (Akrivou and Scalzo 2020). We can call this a teleological, more integrative second level of communication as act which already involves the person in her social and teleological dimension, as virtue and eudaimonia are ends (telos) of personal action. This is already a deeper level (communication at the level of human essence), but it still fails to reach the persons in their profounder singularity.

Personalist approaches to human communication promote a personalist-relational exercise of phronesis (a sound judgement about goals and means, "decision making" and "implementation" as noted earlier) integrating cognitive, affective, ethical, and practical levels of human intelligence in human relations. Such relations are oriented teleologically to improve human nature, each other, and the world at large through a practically wise integration between moral intentions and actions, whereby communication becomes an important facilitator in virtuous

persons' endeavor of freely engaging in living a good life. This personalist understanding raises communication's role to a virtuous choice emanating from freedom for serving each other and the common good. It is the person who, as a free moral agent, activates her own moral life in relation to others involved. A personalist virtue ethic approach to communication posits the service of the good as a free choice of persons who direct purposefully their communicative acts. Hence, it's concerned with the functionality of interpersonal communication as a shared "human product."

While recognizing the person (a relational level of the person that is additional to human nature, as we suggested earlier), personalist communication acts are serving as a potential entry-bridge to a deeper personal level, in the sense that here communicative acts are hinting to something higher (deeper, more profound, more revelatory), something which "feels" essential to the human condition. However, it might be difficult for the person to fathom what will happen to her when accessing to this deeper personal level (when the communicative acts open new paths to mutual personal discovery, as we show next), and therefore, going beyond the initial function persons aim to reach through communication could perhaps be intuitively felt as something challenging.

The Personal Act-Of-Being as a Gate for Understanding Communication at a Deeper Level

The transcendental approach presented in this article is situated at yet another more profound, third level of reality in communicative acts and its ethics; a level that is more nuanced and not yet explored by communication scholars and professional communication scholars, which we hope to inspire, based on the work of Polo (1986).

The acts of communication can involve a profound, intimate, transcendental level whereby persons through communication are freely opening to self-giving and acceptance of the other, and therefore these acts can be referred to the communicative transcendental dimension of the human act-of-being. Communication here involves the level of the human act-of-being; it is not only an act involving knowledge of an object (language), nor only the virtuous mastery of the self in the service of others and society. Instead, at this transcendental level, communication is the very struggle the person(s) leading the communication process face; it is the personal (and interpersonal) struggle vis-à-vis the challenge to overcome "unicity": the unicity that exists between the act of knowing and the "known" or "mastered" object; a unicity that is habitually associated with modernist approaches to communication (and with the modern lifeworld more broadly). This novel transcendental way of approaching communication makes communication to open itself as possibility for a deeper act of relationality and for personal growth and interpersonal self-giving and acceptance; a possibility that is enrooted in the personal act-of-being. As Polo explains, "the deepening of the notion of the person

makes us see that being is communicative . . . The person is radicality, subsistence and, at the same time, it is open because a single person is impossible" (Polo, 1986). In personal and transcendent acts of communication, a deeper level access to oneself and to others is attempted, and this involves an ongoing openness and the courage to face and overcome uncertainty to reach a condition of fully availing of oneself and the other. This also involves deeper levels of reflection: a self-reflection that helps to understand communication as an (imperfect) two-way sharing one's intimacy with others; and a reflection on how to access other people in ways that are deeper than language, e.g., via deeper emotions and human intuitions of phenomenological nature.

This level of communication may also involve the previous (second) level (which includes virtue and a teleological notion of communication), adding to it something more profound as a relational act: a deeper interpersonal exchange that involves a (shared) calling to personal love guided by the free purpose of the persons communicating. This engages persons in a shared process of mutual personal discovery, and such communicative acts bear the potential to elevate communication to mutual personal acts of self-giving and acceptance implemented by persons freely committed to each other (freedom *for* self-giving, to love another better). This means that communication then becomes itself a higher-level gateway for accessing the other person at a deeper level. This level of communication, based on the transcendental level of being and action, involves a deeper level of connection through emotions and gift-acceptance love. In Polo terms, "If the transcendental order is seen from the person perspective, it is possible to speak of the dialogicality . . . This means something very simple at bottom, namely, that the dialogical order is the donal order" (Polo, 1986). This helps to understand true personal communication as a gift: "Communication exists in the [personal] being by donation . . .. Communication has to be donation" (Polo, 1986, 73–74). Therefore, interpersonal communication is elevated here to an act of self-giving and acceptance, and an act of vocation. Based on Polo's philosophy, such personal acts of communication may also be seen as a human inquiry and an attempt to transcend the mental limit and to communicate what is perceived beyond the mental operations and objective knowledge. This transcendental approach to communication implies the recognition and acceptance that it is not possible to establish a truly human and personal relationship with "the other" through acts of mastery, whereby communication is used as a tool to "master" the other and the object-world; so in this sense even the functionality of communication as a human product is being transcended to reach true human communication, because the personal being is intrinsically communicative.

This also means that, beyond language (produced in an oral or written manner through a communicative act, or conceived as discourse or instrument), while acts of communication are taking place, there is a presence of elements that involve each person's own intimacy because, as Polo explains, "intimacy does not mean immanence" (Polo, 1986, 73). These intimacy elements can be, for example, conscious emotions (felt, expressed or latent, concealed or shared), and emotions and states of being which are present at a

less conscious level of the real human experience. These can also be intuitions shared or felt; a more fluid sense of interpersonal personal connection (popularly called "chemistry"); a sense of history and a shared or singular sensitivity about surrounding realities within or outside the field of an interpersonal or social act of communication. All of them are significant, albeit they are not all accessible, nor discernible through common language. Significantly, they all may be captured in a different way, depending on the sensitivity of each person involved in interpersonal communication. It could be argued that there could be more or less accurate and sincere in-depth perceptions of these realities, if they could be "measured" externally. However, within the reality of interpersonal and social relations of the persons involved in communication, what matters is capturing these realities in a way that allows a mutual expression of the transcendental levels involved in the act of personal being, such as personal transcendental love and co-existence, as we discussed earlier.

Conceiving authentic communication as a personal gift has important implications regarding the contents of communication: "If communication is not a continuation of the personal being, if it does not have a gift character, then communication becomes pure information, or, in other words, it is redundant and insufficient as communication. Strictly speaking, what is not redundant is the person. That is why all redundant forms of communication arise from falling into the impersonal" (Polo, 1986). This kind of communication has crucial social and ethical implications:

> "When talking about mass media, it must be said that if the content is dignifying, it is personalizing, and therefore, it is not 'mass communication'. And if it is not dignifying, then it is the deed of gossipmongers, pure redundancy due to superfluity. This can only incite to vices: for example, the eagerness to know what is not worth knowing. What is not worthy knowing is what is insignificant, what is not based on personal authenticity. And what is not worthy knowing should not be communicated either. And when it is communicated through the mass media, then, rather than to speak of communicating with the masses, it would be better to speak of incitements to become a mass … That is why communication is ethically relevant; it is so important that without communication there is no society" (Polo, 1986)

Broadly speaking, our proposal aims to complement personalist approaches with a transcendental anthropology; it aims to highlight what is *additionally* ("*además*") to the objective and realist approach to knowledge and to communication. We suggest that this addition is essential for understanding what true human communication is, what it is for, and why and for whom and how to establish it beyond rational mastery or personal excellence. This extension of the personalist approach to communication involves interpersonal genuine dialogue, mutual admiration, and an association based on the deepening of interpersonal relations at a more profound level of relatedness.

Such aspects are beyond a way of relating to others which would rely on the "tools" of language and communication as ways to exchange information, and beyond self-mastery or mere mutual respect based on values. Using the anthropological transcendentals (in particular, personal co-existence and personal giving and acceptance) as a gateway for accessing a deeper understanding of communication is a theorization that would allow us to overcome sociopolitical polarization, or power-obsessed understandings of communication, and also the subjectivism, fragmentation, and lack of any higher aims to be associated with mere communication at the level of discourse. We suggest that this more profound understanding of communication (accessed through the lens of transcendental anthropological philosophy) is additional and complementary to the second level of communication; and that a transcendental theorization of the communication's deeper basis is a way to see communication as an opportunity, an archway for the possibility for a better society of persons and for persons (as opposed as a tool for interpersonal and social mastery for a better society according to an external value of normativity).

As we offer this contribution from an interdisciplinary field, but which is primarily drawing from disciplines outside communication (as the authors of this proposal are not communication scholars), we also hope to point a direction for the discipline of communication, a possibility for a wider dialogue and interrogation about how a theorization of communication as a human act at a transcendental level would help the field to evolve further and to extend its own philosophical assumptions.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We suggested in this article that, consistently with the direction of the philosophy of personalism, a deeper understanding of human persons as the center of human action and of its orientation to "the good" is required. While the contribution of personalist virtue ethics is invaluable, it can be expanded further. Our proposal sought to provide an extension to the personalist virtue ethics approach to the self and human action grounded in transcendental anthropology. In the final section of our contribution, we have initiated some reflections based on the transcendental anthropology approach in the field of communication.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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