

The Self as the Spiritual Subject. An Overview of Selected Concepts in View of the Positivist Paradigm

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Abstract: The main predicament presented in this article lies in the complexity found in the internal structure of the human being when one searches for key elements that define its essence and uniqueness. The overview begins with empirical research as exemplified in psychology, continues in presenting chosen theories in modern philosophy, with an accent on the phenomenological method, and subsequently puts forward the synthesis of them both in psychotherapy. The last part is dedicated to theology as a distinct way to uncover what the essence of being human is, as based on divine Revelation; the latter is the only one of the presented sciences to be explicitly aware of the source of the mystery at the basis of being human. This article attempts to compare the research end results of chosen approaches by demonstrating their relationship to the most hidden aspects of being human. The analysis is organized around the concept of recognizing and accepting the place of mystery in the understanding of what are the most essential elements in the human being. As a result, psychology is conceptualized as a science that does not allow mystery; theology, however, is found to underline the presence of mystery in relationship to our divine origins.

Keywords: human being, true self, spiritual core, philosophy, theology, psychology

In the variety of academic proposals regarding the understanding of what is the most essential element of who we are, distinct meanings are usually involved. Each of them leads to specific metaphysical questions: is the human being a subject, a person, a brain, or something else? What is the principle of the human person's identity? Who am I? What constitutes my essence? And finally, are we able to know ourselves fully? In fact, already Socrates promoted the Dolphin maxim "Know yourself."¹ These, and numerous related questions, seem to be of great interest to many of our contemporaries.

For millennia, the human being has been a research object for philosophers and theologians; as a result, we have accumulated an impressive body of knowledge as well as developed a number of theories in an attempt to disclose the mystery involved in being human. Recently, psychologists have become a part of this 'task force.' Its beginning was marked by strong positivist bias. No wonder theologians and philosophers, especially those with a Christian background, looked at the early development of psychology with much suspicion. In line with positivist (and neopositivist)

¹ Mecacci, *Psicologia moderna e postmoderna*, 127.

ideology, many scientists rejected the concept of the person with their defined nature or essence. The human being ceased to be a personal center or a subject and became a product of social and cultural influences, a fruit of constant modifications and changes as exemplified in narrative, cultural, feminist, pragmatist, and other approaches,² for the most part this led to reductionist concepts of the human being without acknowledging their spiritual dimension.

The fruit of positivist ideology, wide spread in the twentieth century, became the challenge to any way of knowing reality that did not use experimental evidence for proving their scientific conclusions. In this context, physics became the best example of scientific method which should have permitted us to control the universe; however, it only led to reductionism, determinism and naturalism in our understanding of the human being perceived only as an end product of biology and the evolution of matter. However, with time, scientific methods began to also include understanding and interpretation, especially in the humanities. The classical positivist approach therefore promoted excluding both theology and metaphysics from academia.³ For this reason, in our analysis, we will treat these approaches separately in order to demonstrate the nature and depth of knowledge they are each able to provide regarding the very essence of being human.

We cannot begin our reflection without a note on the challenges that accompany any interdisciplinary endeavor. An interdisciplinary exploration regarding the human being is a challenging task and it is easy to circumvent important methodological differences. Yet, because the research object is ourselves, we are eager to learn all we can. Along this journey of reflection and empirical research, we quickly realize that finding a common ground for exchanging findings originating in different sciences remains quite challenging. For the purpose of this overview, we will need to remain on a more general level of analyses, without entering into longstanding disputes present in both philosophy and theology. Our point of reference will be the relationship to the mystery of being human. The term “mystery” will be used in its epistemological understanding as something unknown that escapes our scientific research methodology and not in its theological sense as supernatural reality. However, once we reach the theological part of our analysis, we will turn to that dimension as well.

There is no doubt that, to be extensively examined, the theme of this article would require a number of volumes to give justice to the complexity of the researched subject. In such a short analysis, we need to limit ourselves to some representative samples and chosen examples. It will be more of a foretaste of how such a full-fledged study could look like. The presented theories are very limited representations of the field and the author is aware of this fact. The point of interest is the extent to

² Martin – Sugarman, *A Theory of Personhood for Psychology*, 120.

³ Comte, *Rozprawa o duchu filozofii pozytywnej*.

which each approach, remaining faithful to their methodologies, is capable of presenting the essence of who we are as humans.

1. Avoiding Mystery – Empirical Research on Humans in Psychology

What kind of knowledge regarding humans can psychology bring to the forefront? Psychology is interested in the empirical dimension of being human that can be researched in chosen populations. In order to discover regularities and dominant trends in society and in individuals, psychology uses statistical tools to present its findings. Psychological research methodology has well-known limitations that go under the acronym WEIRD, (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democratic), and is used as a cultural identifier of psychology test subjects in order to detect sampling bias in research on human persons. For the sake of convenience, most psychological research uses cohorts of college students who are mostly of Caucasian origin, male, with English as their first language, and who come from a Judeo-Christian background.⁴

As psychology evolved, theories describing our human personality and its maturation have been developed. As a consequence, we can now find a description of who we are, of our internal structure, and attempt to shed light on the very foundation of it. The first known description of the structure of the human being was authored by Sigmund Freud who distinguished such parts as id, ego, and superego, where the ego plays the integrating role in human personality.⁵ With time, the question of the ultimate component or the founding element of the human personality took on more importance. It was intended to serve the purpose of understanding such clinical phenomena as multiple personalities, manifold dissociative disorders, and others.⁶ This led to accepting the existence of people who possess many, different selves, each of whom plans, decides, and acts; it also led to a question of whether or not there exists any kind of an even more profound self that is a factor of integration.

Theoretical reflection of this kind in psychology was initiated by the American psychologist and philosopher, William James, who distinguished the *I* from the *me*. The *I* comes to know and maintains the person's identity, and nourishes the sense of unity. The *me* on the other hand is a gradual transition from the *I* to *mine*. The *I* influences its own environment: material things and human relationships.⁷

⁴ Hill, *Measurement Assessment*.

⁵ Erwin, *Philosophy & Psychotherapy*, 41.

⁶ Erwin, *Philosophy & Psychotherapy*, 35.

⁷ Greer, "Self-Esteem," 93–94.

The *self* continuously reworks the *me*-experience. James' concept was developed subsequently by Theodore Sarbin. In Sarbin's theory, the *I* became the author of an ongoing narrative with the *me* as its actor. The self is able to reconstruct its past history and imagine its possible future, whereas the narrative serves as a kind of organizing factor that holds the whole story together.⁸

Historically speaking, one can say that the interest in researching the essence of being human in psychology disappeared after James' works. This was particularly the case during the domination of behaviorism and experimentalism in psychology. This interest reappeared in humanistic psychology as exemplified in the concepts of real and ideal selves (Allport, Rogers, Maslow) and was linked to the weakening of the positivist influence in psychology. In subsequent years, the topics of self-esteem and self-concept gained more popularity.⁹ From then on, most empirical research in psychology came to be related to self-concept and self-esteem, both stemming from the attitude of self-evaluation and self-perception.

As a consequence, psychologists developed empirical tools for measuring one's self-esteem, self-value, and self-acceptance level, etc. Using James' former concepts, one can say that contemporary research of the human personality has been restricted to only one dimension of the self: self-as-known. The self, understood as a knowing subject, seems to be escaping empirical research; nonetheless, the effects of its activity, such as perception and valuation, have become a major point of reference for differential psychology. It turned out that even reducing the self to the self-concept did not resolve all problems. Using quantitative methods in psychological research, where one asks the person what they think of themselves, remains a challenge for strict interpretation. It is difficult to develop empirical models of the human subject exclusively in this way.

Philosophy, and more frequently early psychology, made greater use of such terms as "subject," "intentionality," and "consciousness" than what is used today (Leibniz, Kant, Husserl, Freud, James). This enabled these researchers to see in the self a true moral subject. Contemporary research of the self in the field of psychology usually does not refer to those dimensions of human life. The reason is very simple – these are not empirical problems. Nevertheless, it is difficult to state that self-concept and self-esteem are characteristics of human personality, since personality is not a product of human thought or of the system of perception but rather an effect of self-consciousness.

⁸ Sarbin, "The Narrative as a Root," 3–21.

⁹ Greer, "Self-Esteem," 89–90

2. Approaching Mystery – Selected Philosophical Concepts of the Human Being

Philosophical analyses of the human being's internal structure are much older than psychology.¹⁰ These are not fruits of empirical research but of reasoning and searching for the theoretical conditions necessary and sufficient to justify the encountered reality, in this case the mystery of being human. In this history, long-lasting discussions between realist and idealist, dualist and monist stances have influenced the conclusions of philosophical reflections. We are not able to render justice to this complexity in such a short presentation. However, it is necessary to mention that Plato and Aristotle followed by Saint Augustin and Saint Thomas Aquinas led foundations of the classical understanding of the human being expressed in the theory of the soul as the most essential and organizing element in the structure of the human being. This reflection gave birth to the theory of the human person and its mystery hidden in their spiritual existence. In the modern times, this reflection was exemplified in the philosophical current called personalism and was an attempt to defend the freedom of the human person against determinism as well as reductionism postulated by materialist science, which made us mere well-organised mechanisms.

The modern ways of understanding the essence of being human were paved by Descartes, who brought about a radical change in philosophical methodology by directing our attention to the thinking subject. In this text we chose to focus only on this experiential dimension of being human and discovering the mystery of who we are. Because of the limits of such a presentation, we have to leave aside the rich metaphysical tradition describing who we are and the subsequent discussions around materialistic monism (there is only matter) and dualism (both matter and spirit exist).

Thanks to his famous “*cogito ergo sum*,” in philosophical anthropology, human consciousness and its content gained the most attention. This, in turn, contributed to the development of a reflective method, which articulated the subjective point of view in a better way, i.e., as seeing the human person as a subject that feels and thinks. A distant consequence of Descartes' work was the birth of psychology as an independent field of scientific research and its applied branch – psychotherapy. We will focus on chosen examples of this kind of philosophical reflection within the contemporary context, which, by no means, represents the entire philosophical tradition.

Among the philosophical theories that originate in Descartes' discoveries and are illustrative to our topic, Immanuel Kant's¹¹ anthropology can be mentioned. Kant distinguished the phenomenal self, which is the sum of human experiences, from the transcendental self, the unknowable yet experientially available subject

¹⁰ More on that: Jastrzębski, “Huberta Hermansa koncepcja *self*,” 164–175.

¹¹ Kant, *Krytyka czystego rozumu*.

of thought. This is how Kant approached the mystery of being human.¹² Following Kant's discoveries, Edmund Husserl distinguished three structures of the human interior: empirical, ideal, and pure selves. The empirical self is, according to his terminology, a part of the perceptual world of the concrete person. This empirical self always appears in the phenomenal field of human experience and, as demonstrated in the previous section, can become an object of empirical research in psychology. It is present in every form of sensual perception as the acting subject perceives its own existence. The pure self is something less changeable, and more stable, a permanent subject that ensures self-identity in the face of changing perceptions. The pure self cannot be part of the experiences and perceptions themselves.¹³

Yet another philosopher who came to similar conclusions was Henri Bergson,¹⁴ who made a distinction between the superficial self and the deep self. Bergson explained that the superficial self does not express the true nature of the human being, which is founded within the boundaries of the deeper self. One understands the difference even if one has lived only one experience at that deeper level. The deep self is not available directly for research (such as psychological exploration) and its discovery requires much intellectual effort and analysis. The superficial self is only a shadow of the deep self which gradually emerges from its superficiality in the course of life. The superficial self remains at the mercy of the demands of one's social life. The deep self appears in the process of interior organization if such a process takes place.

It was also Karl Jaspers who stated that there are at least two elements in the human being. The first can be an object of psychological research, because it is conditioned both biologically and historically. This is the empirical self, which enters into a relationship with the external world; because it has a certain predictability, it may possibly be used as an object for research. The true self, sometimes called the transcendent self, however, remains unavailable for psychological research because it cannot be measured empirically. It is the source of meaning in one's life that enables us to take our most important life decisions, and to maintain internal freedom in difficult existential situations.¹⁵

The selected philosophical theories presented above serve as an example of broadening the strict positivist vision of a valid scientific research program, where not only experimentation, but also reasoning and intuition are allowed to support the search for the essence of being human. These theories help us to understand that psychological research is limited to the empirical self, also called phenomenal or superficial self. This kind of philosophy of the human subject clearly recognizes that, in experiencing our own subject, there is some mystery to being human, a space of

12 Kobierzycki, "Ja i jaźń," 48–49.

13 Husserl, *Idee czystej fenomenologii*, 186.

14 Bergson, *Ewolucja twórcza*.

15 Beck, *Philosophical Foundations of Guidance*.

unknown quantities or modus of existence that is either very difficult to grasp and is accessible only through a special form of personal experience (deep or pure self) or cannot be known at all (transcendental self). This subject-oriented approach has been especially developed in the phenomenological methodology used in both philosophy and psychology.

3. Befriending Mystery – Phenomenology in Approaching the Essence of Being Human

One of the ways to come to understand who we really are can be found in the phenomenological approach. It is certainly a step further than a strict positivist outlook as it is open to studying the elements of the human being that stretch beyond the reach of the positivist methodology. However, it has to be noted that phenomenological method, unlike the metaphysical method, puts “in brackets” the question about the very existence of the human subject and their experiences. We can say that the first human experience of getting to know oneself as a subject, is all that one can grasp and acknowledge as one’s proper actions, i.e., one’s own acts. My acts are first to reveal my phenomenal me, and only with time, does my true self appear.

The foundation of the self is the personal subjectivity or one’s own conscious experience. Karol Wojtyła uses the phenomenological method in his own way acknowledging at the same time the objective existence of the knowing subject. Consciousness discovers the existence of the self and tends to identify with it; nevertheless, consciousness remains only a mirror of the self, a sum of all one’s acts of self-knowledge, which lead to self-consciousness. Personal subjectivity (the personal act of being) always differs from consciousness – yet is actually the foundation of the latter and shows itself in it as an experience of the self. Self-consciousness, the awareness of the self, is the effect of an objectification of proper and reflective self-knowledge, making out of the self an object of knowledge.¹⁶ We have to underline that the subject is a source of all acts of knowledge. Then again, consciousness is just a screen where the outcome of this process will be displayed.¹⁷ The first act of self-knowledge is the discovery of one’s existence and would be expressed in a simple expression: “I am.” It is a spontaneous discovery of the act of one’s being (in the world). Only after this first step, can a broader perspective open itself to getting one to know further characteristics of one’s existence, that is, the essence of one’s being or its content. It then takes a second step for one to become an object of proper acts of knowing. It is

¹⁶ Duma, “The Foundations,” 443–444.

¹⁷ Harciarek, *Podstawy psychologii realistycznej*, 137, 151.

in fact a self-referred knowledge. These acts are not immediate. In contrast to the first act of discovering one's existence, they are rather indirect and learned through an act of advanced reflection. The mediator in knowing oneself is "everything that is mine," to use James' phraseology. As mentioned earlier by Bergson, it is only indirectly, that we come to know the nature of our actions and their characteristics.

Maritain lists a number of different paths that may lead to discovering who we truly are. Among the paths leading to this discovery, he mentions the innate gift of a special intelligence or unexpected natural grace prompted by an act of perception, e.g., the sight of a flower, or perhaps a new perception of ourselves, or a sudden insight into certain thoughts or behaviors. We may also move towards it by an inner experience of duration. The paths are many and varied and no matter what path we take, the most important result lies in the releasing of our authentic intellectual intuition, our sense of being (*l'être*), and our sense of value. These are essential to the very act of existing (*l'acte d'exister*).¹⁸ In the very heart of the conscious intimacy of its own operation, we are capable of grasping intuitively ("to see") the being (*l'être*), the existence (*l'exister*) of things as well as our own existence.¹⁹

From the phenomenological vantage point, the following fields of interest are associated with the theory of the self: the nature of subjective first-person experiences, self-consciousness, the experience of existing in a concrete environment, the theory of myself (the picture of oneself), a sense of identity, the continuity of existence in time, and non-transferable knowledge of oneself – i.e., experiencing oneself from within. All of them are also subject of psychotherapeutic work.

4. Encountering the Human Mystery – Counselling and Psychotherapy

Although there is a strong tendency in psychology to avoid addressing more fundamental metaphysical questions because of their non-empirical nature, some psychologists, especially practicing psychotherapists, try to venture into the uncharted territory of the human psyche. Their theoretical proposals are not based on the strict scientific methodology as in psychology, but are an extrapolation and generalization of certain case studies, subsequently verified by clinical work. In this sense, they are not new theories but rather attempts at understanding and interpreting human experience as encountered in the counseling sessions. It is interesting to note that these reflections, stemming from the counseling context, can be continued and enriched

¹⁸ Jastrzębski, "On Some Anthropological," 385.

¹⁹ Maritain, "Reflections on Wounded Nature."

by theological reflection about the spiritual core originating in spiritual theology. We will present them later.

For example, based on the therapeutical praxis, Michael Eigen proposes to conceptualize the true self as the deepest private phenomenological expression of one's being. For Eigen, the true self denotes a dynamic journey of genuine awareness that remains difficult to communicate to others as it is only accessible to oneself. Every person is capable of perceiving their true self and is called to develop it over time.²⁰ According to Paul Cantz the essence of the human being comprises both unconscious (potentially explicit) and nonconscious (necessarily implicit) elements. He calls this essence the foundational or spiritual self. It represents the core of human experience that is beyond any description. It "results from the dialectical fusion of true self object relations with concomitant ontogenetically primitive psychosomatic self states. Transcending consciousness provides access to this primeval core of somatic and affective self states that orients the nonconscious and lies at the root of spiritual experiences."²¹ Cantz continues: "In effect, the foundational self denotes a more holistic, more authentic mode of being since it represents an amalgam of nonconscious embodied self states synthesized with post-symbolic object relations that operate in the dynamic unconscious."²²

The context where understanding and interpretation take place of the empirical research is the counselling setting where the therapist meets with a unique human being. Although, some empirical data stemming from psychological research may be useful in this type of work, it is more significantly the fact of encountering the mystery of another human being that comes to the forefront of therapeutic work. Oftentimes, the therapy helps clients to reach an authentic human existence providing a framework that directs the search for meaning and purpose.²³

Many therapists are aware that the essential dimension of being human, which they sometimes term 'spiritual,' remains hidden in the shadow of unconsciousness. In fact, while fulfilling spiritual acts, we are not reflecting on their nature. No wonder that spiritual existence itself remains beyond our direct knowledge and is only accessible to us through reflection on its accomplishments.²⁴ The very foundation of being human also called "the spiritual core" is like the "blind spot" in the pupil of one's eye. It is unable to see itself so that we cannot directly "see" who we really are and consequently lack this spiritual self-awareness.²⁵

Following the philosophical intuitions on the existence of a human essence that is not directly accessible to our research (pure, deep self), existential therapists aim at

20 Eigen, "The Area of Faith," 413–433.

21 Cantz, "A psychodynamic inquiry," 75.

22 Cantz, "A psychodynamic inquiry," 76.

23 Pargament – Exline, *Working with Spiritual Struggles*, 124.

24 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 32.

25 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 37.

helping their clients in discovering, what they call, the “authentic self.” We are invited to overcome what is “inauthentic” in our personality in order to reach a “pure spiritual life force.” Unfortunately, it is not yet well-defined.²⁶ Here, theology has something to offer.

5. Acknowledging Human Mystery in Theology

When we turn to theology in our search for answers pertaining to the essence of being human, we have to acknowledge that we also shift scientific methodology. Neither psychotherapy nor philosophy use any reference to Divine Revelation because this is not a part of their research methods. Theology not only can present conclusions based on reasoning, where it uses the concepts developed in philosophy, but also offer unique knowledge based on God’s word. If we believe that God has spoken to us, this information has the potential for filling the gaps in our, otherwise inaccessible human knowledge.

Theology says that our life is organized around a spiritual core (the term accepted by some psychotherapists) or soul (the term used more often in philosophy), which is immersed into a human body as its forming energy. The spiritual core is united with God and open to God. Although God communicates with us through our spiritual core, God always remains infinitely greater than our understanding. Nonetheless, we are drawn to God and invited to a deep relationship with God because our roots and our destination are Divine, which in theological anthropology is expressed in the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.²⁷

With its roots in Gen 1:26–27, the theological teachings about the human person being created in the image and likeness of God have a long history which is impossible to present fittingly in such a short presentation. In recent times, this subject has been analyzed by many prominent theologians such as Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Jürgen Moltmann.²⁸ Let us suffice to mention that there are different ways of conceptualize how, as humans, we resemble our Creator. According to one of the conceptualizations, called functional, being God’s image is related to our mission of stewarding the created world. Another conceptualization sees the image as a design and likeness symbolizing the destiny of every human being.²⁹ Traditionally, following the classical philosophical tradition, the image of God within the human being is

²⁶ Vitz, *Psychologia jako religia*, 73.

²⁷ Jastrzębski, “Self-Transcendence,” 515–516.

²⁸ Ladaria, *Antropologia teologica*, 147.

²⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 180–181.

seen in the soul, or in the mind (*nous*) as composed of the intellect and the will. In a more metaphorical way, used in spiritual theology, it is called the divine spark, and the life of a believer is a journey of spiritual purification enabling this spark to progressively reflect its source.³⁰ Let us now turn to spiritual theology which develops many ideas on the essence of being human present in the forementioned psychotherapeutic theories.

It has to be noted that in theological reflection, we will not find the theory of the self or consciousness as presented earlier on selected examples. Nonetheless, in some reflections within spiritual theology, there are certain topics that can be seen as the development of a number ideas originating in the classical reflection on the human subject; we can also identify reflections originating in clinical practice, especially as pertaining to our study subject: approaching the mystery of being human, often expressed in a more metaphorical way.

According to Thomas Merton, our spiritual core lies beyond the reach of sin and always remains indestructible. He compares this core to a pure diamond shining with the “invisible light of heaven.” It is present in all of us, forming a “blaze of sun” that can enlighten all the dark corners of our life,³¹ such that, we can discover our divine origin (image of God) there in our depths. It is constantly present, whether we are aware of it or not.³²

Although we are connected with God through our spiritual core, it should not be identified with God. When our communication with God becomes more effective, our life is more authentic: honest, accepting, and humbly associated with the truth. This conclusion is to some extent in line with the existential approach in psychology but demonstrates its divine origin. We slowly begin to understand what it means to live in bountifulness as promised by God. Various spiritual practices can be of help here.³³ In times of spiritual growth, the light coming from our spiritual core, also called the nucleus of the soul, begins to penetrate our entire being. Gradually, our personality becomes better integrated and we experience both physical and spiritual healing. A new freedom comes to the fore. What is most noble begins to shine.³⁴

In the Bible, our spiritual core is often referred to metaphorically as the “heart.” It does not mean the psychological habitat of the emotions, but something much deeper. The heart in the Bible refers to reason, intuition, and will. When we look deeply into our hearts, we discover moral conscience illuminated by the Word of God.³⁵ In other words the heart is the innermost depths, the personal centre, and

³⁰ Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 144–148.

³¹ Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 155–156.

³² Jastrzębski, *Homo theomorphicus et theophoricus*, 151.

³³ Ryan, *Four Steps to Spiritual Freedom*, 64–65.

³⁴ Ryan, *Four Steps to Spiritual Freedom*, 88.

³⁵ Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 42.

true self in which we exist. Our spiritual core integrates all human faculties such as intellect and will. Through connecting to our spiritual core, we discover our vocation, our unique mission in life³⁶ and realize that we were created in the image of God. This is the foundation of our entire being, but its depths remain inaccessible to our direct knowledge because our consciousness has only a limited range. We know of its existence because of God's Revelation and see it only as in a mirror, as Saint Paul expresses it (1 Cor 13:12). The spiritual core transcends all its external manifestations and although it can recognize its own acts, it cannot see itself. This direct knowledge is available only through mystical intuition, and act of knowing illuminated by the light of God.³⁷ This is also a development of the philosophical ideas about the transcendental, deep, pure, and true self.

Another important way of understanding the spiritual core of the human being in theology is the concept of *nous*. The internal division of human nature was frequently conceptualized by the Greek philosophers as the body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*). The theological reflection of the Fathers of the Church often added the third element: the spirit (*nous*). Gregory Nazianzen had already seen this tripartite division as generally accepted.³⁸ The spirit (*nous*) is the element in the human being that is the closest to God because it corresponds the most closely to the essence of God as it reflects that essence. The human spirit is qualitatively similar to the spiritual essence of angels with the exception of being embodied. Speaking of the human spirit, the Fathers sometimes use the word *pneuma*, sometimes *nous*, and sometimes *logos*. In this context, the *nous* is seen as the spiritual reason, *logos* as the spiritual will, and *pneuma* as the spiritual power or spiritual sense.³⁹ According to Evagrius of Pontus, *nous* itself is only a reflection of the divine light,⁴⁰ nonetheless, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite says that *nous* is what makes a human person be alive, that it is the source of life.⁴¹

Among more contemporary conceptualizations of this topic in theology, we can look into Bernard Lonergan's reflections. He posits that consciousness is the highest dimension of the human mind, which he calls, as the Fathers before him, *nous*; he understands in a more contemporary way similar to that of phenomenology. It is one of the dimensions of the mind. The second dimension of the human mind is the soul (*psyche*). According to Lonergan, the human mind consists of soul and spirit, and the human being as a whole would be composed of an organism (the body), the soul and the spirit.⁴²

³⁶ Lotz, *Wdrożenie w medytację nad Nowym Testamentem*, 27–29.

³⁷ Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 43.

³⁸ Jastrzębski, *Homo theomorphicus et theophoricus*, 157.

³⁹ Jastrzębski, *Homo theomorphicus et theophoricus*, 160.

⁴⁰ Misiarczyk, "Umysł widzący swoje światło," 274.

⁴¹ Stepień, "Being Alive," 1008.

⁴² Lonergan, *Insight*, 230.

Through acknowledging the existence of our spiritual core, we can discover the foundation of our being, and understand more fully who we are in the eyes of God. In this spiritual core, God is one with us and there we can adore God in Spirit and Truth.⁴³ Theology is able, in this way, to teach us more about our deep self as it draws its conclusions from the Divine revelation.

Conclusions

The historically long search for what is the most essential part of who we are led to a variety of conclusions and proposals whose aim was to understand the fundamental dimension of being human. Following their appropriate methodologies, different sciences propose distinct paths of reaching such a conclusion. Recent developments in science have been deeply marked by the positivist (and neopositivist) paradigm that imposed a strict empirical approach followed by reductionist conceptualisations of the human being such as materialism or naturalism. Attempting to follow this outlook, psychology researched the internal structure of the human being by means of empirical research and statistical methods. Although the outcome of this research into the structure of the human personality brought interesting conclusions, it did not satisfy human curiosity and the search for the essence of who we are continues.

Broadening of the positivist paradigm in discussion with humanities (Dilthey, Windelband, and Rickert) ended up accepting humanist methodology of understanding and interpretation. In this contemporary context, philosophical reflection led to the concept of a deep or pure self as the foundation of who we are. Subsequently, phenomenological method, as an unbiased pure regard on reality helped, in the conscientization of the unknown in the human being. This method was successfully used by both philosophy and psychology, and especially applied in psychotherapy, creating the concept of the true self and authentic existence.

Although because of its non-scientific source of knowledge which is Divine Revelation, theology has not been admitted into the broadened positivist paradigm of science, based on the philosophical theory of the person, theology clearly indicated that we remain always connected to the very Source of Being since we are created in the image and likeness of God.

In this article, we have conceptualized the process of getting to know the essence of the human being as a relationship of the different approaches to the human mystery in view of the positivist paradigm and the limits of the scientific methodology. We started by a strictly experimental approach where there is no place for mystery, we mentioned the phenomenological method that allowed academics to approach

⁴³ Jalics, *W szkole Jezusa*, 149.

the mystery of being human in a liberated way and concluded with theology as the science which fully acknowledges this mystery.

In theology we call this aspect an apophatic attitude. From the theological perspective, we understand much clearer why the different scientific methods are not able to reach beyond “the veil.” They all give us valuable insights into the essence of being human. The classical philosophy underlines the mystery of being a person endowed with spiritual existence; theology concludes that there is and always will be some mystery to being human because our origins are in God who remains a great Mystery. Since we are created in God’s image, there will also be some mystery to who we are. Unlike in other sciences, this knowledge comes from the Divine Revelation.

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