

# Person and Culture in Leonardo Polo's Anthropology

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John Branya  
Strathmore University (Kenya)  
jbranya@gmail.com

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**ABSTRACT:** For Leonardo Polo culture is an exclusive activity of human beings. It is all encompassing in the life of individuals and a need for society's cohesion and development. Culture has an individual and a social aspect. Leonardo Polo's transcendental anthropology gives an anthropological foundation to culture. His anthropological positioning on culture makes it possible to link all aspects of culture to the person and his/her development. Polo's approach to culture preserves the individual freedom of those within any particular culture and explains its continuous and unlimited progress. It also links culture with morality and explains how morality is inseparable from culture.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Person, cohesion, development, freedom, progress, morality



This short paper is a reflection on how Polo's Transcendental Anthropology makes it possible to link all aspects of culture to the person and his/her development, and how Polo's approach to culture preserves individual freedom of those within different cultures and can explain the continuous and unlimited capacity to progress that culture has. It can also help understand how morality is intrinsic to culture and not an accident. This means that culture is not an instrument, but a manifestation of morality.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. TRIADIC STRUCTURE OF THE PERSON

The great novelty of Polo's Transcendental Anthropology is his intuition that the *actus essendi* –discovered by Aquinas<sup>2</sup>- is the core of the human person, in fact it is the person.

It may be important to note that the Leonardo Polo defines and uses the traditional terms in a different way that the classics do it. So one should understand the terms as defined here. We are aware that this can be confusing for those accustomed to how they are used in Aristotelian, Thomistic traditions.<sup>3</sup>

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1 For a more detailed explanation of culture in Leonardo Polo and its intellectual foundations check Murillo.

<sup>2</sup> “To complete exposure of the plurality of dimensions of the proposed method, it would be good to consider again the real distinction [between esse and essence], which is the culminating investigation of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy”. “Para completar la exposición de la pluralidad de dimensiones del método propuesto, conviene volver a aludir a la distinción real, que es la averiguación en que culmina la filosofía de Tomás de Aquino”. Polo, (2010, 132). “Traditional philosophy culminates with this finding: the essence and the act of being really are distinguished in creatures”. “La filosofía tradicional culmina con este hallazgo: la esencia y el acto de ser se distinguen realmente in creaturas”. (141).

<sup>3</sup> “The honest seeker is only confused by this endless labyrinth of words. One is then left wondering if scholarship would not be overplaying its hand with such reconstructions”. “In my view three things make Polo's thought cryptic: a) his love for negative statements (“el intelecto agente no es...”); this has the effect of sending the mind off on a wild goose chase without ever settling on anything; b) the change he has wrought on the meaning of some classic concepts thus ‘transcendental’, ‘nature’, ‘essence’, ‘person’, ‘agent intellect’, etc.; when one reads Polo he assumes these concepts keep the meaning given them by classical philosophy, yet...; c) his penchant for

Based on this intuition he splits the spirituality of the human being into two, the person and the essence. Polo identifies the *actus essendi* with the person. The *actus essendi* is the human spirit unmixed. It is what will remain of the human person after the body decomposes, together with the essence one has managed to develop. The person gives us our identity, what is unique, exclusive to each one and because of this it is non-transferable; it is not shareable, because it is the ontological origin goes to the me<sup>4</sup>. Polo liked to stress this individuality calling the person as the “each who”.

The second level is the essence, which is what constitutes our humanity. It is therefore common to all human beings. It distinguishes humans from other non-human essences, and from the animals<sup>5</sup>. It has two interlaced powers or faculties, the intelligence and the will.

Finally the body and what is directly incorporated to it constitutes what Leonardo Polo calls the human nature. This level is endowed with the sensorial knowledge, both external and internal and all the emotions –passions or instincts– that they originate, together with all bodily functions.

The person can have. Because it is “me” and what I possess is “mine”. There is no possession without a “me”. The *actus essendi* – the “me” – is the one that activates what is mine, my human powers, the intelligence and the will, and through them the “me” activates the bodily powers.

This structure of the human being in Leonardo Polo can be called the *triadic structure of the person*. This triadic structure helps to ex-

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applying many terms to the same idea, eg. to characterize what he calls mental presence (*presencia mental*), he uses no less than eighteen terms (cf. 2004, 14): *diferencia pura, lo vasto, mismidad, unicidad, ya, suposición, haber*, etc.; now this is sure recipe for perplexity!!! *Multiplicantur entia(rationis) sine necessitate...* (Cf. Mimbi, P. 31).

<sup>4</sup> We use the expression “ontological me” to avoid confusing the person with the “yo” the “I”, which is the top of the human essence, also called the Synderesis.

<sup>5</sup> “Man is a being that integrates objects in his behavior and acts based on those objects. (...) Human behavior is not fired from his biological constitution: it is not instinctive”. “El hombre es un ser que integra objetos en su conducta y actúa a partir de esos objetos. (...) la conducta del hombre no se desencadena desde su constitución biológica: no es instintiva”. (Polo 1993, 134).

plain the three different components of human behaviour; personal, essential and natural levels.

The person –*the actus essendi*– is the activator of the other powers. Using a mechanical comparison it is like the nuclear reactors of an aircraft carrier, or a nuclear submarine, which is the source of all energy in the ship. It generates heat from which steam, movement, electricity are produced. These different types of energy are then tailored to multiple needs.

Similarly the *actus essendi* is the source of our understanding and will power which configure the decisions that make our habits which shape the character of each person.<sup>6</sup>

The character is developed from our biological nature. It is the personal control of the biology we have inherited and its natural tendencies, what through the habits constitutes the character.

This means that there is a constitutive capacity in humans to model themselves.<sup>7</sup> The behavioural tendencies which come from one's biology is what classically is called temperament.<sup>8</sup> Our first re-

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<sup>6</sup> “Freedom is such way of being that is capable of facing a situation without being subsumed in it. What is able to manifest, establishing a charter for his manifestation, is called person. From the point of view of ethics, from the will, man is a person as he manifests. Person is the ability to overcome the self because of values. Person is being able to manifest and that's generosity, giving of himself. So society is only possible by human contributions, and this indicates an ontological generosity. That's the person”. “La libertad es aquella manera de ser que es capaz de hallarse en una situación sin confundirse con ella. Aquello que es capaz de manifestarse, estableciendo un estatuto para la manifestación, se llama persona. Desde el punto de vista de la ética, desde la voluntad, el hombre es persona en cuanto que se manifiesta. Persona es posibilidad de superar el yo por supeditación a valores. Persona es el ser capaz de manifestaciones, y eso es generosidad, dar de sí. Por eso la sociedad sólo es posible por aportaciones humanas, e indica una generosidad ontológica. Eso es la persona”. (Polo 2013, 69).

<sup>7</sup> “Man can configure his own behaviour. Artificial, is what man makes, and this is natural for man to do, but not for the animal”. “El hombre puede configurar su propia conducta. Lo artificial, que es lo que el hombre hace, es natural para el hombre, pero para el animal no lo es.” (Polo 2013, 10)

<sup>8</sup> “The maturation of man cannot be explained by evolution. There cannot be objectified spirit if there is no autoconfiguration of the human body. The man transcends the bi-univocally with the environment; he is not a homeostatic being but an unbal-

actions, our instinctive reactions that come from our body, from our peculiar chemistry as imprinted in us by the specific DNA we have inherited, and by the physiological state in which we are at a particular moment. These reactions are internal, not seen, though some of them may show out without our control, like blushing. The character, is different in the sense that it assumes the temperament but directs it. Character is one's immediate and visible habitual way of acting. It is made out by the personal level directing the temperament towards a decided aim. We can say that the character is curved out from the tendencies of our natural level by our personality.

Leonardo Polo clearly established that the control of one's conduct is a free activity that is being increased by developing one's skills, this develops not only one's character and body, but also the culture one lives in. Culture therefore is an activity of man's freedom, and starts with the control of one's own mind. "The function makes the organ. Is the activity of man that culturalizes the human brain.<sup>9</sup> Physiology is the base or potency, but the brain is developed by man in the course of his life. Otherwise, neither the language nor speech can be explained. Language is *poiesis*, culture. The configuration of man as talker is an organization of his own making. First one has something as known; these are objectifications. Second, from the mind one can adapt through *poiesis* the objects to configure the action. The link between what man's thinks and his way of acting, so that it is one's way of acting is configured by one's mind-set. The ways of acting that men invent are not inborn, they are configured along one's life. The viability of man comes from the intelligence. Human nature is extremely plastic, is prepared for the trans-theoretical organization that is culture, and in this sense we can speak of human *physis*<sup>10</sup>

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anced being, and this imbalance has positive character". "La maduración del hombre no puede explicarse por la evolución. No hay espíritu objetivado si no hay una auto-configuración del cuerpo humano. El hombre trasciende la bi-univocidad con el medio; no es un ser homeostático, sino un ser desequilibrado, y este desequilibrio tiene carácter positivo". (Polo 2013, 47).

<sup>9</sup> Polo refers to it as "brain" because it clearly starts from the mind and at the same time modifies it.

<sup>10</sup> "La función constituye el órgano. Es el ejercicio del hombre el que culturaliza el cerebro humano. La fisiología es la base o potencia, pero el cerebro se lo hace el

Summing up; we have three levels of behaviour from top to bottom: personality, character and temperament, which correspond to the three levels of the human person; the personal level, the essential level and the natural level.

## 2. TRIADIC STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

The triadic model can be transferred by analogy to the origin and development of culture. Following this analogy culture will be the outcome of the personalization of our material and social environment –which is inherited– by the person. The person is the motor of the change to his or her environment both physical and mental. Culture or the habitual way of behaving are changes introduced in nature by the interaction of the person with the environment understanding environment, both the physical and spiritual world inherited.<sup>11</sup> Though one could speak of a personal culture which could be considered the mind map each person has that configures one's interpretation of the world, it is more common and accurate to consider culture

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hombre en el ejercicio de su vida. Si no, no se explica ni el lenguaje ni el habla. El lenguaje es *póiesis*, cultura. La configuración del hombre como hablante es una organización de su propia configuración. Primero se tiene algo como conocido; son las objetivaciones. Segundo, los objetos se pueden plasmar poiéticamente desde la mente configurando la acción. Es intrínseca la comunicación de lo que el hombre piensa a su modo de actuar, de tal modo que su modo de actuar está configurado por su modo de pensar. La viabilidad del hombre le viene de la inteligencia. Los modos de actuar que el hombre se inventa no son innatos, sino que se configuran a lo largo de la vida. La naturaleza humana es sumamente plástica, está preparada para la organización trans-teórica que es la cultura, y en este sentido se puede hablar de physis humana.” (Polo, 2013, 28).

<sup>11</sup> “Human beings with their deeds add something to the world. It is what is called culture. There are two senses of the word culture: one objective sense (culture as product), which is not the most important sense of what is done. Another, the subjective sense, the action with which man is linked to cultural objects “El hombre con sus actos añade algo al mundo. Es lo que se llama cultura.: uno, el sentido objetivo (la cultura como producto), que no es el sentido más importante Hay dos sentidos de la palabra cultura de lo pragmático. Otro, el sentido subjetivo, la acción con la que el hombre enlaza con los objetos culturales”. (Polo 2013, 35).

as something social.<sup>12</sup> Culture then will be the common mental map that guides the behaviour of a group of people.<sup>13</sup> We could refer it as the essence, what defines, a particular society and that is transmitted from generation to generation.

In culture the same three elements appear, the person, who are those men and women who by having a strong personality influence the reality they received making scientific or artistic contributions that change and benefit or impoverish that particular society. We can mention the many unknown persons who progressively tamed bulls, dogs, started agriculture discovered the wheel, boats, and so on which corresponds what now we call objective or material culture.<sup>14</sup> Similarly on the transformational aspect of culture the achievements of those who started the writing systems, numeric systems, those who grouped together clans, initiated stable ways of solving conflicts, organised armies for defensive or conquering purposes, organised the administration of cities and empires also were great creators of what we now call social culture. Also those who created poems like the

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<sup>12</sup> “Every culture is characterized by sustaining some presuppositions, some inherited beliefs, a system of common basic experiences”. “Toda cultura se caracteriza por sostener unos supuestos, unas creencias heredadas, un sistema de vivencias básicas comunes”. (Polo 1995, 146).

<sup>13</sup> “There are human groups with strong and active common convictions, from which their interconnections are solid: it is a community. In society, by contrast, there is marked pluralism and that means that common convictions are rare or generic, in practice are not accepted and break easily”. “Hay grupos humanos con convicciones comunes fuertes y actuantes, a partir de las cuales la conexión es sólida: es una comunidad. En la sociedad, por el contrario, se da un acentuado pluralismo, y eso quiere decir que las convicciones comunes son escasas o genéricas, por lo que no se reconocen en la práctica y se rompen con facilidad”. (Polo 1995, 146)

<sup>14</sup> “The characteristic of cultural objectification-what is often called objective spirit is to open general possibilities, certainly making (factive) possibilities. Because it has been done, more can be done from what was done: the hammer is projected in the hammering and that’s makes possible new tools. This openness of cultural objects configures the progressive nature of history”. “Lo característico de las objetivaciones culturales –lo que se suele llamar espíritu objetivo– es posibilitar en general, ciertamente una posibilitación to factiva. Porque se ha hecho, se puede hacer a partir de lo hecho en tanto que tal: el martillo se proyecta en el martillar y eso es posibilitante de un nuevo utensilio. Este carácter abierto de los objetos culturales constituye el carácter progresivo de la Historia”. (Polo 1998).

Iliad or Upanishads, the Chanson of Roland or the Mio Cid; those who created the specific music and songs that educated centuries in the same set of values were great personalities that constitute our more artistic emotional culture. And finally the great motor of cultural development, precisely because it is closer to the spiritual nature of human beings, we have the religious culture of those who gave a spiritual meaning to the pursuits and achievements of different peoples, like Lao-tzu, Buddha, Moses, Zarathustra and at a complete different level that is Jesus Christ.

Though man is born and developed in a particular culture he cannot be reduced to culture.<sup>15</sup> Culture is a result of the action of the persons in the social and material environment that one inherited. Because of this, culture is a dynamic entity,<sup>16</sup> it changes when the person decides to change its parameters because one of the essential characteristics of the person is that the person is free, and freedom is the capacity to novelty, to be a non-predictable cause. As one can improve or spoil one's character one can modify both the social and material environment, in which one lives. As such culture is carved differently by different peoples and this depends on the two factors mentioned: the received, inherited which is similar to human nature, and the innovative that is the one that modifies nature.

One of the characteristics of the spirit, the person, highlighted by Leonardo Polo is its infinity, infinity which is extended to the essential level by the habits. In culture this infinity is also a consequence of

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<sup>15</sup> "Man is not a self-realized being, is just a director and configurator itself. There is no objective culture without acculturation of man, but this is a means in its turn. To speak about self-realization is an extrapolation because man is not *causa sui*. Self-realization means that man wants to configure himself exclusively by customs. This is ethically wrong. Ethics appears with culture, with man's own active organization, without which he can do nothing". "El hombre no es un ser autorrealizado, es un realizador y configurador de sí mismo. No hay cultura objetiva sin culturización del hombre, pero esto es medial a su vez. Hablar de autorrealización es una extrapolación, porque el hombre no es *causa sui*. Autorrealización significa que el hombre quiere configurarse sólo en costumbres. Esto éticamente es malo. La ética aparece con la cultura, con su propia organización activa, sin la cual no puede hacer nada". (Polo, 2013, 29).

<sup>16</sup> "History is a situation; culture a dynamic structure". "La historia es situación; la cultura, estructura dinámica". (Polo 2013, 67).

its dynamism, which comes from its source, the personal level. This affects the development of the intelligence, and the practical intelligence, both in its poesis<sup>17</sup>, and the praxis, which permits the moral continuous improvement, but also the risk of losing the improvements gained.

### 3. CULTURE AND ETHICS

To talk about choosing freely, of having a purpose is to talk about morality. What is the purpose of culture?<sup>18</sup> Culture is not an accident, it is constitutive of the person on two transcendental grounds; it is social and it is a free decision. “It is possible to develop a philosophy of ethos? Ethos means custom, regularity. It is how things are done here, or how normally people act. Man is a being that lives on customs. Tradition is fundamentally the organization of behaviour that is not biologically native”.<sup>19</sup>

What is proper of the way spiritual beings exist is radically different from other beings. It is an expansive way in which the intimacy one possesses is there for sharing. As Leonardo Polo insistently says that a unique spirit is a contradiction.<sup>20</sup> The spirit is made to be

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<sup>17</sup> “In the same way well that the operational intelligence infinity prohibits a final object which would prevent keep thinking, there is not a final object that saturates the production capacity of man. Hence the action brings products without stopping in a final product”. “Así como la infinitud operativa de la inteligencia prohíbe que haya un objeto último que impida seguir pensando, tampoco existe un objeto último que sature la capacidad productiva del hombre. De ahí que la acción suscite los productos sin detenerse en un producto último.” (Murillo, 856).

<sup>18</sup> “The man is not his culture, man is more than culture. However, man corresponds to it. Culture is human, but the man is not his culture. This correspondence can be called situation”. “El hombre no es su cultura, no se agota en ella. Sin embargo, se corresponde con ella. La cultura es humana, pero el hombre no es cultura. Esa correspondencia se puede llamar situación”. (Polo, 2013, 63).

<sup>19</sup> “¿Cabe una filosofía del ethos? Ethos significa costumbre, modo regular. Es como se suelen hacer las cosas, o como se suelen conducir los hombres. El hombre es un ser con costumbres. Costumbre es fundamentalmente la organización de la conducta que no es biológicamente nativa.” (Polo, 2013, 63).

<sup>20</sup> “The monadic character of the person would be pure misfortune”. “El carácter monádico de la persona sería la desgracia pura”. (Polo, 2007, 570 and 2014, 155).

shared, to be expansive. This is the most radical explanation of the social nature of the human being. We are not social just because we are born totally helpless, or that we accomplish more together than separated. Those are utilitarian explanations that are true but not radical enough. We are social even when materially we may not need anything. This sharing of intimacies is what makes culture. So, in fact culture is something that is transcendently based on our social nature. We cannot be without a shared culture, a give and take of intimacies.<sup>21</sup>

One of most original Polo's contributions to Anthropology are the four personal transcendentals that constitute, or better, are the person; co-existence-with, personal freedom, personal knowledge and personal love; the highest being personal love, which is like the source the most intimate actions, which cannot be without personal knowledge, personally freedom –love is free- and the need to co-exist. To explain them will distract us from the main topic. Polo very explains them in the first volume of *Antropología Trascendental* (2010).

Personal freedom is the source of radical novelty. We cannot have intimacies to share if all are equal. We each have something different to communicate because we develop ourselves on decisions, and our decisions are unique, are ours. We decide what to think or not to think, what to admire or not, what purpose to choose for our life, for our actions, and this is different in each person. Freedom is the radical transcendental that allows us to innovate, to change a particular culture or to accept the changes suggested by others.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “The human person does not find himself in his manifestation. Man cannot repeat their intimacy in his manifestation. The human manifestation is within the person-society relationship, not in the person-person. Man cannot be repeat himself as person in his manifestation, the he needs society to develop himself”. “La persona humana no se encuentra a sí misma al manifestarse. El hombre no puede repetir su intimidad en la manifestación. La manifestación humana se mueve en el binomio persona-sociedad, no persona-persona. El hombre no puede repetirse como persona en su manifestación, por eso necesita de la sociedad para perfeccionarse”. (Polo, 2013, 69).

<sup>22</sup> “There is at least a third type of possibility: the free possibility, the cultural possibility (since culture is neither natural, nor logical). Culture is an active possibility, although not physis. This possibility clarifies many aspects of life and solves prob-

The most important radical transcendental is personal love. Love is where the person defines his/her more radical decisions. According to Leonardo Polo love's first step is to accept. In our case, in the case of culture it requires acceptance or rejection of the inherited culture or at least of some of its aspects. Acceptance which is not static, because the second movement of the personal love is donation. This donation is to give the best we have; our intimacy, which being free, will be rich and enriching. This enriching, which is not static either, but an enriching that is dynamic, that tries to improve the other's intimacy and therefore improves himself in doing so. And finally the gift which is the objective change effected in the other person or persons, and in the world were one's live with the others. Change that, if it is accepted, improves or reduces the value of the inherited culture at that particular moment.

When we speak of improvement or impoverishment of a culture what are we talking about? What makes a culture better than the other? As in human actions each action has two sides, like the two faces of a coin. Human actions have always a technical and a moral component. The technical component improves the way things are done. The standard is the best practice at that particular historical moment. The moral aspect requires the improvement of the person at a personal level. Can we improve at the personal level? It is a disputed question whether there can be improvement on the act of being and how this is done. We do not enter in the dispute we only point out that the growth in wisdom seems to be a fact recognised by most people and that Polo says it is the highest innate habit and that it belongs to the personal level. Morality also improves the control that the person has on his faculties at the essential level improves by being more on control of the intelligence, the will and of the natural level powers –the sensorial capacities–. In classic Thomist philosophy, which Polo agrees with, the moral aspect is its relation to the final end of man who is God's glory. Similarly good cultural change will

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lems that man finds". "Hay al menos un tercer tipo de posibilidad: la posibilidad libre, la posibilidad cultural (ya que la cultura no es natural, pero tampoco es lógica). La cultura es posibilidad activa, aunque no physis. Esta posibilidad esclarece muchos aspectos de la vida y soluciona problemas con los que el hombre se encuentra". (Polo, 2013, 62).

be the one that benefits the person.<sup>23</sup> A good culture will be the one that makes it easy for persons to improve as persons, then it is a good culture. If it makes it difficult for persons to improve as persons, then it is a bad culture.

#### 4. SUMMARY

We have seen that the foundation of culture for Leonardo Polo is the person, and that the person can be explained well from the four personal transcendentals. Similarly we have seen what the purpose of culture is. That it cannot be other than the person himself. This is why Polo refers to man frequently as the “one who perfects himself perfecting”<sup>24</sup> and that this is done by improving his four personal transcendentals, personal love, personal understanding, transcendental freedom and intimacy and that the contribution to the development of a proper culture is an ethical requirement embedded in the nature of the personal level.

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<sup>23</sup> “A custom is stable trans-theoretical way of acting. It is a commonplace to speak of customs’ tyranny. Customs are often called second nature, because they give capacities to work. We can speak of good and bad customs”. “La costumbre es un modo estable de actuar trans-teórico. Es un tópico la tiranía de las costumbres. A las costumbres se les suele llamar una segunda naturaleza, porque capacitan para obrar. Puede hablarse de buenas y de malas costumbres”. (Polo 2013, 29)

<sup>24</sup> “Man is the one who perfects perfecting, because as he adds perfection, he perfects himself”. “El hombre es el perfeccionador perfectible, pues en cuanto el hombre añade perfección, se perfecciona a sí mismo”. (Polo 2014, 144).

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