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**O osobie bez osoby.
Projekt filozofii impersonalnej
Roberta Esposito**

Rozprawa na stopień doktora nauk humanistycznych

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Toruń 2022

Summary

On a person without a person.

The impersonal philosophy project by Robert Esposito

The dissertation is devoted to the impersonal philosophy, a theoretical endeavour by Robert Esposito, a contemporary Italian philosopher. The project recreated and analysed in this paper is composed of two parts. The first part, the critical one, focuses on the deconstruction of the concept of a "person." The second is the *pars construens* of this project, which aims to theorise a new philosophy that bases its reflection on human identity without reference to the concept of a "person." In addition to a critical recreation of the impersonal philosophy, the paper also introduces a profile of this little-known scholar in Poland and discusses the main tenets of his philosophy. It also addresses the solidity of his postulate to eliminate a person from any discourse (mainly ethical and legal) and indicates potential ethico-legal implications as a consequence of pursuing the assumptions of the impersonal philosophy.

The critical approach of Esposito to the concept of a "person" stems from the negative effects it produces when applicable to human beings. This is related to the fact that it is not simply a term referring to any concept, but a dispositive. It is a key term for both the project of personal philosophy itself and this analysis. It derives from the work of Michel Foucault and denotes a diverse set of elements interacting in a complex manner at the confluence of power and knowledge. A dispositive interpreted this way produces performative implications in extra-linguistic reality.

According to Esposito, it is a "person" that is this kind of concept-dispositive. The criticism analysed here recognizes this adopted research perspective, as well as the fact that the dispositive of a person, since its

inception, has adopted different historical forms throughout history, depending on the field of human experience in which it has marked its presence. These are *persona romana* ("a person" in Roman law), *persona crsiana* ("a person" in Christian theology) and *persona moderna* ("a person" in modern philosophy). Each of these historical forms is analysed separately in this dissertation, given that they are differentiated by their shade of meaning, and the outcomes they produce – albeit characterised by the same mechanism of interaction – concern different spheres of human activity.

The essence of the mechanism common to all these forms lies, according to the Italian philosopher, in the very etymology of the Latin term for a person (from Latin this term spread across other languages, mainly neo-Romance languages). This is because *persona* originally meant a mask worn by ancient theatre actors (or a role played), and only later came to mean a person as an individual. According to Esposito, the etymology of the term was not merely a source phase in the semantic development of the concept, but it is present in every historical form it assumes.

This etymological provenance, which constitutes the potential of the term as a dispositive, is the non-identity of an individual (man as a physical and biological being) with its mask (cultural and social perception of an individual, a status, and a prestige). This non-identity, to which the dispositive of a person contributes, is never neutral, but manifests itself in various kinds of dualisms within an individual (usually leading to a certain hierarchy between the two components of human nature) or social divisions, resulting in exclusion ("a person" is a certain paradigm of thought imposing the protection of only the life considered as personal)

Persona romana is an invention of Roman jurists. Gaius (2nd c. AD) in his *Institutes of Justinian* divided law into those concerning persons (*personae*), things (*res*) and actions (*actiones*). This law, constituting *summa divisio* ("supreme division"), equated persons with free-born men having adequate wealth and implied legal capacity. Formally, in addition to *personae sui iuris*, there were also *personae alieni iuris* dependent on them, with certain limited rights and privileges, but *de facto* they were subject to legal and social exclusion, the emblematic figure of which is the slave – equated with *res* as part of a livestock. The Roman *persona* is thus a status (not coinciding with an individual even throughout its existence) which,

once it embraces a certain group of people, necessarily disqualifies all others from it.

Persona cristiana, in turn, is the result of debates within theology concerning Trinitarian and Christological issues. It was a technical term that allowed for the simultaneous articulation of the ontological unity of God and the trichotomy in *Oeconomicus*, the management of the world. According to Esposito, the opposite is the case with Jesus Christ – here, in turn, 'a person' serves to maintain its dual nature. According to his argument – the theology of a person is reflected in Christian anthropology. Man, created in God's image and likeness, is composed of a soul and a body, and according to Esposito, in both the Augustinian and Thomistic schools of Christianity, there is a strong tendency to identify a personal being with a soul. This implies the imperative for a soul (reason) to rule over a body and its drives ("objectifies" it), which the dispositive of a person within Christianity deprecates.

Persona moderna, a person in modern philosophy, is, in turn, referred by Esposito mainly to the dichotomic division that occurs in the consciousness of a subject. Here, too, the requirement, imposed by philosophers on an individual to rule one part over another, is noticeable. John Locke identifies a personal identity with memory and the principle of responsibility for one's own actions (the body does not play a key role here), and self-ownership becomes a condition for owning anything else. *Homo noumenon* – according to Esposito, the most "personal" element in Kantian philosophy – reigns over *homo phaenomenon*. The mutual dialectics of personalization and reification is also present in the object-personal law he describes. Possession as a condition of personal identity is also recurred, according to Esposito, by Georg W.F. Hegel. Apart from the aforementioned philosophers, the term "person" is also used by Thomas Hobbes, making it a key term for his theory of the social contract.

In modern times – which has also been addressed in the paper – the problems described by Esposito are noticeable in bioethical disputes. The legitimacy of the protection of life, which has been recognised as "personal", is not questioned even by philosophers outside the circle of personalists, such as liberal neo-utilitarians. Peter Singer and Hugo T. Engelhardt, explicitly referring to the Roman law, not only deny the status of a person to those whose existence does not show the characteristics of a personal life

(seriously ill, old people, infants), but also entrust the decision to terminate their existence to individuals recognised as persons.

The paper proceeds by recreating the impersonal philosophy that is supposed to correspond to Robert Esposito's vision of community. Once again, its dynamic are explained by etymology: *communitas* is, on the one hand, the compulsion to provide *munus*, a gift to a community (communisation), and, on the other hand, to resist *immunitas* (immunization), necessary, although also endangering a community, the tendency of an individual to refrain from services to a community. The impersonal philosophy is intended to foster communalisation and protect a community from excessive immunization, an example of which, according to Esposito, is Nazism, in which this tendency is brought to an extreme. The dissertation emphasises the fact that impersonality is not an endeavour to completely eliminate the concept from any discourse (although this issue remains ambiguous for a philosopher), but only to deactivate its negative effects as a dispositive and leave it in the semantic horizon.

The analysis of the impersonal philosophy begins with a discussion on the theoretical framework provided by the anti-personalist thought by Simone Weil and the remarks on the third grammatical person made by the linguist Émile Benveniste, with which Esposito links impersonality. The analysis then focuses on the three semantic areas identified by the Italian in which impersonality as an idea has a potential to come to fruition. These are: universal justice (opposed to the law representing the interests of selected social groups), literary creation and life.

According to Esposito, justice – associated with the impersonal order – is to be ensured by the variously articulated emblematic figure of the third person, who is to break up the I-Thou dichotomy that illustrates the dysfunctional social order and political relations described by binary categories of foe and friend. The concepts of the following French philosophers used by Esposito shall be presented in the recreation of this domain: Alexandre Kojève, Vladimir Jankélévitch and Emmanuel Lévinas.

Literary creation, on the other hand, is an area of research in which Esposito uses the *neutra* figure of the writer Maurice Blanchot, which becomes a minor contribution to the reflection on impersonality in literature, manifested, *inter alia*, in the specific creation of protagonists and the change in the function of the narrator.

The third semantic area is devoted to the idea of life in its broadest sense. Esposito, referring it to his own theoretical project, uses Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's concepts in the analysis recreated here. Discussed are, *inter alia*, the theory of discursive formations, the écriture theory, the figure of the "exterior" and the concept of the "event." The analysis of this semantic field highlights the fact that biological life, according to Esposito, hitherto neglected by philosophy, is indeterminate and amorphous (it does not assume the form of a "person"), it prescind from any exclusionary metaphysics, it is fully immanent (it abolishes dichotomous divisions led by psychophysical dualism), and it also abolishes interspecies barriers, thus favouring the idea of anti-anthropocentrism.

The final part of the dissertation focuses not so much on a recreation of the impersonal philosophy as on a preliminary consideration of the Esposito's postulate to eliminate the concept of a "person" from all discourse, especially ethical and legal one. Firstly, legal issues concerning the use of the concept of a person in normative acts are discussed here. The issue of the functioning of this concept in this field in a purely technical capacity has also been addressed, and the need, justified by the functionality of the protection of human rights, to abandon concepts that are too abstract in the meaning in legal discourse, has been highlighted.

The next part of the chapter emphasises the importance of the concept of a "person" in social sciences (based on the example of the phenomenon of non-persons studied by the sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago), where a "person" – variously culturally articulated – is a term that highlights the fact that a human being is not only a biological being, but also a social and a moral one.

In turn, the concepts of "ontological security" (coined by Anthony Giddens) and "the establishment of the world" (coined by Mircea Eliade), evoked by Wojciech Sawala's research are to prove the need, motivated by a psychophysical well-being of an individual (by Mircea Eliade) are to prove the need, motivated by an individual and a society, that the concept of a "person" should be permanently present in the public discourse, in which it plays an important role in the common experience.

The final part of the chapter deals with criticism of the main assumptions of the project of the impersonal philosophy by the personalist Vittorio Possenti. She draws attention to the fact that Roberto Esposito

misunderstands the ontological aspects of a "person", lapses into contradictions of a logical and linguistic nature, and causes confusion by applying the conceptual apparatus characteristic of social philosophy to the field of ontology. The author of this dissertation partly adopts the results of this criticism.

In the conclusions reached by the author of this paper, who stresses the need for further research due to the diversity and complexity of the subject matter, the benefit of the fact that studying a human being in two ways – from the point of view of its biological humanity and its cultural and social functioning as a person – does not so much describe its inner hiatus, but rather is a way to gain a broader research horizon constantly supplemented with new contexts. Dismissing this dual perspective and focusing only on one would risk an unjustified reductionism. The concept of a "person", even if implying some of the difficulties described by Esposito, ultimately appears to be a term the hypothetical elimination of which, in all likelihood, would not lead to the finding of a less problematic concept.

Keywords

dispositive, impersonality, Italian philosophy, criticism of the person, mask, person, personalism, Roberto Esposito

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