

Analyzing Krapiec's Theory of the Cognitive "I"

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Abstract

Understanding the concept of man has led to explosive debates among scholars of various disciplines for centuries. The discussion becomes particularly acute when it comes to such problems as "what is man?", "what constitutes his nature?", and "where lies his essential feature?" Over the last decade, new studies in philosophical anthropology on the platform of metaphysics began to gain waves among some scholars. One strong pillar to this conviction is Mieczysław Albert Krapiec. The paper aims to discuss and analyze Krapiec's doctrine of the cognitive "I" within the context of his philosophical anthropology. The analysis of Krapiec's doctrine is to show the uniqueness of his anthropological study of man using metaphysical principles as the background of studies and the relevance of this new study in the contemporary discussion.

Keywords

Mieczysław Albert Krapiec, Cognitive "I", Anthropology, Metaphysics

1. Introduction

An attempt to understand man has for centuries raised serious debates among philosophers and scholars of other disciplines more than other inquiries. At first sight, the question of man appears simple perhaps, because each discipline links up quite a definite notion with the word "man" and from its stand, defines and distinguishes him from other living beings based on the notion. An attempt to carry out this investigation also runs into several difficulties of philosophical significances. Over the last decade, new studies in philosophical anthropology set in the background of metaphysics began to gain waves among some scholars of philosophy. One strong pillar to this conviction is Mieczysław Albert Krapiec.¹ Krapiec was a philosopher and theologian who believes that science developed in the Aristotelian tradition and understood from its classical periscope should be the

¹The original pronunciation of Mieczysław Albert Krapiec in Polish is m'etŝi'swaf albert krompyetz.

basis of every rational inquiry. He was a co-founder of the Lublin Philosophical School and the rector of the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland from 1970-1983 (Chudy, 2005: pp. 43-48). He was also one of the authors, who based on the intuitions of Thomas Aquinas and formulated the original contemporary conception of realistic philosophy. For Krapiec and Maryniarczyk (2016), metaphysics is the first among all philosophical study upon which other disciplines of philosophy are dependent, including philosophical anthropology (pp. 422-426). Metaphysics here is understood as “the general theory of being, where being is understood primarily as the concrete existing thing” (Chudy, 2005: p. 76). Many academic minds see the originality of Krapiec’s thought, especially in the areas of philosophical anthropology and metaphysics.

Krapiec’s anthropology, where he developed his theory of the cognitive “I” considers and analyzes man rationally from within and outside of him. Krapiec (1983) believes that man does not have a direct intuition of his nature. This knowledge is only possible through his activities and creativity. Through this indirect way, man can know himself, who he is, what the meaning of his life is, what his essential functions and the conditions for their attainment are, and what his destiny is (p. 2). The general consciousness of educated people regarding man is that despite the various attempts made by different disciplines to explain man, man has remained a mystery. Krapiec (2018) instead sees man as *animal rationale, zoon logikon*—a rational animal that transcends the whole nature and the animal world. For him, man is “a concretely living being of a corporeal and spiritual nature” (p. 597). Man is, therefore, a unity of material and immaterial elements, and as such, is the subject matter of philosophical anthropology. This kind of study for Krapiec is nothing but a metaphysics of man that aims “to present the structure of human being, and to show and explain the foundations of man’s transcendence” (Chudy, 2005, p. 558). The term *man* in Krapiec’s philosophical anthropology used in this paper is equivalent to the Polish *człowiek* that includes all human beings—i.e., both men and women (Krapiec, 2018: pp. 597-664). This paper, therefore, aims to discuss and analyze Krapiec’s theory of the cognitive “I” which, according to him, belongs to the internal fact that constitutes the essential property of man. The analysis of Krapiec’s doctrine is to show the uniqueness of his anthropological study of man using metaphysical principles as the background of studies and the relevance of this new study in the contemporary discussion.

2. The Human Identity

Human identity from the philosophical perspective is more concerned with such questions like what is man; what constitutes his essential nature and his fundamental properties? Identity here refers to the continuing self or the “I” in man that permeates all the changes in human life and remains constant despite all the changes. In the same vein, Norman Holland (1978) describes human identity as “the whole pattern of sameness within change, which is a human life” (p. 452). The discussion about man’s essential feature, that is, his identity has taken dif-

ferent dimensions, with varied opinions since the origin of Western philosophy. This discussion which has been a subject of much historical debate, has continued into the contemporary time. For Aristotle, the intellect or *nous* is the necessary property of the part of a human soul with which it thinks intelligible forms (*Metaphysics* 1030a11). It is the power of the human soul not only to think an intelligible object (noēton) by means of a concept (noēma) but also to combine concepts to think something about a subject (*De Anima* 4-5).² Aristotle suggests that the intellect consists of two parts: Active and Passive intellect (*De Anima* 429a15-18). The thinking part of the soul is capable of receiving a form and be potentially such as that form (being a likeness of it) and not be potentially the form itself. He further distinguishes in *De Anima* III 6 (430a29) simple thought with complex thought, that is, thought in which concepts already formed are combined.

Other scholars like Boethius (1968) also located the identity of man in his rationality. Boethius developed this exposition in the treatise *Liber Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* in his definition of person. According to his definition, which opens the third chapter, “A person is an individual substance of a rational nature” (PL 64, col. 1343). Boethius concludes, therefore, that man is a *persona* or *prosopon* because he is a rational individual. For Aquinas, the specific difference is the rational nature by which the human individual is a person (ST Ia. 29). Aquinas goes further to make a significant distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* within the context of the rational nature. *Ratio* is the method of knowing which is common to every human being (Aquinas, *De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, Rep). For Aquinas, “it pertains to human nature to use reason in order to know the truth.” This mode of knowing is natural to man and thus, defines him, not as an entirely spiritual being but a rational animal. John Locke (1689/1997) describes personal identity or self as a psychological continuity. Locke deals with the issue of identity and personhood in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. For him, personal identity or the self is to be founded on consciousness, i.e., memory. The starting point of personal identity entails identity of consciousness rather than of substance (pp. 211-213/§9-10). Self-consciousness and thinking lie at the heart of personhood. Locke’s theory, however, was criticized by scholars like Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid. Joseph Butler (1975) accused Locke of failing to recognize that the relation of consciousness presupposes identity, therefore, cannot constitute it. Reid (1785), on the other hand, believes that personal identity should be determined by something indivisible and not by operation. He pointed out that Locke’s major problem was confusing evidence of something with the thing itself. Immanuel Kant (2002) sees the human person as a rational agent who can legislate moral laws and autonomously follow such laws. For this reason, the human person should be treated as an end and with respect because of its dignity.

²The term, noēma, generically means a thought, but specifically means a concept or a combination of concepts. A concept is a thought that is true without falsity, and a combination of concepts is a thought that is true or false (See *De Interpretatione* 16a10, *De Interpretatione* 16a15 and *De Anima* 430a29).

For Krapiec (1983), the concept of man and his essential feature can only be understood within the context of an incomprehensible phenomenon called “the fact of man” (p. 33). These facts are those features that characterize or differentiate man from the whole ensemble of nature.

A significant factor of this fact of man is his rational knowing, which constitutes his primary identity. The rational knowing in Krapiec’s anthropology also corresponds to the intellect Aristotle (1984) refers to in his *Metaphysics* (413a23) of which all aspects of human life are connected. Krapiec believes that these aspects of human life find their relevance in man’s ability to transform them into the values of truth, goodness and beauty. The human fact constitutes both the external and internal facts about man. The external facts are those features that identify man as *Homo Faber* (tool producer) that uses language and reflects on the reality of his death. The internal facts are the ontic³ and essential properties of man within which the concept of the cognitive “I” is defined.

3. The Cognitive “I”

Krapiec’s ontical structure of man describes the real physical structure of man from the realistic philosophical position whose point of departure in its analysis of the nature of man is the immediate experience of the human subject. This experience affords the opportunity of distinguishing between that which constitutes my very self; in other words, that which is the “I” and that which is “mine”. This fact also includes the content of the “mine” which is divided into two and its original relationship to the “I” as subject to making explicit the physics of the structure of man. In the broad sense of the word “mine”, it signifies the results of our work, which Aristotle calls the human “art” (*techno*), the transcending of the immanent activity within “me” to external object, that is, external objects that result from our productive activity, work, or other appropriations. This is what Krapiec (1983) calls “possessions” (p. 90). “Mine” in this sense includes, therefore, all objects of external use like house, clothes, field, and money. Thus, in using the term “mine”, we have in mind a type of relation between these “possessions” and the “me” which could as well be called the “I”. The “I” recognized in this sense is associated with the phenomenological “I” which is the dispositional centre, the single psychic centre within man that distinguishes him and does not allow him to be lost in the world. “Mine” understood externally in this way belongs to “me” but does not bear witness to the ontical structure of my “I”.

The second type of “mine” is connected with the act of the subjectivization⁴ of the “I” broadly understood. “Mine” in this sense is inseparable from the “I” so

³The word “ontic” in philosophy comes from the Greek ὄν, genitive ὄντος; meaning “of that which is” physical, real, or factual existence.

⁴The act of subjectivization means the process where the subject is at the same time the performer of a function like in the case of “I am breathing”. Here, breathing is distinguished from “I”, but at the same time, it is “I” who is breathing. So “I” am both the subject and performer of this function of breathing. The breathing is “mine”, and it is inseparable from “me” or “I” since according to Krapiec, the cessation of “my” functions annihilates “me” through death.

long as “I” is both the subject and performer of the action. Like in the case of “I am dancing”, the “I” is both the subject and performer of the physiological function of dancing. Unlike the first sense of the “mine” where the “I” is opposed to “mine”, and ordinarily is ontically independent, “the ‘I’ which appears as the subject and performer of physiological functions, no longer appears as an externally defined object, but as a conceptually indefinite physical-bodily ‘center’, and as a kind of focal point with which all functions are connected: either somehow radiated by this center, or radiated and performed at the same time” (Krapiec, 1983: p. 91). It follows, therefore, that the physiological functions (like eating, dancing, going for a walk) and their organ form the “mine” which are inseparable from the “I”. Although the “I” is completely differentiated from the “mine” in this sense, they are inseparable, so that one cannot exist without the other. Krapiec (1983) concludes that this “I” is in some sense material since it is the subject of physiological functions which are “my” actions (“mine”) that are connected with the structure and function of some material organ and its functions (p. 91). This materiality is in the area of its organization and not necessarily through identity.

Krapiec perceives the “I” as something purely beyond material because its functions known as “mine” are not functions or better put are not exclusive functions of bodily organs. These functions are the cognitive and appetitive functions. He further divides the cognitive function into two: sensory cognition and mental cognition. The sensory cognition refers to those that are more closely connected with the activity of a material organ because of their content character of cognition. The sensory cognition like the sight of colour, the sensation of an impression of a fragrance, the hearing of sound is closely connected with a particular sensory organ like the eye, ear, and taste buds. According to Krapiec (1983) “impressions, of this kind, recognized as ‘mine’, are in a different degree directed toward some ‘centre’, more closely cognitively indefinite: toward that ‘I’, which is in equal measure the subject and performer of these very cognitive impressions, as purely physiological functions” (pp. 92-93). The mental cognition manifests itself in the functions of thought, judgments, intellectual ecstasy, contemplation, consideration of the law, moments of creativity and all the moments of human spiritual life. They are all included in the “mine” that functions through the same “I” which feels pain. In other words, all human acts performed through the various bodily organs, including the purely spiritual acts and intellectual cognition are directed towards the same “centre”—the same subject of which we are conscious as the “I”. It follows, therefore, that this “I” is also the same subject and performer of the human vegetative, animal, and intellectual functions. The “Self” or “I” which is the “centre” and performer of “my” functions in this way could be seen as both material and immaterial. Note that Krapiec rejects the Cartesian position of the meaning of cognition as consciousness and its clear and distinct idea. He instead sees cognition as the understanding of a concrete thing under the aspect of a grasped meaning. By grasped meaning, he refers to a system of signs in cognition which include speech-gestures-writings, con-

cepts, fostered by the mind of the meanings of our speech or writing, and the designated things, material objects. All these elements form a single cognitive process (*I-man*, pp. 119-120).

Krapiec did not identify the “I” with the soul as seen in Descartes’s *Meditation*, except perhaps in a presupposition defined by a philosophical system. The reason is that we cannot know the soul as in the case of the “I”, but its existence can only be inferred from the reflexive analysis of our actions. The soul instead gives the basis for the existence of the *ratio* of being as a result of which “I” live and act (Maryniarczyk, 2012: p. 25). The soul is an essential, fundamental, and most important part of the “I” (Krapiec, 1983: p. 99). The human soul is the source of “my” actions that exists independently in itself as in a subject. Krapiec claims that Plato was quite right to emphasize on the spiritual side of man and to identify the transcendence of the “I” to “my” acts but was wrong to have reduced man to a soul imprisoned in a body. Aristotle, however, attempted to complete Plato’s theory in his holistic *hylomorphic* concept of human existence. The soul, which is the first act of the physical, organic body, potentially possessing life is the form that organizes the material body. However, he (Aristotle) was wrong by reducing the function of the soul only to this forming and organizing of matter to be the body. Therefore, neither Plato’s nor Aristotle’s concept explain the internal experience of the “I” that is immanent and transcends “my” acts. It is only in Aquinas (1952), whose concept synthesizes the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian conceptions that the soul is primarily a subsistent substance that organizes and affirms the body (*Summa Theologica*, 75, 1-2).⁵ Unlike the normal ontical circumstances where the act of existence belongs to the whole being composed of matter and form, the human soul which possesses intellectual cognition and desire, along with its ontical structures and manner of activity (full reflection, immanence and cognitive transcendence) is bound to the act of existence which actualizes it. Thus the act of existence actualizes the soul in the ontical order. In turn, the subsistent soul organizes for itself the body it requires for its actions to attain its full development (Krapiec, 1983: p. 104). For the body to exist means to be organized by the soul.

The body is the first “mine” in which the soul first expresses itself and through which the soul which organizes the body comes into contact with the external world. It is a co-element of man, unlike the model of Plato that sees the body as the prison yard for the soul. We can therefore say that “the act of existence does not belong to man as already composed of matter and form and as a result of this composition, but existence is the ‘act’ of the rational soul and through ‘actualization’—the realization and calling-into-being of the soul—as the act of the soul and through the soul belongs to the whole man, and thus also to his body” (Krapiec, 1983: p. 102). Consequently, man as a being possesses one existence which it receives not as an already constituted being like in the case of other material substance but an act of existence he receives through the soul as an imma-

⁵By subsistence substance Aquinas sees the soul as possessing its own act of existence, and as the form of the body it alone organizes, it imparts this existence to the body.

terial form organizing and animating the body. In this way, the subsistent soul⁶ imparts its existence to the body. This also explains the “acts of man” rising from one centre as from a single subject. Krapiec (1983) concludes that the subsistent spiritual form (soul) is the form of matter, as well as organizing the vegetative and sensory life. Again, the soul possesses its own existence, which is experienced in the subjective “I”.⁷ Man, therefore, in his most profound “I” is a subsistent being, that is, a substance that subsists because it is a spirit (p. 107).

4. The Analysis of Krapiec’s Theory of the Cognitive “I”

Krapiec’s theory that identifies the actual starting point of the study of man in the fact of the existence of one’s own “I” is unique in its scope and methodology, and contemporary in approach. It must be observed, however, that the above description of the “I” as the manifestation of the identity of man immanent in sensory and in acts of intellectual cognition was originally mentioned in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas (1952), “it is the same identical man who perceives both that he understands intellectually and feels sensorially, but the sensory feeling does not occur without a body” (*Summa Theologica*, I, 76, 1). Here, Aquinas makes recourse to the inner experience through which we perceive the identity of man—“the ego” which occurs with the help of a bodily organ and is immanent both in acts of sensory and intellectual cognition. Krapiec, however, recognizes this “ego” (a theory popularized by Karl Jasper) made known by the data of immediate experience as the subject, performer, and unique “centre” of “my” functions which include vegetative, animal and the spiritual-cognition (intellectual cognition). Moreover, like Aquinas, Krapiec argues that the human “ego” which is the “Self” or the “I” is what forms the identity of man as well as being the subject actuating and performing the functions of man. He, however, disagrees with Jaspers (1956) and Hume who tend to identify the subjective “I” with the soul (Jasper, *Philosophy*, pp. 43ff). Nonetheless, Krapiec did not fail to acknowledge the essential aspects of their theories, which give credence to the consciousness of the cognitive self-affirmation of one’s own ego.⁸ The above analysis goes to show why the paper claims that Krapiec was one of the authors, who based on the intuitions of Thomas Aquinas

⁶The subsistent nature of the soul derives from the strength of the act of existence belonging to itself.

⁷The borderline that underlies the immortality of the human soul is its subsistence; the fact that existence belongs immediately to the soul, which at the same time is the form of the body. This explains why the destruction of the body does not entail the destruction of the subsisting substance that is the human soul-ego.

⁸The confirmation of the subsistence of the “ego” was popularized by the writings of Karl Jaspers who argues that man alone in the whole of nature can say: “I am”, that is, man alone is conscious of his existence—an ego. And the existence and authenticity of the subsistence of the “ego” are affirmed in the judgment: “I am”. Jasper argues that when I affirm that “I am”, then that judgmental affirmation is an act of the intellect, an act not representing “contents”, i.e., not any set or some definite “bundle” of attributes, in contrast to the content of each cognitive act that refers to the cognition of that which is recognized as “mine”, but it is the primary, “pure” affirmation of one’s autonomous existence, nonobjectivized in other “things-objects”. For Hume, the attributes of our “I” cannot be cognitively grasped. Hume reduces the cognition of real objects, which fundamentally is most immediately given, to mere sensory impressions.

and formulated the original contemporary conception of realistic philosophy.

Again, Krapiec believes that the real nature of man is to be explored within the personal life of man, the “I” that is conscious of its existence and which differentiates itself from the whole world. This “I” is seen as a person and as Aleksander Brückner (as cited in [Maryniarczyk, 2012: pp. 13-14](#)) pointed out, the word “person” which in Polish means “osoba” signifies a being as it were “standing apart” (osobno) over against everything. Aquinas reflects a similar experience in his *Summa Theologica* I, q. 76, a. 1, resp, however, its elaboration and contemporary application find its clarity in Krapiec’s approach. The anthropological approach adopted by Krapiec in this theory is a growing appreciation and gateway in the contemporary scholarship especially as its explanation of man follows a metaphysical analysis that makes a provision for an understanding of the ontological content of man. This unique style is rarely found in most popular philosophical anthropology works. Furthermore, despite the many-sided variability, Krapiec’s theory of the cognitive “I” in identifying the real identity of man follows the pattern of Aristotle’s description of substance. The Aristotelian substance shows the possibility of self-existing being, which already subsists and no longer is an attribute of something. It is a being whose existence is an original act constituting something as a real being and the bearer of many attributes ([Aristotle, 1984, *Metaphysics*, 1028b36-1029a28ff](#)). From Aristotle’s view, [Krapiec \(1983\)](#) argues that the subsistent subject which is the “I” as the centre from which all human functions flow and toward which they are directed is only recognized and continuously confirmed by the demonstrations of “my” functions relating to Aristotle’s categories except for substance (p. 94). Thus, Krapiec’s ontical structure of man and the description of the relation of the multiplicity of “my” elements-acts to the identity of the “I” is concrete and unique.

Besides the holistic nature of his anthropology, Krapiec’s theory of the cognitive “I” portrays the whole phenomenon of corporeality and spirituality in man in an entirely new light. Its significance lies mainly in the explanation that the soul’s first activity is the formation and organization of the body. It means that “the body is the first ‘mine’, a ‘mine’ that belongs to ‘I’ and which cannot be treated as a tool” ([Maryniarczyk, 2012: p. 35](#)). In other words, the body is an expression of the human soul, and philosophically, the soul cannot be a human being unless it is united to the body that it organized from matter. This anthropological description of the body-soul relation in man is uniquely a novelty in contemporary philosophy. There is no doubt that reflections on the ontological role of the “I” could be found in the works of [Plotinus \(1984\)](#), [Augustine \(Clark, 1994\)](#), and [Wojtyła \(1974\)](#), however, Krapiec’s claim that the “I” in the general theory of man as the subject of one’s actions and in which the “I” is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, makes his theory typically classical in content and modern in its formulation. As such, this theory has created a renewed spirit in the study of classical philosophy by its engaging content and formulation, as well as providing remedies for the many modern thoughts that poses themselves as genuine philosophies. [Tomasz Duma \(2014\)](#) is therefore right in

his claim that the achievements of scholars like Krapiec have sustained and prevented the death of Classical tradition in the present-day scholarship.

5. Conclusion

Krapiec's theory of the cognitive "I" is a new stride in the scientific study of man. The paper has discussed and analyzed his anthropology, which is nothing but a metaphysics of man. This new method of study investigates man within the context of an incomprehensible phenomenon called "the fact of man". The fact enables us to differentiate and identify the "I" which is the manifestation of the identity of man immanent in sensory and in acts of intellectual cognition. The cognitive "I" is also what forms the identity of man as well as being the subject actuating and performing the functions of man. It is the dispositional centre that distinguishes man and the centre from which all human functions flow and toward which they are directed. In Krapiec's final analysis, the "I" is a person. This paper also acknowledges that Krapiec's "I-Man" approach to the study of man and the starting point of philosophical anthropology not only created a renewed spirit among contemporary scholars but also opened up new channels of inquiry. As observed earlier, the question of man's identity has created divergent opinions, which at the same time has run into several difficulties of philosophical significances. The paper, therefore, cannot claim that Krapiec's theory of the cognitive "I" is the final answer to the problem of man but only a contribution to the ongoing debate and an acknowledgement of the scholarly intellectual brilliance of Krapiec. It is the author's conviction that the works of such renowned scholars fully deserved to be studied and passed on to the next generation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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