

## SUMMARY

### ONTOLOGICAL BASIS OF POSSESSION

We tend to think about our experience of possession as well-defined; however, a closer examination reveals its puzzling features. First of all, the combination of power over and intimate connection with things is troublesome. It generates our desire to possess, but also gives rise to moralists' and prophets' anxiety and objections. Another baffling issue is the polisemy of the term 'possess', which refers to a large number of phenomena. In the ordinary language, it is possible to speak of possessing things, experiences, other people or even God. The both indicated facts - the puzzling character of possession as well as the polisemy of the term 'possess' - are practically harmless; however, they are dangerous philosophically, as the philosophers make use of the concept of possession to describe the structure of the world and man's constitution.

The goal of the book is to analyze the ontological basis of possession; it looks therefore for the roots of this phenomenon in the fundamental structures of the world and of man. The aim is to develop a general theory that would identify all the essential and indispensable features of all the kinds of possession.

Chapter 1 deals with the exemplary experience - that of possessing a thing. In this experience it is the sense of power that presents itself most clearly, together with the attachment to the thing as well as the reference of possession to other people. The following chapters scrutinize some theories of possession that concentrate on the consecutive elements of the experience of possessing a thing: power, attachment and the communal aspect.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the ontic theories of possession, ones that point towards the fundamentals of objective *power*. On the one hand, the ontic structure of the possessor is the condition of the very possibility of possessing. The possessor must have an internal structure (must be independent ontically), but he must also be open to the relation with the outer world. On the other hand, one can exercise power only over things that are somehow formed or created by the possessor. Generally speaking, the ontic theories assume that possession is equivalent to embracing something (an accident or a part) into one's inner self or, alternatively, to taking other things under one's control. Only the Absolute exercises an absolute ontological power. Limited entities are capable of possessing in a fragile and unsafe way. They not only fail to possess an absolute power over other entities; they also possess their own accidents in an imperfect way.

The ontic theories of possession fail to address the essential features of the experience of possessing. First, they do not provide us with any criteria for signaling out human possession; second, and more importantly, they do not explain the sources of the intimate and strict relation between the possessor and the thing. Within the ontic perspective such a relation would violate the ontological border that separates the possessor and the thing.

It seems that the aforementioned deficiencies are avoided in the subjective theories of possession, which assume that awareness not only accompanies possession, but also contributes to the developments of its essence.

In Chapters 3 and 4 the subjective theories of possession are analyzed. Their claim is that the strict relation between the possessor and the thing is an essential feature of possession, which is expressed with the word 'mine'.

The first group of the subjective theories places the source of 'mineness' in the active assimilation of the surrounding world. It is done through actual activities or through the constitution of the sense of the world around us.

Human action is very peculiar, as it is effectuated through the will, which in turn has a reflexive structure - it is 'my' will. In other words, it is directed not only towards the world, but also influences the possessor himself. A man who works and creates, transfers the 'mineness' onto the created things, by which he takes them into possession. This explains, in part, the unique character of human possession.

One can submit also that what is fundamentally 'mine', are not actions but experiences of the subject and its reference to its own existence. Husserl claims that possession is an intentional relation; as such, it is not an actual relation between entities. By possessing, we relate to the sense of the things rather than to the things themselves. In the intentional relation objects belong to the 'intentional contents' of the subject - in this way they become 'mine'. Intentional relations alter the sense of things in many ways. This explains the scope of the phenomena referred to with the term 'possess'. The subjective theories assume, furthermore, that any unitary possessing of a thing is not a separate phenomenon, as it requires a simultaneous subjects' possession of the world and of itself. Simplifying somewhat, one may say that a man possesses a thing if, and only if, he lives in 'his' world and he is not an alien to himself.

The second group of subjective theories claims that the source of 'mineness' is the fact that man is rooted in the world. Fundamentally, we are rooted through embodiment; 'my body' incorporates me into the world and makes possible both action and experience.

The assumption that every possession contains the reference to one's own body stands behind various theories of possession. Some of them submit that the bodily connection with things suffices as the basis of possession; other claim that possession requires an active attitude towards one's own embodiment, an attitude emerging out of the attempt to acquire the world and instrumentalize one's relations with other people. A radical form of possession would be an absolute objectification of the world and of the relations towards others that would lead to 'disrooting' with the world. Not all of the described theories are critical towards possession. Some accept that possession plays a positive role, restoring the original closeness between man on the one hand, and the world and other people on the other.

In Chapter 5 'social' theories of possession are considered. They assume that the fundamental aspect of possession stems from the relations that obtain *between* people. Functional theories describe possession in terms of the legal and economic relations. It is

characteristic of them that they 'functionalize' possession: the possessor is presented exclusively as performing a function (e.g., of a capital holder). In such a setting, the possessed things lose their individual features and become 'commodities'. The functional theories put emphasis on the impersonal character of the relation of possessing. Alternatively, they eliminate possession, rejecting its objective and subjective features.

The dialogical theory of possession, in turn, takes the possession of other man to be the fundamental experience of possession. Such expressions as 'my wife' or 'my God' seem to violate the rules of ordinary possession. However, the phenomena they refer to can be described in terms of a gift. This mode of speaking enables one to abandon the logic of 'mine - yours', without dismissing the concept of possession. One should ask, however, whether the dialogical possession is frequent enough to serve as a basis for developing a theory of possession? There are several arguments that testify to the universal character of the dialogical aspect of possession. In ethics it is claimed that one can speak of ethically good possession, governed by the rules of dialogical possession; our every-day experience of possession is only its degenerated form. It is the sad rule that each dialogical possession tends to change into subjective possession, which explains well the apparent absence of the dialogical possession in our typical experiences.

Chapter 6 aims at developing a theory of possession that would avoid the deficiencies of the aforementioned conceptions. The desired theory cannot be *one-sided*; it should identify as essential all the dimensions of possession: the objective, the subjective and the social. It should also assume that possession is a dynamical process, not a static state of affairs. It is claimed that those goals are realized in the dialectical theory of possession. It is centered around a definition of possession as a movement in a field of forces determined by three focal points: objective, subjective and social. Possession is a process changing in time, as it is influenced by changing forces. Depending on which of the forces outweighs the others, one obtains three different models of possession. Moreover, each of the focal points is subject to dialectical tensions itself. The previous chapters have aptly identified those tensions: in the ontic theories - between the inner and the outer; in the subjective - between acquiring the world and being rooted in the world; in the social - between the functional and the dialogical.

The dialectical theory does not offer any absolute solutions to the puzzles of possession. The proposed definition is consistent with three different models of possession that can be evaluated against ontological criteria and tested in every-day experience.

The developed theory has many applications. First, it arranges the traditional ontological theories of possession and exhibits their connection with every-day experiences. Second, it enables one to get a better grasp of the fundamental disagreements concerning possession, such as the problem of the justification of ownership, moral evaluation of possession, the relationship between possession, freedom and responsibility, and even such specific issues as abortion, euthanasia or organ transplantation.

An important result of the book is the confirmation of the conjecture that our fascination with possession is not an eccentricity, but it is rooted in the fundamental structures of the world and in our own constitution.