

BEING, GIFT, SELF-GIFT:
A REPLY TO WALDSTEIN ON RELATIONALITY
AND JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY
(PART ONE)

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“My participation in love, which takes form as responsive generosity, defines my first and most basic act *as a creature*.”



In his 2010 article in *Communio*,¹ Professor Michael Waldstein responds to questions I had raised regarding his reading of John Paul II's “hermeneutics of gift.”² The issue he addresses is fundamental for our understanding of the human person, and indeed for philosophy and theology generally. I wish now to return to

1. Michael Maria Waldstein, “‘Constitutive Relations’: A Response to David L. Schindler,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37 (Fall 2010): 496–518 (hereafter MW).

2. David L. Schindler, “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: *Status Quaestionis*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (Fall 2008), 397–431. The engagement with Waldstein is found on 417–23 (hereafter DLS).

this discussion. Despite its technical character, what is at stake in the matter of “constitutive relations” is in fact very concrete: where in the structure of the human person does the reality of love or gift have its origin? Can being and love be said to bear a unity in the human person, or only in the Creator? Does such an assertion necessarily undermine the *maior dissimilitudo* between the creature and the trinitarian God? Should we not rather say that love can be first predicated of the creature only as a conscious act that follows (ontologically or temporally) upon his original constitution as a creature? To use more precise language: is substance prior to relation in the human being (relation, that is, to the Creator, but also in some significant sense to the entire community of creatures); or are substance and relation somehow coextensive, such that each has a distinct (mutual if asymmetrical) priority relative to the other? Waldstein recognizes that such questions lie at the heart of the legacy of the pontificates of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI. These questions go to the heart of how we are best to understand the cultural problems of our time as identified in these pontificates.

Waldstein notes that he and I agree that “the greatness of John Paul II’s Theology of the Body (TOB) lies in the depth and penetration with which it develops a comprehensive ‘hermeneutics of gift’ (TOB 13:2) rooted in the teaching of Jesus, a philosophical and theological ontology of gift and communion in light of the Trinity” (MW, 497); and that he and I both recognize that this ontology of gift, for John Paul II, owes much to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. He is thus puzzled by my criticism: why do I not see that his own view implies affirmation of “constitutive relations” in the human person—that is, such that the human body-person can be said to be “always-already” filial-spousal? And why do I not see that these “constitutive relations” are indicated by Thomistic metaphysics itself, rightly understood?

I am grateful for the care and perceptiveness of Waldstein’s argument, which invites further clarification of what is meant by “constitutive relations” and further explanation of why such relations are deemed so fundamental for the notion of being as gift that has moved to the center of Catholic thought since Vatican II. Waldstein makes his case for “constitutive relations” on the basis of his reading of the Aristotelian-Thomistic principles of substance, accident, *esse*, and relation, and suggests that

my own view of “constitutive relations” rests on a too negative view of accidents, on the one hand, and on a wrong sense of the priority of *esse* over substance, on the other. He argues that my reading of such relations fails to see that accidents, including relation, rightly conceived as Aristotle conceives them, are genuinely interior and not merely post-factum to substance; and that my way of placing *esse* at the origin of relationality in the human substance entails (however unintentionally) an unravelling of the individual self into pure relationality, or an “ocean” of “*Ipsum Esse*.”

Let me say immediately that I affirm—and have indeed always taken for granted—that accidents, understood as Aristotle understands them, are interior to and in this sense “constitutive” of substance. At the same time, however, I will argue that Waldstein and I differ regarding the relative priority and posteriority of *esse* in relation to substance; and that it is one’s reading of the relation of *esse* and substance that most basically determines the proper meaning to be accorded “constitutive relations.” Recognition that accidents are internal to substance does not yet, of itself—absent an adequate understanding of the relative priority and posteriority of *esse* in relation to substance (essence)—yield a sense of constitutive relations able to sustain the idea of human being as gift: the idea of a giftedness, that is, in which the human being begins to participate already by virtue of the Creator’s creative act. On the contrary, Waldstein’s reading of the relative priority of *esse* and essence in the constitution of *ens* inclines him to conflate “gift” with “self-gift.” By this I mean that his approach to the gift of self fails to take adequate account of what is implied in the Creator’s giving of the self to itself in the act of creation, and what is implied thus in the original *givenness* of the self. As we will see, this failure to integrate the creature’s original *givenness* as *gift* into the original meaning of the gift of self makes all the difference in determining the proper meaning of love among human beings in their relation to God and each other, and indeed of filial-spousal love as conceived in light of the theology of John Paul II.

Waldstein, then, does not mean to deny the human subject a gifted character that is “constitutive” of his reality; rather, he means to propose a different way of conceiving the foundation and structure of this gifted character. What the claim of a

constitutive giftedness, or “constitutive relations,” properly implies is therefore just what now needs to be further explicated, in the face of his carefully qualified criticism. What I intend to show is that one’s view of the relation of *esse* and substance (logically) entails a definite view of creaturely being as gift (and vice versa); and that the differences between Waldstein and myself are thus differences *simultaneously* regarding the relation of *esse* and substance *and* regarding the proper sense to be accorded being as gift/self-gift.³ What I will argue is that the gift of self, rightly understood in accord with the work of John Paul II, is a *participation* in what is *anteriorly given by the Creator* and *received into and by the creature*. The human self, in a word, is a gift from God whose deepest reality as a creature lies in participatory self-giving.

In showing this, I will follow the main lines of Waldstein’s argument, presenting in turn: his framing of the problematic; his reading of the main metaphysical principles of Aristotle-Aquinas as they pertain to the problematic; and his summary assessment of my argument in light of these principles. Following this discussion, I will offer my own reading of Thomistic principles as these bear on the question of being as gift, in light of Waldstein’s critical argument. Part One of my article will focus on the idea of the human being as gift-ordered-to-giving. Part Two will explore further the notions of “perfection,” receptivity, and relationality that are implied in this argument and that I take to be presupposed in a rightly conceived filial-spousal love. In the concluding sections of Part Two, I will return to the question of Waldstein’s reading of John Paul II’s “hermeneutics of gift” and its relation to the tradition of Catholic (Thomistic) philosophy and theology. My purpose will be to refocus and assess the

3. As indicated, then, the discussion between Waldstein and myself takes place within the framework of the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical (and theological) tradition. In engaging the terms of that tradition, however, our arguments are focused on the question of the adequacy of this tradition in terms of its capacity for enabling us to understand the truth about the nature of being in its relation to love. We differ in how we read that tradition, and not regarding whether we accept it in its core principles. But our respective claims of fidelity themselves are a function of how we read the new emphasis on love emergent in the Church in the twentieth century, and what *development* (deepening and amplifying, not rejection) this indicates with respect to the main principles of the Thomistic tradition in its bearing on the metaphysics of creation. I will return to this question of development in Part Two.

differences between Waldstein and myself as they concern John Paul II's "hermeneutics of gift" and its distinct legacy for the present ecclesial-cultural situation.

I. THE PROBLEM

First of all, regarding the point of disagreement between us, Waldstein cites this statement from my article:

Waldstein rightly emphasizes John Paul II's rejection of a Cartesian in favor of an Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding. . . . [Schindler's] question, however, is whether . . . what [Waldstein's] line of argument gives us in the end is truly . . . a body or person understood as gift or love already in its constitutive order *qua body* and *qua person*. (DLS, 417–18; MW 500)

In response to this question of mine, Waldstein says that

by affirming Aristotle's human-organic body as understood by St. Thomas one radically and implicitly affirms John Paul II's filial-spousal body. In the development of doctrine from St. Thomas to John Paul II, this radical and implicit affirmation has been unfolded in a manner that shows the profound continuity of the Catholic Tradition and its roots in Hellenic reason. (MW, 500)

Quoting a text wherein Wojtyła places himself with the "Thomistic school, the school of perennial philosophy," Waldstein says further that "a detailed comparison of Wojtyła's whole thought with that of Aristotle and St. Thomas shows . . . that he can and should be read within an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, also with respect to substance and accident" (MW, 506).

In connection with these statements, Waldstein cites the following passage from my article, indicating that my words suggest a contrasting view.

[Waldstein's] appeal to the organic-personal body of Aristotle and St. Thomas as decisive in Wojtyła's rejection of Descartes is necessary but not yet sufficient. On Waldstein's reading, it seems to me, the human person really becomes a matter of love *first via its own enactment of the gift of self (agere)*. On such a reading, however, it is more

the case that *we make the body into a gift* than that we reenact in freedom—to be sure in a new way—what the body itself already signifies and expresses in its very givenness, or giftedness, *qua* body. Again, it is more the case that *we first bestow a spousal meaning on the body* than that we reenact in freedom . . . what the sexually differentiated body always already symbolizes in its original constitution as a body. . . . It makes all the difference whether the human-spousal act that completes the gift is understood as a recuperation in a new and reflexive way of what is the *already given* meaning of the body as spousal, or on the contrary as a *simple addition* of spousal meaning, *via human intention*, to a body conceived to be sure as an organism rather than a machine, but not yet as a matter of spousal meaning, already *qua* body. (DLS, 421; MW, 500–01; emphases added by Waldstein to the phrases “first via its own enactment of the gift of self,” “we make the body into a gift,” and “we first bestow a spousal meaning on the body”)

According to Waldstein, my argument thus seems to be that the constitutive relations of love and communion are not yet present in Aristotle’s substance or human-organic body; that the relations, on the contrary, “need to be added to the body later, as accidents, in the order of human acts, from which it follows that we bestow spousal meaning on the body by our intention and by our acts rather than receptively ‘remembering’ this meaning as in Ratzinger’s ‘anamnesis’” (MW, 501). Waldstein says that, in fact, he affirms exactly the opposite in his Introduction: “we do *not* bestow spousal meaning on the body; this meaning is *prior* to *our intentions and acts*” (ibid.). Indeed, he says that he focuses “on John Paul II’s concept of ‘rereading the language of the body’ as the key concept on which the argument of the whole book turns” (ibid.).

There is a single main argument that runs through TOB. It is enriched by many subthemes, but is in itself clear and simple. What is at stake in the teaching of *Humanae vitae* about the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meaning of the conjugal act is nothing else than “rereading the ‘language of the body’ in the truth” (TOB 118:6). John Paul II develops the concepts “language of the body” and “rereading [it] in the truth” in the section on the sacrament in the dimension of sign (TOB 103). The whole argument preceding TOB 103 can be understood as providing

the foundation on which the concept of “rereading the ‘language of the body’ in the truth” can be understood. The key concept in this foundation is “the spousal meaning of the body.” It is this meaning that is reread in the truth when man and woman engage in authentic sexual intercourse. (Michael Waldstein, Introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* by John Paul II [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006], 120; MW, 501)

Indeed, Waldstein says that “John Paul II’s concept of ‘rereading’ is quite similar to Ratzinger’s concept of ‘anamnesis,’ which Schindler uses to bring out the ‘always already’ filial and spousal meaning of the body” (MW, 501–02). Waldstein then cites again from his Introduction:

The body, endowed with its own rich intrinsic meaning, speaks the language of self-gift and fruitfulness, *whether the person intends it or not*, because the person “is a body.” The body is not outside the person. Self-gift and fruitfulness are rooted in the very nature of the body, and therefore in the very nature of the person, because the person “is a body.” . . . God’s plan and its renewal by Christ, the redeemer, is *imprinted deeply within the bodily nature of the person as a pre-given language* of self-giving and fruitfulness. For the person to live sexuality in an authentic manner is to speak spousal love *in conformity with this truth* of the language of the body. (Waldstein, Introduction, 104–05; MW, 502, emphases added by Waldstein)

Waldstein thus asks the obvious question: why, in light of the above, do I read his “Introduction as saying the exact opposite, namely, . . . that spousal meaning is *bestowed* on the body by human *intention* in human acts?” (MW, 502). He says that “perhaps the reason is connected with [Schindler’s] concept of ‘constitutive relations,’ which seems to him of key importance in reading John Paul II” (ibid.). And “perhaps the Aristotelian concept of substance presents difficulties as well, because it is at times interpreted as positing an unrelated and static block of being to the secondary outside of which relations are attached as accidental appendages, leaving the core of the substance unrelated” (ibid.). Waldstein thus begins by taking “a close look at substance in light of the legitimate concern for constitutive rela-

tions" (ibid.).

Waldstein is right to emphasize the issue regarding the nature of substance, relative to what I have termed "constitutive relations." And indeed his Introduction does state that the filial-spousal meaning of the body is "prior to our intentions and acts," and already inscribed in the body in its original constitution as such. The burden of my criticism, however, was to question whether the underlying *ontology* of his argument could consistently sustain this affirmation in its requisite sense.

Thus I agree with Waldstein that the concept of substance is indispensable for defending any adequate notion of being as gift. It is after all difficult to know what it could mean to affirm that human being is gift if there is in fact no stable "*what*," or substantive subject of gift, that is the terminus of God's act of creating. Moreover, we must reject the not infrequent tendency to confuse the Aristotelian idea of substance with the seventeenth-century idea that substance is a static, unknown substratum to which relations are added extrinsically, from "outside." Finally, I agree that St. Thomas provides indispensable metaphysical principles in terms of which the notion of being as gift, with its necessary presupposition of substance, and indeed of a human-organic body, is able to be consistently maintained. I take the issue between Waldstein and myself rather to be that of how best to understand these ontological principles in light of the constructive development of John Paul II as interpreter of Vatican II, relative to the idea of the human being as gift. My article asks what this idea of being as gift demands regarding the nature of creaturely being in its relation to God and to others, in light of creation *ex nihilo*.⁴ Specifically, my question concerns the sense in which creaturely reality in its *original givenness* can rightly be called *gift*. Waldstein's argument helps to sharpen the ontological fault-lines with respect to this question. He refers to John Paul II's comprehensive "hermeneutics of gift," and calls attention to the latter's concept of "rereading," acknowledging its similarity to Ratzinger's concept of "*anamnesis*." These concepts clearly

4. My present argument assumes the notion of Christian philosophy as stated in John Paul II's *Fides et ratio*, 76: thus my reflection presupposes a number of truths affirmed in Christian revelation and developed in Church teaching, but develops the reflection essentially in philosophical terms.

suppose that the idea of gift is not first a matter of intention; it is on the contrary rooted in the nature of the body/person and so far *not* first “fabricated” but reread or remembered.

Yet, in affirming this in the important passage above that he himself cites from his Introduction, and elsewhere, Waldstein characteristically conflates the meaning of “gift” and “self-gift.” On first glance this may appear to be little more than a niggling terminological difference. But in fact it goes to the heart of the issue I have meant to raise. “Gift” in the context of creation *ex nihilo* indicates what is first and most basically gift *from another*; it implies *being given to myself by another* and so far *reception* on my part. But all of this implies a gift, or giftedness, that is somehow begun in me in and by virtue of the act of creation itself, and that is so far presupposed *in* my original self-giving (giving of self). My qualifier here to be sure does not deny the human being an *original* self-giving, but only affirms that this original self-giving cannot but be itself somehow a *participatory* expression of God’s creative act. What God gives me in the act of creation is first of all a (subordinate, finite) participation in the generosity of his creative giving. Thus my basic reality as a creature is that of a *gift* (qua *participatory* and so far *receptive* agent of creative giving) who himself *gives* (qua *receptive agent*). It is just the order implied by this unity-in-distinction between gift and giving in the original constitution of the self that was the burden of my question to Waldstein regarding the relational—filial-spousal—character of the self.

My remarks up to this point, however, in a sense merely restate the burden of the critical argument I raised in my article, and Waldstein has now responded to that argument. His response specifies at much greater length the ontological principles that are most in play in our respective readings of gift. I wish therefore to take up anew just this question regarding the ontological principles necessary to sustain all that is implied in the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, with regard to the distinction between the self’s being-given to itself and the self’s giving of self, in the self’s original constitution as a creature. It is one’s response to this question that determines at the most basic level what is meant by the body-person as love or gift as developed by John Paul II as interpreter of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, how we answer the question deeply affects our view of all that the creature is and does,

in relation to himself, to others, and to God.

Waldstein and I thus agree that there is much at stake in how the issue raised here is resolved. In order to understand his argument in all its subtlety and force, I begin by reviewing the key ontological terms in which he frames the argument: substance, accidents, *esse*, relation.

II. WALDSTEIN'S METAPHYSICS OF SUBSTANCE AND RELATION

(1) Aristotle, says Waldstein, distinguishes what comes “to be” from what comes “to be so-and-so.” “Only substances are said to be without qualification” (*Physics*, 190a34–190a37). Substance, in other words, is simply “that which is,” while “accidents” are not being, simply speaking, but substances’ further ways of being. An accident does not make me “‘be’ without further qualification,” but makes me rather “‘be’ in a qualified sense,” for example, “here or there” (MW, 503). Waldstein then says that, “for a human being ‘to be’ (without qualification) and ‘to be human’ are the same, because ‘human’ is ‘what’ a human being is. For a human being to stop being human is for him or her to stop being. ‘This being is human’ is for this reason to be included under ‘this being exists’ without further qualification” (ibid.).

What does this understanding of substance and accidents imply in terms of the problem of internal or constitutive relations?

(2) (a) Regarding “*internal and external*,” Waldstein points out that accidents “*are the being of substance*, not its being, simply speaking, but its being-in-a-certain-respect—nevertheless truly *its being*” (504). Accidents are thus internal and not external to substance, like a coat of paint that remains outside of the wood.

(b) Regarding *constitutive and non-constitutive*, Waldstein contrasts two senses of the former. The essence is constitutively related to the substance in a way that an accident is not. In this specific sense, accidents are not constitutive. “Yet, when one focuses on ‘proper’ or ‘per se’ accidents, it makes good sense to call them *constitutive*” (ibid.). Thus for example, “the power of reason arises as a proper or per se accident from the very nature of human beings” (ibid.). The power of reason is thus constitutive for a human being. “[But] it is not constitutive in the sense of being

that by which a human being exists in the world at all rather than not at all, but in the sense of flowing necessarily and immediately from the rational nature” (ibid.).

(c) Returning again to the question of internal and external, Waldstein says that “the proceeding of the power of reason as an accident can . . . be brought together with the concern for what is *internal*” (505). Noting the potentially misleading character of spatial metaphors like “internal” and “external” (I share Waldstein’s reservations here), he says that “the power of reason proceeds from the substance into the innermost interior of that same substance, since it is the ground of personal interiority and subjectivity” (ibid.).

In light of this account, Waldstein turns to consideration of “the relation of the human person to God as creature to the creator and . . . the manner in which [this relation] is *internal and constitutive* in the Aristotelian-Thomistic account” (ibid.). He says that “what is absolutely first as internal and constitutive of creatures is God’s creative gift of being,” and elaborates further: “In St. Augustine’s brilliant insight adopted from Middle- and Neo-Platonic philosophy, God is not ‘another’ being over against me; he is the fullness of being in which I participate. For this reason, he is *interior intimo meo*, more interior than my innermost. The gift of being is thus most internal and most constitutive” (ibid.).

But what is key here is to see that the “first *terminus* is I myself as a created person, a substance of rational nature. God does not first create a relation to himself that then (if not in time, at least in the order of metaphysical dependence) serves to constitute me as a substance. He creates a substance of a rational nature” (ibid.). Since this rational substance flows in its entirety from God’s gift of being, it possesses two fundamental relations to God.

(3) (a) The first is the relation to God as origin. Waldstein says that this relation “proceeds from the human substance *toward the interior* of that same substance, toward the God who is *interior intimo meo*” (Augustine, MW 505). “It is not an externally affixed relation outside an inert block of unrelated substantiality. . . . It is in this sense an *internal and constitutive relation*. Yet it is not constitutive in the way God’s creative act is constitutive; nor is it constitutive as an intrinsic principle of the creature’s being in the way the essence or the substantial form is such a principle” (506).

(b) The second relation is relation to God as end. Waldstein says that this “is the most *internal* well-spring of the human person’s tendencies and acts. . . . The relation is internal to [the] nature [of the human person] and *constitutive* of it in the sense that, if *per impossibile* it were removed, the human person could not be a person. Nevertheless, the relation does not constitute the being of the person, simply speaking. It is the being of the person ‘in a certain respect’” (ibid.). Waldstein concludes his reflection on this point by emphasizing that, for Aristotle, accidents do not live a merely secondary or shadowy existence on the surface of the substance that alone is “really real.” On the contrary, the perfection of substance is to be found in its activities. “For a human being, merely ‘to be,’ simply speaking, e.g., at birth, is a beginning of being. The decisive level is still to be attained” (ibid.). Later in this connection Waldstein says that he and I “may well need to work through questions concerning ‘*esse*’ and ‘accident’ in order to come to a common understanding of how ‘constitutive relations’ are to be seen in metaphysical terms as the being-in-a-certain-respect of that which has being, simply speaking” (517).

III. “THE METAPHYSICAL DEPTH OF CONSTITUTIVE RELATIONS”

Following this discussion of Aristotelian-Thomistic principles, Waldstein turns to the question of what he terms “the metaphysical depth of constitutive relations” (507–11, at 507). He begins by recalling my exchange with Fr. Norris Clarke several years ago, from which he cites a long passage of mine that concludes with the following:

Fr. Clarke . . . insists (rightly) on the distinction between what Aquinas calls “properties,” or “proper accidents,” and “contingent accidents”—the difference being that the former, unlike the latter, “flow immediately and necessarily from the substantial essence, so that the being could not actually be what it is and be deprived of them.” And he goes on to say that the order of action (*agere*), hence self-communicative relationality, is a proper accident in this sense: the order of action “is a necessary property of an existing substance.” Self-communicative relationality thus becomes equally primordial with substance: in the sense

that a proper, as distinct from a contingent, accident is necessary for the completion of a substance. All of this is true, but it does not yet get to the heart of the point that I had wanted to make. When I argued that relationality must begin already in *esse*, I meant this in terms of *esse* understood as *both* prior *and* posterior to substance. Indeed, this seems to me the burden of . . . the authentic teaching of Aquinas: namely, that *esse*, as the act of acts (*De Potentia Dei*, VII, 2, ad 9) is thereby the act which makes substance be in the first place (absolutely); and that *esse* at the same time nonetheless does not subsist—which is to say, it in some way itself “depends” for its own existence on the very substance it makes be. Certainly there is much to sort out here. The point I had wished to make is simply that, if and insofar as we anchor relationality already in *esse*, we are thereby forced beyond the distinction between proper and contingent accident. For “accident,” on Clarke’s own (correct) reading, *remains posterior to substance*: always and as a matter of principle it is something that “happens to” or “flows from” substance, even if in some cases it does so necessarily (as in the case of a proper accident). *Esse*, on the other hand, on the above . . . reading, must be simultaneously (ontologically) both prior to and posterior to substance: it cannot be properly understood in terms simply of a “flowing from” substance, even if this latter is seen as a necessary “flowing from.” . . . For present purposes, my point is simply this: if and insofar as we anchor relationality already in *esse*, we are just so far committed to a notion of relation which (ontologically) “precedes” substance in the way that *esse* “precedes” substance, and which can just so far not be “accidental” to substance, either “properly” or “contingently.” (507–08; emphasis added by Waldstein)

Waldstein concludes from this that my “concern seems to be that, unless one anchors the relationality of substance in some way *prior to* substance and thus conceives that relationality as a *constitutive relationality, internal to and constitutive of substance*, one ends up with a substance that, as such, in its own essential make-up, lacks such constitutive relations. The attempt to add relation to substance ‘after the fact,’ as something posterior to substance in the order of being, as an accident, comes too late to save substance from non-relationality” (508).

Waldstein says that I am right to insist that “the being of creatures is radically a *being (esse) from God*. This relation is not external to the being of creatures, but most deeply internal and

constitutive” (508). But he adds a qualifier:

Schindler’s metaphysical point about *esse* needs to be completed, as Schindler would doubtlessly agree, by the theological truth that creaturely “*being from*” is an imitation and expression of the Son’s “*being from*” the Father. . . . In a comprehensive ontology of gift and communion rooted in the Trinity, [the] parallel between creaturely “*being from*” and Trinitarian “*being from*” is one of the most important principles. It shows the true metaphysical depth at which constitutive relations are anchored.

At the same time, one needs to point out that in a human being the proper subject of the relation of the creature as created to the Creator as origin is the person, just as the person is the subject of the act of being (*esse*). It is the person who, in his or her *esse*, is related to God as a creature to the Creator. Here too, the substance is ontologically prior to relation. God himself and his creative act, to be sure, are absolutely prior to the created substance, but in the created being, “being, simply speaking” precedes all other modes of being that are in various ways “being-in-a-certain-respect,” including relation. A self-subsistent relation that is not the being-in-a-certain-respect of a substance would have to be pure actuality: the fundamental distinction between “being, simply speaking” and “being-in-a-certain-respect,” which is inalienably proper to creatures, would disappear to give way to the infinite ocean of *ipsum esse*, which does not fall under the genus of substance and has no accidents, but is free from all limiting modes of being. (508–09)

In this connection, Waldstein also states that he does not fully understand

what Schindler means that the relation [to God] makes and lets me be. He does not seem to mean that in my relation to God, it is God who makes me be. He seems to have an inner principle of the creature in mind. Does he mean that the relation is identical with my *esse* or with my substantial form, i.e., with my soul, or with the essence in general? (513)

Waldstein also cites the following sentence of my article: “Each substantial being at once possesses its own substantial unity and does so coincident with relationality to God and to other creaturely beings.” And then he states that he does “not see clearly

what Schindler means by ‘coincident’ in this sentence. What he has in mind is perhaps the relationality of *esse*” (513).

Elsewhere, regarding my affirmation of a receptive relationality implied by the notion of gift, Waldstein says:

Particularly noteworthy . . . is the emphasis, not only on gift, which is the predominant emphasis in most texts of John Paul II, but also on reception. Even in texts that only focus on gift, reception is just beneath the surface, because it is the correlative of gift. . . . John Paul II affirms an aspect of reception even in the Father, to whom the Son *returns* love in the Holy Spirit. Schindler is thus completely correct in placing reception together with gift at the center of his reading of TOB. (497)

Again:

Particularly helpful is [Schindler’s] use of Ratzinger’s notion of *anamnesis* to unfold the teaching of John Paul II about the meaning placed by the creator in our being in complete priority to our acts. I believe Schindler reads John Paul II correctly on that point, including the strong emphasis on the priority of reception. (499)

And yet he also states that “I am not sure what Schindler means when he says, ‘My being . . . *presupposes* in some significant sense an act of receiving on my part’” (515, emphasis added by Waldstein). Nevertheless, Waldstein concludes, “the overall point Schindler is making . . . is clear and true: the logic of gift is present in the innermost constitution of the person” (513).

Finally, following discussion between us and in subsequent correspondence, Waldstein further elaborates his central point here as it concerns *esse*. *Esse creatum*, he says (citing Aquinas’s *De Hebdomadibus*, lecture 2), “is a principle of being,” which means that it “is not a being, and therefore not properly a subject of relations.”

Esse itself, as a principle of a created substance, is in some way ontologically prior to substance inasmuch as it is the existing of that which exists simply, that is, of substance. Yet, just as the created person, rather than its *esse*, is the subject of its *esse*, so the created person, rather than its *esse*, is the subject of all relations.

In addition, relation, at least among us creatures, is a

mode of “being in a certain respect” rather than a mode of “being, simply speaking.” No relation can therefore be the substantial *esse* of a creature. It rather supposes the person, the substance, as constituted by its *esse simpliciter*. Relation, therefore, cannot be ontologically prior to substance in the order of principles and modes of being. If it were, all distinct modes of being would collapse into infinite perfection, into *ipsum esse* that has no subject distinct from itself.

At the same time, Waldstein says that he wants also to affirm that relation is prior to, more intimate, and more constitutive than substance, and explains this as follows:

Among us creatures, simply to be is the bare beginning. To stand in relation, that is when being reaches its perfection. Just to be alive without any of the activities of life such as knowing and loving, all of which involve relation, is almost of no worth by comparison with these activities. In this sense, relation can be prior to substance, prior in the way that the end is prior to a mere beginning. It comes first, both as source (the trinitarian God as our source) and as the end proposed at the very beginning.

Relation is also ontologically more interior and intimate than substance. The activities of life are more intimate to life than mere life is to itself. In fact, our life can only become intimate to itself through these activities. A comatose person cannot reach himself, but is left lying outside of himself. In another sense *esse* is most intimate, more intimate than relation, namely, as “to be,” simply speaking.

Relation is more constitutive than substance in the sense of being constitutive of perfect being, rather than mere being, of perfect life, rather than mere being alive. In another sense, *esse* is more constitutive than relation, again as “to be, simply speaking,” rather than “to be, in a certain respect.”

IV. CREATION *EX NIHILO* AND THE LOGIC OF CREATURELY BEING: A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE

In responding to Waldstein’s metaphysics, let me say first of all that he is of course right that God’s act of creation terminates in myself as subject, and not in my “to be.” *Esse creatum* is not the proper subject of this creaturely relation, because *esse creatum* does not itself subsist. This means, inter alia, that the “to be” of the created substance cannot properly be the efficient cause of that

substance. It is not *esse* on its own, so to speak, that makes me be; it is God who makes me be in and through the communication of *esse*. But insofar as *esse creatum* presupposes substance as its subject, and does not itself subsist, it is also the case that relation to God must so far depend upon the constitution of substance. Furthermore, in this connection, Waldstein is right that relation, understood after the manner of a “proper” or “per se” accident, may be said to be “constitutive” in that it always qualifies in a certain respect, *interiorly*, the actually existent substance. (As noted earlier, Aristotle’s idea of substance ought not to be confused with the seventeenth-century notion of substance as an unknown static substrate to which accidents are related externally as pins to a pin cushion.)

I take the foregoing metaphysical claims to be indispensable for any adequate understanding of the human being. My question nonetheless is whether they suffice—and how they need to be qualified—to account for all that is properly implied in affirming that “the logic of gift is present in the innermost constitution of the person.”

The issue here concerns the radically unique character of the relation between creature and Creator as implied by creation *ex nihilo*. The act of creation from nothing is different from any other act in the universe, and this difference must be reflected in the metaphysical account we attempt to give creation. Of course Waldstein affirms the absolute primacy of God as the source and end of the creaturely substance-subject. My question is whether the distinct sense of the relation between creature and Creator implied by the uniqueness of the act of creation is adequately borne out in his account of the fundamental structure of creaturely being: that is, of the principles of *esse*, substance (essence), accident, and relation, in their relative priority and posteriority with respect to each other.

If we are to account truly for the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, we must account ontologically for two facts. On the one hand, in the act of creation, God gives the whole creature *to the creature himself*. This means that the creature exercises his own act of existing and is the essential agent of the relational activities that perfect him. Anything less than this would drain God’s creative act of its radical generosity, which involves bringing into existence something utterly new, not something that somehow

merely extends God's own being. On the other hand, in the act of creation, God *gives* the whole creature to the creature himself: the whole of the reality exercised by the creature *is given* by, and remains through and through a *gift from*, God. Giftedness from God, in other words, affects from within the whole and every part of creaturely being, all the time. Anything less than this would imply that the creature is not created *ex nihilo*. Creation from nothing implies that there simply is no creaturely subject prior to the act of creating, and thus that this subject can contribute to his own self-constitution only from "inside" the act of creation that is so far (ontologically) presupposed—that is, communicated by God as the *inner condition* of any contribution by the creature.

This appears to give rise to a dilemma, however. On the one hand, God is the communicator of *esse*, which is the act whereby anything is at all, and which so far has absolute priority in the original constitution of the creature. Absent God's communication of *esse*, only God/Subsistent *Esse* can be said finally to exist, and nothing else. On the other hand, such communication, to be realized, must have a terminus, which presupposes some subject other than God in and by means of which God's act is received. However, to posit such a subject, such an agent who receives, involves a *petitio principii* in the face of the first assertion—since there can, *eo ipso*, be nothing "outside" (other than) God prior to God's communication of *esse*. How do we resolve this apparent dilemma?

Above all, we need to keep in mind the radical uniqueness of the act of creation *ex nihilo*. God's calling of the creature into existence through the communication of *esse* involves calling into existence the conditions whereby *esse* can take a new—that is, an other-than-God, hence necessarily finite, and therefore also necessarily complex or composite—form: it involves calling into existence substance (essence) as the subject of the *esse* that is communicated. The truth of this assertion demands a twofold affirmation: on the one hand, we must affirm the priority of the act (*esse creatum*) that is communicated by God to the creature, while recognizing that *esse* subsists only *qua exercised* by the creature. On the other hand, we must affirm the priority of the creature as subject of *esse*, while recognizing that the creature exercises *esse* only *qua communicated* by God.

The double assertion here is paradoxical, and indeed it is the language of paradox that alone seems adequate finally in accounting for the uniqueness of the act of creation. Such language alone makes philosophical sense of the facts of experience, in light of the Christian doctrine of creation.⁵ On the one hand, we must affirm that the act of creation necessarily terminates in a subject other than God. This, however, cannot mean that the creaturely subject is somehow there waiting to receive the act of existence—which would amount to a colossal *petitio principii*. On the other hand, the act of being—*esse creatum*—must somehow be the source, or act, that first accounts for the existence of the creature. This, however, cannot mean that *esse* has some sort of existence inscribed within itself *qua esse*—which would imply that the creature who exists (is brought into existence through the communication of *esse*) remains in the end somehow an extension of *Esse Subsistens*.

The only resolution adequate to the idea of creation by God *ex nihilo*, then, lies in affirming that *esse creatum* and the concrete substance-subject come into existence *simultaneously*. This simultaneity necessarily implies a distinct—mutual if asymmetrical—priority *and* posteriority of *esse* and substance in their original unity *qua ens*, which alone properly exists as a creaturely subject. This is what may appropriately be termed the paradoxical structure of being as demanded by creation *ex nihilo*. It is this structure that alone accounts for the original constitution of the creature. As we will see, such a paradoxically conceived

5. The language of paradox is typically taken to signal what reaches precisely beyond the “reasonable.” But the language of paradox is rightly judged unreasonable or irrational in principle only if the truth about being requires a denial of relationality in the original constitution of creaturely being—which is precisely the point in dispute. The language of paradox must in fact be recognized as the only finally reasonable (metaphysical) language insofar as it can be shown that the substance-in-itself, on the one hand, and relation to God and others, on the other, are neither indifferent nor inversely related to, but on the contrary presuppose and demand, each other. The language of paradox, in a word, is inherently reasonable—though indeed in a way that opens intrinsically to mystery—insofar as the fundamental truth about creaturely being is its original constitution as love or gift—in the sense yet to be developed in the present response to Waldstein. (And indeed we should perhaps add here that the generosity presupposed by gift properly understood precludes any confusion of [Thomistic] paradox with [Hegelian] dialectic. But that is a matter for discussion elsewhere.)

structure of creaturely being maintains the infinite difference between God and the creature, while sustaining as well a unity-in-distinctness between *esse creatum* and substance that enables each of these to retain its own distinct priority as source of the creature's perfection(s) and relation(s). It was the affirmation of just this simultaneous, mutual-asymmetrical, priority *and* posteriority of *esse* in relation to substance that lay at the heart of the questions I raised with respect to Waldstein. To be sure, as the statements cited above attest, Waldstein himself affirms a sense of *esse* and *substance* as *both* prior *and* posterior to each other.⁶ The point, however, is that he and I read this simultaneous priority and posteriority of each differently; and this leads to different readings of the ontology implicit in the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. More specifically, it leads to different readings of the original-constitutive structure of creaturely being as *gift/self-gift*.

The burden of my effort in what follows is thus to develop what is meant by the proposal that the creature is the *subject* of *esse* and thus the terminus of God's creative act, *qua given* to and *received by and into* itself, and hence as a *gift* from the Creator and so far a *participated* subject of giving. I take all the important differences between myself and Waldstein regarding the "hermeneutics of gift" to be tied finally to differences especially regarding our reading of this proposal.

Showing how this is so will require explication above all of four metaphysical principles. These concern the *relative priority and posteriority* of *esse creatum* in the original constitution of the creaturely substance (Part One); the nature of the "*completeness*" or "*perfection*" of *esse* relative to the perfection deriving from substance and accidents; the question regarding *receptivity*, or reception, in the creature; and the respective roles of *esse* and substance as the primary locus of the creature's *relation* to God (and to the world) (Part Two). Explication of these issues will clarify the differences between Waldstein and myself regarding the notions of being as gift and of the relationality of the human person-body.

6. This is implied in Waldstein's affirmation, as noted above, that being simply-speaking "precedes" being-in-a-certain-respect, even as the latter "precedes" the former as the principal source of the "perfection" of the creature.

It will thus enable us to see what is at stake with respect to these issues, in terms of John Paul II's theology.

V. THE SIMULTANEOUS PRIORITY AND POSTERIORITY
OF ESSE (*CREATUM*) AND SUBSTANCE

Creation *ex nihilo* demands an understanding of *esse* as at once prior *and* posterior to substance. Only such a reading enables us to understand the creature in his rightful sense as a *participatory* agent—as an original, but dependently original, subject—of *esse* and of all the activities and relations that perfect him.

Creation terminates in *ens*, the substantial what that is. But the unity of *ens* is complex, composed of *esse* and *essentia*, understood not as two things but as two principles which are distinct but not separate: they exist only *qua* the unity of *ens*, or the concrete substance. Each principle makes a distinct contribution to that original unity. The Creator communicates the act of being (*esse*) to the creature, even as, *in and by virtue of that act of communication*, the creature is called into being *as the subject* of the act. The act of being (*esse*) thus bears, *in its unity as esse creatum*, a dual character of being *given or communicated* to the creature, and simultaneously being *exercised by* the creature: the creature exercises *esse qua* communicated by God, and *esse* subsists *qua* the creature's exercise of *esse*.

The act of *esse qua communicated* to substance, then, implies *esse's* priority and distinctness, and so far “transcendence” (in a sense yet to be clarified) relative to substance, even as *that same act of esse qua exercised by* substance implies *esse's* posteriority to and dependent inherence in substance. We should thus say, in a word, that *esse* and substance are simultaneously prior and posterior to each other, in asymmetrical ways. How do we make sense of this?

The principle that grounds this mutual but asymmetrical priority (and posteriority) between *esse* and essence is aptly articulated in Aquinas's statement that created “*esse* signifies something complete and simple, but not subsistent” (“*esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens*”).⁷ That is, the *esse* of the

7. Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. I, a. 1. I am especially indebted in the discussion

creature (*esse creatum*) participates in the perfection (and simplicity) of the divine *esse*, but does so non-subsistently, in a composite manner (“Unity of *Esse Creatum*”). It is *esse* in its “perfection” (*completum*) that is indeed given to the creature, even as this *esse* (*creatum*) subsists only *qua* the exercise of the creature. Notice then, again, that neither *esse* nor essence is the term of creation, but the *ens* which is the (complex) unity of *esse* and essence. *Esse* (*creatum*) and essence have existence *in and through the creation of ens*, with each principle making its own distinctly prior and distinctly posterior contribution to the *ens* that alone actually exists.

The sense of the simultaneous priority and posteriority of *esse* relative to essence indicated here is nicely summarized in the words of Adrian Walker:

Aquinas is saying that created *esse* is a participated perfection whose subsistent fullness is God. As such, created *esse* can be looked at either (a) as *ultimately* unoriginable from the principles of essence (which is compatible with its being in some sense *secondarily* originable from them) or (b) as actually participated by, or “instantiated” in, an actually existing essence, hence as its distinct “to be,” which in some sense follows from [the] principles [of essence] (though without ultimately deriving from them). As ultimately unoriginable from essence, *esse* has a quasi-unity with respect to it, even though *esse* does not enjoy this quasi-unity apart from actually existing essences, as if it were a substance or essence in its own right. (“The Unity of *Esse Creatum*”)⁸

The upshot, then, is that both those who defend the primacy of *esse* and those who emphasize *esse*’s concrete identity with the existence of an actualized essence can so far claim on Thomistic grounds to stand in the truth. Creaturely substance is simultaneously the proper subject of its being and acting, and so far of its perfection, but only *qua* participated being and perfection.

that follows to Adrian J. Walker’s “Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas’s Doctrine of *Esse Commune*,” *Communio* 31 (Fall 2004), 457–79. (I have drawn also from Walker’s unpublished notes, “The Unity of *Esse Creatum*.”)

8. Walker says further that the quasi-unity of *esse creatum* in this sense is not merely notional but warrants affirmation of what is termed *esse commune*. I will develop in Part Two of this article the sense in which this is so.

Again, in the words of Walker:

At the very moment that *esse* causes the created subject to be, it “inheres” in that substance quasi-formally, and there is never a moment when *esse* exercises its (quasi-formal) causality outside of that inherence. *Esse*, you might say, causes, not by itself being the *creative* subject of creatures’ existence, but by letting *them* be the *created* subjects of their own existence.⁹ Inasmuch as *esse commune*’s letting be is not “its” free act, it is a sign of the creatureliness that distinguishes it radically from *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. And yet, created *esse*’s paradoxical mode of causing by depending not only distinguishes it from God, as *esse creatum* from *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, but also reveals and makes present—through a greater unlikeness, to be sure—God’s being-as-love. Indeed, it *is* that being-as-love—shared “outside” of God. Which means that *esse creatum* is not only the principle of creatures’ self-being. It is this principle, to be sure, but only on the condition that, and insofar as, it builds into creatures’ self-being a participation, realized in analogous modes, in the self-giving love carried in God’s act of donating *esse* to creatures. Being is love, then, not only for God, but also, by participation, for the creature. (“Personal Singularity,” 470–71)

The burden of the statement cited from *De Potentia* is thus that the creature’s self-being is most properly and basically conceived as a participation in the self-giving love implicit in the act of *esse* donated by God to creatures. This self-being is a *participated* self-giving, a *self-being* that originates with the self *qua given* to itself by the Creator through the communication of *esse*. The creature is rightly said to be *in itself*, or indeed to *give itself to itself*, as anteriorly (always already) *given to itself by God*. We may thus say that the creature gives itself to itself by way of active reception

9. That is, creatively letting them be, by virtue of God’s effective communication. The key to Walker’s statement here I believe, rightly understood, is his denial of *esse creatum* as a creative or effective-efficient cause *qua subject*. In other words, *esse creatum* is a creative or efficient cause only *qua given away* to the creature who is its proper subject. Walker’s point is thus not that *esse creatum* is not at all creative—after all, the being of the creature is **communicated through** *esse*. The Creator communicates *esse* to the creature—and *esse* thus truly *participates* in the creativity of the Creator, *qua given away* to the creature. The point, in a word, is that *esse creatum* is creative *qua* the act of being that is **communicated by the Creator, to the creature**. The creature thus is the proper subject of *esse*, but only as a participated subject.

from God. Thus again Walker:

[I]nsofar as created substances are not self-derived, but owe their very existence to God's liberal bestowal of *esse* in creation, we can say that their self-constitution presupposes, and is itself structured from top to bottom by, ongoing reception of the gift of *esse*. But . . . if *esse* is essentially a mediation of God's very giving of being, then we can add that created substances' receptive self-constitution is how God allows them to share in that giving of being—in this case letting them share in the act of giving them to themselves. Created substance's very self-constitution, in other words, is a self-giving—of itself to itself—that occurs by way of participation in God's giving of the giving of being through the non-subsistent act-fullness of *esse*. (“Personal Singularity,” 472)

The essential point I am making, then, is that creation *ex nihilo* demands an absolute priority of God's act in communicating *esse*, which communication consists in generously calling the creature into being as the subsistent subject, and so far agent, of this *esse*. It is thus not the case that *esse* “makes be,” as though it were a subsistent “thing” being parceled out to creatures. “It” is indeed an internal principle of the creature, but only *qua communicated by God*. “It” is the inherent principle of the creature communicated to the creature by God, in and through which communication the creature himself is brought into being as the subject of its own existence. My being thus does indeed *presuppose* “an act of receiving on my part,” but only *simultaneous with*, and as *an inner condition* of, my self-constitution as a creaturely subject of *esse*. “Receptive self-constitution”—or active receptivity—is “how God allows [creatures] to share in [the] gift of being,” “letting them share in the act of giving themselves to themselves.” The crucial point is that this active receptivity has roots already in the “first” act (*esse*), and not only the “second” act (*agere*) of the creature—in the act of being simply, and not merely in the act of being-in-a-certain-respect, although in both these acts simultaneously.¹⁰

10. A simultaneity, again, which involves a mutual-asymmetrical hierarchy of “first” and “second” act.

These comments indicate the essential response to the nucleus of several crucial questions raised by Waldstein. He asks how, if relation to the Creator begins already in *esse*, and not in the substance who is the subject of *esse* (the terminus of God's communication of *esse*), we can in the end logically avoid confusing creaturely *esse* with *Esse Subsistens*? Second, if the creature's being-from, hence relationality, is "constitutive" of the being of the creature, how can we logically distinguish the personal creature finally from a divine person: what is the difference of the being-from that I have said is "constitutive" of the creature from the being-from that constitutes the second person of the Trinity? Waldstein, in a word, takes the priority granted *esse* in my article to imply somehow "hypostatizing" *esse*; and he holds that, because I interpret relationality to begin already in and through *esse*, I am unable to avoid collapsing creaturely being into a kind of subsisting relationality. These assumptions operate at the heart of his questions regarding what I termed a "coincidence" between the creature's possession of his "own substantial unity" and his "relationality to God"; regarding my being already somehow *presupposing* "an act of receiving on my part"; and regarding a relationality in the creature that "ontologically precedes substance in the way that *esse* 'precedes' substance. . . ."

My summary response here, as anticipated above, is this: according to Aquinas, *esse creatum* is indeed simple and perfect, but not subsistent. *Esse creatum* subsists only as *composed* with essence. *Esse creatum* thus truly shares in the perfection of *esse*, but in an infinitely different way from *Esse Subsistens*: in a way that is *finite because composed*—that is, composed with the essence that is an internal principle of otherness from *Esse Subsistens*. Furthermore, creaturely being is constitutively being-from, but likewise only *as composed*. There is nothing in the creature that falls outside of relation to God, but *what* the creature is remains *other than esse (creatum)*, and thereby *dependent* from its innermost depths on the communication of *esse (creatum)* by *Esse Subsistens*.

In a word, there is no creaturely substance that, in its abiding distinctness as the creaturely substance-subject, is not penetrated to its deepest depths by *esse creatum qua* generously communicated by God, and thus by relation to the Creator. At the same time, there is no *esse creatum* that is not always-simultaneously the *esse* of the substance-subject that is brought into exist-

tence in and through the communication of *esse* by God. There is thus a unity of *esse creatum* and the substance-subject *qua ens*, even as this unity is always a composed, not simple, unity. The upshot is that the creature truly does participate in the perfection of God, and indeed in a principled way image the being-from characteristic of the Second Person of the Trinity, but does so in a way proportionate to its *own infinitely different*—because by nature *composite*—reality. The subsistence of such a composite being is thus, *eo ipso*, infinitely different from *Esse Subsistens*, even as the being-from of such a composite being, which involves the absolute dependence of one who is brought into being *ex nihilo*, is likewise infinitely different from the being-from characteristic of the Second Person of the Trinity, who is one in being (consubstantial) with God.

The simultaneous priority *and* posteriority of *esse* relative to essence (substance) proposed here, then, contains the essential principle of the response to Waldstein's two main critical questions. Indeed, such a simultaneous priority and posteriority was affirmed in the statement Waldstein cites from my discussion with Father Clarke:

When I argued that relationality must begin already in *esse*, I meant this in terms of *esse* understood as *both prior and posterior* to substance. Indeed, this seems to me the burden of . . . the authentic teaching of Aquinas: namely, that *esse*, as the act of acts (*De Potentia Dei*, VII, 2, ad 9) is thereby the act which makes substance be in the first place (absolutely); and that *esse* at the same time nonetheless does not subsist—which is to say, it in some way itself “depends” for its own existence on the very substance it makes be. (MW, 507)

The phrases here—*esse* as “prior *and* posterior,” “*esse* . . . does not subsist,” and “itself ‘depends’ for its own existence on the very substance it makes be” all imply the larger context of creation by *Esse Subsistens*. It is therefore clear that *esse* is an act that “makes be” only *qua communicated by the Creator God* to the creature who is brought into existence by virtue of that communication. Creation, in short, sets the context of my argument, and is indeed the context in which Father Clarke reads the argument.¹¹ Waldstein

11. For Father Clarke's complete response to my proposal to him, which he essentially affirms, see W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Explorations in Metaphysics*

cites the above text, but without engaging these references to the (simultaneous) posteriority, and non-subsistence, of *esse* that imply the decisively important backdrop of creation and go to the heart of the critical questions he raises.

Notice, then, the theoretical structure that frames Waldstein's argument. His criticisms proceed on the basis of a definite reading of the *esse*-essence (substance) distinction, which he sets forth with admirable clarity. His argument then consists essentially in *unfolding the critical questions that follow from* these presuppositions regarding *esse*-essence, with respect to my understanding of being (as gift), or "constitutive relations" and "reception." Waldstein assumes the priority of *esse* as a "mere" act of existing; and this reading of the nature of *esse* shifts the weight of the features of "perfection," reception, and relation in the creature away from *esse*.¹² These "features" become matters predicated *first and most importantly* of the *substance* that is the subject of *esse*: of the "accidents" and activities of substance, that is, in its distinctness from *esse*. Given Waldstein's assumption regarding the relation of *esse* and substance and accidents, my assertion of a priority of *esse* as a first principle in the origination of "perfection" and relationality in creaturely being, according to him, necessarily forces me into affirming (logically if unintentionally) an "ocean" of *Esse*, as well as a "pure relationality" in the human person that can rightly be predicated only of a divine person.

The positive proposal Waldstein himself then makes regarding a possible way of harmonizing our respective positions—regarding "constitutive relations" and "reception"—likewise follows from this same assumption. Thus he states:

Schindler and I may well need to work through questions concerning "esse" and "accident" in order to come to a common understanding of how "constitutive relations" are to be seen in metaphysical terms as the being-in-a-certain-respect of that which has being, simply speaking . . . (MW 517, emphasis added)

(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 119–20. Cf. also Clarke's "Response to David Schindler's Comments," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (Fall 1993): 593–98, and the discussions of Steven A. Long, George A. Blair, Father Clarke, and myself in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21 (Spring 1994): 151–90.

12. In other words, he acknowledges the non-subsistence of *esse* but at the expense of its "*completum*."

And, regarding reception, he says:

Particularly noteworthy [in the text from John Paul II¹³] is the emphasis, not only on gift, which is the predominant emphasis in most texts of John Paul II, but also on reception. Even in texts that only focus on gift, reception is just beneath the surface, because it is the *correlative* of gift. . . . John Paul II affirms an aspect of reception even in the Father, to whom the Son returns love in the Holy Spirit. Schindler is thus completely correct in placing reception together with gift at the center of his reading of TOB. (MW, 497, emphasis added)

Waldstein concludes:

[The issues regarding *esse* and “accident”] have a vast scope that goes far beyond the theology of the body to the very roots of theology and philosophy, to the very roots of an ontology of gift and communion rooted in the Trinity. In this way they are extremely important. Yet, as far as the theology of the body is concerned, I find it important that Schindler and I agree in affirming that the human body is “always already” filial-spousal in virtue of constitutive relations.” (517)

The problem, however, is that the views expressed here regarding “constitutive relations” and reception in relation to gift—namely that such relations “are to be seen in metaphysical terms as *the being-in-a-certain-respect* of that which has being simply,” and that reception is first and most properly “the *correlative* of gift”¹⁴—are just the views my article meant to challenge in the first place, and indeed challenge on the basis of a definite view of the relation of *esse*, substance, and accidents. More immediately pertinent to Waldstein’s last sentence above, it was this double claim that lay at the root of my criticism of his way of conceiving the original emergence of (filial-spousal) relationality in the human person-body.

The point, then, is that Waldstein’s argument has not yet responded to my specific claim regarding the simultaneous

13. John Paul II, General Audience, 29 July 1998, §2.

14. That is, and not integral to the gift of self in its original meaning as such. This point will be discussed at length in Part Two.

(mutual-asymmetrical) priority *and* posteriority of *esse* relative to substance that undergirds my original questions. And the positive proposals he puts forward regarding “constitutive relations”—which, according to him, begin first, not in *esse creatum*, and so far in being-simply, but rather in “second” act, or being-in-a-certain-respect; and regarding reception, which, for him, is in its proper meaning only *correlative* to gift—in the end merely restate the views my article originally questioned. Indeed, Waldstein conceives reception as strictly correlative to gift only because he has tacitly conflated the meaning of gift (which implies the “passive” note of receiving, or what has been received, in a sense yet to be developed) with *self-giving*, a generous act *initiated by* the self. But it is just such a conflation that my argument meant to expose. It must be said, then, that Waldstein’s argument, both in its negative criticisms and its positive proposals, so far expresses a *petitio principii*.

Part Two of this article will address with greater specificity questions regarding “perfection,” reception, and relationality, in order to show how my argument accommodates Waldstein’s difficulties in these matters. But let me summarize here where we stand in the resolution of the argument as framed thus far. The question posed in my article was: “When and on what terms does generosity/gift-giving first emerge in the (human) creature? In what sense does this gift-giving presuppose an always anterior being-given by another . . . ?” (DLS, 422).

I have argued that creaturely being is structured at its core as generous in the manner of gift: of what *gives* only *qua first given*. What God grants me in creating me is (*creaturely*) *participation* in his generous giving, in the gratuity that characterizes his being.¹⁵ This participated generosity takes the form of *active-re-*

15. Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §26: “[T]o affirm that God is Creator [entails] grasping the original extent of the Lord’s gratuitous . . . action on behalf of man. In fact, God freely confers being and life on everything that exists. Man and woman, created in his image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26–27), are for that very reason called to be the visible sign and effective instrument of the divine gratuitousness. . . .” It should be noted here

ception in the creature. Generosity in the creature—which is now revealed to be at once receiving and giving being—thus begins in the first act (*esse*), even as *esse* is always already handed over to the subject who exercises *esse*: generosity *begins in esse* as at once *shared with* the whole of *ens* and its activities. I have articulated this in technical terms as the mutual but asymmetrical priority and posteriority of *esse* and substance/*agere*, in light of the absolute priority of God as Creator *ex nihilo*.

What I have meant to highlight is thus that generosity characterizes the *central and most basic act of my being*. The creature “in itself”—in its self-centeredness—bears, from within its original and inmost depths *as* a creature, reference to God as giver and so far centeredness in community with others. The act of *esse* that is communicated to me by God subsists only by virtue of my agency (*agere*) *qua ens* (substance); but this *exercising* of *esse* involves actively receiving an act (*esse*) that is always first given and thus serves as *the inner “forming” condition of all of my (other) activities*. My being, which is a composite or complex being, of course expresses itself in a vast variety of specific acts. But my participation in love, which takes form as responsive generosity, defines my first and most basic act *as* a creature: love is (ontologically) prior to and operative within all other human acts. This act lies at the heart of all the other acts and aspects of my being, and thus cannot but give integrative–dynamic “form” to these—at the most radical level, even if, to be sure, not always intentionally. Love in this sense is rightly said to be “constitutive” of my being: my deepest meaning as a creature is *to be loved by* and *to love* (the Creator). I am not pure love, or Subsistent Love; but love (and the “exigence” for love) shape from within all that I am and do as a creaturely being.¹⁶ Love (of God) orders my being

that God’s gratuitousness, or what we may term his inner reality as generative love, does not imply that he *logically must* create the world of creatures. On the contrary, as a Trinity, God’s generativity is always already infinitely realized in the Father’s relation to the Son in the Spirit.

16. My point here is rooted in Aquinas’s claim that *esse* is innermost in creaturely being (Cf. ST I, q. 8, a. 1; ST I, q. 7, a. 1). *Esse* is innermost in the creature, that is, not only in an “effective” but also “quasi-formal” sense. There are several points to be kept in mind with respect to this claim. First, the fact of being loved and loving need not be, and most often is not, a matter of explicit awareness. Second, this love does not replace the vast variety of other activities proper to the human being; rather, it (re-)orders these from within

from the beginning, even as it is simultaneously the end of all my strivings. As such, it affects the original meaning of all the causes and principles of being.

The burden of my argument, in a word, is that the gift of self is a participation in the meaning of human being, which is “gift” in its original constitution *qua* created, and thus all the way to its core. Only being understood as gift in this “total” sense can sustain the breadth and depth of what John Paul II intends in his theology of the body: the gift of self and the body’s filial-spousal meaning. Only being understood as gift in this “total” sense warrants the claim that the logic of gift is present in the innermost constitution of the person. Part Two will examine the role played by “perfection,” receptivity, and relationality in this understanding of being as gift; and will conclude by posing several questions regarding Waldstein’s understanding, in terms of John Paul II’s proposal and its distinct legacy for our time. □

END OF PART ONE

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their inmost depths. Third, this abiding presence of love does not overlook the reality of sin. On the contrary, it assumes the Catholic view that sin deeply wounds and weakens but does not destroy nature in its integrity. In light of these qualifications, then, we reassert our claim: that at the depths of his (implicit) consciousness, the human being senses that he is made in and for generous love; that that is what life is most truly about; and that restlessness for such love, and for communicating it to others, remains hiddenly operative at the heart even of any conscious denial that this is so.