

# BEING, GIFT, SELF-GIFT

(PART TWO)

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“Participation in love, which takes the form of responsive generosity, defines one’s most basic act as a creature.”



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This article develops the sense in which love is basic for human being and acting. Is creaturely being properly conceived as love, that is, as gift? Part One argued that such a claim can be rightly understood only if “giftedness” is a matter of what is first given by God—or better, of what is indeed initiated by the self but only

as anteriorly given by God.<sup>1</sup> Granted that the act of both God and the creature is necessary to account for the creature's original giftedness, the primacy of God's act is made clear in 1 John 4:10: "in this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us."

What God grants me in creating me is *creaturally participation* in his generous giving, in the gratuity that characterizes his being.<sup>2</sup> This participated generosity takes the form of *active-reception* in the creature. Generosity in the creature begins in *esse*, even as *esse* is handed over to the creature who is simultaneously produced as the subject who exercises *esse*. Generosity, in other words, *begins in esse* as *shared with* the whole of the creature and its activities (*agere*).<sup>3</sup> I have articulated this in technical terms as

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1. David L. Schindler, "Being, Gift, Self-Gift: A Reply to Waldstein on Relationality and John Paul II's Theology of the Body (Part One)," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 221–51 (hereafter cited as Part One). See also Michael Waldstein, "Constitutive Relations: A Response to David L. Schindler," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 496–517 (hereafter cited as MW).

2. Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (hereafter cited as CSDC), 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. *Gen.* 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 that God's gratuitousness, or what we may call his inner reality as generous love, does not imply that he logically must create the world of creatures. God is infinitely generous for all eternity *in se*: his generosity is already complete in itself, because he is of his essence expressed in a tri-unity of divine persons. Cf. *De potentia Dei* (hereafter cited as *De pot.*), q. 9, a. 9, *sed contra*: "as goodness is self-communicative, the perfection of divine goodness requires that he communicate his perfections supremely. But if there were only one person in God he would not communicate his goodness supremely." While creation is thus not necessary in order for God to be the fullness of self-communicative love, when such a God creates we can say ("after the fact," as it were) that he "necessarily" creates generously, as befits his (triume) being.

Needless to say, the issue raised here is a difficult one and needs further discussion. The point is not to suggest that we can deduce the doctrine of the Trinity, or indeed know the full meaning and gratuity of creation *ex nihilo*, without God's self-revelation and our response of faith. As noted in Part One, the argument of this essay presumes the soundness of the method of Christian philosophy, which acknowledges indebtedness to faith even as it defends the integrity of reason as exercised within faith (cf. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 76). On all of this, cf. the related discussion in footnote 34.

3. See *De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1: "*esse* denotes something complete and simple yet non-subsistent"; q. 3, a. 1 ad 17: "God at the same time gives being and produces

the mutual but asymmetrical priority (and posteriority) of *esse* and substance/*agere*, in light of the absolute priority of God as Creator *ex nihilo*.<sup>4</sup>

What I have highlighted in Part One is thus that the *central and most basic act of my being* is characterized by responsive generosity, or participatory gift-giving. The creature “in itself”—in its own self-centeredness—bears, from its inmost depths *as a creature*, reference to God as giver, and so far centeredness in another. The act of *esse* that is communicated to me by God subsists only by virtue of my agency (*agere*) as subject (*ens*, substance); but this *exercising* of *esse* involves my actively receiving an act (*esse*) that is first given, and so far serves as the inner “forming” condition of all my activities.<sup>5</sup> My being, which is a composite or complex being, of course expresses itself in a vast variety of specific acts or actions. But my participation in love, which takes form as responsive generosity, defines my most basic act as a creature: love is (ontologically) prior to and operative within all human acts. It thus cannot but give integrative-dynamic “form” to these acts, at the most radical level. My deepest reality as a creature is at once *to be loved by* and *to love*, first the Creator, and within this, other creatures. I

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that which receives being [*Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit*], so that it does not follow that his action requires something already in existence.”

4. Part One makes clear that the mutual but asymmetrical priority (and posteriority) of *esse* and substance/*agere* does not imply that these are two separate acts, as though the concrete substance first exists (*esse*) and then acts (*agere*). On the contrary, *esse* and *agere* constitute an original unity within distinctness: a unity that presupposes and demands an abiding distinction between the two. The simultaneous priority and posteriority of *esse* and *agere* in the creature thus grounds the truth of the axioms both that *agere sequitur esse* (action follows being) and that *esse sequitur agere* (being follows action), *in that (ontological) order*. All of this secures the important point emphasized by Fr. Norris Clarke in our mutual discussion some years ago: that *esse* flows of its very nature as “communicative” into *agere*, even as *agere* thus in its own way further “perfects” *esse*. Cf. Clarke’s introduction in *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. James F. Anderson (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1997), ix–xxiii, especially the texts from Aquinas cited on xviii–xix. This point regarding the mutual but asymmetrical priority (and posteriority) of *esse* and *agere* will be elaborated further in various contexts below and needs to be kept in mind throughout the argument of Part Two.

5. On *esse* as “*formale*,” or “*maxime formale*,” see ST I, q. 8, a. 1; q. 7, a. 1; q. 4, a. 1 ad 3. The question of *esse* as “formal” will be discussed below.

am not myself pure love, or Subsistent Love; but love, and the “exigence” for love, shape from within all that I am and do as a creature.<sup>6</sup> Love (of God) orders my being 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.

In the course of my argument in Part One, I have had recourse to notions of creaturely “perfection,” receptivity, and relationality in order to characterize the nature of the giftedness proper to creaturely being. Waldstein raises important questions concerning these concepts (MW, 513–17), which demand fuller explanation and justification. This is the primary task of Part Two. What does it mean to say that perfection in the creature has its origin in being (*esse*), even as *esse* subsists only through substance/*agere*? What does this entail regarding the primary meaning of the creature as gift, that is, as one who *gives* but only as always *first given*? What does this primacy of creaturely being as gift—as participatory giver—imply regarding the creature’s receptivity and relation vis-à-vis God and other creatures?

Only being understood in its original constitution and from its depths as gift can sustain all that is affirmed in John Paul II’s theology of the body. Following examination of the nature of the perfection, receptivity, relationality, and filiality/sponsality implied by the understanding of being as gift, I will pose several questions regarding Waldstein’s understanding. I then conclude with reflections on the distinctness of John Paul II’s achievement regarding the meaning of being as love, and its legacy for our time.

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6. 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. Third, this abiding presence of love does not imply denial of 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, we thus reassert our claim: at the depths of his (implicit) consciousness, the human being senses that he is made in and for generous love: that this is what life is most truly about. Restlessness for such love, and for communicating it to others, remains hidden and operative at the heart even of any conscious denial that this is so.

## PART TWO, A

VI. *Esse (creatum), substance, and the source of creaturely perfection*

Section V of Part One argues that *esse* and substance should each be said in its own distinct way to precede and to presuppose the other in perfection. *Esse creatum* is “perfect” (*simplex et completum*) as distinct, but not separate, from substance; *esse* is “perfect,” in other words, only as *given to substance in the latter’s reception and exercise of esse*, which is “itself” non-subsistent (*non subsistens*).<sup>7</sup> *Esse* and substance/*agere* thus each contribute “perfection” to *ens*, in their own order of priority. Let us now develop this idea in terms of the claim that perfection in the creature is constituted in the first instance by love. The perfection of the human being consists most basically in being a gift ordered toward giving—a gift given *to* the self that at once gives *of* itself.

Regarding the priority, hence perfection (“completeness”), of *esse*, Aquinas says, on the one hand, that *esse* is “the actuality of every form, whether substantial or accidental.”<sup>8</sup> “The act of existing [*esse*] is that by which substance is given the name of being [*ens*].”<sup>9</sup> Again: “existence [*esse*] is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore, existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality.”<sup>10</sup>

Being [*esse*] . . . signifies the highest perfection of all [*inter omnia perfectissimum*]: and the proof is that act is always more perfect than potentiality. . . . Wherefore it is clear that being as we understand it here is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections. Nor may we think that being, in this sense, can have anything added to it that is more formal and that determines it as act determines potentiality: because being in this latter sense

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7. Cf. *De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1: “Being signifies something complete and simple but non-subsistent [*esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens*].”

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s On Interpretation*, bk. I, lect. 5.

9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter cited as *SCG*) II, ch. 54.

10. *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4.

is essentially distinct from that to which it is added and whereby it is determined. But nothing that is outside the range of being can be added to being: for nothing is outside its range except non-being, which can be neither form nor matter. Hence being is not determined by something else as potentiality by act, but rather as act by potentiality.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Aquinas says that *esse* is “innermost in each thing and most deeply present within all things [*esse . . . est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest*], since it is formal [*formale*] in respect of everything found in a thing” (*ST I*, q. 8, a. 1).

These texts indicate the sense of the priority of *esse* over essence as the primary locus of (creaturely) being’s perfection. They make clear that the perfection imparted by *esse* is not a condition providing the mere existence—the existential platform, so to speak—necessary for a being to realize perfections through its own action (*agere*, accidents). On the contrary, Aquinas holds that *esse* is the actuality of every form or nature—whether substantial or accidental—and is deepest in all things. *Esse* is the actuality of all acts, and hence the perfection presupposed within all perfections. In this sense, as perfect act (*completum*), *esse* is most formal (*maxime formale*: *ST I*, q. 7, a. 1) and most determinative of all that is in a thing.<sup>12</sup>

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11. *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2 ad 9. Cf. *SCG I*, ch. 22: “Being [*esse*] . . . is the name of an act, for a thing is not said to be because it is in potency but because it is in act. Everything, however, that has an act diverse from it is related to that act as potency to act; for potency and act are spoken of relative to one another. If, then, essence is something other than its being, the essence and the being are thereby related as potency and act.”

12. There is indeed a sense in which Aquinas speaks of *esse* as an “accident”: see, e.g., *Quaestiones quodlibetales II*, q. 2, a. 1: “Being [*esse*] is participated in as a reality not existing from the essence of a thing; and for this reason the question, *whether* a thing is [*an est*], is different from the question, *what* a thing is [*quid est*]. Now, inasmuch as everything outside the essence of a thing may be called an accident, that which pertains to the question, *whether* a thing is, is an accident.” But elsewhere Aquinas provides the explanatory qualification: “If we speak of the *esse* of a substance, *esse* is not described as an accident as though it were in the genus of accident (for it is the act of an essence), but by a kind of similitude, inasmuch as, like an accident, it is not part of the essence” (*De pot.*, q. 5, a. 4 ad 3). The point, in other words, is that *esse* is said to be an accident only in the broad sense that it is not part of, or is distinct from, the essence. Aquinas clearly affirms, then, that *esse* is the

On the other hand, Aquinas also qualifies the perfection of *esse* in the direction that Waldstein emphasizes:

Being [*esse*], taken simply, as including the perfection of being, surpasses life and all perfections that follow; for thus being itself includes all these. . . . But if we consider being as participated in this or that thing, which does not possess the whole perfection of being, but has imperfect being, such as the being of any creature, then it is evident that being itself with a superadded perfection [*ipsum esse cum perfectione superaddita*] is more eminent. Hence . . . things that live are better than things that exist, and intelligent things better than living things. (*ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 5 ad 2)

Further, we have seen that, for Aquinas, “every created substance is . . . related to its own existence as potentiality to act” (*SCG II*, ch. 53). But it is also axiomatic for Aquinas that substance alone subsists, and that *esse* subsists only in and through substance: “A being means that-which-has-existence-in-act. Now, this is substance, which subsists [*ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit*].”<sup>13</sup> If *esse* subsists only as dependent upon substance, then we must also affirm, with Waldstein, a proper sense of the priority of substance over *esse* as a source of creaturely perfection. Furthermore in this connection, Aquinas says that “every substance exists for the sake of its operation” (*ST I*, q. 105, a. 5), and that “operation is the ultimate perfection of each thing” (*SCG II*, ch. 79).

The above statements of Aquinas, taken together, thus assert (1) a priority of *esse* over substance/*agere* as source of perfection, simultaneous with (2) a distinct priority of substance/*agere* over *esse* as source of perfection. The key to resolving the apparent conundrum here lies in the principles stated earlier.<sup>14</sup> Put in terms of Aquinas’s principle that *esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens*: on the one hand, in the act of creation, God communicates the *esse*

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actuality of every form, substantial or accidental, and is thus itself not identical with either substance or accident. *Esse* in this sense may rightly be said to be “trans-substantial” and “trans-accidental.”

13. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, bk. XII, lect. 1.

14. See Part One, 241–46.

*creatum* that is simple and perfect, and thus whole (*simplex et completum*), as act (“the actuality of all acts,” hence the “perfection of all perfections”). At the same time, in the act of creation God *gives esse away* to the creature (*ens*), whom God thereby, via this communication of *esse*, calls into existence as the finite and composed *subject of esse*, which of itself is non-subsistent. The creaturely subject thus exercises the perfection of *esse* in a dependently original way, as one who gives *qua* given. The creature, we should say, in and through its actions (*agere*), really does “add” something to the perfection of being, but only from “inside” *esse* in its perfection as act communicated to the creature by God. Once again, the summary point is that *esse* indicates the first “form” of God’s generosity as expressed in creation; and that this generosity consists precisely in the creature’s *being granted a share* in the perfection of existing, which means so far being itself an agent of being and acting, given to itself.

Thus God really does grant to finite beings participation in his perfection as *Esse Subsistens*, in the act of creation. What he creates, the finite *ens*, is not first *imperfect* in being, as would tend to be the case were *esse* to signal merely an empty beginning of existence that remained so far in potency to any perfection to follow via *agere*. Rather, each *ens* is *perfect in a finite, limited way*, by virtue of the original unity-within-distinctness of act (*esse*) and potency (essence) which constitutes its being. Failure to see this would imply that *esse creatum* is in fact *non-completum*: that the non-subsistent character of *esse* signifies an *esse* that, as *esse*, is imperfect. But this is precisely what Aquinas does *not* affirm. On the contrary, he asserts what is rather more paradoxical: in the act of creation, the *esse* that is perfect *qua esse* (*simplex et completum*) is itself *non subsistens*, and thus subsists only *qua ens*; even as each *ens* is brought into being by God via his communication of *esse*. Hence, in a word: (1) the already “perfect” (*completum*) *esse creatum* (2) subsists only as the act of an essence that is distinct from, and thereby *limits*, *esse* (*esse* as *non subsistens*, subsisting only *qua* the composite *ens*). The perfection of *esse creatum* involves “composition” for its subsistence.

Within the concrete *ens* that alone exists, we may thus say that *esse* is the primarily original source of creaturely perfec-



tion, while substance in its *agere* is *at the same time* the secondarily original source of such perfection.<sup>15</sup>

Waldstein is therefore right to insist on the importance of substance/*agere* in the perfection of the creature. From the perspective put forward here, however, by conceiving *esse* as empty (a “bare beginning”), Waldstein logically fails to integrate any note of “being-given” into what is understood as the perfection of substance and its activity.<sup>16</sup> In his idea of substance and its actions, there is no adequate sense of an anterior givenness as *giftedness*: of substance’s *being granted* existence in and through God’s communication of *esse*, such that existing as such is seen to reach down through the whole of substance, imparting to substance and all of its specific actions *the ratio of gift*—and thus demanding a conception of substance as properly gift, and of its actions as specific participatory acts of gift-giving.

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15. It is by virtue of this original perfection unique to each creature that it images God’s infinite perfection. Given the limited, finite nature of each creature, however, Aquinas says that “no creature represents the first exemplar perfectly,” and that therefore the first exemplar needs to “be presented by many things” (*ST I*, q. 47, a. 1 ad 2). Or, more fully: “[God] brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated, and be represented by them; and because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever” (*ST I*, q. 47, a. 1).

16. Waldstein leaves himself vulnerable to this criticism insofar as he understands *esse* to mean “merely ‘to be,’ simply speaking” (MW, 506), or again as “mere being” (Part One, 236). While Waldstein thus affirms that “[*e*]sse *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” (Part One, 235), his conception of *esse* is “empty,” standing in need of completion through the acts of the substance. *Esse* is so far, on Waldstein’s reading, *non-completum*: “Among us creatures, simply to be is the bare beginning. To stand in relation, that is when being reaches its perfection” (Part One, 236). On Waldstein’s understanding, this “standing in relation,” which brings being to perfection through greater interiority and intimacy, and only in this sense is more constitutive than substance, is properly said to be a *per se* accident. It is thus the case that both *esse* and relation remain for Waldstein ontologically posterior to the person (substance) *in direct proportion* as we affirm that the person is “perfectly” alive or possesses “perfect” being. Creaturely *esse* indicates simply the beginning of the person’s being, whose richness or perfection is first and most properly a function of his realization of relations to God and others via his activities of knowing and loving (*agere*).

The points regarding *esse* and perfection, then, are two. First, it is this primacy of *esse* in the constitution of the creature that alone warrants the claim that generosity or love is the basic act of the creature. Love reaches to the innermost depths of my reality as a creature because and insofar as *esse* reaches to my innermost depths.<sup>17</sup> This of course does not mean that my being is, simply and without qualification, a matter of love. On the contrary, as we have noted, I am as a creature finite and composed. My being (*esse*) always involves acting (*agere*) in the vast number of distinct ways proper to a being that is composed and that develops in space and time. The point, rather, is that *esse* as the primary act of the creature—as the act that indicates being, simply speaking—is generous by nature and reaches to the center of my being in a way that affects all other activities and aspects of my being. In the words of Aquinas, *esse* is “formal with respect to everything that is in a being” (*ST I*, q. 8, a. 1).

But, secondly, this perfection-as-love in the creature, rooted in *esse* as granted gratuitously *by* God, is so far a perfection that is *given to* the creature. The love that I am to communicate with others is a participated love: a love that is first and always given to me in my very exercise of it. It is, so to speak, my own being-loved-by-God that I am to receive into myself and make my own; while also simultaneously, in this very act of receiving and interiorizing this love as my own, returning it to God (in a movement that entails making a gift of myself also to others). It is, in a word, my own givenness as gift, effected by God’s loving me into existence (through others), which calls forth, and indeed undergirds, my own giving of myself (which is simultaneously a receiving of myself from others).<sup>18</sup>

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17. Being itself, in other words, must be understood in terms of love. Indeed, we can say that being itself *is* love, insofar as creaturely being is, to its core, a being-given by God. The generosity of the Creator in the gift of creation, which gives the creature not only to be but to be generously, that is, to share in the very giving of being, is communicated by way of the act of *esse creatum*. For more on this point, see Adrian J. Walker, “Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas’ Doctrine of *Esse Commune*” (hereafter cited as “Personal Singularity”), *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 457–79, at 470–71 (cited in Part One, 243).

18. The sense in which my gift of self involves being given to myself by, and hence receiving myself from, not only God but also other creatures, will be developed in my discussion of filiality and sponsality below, in section IX.

What we can say in this light, thus, is that creaturely *esse*, in its character as *completum* but *non subsistens*, takes the form of a generosity that is always first re-sponsive (from *sponsa*, of one's own will). As we will show below, it is this responsive generosity that characterizes the filial and spousal nature of human being.

But let us conclude this section regarding perfection. The perfection proper to the creature is a matter of generosity, but of a generosity that is through and through *given* to the creature and participated in by the creature, via *esse* and essence/*agere* in the distinctly prior way proper to each. Such a generosity, as *given* to us—as shared with us in our composed, hence finite, creatureliness—presupposes and demands the absolutely prior agency of the Creator, even as it likewise presupposes and demands *active creaturely reception*. The dilemma addressed in Part One thus recurs in a distinct form: to speak of the creature as *gift*—in terms of a generosity or “givingness” that is participated in by the creature—necessarily implies a distinct *subject* of receiving, a subject that seems so far simply to precede (ontologically) the “exchange” implicit in receiving what is given. It seems, in a word, to imply a subject that first exists, or is already “in act,” as the condition for its being an agent of receiving. This, in fact, is Waldstein's argument (see, e.g., MW, 505–06, 509). What we thus now have to show is how reception begins already in *esse*, even as *esse* subsists only via the act (*agere*) of the creature. The question, in other words, concerns once again the paradox of the distinct but asymmetrical primacy of both *esse* and substance/*agere* in the creature's reception of God's initiative in the creation of each human being.

## VII. *The creature as active receiver*

My defense of the notion of being as gift logically demands that we ascribe reception, in some principled sense, to the first act of the creature. If my being is through and through a matter of being-given as gift, then the act of receiving my being must likewise reach all the way down through my being. How can this be reasonably affirmed?

The burden of my exchange with Fr. Norris Clarke some years ago, which Waldstein refers to in his article, con-

cerned just this point: namely, that love in the creature begins in the act of *esse* whereby I am said to be, simply speaking. My argument in this exchange was that we must anchor love first in *esse*, as innerly disposed toward, and always already further communicated by, *agere*.<sup>19</sup> There is a “from” (*esse ab*) and “toward” (*esse ad*) God, and indeed also a being “with” (*esse cum*) God,<sup>20</sup> as well as an “in-itselfness” (*esse in*), inscribed in the creature in his original constitution as such. *Esse creatum* and *agere* both account, asymmetrically, if mutually, for these features within the unity of *ens*. In light of Waldstein’s critical questions regarding the gifted nature of the human creature, let me now develop further how we can, and must, affirm that receptivity is anchored first in the creature’s act of being, even as this requires a subject that retains its own proper priority in the creature’s act of receiving.

Professor Kenneth Schmitz, in his reflections on the meaning of creation, helps clarify what is involved in inscribing receptivity within first act (*esse*):

The creature is an effect of God’s communication of being and stands in causal dependence upon God as upon the Cause of its being. The absolute nature of ontological dependence entitles us to use the category of gift to articulate the implications of the relation, since it belongs to a gift to be uncalled for, to be given without prior conditions. Now reception is integral to the very character of a gift, for a gift refused is an unfinished gift. . . . [T]he acceptance completes the gift, fulfills it. This creaturely acceptance takes the form of ontological self-affirmation (*ens per se subsistens*). And, since it is first act that is being received, it is received *as act* at a level deeper and more original than secondary activity which is grounded in and expressive of first act. It follows, then, that both first act and secondary act are re-sponses.

At the level of first act, however paradoxical this sounds, the creature accepts its being in the very reception of it

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19. As noted above, Clarke’s response rightly illumines the sense in which the axiom *agere sequitur esse* implies—mutually but asymmetrically—the axiom *esse sequitur agere*. See Norris Clarke, “Response to David Schindler’s Comments,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 593–98.

20. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 16–35, at 28.

(*esse-ab*). How are we to understand this, since the creature does not stand outside the relation so as to receive being before it even exists? We must understand the acceptance as expressed by its subsistent self-reference (*autos, per se*) and within its primordial ordination towards the Source of the being communicated to it without which there would be no self (*autos*), so that its original reception is communicated to it in its very institution. This relation to self and Source is the tension—one might say, paradox—of finite being.<sup>21</sup>

Schmitz goes on to say that the creature's movement from God (*influxus entis, esse-ab*) is such that it is complete only in the creature's simultaneous dynamism back toward its source (*reditus entis, esse-ad*).

This means that the created "self" of each being is preserved only through reference to the Creative Other. This communication and response is the initial generosity, the initial deposit of being, that is inseparable from the creative endowment and that weights created being towards the actual good (i.e., the good of its own being and the Good that is its Source). And this is the meaning of final causality in the ontological relation, that is, insofar as final causality bears first of all on created being and only then on its agency. For there is more than passivity in reception; there is also self-possession and ordination to the good. *Esse* as the supposit of secondary activity already possesses the integral mode of potency and act in the form of an integral ordination towards (*esse-ad*). ("Created Receptivity," 127)

Regarding the question of potency, then, and Aquinas's view that the created substance "is related to its own existence as potentiality to act" (SCG II, ch. 53),<sup>22</sup> Schmitz states that, for Aristotle,

the potential is the able-but-not-yet of the subject in accidental change and analogously the able-but-not-yet of

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21. Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete," in *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 106–31, at 126. On the language of *esse* as "first act" and *agere* as "secondary act," and the importance of understanding *esse* and *agere* as a unity (within their distinctness), see footnote 4.

22. Although, again, there is a paradoxical sense in which created *esse* itself bears the "potential" for further actualization, via the activity of the creature, as noted above.

primary matter in substantial change. With his sense of creation *ex nihilo*, St. Thomas interprets the distinction by situating potency within a more radical context of being.

With the entry of the doctrine of creation . . . comes a deeper sense of potentiality: for the potential is not potentiality to the reception of form (*eidos*) on the part of matter (*hyle*) or subject (*hypokeimenon*), but the reception of being where there had been none at all (*esse absolute seu simpliciter*). (“Created Receptivity,” 121)<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, in this context,

We must look to act, in keeping with its primacy, in order to determine the character of the indeterminacy and otherness that is characteristic of potency. For the Aristotelian understanding of potency posits a pre-existent recipient (ultimately, undervived matter) whereas potency to being simultaneously demands that there can be no recipient before the reception itself has been achieved. And so creation *ex nihilo* is to be understood as the endowment of the capacity to receive being in the very communication in which that actuality is being received. Nature, or properly the essence (*essentia*), functions as the potential principle that marks the finitude (receptive dependency, radical contingency) of created being and ensures its limited integrity (*per essentiam/naturam*). (“Created Receptivity,” 122–23)

Finally, Schmitz says that “[c]ertainly the potentiality of the creature (*essentia* in the broad sense) is included within [this] ontological relation, and it plays its role as a co-principle of ‘ontological reception’; essence is the principle within the created being that is the intrinsic ‘receptor’ of being” (“Created Receptivity,” 124–25).

The text of Aquinas from the *De potentia Dei* discussed above and in Part One, regarding *esse* as *simplex et completum sed non subsistens*, seems to me important in articulating the warrant for Schmitz’s claim. The whole creaturely being, in its essence

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23. Here Schmitz cites *ST I*, q. 44, a. 2 ad 1: “The *Philosopher* (Phys. i, text 62) is speaking of ‘becoming’ in particular—that is, from form to form, either accidental or substantial. But here *we* are speaking of things according to their emanation from the universal principle of being” (emphasis original).

and existence, is received; thus, it is not only potency but also act that is received, in a way that from the beginning involves the creature's dependent-active participation in the Creator's initiative.<sup>24</sup> The point is that "God creates beings whole and entire, singular beings in community" ("Created Receptivity," 125). He does not bring together principles of act and potency that somehow exist as "things" antecedent to their integration *qua* the unity of the *ens* that alone subsists. For this reason, Schmitz concludes:

We must, then, include created act within the notion of ontological reception. Created act is received act. Moreover, everything in the created being is penetrated by this receptive relation. Since act determines everything within the being, it follows that the meaning of all the causes and principles of the being reflect this reception. ("Created Receptivity," 125)<sup>25</sup>

The upshot of Schmitz's position, in light of our concern with the nature of gift and reception, is that receptivity in the creature is not simply passive, but innerly active—or better, active *as* receptive. The being of the creature is a being from the Creator (*esse-ab*) and being toward the Creator (*esse-ad*), as at once possessing a center in itself (*esse-in*).<sup>26</sup> The giving in which the creaturely being participates from the beginning of its existence is thus to be properly conceived as

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24. That is, the generosity of the Creator is such that the act of *esse* that he communicates involves bringing into existence a subject who participates in his own receiving of himself.

25. It is important to understand that Schmitz is not denying the distinction between act and potency but only insisting that this distinctness be seen from within what he terms the contemporary shift to the "concrete order of being," or to the "concrete singular" ("Created Receptivity," 117–18). The burden of Schmitz's argument, in other words, is that the original distinctness of act and potency takes its meaning from within what is always at once an original integration of the two. This means that, in the concrete *ens*, the receptive nature of potency shares from the beginning of the creature in the perfection of its act, even as its act (thereby) participates in receiving.

26. *Esse-in*, in other words, implies the reference of *esse creatum* to the itselfness of a subject (*ens*) that is other than *esse*, in which *esse* alone has subsistence, within its constitutive dynamic as *ab* and *ad*—a centeredness in itself, and a movement from and toward God, that indeed imply at a deeper level centeredness in God.

re-responsive, that is, active in and of itself (*sponte*) always *in an anteriorly receptive way*.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the core of my answer to Waldstein: receiving, in its root creaturely sense, is never simply *correlative* to gift-giving (cf. MW, 497); on the contrary, it is the *distinct-anterior form of* gift-giving.<sup>28</sup> Receiving is the distinct *act* in and through which the creature first becomes what he is as *participant* in the Creator's own generosity. God's generous initiative in creating me is such that it involves my participation in his generous initiative from the first moment of my conception. As Adrian J. Walker puts it, God does not simply give me to be, but gives me the giving of being.<sup>29</sup> Thus, I *actively am* in the form of a *gift*, whose re-responsive character reaches to the core of my being, affecting every aspect and activity of my being. My own being as self-giver is truly a *self-giving*, but only as at once a *being given to* myself. I am a self-giver only *qua* participatory gift-giver that is given.<sup>30</sup> This givenness is something I receive from God through others.

Creaturely generosity can thus be said to consist at root in letting be: letting God's generosity be effective in me, such that my own "efficient" activity takes its most basic form as grateful re-sponse.<sup>31</sup> It is this grateful-responsive generos-

27. From *re-cipere*, to take back or take in, to recover, welcome, accept; *capere*, to take or hold; hence *capabilis*, receptive, able to take in.

28. The point I am making here does not deny a proper polarity of giving and receiving, within the unity of gift. The point is simply that, in the creature, by virtue of his being as created, *givenness* or receptivity necessarily informs, from the inside and continuously, every *giving* act.

29. Cf. "Personal Singularity," 472 (cited in Part One, 244).

30. It is perhaps worth noting, in this regard, that "gift of self" bears a twofold meaning: (1) the self as gift (objective genitive) and (2) the giving of the self (subjective genitive). My argument is that the first—the givenness of the self as gift—informs the second—the self's giving—even as the self's giving is thereby (always already) a participatory expression of the self's givenness as gift.

31. As noted above, Waldstein says that he agrees regarding my "placing reception together with gift at the center of [John Paul II's theology of the body]," insofar as reception "is just beneath the surface, because it is the *correlative* of gift" (MW, 497, emphasis mine). But he also states that he does not understand what I mean when I say that my being "*presupposes* in some significant sense an act of receiving on my part" (MW, 515, emphasis Waldstein's). Here I have indicated what this "presupposes" means: participation (*ab initio*)



ity that characterizes the creature in his original constitution as gift. This generosity most properly and deeply characterizes each of the creature's activities, and indicates the *root meaning* of creaturely *perfection*.<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion to which we are led is that receptivity, or act as grateful re-sponsiveness, itself participates in the perfection of act, indeed act in its primary sense (as *esse*). Now Aquinas, as we have seen, affirms that the *esse* of the creature is perfect (*completum*). We need to say more, then, about how an act that is receptive or re-sponsive can be perfect.

Aquinas focuses the key difficulty when he says that a thing that is agent and patient at the same time is so far an imperfect agent. The reason, he says, is that reception implies a lack, that is, the need to acquire some perfection, and only the creature lacks perfection and thus needs to acquire it.<sup>33</sup> For Aquinas,

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in one's own coming into being as gift through God's utterly free and generous giving *ex nihilo*.

If reception is not initially anchored in *esse*, the act whereby the creature is first said to be, then by definition the creature becomes a gift only in "second" act, or *agere*. The result, in other words, is twofold: (1) Giftedness becomes the expression of my own action. I first generate through my action. (2) Relation becomes inter-active: something, *not* in which I already initially stand by virtue of my original *givenness qua* created, but which I on the contrary *first enact* or *produce*. Waldstein insists that, in the act of creation, God does not first create a relation; rather, he creates a creaturely substance that then relates (MW, 50). This is of course indisputably true. But if left unqualified it becomes also—in light of the argument presented here—question-begging. The *ratio* of giftedness implies givenness. Insofar as I *am* a gift, I am first-already a receiver. This does not exclude my being also an original enactor. The point, rather, is that my reality as enactor is itself innerly receptive. My proposal with respect to Waldstein, then, is that giving and receiving are not first or most basically *correlative* acts, but rather that they bear a unity within their original distinctness. For this reason, my relation to God (and to all other creatures) is not first or most basically inter-active in nature. On the contrary, it is "something" in which I always already stand, in my very enactment of it.

32. A perfection indeed that images the perfection of the Son of God himself, *as begotten*; see footnote 34.

33. *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4: "Some things . . . are both agent and patient at the same time [*simul agunt et patiuntur*]: these are imperfect agents, and to these it belongs to intend, even in acting, the acquisition of something. But it does not belong to the First Agent, who is agent only, to act for the acquisition of some end; he intends only to communicate his perfection, which is his goodness; while every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness." Cf. also *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4 ad 1: "To

then, patience, and so receptivity, involves imperfection of its very nature, insofar as it entails, of its inner *ratio*, a lack needing to be remedied through acquisition. But this implies defining act in its original and essential fullness as agent only—in terms of an *Esse Subsistens* abstracted from the giving and receiving from all eternity implied in God's reality as triune community.<sup>34</sup>

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act from need belongs only to an imperfect agent, which by its nature is both agent and patient. But this does not belong to God, and therefore he alone is the most perfectly liberal giver, because he does not act for his own profit, but only for his own goodness."

34. But see Aquinas's important qualification in *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6 ad 3, where, in a trinitarian context, he affirms the Son's perfection—here, his divine omnipotence—precisely in a receptive mode: "As the same essence is paterernity in the Father, and filiation in the Son: so by the same power the Father begets, and the Son is begotten. . . . So the Son has the same omnipotence as the Father, but with another relation; the Father possessing power as giving [*ut dans*], which is signified by saying that he is able to beget [*potest generare*]; while the Son possesses power as receiving [*ut accipiens*], which is signified by saying that he is able to be begotten [*potest generari*]." Cf. also, in a similar vein, *ST I*, q. 41, a. 6 ad 1.

As the texts cited above make clear (cf. footnote 33), Aquinas rules out patience or receptivity as "perfect" insofar as patience implies acting from need, and hence for the acquisition of what one does not yet have. But such need does not obtain in the Trinity, whose giving and receiving is circumincessive and thus "complete" from all eternity.

There is a further point to be made here, however. Receptivity in God implies relation or community in God—and thus that the unity of God (*in se*) as *Esse Subsistens* is a tri-unity (*communio*) of three persons. This is not something we can demonstrate or deduce regarding ultimate reality. On the contrary, it is something we first see only in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ (regarding the method of Christian philosophy implied here, cf. footnote 2 and *Fides et ratio*, 76). But what we do see in the light of faith is truly remarkable: we see that God's perfection as *Esse* consists not only in his subsistent unity (*in se*) but in a subsistent unity that simultaneously and from all eternity itself consists in subsistent relations of persons. And once we "see" this, we are disposed to see that the perfection (*completum*) of act (*esse*) that is handed over to the exercise of the creature in the act of creation involves (of its inmost *ratio* and perfection *qua esse*) not only the self-reference implied by unity, but also the other-reference (giving to and receiving from) implied by a unity that is intrinsically related and communal. To be sure, in the creature this relationality—together with the receptivity implied by relation—is marked by imperfection. But it is crucial to see that the neediness implied in the creature's receptivity and relationality stems, not from the nature of receptivity and relationality as such, but rather from the *composed* nature of the creature, that is, from the distinction within the creature between *esse* and *what* the creature is.

Needless to say, there is much that needs still to be argued, both on philosophical grounds and in terms of the writings of Aquinas (cf., for example, *ST*

I will return to the question of community later, in light of John Paul II. It will suffice for the present purposes to point out that, on Aquinas's own terms, we must logically exclude receptivity from the perfection of act *only* if we begin by assuming that the perfection of act (*esse: Esse Subsistens*) is not itself a matter of love—where love is understood to involve relations to or from another. In this context, we have shown that the creature, as disclosed in the act of creation, is intrinsically and interiorly related to the Creator, as gift to Giver. Love in the creature, with its in-built responsiveness as gift, does indeed involve limitedness, and so far “imperfection.” This is so, however, not *qua responsiveness*, but because creaturely being is *composed* (of act and potency).

Before returning to this question below, we first need to consider further the sense in which the creature is indeed interiorly *related* to God. In my previous engagement with the work of Waldstein, I qualified the creature's relation to God as “constitutive,” and he objects to the appropriateness of this term. What does it mean, and in what sense does it seem to me appropriate?

### *VIII. Created esse and the nature of relation*

Waldstein criticizes my affirming relation in the creature that “(ontologically) ‘precedes’ substance in the way that *esse* ‘precedes’ substance, and which can so far not be ‘accidental’ to sub-

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I, q. 32, a. 1 ad 2, and again *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 8 ad 2, regarding whether fellowship or community is necessary for complete possession of the good). The discussions in the present section regarding receptivity, and in later sections regarding relation, filiality, and the achievement of St. John Paul II, presuppose even as they elucidate further the point noted here. My immediate purpose is simply to underscore the fact that receptivity and relation are necessarily signs of neediness or imperfection only insofar as we already assume (consciously or unconsciously) that the perfection or fullness of act (*esse*) implies a unity *in se* that necessarily excludes inherent openness to others. Christian faith disposes us to reject this a priori assumption, and thereby to be open in principle to a “new,” intrinsically reasonable, sense of the creature as image of God: an image, that is, which reflects God (*maior dissimilitudo*: in an infinitely different way) not only as a unity *in se* but a unity *in se* that always also involves relation to others. Indeed, my argument is that it is just such a “developed” view of the human being as image of God (not only as an individual but also as a “communion of persons”) that is the burden of the work of John Paul II.

stance, either ‘properly’ or ‘contingently’” (MW, 508).<sup>35</sup> According to Waldstein,

It is the person who, in his or her *esse*, is related to God as a creature to the Creator. Here . . . 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. (MW, 509)

The principle of my response on this point has been recorded above. The preceding section (VII), which indicates the sense in which receptivity reaches all the way down through the being of the creature, indicates the sense in which relation does as well. Relation to God is initiated in the creature via *esse* as communicated to and received by and into the creature via his own activity (*agere*).

This “constitutive” relation to God thus does not absorb substance into itself, but rather *presupposes substance* even as it *affects from within* the whole of substance and its activity.<sup>36</sup> This is so because the relation initiated in God’s communication of *esse* to the creature is inherently generous: God’s creating the creature involves giving *esse* away to the creature and thus letting the creature be in itself, and in this sense involves the creature’s “constitutive” participation in *actively letting itself be*. What is crucial to see, however, is that my “letting myself be” is at the same

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35. Citing my “The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 172–90, at 176n2.

36. Cf. Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 125 (cited in part above): “[I]t is not only potency that is received; the act is received as well, because the whole being (essence and existence) is received. . . . The ontological relation determines the act at its very core as a *received* act. . . . Created act is a received act. Moreover, everything in the created being is penetrated by this receptive relation. Since act determines everything within the being, it follows that the meaning of all the causes and principles of the being reflect this reception. It is not only the agency of the creature (its secondary activity) that is affected by its participation. All the causes are affected” (emphasis original).

time, and at a deeper level, *a letting be of God within me*.<sup>37</sup> In a word, the creature's relation to God, initiated by God in the act of creation, establishes the creature's own relation to itself *simultaneously with* its relation to God that is *more interior to the creature than the creature is to itself* (cf. *ST I*, q. 8, a. 1).

The creature's relation to God is thus one of being (*esse*) as exercised by the creature (*agere*), even as *esse* and *agere* each have their own distinct priority within their unity. In this sense we may say that the relation is at once a *gift opening into*, and already engaging, a task, and a task *only as anteriorly gift*. That is, the creature is a gift to himself from God even as the creature is thereby himself established as one ordered to participatory gift-giving.

To say that relation is "constitutive" is therefore to say that it is not merely a "categorical" or "accidental" act (an enactment by the substance or "being-in-a-certain-respect"), even as this relation opens into and includes categorical-accidental acts. Conceiving relation to God as first a categorical or accidental act would imply granting originary primacy to the creature's act in initiating the relation—and so far imply denying the originary primacy of God's act that is communicated via created *esse*.<sup>38</sup> It is rather the case that my initiative as

37. And indeed a letting be of other creatures within me. The sense in which this is so is clarified below in the discussions of *esse commune* and of sponsality.

38. The problem forced by Waldstein's argument, in sum, is as follows: how can we say that reception and relation are anchored in the first act (*esse*) of the creature, the act whereby the creature is said to be, simply speaking, without thereby tacitly supposing a *subject* that receives and relates? The options, according to Waldstein, seem to be two: either we insist on anchoring receiving and relation in *esse*, in which case the creature ends up becoming logically absorbed into God or an ocean of *esse*, or indeed confused with the (subsistent) being-from that is proper to the Son; or we affirm the priority of a distinct subject, in which case the creature (creaturely *ens*, as opposed to *esse creatum*) becomes the first and most proper locus of receiving and relating. Waldstein affirms the second alternative, and charges me with backing into the first. I have argued, on the contrary, that we must defend the simultaneity of *esse* and substance as the first locus, within a hierarchical (mutually asymmetrical) order that grants (primarily original) priority to *esse*. Indeed, my contention is that Waldstein, adopting the first alternative, collapses the *ratio* of the creature as gift into what is first—logically—*self-gift*: a matter of what is first truly given to, *only qua enacted by*, the self. To put it in other words, love in the creature becomes a matter of being, not one who is first *loved by* God, but who first *loves* God (cf. 1 Jn 4:10)—a mat-

a creature *in relation to* the Creator presupposes, and is always borne from within by, the initiative of the Creator in me, even as the Creator graciously involves me in enacting that relation from the beginning of my existence.

But let me qualify further the meaning and scope of what is entailed by “constitutive.” Adrian J. Walker, following Aquinas, refers to *esse creatum* as *esse commune* (“Personal Singularity,” 467). By this he does not mean that *esse* in its “quasi unity” as *esse* subsists prior to and apart from *esse* as exercised by and inherent in each substance. *Esse* is not some *thing* shared in common by creatures. Rather, the *esse* which subsists only as exercised by and inherent in substance *is given to* the creature in the creature’s act of reception. This being-*given-to* implies that *esse* is not exhausted in the being of any single creature, or indeed in the sum of all of them. It implies, in other words, *esse*’s non-reducibility to, and so far transcendence of, substance. Walker explains this transcendence in terms of Ferdinand Ulrich’s understanding of *esse commune* as a “pure mediation” of God’s creative giving. Ulrich holds that

*esse*’s status as pure mediation . . . means that it cannot gather itself up into a quidditative *tertium quid* standing halfway between God and the creature. It is, rather, given over, without reserve, to creatures, so that they might be so to say “in its place.” It is precisely in its given-awayness, and not as an essentialized hypostasis . . . that *esse commune* has the transcendent unity by which it mediates the presence of the Giver *as* Giver. Its self-being is selflessness—not as a destruction of selfhood, but as the position of it in “others.” Being, in other words, is love, and whatever participates in being is *ipso facto* drawn up from its very roots into the same logic of love. (“Personal Singularity,” 470)

The consequences of the above for our argument are striking:

[I]f God gives the act of giving, then, just by being, creatures are caught up in the act of giving—not only *vis-à-vis*

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ter first, not of *being in* love but of *enacting* love. My own proposal is that we are indeed from the beginning enactors of love, but only *qua* being-in-love by virtue of God’s absolutely prior initiative *that is received into me* via my first act (*esse*), and that is always already overflowing into and expressed in second act (*agere*).

themselves . . . but also vis-à-vis one another within that web of secondary causes known as the universe. Indeed, we can go so far as to say that creatures' reception of God's giving of the giving of being must, in some sense, be [an act] which, at any given moment, all existing creatures perform at once, and whose content is for each to give and receive being (and the giving of being) to and from all (and vice versa). Not only does each creature give itself to itself, . . . but, at the very moment in which it does so, it must also be giving itself to, and receiving itself from, all other creatures. ("Personal Singularity," 473)

Again: "To have a share in *esse commune* is at once to give oneself, and one's giving, to oneself and to others—and to receive oneself, and one's giving, from others" ("Personal Singularity," 473). Given this character of *esse* as a matter of love that shares at once in receiving and giving, *esse creatum* can in principle never be hypostatized as a kind of subsistent unity, either *qua common* to all creatures or *qua* any one particularized thing (which would then in fact make up a universe unto itself). In a word: "*esse commune* establishes a shared order of being, of which each thing is a member simply by dint of being. To be is to share being with others—not, however, by performing in numerically one exercise of the *actus essendi* with the others, but, rather, through mutual giving and receiving" ("Personal Singularity," 473–74)—which giving and receiving, it is crucial to see, begin already *in first act (esse)* as given away to and received by the creature.

Further, then, as Schmitz puts it in *The Gift*, "in creation *ex nihilo* the very unity of each creature *and of the world itself* is given."<sup>39</sup> He specifies this as follows:

To be sure, the world [i.e., common being, *esse commune*] is not some thing apart from its creatures: it does not have its own *act* of being. . . . The world is not an individual. Nor is it a mere collection, a network of relations resting upon non-worlded and private individuals. Nor is it the System of which they are mere members. Rather, the world is that which is built into its creatures, and they into it. For they are built-up in and for and with regard to the world within which they have their being. . . . The creator's regard for creatures' being-in-the-

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39. Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996), 130, emphasis added (hereafter cited as *The Gift*).

world is not restricted to ordinary categorial relations, but is directed fundamentally to a distinctive kind of transcendental interrelationship. (*The Gift*, 111–12)

Schmitz says further that “actually existent creatures are individual beings”: each is an “*unum per se*, Aristotle’s ‘this of a certain kind (*tóde tí*).” Created beings, therefore, “[i]nsofar as they retain their existent individuality . . . cannot form an ontological unit” (*The Gift*, 113). Nevertheless, he says, for St. Thomas, *esse* as act “is by its very nature communicative and diffusive” (*The Gift*, 115):

Act [*esse*] is absolutely *fundamental*, since without it nothing else can be. It is most *radical*, since it is the root without which nothing else in the thing can be. At the same time, it is most *common* or *universal*, since its proper effect is not merely some modification or arrangement of already existing things, nor merely the generation of a certain kind of thing; but, rather, creation has as its distinctive effect the very coming into being of any and everything *qua* being. (*The Gift*, 117)<sup>40</sup>

What, in light of these texts, is the most appropriate term with which to describe accurately the sort of relation I have presupposed in my critical engagement with Waldstein? Schmitz refers to this relationality as “transcendental,” as distinct from “categorial” (*The Gift*, 112). He also characterizes this relationality as a “*mode of being*” (*The Gift*, 111), and indeed characterizes it elsewhere in terms of “subsistent” relations.<sup>41</sup> For my part, I have

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40. Cf. “Personal Singularity,” 467: “When Aquinas speaks of *esse commune* . . . he refers, not to the *things* that are, but, rather, to the very act of be-ing, the very ‘izzing,’ thanks to which those things *are*. *Esse commune* is the act-fullness in which all beings participate insofar as they are beings in the participial-substantive sense of *ens*.”

41. Cf. Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 123. Schmitz employs the language of “subsistent relation” to characterize the radicality of the creature’s relation to God, while carefully qualifying his use of the phrase, given its privileged place in the tradition as a term for the divine persons of the Trinity: “The inequality and limitation inherent in the relation of dependence is such as to ensure the distinction between God and creatures. The advantage of the term is that it removes all suggestion of *absolute* autonomy from the creature at the originating level of its being” (123). “The value of the term *subsistent relation* as applied to creatures is that it manifests the radical dependence for all



called it a “constitutive” relation, following the language of John Paul II and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,<sup>42</sup> and for the reasons I have given: because the relation to God (and others) establishes or constitutes the creature from its beginning and all the way through, in every act and aspect of its being.

The issue here is uniquely subtle, since in the end it affects our understanding of everything that exists: the nature of the Creator, and also of all created beings in their relation to the Creator and to each other. What is crucial, whatever term we employ, is to secure a sense of relation that presupposes and demands the integrity of substance (of each *ens in se*), while simultaneously (re-)ordering our understanding of substance from within, such that *reference to God* (and to all other creatures) reaches to the very depths of sub-

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that is in them through participation in the *communicatio entis* flowing from the First Being” (123n59).

For my part, the term “subsistent relation” demands further qualification in order to show how it allows for an adequate sense of analogy—*maior dissimilitudo*—between the divine persons of the Trinity and the human person-in-relation. It seems to me that it risks suggesting an insufficient account of the paradox of *simplex et completum sed non subsistens*. The being of the creature, as composite, so far demands an infinite difference between divine persons and the human person, in terms of what is meant by *both* relation and substance. Neither relation nor substance is as complete or perfect in a composite person as in a divine person. The creature can never be as deeply related to God as God is to himself (*one* in three); nor can the creature ever be as ordered to the other as God is within his unity (*one* in *three*). Nonetheless, it is still possible, indeed necessary, to assert that the creature is constitutively related in a way that goes all the way down to the roots of his being, while presupposing the whole integrity of substance. The key to this question seems to me to lie in the argument of Walker, following Ulrich.

42. See John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 39: “In fact, the individual’s relation to God is a constitutive element [*elementum constitutivum*] of the very ‘nature’ and ‘being’ of an individual: for it is in God that we ‘live, move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28)”; *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (hereafter cited as TOB) (Boston: Pauline Press, 2006), 182: “This norm of existing as a person is demonstrated in Genesis as a characteristic of creation precisely by the meaning of these two words, ‘alone’ and ‘help’ (Gn 2:18). They point out how fundamental and constitutive the relationship and the communion of persons is for man [*quanto fondamentale e costitutiva per l’uomo sia la relazione e la comunione delle persone*]”; TOB, 166: “Precisely the function of sex [that is, being male or female], which in some way is ‘constitutive for the person’ (not only ‘an attribute of the person’), shows how deeply man . . . is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she’”; CSDC, 109: “The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God [*costitutivamente relazionate a Dio*] in the most profound manner.” The point here will be developed further below.

stance's own *self*-reference. Indeed, as we have already suggested above and will develop further below in terms of the writings of John Paul II, a proper understanding of relation (in light of being as gift) demands the indissolubility of self-centeredness, on the one hand, and God- (and other-) centeredness, on the other.

The point then, is that created *esse, qua esse commune*, is an *order of being* that truly affects each being from within, such that all beings are understood from their original beginnings to bear a *unity*, to be *in* community with one another, in and through the Creator's bestowal of *esse* commonly to all and uniquely to each.<sup>43</sup> Schmitz draws into relief the crucial point: "*receptivity*, as distinct from *reciprocation by interaction*, is the initial response" of beings who are first established in community in and through the very act of their being created (*The Gift*, 125, emphasis added). Each creature receives and gives itself from and to all other creatures.

The distinction between receptivity, on the one hand, and reciprocation by interaction, on the other, signals the distinction between a community of beings that is intrinsically or constitutively related and one that is merely inter-active. An inter-active community logically presupposes multiple subjects, each of which is first constituted as an existing subject (*ens*) in itself, which realizes relation to the other (God, other creatures) first-simply through its activity (*agere*). What I have termed constitutive relationality, on the contrary, indicates a community that is given to creatures in their original constitution as being (*esse commune*), even as this initially given community is—in the very act of creation—handed over to each creature as simultaneously its own task (*agere*).

According to this understanding of constitutive relations, I am most a "being-in-myself" only *from within a reference to God* that embraces the whole of me and refers me back to him—while implicitly referring me also, at the same time, back to my constitutive community, or original "communiality," with all other creatures, who themselves exist "in themselves" in

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43. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 55: "The Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a *metaphysical interpretation of the "humanum" in which relationality is an essential element*" (emphasis original); *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter cited as CCC), 360: "Because of its common origin *the human race forms a unity*, for 'from one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth' (Acts 17:26)" (emphasis original).

relation to God.<sup>44</sup> In a word, being *in myself*, or *self*-reference, and being *related to God* and other creatures, via the created *esse* shared by all creation, are directly, not inversely or indifferently, related.

What, then, are the differences between Waldstein and myself on the constitutiveness and interior depth of relation in the creature? He says that “what is absolutely first as internal and constitutive of creatures is God’s creative gift of being” (MW, 505). In clarifying what he means by “gift of being,” however, he stresses that in creation the “first *terminus* is I myself as a created person, a substance of a rational nature” (MW, 505). This substance “possesses two fundamental relations to God,” namely to God as origin and as end.

Regarding the first, Waldstein says:

This relation, which is a consequence of God’s creative act, proceeds from the human substance toward the interior of that same substance, *toward* the God who is *interior intimo meo*. It is not an externally affixed relation outside an inert block of unrelated substantiality. The removal of this relation would let the creature fall into nothingness. 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 substantial form is such a principle. (MW, 506)

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44. Schmitz makes the further important point regarding the metaphysical interiority of created beings that is implied by the cosmic relatedness indicated here: “[T]his endowment and reception of being is constitutive of the created being and cannot, therefore, be understood as an external relation. It is the very inner constitution of the being itself. It is imperative, therefore, to release interiority from its modern prison in human subjectivity and to restore to natural things (*res*) the appropriate kind of interiority which they have in a metaphysics of being, where they are not mere objects standing before the human subject. For the principles that constitute a created being comprise the complex depth appropriate to the things we have not made. Indeed, they lead us back to the Source of being, so that the depth in created things is without measure. It is not only human subjectivity that has an interior, then; things do too. Once that interiority is recognized, things receive the name of ‘subject’ (*suppositum entis*), the privileged name we give to primary centers. And this ontological interiority lends its character to all interior relations, including the spiritual interiority encountered in personal beings” (“Created Receptivity,” 127–28). Schmitz’s point is that no creatures are simply “dumb,” utterly opaque in relation to other creatures. On the contrary, all beings, by virtue of creation, bear some analogically conceived interiority whereby each is open to others. It is in personal beings alone (e.g., human beings) that this interiority takes a properly spiritual form.

Regarding the relation to God as end, Waldstein states that this “is the most internal well-spring of the human person’s tendencies and acts. . . . Nevertheless, the relation [to God as end] does not constitute the being of the person, simply speaking. It is the being of the person ‘in a certain respect’” (MW, 506).

According to Waldstein, then, relation in the creature presupposes substance, or what Waldstein calls the “being of the creature, simply speaking,” in a way that makes substance *simply prior* to relation. There is thus no proper sense in which relation in the creature can be conceived as ontologically prior to substance, in the original constitution of the creature. Relation for Waldstein proceeds *from* the substance *toward* the interior of the substance. He argues that this suffices for relation to be called “interior and constitutive,” but only *qua* “being in a certain respect.” The relation cannot be an interior or constitutive principle of being in the way in which the creative act of God, on the one hand, or the principles of essence or substantial form, on the other, are internal and constitutive of the creature.<sup>45</sup>

Waldstein is right, of course, that relation does not constitute the being of the person *simply speaking*. But the alternative he proposes begs the burden of my argument: namely that relation has its beginning in *esse as communicated by God* to the substantial subject (substance, *ens*) who is *thereby, via this communication, brought into being as the subject who exercises relations*. My own position, thus, is that relation *is* in fact an interior or constitutive principle of being in a way that simultaneously includes *both* the creative act of God *and* essence or substantial form. Relation to God and others, as I am defending it, is tied first to created *esse*, even as *esse* at once “precedes” *and* “succeeds” essence. For the

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45. Striking in this context is Waldstein’s statement elsewhere that “John Paul II speaks about love mainly as a gift of self *leading to* a communion of persons” (“John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity,” *Anthropotes* 18 [2002]: 113–38, 269–86, at 274, emphasis added). I will discuss this text at more length in section X. Here I wish only to note the consistency of this claim with Waldstein’s overall argument. For Waldstein, relation between persons, or the *communio personarum*, is properly conceived as first “inter-personal,” or, in the language I have used here, “inter-active.” Relation between persons, that is, *first results* from the distinct giving of each to others; there is no anterior sense of *being first given to and for* each other (by God). But again, we will return to this point later, in terms of its adequacy as a complete expression of the view of John Paul II.

reasons I have set forth, relation is neither first simply enacted by a substance, on the one hand—relation is never first *inter*-active or *inter*-personal; nor does relation in the creature itself “subsist,” on the other hand—as though the creature were itself a “purely actual” relation. Relation in the creature, in other words, cannot be *reduced* either to *esse* or to substance/*agere*, even as it *involves both esse and substance/agere*, each in its own way.

This is the reason for my employing the distinct term “constitutive.” Constitutive signals a creaturely relationality that is *interior* to substance, in a way that presupposes substance’s self-centeredness, even as it opens that self-centeredness from within its deepest depths to God- (and other-) centeredness. Constitutive relationality thus signals a creaturely substance that is a *genuine source* of relationality, but always already from “inside” *esse*.

Waldstein’s argument in response presupposes only two possible alternatives: either relation as pure or “subsistent” actuality, or relation as being “in a certain respect” (“accident”). Faced with these two alternatives, Waldstein defends the latter (cf. MW, 509). The burden of my own argument has been to challenge the claim that these two conceptions of relation exhaust the possibilities, and in this context to offer a distinct alternative regarding created *esse*. Waldstein’s criticism does not engage the precise terms of this alternative.

In sum: Waldstein is resolute that relation cannot reach to the very root of substance in the latter’s constitution *qua* substance. My argument is that relation does indeed reach to the very root of substance, but that it does so by virtue of the act of being, whose communication to the creature by God first brings the creature into being *ex nihilo*, even as this act subsists only *qua* the subject who exercises *esse*. Relation is thus, in this sense, at once prior and posterior to substance. That is the implication of *esse*’s threefold character as *esse-ab*, *esse-ad* and *esse-in*: substance is from its depths a being “in itself” even as it is simultaneously a “being from” and “being toward” God (and other creatures). Substance is *complete in itself* as at once *wholly from-and-toward (and with) the Creator*.

My criticism of Waldstein, then, regarding the interiority of relation in the creature—namely, that he roots relation first in being “in a certain respect”—is not that he construes relation as too external, in a (mechanized) spatial sense, as though ac-

cidents were literally “outside” substance (cf. MW, 502, 504). The criticism is rather more precisely that, by locating relation first in substance and its acts (accidents, *agere*), he makes relation *exclusively posterior* to *esse*. He accepts no sense in which relation can be rightly conceived as prior to substance, because he can see no sense in which *esse* is prior to substance, save for providing bare existence to the “what” that is. My own contrary argument involves rooting creaturely relationality first in the act (*esse*) that is *exercised* by the substance (*agere*) *as given* to it.

### IX. *The filial and spousal meaning of the human person*

To set the context for reflection on the question of filiality and sponsality in the human person, let me summarize the different positions of Waldstein and myself as they bear on the reality of the human creature as gift. It is my contention that the notion of being as gift demands that creaturely “perfection,” receptivity, and relation all be affirmed in terms of the mutual, asymmetrical priority of *esse* and substance/*agere*. Thus, (1) the creature is (analogically) “perfect” because and insofar as he shares in the generosity of God, in the Creator’s “givingness,” by virtue of the Creator’s communication of *esse* to the creature, who is thereby brought into being as a new subject of *esse*. The creature participates in this generosity, or “givingness,” from the first moment of his existence. (2) This sharing is one of *dependent participation*: what I properly *give of* or *by* myself is anteriorly a *being-given to* and *received by* myself from God, through others. My giving is anteriorly a *receiving-giving*, or an *active receptivity*: *esse* is communicated to me and received by me in my very constitution as “its” subject-agent. (3) What I am first *given* involves the whole of myself, my entire breadth and depth. The Creator in the act of creation gives me the whole of myself “in myself,” even as this act draws me into responsive participation in his act of giving the whole of myself to myself and to him (and to all creatures). Thus I am made complete or whole unto myself in the act of creation, even as, by virtue of that act, my entire self—my substantial self, as thus *referring innerly to itself*—*refers* at a prior, and more basic, level *to God* and others (even if only implicitly or unconsciously). In my original constitution as a creature via God’s creative act,

my substantial self and my relation to God and others are neither indifferently nor inversely related. On the contrary, they are interiorly and directly related to each other: each presupposes and demands the other for the creature's proper integrity *as a creature*, as one whose being is at once substantial (self-related) *and* God- (other-) related.

Waldstein, for his part, rejects any priority of *esse* over substance, apart from *esse's* accounting for the bare fact of existence (MW, 506; Part One, 235–36). He thus does not agree with my claim of a priority of *esse* over substance *within esse's* simultaneous posteriority to substance as the proper subject of *esse*. As a consequence, (1) he locates the source of creaturely perfection first-exclusively in the creature's acting (*agere*, accidents: being “in a certain respect”) (MW, 506). (2) He likewise understands receptivity as first and most basically *correlative* to gift (MW, 497). (3) Finally, he sees relationality between myself and God, and between myself and other creatures, as first a matter of *inter-active* relations.<sup>46</sup>

The consequence of the foregoing, relative to the differences between Waldstein and myself, is that the term “gift” becomes for Waldstein synonymous with “*self-gift*.” The note of reception implied in the idea of gift properly understood—gift as something *given*—is therefore elided in favor of the agency of the self as source of gift in the creature. Thus Waldstein says in his introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them* that “love is a gift of self,” or in other words, “to love is to give oneself” (TOB, 78, 24). He says that “spousal love between man and woman is the paradigmatic case of the gift of self,” and that “the gift of self is present with particular completeness in the spousal love between man and woman” (TOB, 78, 24). Finally, invoking the important text from *Gaudium et spes* (hereafter cited as GS) 24 (“man, who is the only creature on earth that God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through the sincere gift of self”), Waldstein emphasizes the fundamentality of the principles it contains: “First, God wills human beings for their own sake, for their good. . . . Wojtyła calls this principle the ‘personalistic norm.’ Second, persons can only find themselves in a sincere gift of self” (TOB, 23).

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46. See footnote 45, and section X below.

All of these statements are of course true! They nevertheless harbor an ambiguity regarding the *order* that properly characterizes love or gift in the creature. They do not take sufficient account of the sense in which gift involves an anterior *givenness to* and *reception by* oneself, within the very act of *giving* oneself.

I will consider these issues in light of the teachings of John Paul II in section X. Here I limit my treatment to their bearing on the differences between Waldstein and myself with respect to the questions of filiality and sponsality. All that I have argued above regarding being as gift is an argument on behalf of *filiality and sponsality as disclosive of the primordial structure of the human being as a creature*.

First, regarding filiality: the human being, in his root ontological and anthropological meaning, is a *dependently re-sponsive giver*, one who, by virtue of the act of creation, has been granted participation in the generosity of God. The human being is called *to give* himself to God and others, and thereby find himself, because *he is himself gift*: because he has, by virtue of his deepest reality as creature, *always-first received* all that he is *from* God.<sup>47</sup> The creature is thus most properly conceived as one who is *loved by God for his own sake*.<sup>48</sup> There are two dimensions to this claim from GS: “for his own sake,” hence as a unique be-

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47. And indeed in and through others. It is significant that not only sponsality but also filiality is inscribed in the order of creation and written into the flesh: every human being is a being-born. For further reflections on the meaning and significance of childhood, see my “‘We Are Not Our Own’: Childhood and the Integrity of the Human in a Technological Age,” *Humanum Review: Issues in Family, Culture and Science*, Fall 2011 ([www.humanumreview.com](http://www.humanumreview.com)).

48. On Aquinas’s insight into the coincidence of the creature’s being made for its own sake, on the one hand, and for the sake of God and God’s goodness, on the other, cf. *De pot.*, q. 5, a. 4: “God wills the created universe for its own sake, although he wills its existence for his own sake: for these two are not incompatible with each other. Because God wills creatures to exist for his goodness’ sake, namely that they may imitate and reflect it; which they do inasmuch as from it they derive their being, and subsist in their respective natures. Consequently it amounts to the same thing whether we say that God made all things for himself, according to Prov 16:4, ‘The Lord has made all things for himself,’ or that he made creatures that they might exist, according to Wis 1:14, ‘He created all things that they might be.’” God in no way creates the world out of need or necessity; yet it befits his generous (“communicative”) nature to share being and joy gratuitously with his creatures. Cf. footnote 2.



ing *in himself*; and “loved by God,” hence as a being in himself that continually, from the first moment of his existence, exists in community with the God whose love is always—first *given to him*, in which love he is a receptive—active participant. But this is just what we call a child in the most fundamental sense: one who has dignity *in himself*, as brought into being *by another*. The child, in a word, is the primordial revelation of gift, and thereby of the (filial) meaning of being, in the order of creation.

What does it mean to say that the human being also bears an inherently spousal structure? First of all, we must recognize that spouses never leave their filiality behind. On the contrary, they take it up and give it adult form, so to speak. On an adequate reading of creation, human beings can never properly be said to outgrow their (ontological) childlikeness. Rather, they grow into their childlikeness (that is, into their filial being—from), *realizing childlikeness in a more fully responsible (adult) way*.<sup>49</sup> Thus human sponsality intrinsically expresses the basic form of gift-giving in the order of creation, *in a new way*. Human spouses, in their sexual-gender difference, together participate with the Creator in bringing into being the gift par excellence in the order of creatures: namely, the child, who is *an absolutely new participatory subject of creative gift-giving*. In this way, spouses realize the highest form of creative gift-giving in the physical created universe.

There is, of course, much that needs to be said regarding the nature of the sex/gender difference between the spouses.<sup>50</sup> It suffices for our purposes, however, simply to link the na-

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49. This is the root reason why Jesus said that “unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). By contrast, we might say that a basic feature of a liberal society is its according dignity, and hence rights, only to adults: to those human beings who are visible and (fully) rational agents. On this, see my “We Are Not Our Own.”

50. Without entering fully into the question of the difference between sex and gender, we can say here simply that the former correlates most directly with the body, while the latter correlates with the soul or spirit (*psyche*), and in this sense with the psychological. In light of the unity of the person, however, it is crucial to see that sex and gender, while distinguishable, are never separate, or merely extrinsically related. Cf. CCC, 2331–35, esp. 2332: “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.” Cf. also CCC, 2361: “Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to

ture of this difference with the burden of what we have set forth above. The sex/gender difference at its most basic level indicates two different forms or ways of giving and receiving. Note that this difference does not simply indicate a giving by the one (the man), and a receiving by the other (the woman). On the contrary, it indicates the whole of *giving-and-receiving* in *two different ways*, proper respectively to a man and a woman. The man–father and the woman–mother each take up in a different way the entire structure of the responsive–gift–giving characteristic of the child. That difference is disclosed in the bodily being of each, most immediately in the organs directly bound up with the conceiving of this new subject of gift–giving, even as the difference pervades the entire being of the man and the woman. Man and woman are thus both receivers and givers, differently. One might say that man receives through giving and woman gives through receiving: that man loves, as it were, from the “outside” and woman from the “inside.”<sup>51</sup> At any rate, the point here is that the sexual–gender differences of each complement the other, but only from within what is the *wholeness or completeness* of each *qua human and qua gift*.<sup>52</sup>

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spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.”

51. Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* (hereafter cited as *MD*), 18: “Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman’s ‘part.’ . . . The gift of interior readiness to accept the child and bring it into the world is linked to the marriage union, which—as mentioned earlier—should constitute a special moment in the mutual self-giving both by the woman and the man. . . . Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman’s womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and ‘understands’ with unique intuition what is happening inside her. . . . This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman’s personality. . . . The man—even with all his sharing in parenthood—always remains ‘outside’ the process of pregnancy and the baby’s birth; in many ways he has to *learn* his own ‘fatherhood’ from the mother” (emphasis original). On the nature of the sexual difference, see also Walter Ong, “Separation and Self-Giving: Pietà and Quixote,” in *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality and Consciousness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), esp. 97–104.

52. Cf. CCC, 372: “Man and woman were made ‘for each other’—not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are

What this means is that man and woman, in the wholeness of each as human and as gift, are made for each other in their natural givenness as created by God. In and through their creation by God, the man and the woman are each *given to* themselves and to the other even as each is *ordered toward* (and *from*) the other, in mutual yet asymmetrical ways. They are each *dependent participants* in God's creative love, which is meant to be truly *received from and given to each other*, and become *fruitful in a third* (the child, the larger community).

We should emphasize that the sexual-gender difference is properly predicated only of human beings, that is, of *persons* whose nature it is to be *embodied*; and is predicated of them *qua their embodiment*. *There is no gender in God*.<sup>53</sup> It is important, however, to see the link of creaturely sponsality and its sexual-gender difference with the human being's original structure as gift. The key principle is this: there is *in God* the fullness of *the order of love*, which *in created persons who are embodied* takes the form of sexual and gender difference.<sup>54</sup> It is in the embodied human creature

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equal as persons ('bone of my bones . . .') and complementary as masculine and feminine."

53. Cf. CCC, 370: "In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective 'perfections' of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband." The *Catechism* also notes that "the divine image . . . shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves" (CCC, 1702). Cf. also CCC, 1549, 2129–32.

54. The difference between the (trinitarian) God of love and embodied human persons is thus infinite: there is no sex or gender properly speaking in God. Yet, there *is a real similarity* coincident with this infinite difference: there is in God an order of love, a giving and receiving that is fruitful in a gift (third), and a fruitful gift that presupposes mutual giving and receiving.

According to Waldstein, insofar as the communion of persons involves man and woman, or male and female, it represents what is properly a metaphorical, as distinct from analogical, use of language. The analogy, he says, is based rather on the communion of persons, to the exclusion of the sexual difference ("John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity," 272–74). Waldstein is correct that the analogy, rightly understood, precludes inclusion of the sexual difference in God. However, I would suggest that the order of love manifested in the sexual difference indicates some analogical sense of the order of love that exists in the divine persons. Again, Waldstein is right to say that this order does not correlate strictly, such that the Father is linked simply with "the masculine," and so on. It nevertheless seems to me crucial to understand that, for John Paul II, it is the order of love *that is expressed intrinsically*

alone, among all creatures, that this order of love takes a properly filial and spousal form. The filial-spousal structure of the embodied human being, as an order of gift, that is, as an order of givenness and gift-giving, discloses the heart of what it means for the human being *to be*, in itself and as related to God and others.<sup>55</sup> The very *form* of the body in its *givenness as male and female*

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*in the human body*—that is indeed actualized *in* and *as* the order of the body as such, especially in the sexual difference in its ordering to the co-creation of new life—that is analogous. Indeed, we could say that the body draws out a “new” sense of the order of love that is properly characteristic of spirit. Cf. Adrian J. Walker, “‘Sown Psychic, Raised Spiritual’: The Lived Body as the Organ of Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 203–15.

It is not a matter of indifference, then, that Scripture, the Creed, and the tradition use the language of paternity and filiation in relation to God. Debates regarding the suitability of naming the trinitarian persons “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (versus, for example, “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier”) are part and parcel of this same question regarding metaphor and analogy. While the terms “Father” and “Son” are of course not to be understood of God literally, in the creaturely-bodily sense, neither are they to be understood in a merely positivistic way. That is, these terms are not arbitrary, but rather disclose to us something true about God’s ineffable triune being.

55. Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (hereafter cited as LF):

No living being on earth except man was created “in the image and likeness of God.” Human fatherhood and motherhood, while remaining *biologically similar* to that of other living beings in nature, contain in an essential and unique way a “*likeness*” to God which is the basis of the family as a community of human life, as a community of persons united in love (*communio personarum*).

In the light of the New Testament it is possible to discern how *the primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself* in the trinitarian mystery of his life. The divine “We” is the eternal pattern of the human “we,” especially of that “we” formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness. . . .

The family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum*. Here too, while always acknowledging the absolute transcendence of the Creator with regard to his creatures, we can see the family’s ultimate relationship to the divine “We.” *Only persons are capable of living “in communion.”* The family originates in a marital communion described by the Second Vatican Council as a “covenant,” *in which man and woman “give themselves to each other and receive each other.”* . . .

The Second Vatican Council, in speaking of the likeness of God, uses extremely significant terms. It refers not only to the divine image and likeness which every human being as such already possesses, but also and primarily to “a certain similarity

is disclosive of the filial and spousal *order of gift and gift-giving*, that is, of the order of being as love that is most basic to the human being.

The basic claim with respect to Waldstein, then, is that this order of love, which takes a (sexual-gendered) form in human embodied creatures, draws its first and deepest meaning from the ontological structure of the human being. In the metaphysical terms indicated above, love as gift in the creature takes its meaning from the relationality that is rooted first in the creature's being (*esse-ab*, *esse-in*, *esse-ad*), and that reaches at once into, and is recapitulated and enacted by, the embodied human-personal substance and its acts. It is gift in this radical ontological sense that discloses the first and proper meaning of filial-spousal order in the human being.<sup>56</sup>

Waldstein's way of conceiving the body vis-à-vis the memory of the order of love seems rather to elide the order of gift with that of *self-gift*. The problem, again, is a failure to recognize that the structure of creaturely being is first one of gift, not of self-gift. As we have shown, this problem is bound up with a failure to affirm that *esse* is, in asymmetrical ways, at once prior and posterior to substance. The basic question I have for Waldstein arises from this context. The body, he wants to argue, participates in the original order of human being, and thus reflects and expresses this order. But how can the body in its original meaning be rightly said to bear the order of gift or gift-giving, if the human being in its original constitution as created does not bear the structure of gift?

As we have seen, the order of gift for Waldstein begins logically first in the order of accidents or action (secondarily original act: *agere*), not in the order of being (primarily original

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between the union of the divine persons and the union of God's children in truth and love." . . .

In the words of the Council, the "communion" of persons is drawn in a certain sense from the mystery of the trinitarian "We," and therefore "conjugal communion" also refers to this mystery. The family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God. (6–8, emphasis original)

56. The meaning of filial-spousal order in the human creature thus involves and affects all of the key principles of human being: *esse*, spiritual form, matter, substance, accidents, *agere*.

act: *esse*). But this means that the body as originally constituted via the act of creation cannot, ontologically, involve the structure of gift. It follows that human action does not—as a matter of principle *cannot*—properly bear a *memory* of a bodily structure of gift, as Waldstein insists that it does (MW, 501–02). But then, further, human activity cannot properly be said to entail a genuine *re-reading* of (filial-spousal) giftedness in the body. On the contrary, human activity can only be understood, strictly speaking, to *read* giftedness *into* the structure of the body as originally given.

To be sure, as Waldstein emphasizes, on an Aristotelian-Thomistic reading, the body is rightly said to exist in unity with the rational-spiritual form of the human being, and hence to bear within it, from the beginning, a distinctly human order (cf. MW, 500, 512; TOB, 103–05). On a hylomorphic reading, the (sexual) shape of the body may rightly be said to be intimately involved in expressing this human order. The decisive point, however, is that, on Waldstein's reading, there is no *givenness-as-gift*, and no *re-sponsive receiving of gift*, that order the human being, and consequently also the human body, from the beginning. There is *no order of relation built into* the very structure of the human being as created *ex nihilo*. It is the implicit lack of these principles—givenness-as-gift, re-sponsive receiving, constitutive relationality—I argue, that is reflected in and undergirds Waldstein's tendency to elide gift into *self-gift*: into something that is first realized via the self's enactment.

Here, then, is the burden of my criticism: if love or gift means first self-gift, and if love is thus a matter most basically of *self-initiation*, then there can be no giftedness that is *recapitulated*, or *re-read*, in the creature's own activity: no giftedness that is structured into one's bodily being in its original givenness, which can then be "remembered" in the order of human action. Love is rather, logically conceived, something that is first generated (ontologically) in the order of human action. It is through such action that the organic, biological finalities of the body are (re-)ordered in terms of the distinctly personal exchange of love. Human action thus takes up these finalities and puts them *to use in the service* of this personal exchange.

Consider Waldstein's Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding in this light. The (sexual) shape of the body does

indeed indicate an order toward reproduction or procreation. This reproductive order, however, can be understood at the same time as an *intrinsic expression of spousal love* only if the logic of such love is already inscribed within the body *as given*. Only then can the (sexual) shape of the body itself, *qua bodily* and ordered for reproduction, signify an order that is apt of its inner nature for *spousal love*: for a mutual *gift-giving-and-receiving that is fruitful*. Lacking this original inscription of love, the (sexual) body in its original constitution becomes simply the bearer of biological finalities that can so far, *even on an Aristotelian-Thomistic account of the organic body*, be only instrumentalized expressions of the spouses in their personal exchanges of love. And the spouses' personal exchanges of love, for their part, bear no *intrinsic* relation to the form or shape of the body. Failing to recognize creaturely being itself as gift, neither can the sexual-gendered body be intrinsic to the exchanges of spousal-personal love, nor can spousal-personal love be intrinsically bound up with the sexual-gendered body.<sup>57</sup>

My earlier criticism of Waldstein regarding the body as a memory of filial-spousal gift thus still stands. In the end, his argument leaves no logical room for filiality *in the ontological sense*. On the contrary, it leaves room only for what is more accurately understood as a childlike human being *on its way* to the adulthood that alone expresses the full and proper sense of being human, here understood as the capacity fully consciously to give oneself. Waldstein's argument likewise leaves no room for an *ontologically-anchored* sponsality: that is, for an understanding of man and woman as each constitutively *given to* or *for* each other as the informing condition of their own inter-personal enactment of the spousal relation.

The fundamental difference between Waldstein and myself in the matter of the filial-spousal body comes down, in the

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57. The criticism of Waldstein here is thus twofold: on the one hand, the body in its sexual dimension cannot intrinsically be said to be a matter of gift and love; on the other hand, love among human beings cannot be said to take a fundamental sexual-gendered, and so far spousal, form. In the present exchange with Waldstein, I am primarily focused on the latter point: that human love, given the logic of his argument, cannot be said to have a *given* filial-spousal form. But it is important to see that his argument also logically fails to sustain the idea that the sexual-gendered expressions of intimacy proper to spouses is intrinsically a matter of gift-giving and receiving.

end, to our understanding of the relation between *esse* and *ens*, or *esse* and *agere*. Failing to recognize the simultaneous priority and posteriority of *esse* in relation to *ens*, Waldstein is logically unable to affirm being (*ens*) as gift. If giftedness is not inscribed already in *esse* as given to the creature, this giftedness can only be first introduced by the act (*agere*) of the creature. In this case, however, *agere* in its primitive meaning cannot truly be said to bear a *memory* of gift; it can only be itself the exclusive generator of gift. But this would be to miss the very *ratio* of the filial and spousal meaning of the body as John Paul II understands it, which necessarily entails a prior order of “being given to oneself,” by another.<sup>58</sup>

My claim with respect to Waldstein, in short, is that the body, as originally integral to the essence of the human person, itself reflects this order of “being given to oneself”—this original *participation* in giving that is always itself a “*re-sponsive*” *giving* in return. In the human body, this order of being given and of re-sponsive giving in return takes the form of the sexual-gender difference, and it is this sexual-gender difference that John Paul II identifies as the body’s spousal meaning. In sum, the order of the human person indicates a being that is given-to-itself (the figure of the child), whose participatory giving takes a dual form in the human person as male and female (the figure of the spouse). The very form of the human body as filial and as spousal indicates the irreducibly dual order of gift-giving proper to the human person in his or her original constitution as such.

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58. Cf. John Paul II, “A Meditation on Givenness,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 871–83 (cited hereafter cited as “Meditation”). This critical point, focused here with respect to Waldstein, goes to the heart of Karol Wojtyła’s/John Paul II’s concern regarding the argument of *Humanae vitae*. Fully supporting *Humanae vitae*’s prohibition of contraception, John Paul II understood that the “personal” and the “bodily-biological” ends of sexuality could be truly and intrinsically united only if the body *qua* body bears a (theo-)anthropological order of love. Cf. Karol Wojtyła, “The Anthropological Vision of *Humanae Vitae*,” *Nova et Vetera* 7 (Summer 2009): 731–50; David S. Crawford, “Benedict XVI and the Structure of the Moral Act: On the Condoms Controversy,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 548–82.



## PART TWO, B

## X. John Paul II's "hermeneutics of the gift"

The discussion between Waldstein and myself regarding the meaning and nature of gift and self-gift has unfolded largely in terms of Aristotelian-Thomistic principles, on the basis of our shared assumption that the recent pope's thought stands in a tradition in which this philosophy holds a central place. Relying on these principles, both of us have sought to present an integrated understanding of the central truth John Paul II meant to communicate, that man is made in and for love, ultimately the love of the trinitarian God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup> Our exchange to this point still leaves much to be argued in terms of the pope's own writings. Although adequate engagement of this further task lies beyond the scope of the present study, I will attempt in this section to set in relief the main terms of John Paul II's teaching that are at play in the differences between Waldstein and myself. I begin by stressing three points.

First, let me highlight a simple but important methodological principle. Interpretation of John Paul II's teaching, as that of any significant thinker, is a matter most basically of pondering his texts in terms of *what the texts themselves are about*. Or better: it is a matter of pondering *with* John Paul II *the reality* he is

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59. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* (hereafter cited as *RH*), 10: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate in it. This . . . is why Christ the Redeemer 'fully reveals man to himself.' . . . The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly . . . must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and the Redemption in order to find himself." Cf. also *RH*, 8, where the pope cites the text from *GS* 22 that is so foundational for his thought and pontificate, and that has since become so familiar to us: "'Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling. . . . Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, *in a certain way united himself with each man*'" (emphasis original). Cf. also *RH*, 13–14.

attempting to articulate. The tasks of tracing carefully the historical influences on the pope's thought, and of demonstrating with accuracy the continuity of that thought with the great tradition of Catholic theology and philosophy, are of course indispensable. Nonetheless, in carrying out these tasks, we must remain focused on the reality on which John Paul II himself was ever focused: the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ as the key to the meaning of human existence. What most basically "explains" the pope's reflections are his fidelity to the love revealed in Christ, along with his steadfast conviction that such love finds an echo in the innermost depths of every human being. Every human being remains restless and finds life "senseless" to the degree that he fails to encounter this love and integrate it into his life. All textual interpretations of the writings of John Paul II, then, must be measured finally and most fundamentally by love in its integrity: by the truth regarding the reality of love as revealed in its fullness in Christian faith, and as experienced by every human being in his innermost depths *as a creature*.<sup>60</sup>

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60. What I wish to suggest in this connection is that any engagement with the work of John Paul II and his historical sources, by Waldstein or myself, demands integration into what the pope calls the "original experience" of man. As John Paul II explains, this experience is original, not in terms of its "distance in time," but in terms of its "foundational significance. The important thing, therefore, is not that these experiences belong to man's prehistory . . . but that they are always at the root of every human experience," even if they are "so interwoven with the ordinary things of life" that we "pay little attention" to them, and "generally do not realize their extraordinary character" (TOB, 169–70).

This idea of original experience is key to the methodology of the pope. As Fr. Jarosław Kupczak notes, John Paul II's approach is eminently concrete: "First and foremost, the hermeneutics of the catecheses is an interpretation of biblical texts, which intends to explain man through 'what is essentially human' (TOB, 178). Using this hermeneutics in his interpretation of biblical texts, John Paul II creates a theological anthropology that 'relies on essentially "human" experience' (TOB, 179)" (*Gift and Communion: John Paul II's Theology of the Body* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014], 20). The pope thus understands the human person in the light of God's acts of creation and redemption: "every man carries in himself the mystery of his "beginning"" (TOB, 217)," as well as "the mystery of the eschatological fulfillment of his existence in the life to come" (Kupczak, *Gift and Communion*, 26). Only when we take into account these trans-historical dimensions of human experience can we account adequately for who man is.

Kupczak asks, in this regard, whether we can know the truth about the "eternal meanings of the human person" (original solitude, original unity, the dynamics of mutual gift, etc.) "in an exclusively natural way, without God's

Indeed, John Paul II seeks to understand the original foundation and nature of the human being, as made for the love revealed by God in Jesus Christ, at the point where the human being is first given his existence—in the light, that is, of God’s creation of the creature *ex nihilo*.<sup>61</sup> As the pope says in a key passage of his catecheses on human love:

We should now turn anew to those fundamental words that Christ used [“From the beginning, the Creator created them male and female” (Mt 19:4)], . . . to the word “created” and to the subject, “Creator,” introducing into the considerations carried out so far *a new dimension, a new criterion of understanding* that we will call “*hermeneutics of the gift*.” The dimension of gift is decisive for the essential truth and depth of the meaning of original solitude–unity–nakedness. *It stands also at the very heart of the mystery of creation*, which allows us to build the theology of the body “from the beginning,” but at the same time demands that we build it in precisely this way. . . .

The Creator is he who “calls to existence from nothing” and who establishes the world in existence and man in the

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revelation” (27). He says that John Paul II neither asks nor answers this question directly. Nonetheless, “we should emphasize that the historical experience of man necessarily points to the human roots in the prehistory of ‘the beginning,’ as well as to completion in the posthistory of the Resurrection.” My own methodology in this article, in keeping with that of the pope, is perhaps best summarized in the terms of *Fides et ratio*, which speaks of a “Christian philosophy,” that is, “a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith,” which “includes those important developments of philosophical thinking that would not have happened without the direct or indirect contribution of Christian faith” (*Fides et ratio*, 76).

61. In his introduction to the pope’s theology of the body, Waldstein, quoting Lino Ciccone, says that “the two expressions [*redemption of the body and theology of the body*] are, in fact, equivalent to each other in the language of John Paul II” (TOB, 111). I would only note that while redemption is of course necessary for a complete understanding of the theology of the body, this theology involves a “primordial” sacramentality revealed in and with the mystery of creation itself. While John Paul II presupposes a distinction between creation and redemption, he affirms the distinction between these two orders *within their unity*. The fundamental meaning of the human person–body, as gift, is structured into man’s being at his creation, even as the full implications of the meaning of gift come into view only in light of the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. For more on the relationship between creation and redemption, or nature and grace, in the thought of John Paul II, see Kupczak’s *Gift and Communion*.

world, *because he “is love”* (1 Jn 4:8). . . . [W]e are led to glimpse in love the divine motive for creation, the source, as it were, from which it springs. . . . As an action of God, creation thus means not only calling from nothing to existence and establishing the world’s existence as well as man’s existence in the world, but, according to the first account [of creation], *bʾrēšīt bārāʾ*, it also signifies *gift*; a fundamental and “radical” gift, that is, an act of giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothing. (TOB, 179–80, emphasis added)

The pope concludes: “Consequently, every creature bears within itself the sign of the original and fundamental gift.” But “the concept of ‘giving’ cannot refer to nothing. It indicates the one who gives and the one who receives the gift, as well as the relation established between them. Now this relation emerges in the creation account at the very moment of the creation of man.” In light of this, one can say that “creation constitutes the fundamental and original gift” (TOB, 180–81).

This leads to my second prefatory comment in framing the fault lines that exist between Waldstein and myself. Self-gift or self-giving unquestionably expresses the heart of John Paul II’s teaching, and Waldstein is right to emphasize this. It should be abundantly clear that my argument has not set the human being’s givenness as gift *in opposition to* the human being’s self-giving, as though one or the other were primary to the exclusion of the other. My intention has been rather to *integrate* the creature’s original givenness-as-gift into the original meaning of self-giving. The creature gives only as first and always *given by* God *to* itself, and thus via its self-reception as gift. This does not make the creature’s own self-giving simply secondary. Indeed, it has its own primacy—but *always in the way proper to the being of a creature*, the heart of whose reality consists in its participation in God’s givingness. The human creature is, *in himself*, constituted as a *gift to* himself, ordered toward, and always already engaged in, *giving* himself to God and others.

Third, the fundamental question raised by John Paul II’s theology of gift concerns the integrity of the human being in himself, vis-à-vis his reality that gives himself to God and others. How does one maintain integrity as a substantial self if the relating “movement” that consists at once in being *given to*

oneself and in *giving* oneself reaches to one's inmost depths as a substantial being? The whole tradition in which John Paul II stands, and indeed any adequate conception of the human being as an "individual substance of a rational nature," demands that this question be addressed. However one interprets the burden of John Paul II's anthropology of gift, this interpretation will have to provide, as its most fundamental metaphysical requirement, an account of how the human being's relating (that is, being given and giving) stands with respect to the integrity of the substantial human being *in se*.<sup>62</sup>

I have indicated above the metaphysical principles necessary for responding adequately to this question. Assuming this earlier argument, and mindful of Waldstein's criticisms, I will now proceed by identifying the issues that continue to exist between us, with respect to the specific terms of John Paul II's own teaching. I will first present some representative texts of the pope concerning (1) man's relation to God, (2) the human communion of persons, and (3) the filial-spousal meaning of the human being-body.<sup>63</sup> I will then comment briefly on these texts, with

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62. Note that Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, particularly in his years as a philosopher in Communist Poland, emphasized the human person's innate capacity for self-possession and self-determination. This led him so far to see self-possession or being-in-oneself as the necessary ground for self-gift (without explicit account of the fact that one is always *given* to exist in oneself), or even to understand "gift of self" in moral *as opposed to* metaphysical terms. Cf., e.g., *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 96–97: "[T]he question arises whether any person can give himself or herself to another person. We said above that the person is always, of its very nature, untransferable, *alteri incommunicabilis*. This means not only that it is its own master (*sui juris*) but that it cannot give itself away, cannot surrender itself. The very nature of the person is incompatible with such a surrender. Indeed, in the natural order it makes no sense to speak of a person giving himself or herself to another. . . . But what is impossible and illegitimate in the natural order and in a physical sense, can come about in the order of love and in a moral sense." Over time, and it would seem especially through theological reflection on the nature of creation, the family, and the Trinity, as well as growing familiarity with the work of Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, John Paul II emphasized more the coincidence of being incommunicably in-oneself and being given oneself by God and others, for giving oneself to God and others, as "the great and wondrous paradox" of human existence. For more on his view of the human being as *ontologically* given-gift, see the following sections (1–3).

63. Needless to say, I take the texts which follow to be representative of the pope's thought, but hardly exhaustive. Nor do I take them to be unambiguous. The point is to draw out the line of thought in his work

an eye to reformulating my criticisms of Waldstein in light of the pope's anthropology of gift.<sup>64</sup> My purpose in this, once again, is to bring into better relief the issues that remain most in play between Waldstein and myself in our common effort to interpret John Paul's teaching faithfully.

(1) *The human being's relation to God.* How do we properly understand the reference to God implied in the idea of being as gift? Where in the creature is this reference or relation first rooted, and what does it imply in terms of the self-centeredness and other-centeredness of the human being? Finally, how must this reference to God be conceived, such that it is reasonable to say that every human being is called to a "total gift of self" by virtue of his original constitution as a creature?

In his *Letter to Families*, John Paul II states: "'To be human' is [man's] fundamental vocation: 'to be human' in accordance with the gift received. . . . In this sense God wills every man 'for his own sake'" (LF, 9). The pope asks in this context whether man's being created for God ("to share in God's own life") and at the same time being created "for his own sake" implies a conflict between two ends (God and the self). The answer to this question, he says, lies in Augustine's celebrated phrase, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you":

This "restless heart" serves to point out that between the one finality and the other there is in fact no contradiction [*nihil dissensionis*: no conflict or discord], but rather a relationship, a complementarity, a unity [*contra vero vinculum, compositionem, congruentiam maximam*]. By his very genealogy, the person created in the image and likeness of God exists "for his own sake" and reaches fulfillment precisely by sharing in God's life. The content of this self-fulfillment is the fullness of life in God, proclaimed by Christ, who redeemed us precisely so that we might come to share in it. (LF, 9, emphasis original)<sup>65</sup>

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that best integrates its most important threads and thereby captures its main burden.

64. In connection with what follows, cf. Pascal Ide's reflection "John Paul II's 'Meditation on Givenness,'" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 123–38. Ide focuses on unfolding the rich meaning of the pope's phrase "God has given you to me," seeing this as the key to the entire meditation.

65. Cf. LF, 11: "After affirming that man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, the Council immediately goes on to say that he

Similarly in *Evangelium vitae* (hereafter cited as *EV*), John Paul II states: “Man has been given a *sublime dignity*, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator” (34, emphasis original). “Because he is made by God and bears within himself an indelible imprint of God, man is naturally drawn to God. When he heeds the deepest yearnings of the heart, every man must make his own the words of truth expressed by Saint Augustine: ‘You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you’” (*EV*, 35). And further: “the creation of man . . . establish[es] a *particular and specific bond with the Creator*. . . . *The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature*” (*EV*, 34, emphasis original). The gift of God’s grace “make[s] it possible to appreciate and achieve the deepest and most authentic meaning of life: namely, that of being a *gift which is fully realized in the giving of self [esse donum quod impletur in donatione]*” (*EV*, 49, emphasis original).

In his Wednesday catecheses on the theology of the body, John Paul II speaks of man’s originary relation to and dependence on his Creator in terms of man’s “original solitude” (cf. Gn 2:18). Such original solitude refers first and above all, not to man’s lack of relation (to the woman) but to his unique and irrepeatable relation to God: “The original meaning of man’s solitude rests on the experience of existence he obtained from the Creator. . . . The words of God-Yahweh addressed to the man confirm a dependence in existing” (TOB, 154–55). Again, “The words of the first command of God-Yahweh (Gn 2:16–17), which speak directly about the submission and dependence of man-creature on his Creator, indirectly reveal precisely this level of humanity as subject of the covenant and ‘partner of the Absolute.’ *Man is*

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*cannot ‘fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.’ This might appear to be a contradiction, but in fact it is not. Instead it is the magnificent [magnum mirumque: great and wondrous] paradox of human existence: an existence called to serve the truth in love. Love causes man to find fulfillment [se ipsum perficiat] through the sincere gift of self” (emphasis original). In the reflections that follow, the pope indicates why the total giving away of self is precisely a fulfillment of what it means to be a self, because the self is, in its deepest nature, a gift given to itself: “The process from conception and growth in the mother’s womb to birth makes it possible to create a space within which the new creature can be revealed as a ‘gift’: indeed, this is what it is from the very beginning. . . . Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature” (emphasis original).*

'alone': *this is to say that through his own humanity, through what he is, he is at the same time set into a unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship with God himself*" (TOB, 151, emphasis original).<sup>66</sup>

In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published by the magisterium of John Paul II, we read:

*The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God [costitutivamente relazionate a Dio] in the most profound manner. This is a relationship that exists in itself; it is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside. The whole of man's life is a quest and a search for God. This relationship can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be eliminated. Indeed, among all the world's visible creatures, only man has a "capacity for God" ("homo est capax Dei"). The human being is a personal being created by God to be in relationship with him: man finds life and self-expression only in relationship, and tends naturally to God. (CSDC, 109, emphasis original)*

(2) *The human communion of persons.* The second key issue relative to Waldstein and myself is whether what is termed a spousal or familial "communion of persons" is synonymous with interpersonal communion: with action that occurs, so to speak, simply *between* two persons, and with a communion, consequentially, that is most properly identified as a personally *inter*-active communion. The question is whether there is not a communion that (ontologically) precedes, and so far serves as *the immanent and informing condition of*, the communion realized via the inter-action of persons. The following texts from John Paul II help shape the issue here.

John Paul II says that "the theology of the body . . . is linked from the beginning with the creation of man in the image of God" (TOB, 165). Man "is, in fact, not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world,

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66. The pope also refers to this reality as man's "original virginal value, which emerges from the mystery of his solitude before God" (TOB, 167). It is this original solitude or original virginity which man "relives" in the spousal communion of persons. Thus, the pope continues, "[w]hen they unite with each other (in the conjugal act) so closely as to become 'one flesh,' man and woman rediscover every time and in a special way the mystery of creation," in which each is *given* by God to himself, and to the other (TOB, 167).



mirrors itself, but also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons (cf. GS, 12)” (TOB, 163). The pope develops this idea further in his apostolic exhortation *Mulieris dignitatem*:

[E]very individual is made in the image of God, insofar as he or she is a rational and free creature capable of knowing God and loving him. Moreover, we read that man cannot exist “alone” (cf. Gn 2:18); he can exist only as a “unity of the two,” and therefore *in relation to another human person*. . . . Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other “I.” This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . .

The fact that man “created as man and woman” is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a “unity of the two” in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. . . .

This “unity of the two,” which is a sign of interpersonal communion, *shows that the creation of man* is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion (“*communio*”). This likeness is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman [*inscripta est ut personalis utriusque proprietatis*], and is also a call and a task. (*MD*, 7, emphasis original)

In his Wednesday catecheses, John Paul II affirms this same idea, namely, that the communion of persons is at the same time something *given* to man and something *to be actualized* by him: “‘from the beginning’ that unity of man and woman, inherent in the mystery of creation, is also given as a task in the perspective of all future time” (TOB, 169). Like original solitude, then, this communion between man and woman is said to be constitutive of human being: “[A]lone,’ the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing ‘*with someone*’—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing ‘*for someone*.’ This norm of existing as a person is demon-

strated in Genesis as a characteristic of creation precisely by the meaning of these two words, ‘alone’ and ‘help.’ They point out how fundamental and constitutive the relationship and the communion of persons is for man” (TOB, 182, emphasis original).

In the CSDC, which cites *EV* as well as *GS*, we read:

*The relationship between God and man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature. Man, in fact, is not a solitary being, but “a social being, and unless he relates himself to others [sine relationibus aliis: without relations to others] he can neither live nor develop his potential” (GS, 12). In this regard the fact that God created human being as man and woman is significant: “How very significant is the dissatisfaction which marks man’s life in Eden as long as his sole point of reference is the world of plants and animals. Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence” (EV, 19). (CSDC, 110, emphasis original)*

(3) *The filial and spousal meaning of the human person-body.*

The pope sees an intrinsic link between the constitutive relationship between man and woman (original unity, the human communion of persons) and the constitutive relationship between man and God (original solitude, man’s relation to God). Indeed, what we have called filiality, or what John Paul II calls original solitude—man’s receiving his being as a gift from God—indicates the inner form of sponsality—man’s receiving the other and giving himself to the other in a love that is fruitful of a third.

There is a strong link between the mystery of creation, as a gift that springs from Love, and that beatifying “beginning” of man’s existence as male and female. . . . The body, which expresses femininity “for” masculinity and, vice versa, masculinity “for” femininity, manifests the reciprocity and the communion of persons. . . . This is *the body: a witness* to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to *Love as the source from which this same giving springs*. Masculinity-femininity . . . is the original sign of a creative donation [i.e., a sign of God’s gift of existence to man] and at the same time <the sign of a gift that> man, male-female, becomes aware of as

a gift lived so to speak in an original way. (TOB, 183, emphasis original)<sup>67</sup>

Here then, in this givenness, we find the implicit memory of the Creator God that reveals the human being to be always, at the root of his being, an active-responsive giver and receiver: both in relation to God (the child), and in relation to the other who is the same differently (man and woman). As the pope says in his theology of the body:

Precisely the function of sex [that is, being male or female], which in some way is “constitutive for the person” (not only “an attribute of the person”), shows how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as “he” or “she.” (TOB, 166)

Thus . . . a primordial *sacrament* is constituted, understood as a *sign that efficaciously transmits in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity*. And this is the mystery of Truth and Love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates. . . . The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted with man, inasmuch as he is a “body,” through his “visible” masculinity and femininity. The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.

In man, created in the image of God, the very sacramentality of creation, the sacramentality of the world, was thus in some way revealed. In fact, through his bodiliness, his masculinity and femininity, man becomes a visible sign of the economy of Truth and Love, which has its source in God himself and was revealed already in the mystery of creation. . . . Original innocence, connected with the experience of the spousal meaning of the body, is holiness itself, which permits man to express himself deeply with his own body, precisely through the “sincere gift” of self. Consciousness of the gift conditions in this case “the sacrament of the body”: in his body as man or woman, man senses himself as a subject of holiness. With this consciousness of the meaning of his own body, man, as

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67. Text in angled brackets supplied from the Polish by Michael Waldstein.

male and female, enters into the world as a subject of truth and love. (TOB, 203–04, emphasis original)<sup>68</sup>

Finally, regarding the body–soul unity of the person, the pope affirms that “Man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit” (LF, 19),<sup>69</sup> which body–soul unity witnesses to the person himself as gift:

*[I]t is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts. The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. (Veritatis splendor, 48, emphasis original)*

Fundamental for John Paul II’s theology of the body, then, is the claim that love, or the order toward gift of self, is inscribed in the human body as originally given via the act of creation. The body *qua* body bears the anticipatory signs of this order of love. The question that arises here, with regard to Waldstein, is: what in the human being first accounts for and gives form to what is meant by love? The body, according to the pope, is an *anticipatory sign* of this order of love, in which the body thus *participates*, and which must so far “precede” the body (ontologically, not temporally). My argument has been that this order of love or gift has its origin in the very structure of the human being *qua* being, beginning already in the *esse* of the creature as *communicated to* (and exercised by) the creature in the act of creation. In the body *qua* body, this order of gift takes the form of natality and sponsality.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (hereafter cited as *FC*), 11: “Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God.’ Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.”

69. Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 48, which speaks of “the human person, whose rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body.”

70. All of this expresses John Paul II’s view that procreation is the continuation of God’s own creativity and thus a sign of the person’s call to holiness: “Begetting is the continuation of Creation” (LF, 9). Cf., again, *FC*, 11: “Either

Let me now comment briefly on these texts from the pope in terms of (i) the original or constitutive nature of our relatedness to God, and indeed of our awareness of this relation; (ii) the original meaning of the creature's self-centeredness vis-à-vis other-centeredness; (iii) the depth and breadth of what this relation to and (implicit) awareness of God demand from us in response; and finally, (iv) the nature of the human communion of persons, as given and as task.

(i) I have argued that the primitive structure of the human being, of his givenness as gift, implies a tacit awareness of the Giver of the gift. This is not a complete knowledge, nor does it involve a clear conceptual grasp. It is not "a priori," in the sense of simply preceding our experience of the world. On the contrary, it arises *in* our originary experience of the world. The texts of John Paul II cited above speak of a quest or a search, of the deepest yearnings of the heart, and of restlessness and of being naturally drawn to God, all of which suggest an end toward which we are moving. Yet this search or restlessness or yearning or being drawn all imply something that is somehow present in the person and his consciousness from the beginning, and that alone "explains" and drives the search and the yearning.<sup>71</sup> The point, in light of the teaching of John Paul II, is that this implicit knowledge operates already in our original experience of solitude before God. In this original experience, I grasp implicitly that I am from another: I have some originary sense of myself as "an indelible imprint of God" (*EV*, 35), which draws me to God as to my end—but *also as to my source*. To be sure, discovery of God is properly realized only insofar as, over time, we "heed the deepest yearnings of the heart"; but the imprint—and so far memory—of God is built into our original constitution as creatures.<sup>72</sup>

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[marriage or virginity] is, in its own proper form, the actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his 'being created in the image of God.'"

71. Cf. Aquinas's statement that we "know God implicitly in whatever [we] know [*omnia cognoscencia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quolibet cognito*]" (*De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1 ad 1), and love God implicitly in all that we love (*ST I*, q. 6, a. 1 ad 2; q. 44, a. 4 ad 3).

72. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), esp. 87–116; Joseph Ratzinger, *On Conscience* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), esp. 30–41.

Once again, my argument has been that all of this is rooted in the primitive structure of my being as gift. At the heart of my being, I grasp implicitly that I do not belong simply to myself. Or rather, I grasp that I belong fully to myself, but only as at once belonging even more fully to the God who is deeper and more interior to me than I am to myself. I *belong* to myself as always and continually *given* to myself. The creature thus has proper dominion over himself and his acts, but only from inside God's dominion over him. "Willing the creature for his own sake," God makes of the creature a gift that now acts "on his own," but only as bearing implicitly, in every thought and act, the memory of his Creator. In a word, God is not only a point of arrival for the human being, but also an always-implicit point of departure.<sup>73</sup>

(ii) It follows that the self-reference implied in my original constitution as a being-in-myself involves an anterior other-reference: a reference to the Creator, and indeed to other creatures. It is crucial to see that this other to whom I refer in my very constitution *as* a self is not in any way a threat to my self-reference. On the contrary, this other—first and above all the Creator God—precisely *sustains* and *fulfills* my self-reference. After all, the Creator "wills me for my own sake": that is why *I* exist in the first place. Self-reference or self-centeredness and God-reference or God-centeredness are therefore not indifferently or inversely related to each other. On the contrary, my own self-centeredness, rightly conceived in accord with the deepest reality of my being as created, presupposes an (ontologically) prior and deeper centeredness in God and others.

The consequence is that I cannot truly love myself without somehow implicitly loving God more—without loving more the one who loves and founds me more completely for my own sake than any other being in the cosmos, including myself.<sup>74</sup> This is the metaphysical ground for John Paul II's claim that I can

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73. Cf. Ide, "John Paul II's 'Meditation,'" 130. See also 132: "the divine gift is conjugated in the past tense ('God *has* given you to me'). This reference to the past demands an act of memory. . . . This is a memory, moreover, not of a beginning in time, but of an origin that endures."

74. We can, of course, consciously mistake the object of our love. Nonetheless, there is always an implicit awareness of God at work in all our thought and action, even in our sin. For more on this point, see section XI below.

find myself only by giving myself away to God—in which giving away I am returned to myself ever richer because of my ever deeper relation to him.<sup>75</sup>

(iii) Regarding the depth of what is called for in my response to God: John Paul says that “God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. . . . [M]an is called to love in his unified totality” (*FC*, 11). Again, in the phrase that frames the meaning of his entire life: “*Totus tuus*. All yours. Yes. We must ourselves be a total gift . . . in order to recognize, in every man, the gift that he is, and to thank the Giver for the gift of [this] person” (“Meditation,” 883). What needs to be affirmed to account for this intended “totality of self-gift” that is innate to our being as its most fundamental calling?

My argument is that this demand of a total gift is warranted only if generosity reaches to the very depths of my being as originally constituted. I am—reasonably—called to complete generosity only if my being is originally and intrinsically ordered toward generosity. But that is just the burden of the earlier argument: my very existence (*esse*) is a gift from God which God hands over to me through others as its subject, in the very act of creation. My original giftedness as a creature is a finite participation in the Creator’s “givingness.” Receiving and giving, or loving, is thus my deepest and most fundamental act as a creature. To be sure, as finite and composite, my being consists of many “things” besides love; and as a sinner, I never love perfectly. Nevertheless *esse* remains the

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75. It is important to notice the difference between John Paul II and Aquinas on this point. For Aquinas, self-reference or self-identity retains a priority, in the sense that love of the other is ultimately understood in terms of the love that one has for oneself (see, e.g., *ST* II-II, q. 25, a. 4). This tendency in the scholastic tradition (influenced by Aristotle) is so far insufficiently integrated into an understanding of the self as *gift* given by God. John Paul II, by contrast, proposes a simultaneity of self- and God- and other-centered love, which follows from his understanding of reference to the other as implied already in my own self-reference or self-identity. A self that is centered more deeply in God as the “*form*” of its being centered in itself entails a love that is “self-centered” only as always and more deeply “God-and-other-centered.” Indeed, the creature’s own “in-itselfness” indicates at once the very depth of its giftedness from God. My argument has been that one finds an openness in Aquinas’s own metaphysics of *esse* to this development in John Paul II regarding gift.

first and most basic act of the creature, which innerly informs every other (specific) act.<sup>76</sup>

(iv) Finally, regarding the nature of man and woman as a communion of persons. First of all, relative to man's imaging of God, John Paul II clearly acknowledges the traditional location of the *imago Dei* in the individual person's intelligence and freedom, and he emphasizes repeatedly man's self-determination, self-consciousness, and the like. But the pope also emphasizes the fact that man exists from the beginning in a unity of two, hence in mutual relationship, man to woman and woman to man. This is a unity that is at root first a *given* unity in *distinctness*: a unity, in other words, that is both originally given, and that involves a distinctness of man and woman.<sup>77</sup>

The pope to be sure emphasizes "the need for interpersonal dialogue" between the two (*EV*, 19), as well as their being "called to live in a communion of love" (*MD*, 7, emphasis original). He so far conceives of a communion of persons that is interpersonal, involving "inter-action" between the spouses. My contention with regard to Waldstein is simply that communion in this interpersonal sense presupposes an *order* of relations that is first *given* to man and woman, and that so far (ontologically) precedes—that is, affects from within the first meaning of—their interpersonal acts of relating.

The point, then, concerns man and woman's original constitution in the "dative," as it were.<sup>78</sup> Each is always already,

76. The creature is thus not intrinsically or by nature selfish, but rather generous. Indeed, generosity is structured into my very being as a being-given. The grace given in Christ infinitely surpasses while simultaneously fulfilling this first, natural generosity of the creature's love.

77. Cf. Fergus Kerr's criticism of John Paul II's teaching regarding the *imago Dei*. According to Kerr, the pope's nuptial theology teaches that "[i]t is not in our rationality but in sexual difference that we image God—in our genitalia, not in our heads, so to speak" (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* [Malderf, MA: Blackwell, 2007], 194). Apart from overlooking the pope's many affirmations of man's being made in the image of God as a rational being that is *capax Dei* (see, for example, *MD*, 6), Kerr's criticism also misses the basic point that sexuality is a participant *qua* body in the creative love of God himself. This is no less a "spiritual" source of the image of God in man than rationality and freedom are. Rather, it serves to show the human person in the light of love, and does so coincident with the person as a soul-body unity.

78. Cf. Ide, "John Paul II's 'Meditation,'" 129.



by virtue of the act of creation, given *to* himself *for* the other. Each bears an original reference to the other that affects from within the nature of his or her own self-reference. The human being, in a word, is relationally ordered already in his original solitude. This is the ground that “explains” the man’s enacting of relationship with another human being—above all, with the other who is at once like and different from him, as a “second incarnation of the same metaphysical solitude before God” (TOB, 166). The spousal relationship in this sense is not merely a goal of human existence; it is a goal only as already-initially *given to* the man and the woman by the Creator, and inscribed in their very flesh. This originally “dative” meaning of the human person (that is, of each as gift given simultaneously to and for himself and to and for the other) must be acknowledged and integrated into the original meaning of the (inter-active) self-giving that occurs between the spouses.

In light of the foregoing, let us turn now to two texts of Waldstein’s that help identify more precisely the issues at play in our mutual discussion. In an essay comparing John Paul II’s and St. Thomas’s understanding of love and the Trinity, Waldstein states:

The thesis of John Paul II that love is the meaning of human life seems to be contrary to St. Thomas. According to St. Thomas, the final goal or end of man, happiness, cannot consist in love since love as an act of the will can be directed to a good even when that good is absent. The goal of human life, by contrast, consists in a presence of the definitive good that completely excludes its absence. . . . [But] John Paul II does not assert that the meaning or goal of human life consists in love in this sense, love as an act of the will. *In addition to using the word love for a certain type of act, we use it to refer to various relationships that are formed on the basis of love as an act of the will.* (117–18, emphasis added)<sup>79</sup>

Again, Waldstein states that “John Paul II speaks about love mainly as *a gift of self leading to a communion of persons*. St. Thomas speaks about love mainly in terms of perfection, end, good, appetite and inclination, not in terms of gift of self” (284, emphasis added). However, Waldstein says, in a number of texts

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79. Waldstein, “John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity,” 117–18. The following in-text citations are from this article.

Thomas teaches that “the love of friendship involves a self-communication, in which all further gifts are implicitly given” (285). According to Waldstein, Thomas also speaks of “the Trinity as an interpersonal communion of love. He does not explicitly teach that man is made in the image of God with respect to this interpersonal communion, but this teaching follows necessarily from what he does say about the divine image” (286). Waldstein thus claims that “according to . . . St. Thomas one can indeed speak of an interpersonal unity of love between the divine persons,” and that “love between distinct human persons is similar to love between the divine persons in precisely the manner required by the strict definition of ‘image of God.’ . . . *The unity of the divine persons as one God appears as the summit of an interpersonal love between distinct persons*” (274, emphasis added).

Waldstein thus understands love to be both an act of the will that leads to a communion of persons, and the communion that results from this act of love. This communion of persons comes about, he says, through a “process . . . of giving and receiving. How else could he who was at first not mine, but only his own, become mine?” (120). As a “cycle of giving and receiving,” this human communion must “continually renew itself, if [the beloved’s] love for me and my love for him is not to die and become a mere memory[.] What else, then, is love, if not a continuing gift of self?” (120). While Thomas, for his part, does not use the exact language of “gift of self,” he articulates the same idea in his notion of friendship, which necessarily entails “sharing or communion, *communio*, κοινωνία, i.e., a fabric of activities that make up a common life” (130).

Waldstein’s emphasis here on acts of love (self-gift) resulting in a communion of love is consistent with his understanding of the metaphysical relation between *esse* and substance/*agere*. As we have noted, according to Waldstein, following Aristotle-Aquinas, “the perfection of substances, their full being, is to be found in their activities. . . . For a human being, merely ‘to be, simply speaking,’ e.g., at birth, is a beginning of being. The decisive level of being is still to be attained” (MW, 506). Waldstein thus understands relation as simply “adding” perfection to the “mere beginning” indicated by the “to be” of being. Communion does not, and in no principled (ontological) sense is able to, precede the creature’s enactment thereof. Rather, communion is

first the result of creaturely action. It is in this sense, I argue, that Waldstein consistently presents the communion of persons as an *inter-personal* reality.<sup>80</sup>

According to my interpretation of John Paul II, on the other hand, communion—both with God and with the human other, and by implication with the whole of creation—is already present in the human person “from the beginning,” by virtue of the latter’s givenness as gift. God creates man *ex nihilo*, not out of need or necessity, but gratuitously. In this creation, God gives man to himself and to others, *for* man himself and for others, and for God above all. In creating man for his own sake, God constitutes him as a gift ordered toward, and always already participant in, God’s own creative giving. This givenness as gift that participates in God’s creative giving begins already in the act whereby the creature is said first to be at all: *esse creatum*, even as the creature participates in enacting this given-giftedness from the first moment of his existence. It is this structure of being, I argue, that alone “explains” why the original communion of persons, of man and woman, while involving of its essence interpersonal love, nonetheless presupposes an order of communion (unity of two) that is first *given* to them by God, and received by them from God and each other, as the informing condition of their mutual self-gift. In the giving of each to the other, each anteriorly receives the gift that is always anteriorly given to each.

The root issues between Waldstein and myself thus involve the fundamental meaning and structure of man’s creation *ex nihilo*, and, in this context, the question of the origin and nature of love in the creature. Waldstein understands love both as an act of the will (with Thomas) and as the communion that results from such acts (with John Paul II, as Waldstein interprets him). The argument I have proposed does not deny that love is specifically an act of the will, nor that human acts “actualize” the communal structure in-built in man. It is a question, rather, of the meaning of the will and its acts—and the result of these

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80. The kind of harmony Waldstein finds between John Paul II and Aquinas rests on his assumed notion of the person as a substance who enacts relations. Such a substance is constitutively self-centered and first becomes other-centered only through action. What Waldstein understands John Paul II to add to the thought of Aquinas is an emphasis on self-gift that is not found in a central or explicit way in Aquinas.

acts—relative to the primary act of creaturely being. It is a question, in other words, of the meaning of all other specific acts of the creature, relative to the integrative meaning of the human person indicated in *esse*. Thomas says that *esse*, as the act that is most fundamental and most interior to the being, is “formal with respect to everything that is in being” (*ST I*, a. 8, q. 1). Created *esse* is therefore rightly understood to communicate its gifted-giving “form” of love to all the other specific acts, and to the body, of the person.

Love in the creature, for this reason, cannot be simply moral or psychological in nature. On the contrary, since such love goes to the innermost depths of the human being before God, its moral and psychological dimensions must be integrated into its more proper ontological (and theological) meaning. The act of the will as an act of love is a distinctly moral act only as rooted in and expressing the ontological structure of my being.

In a word, we should affirm, with the (Thomistic) tradition, that giving or loving is an act of the will (cf., e.g., *ST I*, q. 20, a. 1). But the will must be understood as taking up what is already structured into the very being of the creature by virtue of the act of creation. The will receives its own deepest élan from the generosity carried in created *esse*.<sup>81</sup> To be sure, the will of its own inmost-specific nature tends toward the (true) good, and toward giving to others as good. But it is crucial to see that, for John Paul II, all other acts of the human being—acts of the mind, and indeed of the body that is itself part of the very substance of the human being—also participate from their depths in this self-gift-giving, *qua* mind and *qua* body. Only in this metaphysical light are we able to sustain the radicality of what John Paul II terms “*totus tuus*”: to sustain, that is, the fundamental and innate vocation to love in one’s unified totality.<sup>82</sup>

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81. In this connection, cf. Wojtyła’s understanding of being as flowing over into action: “[A]ction is an enactment of existence. . . . [E]xistence may, indeed, be seen as the first act of every being, that is, the first and fundamental factor establishing its dynamism” (*The Acting Person* [Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1979], 73). Wojtyła refers here to Joseph de Finance’s well-known work, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1965).

82. Indeed, only in this metaphysical light do we see the radical origin of this innate call to holiness, which is a call to a love that involves the

A final important point: in his introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Waldstein draws the following connection between the two texts of GS most often cited by John Paul II: GS 22:1 and 24:3. GS 22 states that “Christ, the final Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear,” while “[a]ccording to GS 24:3, the trinitarian exemplar of union between the divine Persons shows that man can only find himself through a sincere gift of self” (TOB, 96). Waldstein comments as follows:

These two formulations [GS 22:1 and 24:3] seem to aim at one and the same thing: for man to be fully revealed to himself and to find himself are at least closely connected, if not identical. . . . This close connection suggests a similarly close connection between the conditions that lead to revelation and finding, namely, on the one hand, the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, and, on the other, the sincere gift of self. From the Father’s love and the Trinity of Persons, through the creation of the world, all the way to the body, there is a single logic of gift. The body must be seen in these terms, in what John Paul II calls a “hermeneutics of the gift.” . . . In the Incarnation,

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unified whole of our being, and which expresses itself in a vow or state of life.

Note the difference between the view I have presented here and that of the traditional (Thomistic) understanding of the will. While in the traditional view the will moves the other specific acts to their end (as good), these other acts and ends do not thereby, as such, participate in the “*form*” of the good. In this traditional understanding, the will, in its movement toward the good, functions more properly as a *causa movens* than a *causa formans* (cf. ST I, q. 82, a. 4, c. and ad 1). This holds also with respect to the good of love in the sense of friendship with another—hence including also what John Paul II would call the gift of self. While the will may order various other human activities toward the beloved, and in this regard seek to integrate those activities in terms of the love I have for the other, such integration cannot logically involve these activities’ own (intrinsic) *participation* in my love. On the contrary, strictly speaking, it can only be an *instrument* of that love. Why?

Recall my earlier argument: the various acts or activities (*agere*) of the human being are open to (intrinsic) participation in gift-giving—*qua the specific nature/act of each*—only if each specific act is originally constituted as so open, by virtue of the generosity already-initially present in the act by which the human being is at all. Love reaches to the innermost depths of my reality as a creature because and insofar as *esse* reaches to my innermost depths, in a way that affects (“informs”) all other activities and aspects of my being from within.

Christ's body is the place of the divine redeeming gift of self. As "*the great mystery*" of spousal love (Eph. 5), the Incarnation shows that the meaning of the body is spousal. All things, and in particular the body, were created in Christ and for him: Christ's gift of self is thus the goal that most deeply explains God's original intention in creating the body. (TOB, 96–97, emphasis original)

The point to which I wish to call attention here concerns Waldstein's suggestions that the respective formulations of GS 22:1 and 24:3 "seem to aim at one and the same thing," and that "there is a single logic of gift" that goes "from the Father's love and the Trinity of Persons, through the creation of the world, all the way to the body." Both of these suggestions are true, and both have the central importance in John Paul II's thought that Waldstein gives to them. But they stand in need of important qualification as interpreted by Waldstein.

The necessary qualifier bears on the familiar distinction we have stressed throughout: the distinction between gift and self-gift. This distinction, to be sure, presupposes a unity, consisting in the single reality of love. But the reality of love bears within its unity the distinctness of being given to (and received by) oneself, on the one hand, and of giving oneself, on the other. Again, in an important respect these amount to the same thing, in the sense that the single reality of gift-love demands both features. But the key is that these two features or "moments" are to be understood as *integrated* with one another, not as separate or (merely) correlative, and not one elided in favor of the other.

My criticism of Waldstein is that he treats the single logic of gift as though it were exhaustively the logic of self-giving. My argument has been that it is because God wills the human being for its own sake that the latter is constituted as a *gift* in the first place, in the sense of one who is first loved by God (1 Jn 4:10), and who is so far the *recipient* of God's gift of love. This is what, as a creature, he most profoundly *is*—a gift that shares in the Creator's giving; and what, accordingly, he is most profoundly called to *do*—to participate in and further "magnify" the Creator's gift-giving. The ontological order indicated here is of decisive importance: the innermost demand of my being is

indeed *to love*, but precisely because and insofar as *I am loved* in and for myself.<sup>83</sup>

I have elaborated the nature of this distinction at length with regard to the being of creation. But here we need also to ponder, briefly, the christological context Waldstein focuses upon.<sup>84</sup>

In light of GS 22:1, we see that the full meaning of the Creator's love lies in the Father's love as revealed in and through Jesus Christ. The neuralgic point, however, is that it is in and through his reality *as Son* that Christ reveals the Father's love. Christ is not unoriginate origin, but rather origin as *unigenitus* ("only begotten one"). As Son, Christ is obediently responsive to the Father: his work is to communicate, not what he himself proposes, but what he has received. The mission of his person is to carry out the will of the Father who sent him. Christ is the one who communicates the Father's love *as communicated*, that is, as

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83. Cf. footnote 89.

84. We can note in passing the way in which John Paul II understands the underlying unity between GS 22 and 24 in light of the gift of the child: "The process from conception and growth in the mother's womb to birth makes it possible to create a space within which the new creature can be revealed as a 'gift': indeed this is what it is from the very beginning" (LF, 11). Furthermore, the pope says, the child realizes the common good of the family (LF, 11); and it is of the nature of the good to diffuse itself (*bonum est diffusivum sui*) (LF, 10, 14). Therefore, the pope says, if a man accepts and follows out the logic of his being, "his life becomes a 'sincere gift'" (LF, 10). Again: "The newborn child gives itself to its parents by the very fact of its coming into existence. *Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature*" (LF, 11, emphasis original).

John Paul repeatedly emphasizes the truth articulated in GS 24:3, that God wills every human being "for his own sake" (LF, 9, 11). This willing of the creature for his own sake is what makes the creature intrinsically good, that is, a gift, in the first place. But if the child's existence is *already* a gift—if the *fact* of his existence is already *good*, as *gift*—and if the child "gives itself to its parents" in and by way of this very fact of existence, then it follows that finding oneself as a person implies at root discovering oneself as a gift who gives. The point here is that GS 22:1 and 24:3 do indeed "amount to the same thing," as Waldstein says, but only as a unity that exists together with distinctness. It is in discovering myself as a gift ("willed by God for my own sake") that I find that I am called to make a sincere gift of myself. It is in discovering myself as a gift that I discover I am a participant, *qua* gift, in generosity, and am (thereby) called myself to be a generous giver. Indeed, in the context of the family, this generosity is taken up and fulfilled when, as spouses, parents "cooperate with God the Creator in conceiving and giving birth to a new human being" (LF, 9).

the Word communicated by the Father in the Holy Spirit. When I suggest that Waldstein elides the meaning of gift into self-gift, then, I mean, in the present context, that he does not make explicit the distinction between the love of the Father and the love of the Son. The Son, to be sure, reveals the Father's love, but he does so through *filial obedience* to the Father.

It is because of this omission that Waldstein, in my opinion, misreads the sense in which the formulations of GS 22:1 and 24:3 "aim at one and the same thing." Indeed they do, but not without the qualification I am suggesting: namely, that there is a distinction (within unity) between gift or givenness (gift *qua given* and *received*) and self-gift or givingness (gift *qua giving*)—the sense of which is now deepened in light of the distinction between the unoriginated-original love revealed in the Father and the filial love revealed in Jesus Christ as Son. Christ reveals the Father's love *precisely through his Sonship*. Being begotten and being from, and so far receiving—and not only begetting and giving—are integral to the inner meaning and perfection of God himself as trinitarian.

The question thus arises: if human begetting (giving) continues God's act of creation (LF, 9), and so far images God, then why not also human being-begotten (receiving)? Waldstein says here that "the essential point to note is that Wojtyła sees the heart of the Council in the call to deeper personal awareness of love as self-gift rooted in the Trinity" (TOB, 89). But is the love characteristic of the Trinity exhausted in self-giving? Does it not also involve reception (being begotten)?

The infinite difference between God and creature must of course be rigorously safeguarded. But the crucial issue turns on whether receptivity signals imperfection as a matter of principle, which we have discussed above.<sup>85</sup> My concern here is sim-

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85. See the conclusion of section VII above, and the texts of Aquinas cited there. As pointed out earlier, a core claim of Aquinas is that patience can only be present in an imperfect being, insofar as patience implies an inner capacity for change, and hence for growth in perfection, and so far also dependence. But this holds only insofar as one thinks of patience or receptivity solely "from below," as it were, or of the perfection of subsistent *esse* in abstraction from the Trinity. Patience involves dependence and need and openness to further growth in perfection only if one has already assumed a being that exists in space and time, such that this being is understood as somehow first empty and then filled. But that is just what we do not and cannot assume in the case of



ply to underscore that the question of love in the manner of one's being given and receiving, as distinct from love simply as giving, arises already in the trinitarian God revealed in Jesus Christ. This logic of *given* self-gift reaches all the way down through the order of creation and has a privileged meaning in the human creature.

My point, in sum, is that the argument of John Paul II, adequately considered, presupposes and calls for an integration of givenness and receptivity ("being begotten" [created]), on the one hand, and of self-giving ("begetting" [creating]), on the other, into the single reality of love disclosed in the human being as adequately conceived in light of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

### *XI. The legacy of John Paul II*

I conclude by summarizing the main theses and implications of my reading of John Paul II's "hermeneutics of gift." In offering this summary, I am not suggesting that John Paul himself defended these points systematically or by way of a fully integrated theory, but only that they express essential principles in his understanding of gift, which need to be included and developed in any integral account of his thought. These principles reveal the depth and breadth of the pope's achievement. John Paul II's "hermeneutics of gift," while standing squarely in the ancient-medieval tradition, recuperates this tradition in terms of a reality centered from its core in love. It is in this radical (re-)centering of the creature in love that we find the profound "newness" of John Paul II's teaching, as well as its fittingness and importance vis-à-vis the problems

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the trinitarian God. The key to God's trinitarian life is the perfect, eternal circumincessive giving and receiving of love. The love that characterizes the Trinity has always already and from all eternity been "completely" given and received and fruitful in a third—although it is important to see that the completeness entailed is not simply "static" but fully "active," in the way of love.

Indeed, it is important to see, as we have argued at length, that even in the creature receptivity (or receptive love) is first of all "perfect," albeit in a creaturely way, because it has its roots already in first *act* (*esse*). The human creature is not first *imperfect*, but rather *perfect in a limited, finite way*. Receptivity in the creature is thus infinitely different from receptivity in God, because it essentially involves the need for temporal-spatial change and growth in perfection. For further comments on the point here, cf. footnote 34.

of modern culture. The following five principles indicate the nature of this *novum*.

(1) *A radical God-centeredness rooted in being.* John Paul II understands the human being to be radically God- and love-centered, in his very being (*esse*). Two principles of St. Thomas are especially helpful for understanding this claim: first, that “*esse* is simple and complete but not subsistent” (*De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1), and second, that “*esse* is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally present within all things, since it is formal with respect to everything that is in being” (*ST I*, q. 8, a. 1). The first principle establishes the foundational claim that being is given to the creature as gift: on the one hand, the creature is *given to* himself by God through others, and thus receives himself—from God through others—as gift; on the other hand, the creature, as really given *to himself*, is from the beginning the *subject* of his own giftedness. The creature, in a word, is a (*dependently original*) *participant in God’s creative givingness*. The second principle affirms that *esse*, in its “formal”-act character with respect to the whole and every “part” of creaturely being, shapes the latter in its inmost depths in (and toward) giftedness and giving. Since *esse* is “formal with respect to everything in being,” it follows that all specific acts, principles, and aspects of being are ordered in and toward the generosity implied in *esse*. *Esse creatum*, by virtue of its generosity as gift of the Creator, presupposes—indeed demands—the integrity of each of these acts in its proper specificity, even as it opens each from within to the unity of the whole being, and the whole being itself to all other created beings. Thus all creatures and all acts and aspects of all creatures revolve—not only appetitively or via acts of volitional power, but structurally and ontologically—around God-centered love.<sup>86</sup>

This does not mean that human beings always consciously and freely center their being and activity in God and in love. Nor does it mean that sin does not obscure, often profoundly, the implicit presence of God in every human being and activity. It means only that this God-centered love continues to operate in man by virtue of his nature as created, despite its being often hidden and obscured, and indeed misidentified with false

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86. Which itself presupposes and demands the creature’s own self-centered love.

gods and spurious loves. The point is that human activity is never neutral or indifferent to God, but always ordered (consciously or unconsciously) toward the Creator.<sup>87</sup>

For John Paul II, then, affirming God with all of one's heart and soul and mind is something we seek to realize at once volitionally *and* cognitively, and from the depths of our being, as the ultimate truth and good of all things. Man's love of God is thus not merely "moral," in the sense of an act of the will that moves the other acts and aspects of the human being "instrumentally" toward God as the good, as though these other acts in their specific character were originally neutral or indifferent toward love and God. Rather, man's love is indeed "moral," but only as always first *theo*-logical and *onto*-logical: as informed by a structure of being and consciousness that is innerly ordered toward God. The will moves as first moved: it takes up and orients the specific "aspects" of man's being, body, and consciousness only as these, and the will itself, are already formed by, in, and toward the truth of God's love, as reflected in the generosity of his gift of existence to the creature.<sup>88</sup>

(2) *The twofold commandment to love.* John Paul II's notion of gift, as at once given-to-self and self-giving, adds a crucially important new term to the second great commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." The key, according to the pope's view of gift, is to see that "as myself" implies "as I am loved by God," and thus implies the primacy of the first commandment. According to GS 24, God loves the human being for his own sake. Indeed, it is in and through this love that the creature exists as gift—as truly given its own intrinsic worth and dignity. It is *as loved into existence* by God that the creature is love-worthy *in itself*.<sup>89</sup> The commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself thus

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87. Cf. my "Disenchantment' and the End of Modern Civilization: The Symbolical, the Neutral, and the Diabolical," forthcoming in a collection of essays edited by Antonio López (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

88. Cf., in this connection, Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), esp. 327–456; D. C. Schindler, "Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 618–53.

89. It is crucial to see both sides of this claim: in being *loved into existence by God*, the creature is truly *loved in and for itself*. The creature, in other

carries a crucial implication: loving the other as myself means loving him as God loves me! Emphatically, it is not the case that I somehow simply (“naturally”) love myself first, and then proceed to love others as I love myself, both in abstraction from the love of God. On the contrary, my own reality-in-itself, as gift, implies the immanent presence of the Creator-Giver in me, which founds me as intrinsically love-worthy *in myself*, and indeed as always already loved.

The point here is of crucial importance: it shows the intrinsic and indissoluble link between the two great commandments. The terms of the seemingly never-ending controversy regarding the primacy of self-centered vs. other-centered love are thus transformed, insofar as self-love is seen, of its own proper dynamic, always to imply the love of God, and so far of the other—and conversely.<sup>90</sup>

This is the ground for John Paul II’s claim that love is the fundamental and innate vocation of the human being (*FC*, 11). The call to love God above all things and with the whole of one’s being, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, has its roots in man’s original constitution as a creature. Love is not simply one act among many of the creature; it has its ground in the act of acts (*esse*), and in this sense love itself is the “form” of forms, *also* for creaturely being. The human being exists “in itself”

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words, is not merely an *instrument* of God’s love, but a proper, or dependently original, *participant* in this love. Cf. Ide, “John Paul II’s ‘Meditation,’” 130–32.

90. By “transformed,” I mean that the terms set by John Paul II’s anthropology of gift enable an integration of two main theological traditions in the history of Christian thought that may be said to emphasize distinct approaches to the nature of the human person vis-à-vis the reality of love: one that emphasizes an ontological self-centeredness in each person (the approach of St. Thomas, for example); and a second that emphasizes an ontological other- or community-centeredness in each person (the approach of the Victorines, for example). Each of these approaches retains its essential truth in John Paul II’s ontological anthropology, indeed by way of genuine *integration*. According to John Paul II, each person cannot but affirm his own self as true and good *in itself* and *for his own sake*, in a way that at the same time—always anteriorly—affirms the other (human creature) as true and good in *himself* and for *his own sake*. The ground of this indissoluble double affirmation for the pope is his (“new”) awareness of God as the radical—always implicitly known and loved—Giver present in my being as gift. But the historical aspects of this question are for sorting out elsewhere.

(*esse-in*) only from within what is always its “movement” from and toward God, and all others in God (*esse-ab, esse-ad*). This coincidence of in-itselfness and from-and-toward-otherness—of the human being as gift given for giving—constitutes the ontological ground of love: of God, of self, and of neighbor. Such a (tri-polar) love is constitutively written into each person from his creation.<sup>91</sup>

(3) *A new understanding of the transcendentals: the primacy of beauty.* A third distinctive achievement of John Paul II lies in the area of what are called the transcendentals of being—truth, goodness, and beauty. The pope-saint affirms that I am myself a gift from God and that each “you” is given by God to me, as gift (“Meditation,” 873–74). Thus the basic structure or “form” of human being is gift. As ordered “form,” we could say, my being is true; as given gift, it is good, meant to share itself through self-gift (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). But as the pope recalls, in the words of Cyprian Norwid, “the form of love is beauty” (“Meditation,” 878). This idea echoes that of Aquinas, for whom beauty is a kind of unity of the appetitive (good) and cognitive (true) dimensions of being.<sup>92</sup> Key

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91. Cf., on this point, Ide, “John Paul II’s ‘Meditation,’” 129–32 and *passim*. It is the radical nature of this call to love that generates the “states of life” question that was central for John Paul II: realization of love of self entails realization of a total—which finally implies definitive—gift of self to God, by way of virginity or marriage. In particular, the radical nature of the call to love leads John Paul II to the recognition of marriage, and not only virginity, as a state of holiness in the proper sense, and thus to a development in the Church’s theology of marriage. It is no longer the case that the call to holiness is proper only to each of the individual spouses. Rather marriage itself, *qua* spousal community, is now a state of holiness. A hierarchy remains between virginity and marriage, but it is a hierarchy of two states of holiness, rather than one being a state of holiness and the other not. For more on this development, see David S. Crawford, *Marriage and the Sequela Christi* (Rome: Lateran University Press, 2004).

92. Cf., for example, *ST I–II*, q. 27, a. 1 ad 3: “The beautiful is the same as the good, and they differ in aspect only. For since good is what all seek, the notion of good is that which brings desire to rest; while the notion of the beautiful is that which brings desire to rest by being seen or known. . . . Thus it is evident that beauty adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive faculty: so that ‘good’ means that which simply pleases the appetite; while the ‘beautiful’ is something pleasant to apprehend.” Cf. also Aquinas, *Commentary on Dionysius’s The Divine Names*, bk. 4, lect. 5: “Although beauty and goodness are the same in reality—for both splendor of form [*claritas*] and harmony [*consonantia*] are contained in the notion of goodness—nevertheless, they differ in

for John Paul II, however, is the emphasis on beauty that is implied in affirming that human reality as such, in its very nature as created, is gift. The point is that the pope emphasizes beauty as the *unity* of truth and goodness. The very *truth* (fact, form) of your being is *good* (at once desirable and self-diffusive); and so what you are from the beginning, in your most fundamental and integral being, is *beautiful*.

Beauty for John Paul II, then, is ultimately the most proper way of understanding the reality of the human being—as gift. Perception of the beauty of human being, moreover, not only implies an “objective” unity of the good and the true, but also demands a “subjective” unity of the perceiver’s cognitive and appetitive acts, as well as the intrinsic involvement of the body. Beauty, in a word, engages the whole of our being. *Knowing* the other and *loving* the other in his full and proper reality *as* other cannot be separated from one another, without distorting the nature of knowledge and love as well as the other as object of our knowing and loving. The language of beauty, as signaling the *integration* of the true and the good, so far recognizes an intrinsic objective or cognitive dimension proper to the reality of being as love or gift. Love or gift for John Paul II, in other words, is not conceived (in the more traditional and customary sense) as simply a matter of will and appetite, hence a matter only or primarily of “morality,” but rather as a matter also and more profoundly of the very “logic” of being itself.<sup>93</sup>

(4) *Filiality and sponsality: the radiation of Fatherhood.* Gift in its twofold meaning, *qua* given and *qua* finite participant in God’s giving, establishes the primacy of the filial and spousal character of the creature. The most fundamental human act consists in grateful receptivity—both of oneself as child of God (“original solitude”) and of the other human being as given by God (“original unity”). In the words of an important play of the pope, to receive and accept one’s own reality as a creature, and the reality

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reason, because beauty adds to goodness the notion of cognition.” We need not enter here into the controversy over whether or in what sense beauty is a transcendental for Aquinas.

93. Cf. D. C. Schindler, *Love and Reality: On Man in the Light of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (forthcoming).

of the other, is to enter into “the radiation of fatherhood.”<sup>94</sup> Man becomes genuinely fruitful only in and through such receptivity.

In terms of what John Paul II calls the original solitude of man, this means participating, in a filial way, in the Creator-God’s giving of being. This original receptiveness of myself as given to me by God is always also an original receptiveness to the other whom God gives me. Indeed, in the act of creation, I am given to myself as ordered by and toward love, in a filial and spousal order that is inscribed in my flesh. The human other, above all the other sex as a distinct “‘incarnation’ of the same metaphysical solitude before God” (TOB, 166), is thus also given to me together with the gift of myself. I am at once complete in myself in relation to God, and complete in myself in relation to God and to an other who is of the same kind, differently.

Man’s distinct meaning as a creature thus lies in the structure of his being as given by God to himself (filiality) together with the being of another (sponsality). Man’s participation in God’s creative love consists most basically in gratefully responding to, that is, re-capitulating or re-initiating, what is first initiated by God and the other. I act and am creative—creatively fruitful—only in union with God and others, and the anterior form of this community is always first *given to me* in my reality as the re-sponsive (filial, spousal) subject of its exercise. Creative fruitfulness in the creature thus presupposes the creature’s anteriorly *given community with God*, as mediated through the given community with other human beings. It is this original *givenness by God* through others that requires that creative fruitfulness in the creature bear an anteriorly *contemplative* or “theoretical”

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94. In his play of this title, John Paul II speaks of the need to “be liberated from freedom through love” (“Radiation of Fatherhood: A Mystery,” in *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 333–68, at 355). He says that “love reveals the Father in the Son” (362), and that accepting fatherhood involves becoming child-like: “to absorb the radiation of fatherhood means not only to become a father but, much more, to become a child” (368). This also involves a necessary link to the mother: “The radiation of fatherhood passes [or] acts through . . . motherhood” (362). Again: “One returns to the father through the child. And the child, in turn, restores . . . the bridegroom in the father. . . . One must enter the radiation of fatherhood, since only there does everything become fully real. . . . Think, all of you: one must choose to give birth! . . . One must choose to give birth even more than to create” (341).

form, whose archetype is a “*fiat*” (“letting be” of the other, and of the other in me) that is at once a “*magnificat*” (a “magnification” of the other, and of myself in and through the other).

Being and acting in the creature, we may say, are at their core *fruitful* only *qua procreative*—that is, *qua given by and with* God through others. This, I take it, is the root meaning of John Paul II’s insight concerning the radiation of fatherhood. This procreative fruitfulness has its first and most basic form in the conception of a child, but it is also expressed in one’s entire engagement with the world. Human work is an extension into the world of a human presence that is genuinely procreative. Only through such procreative human activity can the created world itself be transformed into the gift that it already, initially and most truly, is.

(5) *Work and worldly power: toward a civilization of love.* John Paul II’s anthropology of gift is confirmed and richly extended in his treatment of what may be termed “worldly power,” or the order of civilization. According to the pope, worldly power is most basically a matter, once again, of recapitulating reality’s givenness as gift in the whole of our lives, both “public” and “private” (to use the common parlance). If every person and thing in the created universe bears the *form* of the *good*, and so participates in beauty, then it is beauty in the end that most properly identifies the innermost reality of every created being. To be sure, sin obscures this beauty, and Christian faith alone reveals to us the beauty of things in their full realization as redeemed—as *re-given* in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, the beauty of things can never be entirely lost to view, unless being itself, in its very nature as given, is destroyed.

Again, as John Paul II says, man can “clutter up his civilization with substitutes,” such that it “ceases to be a civilization of beauty, because it is not born of that eternal love from which God brought man into being and made him beautiful” (“Meditation,” 878). This is especially a danger in our day. Ceasing to recognize ourselves, others, and the world itself as gift, we reduce what lies before us to a mere “object of use.” According to the pope, this represents “the utmost threat to our civilization.” Contemporary Western culture gravitates toward “more plea-

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95. On this idea of redemption as re-giving, cf. John Paul II, “Meditation,” 879.



tures, more experiences, more sensations, fewer real values, less creative suffering for good, less readiness to sacrifice self for the good and beauty of humanity” (“Meditation,” 879).

In the face of this threat, John Paul II insists that we propose nothing less than the truth about creatures as gifts of God. The burden of what he calls an “authentic theology of integral human liberation” (*Centesimus annus*, 26) is precisely to promote a “civilization of love,” that is, a civilization centered in the beauty of the creature as gift. In proposing such a civilization, the pope is aware of the common contemporary objections: that it is “unrealistic” and will not “work”; that we need to be prudent, especially in a culture containing a pluralism of religions and worldviews; that we need to be “successful” in obtaining a position from which we can then exercise significant cultural influence; that we need to affirm the “givens” of our particular time in history in their goodness, while then correcting them; and so on. John Paul does not deny the important truths contained in these objections. The burden of his anthropology of gift is simply that these legitimate concerns need to be “re-formed” in their root meaning, in terms of the “power” of the given-as-gift.

According to John Paul II’s vision of “integral liberation,” that from which we need most to be liberated is sin, not only in its “subjective sense,” but also in its “objective dimension.”<sup>96</sup> By “objective sin,” John Paul means the ideologies, philosophies, and worldviews—in a word, the false visions of reality—that dispose persons to act counter to the truth, in ways that promote disorder in one’s own life and in the life of the culture. This is what the pope calls “structural sin”: false or distorted ideas of reality, as embodied in the institutional structures and patterns of the culture, that dispose human beings toward sin.<sup>97</sup> Or better: false ideas, by virtue of their inner logic, “force” a misreading of

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96. Cf. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 56: “[T]he resistance to the Holy Spirit which Saint Paul emphasizes in the *interior and subjective dimension* as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its external dimension [*rationem exteriorem*], which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a *philosophical system, an ideology, a programme* for action and for the shaping of human behavior” (emphasis original).

97. On structures of sin, see John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 35–40; *Reconciliatio et paenitentiae*, 16.

the meaning of reality in its proper givenness as gift from God. Integral human liberation, then, authentically conceived, is liberation not simply from social injustice in its customary sense, but from false (cognitive-appetitive) relations to God, and in this sense from sin.

Relative to John Paul II's "hermeneutics of gift," the point here is that the civilizational disorder indicated in "structural sin" involves (a) an intrinsically cognitive dimension, which (b) bears most basically on the reality of God as Creator-Giver. The problems most deeply affecting cultural institutions today—the economy, the polity, science, technology, and the academy—are in the first instance not merely "moral" problems. They are not first or simply matters of bad will, which give rise in turn to bad policies, except insofar as they are also matters of false conceptions of the theological, ontological, and anthropological order of things. Whatever moral or policy issues may be involved, such problems remain at root matters of the *truth* of being before God. In a word, structural disorder is a matter of moral evil or sin only as also a matter of an untrue perception of things.

The civilization of love proposed by John Paul II, then, seeks to liberate disordered institutional forms by showing forth and engaging the whole of reality in its givenness as gift. Human work and worldly power involve the human subject living out, in his unified totality, the nature of creaturely reality as gift from God, imparting this "logic" of gift to the institutions that, authentically conceived, are designed to express it.



In conclusion, we can say that there are, in the end, two large issues that lie at the heart of the discussion between Professor Waldstein and myself, which need to be addressed together in light of John Paul II's anthropology of gift.

(1) What is the nature of love as disclosed in man's "original experience," in light of the Gospel? My argument has been that, according to John Paul II, love in the creature, from man's beginning as created, consists in his being-given as gift. The human being is, in himself, a gift that participates in the giving of the divine Giver. This is the heart of John Paul II's vision.

(2) Are love and gift rooted in being? The “technical” philosophical issue here concerns above all the meaning of *esse creatum*. John Paul II insists that the reality of the human being as gift is true “from the beginning.” The giftedness of the human being, that is, begins in the very act of his being created, and hence (in metaphysical terms) in the relation between *esse* (act of being) and *ens* (what is). I have argued that *esse* is *given* to the creature even as it is *exercised* by the creature. The creature is thus given to itself, by God through others, as a gift that participates in giving, the primary form of which consists in responding generously.

I have presented my argument in light of John Paul II’s hermeneutics of gift. Neither Waldstein nor I simply repeat the position of John Paul II. Both of us, rather, attempt to interpret his thought in a way that most adequately discloses the integrity and coherence of his vision. I have proposed what seems to me the most adequate understanding of love in the creature—on the basis of man’s “original experience,”<sup>98</sup> illuminated by the light of the Gospel—in response to the pope-saint’s intellectual and spiritual legacy.\* □

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98. Cf. Ide, “John Paul II’s ‘Meditation,’” 137.

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