

The second function of historical investigation unfolds *within* the theological inquiry itself. The goal here is not simply to liberate historical reasoning so that it can do what lies within its own power, namely to state its own inability to come to terms with the reality of Jesus. In this second, properly theological inquiry, historical investigation uses the explicit, fully developed faith of the Church to recover as much as possible of the infinite riches of meaning that God has inspired for our instruction in every text of the Bible, as preparation and prefiguration of Christ in the Old Testament and as a manifold witness to his unfolding mystery in the New Dispensation.<sup>35</sup> □

<sup>35</sup>For the use of historical investigation within Christology proper, see my attempt to outline a theological history of Jesus, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, 3-151.

## Person, Being, and St. Thomas

W. Norris Clarke

The perfection of being—and therefore of the person—is essentially dyadic, culminating in *communion*.

The notions of person and being are in fact deeply intertwined, since personal being is the highest mode of being, the most perfect expression of what it means to be. As St. Thomas has put it, "Person is that which is most perfect in all of nature."<sup>1</sup> But too often the person is treated merely as a special mode of being, from the point of view of psychology, or ethics, or legal philosophy, or the phenomenology of interpersonal relations, and the like. Yet the person is not something added on to being as a special delimitation; it is simply what being *is* when allowed to be at its fullest, freed from the constrictions of sub-intelligent matter. So the notions of being and person can each throw much light on the other when brought together on the level of being itself.

My objective in this article is to work out what I might call a "creative completion" of St. Thomas's own thought on these two themes, or perhaps a "creative retrieval," as a Heideggerian might put it. For, on the one hand, Aquinas has an explicit, powerfully dynamic notion of being, of what it means to be, as intrinsically self-communicative and relational through action. On the other hand, he never quite got around to applying this in explicitly thematized fashion to his *philosophical* notion of person. Medieval discussions of the metaphysics

<sup>1</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 29, art. 3.

of personhood tended to get fixated on the technical problems of the "incommunicability" of the person, i.e., what makes it unique, not a part of any other being, and distinct in some way from the rational nature which always accompanies it.

Drawing the distinction between person and nature was indeed necessary in the context of Christian theology because of the need to explicate, as far as humanly possible, the two central doctrines of God as Triune (i.e., one divine nature possessed equally by three distinct Persons, distinguished only by their relations of origin to each other) and Christ as God-man (i.e., one divine Person possessing two distinct natures, one divine, one human). The challenge of these two revealed doctrines forced a careful working out of the distinction between person and nature which might have taken much longer if left to purely philosophical inquiry into our ordinary human experience, and in fact might never have occurred at all—as is the case in the Chinese and Japanese traditions before their encounter with Western thought, where the notion of "person" as a distinct concept seems to have been lacking. But as a result, the relational, self-communicative dimension of the person, flowing from its very status in being, was left in the shadow. The two notions were ready and waiting to be brought together. But St. Thomas did not quite get around to making the junction explicit. The controversies of the day absorbed his attention elsewhere. The explicit philosophical thematizing of the relational, interpersonal dimension of the human person had to wait until the existentialist and personalist phenomenologies of the twentieth century for its full highlighting and systematic development.

It is one of the paradoxes of intellectual history, however, that St. Thomas and the other medieval scholastics did indeed develop a relational notion of the person for use in the *theological* explanation of the Trinity. But for some reason they did not exploit this remarkable intellectual achievement for the *philosophical* explanation of the person. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (in his previous "incarnation" as a creative and daring theologian) takes St. Thomas—and other scholastic thinkers—to task rather sharply for not developing this relational notion of the person within Christian philosophy but instead slipping back into the traditional Boethian definition of person as "an individual substance of a rational nature." And so St. Thomas failed to recognize that in the relational notion of person developed within the theology of the Trinity,

... lies concealed a revolution in man's view of the world: the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality . . . and it is made apparent how being that truly understands itself grasps at the same time that *in* its self-being it does not belong to itself; that it only comes to itself by moving away from itself and finding its way back as relatedness to its true primordial state.<sup>2</sup>

I think the Cardinal has a point, and I would like to do for Thomistic metaphysics what Thomas himself could have done, but for various reasons did not get around to doing. I would like to join together his dynamic relational notion of being as active, already explicitly developed, with the notion of person, already rooted by him in the act of existence, to bring into the clear the intrinsically relational character of the person precisely as the highest mode of being. Person and being are, in a sense, paradigms of each other.

#### *The dynamic, relational notion of being*

One of the central themes in the thought of Aquinas is his notion of real being, i.e., actually existing being, as intrinsically active and self-communicating. A superficial reading of Aquinas might not notice this at first, because it is never thematized as the formal question asked in any question or article. But it runs all through his thought, both philosophical and theological, as one of the key mediating ideas in explanations and drawing of conclusions, as I have tried to show at greater length in my article on the subject.<sup>3</sup> A sampling of his texts will show this clearly enough.

From the very fact that something exists in act, it is active.<sup>4</sup>

Active power follows upon being in act, for anything acts in consequences of being in act.<sup>5</sup>

It is the nature of every actuality to communicate itself insofar as it is possible. Hence every agent acts according as it exists in actuality.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 132 and 137; "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 13 (1990): 438-54.

<sup>3</sup>W. Norris Clarke, "Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas," in Linus Thro, ed., *History of Philosophy in the Making* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 63-80.

<sup>4</sup>*Summa contra Gentiles*, I, chap. 43.

<sup>5</sup>*Sum. c. Gent.*, II, chap. 7.

It follows upon the superabundance proper to perfection as such that the perfection which something has it can communicate to another. Communication follows upon the very intelligibility (*ratio*) of actuality. Hence every form is of itself communicable.<sup>7</sup>

For natural things have a natural inclination not only toward their own proper good, to acquire it, if not possessed, and if possessed, to rest therein; but also to diffuse their own goodness among others as far as is possible. Hence we see that every agent, insofar as it exists in act and possesses some perfection, produces something similar to itself. It pertains, therefore, to the nature of the will to communicate to others as far as possible the good possessed; and especially does this pertain to the divine will, from which all perfection is derived in some kind of likeness. Hence if natural things, insofar as they are perfect, communicate their goodness to others, much more does it pertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own goodness to others as far as possible.<sup>8</sup>

Not only is activity, active self-communication, the natural consequence of possessing an act of existence (*esse*); St. Thomas goes further to maintain that self-expression through action is actually the whole point, the natural perfection or flowering of being itself, the goal of its very presence in the universe:

Every substance exists for the sake of its operations.<sup>9</sup>

Each and every thing shows forth that it exists for the sake of its operation; indeed, operation is the ultimate perfection of each thing.<sup>10</sup>

Thus there is an immense innate dynamism in the very nature of actual being as such, wherever an act of existing is found, participated or unparticipated, to pour over into self-expression, self-communication of its own inner perfection or goodness. Full credit must be given to Etienne Gilson for his role in rediscovering the centrality and dynamism of the act of existence in contemporary Thomism. And he puts it pithily:

Not: to be, then to act, but: to be is to act. And the very first thing which "to be" does, is to make its own essence to be, that is, "to be

<sup>6</sup>*De Potentia*, q. 2, art. 1.

<sup>7</sup>*Sum. c. Gent.*, III, chap. 64.

<sup>8</sup>*Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 19, art. 2.

<sup>9</sup>*Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 105, art. 5.

<sup>10</sup>*Sum. c. Gent.*, III, ch. 113.

a being." This is done at once, completely and definitively. . . . But the next thing which "to be" does, is to begin bringing its own individual essence somewhat nearer its own completion.<sup>11</sup>

Gerald Phelan, one of the early disciples of Gilson at Toronto, was also peculiarly sensitive to the expansive character of being through action:

The act of existence (*esse*) is not a state, it is an act and not as a static definable object of conception. *Esse* is dynamic impulse, energy, act—the first, the most persistent and enduring of all dynamisms, all energies, all acts. In all things on earth, the act of being (*esse*) is the consubstantial urge of nature, a restless, striving force, carrying each being (*ens*) forward, from within the depths of its own reality to its full self-achievement.<sup>12</sup>

Despite their sensitivity to the intrinsic connection between *to be* and *to act*, these comments of Gilson and Phelan limit their focus to the drive of each being towards fulfilling its own perfection, to its passage from its own potency to its own act—still in some respects an Aristotelian perspective. Aquinas, in the texts we have seen above, goes considerably further, speaking of an intrinsic dynamism in every being to be *self-communicative*, to share its own goodness with others, to pour over into the production of another actuality in some way like itself. This is what Maritain has aptly called "the basic generosity of existence."<sup>13</sup>

It follows that, for Aquinas, finite, created being pours over naturally into action for *two* reasons: (1) because it is *poor*, i.e., lacking the fullness of existence, and so strives to enrich itself as much as its nature allows from the richness of those around it; but (2) even more profoundly because it is *rich*, endowed with its own richness of existence, however slight this may be, which it tends naturally to communicate and share with others.

This innate fecundity and generosity proper to being as existent, by which it is naturally self-communicating to

<sup>11</sup>Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 184.

<sup>12</sup>Gerald Phelan, "The Existentialism of St. Thomas," *Selected Papers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 77.

<sup>13</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 90.

others, is St. Thomas's way of integrating into his own metaphysics of being the rich Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions of the self-diffusiveness of the Good (understood by them as more ultimate than being, which always meant limited intelligible essence). Existence itself (*esse*) now becomes for Thomas the ultimate root of all perfection, with unity and goodness its transcendental properties or attributes, facets of the inexhaustible richness of being itself. And once the Platonic realism of divine ideas is overcome, Thomas's Supreme Being, the pure subsistent Act of Existence, can become identically Intelligence and Will, and the intrinsic self-diffusiveness of the Good turns into Love, self-communicative Love. The ultimate reason now appears why all beings, by the very fact that they *are*, possess this natural dynamism toward action and self-communication: they are all diverse modes of participation in the infinite goodness of the one Source, whose very being is identically self-communicative Love. Dante, good Thomist that he was, was right after all when he summed it up in the *Paradiso*: "Love makes the world go round."

This understanding of being as intrinsically active, self-manifesting and self-communicating through action, I consider not merely as a position of historical interest for appreciating ancient and medieval thought, but also in its own right as one of the few great fundamental insights in the history of metaphysics, without which no viable metaphysical vision can get far off the ground. For consider what would happen if one attempted to deny that every real being is active, self-manifesting through action. Suppose a being that really exists, but does not act in any way, does not manifest itself in any way to other beings. There would be no way for anything else to know that it exists; it would make no *difference* at all to the rest of reality; practically speaking, it might just as well not be at all—it would in fact be indistinguishable from non-being. If many or all real beings were this way, each would be locked off in total isolation from every other. There would not be a connected universe (its root, *universum*, means in fact "turned toward unity"). The only way that beings can connect up with each other to form a unified system is through action. To be and to be active, though logically distinct, are inseparable. "Communication," as Aquinas says, "follows upon the very intelligibility of actuality." The full meaning of "to be" is not just "to be present," but "to be actively present." Existence is power-full, energy-filled presence. *Agere sequitur esse* (action follows upon

being, as the medieval adage has it, although the interpretation varied according to the meaning given to *esse*). To know another being, therefore, is to know it as *this kind of actor*.

The innate dynamism of being as overflowing into self-manifesting, self-communicating action, is clear and explicit in St. Thomas. What is clearly implied, however, though not as explicit, is the corollary that *relationality* is a primordial dimension of every real being, inseparable from its substantiality, just as action is from existence. For if a being naturally flows over into self-communicating action to and on others, it immediately generates a network of relations with all its recipients. Action, passion, and relations are inseparably tied together even in the Aristotelian categories. While all relations are not generated by action, still all action and passion necessarily generate relations.

It turns out, then, that relationality and substantiality go together as two distinct but inseparable modes of reality. Substance is the primary mode, in that all else, including relations, depend on it as their ground. But since "every substance exists for the sake of its operations," as St. Thomas has just told us, being as substance, as existing *in itself*, naturally flows over into being as relational, turned *towards others* by its self-communicating action. *To be* is to be *substance-in-relation*.<sup>14</sup>

In a creature it may well be accidental *which* particular other being it will be related to here and now. But *being related* in some way to the world around it, as well as to its various sources, will flow from its very nature both as an existent being and as material. Within the divine being, the relations of procession between the three Persons are not accidental but constitutive of the very nature of the divine substance. Substantiality and relationality are here equally primordial and necessary dimensions of being itself at its highest intensity. And the ultimate reason why all lower beings manifest this relationality as well as substantiality is that they are all in some way images of God, their ultimate Source, the supreme synthesis of both. Therefore, all being is, by its very nature as being, *dyadic*, with an "introverted," or *in-itself* dimension, as

<sup>14</sup>I have developed this formula at length in my article, "To Be is To Be Substance-in-Relation," to appear in the forthcoming festschrift, *Metaphysics as Foundation: Essays in Honor of Ivor Leclerc* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

substance, and an "extroverted," or *towards-others* dimension, as relational through action.

Let us conclude this section with a quotation from Josef Pieper, who, more than most contemporary Thomists, has brought out the proportional connection between the substantial and relational aspects of being:

To sum it up, then: to have (or to be) an "intrinsic existence" means "to be able to relate" and "to be the sustaining subject at the center of a field of reference". . . . Only in reference to an inside can there be an outside. Without a self-contained "subject" there can be no "object." Relating-to, conforming-with, being-oriented-toward—all these notions presuppose an inside starting point. . . . The higher the form of intrinsic existence, the more developed becomes the relatedness to reality, also the more profound and comprehensive becomes the sphere of this relatedness: namely, the world. And the deeper such relations penetrate the world of reality, the more intrinsic becomes the subject's existence.<sup>15</sup>

This dynamic polarity between substance and action-plus-relations was submerged and almost forgotten in the post-medieval period from Descartes on. Three major distortions of the classical notion of substance broke the connection: (1) the Cartesian notion of the isolated, unrelated substance, "that which needs nothing else but itself (and God) to exist"; (2) the Lockean static substance, the inert substratum needed to support accidents but unknowable in itself; and (3) the separable substance of Hume, which, if it existed, would have to be empirically observable as separated from all its accidents, and hence is an impossible fiction.

Because these emasculated versions of substance were the only ones familiar to them from classical modern philosophy, a large number of modern and contemporary thinkers have simply rejected substance entirely as a nonviable mode of being, e.g., Bergson, Collingwood, Whitehead, Dewey, Heidegger, most phenomenologists, and many others. As a result, the person tended to be reduced to nothing but a relation or set of relations. The difficulty, here, however, as Pieper warned, is that if the substance, or *in-itself*, pole of being is dropped out, the unique interiority and privacy of the person are wiped out

<sup>15</sup>Josef Pieper, *The Truth of all Things*, reprinted in the *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 83 and 82.

also and the person turns out to be an entirely extroverted bundle of relations, with no inner self to share with others. But there is no need for this either/or dichotomy between substance and relation, once the notion of substance as center of activity—and receptivity—has been retrieved. *To be* is to be *substance-in-relation*.

#### *Application to the person*

For St. Thomas, personality in the ontological sense, i.e., to be a person, is rooted in the act of existing: to be a person is to be an intellectual nature possessing its own unique act of existing so as to be the autonomous source of its own actions. Thus, in the theological application of the doctrine, the human nature of Christ is complete as a nature, but does not own its own act of existing, so it is not a *human* person, but is owned by the personal act of existence of the Second Person of the Trinity. Now the person, for Aquinas, "is that which is most perfect in all of nature." But since the act of existing is for him the root of all perfection, it follows that to be a person is not something added on to being from without, but is really only the perfection of being itself, being come into its own, so to speak, allowed to be fully what it tends to be by nature when not restricted by the limitation proper to the material mode of being, with self-dispersal over space that is characteristic of matter. In a word, when being is allowed to be fully itself as active *presence*, it necessarily turns into luminous *self-presence*—self-awareness, or self-consciousness—one of the primary attributes of person. To be fully is to be personally.

All this is clear enough in Aquinas himself. But another very significant implication follows from this rooting of personal being in being itself at its supra-material levels—an implication that was not brought out explicitly, or at least was not thematized or highlighted by him. Being is not just *presence*, but *active presence*, tending by nature to pour over into active self-manifestation and self-communication to others. And if personal being is really being itself only at its supra-material levels, then it follows that to be a person as such is to be a being that tends by nature to pour over into active, conscious self-manifestation and self-communication to others, through intellect and will working together. And if the person in question is a *good* person, i.e., rightly ordered in its conscious free action, then this active presence to others will take the form of willing

what is truly good for them, which is itself a definition of *love* in its broadest meaning, defined by Thomas as "willing good to another for its own sake." To be a person, then, is to be a bi-polar being that is at once present *in itself*, actively possessing itself by its self-consciousness (its substantial pole), and also actively oriented *towards others*, toward active loving self-communication to others (its relational pole). To be an authentic person, in a word, is to be a *lover*, to live a life of *interpersonal* self-giving and receiving. Person is essentially a "we" term. Person exists in its fullness only in the plural. As Jacques Maritain puts it felicitously:

Thus it is that when a man has been really awakened to the sense of being or existence, and grasps intuitively the obscure, living depth of the Self and subjectivity, he discovers by the same token the basic generosity of existence and realizes, by virtue of the inner dynamism of this intuition, that love is not a passing pleasure or emotion, but the very meaning of his being alive.

Thus subjectivity reveals itself as "self-mastery for self-giving . . . by spiritual existing in the manner of a gift."<sup>16</sup>

Josef Pieper has also caught well the intrinsic bipolarity of personal being as spirit, when, commenting on a brief sentence of St. Thomas, he unfolds it thus:

The higher the form of intrinsic existence, the more developed becomes the relatedness with reality, also the more profound and comprehensive becomes the sphere of this relationship: namely, the world. And the deeper such relations penetrate the world of reality, the more intrinsic becomes the subject's existence. . . . These two aspects combined—dwelling most intensively within itself, and being *capax universi*, able to grasp the universe—together constitute the essence of the spirit. Any definition of "spirit" will have to contain these two aspects as its core.<sup>17</sup>

Transpose "spirit" into "person," as being itself existing on the spiritual level, and Pieper and I are both expressing the same insight.

<sup>16</sup>The first part of the quotation is from *Existence and the Existent*, 90; the second is from *Challenges and Renewals* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 74-75.

<sup>17</sup>Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 83.

Once the intrinsically self-communicating and relational notion of being has been integrated into the notion of person as its highest expression, the way is open to grafting the whole rich contemporary phenomenology of the person as essentially relational and interpersonal onto the more basic metaphysics of being as active presence. It also becomes clear that, viewed in this relational perspective, the person cannot be looked on as primarily an isolated, self-sufficient individual, with freely chosen relations added on as a merely occasional, accidental complement. The person is intrinsically ordered toward togetherness with other human persons—and any other persons accessible to it—i.e., toward *friendship, community, and society*. As Aquinas himself puts it in a beautiful little aside: "It is natural for man to take delight in living together with other human beings."<sup>18</sup> Thus precisely because to be a person is to be the highest mode of being, the fullest expression of what it means to be, person means at once that which stands in itself as a self-possessing, autonomous center and at the same time, by the very dynamism of its self-possession, that whose whole being is oriented toward others, especially other persons, in self-communicative expression and sharing of itself, as *interpersonal*. Thus one of the small but growing number of contemporary Thomists who have caught on to the intrinsically relational aspect of both being and person, Norbert Hoffman, can speak of "this movement of the *pro*, this self-openness towards the other" (most luminously manifested in the revelation of divine being as self-communicative interpersonal love), as "the primal mystery and the first of all impulses in the heart of being. All of its own, and not because of subsequent determination, Being posits itself as *communicatio*; its essential form is called 'love.'"<sup>19</sup>

#### *Receptivity as a perfection of being and person*

So far I have developed the self-communicative aspect of the person as stemming from the intrinsic dynamism of

<sup>18</sup>*Sum. Theol.*, II-III, q. 114, art. 2 ad 1. Cf. the rich metaphysical grounding of this in Mary Rousseau, *Community: The Tie that Binds* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

<sup>19</sup>Norbert Hoffman, *Towards a Civilization of Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 237-38, quoted in the interesting article by Robert Connor, "Relation, the Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity," *Communio*, 17 (1990): 455-64.

being itself. I would now like to bring explicitly into focus another aspect of this same dynamism of being and the person which has not been developed, even implicitly, it seems, by St. Thomas himself. Yet, I think it deserves to be developed if we are to carry through all the way our "creative completion" of St. Thomas. The suggestion for this development I owe to two sources: one is John Cobb, representing the process point of view, who made the point during the question period after the initial presentation of this paper at the annual meeting of the Metaphysical Society of America at Villanova University in March, 1992. The other is the profound and daring speculation of the Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose thought on the subject has been made available to the English-speaking community by the work of Gerard O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to Balthasar's creative rethinking of the notion of the immutability of God to allow in the Trinity an eternal dynamic "process" or "event" of interpersonal communication beyond time and change—but of which change and time in our world are an imperfect image—he makes the point that in an adequate notion of the perfection of love *receptivity* is the necessary complement of active self-communication and of equal dignity and perfection as the latter. Self-donation would be incomplete without welcoming receptivity on the other side of the personal relation. And this belongs to the very perfection of the love relationship itself. We have too long been accustomed to regard receptivity as passivity, associating it with the inferior status of potentiality as poverty which is completed by actuality as the perfecting principle. This is certainly the case with many lower-order examples of receptivity, particularly as connected with the passivity of matter. But the higher up one moves into the realm of spirit and person, the fullness of being as such, the more this "passivity" turns into an active, "welcoming" receptivity that is mark of the perfection—not the imperfection, of interpersonal relations. As O'Hanlon puts it:

. . . This is shown most clearly at the top of an ascending scale of subject/object relationships in the created sphere when one arrives at the interpersonal relationship between two subjects, at the heart of which is a welcoming, active receptivity. . . . the higher up the scale of created reality one goes the more this passivity (in the sense of an

<sup>20</sup>Cambridge University Press, 1990.

active receptivity) increases, and the more it may be seen, in the case of human inter-personal encounter, as a perfection.<sup>21</sup>

The proof that this welcoming, active receptivity is a mode of actuality and perfection, not of potentiality and imperfection, is seen clearly when we turn to the intra-Trinitarian life of God. Here it is of the essence of the personal being of the Son as such that it be totally and gratefully receptive to the gift of the divine nature from the Father; the personality of the Son might well be called "subsistent gratitude." So too with the Holy Spirit as the love image of both Father and Son, receiving its whole being from them as gift and reflecting that back as the pure essence of actively receptive love. Since all notion of change—with its accompanying imperfection of first a state of non-possessing potentiality, then a later state of possession—is eliminated from this eternal, ever actualized "process," all notion of imperfection disappears, too.

Thus in its highest and purest form, echoed analogously and proportionately, with increasing imperfection, down through creation, the radical dynamism of being as *self-communicative* evokes as its necessary complement the active, welcoming *receptivity* of the receiving end of its self-communication. Authentic love is not complete unless it is both actively given and actively—gratefully—received. And both giving and receiving at their purest are of equal dignity and perfection. The perfection of being—and therefore of the person—is essentially dyadic, culminating in *communion*.

I call this grounding of the person as relational—both self-communicative and actively receptive—in the very dynamism of being itself a "creative retrieval and completion" of the latent, implicit resources and implications of Aquinas's own metaphysics, lying just under the surface and waiting to be developed. But it must be honestly admitted that without the stimulus of contemporary phenomenological insights into the relational aspects of the person, the insistence of process thinkers, and the theological speculation of thinkers like Balthasar, they might have continued to lie there undeveloped. As Ivor Leclerc has so insightfully pointed out, the history of

<sup>21</sup>Taken from the preparatory article summarizing his book, "Does God Change? Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Immutability of God," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 53 (1987): 161-83, 171.

metaphysics is inseparable from, though not identical with, its content.

### Objection

Before concluding, I must take into account an obvious objection that must have come into the minds of many of you, especially perhaps of fellow Thomists. If this self-communicative, relational view of being is taken seriously and applied all across the board, even to God, or whatever one wishes to call Ultimate Reality, a consequence emerges which St. Thomas himself, with many other Christian thinkers, rejects. It is this: If being is intrinsically self-communicative and relational at all levels, including the divine, then it would follow that either (1) God must necessarily, rather than freely, communicate himself in creation—which Aquinas as a Christian thinker could not subscribe to; or else (2) God's own inner being must be intrinsically relational, involving more than one person—and then we have a philosophical deduction of the doctrine of God as Trinity of distinct Persons, which Christian tradition has always held to be a "strict mystery," inaccessible to any argument of natural or purely philosophical reason, and knowable in this life only by a divine revelation. St. Thomas explicitly rejects both of these positions, the first because it seems to deny the absolute freedom of God in creation, which Christian thinkers in his time were very sensitive about maintaining against the necessary emanationism of the great Islamic thinkers like Averroes and Avicenna. The second he rejects because it seems to deny the need of a divine revelation, accepted by faith, as the only way of knowing the small number of central "strict mysteries" of the Christian religion, such as the Trinity and Christ as God become man.

What are we to make of these objections? Let us take first the *freedom of creation*. Frankly, I think St. Thomas has been overcautious here, that St. Bonaventure has done better, following out more consistently the doctrine of the self-diffusiveness of the good. In his philosophical expositions, Aquinas habitually puts forward the strong interpretation of the self-diffusiveness of being, as the texts we cited earlier clearly bear witness to. Then suddenly, when he comes to the question of the freedom of creation, he pulls back and explains that in this case the self-diffusiveness of the good must be taken only in the sense of a final, not an efficient cause. That is, once God has

created freely through efficient causality then he necessarily diffuses his goodness as final cause over all things.<sup>22</sup>

This seems to me a cop-out—and an unnecessary one. Through overcaution, in order to safeguard the freedom of creation, Aquinas has pulled back from following through consistently on his own principles. In the texts which we have cited he clearly asserts as a property of all being as actual that it pour over *actively* to self-communicate its goodness by producing another actuality similar to itself, and that this is most appropriate for God also. This active self-communication clearly means more than just the attraction of a final cause on already existing beings. I think he could have handled the objection in one or both of two ways.

1) Suppose, as Christian revelation declares, that God has already carried out a self-communication within his own being among the three Persons, which is infinitely perfect and complete, since each recipient is equally infinite and possesses the identical divine nature. Then the innate metaphysical dynamism in the divine being toward self-communication is *already* satisfied with infinite fullness, independently of any finite creation. Any further self-communication to finite beings in a finite creation can be a purely gratuitous, free overflow. And since philosophical reason cannot show the impossibility of such an intra-divine self-communication, the force of the philosophical objection is annulled. Hegel, by the way, might well have thought of this move to soften the apparent necessity of his Absolute to express itself in a finite world.

2) The objection can be handled directly on the level of creation itself, philosophically, without any reference to the doctrine of the Trinity or other theological doctrines. One can say first that the creation of any *particular* finite world by an infinite cause must be free. For, given a cause of infinite perfection, as God must be, it is impossible to deduce from it by any logical argument—by any necessity of reason, to put it more broadly—the existence of any *particular* finite effect, or

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Jules Péghaire, "L'axiome 'Bonum est diffusivum sui' dans le néoplatonisme et le thomisme," *Revue de L'Université d'Ottawa*, 2 (1932): 5\*-30\*; the valuable collection *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. by Scott MacDonald (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990); M. J. Nicolas, "Bonum est diffusivum sui," *Revue thomiste* 55 (1955): 363-76. A key text of Aquinas is *De Veritate*, q. 21, art. 1, ad 4.



system of effects: given an infinite cause, an infinite number of other effects is always possible. So the appearance of any one particular finite order must pass through the selection process of intelligent free choice, otherwise nothing definite will emerge at all. There can be no necessary connection between a source of infinite power and any finite effect, only a contingent one. Thus whatever finite created order exists must be the result of a free choice on God's part. This is enough, I think, to satisfy the requirements both of sound theistic metaphysics and Christian theological tradition.

But the further question now arises: Is it necessary that the self-diffusiveness of the divine goodness manifest itself in *some* finite universe, although any particular one would have to be freely chosen? This is a considerably more difficult question. St. Thomas would say "No." I think one should say "Yes," with some reservations. Given an infinitely good and loving personal being, it seems to me one can say it is *inevitable* that it will pour over in *some* way to share its goodness outside itself, though one cannot predict just how. This inevitability, or "necessity," if you will, is not any external compulsion or blind metaphysical force, but the very "logic," the special logic, of a loving nature, that it will spontaneously pour over to share its goodness in some way, if it can, with a spontaneity that is at once lucidly and consciously free, uncompelled by anything but love, yet inevitable, "out of character" for it not to happen. Thus in the case of God, as Hegel and others have well said, in a certain sense freedom and necessity come together in a transcendent synthesis, proper only to the nature of love. Even on our own human level, in fact, if we know a habitually generous, loving and compassionate person, we can predict with practical certainty that if someone needy comes his way and he is able to help without obstacles or conflicting demands, he will certainly do so, though freely. The rationality of love is a unique kind of rationality transcending the limits of logic (though not contradicting them).

Let us come now to the second main objection noted earlier: Are we not deducing from natural reason the need for some kind of *interpersonal relationship on the divine level itself*, thus deducing the philosophical necessity of something like the Trinity of Persons in God, which is supposed to be accessible only through divine revelation accepted through faith, according to orthodox Christian tradition? The question is not an easy one, but I do not think we are forced into an

either/or confrontation between faith and reason. Already in the twelfth century, Richard of St. Victor proposed a kind of deduction of a suasive argument from natural reason showing why, if God is personal at all, he must have some other person to relate to in love, since the very meaning of person and loving implies an interpersonal term of relation. He also tried to show why there must be not only some plurality of persons within the divine life, but precisely three and no more.<sup>23</sup>

Aquinas and the later scholastics rejected his argument as not meeting the rigorous requirements of the newly discovered Aristotelian rules of argumentation. But there is much wisdom and cogency in Richard's analysis, as Ewert Cousins has tried to show, although a strict rigorous argument cannot be framed. It would seem to me that one could hold there must be *some* kind of interpersonal relation on the divine level, following from the analogy of the terms person and love, but one could not deduce with any certainty just what form this would have to take or *how many* persons it would have to involve: why not two, or four, why necessarily only three: If one leaves the latter point open, it would seem that one has not deduced from reason the precise Christian mystery of God as *Triune* in persons.

#### Conclusions

Thus the way seems open to me to work out a philosophically—and theologically—viable "creative completion" or retrieval of St. Thomas's metaphysics of being and the person. This retrieval which would first highlight the intrinsically expansive, self-communicative, and therefore relational dimension of existential being as such, then apply this to the person as the fullest realization of what it means to be. Thereby would be generated a metaphysics of the person as intrinsically self-communicative, relational, and therefore interpersonal, whose natural self-expression on the highest level would be love.

Is the above analysis a purely philosophical, or a theologically guided one? I think it is one of those not infrequent cases in Western thought (also found in most Eastern

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Ewert Cousins, "A Theology of Interpersonal Relations," *Thought* 45 (1970): 56-82.

traditions in an analogous way) of a basic metaphysical concept that as a historical fact received its first stimulus and illumination from a theological source, but once "unveiled" can become a self-sustaining philosophical insight, recommending itself by its superior explanatory power. □

## The ethics of conquest: The European background of Spain's mission in the New World

Glenn W. Olsen

As the great imperialists of the sixteenth century, the Spaniards continued the articulation of natural law ideas, the law of nations, and a theory of empire.

### *I. The European background of Spain's mission in the New World*

Christopher Columbus was no Spaniard, but rather brought to the employ of the Catholic Monarchs a specifically Italian experience of the larger world. An avid reader of Marco Polo who had travelled many of the shipping routes used by Europeans, Columbus, like any Italian merchant, knew the implications of the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman Turks in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Italians had been cut off from their customary trade relations, especially to the spices of the East, and were either having to adjust their hopes for future prosperity downward, or turning to alternative ways of reconnecting with the East. This was a European-wide problem: "In many directions the fifteenth century was for Western Europe

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<sup>1</sup>Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492* (Philadelphia, 1987).