

Let us return to the question with which we began: where in the constitution of the human person do we first anchor relation, most particularly the relation that is receptive? It should be clear now that the issue regarding the distinction between *esse* and *agere*, as it involves relation, and again regarding the relative priority of receptivity and communicativity, is not an arcane matter, of serious import only for metaphysicians. The issue on the contrary lies embedded at the heart of the Murray project and, more generally, at the heart of Catholicism's engagement with the liberal culture of America. The issue lies embedded in the pope's call for a new evangelization of culture and for an authentic liberation of humanity.

Few would doubt that America's patterns of thought have been deeply affected by activism and extroversion, and its patterns of life by consumerism. The burden of my proposal is that, unless Catholics ensure that receptivity, with its implication of interiority and a priority of the contemplative, be given its anterior place in the constitution of being and acting, their own responses to the culture, for example, in terms of its morality and politics, will leave intact, indeed will themselves embody (however unwittingly), the very activism, extroversion, and disposition toward "having" and "possessing" that are the source of the problem.

How does an understanding of the human person (cf. Murray's emphasis) as one who first "possesses" his own act of existence, who is the autonomous source of his actions, whose relation to the other is engaged first through an outward-directed (communicative) *agere* help us to reverse these activist, extroverted, and consumeristic patterns of American culture? What revisions in the primitive meaning of "possession," "autonomous source," and *agere* are indicated by a different sense of the priority of receptive relation?

Clarke's stimulating and challenging book seeks to introduce into Thomism a more foundational place for relation and receptivity than is presupposed in the work of Murray. My question is nonetheless whether that place is yet foundational enough. Do we not need somehow to inscribe relation *from* the O(o)ther—hence receptivity—already within the human-creaturely *esse*, as the anterior condition of all human being-acting, both *in* itself and *toward* the O(o)ther?

This is hardly a niggling question. It lies at the intersection of Anglo-American liberalism, Thomism, and John Paul II's hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council.

David L. Schindler

RESPONSE TO DAVID SCHINDLER'S COMMENTS

I am deeply grateful for these comments, both the appreciative, the critical, and the constructive ones. In a sense they are a model for what a truly fruitful philosophical or theological discussion should be, as I think the reader will soon see. In my answer I would like to do two things: (1) clear up certain misunderstandings of my thought, and in this sense to defend it; but more importantly, (2) to acknowledge the lacuna in my own thought which Prof. Schindler has very insightfully laid his finger on, to accept gratefully the new lines of development he has sketched out, and to begin to integrate them into a more complete metaphysical vision.

First as to the misunderstandings: Schindler is worried that, in rooting the relationality of the human person in action (*agere*), which is the "second act" of a being, rather than in the very act of existence (*esse*), I am not going deep enough but am stopping at the level of the accidental, the secondary (since action in creatures is an accident following upon existence, but is distinct from it and secondary to it). Hence he is concerned that I am not really justified in making the claim, as I certainly do, that relationality should be considered an equally primordial dimension of reality as substantiality itself. As a result, he believes I am holding that the *esse* of a created being grounds only its in-itself-ness, or substantiality, whereas action, by itself as an accident, grounds the relationality.

This is not at all my position. I hold that the relationality dimension

of any real being, its dynamic tendency toward self-communicative action, is rooted in the very substantial act of *esse* itself; it is "expansive" by its very nature as act of existence, not by something secondary or distinct from it. The secondary act, the concrete particular action, does not originate this dynamic tendency on its own; it is rather the *expression* of the self-communicating dynamism already in the grounding act of *esse* itself. But we still must distinguish in a creature its *actual relations* to other beings from its substantial *esse*, because any actualized real relation demands that the other end of the relation also be real, and such real relations in a contingent world to other contingent beings must be themselves contingent. If these real relations were identical with the substance, they would have to be always, immutably, and necessarily present wherever the substance itself were. But this cannot be true in a contingent, changing world. Only in God, as St. Thomas unambiguously teaches, can his actions be identical with his essence, not in any creature, even angels. Surely Prof. Schindler would not want to hold the opposite.

Thus the radical dynamic tendency toward relationality belongs to the substantial *esse* itself, which in this sense grounds both the in-itself of the creature and its relational dynamism; but the expression of this innate dynamism in actual particular relations is rooted in particular actions contingently posited with respect to other contingent beings. (The relation to God is an exception, as we shall see.) I think that part of the difficulty lies perhaps in too heavy a distinction between sub-

stance and accident, tending to reify them into two distinct beings, united only by a link of causal dependence. But real accidents are not like that at all for St. Thomas (though they were for Ockham and his followers); the entire being of an accident is to be in its substance, to express or perfect what is in the latter. Hence in sum, relationality, as the dynamic tendency in every real being to be self-communicative, is rooted in the very substantial *esse* itself of the being; but in a creature its actual relations towards others expressing this dynamic tendency are rooted in actual particular actions which must be in the order of the accidental—which does not mean at all the unimportant. Getting to heaven or hell are indeed accidental to one's being in a technical sense; but they are hardly unimportant if the whole purpose of one's being is either fulfilled or frustrated thereby.

In view of the above clarification, it is clear what my answer must be to the author's summing up of his objection in sentences like the following:

... either ... relationality already in some significant sense begins—has its foundation—in *esse*, or it does not—in which case it follows rather that relationality begins simply in *agere*. But, if the latter is true, does this not mean that relation is something not strictly "required" by the inner dynamic of *esse*, and is in this sense still too "accidental"? ... How can relationality in fact be said to be—as Fr. Clarke himself says it is—"an equally primordial dimension of being as substantiality," if relationality begins not in first but in second act?

The answer is simple. *Relationality* does indeed begin, have its roots in,

esse itself, is thus equally primordial with substantiality; and it is also necessary that this dynamic tendency find expression in some actual relation. But it does not follow that *this particular actual relation* toward this particular contingent creature contingently encountered is also identical with the substantial *esse* and is equally primordial with its substantiality.

To put it another way, in more technical Thomistic terms: Schindler seems to put all accidents on the same level of contingency and hence inferior status in being. But for St. Thomas there are two kinds of accidents. One is the strictly contingent kind that can be or not be while leaving the substantial existence intact, e.g., scratching my head or not, joining this or that college, being stung by this or that mosquito. But there is another kind—which St. Thomas, with Aristotle, calls "properties," or "proper accidents"—which, though in the order of accident, flow immediately and necessarily from the substantial essence, so that the being could not actually be what it is and be deprived of them. The order of action is akin to this, though the need to act flows from the substance only as actually existing. A being cannot be without expressing itself in some kind of action. This connection is not contingent but necessary, inseparable from the very substantial existence of the being. *Being* and self-expression in action are so intimately intertwined that the intelligibility of each is incomplete without the other. That is not true of the merely contingent accident. So the order of action is a necessary property of an existing substance. In that sense the two orders are equally primordial. Sub-

stance is first in the order of origin; but action is first in the order of self-fulfillment.

In fact, one of the things I was deliberately trying to do was to show that what is primordial in a being is not just the order of substance but the order of action itself, accidental though it be, as the necessary complement of the substance as existing. But at the same time any (or at least most) particular actions will be contingent accidents. In a word, it is absolutely essential to a created being, a primordial aspect of its very being, that it have a history, contingent and accidental though this must be.

So much for the misunderstandings between us on the apparent opposition between "accidental" and "primordial." A little sharpening up of our technical language will show, I hope, that we are not that far apart.

Now for what I consider the most significant part of Prof. Schindler's comments, his pushing beyond what I now realize was my own limited perspective on relationality to a much deeper level of primordial relationality linked with the receptivity belonging to created *esse* as such, preceding any action on our part—a receptivity which is not just imperfection but in a mysterious way is an image of receptivity as pure perfection of being as exemplified in the Son as the Second Person of the Trinity. Here I agree with Schindler almost entirely (differing only in the relative appropriateness or felicity of a few phrases).

What he is worried about—and justly so—is that I seem to have limited the dimension of relationality in us as created beings to the relations rooted in the active dimension of our own self-communicative-

tion. First comes active self-communication, with the relations flowing from it, then receptivity, with its corresponding relations, as necessary complement to any achieved self-communication. This is indeed true in the absolute order of things, I would insist (and I think he would agree), because in the last analysis the very meaning of receptivity as gift implies a relation to an active giver as primary in the order of origin; thus in the Trinity the Father, the unoriginated One, must be first in the ultimate order of being itself, from whom the Son eternally originates.

But once we turn to the order of creatures the situation changes dramatically. Here the absolutely primary status of our being, of our substantial *esse* itself, is receptivity: it is a gift received *from another*, i.e., from God our Creator. This status as gift generates in us an absolutely primordial relation of receptivity and dependence, inscribed inseparably in the very depths of our being, prior to any action or initiative of our own. Thus in us as created beings the divine order is reversed: first comes *receptivity* and the primordial relation flowing from it; then our taking possession of this gift so that we stand *in ourselves* as self-governing masters of the gift we have received; then we pour over in *active self-communication* of the gift we have received, generating as we go the relations flowing from action. Relationality is indeed a dimension of our being equally primordial with our substantiality, but the most primordial aspect of it is the foundational relation of receptivity in our very being as a whole *from Another*, from God. Thus rather than the dy-

adic structure of being that I was proposing, being in itself and being turned toward others, it is more accurate to propose a triadic structure: being from another, being in oneself, being turned toward others (neatly summed up in Latin: *esse ab, esse in, esse ad*). And I agree with Schindler that the awareness of this primordial receptive relationship should mark our whole personal psychological self-understanding and spirituality. All our maturing self-possession and generous self-giving are themselves empowered in us as part of the gift we have received.

All of the above I accept gratefully, as an important broadening and deepening of my own horizon of discussion. It is not that I ever explicitly denied any of this. It is simply that I was focusing on one dimension of relationality that had been left in the shadows previously, without fully realizing that this too was a limited perspective, which needed to be broadened to take in the full picture of what it means to be as a created person. I welcome this insightful and constructive criticism of Schindler, and hope to take it into account in the future.

It is true that St. Thomas himself calls the relation of creature to God based on the receiving of *esse* through creation an "accident," and so distinct from the created substance itself. But his reasons for this are highly technical, within the framework of Aristotelian definition, where one never defines an essence in the category of substance by a relation of origin to something else, and the absolute order of a being in itself is never conceptually reducible to the relative order of toward another. Nonetheless the essential in-

sight of Schindler is there, that this relation is absolutely inseparable from the created essence as *existing* and proceeds immediately from it by necessity and not contingently.

So much for the philosophical dimension. But now Schindler proceeds further into the theological dimension opened by Christian revelation, as I do myself, by probing more deeply into the created person as image of the trinitarian God. I linked the image of God in us with the generous self-communicative love which is the very nature of the divine being, a perfection which we share in our own limited way. I think this remains certainly true. But Schindler wishes to go further and suggests that the very receptivity of our being from God is also and even more primordially a positive image of the status of the Second Person, the Son or Word of the Father, within the divine being itself. For the very being of the Son is possessed totally as a *gift*, as received from the Father, responded to by an eternal "looking back" toward the Father with welcoming gratitude. The Second Person, in his distinctive personality, can be said to be Subsistent Receptivity, Subsistent Gratitude. And this stance is a purely positive perfection of being itself, inseparable from what it means to be in its fullness, without a shadow of inferiority or imperfection within it. It is this aspect of the divine being, its receptive and grateful dimension, that we imitate most characteristically in our own created being, despite its imperfection. And that is why we are said in Scripture to be formed to the image of Christ; it is in Christ and in being conformed to him that we are images, sons and

daughters, of the Father like him. Our whole spirituality should reflect this, and so always bear the mark of something like childlikeness, with its apparent "emptiness" or "poverty" of total loving dependence on its parent. Hence a certain contemplative attitude of first looking back gratefully toward our Source should be the primal moment of our religious relation to God, preceding and grounding all our going out from self in active self-communication.

All of this I find extremely rich, both theologically, spiritually, and metaphysically. And I believe I can accept it all in substance. For the receptive dimension in us, precisely as gratefully receiving and actually possessing our own being as a gift from God, is not an imperfection, just as it is not in the Son, but is part of the divine perfection which we are reflecting. The imperfection and inferiority in our mode of receiving is that we receive only a limited participation in the divine perfection, and also that we receive it first as not having it, then passing from nothingness to reception. Possessing being through reception, as a gift, of itself has no imperfection in it. It is only the partial negations of actual possession that render it imperfect in creatures. I might add that this radical receptivity in the human being, preceding any action of ours, extends not just toward God as ultimate source of our existence, but also towards the secondary sources of our being, both physical and social. These would include first our parents, then the wider human community, then the still wider community of the earth itself, all of which give to us first and deeply influence us as we grow into responsible and

responsive agents on our own. I cannot become an "I" without prior receptivity from the "We."

I admit that this finely tuned analysis of receptivity in being which Schindler lays out here so eloquently is something new to me, at least explicitly. But the light that it brings seems to me very strong evidence of its claim to validity, though the examples, especially that of the child, need to be very carefully and critically controlled. This metaphor, though it has a deep spiritual and mystical sense, can easily crack up if pushed too far or too literally.

Let me now offer some final remarks on the application of this primacy of receptivity in us to the American cultural scene, and especially to the ethical-political thought of John Courtney Murray. I am quite ready to admit that in our American ethos of strong individualism and activism we very much need a strengthening of the contemplative and receptive dimensions of the person, indeed as does most of the West now. But I do not think it is fair to pass over from this depth analysis to the particular work of Fr. Murray. He was not working on the level of purely speculative metaphysics or anthropology for its own sake. He was trying to find a common ethical language to generate a public consensus in the American people that would transcend the limits of any particular religion or lack of it. In so doing he used a notion of the person as focused on responsible freedom that is not especially American but goes all the way back in a long history of the West, including St. Thomas, and is widely acceptable. As far as it goes, it is quite sound. To have tried to go into the deeper levels of

metaphysics and especially theology based on the Christian Trinity, as Schindler and myself have explored in this discussion, would have been to lose his audience entirely. Metaphysics and theology do not mix well with all modes of discourse, though they should underlie them for the wise ones. I do not think that we can judge Murray's deeper ontology from these texts, nor that he would have been resistant to the conclusions we have reached here, once confronted on these deeper levels of discourse. Furthermore, Murray is trying to locate the ground

of human rights; and such rights are not grounded directly in the relation of receptivity of our being from God: all creatures share this basic relation, but not all have rights. These are rooted not in the general metaphysics of being but in our special character, as human, of possessing rational freedom. But Schindler is certainly right that in our own attempts to rebuild Christian culture we must descend all the way to such ultimate ontological roots.

W. Norris Clarke

ANNOUNCEMENT

Persons interested in starting a 'Communio Study Circle' in their areas are asked to contact the *Communio* office: P.O. Box 4557, Washington D.C. 20017-0557; tel/fax 202-526-0251.

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