

Taking Matters Personally: Papers from “Person, Soul, and Consciousness,” the 2017 *Dominican Colloquium in Berkeley*

BRYAN KROMHOLTZ, O.P., CO-ORGANIZER
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
Berkeley, CA

The majority of the current issue of *Nova et Vetera* is dedicated to papers presented at the conference “Person, Soul, and Consciousness: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives,” which took place at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, in July 2017. This was the second conference in the series entitled the *Dominican Colloquia in Berkeley*, dedicated to bringing philosophers and theologians together every three years for conversations and interchanges on topics of mutual interest.¹ The other organizers and I greatly appreciate the generosity and graciousness of the editors of *Nova et Vetera* for providing the opportunity to share with a broader public some of the scholarship from that event.

These papers reflect the dialogical structure of the colloquium itself: the paper from each plenary session is paired with a respondent, such that a paper that is primarily theological receives a response that is primarily philosophical, and vice-versa. The response, then, is intended to show some of the paper’s implications for the other field. These exchanges of views, along with the engaging question-and-answer periods at the colloquium itself, have resulted in a fruitful cross-disciplinary exchange. The present

¹ For more on the conference series, see Bryan Kromholtz and Justin Gable, “Direct Service between Athens and Jerusalem: On the Purpose and Organizing Principles of the Dominican Colloquia in Berkeley,” *Nova et Vetera* 14.2 (2016): 403–7, as well as the nineteen papers from the first conference, in subsequent pages of the same issue (409–697).

volume includes six papers from the plenary sessions of the 2017 colloquium, along with their respective responses. There were also nearly sixty shorter papers presented in concurrent sessions at the colloquium; of these, we have been able to include only a small but eminent selection—two papers. The following is an all-too-brief summary of the contents of the six plenary-session papers and the two concurrent-session papers.

In “Union and Indwelling,” Eleonore Stump explores the way a human person can be united to God. She first considers the nature of union between two human persons who love each other as friends, and then proposes the union between God and the human person to be something analogous to human friendship. Bas C. van Fraassen asks the question, “How Can We Understand Transcendence of the Ego?” He argues that since having language is a central and crucial aspect of the self (or ego), and since language itself is inherently limited in its grasp, it is literally and logically impossible ever to have a complete or fully adequate answer to the question. In “The Hypostatic Union—Personhood, Consciousness, and Knowledge,” Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., considers the divine personhood of Jesus; the ontological relationship between this divine personhood of the Son and his incarnate human self-consciousness and knowledge that gives rise to his human “I”; Aquinas’s understanding of Jesus’s human knowledge and a critique of this interpretation; and Jesus’s human, filial consciousness and knowledge. Nancey Murphy’s “How to Keep the Non-Reductive in Nonreductive Physicalism?” favors a monistic approach to Christian anthropology, with philosophers of mind calling it “nonreductive physicalism.” She argues that it is possible to be ontologically physicalist (with regard to humans) without reducing our traditionally understood higher faculties to mere brain functions, and draws our attention to “complex self-organizing dynamical systems theory” as a promising and recently developing explanatory paradigm that is non-reductionistic (without need for any metaphysical postulate). In his contribution, “Personhood and Recognition,” Markus Rothhaar asserts that the concept of a “person” is the core concept of every practical philosophy. For every ethical theory, he states, there are two fundamental presuppositions: that other subjects exist, and that, in a normative sense, these other subjects matter. This is precisely what is entailed in the concept “person.” In “The Word Breathes Forth Love: The Psychological Analogy for the Trinity and the Complementarity of Intellect and Will,” Lawrence Feingold proposes that while this analogy is usually considered a way of deepening our understanding of the Trinity’s inner life, it can also help us understand the spiritual operations of the human intellect and will, their fruitfulness and complementarity, and the manner of their elevation

by grace and glory. Each of these six papers is immediately followed by its response, which, in each case, brings philosophical and theological considerations into conversation.

In addition to the twelve pieces mentioned above, there are two papers from concurrent sessions of the colloquium, as noted. Brian T. Carl, examining Aquinas's thought in "Action, Supposit, and Subject: Interpreting *Actiones Sunt Suppositorum*," distinguishes the meanings of the term "subject" in order to consider how human souls and persons should be characterized as subjects of intellectual activity. In "The Human Person as Believer," Joseph Gamache, exploring a suggestion of G.K. Chesterton, considers how the act of belief is central for understanding human persons, including the nature of that belief and the norms governing it. He ultimately argues for truth as a plausible norm for a person's belief, insofar as one opts for that truth as a value.

We can see in this group of papers the wide range of topic areas touched upon, including the philosophy of consciousness and subjectivity (Stump, van Fraassen, Carl, Gamache), ethics (Rothhaar), Christology (Weinandy), Trinitarian theology (Feingold), and anthropology, both philosophical and theological (Murphy, Weinandy, Feingold, Carl, Gamache). It is evident that the topic lends itself to a wide range of potential approaches and a richness of subject matter that is inexhaustible. It is also clear that there are many ways in which fundamental questions surrounding personhood, the soul, and consciousness lie behind a great number of contemporary concerns. We can name just a few of them. *Technological advances* allow for the replacement of human work (robotics, automation), whose significance has profound societal effects. Other advances even promise the eventual emulation of human interaction, leading to questions about the nature of the human need for interpersonal contact. *New modes of social interaction* show great promise for increasing the reach of social participation, yet present new kinds of social difficulty, alienation, and despair. *Developments in neuroscience* prompt new questions about the distinction between humans and other bodily beings. Current debates about the *basis for ethics* cannot forgo a deeper inquiry into regard for the person—which should also inform any attempt to reckon with the recent decline in civility and mutual respect in public discourse. These are only some of today's currents upon which the reflections that follow may, at least indirectly, shed some light.

Indeed, in the following papers—on the status, structure, and experience of the human—both the philosopher, who seeks to understand all, and the theologian, whose mission is to show how God's Word addresses all, will find worthy matter for their respective forms of reflection. We at

the Dominican Colloquia in Berkeley express our gratitude, once again, to *Nova et Vetera* for allowing us to make them available to you. 