

On Nature, Freedom, and Person in Aquinas and Beyond

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THE following essay, particularly its analysis of Aquinas's thought, was first composed in rudimentary form when the author was a member of the sub-committee of the International Theological Commission entrusted with writing a document on the natural law, *A la recherche d'une éthique universelle: nouveau regard sur la loi naturelle*. Although not all the members agreed entirely with its presentation, it influenced the final composition of the third section, "The Theoretical Foundations of the Natural Law." While the author might have "tweaked" a few phrases slightly differently, he had no difficulty in approving the whole document and considers that the ITC's final document and his own views correspond.¹ This essay, however, has implications in philosophy and dogma far beyond morality.

The Problem

The relation between nature and person is quite complex. Various opinions about the identity of each have proliferated in the history of philosophy. In modern times the influence of Galilean-Newtonian physics has led many to imagine "nature" as an inert mass subject to universally deterministic laws. In contrast to that determinism the person is interpreted as a free

¹ Besides the document's foundations in Scripture, tradition, and magisterial documents an attentive reader will also discover the influence of Servais Pinckaers, O.P., (compare his *Les Sources de la Morale Chrétienne*, 3rd ed. [Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1993], 406–62 with sections 2.3–4 in the ITC's document) and Jacques Maritain's dynamic interpretation of the natural law (cf. *Neuf leçons sur les notions premières de la philosophie morale* [Paris: Téqui, 1950] and *Man and the State* [Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1951]). Yet these thinkers were scarcely mentioned in the sub-committee's discussion.

center of activity removed from nature and capable of manipulating its laws.² This opposition between person and nature not only results in man's alienation from nature but also introduces irresolvable philosophical dilemmas. How can man influence his world if that world is predetermined by physical laws? Why is man, living in a body, not himself determined by the physical laws? Inversely, if man acts freely, does he not change the course of events and natures off which "natural laws" are read? Does not freedom precede and relativize laws? How is moral action to be determined if nature no longer supplies norms? The breakdown of the Newtonian synthesis in physics has opened the way to a reevaluation of the relation between nature and person. Long before Galileo, St. Thomas offers good guidance in contemplating the mysterious relation of person and nature. Since Aquinas borrows his "natural" foundation from Aristotle, with his "philosopher" our analysis should start.

Aristotelian Nature

The classical understanding of nature as a principle of motion and rest is expressed well by Aristotle in *Physics* II, 1 (192b 14–15.21–23) and repeated in *Metaphysics* V, 4: "Nature in the primary and proper sense is the substance (*ousia*) of what have in themselves as such a principle of motion. . . . It is the principle of motion of natural objects inhering somehow, either potentially or really" (1015a 13–19). That definition, however, contains various ambiguities, which are manifest in five previous explications that the definition attempts to summarize. First, nature is understood as "the genesis of growing things," then as "the first inherent principle from which a growing thing grows," and, thirdly, as "the source from which the primary movement in each natural being is present in it insofar as it exists as itself" (1014b 14–20). Already one notices a slight oscillation between the nature itself and its internal principle of motion. As the *Physics* says, "As many things as have such a principle [of motion], have a nature. And all these are a substance; for there is some subject (*hypokeimenon*), and nature is always in a subject" (192b 32–34). Variability is accentuated in the subsequent understandings. Fourthly, "nature

² For person as a free, self-conscious center of activity cf. Max Müller and Alois Halder, "Person," in *Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968–70), 4:405; Karl Rahner, S.J., "Jesus Christ," in *ibid.*, 3:206; Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 39–41; Luigi Stefanini, "Persona," in *Encyclopedia Filosofica* (Venice: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1957), 3:1297–1303. This is also the emphasis of Kierkegaard, Barth, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre: cf. Stefanini, "Personalismo," in *Encyclopedia Filosofica*, 3:314–16. Of course this "modern" (Rahner) notion of person fits perfectly with Boethius's *naturae rationalis individua substantia*.

means that out of which any of the beings by nature is or becomes; it is that first which is unorganized (*arrythmistos*: not reducible to form) and unchangeable from its own potency.” Here Aristotle is referring to the “prime matter” into which forms are introduced in change (192b 27–35). Yet, fifthly, nature is the “substance of beings by nature.” Aristotle specifies this by noting that “nature is the prime matter . . . and also the form and substance; this is the end of the becoming (*genesis*: generation)” (*Metaphy.* V, 4, 1015a 7–11). In commenting on this passage St. Thomas notes that the substantial form gives the name of the species and the shape is the “sign of the species” insofar as the shape “follows the species.” Explaining how the form can be designated “nature,” he observes that the form can be not only the form of the part (*forma partis*) but also the form of the whole (*forma totius*), or the species, “as if we say that man’s nature is not only the soul but the humanity and the substance which the definition signifies.” Citing Boethius’s definition of nature as “the specific difference informing each thing,” Thomas comments:

For the specific difference completes the reality’s substance and gives it a species. As the form or matter is said to be nature because it is the principle of generation, which is said to be nature according to the name’s first application, so the species and substance are said to be nature, which is generation’s goal. For generation is terminated at the species of the one generated, and the species results from the union of form and matter. (*In V Metaphysicam*, 820–22)

Thus one sees that matter, form, and their combination can all be considered in turn “nature.” Furthermore, there is an inherent tension in the form, which both informs the matter and provides the goal of the nature’s becoming as it dynamically penetrates ever more the matter: “since nature means two things: the matter and the form, of which the latter is the end, and since all the rest is for the sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of a final cause (that for the sake of which)” (*Phy.* II, 1, 193b 12–13; 8, 199a 30–32; *Metaphy.* V, 4, 1015a 17–19). Thus “the nature understood as becoming (*genesis*: origin, generation) is the road toward nature” (*Phy.* II, 1, 193b 13–14) and “nature is the end and the ‘for the sake of which’” (*Phy.* II, 2, 194a 28–29). Hence a final cause is present in things that by nature come to be or are (*Phy.* II, 8, 198b 10–12; 199a 7–8); final and formal causes often coincide (*Phy.* II, 7, 198a 24–25). “Nature is a cause that acts for a end” (*Phy.* II, 8, 199b 32–33). It joins the “already,” which impresses its form on a nature, to the “not yet” of the goal to which the nature is inherently ordered. The *Summa theologiae* later summarizes these various tensions and oscillations within the

notion of nature understood as a principle of motion: "Because this type of principle is formal or material, matter as well as form is commonly said to be nature. And because the essence of any reality whatever is completed through a form, which its definition signifies, it is called nature." Indeed, the specific difference, which completes the definition, "is taken from the reality's proper form" (*ST I*, q. 29, a. 1, ad 4).

Besides the oscillations between form and matter, formal and final causes, "already" and "not yet," the identity of nature with substance introduces another polarity into the study of natures. Aristotle recognizes the distinction between first, or individual, substance and second substance, which is the qualitative, or formal, part of first substance, to which definition corresponds. For substance, like nature, can apply to the underlying matter, the form, and the combination of the two (*Categories* 5, 2a 11–3b 23; *Metaphy.* V, 8, 1017b 10–26; VII, 10, 1035a 1–2; VIII, 1, 1041a 13–b 7; 2, 1043a 26–28; XII, 3, 1070a 9–13). So Aristotle distinguishes substance from substance, "The substance is the form (*eidōs*: shape) present in the reality; from this form and the matter the whole substance is said to be" (*Metaphy.* VII, 11, 1037a 29–30). Since matter is the principle of diversity among members of the same species while form assures their essential likeness (*Metaphy.* VII, 8, 1034a 7–8; VIII, 1, 1042a 25–29; *De generatione et corruptione* I, 3, 318b 15–17), the distinction between first and second substance (nature) depends upon seeing the abstracted universal as somehow identical with the composite of matter and form, yet also diverse from the same composite.

This unity in diversity of matter and form means that substance and nature can be considered either universally or particularly. Indeed Aristotle's considerations of substance and nature often slide back and forth from the universal to the particular: "sometimes it escapes notice whether the name signifies the composite substance or the act (*energeia*) and the form" (*Metaphy.* VIII, 3, 1043a 29–30). If truth is to be attained, the form known by abstraction must represent the concrete nature known, yet the abstraction in the mind is not the same as the concrete, material substance. So nature and substance can be understood in terms of a universal form or of a particular matter. Yet Aristotle realizes that all abstractions from material instances are not identical with those instances; no universal definition or demonstration can apply to individual substances, even though the universal forms actually exist in matter (*Metaphy.* VII, 11, 1036b 21–32; 1037a 5–10; 13, 1038b 8–16; 1039a 14–19). Aristotle sees that in universals like "man" and "horse" it is impossible to abstract fully from matter; thus there is no definition of a concrete, material whole (*Metaphy.* VII, 10, 1035b 27–31; 11, 1036a 2–6; 11, 1036b 2–7.21–30). For St. Thomas and later

Scholastics such abstracted forms as “man” are known in relation to the sensible phantasms from which they are abstracted and the matter remains implicit in universal definitions as “common matter” in distinction from individuating matter (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 4c; q. 85, a. 1, ad 2).³

Precisely because first substance contains matter, it can be identified also as a nature. Insofar as motion is defined as “the act of the potency” (*Phy.* III, 1, 201b 10–11; 2–3, 202a 6–15; *Metaphy.* XI, 9, 1065b 14–1066a 34), it involves both potency and act. Act is the equivalent of form as potency is of matter (*Metaphy.* VIII, 6, 1045a 24–25; IX, 8, 1050b 2–3; XIII, 10, 1087a 16–17). Matter is unlimited (*aoriston*: indefinite: *Metaphy.* VII, 11, 1037a 27; XIII, 10, 1087a 16–17) or infinite (*Phy.* III, 7, 207b 34–208a 3) and equivalently “non-being” (cf. *Metaphy.* IX, 10, 1051a 34–1051b 1; XII, 2, 1069b 14–34; XIII, 10, 1087a 16–17; XIV, 2, 1089a 26–30), existing not in itself but only potentially in relation to a form, which it “desires” (*Phy.* I, 9, 192a 20–23; II, 1, 194b 8–9; III, 6, 206b 14–16; *De gen. et cor.* I, 5, 320b 16–17; *Metaphy.* VIII, 6, 1045a 23–24; XII, 5, 1071a 10–11). “The infinite is the matter of the perfection of size, and it is a whole in potency but not in act. . . . As infinite it is does not contain but is contained. Therefore the infinite is also unknowable. For matter has no form (*eidos*)” (*Phy.* III, 6, 207a 21–26). As non-being it cannot change or be moved (*Phy.* V, 1, 225a 10–12.20–23; *De gen. et cor.* II, 1, 329a 26–27; *Metaphy.* XI, 1067b 30); change needs limits and matter has no limits (*Phy.* VI, 10, 240a 27–b 12); as a formless infinite, it can exist only within the limits of form (*Phy.* III, 6 206b 12–16). Since it is unlimited, it also has no directions (cf. *Phy.* IV, 8, 215a 7–9). As potency matter is not subject to becoming; “for if it came to be, there would have to be some existing first from which it came,” whereas matter is “for each thing the first subject from which something comes to be and which exists not accidentally” (*Phy.* I, 9, 192a 27–32). For its part a pure form would have nothing toward which it might move, and it cannot be affected by other things (*Metaphy.* VII, 8, 1033b 19–29; *De gen. et cor.* I, 7, 324b 15–16). “Neither form nor matter comes to be” (*Metaphy.* XII, 3, 1069b 35). Yet “in everything that becomes, matter is present” (*Metaphy.* VII, 8, 1033b 19–20). Only

³ Cf. John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University, 2000), 330–33, where a corporeal essence includes matter as well as form; also 351–75, for Thomas’s hesitations on designating the ultimate principle of individuality. Robert O’Donnell, C.S.P., “Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *New Scholasticism* 33 (1959): 49–67, earlier noted the development but wound up rooting the individuality of material composites in the substantial form instead of matter signed by quantity. Paradoxically the form, the principle of universality, grounds individuality.

in the conjunction of matter and form do becoming and motion occur, and only in this composite understanding can matter be said to be that out of which natural becomings come to be (*Metaphy.* VII, 7, 1032a 15–17).⁴

A final tension should be mentioned. Since every change involves continuity and discontinuity, not annihilation and creation, nature and substance can also be contrasted to each other. As “a principle of motion and change” (*Phy.* III, 1, 200b 12), nature is clearly dynamic. But substance can be understood as “the ultimate subject (*hypokeimenon*)” underlying change (*Metaphy.* V, 8 1017b 23–24; VIII, 1, 1042a 32–b 5). Here it is considered a more static element. Since, however, nature and substance can be identified—Thomas notes, “As is clear from *Metaphysics* V, substance has a double appellation: in one way it is essence or nature, in another way it stands for supposite or hypostasis” (*ST* III, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3)—a paradoxical oscillation or tension between its static and dynamic moments results.

Beyond these meanings Aristotle also extends the meaning of “nature” to include all substances (*Metaphy.* V, 4, 1015a 11–13). This would apparently include inanimate substances since for Aristotle the basic elements and the simple bodies move themselves to their natural places of rest (*Phy.* VIII, 4, 255b 8–21; *De caelo* II, 13, 295b 20–23; III, 2, 300a 20–301b 32; IV, 1, 308a 23–33; 3, 310b 23–311a 7; 4, 311b 15–312a 8; *De gen. et cor.* II, 2, 330b 31–34).⁵

Clearly “nature” is an analogous concept. This insight is important for the acknowledgment of natural law. For there is a necessary connection between a nature’s form and its end. As Thomas maintains, the form is a reality’s principle of action: “Anything whatever acts according to the exigency of its form, which is the principle of action and the norm for the work” (*In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1c). Natural things, indeed all agents, act by their form (*ST* I, q. 15, a. 1c; q. 42, a. 1, ad 1). Aristotle’s universe has one final goal: the Prime Mover, or God (*Metaphy.* XIII, 4, 1070b 34–35; 7, 1072b 3–4; 10, 1075a 13–19; b 34–1076a 4). Since in an interconnected universe “all things are ordered toward one (end),” “God and nature make nothing in vain,” and “there is a final cause in what happens

⁴ On the paradoxical notion of matter in Aristotle and Aquinas cf. John McDermott, S.J., “The Mystery of Matter,” *Angelicum* 87 (2010): 993–1014.

⁵ Aristotle’s universe is almost alive. In *Phy.* VIII, 1, 250b 14 he describes the universe’s eternal movement “as a sort of life” (*oion zoe tis*) to all natural things and accepts the comparison of the universe to an animal in *ibid.*, 2, 252b 17–28 and 253a 7–20; for “motion is the natural state” (*ibid.*, 3, 253b 9) and animals are self-moving (*ibid.*, 4, 254b 12–19). Yet *Phy.* VIII 4, 255a 1–19 denies to heavy and light things the internal motion proper to living realities. A similarly organic, living universe is postulated by Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: U. of Virginia, 1978), 124–27.

by nature" (*Metaphy.* XII, 1075a 19–20; XI, 8, 1065a 26–27; *De caelo* I, 4: 271a 34), one would expect natures to attain their end. That, however, is not always the case. Aristotle acknowledges accidents (contingent events), where the purpose of nature is not attained but monstrosities occur; impediments to nature's fulfillment can occur (*Phy.* II, 8, 199a 2–11.33–b 4). In accidental occurrences chance (or spontaneity) is recognized as an accidental or "indefinite" cause, not a definite cause in the strict sense; such a cause is "unclear to man" (*Phy.* II, 5, 197a 8–14; *Metaphy.* V, 30, 1025a 24–25). For chance, which is opposed to what is or becomes always or usually, proceeds from matter, which is the "cause" equally of something's existence or non-existence (*De caelo* I, 12, 283a 34–b 5). Hence in contrast to chance, which is disorderly, nature produces its results "for the most part" or "without exception" (*Magna Moralia* II, 8, 1207a 2; b 19). The "for the most part" allows for failure in individual cases. Matter, which is always capable of being otherwise, is the cause of the accidental (*Metaphy.* VI, 2, 1027a 13–15; VII, 7, 1032a 20–22). Conversely, since "matter is unknowable in itself" (*Metaphy.* VII, 10, 1036a 8–9) and science is of what is always or is for the most part, the contingent falls outside the realm of science (*Metaphy.* VI, 2, 1027a 19–28). It is "something close to non-being" (*ibid.* 1026b 21).

A principal paradoxical element in this understanding of nature derives from the role of matter. On the one hand, unless matter were joined to form, there would be no motion and hence no nature to be studied. On the other, matter is unintelligible to man, and thus he is prevented from fully understanding existing singular substances and motion itself. As a combination of form and matter, act and potency, being neither act nor potency but both, motion's reality is incomplete; hence "it is difficult to grasp what it is" (*Metaphy.* XI, 9, 1066a 17–31).

St. Thomas's World

St. Thomas takes Aristotle's basic understanding of nature and expands it to fit his Christian *Weltanschauung*. Thomas's God is more than Aristotle's pure form, or thought thinking himself: He is the infinite, omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, whose knowledge extends to every material singular (*ST* I, q. 14, a. 11c et ad 1; q. 22, a. 2c).⁶ Hence nothing escapes His will (I, q. 19, a. 6c). To allow for God's infinity both transcending the finite order and allowing Him to intervene freely in it, Thomas postulates an order of *esse* alongside the order of Aristotelian essences. This existential order allows

⁶ All subsequent references to Thomas's works in our main text are continuous, i.e., unless otherwise noted, the numbers refer to the work previously cited or referred to.

him to distinguish angels from each other without appeal to Franciscan “spiritual matter.” Furthermore it explains how the judgment in returning to the phantasm can be man’s highest intellectual act, the act in which truth is attained (I, q. 16, a. 2c); instead of affirming beyond form its juncture with matter, which is unintelligible to man, now judgment affirms the act of existence, the deeper intelligibility undergirding the form-matter composite. In addition to these enlarged philosophical insights Thomas knows that through the Incarnation a supernatural order of redemption and grace has been grafted into a fallen natural order. Man’s way of attaining God is no longer principally by contemplation but by love, specifically by believing and loving God’s only Son (I–II, q. 5, a. 7, ad 2; II–II, q. 23, a. 6c; III, prol.; q. 1, a. 2c; q. 3, a. 9c). In an historical economy of salvation the accent falls upon love beyond knowledge (I, q. 82, a. 3c). All of these expansions and additions introduce further tensions into a basic Aristotelian understanding of nature. Let us enumerate some of them.

First, nature is more than both a singular instance, understood statically or dynamically, and an abstraction. In trying to explain original sin’s propagation, the *Summa theologiae* considers all Adam’s children as “one man insofar as they unite (*convenient*) in the nature which they receive from the first parent”; since they are as many members of the one body moved freely by the first parent, original sin appears as a “sin of nature” (I–II, q. 81, a. 1c). Though the disorder in willing was due to the will of Adam, he moves by generation all who derive from his origin. The basic principle is this: “what pertain to the nature of the species are passed on by parents into children unless there is a defect of nature.” Just as original justice was to be passed on through generation, so the disorder of original sin, which corrupts nature, is passed on (q. 81, a. 2c; 4c). The infection derives from the nature’s origin (q. 83, a. 4, ad 2). This aspect may have been implicit in Aristotle insofar as his first understanding of nature recognized that “nature” (*physis*) derives from “to beget or engender” (*phyo*) or the passive “to be born from” (*phyesthai*) (*Metaphy.* V, 4, 1014b 16–18). Thomas recognizes this meaning on account of the relation between *natura* and *nascere* (ST I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 4; III, q. 2, a. 1c). Certainly it shows an awareness that “nature” involves the concrete whole of the species, not merely individuals who happen to possess a common form.⁷

⁷ Thomas is not always consistent on this point; in ST I, q. 39, a. 4, ad 3 he writes: “The unity or community of human nature corresponds not to reality, but to a way of thinking (*secundum considerationem*); hence the term “man” does not stand for the common nature unless a modifier (*additum*) requires it, as when one says, ‘man is a species.’”

Second, given that God is a creator who works through efficient as well as final causality (I, q. 2, a. 3), all of irrational creation is seen as an instrument directed by the principal Agent, moving it like an artist and directing it to an end (I–II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3). This universal nature need not be considered an inert mass, but has its own innate, active power (I–II, q. 85, a. 6c). For God creates the natures with an innate tendency or appetite (I–II, q. 26, a. 1c). “Nature is nothing but the reasonable cause (*ratio*) of a certain art, specifically God’s art, imparted to realities by which the realities themselves are moved to a determined end” (*In II Phy.* 14). Yet, because the divine knowing is infinite, one with His will, and non-discursive, it cannot be used as a middle term in deducing conclusions about finite results of His knowledge (*ST* I, q. 14, a. 1c et ad 3; 2c; q. 3, a. 1; a. 7c; a. 8c et ad 1, 3; 14c et ad 1, 2). Thus He can seek the good of nature as a whole by allowing the corruption and defect of individual natures (I, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2).

Third, even though man cannot perceive the end intended by God, Thomas does not wish to deny the intelligible finality impressed on every creature. Without that finality the “way” to affirming God’s existence in terms of final causality would be destroyed (I, q. 2, a. 3). “The natural necessity inhering in realities that are determined to one (end) is a certain impression of God who is directing them to the end” (I, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3). This necessity is traced back to the form, whereas contingency is ascribed to matter. Even the most contingent reality has something of necessity in it. Thus the human mind by abstracting particular material instances attains “universal and necessary reasons.” But Thomas realizes that even this abstract necessity is relative to the particular instances from which it is derived. “Hence if universal reasons for realities that can be known are considered, all sciences concern what are necessary. If, however, the realities themselves are considered, some sciences deal with what are necessary, others with what are contingent” (I, q. 86, a. 3c). So in all real material beings there is an oscillation between necessity and contingency, reflecting their hylomorphic composition. This supports the oscillation of analogy between God’s and man’s knowledge of impressed ends.

Fourth, since human freedom is central to Christianity, the universe cannot be rigidly determined. While it is true that “nature is determined to one (end)” because of the single form informing the nature and, hence, irrational creatures possess an “operative potency determined to one end,” man on the basis of his free will is master of his own acts and thus directs himself to his own end: “The will is not determined to one (end)”; nonetheless it does not escape divine providence (I, q. 22, a. 2, ad 4; q. 41, a. 2c; q. 83, a. 1c; q. 92, a. 2, ad 2; q. 103, a. 5c et ad 2, 3; I–II, q. 1, a. 2c). (This accords with Aristotle’s position that rational beings can produce

contrary effects: *Metaphy.* IX, 2, 1046b 4–5; 5, 1048a 8–9.) This indeterminacy in choice occurs even though the nature's basic love or inclination is not divorced from the will: "In an intellectual nature the natural inclination is found to be according to the will" (I, q. 60, a. 1c). The will is recognized as a potency, or faculty, of the soul, which in union with the body constitutes human nature and is the subject of the potencies that function as its proximate principles of operation (I, q. 75, a. 1c et ad 1; a. 4c; 77, q. 1, aa. 3–5; a. 6c et ad 2; q. 78, aa. 1c, 4c). While it might be possible to reconcile natural necessity with freedom by pointing out that nature's end-directedness need only be "for the most part" (I, q. 103, a. 1c), thus allowing with Aristotle for the interference inherent in matter, Thomas chooses a better way. Even though the will can be distinguished from and even opposed to nature, it is ultimately rooted in nature:

The will is distinguished from (*dividitur contra*) nature as one cause from another: for some things happen naturally, other voluntarily. However there is a different manner of causing proper to the will, which is master of its own act, beyond the manner which is appropriate to nature, which is determined to one goal. But because the will is grounded in some nature, the motion proper to nature necessarily participates in the will: just as what is due to a prior cause is participated in by a subsequent cause. For in every single reality *esse* itself, which is through nature, is prior to willing, which is through the will. This explains why the will naturally wills something. (I–II, q. 10, a. 1, ad 1)

Thomas balances the will as nature with the will as free by distinguishing the necessary object of the will, happiness, from the objects, or goods, short of that end which are subject to free choice. The final end is given by nature, the intermediate goods are subject to the will's free choice (I, q. 82, a. 1c et ad 1, 3; a. 2c et ad 1, 2; I–II, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2). Thomas also distinguishes the former's act as willing from the latter's as choosing, the former faculty as *voluntas*, or *voluntas ut natura*, from the latter as *liberum arbitrium*, or *voluntas ut ratio*, but insists that they are one faculty (I, q. 83, a. 4c et ad 1, 2; I–II, q. 6, a. 4c; III, q. 18, a. 3c). Thus he attempts to hold human freedom within the bounds of nature and preserve his arguments from finality. But underlying tensions remain.

Fifth, in his famous *Surnaturel* H. de Lubac shows how Thomas understands angelic freedom as something transcending the necessity of nature. He has to allow the possibility of sin in a creature without matter, which in man impedes insight. The problem is already identified by his predecessors: if, according to Aristotle, the intellect, whether theoretical or practical, cannot err about its proper object, it surely does not err about

the good and the true, especially about its own preeminent good. How then can an angel sin? Thomas insists that a creature, created from nothing, cannot be impeccable—only God is impeccable by nature—even though the creature has a natural love for his Creator. The very potency implied in that love distinguishes him from God. Hence, according to de Lubac, Thomas distinguishes: “The angel naturally moves himself toward God insofar as God is the author of his natural being, but not insofar as God is the author of his supernatural beatitude.” But the natural love opens toward a greater, supernatural love whereby the angel has to choose freely to accept God supernaturally or not. Thus two regions are postulated, one natural, or necessary, the other free, or voluntary. There has to be a choice or a “conversion” to enter into the supernatural order to which the creature is called by nature. For the supernatural order is the order of freedom. Hence the angel is naturally peccable but can only attain his end in the supernatural vision of God.⁸

Sixth, even in the case of man there is a tension between his nature and his actual supernatural calling. Insofar as God is man’s and the universe’s final cause, there should be a proportion between man’s end and his nature “because the end responds to the beginning (*principium*: principle)” (I–II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 3). But God’s infinity seems to destroy any proportion (cf. I, q. 12, a. 2, obj. 4; I–II, q. 2, a. 8, obj. 3): “No created intellect can know God infinitely” *nullus autem intellectus creatus potest Deum infinite cognoscere* (I, q. 12, a. 7c et ad 1). Thomas oscillates in his characterization of man’s final natural end, at times proposing “universal good” or “good in the universal,” which can be understood as an abstract good grasped by the intellect as parallel to the “universal true” or the “common true” (I–II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3; q. 2, a. 7c; q. 5, a. 1c; a. 8c et ad 2; q. 10, a. 1, ad 3); at other times the same end or universal good is identified with God Himself (I, q. 105, a. 4c; q. 106, a. 2; I–II, q. 2, a. 3c; a. 8c et ad 1–3; q. 3, a. 1c; q. 5, a. 3c; q. 9, a. 6c). Yet the possession of God as supreme good in the beatific vision is purely supernatural, surpassing every natural principle and power (I–II, q. 5, a. 5c et ad 1).

Seventh, the previous oscillation is linked to Thomas’s distinction between essence and existence. Since the concrete nature which knows is an existential nature and its natural intellectual operation attains the truth in a judgment, which affirms the existence of an object, the concrete man is naturally more than an essence or nature. His active intellect, which ultimately produces the judgment, must refer to the existential order, which

⁸ Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), 219–60, esp. 246, 254. For the development of this insight in his other works cf. John McDermott, S.J., “De Lubac and Rousselot,” *Gregorianum* 78 (1977): 740–58.

God, pure *esse* and First Truth (I, q. 3, a. 4c; q. 16, a. 5c; II–II, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3), grounds. So the agent intellect participates in the divine intellect, from which it receives its light (I, q. 12, a. 2c). Since the divine intellect and the divine *esse* are identical (I, q. 14, a. 4c), the agent intellect participates already in God to whom it is referred. Insofar as the intellect's judgment is a motion, that is, a conversion to the phantasm involving composition and division (I, q. 84, a. 7c; q. 85, a. 5c et ad 1–3), it refers to God as its ultimate termination; thus it desires God as the fulfillment of its motion. But the God so desired is not an abstract God; for a judgment goes beyond the subject of the sentence, be it an abstract concept or a concrete indexical referent, to existence.⁹ The judgment refers to and seeks the one God who is to be attained immediately in Himself. So there is a natural desire to see God in Himself, a natural desire for the supernatural vision (I, q. 12, a. 1c; I–II, q. 3, a. 8c; *Summa contra Gentes* III, cc. 50–57; *Compendium theologiae* I, cc. 3, 103–6; etc.). Nature at once *is* nature and strains beyond the bounds of nature.¹⁰

Thomas can clearly distinguish natural and supernatural orders by their end: the natural end is “proportionate to a created nature which the created

⁹ Karl. Rahner, S.J., *Geist in Welt* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1938), 82–83, notes that there cannot be an “it” without a universal concept, i.e., a judgment must have as its subject a noun which is abstract (even if it has an internal reference to matter: cf. John McDermott, S.J., “Dialectical Analogy: The Oscillating Center of Rahner’s Thought,” *Gregorianum* 75 [1994]: 680–86), but the late Maritain, “Réflexions sur la nature blessée,” *Approches sans entraves* (Paris: Fayard, 1973), 264–72, esp. 270–72, allows for an existential basic judgment without and before an abstraction. On this point Rahner seems to be correct, since an indeterminate “it” or “that” refers ultimately to the prime matter, which as infinite cannot be distinguished from existence. Maritain may have been trying to avoid the paradox that the concept of being is included implicitly as subject in the existential judgment producing the concept of being; thus the concept of being would be both a part and the totality of the judgment: cf. *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald Phelan (1948; rpt. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1975), 22–35, esp. nn. 13 and 14. There can be no perception of matter without a simultaneous perception of form. That insight seems clear from the experience of Helen Keller as quoted and elucidated by Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (1944; rpt. New Haven: Yale, 196), 33–41.

¹⁰ William O’Connor, *The Eternal Quest* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1947), 7–23, examines all Thomas’s texts about the natural desire for the supernatural. His own interpretation that the desire is an imperfect act of tendency which arises in the intellect after it has attained knowledge of God’s existence (181–83) does not quite convince, since the intellect per se is not a desire. Moreover it seems more an elicited than a natural desire. Transcendental Thomists place the natural desire for the supernatural at the foundation of their theologies, allowing an amalgamation of intellect and will: cf. John McDermott, S.J., “The Theology of John Paul II: A Response,” in

reality can attain according to the power of its own nature,” whereas the beatific vision “exceeds the proportion and capacity (*facultas*) of a created nature” (ST I, q. 23, a. 1c). Likewise, alongside the natural desire to see God in Himself, he affirms that “the natural desire of a rational creature is to know all those things which pertain to the intellect’s perfection; and these are the species and genera of things and their reasons (*rationes*)” (I, q. 12, a. 8, ad 4). Correspondingly “the first and proper object of the [human] intellect” is identified as “the quiddity of the thing itself,” or, more precisely, “the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter” (I, q. 85, a. 5c; q. 84, a. 7c). For knowing its proper object, the essence of a thing, what it is, constitutes the intellect’s perfection (I–II, q. 3, a. 8c).

Corresponding to the oscillation between God and finite natures as the intellect’s proper object is Thomas’s oscillation on the meaning of truth. On the one hand truth is seen as the con-*form*-ity of the intellect with the object known (I, q. 16, a. 8c et ad 3). “Our intellect is true insofar as it is conformed to its principle, viz., the realities from which it receives knowledge” (I, q. 16, a. 6). This apparently consists in the mind’s possession of the form of the reality known:

Since every reality is true insofar as it has the proper form of its nature, the intellect, insofar as it knows, is necessarily true insofar as it has the likeness of the thing known, which is its form insofar as it knows. Therefore truth is defined through the conformity of intellect and reality. (I, q. 16, a. 2c)

Yet, on the other hand, Thomas is well aware of Aristotle’s view that truth is in judgment (ScG I, c. 59; *Metaphy.* IV, 7, 1011b 25–29, 1012a 1–29; VI, 4, 1027b 18–34). He allows for that in the passage immediately following the previous quotation as he discusses how “the intellect can know its conformity to the intelligible reality”: “Nevertheless it does not apprehend this [conformity] insofar as it knows about something *what something is*, but when it judges that a reality is such as is the form which it apprehends about the reality; then it first knows and speaks what is true. And it does this by composing and dividing.” That will lead to the conclusion:

Therefore truth can indeed be in sensation or in the intellect knowing *what something is*, as in some true reality, but not as the known in the knower, which bears the name of the true; for the perfection of the

The Thought of Pope John Paul II (Rome: Gregorian, 1993), 63–64, n. 36, for references to the basic “paradox” in Rousselot, Maréchal, Lonergan, Alfaro, Rahner, de Lubac, von Balthasar, and Mouroux. But they never explain why the paradox is only an *apparent* contradiction.

intellect is the true as known. And therefore, properly speaking, truth is in the intellect composing and dividing, but not in sensation nor in the intellect knowing *what something is*. (Cf. also *ST* I, q. 16, a. 4, ad 2; *De veritate* I, 3c)

The priority of judgment accords with Thomas's emphasis on the existential order which is affirmed in judgment: "Truth is grounded more in a reality's *esse* than in the quiddity" (*In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1c). Yet the "truths" of both concept and judgment are reconciled insofar as human truth is based on the realities known and their truth consists in their accord with the mind of the Creator (*ST* I, q. 16, a. 3, ad 2, 3; a. 5c et ad 2; q. 21, a. 2c). Thus all truth is grounded in God whose knowing is existential, yet insofar as His truth transcends judgment's plurality it is more like man's simple apprehension (I, q. 16, a. 5c et ad 1). "God, according to His simple intelligence, possesses that perfection of knowledge which our intellect possesses through the knowledge of complex objects and the knowledge of simple objects (*per utramque cognitionem et complexorum et incomplexorum*)" (*ScG* I, c. 59). In God the simplicity and unity of infinite *esse* is reconciled with a plurality of ideas (*ST* I, q. 3, a. 7c; q. 11, a. 3c; a. 4c; q. 15, a. 1c et ad 3; a. 2c et ad 1, 2).¹¹

On Freedom

Given the complexity of the understanding of "nature," it is hardly surprising that the notion of freedom should be neither straightforward nor simple. Two principal understandings can be readily identified.¹² The first, liberty of indifference or free choice, called in Latin *liberum arbitrium* (which can refer to the faculty as well as the decision), has been mentioned above. It presupposes a distinction between will and intellect, the will's formal object being the good (I, q. 19, a. 3c), which characterizes the end sought (I, q. 6, a. 2, ad 2; q. 19, a. 1, ad 1), and the intellect's formal object, the true (I, q. 16, a. 3, ad 3; a. 4, ad 2; q. 59, a. 2, ad 2; I–II, q. 3, a. 7c). Since the will is guided by the intellect, which knows the universal true as a universal good (I, q. 59, a. 3c; q. 82, a. 3, ad 2; a. 4c et ad 1; q. 83, a. 3c et ad 2), the will is not restricted to any particular finite good (I–II, q. 13, a. 2c). It has power over its own acts and is thus capable of choosing opposites (I, q. 83,

¹¹ Cf. Eileen Sweeney, "Thomas Aquinas' Double Metaphysics of Simplicity and Infinity," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1993): 287–317, for Thomas's balance between transcendental oneness and plurality.

¹² Other notions of freedom: independence, doing what one feels like doing, and following reason, can also be found in Thomas's thought, but they are subordinate to these two principal notions: cf. John McDermott, S.J., "The Mystery of Freedom," *Lateranum* 74 (2008): 493–542.

a. 1c), even, it is said at times, choosing between good and evil: “*Liberum arbitrium* maintains itself in indifference between choosing well or choosing badly” (I, q. 83, a. 2c; I–II, q. 114, a. 9c). In the actual choice the intellect acts like a form, the will like matter informed by the intellect (I–II, q. 13, a. 1c). The principal difficulty with this schema resides in its inability to offer a reason for the actual choice. Since none of the finite goods presented as possible objects of choice to the intellect can fill the whole horizon of possible goods, the final choice of the intellect seems to be arbitrary. A secondary difficulty concerns the object of the will’s natural appetite. Since the will’s object is not internal to the faculty, as the true is to the intellect, but is an external good (I, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3; q. 82, a. 3c), that is, a concrete actually existing good, it is hard to see how a “universal good” can serve as the will’s object. If it is abstract, it is not exterior to the knower-lover; if it is concrete, it must be God Himself. Then the difficulty again arises about a natural desire to possess God in Himself, a supernatural goal. A third difficulty attaches to the reconciliation of divine omnipotence with human freedom. Insofar as man is seen as master of his acts, an apparently independent center of activity, how can that independence be reconciled with God’s omnipotent providence? For the will is not sufficient to move itself unless it be moved by God (I, q. 83, aa. 2–4). The debates between Molinists and Bañezians mark the impossibility of resolving the question as it is formulated.¹³ Perhaps the question has been improperly formulated.

A second understanding of freedom can be labeled Pauline or Augustinian. The will has been created to choose the good. The choice of evil not only contradicts God’s intention (I, q. 63, a. 1c) but also is hard to explain insofar as evil is nothing in itself (*per essentiam*) but only the privation of a good, or the lack of a good which it should have (I, q. 49, a. 1c; 3c et ad 4; q. 65, a. 1, ad 2, 3). As such evil has no proper cause; it occurs only by accident (I, q. 49, a. 1c; q. 3, a. 5; I–II, q. 75, a. 1c). A privation cannot be directly chosen. It does not exist in itself but only in a good subject (I, q. 48, a. 3c). When God frees a fallen will from its subjugation to sin, then it becomes free in the choice of the good. This freedom is inherently

¹³ The sixteenth century’s end and the whole seventeenth century were filled with the controversy *de auxiliis* between Bañezian and Molinist theologians, whom successive popes had to interdict from accusing each other of heresy (DS 1997, 2008, 2170–71). In 1748 Benedict XIV again had to intervene to impose peace and silence (DS 2564). Cf. Christian Pesch, S.J., *Praelectiones Dogmaticae*, V (Freiburg: Herder, 1916), 346–63; Hermann Lange, S.J., *De Gratia*, 2nd ed. (Valkenburg: St. Ignatius, 1926), 331–37. Also cf. John McDermott, S.J., “The Neo-Scholastic Analysis of Freedom,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1994): 149–65, and “Mystery of Freedom,” 517–25, for a longer explication of the inherent difficulties of this analysis of freedom.

dynamic. "Sin is contrary to natural reason; consequently freedom from sin is a true freedom, which is joined to the servitude to justice since through both man tends toward what is appropriate to him (*quod est conveniens sibi*)" (II-II, q. 183, a. 4c). For Thomas there is no opposition between freedom and the necessity of the end: "Of necessity the will inheres in the ultimate end, which is beatitude" (I, q. 82, a. 1c). This holds not only with regard to the end but also with regard to the means. To choose a disordered means is not freedom but its lack: "It belongs to the perfection of its freedom that *liberum arbitrium* can choose diverse things, if the order to the goal is preserved; but to choose something by turning aside from the order to the goal, which is to sin, belongs to freedom's defect. Hence there is greater *liberum arbitrium* in the angels who cannot sin than in us who can sin" (I, q. 62, a. 8, ad 3). The blessed cannot not love God (I, q. 60, a. 5, ad 5), and freedom of choice is not denied to them (III, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3). Likewise, since God is free and cannot sin (I, q. 49, a. 2c; q. 63, a. 1c), the capacity to sin does not essentially belong to freedom. "Just as inability to sin does not diminish freedom, so also the necessity of a will rendered firm toward the good does not diminish freedom: as this is clear in the case of God and the blessed" (II-II, q. 88, a. 4, ad 1). That is why a vow does not limit freedom; rather, Thomas quotes Augustine praising "the happy necessity which compels to do the better." Earlier Thomas notes how the possibility of choosing evil is not really freedom:

Although *liberum arbitrium* can turn to good and evil, nonetheless of itself it is ordered to the good; therefore what hinders it in doing good, simply hinders and corrupts it; for that reason freedom from what hinders is said simply to be freedom, and this is freedom from sin; what hinders it from doing evil, which corrupts it, only accidentally (*secundum quid*) impedes it. (*In II Sent.*, d. 25, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2)

Such a schema, whereby man chooses goods insofar as they are participations in the Supreme Good, allows for the reconciliation of human freedom and divine omnipotence: man chooses any good in the attraction of the Supreme Good, the source in which limited goods participate and of which they are likenesses (*ST* I, q. 6, a. 1c et ad 2; a. 2c et ad 2; a. 4c; q. 44, a. 3c; q. 60, a. 5c). The obvious difficulty with such a view is that it obviates the need for choice at all. It is impossible to explain how one can choose evil, which is nothing positive. Since evil, as a privation of good, only "exists in" a good, making it a lesser good, any choice would involve the lesser good, which as good still participates in the Supreme Good. Thus the choice of the good, though lesser, would still implicitly involve the choice of God (I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 3). Moreover, if freedom

consists ultimately in the choice of the good, God could have created man free and impeccable, and the whole justification for God's permission of sin in Paradise would fall away. Furthermore, impeccable man would be like God; but it is impossible that a creature, who is not the measure of the good, should be equated with the good itself. As long as any intelligent creature is distant from God, the possibility of turning from Him is real (I, q. 63, a. 1c).¹⁴

Clearly these two understandings of freedom balance each other off. Liberty of indifference remains static, motionless and ineffective, unless the actual movement of choice is applied to it. Augustinian liberty, which starts with the will as a dynamic power oriented to its end, remains incapable of changing direction, of actually making a choice, unless it can win a certain distance from its own dynamism through the intellect's abstractive power, a power at the basis of freedom of indifference. Furthermore, these two notions of freedom correspond to "nature" understood as dynamic and to its equivalent "substance," the persistent static substrate of change.¹⁵

A further point of juncture between "nature" and "freedom" can be found in the underlying notion of matter. As we saw earlier, motion, which is so difficult to grasp, happens because of matter, in itself unintelligible; only insofar as matter is joined to form can motion come about. Matter also is responsible for the distinction between first and second substance and the intellect's oscillation between those two understandings. Matter plays a similarly central role in human freedom. Its very unintelligibility prevents the world from being reduced to a determinist, rationalistic schema: the individual as such is not subject to science. Indeed, since choice is a motion, going beyond static contemplation, matter is also at the

¹⁴ Admittedly Thomas attributes sin, on the one hand, to error or ignorance and, on the other, to the choice of a good "without the order of an owed measure or rule" insofar as there is "only the absence of consideration of what should be considered" (ST I, q. 63, a. 1, ad 4). But ignorance and error excuse from sin while mere lack of due consideration concerns the intellect alone, not the will in which sin is located. Such an evasion presupposes a clear distinction of intellect and will. Cf. John McDermott, S.J., "Metaphysical Conundrums at the Root of Moral Disagreement," *Gregorianum* 71 (1990): 717–32, 736–40, and "Mystery of Freedom," 525–31, for a criticism of the choice of evil and the transcendental Thomist understanding of freedom.

¹⁵ Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1925), 209–20, notes the need of uniting in complementarity the double notion of freedom; this insight finds its place within a universe of polar opposites. Similarly the complementarity of polar opposites is upheld by Erich Przywara, S.J., *Analogia Entis*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1962) and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologic: I. The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000); both thus make room for freedom.

root of freedom's choice. Yet matter alone suffices to explain freedom as little as it explains motion. As for motion so also for freedom, form is required. Man needs the abstract intelligibility of form in order to guide his choice and win distance from the immediacy of his desires. Otherwise he is blind in identifying the possible objects of choice. Thus the structures of motion, substance, and freedom reflect the tension in man's hylomorphic composition. To understand these mysteries man has to approach reality from various perspectives. He must oscillate between formal and material as well as static and dynamic aspects in order to approximate reality and leave himself open to the mystery of freedom.¹⁶

Before leaving the topic of freedom, Thomas's treatment of God's freedom should be mentioned. In God are found exemplified in a superlative way both types of freedom. As supreme Good immediately present to Himself, God can be said to love Himself necessarily. He is joined to His end since He is His end (I, q. 19, a. 3c). This is the perfection of Augustinian freedom. Yet vis-à-vis creation He is free to choose to create or not to create various finite entities. He possesses complete freedom of choice (I, q. 19, a. 10c). This implies distinction not only between the divine intellect and the divine will, in order to prevent the perfectly simple God from having to create everything that He contemplates, but also within His spiritual faculties. In His intellect "knowledge (*scientia*) of vision," which comprehends all actual beings past, present, and future, is distinguished from "knowledge of simple intelligence," whereby all possible beings are known (I, q. 14, a. 9c). Analogously His antecedent will, which "in a first consideration" regards good or evil "absolutely," that is, apart from particular circumstances, is distinguished from His consequent will, which effects what it wills (I, q. 19, a. 6c). Why He chose this creation instead of that remains a mystery, and Thomas can only assure his readers that insofar as God's will is one with His intellect, He chooses everything in view of His own goodness, orders everything created to His goodness, and in the resultant order of the universe wills means in view of ends, His choice is "rational," not arbitrary (I, q. 19, a. 1c; a. 2c; a. 3c; 4c; 5c et ad 1).

These assurances complete the circle of Thomas's theological presentation. The beginning of the *Summa theologiae* argues to the existence of God on the basis of the order in the universe: both the final causality exhibited by things in motion and the purpose exhibited by the universe's unity point to God's existence (I, q. 2, a. 3c). All freedom and

¹⁶ Cf. John McDermott, S.J., "Matter, Modern Science, and God," forthcoming in *Angelicum* for the oscillations in modern science's relation to reality that leaves it open to God. Matter thus fulfills the same role in modern as in ancient physics.

all meaning are thus referred to God, in whose simplicity not only is His intellect distinguished from His will but also knowledge of vision is distinguished from knowledge of simple intelligence (I, q. 14, a. 9c) and antecedent will is distinguished from subsequent will and will of sign (I, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1; a. 11c). The plurality, attributable to matter, of earthly creation, which nonetheless constitutes a single universe, is thus mirrored in the “pluriunity” of God.

On Person

“Person” is a novel concept to the ancient world. Aristotle does not pay any attention to it, and it is not until the Christological controversies of the early Church that it comes to prominence. Although Tertullian hits upon the fortunate terminology of two substances, God and man, conjoined “in one person” (*in una persona: Adversus Praxean* 27), he never explains what “person” means nor the relationship of the two terms “person” and “substance.”¹⁷ But the phrases become embedded in the Christian tradition of the West. Then for the Council of Chalcedon, striving, after decades of tumultuous controversy, to establish and clarify the Church’s explicit unity of faith, St. Leo the Great proposes the Western formulation involving two substances or natures in one person. Upon the reading of Leo’s *Tōmus ad Flavianum* the Chalcedonian Fathers immediately accept it as the faith of Peter and the Church. They define that the two natures, human and divine, come together “into one person and one subsistence” (DS 302). While the formulation marks the terminological middle ground between Nestorius and Eutyches, Leo and the Fathers neglect to render precise the exact meanings and relation of the terms “nature” and “person.” Two more centuries of controversy are necessary to attain those insights which St. Maximus Confessor wrings out of the Monotheletic controversy.

Unfortunately St. Thomas has no access to Maximus’s texts. When the greatest of Western doctors attempts to cast light upon the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, the insights of the greatest of Eastern doctors are denied him. Nonetheless his brilliant intellect, psychological sanity, and fidelity to Church tradition enable him to approach the Trinitarian and Christological notions of “person” in such a way that he sheds his own light upon the mysteries. His starting point is anchored in the Western tradition. Augustine understands the “three” within the one divinity as

¹⁷ Cf. Alois Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. I, 2nd ed., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: Knox, 1975), 121–31. Grillmeier is a good guide to the patristic controversies; he implicitly refutes Harnack’s thesis about Christianity’s alleged “Hellenization.”

relations, even though he does not explicitly identify the three relations as persons.¹⁸ Boethius offers a definition of person as “the individual substance of a rational nature.” Of themselves these understandings are contradictory. Boethius apparently defines nothing more than an individual rational nature (*De persona et duabus naturis* 3), a substantial *in-se* or *per-se*, an “absolute,” while Augustine stresses the opposite of substance, “relation,” which is *ad aliquid* (*De Trinitate* V, 6.12–15), and which Aristotle lists among the accidents in *Categories* 7 (6a 36–8b 24). Thomas borrows from Augustine the notion of relation, *ad aliquid* (ST I, q. 28, a. 1c; a. 2c; a. 4c), and from Boethius his definition resting on the *per se* of substance (I, q. 29, a. 1c; a. 4c). Can the two definitions be reconciled?

In the *prima pars*, q. 29, Thomas commences his study of Trinitarian person with Boethius’s definition and ends with an Augustinian “subsistent relation.” After noting that “individual” limits Boethius’s “substance” to first substance, specifically to “rational [first] substances which have mastery of their act” so that “they act *per se*” (a. 1), Thomas adds that “individual” designates “the mode of subsisting which is proper to particular substances” (ad 3). This permits the distinction in article 2 of a reality’s essence from “the subject or supposite which subsists in the genus of substance”; this latter, insofar as “it exists of itself (*per se*) and not in another, is called subsistence.” The same subsistence, as underlying a common nature, is called *res naturae* (a reality of nature), and, as underlying accidents, “a hypostasis or substance.” Deftly Thomas has distinguished subsistence, or person, from a common nature. Thus subsistence is said to contain “individuating principles” beyond “common matter and form” which make the matter-form composite “this man” (ad 3). One is tempted to identify matter signed by quantity with subsistence, but Thomas assures the reader that the substrate subsisting of itself as an individual does so by virtue of its form, which supplies the “actual *esse* to matter.” Thus form is the “principle of subsisting” (*principium subsistendi*) whereas matter is the “principle of standing under” (*principium substandi*: ad 5). Thus *esse* as well as matter constitute the subsistent individual, who is spiritual because he possesses a form, is rational, and exercises freedom. Thomas is ready for his next step.

Since God neither supports accidents nor is individuated by matter, individuating distinctions can be attributed to existence. Loosened from substance and nature, person is redefined as “what is most perfect in all of nature, viz., a subsistent in a rational nature” (a. 3). This perfection is applied to God insofar as it designates a “subsisting reality (*rem subsisten-*

¹⁸ Luis Ladaria, S.J., “Person y Relacion en el *De Trinitate* de San Agustin,” *Miscellanea Comillas* 30 (1972): 271–83.

tem)" (ad 3). Hence, "individual," applied to God, denotes "incommunicability," not materiality, and "subsistence" means "to exist *per se*" (ad 4). Clearly Thomas has shifted the accent from the essential order of Boethius's "substance" to the existential order of "subsistence." Hence in article 4 "person" can be more easily distinguished from the divine nature common to the three divine persons. Admitting that the word "person" must be accommodated from its original meaning so as to avoid heresy, Thomas uses "person" to indicate a "relative" reality (*relativum*) in God. Likewise "individual" is understood as "what is distinguished not in itself, but from others," and "person" signifies "what is distinct in [the divine] nature." Because his previous analysis of processions in God has led him to see that "a distinction in God only happens through relations of origin" and person signifies "what is distinct in the divine nature," Thomas identifies divine person with "relation." Since "relations" in God cannot be accidents but are identified with the divine essence which subsists, "divine person" means "relation as subsisting."¹⁹

Thomistic Tensions

Thomas's analysis of "person" contains some ambiguities. If "subsistence" means "to exist *per se*," one might expect every existing nature, especially the divine nature, to be qualified as a "person" (cf. III, q. 3, a. 3, ad 1; *De potentia* q. 8, a. 3c). For God is "self-subsisting *esse*" (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*: ST I, q. 44, a. 1c; q. 12, a. 4c; q. 7, a. 1, ad 3). Moreover, if person means the ability to "act *per se*," each person of the Trinity would be able to act independently; that would dispute the understanding of God's nature as a single principle of activity (III, q. 3, a. 2c; a. 4c et obj. 1; q. 32, a. 1, ad 1). In his sanity Thomas draws neither conclusion. But he is willing to stretch the meaning of person from individual substance to subsistent relation because he wishes to maintain the analogy between divine and human persons (I, q. 29, a. 4, ad 4). That allows him to use Boethius's definition in his Christology, interpreting it as an individual subsisting in its nature (III, q. 2, a. 2c). Thereafter a double understanding seems to develop, depending on whether Thomas places the emphasis upon the *individual* subsisting or upon the *subsisting* individual. Initially emphasis is placed on the individuality of the supposite as opposed to the nature understood more universally: "For nature signifies the essence of the species which the definition signifies." Since accidents and individuating principles are added to the formality of species (*ratio speciei*), it is possible to distinguish the nature from the "supposite of the nature." Though really (*secundum rem*) different,

¹⁹ Cf. our "Is the Blessed Trinity Naturally Knowable?" to appear in *Gregorianum* 93 (2012).

they are not separated “since in the supposite the very nature of the species is included.” The supposite is the totality (*totum*) which “has the nature as the formal part perfecting it.” For that reason “in hylomorphic composites nature [viz., humanity] is not predicated of the supposite,” viz., “this man” (III, q. 2, a. 2c). Here supposite, or person, seems to intend both the first substance, the totality, and its material substrate. Like first substance, it can be understood as either a part, the supposite distinct from the nature, or the whole, the supposite embracing the nature. Thomas notes that this distinction between nature and person, or supposite, is clear in beings composed of form and matter, but less clear in beings, like God, in whom there is nothing beyond the “formality (*ratio*) of species or nature.” In Him the distinction of supposite from nature is not real (*secundum rem*) but merely intentional (*secundum rationem intelligendi*). “For it is called nature insofar as it is a certain essence, but the same thing is called a supposite insofar as it is subsisting” (III, q. 2, a. 2c). Thus beyond material individuality a subsistence is recognized as distinct from nature in God and angels. But is not God’s subsistence identical with His *esse per se* (I, q. 29, a. 2c) and therefore with His essence, or nature (I, q. 3, a. 4c)?

What does Thomas here intend by “subsistence”? Subsistence again seems to involve “existence *per se*.” For “only that which exists *per se* . . . has the formality (*ratio*) of a person.” Precisely because Christ’s human nature exists, not in itself, but in the person of the Word, it does not have its own personality (III, q. 2, a. 2c et ad 3; a. 5c; q. 16, a. 12, ad 2). How is “person” then related to “existence”? Certainly “*esse* belongs to the person’s very constitution” (III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 4). Further specification of that relation, however, allows a variety of formulations. Christ’s human nature “exists in the person of the Word” (III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1), who, we just saw, exists *per se*. “The hypostasis is previous to and higher than the human nature” (III, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2), and the Word exists previous to and independent of the nature assumed in the Incarnation (III, q. 2, a. 5, ad 1; a. 6c; q. 3, a. 1, ad 3). For the Word has an uncreated *esse* according to His divine nature (III, q. 16, a. 10, ad 3). Yet Thomas apparently reverses the relation when he writes that “the Word subsists in it [the human nature]” (III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1; a. 5, ad 1; a. 8c). For “everything that subsists in a human nature is a person” (III, q. 16, a. 12c et ad 1); it belongs to the formality (*ratio*) of the person “to subsist in some nature” (III, q. 2, a. 4c). This corresponds with the earlier understanding whereby the person subsists in a rational nature and the divine Word subsists in the divine nature (I, q. 29, a. 3c; q. 30, a. 4c; q. 33, a. 2, ad 3).

Why does Thomas employ such variations? Here we run into one of the greatest exegetical problems in the Thomistic tradition: what exactly

does “subsistence” mean? At first sight it might be possible to distinguish subsistence from existence insofar as the latter, *esse*, is only a part of the total subsistence, which unites existence to essence and whatever “individuating principles” are added to them. So Jesus’ humanity “exists” only with the “borrowed” existence of the Word, and the Word “subsists” in the human nature because that nature is assumed into the whole that is the incarnate Word. Although Jesus’ humanity is incomplete without its existence, the Word is always a complete person in His existence, which secondarily actuates the assumed humanity. In this sense the person mediates *esse* to the human nature. Person is “what has *esse*,” while nature is “that by which something has *esse* (*id quo aliquid habet esse*)”; thus the Word has *esse* by His divine nature and this *esse* “becomes the *esse* of man” (III, q. 17, a. 2c et ad 1–3).

While subsistence would include existence *per se*, it must be more than that. It is an individual something or, better, someone that “has” a nature. This subsistence must supply individuating principles beyond matter and accidents; for the eternal Son, in whom no accident exists, “has deity under a determined personal property”; indeed the Son “has” both natures (III, q. 17, a. 1c et ad 2; q. 35, a. 1c et ad 2). In the Trinity the incommunicability of personhood consists in the subsistent relation resulting from the order of processions (cf. I, q. 29, a. 3, ad 3; a. 4, ad 3; q. 30, a. 4, ad 2; III, a. 3, q. 1, ad 2). But how does the Son as an individual personal relation have the humanity?

Toward a Resolution

To identify more closely in man what has *esse*, exists *per se*, is individual, and acts freely, one can have recourse to Thomas’s earlier disquisition about the “essence of the soul” in the *prima pars*, q. 77, aa. 4–7. There he seeks to explain the unity between the soul and its potencies. Given that man’s hylomorphic unity is due to its form, or soul, there has to be a unity in the soul and the potencies, or faculties, which perform its operations. Since knowing involves the unity in diversity of sensation, abstraction, and judgment (*conversio ad phantasma*), an internal spiritual unity must underlie man’s diverse ways of knowing. Indeed man’s ways of knowing correspond to his internal composition of body, form, and existence. Thomas explains the unity in terms of the essence of the soul from which as a principle emanate in a hierarchical *resultatio* man’s diverse faculties, starting with intellect and will and proceeding to his sensible and nutritive faculties. The essence of the soul functions as both active and final cause. Thus, as the unity diversifies into multiplicity, the diversity also returns to unity, bringing with it the stimulations from the

outside world. The soul's essence comprises an ontological unity, simultaneously diverse from the faculties and containing all of them virtually. Like the person it can easily be understood as part and whole. It must also be the ground of individuality, since not only is it one but also from it the sensible faculties flow, yet it has to be spiritual, since it is ontologically higher than the spiritual faculties of intellect and will. Finally, although this is not mentioned by St. Thomas, it must be the point joining essential and existential orders, since in judgment existence is predicated of the affirmed subject. Although existence is not perceived *per se* through the senses, Thomas reminds his reader that ultimately in knowing it is not so much the faculty that knows as the whole man who knows through the faculties (I, q. 77, a. 5c; q. 75, a. 2, ad 3; q. 76, a. 1c). Thus there seems to be in man a point of spiritual individuality; it can be identified with the whole person, which embraces the concrete existential nature, yet is capable of distinction from it as person from nature. Furthermore this point is at the juncture of the essential and existential orders, for the person not only exists *per se* but also has *esse*. At this point of spiritual individuality in a concrete humanity, the spiritual individuality of the Son, who exists as an individuated relation, can enter to substitute for a human person and take possession of a concrete humanity. So the spiritual individuality of the second person of the Trinity corresponds analogously with the spiritual individual person in a human nature. Indeed, Thomas remarks, as the name "person," applied to each of the three Trinitarian persons, serves to designate a "vague individual," so it often functions among men: "*Vague individual*, as *some man*, signifies the common nature with a determined mode of existing which coincides with individuals so that he might be one subsisting *per se* distinct from others" (I, q. 30, a. 4c). Leaving aside the difficulty of defining exactly what "mode" means in Thomism, one sees that Thomas intends a correspondence between what is most individual in the Trinity and what is most individual in man. That correspondence allows the substitution of a Trinitarian person for a human person at the point of greatest spiritual individuality.

Many advantages flow from such an interpretation. First it reconciles various axioms about action that are otherwise contradictory. On the one hand, "nature designates a principle of action," or motion, and a thing's proper operation occurs "according to its form": "operation follows nature" (I, q. 2, a. 3; III, q. 19, a. 1c; a. 2, *sed contra*). On the other, actions or acts are attributed to the person: *actiones (actus) suppositorum sunt* (I, q. 39, a. 5, ad 1; q. 40, a. 1, ad 3; III, q. 7, a. 13c; q. 20, a. 1, ad 2) and "acting belongs properly to the person" (III, q. 3, a. 1c). Insofar as natures do not emit actions determined in their particularities but give a specific propulsion allowing leeway for further particularization ("for the most part"),

the person can be seen as the one who determines the choice, or election, most concretely. For persons, “who have control of their acts, are not only acted upon, as are other things, but they act through themselves (*per se*); yet actions are in individuals” (I, q. 29, a. 1c). So a man recognizes that his nature demands sleep, but the individual person can decide when, where, how long, etc. “To operate belongs to a subsistent hypostasis, but according to form and nature, from which the operation receives a species” and “the operation is a certain effect of the person according to some form or nature” (III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3, 4). Second, by placing freedom in the person, the hesitancy inherent in freedom of indifference can be overcome; whereas the interplay of intellectual and voluntary faculties set the condition of possibility for choice, the actual choice depends upon the person. A human child does not choose to be born from his parents; he or she must react to the gift of life which comes from love. No neutrality is permitted. As Blondel often writes, *Nous sommes embarqués*. So much more urgent is the demand when a person is confronted with Jesus Christ who died for him. Person calls to person as depth to depth. In the person, knowing and loving come together to overcome the indifference of choice before rationally proposed alternatives. “To act is attributed not to the nature as agent, but to the person. . . . Action is, however, attributed to the nature as to that according to which the person or hypostasis acts” (III, q. 20, a. 1, ad 2). Third, such a view explains how Jesus can be impeccable while subject to temptation: though His will is being repulsed by His impending fate, death and the abolition of all that His human nature naturally seeks in life, the ultimate choice depends upon the divine person, who, being divine, cannot sin. “Father, if you wish, take this cup from me, but let your will, not my will, be done” (Lk 22:42). Fourth, because Jesus identifies Himself as the Father’s Son, His inmost identity is relational. Insofar as freedom exists for love, the free person is never closed within himself. Thus the substantial in-itself of Boethius’s definition is reconciled with Thomas’s “subsistent relation.” “Relation” is just as primordial as personal “in-se.” Indeed, alongside the modern notion of person as free, self-conscious center of activity is an equally modern notion of person as relation.²⁰ Fifth, Christ’s direct knowledge

²⁰ Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Smith (New York: Scribner’s, 1958), 3–4 et passim; also Marcel Mounier, Blondel, Nédoncelle, as noted in Stefanini, “Personalismo,” 1313–14. Emmanuel Mounier, *Le Personalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 8, starts with a substantialist view of person but strongly rejects all closed individualism; person is for communication (35–50). Similarly Karl Rahner, S.J., “Person: C. Theological,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 3:418, insists that man’s social orientation is equally primordial to

of the Father would be personal, beyond the abstractions normally provided by the intellect. This allows for growth in His explicit human knowledge—that is, knowledge mediated by concepts—of Himself. Yet His utterly personal knowledge of His Father lets Him—otherwise pure audacity for a Jew—address His Father as *Abba* and communicate it to those whom He taught to pray “Our Father” (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15).²¹ Sixth, such a spiritual individuality grounds personal immortality; what survives death is no universal form but a person, and there is no need to invoke *esse* as a second principle of individuality alongside matter.²²

Difficulties

Unfortunately multiple difficulties beset this interpretation of Thomas. First, the Angelic Doctor never identifies the essence of the soul with person; indeed, it is called the soul’s *essence* and as such seems to belong to the essential order; for “the essence of the soul is the act of the body” (III, q. 46, a. 7, ad 1). Second, other texts do not support this interpretation. Thomas holds that man’s substantial form *per se* has *esse*, communicates it to the body, and causes *esse* actually in its subject; moreover, the soul subsists *per se* and is therefore incorruptible (I, q. 75, a. 6c; q. 77, a. 6c; a. 7c; cf. q. 29, a. 2, ad 5; q. 42, a. 1, ad 1). Despite the language of subsistence, the soul is not a person, since a person “has the complete nature of a species” (I, q. 75, a. 4, ad 2). So our attempt to limit the language of subsistence to the person is not utterly persuasive. Distinctions might possibly be constructed: for example, the soul as part of the composite does not subsist *per se* since its totality depends upon the possession of a body (“the form in [composite creatures] is not a complete subsistent”: I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2), but in a separated state it may be said to “subsist in its *esse*” insofar as it retains the *esse* of the composite and thus possesses an *esse totius* (an *esse* of the whole) and a *perfectum esse* (I–II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 2; I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5). Yet, even while defending the separated soul’s essential beatitude, Thomas admits that something is missing to the separated soul’s *bene esse* (well being), since it still desires the “administration of the body” (I–II, q. 4, a. 5c et ad 5). More tellingly, he admits that the separated soul lacks “the

the free person: “Intercommunication and self-realization, self-possession, grow in principle in like and not inverse proportion.”

²¹ On the significance of *Abba* cf. John McDermott, S.J., “Jesus and the Son of God Title,” *Gregorianum* 62 (1981): 227–317, esp. 278–81, 316–17.

²² Cf. John McDermott, S.J., “How Did Jesus Know He Was God? The Ontological Psychology of Mark 10:17–22,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009): 272–97. For man’s immortality cf. *ibid.*, “Faith, Reason, and Freedom,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002): 328–31.

perfect nature of the species" (I–II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 2), which apparently denies its personhood. Thomas's language may not be totally consistent on this point as he searches for an answer to one of the most difficult problems of theology. One might seek to preserve the language of "personal subsistence" by arguing for a development from the *prima pars* to the *tertia pars*: the question of the hypostatic union forces Thomas to be more precise in his use of language. But further difficulties remain.

Third, because *esse* stands to essence, or nature, as act to potency (I, q. 9, a. 2c; q. 50, a. 2, ad 3; q. 75, a. 5, ad 4), it seems superfluous to posit an intermediate entity, the person, to join *esse* and essence. The form possesses *esse* and is the "principle of being" (*principium essendi*: I, q. 76, a. 2c) and the "cause of being" (*causa essendi*) to the matter (I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 3). Fourth, tied to the previous problem is the question of the number of existences in Christ. The *tertia pars* holds that since the human nature is personally united to the Son and *esse* pertains *secundum se* to the person as the one who possesses *esse*, there is in Christ only one *esse*, the Son's divine *esse*, "because it is impossible that there not be one *esse* for one reality" (III, q. 17, a. 2c et ad 2). With this affirmation, however, comes a plethora of new problems. Since the divine *esse* belongs to the whole Trinity (III, q. 17, a. 2, ad 3), would not the whole Trinity be actuating Christ's humanity? Furthermore, since "act is proportioned to that of which it is the act" and "every reality has *esse* according to its form" (I, q. 12, a. 3c; q. 42, a. 1, ad 1), where is the proportion between the infinite divine *esse* and the human nature?²³ Christ's humanity must either become divine or be overwhelmingly crushed or splintered through the divine *esse*. Most probably in the face of such problems Thomas wavers in formulating his position. Earlier the *tertia pars* asserts that since the hypostatic union "has only one real *esse* in the created nature . . . consequently it has a created *esse*" (q. 2, a. 7, ad 2), and *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 1c et ad 10, written at approximately the same time as the *tertia pars*, affirms a subordinate, secondary *esse* in Christ.²⁴ Of course the secondary *esse* raises equally troubling questions: How are both existences

²³ ST I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1 also states that "*esse* is the form's first effect." That may seem at first paradoxical, given the identification of *esse* with act and form with potency, but one allows for a mutual causality between form and *esse*, as between matter and form, in producing the existing individual nature. For form mediates "actual *esse*" to matter (I, q. 29, a. 2, ad 5).

²⁴ Franz Pelster, S.J., "La Questio Disputata de Saint Thomas 'De Unione Verbi Incarnati,'" *Archives de Philosophie* 3 (1925): 198–245, has proven the authenticity and date of *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*.

joined? How does Thomas avoid his own principle that “for one reality there can be only one *esse*”?²⁵

A final difficulty with our exegesis is that Thomas does not draw conclusions which seem to flow naturally from it. Whereas our interpretation would locate the actuation of the free act in the person beyond the will, Thomas clearly maintains in Christ not only two wills, human and divine, the former moved interiorly by the latter as with other holy men (III, q. 18, a. 1c et ad 1–4), but also a *liberum arbitrium* in which the will as *ratio* makes the election (III, q. 18, a. 4c et ad 1–3; q. 18, a. 5c et ad 2). Freedom is not located in the person; “since the will belongs to the nature, any type of willing (*ipsum quod est aliquialiter velle*) also belongs to the nature” (III, q. 18, a. 1, ad 4). Furthermore, the beatific vision is ascribed to the “superior part” of Christ’s soul, not to the person (III, q. 46, a. 8c), while the lower part suffers, strange as it may be that the principle of man’s essential unity should itself be divided. Lastly, Jesus’ miracles are caused not by His acting person but by the divine nature (III, q. 19, a. 1 et ad 1, 2, 5; q. 43, a. 2c).²⁶

Toward a Conclusion: Thomistic Disarray

Our analysis of Thomas’s doctrine on the relation of person and nature does not lead to a pellucid conclusion.²⁷ One suspects that Thomas himself is not clairvoyant about the relation, but with his usual balanced breadth of vision he wishes to keep together as many elements as are necessary to uphold the Church’s dogmatic faith. Certainly the leading theologians of the twentieth century fail to agree among themselves on how to interpret Thomas’s

²⁵ While following Cajetan’s position, Shawn Colson, “Accrued Eyes and Sixth Digits: Thomas Aquinas and Cardinal Cajetan on Christ’s Single *Esse* and the Union of Natures,” *Nova et Vetera* 8 (2010): 55–87, ignores the disproportion between the infinite divine *esse* and the human nature as well as the problem of the whole Trinity assuming Christ’s humanity. As will become clear below from the divergent views of modern Thomists, such are the main problems of Christ’s ontological constitution.

²⁶ While Thomas does not formulate the later axiom, *omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt communia*, he supplies a basis for it in his discussion of the Trinitarian missions: “God’s creative power is common to the whole Trinity” (*ST* I, q. 32, a. 1; q. 43, a. 7, ad 3; q. 45, a. 6c).

²⁷ This section restricts itself principally to the person–nature relation in Christology, where the problems are most obvious. Omitted is relation between Trinitarian and Christological “person,” which most thinkers do not analyze. Also omitted is the problem concerning the relation of human and divine, personal knowledge in Jesus, which underlies modern Christologies on account of modern philosophy’s turn to the subject and historical-critical studies in biblical exegesis. For an answer cf. McDermott, “How Did Jesus Know?” 272–97.

Christology. The variety of their interpretations is astounding. Billot postulates one divine *esse* in Christ; since this is the *esse* of the Trinity, there have to be three modes of possessing it; hence this one *esse* is joined to Christ's humanity "through the mode of filiation." Moreover, on account of the lack of proportion the divine *esse* actuates Christ's human nature "quasi-formally."²⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange and the early Maritain see personality as a substantial mode terminating a nature; the mode thus renders the nature capable of becoming the immediate subject of existence. Garrigou-Lagrange then constitutes the divine person the source of all activity, whereas the nature becomes "*that by which* a thing is such as it is, in such a species."²⁹ De la Taille interprets Christ's secondary human *esse* along the model of the beatific vision as a finite actuation created by God's uncreated act whereby the Word terminates the human nature, exercising a terminative, not an informative, act. Since the Word's *esse* is received from and relative to the Father, when it actuates Christ's humanity, the humanity has a different relation to the Word than to the Father and the Spirit.³⁰ Galtier affirms two existences in Christ, but the secondary *esse* produces only an incomplete being (*ens quo*), since the complete being is what is united to the divine personal *esse*. He interprets person as an independent, rational, free totality, adding to nature only "a total and exclusive possession"; since Christ's human nature is possessed by the Word, it is not a human person. The divine person does not influence Christ's humanity beyond the manner in which God exercises His influence on any other human nature.³¹ Diepen accepts two existences in Christ, since a nature specifies its act of existence as its formal principle. The human existence is somehow integrated into the divine, while the "person" possesses exclusively its nature, which is joined to its proportionate existence. The person mediates *esse* to the nature, giving it a subsistence so that the whole becomes autonomous and incommunicable.

²⁸ Louis Billot, S.J., *De Verbo Incarnato*, 4th ed. (Rome: St. Joseph, 1904), 57, 132–33, 142, n. 1, 149, 157–58, 165; also Pietro Parente, *L'Io di Cristo*, 2nd ed. (Brescia: Marcelliana, 1955), 213–19, 229, 231–33, 246, 340.

²⁹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *De Christo Salvatore* (Turin: Marietti, 1949), 87, 89, 116; Jacques Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 4th ed., trans. G. Phelan et alii (New York: Scribner's, 1959), 433.

³⁰ Maurice de la Taille, S.J., "The Schoolmen," *The Incarnation*, ed. C. Lattey (Cambridge: Heffer, 1926), 183–86; idem, *The Hypostatic Union and Created Actuation by Uncreated Act*, trans. Cyril Vollert (West Baden Springs, IN: West Baden College, 1952), 58, 62–63, 68, 72–74.

³¹ Paul Galtier, S.J., *L'Unité du Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1939), 101, 132–36, 200–234, 247, 262, 319, 334, 348; idem, *De Incarnatione et Redemptione* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1947), 175, 180–82, 185, 192–203, 209–12, 237. He admits a proximity to the Scotist position of Déodat de Basly, O.F.M., in *L'Unité*, 313–17.

The personal subsistence is “the crowning of individuation.” “The *esse humanum* realizes the human nature in and with its hypostatic union with the Word.” The person then exercises the act of existence so that Christ’s humanity is seen as the divine person’s “created prolongation” or “temporal annex” insofar as it is “a participation in the personal being of the Son of God.”³² The middle Maritain deepens Diepen’s position, seeing the person, or subsistence, as a state of active, autonomous exercise of an act of existence; thus in Christ, not His human nature but the Word exercises the human *esse* received in that nature.³³

If there is a lack of consensus among earlier conceptualist theologians in the twentieth century, later transcendental Thomists encounter similar difficulties. Lonergan understands person as an individual subsistent in an intellectual nature. A human person is a complete nature with its proportionate *esse*. But that proportion is lacking in the Incarnation for both the created *esse* and the divine *esse*. The *esse* of Christ’s humanity is not proportionate, since it is supernatural on account of its assumption by the Word; for it is assumed into unity with the Word’s divine *esse*, its extrinsic condition, just as contingent created being is intended by God along with His infinite being. It follows the divine *esse* of the assuming Word “in the manner of a simply posterior term, as the ultimate disposition for a form is said to follow the form’s reception.” Ultimately unity is grounded in the being by which something is, and “the incarnate Word is simply one.” Christ’s immanent human operations are of the man Christ alone but the humanity has a real relation to Word alone, who assumes it and is its intrinsic cause.³⁴ Rahner employs at least six different understandings of “person,” according to need. A Trinitarian person is a mode of subsistence or a mode of presence, depending on whether he is talking of the immanent or the economic Trinity; in Christology he defines person as a “self-

³² Herman Diepen, O.S.B., “La Critique du Basileisme selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue Thomiste* 50 (1950): 97–98, 101–2, 104, 107–11, 115–16, 297, 303–18, 321–22, 324; idem, “L’unique Seigneur Jésus-Christ,” *ibid.* 53 (1953): 34–35, 37–39, 45, 47–51, 53, 55–57, 59, 61.

³³ Maritain, *Degrees*, 436–43.

³⁴ Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *De Verbo Incarnato*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian, 1961), 245–52; idem, *De Constitutione Christi ontologica et psychologica*, 4th ed. (Rome: Gregorian, 1964), 9, 20–24, 33–34, 57–61, 69–79. For the Trinitarian person-nature relation cf. John McDermott, S.J. “Person and Nature in Lonergan’s *De Deo Trino*,” *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 153–85. Of all the theologians, Lonergan presents the most consistent doctrine of person, analogously bridging Trinity and Christology. Cf. Giovanni Rota, “*Persona*” e “*Natura*” nell’*Itinerario speculativo di Bernard J.F. Lonergan (1904–1984)* (Milan: Glossa, 1998), 175–282, for greater detail; Rota also points out Lonergan’s double notion of “nature,” the dynamic existential subject affirming truth as well as the Aristotelian principle of motion and rest.

conscious, free center of activity” and, more closely applied to the hypostatic union, as the event of man’s self-transcendence into God.³⁵ Because in the hierarchy of being, greater union corresponds to greater independence, Malmberg allows for two existences and analogously two persons in Christ integrated into one; the human *esse* and person are relatively (*secundum quid*) such as not to oppose the divine person and *esse*. Though Jesus is otherwise like other men, his human nature is entirely supernatural since it is constituted by the hypostatic union; moreover the term of his transcendence is not the Trinity but the Son, who exercises a special causality actuating the nature’s potency and brings about (*setzt*) all its operations.³⁶ Wiederkehr understands the hypostatic union as a communication of relations based on the parallelism of relations between the Son and the Father in the Trinity and its reflection in Jesus’ man-God relation. In this way Jesus’ human person and *esse* are integrated in a gradated analogy into the Word’s person and *esse*. “God relates Himself to Jesus exactly as He relates Himself in Himself to His Son, and therefore Jesus is the eternal Son of God and the eternal Son is none other than Jesus.” “Man” and “Son of God” are related in their turn as condition of possibility and realization. There exist a divine filiation and a filial divinity, and the subject of both is not found outside Jesus’ human personality and subjectivity. This gives meaning to Jesus’ history, as, under the Logos, Jesus becomes the expression of who the Logos is; yet, to preserve this unity, Wiederkehr identifies the Word’s will with Jesus’ will.³⁷ Schoonenberg allows Jesus to be a human person in whom the divine nature is “enhypostasized.”³⁸ Indeed, many followers of Rahner allow Jesus to be a human person—his concrete nature, like Boethius’s, fulfills the definition of person: free, self-conscious center of activity—in some unique relation with God.³⁹ In

³⁵ Cf. John McDermott, S.J., “Karl Rahner in Tradition: The One and the Many,” *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* 3 (2003–7): 30–34, 36–45, 58–59, n. 112; for greater detail cf. idem “The Christologies of Karl Rahner,” *Gregorianum* 67 (1986): 87–123, 297–327, but this earlier article overlooks Rahner’s insight of person as event. In “Jesus Christus,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., ed. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Herder, 1957–67), 5:959, Rahner introduces a different ontology into Galtier’s basic Christology.

³⁶ Felix Malmberg, S.J., *Über den Gottmenschen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), 40–49, 60–61, 69–70, 80–86, 93–105.

³⁷ Dietrich Wiederkehr, O.S.B., “Entwurf einer systematischen Christologie,” *Mysterium Salutis*, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965–76), 3/1: 566–73, 576–77, 616–21.

³⁸ Piet Schoonenberg, S.J., *Ein Gott der Menschen*, trans. H. Mertens (Zurich: Benziger, 1969), 74–99.

³⁹ E.g., John Dwyer, *Son of Man and Son of God* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 3, 79–80, 124, 131, 148; William Dych, S.J., *Thy Kingdom Come: Jesus and the Reign of God*

brief, modern Christologies manifest much confusion in failing to explain the normative language of the Church's doctrine (DS 424–26, 432, 516, 555, 558).

Conclusions

Another series of theologians from various schools converge upon a different notion of person. Maximus Confessor, Maréchal, Rousselot, Mouroux, the late Maritain, Clarke, and Wojtyła locate person in that center of spiritual individuality, where knowing and willing are joined and from whose unity the natural faculties devolve.⁴⁰ They do not handle the problems resulting from Thomas's existential order; Maximus has no essence-existence distinction, the others ignore the question on this point. (Maritain stands at the threshold of identifying person with the essence of the soul, but it is perhaps his commitment to the existential order, distinct from the essential order, that makes him hesitate to pass over the threshold.) In fact, since the order of freedom transcends the essential order, there is no need to appeal to a separate existential order to relativize nature and indicate how God is free to intervene in the world while remaining transcendent. Substituting the order of freedom for the existential order also dissolves all the problems regarding the rela-

(Herder & Herder, New York, 1999), 54–55; Roger Haight, S.J., *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 296, 439, 441–43, 461; on Jon Sobrino, S.J., cf. John McDermott, S.J., "What Went Wrong with Catholic (NT) Exegesis and Christology?" *Angelicum* 86 (2009): 815–19, esp. n. 66. Though from different traditions both Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., *Jesus Christ Liberator*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 181, 192–93, and Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979), 33, 601, 604, 655–56, 661, also consider Jesus a "human person." On Schillebeeckx cf. McDermott, "What Went Wrong," 821–24.

⁴⁰ Guido Bausenhardt, "*In allen uns gleich ausser der Sünde*" (Mainz: Grünewald, 1992), 147–78; Daniele Moretto, *Il Dinamismo intellettuale davanti al Mistero: La Questione del Soprannaturale nel Percorso speculativo de J. Maréchal* (Milan: Glossa, 2001), 325–64; John McDermott, S.J., *Love and Understanding: The Relation of Will and Intellect in Pierre Rousselot's Christological Vision* (Rome: Gregorian, 1983), 266–90; idem, "The Theology of John Paul II: A Response," in *The Thought of Pope John Paul II*, ed. John McDermott (Rome: Gregorian, 1993), 55–68; John McDermott, S.J., and Glenn Comandini, "The Problem of Person and Jean Mouroux," *Sapientia* 52 (1997): 75–97; Benedikt Ritzler, *Freiheit in der Umarmung des ewig Liebenden* (Bern: Lang, 2000), esp. 409–93 (on Maritain); W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1993), esp. 42–108. Joseph de Finance, S.J., "L'Éclair de la liberté," in *S. Tommaso Teologo*, ed. Antonio Piolanti (Vatican: Pont. Accademia Romana di S. Tommaso, 1995), 35–49, also locates freedom beyond the natural will in the "spiritual subject," or "the invisible center of personal consciousness," that stands before God.

tion of *esse* to the person. These thinkers see man primarily as created freedom called to respond to God's omnipotent love as mediated through his fellow men and the finite structures of the world. In their view, human nature is not merely an individual principle of activity but refers to the entirety of the species, in which various polarities are held in balanced yet dynamic tension.⁴¹ For the nature does not ground itself, but in its limitations, which render it incapable of fulfilling itself, it is always referred to its ground, God. In individuals nature gives a direction, but the ultimate specification of that direction depends on freedom.

Personal freedom, though transcending nature, is not arbitrary. Rather, it is called to respond to God through the structures of nature. Nature, being a concrete whole containing all members of a species, reveals itself as universal and particular, in itself and in relation, static and dynamic, developing through time yet retaining intelligible continuity and giving guidelines for action. For there can be no final opposition between personal freedom and nature. A good God created both nature and freedom, and a constant opposition of nature and freedom would result in an unhappy, destructive rendering of man, forced into perpetual opposition to himself. As men are intended to live in solidarity, helping each other to achieve a common end, so individual man is a unity of nature and personal freedom. Freedom embraces nature as a condition of possibility even while transcending it and expressing itself in it. Since human freedom is neither arbitrary nor autonomous but always dependent upon God as its ultimate condition of possibility, human freedom shows that the person, the "I" at the center of free decisions, is simultaneous in-himself and in-relation. Man is created as the image of God precisely in his freedom. Since God is love, man is simultaneously loved and challenged to respond to love in the orders of creation and redemption. As John Paul II repeated so often, man only finds himself and becomes free in giving himself; man is created to sacrifice himself for God and his fellows. In this he quotes *Gaudium et Spes* 24 and, of course, reaffirms the

⁴¹ This reference to a concrete nature embracing all men is explicit in Maximus (cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, trans. Brian Daley [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003], 155–57, 159–65, 216–18); Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1924), 127, 130–31 (cf. McDermott, Love, 29–30, 276–77); and Jean Mouroux, *The Meaning of Man*, trans. A. Downes (1948; repr. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 119–26. Clarke, *Person and Being*, 6–24, considers being as relational and communicative before he treats personal relationality, and Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 275, 278, 283, 284–85, 292–96, presupposes the concrete natural unity of mankind as the basis for interpersonal solidarity.

truth of Sacred Scripture (Mk 8:34–37; Lk 17:33; Jn 12:24–25; 15:13).⁴² Such an understanding of person unites not only Thomas's Trinitarian and Christological applications but also the main currents of modern personalism, some of which emphasize the relational aspects of the person (I-Thou), others the individual possession of freedom.⁴³

This understanding upholds the natural law on two principal counts. First, at the beginning "nature" was employed by moral thinkers to indicate an objective, intelligible basis for morality; moral conduct was thus liberated from arbitrary subjectivity, mere custom, or civil law. The affirmation of a basic structure of freedom oriented to self-sacrificial love prevents irrational arbitrariness from ruling. The structure of love is "natural" in the sense of "objective." Second, even with the contrast between person and nature, nature and natural operations provide norms for moral action insofar as they are meant to harmonize with the structure of love. Just as the structure of nature points beyond itself to God's existence, so also it provides an objective orientation for the fulfillment of natural tendencies which correspond with the demands of love. There exists an intelligible finite order in the world. Though love alone is absolute, alone providing the norm for all human morality, natures enable reason to identify the specific norms of love's correctly ordered action.⁴⁴ N-V

⁴² E.g., John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* 21; *Veritatis Splendor* 85–87; *Centesimus Annus* 41; *Gratissimum sane* 11–12.14; *Ut Unum Sint* 28.

⁴³ Having three centers of free activity in the Trinity does not deny monotheism since the three persons, being love, give themselves fully to each other. There is no division of will among them. They act in complete concord. Insofar as a nature is a principle of activity and they act as one principle, "nature" can be predicated of them. Certainly the analogy of nature applied to God's "nature" must be very tenuous, since His nature is not only pure freedom, not bound by laws of development, but also infinite mystery.

⁴⁴ Cf. John McDermott, S.J., "Faith, Reason and Freedom," 307–32, for a metaphysics of freedom; "Science, Sexual Morality, and Church Teaching: Another Look at *Humanae Vitae*," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 237–61, for an example of the correspondence between personal and natural aspects in morality; and our forthcoming "The International Theological Commission and the Natural Law," in *St. Paul, the Natural Law, and Contemporary Legal Theory*, ed. Jane Adolphe and Robert Fastiggi (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), for a personalist grounding of the natural law.