

THOMISTIC PERSONALISM: CLARIFYING AND ADVANCING THE PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Personalism is a reaction against two equally serious errors in the moral and political realms: placing ultimate importance on autonomy and self-interest (individualism), and placing ultimate importance on the glory of the collective (collectivism). Seeking a third way between these errors, personalists argue that a philosophical anthropology must be the guiding light. And they also argue that three claims are central to an accurate philosophical anthropology: (i) persons possess an inalienable dignity; (ii) the *telos* of persons is communion or love; and (iii) some dimensions of persons are inexhaustibly mysterious. At its core, personalism demands that all intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional activity must respect these three truths.

Following philosophers such as Jacques Maritain, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II, and Fr. W. Norris Clarke, S.J., I believe that personalism must be grounded in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, my dissertation is an attempt to clarify and advance the project of Thomistic personalism. In order to clarify the project, I identify three species of Thomistic personalism. The first grounds the main commitments of personalism in the metaphysics and other relevant work of St. Thomas; the second adds to the first by arguing that phenomenology must be integrated into the project; and the third adds to the second by arguing that St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* (i.e., the act of existing) must be completed creatively and placed at the heart of the project.

With these species made clear, I advance the project in two main ways. First, I identify two norms which are internal to the project and show that both norms require the integration of phenomenology. Second, I acknowledge that Clarke's work on Thomistic personalism makes a compelling case for the primacy of *esse*, but I also note that his work has received some serious criticism. Thus, I modify and defend two fronts of Clarke's work: his claim that *esse* is "thick" and essence is "thin," and his claim that receptivity is an ontological perfection. I conclude that Clarke's understanding of *esse*, with some alteration, remains highly plausible. Accordingly, the primacy of *esse* in Thomistic personalism is still a viable path.

DEDICATION

To Erin Schaeffer

For all that only God, you, and I will know. For all that words cannot tell. For all that you are beyond what I deserve. For all that you are beyond attributes that can come and go.

If in this earthly existence sacrifice for another is a proof of love, you have proved your love beyond all measure—and this dissertation, whatever its failings, whatever its inadequacies, for as long as it endures, will always carry the invisible marks of your courage and generosity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to say a number of things here. First, I should note that Chapter 1 is a revised (and extended) version of my previously published article “Thomistic Personalism: A Vocation for the Twenty-First Century,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2012): 181–202; and Chapter 3 is a revised version of my previously published article “The Thick-*Esse*/Thin-Essence View in Thomistic Personalism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2015): 223–251. A paragraph or so of the latter also plays a role in my Introduction to this dissertation. I am grateful to the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* for permission to reuse this work. I would also like to express my thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding support during the early stages of my dissertation research.

Second, a number of people read and commented on portions of this dissertation at various stages of its development. For their reading and comments I thank David Clemenson, Fr. Robert A. Connor, Jeffrey Schaeffer, and three anonymous reviewers from the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*. Indeed, one of the latter reviewers provided comments that were essential to the overall trajectory of the dissertation. I also thank Dcn. Douglas McManaman for our many conversations on Thomism and philosophy in general; these conversations were extremely helpful in the development of my understanding of Thomism.

Third, apart from a single course, all of my undergraduate and graduate work in philosophy has taken place at York. I therefore owe a great deal to the Department of Philosophy at York, not to mention many of its professors. I am especially grateful to Professors Michael Giudice, Alice MacLachlan, and Robert Myers—all of whom served as members of my supervisory committee. I firmly believe that a graduate student’s supervisory committee plays a significant role in determining whether a graduate student completes his program. I was fortunate. All of my committee members were intellectually and motivationally supportive; they consistently offered pertinent comments, and they never ceased to help me move ahead. I am very thankful for this. Professor Giudice, I should note, was my supervisor. And I think it is fair to say that his excellent guidance and consistent willingness to help were decisive factors in my ability to produce this work. Even if we have not always seen eye to eye philosophically, there is no doubt in my mind that I have learned a great deal from him about how to do philosophy well.

Fourth, beyond my supervisory committee, I would also like to thank the other three members of my Oral Examining Committee: Professor Mark Cauchi (Internal Member), Professor Esteve Morera (Chair), and Professor John Thorp (External Examiner).

Fifth, many people deserve to be recognized who provided support on a much deeper level. In particular I would like to thank my children—Anna, Clare, and Mary—who fill my life with beauty and joy. I owe my wife, Erin, more than words can say, so I will not try. And a similar point applies to my parents: Ross and Donna Schaeffer. I thank you, Mom and Dad, for all that you have done and all that you are. For all the others who have helped in some way, especially my family and friends, I am so grateful for your support.

Finally, I thank the Holy Trinity. Philosophers love the truth. May we find the truth we love, and may this truth we love remind us of the Truth we were made to love, that is, Love Itself.

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INTRODUCTION

[I]t is rather in the plural—of personalisms—that we should speak. In the face of unwieldy and partially inhuman conceptions of civilization, our immediate aim is to define the primary points of agreement upon which a civilization devoted to the human person can be constructed.

—Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto*¹

Thomistic personalism is an emerging practical philosophy that seeks to synthesize the work of twentieth-century personalists with the philosophical work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Accordingly, its reach extends into moral, political, and legal philosophy; and its objectives are the same as every other serious practical philosophy: (i) to acquire the truth about practical philosophy insofar as this is possible, and (ii) to help human persons act in accordance with this truth.² It is a practical philosophy—devoted to the dignity, mystery, and communal *telos* of the person—that is ever mindful of the concrete errors of individualism and collectivism (at both the moral and political levels), along with the need to ground practical philosophy in the truths of metaphysics (a need often rejected or forgotten today).³ In this introduction, I will (i) provide an overview of the dissertation; (ii) explain its importance; (iii) comment on its philosophical method and scope; and (iv) summarize its main theses.

The title of this dissertation—*Thomistic Personalism: Clarifying and Advancing the Project*—explains well the content of the four chapters which constitute the dissertation.

Speaking generally the first chapter clarifies Thomistic personalism, while the following three advance the project towards its most plausible form.

¹ Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto*, trans. the monks of St. John's Abbey (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1938), 2.

² A terminological note. In this dissertation I will take the concept of moral philosophy (or ethics) to comprehend and include metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics; and I will use the concept of theoretical ethics to comprehend and include metaethics and normative ethics. On this scheme, then, moral philosophy (or ethics) includes theoretical ethics, but it also goes beyond it by including applied ethics.

³ Since moral and political engagement plays a role in personalism, some may suggest that Thomistic personalism—in its very essence—is a moral and political movement. I think this addition is unnecessary. Personalism in general has the aspect of a moral and political movement, but a personalism that is grounded in the work of St. Thomas, I think, is best described as a theoretical project ordered to action, that is, a practical philosophy.

In Chapter 1, I perform three tasks. First, I clarify the nature of Thomistic personalism by identifying the main commitments of personalism. Second, I clarify the theoretical alternatives within the project by identifying three species of Thomistic personalism: Weak, Moderate, and Strong. Finally, I exhort practitioners of Christian philosophy—especially in the Catholic tradition—to see that Thomistic personalism is a project that deserves attention. To avoid confusion, I should stress that the objective of this opening chapter, aside from its exhortative component, is *not* to defend Thomistic personalism against familiar philosophical rivals, e.g., Kantianism in theoretical ethics or Rawls in political philosophy. The goal is simply (and only) to clarify the nature of Thomistic personalism and its present species, just as another philosopher working on Kantianism might clarify the nature and present species of Kantianism (before developing it further or comparing it to competitors). Accordingly, I offer arguments in support of Thomistic personalism—e.g., I provide arguments for the superiority of personalism over Kantianism—but these arguments are offered as aids to achieve the clarificatory objective, not as sufficient demonstrations of the superiority of Thomistic personalism.

In Chapter 2, I move beyond clarification and seek to advance the project of Thomistic personalism by demonstrating that Weak Thomistic Personalism is indefensible. Although Weak Thomistic Personalism seeks to ground the main commitments of personalism in the work of St. Thomas (as do all species of Thomistic personalism), it does not seek to include, in any robust way, the phenomenological method or phenomenological analyses contained in other schools of personalism or other currents of philosophy. This issue divides Weak Thomistic Personalism from the other two species of Thomistic personalism. Thus, after demonstrating that contemporary work in Thomistic personalism still supports an inhospitable stance towards phenomenology, I proceed to identify two norms internal to Thomistic personalism that require the integration of phenomenology. I also specify how we ought to think about the relationship

between phenomenology and Thomistic personalism, along with some of the crucial tasks that phenomenology must undertake in the project. I conclude that the role and importance of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism is no longer an open question.

In Chapters 3 and 4, with Weak Thomistic Personalism no longer a viable option, I turn to the two remaining species. Moderate Thomistic Personalism, best exemplified by the work of St. Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, seeks to ground the main commitments of personalism in the work of St. Thomas, but it also seeks to complement the project with the resources of phenomenology. Strong Thomistic Personalism, on the other hand, agrees with the importance of phenomenology, but it goes beyond Moderate Thomistic Personalism by suggesting that the main commitments of personalism can be found in St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* (i.e., the act of existing). This is because a creative completion of St. Thomas's understanding of *esse*—in all of its inward and relational activity—throws light upon what it means to be a person, and this light justifies the main commitments of personalism.

In Chapters 3 and 4, then, I try to advance Thomistic personalism by defending the superiority of Strong Thomistic Personalism. I do this by defending two significant and contentious fronts of Fr. W. Norris Clarke's Strong Thomistic Personalism: (i) his claim that *esse* is "thick" and essence is "thin"; and (ii) his claim that receptivity is an ontological perfection (a perfection of being or *esse*). In Chapter 3, I modify and defend (i); in Chapter 4, I modify and defend (ii). I conclude that Clarke's work is still plausible, despite the direct and indirect criticism of his work vis-a-vis (i) and (ii) over the past twenty-five years. Indeed, the fronts of Clarke's work which have received the most criticism remain plausible. Thus, there is good reason to believe that Strong Thomistic Personalism is still worth pursuing, especially along the lines set out by Clarke.

The importance of this work can be discerned on at least four levels. The first level is personalism. Personalism is an impressively rich practical philosophy—particularly in terms of its philosophical anthropology—that offers a compelling alternative in moral and political philosophy (especially for those who are attracted to Kantian ethics but not transcendental idealism).⁴ But a close reading of personalists often leaves one unclear about what exactly personalism affirms, and the explicit recognition of diversity in personalism—necessary for the moral and political movement of personalism to be effective—also leaves a philosopher wondering about the ultimate justification of the main commitments of personalism.⁵ Thus, without rejecting the need for a broad concept of personalism, it seems clear that philosophical rectitude requires the completion of personalism in a specific way. A personalism that is Thomistic offers such a completion. Consequently, from the perspective of personalism in general, it is clear that further clarification and advancement of Thomistic personalism is a project worth pursuing.

The second level is Thomism in general. It is well-known that St. Thomas is a paradigmatic natural law theorist in the areas of moral, political, and legal philosophy. Leaving

⁴ The sub-area of philosophical anthropology is prominent in Catholic circles. It is best understood, I think, as an attempt to understand the human person via philosophical investigation and argumentation (without denying, of course, the relevant data of the natural and social sciences). Thus, a great deal of contemporary analytic philosophy touches on philosophical anthropology: moral philosophy often tries to get clear on the *telos* of the human person; philosophy of mind tries to get clear on the constitutive elements, ontologically speaking, of the human person's intellect and consciousness; epistemology tries to get clear on the epistemic capacity of the human person; and so on. I should note, though, that philosophical anthropology does—at least in my eyes—demand a certain unity of investigation. In other words, since the human person is a unified whole, separated only in thought, a successful philosophical anthropology must explicitly bring together all of the relevant data from the many sub-areas of philosophy and ensure they cohere. Almost no philosopher, of course, would deny that this is important, but the sub-area of philosophical anthropology explicitly recognizes this importance by taking the human person—not flourishing, mind, or knowledge—as its object (and indeed subject) of investigation.

⁵ Recognition of the vagueness of personalism can be found, for example, in both Jacques Maritain (over half a century ago) and Kenneth L. Schmitz (in the twenty-first century). Maritain declares that there is no unified school or doctrine of personalism; Schmitz calls personalism a “turn.” In Chapter 1, of course, I will suggest that the dominant current of personalism involves some main commitments which do entail some substantive unity. See Maritain's, “The Person and the Common Good,” trans. John J. FitzGerald, *The Review of Politics* 8 (1946): 419–55, at 419–20; and Schmitz's, “The Solidarity of Personalism and the Metaphysics of Existential Act,” in Schmitz's *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy*, ed. Paul O'Herron, vol. 46 of *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 133.

aside natural law theory in general jurisprudence (i.e., work on the nature of law), consider St. Thomas's natural law reasoning in his seminal "Treatise on Law" (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae q. 90 to 114). As background to this "Treatise," we need to lay down some basic theses: beings are good insofar as they are (*ST*, Ia q. 5, a. 1); each type of being fully actualizes itself (makes itself fully to be) by exercising its species-specific potency (*ST*, Ia q. 5 a. 5; and q. 12, a. 2); the species-specific potency of human persons is rationality; and, lastly, the final end of human action is happiness, that is, communion with God (*ST*, Ia IIae q. 3, a. 1 and 8). (In this life, of course, our imperfect happiness lies in the perfection of our speculative *and* practical rationality, so the elements of earthly happiness will certainly differ [*ST*, Ia IIae q. 4, a. 7].)

With these theses in mind, we can move to the "Treatise," focusing on Question 94. Here St. Thomas gives us the first principle of practical reason—do good and avoid evil—and this is fleshed out with reference to the basic human goods that are fixed or determined by our nature or essence (e.g., life, procreation, education, communion with finite persons, and knowledge of God). With the first principle conjoined to the basic goods—which are all good precisely insofar as they contribute to happiness—we are equipped to think about practical issues. In moral philosophy, for example, we can reason from the universal to the particular: for all *X*, if *X* is an innocent, it is wrong to kill *X*; *P* is an innocent; therefore, it is wrong to kill *P*. We must simply remember, of course, that the level of the particular leads to the need for prudence (i.e., practical wisdom), and that all action must be ordered under the governing truth that the fullness of happiness (and therefore rational activity) lies in the beatific vision. Unlike contemporary Thomist John Finnis, St. Thomas does not declare that all goods are equal.⁶

⁶ Cf. John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Chs. 3 and 4, esp. 92. It cannot be emphasized enough that Finnis's rejection of a hierarchy concerning the basic goods takes him worlds away from St. Thomas's discussion of happiness in *ST*, Ia IIae q. 3.

Now, the above sketch is perhaps objectionably brief, and I feel bound to note that St. Thomas does a masterful job of fleshing the above out in terms of eternal law, the virtues, and action theory. The point of this quick sketch, however, is to note some deficiencies. On a very general level, there seems to be a lack of emphasis on the dignity, mystery and communal *telos* of the person. St. Thomas does not deny (or even ignore) these truths, of course, but we must acknowledge that goodness, law, and the basic goods take the foreground. The application of universals to particulars is ubiquitous, and the persons who fall under the universals become cases. And there also seems to be an excessive prioritization of rationality, as if communion with others is an aspect of the more important reality of rational activity. St. Thomas's vision, articulated centuries ago, did not have the benefit of familiarity with "the problem of personalism," as St. Wojtyla/John Paul II notes, nor did it have the benefit of encountering the inward turn of philosophy as manifested in twentieth century phenomenology and existentialism.⁷ Thus, there is reason to believe that Thomistic personalism is necessary to elevate and purify the essentials of the natural law tradition, making the development of the project important to Thomism in general.

The third level is Thomistic personalism itself. The project of Thomistic personalism first appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, and a decent amount of work—although by no means a large amount—has been produced since this time. Still, the project seems to be uncertain about its nature, scope, and direction. In particular there is confusion concerning the nature of personalism and the theoretical alternatives within Thomistic personalism (justifying Chapter 1); there is confusion about the status of phenomenology (justifying Chapter 2); and there is uncertainty about the primacy of *esse* (justifying Chapters 3 and 4). It is my hope that this dissertation can

⁷ Karol Wojtyla, "Thomistic Personalism," in Wojtyla's *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 165.

eliminate the first two confusions, and help remove some of the uncertainty surrounding the primacy of *esse* in the project. *The primary importance and significance of this dissertation, I should add, is located precisely at this point—in the attempt to clarify the project of Thomistic personalism and advance it towards its most plausible species.*

The final level is contemporary practical philosophy. How is this possible, some may ask, given that I do not substantively engage contemporary rivals (apart from some engagement with Kant in Chapter 1)? How can I claim that my work is important on this level if I do not engage the large number of competitors whose claims entail the falsity of Thomistic personalism: non-cognitivism and judgment dependent accounts in metaethics, contractualism and moral particularism in theoretical ethics, Rawls and Nozick in political philosophy? In reply, my answer is that contemporary practical philosophy, speaking generally, can benefit from an encounter with a philosophy of being. In medieval philosophy a great deal of practical philosophy recognized that action must track and follow being in some sense, that goodness and being are somehow intimately connected (on the ontological and moral levels).⁸ Speaking very roughly, however, since Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in which the "is/ought fallacy" was announced, and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which a wedge was driven between things as they appear and things in themselves, this intrinsic link between being and goodness has faded into the background (rejected by some, and forgotten by others).⁹ In place of this link, we have been offered alternatives. In theoretical ethics, for example, we have been offered various forms of non-cognitivism, pure practical reason, consequentialist goods identified without reference to

⁸ Cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Being and Goodness" in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁹ Fr. W. Norris Clarke describes and criticizes the severing of being and goodness (with reference to Hume and Kant) in *The One and The Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), at 291. Cf. Clarke's "Introduction" to James F. Anderson's *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. and trans. James F. Anderson (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1997), xx–xxi.

being, and so on. There are exceptions to this, no doubt, especially in work with Aristotelian sympathies, but I think it is undeniable that, for better or worse, this is the state of things, and things are not much different in political philosophy.¹⁰

Thus, although I do not substantively engage rivals in this work, I still think we can say that the following work is important for contemporary philosophy. Obviously I think it is important because I believe it contributes to the development of the most plausible practical philosophy without qualification, but it is also important on a less controversial level. It is important because it works toward the development of a practical philosophy that is grounded in a philosophy of being, and this may serve to remind contemporary practical philosophy of the deep connections between being and normativity.

Concerning the philosophical method of this work, I should say explicitly that I take this work to be an instance of Christian philosophy. What does this mean? And how is this possible? Is it not akin to talk of silent singing or motionless running? Does not, in other words, the adjective “Christian” undermine the noun “philosophy,” rendering the two forever incompatible? Etienne Gilson responds masterfully to this concern in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*. He argues, in brief, with an abundance of historical evidence, that Christians can legitimately and productively use Christian revelation as a guide and light for philosophical investigation. He defines Christian philosophy as follows:

I call Christian, *every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct [i.e., revelation and reason], nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason*. For whoever understands it thus, the concept does not correspond to any simple essence susceptible of abstract definition; but corresponds much

¹⁰ The undeniable dominance of John Rawls in political philosophy suggests a similar state. Cf. Rawls’s “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” in John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). And further reflection upon the Kantian and Hobbesian pedigrees of much political philosophy should lend further credibility to the claim, given that Kant’s pure practical reason rises forth without reference to being, and Hobbes’s goodness is that which we desire, not that which merits our desire and therefore explains it (*Leviathan*, Ch. 6).

rather to a concrete historical reality as something calling for description. It is but one of the species of the genus philosophy¹¹

Philosophy *qua* philosophy, in other words, is still autonomous; revelation cannot be used as a premise in philosophical argument. But Christian revelation is allowed to prompt investigation, suggest philosophical paths, and flag potential errors. And we might further add that if a Christian philosopher is a Catholic, the Magisterium (i.e., Teaching Authority) of the Church is allowed to play a similar role. To offer a simple example of how Christian revelation can serve in this capacity, consider Exodus 3:14 in which God reveals his name to Moses: “God replied, ‘I am who am.’ Then he added, ‘This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.’”¹² Now, leaving exegetical matters to the side, a Christian may believe that this revelation specifies a connection between God and being, and he may then proceed to investigate this possibility philosophically, viz., with reason alone—*a priori*, *a posteriori*, or both—serving as the ground of every insight or justificatory move. Revelation here is an impetus, not a source of philosophical insight or justification.¹³

As a Christian philosopher and practicing Catholic, I accept Gilson’s understanding of Christian philosophy, and in what follows—especially in Chapters 1 and 4—I will make some reference to Christian revelation and the Magisterium of the Church. But these comments are made only as auxiliaries, in the sense specified above. I understand that some philosophers may be sceptical about this idea of Christian philosophy. I only wish to point out, first, that the history of Christian philosophy, documented by Gilson, provides strong evidence for the legitimacy and productivity of Christian philosophy; and, second, that all philosophers approach the discipline with commitments that guide and direct their thinking, and it is not a necessary condition for the

¹¹ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 37.

¹² *The New American Bible*, Saint Joseph Edition (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., c. 1992).

¹³ Cf. Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 51–2.

possibility of philosophical investigation and argument that the investigator or arguer ignore all of his non-philosophical commitments (or be willing to disavow them). Such a demand would render the number of legitimate philosophical investigations and arguments very small indeed, and it would also demand that we excise weighty portions of the philosophical canon.¹⁴

Concerning the scope of this work, I should say (i) that my primary aim is to work *within* the project of Thomistic personalism, and (ii) that I will mostly focus on the domain of theoretical ethics—not applied ethics, political philosophy, or legal philosophy. Because of (i) it follows that I will make no claim to have demonstrated that Thomistic personalism is superior to other competitors in the domain of theoretical ethics, nor will I claim to have shown the inadequacy of other political philosophies. These comparisons and evaluations must come later; in this work I have judged that it is necessary to focus on developing the internal resources of Thomistic personalism. Because of (ii) some may think that Thomistic personalism should be considered only a theoretical ethics. This would be a mistake. Insofar as my work focuses on matters in theoretical ethics vis-à-vis Thomistic personalism, this is simply because theoretical ethics is the domain that most requires attention at this time.

Finally, I will summarize the primary theses of this dissertation. There is a risk to such clarity. It may suggest that these theses can be grasped fully without reference to the relevant chapters, and that I offer no other claims throughout the dissertation (both of which are obviously false). Still, I think it is worth running these risks in order to communicate the main objectives of each chapter, along with the overarching trajectory of the dissertation. The theses are as follows:

¹⁴ Taken to its logical conclusion, it announces that the non-philosophical life of a philosopher should be completely and utterly irrelevant to his philosophizing (unless it is that which is worked upon by the philosophizing); it announces that even if the heart has reasons which reason does not know about (as Pascal suggests), the reasons of the heart cannot suggest that reason (in the regular sense) investigate a particular problem or consider a particular solution. See Pascal, *Thoughts and Minor Works of Pascal* (New York: P.F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1965), 96–9 (aphorisms 265–82).

Chapter 1: There are three main commitments of personalism, and three species of Thomistic personalism. Catholic philosophers should consider the project of Thomistic personalism a task to be completed in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 2: Weak Thomistic Personalism is indefensible.

Chapter 3: William E. Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is plausible; this buttresses W. Norris Clarke's Strong Thomistic Personalism, and this buttressing speaks in favor of the move from Moderate Thomistic personalism to Strong Thomistic Personalism.

Chapter 4: Receptive activity is a transcendental perfection (i.e., an aspect of being that is present to the degree that being is present); this buttresses W. Norris Clarke's Strong Thomistic Personalism, and this buttressing speaks in favor of the move from Moderate Thomistic Personalism to Strong Thomistic Personalism.

With these theses defended, I will articulate—in the Conclusion—what I take to be the next steps in the development of Thomistic personalism. I will also identify two regulative intuitions (or we could say norms) which I believe ought to govern the project.

CHAPTER 1

THOMISTIC PERSONALISM: A VOCATION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Person signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 29, a. 3¹

1. Introduction

In a posthumously published paper “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” Fr. W. Norris Clarke, S.J., declares that the integration of personalism and Thomism (hereafter “Thomistic personalism”) is the “most creative and fruitful development in Thomism today [i.e., the early twenty-first century].”² I agree with Clarke, and I would also add that Thomistic personalism has the potential for much more substantive and systematic development. But Thomistic personalism, for whatever reason or reasons, has not acquired a strong following, even in the species of philosophy we can label Christian philosophy.³ This seems to explain why Clarke offers us this précis on Thomistic personalism

As noted in my Acknowledgements (p. iv), this chapter is a revised (and extended) version of my previously published article “Thomistic Personalism: A Vocation for the Twenty-First Century,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2012): 181–202. I thank the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* for permission to reuse this work.

¹ *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948).

² This article, as far as I can tell, is Clarke’s last word on Thomistic personalism, and can be found in Clarke’s *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 226–31. For his longest and most unified treatment of Thomistic personalism, see *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993); and for a condensed version of *Person and Being*, see “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 601–18. Readers will note that Clarke, in the paper just quoted, declares that the integration of personalism and Thomistic metaphysics—not the integration of personalism and Thomism—is the most creative and fruitful development in Thomism today. I replace “Thomistic metaphysics” with “Thomism” because it more accurately describes the integration that Clarke discusses and defends.

³ Since Clarke’s *Person and Being*, for example, there is little work that focuses primarily on Thomistic personalism (as opposed to personalism on its own or Thomism on its own). For some recent work on Thomistic personalism, though, see Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons, *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas’s Personalist Natural Law* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Peter Kreeft, “Thomistic Personalism: A Marriage Made in Heaven, Hell, or Harvard,” the 2011 Aquinas Lecture at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, accessed January 15, 2012, http://videoarchive.stthom.edu/index.php?option=com_jmovies&Itemid=54&task=showcategory&catid=35; four articles in the recently launched e-journal entitled *Journal of Thomistic Personalism*, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/rmlemmons/STP-home.htm>; Thomas D. Williams, L.C., *Who is my Neighbor? Personalism and the Foundations of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press,

near the end of his long and productive life. Clarke, one last time, holds high the torch of Thomistic personalism, calling for workers to carry on the project in the twenty-first century.

I think we should heed Clarke’s call. And so, in this chapter, doing my best to carry the torch a few steps further, I will identify the main commitments of personalism in Section 2, identify a weak version and a moderate version of Thomistic personalism in Section 3, and identify a strong version of Thomistic personalism in Sections 4, 5, and 6. With these tasks completed, I will suggest, in Section 7, that Catholic philosophers should consider Thomistic personalism a vocation for the twenty-first century that requires collaboration between specialists from diverse backgrounds. I do not pretend to offer scintillating insights in this chapter. On the contrary, my objectives are fairly modest: clarification and exhortation (not a defense of the superiority of personalism or Thomistic personalism in contemporary practical philosophy).⁴ But it is worth noting that modesty does not exclude importance in this case, for if Thomistic

2005); Thomas D. Williams, L.C., “What is Thomistic Personalism?” *Alpha and Omega* 7 (2004): 163–97; Robert A. Connor, “The Person as Resonating Existential,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992): 39–56; Robert A. Connor, “Relational *Esse* and the Person,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 65 (1991): 253–67; and two issues of *Communio*—20 (1993): 580–98, and 21 (1994): 151–90—which include some dialogue between Clarke and others. It is possible that I have missed some recent work on Thomistic personalism, but I think the reality is undeniable: Thomistic personalism, as a fully self-conscious and well-defined project, is not flourishing in Christian philosophy, let alone philosophy in general. (For a defense of the possibility and worth of Christian philosophy, see Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009], 1–41.) Fortunately, change is in the air. The *Journal of Thomistic Personalism* (founded in 2010) is evidence of this, along with the recently formed Society of Thomistic Personalism.

⁴ I make this point clear, I hope, in my Chapter 1 synopsis in the Introduction of this dissertation. Readers unfamiliar with Thomistic personalism (or personalism in general) no doubt rightly see that a good deal of this chapter lends some plausibility to personalism and Thomistic personalism. This is true, but establishing the superiority of Thomistic personalism (over and against the various forms of consequentialism, virtue ethics, feminist ethics, and so on) is not the target of this chapter. If it was, extensive engagement with contemporary practical philosophy would be required. Instead, the goals are simply (and only) clarification and exhortation (and the justification given for the exhortation in question is grounded in a magisterial document of the Catholic Church). This reduced scope is not meant to evade real engagement with contemporary philosophy. I focus on these goals because both personalism and Thomistic personalism suffer from a lack of clarity—and this chapter seeks to remedy this problem. Engagement with contemporary practical philosophy is a necessary but separable matter. To use a metaphor, the road of philosophy must be built brick by brick, and I consider this a single brick along the way, not the entire road, and not even the entire region of the road we could call practical philosophy.

personalism is truly a vocation for the twenty-first century, these modest objectives are extremely important.

2. Personalism

With its roots forever entrenched in the tumultuous twentieth century of Europe (especially Germany, France, and Poland), personalism is a reaction against two equally serious errors in the moral and political realms.⁵ The first error, the error most of us no longer worry about, is the error of collectivism—the subordination of the person to the collective (in both moral and political matters) “in such a way that the true good of persons is excluded and they themselves fall prey to the collectivity.”⁶ Here, the glory of the collective reigns supreme; persons become servants of the whole for the sake of the whole. Collectivism in this sense does not refer to the consequentialist emphasis on taking into account the good of *all* persons, nor does it refer to the consequentialist emphasis on collecting or maximizing as much good as possible (in each action, as act-consequentialists prefer, or each system of rules, as rule-consequentialists prefer). On the contrary, collectivism here means the ordering of all moral and political activity to the good of the collective, that is, the good of the whole precisely as the whole. Collectivism here prizes the flourishing of the community over the persons who constitute it. A non-personal social organism—replete with economic health, military might, artistic excellence, and whatever else might fill in the sketch—is the ultimate good which practical reason must seek to instantiate.

⁵ Since space constraints make it impossible to offer an historical sketch of personalism in this paper, I should note that Jan Olof Bengtsson and Thomas D. Williams, L.C., give a detailed history (and overview) of personalism in “Personalism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer Edition 2010), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/personalism>; and John Hellman gives a detailed history of French personalism in *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). I would be remiss, too, if I did not note that there are two main streams of personalism: one European (with its roots in Germany, France, and Poland) and one American (with its roots in Boston University). The American stream is primarily concerned with offering a metaphysical idealism (in which all of reality is personal), while the European stream is primarily concerned with moral and political philosophy. In what follows, I will focus on the European tradition.

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in Wojtyła’s *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 174.

The second error, an error that plagues the present age, is the error of individualism—the subordination of the good of others to the desires, fears, and preferences of the self (in both moral and political matters), producing “a system of morals, feelings, ideas, and institutions in which individuals can be organized by their mutual isolation and defense.”⁷ Here, the autonomy and private good of the individual reign supreme. In this sense individualism is still compatible with a certain kind of respect for others. The bodily integrity and property of others, for instance, should still be respected, but this is justified because each person recognizes that mutual respect in these basic matters best serves his private good and autonomy (and even if it is conceded that each person *deserves* to be respected for his own sake in these basic ways, this is all that is conceded). Individualism begins with the assumption that persons are morally disengaged from others in their community (at least beyond the side constraints noted above), and it further seeks to reinforce this disengagement—unless persons *choose* to eliminate their disengaged position. On the most pure form of this vision, persons self-rulingly choose their own conception of the good (not in the sense of discerning what they should believe about the good, but rather in the sense of really determining and fixing what is indeed good for them), and the ties that bind persons to others are severed in favor of boundary lines which specify the domain in which persons can achieve their private good.⁸

⁷ Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 18.

⁸ At this point I suspect that some may ask for more clarification on the nature of collectivism and individualism. Who were the main supporters in the twentieth century, for example? And how does this taxonomy map onto contemporary practical philosophy? I will take each question in turn. Concerning exemplars in the literature, I think it is crucial to note that twentieth century personalists often focused on the concrete realities of collectivism and individualism. The twentieth century included no shortage of examples. Persons really were being subordinated to the glory of the collective (or nation) in some countries, and the *credo* in some places in the United States really was something like “All that I make and have is mine, and I am responsible only for myself and those to whom I *choose* to bind myself.” Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (1906) does a particularly good job of communicating how this creed finds a home and nourishment in unbridled capitalism. Thus, providing citations to French and German literature from the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, seems superfluous. (It is worth noting that concrete representatives of both extremes are still present in the twenty-first century. North Korea, for example, seems to border on collectivism, while large swaths of the West—at the levels of populace and government—seem to prize the project of seeking one’s own conception of the good insofar as this seeking does not infringe upon the rights of others.)

Against collectivism and individualism, however, personalism asserts that

“[i]ndividualism sees man only in relation to himself ... [and] collectivism does not see man at all, it sees only ‘society.’ With the former man’s face is distorted, with the latter it is masked.”⁹

The first and most fundamental commitment of personalism, then, is this: there is a serious need for a third way between collectivism and individualism.¹⁰

But what about contemporary practical philosophy? Does anyone defend collectivism or individualism in academic literature? And if not, why talk about it at the theoretical level? A careful answer must be given here. Speaking generally it is true that most practical philosophers do not explicitly defend collectivism or individualism. But I would submit that many philosophers defend forms of individualism in theoretical ethics and political philosophy. To offer a couple of examples, David Gauthier’s contractarianism places autonomy and self-interest at the ground of normative ethics (as his constrained maximizer makes clear), and John Rawls’s emphasis on neutrality between different conceptions of the good (insofar as they do not violate the basic principles of justice) results in a political philosophy that prioritizes and protects autonomy and self-interest. In both cases, autonomy and self-interest overshadow (i) the obligations we have to others *qua* others, and (ii) the importance of deep and substantive relationships (e.g., relationships of love and communion). No doubt Gauthier could try to show that there is room for (ii) in his moral philosophy, and Rawls that there is room for (i) and (ii) in his political philosophy, but the reality is that Gauthier and Rawls treat human persons as relatively disengaged from others and relatively free to remain disengaged. Communion or love is neither an obligation nor a clear and universal good. See Gauthier, “Why Contractarianism?” in *Contractarianism and Rational Choice*, ed. Peter Vallentyne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15–30; and Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 388–414.

At the end of the day, though, I think personalists must be careful not to overemphasize collectivism and individualism. I say this because reference to the extremes of collectivism and individualism is best seen as a *point of departure* from which personalism grew and can continue to grow. By keeping the extremes of the spectrum in mind, we are able to perceive the errors of prizing community without individuals, and individuals without community—and we are also able to perceive that each error arises from a rejection or suppression of some aspect of the human person. Both of these perceptions then found a practical philosophy in search of a third way that is grounded in a philosophical anthropology. The solidity and persuasiveness of personalism, I would argue, must be justified and anchored in philosophical anthropology, not in bare claims that such and such a practical philosophy is, say, too individualist. It is philosophical anthropology, in other words, that will explain why individualism and collectivism are unacceptable.

⁹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins Press, 1971), 241.

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain declares that this search for a third way is a defining feature of personalism. See Maritain’s “The Person and the Common Good,” trans. John J. FitzGerald, *The Review of Politics* 8 (1946): 419–55, at 419–20. Personalists, as I read them, do not usually draw a hard distinction between moral philosophy and political philosophy, but for some explicit and implicit references to this third way vis-à-vis political philosophy, see Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 243–7; Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 189; Nicholas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 7–58; Mounier, *Personalism*, 18–29; Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Volume One*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), 22–47; Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 174; and, more recently, John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), preface. (Indeed, like Maritain, Crosby claims that this search for a third way is at the heart of personalism [ibid.]

Of course, this third way can take any number of forms, but personalism sees “in the notion and term ‘person’ the solution sought.”¹¹ In other words, the main error of collectivism is to overlook the worth of the person, the main error of individualism is to overlook the communal dimension of the person, and the provenance of both errors is an inadequate awareness of the spiritual nature of the person. Thus, according to personalists such as Max Scheler, Martin Buber, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier, Nicholas Berdyaev, St. Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, and many others, the guiding light of this third way needs to be a philosophical anthropology that acknowledges the integral person. This is the second commitment of personalism.

Working along these lines, and keeping the errors of collectivism and individualism before their eyes, personalists try to disclose the reality of the person. Although it would be misleading to say that personalists rely on a single method to bring about this disclosure, it is fair to say that personalists often rely on metaphysics, phenomenology, existentialism, and Christian revelation. In light of these methods, personalists agree upon a basic framework for philosophical anthropology. Non-controversially, personalists assert that persons are rational and free beings of objective and subjective dimensions, and they emphasize that these truths alone highlight the unbridgeable chasm between persons and all else. More controversially, personalists argue that

¹¹ Maritain, “The Person and the Common Good,” 419. I should note that many contemporary moral and political philosophies seem to provide a third way between these errors. Consequentialists are, after all, not concerned with the glory of the collective, nor are they concerned with maximizing the good for the self alone. Also, virtue ethics and feminist care ethics, for their own unique reasons, seem to provide alternatives that do not fall prey to collectivism or individualism. I point this out because I do not want to imply that personalism is justified simply because it offers a third way; this may speak in its favor (if one agrees that collectivism and individualism are unacceptable), but this cannot manifest its superiority over the many other practical philosophies which seem to avoid the ills of collectivism and individualism. If personalism wants to be taken seriously as *the* best third way (the best response to these two errors), it will need to justify itself via claims which go beyond reference to collectivism and individualism. As I have said above, these claims must be focused in the realm of philosophical anthropology, but this *comparative* task goes beyond the scope of this chapter and the dissertation. The overall dissertation, however, should fill in some of the contours of a philosophical anthropology as I think it should appear in Thomistic personalism.

persons are beings-for-communion (or, put a bit differently, beings-for-love). In the words of Mounier:

The person only exists towards others, it only knows itself in knowing others, only finds itself in being known by them. The *thou*, which implies the *we*, is prior to the *I*—or at least accompanies it. It is in material nature (to which we are only partly subject) that we find mutual limitation and exclusion, because a space cannot contain two things at once. But the person, by the movement which is its being, *ex-poses* itself. It is thus communicable by nature, and it is lonely from the need to communicate. We must start from that primordial fact.... When communication fails or is corrupted, I suffer an essential loss of myself.... One might almost say that I have no existence, save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is, in the final analysis, to love.¹²

Or in the words of Berdyaev:

The realization of personality in man is ... [a] continuous transcending of self.... This path [i.e., the emergence from subjectivity through a process of transcendence] lies in the depths of existence, on this path there take place the existential meeting with God, with other people, with the interior existence of the world. It is the path not of objective communication but of existential communion. Personality reaches full realization of itself only on this path.¹³

And on top of this claim that persons are beings-for-communion (or beings-for-love), personalists make the further controversial claim that the fullness of persons cannot be grasped or had like other objects. Some dimensions of persons are a mystery. Thus, Marcel says the following:

In fact, it seems very likely that there is this essential difference between a problem and a mystery. A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved [making personhood a mystery], and it can therefore only be thought of as *a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity*. A genuine problem is subject to an appropriate technique by the exercise of which it is defined: whereas mystery, by definition, transcends every conceivable technique.¹⁴

And Berdyaev moves along similar lines:

Personality cannot be recognized as an object, as one of the objects in a line with other objects in the world, like a part of the world. That is the way in which the anthropological sciences, biology, psychology, or sociology would regard man. In that way man is looked

¹² Mounier, *Personalism*, 20.

¹³ Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 29.

¹⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. K. Farrer (London: Collins, 1965), 127.

at partially: but there is in that case no mystery of man, as personality, as an existential centre of the world. Personality is recognized only as subject, in infinite subjectivity, in which is hidden the secret of existence.¹⁵

Although personalists do not always agree on what the mystery of personhood amounts to (e.g., there are certainly differences between Marcel and Berdyaev on this point), all personalists—to a greater or lesser extent—believe that central dimensions of the person cannot be investigated, understood, grasped, had, or deconstructed like other objects. The ontology of the person resists this treatment, for persons are simultaneously objects and subjects.

In light of the above, personalists affirm three truths about philosophical anthropology: (i) all persons possess an inalienable dignity (and this inalienable dignity is morally prior and morally superior to any nation or abstract principle); (ii) the *telos* of persons is to enter into a communion of love with other persons (and the achievement of this *telos*, to the extent it is possible from the side of the person in question, constitutes the moral dignity of the person); and (iii) persons are mysterious (for the subjectivity of the person cannot be grasped or had like an object).¹⁶ The third commitment of personalism is therefore an affirmation of these three theses about philosophical anthropology, and we can reasonably call these three theses the three pillars of personalism.

Agreement with these three commitments of personalism, accentuated to a greater or lesser degree (and with varying emphases), allows personalists to “confirm one another in certain realms of thought, in certain fundamental affirmations and upon certain lines of practical conduct concerning the individual and collective order....”¹⁷ Concerning normative ethics, for example, it allows personalists to affirm what St. Wojtyla/John Paul II has called the Personalist Norm: “A

¹⁵ Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 22.

¹⁶ Thomas Williams, with slightly different terminology, draws the distinction between inalienable dignity and moral dignity in *Who is My Neighbor?*, 156; and he also offers an informative discussion on all three of these themes in the same work, 128–45. In particular, see his discussion concerning what it means to be a being-for-communion (or, as he says, a being-for-relation), 139–43.

¹⁷ Mounier, *Personalism*, xvi.

person is an entity of a sort to which the only proper and adequate way to relate is love.”¹⁸

Translating things into Kantian language, this means that persons are ends and the ends of persons are relationships of love with other persons (i.e., reciprocal relationships in which each person confirms and affirms the worth of the other by a gift of self). Concerning political philosophy, it allows personalists to endorse institutions and societal structures that respect and promote the inalienable and moral dignity of the person.

The enduring value of personalism is therefore negative and positive: negatively speaking, it rejects collectivism and individualism (in both moral and political matters); positively speaking, it offers the person (with its inalienable dignity, communal *telos*, and mystery) as the normative standard by which interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal activity, and political structures can be judged.¹⁹ This, in all too short a fashion, is an outline of the main commitments of personalism.

Before moving on, though, it may be instructive to articulate and reply to a couple of objections. First, some may ask why I have not identified a reliance on phenomenological analyses as an essential aspect of personalism.²⁰ After all, the first personalists were followers of phenomenology, and the presence of phenomenological analyses is a dominant theme in personalism (as the work of Scheler, Buber, Berdyaev, Marcel, Mounier, and St. Wojtyla/John

¹⁸ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 41.

¹⁹ Some may argue that the mystery of the person cannot serve as a useful standard because the concept of mystery is unbearably nebulous. I think this objection is off the mark. Personalists spend a great deal of time getting clear on the mystery of the person, and thus it is intelligible to claim that we can judge whether human activity recognizes—i.e., does not flout or ignore—the mystery of the person. To offer an example, we could plausibly argue that some pedagogical systems focus excessively on the natural sciences and thereby fail to recognize adequately the mystery of the person.

²⁰ In this chapter I will use “phenomenology” as follows. If a writer *rigorously* and *extensively* investigates lived experience and then offers relevant descriptions, I will consider the writer to be doing phenomenology. In this sense, then, a great deal of dialogical philosophy and existentialism is phenomenological. In Chapter 2 (Section 3) I will offer an account of phenomenology that justifies this use of the concept.

Paul II makes clear).²¹ So why not include a reliance on phenomenological analyses as the fourth commitment of personalism?

I would say, in reply, that although the descriptive claims about personalism are accurate—i.e., the history of personalism is bound up with phenomenology, and a reliance on phenomenological analyses is a dominant theme in the work of many personalists—this reliance cannot be included as a fourth commitment, for two reasons. First, Mounier, who is arguably the most paradigmatic personalist of all, clearly asserts that personalism allows for differences in philosophical methodology. In *A Personalist Manifesto* he writes:

[I]t is rather in the plural—of personalisms—that we should speak. In the face of unwieldy and partially inhuman conceptions of civilization, our immediate aim is to define the primary points of agreement upon which a civilization devoted to the human person can be constructed. These agreements must be sufficiently grounded in truth to prevent this new order from being divided against itself, sufficiently comprehensive to unite men of different philosophical slants in one and the same spirit. It is not within our scope in sketching a common platform here to trace in detail the underlying truths of the different philosophies held by members of our groups.²²

And in *Personalism*, written almost fifteen years later, Mounier reiterates his position:

“[A]lthough we speak, for convenience, of personalism, we ought rather to say that there is a plurality of personalisms and to respect their diverse procedures.”²³ Put another way, Mounier claims that the umbrella of personalism—i.e., the first three commitments—allows for substantive difference in philosophical methodology (not to mention metaphysics and epistemology), and this allows for different species of personalism. As a result, it would be a serious error to include a reliance on phenomenological analyses as a fourth commitment: not

²¹ The early German personalists such as Scheler and Buber, for example, relied on phenomenological analyses, and the French personalists emerged with the help of phenomenological analyses. For a discussion on the relationship between phenomenology and the emergence of French personalism, see John Hellman’s “John Paul II and the Personalist Movement,” *Cross Currents* (1980–81): 409–19, at 410–1.

²² Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto*, trans. the monks of St. John’s Abbey (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1938), 2.

²³ Mounier, *Personalism*, xvi.

only would this contravene the authoritative claim of Mounier, it would also disregard the presence of philosophical diversity in the history of personalism.²⁴

Second, personalism is also a moral and political movement. It looks to the person to discern a third way between collectivism and individualism, and it provides some guidance by endorsing some theses in philosophical anthropology (i.e., the three pillars noted above). As a result, membership in the personalist camp does not require adherence to a specific philosophical method or school (e.g., phenomenology or Thomism), for persons relying on different philosophical methods and schools can still agree on the main commitments of personalism. And from this it follows that phenomenology should not be considered a commitment of personalism, even though it is a dominant theme in the work of many personalists. Of course, this is not to say that personalism disparages or discourages argumentation vis-à-vis philosophical methodology (or metaphysics and epistemology); it simply means that a decent level of philosophical diversity is tolerated.

Let us now move to the second objection. Some may suggest that personalism does not go beyond Kant in any robust sense. And if this is the case, why talk about personalism? Consider the Formula of Humanity: “*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.*”²⁵ Presumably this rules out both collectivism and individualism, especially if we recall that the Formula of Humanity bids us to make the ends of others our ends.²⁶ So how does personalism differ from Kant? I cannot aim for a complete treatment of the relationship between

²⁴ For further evidence of philosophical diversity in the history of personalism, see Maritain’s “The Person and the Common Good,” 419–20.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

Kant and personalism, but a brief overview of some points of divergence in *metaethics* and *normative ethics* should help disclose the distinctiveness of personalism.

Let us begin with metaethics. According to Kant the ground of morality is a self-legislated, *a priori* categorical imperative of pure practical reason which demands complete and total reverence.²⁷ The ground of morality is reason, not concrete persons. It is most certainly true, of course, that Kant explicitly places the ground of morality in concrete persons in some passages (e.g., in his work on the Formula of Humanity and the dignity of persons), but this does not square well with other claims such as “[a]ll reverence for a person is properly only reverence for the law ... of which that person gives us an example” or “[d]uty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law.”²⁸ Moreover, and most tellingly, it does not square well with Kant’s radical doctrine of autonomy. Kant cares very much about the self-legislative aspect of the moral law because he believes that the concept of causality is bound up with the concept of law (causality must, in his eyes, occur in accordance with law), and therefore the causality of our will—if it is to be autonomous—must occur in accordance with a law we give ourselves: the moral law.²⁹ But consider the following. If the ground of morality is outside the self, in the persons in front of us, morality is heteronomous; it is forced upon us by others—and all of Kant’s cherished connections between freedom and the moral law are lost. Thus, although Kant often does suggest that concrete persons are the ground of morality, the majority of his work indicates otherwise.³⁰ According to Kant, then, pure practical reason is the ultimate justificatory ground in

²⁷ For a discussion on reverence for the law, see *ibid.*, 68–9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: see 95–8 for the Formula of Humanity; 102–3 for his treatment of dignity; 69 for the first quotation; and 68 for the second quotation.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁰ For further evidence, consider Kant’s Formula of Universal Law (*ibid.*, 88). The concern here is to maintain logical consistency (*ibid.*, 91), not to respect the dignity of persons or bring about their flourishing. And it is further worth noting that Kant says the following (*ibid.*, 104): “It is, however, better if in moral *judgment* we proceed always in accordance with the strict method and take as our basis the universal formula of the categorical imperative: ‘*Act on*

terms of epistemology and normativity: we *know* the moral law through reason, and the moral law also *fixes* and *grounds* the truths of morality.³¹

Still, some may argue that this account of Kant's metaethics is a caricature. As I have already noted, this is understandable. Kant really does say in a number of places that the ground of morality is in persons, given their status as ends in themselves, and his work in *The Metaphysics of Morals* on interpersonal relations may seem to indicate that he thinks the dignity of persons grounds and justifies the moral law. If we agree with Kant, however, and say that "[t]o be *consistent* is the greatest obligation of a philosopher, and yet [consistency] is most rarely encountered,"³² and we further agree that we should resolve putative contradictions in his work via reference to "the idea of the whole"³³ (which seems to be Kant's preference), then I think the above metaethical interpretation is the most faithful to his work—especially when we keep Kant's transcendental idealism at the fore.

Consider Kant's system as a whole.³⁴ In response to Hume's critique of our ability to acquire universal and necessary knowledge from experience (e.g., we cannot learn from experience that change universally and necessarily requires a cause), Kant wholeheartedly agrees. But Kant also believes that we do have necessary and universal knowledge about a number of truths in mathematics (e.g., $5 + 7 = 12$) and physics (e.g., action and reaction are always equal in

the maxim which can at the same time be made a universal law." It is not an exaggeration to say that logical consistency seems more important than persons here.

³¹ For the epistemological claim, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 43; for the claim about truth-making, see *ibid.*, 84–5. In the latter spot we see that the right is prior to the good, not *vice versa*.

³² Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 37.

³³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 37. Of course, Kant thinks that reference to his system as a whole will dissolve putative contradictions; it may be the case, however, as I will suggest, that reference to the whole shows that Kant unknowingly incorporates some theses into his system which are incompatible with the overarching trajectory of the whole.

³⁴ In what follows, my discussion of Kant's transcendental idealism is indebted to Andrew Ward's excellent discussion in *Kant: The Three Critiques* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), esp. 1–15.

the communication of motion).³⁵ The question we must ask, he thinks, as a result, is what are the necessary conditions for the possibility of this synthetic *a priori* knowledge (as opposed to analytic *a priori* knowledge and synthetic *a posteriori* knowledge)? Kant's answer, of course, is his Copernican revolution: if we assume that the objects of our experience conform to our forms of intuition (e.g., space and time) and conceptual laws of understanding, instead of *vice versa*, it follows that knowledge of these forms of intuition and conceptual laws of understanding will apply universally and necessarily to all experience. And since this is the *only way* to explain our synthetic *a priori* knowledge (which holds with necessity and universality), the Copernican revolution in metaphysics must be endorsed. And it is worth reminding ourselves here that Kant's understanding of *a priori* knowledge is very robust:

[W]e shall understand by *a priori* knowledge, not knowledge independent of this or that experience [e.g., if we are in a blizzard and *past experience* allows us to know that fire would melt some snow], but knowledge absolutely independent of all experience. Opposed to it is empirical knowledge, which is knowledge possible only *a posteriori*, that is, through experience.³⁶

A priori synthetic knowledge, as a result, is that which we impose upon experience, not that which is abstracted from it. It is the sole source of universal and necessary synthetic knowledge, and it is also the sole explanatory ground of universal and necessary synthetic truths (as far as we can tell, for even if there is an explanatory ground of universal and necessary synthetic truths in the noumenal realm, this explanatory ground is forever inaccessible). Seeing one thousand red cardinals does not tell us that all cardinals must be red, nor does it make it true that all cardinals must be red.

Now, what happens if we interpret Kant's practical philosophy in light of his transcendental idealism? Consider Kant's central and consistent claim that the moral law is a

³⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, 53–4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

synthetic *a priori* dictate of pure practical reason. What does this mean? In light of what we have said above, this means that the moral law is not *determined by* or *acquired from* our experience of real concrete persons; in order to possess its universality and necessity (akin to the universality and necessity in theoretical reason), the moral law must be grounded in and issue forth from the wellspring of reason alone—and without qualification. The right truly is prior to the good (the desirable, or the valuable), or at least independent of it. Concrete persons therefore simply do not serve as the justificatory ground of the moral law. Consequently, if we interpret Kant’s practical philosophy in accordance with his system as a whole, we see that the center of gravity in Kant’s moral philosophy lies at the intersection of reason and the moral law. Epistemically, reason is the source of our awareness of the moral law; normatively, reason is the ultimate explanation of the universal and necessary normativity in the moral law. Thus, it seems fair to say that our interpretation of Kant’s metaethics is accurate, or at the very least more plausible than other interpretations which possess some plausibility.

How do personalists differ from Kant on these matters? To be sure, personalists acknowledge an enduring debt to Kant’s practical philosophy, but they also go beyond him by declaring clearly and loudly that concrete persons ground and explain the truths of morality.

Berdyayev makes the point as follows:

The personalistic transvaluation of values regards as immoral everything which is defined [in the moral realm] exclusively by its relation to the “common”—to society, the nation, the state, an abstract idea, abstract goodness, moral and logical law—and not to concrete man and his existence.³⁷

For personalists, then, the dignity of each person, incommunicable and inalienable, is always that which merits reverence, not abstract laws or dictates of pure practical reason—and if we respect the latter, it is only because of the former. (Indeed, epistemically speaking, our awareness of the

³⁷ Berdyayev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 43.

bindingness of the moral law is best acquired through an awareness of the dignity of concrete persons.) A simple example can illustrate how personalists think of the ground of the moral law. Suppose a father spends an afternoon of recreation with his son and then comfortably and cheerfully tells his son that he has done this simply out of duty, simply because the moral law demands that fathers do this sort of thing once in a while. It is clear that he is missing something. What is he missing? According to personalists he is missing that the law *qua* law is worth nothing. It is okay, in other words, to think *about* the law, but this must be done to think *through* the law to that which the law is about.³⁸ The normativity of the moral law is ultimately grounded in the being of concrete persons. (The explanation for why this is the case is an important issue, but personalists give different answers; here, it is enough to note that this is their position.)

Let us now move to the domain of normative ethics. It must be acknowledged that personalists go far beyond Kant in emphasizing the communal *telos* of persons—quantitatively (since much more work is offered) and qualitatively (since relations with people are emphasized, not relations with the moral law or the fulfillment of duty). Indeed, even if we remind ourselves that Kant bids us to make the ends of others our ends (a point which receives little development until *The Metaphysics of Morals*), and even if we remind ourselves that Kant calls each person an end in itself, personalists are still distinctive. They are distinctive because

³⁸ Cf., Michael Stocker's germane article: "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976) 453–66. Peter Railton also offers some relevant thoughts. See his "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 134–71. Someone familiar with Railton's article might suggest that a follower of Kant could spend an afternoon of recreation with his son for the sake of his son, not the moral law. In other words the follower of Kant could declare that the truths of morality are determined by the moral law, but this does not entail that we must always act out of respect for the moral law. I would like to say two things in response. First, Kant does not seem to make this move, given his account of moral motivation in the *Groundwork*, 68–9. Second, and more crucially, if the moral law *explains* why a father ought to spend recreational time with his son, and this explanatory account does not ground itself in the *being* of the son—i.e., the son's ontological goodness and dignity—then acting for the son as opposed to the moral law seems to approach the status of a moral error, for the father does not act on the morally relevant reason. This seems to show, of course, that Kant has things the wrong way around: the moral law receives its normative force because it reflects the goodness and dignity of the *being* of persons, and this means that it is laudable to push through the moral law in our actions and act for the sake of that which the moral law is about.

they focus on love, while Kant focuses on respect (or, at best, an impoverished conception of love). Some may not think there is much of a difference between these two concepts—love and respect—but I think an examination of the two can help us discern some differences between personalists and Kant.³⁹ Thus, I will try to show how the Personalist Norm goes beyond Kant. This foray can serve a double role. It can both communicate the distinctiveness of personalism and disclose some of the aspects of love that are emphasized in personalism.

Recall the Personalist Norm: “A person is an entity of a sort to which the only proper and adequate way to relate is love.”⁴⁰ Is this all that can be said about normative ethics in personalism? It is far from it. A normative ethics must offer direction on two interrelated matters: ontological guidance (how we ought to be) and action guidance (what we ought to do). And, as it stands, the Personalist Norm is a bit unclear. How, exactly, should we relate to others in love?

On one level it certainly involves treating persons as ends, and on another it certainly involves making the ends of others our ends. These points entail that we should not manipulate others, that we should help those in need, that we should work for the common good, and countless other prescriptions relating to the basic elements of human flourishing. But love involves something more than this. At this point, it is true, we are somewhere on the periphery of love (for we are talking about willing the good of others), but personalists generally suggest that

³⁹ To avoid confusion, I do not mean to suggest that Kant says nothing about interpersonal relations, or that he says nothing about love. He does in some places (e.g., especially in *The Metaphysics of Morals*), but I think a unified assessment of his practical philosophy would be hard-pressed to declare that Kant’s main key is love, not respect. Moreover, there are the following two truths. First, Kant says that love proper (as opposed to benevolence, which Kant calls practical love, that is, willing the good of others) cannot be a duty because this would require a duty to have a certain feeling. The duty to love is therefore constrained to the realm of the will. This seems to leave aside the I-Thou relation, which I will discuss below. Second, there is the telling—indeed, glaring—reality that Kant defends practical love via reference to whether a maxim can be universalized. One gets the disconcerting sense that Kant simply misses a central aspect of the nature of love, namely, to will the good of the other *for the sake of the other*, not the sake of conformity with the moral law (or logical coherence). More charitably, though, it may be that he does not miss it; rather, his transcendental idealism forces him to terminate all normative justification in the realm of the *a priori*, and he then deceives himself by thinking that this does not impugn his commitment to persons as ends in themselves. See *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161 and 198–202, esp. 200 and 202.

⁴⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

authentic love involves at least two more aspects: (i) a deeper level of communion, and (ii) a willingness to sacrifice and suffer. The civilization of love, for personalists, is different from a civilization of respect. In the civilization of respect, solicitude reigns supreme, and persons help others insofar as this does not cost them too dearly; but in the civilization of love, I-Thou relationships are formed, and persons sacrifice and give of themselves (without counting the cost). One is a civilization of justice and concern; the other is a civilization of gratuitousness and communion. Some reference to Buber's work on the I-Thou relation, Marcel's work on disposability, and Mounier's work on the person should help us perceive these differences more clearly.

But let us begin with Kant as our starting point: we must treat others as ends, and we must make the ends of others our ends (insofar as helping others with their ends does not cost us too dearly). It would be reasonable to infer from this that solicitude is the appropriate response to others, that solicitude, somehow, is all that is required. As forcefully as possible, Buber implores us to realize that this is not the case:

In *mere* solicitude man remains essentially with himself, even if he is moved with extreme pity; in action and help he inclines towards the other, but the barriers of his own being are not thereby breached; he makes his assistance, not his self, accessible to the other; nor does he expect any real mutuality, in fact he probably shuns it; he "is concerned with the other," but is not anxious for the other to be concerned with him. In an essential relation, on the other hand, the barriers of individual being are in fact breached⁴¹

Original guilt, says Buber, is staying within the self, a refusal to turn towards others, a refusal to be a presence for others, a refusal to participate in a relation that is reciprocity in the strongest sense. In line with this, Buber offers us two modes of being: we can say the basic word of the word pair I-It or the basic word of the word pair I-Thou. If we speak the former with our being, we do not communicate ourselves to others, nor do we open ourselves to others; instead, we

⁴¹ *Between Man and Man*, 207.

selfishly withhold our being and ungraciously refuse the being of others. If we speak the latter with our being, we communicate ourselves and receive others. Here, there is a genuine exchange, a living mutuality. In the I-Thou relation we do not have others, but we encounter others.⁴²

How should we understand this exchange? What does it mean for persons to go out to one another or happen to one another, as Buber might say? According to Buber, we cannot simply say that there is an exchange of deep thoughts or hidden feelings. What happens in the exchange is something ontological. Each person offers a “reserve over which only he himself has power,” and this allows for reciprocity, a reciprocity that is not known but lived.⁴³ Openness must turn to openness, and permeability to permeability. Without the I-Thou relation there can be no love or communion in the fullest sense, for if persons are unwilling to make a gift of themselves or receive others, at the very deepest level, the result is a heavy curtain between persons, an atomistic society in which outward acts of solicitude mask a deep-seated self-ishness. The I-Thou relation is at the very least a pre-condition to love.⁴⁴

Marcel, too, touches on similar themes with his distinction between disposability (sometimes translated as availability or handiness) and non-disposability (sometimes translated as non-availability and non-handiness).⁴⁵ According to Marcel, the very center of love or communion is self-gift.⁴⁶ We must, in other words, make ourselves disposable to others—in a spiritual, bodily, and economic sense. In the spiritual sense, agreeing with Buber, this means that we must be a *presence* for the other. We must be *with* (not alongside) the other, and so we must

⁴² See Buber’s *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Buber thinks that we can relate to nature, human persons, and spiritual beings in the I-Thou relation. I am focusing on the I-Thou relation between human persons.

⁴³ *Between Man and Man*, 20 (and cf. 246).

⁴⁴ Buber is unclear about whether we should identify the I-Thou relation with love (see *I and Thou*, 66) or whether the I-Thou relation is best seen as a pre-condition to love (see *Between Man and Man*, 39).

⁴⁵ These are translations of the French words “*disponibilite*” and “*indisponibilite*.” Sam Keen offers a discussion concerning the best translation in *Gabriel Marcel* (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 33.

⁴⁶ *Being and Having*, 69.

be bound to the other in an ontologically mysterious intersubjectivity that goes beyond the mere transmission of signals.⁴⁷ Relationships between spiritual subjects, as opposed to relationships between objects, are ontologically unique, and we falsify these relationships if we try to objectify them. As for being disposable in a bodily or economic sense, Marcel has the idea of being handy. If a person is truly disposable to another, the person offers his bodily and financial resources, as opposed to clutching these resources in a spirit of fear and greed.

The non-disposable person, on the other hand, withholds himself from others. He greedily holds onto his bodily health and financial resources, and he refuses to make himself present to others or with others.⁴⁸ If we are with a non-disposable person, says Marcel, we often see that the non-disposable person is self-conscious (so worried about how others will judge him that he cannot go out of himself) or self-occupied (so consumed with health, fame, beauty, or pleasure, that others are judged in light of how well they promote these ends).⁴⁹ The non-disposable person, says Marcel, "... becomes the centre of a sort of mental space, arranged in concentric zones of decreasing interest and decreasing adherence, and to this decreasing adherence there corresponds an increasing non-disposability."⁵⁰ It might not be a stretch, says Marcel, to think that the main goal of the spiritual life—and therefore the moral life—is to replace the non-disposability of our being with disposability. And we do not go wrong if we think of disposability as love or communion, for this claim is vindicated in the result of mutual disposability: X belongs to Y, Y belongs to X, and therefore both Y and X belong to themselves once again but in an infinitely richer sense.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Mystery of Being*, 222–4.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 54.

⁴⁹ Marcel gives an excellent phenomenological analysis of a self-conscious person in *The Mystery of Being: Volume I*, 217–9; and he notes the connection between self-occupation and non-disposability in *Being and Having*, 73.

⁵⁰ *Being and Having*, 70–1.

⁵¹ *Creative Fidelity*, 42.

Finally, writing with his usual passion, Mounier lays bare the difference between a bourgeois-person and a fully actualized person. In the eyes of a bourgeois, a human being is a disengaged atom, unattached to others and unaccountable for others. Negative freedom—unbridled and undirected—is to be used to achieve one’s private good, and other human beings are correctly viewed with a fundamental mistrust.⁵² Spirit is but an abstract concept, not the very fabric of our being, and love is strangled by an obsession with security, comfort, and wealth.

Mounier paints the picture well:

[The bourgeois person] can endure nothing but the spectacle of his own security ... far from the living reproaches of poverty, in his own residential sections, his own schools, his own habits, his cars, his relations, his religion He has lost the true sense of being, he moves only among things, and things that are practical and that have been denuded of their mystery. He is a man without love, a Christian without conscience, an unbeliever without passion For him there is only prosperity, health, common sense, balance, sweetness of life, comfort. Comfort is to the bourgeois world what heroism was to the Renaissance and sanctity to medieval Christianity—the ultimate value, the ultimate motive for all action.⁵³

In the eyes of a fully actualized person, on the other hand, each person is a brother or sister, and the whole of humanity constitutes a large family in which each member is accountable for all the others. Negative freedom is ordered to the good of others, and human beings must decentralize themselves and go out to others. Spirit is the reality of the person (a metaphysical fabric capable of love), and security and comfort are subordinated to generosity and faithfulness. Authentic peace is achieved in the triumph of communion over selfishness.⁵⁴ To sum up: the person goes out to others; the bourgeois goes into himself. The person finds himself by losing himself; the bourgeois loses himself by gathering himself into himself.⁵⁵

⁵² *Personalism*, 18–9.

⁵³ *A Personalist Manifesto*, 17–8. See also 13–27.

⁵⁴ *Personalism*, 20–3; *A Personalist Manifesto*, 67–98.

⁵⁵ Cf. Luke 17:33; and *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 24.

So how should we relate to others in love? Kant offers us a start. We must always treat each person as an end in itself, and we must also make the ends of others our ends (i.e., we must will the good of others). But there is more to say. As Buber and Marcel make clear, the fullness of communion or love involves the I-Thou relation, a relation whose mystery is profaned if we say too much; and as Mounier makes clear, communion or love involves a willingness to sacrifice and make a gift of oneself for others. In the Personalist Norm, then, there is Kant, but there is more. There is mystery and self-gift, intersubjectivity and self-donation, permeability and grittiness. Here the Personalist Norm *qua* norm is nothing; concrete persons are everything. And to love is to will the good of the other for the sake of the other (never for the sake of some abstract law or social justice program), but it is also to do this with an openness to the I-Thou relation, and it is also to do this in a spirit of self-gift—a spirit of self-gift that is willing to sacrifice, if necessary.

Now, with all of the above made clear, we can note the teleological difference between Kant and personalists: for Kant, the ends of persons are generally left unclear (as if there is choice involved once we get beyond health, food, shelter, etc.); for personalists, the end of persons is communion or love. Persons are due love, but persons also actualize themselves most fully in love. Kant does not say this or emphasize this in a serious way, and I can think of no other contemporary normative ethics that offers love as both our duty and *telos*.⁵⁶

But how do we apply all of this to the concrete? Obviously we cannot love all persons equally, and there is an obvious sense in which we still must love ourselves (for each of us is a person just as much as other persons). My response is simply that the application of the Personalist Norm is no more difficult than the application of Kant's Categorical Imperative, the

⁵⁶ To get a better sense of what this moral philosophy looks like in the concrete, see Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005).

principles of various forms of consequentialism, or a principle of exemplariness in virtue ethics (e.g., do whatever the fully virtuous person would do, and precisely in the way he would do it)—and this suggests that moral philosophy just is not amenable to the clarity that some desire.⁵⁷ Applying generals to particulars often involves a haziness that must be penetrated. And this means that each person, in the silence and majesty of his own conscience, must judge (i.e., see correctly) who and how he ought to love. In a responsiveness to the real, a responsiveness to the dignity of concrete persons, each of us must judge the way in which we can best love others. In many cases we will find that we are assigned the persons we ought to love.

But some may still ask for more content here (even if we leave the justification or authority of morality to the side for the moment). Are persons supposed to run around frantically—in an attempt to love as many others as possible? Or are deeper and substantive relationships of love more important? What role do human rights play here, not to mention the virtues? How about agent-relative obligations? In response, two things should be said. First, given the great diversity within personalism, I think it would be a mistake to suggest that there is unanimity concerning the precise details which determine how we should interpret and apply the Personalist Norm. It seems clear, however, that superficial relationships are incompatible with the I-Thou relation (meaning the task cannot be to enter into relationships of love with as many as possible). And it also seems clear that lovers of others should give others their due (and treat them as ends), so violations of human rights are never acceptable in order to bring about good. As for the virtues, it seems clear that the more we acquire the virtues (as states of being), the

⁵⁷ For a nuanced and insightful account of why virtue ethics should not endorse a principle of exemplariness (at least in the way I have formulated it), see Julia Annas “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78 (2004): 61–75, esp. 66–74. Central to Annas’s concern is that most persons are far from the ideal of virtue (we are developing and on our way, if we are to be honest), and this suggests that we should not exhort persons to act as one who has reached the fullness of virtue. (How could a fully virtuous person justly accept his punishment? He would have done nothing wrong.) Interestingly, Annas still seems to give us a principle: given your current abilities and circumstances, act in such a way that you strive to develop and exemplify the virtues, even if you believe that you will never reach this ideal.

more we will be able to love; indeed, it seems reasonable to think that there must be great ontological overlap between being a lover and being virtuous. Still, this may not give the action guidance some are looking for. For the personalist, though, I think we can say that guidance comes in the form of a relation: as rational and free beings, persons must exercise their practical reason in relation to their concrete circumstances (*hic et nunc*). And this allows for agent-relative obligations (e.g., a mother cannot help others in another country while her young children go hungry). There is no rulebook other than practical reason's internal orientation toward a responsiveness to being and goodness—which takes into account the past, present, and future; and, most importantly, the dignity and flourishing of persons.

But this is not the end of the story. Since different species of personalism are grounded in different philosophical commitments and traditions, each species of personalism will no doubt add more flesh to what it means to love (especially to what it means to will the good of the other). In Thomistic personalism, which I will begin to discuss below, the content of the Personalist Norm and its application will no doubt make reference to St. Thomas's work on the basic goods, the virtues, and action theory (i.e., his scheme of object, end, and circumstance). It will also reference our directedness to communion with God. One of the most pressing tasks in Thomistic personalism is to get clear on how the Personalist Norm connects up with St. Thomas's relevant work. I do not undertake this task in this dissertation (a task which could require a dissertation in itself), but it is clear that St. Thomas's work on natural theology, practical reason, the basic goods, and the virtues can help to add some content (not just metaphysical justification) to the normative ethics of personalism.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons makes a start on this task in her *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas's Personalist Natural Law*.

Finally, I think a concluding point can help us bring to a close our protracted engagement with Kant: even if one is not convinced that the differences between Kant and personalism are great (although I hope to have shown that they are substantial), one must keep in mind that a serious personalism must be grounded in a deeper philosophical framework, and this grounding will in most cases render the differences between Kant and personalism even greater (e.g., the addition of Thomistic realism to personalism will further separate personalism from Kant).

3. Weak and Moderate Thomistic Personalism

The species of personalism that we are labeling “Thomistic” is grounded in the work of St. Thomas. In this section, I will adumbrate a weak version and a moderate version of Thomistic personalism.

The first version of Thomistic personalism came into being in the 1930s, around the same time that French personalism began to acquire a serious following, and its best representative is Jacques Maritain (although Etienne Gilson is also a good representative).⁵⁹ We can begin to discern the main contours of this version by looking at Maritain’s definitive work on Thomistic personalism, “The Person and the Common Good.”

In this work, Maritain endorses the main commitments of personalism, but he also argues that personalism must receive its full justification in the metaphysics of St. Thomas. In particular—leaning on Thomistic concepts such as potency, act, prime matter, form, substance, soul, and so on—he argues that the metaphysical distinction between *individuality* and *personhood* is needed to justify the moral and political philosophy of personalism. In short, he argues that human beings, although individuals like plants and fish, are much more than

⁵⁹ Gilson offers a sketch of Thomistic personalism (which he calls Christian personalism) in his Gifford Lectures, presented in the early 1930s. Interestingly, he argues that personalism first appeared in medieval philosophy. It is here, with the aid of Christian revelation, says Gilson, that philosophers began to ascribe ultimate worth to persons, not to the idea of Man (as in Plato) or to the unity and permanence of the human species (as in Aristotle). See Gilson’s *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Ch. 10.

individuals. For human beings are individual substances of a rational nature, and this rational nature entails intelligence, free will, a capacity for communion with others, and a capacity for communion with the Uncreated Good. A human being is, to be sure, a concrete individual, but it is precisely because a human being is a spiritually enriched individual that we call a human being a person: an individual substance of a rational nature that is an end in itself and a being-for-communion. It is not difficult to see how this philosophical anthropology, grounded in the metaphysics and other work of St. Thomas, justifies the main outlines of personalism.

Maritain therefore offers us a Thomistic personalism, but it is worth noting that he does not suggest that Thomistic personalism should incorporate the phenomenological analyses of other personalists—or rely on phenomenology in any serious way. On the contrary, he seems quite concerned to show that Thomistic personalism is a self-sufficient doctrine, in need of little help from other species of personalism.⁶⁰ But the point here is not to make conclusive claims about Maritain's views on phenomenology. The point is simply to note that Maritain, in his definitive treatment of Thomistic personalism, offers us a Thomistic personalism that does not make serious use of phenomenology.⁶¹ Accordingly, let us say that Maritain offers us a Weak Thomistic Personalism:

Weak Thomistic Personalism: a personalism—which makes little or no use of phenomenological analyses—that is grounded in the metaphysics (and other relevant work) of St. Thomas, especially in concepts such as potency, act, prime matter, form, substance, soul, individual, person, and so on.

It was not until St. Wojtyla/John Paul II presented his paper “Thomistic Personalism” in 1961 that Weak Thomistic Personalism was challenged. In this paper St. Wojtyla/John Paul II

⁶⁰ See Maritain, “The Person and the Common Good,” 419–20.

⁶¹ So I am certainly not saying that Maritain thinks phenomenology is useless. He makes considerable use of Marcel's work, for example, in *A Preface to Metaphysics* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 3–5 and 50–1; and he also says that phenomenology can make “very valuable discoveries” in *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 129.

agrees that St. Thomas provides “a point of departure for personalism in general.”⁶² St. Thomas’s metaphysics (along with the rest of his work) can certainly buttress personalism, and most importantly it gives us a philosophical anthropology that does not identify consciousness with the integral person. With this noted, however, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II says that “...St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person, but it would be difficult to speak in his view of the lived experiences of the person.”⁶³ He does not proceed to articulate the main entailment of this criticism, but it is not difficult to discern: if Thomistic personalism is to pay attention to the integral person, phenomenology must be used. Indeed, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s commitment to Thomism and phenomenology is manifest in his two well-known books—*Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*—and he makes this dual commitment explicit in his later article “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being”:

We should pause in the process of reduction, which leads us in the direction of understanding the human being in the world (a *cosmological* type of understanding), in order to understand the human being inwardly. This latter type of understanding may be called *personalistic*. The personalistic type of understanding the human being is not the antinomy of the cosmological type but its complement. As I mentioned earlier, the definition of the person formulated by Boethius [i.e., a person is an individual substance of a rational nature] only marks out the “metaphysical terrain” [i.e., the objective terrain] for interpreting the personal subjectivity of the person.⁶⁴

Interpreting his earlier criticism in light of this passage (and his two books mentioned above), we can see that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II calls for no little shift in Thomistic personalism. Like Maritain, he thinks that personalism must be grounded in the metaphysics of St. Thomas, but unlike Maritain he suggests that phenomenological analyses greatly complement and improve Thomistic personalism. Personalism needs the skeleton of Thomistic metaphysics (and that is why we need a Thomistic personalism), but the synthesis of personalism and Thomism still needs

⁶² Wojtyla, “Thomistic Personalism,” 165.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁴ “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in Wojtyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 213.

to be vivified by the life-blood of phenomenological analyses (and this is why we need a Thomistic personalism that incorporates phenomenological analyses). So, for the sake of clarity, let us say that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II offers us a Moderate Thomistic Personalism:

Moderate Thomistic Personalism: a personalism—which makes serious use of phenomenological analyses—that is grounded in the metaphysics (and other relevant work) of St. Thomas, especially in concepts such as potency, act, prime matter, form, substance, soul, individual, person, and so on.

Does Moderate Thomistic Personalism offer a richer integration of Thomism and personalism than Weak Thomistic Personalism? In one sense it does not, because both species of Thomistic personalism adhere to the main commitments of personalism and Thomism. So it would be inaccurate to declare that Weak Thomistic Personalism is an attenuated Thomistic personalism. In another sense, however, it does. This is because Moderate Thomistic Personalism seeks to integrate, or at the very least learn from, the interpersonal and intrapersonal phenomenological analyses which are ubiquitous in other species of personalism (e.g., analyses in Scheler, Buber, Berdyaev, Marcel, Mounier, and so on).

4. Strong Thomistic Personalism: Metaphysics

Since St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's incorporation of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism, it seems fair to say that Clarke has done the most to explore new territory.⁶⁵ Indeed, in *Person and Being* (along with some earlier and later articles), Clarke affirms the main tenets of Moderate Thomistic Personalism, but he further argues that St. Thomas's understanding of being itself calls out for personalism.⁶⁶ He attempts to demonstrate this via three steps. First, drawing us into the

⁶⁵ Fr. Robert Connor, I should add, has also done a great deal. In three articles, independently of Clarke, he articulates a view of Thomistic personalism that is very close to Clarke's. See Robert A. Connor, "Relation, the Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity," *Communio* 17 (1990): 455–64; "Relational *Esse* and the Person"; and "The Person as Resonating Existential."

⁶⁶ See Clarke, "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics," 226–7; and *Person and Being*, 4–5. Clarke often talks about Thomistic personalism as a synthesis of Thomism and personalist phenomenology, but it is also clear that he affirms the three commitments of personalism—since (i) he values phenomenological analyses

deepest courts of St. Thomas's metaphysics, he explicates St. Thomas's understanding of being as dynamic or active. Second, drawing us into the deepest courts of St. Thomas's moral philosophy, he explicates St. Thomas's main metaethical thesis. And, third, he argues that the unification of these two steps with an extra premise provides us with a philosophical anthropology that justifies personalism.⁶⁷ In Clarke's view, then, Thomism is not so much the base upon which personalism must be anchored (as if two foreign and hostile bodies had to be fastened together) as the root from which the tree of personalism springs forth as a fully continuous whole. In this section and the next two, I will set out Clarke's version of Thomistic personalism. Along the way I will flesh out and fill in Clarke's arguments where possible, since this will help us see his position more clearly, and I will also highlight the controversial status of some of his claims. (A quick note, though. For those who remain perplexed or unconvinced by the metaphysics involved in these sections, I should say that I will offer a robust defense of Thomistic metaphysics in Section 5 of Chapter 3, and offer further argumentation in Chapter 4.)

Let us start with the first step. The first movement in this step, according to Clarke, is to get clear on St. Thomas's understanding of metaphysics. For St. Thomas, metaphysics is not the study of the concept of being, nor is it a descriptive cataloguing of the categories we necessarily impose on reality (which assumes a Kantian view of things). And it is certainly not a set of problems that cannot be solved by the natural sciences (e.g., time, free will, the existence of God, and so on). Not at all: following Aristotle, metaphysics is the study of being *qua* being—in which the laws, properties, and ultimate causes of being are sought.⁶⁸ It is in this context, declares

because he thinks they help us discern the main outlines of personalism, and (ii) he thinks, as we will see, that the main outlines of personalism are implicit within Thomistic metaphysics.

⁶⁷ A quick note: Clarke usually runs these first two steps together (e.g., see *Person and Being*, 6–13, esp. 10), but I think this obscures some relevant connections, so I will explicate his account in three steps.

⁶⁸ Clarke gives a masterful overview of St. Thomas's understanding of metaphysics in his "Introduction" to James F. Anderson's *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. and trans. James F. Anderson (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1997), ix–xxii.

Clarke, that the twentieth-century existential Thomists highlight St. Thomas's most important metaphysical insight: being is dynamic or active.⁶⁹

But what, exactly, is this dynamic or active aspect of being? Clarke provides a couple of passages from St. Thomas to help make things clear:

From the very fact that something exists in act, it is active.⁷⁰

Active power follows upon being in act, for anything acts in consequence of being in act.⁷¹

No doubt these quotes are dark and obscure (at least to some degree), but existential Thomists think this is to be expected, for they are convinced that St. Thomas is gesturing at something that is “rebellious in the presence of concepts,”⁷² something “that cannot be known by a purely conceptual representation,”⁷³ something that is “inexhaustible and incomprehensible.”⁷⁴ Indeed, according to Clarke, St. Thomas is gesturing at *something* that is beyond all *thinghood* because it is the ground of all things. To uncover what St. Thomas is getting at, Clarke leans on the distinction between *what a thing is* (its essence) and *that a thing is* (its existing). For St. Thomas, *that a thing is* is not merely some reality to be noted (as Kant might say).⁷⁵ On the contrary, it is a reality to be explained. And a primary part of the explanation for *that a thing is* is that the thing in question possesses its own *esse* (its own *actus essendi*, act of existing, to-be, be-ing, is-ing). It stands outside the abyss of nothingness, the silent night of non-being, precisely because it

⁶⁹ For a good introduction to existential Thomism, along with other strains of Thomism, see John F.X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 1–31. And for more work in existential Thomism, see Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005), esp. Ch. 5; Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*; Gerald B. Phelan, “The Existentialism of St. Thomas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1946): 25–49; and William E. Carlo’s *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).

⁷⁰ *Summa contra Gentes* I, Ch. 43, quoted in Clarke’s *Person and Being*, 6.

⁷¹ *Summa contra Gentes* II, Ch. 7, quoted in Clarke’s *Person and Being*, 6.

⁷² Etienne Gilson, “Existence and Philosophy,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1946): 4–16, at 7.

⁷³ Phelan, “The Existentialism of St. Thomas,” 39.

⁷⁴ Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, 44.

⁷⁵ See Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, 500–7.

possesses a certain level of energy-filled, dynamism-filled, and power-filled activity. In the inimitable words of Etienne Gilson, the point can be put as follows:

Not: to be, then to act, but: to be is to act. And the very first thing which “to be” does, is to make its own essence to be, that is, “to be a being.” This is done at once, completely and definitively, for, between to be or not to be, there is no intermediate position.⁷⁶

Thus, at the very core of St. Thomas’s metaphysics, says Clarke, is the following thesis: (1) being is inwardly active.

But Clarke is quick to point out that *esse* (the act of existing) does not simply entail that being is inwardly active. It also entails that being is self-communicative, or we could say communicatively active. Once again, Clarke offers us some passages from St. Thomas to illustrate his point:

It is the nature of every actuality to communicate itself insofar as it is possible. Hence every agent acts according as it exists in actuality.⁷⁷

It follows upon the superabundance proper to perfection as such that the perfection which something has it can communicate to another. Communication follows upon the very intelligibility (*ratio*) of actuality. Hence every form is of itself communicable.⁷⁸

So being is more than inwardly active, argues Clarke. It is also communicatively active. The *esse* that constitutes a thing’s to-be also makes it self-communicative. *Esse* is so rich with power, energy, and activity that being necessarily gushes forth towards others (e.g., interaction) and sometimes in others (e.g., progeny). All being manifests itself to others and makes itself known to the community of existents. Call this our second thesis: (2) being is communicatively active.

But Clarke declares that there is one more aspect to the activity of being. Going beyond the work of St. Thomas in a spirit of creative completion, he emphasizes that (2) entails that receptivity is a basic aspect of the totality of the set of beings. This is because successful

⁷⁶ Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 184. Gilson also makes this point in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 94.

⁷⁷ *De Potentia* q. 2, a. 1, quoted in Clarke’s *Person and Being*, 6.

⁷⁸ *Summa contra Gentes* III, Ch. 64, quoted in Clarke’s *Person and Being*, 7.

communication requires reception, and we know that communication is successful everyday.⁷⁹

The self-communication of your bodily presence is received by others. The pat on your dog's head is received by your dog. The batch of bananas receives your grasp as you put them in your cart.

Now, at the sub-human level, says Clarke, receiving is best understood as a passivity and inactivity. Atoms of gold receive their place on your hand as you put them on your finger; the flower receives the touch of a bee as the bee gathers its pollen; the rabbit receives the bite of a predator. In these cases, says Clarke, the receiving is mostly a passivity, inactivity, and ontological poverty.⁸⁰ If we shift our gaze to the personal level, however, we notice a difference. Here, says Clarke, we see that receptivity can transition from a passivity and inactivity into an activity. This is especially the case in relationships of love. Love is not simply to will the good of the other, says Clarke. It is also involves—in its essence—mutuality and reciprocity. A mature lover must not only give, but also receive. The lover must be actively ready to receive the communication of the other, and he also must actively receive the other in the exchange of reciprocity.⁸¹ Thus, our third thesis of this section is this: (3) the totality of the set of beings involves receptivity (in a passive and inactive sense), and this receptivity turns into receptive activity at the personal level.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Person and Being*, 20.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 83–4.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, 84; and W. Norris Clarke, “Response to Long’s Comments” *Communio* 21 (1994): 165–9, at 167–8.

⁸² For Clarke’s initial treatment of receptivity, see *Person and Being*, 20–4 and 82–6; and “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 611–3. This work generated some theologically centered discussion on the receptivity of being in *Communio* 20 (1993): 580–98, and *Communio* 21 (1994): 151–90. The former issue includes an exchange between David L. Schindler and Clarke, while the latter includes articles by Steven A. Long and George A. Blair—with responses from Clarke and David L. Schindler. Finally, there is an exchange between Long and Clarke, once again, in the *The Thomist*. See Steven A. Long, “Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 1–20; and Clarke’s “Reply to Steven Long,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 617–24. Clarke’s work on receptivity is unclear in places and difficult to grasp. I offer an extensive explication of his view, though, in Chapter 4, Section 2; and I defend a modified version of Clarke’s account in Sections 3–5 in the same chapter.

So we might therefore say that Clarke offers us a *triadic* account of being (since there are three conceptually distinct aspects to the activity of being), but it is probably best to follow Clarke’s terminology and say that he offers us an account of being in which “[a]ll being ... is, by its very nature as being, *dyadic*, with an ‘introverted,’ or *in-itself* dimension, as substance, and an ‘extraverted,’ or *towards-others* dimension, as related through action.”⁸³ To put it a bit differently, Clarke offers us a metaphysics in which the inwardly active aspect of being grounds the *in-itself* dimension of substance, while the relationally active aspects of being ground the *towards-others* dimension of substance. As he says so succinctly, “To be is to be *substance-in-relation*.”⁸⁴ Relationality is just as primordial as substance.⁸⁵ So, condensing (1), (2), and (3) into a single thesis, let us say that Clarke gives us the following: (4) to be means to be substance-in-relation (with “substance” meaning inwardly active and “relation” meaning communicatively active and receptive—with receptivity turning into activity on the personal plane). Or, in shorthand, we can simply say that being is active.⁸⁶

Before moving on to Clarke’s second step, though, it may be helpful to note a couple of Clarke’s arguments which militate in favor of (4), since so much will rest on it—and since a

⁸³ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 15–6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁵ For further discussion on this matter see Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 439–54.

⁸⁶ At this point a bit of clarification may be helpful—for the remainder of this chapter, and Chapters 3 and 4. Those unfamiliar with or unsympathetic towards the Thomistic tradition may think that we are asking the concept of “act” to do too much work. Those concerned may say that it is okay to use the concept of act analogically, but surely it is a stretch to say that atoms of carbon and sunflowers act. In response, it is crucial to keep in mind the Scholastic distinction between first act and second act. The first act (or first actuality) is the act by which a being is; second acts (or second actualities) are grounded in first act and emerge from it (indeed, I would prefer to say that second acts are modifications of first act—in the sense that the being of second acts must be grounded in first act). Consider an example. My first act is the act that makes me both be and be what I am; it is the unified act without which I would cease to be (become a corpse, for instance). If I wave to a friend, however, or instruct a student, these are second acts. Thus, Clarke’s talk of all beings being inwardly and communicatively active is focused on the inward and communicative activity of first act which grounds and makes possible second acts. The point is that first act itself is relationally charged. Beings do not simply exist and *then* push outward to relate; in their existing (their act of being, first act, *esse*) beings pour forth communicatively. For further discussion on the distinction between first act and second act, see Fr. Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 174–5.

glance at these arguments may help us get clearer on (4). First, in a number of places Clarke offers a *reductio* in support of (4), especially concerning the relational activity of being. The *reductio* runs as follows. Assume, for the sake of argument, that being is not relationally active. It would then follow that no being manifests itself and no being is acted upon. And from this it would follow that the universe is akin to a silent and dark emptiness in which beings do not and cannot encounter each other. Beings would simply subsist in their incommunicable and untouchable individuality, disengaged from others for all eternity in a life of never-ending isolation—and causal interaction between beings would be a fiction. But this is not our universe. Beings in our universe show themselves and open themselves to others. This is why we have a community (a common-unity) of existents that can act upon others and be acted upon. Activity is at the very heart of being, and if we deny this we deny our universe. Of course, once we acknowledge that beings are communicatively active (and correspondingly receptive at all levels), it seems necessary to explain this by acknowledging that beings are inwardly active as well, for communication must be grounded in an abiding center of activity. Absent the center there is no place from which the communication can emerge. As a result, we can see that inward and communicative activity—in the sense of a self-giving or pouring forth—are both *intrinsic* aspects of being, aspects of being that must be acknowledged as necessary for the very possibility of causal interaction. Here, to be as clear as possible, we are not grasping that beings stand in causal relations; we are grasping that the inward and communicative aspects of being, both intrinsic to being, *generate* and *explain* causal relations.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Some may ask, as an anonymous reviewer did, whether this *reductio* gets us to the conclusion that being is necessarily relational. Could not God, for example, freely choose to enter into relations (instead of communicating himself and receiving others necessarily)? For an initial response to this concern, see Clarke's *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 221–4. As for Clarke's version of this *reductio*, he offers it in a number of places (with slight variations), but see Clarke, *Person and Being*, 12–3.

Second, Clarke thinks that once we agree that each being is a “combination” of *esse* and essence, we are finally in a position to solve the most basic problem of the one and the many. The problem, of course, is this. Being is one, for what can be added to being to make it diverse when anything outside of being must perforce be non-being. So being is one. But if being is one, why is it the case that our universe is full of multiplicity? According to Clarke, many philosophers try to reduce the multiplicity to one thing (e.g., unity, goodness, consciousness, or matter), but these philosophers seem to forget that we must ask whether unity, goodness, consciousness, or matter *is*. We must ask about the existence of the one into which the many have been reduced, and this shows that something has not been reduced to the one, to wit, existence itself. According to Clarke, St. Thomas’s discovery of *esse* allows us to solve this problem once and for all, for it allows us to see that the one is existence (or *esse*), and the many are different modes of *esse*, limited to a higher or lesser degree of *esse* by the essence of the being in question, which is best understood as an internal negation or limitation of *esse*. And it then becomes clear that God is *Esse* Itself—*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*—the One through which other ones receive their *esse* and participate in *esse*, just as the sun is the one through which air receives light and participates in light.⁸⁸ Thus, Clarke thinks that the recognition of *esse* allows us to solve one of the greatest metaphysical problems in the history of philosophy.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Summa Theologica* Ia, q. 8, a. 1; and Ia, q. 104, a. 1. For further discussion on this comparison, see Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 161–2.

⁸⁹ This argument, like the previous one, seems to rely on assumptions that have been questioned. In particular, Clarke’s solution seems to rely on a “thin-essence” view as opposed to a “thick-essence” view. The former asserts that all finite beings are a “combination” of *esse* and essence, where essence is really just an internal negation or limitation of *esse* (located within *esse* itself); the latter asserts that all finite beings are a combination of *esse* and essence, where essence possesses a reality (and role) that is not fully explained by *esse*. For an introduction to this intra-Thomistic debate, see Clarke’s “Preface” to William Carlo’s *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*; for some recent criticism of Clarke’s “thin-essence” view, see Kevin Staley, “Norris Clarke and Sarah Borden on the Limitation of Existence or Why We Are Not God: A Response,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7 (2009): 1–9; and for Clarke’s treatment of the one and the many (along with a short discussion on the “thin-essence” and “thick-essence” views), see “What Cannot Be Said in Saint Thomas’s Essence-Existence Doctrine,” in *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), esp.

5. Strong Thomistic Personalism: Metaethics

So let us assume, for the sake of argument, that (4) is true: to be a being means to be a substance-in-relation, where “substance” refers to inward activity, “relation” refers to communicative activity and its corresponding receptivity (passive at the sub-human level and active in personal relationships), and all of this activity is grounded in a single *esse* of the being in question. With this assumed, Clarke goes on to explicate St. Thomas’s metaethics, but he does this quickly. Thus, staying faithful to Clarke’s train of thought, I will explicate St. Thomas’s metaethics in more detail.⁹⁰

St. Thomas’s main metaethical thesis, according to Clarke, is that existence (i.e., *esse*) is convertible with goodness (or, in the usual wording, being is convertible with goodness). Why does St. Thomas offer us this thesis? His reasoning—set out so clearly at the beginning of his *Summa Theologica*—runs as follows. First, for all X, X is good to the extent that X is desirable (for, as Aristotle says, the essence of goodness is desirability). Second, for all X, X is desirable to the extent that X is perfect (for perfection is desirable, not imperfection). Third, for all X, X is perfect to the extent that X exists (for X is perfect to the extent that X is actual, but the actuality of X depends on the existence—or *esse*—of X). Thus, it follows that, for all X, X is good to the extent that X exists (or has *esse*), and X exists (or has *esse*) to the extent that X is good. In other words, *esse* is convertible with goodness.⁹¹

But it is important to note that goodness can be predicated of an X in two ways: an immanent way and a transcendent way. In some cases we might say that for all X, X is good to

118–20 and 129–31. I take up this issue extensively in Chapter 3, and defend a modified version of Clarke’s “thin-essence” view.

⁹⁰ See Clarke’s *Person and Being*, 8 and 10; or his “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 606.

⁹¹ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 5, a. 1. To use the language which emerged from the thought of medieval philosophy, we could say that goodness is a transcendental, an aspect of being that is present to the degree that being is present. Other attributes usually considered to be transcendentals are unity, beauty, and truth—and, unsurprisingly, Clarke has recently added activity. For further discussion on this matter, see footnote 3 in Chapter 4.

the extent that X has *esse*, and we judge how much *esse* X has in reference to the Divine Idea that God has of the species of X. Here the relevant Divine Idea is the exemplar by which we judge X, and so we can say that we predicate goodness in an immanent sense (because the goodness of X depends on whether the nature of X is actualized). When we are in this frame of reference, we can say, with good reason, that a fully actualized rose is good, while a maimed tiger is imperfect and lacking in goodness. In another way, however, we might say that for all X, X is good to the extent that it has *esse*, and we judge how much *esse* X has in reference to *Esse* Itself. Here God is the exemplar by which we judge X, and so we can say that we predicate goodness of X in a transcendent sense (because the goodness of X depends on the “nature” of God, not the nature of X). When we are in this frame of reference, we can say, with good reason, that a fully actualized rose is less good than a maimed tiger. Here we see that there is a hierarchy of being, with God being the Being from which all beings originate and to which all beings tend as much as possible.⁹²

So Clarke thinks that St. Thomas gives us the following: (5) *esse*—or being—is convertible with goodness (in an immanent and transcendent sense). He makes this fully explicit when he says the following:

Existence itself (*esse*) now becomes for Thomas the ultimate root of all perfection, with unity and goodness its transcendental properties or attributes, facets of the inexhaustible richness of being itself.⁹³

Before moving on, however, it may be instructive to discuss the difference between ontological goodness and moral goodness. Moral goodness, on this scheme, is a subset of ontological goodness that is found only in rational beings—beings endowed with intellect and will. Thus, an

⁹² Cf. St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s discussion on the difference between an immanent and transcendent measure in “On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm,” in Wojtyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 77–8.

⁹³ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 10.

illness may render a person less good in an ontological sense, but this entails nothing concerning the person's moral goodness. St. Wojtyla/John Paul II describes moral goodness as follows:

Morality is not the most strictly connected with thought; thought is merely a condition of morality. Directly, however, morality is connected with freedom, and therefore the will. The object of the will is the good. There are a variety of goods we can will. The point is to will a true good. Such an act of the will makes us good human beings. To be morally good, we must not only will something good, but we must also will it in a good way. ... In this way, not only does our will become good or evil, but our whole person becomes good or evil.⁹⁴

We might say, then, that moral goodness entails a certain pinnacle of ontological goodness, the goodness that is found solely in the species-specific actualization of rational beings. Thus, in thinking about the Thomistic conception of goodness, it is important to keep in mind that moral goodness is a small domain within the larger domain of ontological goodness, and very often one becomes morally good by helping others acquire their basic ontological goodness (e.g., health, knowledge, and so on). (Again, I will provide further argumentation in Chapters 3 and 4 for the metaphysics which undergirds this understanding of goodness, that is, a metaphysics that maintains the flexibility of being or *esse*.)

6. Strong Thomistic Personalism: From Metaphysics and Metaethics to Personalism

So let us assume that both (4) and (5) are true: being is active, and being is convertible with goodness. With these theses in hand, Clarke finally makes the transition to philosophical anthropology. He does this by citing a passage from St. Thomas:

Person signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.⁹⁵

Combining (4) and (5) with this claim, Clarke draws out some profound entailments. To begin, if person is the most perfect in all of nature, it follows that person has the highest intensity of *esse* and goodness in all of nature (because perfection rides on *esse* and *esse* is convertible with

⁹⁴ "Thomistic Personalism," 172.

⁹⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 29, a. 3.

goodness). With this in mind, Clarke demands a gestalt switch in how we see the person. We should not see the person as some special determination or limitation of being; instead, we should see the person as “simply what being *is* when allowed to be its fullest, freed from the constrictions of sub-intelligent matter.”⁹⁶ Put another way, when *esse* reaches its highest and richest intensity, when it is freed from the constraints of the material mode, its inward activity reaches self-consciousness (which includes intelligence) and self-mastery (which includes free will), while its relational activity reaches communion with others. “To be fully is to be personally,”⁹⁷ says Clarke. Or again, “Person and being are, in a sense, paradigms of each other.”⁹⁸ Person is the most perfect and most good being in all of reality precisely because it is the blossoming of being itself, and since being is relational through and through (bound by the law of giving and receiving), the flower of the person fully blossoms if and only if the self-consciousness and self-mastery of the person are exercised in communion with others. The metaphysics of being, exclaims Clarke, is a metaphysics of love.⁹⁹

Let us pause here. When *esse* reaches its highest intensity, its inward activity blossoms into self-consciousness and self-mastery. Fine. This seems reasonable enough. But why is the highest intensity of relational activity communion with others? Why should it not be destruction and rejection of others, for example? Clarke does not address this question (at least in a sustained way), but I think two things can be said on his behalf.

First, we could argue that there is an ineliminable interdependence between self-consciousness, self-mastery, and communion. A person cannot possess fully actualized self-consciousness and self-mastery without communion, for we only constitute and know ourselves

⁹⁶ Clarke, “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 601.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 609.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 603.

⁹⁹ Clarke, *Person and Being*, 72.

through communing with others, and we only master ourselves through the help of others.¹⁰⁰ At a foundational level children require basic forms of communion (even if they are imperfect) to develop physically and psychologically. At a deeper level persons require basic forms of communion (even if they are imperfect) to know and control their thoughts and emotions well, and it is also worth noting that a person cannot say “I,” in the sense we usually mean it, without a “you” (or “we”).¹⁰¹ And looking at things from another angle, it also seems that fully actualized self-consciousness and self-mastery must pour forth in communion, for once a person knows the good and is able to will the good (which are both natural consequences of fully actualized self-consciousness and self-mastery), the person wills the self-consciousness and self-mastery of others (which is to engage in communion). The only way to escape this truth is to declare that self-consciousness (i.e., knowledge of the self and its place in the world) and self-mastery (i.e., freedom) in concrete persons is worth less than some other ontological reality in our world. But this means one would have to declare that the flourishing of persons is less good than the flourishing of mere animals or inanimate objects, a proposition that seems quite implausible. All of this suggests, as a result, that communion is the highest intensity of relational activity, for it seems reasonable to assume that the highest level of inward activity (i.e., self-consciousness and self-mastery) *requires* and *generates* the highest level of relational activity (i.e., communion), not some mediocre level of relational activity.

Second, we could argue that it just seems clear that communion is the most intense and awesome relational activity. When a person destroys and rejects others, for example, the relational activity remains on the plain of the I-It relation: others are treated in the same way as cows, rocks, and cars; and the person reduces himself to an etiolated “I” through his rejection of

¹⁰⁰ For further argumentation, see Paul J. Waddell, C.P., *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 54–5 and 69–72.

¹⁰¹ For further discussion, see Mounier, *Personalism*, 19–23, esp. 20.

truth and goodness.¹⁰² When two persons commune with each other, however, each person confirms and affirms the worth of the other, and something more happens: “deep calls unto deep.”¹⁰³ The two persons open themselves, expose themselves, give themselves, release themselves, and this permeability allows for an ineffable exchange. The two happen to one another, and each becomes an “I” and a “Thou” and together they become a “We.” Communion, we might argue, is the most perfect and good relational activity known to persons, and for those who cannot see this, the best way to discern this truth is through the experience of communion itself, not some argument about communion.

Thus, let us summarize Clarke’s final thesis: (6) person is the highest mode of being possible; and this highest mode of being, when fully actualized, is a life of self-consciousness and self-mastery that engages in communion. Put a bit differently, the *telos* of persons is communion (or love) grounded in self-consciousness and self-mastery.

It is not difficult to see how (6) supports the three commitments of personalism: it cries out for a third way between individualism and collectivism, it offers the person as the beacon for a third way, and it grounds the three pillars of personalism.¹⁰⁴ The Personalist Norm, we learn, is justified by and grounded in the very heart of metaphysics. But what about phenomenology? As I

¹⁰² Of course, some might object that it is possible to bully and abuse persons as persons; thus, the I-Thou relation is not always superior to the I-It relation. One could manipulate persons, for example, by stimulating certain emotions, or one could try to disorganize another person’s mental life. In reply, I would simply say that the aggressor is still on the I-It plane; he is not treating these persons in line with their *personal dignity* (a dignity recognized by Kant in his Formula of Humanity), nor is he engaging these persons in an intersubjective manner. On the contrary, the victims are being treated as objects that can be used or consumed as one sees fit (like inanimate objects). Moreover, at some point it is best to place the arguments aside and look carefully at the reality. We must simply see that communion is a superior activity that respects the reality (i.e., truth and goodness) of the person in a way that bullying and abuse, say, do not. (For further discussion on the nature and reality of communion, see my explications of Buber, Marcel, and Mounier in Section 2.)

¹⁰³ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 246.

¹⁰⁴ Some may insist that (6) does not support the claim that persons are mysterious. In reply, I would say that self-consciousness, self-mastery, and communion are precisely the sort of “things” that are mysterious. Complete knowledge of these activities requires much more than objective observation. This is because the first-person perspective is required, but the first-person perspective does not allow us to grasp or have these activities in the way we grasp or have regular objects.

noted at the start of Section 4, Clarke explicitly asserts that Thomism is complemented—or brought to a higher stage of completion—by the phenomenological analyses of personalists. This is because he thinks that these analyses help us get clear on the inward, communicative, and receptive activity that is appropriate for persons. In other words, these analyses help us perceive the activity or dynamism of being that is our calling.¹⁰⁵ As a result, it seems fair to say that Clark offers us a Strong Thomistic Personalism:

Strong Thomistic Personalism: a personalism—which makes serious use of phenomenological analyses—that is grounded in the metaphysics (and other relevant work) of St. Thomas, especially his understanding of *esse* and goodness, although not to the exclusion of other concepts such as potency, act, prime matter, form, substance, soul, individual, person, and so on.

To sum up, then, this version of Thomistic personalism is “implicit within the very structure and meaning of being itself in a fully developed Thomistic metaphysics....”¹⁰⁶ In at least one sense, then, Clarke offers us a richer integration of Thomism and personalism than St. Wojtyla/John Paul II, for his version of Thomistic personalism seeks to demonstrate that a phenomenologically enriched personalism must spring forth from the deepest recesses of St. Thomas’s metaphysics and metaethics.

7. Thomistic Personalism: A Vocation and Collaborative Task

In this final section I would like to make three points—speaking from within the tradition of Christian philosophy. First, in light of these three versions of Thomistic personalism, it is time to think more deeply about the best formulation of Thomistic personalism. In particular, we need to discuss whether Thomistic personalism should incorporate phenomenology (in the way St. Wojtyla/John Paul II suggests), and we also need to discuss whether Thomistic personalism should be grounded in *esse* (in the way Clarke suggests). It may be the case, of course, that we

¹⁰⁵ See Clarke, “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics,” 226–7; and Clarke, *Person and Being*, 4–5 and 64–93.

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics,” 227.

come to resolve these controversies indirectly (e.g., we may begin to discern which version is best by working on the relationship between Thomistic personalism and natural law ethics or the relationship between Thomistic personalism and Kantianism), but I think it is clear that we must recognize and address the divisions in Thomistic personalism. Fortunately, given that the synthesis of Thomism and personalism is still in its early stages, it seems reasonable to expect that progress will be made.

Second, although “[t]he Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others . . .”¹⁰⁷ the Church has—in more recent years—consistently affirmed the value of the philosophy of St. Thomas and the main commitments of personalism.¹⁰⁸ This alone should be of serious interest to Catholic philosophers, but things get even more interesting, I think, when we find St. John Paul II, on the doorstep of the third millennium (in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*), offering some guidelines for moral philosophy. Just after noting that a proper understanding of revealed truth requires a philosophy of being (“based upon the very act of being itself”), he says the following:

In order to fulfill its mission, moral theology must turn to a philosophical ethics which looks to the truth of the good, to an ethics which is neither subjectivist nor utilitarian. Such an ethics implies and presupposes a *philosophical anthropology* and a *metaphysics of the good* [my emphasis]. Drawing on this organic vision, linked necessarily to Christian holiness and to the practice of the human and supernatural virtues, moral theology will be able to tackle the various problems in its competence, such as peace, social justice, the family, the defence of life and the natural environment, in a more appropriate and effective way.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Vatican trans. (Boston: Pauline Media and Books, 1998), para. 49.

¹⁰⁸ St. John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* (para. 43–4) and Pope Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris*, for example, affirm the worth of St. Thomas’s work. And Vatican II explicitly affirms the third commitment of personalism in *Gaudium et Spes* (e.g., the inalienable dignity of the person, the communal *telos* of the person, and the mystery of the person are all discussed within para. 1–23), while St. John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* (Para. 14) strongly recommends a civilization of personalism over individualism—and we may safely assume over collectivism too. For further discussion on the relationship between the Magisterium of the Church and personalism, see Thomas Williams, “What is Thomistic Personalism?” 173–4.

¹⁰⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, para. 97–8.

St. John Paul II tells us that moral philosophy ought to be grounded in a metaphysics of the good (“based upon the very act of being itself”) and a philosophical anthropology (which, no doubt, he expects to focus on the dignity, communal *telos*, and mystery of the person). In other words, at the very least, he recommends a moral philosophy that is grounded in (i) the act of existing (or *esse*), (ii) the convertibility between being and goodness, and (iii) a philosophical anthropology which affirms the third commitment of personalism—which, in turn, plausibly entails the first two commitments.¹¹⁰ But this vision of moral philosophy seems to be Thomistic personalism (at least in outline), viz., it is a synthesis of personalism with Thomistic metaphysics and metaethics, and this synthesis can move in a number of different directions. So, for example, *esse* and the convertibility between being and goodness may hover in the background (as they do in Weak and Moderate Thomistic Personalism), or they may play a more central role (as they do in Strong Thomistic Personalism); and the relevant philosophical anthropology may make more or less use of phenomenological analyses.

In sum, not only has the Church consistently affirmed the value of Thomism and personalism in a general and diffused sense, it has specifically recommended Thomistic personalism (or something very close to it) as the appropriate framework for moral philosophy. This is not an infallible declaration, of course, but it is a recommendation—and maybe even a requirement in some sense, if we keep paragraph 79 of *Fides et Ratio* in mind—from the Vicar of

¹¹⁰ For the benefit of those who do not think St. John Paul II defends (i) or (ii) in para. 97–8, John F.X. Knasas explains in detail why we must interpret him as defending both. See *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, xviii–xxiv. Also, for those who do not think St. John Paul II defends (iii) in paragraph 98, a brief look at St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s philosophical work—e.g., *Love and Responsibility* or “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being”—should make it clear that his aspirations for philosophical anthropology go far beyond an account of substance, soul, and rationality; they also include an account of inalienable dignity, gift of self, mystery, and so on. (To see this more clearly, see Elizabeth Salas, “Person and Gift According to Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 [2010]: 99–124.) Indeed, I think we could even argue that St. John Paul II’s reference to philosophical anthropology is a tacit endorsement of phenomenological analyses (given his philosophical background and work, and given his discussion of phenomenology in para. 59 of *Fides et Ratio*), but I will not pursue this line of thought here, mainly because I would need more space to discuss St. John Paul II’s complex relationship to phenomenology.

Christ at the turn of the twenty-first century. And the least Catholic philosophers can do, in a spirit of humility and obedience, is apply themselves to this vision of moral philosophy and see what fruit is produced. It is no exaggeration to declare that Thomistic personalism is a vocation for the twenty-first century, especially if we make the assumption that we ought to take seriously the recommendations of the successors of St. Peter.

Finally, I think it is important to note that the project of Thomistic personalism is a colossal one: theology, metaphysics, epistemology, medieval philosophy, phenomenology (in a way that is still unclear), metaethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, political philosophy, and legal philosophy all need to contribute to this project in an interpenetrating process of cross-fertilization. It is likely, of course, that no one person will possess all of the requisite skills to complete this project. Rather, it seems there must be a collaboration between specialists from diverse backgrounds. Whether philosophers and theologians shoulder the burden of this twenty-first century calling remains to be seen. If there is a response, what will happen? We cannot know with certainty (for success depends on God), but it seems likely that the result will be a living Thomism that offers guidance and sustenance to the Bride of Christ—and the community of humanity—throughout the twenty-first century and possibly beyond.¹¹¹ We may even find that Thomistic personalism goes far beyond natural law ethics in (i) its grasp of truth, (ii) its normative guidance, and (iii) its persuasiveness, all the while remaining absolutely faithful to the essentials of the natural law tradition.¹¹²

¹¹¹ I am certainly not the first to talk of a living Thomism, nor am I the first to note that the success of a vocational response lies in the hands of God. See Etienne Gilson's exhortation to Thomism, which I have slightly imitated, in *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), 101–2.

¹¹² Compare Wojtyla's "The Human Person and Natural Law," in Wojtyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 181–5.

CHAPTER 2

PHENOMENOLOGY IN THOMISTIC PERSONALISM

After all, lived experience is also—and above all—a reality.

—St. Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being”¹

1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I (i) identified the main commitments of personalism; (ii) identified three species of Thomistic personalism; and (iii) argued that Thomistic personalism is a vocation for the twenty-first century (at least for Catholic practitioners of Christian philosophy). Concerning the main commitments of personalism, I argued that personalism seeks a third way between the equally serious errors of collectivism and individualism (in both the moral and political realms), that personalism develops a philosophical anthropology to disclose this third way, and that the central elements of this philosophical anthropology are as follows: a person is a rational and free being—with objective and subjective dimensions—endowed with an inalienable dignity, oriented towards relationships of love, and forever enshrouded in a degree of mystery. The moral and political philosophy of personalism—along with an ethos of engagement—then springs forth from this philosophical anthropology.

Concerning the three species of Thomistic personalism, I argued that we can, for the sake of clarity, use the following taxonomy. A Weak Thomistic Personalism seeks to ground the main commitments of personalism in the work of St. Thomas, but it does not seek to make serious use of phenomenological analyses. A Moderate Thomistic Personalism, on the other hand, agrees that the main commitments of personalism need to be grounded in the work of St. Thomas, but it also asserts that phenomenological analyses (offered by many personalists and existentialists, for

¹ “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 209–17, at 216.

example) are needed to complement Thomistic personalism. Finally, a Strong Thomistic Personalism, fully acknowledging the importance of phenomenology, attempts to show that the heart of St. Thomas's metaphysics (*esse* or the act of existing) and the heart of St. Thomas's metaethics (the convertibility between being and goodness) do much more than ground the main commitments of personalism: they entail and produce them, theoretically speaking.²

In this chapter, I will focus on the main issue that divides Weak Thomistic Personalism from the other two species, namely, the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism. What role, exactly, should phenomenology play in Thomistic personalism (if any)? It seems that Thomistic personalism must answer this question directly, so this is the question I will address in this chapter. Of course, some may assert that there is little need to take up this question because St. Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II has responded to it with great insight—settling this matter definitively.³ In reply, I would simply say that, as I will show later on, the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism is still controversial; moreover, even if we assume that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II answered this question with great insight, it must be granted that he could have specified the precise role and tasks of phenomenology more clearly. Thus, there is sufficient reason to discuss the relationship between Thomistic personalism and phenomenology.

² For two representatives of Weak Thomistic Personalism, see Jacques Maritain, "The Person and the Common Good," trans. John J. FitzGerald, *The Review of Politics* 8 (1946): 419–55; and Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), Ch. 10. For two representatives of Moderate Thomistic Personalism, see Karol Wojtyla, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being" and "Thomistic Personalism" in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 165–75; and Thomas D. Williams, L.C., "What is Thomistic Personalism?" *Alpha and Omega* 7 (2004): 163–97. Finally, for two representatives of Strong Thomistic Personalism, see Robert A. Connor, "The Person as Resonating Existential," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992): 39–56; and W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993).

³ St. Wojtyla/John Paul II addresses this issue most clearly in "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," and one could argue that his two well-known books—*Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981); and *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potecki (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979)—highlight the role that phenomenology ought to play in Thomistic personalism.

I will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I will delineate the status of phenomenology in contemporary Thomistic personalism and make it clear that the role of phenomenology is still unsettled. In Sections 3 and 4, I will offer an account of the nature of phenomenology and the possible roles of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism. Then, in Sections 5 to 8, I will articulate and defend the main thesis of this chapter. In short, I will point out that two norms are internal to the project of Thomistic personalism—an investigative norm and a communicative norm—and I will then argue that compliance with these norms requires the integration of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism. The role of phenomenology in this integration, I will argue, is best described as an organic complementarity that undertakes a number of important tasks.

Overall, then, the objective of this chapter is not to discard St. Thomas’s method of philosophizing or some of his central theses, nor is it to suggest that phenomenology should be elevated to first philosophy (which explains why this chapter does not proceed via phenomenological analysis from start to finish). On the contrary, the objective is to demonstrate that phenomenology is needed to complement—and perhaps even refine and deepen—the work of the Common Doctor of the Church, which has provided a permanent foundation for Thomistic personalism.⁴

2. The Status of Phenomenology in Contemporary Thomistic Personalism

What constitutes contemporary Thomistic personalism? One way to answer this question is to specify, rather arbitrarily, some recent date and then declare that this date to the present provides

⁴ Should we say that St. Thomas provided us with a foundation for Thomistic personalism, or should we say that he gave us an authentic Thomistic personalism over seven centuries ago? I am inclined to opt for the former, since St. Thomas did not write in response to the double errors of collectivism and individualism, nor did he focus on the dignity, communal *telos*, and mystery of the person to the same extent—and with the same categories—as modern personalists. All the same, I think we can say legitimately (with the appropriate qualifications) that St. Thomas provided us with a Thomistic personalism, just as we can say legitimately (with the appropriate qualifications) that St. Augustine or Pascal provided us with an existentialism. Cf. Etienne Gilson’s *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Ch. 10.

us with our answer. Unfortunately, I do not think that we can answer our question in this manner, primarily because this almost certainly would exclude St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's pre-pontifical philosophical work, and it also most likely would exclude some of his pastoral-cum-philosophical work from the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., his *Theology of the Body*). But it is indisputable that all of this work looms large in contemporary Thomistic personalism.⁵

As a result, I would suggest that the landscape of contemporary Thomistic personalism is constituted by relevant work from the past twenty-five years *and* the work of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II. Why the past twenty-five years and not ten or fifteen years? In short, because the writings that make up the genesis of Strong Thomistic Personalism were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and it is undeniable that these writings are still awaiting a full assessment, not to mention that the exclusion of these writings would considerably reduce the number of works which we could label contemporary.⁶

Now with these parameters made clear, what is the status of phenomenology in contemporary Thomistic personalism? *Prima facie*, we might say that a consensus has been reached: phenomenology is indispensable for an accurate understanding of the lived experience of the person, and its insightful descriptions often lead to explanations that terminate in the domain of metaphysics—although its impotence in many areas shows that it ought to be used as a complement to the Thomistic tradition. Remarkably, this position concerning the role of

⁵ In recent years, almost every work in Thomistic personalism makes considerable use of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's work, and a large collection of his philosophical papers—*Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., vol. 4 *Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993)—was translated and published only in 1993, making some of his work fairly recent in the English-speaking world.

⁶ See, for example, Robert A. Connor, "Relational *Esse* and the Person," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 65 (1991): 253–67; and W. Norris Clarke, "Person, Being, and St. Thomas," *Communio* 19 (1992): 601–18. These writings are still awaiting a full assessment precisely because they rely on Cardinal Josef Ratzinger's revolutionary suggestion—inspired by the Mystery of the Holy Trinity—that relationality is just as primordial as substance (metaphysically speaking), and it seems clear that the incorporation of this revolutionary suggestion into Thomistic personalism (fleshed out with St. Thomas's concept of *esse*) requires considerable and patient assessment. See Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, "Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17 (1990): 439–54, esp. 444–5.

phenomenology is endorsed by St. Wojtyla/John Paul II, Fr. Robert A. Connor, Fr. W. Norris Clarke, and Fr. Thomas D. Williams, four prominent thinkers in contemporary Thomistic personalism.⁷ A single quotation from St. Wojtyla/John Paul II should suffice for the general outlines of this consensus:

The irreducible [i.e., the lived experience of the person] signifies that which is essentially incapable of reduction, that which cannot be reduced but can only be *disclosed* or *revealed*. *Lived experience essentially defies reduction*. This does not mean, however, that it eludes our knowledge; it only means that *we must arrive at the knowledge of it differently*, namely, *by a method or means of analysis that merely reveals and discloses its essence*. The method of phenomenological analysis allows us to pause at lived experience as the irreducible.... When we pause at the lived experience of the irreducible, we attempt to permeate cognitively the whole essence of this experience. We thus apprehend both the essentially subjective structure of lived experience and its structural relation to the subjectivity of the human being [i.e., that which makes the lived experience of the person possible and goes beyond it, namely, the person as an individual substance of a rational nature]. Phenomenological analysis thus contributes to trans-phenomenal understanding; it also contributes to a disclosure of the richness proper to human existence in the whole complex *compositum humanum*.⁸

The objective dimension of the person, investigated so well by the Thomistic tradition, must be complemented by phenomenological analyses—otherwise we cannot get a “true and complete picture of the human being,” nor can we pursue many rewarding avenues of metaphysical investigation.⁹ So, for example, phenomenological analyses are needed to grasp fully the nature of self-determination, and these same analyses also offer data which justify metaphysical explanations.¹⁰ Along these lines, then, the phenomenological method and phenomenological

⁷ For St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s treatment of this issue, see “Thomistic Personalism,” 170–71; “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being” esp. 213 and 215–16; *The Acting Person*, esp. xvi and 105–86; and “Address of John Paul II to a Delegation of the World Institute of Phenomenology in Hanover,” *Vatican*, accessed November 10, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/march/documents/hf_jp-ii. For Connor’s treatment, see “The Person as Resonating Existential,” 45–56. For Clarke’s treatment, see “Person, Being and St. Thomas,” 602 and 613; *Person and Being*, 4 and 66; and “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” in W. Norris Clarke, *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 226–31. For Williams’s treatment, see “What is Thomistic Personalism?” esp. 171, 176–9, and 184–6.

⁸ “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 215–6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 213–4.

¹⁰ See part two of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s *The Acting Person* (105–86), where he offers a phenomenological description of self-determination and then proceeds to move to metaphysical explanation (e.g., at 179–86); and see

analyses are synthesized with the initial form of Thomistic personalism (articulated, for example, by Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson), and it is claimed that St. Thomas would have no qualms making judicious use of phenomenology, just as he had no qualms making judicious use of Aristotle.¹¹

In line with this impressive consensus, it is tempting to declare that the status of phenomenology in contemporary Thomistic personalism is uncontroversial. For better or worse this would be a mistake. This is because two recent articles by Anthony T. Flood and a recent book by Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons indirectly suggest that Thomistic personalism does not need phenomenology. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer an overview and evaluation of these works, I will explain why they impugn the need for phenomenology in Thomistic personalism.

First, let us start with Flood. Although Flood focuses on different issues in these articles, one form of argument appears in both—even though this form is never made explicit. In brief, I think that anyone familiar with the work of John F. Crosby and St. Wojtyla/John Paul II will find the following form of argument (unsaid but said, so to speak) in both articles: we may think that phenomenology was required to disclose some X (indeed, we may also think that the disclosure of X necessarily requires phenomenology), but deeper examination shows that X can be found in the work of St. Thomas.

So, for example, in his article “Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby,” Flood argues that, *pace* Crosby (and also St. Wojtyla/John Paul II), St. Thomas offers an account of subjectivity through his account of self-love and self-friendship, which is further enriched by his

Connor’s “The Person as Resonating Existential,” 56, where he suggests that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s phenomenological analysis of self-determination is best explained by the claim that a person is first and foremost an act of existing (*esse*), with substance and relation constituting equally primordial (resonating) dimensions of the person.

¹¹ Clarke expresses this sort of sentiment, without reference to Aristotle, in *Person and Being*, 66; and “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” 226–7.

understanding of *amor, dilectio, amicitia, and caritas*. Thus, phenomenology was not (and is not) required for an investigation into the lived experience of the person (as Crosby and St. Wojtyla/John Paul II appear to suggest in their work); St. Thomas investigated this terrain many centuries ago.¹²

Next, in his article “Love of Self as the Condition for a Gift of Self in Aquinas,” Flood argues that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s understanding of the gift of self, sometimes called the “law of the gift,” is not a fresh insight from the modern era (acquired through phenomenology, for example). On the contrary, St. Thomas provides us with an understanding of this gift of self imperative which is grounded in his understanding of self-love and self-friendship—and we therefore find a “deep symmetry” (a real similarity) between St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s understanding of a gift of self and St. Thomas’s.¹³

What is noteworthy in these articles—both of which do an admirable job of elucidating critical aspects of St. Thomas’s philosophical anthropology—is that Flood does not say much about the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism or Thomism in general. At one point, to be sure, he asserts that medieval philosophy lacks the terminological resources to describe properly the interiority of the person, and at another point he also compliments Crosby’s phenomenological analysis of subjectivity, but he does not go further than this.¹⁴ For instance, he does not declare that phenomenology is still necessary and of great worth. Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, Flood calls into question the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism,

¹² “Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (2010): 69–83. Flood is responding to Crosby’s *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), Ch. 3, esp. 82. Here, through an explication of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” Crosby argues that the cosmological focus of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition needs to be filled in with an approach that investigates the subjectivity of the person, e.g., the “self-presence, inwardness, and self-donation” of the person.

¹³ “Love of Self as the Condition for a Gift of Self in Aquinas,” *Journal of Thomistic Personalism* 2 (2012): 1-13, esp. 1 and 12-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5; “Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby,” 70-2.

for his articles leave the impression that Thomistic personalism possesses the philosophical resources to operate successfully (i.e., discern and communicate the relevant theoretical and practical truths) without phenomenology.

Let us move to Lemmons's book, *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas's Personalist Natural Law*.¹⁵ In this impressive work, Lemmons attempts to show that the moral and legal phenomena of indefeasibility and universal obligations are best explained and justified by St. Thomas's personalist natural law. For our purposes, however, I would like to underline how Lemmons describes the personalist aspect of her book.¹⁶ What is this personalism that can be found in a personalist natural law that is grounded in the work of St. Thomas and renewed by St. Wojtyla/John Paul II?¹⁷

In short, if I read her correctly, Lemmons declares that St. Thomas's natural law is personalist for two independent, although related, reasons. First, because it asserts that the *eudaimonia* of this world—which is the anchor of normative morality in natural law and a necessary means for the achievement of *eudaimonia* in the world to come—must be a perfection of the integral person. For too long, says Lemmons, this aspect of St. Thomas's natural law has been obscured and hidden by a fixation with law.¹⁸ Second, because it asserts that the moral obligations of persons are always *to* persons—and, moreover, that these obligations are all grounded in the obligations to love God and neighbor, which should not be seen as burdens but rather as the path through which persons achieve *eudaimonia* in this world (and lay the

¹⁵ *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas's Personalist Natural Law* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

¹⁶ For an overview of Lemmons's book, though, see Alice Ramos's review, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (2012): 734–7.

¹⁷ *Ultimate Normative Foundations*, xii and 413. Here Lemmons makes it clear that she is defending a Thomistic version of natural law that is enriched and renewed by St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's recent work (e.g., his Personalist Norm, his discussion of human rights, his emphasis on freedom, and so on).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xix (footnote 12), 44–5, 92, 106, 189–91. For Lemmons's distinction between the *eudaimonia* of this world (an imperfect flourishing) and the *eudaimonia* of the world to come (a perfect flourishing received in the beatific vision), see 106 and 187–94.

groundwork for *eudaimonia* in the world to come). Concepts such as human rights, subsidiarity, and solidarity then help us specify, with greater precision, what it means to love God and neighbor.¹⁹ So, according to Lemmons, St. Thomas's natural law is personalist because it focuses on the actualization of persons through relationships of love, not the actualization of lawfulness and rationality (although, of course, the latter are significantly related to the former). Without evaluating this understanding of personalism, I would like to draw attention to a single point.

As far as I can tell, Lemmons does not associate personalism with phenomenology, even though phenomenological analyses play a dominant role in the work of many personalists, nor does she appropriate the work of phenomenologically grounded (or inclined) personalists such as Scheler, Buber, von Hildebrand, Marcel, Mounier, Berdayeav, and Crosby (or other phenomenologists, e.g., Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas).²⁰ Accordingly the Thomistic personalism offered downplays the role of phenomenology. No doubt Lemmons makes insightful and extensive use of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II (and therefore some phenomenology enters her work), but she does not seem interested in following St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's call for sustained phenomenological analyses in the same way as others (e.g., Crosby or Clarke).²¹ The suggestion is not made, for example, that readers should turn to Buber, Marcel, and Mounier for a deeper understanding of the splendor of love. Lemmons therefore offers an impressively *comprehensive*

¹⁹ Ibid., xii, xix (footnote 12), 133, 189–91, 292–3, 329, 400, 413.

²⁰ Two exceptions. First, Lemmons references an article by Crosby, but she does not refer to either of his books which make great use of phenomenology, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*; and *Personalist Papers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 2004). Second, Lemmons references an article by Sartre, but she does not refer to any of his more phenomenological work, e.g., *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992); or *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Routledge, 2002).

²¹ Indeed, although Lemmons refers to an impressive range of St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's work, she does not refer to his "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being"—but it is precisely in this paper that St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's call for phenomenology in Thomistic personalism reaches its highest pitch. For Crosby's and Clarke's eagerness to heed this call, see Crosby's *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, 82; and Clarke's "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism," 226–7. It is true that Clarke does not spend much time producing phenomenological analyses himself, but he explicitly and repeatedly affirms the worth of phenomenology.

and *systematic* work in Thomistic personalism, one of the few in existence, which leaves phenomenology on the penumbra. Needless to say, this constitutes an indirect argument against the inclusion of phenomenology in the project of Thomistic personalism, for Lemmons's work suggests that phenomenology is dispensable.

To summarize, then, the role of phenomenology in contemporary Thomistic personalism is still controversial. Although St. Wojtyla/John Paul II, Connor, Clarke, and Williams argue that phenomenology is an indispensable complement to Thomistic personalism, Flood and Lemmons challenge this vision. As a result, the project of Thomistic personalism requires a direct assessment of this matter; the remainder of this chapter, accordingly, is an attempt to complete this assessment. It is common knowledge, I think, that there is an underlying concern in some quarters of Thomism that Thomism and phenomenology are incompatible. My aim is to render this concern historical, at least in the domain of Thomistic personalism.

3. The Nature of Phenomenology

As a matter of logical priority, it seems clear that we need to have a firm grasp of the nature of phenomenology and its potential roles in Thomistic personalism before we can make a considered judgment about the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism. Thus, in this section I will offer a provisional account of the nature of phenomenology, and in the next section I will specify some of the ways phenomenology can relate to Thomistic personalism. Of course, given space constraints, I will need to assume a general familiarity with the phenomenological tradition.²²

²² For an introduction to phenomenology, see Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The second offers a more ahistorical treatment, while the first offers a more historical one. Also, for a brief discussion on the relationship between phenomenology and existentialism, see John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 8–12.

What is phenomenology? It may help to note that two answers are unacceptable—both of them extremes.²³ First answer: phenomenology is whatever Edmund Husserl says it is (especially after his shift to transcendental phenomenology); insofar as we depart from Husserl, we are *ipso facto* no longer practicing phenomenology. Thus, we might arrive at the following definition: phenomenology, as a rigorous science and first philosophy, is a method of philosophizing that goes to “the things themselves”—and necessarily makes use of *Husserl’s epoche* (i.e., the bracketing or suspension of the natural attitude), necessarily makes use of *Husserl’s eidetic reduction* (through which essences are intuited), necessarily makes use of *Husserl’s concepts of noesis, noema, lebenswelt*, etc.; and necessarily takes the form of *Husserl’s transcendental idealism* (whatever this idealism amounts to at the end of the day).²⁴ What is wrong with this answer? A passage from Dermot Moran explains:

It is important not to exaggerate, as some interpreters have done, the extent to which phenomenology coheres into an agreed upon *method*, or accepts one theoretical outlook, or one set of philosophical theses about consciousness, knowledge, and the world. Indeed ... the philosophers who in some sense identified with the practice of phenomenology are extraordinarily diverse in their interests, in their interpretation of the central issues of phenomenology, in their application of what they understood to be the phenomenological method, and in their development of what they took to be the phenomenological programme for the future of philosophy.²⁵

Summed up pithily, Moran paraphrases Paul Ricoeur: “... phenomenology is the story of deviations from Husserl; the history of phenomenology is the history of Husserlian heresies.”²⁶

²³ Paul S. MacDonald talks of two “extreme” approaches to phenomenology, and I am leaning on this insight—although my explications of the extremes will differ. See MacDonald’s “Current Approaches to Phenomenology,” *Inquiry* 44 (2001): 101–24, at 101–4, esp. 101.

²⁴ Husserl discusses his transcendental idealism in *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), esp. 83–8. For recent work on Husserl’s transcendental idealism, see Herman Philipse, “Transcendental Idealism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, eds. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 239–322.

²⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, footnote removed. There is no shortage of authors pointing out this diversity in phenomenology. Compare, for instance, Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk’s claim in their foreword to one of Max Scheler’s works: “[A]s every reader of phenomenology knows, no unanimity concerning the nature of phenomenology itself is to be found as one surveys the works of the authors of the phenomenological circle.” See Frings and Funk’s “Foreword” in Max

Thus, our first answer is too *narrow*, for it would dictate that Husserl and a small band of his disciples are the only phenomenologists—but this is patently false (consider: Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II). We must keep Husserl in mind when thinking about the nature of phenomenology, but we should not let him dominate our thinking.²⁷

Now the second answer: phenomenology is a procedure through which philosophers, every once in a while, reflect on their first-person experience and offer relevant descriptions; these descriptions then count as the phenomenology, that is, the “what-it-is-like-ness” of the first-person perspective. This is how practitioners of analytic philosophy often, although not always, talk of phenomenology.²⁸ What is wrong with this answer? In short, it is indefensible because it does not conform to the phenomenological tradition on two levels: (i) the level of “going to the things themselves,” and (ii) the level of description of the “thing” being described. Concerning (i), there is nothing akin to Husserl’s demand for the shift from the natural attitude to the transcendental attitude (the *epoche*)²⁹; there is nothing akin to Heidegger’s demand that we penetrate through the hiddenness, disguisedness, or covered-up-ness of entities to the Being of entities³⁰; and there is nothing akin to St. Wojtyla/John Paul II’s demand that we allow our minds

Scheler’s *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xiv.

²⁷ This imperative acquires even more force when we acknowledge that phenomenological diversity was present in the Göttingen and Munich groups at the very beginning of the phenomenological movement. See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 212–3.

²⁸ For a good example of this, see Eddy Nahmias, Stephen Morris, Thomas Nadelhoffer, and Jason Turner’s “The Phenomenology of Free Will,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11 (2004): 162–79. In this article, phenomenology means “... roughly the way experiences seem from the first-person point of view.” And “folk phenomenology” is offered not only as a conceptual possibility, but also as “... the best way to understand the phenomenology of free will [if there is indeed a best way]” See pages 162–4 especially, and 164 for both quotations (including footnote 1). For similar accounts of this understanding of phenomenology in analytic philosophy, see Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 14–5; and MacDonald, “Current Approaches to Phenomenology,” 101–4.

²⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, e.g., First Meditation. Also, see Sokolowski’s explication of the transition from the natural attitude to the transcendental attitude (and therefore, transitively, his account of the *epoche*) in *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 42–65.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 58–60

to soak in the essence of the experience at hand.³¹ Concerning (ii), the analyses offered are brief and prosaic, and they do not approach, in any way, the depth or richness of the analyses offered in the phenomenological tradition.³² So this answer does not provide us with the nature of phenomenology; the dissonance between it and the phenomenological tradition is too large.³³ We might also say that this answer is too *broad*, for the dissonance mentioned allows most first-person reflections to count as phenomenology.

In light of these extremes, one narrow and the other broad, how should we arrive at our answer? I would suggest that we look at the work of those often identified as working within the phenomenological tradition—and then, with these philosophers in mind, abstract the commonalities that unite all of these thinkers (or, at the very least, most of these thinkers). This will help us avoid the extremes noted above, as we will not restrict our attention to one thinker or one aspect of the phenomenological tradition, and it will also leave room for us to learn that some who are marginalized by the canon of phenomenology are indeed phenomenologists *par excellence*.

So, keeping the diversity of those frequently labeled phenomenologists before our eyes (e.g., Husserl, Scheler, von Hildebrand, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Marcel, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II), I would suggest a provisional—and slightly protracted—definition that runs as follows. Phenomenology is a method or style of philosophizing that includes, at the very

³¹ Wojtyla, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 216.

³² Compare, for instance, what counts as a phenomenological analysis of the acting person in Wojtyla’s *The Acting Person* to what counts as a phenomenological analysis of free will (and thus, in a way, an analysis of an aspect of the acting person) in Eddy Nahmias et al.’s “The Phenomenology of Free Will.”

³³ Both Moran and MacDonald evince a similar sentiment. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 14–5; and MacDonald, “Current Approaches to Phenomenology,” 101–4, esp. 103.

least, two steps and a permissive note.³⁴ I will articulate these steps as directives for philosophers thinking of entering the tradition:

Step one: place all abstract philosophizing to the side—where deductions, inferences, and analyses consider the plants of reality, so to speak, disengaged from their native soil—and re-collect yourself in the concrete reality of your being (i.e., plunge into your lived experience); here, digging away the debris and mire that is before you and within you, go “to the things themselves” (e.g., acts of intending, acts of willing, authenticity, relationships of love) and allow these “things themselves” to show themselves from themselves, so that you see these “things” as they really are (as if for the first time), as if you are leaving space for a new acquaintance to show himself and this openness allows you to receive him for what he really is (not what you, or those around you, expected him to be).³⁵

Step two: once you are confident that you have seen the reality of the “thing” you have “gone to” (insofar as this is possible given the reality of the “thing” in question), then proceed to describe carefully and faithfully this “thing,” laying bare its very being—including its essence and essential interconnections, if this is possible—in such a way that others are guided through the debris and mire to see what you have seen, which is possible if and only if they are able and willing to make the journey, of course.³⁶

The permissive note is as follows:

³⁴ As Merleau-Ponty says, “... *phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking ... [and] it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy.*” See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), viii. My division of the phenomenological method into two steps follows the form of a two-step account in Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds, and Ashley Woodward’s “Introduction” to *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, eds. Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds, and Ashley Woodward (London: Continuum Publishing, 2011), 9. I should note, though, that the two steps I will offer are different in style, scope, and content; and I should also note that these authors do not make use of a permissive note.

³⁵ For some relevant discussions, see Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49–63; Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 50–1; Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Heart* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 19–20; Gabriel Marcel, “Concrete Approaches to the Ontological Mystery,” in *Gabriel Marcel’s Perspectives on the Broken World*, trans. Katharine Rose Hanley (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 172–209; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xii–xxi; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), preface, esp. 27–9; Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being.” The phrase “to the things themselves” is from Husserl, of course, and the phrase “show themselves from themselves” is a modification of Heidegger’s “show itself from itself.”

³⁶ Some may wonder why I did not specify that a description of an essence or essential interconnection is a necessary component of this step. I did not do this because of Levinas’s description of the Other (in *Totality and Infinity*)—where the other expresses himself in an overflowing of infinity, in an otherness that cannot be reduced to the same. Levinas is clearly doing phenomenology here, so I think it is fitting to say that the core of this step lies in description. If a philosopher, like Levinas, thinks that a faithful description of a “thing” requires abstaining from a totalizing description, I do not think this should exclude him from the practice of phenomenology. Indeed, this abstaining could be indicative of a master phenomenologist. For a view contrary to this, see David Jopling, “Levinas on Desire, Dialogue and the Other,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 405–27, at 417 and 420.

You can do the following and still claim legitimately that you are performing steps one and two: (i) perform steps one and two as a complement to other philosophical methods (insofar as these other methods do not compromise the performance of the steps)³⁷; or (ii) interpret steps one and two in terms of transcendental idealism or realism. Also, your performances of steps one and two do not lose their legitimacy if you do the following: (i) move beyond your descriptions (produced in step two) to offer efficient, material, formal, or final causes (i.e., explanations) for your descriptions³⁸; or (ii) oscillate between your descriptions (produced in step two) and metaphysical explanation, allowing the former to offer data for the latter and the latter to direct your points of departure concerning steps one and two.³⁹

Thus, in a spirit of provisionality, we can say that steps one and two constitute the *phenomenological method*, that the application of this method constitutes the *doing of phenomenology*, that the analyses achieved through the doing of phenomenology are *phenomenological analyses*, and that the union of these three is *phenomenology* as a whole. A *phenomenologist*, then, is simply one who makes serious use of phenomenology in his philosophizing; in light of the permissive note, no more is required.

The strength of this account, I think, is that it finds the right balance between narrowness and broadness: it is not so narrow that it excludes obvious practitioners of phenomenology; it is not so broad that it includes philosophers on the search for *qualia*. Phenomenology is still a rigorous and demanding method of philosophizing that requires intensive training and intensive

³⁷ Wojtyła's *The Acting Person* justifies this permission well. There is no doubt that he is doing phenomenology and that he merits the title phenomenologist, but there is also no doubt that he is using phenomenology as a complement to Thomism. This can also be seen in Wojtyła's "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," 213.

³⁸ To offer an example, Sartre enriches his phenomenological descriptions with his progressive/regressive method in which formal and material conditions (i.e., causes) add flesh to the analyses. For an insightful discussion on this, see Thomas R. Flynn's "Phenomenology and Faith: From Description to Explanation and Back," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 40–50, esp. 46–8. And Sartre is not alone here; Marcel and St. Wojtyła/John Paul II also move from description to explanation in numerous places. For further discussion, see M. J. Larrabee's "Phenomenologists and the Problems of Traditional Metaphysics," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 57 (1983): 52–9, where she argues that phenomenologists can offer metaphysical explanations for their descriptions and still remain phenomenologists.

³⁹ Some may argue that this oscillation compromises step one, for they may assert that metaphysical theses act as blinders when they direct our attention to a set of finite tasks in the infinite fields of phenomenology—and, moreover, that we will see only in light of our metaphysical positions. In reply, I doubt that any person can, Husserl included, select a set of finite tasks without being guided by some presuppositions (metaphysical or otherwise). Also, there is no *a priori* reason why a phenomenologist cannot be guided to certain "things" by the light of metaphysical truth (obtained through explanations for phenomenological descriptions, or through methods other than phenomenology) and then perform steps one and two with great excellence. This seems no more difficult than Husserl's exhortation to bracket the reality of the "thing" being analyzed.

practice, not to mention great skill. But there is diversity in unity, for the phenomenological method allows for different weltanschauungs, conceptual repertoires, overall aims, overall philosophical methods, and so on. Husserl, we might say, led a groundbreaking expedition to “the things themselves,” worked hard to perfect the phenomenological method, and offered some important analyses. This does not entail that others must follow Husserl to get to “the things themselves,” nor does it entail that others must analyze the same “things,” use the same concepts, follow the same idiosyncrasies of method, and endorse the same understanding of the being of “the things themselves.” Gabriel Marcel provides solid evidence for this claim, and other existentialists and personalists—e.g., Martin Buber, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Emmanuel Mounier—further support the point.⁴⁰

Before proceeding I would like to articulate and respond to a possible objection. I suspect that some may think this account of phenomenology is still too broad. True enough, they may say, much of analytic philosophy will not count as phenomenology (which seems fitting), but this account still opens the doors too wide. Instead, we should retain a substantive meaning—and a sort of purity—for the tradition by restricting our concept of phenomenology to Husserl’s work and those philosophers who stay relatively close to his method, concepts, and goals. Thus, Heidegger, Sartre, and St. Wojtyla/John Paul II are phenomenologists, but we cannot say that

⁴⁰ Indeed, I think Helen Tattam gets things right when she says that “whilst Husserl was developing his phenomenological approach in Germany, Marcel was independently discovering phenomenology in France.” See Helen Tattam’s review of Michael Lewis and Tanja Staehler’s *Phenomenology: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2010) in the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85 (2011): 501–3, at 503. Also, the claim that existentialists and personalists offer phenomenological analyses is nothing radical; on the contrary, it is commonplace. For example, after noting that personalism is closely linked to existentialism, John Macquarrie asserts that “[m]ost existentialists are phenomenologists, though there are many phenomenologists who are not existentialists.” And Clarke, who studied in Europe immediately after WWII, declares that many personalists and existential phenomenologists—such as Buber, Marcel, Mounier, and Sartre—offer “sensitive phenomenological descriptions.” See Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 7–8; Clarke, *Person and Being*, 66–7. For some phenomenological analyses in Buber, Berdyaev, and Mounier, see Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Nicholas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R.M. French (San Rafael C.A.: Semantron Press, 2009), esp. 7–59; and Emmanuel Mounier, *The Character of Man*, trans. Cynthia Rowland (London: Rockliff, 1950).

Buber, Berdyaev, and Mounier do any serious phenomenology—and we should also acknowledge that ascriptions of the appellation “phenomenologist” to Marcel are mistaken.⁴¹

In reply, I would emphasize that the account I have offered points out the salient *philosophical bond*—not the salient historical or linguistic bond—which unites those commonly associated with the phenomenological tradition. As a consequence, the demand that we restrict our account to Husserl (and those relatively close to his work) seems to confuse philosophical salience with historical or linguistic salience. More importantly, it also seems to rest upon the evaluative judgment that Husserl offers us the richest and purest account of phenomenology. But this evaluative judgment is one that requires intra-phenomenological debate. Indeed, if this evaluative judgment is allowed to determine the nature of phenomenology, it will *suppress* and *limit* diversity in phenomenology (and therefore suppress and limit intra-phenomenological debate about the best form of phenomenology) through a “definitional stop,” not philosophical argumentation.⁴² Thus, a close look at the reality of the tradition supports my account; and, more importantly, philosophical rectitude demands that we do not identify Husserl’s work as the vibrating center of phenomenology from which all outward movements can count only as sedition or treason. As a result, we are right to declare that many existentialists and personalists,

⁴¹ In light of Herbert Spiegelberg’s treatment of Marcel, it seems he would make this sort of objection. For instance, while discussing the relationship between Marcel and phenomenology, Spiegelberg declares that Marcel is a “user of phenomenology to a limited extent, but certainly not a phenomenologist . . .” Ostensibly this is for two main reasons: first, his work does not conform to the work of Husserl; second, he uses phenomenology as an entrance to metaphysics (indeed, as metaphysics). Interestingly, though, Spiegelberg appears to accept a broad understanding and narrow understanding of phenomenology, tacitly allowing Marcel to enter the former but not the latter. See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, Second Edition, vol. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 424 and 442–3.

⁴² By “definitional stop” I mean the elimination or suppression—intentionally or unintentionally—of a matter worthy of philosophical discussion through a conceptual claim. To be sure, there are instances where definitional stops can be justified (because the conceptual claim doing the eliminating or suppressing is obviously true); but unless conceptual truth (i.e., the essence of a thing) obviously demands it, it seems best to stay away from definitional stops. I take the term from H.L.A. Hart, who used the term to point out that a definitional claim was being used to sidestep and eliminate important issues in the philosophy of punishment. See Hart’s “Presidential Address: Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 60 (1959–1960): 1–26, at 3–6. For further discussion on the legitimacy and illegitimacy of definitional stops, see Leo Zaibert, *Punishment and Retribution* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 27–8.

at the very least, offer phenomenological descriptions (even if they do not focus on phenomenological descriptions to such an extent that they are phenomenologists)—and we also must begin to think about whether Marcel is a phenomenologist *par excellence*.

Finally, as for the concern that this account of phenomenology does not allow for a substantive enough meaning, I would simply suggest that we highlight the depth and diversity of phenomenology by dividing it into different species via the relevant adjectives (e.g., Husserlian phenomenology, Heideggerian phenomenology, and so on). Besides highlighting the depth and diversity of phenomenology, this will engender clarity, protect the integrity of Husserl's phenomenology, and foster intra-phenomenological debate.

4. The Possible Roles of Phenomenology in Thomistic Personalism

So, let us assume that we have good reason to accept this account of phenomenology. With this account in hand, we can now think more clearly about the relationship between phenomenology and Thomistic personalism. What role should phenomenology play in a moral and political philosophy that is entrenched in the essential theses of Thomism and guided by the Thomistic method of philosophizing—a decidedly cosmological and objective method?⁴³ At the very least there are six potential answers. But before we outline these answers, it would be good to draw a distinction.

When we ask what role phenomenology ought to play in Thomistic personalism, the word “role” is ambiguous. On one the one hand, it could refer to the methodological (and more macroscopic) relationship between phenomenology and Thomistic personalism; on the other hand, it could refer to a specific activity that phenomenology might perform (e.g. disclosing the lived experience of the person or providing rich insights for metaphysical investigation). For the

⁴³ For discussion on the cosmological and objective emphasis in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, see Wojtyła's “Thomistic Personalism,” 170–1; and “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being.”

sake of clarity, then, and rather arbitrarily, I will use the word “role” to refer to the methodological (and more macroscopic) relationship, and I will use the word “task” to refer to a specific philosophical activity that phenomenology might fulfill. This distinction is important, for it forces us to recognize that the relationship between phenomenology and Thomistic personalism is two-tiered. In this section, I will talk of “roles,” and I am therefore opting to attend to the forest instead of the trees. But an assessment of which role phenomenology ought to play in Thomistic personalism requires that we consider the potential tasks of phenomenology—and so the potential tasks of phenomenology will come into view in Sections 5 to 8. I will also explicitly discuss the appropriate tasks of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism in Section 8. Now, let us turn to the six potential answers.

(i) *Absolutely no role.* Thomistic personalism should eschew phenomenology as a method, and it should also eschew the appropriation of phenomenological analyses.

(ii) *The role of dispensable aid.* Thomistic personalism should not take the initiative to perform phenomenological analyses, nor should it seek to appropriate the phenomenological analyses of others. If Thomistic personalism encounters phenomenological analyses worth appropriating, however, they should be appropriated—but, in order to preserve the integrity of the “Thomism” in Thomistic personalism, analyses incompatible with the method or central theses of Thomism must be rendered compatible or rejected. Overall, phenomenological analyses should be seen as occasionally useful additions to the project of Thomistic personalism, but they are unnecessary for its success.

(iii) *The role of adhesive complementarity.* Thomistic personalism should take the initiative to perform phenomenological analyses, and it should also seek to appropriate the phenomenological analyses of others. In order to preserve the integrity of the “Thomism” in Thomistic personalism, though, analyses incompatible with the method or central theses of

Thomism must be rendered compatible or rejected. Overall, phenomenology should be seen as offering an indispensable method and indispensable content (i.e., analyses) for the success of Thomistic personalism, even though it is a cumbersome matter to cement the bricks of phenomenology to the bricks of Thomistic personalism.

(iv) *The role of organic complementarity.* The first two sentences of (iii) are correct, but the third sentence needs to be replaced with the following: overall, phenomenology should be seen as offering an indispensable method and indispensable content (i.e., analyses) for the success of Thomistic personalism—and the inclusion of phenomenology in this project is best seen as something called for by Thomistic personalism itself, viz., phenomenology is the organic continuation and actualization of this project, the following through of its internal commitments.

(v) *The role of reflective equilibrium.* Answer (iv) is on the right track, but one revision is required: just as John Rawls argues that we should seek a reflective equilibrium between the principles agreed upon in the original position (i.e., behind the veil of ignorance) and our considered judgments of justice, so Thomistic personalism should seek a reflective equilibrium between the results achieved through St. Thomas's method and the results achieved through the phenomenological method.⁴⁴ Overall, then, phenomenology should not be seen as methodologically submissive to Thomism, nor should Thomism be seen as methodologically submissive to phenomenology. Instead, truth, which is a unity, should be sought through a reflective equilibrium—where in situations of discrepancy we sometimes follow the results of one method and other times follow the results of the other.

(vi) *The role of methodological primacy.* Thomistic personalism should take seriously both St. Thomas's method and the phenomenological method—allowing each method to shore up

⁴⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 17–8.

the deficiencies of the other. On top of this inter-supplementation, there is good reason to expect that these methods will occasionally corroborate each other (e.g., it may be possible to defend concepts such as prime matter, potency, act, form, substance, soul, *esse*, etc. through both methods).⁴⁵ But in the event of a divergence in results, we should follow the results of the phenomenological method, for a true personalism must give lived experience the upper hand.

There are therefore a number of ways we can think about the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism. In the next three sections, I will argue that phenomenology must play the role of organic complementarity. To reach this conclusion, I will proceed as follows. First, in Section 5, I will identify two norms that are internal to Thomistic personalism and then argue that these norms exclude the possibility of phenomenology playing the role of reflective equilibrium or methodological primacy. Second, in Sections 6 and 7, I will argue that these two norms demand the integration of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism. Finally, in Section 8, I will point out that the role of phenomenology in this integration can be none other than the role of organic complementarity. I will also discuss the main tasks that phenomenology must fulfill in this role.

5. The Investigative and Communicative Norms

I think that two norms, among many, are internal to the project of Thomistic personalism. In this section I will articulate these norms, attempt to demonstrate why they are internal to the project, and finish with three points. The norms are as follows:

The Investigative Norm: Thomistic personalism ought to make serious use of philosophical methods which are indispensable for an investigative program that can, at least in principle, investigate adequately the integral (human) person—with the following qualifications: the philosophical method of Thomism should be supplemented only when

⁴⁵ For example, the door seems open for phenomenology to point towards, although not fully justify, the Boethian definition of the person: a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Cf. John Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, Ch. 4.

necessary, and the philosophical methods appropriated should be compatible with the philosophical method and essential theses of Thomism.

The Communicative Norm: Thomistic personalism ought to make serious use of those writing forms (i.e., writing or rhetorical styles) which are indispensable for the successful communication of its investigative findings vis-à-vis the integral (human) person—with the following qualifications: the form of Thomistic writing should be supplemented only when necessary, and the forms of writing appropriated should be compatible with the philosophical method and essential theses of Thomism.

Let us begin with the Investigative Norm. We can see that this norm is internal to Thomistic personalism by looking at the general structure of personalism. Rejecting the errors of collectivism and individualism, personalism asserts that “a genuine third alternative” must be found by attending to the reality of the integral person.⁴⁶ In line with this conviction, personalists attempt to construct a philosophical anthropology that will produce and justify the moral and political philosophy of personalism.⁴⁷ But this means that the species of personalism that is Thomistic must aim to disclose the reality of the integral person in a philosophical anthropology that is authentically Thomistic, and from this it follows that Thomistic personalism is bound to comply with the Investigative Norm. Because Thomistic personalism aims at disclosing the integral person, it must undertake a satisfactory investigative program; because Thomistic personalism is grounded in Thomism, the specified qualifications must be respected.

As for the Communicative Norm, we can see that this norm is internal to Thomistic personalism for two discrete reasons. First, because Thomistic personalism aims at the development of a philosophical anthropology, it must aim to discern *and* communicate successfully the reality of the integral person. It is undeniable that both of these tasks are constitutive elements of an adequate philosophical anthropology. But if this is the case, it follows

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins Press, 1971), 244.

⁴⁷ A quick note. Although personalism asserts that philosophical anthropology is the justificatory ground of its moral and political philosophy (and so theoretical philosophy does, in a way, ground practical philosophy), it does not follow from this that moral knowledge is epistemically useless in the construction of a philosophical anthropology. On the contrary, a personalist can—and most likely should—insist that moral knowledge and interpersonal relations are realities *through* which we are able to develop a more accurate philosophical anthropology.

that Thomistic personalism is bound to comply with the Communicative Norm. It must make serious use of those forms of writing which are indispensable for the successful communication of that which it discovers through its investigative activity.

Second, according to the three pillars of personalist anthropology, persons are endowed with an inalienable dignity, oriented towards relationships of love, and permanently enshrouded in a degree of a mystery. These three theses are non-negotiable in personalism.⁴⁸ But these theses give rise to a moral imperative that binds the project of Thomistic personalism. In short, out of respect for the inalienable dignity of each person, out of concern for the flourishing of each person, and out of an awareness that each person is much more than a passive receiver of abstract propositions, Thomistic personalism must strive to communicate successfully its main positions and theses—especially its investigative findings concerning the integral person—to those concrete persons who are willing to be interlocutors. It must do this because it is plausible to think that the successful communication of its philosophical anthropology will help these interlocutors flourish.⁴⁹ The three pillars of Thomistic personalism therefore give rise to a morality of writing a philosophical anthropology (and thus, for personalists, a morality of writing a moral and political philosophy): successful communication to potential interlocutors is neither optional nor trivial.⁵⁰ Thus, for two discrete reasons, the personalism involved in Thomistic personalism demands compliance with the first half of the Communicative Norm, and it seems reasonable to assert that the Thomism involved in Thomistic personalism demands compliance with the specified qualifications.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 1, Section 2.

⁴⁹ By no means am I asserting the Socratic thesis that “to know the good is to do the good” (seen, for example, in Plato’s *Protagoras*); but I am assuming, at a minimum, that theoretical and practical knowledge can aid in the achievement of one’s flourishing.

⁵⁰ This may sound similar to Derrida’s reference to an “Ethics of Ethics” in Levinas’s work, but I am not suggesting anything along these lines. See Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 111.

But an objection may be raised. Some may argue that the qualifications included in these norms are Thomistically, philosophically, and personalistically unacceptable. They are Thomistically and philosophically unacceptable, some may argue, because Thomism is prioritized without philosophical argument, but the spirit of Thomism and the spirit of philosophy are both opposed to unjustified prioritization. They are personalistically unacceptable, some may argue, because they sacrifice investigative and communicative success to an unjustified predilection for an unadulterated Thomism (since Thomism is modified, if at all, in inessential ways).

In reply, I would say that these concerns are weighty but misplaced. The qualifications are not meant to legitimize an off-handed rejection of anything incompatible with Thomism; rather, they are meant to provide conceptual limitations (and methodological guidelines) to the philosophical activity of Thomistic personalism. In other words, those working on Thomistic personalism must strive to investigate successfully the integral person, and they also must seek to communicate successfully their investigative insights (if not, personalism is rejected); but this activity must respect the philosophical method and essential theses of Thomism (if not, Thomism is rejected).⁵¹ Thus, I mean to say only that these norms bind one as soon as one begins working *in* Thomistic personalism. The norms are internal to the project itself.

Finally, three more things must be said. First, by distinguishing between “philosophical method” and “writing form” I do not mean to suggest that the latter is unconnected to the former. In my eyes, an essential component of any philosophical method is its choice (or choices) of writing form. Writing form does at least three things: (i) it *says* certain things (e.g., dry and

⁵¹ Of course, we need to be careful here. Personalism is not *simply* some extra added to Thomism from without; it is *also* an aspect of Thomism that emerges from within. The personalism of Thomism, we might say, is simultaneously an emergence and integration. To point out this unique reality, we might say that Thomistic personalism is a *synthetic emergence*—the addition of something from without that allows for the fulfillment of that which lies within. Cf. Gilson’s *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Ch. 10; and Maritain’s “The Person and the Common Good.”

abstract writing asserts that successful communication does not require the stirring of emotions, and metaphorically rich writing asserts that the reality being discussed resides in misty regions); (ii) it *limits* what can be said and how things can be said; and (iii) it *encourages* and *discourages* research topics. In other words, I am declaring that there is substantive content to every writing form. The neutrality of form is an illusion.⁵² Notwithstanding this connection between philosophical method and writing form, I still think it is important to distinguish between those philosophical methods which are required for an adequate investigation into the person and those forms of writing which are required for the successful communication of the insights of this investigation. These are separable issues and I will treat them as such. Although this distinction may attenuate the clarity of our discussion, I think it will, in the end, help us perceive the depth at which phenomenology must be integrated into Thomistic personalism.

Second, although these norms are internal to Thomistic personalism, the first half of each norm is plausible as soon as one takes seriously the goals of philosophy. Thus, if Thomists can provide compelling arguments for Thomism in general, it would follow that these norms bind philosophers without qualification. Obviously I will not attempt to travel this justificatory route in this chapter. (Besides, someone like Etienne Gilson or Jacques Maritain would need to show the way.) All the same, I think it is important to keep in mind that these internal norms can be defended via philosophical argumentation, and when this is done they must be treated as potential norms for all philosophers.

Third, these norms exclude the possibility of phenomenology playing the role of reflective equilibrium or the role of methodological primacy in Thomistic personalism. These

⁵² My understanding of the relationship between form and content in philosophy is indebted to Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Ch. 1. In this book, Nussbaum attempts to show that (i) and (ii) point to the need for the inclusion of literature in moral philosophy—broadly construed. For a more general discussion on rhetorical style in philosophy, especially concerning the difference in style between analytic and continental philosophy, see Michael Rea, "Introduction" in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, eds. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–30.

roles are excluded because they contravene the qualification—contained in both norms—that the philosophical method and central theses of Thomism must be respected. To see this contravention, assume that phenomenology plays the role of co-authority (as in reflective equilibrium) or the role of ultimate authority (as in methodological primacy). In either case, two things follow. First, the priority of metaphysics in Thomism is rejected. Second, central theses of Thomism are left open to revision. Why? In brief, metaphysical explanations can be revised if phenomenological analyses suggest that these explanations fail to attend sufficiently to the data being explained, and more general theses (e.g., in metaethics and philosophical anthropology) can be revised as soon as phenomenological analyses suggest they are false. If a discrepancy arises, *calibration* (in reflective equilibrium) or *domination* (in methodological primacy) is able to push essential theses of Thomism to the side: the real distinction between existence and essence, the convertibility between being and goodness, the human being as a body-soul unity—all of these theses, and many others, are left open to revision. As a result, these potential roles in Thomistic personalism are incompatible with Thomism because, first, they eliminate the status of metaphysics as first philosophy; and, second, they treat essential theses of Thomism as inessential. To be sure, allowing phenomenology to play these roles can produce a personalism that is friendly to Thomism; it cannot, however, produce a Thomistic personalism. Thus, in light of the Investigative and Communicative Norms, the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism cannot be one of reflective equilibrium or methodological primacy.

6. The Investigative Norm and Phenomenology

Does The Investigative Norm entail that phenomenology should be integrated into Thomistic personalism? I think it does, and I will try to demonstrate this in the following way. First, I will highlight four overlapping aspects of the person which need to be investigated. Second, I will argue that phenomenology is indispensable for the investigation of these four aspects, even after

we have taken into account the general method of Thomism and other philosophical methods.

Third, I will argue that the integration of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism can be done in such a way that the qualifications of The Investigative Norm are satisfied.

Let us start with the four overlapping aspects. Once we agree that we are investigating the integral person (not just an aspect of the person), it follows that we need to investigate the *breadth* of the person. By “breadth” I mean to gesture at the undeniable reality that the person is both an object and subject; thus, the objective (exterior) life of the person and the subjective (interior) life of the person must be investigated. But the breadth of the person “contains” the *depth* and *height* of the person, so these must be investigated as well. By “depth” I mean to gesture at the vibrating ecology of our inner universe and its relation to the vibrating ecology of the outer universe; thus, the lived experience of the person—I-Thou relationships, the weight of existential finitude, the dark nights of the soul—must be investigated in detail.⁵³ By “height” I mean to gesture at that unobjectifiable elevation of being that persons achieve when they subsist in the dynamism of subjectivity; thus, the mystery of the person must be caressed but not grasped, engaged but not trapped, encountered but not reified. But these three aspects, especially the aspect of depth, remind us of the fullness of the person. By “fullness” I mean to gesture at the ontological dynamism that constitutes the moral fullness (as opposed to the moral emptiness) of the concrete person; thus, the splendor of the saint must be described in its objective manifestations and lived experience, even if the latter requires that we separate the full from the empty by sifting through the rubble of our own being.⁵⁴ Consequently, an investigative program

⁵³ I take the term “inner universe” from Archimandrite Roman Braga’s *Exploring the Inner Universe* (Rives Junction, MI: H.D.M. Press, Inc., 2006). Fr. Braga does not offer a philosophical exploration of the inner universe, but he does outline—insofar as concepts and discretion allow—a religious exploration. His recounting of this exploration, brought about by an extended period of solitary confinement, highlights the depth of our being which is too often obscured by our focus on cosmological and academic knowledge (see esp. 39–44).

⁵⁴ I take the distinction from Gabriel Marcel: “I have had occasion to write, provided this be understood in a metaphysical and not physical sense, that the distinction between the full and the empty is more fundamental than

that is, at least in principle, capable of investigating adequately the integral person must include philosophical methods which allow it to examine adequately the breadth, depth, height, and fullness of the person.

It is clear that a whole treatise could be written on the importance and significance of these four metaphors which emphasize the immaterial and invisible dimension of the person, but I think a quick reference to them is sufficient for our purposes.⁵⁵ Here, working with inadequate concepts, and fully aware that a degree of amorphousness permeates our discussion, I think it is nonetheless clear that the method of Thomism cannot—on its own—satisfactorily investigate these four aspects of the person. The metaphysically, cosmologically, and objectively focused method of Thomism lays a foundation of inestimable worth.⁵⁶ It helps us see that a person is an individual substance of a rational nature, that a person is a body-soul unity, that the soul of a person is incorruptible, that the *esse* of each person is a sustained gift from *Esse* Itself, that the division of potency and act applies to the person, that the goodness and beauty of the person is determined by the degree of his being, and so on.

But the investigative method of Thomism seems to miss the lived experience of the person that is present in the breadth, depth, height, and fullness of the person. As St. Wojtyla/John Paul II says, “St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person, but it would be difficult to speak in his view of the lived experiences of the

that between the one and the many.” He then goes on to note the emptiness of an over-functionalized world, a world full of problems but blind to mystery, a world kowtowing before technological exigency but running from ontological exigency. See “Concrete Approaches to Investigating the Ontological Mystery,” 173–5.

⁵⁵ It seems metaphor is often needed to discuss the person. For instance, Jacques Maritain—inspired by St. Paul (Ephesians 3:18)—talks about the length, breadth, height, and depth of the mind. I am obviously using the common terms differently. See Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), ix–x.

⁵⁶ Again, see Wojtyla’s “Thomistic Personalism,” 170–1; and “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being.” Also, for a short but illuminating account of St. Thomas’s philosophical method, see Vernon J. Bourke’s “Foreword” on St. Thomas’s understanding of knowledge and method in *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Pocket Books, 1960), 1–7.

person.”⁵⁷ It is true that St. Thomas investigates rationality, the will, friendship, faith, hope, love, and much more. But these subjective and intersubjective activities are treated, for the most part, in an objective fashion.⁵⁸ No doubt it would be an egregious error to say that St. Thomas was unable to investigate his lived experience (there can be no question of saying that this saint lacked an interpersonal and intrapersonal life of the highest degree), but it does seem accurate to say that his philosophical method led him to focus his attention elsewhere. Thus, the lived experience involved in the breadth, depth, height, and fullness of the person is left largely uninvestigated.

But some may object, following the work of Flood (discussed in Section 2), that the method of Thomism does allow for an investigation into the lived experience of the person. Of course, there is some truth to this. It is not all or nothing. St. Thomas occasionally enters into the terrain of lived experience.⁵⁹ But it must be recognized that these excursions are inadequate on both the quantitative and qualitative level. There are not enough of them (leaving great swaths of territory uncovered), and they terminate too quickly. We might say that the Scholastic emphasis on universality, abstraction, principles, deduction, coherence, certainty, and clarity disposes St. Thomas to investigate the objective domain rather than the subjective domain. Indeed, the form of writing in Thomistic philosophy, which is an essential component of St. Thomas’s philosophical method, discourages investigation into lived experience, for this form suggests that philosophy deals mostly with the clear; and, moreover, that philosophy is primarily about abstraction, reasoning, and objective conclusions. In other words, the form of Thomistic writing

⁵⁷ “Thomistic Personalism,” 171.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 170–1.

⁵⁹ I trust that the Thomistic emphasis on (i) sense experience as the beginning of knowledge and (ii) the acts of simple apprehension and judgment will not be identified with an emphasis on lived experience, at least as it is used in the contemporary sense. Thomism is a philosophy of experience, no doubt—but the issue at hand is what regions of experience should be prioritized and prized.

harbors substantive content that discourages investigation into our lived experience.⁶⁰ None of this derogates from the work of St. Thomas; the patrimony of Thomism is an enduring philosophical foundation. But it does suggest that the method of Thomism is unable to investigate adequately—on its own—the breadth, depth, height, and fullness of the person.

But if the Investigative Norm requires that Thomistic personalism investigate the integral person adequately, it follows that Thomistic personalism must search for other philosophical methods. It must look to assimilate other methods to itself in order to work towards its goal. But what other methods are capable of fulfilling this investigative lacuna? It seems that phenomenology is the one best suited to the task. This is because phenomenology—when considered against the horizon of a metaphysical realism—demands that we re-collect ourselves into our concrete existence (i.e., descend or sink back into our reality, away from abstractions, theories, and systems) and attend to our lived experience. Next, it exhorts us to describe in detail that which we have allowed to show itself from itself. Thus, phenomenology makes it possible to investigate our lived experience in the depth, breadth, height, and fullness of the person.⁶¹ A whole new microcosm opens up, and investigation takes place through and around a form of philosophical writing that does not limit or suppress sustained investigation into the unreifiable world of our lived experience. The form of phenomenological writing harbors content, unsurprisingly, that is friendly to phenomenological investigation, viz., that philosophy is just as

⁶⁰ To avoid confusion, it should be noted that the form of Thomistic writing cannot be identified with the objection-body-reply format so well-known from St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*. He does not use this format, for example, in *De Ente et Essentia* (*On Being and Essence*) or *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In what follows, then, by "Thomistic style" or "Thomistic form of writing" I simply mean a rhetorical style which possesses the properties just described in the body of the text above. It should also be noted that the form of Thomistic writing is one that continues today—for it can be found in the work of many philosophers working within the Thomistic tradition, even when we acknowledge that some of these philosophers have been influenced by the analytic style. The analytic style is not far removed from the Thomistic one. Again, for an account of the analytic style, see Michael Rea, "Introduction," esp. 5–6.

⁶¹ Cf. Clarke, "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism," 226–7.

much about showing as it is about proving, and that philosophy must not rush over the recalcitrance of lived experience—but patiently travel into dark regions replete with unstable ground. We might also say that this form says that philosophy ought to look and look again; then it must communicate what is seen, even if this communication can succeed only by leading others to the requisite lookout point through a maze of personal transformation.⁶²

Of course, some may suggest that existentialism is equally capable of helping us conduct this sort of investigation. This is a fair consideration, but I do not think it can affect our overall answer, for existentialism descends or sinks back into concrete existence precisely because it makes use of literature *and* phenomenology.⁶³ We could, of course, attempt to argue that literature, drama, and poetry are capable of filling this investigational lacuna, and it is surely true that these genres possess great investigative potential, but to suggest they could render phenomenology superfluous seems implausible. It is not clear, for example, how the investigational processes would work, and it is unlikely that these genres could investigate reality with the same focus and effectiveness as phenomenology—for the investigative wellspring of these genres seems to lie in their ability to illuminate after the writing, not before it.⁶⁴

⁶² Cf. Merleau-Ponty's claim that "[t]rue philosophy consists in re-learning to look at the world ..." and Marcel's claim that "[t]he responsibility of the philosopher is much less to prove than to *show*" And this showing, according to Marcel, is more akin to leading another to a ripening or transformation. See Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, xx; and Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 31.

⁶³ It is worth noting that the nature of existentialism does not lie in Sartre's claim that "existence precedes essence." On the contrary, the nature of existentialism lies in its objectives and method. The objectives are, quite ordinarily, to understand the person and live aright (even if this living aright means responsibly and freely choosing one's values); its method, quite extra-ordinarily, is to investigate personal existence in the concrete—in *existence*. This is what unites the diverse set of philosophers often labeled existentialists e.g., Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Heidegger, Berdyaev, Marcel, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus. This is also why phenomenology and literature take on such prominent roles in the movement (along with aphorism, diary, and indirect communication). Obviously much more could be said, especially about the themes which are arguably part of the essence of existentialism, but I make this clarification to show that the relationship between existentialism and phenomenology is an overlapping one. Thus, if phenomenology is integrated into Thomistic personalism, a great deal of existentialism will come along with it. Some may think this is a serious problem, but I suspect that this worry trades on the mistaken assumption that Sartre constitutes the core of existentialism, or that existentialism is incompatible with essences.

⁶⁴ Clearly this is a topic that needs to be explored further in Thomistic personalism, for it may be the case that Thomistic personalism should make considerable use of literature, drama, poetry, and other unorthodox forms of

Consequently, we are justified in saying that phenomenology is indispensable for an adequate investigation into the integral person. But does it comply with the two qualifications specified in the second half of The Investigative Norm? If by “phenomenology” we mean Husserlian phenomenology, the answer is no. But if by “phenomenology” we mean the account I articulated and defended in Section 3, there is no reason to think that phenomenology is incompatible with the prioritization of the method of Thomism or the essential theses of Thomism. Phenomenology can serve legitimately as a complement to the method of Thomism because of the permissive note. It can work *from* and *for* the metaphysics of Thomism. Indeed, just as Thomism seeks to work out a philosophy that is guided by and compatible with Christian revelation (e.g., creation *ex nihilo* in Genesis 1; God as “I AM” in Exodus 3:14; God as a Trinity in Unity), so phenomenology in Thomistic personalism can seek to be guided by and remain compatible with the method and essential theses of Thomism. This does not mean that phenomenology must lean on Thomism for its analyses, nor does it mean that it must reject incompatible analyses without philosophical justification. It simply means that the method and essential theses of Thomism can guide phenomenological focus (e.g., specifying which “things themselves” should be analyzed) and prompt phenomenological reassessment (e.g., when analyses are inconsistent with essential theses of Thomism). In short, the core elements of Thomism can do for phenomenology what Gilson claims Christian revelation does for Christian philosophy (as seen, for instance, in Thomism).⁶⁵ We can justifiably call this vision of phenomenology Thomistic phenomenology.

philosophical writing. Cf. Gabriel Marcel’s declaration that his dramas often precede and give rise to his philosophical insights. Gabriel Marcel, *Presence and Immortality*, trans. Michael A. Machado (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 13–5.

⁶⁵ See Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Chs. 1–2.

Given the above, then, it follows that The Investigative Norm demands the integration of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism. For those who still think this conclusion requires further justification, I would simply propose a reading or re-reading of phenomenological analyses and a sincere attempt to enter into the practice of phenomenology itself. Ultimately it is through the reading of phenomenological analyses (in their unabridged fullness) and the performance of phenomenology itself that we are best able to perceive the indispensability of phenomenology for an adequate investigation of the four aspects of the person mentioned, and that phenomenology can co-exist with Thomism.

7. The Communicative Norm and Phenomenology

At this point some may think that we can argue as follows: (i) due to the last section, it is clear that phenomenology must be integrated into Thomistic personalism for investigative reasons; (ii) according to The Communicative Norm, Thomistic personalism must make serious use of those forms of writing which are required for the successful communication of its investigative results vis-à-vis the integral person; (iii) the phenomenological form of writing—which we can call “phenomenological description”—is best suited to communicate phenomenological insights; (iv) therefore, due to (i)-(iv), along with a hidden premise or two, The Communicative Norm requires Thomistic personalism to make serious use of phenomenological description.

This may appear obvious. But I think we need to move slowly. In particular, (iii) could be doubted. It is conceivable that philosophers comfortable with the Thomistic or analytic form of writing could assume that these forms of writing are able to communicate phenomenological insights just as well as phenomenological description.⁶⁶ Form is one thing and content is another;

⁶⁶ Indeed, if Nussbaum is right—when she claims that contemporary Anglo-American philosophy usually disregards the relationship between form and content or regards form as “irrelevant to the stating of content”—then we have good reason to believe that (iii) could be consciously or unconsciously rejected. See Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 8.

how something is said is one thing and what is said is another. But if this is the case, and we remind ourselves of the qualifications contained in The Communicative Norm, it would follow that the Thomistic form of writing should be used to communicate the investigative insights of phenomenology. In practice, of course, Thomistic personalists are not going to prohibit phenomenological description and decree that all phenomenological insights must be recast in the Thomistic form of writing. Still, another more subtle scenario could emerge. In short, Thomistic personalists could recognize that phenomenology is needed to discern some aspects of the integral person, but then fail to recognize that phenomenological insights must be communicated in the phenomenological form of writing. Phenomenological descriptions would then take on an inessential and peripheral role in the communicative activity of Thomistic personalism. They would be gestured at here and there (in explications and footnotes), but their communicative significance would not be recognized explicitly.

Accordingly, in this section I will attempt to demonstrate that the successful communication of phenomenological insight requires the phenomenological form of writing. To establish this—and therefore show that Thomistic personalism must endorse a stylistic dualism, at the very least—I will argue that phenomenological description is indispensable for the successful communication of phenomenological insight on the levels of *disengaged knowledge*, *engaged knowledge*, and *ontological transformation*. With this established, I will argue that the phenomenological form of writing does not violate the qualifications contained in The Communicative Norm.

To better situate the potential communicative roles of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism, we should begin by acknowledging that Thomistic personalism ought to rely on the form of St. Thomas's writing to communicate much of its investigative results vis-à-vis the integral person. The Thomistic form of writing, for instance, is needed to communicate St.

Thomas's systematic understanding of the relationship between Being and beings; the relationships between *esse*, soul, form, and matter; the nature of human action; and so on. These positions cannot be communicated successfully through description alone, especially if the description tolerates lengthy and unclear passages. Instead, persons willing to be interlocutors must be provided with the trains of reasoning that lead to these positions, and because many central concepts—such as prime matter, potency, act, form, substance, soul, intellect, *esse*—must be understood in relation to other concepts, these concepts must be communicated through the arguments which specify the appropriate relations. The Thomistic form of writing, with its great clarity and argumentative precision, developed for good reason. We might even say that this style is eminently suited to the communication of a systematic account of reality. A systematic vision, fleshed out through the properly personalistic activities of abstraction and reasoning, can be successfully communicated only if a form of writing is used that emphasizes clarity and reasoning. Still, from all of this it does not follow that Thomism can easily assimilate the investigative findings of phenomenology and cast them in its own style.

We can see this by noting that phenomenological descriptions always communicate disengaged knowledge and engaged knowledge. By “disengaged knowledge” I mean knowledge that is acquired and recalled in a mode of disengagement from one's concrete being-in-the-world (to use one of Heidegger's terms). It is an objective or spectatorial cognizing of reality that can target objects and subjects—including the self. In its purest form, the knower disengages objects and subjects, including himself, from his being-in-the-world (or receives objects and subjects from another already disengaged) and examines them on the plane of abstraction. On the other hand, by “engaged knowledge” I mean a knowledge that is acquired and recalled in a mode of engagement with one's concrete being-in-the-world. It is a subjective or participatory encounter with reality that can target objects and subjects—including the self. In its purest form, the knower

engages objects and subjects, including himself, in the totality of his being-in-the-world and examines them on the plane of the concrete. Conceptualization can still play a role here, to a greater or lesser degree, but the known is acquired and recalled by the knower as it is in the concrete. To offer a simple example, there is an obvious difference between a disengaged knowledge of love and an engaged knowledge of love; to offer a more abstruse example, there is also a difference between a disengaged knowledge of a tree and an engaged knowledge of a tree.⁶⁷ Obviously this distinction needs to be fleshed out in more detail, but in what follows I need to assume its validity. For those familiar with Gabriel Marcel's distinction between concrete philosophizing and abstract philosophizing or Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective thought and objective thought, I am moving along similar lines.⁶⁸

But some may argue that this distinction is simply a convoluted way of articulating Bertrand Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description (assuming we leave Russell's account of sense data aside). To be as clear as possible, I should say that, although similar, these distinctions are different. They are different because Russell's knowledge by acquaintance is not an epistemic achievement in a robust sense. For example, if a person thinks, then he has knowledge by acquaintance of his thinking—and the matter is settled. When it comes to engaged knowledge, however, it is manifest that simply because a person thinks it does not follow that this person has engaged knowledge of thinking. To see this, suppose that a person learns about thinking by thinking about the nature of thinking, not by living through and attending to his everyday thinking (or, alternatively, suppose a person never reflects upon his thinking from any angle). This person is directly acquainted with his thinking, but it is also clear

⁶⁷ Concerning engaged knowledge of a tree, cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 57–9.

⁶⁸ See Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 58–81; Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 20–1; and Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), esp. 191–3.

that he lacks an engaged knowledge of his thinking. A person can suppress engaged knowledge by consistently denigrating concrete experience and praising objective—i.e., disengaged—knowledge.⁶⁹ Thus, engaged knowledge cannot be identified with Russell’s knowledge by acquaintance, and we must recognize that any engaged knowledge worthy of the name is often, although not always, an *intellectual achievement* that requires effort and skill. Speaking loosely we might say that knowledge by acquaintance is necessary but not sufficient for engaged knowledge.⁷⁰

Now, with this distinction in hand, we can immediately see that phenomenology, through phenomenological description, communicates disengaged knowledge. For example, Marcel’s descriptions of disposability (as opposed to non-disposability) offer conceptual claims concerning disposability and some specific ways in which disposability can be instantiated in the concrete.⁷¹ They tell us, for instance, about a specific way of relating to others that is characterized by presence, witness, openness, permeability, charity, self-gift, adherence-to-others, generosity, non-calculative thinking, optimism, hope, and so on.⁷² A person can leisurely read the analyses and appropriate some abstract knowledge (assuming the analyses are, by and large, accurate). The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Buber’s account of the I-Thou relation vs. the I-It relation, Heidegger’s account of Dasein, Mounier’s account of the person vs. the bourgeois-

⁶⁹ Cf. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 202.

⁷⁰ See Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 46–59.

⁷¹ In French, Marcel talks of *disponibilité*, and the best translation is contentious. As Sam Keen notes, some translators resort to “availability” and Marcel himself has suggested “handiness” or “spiritual readiness” as alternatives. See Sam Keen, *Gabriel Marcel* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 33.

⁷² A short explication of disposability, I fear, would likely obscure the reality, although see Section 2 of Chapter 1—where I (reluctantly) offer a short explication. For some examples of Marcel’s descriptions, which are scattered throughout his work, see *Being and Having*, 69–74; “Concrete Approaches to Investigating the Ontological Mystery,” 190–4; *Creative Fidelity*, 38–57; and Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1, trans. G.S. Fraser (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), Chs. IX and X, both of which touch on similar issues.

individual, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II's account of the acting person, Levinas's account of the face, etc.⁷³

But Marcel's descriptions of disposability seek to communicate more than disengaged knowledge. His patient and effervescent descriptions are simultaneously a plea and a challenge: they say "look at reality yourself and you'll see what I see; engage your being-in-the-world and the reality I've described to you will be known in the concrete." In other words, Marcel's descriptions are meant to communicate more than conceptual truths; they are also meant to communicate contact with a region of the real. The disengaged knowledge acts as a springboard from which we are supposed to plunge into the engaged knowledge of our own being-in-the-world—in this case disposability and non-disposability in ourselves and others—and then allow this engaged knowledge to illuminate and purify our earlier obtained disengaged knowledge. The same applies to all phenomenological descriptions (e.g., the ones specified in the previous paragraph). Phenomenological descriptions are just as much exhortation as they are a description; they point beyond themselves to the reality in question. Also, and I think this is usually unrecognized, these descriptions communicate a kind of non-conceptual ability or procedural knowledge which allows persons to navigate the messy milieu of their being-in-the-world with greater skill. To refer to our example once again, Marcel's wandering, cautious, expectant, and effervescent descriptions of disposability serve to teach us how to investigate our concrete reality more adequately, just as a beginning philosopher learns the acceptable and unacceptable moves of more general philosophical thinking by seeing his teachers philosophize.⁷⁴ Thus,

⁷³ See Buber, *I and Thou*; Heidegger, *Being and Time*; Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalist Manifesto*, trans. Monks of St. John's Abbey (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1938), 13–27, 67–98; and *Personalism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 18–23; Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*; Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

⁷⁴ For those who have had the strange experience of suddenly realizing that they are thinking or writing like those they have been reading, I suspect this claim about procedural knowledge will appear sufficiently plausible. Learning

phenomenological descriptions communicate engaged knowledge via a combination of disengaged knowledge and procedural knowledge—a “know-how” concerning concrete investigation.

Finally, phenomenological descriptions sometimes seek to communicate an ontological transformation to persons. This usually happens when the “thing” at hand is related to the moral fullness of the person. So, to return to Marcel’s descriptions of disposability, we can see that Marcel also seeks to bring about an ontological transformation in his readers: moving beyond disengaged and engaged knowledge of disposability, he seeks to communicate the dynamism of being that constitutes disposability. Accordingly the beauty and strength of disposability are compared to the ugliness and weakness of non-disposability, and we are presented with a vision of intersubjectivity that washes over us like a magnetized field of moral normativity—a field that is meant to draw us towards a transformation from *being* a non-disposable person to *being* a more disposable one. Marcel is urging us onward towards perfection. How often do phenomenological analyses communicate ontological transformation towards the fullness of personhood? This is a difficult question, and I suspect that empirical studies would not help us much. (How could an experimenter verify, for example, whether a person is moving towards disposability as opposed to a solicitude that wants nothing to do with the other?)⁷⁵ All the same, it is plausible that these accounts do bring about ontological transformation in some cases. As St. Thomas asserts (following Aristotle), we do, after all, desire goodness.⁷⁶ And these phenomenological

via the modeling of others is an everyday occurrence. See Herbert Spiegelberg for a discussion on Marcel’s cautious and expectant method in *The Phenomenological Movement*, Second Edition, vol. 2.

⁷⁵ As Marcel says, “The most conscientious attentive listener can give me the impression of being unavailable; he or she brings me nothing; he or she cannot really create a space for me in his or her life In reality, there is a way of listening that is a giving of oneself; there is another way of listening that is a refusal, *a refusal to give of oneself*” “Concrete Approaches to Investigating the Ontological Mystery,” 192. Cf. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 207.

⁷⁶ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948), Ia, q. 5, a. 1.

descriptions paint the goodness of the person so beautifully (which is to be expected if goodness and beauty are both convertible with being) that it would be nothing short of obstinacy to assert that they never (or almost never) successfully communicate the ontological transformations—at least to some degree—that they aim to impart.⁷⁷ The density of the goodness and beauty depicted must, at least in some cases, initiate an auspicious joining of intellect and will towards the fullness of being. Marcel’s account of disposability, Buber’s account of the I-Thou relation, and Mounier’s account of the fullness of the person are excellent examples of the way in which phenomenological description can communicate ontological transformation (insofar as this is possible for writing, as opposed to free will and grace).

To sum up, then, phenomenological insights (or “results”) are communicated through phenomenological description—but on three levels. If all goes as planned, the insights are communicated to the intellectual plane of abstraction alone (disengaged knowledge); the concrete person (engaged knowledge); and, in some cases, the very dynamism of the integral person (ontological transformation). I would now like to argue that phenomenological description, as a form of writing, is indispensable for the successful communication of phenomenological insights (or “results”) on all of these levels.

Although many arguments could be adduced in support of this tripartite claim, I will offer only two. First, I believe a passage from Gabriel Marcel suggests a significant justification. In the *Mystery of Being*, while discussing the nature of philosophical investigation, he says the following:

One might postulate it as a principle ... that in an investigation of the type on which we are now engaged, a philosophical investigation, there can be no place at all for results of this sort [i.e., results which can be appropriated by those uninvolved in the research, e.g., a consumer buying the result of technological investigation, or a person using the result of a meteorological investigation into next week’s weather]. Let us expand that: between a

⁷⁷ For a discussion on the relationship between goodness and beauty, see *ibid.*, Ia. q. 5, a. 4 ad 1.

philosophical investigation and its final outcome, there exists a link which cannot be broken without the summing up itself immediately losing all reality.⁷⁸

Applying Marcel's claim in this context, we could say that an attempt to cast a phenomenological insight in a form of writing other than phenomenological description is bound to efface or pulverize the investigative steps (or we might even say "investigative pieces" or "investigative brush strokes") upon which the insight was originally reached—and this, in turn, entails that the insight must fall to the ground and be destroyed, so to speak. Even if the phenomenological description does not describe these investigative steps one by one, a good description at the very least prompts the reader to make the steps himself, i.e., at the very least the reader is indirectly led in a certain direction and down a certain path. He begins to see—slowly, more clearly, a glimmer here, an outline there, and so on.

And this applies to both disengaged and engaged knowledge. The reader must slowly and patiently take the requisite steps to acquire some disengaged knowledge, and then he must descend into his being-in-the-world, purging preconceptions and tenaciously attending to the relevant aspects of the "thing" at hand. But the reader requires solid guidance. Thus, the *compression* of a phenomenological description into a form of writing that is less tolerant of lengthy and sometimes hazy description will impede the attainment of the phenomenological insight on both the disengaged and engaged levels. The investigative steps (or puzzle pieces, or brush strokes) are either effaced or pulverized and this makes it difficult or impossible for the interlocutor to make the required movements. Moreover, the communication of an ontological transformation, when it is an aim of the phenomenological description, will be hampered too. This is because this ontological transformation depends, in large part, on the interlocutor's ability to acquire the relevant disengaged and engaged knowledge. Explications in the Thomistic or

⁷⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 4–5.

analytic style are acceptable (to an extent), but only on the condition that they serve to point the reader to the phenomenological descriptions themselves.

The second argument leans on Nussbaum's claim that writing form necessarily makes substantive assertions. Kierkegaard, the master of indirect communication, addresses this issue when he says the following:

The difference between subjective and objective thinking must also manifest itself in the form of communication. This means that the subjective thinker must promptly become aware that the form of communication must artistically possess just as much reflection as he himself, existing in his thinking, possesses. Artistically, please note, for the secret does not consist in his enunciating the double-reflection directly [i.e., his thought on the level of the universal and his thought on the level of subjective inwardness], since such an enunciation is a direct contradiction.⁷⁹

Kierkegaard's point, if I read him correctly, is that the subjective thinker—thinking himself in existence—must be careful about his choice of writing form, for the form chosen can contradict that which is supposed to be communicated. In this case, Kierkegaard argues that the use of direct communication to communicate one's lived experience is an intolerable error precisely because the form of direct communication says that the "thing" being communicated can be acquired without concrete exploration and transformation. All that is required is a competence with the relevant concepts and the ability to make logical connections. But this is false: the acquisition of lived experience (from the communicator) requires more than conceptual and logical competence. Therefore, direct communication should not be used.⁸⁰

Refocusing on phenomenological description, we can see that this form of writing generally suggests that the "thing" being communicated (on all three levels, but especially on the level of engaged knowledge) demands patience, seeing anew, penetration into *essentially* unclear

⁷⁹ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 191–2, footnote removed; cf. 228–9.

⁸⁰ For two articles on Kierkegaard's understanding of indirect communication, see Harry S. Broudy, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication," *The Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1961): 225–33; and J. Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 153–60. Pages 153–4 of the latter are quite helpful.

and unstable lands (in some cases), and a respect for the concrete whole (i.e., unity, synthesis, and re-collection) and not simply abstraction (i.e., compartmentalism, analysis, and disassembly). When we look at the writing forms of analytic philosophy and Thomism, on the other hand, these forms of writing generally suggest that there is little need to penetrate into essentially unclear and unstable lands; that concrete knowledge is less important than abstract thinking; and that investigational steps are best thought of as premises, not as wending paths through the depth of one's being-in-the-world. (This does not mean, of course, that analytic philosophers or Thomists must believe or assert this; indeed, I think St. Thomas's work on analogy and God as *Esse* Itself entails that we must investigate essentially unclear lands, given our limited mode of knowing, and strive for systematicity and synthesis at the abstract level.)

Consequently, the writing form of phenomenology allows phenomenologists to communicate phenomenological insights without *misleading* their interlocutors; and, in some cases, without *contradicting* themselves. To offer a single example, Levinas could not successfully or coherently try to communicate his "understanding" of the Other in a form of writing that prizes clarity, brevity, and abstraction, as this would (i) assert that personal transformation is not the path through which we encounter the Other, and (ii) assert (i.e., really declare) that his main "thesis" is false—for clarity, brevity, and abstraction would all point to our ability to totalize the Other by reducing him to the same. In other words, the recasting of phenomenological insights in the analytic or Thomistic style results in misleading instructions concerning the requisite steps for the acquisition of the insights (thereby impeding the communication of disengaged knowledge, engaged knowledge, and ontological transformation), and in rare cases this recasting can contradict specific insights.

Thus, due to the two considerations above—one grounded in the need for the preservation of investigative steps, and the other grounded in the need for consistency between the content of

the form of writing and the procedural instructions for the acquisition of phenomenological insight, along with phenomenological insights themselves—phenomenological descriptions cannot be recast in the analytic or Thomistic form without communicative loss.

What about unorthodox literary forms (e.g., literature, drama, poetry)? I think these forms of writing are capable of communicating many phenomenological insights, but it is doubtful that these forms of writing could render phenomenological description dispensable. The primary reason for this claim is that these forms of writing do not allow for a firm and unwavering directing of the interlocutor to the “thing” being discussed. Literature, drama, and poetry can, if done skillfully, concretize the “thing” being discussed (and, in a way, allow for an artificially grounded concrete knowledge), but these forms somehow make it easier for the interlocutor to go astray and get lost among the plot or the sound of prose. They do not offer the communicator enough control over the exchange. Clearly this is an issue that requires further attention.

Finally, let us address the qualifications contained in The Communicative Norm. Is the form of phenomenological writing compatible with the philosophical method and essential theses of Thomism? At first blush there may appear to be a tension between the form of phenomenological writing and Thomism in general. Does not Thomism proclaim in its method and essential theses that reality is intelligible and that philosophy is about moving from what is immediately known to what is mediately known via trains of reasoning? And is not this incompatible with the claim that we need to penetrate into essentially unclear and unstable lands, along with the claim that philosophers must learn to look anew at what they have already looked at many times? Questions like this could be multiplied, but I think a close inspection will reveal that there is no incompatibility. The form of phenomenological writing does not say philosophical investigation *simpliciter* has nothing to do with abstraction and premised arguments, nor does it say that all regions of philosophical investigation take place in unclear and

unstable lands which require patient re-looking. No: it merely asserts that there is more to philosophy than abstraction and premised arguments, more than concepts and systems. There is also lived experience. Thus, there is no reason why the form of phenomenological writing cannot serve to supplement the form of Thomistic writing. There can be two forms, each suited to different, although related, philosophical activity. To conclude, then, The Communicative Norm demands the use of phenomenological description in order to communicate phenomenological insights vis-à-vis the integral person. Phenomenology—whole and entire—must be incorporated into Thomistic personalism.

8. The Tasks of Phenomenology in the Role of Organic Complementarity

The Investigative and Communicative Norms therefore require Thomistic personalism to make serious use of phenomenology for both investigative and communicative reasons. But how should we think of the role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism? As pointed out in Section 5, the answers of reflective equilibrium and methodological dominance are both unacceptable. And since we now know that phenomenology is indispensable for the investigative and communicative activity of Thomistic personalism, it also follows that phenomenology must play a role and that this role cannot be one of dispensable aid. So, it seems we are left with two possible answers: adhesive complementarity or organic complementarity.

But once we recall that the norms which justify the integration of phenomenology into Thomistic personalism are norms internal to the project itself, we can see that phenomenology must play the role of organic complementarity. Phenomenology must be seen as something that is called for by the essential principles guiding the growth of Thomistic personalism. The investigative and communicative goals of Thomistic personalism require phenomenology, and the integration of phenomenology serves to actualize Thomistic personalism. In other words, just as good soil is essential for the flourishing of a flower but inessential for its existence (e.g., think

of an undernourished flower), so phenomenology is essential for the flourishing of Thomistic personalism but inessential for its existence. Phenomenology need not appear in every work in Thomistic personalism, of course, but it must make its required contribution to the overall project.

More specifically, though, which investigative and communicative *tasks* should phenomenology perform in this *role*? The number of tasks we enumerate will depend, of course, on the level of generality with which we reply. In light of our discussions in Sections 5 to 7, and taking a mid-level view of things, we can say the following. Concerning the investigative domain, phenomenology must be used to help perceive the full range of lived experience (i.e., the being-in-the-world of the person) which permeates the breadth, depth, height, and fullness of the person. And the insights achieved through this investigation should be used, when possible, as data which justify metaphysical explanations that terminate beyond lived experience.⁸¹ Concerning the communicative domain, phenomenology must be used to impart disengaged and engaged knowledge of the four aspects of the person discussed—along with ontological transformation in some cases (insofar as this is possible for philosophical writing, as opposed to the grace of God, say). These are the tasks of a Thomistic phenomenology that is ready to take its place in a living Thomism. The wisdom of the perennial philosophy must continue to grow.⁸² Most importantly, it must grow in its understanding and presentation of that dimension of being which is so often treated as if it is outside of being: the immaterial and invisible self-presencing of souls which are capable of being unified with God and others through the reciprocity of love. This, too, is a dimension of being, and it may be that the most significant achievement of

⁸¹ In Section 6, I did not, it is true, argue that phenomenological insights can serve as data for metaphysical investigation, but I take this claim to be uncontroversial. If phenomenological insights require metaphysical explanations, I can see no reason—short of a wholesale skepticism concerning explanatory metaphysics—for why Thomistic personalism should refuse to make the relevant explanations.

⁸² Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1945), 1–2.

Thomistic phenomenology will be a recapitulation of the reality of the spirit that is so often trampled in the dust—even though we, the trampers, are incarnate spirits ourselves. Moving forward, then, let us not question the inclusion of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism. We should simply recognize its role and perform and promote its tasks.

CHAPTER 3

THE THICK-ESSE/THIN-ESSENCE VIEW IN THOMISTIC PERSONALISM

Essence is the intrinsic limitation of *esse*, the crystallization of existence, bordered by nothingness.

—William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*¹

1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I identified three species of Thomistic personalism—Weak, Moderate, and Strong—and in Chapter 2, I focused on the main issue dividing the first species from the other two: the role of phenomenology. Concerning this latter issue, I pointed out that an investigative norm and a communicative norm are internal to Thomistic personalism, and I then argued that both norms require the integration of phenomenology. Investigatively, phenomenology is needed to disclose the lived experience of the person and provide crucial data for metaphysical explanations; communicatively, phenomenology is needed to communicate disengaged knowledge, engaged knowledge, and ontological transformation. The role of phenomenology in Thomistic personalism, I argued, is therefore best seen as one of organic complementarity. It is organic because phenomenology performs investigative and communicative tasks which are called for by the main commitments of personalism (and, we could add, central commitments of Thomism); it is complementary because phenomenology is used in such a way that it is subordinated to and respectful of the philosophical method, central theses, and rhetorical style of Thomism. The overarching conclusion: Weak Thomistic Personalism is indefensible.

As noted in my Acknowledgements (p. iv), this chapter is a revised version of my previously published article “The Thick-*Esse*/Thin-Essence View in Thomistic Personalism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2015): 223–51. I thank the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* for permission to reuse this work.

¹ William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 103–4.

Accordingly, in this chapter I will focus on the main division between Moderate and Strong Thomistic Personalism, that is, whether the dynamic “nature” of *esse*, understood along the lines of the tradition of existential Thomism, should be placed at the heart of Thomistic personalism—as discussed in Chapter 1, Sections 4–6. Should we say, in other words, that an awareness of the inward and relational activity of *esse*, waxing and waning in intensity throughout the entire range of being, allows us to see that the fullness of personhood (and indeed the fullness of being) is achieved through and only through the most perfect inward and relational activity, namely, love grounded in self-consciousness and self-possession? Should we assert the primacy of *esse* in Thomistic personalism—and therefore allow *esse* to *ground, fructify, and illuminate* our grasp of practical philosophy?

By my lights, the most compelling form of Strong Thomistic Personalism was articulated by Fr. W. Norris Clarke, S.J., in the early 1990s.² Since this time, Clarke’s work has received a mixture of criticism and approval. Concerning the approval, David L. Schindler and David Liberto have offered generally positive reviews, and a small number of philosophers have appropriated Clarke’s work.³ Concerning the criticism, three main concerns have been

² See Clarke’s “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 601–18; and *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993). Other than Clarke, only Fr. Robert A. Connor, in my judgment, has supported Strong Thomistic Personalism in a serious way. David L. Schindler and Kenneth L. Schmitz, though, could also be called supporters in some sense. See Connor, “Relation, the Thomistic *Esse*, and American Culture: Toward a Metaphysic of Sanctity,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 455–64; Connor, “Relational *Esse* and the Person,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 65 (1991): 253–67; Connor, “The Person as Resonating Existential,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992): 39–56; Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?” *Communio* 14 (1987): 262–90; Schindler, “Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism and American Culture,” *Communio* 15 (1988): 92–120; Schindler, “Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 581–92; Schindler, “The Person, Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 172–90; Schmitz, “Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 339–71; and Schmitz, “The Solidarity of Personalism and the Metaphysics of Existential Act,” in the *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy*, ed. Paul O’Herron, vol. 46 of *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

³ Schindler, “Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas”; and David Liberto, “Person, Being, and Receptivity: W. Norris Clarke’s Retrieval and Completion of Thomas’ Thought,” in *Aquinas as Authority*, eds. Paul Van Geest, Harm Goris, Carlo Leget (Peeters Publishers, 2002), 201–11. For some recent appropriations of Clarke’s work, see Thomas L. Gwozdz, “Metaphysics and Ethics: Levinas, Clarke, and Maritain,” *International Philosophical*

articulated: (i) Steven A. Long has argued that Clarke’s account of receptivity as a positive ontological perfection is indefensible; (ii) George A. Blair has argued that Clarke’s emphasis on the relationality of *esse* eliminates God’s freedom vis-à-vis creation; and (iii) some have impugned Clarke’s work—intentionally or unintentionally—by challenging his understanding of *esse* as “thick” and essence as “thin.”⁴ On a more general level, it may be that some think criticism of Clarke is unnecessary because he relies on an existential Thomism that has been declared dead, that is, simply a matter of historical interest.⁵

Now, in Chapter 2, I attempted to construct a conclusive argument for the move from Weak Thomistic Personalism to Moderate Thomistic Personalism, and it is tempting to try something similar here, to wit, construct and defend a conclusive argument for the move to Strong Thomistic Personalism. I will not do this in this chapter, however, and for two reasons. First, this task—given the complexity of the issues involved, e.g., existential Thomism, the

Quarterly 50 (2010): 489–500; and Catherine Green, “A Comprehensive Theory of the Human Person from Philosophy and Nursing,” *Nursing Philosophy* 10 (2009): 263–74.

⁴ See Steven A. Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” *Communio* (1994): 151–61 (which is followed by Clarke’s reply at 165–9 of the same issue). There is also another exchange on receptivity between Long and Clarke in *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 1–31 (for Long’s article) and 617–24 (for Clarke’s reply). For the worry about divine freedom (along with some other concerns, including a brief paragraph on receptivity), see George A. Blair “On *Esse* and Relation,” *Communio* (1994): 162–4. And for an indirect criticism of Clarke’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, see John F.X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 307–8n24; for direct criticisms, see Sarah Borden Sharkey, “How can Being be Limited?: W. Norris Clarke on Thomas’s ‘Limitation of Act by Potency’,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7.1 (Fall 2009): 1–19, esp. 11–2; and Kevin M. Staley, “Norris Clarke and Sarah Borden on the Limitation of Existence or Why We Are Not God: A Response,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 7.1 (Fall 2009): 1–9.

⁵ Wayne J. Hankey fits well into this category—given his claim that “*Esse* ... has become historical.” See Hankey, “From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: the Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America,” *Dionysius* 14 (1998): 157–88, at 188. John Knasas agrees that existential Thomism has lost much of its support, but he also argues—convincingly in my eyes—that the attenuation of support for existential Thomism is philosophically unjustified. See Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*. Interestingly, Hankey’s pronouncement, made at a conference in 1992 (before being published in 1998), is now highly dubious: the work of Schindler, Connor, Clarke, Schmitz, and Knasas should make this clear, along with the recent appropriations of Clarke’s work (listed in footnote 3)—not to mention St. John Paul II’s explicit exhortation in *Fides et Ratio* (para. 97–8) to develop theology and moral philosophy in line with a deeper understanding of *esse* (or the *actus essendi*). Moreover, it is also plausible to think that the persistent interest in Maritain signals a continued interest in existential Thomism, for *esse* is at the heart of Maritain’s thought. See Maritain’s *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Image Books, 1957), 29: “A philosopher is not a philosopher if he is not a metaphysician. And it is the intuition of being ... that makes the metaphysician.”

relationship between *esse* and essence, receptivity, divine freedom, interpretation of St. Thomas—would require the space of numerous chapters. Second, Clarke has recently articulated and defended a solid case for Strong Thomistic Personalism. And this means that a solid framework and overarching argument are already in place. In the next two chapters, then, I will try to contribute to the development of Strong Thomistic Personalism by buttressing two fronts of Clarke’s Thomistic personalism. In this chapter I will defend his reliance on a thick-*esse*/thin-essence view; in the next, his claim that receptivity is an ontological perfection. In both cases I will argue that Clarke’s work needs to be modified, but the modifications I suggest will only serve to strengthen Clarke’s Thomistic personalism, not undermine it.

Let us therefore begin with the first task. Speaking generally, the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view asserts that *esse* (as “thick”) is the ground of all ontological positivity, perfection, and intelligibility in beings without qualification; and essence (as “thin”) is simply an internal limitation or mode of *esse*. I do not believe that the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is essential to Strong Thomistic Personalism (e.g., Fr. Robert A. Connor’s work suggests an alternative which I will discuss below), but I am convinced that the plausibility of Strong Thomistic Personalism increases considerably if the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is true.

I will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I will remind us of Clarke’s overall vision of Thomistic personalism and explain why his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view plays a significant unifying role. In Section 3, drawing on recent literature, I will articulate three objections to Clarke’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. In Section 4, I will acknowledge that Clarke’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view cannot adequately respond to one of these objections. But I will then proceed to note that William E. Carlo’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view—which is different from Clarke’s—can respond to all three objections. Moreover, Carlo’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view can be integrated into Clarke’s overall vision without theoretical difficulty. Finally, in Section 5,

I will offer a positive argument (or case) for Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. Thus, in sum, my main thesis is that three criticisms of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view do not reduce the plausibility of Clarke's vision of Thomistic Personalism, for a slight modification allows for adequate responses; moreover, we have good reason to believe that other objections will be unsuccessful as well. The thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is a strength of Clarke's Strong Thomistic Personalism, not a weakness.

The objective of this chapter therefore falls outside the domain of interpretation. No doubt it is extremely important to discuss whether Clarke's Thomistic personalism, slightly modified by the addition of Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, provides us with an accurate interpretation of St. Thomas, but this is not an issue I will address in this chapter.⁶ One thing should be noted, however. Even if it becomes undeniable that St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* and essence does not map onto Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (which in my eyes is a serious possibility), it does not follow that this thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is by this very fact excluded from Thomistic personalism. This is because the boundaries of Thomistic personalism must allow for purification, extension, assimilation, and creativity in relation to the work of St. Thomas—and it may be that Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is a justifiable purification of St. Thomas's work from error. Indeed, once we acknowledge that the boundaries of Thomistic personalism stretch beyond the work of St. Thomas, it becomes clear that the legitimacy of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view in Thomistic personalism rests on its philosophical plausibility, not its interpretive status. Why? In brief, the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view's undeniable proximity to

⁶ Reasons for the existentialist interpretation of St. Thomas (and its history) can be found in Helen James John, S.N.D., "The Emergence of the Act of Existing in Recent Thomism," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (1962): 595–620; Knasas's *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* is also helpful. To get a feel for the legitimacy of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view as an interpretation of St. Thomas, see Gerald B. Phelan "The Being of Creatures: St. Thomas' Solution of the Dilemma of Parmenides and Heraclitus," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 31 (1957): 118–25; and William E. Carlo's and W. Norris Clarke's commentaries (which follow on pages 126–32).

St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* and essence conjoined with a recognition of its philosophical superiority seems to entail the following conditional: if St. Thomas does not endorse the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (but rather something slightly different), then the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view should be considered a legitimate purification of St. Thomas's work. Thus, in what follows I will assume that the plausibility of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view speaks in favor of its legitimacy in Thomistic personalism.

2. The Unifying Role of Thick-*Esse*/Thin-Essence in Clarke's Thomistic Personalism

To begin, then, let us remind ourselves of the main elements of Clarke's relevant work, with an added emphasis on its metaphysical foundations. For ease of explication, I will articulate five questions and answer them as Clarke would answer them.

Question (1): Why are beings one (i.e., intrinsically similar) and yet many (i.e., numerically and essentially different)? Response: Beings are one because all of the ontological positivity, perfection, and intelligibility in each being is due to its *esse*. This is why there is a bond of unity, an intrinsic similarity between all beings. On the other hand, however, there are many numerically distinct beings and groups of numerically distinct beings which share their modes of being because finite beings are more than simply *esse*; they are acts of existing limited to this or that mode through a negative, limiting principle or internal negation. This is why beings are numerically distinct and some beings share their modes of being with others. Finite beings are not essences existing. They are acts of existing essentialized: act of existing (i.e., *esse*) + negative, limiting principle or internal negation devoid of all ontological positivity (i.e., *essentia*) = a finite being (i.e., *ens*). The supra-intelligible density of *esse* limited to this or that mode produces the hierarchy of being that we call the universe.⁷

⁷ Clarke does not articulate all of this in *Person and Being*, but it is clearly the context in which he situates his discussion. For his solution to the problem of the one and the many, see W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A*

To see this vision more clearly, it can help to talk a bit differently. Instead of saying, for instance, “There is a human looking at a rose which is covered by rain,” we might say “There is an act of existing (*esse*) in the human mode looking at an act of existing in the rose mode which is covered by many acts of existing in the water mode.”⁸ The hierarchy of being is a hierarchy of the modes of *esse*. It is crucial to see all beings in this light, and one has the relevant synthetic vision only if one sees all the different modalities of being as the result of the flexible and modifiable intensity of *esse*.

Question (2): But why is there a universe, a turn towards unity? Response: In short, being is also communicatively active. The rich *esse* that grounds the inward activity of each being also pours forth into communicative activity which is often received by others. Indeed, successful communication requires reception. Try to imagine a universe in which beings do not give themselves to others or receive others. We cannot. The result would be a turn towards silence and solitude, not a unified community of inter-acting beings. Consider a tree: it would be an invisible and untouchable being unable to affect other beings as a matter of necessity, and it would also be a disengaged being unable to receive nutrients, light, rain, human touch, etc. as a matter of necessity. The necessary conditions for the possibility of causal relations would be absent. From this vantage point, and moving beyond inductive generalization and inference to best explanation, our intellects can penetrate into the very intelligibility of being and see that being is necessarily active—inwardly and relationally. “To be is to be substance-in-relation.”⁹ (Of course, receptivity

Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), Ch. 5; and W. Norris Clarke, “What Cannot Be Said in Saint Thomas’s Essence-Existence Doctrine,” in Clarke’s *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), esp. 117–20 and 129–31.

⁸ Cf. Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 89; and Staley, “Norris Clarke and Sarah Borden on the Limitation of Existence,” 7.

⁹ See *Person and Being*, 12–3 and 20 (for the *reductio*/intuition-scaffolding) and 13–9 (for the relationally charged understanding of substance). For a deeper treatment of the latter, see “To Be Is to Be Substance-in-Relation” in Clarke’s *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Ch. 6.

at the sub-personal realm is bound up with passivity and therefore cannot be described as active. But we can see that receptivity transitions into receptive activity on the personal plane, where it manifests itself as an ontological perfection in the reciprocity of love.)¹⁰

Question (3): But if the essence of each finite being is not *esse* (but merely a negative, limiting principle or mode of *esse*), from where do beings acquire their *esse*? Response: The answer must be *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. *Esse* Itself, unlimited in anyway, beyond all modes and yet containing all modes, causes and sustains the *esse* of each being. All beings participate in the infinite fullness of *Esse* Itself to one degree or another.¹¹

Question (4): What is perfection? Response: For all X, X is good insofar as it is desirable; X is desirable insofar as it is perfect; X is perfect insofar as it is in being.¹² But this means that *esse* is the source and fabric of all perfection (and goodness), for there is nothing in being that is outside of *esse*—even essences are nothing but internal limitations of *esse*. It is really the case, then, that *esse* is the act of all acts, the perfection of all perfections.¹³ The qualitative intensity of *esse* is that which fixes or determines the perfection of a being.¹⁴

Question (5): And what does all of the above entail if we take seriously St. Thomas's claim that "person" signifies "that which is most perfect in all of nature"?¹⁵ Response: It entails a great deal. Although we must remember that "person" is an analogical concept, we can say that person is precisely what being is at its fullest.¹⁶ The inward activity of *esse* turns into self-

¹⁰ Clarke's work on receptivity is extremely complex and sometimes unclear. See *Person and Being* 20–1 and 82–8; "Response to Long's Comments," *Communio* 21 (1994): 165–9; and "Reply to Steven Long," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 617–24. The latter two articles help to clarify some of the ambiguity in *Person and Being*.

¹¹ See Clarke's "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" and "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," both in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Chs. 4 and 5.

¹² Cf. St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1.

¹³ Cf. St. Thomas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God (Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei)*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

¹⁴ See Clarke, *Person and Being*, 10; "What Cannot Be Said," 120.

¹⁵ St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, Clarke's trans. in *Person and Being*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32 and 25.

consciousness and self-mastery, while the relational activity of *esse* turns into the interpenetrative activity of love. To be fully is to love fully.¹⁷

This is an abbreviated account of Clarke’s synthetic vision of metaphysics, metaethics, and personhood. Synthesized, the interlocking unity is manifest: personhood is the fullness of perfection; the fullness of perfection is ontologically identical with the fullness of *esse*; the fullness of *esse* is ontologically identical with the fullness of inward and relational activity—which is communion or love grounded in self-consciousness and self-mastery. Human persons reside on an ontological plane that is best understood as the fullness of being, a sort of final and sublime hierarchical level (with angelic persons above human persons, and the Trinity of Persons ineffably above angelic and human persons), beneath which all else pales in comparison. Here, we see that love is not something extraneous to the fullness of personhood; it is an essential component of its fullness. Persons really must make a gift of themselves to find themselves.¹⁸ We have a personalization of metaphysics itself.¹⁹

With Clarke’s synthesis before our eyes, I would now like to underline the unifying role of his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. To help us see this, it may be useful to note some alternative configurations of the relationship between *esse* and essence. Besides Carlo’s variation of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (which I will identify later on), and speaking in a general way, there seem to be two main alternatives in the Thomistic tradition. Both are discussed by Clarke in his paper “What Cannot Be Said in Saint Thomas’s Essence-Existence Doctrine,” but I will use

¹⁷ Ibid., 72 and 76, for example.

¹⁸ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 24.

¹⁹ “Personalization of . . . Metaphysics” is Clarke’s term. “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” in *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), Ch. 16, at 227.

different labels for these alternatives and offer my own formulations; the general content, I think, remains the same (or at least very close).²⁰

(1) The thin-*esse*/thick-essence view: The *esse* of a being is that which gives existence to the essence of the being (as if *esse* is the light switch and essence the light), and the essence of the being, although dependent on the *esse*, seems to contribute a weighty amount of ontological positivity, perfection, and intelligibility to the being as it exercises *esse*. The being here is an essence that exists.

(2) The thick-*esse*/thick-essence view: The *esse* of a being is that which gives existence to the essence of the being (as if *esse* is the light switch and essence the light), and although *esse* is certainly the source and fabric of all perfection and intelligibility in the being, the essence takes on a distinct reality and distinct role in order to limit and govern the *esse*. The being here is both an *esse* with an essence *and* an essence that exists.

With these alternatives noted, let us formalize Clarke's position as well:

(3) The thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (according to Clarke): The *esse* of a being is *not* that which gives existence to the essence of the being (as if *esse* is the light switch and essence the light). On the contrary, it is the source and fabric of all ontological positivity, perfection, and intelligibility that "receives" an essence precisely as an ontologically bare, perfectionless, and unintelligible negative, limiting principle. Beyond this negative, limiting principle—this intrinsic limitation of *esse*—essence is nothing. The being here is an *esse* in essential mode X.

Now, what happens to Clarke's vision of Thomistic personalism if his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is relinquished? I think the following. If we allow essence to grow thick, as in the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view or the thin-*esse*/thick-essence view, then Clarke's tightly wound synthesis begins to weaken at best or unravel at worst.²¹

²⁰ See "What Cannot Be Said," 129–31, where he uses different labels—"pre-existentialist ... interpretation" and "thick-essence" view—to designate the two alternatives which I am about to discuss. I consider this his clearest treatment of the issue. But it is also worth seeing Clarke's "Preface" in William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); *The One and the Many*, 82–4; and "What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today," in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Ch. 1, esp. 14–5 and 29n7. I have also found the following discussions helpful: Knasas's discussion in *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, 307–8n24, from which I have appropriated the term "thin essence/thick *esse*" (although in reverse) and its cognates which will follow momentarily (although I think I attach different meanings to these terms); Sarah Borden Sharkey's discussion in "How can Being be Limited?" 7–8; and Robert Connor's discussion in "Relational *Esse* and the Person," 260–1.

²¹ Even after the above, some may still wonder what I mean to point out via my use of metaphor in these formulations. The first thing to say is that my primary aim is to pick out three different theses. As a consequence, it is best not to look for some perfectly univocal meaning for "thick-*esse*," "thin-*esse*," "thick-essence," or "thin-

As soon as essence is declared to possess some reality and role that exercises or governs *esse*, then the properties that accrue to a being in virtue of its *esse* become only one side of a being, the other side being essence. We find an *ontologically significant* cleavage in the heart of finite beings, a cleavage between “what the being is” and “that the being is,” and the cleavage forces us to say that “what I am” is outside of *esse* in some vague yet significant sense. I am an X that exercises, limits, or governs *esse*. But then it becomes difficult to see why we should think of human persons as residing on the plane of the fullness of being (i.e., *esse*), and even more difficult to see why we should think of human persons in terms of those existents capable of the highest level of inward, communicative, and receptive activity. Essence, when thick, strongly seems to suggest that we should think of human persons in terms of limit and governance (not fullness); and, furthermore, that *esse* should not be allowed to determine, to any great extent, how

essence,” for the meaning of each changes slightly when combined with a different partner. It is best simply to try to understand each formulation as a whole. Still, it makes sense to say that by “thin-*esse*” I mean to point out that existence is treated as a mere brute fact, one with little ontological positivity, intelligibility, and perfection; and by “thin-essence” I mean to point out that essence is treated as not possessing any irreducible positivity, intelligibility, or perfection. Alternatively, by “thick-*esse*” I mean to point out that existence is treated as a plenitude, one rich in ontological positivity, intelligibility, and perfection; and by “thick-essence” I mean to point out that essence is treated as possessing at the very least an irreducible positivity (and maybe even intelligibility and perfection)—even though this irreducible positivity needs existence to be.

An illustration may be helpful. Consider a blade of grass (or any other real being, e.g., a dog, an atom of gold, a friend). There is an obvious difference between *what* this grass is and *that* this grass is. There is an obvious difference, in other words, between its essence and existence (or *esse*). On our first formulation, the existence of our blade of grass is seen as some brute fact that brings forth an ontologically rich essence which possesses its own intelligibility and perfection. Here existence hides in the background, serving to turn on the essence. On our second formulation, the existence of our blade of grass is seen as the majority of the grass’s ontological positivity and the fount of all the grass’s intelligibility and perfection, but an irreducible essence (ontologically positive, in some sense) still serves to govern and organize the blade of grass. Finally, on our last formulation, existence no longer shares the stage with essence; it takes centre stage. Existence constitutes all of the ontological positivity, intelligibility, and perfection of the grass *without qualification*. The blade of grass still has an essence (it is not, after all, a dog or atom of gold), but this essence—considered on its own—is ontologically empty, unintelligible, and perfectionless. All that the grass is, even its essence, is from existence. A blade of grass is a mode of being, just as an atom of gold is a mode of being. To see all of these distinctions clearly, it is best to follow the common reminder to “think it” not “see it.” Our world of experience involves only complete beings (never existence on its own, nor essence on its own), and it is only given to the intellect (not the imagination) to penetrate into the sources or grounds of complete beings. Cf. Clarke, *One and the Many*, 86. In the next two sections I will revise and defend Clarke’s formulation (i.e., the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view). If things are still unclear, it may be because the prominence of reductionism in contemporary philosophy makes it difficult to see that each being is a unified act of existing (not a composite of inter-acting beings), and that this act of existing (*esse*) comes in degrees. I assess and reject reductionism in Section 5, and attempt to provide a generally accessible argument (or case) for the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view.

we understand the human person.²² In other words, once the thickness of essence is granted, it makes sense to think of human persons in terms of how they exercise or govern *esse*, not the *esse* they exercise or govern.

Theoretically speaking, I think it is undeniable that the thin-*esse*/thick-essence view is incompatible with Clarke’s synthetic vision, primarily because it rejects existential Thomism. On this view, existence is treated as a complementary or foundational act which makes an essence to be and that is all. The act of existing is an important act, to be sure, but essence takes the foreground and *esse* the background. If we endorse this account of *esse* and essence, Clarke’s vision unravels. As for the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view, I suspect that this view is theoretically compatible with Clarke’s overall vision—insofar as careful qualifications are made and all perfection and intelligibility are purged from essence. Still, once the “what I am” finds some ontological positivity outside of *esse*, it becomes more difficult to find the appropriate diction to present Clarke’s vision. At the very least, if essence “can still be thought of as a kind of positive structure”²³ or a “positive *subject which* exists,”²⁴ it becomes more difficult to see why *esse* should be determinative for our understanding of the human person. Insofar as the ontological status of essence is not fully reducible to *esse*, and insofar as a positively real essence fulfills the role of governing or limiting *esse*, the primacy of *esse* in our understanding of the human person is called into question; and this seems to suggest that we are missing something important if we think about the human person in terms of the fullness of inward, communicative, and receptive activity of *esse*. If we endorse the thick-*esse*/thick-essence account, Clarke’s vision may not

²² Cf. Connor’s “Relational *Esse* and the Person,” 260–3.

²³ Borden Sharkey, describing essence in what we are calling the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view: “How can Being be Limited?” 7.

²⁴ Clarke, describing essence in what we are calling the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view: “What Cannot Be Said,” 129.

unravel, but it does seem to weaken. The unity and tightness of Clarke's vision therefore does seem to lean on his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view.

Thus, I think it is worth evaluating, in more detail, the viability of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. If a thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is defensible, this will support Clarke's overall vision; if it is not, either Clarke's vision must be rejected, or it must be pieced back together with a slightly new terminology and slightly different moves.

(As an aside, if a new start does need to be made, Connor's work is a good place to begin. After discussing what we are calling the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view and the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, Connor declares that no matter which view is right—he considers these the only viable options—Christian philosophers must realize that personhood lies on the level of *esse*. Essence, on both views, refers to the limitation of finite beings, while the Persons of the Holy Trinity are constituted through their dynamism and relations. Thus, the principle of personhood must lie in *esse*, not essence. To understand the person rightly, then, we must place *esse* before essence; we must give *esse* the upper hand and refuse to let the clamoring of essence obscure the primacy of *esse*. This deflection of essence and elevation of *esse* would allow us to continue a personalization of metaphysics even if we must, in the end, endorse a thick-*esse*/thick-essence view.)²⁵

3. Three Objections to Clarke's Thick-*Esse*/Thin-Essence View

Accordingly, let us look at three objections to Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, all grounded in recent literature. The first objection, gestured at by a number of philosophers (including Clarke himself), can be formulated as follows:

The Unexplained Limit Objection: How is it possible for an ontologically bare principle to limit *esse*? If we say that this limiting principle has some reality or act, then we *ipso facto* have lost our ontologically bare limiting principle. On the other hand, if we say that

²⁵ See Connor's "Relational *Esse* and the Person," 260–3, esp. 261.

this limiting principle has no reality or act, then it seems impossible to explain why acts of existing are limited in different ways, for it makes no sense to say that act is limited by non-act. And it also makes no sense to say that the limiting principle is somehow internal to *esse* (internal to the fabric of *esse*, so to speak), as this would entail that each *esse* should be limited in precisely the same manner. In short, this talk of negative, limiting principle cannot explain why beings are limited as they are.

Thus, Sarah Borden Sharkey, commenting on Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, says she finds it difficult to see how a non-act could limit a particular instance of *esse*?²⁶ And Kevin Staley reminds us that "... experience suggests strongly that act is not limited by potency; rather act is limited by some other act."²⁷ As a result, our first objection is that Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view cannot explain how limitation or negation is brought about in or on *esse*.²⁸

Staley also presents us with another objection. "[T]he first time Clarke's thin theory of essence struck [him] with great force ..." he says, the following question came to mind: "How can I be and be what I am because I am a composite of the act of existence (which is God) and essence (which is nothing at all)? I am God, and besides that, nothing at all?"²⁹ Let us reformulate this objection as follows:

The Otherness Objection: God is *Esse* Itself. But if other beings are simply a "composition" of *esse* and an ontologically bare essence (i.e., no-thing), then all beings are *esse* itself, that is, God. Put more pointedly, an ontologically bare essence makes it impossible for us to distinguish between God and creatures.

In one sense this objection is related to The Unexplained Limit Objection, for it challenges the thick-*esse*/thin-essence defender to explain why there is a difference between God and creatures, and this explanation will most likely need to address The Unexplained Limit Objection. But it is still worth keeping them separate, for one might argue that even if we can explain how instances

²⁶ "How can Being be Limited?" 12.

²⁷ Staley, "Norris Clarke and Sarah Borden on the Limitation of Existence," 2.

²⁸ Clarke does not articulate this precise objection, but he does come close. See "What Cannot Be Said," 130–1; and *The One and the Many*, 86. Cf. Connor's "Relational *Esse* and the Person," 260–1; and Knasas's *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, 307n24.

²⁹ Staley, "Norris Clarke and Sarah Borden on the Limitation of Existence," 1. Staley gestures at his preferred solution at 8–9.

of *esse* are limited according to Clarke's vision, Staley's concern remains: since creatures are still *esse* and only *esse*—essence is still no-thing—we cannot distinguish between God and creature.

Finally, John Knasas provides us with a third objection in his criticism of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view vis-à-vis the work of William Carlo and Msgr. Gerald Phelan. He says the following:

[R]eflection confirms that in sense awareness, reality presents itself as also cognitively existing. This phenomenon requires that reality is not real of itself. Rather, reality involves a dimension that as existence-neutral enables reality to take on in a genuine fashion another way of existing. Reality is, then, a composition of an existence-neutral subject plus its act of real existing. The understanding of real things as limited *esse* makes reality impervious to another way of existing; the realism of human cognition is rendered impossible.³⁰

Let us label and condense this objection:

The Cognitive Existence Objection: Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view would render the cognitive existence of beings impossible, but the cognitive existence of beings is a fact; therefore, Clarke's view is false.

We therefore have three significant objections to Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view.

4. Three Replies (After a Modification)

Now, can we respond to these objections on behalf of Clarke? I think we can reply to the second and third, but I do not think we can respond to the Unexplained Limit Objection. I simply do not see how Clarke can escape from the dilemma: either this negative, limiting principle limits *esse* through some reality and act (but then we lose our thin-essence), or we must say that *esse* is limited by no-thing (which seems highly implausible). Both horns seem fatal.

In my judgment, though, this Unexplained Limit Objection applies only to Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, not William Carlo's. Thus, I will articulate Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-

³⁰ Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, 307–8n24, but I should note that Knasas explicitly links this objection to his work in Ch. 6 of his book (see esp. 194).

essence view, note its compatibility with Clarke's overall vision, and defend it from all three objections.

Let us start with the main similarity between Clarke's and Carlo's views. Both views assert that the limitation of *esse* is intrinsic to *esse*, not extrinsic. There is no positivity, perfection, or intelligibility outside of *esse*. The difference comes in explanation. Clarke seems to suggest—and I must say that I find things a bit unclear here—that the limiting of *esse* takes place somehow within *esse*, within the very act, as if the act is being limited or negated from the inside. He suggests that we cannot say anything more about how this happens, however, because he thinks that the being of limit “exceeds the limits of language and conceptual thought.”³¹ This is not Carlo's view.³² Carlo says the following:

Let us consider existence as if it were a liquid poured from ... [a] pitcher simultaneously with a sudden drop in temperature. Under freezing conditions it becomes a solid before it strikes the ground. The liquid existence is possessed of its dimensions, its own limitations. The shape it assumes is the determination of its own substance. Essence is not something extrinsic to existence which limits and determines it in the way that a pitcher shapes its recipient liquid, but essence is rather the place where existence stops. There is nothing in water which is not water. There is nothing in an existent which is not existence. Essence is the intrinsic limitation of *esse*, the crystallization of existence, bordered by nothingness.³³

³¹ “What Cannot Be Said,” 118, 129–31, esp. 131; cf. “What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today,” 14–5. It is also worth noting that in one of his final treatments of this matter Clarke emphasizes the particularizing and finitizing role of essence. See *The One and the Many*, 82–4.

³² That Clarke offers us—or at least intends to offer us—a different view should be clear. Clarke says the following: “The position of Carlo, which I lean toward with some adaptation, has been strongly criticized by Fabro ... and by not a few other Thomists, including Joseph Owens. I have had to tone down my support of Carlo due to their criticisms.” “What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today,” 29n7. Regrettably Clarke does not specify the mentioned adaptation or adaptations; moreover, the references to Owens and Fabro are of little help. This is because Clarke does not offer a citation for his reference to Owens, and his mention of Fabro refers to a single footnote in which Fabro (i) criticizes Carlo's interpretation of St. Thomas, and (ii) articulates one criticism of Carlo's philosophical argumentation that does not, in my eyes, significantly engage Carlo's work. But (i) cannot explain or illuminate Clarke's mentioned adaptation because Clarke is consistently willing to modify or creatively complete the work of St. Thomas, and the brevity and superficiality of (ii) leave one wondering why Clarke would feel the need to adapt Carlo's view. Whatever the influence of Fabro on Clarke, we can be sure of one thing: Clarke's understanding of *esse* and essence is not Fabro's; it is much closer to Carlo's, although still different from Carlo's. In my judgment a wide reading of Clarke's work on this issue strongly corroborates this claim. See Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 449–91, at 482–3n115.

³³ Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 103–4.

Put a bit differently:

This is what we mean when we say that essence is the intrinsic limitation of existence. It is not *that which* limits *esse*, it is *the limitation* of *esse*; it is not *that which* receives, determines, and specifies *esse*, it is the very *specification itself* of existence.³⁴

What does the limiting? Carlo answers unambiguously:

The created essence is not its *esse*, it is the intrinsic *limitation* of *esse*, the prism through which the intelligible riches and perfections of *esse* are refracted and contracted to this kind of being. *This limitation is the result of the creative act pouring out in less and less perfection until it reaches the least perfect of material beings.*³⁵

Unlike Clarke, who seems to pack his explanation for the limitation of *esse* into *esse*, Carlo grounds his explanation for the limitation of *esse* in creation *ex nihilo*—in the hands of the Creator and Sustainer. Each *esse* has a limitation precisely because God pours out more or less *esse*, and it is the amount of *esse* given that determines the limitation of *esse*. Essence is not that which exists through *esse* but yet governs *esse*, nor is it a negative, limiting principle that is simultaneously the limitation. On the contrary, essence is caused by God as he chooses to bestow more or less *esse* through the creative act. “Essence flows from *esse*.”³⁶ Essence just is the qualitative mode at which the dynamism of *esse* stops or crystallizes. Here it seems we have a very robust doctrine of double divine conservation: not only does God sustain beings at every moment, he also sustains the essential modes of beings at every moment as well. Thus, Carlo offers us the following:

(4) The thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (according to Carlo): The *esse* of a being is *not* that which gives existence to the essence of the being (as if *esse* is the light switch and essence the light); on the contrary, it is the source and fabric of all ontological positivity, perfection, and intelligibility which is limited to this or that mode (this or that limitation) as a result of the amount of *esse* God chooses to bestow upon it through his creative and sustaining acts. The being here is an *esse* in essential mode X.

³⁴ Ibid., 104.

³⁵ Ibid., 140, my emphasis in last sentence.

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

Two things can now be said. First, Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is consonant with Clarke's synoptic vision. The main difference lies in the explanation of the intrinsic limitation of *esse* that just is essence, and I can see no reason for why the incorporation of Carlo's explanation would be incompatible with other aspects of Clarke's synoptic vision. Clarke's main themes and arguments all remain intact—the one and the many, the dynamism of being, personhood as the fullness of being, and so on.

Second, once we replace Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view with Carlo's, we are in a position to reply to our objections. Concerning The Unexplained Limit Objection, we can see that it no longer has any force. The *esse* of each being is limited by God through his creative and sustaining acts. Just as continued existence is best explained by the claim that God constantly imparts it, so is continued essence best explained by the claim that God constantly imparts it through his bestowal of existence at such and such a qualitative intensity. Some may have objections to this explanation, but it must be acknowledged that this is an explanation. Essence has been reduced to a limitation (or mode) of *esse*, which flows from the qualitative intensity of *esse*, and the qualitative intensity of *esse* is determined by God's creative and sustaining acts. Here, the limitation of *esse* is intrinsic to *esse*, but the primary explanation for this limitation lies outside of *esse* in *Esse* Itself.³⁷ The limitation is internal; the limiting is external. Clarke runs into problems because he tries to make both the limitation *and* the limiting internal to *esse*.

In response to The Otherness Objection, I think it is important to emphasize the analogous character of *esse*: *esse* is not our most abstract concept (like a supremely general universal, the

³⁷ I say "primary explanation" because I still believe more explanation must be given. In particular I think we must say that self-integration or self-organization is an intrinsic aspect of *esse*—otherwise we cannot explain why each limited *esse* achieves its unity. Thus, we should say that the limitation (or mode) of *esse* is internal to *esse* (no positively real and irreducible essence is involved), the limiting principle is external to *esse* (in the hands of God), and the self-integrating or self-organizing principle is internal to *esse* (achieving the limitation, mode, or essence that is determined by God via the intensity of *esse* he chooses to bestow and sustain). I say more about the self-integration of *esse* in the next section.

ultimate genus of our conceptual framework), nor is it a predicate (like a property of a being), nor is it an identical act that instantiates any number of essences (like an unassuming and unchanging light switch that is capable of turning on any number of lights—some big, others small; some white, others blue; and so on).³⁸ On the contrary, it is a qualitatively intensive act that can run up and down a range of intensity. This flexibility and range is found unified in only one Being: *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. And it is the supra-intelligible density of *Esse* Itself that creates and sustains the intelligible density of each act of existing in some mode. Thus, we are distinguished from God because (i) we are created acts of existing with such and such a mode, not the Uncreated Act of Existing without mode; and (ii) our acts of existing are of a lower intensity than the Act of Existing Itself. Accordingly, there is no reason to assert that the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view entails that each of us is God.³⁹

Finally, we can also respond to The Cognitional Existence Objection. The existence-neutral aspect of reality that can achieve cognitional existence is essence, that is, the different modes of finite acts of existing which are all contingent. We can never know a modally bare *esse* (at least in this life). But we can know modes of *esse*, and it is upon these modes that simple apprehension works, allowing the mind to become, in a way, as Aristotle says, all things.⁴⁰ I must confess that I worry I have missed the depth of Knasas's objection, but at this moment I have trouble seeing why the cognitional existence of beings cannot be acquired from the essences of finite beings, which are nothing more than existence-neutral modes of *esse* that may or may not be instantiated by particular acts of existing.

³⁸ For discussion on the analogous character of *esse*, see Phelan, "The Being of Creatures," 119–21; and Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 101.

³⁹ For further discussion on this matter, see Phelan, "The Being of Creatures," 120–3; Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 112–3; Clarke, "What Cannot Be Said," 118; Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 81 and 85–6; and Connor, "Relational *Esse* and the Person," footnotes 46 and 47.

⁴⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *On the Soul* (Book III, ch. 7, 431b), trans. J.A. Smith, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 595; and St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1.

5. An Argument (or Case) for the Thick-*Esse*/Thin-Essence View

With replies made to these three objections, I would now like to provide a positive argument for the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view—as outlined by Carlo. (I will assume that we have seen why Clarke’s account fails, so all references to “thick-*esse*/thin-essence” in this section will refer to Carlo’s.) Now, since the setting of this chapter is clearly within the tradition of Thomism, it would be legitimate to focus on showing why the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is more plausible than its Thomistic competitors (delineated in Section 2). Still, in what follows, I will do my best to start from outside the tradition. It is acceptable and necessary to assume central theses of Thomism from time to time and then work from these assumptions (as if working from platforms), but at some point all of these assumptions must be justified (or resolved into first principles etc.). This is why I will offer a broader argument.

To be clear, though, I will not provide a deductively valid argument with incontrovertible premises, nor will I safeguard and defend my claims on every side. An entire book would be needed for such an undertaking. But I will try to provide a convincing argument—or we could say case—for a thesis that has had few defenders and absolutely no contemporary defenders (as far as I am aware).⁴¹ An overall justification will be given, in other words, one that I think is convincing, but there will be no attempt to achieve demonstration. The general strategy of this argument will rely on reflective analysis and the need to get clear on the conditions of intelligibility of that which we know with certainty (or that which we cannot deny).⁴² The overall

⁴¹ Since Carlo’s passing in 1971, I have not found a single defense or endorsement of his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. Prior to 1971, it seems only a few philosophers argued for something close (or identical) to Carlo’s view. Two papers by Phelan should be noted: “The Being of Creatures”; and “Being, Order, and Knowledge,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 33 (1959): 12–20. In the latter, we find the following (at 16–7): “No *esse* but God’s is a *quod* unless and until it is limited, restricted, and distinguished from all others by a *modus essendi*; and that *modus essendi* which so limits and restricts it is not an *ens*, nor an *actus essendi*, nor has it any *esse* of its own: it is simply the non-being (or absence) of *esse* within that *ens* beyond that limit or restriction” (footnote removed).

⁴² Cf. Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 9; for a defense of the intelligibility of reality, see 16–8.

argument will lean heavily on the work of existential Thomists—e.g., Gilson, Maritain, Phelan, Carlo, and Clarke—and I will try to note these debts as I go along.

Let us start in a place the importance of which cannot be denied. Let us begin in the domain of metaphysics. Why do we need metaphysics? The answer is as follows. All other disciplines take as their object a well-demarked region of being—e.g., physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, psychology, economics, mathematics—and then investigate and analyze those beings or aspects of beings which reside in their respective region of the real. But none of these disciplines investigates and analyzes beings insofar as they are beings (*that which* is insofar as *that which is*, being *qua* being, *ens qua ens*). And from this it follows that an aspect of reality is left uninvestigated; indeed, it follows that each discipline pursues knowledge about a set of beings (or a set of abstractions from a set of beings, e.g., geometrical figures which are abstracted from material beings), without knowing that which is most fundamental and central to beings in the first place. A wider field of vision is required. Prescinding from all that is particular in the aforementioned disciplines, a single discipline must take as its object that which is common to all: beings insofar as they are beings.⁴³ This is why we find Aristotle saying the following:

There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being.⁴⁴

Accordingly, let us behold beings insofar as they are beings. For our purposes, I would like to point out two facets of any real being: *essence* (i.e., nature, quiddity, whatness) and *existence* (i.e., presence in the universe, as opposed to absence). Two things should be said here. First, by “real being” I mean any being that stands outside of nothingness without needing to

⁴³ For a masterful discussion on the proper object of metaphysics, one that goes beyond what I have offered above, see Gerald B. Phelan, “A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics,” *The New Scholasticism* 18 (1944): 197–201.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Book IV, Ch.1, 1003a), trans. W.D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 731. Cf. Etienne Gilson’s use of this passage in *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 1–2.

subsist in another. Accidental beings need to subsist in another (e.g., the color purple, smoothness, and so on), but real beings do not. In my mind, real beings are substantial beings, but I will simply talk of real beings or accidental beings in what follows. Second, I will set aside the epistemological account of how we come to know the above, although I think St. Thomas's emphasis on simple apprehension and existential judgment can do the explanatory work.⁴⁵ No doubt some may express reservations about the claim that we know that some beings *are* (i.e., some beings exist), or that essences are "in" beings in some sense as opposed to constructions or projections of our cognitional activity (which are determined, in turn, by our cognitional structure). In response, I will say only that the former concern seems to lead to solipsism, and the latter seems to entail a radical skepticism—for essences are the life-blood of the intellect, the very handle upon which we grasp the real (even if this grasping is often onerous, partial, and limited by our mode of knowing). Once we assert that we are the creators of essences (not discerners), all intellectual dialogue dissipates into a language game that has no contact with reality. It literally becomes impossible to think or talk *about* anything real.⁴⁶ To be sure, it is still possible to talk about phenomenal beings in the Kantian sense, but these are not real beings. It is generally unrecognized, in my eyes, just how radical a skepticism Kant offers.

Thus, let us move forward. At this point, we would be justified in wandering away from metaphysics into other areas of philosophy or other disciplines to focus on the essences we encounter in the world. What is an atom, a flower, a dragon fly, a human person, freedom, morality, love? If we continue with our metaphysical investigation, however, we are faced with a fundamental question: *For all X, where X is a real (finite) being, what can explain the unity of*

⁴⁵ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1; and *On Truth (De Veritate)*, q. 1, a. 3. For an explication of simple apprehension and existential judgment, see Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 22–8. And for a good collection of St. Thomas's work on philosophical method and epistemology, see *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Pocket Books, 1960), 8–45.

⁴⁶ Cf. Maritain, *Existence and The Existent*, 15–6 (and 23).

*existence and essence that just is X?*⁴⁷ Reformulated, how are these two principles, grounds, or sources “joined” together to engender a unity that merits the article “a” in “a being”? And, to be clear, we are not concerned with sandcastles or bicycles; these are artifacts composed of a number of real beings inter-acting with each other. Atoms, cats, and human persons, on the other hand, are real beings which act as a unified whole. Our question applies to real beings.⁴⁸

Presumably, some might suggest a reductionist account. The existence-essence unities of higher-level beings are nothing but conglomerations of mid-level beings, mid-level beings are nothing but conglomerations of micro-level beings ... and so on—until we reach the ultimate “stuff” of the universe. Three things must be said about this answer. First, this account destroys the unity of the beings with which we are concerned. As such it fails as an answer. It entails that there is no difference in kind (as opposed to complexity) between an artifact and a real being. Of course, some might think this is not a problem; it simply shows that our question is working with a mistaken understanding of real beings. Without entering the debate about whether there is a substantive difference between artifacts and real beings (I rest my case on Clarke’s work in *The One and the Many*), I would simply like to note that reductionists still must include some real beings, as I have described them, in their ontology.⁴⁹ This should be sufficient for the context of

⁴⁷ Carlo often emphasizes the need to get clear on how existence and essence “combine” to produce unified beings. I think he is right to focus on this issue, and so I use this question as a point of departure for what follows. See *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, e.g., 92 and 108–14 (esp. 114). Clarke, on the other hand, seems to prefer departing from the problem of the one and the many in order to motivate his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view (e.g., *The One and the Many*, Ch. 5); but he also highlights the need to get clear on how unified beings come about (e.g., *ibid.*, 82). I think both strategies are useful.

⁴⁸ For a discussion on the difference between intrinsic unity and extrinsic unity (with real beings constituting the former and artifacts constituting one type of the latter), see Clarke’s *The One and the Many*, Ch. 4, esp. 64–8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Some may ask how I can say that real beings—such as butterflies, dogs, and human persons—are unities when their being is clearly constituted by a large number of real beings, elements for example. In response, I would say that real beings can integrate other real beings into their unity. These integrated real beings then become semi-autonomous beings. Water is a good example. In a cup, water is a fully-autonomous real being, but once it is consumed by human beings, it is taken up into the systemic unity of the entire human being and the water therefore becomes a semi-autonomous being—retaining some structure of its own but yet subject to the structure of the whole. Terence L. Nichols proposes this sort of an account, in much greater detail, in “Aquinas’s Concept of Substantial Form and Modern Science,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1996): 303–18. Although I cannot endorse

this argument. Consider: we start the reduction; we get to mid-level beings; we get to micro-level beings; we get to “stuff”—but this final “stuff” or set of “stuff” cannot be an artifact as well. What would be its constitutive elements? The working hypothesis requires that there is nothing more ultimate or fundamental. Thus, even the reductionist account must include real beings in its ontology.

Second, expanding on the point just made, this account must still explain why this fundamental “stuff” is imbued with the existence-essence unity it possesses. Why does this “stuff” have the existence it has, the essence it has, and the unity it has? As such our main question is merely delayed and not answered; existence, essence, and unity all remain unintelligible, just at a lower level.

Finally, this account generates new questions. How does the diversity of real beings—carbon, fish, roses—come about from one basic type of “stuff” or a small set of “stuff”? How can we explain the diversity of dispositional properties of beings—e.g., gold does not quench thirst; water does—when all beings are reduced to similar “stuff”? Some may point to different structures of this “stuff,” but this is precisely the point: how does alternative structuring come about with this extremely parsimonious, and possibly monistic, ontology? Consequently, in light of these three points, a reductionist answer is not as plausible as it may seem; indeed, and here is the most important point, it is an incomplete answer.⁵⁰

But reductionists might play one more card. Taking their inspiration from Bertrand Russell and going beyond him, some might assert that their answer is complete. This is because explanation begins from these existence-essence unities, these real beings, which just are the

Nichols’s entire proposal (e.g., his understanding of formal causality), I do think he convincingly argues that Thomism must make some modifications in light of modern science. Carlo also offers a germane discussion on the plasticity of being (or *esse*) in *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 126–7.

⁵⁰ For further discussion on reductionism, see Clarke’s *The One and the Many*, Ch. 4, 62 and 68–70.

ultimate “stuff.”⁵¹ A complete explanation for the dimensions of existence, essence, and unity when it comes to the ultimate “stuff” is unnecessary. Now, this can surely be said, but philosophically this claim seems to be a capitulation of the highest degree, even a betrayal of philosophy. Philosophers seek to provide an intelligible account of reality (and act in accordance with this account), and insofar as a philosophical account cannot explain (i.e., make intelligible) the reality of existence-essence unities or real beings, wherever they reside in the account, it follows that the account is seriously inadequate.

At this juncture, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic answers could be given, along with many others. But there can be no question of evaluating every possible answer.⁵² Thus, with the reductionist answer behind us, I would like to begin drawing from the Thomistic tradition. I think four steps will allow us to answer our question about what can explain the unity of existence and essence in all real (finite) beings. (Again, interpretive matters are beyond the scope of this chapter; there is not enough space to address whether St. Thomas would accept these four steps.)

Step one: essences are existence-neutral. We should begin by recognizing that we can contemplate and know an essence apart from its instantiation in reality; we can know *what* an X is without knowing whether an X *is*. As St. Thomas says:

[E]very essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its being. I can know, for instance, what a man or phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being in reality.⁵³

⁵¹ Clarke writes the following: “The question of the existence of the system itself as a whole [i.e., the system of the universe] is simply never asked. It is taken for granted as a sheer ultimate given about which no questions are legitimate. As Bertrand Russell has put it in his debate on the existence of God with Father Copleston: ‘I should say that the universe is just there, and that’s all.’” See Clarke, “A Curious Blind Spot in the Anglo-American Tradition of Antitheistic Argument,” in Clarke’s *Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 48–65, at 63.

⁵² But see Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers*, esp. Chs. 1–2. Here, Gilson discusses the metaphysical shortcomings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Neo-Platonists—along with their impressive insights.

⁵³ *On Being and Essence (De Ente et Essentia)*, trans. Armand Mauer, C.S.B. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 55.

This is further confirmed when we realize that the instantiation of an essence in existence does not add anything to the content of the essence. As Kant says:

By whatever and by however many predicates we may think a thing—even if we completely determine it—we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing *is*.⁵⁴

But this means that essences are existence-neutral; they are intelligibilities whose being or non-being is an open question when they are considered *qua* essences. And from this it follows that essences cannot single-handedly explain why essences are found in reality. Even an essence that is identical to Existence Itself is existence-neutral when considered *qua* essence. This is why St. Anselm’s ontological argument does not work.⁵⁵

Step two: essences cannot outstrip existence. But if essences are existence-neutral, why are essences in reality? How do they get there? And how do they stay there? Here we must move slowly. One answer is as follows. A being is an essence that exists, or an existing essence. Consider an oxygen atom. Existence is somehow *given to* or *possessed by* the essence of an oxygen atom and this yields a real oxygen atom. Just as a light switch turns on and maintains a light, so existence “turns on” and “maintains” the essence of an oxygen atom. Just as the light switch sends important sustenance to the light but is not the light, so existence sends important sustenance to the essence but is not the essence. The perfection, intelligibility, and positivity of our atom cannot be identified fully with its existence. This is the thin-*esse*/thick-essence view discussed in Section 2.

Can this account explain the existence-essence unities we meet everyday? No. The relationship between existence and essence is unintelligible. The primary problem is this. If existence turns on and sustains an essence that cannot be reduced fully to its existence, then

⁵⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 505 (A 600; B 628).

⁵⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

where does this irreducible “stuff” vis-à-vis the essence come from? How *is* (in a positive sense) an essence more than its existence? We would need to say that essences exist beyond their existence. But this is impossible. In at least one place, St. Thomas seems to suggest this point:

[T]his item that I call actual being [*esse*] is the actuality of all acts, and for this reason is the perfection of all perfections. Nor should this be understood to mean that to this item that I call actual being there is something added that is more formal than it, determining it as act does potency. For actual being, in this sense, is essentially different from that to which an addition is made for the sake of determination. Nothing can be added to the act of being [*esse*] that is extraneous to it, since nothing is extraneous to it except non-being, and that can be neither form nor matter.⁵⁶

Of course, the defender of the thin-*esse*/thick-essence view may argue that essence does not really exist beyond existence because essence is still grounded in existence, dependent upon it, nourished by it, and so on. But this misses the point. Insofar as we declare that the essence of a being has a positive reality (not to mention intelligibility and perfection) which transcends the existence of the being, we say the unintelligible: we declare that the essence *is* beyond existence.⁵⁷

From this, then, we learn an important metaphysical truth: essences cannot outstrip existence; they cannot possess any positivity, intelligibility, or perfection outside of existence. Thus, the essence of a real being does not have existence (like a cup has its water); rather, the existence of a real being has an essence (like an apple has its shape). None of this entails that beings are unable to have existence in another sense; they still can be described as having their

⁵⁶ St. Thomas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God (Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei)*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, in *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. and trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Pocket Books, 1960), 154–5; both insertions of “*esse*” can be found in Bourke’s translation. Cf. St. Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 1, a. 1. Here we are told that “nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being—in the way that a difference is added to a genus or an accident to a subject—for every reality is essentially a being.” *Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 5.

⁵⁷ Clarke makes this point well. See *The One and the Many*, 82–3. Cf. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 114.

existence from Existence Itself.⁵⁸ But it does entail that essences cannot (i) get outside of the fabric of existence ontologically speaking; (ii) receive existence in the way a cup receives water or a ball receives air; or (iii) exercise existence in the way a heart exercises blood or a flower exercises water. The comparisons in (ii) and (iii) are imperfect, but I hope the points are clear.

But from all of this it immediately follows that the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view cannot answer our question either. Although the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view asserts the primacy of existence in the domains of perfection and intelligibility, it still declares that essence possesses an ontological positivity—a “thickness”—which allows it to limit and govern existence. Of course, this view asserts that essence is dependent upon existence in a robust sense, but as soon as and insofar as this essence is allowed to grow beyond its existence (ontologically speaking), we run afoul of our metaphysical insight: essence cannot outstrip existence. Thus, the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view is indefensible too. It reproduces the same error as the thin-*esse*/thick-essence view but in a less egregious manner. Both views assume that existence can give an existence-less existence to essences. But this just cannot happen.

Step three: essences are modes of esse; they are self-integrations of esse. At this point some may wonder how existence can be all that is in a being. We are accustomed to thinking of existence as a fact. Either *X* is or *X* is not. There is nothing wrong with this fact-view of existence, but it does need to be expanded. Indeed, the requirement of intelligibility forces this expansion upon us.

⁵⁸ Carlo’s discussion on this matter is relevant: “The term *habens esse* is another relic of the Greek philosophical vocabulary with its essentialistic context which Thomas inherited at the very start of his philosophical career. ... But *habens esse* means simply for Thomas that in creatures their essence is not existence simply, their essence is not simply to exist as is the case with the Divine *Esse*. ... It is the fact of the finite limited character of the created *esse* which is indicated by the *habens esse*. ... If we take literally the words *habens esse* then the implication is that *something* has *esse*, either as *ens* or *essentia*, but the doctrine of creation demands that essence be constituted simultaneously with the communication of *esse* in the creative act.” *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 104–5.

Take an existing X. Some may say that the existence of X is a fact to be noted—full stop. Again, in one sense this is fine. But philosophers must make intelligible that which is, including the “is” of that which is. Thus, philosophers must make sense of why X exists instead of not-existing. Why does X exist? The answer must be that X rises forth as a presence because of a “to be” that makes it exist. To use St. Thomas’s language, it is an *esse* or act of existing that makes X exist.⁵⁹ And, as noted in Section 2, fuller investigation into the dynamism of *esse* seems to reveal that *esse* is relationally active too. This, in turn, confirms the inward dynamism of *esse*, for this relational activity needs to pour forth from and point back towards a subsisting center of activity.

Now, when we grasp the activity of existence, when we penetrate through essences to the dynamism in all that is, when we “dig” into the being of beings and encounter the fount of all, we are able to see that the term “existence”—a noun—is misleading in the highest. Existence is an act, and thus we can see that it is helpful to talk about *esse*—an infinitive which cannot disown its activity when serving as a noun—and essence. We also see that all positivity, perfection, and intelligibility are from *esse*; *esse* is the rising and falling plenitude of all that is. Phelan fills out the sketch as follows:

The act of existence (*esse*) is not a state, it is an act, the act of all acts, and, therefore, must be understood as act and not as any static and definable object of conception. *Esse* is dynamic impulse, energy, act—the first, the most persistent and enduring of all dynamisms, all energies, all acts. In all things on earth the act of being (*esse*) is the consubstantial urge of nature, a restless, striving force, carrying each being (*ens*) onward, from within the depths of its own reality to its full self-achievement, i.e., fully to be what by its nature it is apt to become.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cf. Clarke’s discussion on the need to move from a fact-view of existence to an existential one. Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 79–80; or Clarke, “Introduction” to a collection of St. Thomas’s metaphysical work in *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. and trans. James F. Anderson (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1997), xv–xvi.

⁶⁰ Gerald B. Phelan, “The Existentialism of St. Thomas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 21 (1946): 25–40, at 35, footnote removed.

As Clarke rightly notes, Phelan seems to miss or leave aside the communicative activity of *esse* (and we could add receptive activity, too).⁶¹ Still, Phelan describes the inward dynamism of *esse* well. The existence of an X may be a fact, but this fact is an act, the act of existing (*esse*).

Now, when we combine the dynamism and plenitude of *esse* with the truth that essences cannot outstrip existence, what happens? It seems that essences become modes of *esse*. If the essence of a being cannot stand over and against the *esse* of a being (ontologically speaking), then the essence—i.e., the intelligibility—of the being must emerge from *esse*. And the “moment” an essence emerges from an *esse* we have a being. But how is essential difference achieved if all beings are acts of existing? In short, different essences emerge as a result of the flexible or modifiable intensity of *esse*. And it follows that the range of the intensity of *esse* is the range of the hierarchy of being.

If these claims are not ringing true for some, if they seem cryptic and unintelligible, I think it may help to emphasize that we need to be shaken by the intuition of *esse*. Thus, let us consider the *analogous* and *supra-abstractive* (or, in one sense, supra-conceptual) aspects of *esse*, starting with the analogous aspect. In the concrete, as we touch the earth, swim in water, and laugh with friends, we are able to see that all acts of existing are the same: they are. But there is such multiplicity: what they are is different. Yet the sameness of beings—*esse*—is precisely that by which and in which the difference is achieved. There is sameness *in* (not *with* or *alongside*) difference, and *vice versa*. And this means that our concept of *esse* must embrace and contain all of the riches of every mode of *esse*, descending to the most basic matter and ascending to the infinity of *Esse* Itself. It must be an analogous concept, not a univocal or equivocal one. This is

⁶¹ *Person and Being*, 9.

not a choice; reality demands the use of this analogical concept.⁶² We might say this can be summarized as follows: not only must we carve nature at the joints, we must also sigh as we behold all as one and one as all. The “sigh” may be unnecessary, but I am simply trying to communicate that the beholding in question, if genuine, is akin to an aesthetic intuition, although it certainly is more than this.

But this very same concept, as I have already suggested, cannot be formed via regular abstraction. Recall: *esse* is the ground of finite beings and essences, never the essence of a finite being from which it can be abstracted via essential or quidditative abstraction. But it can be seen, I believe, through an intellectual sight in which the intellect maintains the multiplicity of the symphony of beings but yet sees them all, material and immaterial, as participations of One—varying lights, some glowing and others radiating, of the inexhaustible goodness, beauty, unity, and activity of *Esse* Itself. It is through the beholding of this tension of multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity that we know and do not know, in the way we see and do not see the sun, the overflowing and uncontainable splendor of *esse*. What is needed here is an intuition of *esse*. And this sight, in its fullness, insofar as this is possible for human persons, must contain the *active*, *analogical*, *axiological*, and *aesthetic* aspects of *esse*.⁶³ At the very least, it is manifest that a fact-view of existence fails to pay attention to the deeper aspects of existence.⁶⁴

⁶² Cf. St. Thomas, *On Truth*, q. 2, a. 11. And for two comprehensive overviews of analogy, see James F. Anderson, *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1954); and Clarke, *The One and the Many*, Ch. 3. Cf. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 101. Gerald Phelan, in the “Foreword” to Anderson’s *Bond of Being*, defends the use of analogy as follows (at ix): “Analogy is a way of understanding what is only because it is the way what is, is.”

⁶³ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1945), 44 and 63–74; and Phelan, “A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics,” 198.

⁶⁴ This is a brief attempt to communicate what I take to be the intuition of *esse* (or being). I have trouble discerning how my understanding of the intuition of *esse* matches up with Maritain’s intuition of being. But Maritain is a metaphysical master, as many have noted, and I would be happy if readers pass over my feeble gesturing to learn from a true seer. See *A Preface to Metaphysics* and *Existence and the Existent*. I should also note that Clarke’s synoptic vision of the one and the many deserves attention as well, and it may be that my gesturing above is closer to Clarke’s synoptic vision than Maritain’s intuition of being. See *The One and the Many*, Ch. 5.

Now, with our grasp of *esse* deepened, let us return to our claim that essence is a mode of *esse*, and that it is the intensity of the *esse* which fixes the mode. Why does a particular intensity of *esse* result in an essence? How does this happen? Would not the *esse* degenerate into nothingness? These are fair questions, and I think that Carlo could have done a bit more in this area. Carlo suggests, for example, that essence is the “place where existence stops,” and that essence is the crystallization, surface tension, limitation, and specification of *esse*.⁶⁵ But these suggestions still leave us wondering why this happens. Why crystallization instead of dissipation?

If we are to provide a satisfactory answer to this sort of question, I think we must attend to the fabric or intrinsic properties of *esse*. To be sure, the primary explanation for why an instance of *esse* produces essence X, say, is that the *esse* has a certain intensity—determined by God—which “stops” at X. But there is a secondary role for the fabric of *esse* to play. The intrinsic properties of *esse* must figure into a complete explanation. In short, we must assert that integrity, or a drive towards unity, is an intrinsic property or aspect of *esse*. The dynamism of *esse* is not an unwieldy or chaotic dynamism but an integrative dynamism. Accordingly, this is why a particular intensity of *esse* self-integrates—organizes itself, unifies itself, braces itself—in a specific mode of *esse* from the very moment it enters reality. Beings are one because they are undivided, but they are undivided because it is the “nature” of *esse* to achieve unity.⁶⁶

What is the justification for this claim? Two reasons can be given. First, in light of our awareness that essence cannot outstrip existence, this seems to be the best explanation for the unity we see in beings. We cannot say that essence determines or limits *esse* in the sense of a

⁶⁵ Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence*, 103–4.

⁶⁶ This insight might have allowed Antoine Roquentin to have a different vision in the park—one with more unity and order. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1969), 126–35.

quasi-efficient cause. And this means that unity must come from within the act of existing itself. Second, that *Esse* Itself is one, indeed supremely simple, should lend some plausibility to this claim, especially when we keep in mind that this One reaches unity without a limiting essence. I suspect that the reification or ontologizing of essence is often due to the belief that a positively real essence, standing outside of *esse* in some sense, is needed to unify *esse*—to mold it into a unified whole. But there is no necessity here. We know that *Esse* Itself (Pure Act, infinite and unlimited) achieves unity without a limiting essence, so there is no reason to deny that an act of existing (*esse*) cannot self-integrate or self-organize at a lower level.⁶⁷

But some may argue that our account is now identical to the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view, for if *esse* gives existence to a distinct act (read: essence) which unifies and integrates the *esse*, then it follows we have a thick essence. In response, the consequent certainly follows from the antecedent, but I am not affirming the antecedent. I am not saying that *esse* gives rise to an act other than itself in order to limit itself. I am asserting only that *esse* unifies itself or self-integrates through its own fabric (or intrinsic properties). There is no other involved in this unifying or self-integrating—only *esse*, and so it follows that I am not moving to the thick-*esse*/thick-essence view.

Let us now take stock. At this stage we seem to have gotten clear on why existence-essence unities are unified: they are unified because *esse* strives towards self-integration. Moreover, *esse* is the only positive reality in each unity; there is no piece called essence to fasten onto or weave into *esse*. We also seem to have explained why these existence-essence unities have the facets of existence and essence: *esse* explains the fact of existence of each being; the intensity and fabric of *esse* explain the essence. But full intelligibility is still beyond our reach.

⁶⁷ Cf. Schmitz's interesting discussion on the freedom, integrity, and self-expression of being in "The Solidarity of Personalism and the Metaphysics of Existential Act," 143.

We still need to explain why beings have *esse* at all, and why they have *esse* at such and such an intensity.

Step four: Ipsum Esse Subsistens as the ultimate ground of intelligibility. We can see that finite beings are not *esse* itself without qualification. What they are in an intelligible sense is their essence. That they are is their *esse*. And what they are in an ontological sense is a limited *esse*—an *esse* which does not possess the sufficient reason for its continued existing or its continued mode of existing. (I think it is urgent for the tradition of Thomism to recognize that the question “What is it?” is underdetermined: in one sense it can refer to essence, in another ontological fabric. Concerning the latter, is this fabric *esse* and essence? Or *esse* alone? I am of course endorsing the latter.)

How does all of this come about? There is only one possibility. *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* creates and sustains finite beings through gifts of *esse*, and these outpourings of *esse* vary in intensity. As *Esse* Itself, God eternally contains all possible modes of *esse* within the infinity of his *Esse* (all are in All); as *Esse* Itself, God creates—not makes—beings from nothing (all are through All); as *Esse* Itself, God continually sustains all that he creates (All is in all). Finally, as *Esse* Itself, God does not require an explanation for his existence. He is (of identity) Existence. Some may demand an explanation for this, but this demand only evinces a misunderstanding of the nature of God. Existence Itself is not self-caused, nor does it need a cause; indeed, it is logically impossible for Existence Itself to be self-caused or have a cause. There is no possible universe where this could happen.

God is the final resting place of intelligibility, and it is clear that this could not be otherwise. Intelligibility demands a final resolution, but a final resolution cannot be found in an infinitely extending chain of causes or web of causes (temporally or atemporally extended), nor can it be found in finite beings which require an explanation for their own existence-essence

unities. Of course, some may demand an argument for the existence of God, and this is fair enough. But I think it must be acknowledged that once God is needed to explain existence-essence unities, the very beings that make up this universe, it follows that we have an argument.

Let us now recall our main question: *For all X, where X is a real (finite) being, what can explain the unity of existence and essence that just is X?* We now have an answer. A being is an *esse* in such and such a mode. This mode is the essence. And this mode is achieved through the self-integration of *esse*, which is determined by and grounded in the intensity of *esse*, which is determined by and grounded in God's creative and sustaining acts. Moreover, this creative and sustaining Being is the cause of causality, needing no explanation at all. The unity of each being is achieved because any possibility of an ontologically significant cleavage between *esse* and essence has been erased; there is—positively speaking—only *esse*, in such and such a mode.

Given all of the above, then, the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view is plausible in its own right. It can provide a satisfactory answer to one of the most fundamental questions in all of metaphysics, and a brief assessment suggests that a wholesale reductionism and the two main competitors in the Thomistic tradition cannot. To be sure, I have not attempted to demonstrate conclusively the truth of the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. More objections would need to be considered, alternative accounts assessed, and other metaphysical questions addressed. Still, at the very least, it seems fair to conclude that the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view offers us a plausible account of why there are existence-essence unities; moreover, this account seems more plausible than three rival accounts. This investigatory result, on its own, strongly supports the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view.

6. Conclusion

I hope to have buttressed one front of Clarke's Thomistic personalism, namely, his reliance on a thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. To recapitulate, I highlighted the unifying role of Clarke's thick-

esse/thin-essence view in his work, articulated three possible objections to his thick-*esse*/thin-essence view, and replied to these objections. In order to reply to all three objections, I replaced Clarke's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view with Carlo's (allowing for a minor modification to Clarke's overall vision of Thomistic personalism). Finally, I offered a positive argument (or case) for Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. I hope to have shown, therefore, that Clarke's reliance on a thick-*esse*/thin-essence view does not militate against his Thomistic personalism; on the contrary, it militates in its favor.

Thus, Clarke may be right. It may be time to think more about the primacy of *esse* in Thomistic personalism; it may be time, in other words, to think more about the human person in terms of the inward, communicative, and receptive activity of *esse* that is most fully actualized in relationships of love which are grounded in self-consciousness and self-mastery. Does this mean that we must suppress the truth that human persons are individual substances of a rational nature? Not at all. We still have an essence, a mode of *esse* which casts us above and beyond every level of the impersonal. But we must learn to see this mode through the splendor and radiance of *esse*. We must learn to see that the essence of personhood is found in the fullness of *esse*—a truth Christians may find corroborated when they hold Exodus 3:14 and the Mystery of the Holy Trinity before their eyes—and this means that the dynamism of *esse*, relational through and through, must illuminate our understanding of the human *person*: that fullness of the act of existing (*esse*) which is slightly lower than the angels, created in the image of *Esse* Itself, and called to become *Esse*-like, that is, Love-like.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Psalms 8:6 (or 8:5); Genesis 1; 2 Peter 1:4.

CHAPTER 4

RECEPTIVITY IN THOMISTIC PERSONALISM

I never said or intended to imply that “receptivity” was a *transcendental* perfection of being, which means predicable analogously of every being insofar as it is a being. Someone else might try to establish this; but I certainly am not trying to do this here.

—W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “Response to Long’s Comments”¹

1. Introduction

After identifying three species of Thomistic personalism in Chapter 1—Weak, Moderate, and Strong—I argued in Chapter 2 that phenomenology must be integrated into the project. Weak Thomistic Personalism, I concluded, is indefensible. Accordingly, in Chapter 3, I set my sights on the main division between Moderate and Strong Thomistic Personalism, that is, whether the primacy of *esse* should be endorsed in the project. Should we, in other words, declare that the inner and relational dynamism of *esse* is well-suited to ground, fructify, and illuminate the practical philosophy of Thomistic personalism? Should we say that the “nature” of *esse* can throw light upon the dignity, *telos*, and mystery of the person? (For further elucidation of Strong Thomistic Personalism, see Chapter 1, Sections 4–6, and Chapter 3). Since a full resolution of this question would require the treatment of many complex issues, though, I judged that it would be more productive to aim for depth as opposed to breadth. Thus, at the start of Chapter 3, I asserted that I would devote Chapters 3 and 4 to a defense of Strong Thomistic Personalism via a defense of two significant and contentious fronts of Fr. W. Norris Clarke’s Strong Thomistic Personalism: his claim that *esse* is “thick” and essence is “thin,” and his claim that receptivity is a positive ontological perfection.

Of course, since I have already defended a modified version of Clarke’s thick-*esse*/thin-essence view in Chapter 3, I will now turn to his thesis concerning receptivity, a thesis which I

¹ “Response to Long’s Comments,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 165–9, at 165.

treated only cursorily in Chapters 1 and 3.² I will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I will explicate Clarke’s understanding of receptivity and the arguments he adduces in support of its status as an ontological perfection. I will then argue, in Section 3, that Clarke’s account suffers from two problems, but I will propose that these problems can be avoided if we tighten our concept of receptivity and recognize that receptivity, thus tightened, is a transcendental perfection, that is, an aspect or property of being (i.e., *esse*)—such as unity, goodness, intelligibility, and beauty—that is present to the degree that being is present.³ In short, I will propose a modified account of receptivity. With this account in hand, I will proceed to provide a justification on its behalf in Section 4; and in Section 5, I will reply to three objections articulated by Steven A. Long. Then,

² Clarke’s work on receptivity can be found in “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 601–18, esp. 611–4; *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), esp. 20–4 and 82–8; “Response to David Schindler’s Comments,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 593–8; “Response to Long’s Comments” and “Response to Blair’s Comments,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 165–71; “Reply to Steven Long,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 617–24; and “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” in *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 226–31, esp. 229–30. For the articles to which Clarke is responding, see David L. Schindler, “Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 581–92; Steven A. Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 151–61; George A. Blair, “On *Esse* and Relation,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 162–4; and Steven A. Long, “Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 1–31, esp. 26–31.

³ Clarke defines a transcendental property (or perfection) of being as “a positive attribute that can be predicated of every real being [analogously], so that it is convertible with being itself Such a property is called ‘transcendental’ (from the Latin *trans-cendere* = to leap over) because it leaps over all barriers between different kinds and levels or modes of being, in contradistinction to other, more limited concepts that apply only to certain beings or kinds of beings: intelligent, material, etc.” See Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), Ch. 18 at 290–1. Indeed, transcendental properties or perfections of being (i.e., *esse*) also run through and transcend all the Aristotelian categories (i.e., on top of substance [i.e., real being], also quantity, quality, relation, etc.), although we must remember that these properties apply in a deeply analogous sense. For further discussion, see St. Thomas, *Truth (De Veritate)*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952) q. 1, a. 1; and Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), Ch. 8. For those unfamiliar with the Thomistic understanding of transcendentals (found in contemporary Thomistic accounts or in St. Thomas himself), the most important point to remember is that the transcendental properties of being (i.e., *esse*) do not add anything to being; rather, they are aspects of being that are present to the degree that being is present. Thus, the Thomistic doctrine of the transcendentals only makes sense once we begin to see that being is not univocal (as contemporary philosophers usually assume), as if being is some single foundational act that is the same in a bee and a lion, the same in an atom of gold and a human person (with essences explaining all of the difference in existents). Once we see that being (i.e., *esse*) rises and falls throughout the entire hierarchy of being, allowing existence to explain all of the difference in essences, we can see that our concept of being must be analogous—along with every transcendental concept that just is an aspect of being. The transcendental concepts, then, are continually instantiated in such a way that sameness-in-difference riddles our universe. A final clarificatory point: as St. Thomas notes in *Truth* (q.1, a. 1), some transcendentals follow upon the being of a thing in itself (e.g., unity); others follow upon the being of a thing in relation to others (e.g., goodness in relation to will, and intelligibility in relation to intellect).

in Section 6, I will identify the boundaries of Thomistic personalism in order to demonstrate that the account of receptivity offered is a legitimate move in Thomistic personalism, despite its absence in St. Thomas.

A final matter. A great deal of work on receptivity has taken place against the backdrop of Christian revelation, especially the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.⁴ Because the persons are distinguished by their relations, not their substance, and because the Son eternally receives his being from the Father *and* eternally receives the Father's love (not to mention the unique receiving of the Holy Spirit), theologians have tried to offer theological accounts of receptivity (i.e., accounts explicitly relying on reason and revelation as premises), and Christian philosophers have tried to offer philosophical accounts of receptivity (i.e., accounts inspired by revelation but grounded in and built upon philosophical argument alone).⁵

The task in what follows, of course, is to construct a strictly philosophical account of receptivity. As such, it would still be acceptable throughout this chapter to underscore the relevant consonances and dissonances between Christian revelation and the philosophical account developed, but this can lead to confusion. Indeed, Clarke's work on receptivity sometimes seems to suggest, notwithstanding explicit claims to the contrary, that the Mystery of the Holy Trinity

⁴ See, for example, *Communio* 20-21 (1993–1994). All of the relevant articles—by Schindler, Clarke, Long, and Blair—make reference to the Trinity. This does not mean that these authors run together theology and philosophy; it simply means that the philosophical arguments take place against the horizon of revelation, when indeed the arguments are philosophical and not theological.

⁵ Clarke's work is instructive here: his own work is philosophical, but the main impetus for his work lies in some of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological work on receptivity. See *Person and Being*, 84–6, where Clarke cites Gerry O'Hanlon, S.J., "Does God Change? H. U. von Balthasar on the Immutability of God," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 53 (1987): 161–83, esp. 171; and Balthasar's *Theodramatik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1983), IV, 75. For further theological work on receptivity, see David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Communio* 14 (1987): 262–90; and Larry S. Chapp, *The God of Covenant and Creation: Scientific Naturalism and its Challenge to the Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), esp. 183–201. For further philosophical work on receptivity, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 339–71; and David Liberto, "Person, Being, and Receptivity: W. Norris Clarke's Retrieval and Completion of Thomas' Thought," in *Aquinas as Authority*, eds. Paul Van Geest, Harm Goris, Carlo Leget (Peeters Publishers, 2002), 201–11.

counts as philosophical evidence for his account of receptivity.⁶ In light of this, and because Christian philosophers must be careful not to allow the light of revelation to replace the need for philosophical investigation, I will make no substantive reference to Christian revelation until Section 7. At this point I will suggest a line of thought in which the account of receptivity developed seems to approach compatibility with the Trinity (noting, though, that there is an apparent problem with this line of thought); and I will also explain why the account developed does not violate the authoritative tradition among Christians that the Trinity is inaccessible to reason (in terms of demonstration and comprehension).⁷ I will do this because, although Christian philosophy must not use revelation as evidence, Christian philosophy must remain compatible with revelation. My hope is that theologians will provide deeper theological assessment (or criticism), if this is warranted, since I profess little theological competency.

For those who are not practitioners of Christian philosophy, I would like to say, as clearly as possible, that the objective of Section 7 is not to provide further philosophical evidence for the account of receptivity developed; on the contrary, the objective is to assess whether the account developed merits theological approval and corroboration, approval and corroboration that many Christian philosophers take seriously because of their belief in both the unity of truth—which excludes inconsistency—and the veracity of Christian revelation.

2. Clarke on Receptivity

The objective of this section is to explicate (and therefore not defend) Clarke's work on receptivity. Before starting this task, though, four things need to be said. First, I will assume a

⁶ See Clarke's "Person, Being, and St. Thomas," 613; *Person and Being*, 86–8; and "Reply to Steven Long." There is no doubt in my mind that Clarke offers a philosophical account of receptivity, one that can be articulated without reference to revelation. But those unfamiliar with the Gilsonian understanding of Christian philosophy, which Clarke appears to follow, may interpret his references to the Trinity as attempts to strengthen or bolster the philosophical plausibility of his argument. (Indeed, a thinker familiar with Thomism accuses Clarke of arguing from the Trinity to the relational dynamism of *esse*: see Blair's "On *Esse* and Relation," 162, and Clarke's "Response to Blair's Comments," 170.)

⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1995), para. 237.

general familiarity with Clarke's work on Thomistic personalism, which I have elucidated in Chapters 1 and 3. Second, given that Clarke makes frequent reference to the Trinity in his work on receptivity, it would be appropriate for an explication to show how Clarke relies on revelation to illuminate his philosophical work. For the reasons noted in Section 1, however, I will not do this; instead, I will offer a purely philosophical reconstruction.⁸ Third, I will provide a holistic or synthetic explication that is grounded in Clarke's work over a period of approximately fifteen years. In other words, because Clarke clarified and expanded his account of receptivity after his initial work in "Person, Being, and St. Thomas" (1992) and *Person and Being* (1993), I will try to articulate Clarke's final and all-things-considered position. Lastly, because the target of this section is an explication of Clarke's view alone—as opposed to recent work on receptivity without qualification—I will refer to Clarke's exchanges with others only insofar as they are required to understand his view. With these preliminary matters out of the way, we can begin. A grasp of Clarke's work on receptivity can be acquired in four steps.

Step one: the personalization of metaphysics. It is important to start by highlighting the context in which receptivity becomes significant. Recall the first two species of Thomistic personalism. The first synthesizes the commitments of personalism with the metaphysics and other relevant work of St. Thomas: concepts such as potency, act, prime matter, form, substance, soul, individual, person, and so on fill out the picture. The second endorses the overall movement of the first but goes on to integrate phenomenology into the project. Clarke agrees with both of these developments, but he also goes beyond the second species (and therefore also the first) by arguing that the main commitments of personalism can be discovered in the depths of St.

⁸ For those interested in Clarke's use of revelation vis-à-vis receptivity, *Person and Being* is a good place to start, but I would also strongly recommend Clarke's "Reply to Steven Long."

Thomas's "concept" of *esse*. This is because Clarke thinks that to be (i.e., exist) fully is to be personally, which entails that a better grasp of *esse* can serve to disclose personhood.

Now, because we have already looked at Clarke's creative completion of St. Thomas's understanding of *esse* (in Chapters 1 and 3), let us simply recall the sequence of reasoning he provides to justify his proposal: (i) *esse* is inwardly and communicatively active throughout the entire hierarchy of being, and receptively active at the final stage of the hierarchy of being; (ii) the hierarchy of being is a result of the flexible and modifiable intensity of *esse*, and *esse* is convertible with goodness and perfection; and (iii) personhood is not something outside of *esse*, as if *esse* is some complement that makes a person to be; rather, personhood is what is achieved when *esse* reaches the final stage of the hierarchy of being—a stage that includes human persons and God (with the concept of "personhood" being used analogously, of course). Thus, the full actualization of personhood must include the most perfect (and good) inward, communicative, and receptive activity, in short, self-consciousness and self-possession in relationships of love. This, in condensed form, is Clarke's proposed addition to Thomistic personalism. It is not so much a rejection of anything prior—e.g., the general framework of Thomism or the integration of phenomenology—as it is an attempt to achieve a *systematic deepening* through a metaphysical, metaethical, and anthropological unification.

But what role does receptivity fulfill here? And how important is it? In my eyes, it plays an essential role in the personalization of metaphysics. Consider what would happen if we asserted that receptivity is necessarily a passivity or non-act that has nothing to do with activity, nothing to do with *esse*? This would make receptivity an ontological imperfection (since all ontological perfection rides on *esse*), and we would then be left with the inner and communicative activity of *esse* alone. This may seem trivial, but an examination demonstrates that this small shift calls into question the philosophical plausibility of Clarke's work on two

fronts, along with its legitimacy as a species of personalism. This is because the separation of receptivity from *esse* entails (i) that God and love are mutually exclusive, and (ii) that the love of human persons is only instrumentally good.

Why? Let us start with (i). In brief, if ontological perfection *simpliciter*—i.e., The Fullness of Existence, Pure Act, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*—excludes receptivity, then it seems to follow that there is no mutuality or reciprocity in God. But if this is the case, it follows that there can be no love in God because love necessarily requires more than willing the good of another; it also requires the reciprocity of giving and receiving, or at least an orientation towards giving and receiving. Where there is no receiving, or at least an orientation towards this, there can be no love; at best there can be only solicitude. Thus, if receptivity is not an ontological perfection, God is Solicitude, not Love. But this is a problem precisely because there is good reason to believe that love is a perfection of being, not an imperfection. (More will be said on these two claims—i.e., that there is a conceptual tie between love and receptivity, and that love is an ontological perfection—in step two of this explication.) Also, once we recognize that receptivity is a necessary element of love, the understanding of *esse* in question leads us to the following: if we say that to be fully is to be personally, it follows that the fullness of personhood excludes love. But personalism asserts that the fullness of personhood must include love (Chapter 1, Section 2).

Moving to (ii), if the fullness of human persons is constituted by the inner and communicative activity that is proper to humans, it follows that love is instrumentally good (at best) or something to be transcended (at worst). Let us be generous and assume that even with the understanding of *esse* we are entertaining it still makes sense to say that love is the *telos* of human persons. How could this be? This is conceivable, at least in one sense, because one could argue that human persons must achieve their fullness of inner and communicative activity

through loving others. Our creaturely status as finite persons, in other words, requires that we aim at the target of love in order to achieve our proper inner and communicative activity.

But notice what this means. If this is true, it follows that the reciprocity involved in love—the very giving and receiving that is part of its essence—is cleaved in two: the giving retains its status as an ontological perfection; the receiving, on the other hand, the putative passivity and inactivity of being acted upon by others, is relegated to the status of ontological imperfection. As such, love becomes *only* instrumentally good. If human persons could achieve the same level of inner and communicative activity without needing to rely on love, this would be superior. Humans, however, cannot. Thus, this inner and communicative activity must be achieved through love. But it just seems clear that this understanding of love is mistaken: love is not some ladder human persons must climb and yet wish they could do without. On the contrary, entering into relationships of love is perfective of human persons. It also goes without saying that this instrumental understanding of love is foreign to personalism (see Chapter 1, Section 2).

As a result, it does seem that Clarke's personalization of metaphysics requires a justification of receptivity as an ontological perfection—a justification of receptivity as an activity that is somehow, at the very least, an aspect of *esse* at the final stage of the hierarchy of being, that is, the personal stage. Otherwise we must accept theses which are both implausible and incompatible with personalism.

Step two: Clarke's overarching vision and argument. What argument, then, does Clarke provide on behalf of his claim that receptivity is an ontological perfection? The best way to see his argument, I think, is to attend to Clarke's overarching vision of receptivity. If we focus on his overarching vision, we will simultaneously grasp the relevant justificatory moves because these moves are intrinsic to an understanding of the vision.

The starting point for the construction of this vision is existential Thomism. Each being is a “combination” of *esse* and essence, and the *esse* of each being is dynamism-full and power-full in such a way that the being is inwardly and communicatively active (see Chapter 1, Section 4; Chapter 3, Section 5). To be is to be substance-in-relation. With these aspects of *esse* made clear, Clarke suggests that we can further develop St. Thomas’s understanding of *esse* by thinking about receptivity. Towards this end, Clarke begins by emphasizing the metaphysical necessity of receptivity in the totality of the set of beings:

If self-communication is a fundamental aspect of real being, so too must be *receptivity*, the complementary pole of self-communication. Without receptivity no communication can become actual and complete itself. It must therefore be a primordial dimension of reality as a whole, even though it follows upon the substantial and self-communication aspects of being in the ontological (not necessarily temporal) order of dependence and intelligibility.⁹

In other words, since we know that beings successfully communicate, in a very broad sense, with other beings—e.g., when I pick up a flower, I communicate my being to the flower and the flower receives my being (i.e., my fingers touch the stem; the stem receives my touch, etc.) and the flower communicates its being to me and I receive its being (i.e., its stem imposes upon my fingers; my fingers receive the stem, etc.)—it follows that we must acknowledge that receptivity is an aspect of reality. Otherwise communication would be an illusion; indeed, everyday instances of efficient causation would be impossible. Thus, we must acknowledge that “reality as a whole” is receptive.

But what does Clarke mean by “reality as a whole”? Does he mean to point out that all beings must be receivers of communicators? Or does he mean to point out that all beings must be actively receptive in some sense—that is, ready to receive from others—while only some are receiving others at any given moment? Or does he simply mean to point out that only some

⁹ *Person and Being*, 20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 83; “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 613; “Reply to Steven Long,” 619; and “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics,” 228–9.

beings must be receivers of communicators? In short, Clarke seems to mean the latter. The point of the above passage is simply to note that real receiving from others is a primordial dimension of reality as a whole, not a dimension of each particular being.¹⁰

With receptivity, in the sense of real receiving from another, somehow situated in the totality of the set of all real beings, Clarke makes a crucial move. It is worth quoting him at length:

Ordinarily metaphysicians, including St. Thomas, following the lead of Aristotle, have identified receptivity with the deficiency side of being, i.e., with poverty, potentiality, a prior lack that is later filled up There is no great harm perhaps in looking at the subhuman world this way But once one crosses the threshold into personal being, the picture begins to change significantly. Once one begins to analyze love, in particular the highest mode of love, the love of pure friendship, it is clear that *mutuality* is of the essence of this love. Friendship means essentially that one's love is accepted, joyfully welcomed by another, and returned in kind, and the same is true reciprocally for the other person with respect to me. Receptivity, therefore, is part of the essence of the highest love. ... Here the ontological value of receptivity, as not a defect or inferiority but a positive perfection of being, emerges more and more clearly into the light.¹¹

The crucial move, then, is to draw *a bright line* in the hierarchy of being. In the sub-human realm, receptivity does not involve any active readiness or active receiving; instead, receptivity always refers to the inactivity of having one's passive potencies actualized through the activity of another (e.g., a dog has its passive potency to being healthy actualized by the hands of a skillful veterinarian; or, alternatively, a dog has its passive potency to being less healthy actualized by hands of an inept veterinarian).¹² Receptivity here signifies ontological poverty, imperfection,

¹⁰ Clarke clarifies this matter in "Response to Long's Comments," 165–6.

¹¹ *Person and Being*, 83–4.

¹² Speaking broadly, we might define passive potency (or passive power) as the ability or capacity to change as a result of being acted upon by another, and we might define active potency (or active power) as the ability or capacity to act upon another or the self as other. These fundamental powers have reappeared in modern language under the category of dispositional properties (or powers), which seem to encompass both active and passive potency. Although unfashionable in contemporary philosophy, active and passive potencies are necessary to explain the data of our everyday experience. This necessity can be seen quite clearly, I think, if we look at everyday instances of change. Without recognizing these potencies, it becomes impossible to explain why we can predict with great accuracy the abilities of beings and their responses to interactions with other beings. Indeed, it becomes impossible to explain any substantial or accidental change. Without active and passive potencies, every action and inter-action between beings would be completely unintelligible and random. We would never be sure whether we should drink

dependence, passivity, inaction. This is why Clarke says the following in a response to a criticism of his initial work on receptivity:

I never said or intended to imply that “receptivity” was a *transcendental* perfection of being, which means predicable analogously of every being insofar as it is a being. ... What I did hold was only that at a certain point, as it moves up the scale of being and becomes receptivity in a self-conscious free being, it can take on a mode of active, grateful welcoming that is a positive perfection—revealing that receptivity as such is not necessarily tied *in its very meaning* to some intrinsic limitation and imperfection, though these are the modes in which we ordinarily find it in our experience of creatures.¹³

Sub-human receptivity, then, is always outside of the activity of *esse—or*, at the very most, a mixture of activity and passivity (with the passivity dominating and entailing inaction, poverty, and imperfection).¹⁴

As Clarke suggests in both passages above, however, the personal realm, the other side of our bright line, is much different. Here, the receptivity that is essential to love must be seen as a perfection of being; here, receptivity transitions into activity, an active readiness to receive others (which precedes and makes possible active receiving) and an active receiving of others (which allows and sustains the receiving of others).¹⁵ Love is preconditioned and sustained via

water or gasoline. For a good article on active potency, see James E. Royce, S.J., “St. Thomas and the Definition of Active Potency,” *New Scholasticism* 34 (1960): 431–7; and for a discussion on passive potency, see St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 79, a. 2. A glance at Royce’s article will show that my definition of active potency deviates slightly from St. Thomas’s explicit definition, although Royce’s work suggests that my deviant definition may indeed more closely mirror St. Thomas’s actual use of the concept.

¹³ “Response to Long’s Comments,” 165. In a critique of Clarke’s initial work on receptivity—i.e., Clarke’s “Person, Being, and St. Thomas” and *Person and Being*—Steven Long reads Clarke as asserting that receptivity is a transcendental perfection. Clarke rejects this interpretation, but Long’s interpretation of Clarke’s early work seems fair enough. For Long’s critique, see “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term”; and for places where Clarke seems to endorse receptivity as a transcendental perfection, see “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 613; *Person and Being*, 85–6.

¹⁴ I use a disjunctive because Clarke is unclear on this matter. Most of the time he suggests that receptivity in the sub-human realm is absolutely devoid of activity; it signifies the movement of a potency to act through the activity of another. Thus, receptivity signifies passivity and imperfection, not activity. See, for example, “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 612–3; and *Person and Being*, 83–4; and “Response to Long’s Comments,” 165–6. In other places, however, Clarke seems to suggest that receptivity in the sub-human realm is a mixture of activity and passivity, with the passivity dominating. See, for example, *Person and Being*, 20–1. In what follows, I will assume that the former reading is most accurate.

¹⁵ Clarke identifies these two aspects of receptivity, with slightly different terminology, in “Response to Long’s Comments,” 167–8.

receptivity, and the receptivity found in love is an act that encounters the act of the other, not a passivity that encounters the act of the other.¹⁶

But why, exactly, must we say that receptivity is essential to love? And, moreover, why must we say that love is an ontological perfection? Concerning the first question, Clarke gestures at examples of love. Consider the poignant example of a husband and wife. Let us assume that the husband is extremely concerned about the good of his wife, and that he constantly wills her good. Let us even suppose that he makes heroic sacrifices. But, for whatever reason, he refuses to receive anything from his wife: gifts, money, emotional support, thoughts, body, soul—he refuses them all. The relevant conclusion is that this lack of receptivity indicates a lack of love on the part of the husband. He is solicitous, at least in one sense. But he does not desire to be united with his wife, nor does he strive to achieve the union of love. Mature, personal love requires a receptivity of readiness (an active openness to the activity of the other) and a receptivity of receiving (an active allowing of the activity of the other as this activity is being given). Countless examples, with slight differences, could be drawn from the love of friendship in general.¹⁷

Concerning the second question, I think Clarke would say this. Once we agree that (i) there is a hierarchy of *esse*; (ii) *esse* is inwardly and communicatively active; (iii) *esse* is convertible with goodness and perfection; (iv) personhood is what *esse* is at its fullest and final stage; and (v) love is a constitutive element of the full actualization of personhood, then we reach our conclusion: love is an ontological perfection. Moves (i) to (iv) are especially contentious, no doubt, and there is not space to develop these further.¹⁸ What is worth noting, however, is that Clarke would say each thesis gains in plausibility when held in connection with the others. That

¹⁶ Cf. Clarke, “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics,” at 230; and *Person and Being*, 84.

¹⁷ Cf. Clarke’s “Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” 612–3; and *Person and Being*, 20–1 and 84–5. Also, see David L. Schindler’s insightful discussion on this matter: “The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity,” *Communio* 21 (1994): 172–90, at 172.

¹⁸ But see Chapter 1, Sections 4 to 6; and Chapter 3, Sections 2 and 5.

is, if we shift our focus from the trees (the premises) to the forest (the system), then an implausible thesis on its own—e.g., (iv)—increases in plausibility insofar as it plays a role in offering a comprehensive explanation of the data of our experience in the widest possible sense, as opposed to a localized explanation of the data of our experience in a qualified sense.¹⁹ This may enable us to see how receptivity, a necessary element of love, can transition into an aspect of *esse* and become an ontological perfection—joining the inward and communicative activity of *esse* at the final stage of being.

At this juncture, however, some may ask the following question. If receptivity is an ontological perfection, God must be receptive. But if God is receptive, it seems he must depend on another or others for the communication which he receives. Clearly, though, this is impossible, for this ontological dependence would render God imperfect. How, then, does God achieve the ontological perfection of receptivity? In short, Clarke would argue that our understanding of *esse* (coupled with a proper understanding of love), gathered through reason alone, allows us to see that God must be a plurality in unity and a unity in plurality, even if we cannot see clearly the number of this plurality. God is *Esse* Itself, so there is no passive potency in God (as passive potency would entail the capacity to be moved from an imperfection to a perfection, or a perfection to an imperfection). But this does not exclude receptivity, for if we say there is a plurality of persons in the unity of God (how many we can leave to the side), then we can say that these persons give and receive each other beyond time and change—in an eternally continuous and complete exchange—in such a way that these persons are a unity without losing their distinctness. No doubt this transcendent reality necessarily overflows the ability of our intellect, but none of this entails that receptivity in God involves passive potency (as time,

¹⁹ Cf. Clarke's claim "that metaphysical systems are more properly compared as wholes, not parts abstracted from the whole." *The One and the Many*, 3.

change, and poverty are absent) or dependence on a being that is not God (as the “dependent” persons are all one being), both of which are obviously incompatible with God’s nature as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. Like Richard of St. Victor, Clarke thinks reason alone can suggest that there is a plurality in God; unlike Richard of St. Victor, Clarke thinks the number three cannot be determined via reason.²⁰

Step three: appropriating Schindler’s work. At this stage, then, we might sum up Clarke’s understanding of receptivity as follows. Prior to the personal stage of being, receptivity is a passivity and inactivity; at the personal stage, in the reciprocity of love, receptivity manifests itself as an ontological perfection. In some instances this activity is an active readiness to others (e.g., attentively awaiting the thoughts of a friend), and in others it is an active receiving (e.g., the actual receiving or drawing in of the thoughts of a friend). But Clarke goes on to add one more aspect to his understanding of receptivity.

Following the urging of David L. Schindler, Clarke acknowledges that receptivity can be anchored even more deeply in *esse*. The argument appropriated runs as follows. Because the essence of each finite being is not being itself—we never answer “being” in response to the question “What is it?”—we come to see that each being is a participation of Being Itself.²¹ Each finite being must therefore receive its being from God and continue to receive it; otherwise it would cease to be. But this means that receptivity can be located more deeply in *esse*. Since each

²⁰ For Clarke’s work on this issue, see “Person, Being, and St. Thomas, 616–7; *Person and Being*, 21 and 85; “Response to Long’s Comments,” 166; “To Be Is to Be Substance in Relation” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), esp. 108–9 and 119–20; and “Reply to Steven Long,” 622. For Richard of St. Victor’s work, see *On the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).

²¹ It is important to note here that St. Thomas’s understanding of participation includes real giving and dependence (unlike Plato’s understanding of participation). In this case, Being Itself bestows “part” of its fullness on partakers and this allows the partakers to “take part” in being. For further discussion on the nature of participation in St. Thomas, see W. Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, and Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Ch. 5; and Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 449–91.

finite being necessarily receives its being, and this is part of what it means to be for all creaturely beings, we can say that receptivity is a feature of all finite beings.²² Clarke describes his appropriation of Schindler in detail, and it is worth quoting him at length in order to achieve clarity:

What he [i.e., Schindler] is worried about—and justly so—is that I seem to have limited the dimension of relationality in us as created beings to the relations rooted in the active dimension of our own self-communication. First comes active self-communication, with the relations flowing from it, then receptivity, with its corresponding relations, as necessary complement to any achieved self-communication. This is indeed true in the absolute order of things ... because in the last analysis the very meaning of receptivity as gift implies a relation to an active giver as primary in the order of origin; thus in the Trinity the Father, the unoriginated One, must be first in the ultimate order of being itself, from whom the Son eternally originates. ... But once we turn to the order of creatures the situation changes dramatically. Here the absolutely primary status of our being ... is receptivity: it is a gift received *from another*, i.e., from God our Creator. This status as gift generates in us an absolutely primordial relation of receptivity and dependence, inscribed inseparably in the very depths of our being, prior to any action or initiative of our own.²³

Thus, according to Clarke, there is a constitutional receptivity in each finite being, and this radical dependence and receptivity must be added to our understanding of ourselves and others. Is this receiving of being an ontological perfection? On this point, Clarke is not as clear as he could be. He says that receiving one's being in itself implies no imperfection (although limited receiving and prior emptiness certainly do). But he is not clear about whether the bare receiving of being (*esse*) is an ontological perfection. In some instances, for example, he suggests that it is; in others, that it is not.²⁴ Despite all of this, however, I think we can say via the principle of

²² This general argument, and urging of Clarke, can be found in Schindler's "Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas."

²³ "Response to David Schindler's Comments," 595.

²⁴ Consider a single passage (ibid., 595): "Now for what I consider the most significant part of Prof. Schindler's comments, his pushing beyond what I now realize was my own limited perspective on relationality to a much deeper level of primordial relationality linked with the receptivity belonging to created *esse* as such, preceding any action on our part—a receptivity which is not just imperfection but in a mysterious way is an image of receptivity as pure perfection of being as exemplified in the Son as the Second Person of the Trinity." The connection of this receptivity with the Son points towards the status of ontological perfection; the receptivity "preceding any action on our part,"

interpretive consistency—i.e., interpretation of an author should cohere, as far as possible, with other relevant passages—that Clarke does not confer the status of ontological perfection upon this type of receptivity. This is because such a conferral would entail that receptivity is a transcendental perfection, as he acknowledges that this type of receptivity is found in all finite beings and God, but in another paper he explicitly declares that receptivity is not a transcendental perfection.²⁵

Step four: summary through the imposition of a four-part account of receptivity. At this stage it is necessary to make some clarifications. I say this because we have used the word “receptivity” in at least four senses in our discussion above, and so I will distinguish between four types of receptivity and then provide a summary of Clarke’s work in light of these distinctions. I will lay down a formal definition of each:

Constitutional Receptivity: The receiving of *esse* (or being)—from *Esse* Itself—that allows a being to be. Since it is a receiving that makes a being to be and continue to be, it involves no act of the being (as the being would need to act anteriorly to the very act that makes it to be). Thus, we can say that this receiving is a gift of an act of existing that is ordered to interaction with others. It is not the receiving of a being (something a being is or does), but a receiving that makes a being to be.

Readiness Receptivity: The aspect of *esse* (or being) that makes a being capable of receiving the communicative activity of others. It is an active openness—a standing readiness—to the activity of others. (It arguably follows upon the inward and communicative aspects of *esse*, speaking ontologically and atemporally, for by standing in itself and presenting itself to others, a being also exposes itself to the activity of others.)

Receiving Receptivity: The real receiving and drawing in of the activity of another that is responsive (or we could say sensitive) to the activity of the other that is being received.

Passive Receptivity: That aspect of the actualization of a passive potency in a being that requires and involves the activity of another. In other words, if the actualization of a passive potency in a being X is best described as a change or actualization in X as a result of X’s being acted upon by another, then we are talking about the immediate activity of

assuming “action” includes first and second act, points towards the status of ontological neutrality, viz., neither ontological perfection nor ontological imperfection.

²⁵ “Response to Long’s Comments,” 165.

the other on or in X that brings about the change or actualization in X. We are talking about all of the activity on or in X that is not owned by X.

Two things need to be said before moving on. First, readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity are the only types of receptivity that properly merit the title “receptive activity,” and it would be right, I think, to recognize that these two types of receptivity simply pick out different aspects—or we could say types—of receptive activity.²⁶ How these two types of receptive activity meet up is difficult to flesh out, but it is clear that the height or maximum of receptive activity must exclude readiness receptivity precisely because readiness receptivity is always found alongside passive potency (which entails ontological imperfection).

Second, some may object to my framing of constitutional receptivity. These objectors may argue that constitutional receptivity can include something like readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity. In short, although sub-personal beings do not actively prepare themselves to receive their being or actively receive their being (atoms and dogs, for instance, do not do this), we might say that human persons, through their self-consciousness and self-possession, can exhibit readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity vis-à-vis their own *esse* (or being). In a stance of openness to God’s gift of being, human persons can stand ready to receive and may indeed actively receive their very being.

In response, let us start with the obvious. A non-existent receiver cannot prepare itself to receive or actively receive its existence (as it would need to exist prior to its existence); thus, the initial receiving involved in constitutional receptivity, for impersonal and personal beings, clearly cannot involve a modified readiness receptivity or receiving receptivity.²⁷ The question here,

²⁶ Thus, we must be careful not to suggest that there is such a thing as passive activity, or that receptive activity *qua* receptive activity includes passivity. For two places where this suggestion is made (or at least gestured at), see David Liberto’s “Person, Being, and Receptivity,” 210; and O’Hanlon’s “Does God Change?” 171.

²⁷ Cf. Anselm Ramelow, O.P., “The Person in the Abrahamic Tradition: Is the Judeo-Christian Concept of Personhood Consistent?” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2013): 593–610, at 607.

then, is whether an already existing and personal being can somehow prepare itself to continue to receive its being or continue to receive its being actively. These are dark waters. The question is not whether an X can exhibit receptive activity in relation to another being Y, but whether an X can exhibit receptive activity in relation to the very *esse* that makes X to be. Still, consider the following: “to receive” is a verb that picks out an activity. What would the activity be in the case of a person preparing to receive or actively receiving his own *esse*? The person would have to prepare himself to receive or indeed actively receive that which is identical to his own being, and this seems impossible. The division between the given and the receiver collapses, unless we seek to divide *esse* up into pieces and relate one piece to another (an indefensible move). Thus, it seems difficult to see how something like readiness receptivity or receiving receptivity could play a role in constitutional receptivity at the personal stage, let alone the sub-personal stage.²⁸ Still, even if there is a unique type of receptive activity in the domain of constitutional receptivity—one I am missing—it is difficult to see how it would take on an overriding importance in Thomistic personalism.

Now, in light of our new taxonomy we can sum up Clarke’s work on receptivity as follows. As *Esse* Itself, God gives and sustains the *esse* (or being) of each finite being, and this means that constitutional receptivity is found in all finite beings. But more must be said. Since each *esse* is inwardly and communicatively active in proportion to the degree of *esse* possessed, and since we know that communication is successful at all levels of being, it follows that passive receptivity is a fundamental aspect of the entire set of beings (for reception is the necessary complement of communication). Each being can receive the activity of another in this sense,

²⁸ Some may think this entails that human persons cannot exhibit readiness receptivity or receiving receptivity in relation to God. But this would be a mistake. Insofar as God acts on a human person and is received as other (even if this receiving is mystical in nature), then we move outside the domain of constitutional receptivity. Indeed, constitutional receptivity can never include the receiving of God himself in finite beings precisely because constitutional receptivity is the receiving of the self.

although many beings go through periods of no reception. Once we enter the final stage of the hierarchy of being, though, the personal stage, we see that readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity are manifested as activities in the reciprocity of love—and since the activity of love is an ontological perfection, we know that receptive activity is an ontological perfection (even though in the human mode we always find it bound up with passive receptivity). Furthermore, since God is pure act, the fullness of ontological perfection, we can know that receiving receptivity, purged of all passive receptivity, resides in God. This means, of course, that God must be a plurality in unity and *vice versa*. We can say, then, that receptive activity—in the sense of active readiness and active receiving—is a perfection of being. But we cannot say that receptivity, in any sense, in any way, is a transcendental perfection or property of being. This is the vision of receptivity that plays a crucial role in Clarke’s Strong Thomistic Personalism.

3. Two Problems and a Proposal

I think there are two main problems in Clarke’s account: the prominent place given to Schindler’s constitutional receptivity, and the rejection of receptivity as a transcendental perfection. Let us begin with the first. On its own, constitutional receptivity is an extremely important insight. Indeed, once one endorses the general framework of existential Thomism, as I have in Chapter 3, it necessarily follows that all beings receive their *esse* from *Esse* Itself. But I think Clarke is mistaken to give constitutional receptivity a prominent place in his work on receptivity. This is because his objective in discussing receptivity is to show that receptivity is an ontological perfection (a perfection of *esse*, the *act* of existing); yet constitutional receptivity, as discussed at the end of the last section, does not involve activity in any regular sense (and therefore cannot be a perfection of *esse*, the *act* of existing). Accordingly, a lack of clarity emerges in Clarke’s work; it becomes difficult to discern what he is saying when he argues that receptivity is an ontological perfection, that receptivity is found in God, and so on (especially in places where theology enters

the discussion). This is not an insuperable problem, but it is an important consideration, for failure to communicate clearly impedes the dialogue.²⁹ As a result, I would propose that constitutional receptivity should be placed on the periphery of discussions of receptivity in Thomistic personalism—insofar as the aim of these discussions is to show that receptivity plays a role in the personalization of metaphysics.

Second, let us move to Clarke's rejection of receptivity as a transcendental perfection. In discussing this matter he says the following:

The transcendental attributes of being are very few in number: one, true (intelligible), good, beautiful, and—I would add—active. Receptivity, in my view, would be one of those attributes that, like intelligence, love, freedom, etc., belong to a being only from a certain level upward, i.e., from the personal level—an attribute that has a “floor,” so to speak (below which it is not found), but no “ceiling.”³⁰

But there seems to be a serious transition problem here. In other places Clarke clearly recognizes that beings are inwardly and communicatively active (i.e., at least pouring forth in search of communication) to the extent they are in being.³¹ Thus there is an inner and communicative dynamism in being throughout the entire range of being (fluctuating, of course, according to the degree of the intensity of being), and we can readily understand that the inward and communicative activity of being may result in perfections of being that do not run throughout the entire range of being. We can understand, for instance, that freedom and the virtue of generosity are culminations, of course by no means the only ones, of the inward and communicative activity of being. But since Clarke says receptive activity—the receptivity of readiness and receiving—is absent below the personal plane of being, it seems difficult to see how receptive activity emerges as an aspect of *esse*. How could being be completely devoid of receptive activity at the lower

²⁹ For evidence of this, see Steven A. Long's "Divine and Creaturely 'Receptivity': The Search for a Middle Term." At a number of points, Long (understandably) interprets Clarke as forwarding the same overall understanding of receptivity as Schindler, but Clarke's overall understanding is different.

³⁰ "Response to Long's Comments," 166.

³¹ See, for example, *Person and Being*, 6–19.

stages of being and then suddenly appear at the highest? This is qualitatively different from a *type* of inward activity emerging at the upper echelons of being (say freedom) that is absent in the lower regions of inward activity. Here, Clarke suggests that receptive activity emerges as a completely new dimension of being.

In a way, then, Clarke's addition seems *ad hoc*; receptive activity is needed to complete a personalization of metaphysics, and receptive activity just happens to appear in the only place it is needed (the personal stage). Clarke's addition would not seem *ad hoc*, however, if he could show that receptive activity is a transcendental perfection and therefore an analogous concept applicable to the entire range of being, viz., an aspect of *esse* (or being) that leaps over and transcends all of the categories of being—e.g., sub-atomic particles, atoms, plants, animals, persons, etc.—and is present to the degree that *esse* is present.³² This would still allow us to agree with Clarke that activity is a transcendental (in a general sense), but it would also allow us to say that penetration into this activity discloses three profiles or aspects of *esse* that are always present to the degree that being is present: inward, communicative, and receptive activity. These would not be three discrete acts of *esse*, but three aspects of the act of existing that rises and falls in intensity to generate all of the difference in unity and unity in difference that just is our universe—three aspects of the single act that is also the source of all the unity, goodness, beauty, and intelligibility of each being. In this way we would avoid Clarke's transition problem, and we would also increase the overall plausibility of Clarke's vision of receptivity in his Strong Thomistic Personalism.³³

³² For a brief discussion on the transcendentals, see footnote 3 (above). For further discussion, see Clarke's *The One and the Many*, Ch. 18.

³³ David Schindler, it should be noted, also argues that Clarke ought to recognize that receptivity is a transcendental perfection. But Schindler's understanding of receptivity, if I read him correctly, is constitutional receptivity. See "The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity," 174–7.

The proposal, therefore, is (i) to leave discussion of constitutional receptivity on the periphery in discussions of receptive activity (while not in any way denying its importance for Thomistic personalism and philosophy in general); and (ii) to argue that receptive activity, involving readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity, is a transcendental perfection. To be sure, (i) requires no more work, simply following through in further discussion, but (ii) needs justification and defense. In Section 4, I will accordingly offer a justification for (ii); and in Section 5, I will reply to some objections articulated by Steven Long.

4. Penetration into the Act of Existing

I have already provided an argument for the legitimacy and importance of metaphysics in Section 5 of Chapter 3, so I will take this for granted. I will assume, in other words, that the investigation and analysis of beings insofar as they are beings is a legitimate and necessary project in philosophy. Let us start, then, with beings as beings before our eyes. What I would like to do here is not so much provide an argument from beings insofar as they are beings to the conclusion that receptive activity is a transcendental perfection; rather, I would like to point out a path of intellectual penetration into the very intelligibility of *esse* (i.e., the act of being or existing), and through this intuition of *esse* lay bare the transcendental status of receptive activity.

I have already talked about the intuition of *esse* in Section 5 of Chapter 3, so I will not repeat my emphases on the analogical, aesthetic, or axiological aspects of *esse* (although the analogical aspect must come into play once again). Here I will focus on the dimension of activity. I understand, of course, that reference to an intuition of *esse* may appear sophisticated or question begging to those who do not think there is such a thing. Thus, before proceeding, I would simply like to call to mind that every deductive or abductive argument has a finite number of premises, and the unjustified premises are not that which we argue to but that which we argue from. The final premises are “seen” to be true; they are not reached via reasoning, although reasoning can

certainly help in many cases. An epistemological coherentist may suggest otherwise, no doubt, but even a coherentism concerning epistemic justification should allow that theses can possess a defeasible intrinsic plausibility; thus, the discussion should still be of interest.

Step one: communicative activity. Consider the range of being: atoms of water in your bottle, a flower in your garden, the dog next door, your neighbor. These beings are not communicatively indifferent; they do not refuse causal interaction. On the contrary, each of these beings—in its own way, to be sure—shows itself and manifests itself to the community of existents. This truth is not discovered through conceptual analysis, nor is it the result of some *a priori* dictate of theoretical reason, nor is it some truth that we simply must assume in order to get by in our world. This is a truth that we pre-reflectively grasp in and through our everyday experience. The dog next door manifests itself in such a way that you can see it; a new acquaintance manifests his hand in such a way that you can grasp it in a handshake. There is, as Jacques Maritain says, a “basic generosity of existence.”³⁴ This applies to every being insofar as it is a being. All beings communicate themselves generously—at least in the sense of an offering of themselves—to the community of existents. To be necessarily involves communicating, showing, giving, manifesting.

Can we really say, though, that the atoms of gold in wedding rings give themselves and communicate? Is this not simply a category error? Do not verbs such as “communicate,” “show,” and “give” apply simply to rational beings, or at least those beings imbued with a requisite level of self-awareness? The answer is no. There is no oddity or confusion here once we realize that these words must be used in an analogical sense. These concepts, in other words, apply literally and legitimately to every being that is, but there is sameness in difference and difference in sameness: the *esse* (i.e., act of existing) of each being is that by which and in which

³⁴ *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Image Books, 1957), 89–90, and for further discussion see 51–3.

communicative difference is achieved. Why? Because each being is an act of existing (*esse*) at some intensity or other, and the variation of intensity allows for essential difference which allows for different modes of being—and these different modes of being entail different types of communicative activity. The ontological communication of a tree or mouse can be ignored; this is not true for the ontological communication of poison ivy or a tiger.

This giving, we might add, is a necessary condition for the possibility of efficient causation between finite beings (absent giving there is no inter-action). And deeper consideration also shows that this giving plays an instrumental role in our acquisition of knowledge, for all knowledge is about beings and—barring Plato’s doctrine of recollection, a modified doctrine of Kant’s synthetic *a priori* knowledge, or similar doctrines—it is difficult to see how human persons could acquire knowledge of other beings unless beings offer themselves to the community of existents (at least in in some sense, in some way).³⁵ Up and down the range of being, then, we see that all beings, simply in virtue of their being, are communicatively active: their being is actively shown forth and in some cases this showing forth is received. Indeed, sometimes this communicative activity even results in other beings, e.g., in cases of vegetative and animal reproduction.

Most significantly, we also see that the level and type of communicative activity increases as we move up the hierarchy of being: compare the communicative activity of atoms, apple trees, dogs, and human persons. The increase in qualitative communicative activity is luminous. An elephant may destroy a large fence (a quantitatively large ontological communication, no doubt),

³⁵ For discussion on this point, see W. Norris Clarke’s “Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Ch. 3. Here, Clarke says the following (at 46): “I am willing to venture the following risky, but I think well defensible, statement, that the whole of Thomistic epistemology, in its large lines, can be summed up as follows: all human knowledge of the real is an interpretation of action.”

but this communicative activity is qualitatively nothing compared to the whisper of a fifth grade student's speech in the gymnasium.³⁶

Step two: receptive activity. But are beings receptively active simply in virtue of being? How can atoms or flowers actively receive anything at all? Is it not one thing to receive something passively (i.e., be acted upon by another) and another to receive something actively? Let us move slowly here. Consider again the range of being. Moving up and down the range, is there any being that cannot be acted upon and receive communicative activity in at least some sense? An atom can receive the communicative activity of another atom. A sunflower can receive the touch of an animal, nutrients from the soil, water from the rain, and light from the sun. A dog can receive its owner's touch, food in its stomach, and information about its surroundings. A human person can receive the very thoughts of another. Receptivity, as a result, is what makes all of the communicative activity noted above significant. In thinking about any being we see that it can receive the activity of others in some sense and at some level. Receptivity, too, is a necessary ingredient for the possibility of efficient causation between finite beings.

But now we must come to the pivotal question: is the receptivity noted above active in the sense of readiness receptivity or receiving receptivity? Or is all of the receptivity noted above most accurately described as passive receptivity, the passive and inactive reception of the activity of another. In technical terminology, is all of the above best explained by passive potency? Should we simply say that each being possesses passive potencies (varying according to the being in question), and that the actualization of these potencies via the activity of others is what explains all of the instances of reception noted in the previous paragraph? A close look at concrete beings can provide us with an answer.

³⁶ Cf. Robert Connor's "Relational *Esse* and the Person," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 65 (1991): 253–67, at 259.

It is obvious, to be sure, that all of the instances of reception in our world involving two beings include an element of passive receptivity on behalf of the receiver. The receiver (i.e., the non-initiator) is acted upon by the communicator (i.e., the initiator). This is incontrovertible. The dog that is patted on its head, for example, is acted upon by his owner. But it is also undeniable, and this is the crucial insight, that the *ground* or *underside* of each passive potency is readiness receptivity. The dog, for example, in its very act of existing, stands ready to receive physical interaction with other beings; it is actively ready to receive the touch of its owner. A ring of gold can be melted in an oven; it can be acted upon. But the reason for this possibility is that gold in its very act of existing is actively ready to melt in response to heat. Thus, passive potencies do not suggest receptive activity is an illusion; far from it. On the contrary, passive potencies, running up and down the entire range of being, reveal that receptive activity is an aspect of the act of existing—and this activity, like the showing of communicative activity, differs according to the intensity of *esse* involved.³⁷

There is more to say, however. Simple material objects possess the receptivity of readiness, but not the receptivity of receiving (at least not in a high degree). But as we move up the range of being this receptivity of readiness increases and the receptivity of receiving begins to emerge and grow in direct proportion to the intensity of the *esse* of the being. Consider a tree. A tree does not merely stand actively ready to encounter the activity of the soil, nor does it simply stand actively ready to encounter the rain and sun. It does much more. A close assessment reveals that it also exhibits the receptivity of receiving by drawing in nutrients from the soil, water from

³⁷ Interestingly, St. Thomas seems to lean in this direction in the following passage: “Indeed, an active power is not distinguished from a passive power because it has an activity, for since every power of the soul, active as well as passive, has some activity, every power would be active. . . . We learn the distinction between the two by comparing the power to its object. For, if the object relates to the power as that which undergoes and is changed, the power will be active. If, on the other hand, it relates as agent and mover, the power is passive.” *Truth*, trans. Mulligan, McGlynn, and Schmidt, XVI, 1, reply to Obj. 13, in *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Pocket Books, 1960), 172.

the rain, and light from the sun. There is passive receptivity involved here, but there is also receiving receptivity as well. Consider further a dog. The dog goes beyond our mere tree. It can hurriedly draw in large quantities of water and food; through its sensory organs it can actively receive and cognize (in some sense) its surroundings. Consider further a human person. Going beyond a tree or dog, human persons can actively receive the thoughts and emotions of others, and if we leave this abstract discussion and enter our everyday life, we may also recall that human persons can actively receive—in a mysterious way—the “Thou” of another in the reciprocity of friendship or love.³⁸ Receptive activity, woven in with passive receptivity, is still receptive activity.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that receptive activity, like communicative activity, is an analogous concept that applies to both the standing readiness of a tree to absorb my touch and the standing readiness of a lover to hear the suffering of his beloved. The same concept applies to a tree’s receiving of rain and a person’s receiving of a theatrical play. Receptivity—excluding constitutional receptivity and passive receptivity—is an aspect of the act of existing that is the ground of all beings.

Step three: inward activity and the unity of esse. But communicative activity does not pour forth from emptiness, nor does receptive activity draw into nothingness. These activities are rather grounded in the inward activity of each being. But it would be a mistake to conceive of the inward activity of a being as if it was the core of the being and the communicative and receptive activity of a being as if they were the offshoots of this core. It would be better to see that the *esse* of each being is a single act (the division of this act would annihilate the unity of each being) that owns three profiles or aspects: an inward aspect, communicative aspect, and receptive aspect. In

³⁸ Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1971); and Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Volume I: Reflection and Mystery* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press), Chs. 9–10.

the *esse* of each being all three are unified in a single act, and these three aspects of a being cannot be separated except in abstraction.

Step four: the intuition of esse and the aspect of receptive activity. In an article on the proper object of metaphysics, Msgr. Gerald Phelan says the following:

It is this ultimate formal constituent of being as such, namely, the act of being (*esse*) which, when grasped by the intellect, specifies the habitus of metaphysical wisdom and differentiates it from every other habitus of knowledge. The act of being (*esse*) in itself cannot strictly speaking be conceived by any finite mind. It needs to be linked with some, at least vague, notion of a thing which exercises this act. But when the metaphysician thinks of being, he thinks primarily of the act by which all being is (*esse*) and only secondarily of the thing or quiddity [i.e., essence] which exercises this act and which is, as it were, but the vehicle by which the knowledge of that act (*esse*) is transported to his mind and the staff or stay or prop which upholds it in conception. ... [In the peak of metaphysical abstraction] [t]he quidditative [or essential] substream of the act of being (*esse*) is but vaguely and implicitly conceived while the act of being itself (*esse*) is explicitly envisaged and stands at the focus of intellectual intuition.³⁹

I think Phelan is mistaken in his suggestion that positively real essences exercise *esse* (indeed, he acknowledges this to be an error in his later work).⁴⁰ At this stage, however, it is worth following Phelan's reminder that we must penetrate essences without discarding them in order to possess the intuition of *esse*. Let us therefore consider all of the beings in our surroundings, and then let us add to this collection all of the other beings we can think of in the range of being. Let us gaze upon the rising and falling plenitude of the acts of existing inhabiting the entire range of being, slowly beholding how the same act in different intensities produces an array of difference in sameness. Let us behold the sublime inter-action between beings, the unending vista of iterations in generosity and openness to others, iterations of communicative activity and receptive activity. Peering through the essences of all the beings we encounter, let us penetrate into the very

³⁹ Gerald Phelan, "A Note on the Formal Object of Metaphysics," *The New Scholasticism* 18 (1944): 197–201, at 198–9

⁴⁰ Phelan makes this important shift in "The Being of Creatures: St. Thomas' Solution of the Dilemma of Parmenides and Heraclitus," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 31 (1957): 118–25; and reaffirms it in one of his final papers, "Being, Order, and Knowledge," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 33 (1959): 12–20, at 16–7

intelligibility (the very *ratio*) of *esse* and see that the act of existing is a single act with three aspects of activity: inward, communicative, and receptive. Let us seize upon these aspects as they rise and fall in accordance with the rising and falling of *esse*, which is precisely what generates the hierarchy of being and the multiplicity of essences encountered. Now, in this beholding, focusing on receptive activity alone, let us grasp that receptive activity—manifested in the forms of readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity—is an aspect of *esse* that is present to the degree that *esse* is present. From the receptive activity of an atom to the receptive activity in the mutuality of love, we see that receptive activity, properly understood, is a transcendental perfection, a perfection of being itself. If we are willing to be docile to the real, the receptive activity of being meets our gaze. To be is to be substance-in-relation, as Clarke says, but we must ensure that we read “relation” as referring to both communicative and receptive activity. To deny the receptive activity of *esse* would be to deny a large swath of the face of being (or *esse*), not to mention a large swath of the very universe in which we live. We must affirm the *generosity of being*, as Maritain does, but we must also affirm the *hospitality of being*.

Consequently, it should now be clear that the receptive activity we find in love is no aberration, no inexplicable and unique emergence. The receptive activity of love is simply the continuation and culmination of the receptive activity we find throughout the entire range of being. Clarke’s Strong Thomistic Personalism, accordingly, cannot be charged with making an *ad hoc* move. Moreover, once we break free from the long tradition of hiding receptive activity under the blanket of passive potency, the overall plausibility of Clarke’s work increases. In particular, Clarke’s personalization of metaphysics, with its emphasis on love, seems to take on a systematic comprehensiveness and coherence that speaks in favor of its truth.

5. Replies to Three Objections

At this stage it is necessary to respond to three objections articulated by Steven A. Long in his engagement with Clarke. The first objection we can address is Long's claim that receptivity necessarily includes passive potency in its definition (unlike unity, goodness, and intelligibility). As a result, receptivity cannot be identified fully with act (as passivity is necessarily involved); and, moreover, it follows that receptivity cannot be a transcendental perfection of being because the passive element in receptivity is incompatible with Pure Act, that is, God as Being Itself.

Long puts the objection as follows:

[T]he very idea of receptivity as the taking in or assimilating of a perfection or good not already resident in the subject is an idea that includes and requires potency. Therefore, unlike being, goodness, and truth—whose ideas do not of themselves include potency or matter in their definitions—receptivity in the common sense of the term does include potency in its definition.⁴¹

Given the taxonomy of receptivity offered in Section 2, I think our response should be obvious. It is true that passive receptivity includes in its very meaning passivity, and it is also true that acts of readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity are bound up with passive receptivity in the finite realm. But none of this entails that receptive activity—understood as including readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity—includes passive potency in its very definition. Indeed, our ability to disengage successfully receptive activity from passive receptivity shows that receptive activity is pure in its act, yet always bound up with passive receptivity in finite creatures. How, though, is receptive activity possessed in Pure Act? Without recourse to divine revelation, there seem to be a number of options. It is clear, of course, that only receiving receptivity can be involved (for readiness receptivity entails passive potency and therefore ontological imperfection), but the manner of this receiving could take at least a few forms. First, consider an

⁴¹ Long, "Divine and Creaturely 'Receptivity': The Search for a Middle Term," 157, footnote removed; see 161n12 as well. Cf. Long's "Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique," 27–8.

Aristotelian line of thought in which we declare that God is Thought Thinking Itself.⁴² We could say, for instance, that thought continually and completely gives itself to itself (a sort of bending back of thought upon thought) and therefore continually and completely receives itself (a sort of receiving by the initial level of thought of the second level thought that is bent back upon the initial level). Accordingly, we could, in some sense, say that the unity of Thought Thinking Itself in the height of Pure Act involves receptive activity. Second, imposing the psychological aspects of intellect, will, and memory on God (in an analogous sense), we could say that these psychological aspects involve giving and receiving in the unity of Pure Act. And, finally, we could take the Mystery of the Trinity and say that there is a plurality of persons in the unity of God, for each person—differentiated via their origins—eternally and completely gives and receives each other in such a way that the mutual indwelling possessed does not compromise the unity of Pure Act. (My preference, for theological and philosophical reasons, is the last option; but I will reserve discussion of this matter for Section 7.) These quick points should make it clear that, *pace* Long, there are a number of ways we could think of receptive activity in Pure Act.

At this point, in light of our above response, Long might suggest that our use of “receptive activity” is trivial. He might say something like the following:

The scholastic tradition—Thomist and non-Thomist alike—has always acknowledged that acts associated with receiving from others, are perfections. If these acts are what is intended by speaking of “receptivity” as a creaturely perfection, then the Thomist can only plea *nolo contendere*.⁴³

The argument might be, in other words, that highlighting readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity is nothing profound. Instead, our emphasis on receptive activity simply points out that

⁴² Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. XII, Ch. 9.

⁴³ Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” 154 and see also 157. Cf. “Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique,” 28.

some acts are associated with receiving and therefore can be called receptive as a result of this association.

In this passage from Long we see, I think, the difficulty of moving outside of a dominant paradigm (in the Kuhnian sense). The issue at hand here is not a terminological or semantic game about the proper reference of receptivity, an issue that can be adjudicated via common usage. The issue here is whether the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections—*esse*—includes in its “nature” an aspect that is best labelled receptive activity. For Long, although he does not say this explicitly, there seems to be only act *or* reception (allowed to meet up in a symbiosis but never merge). If there is an act, it is an act and therefore *qua* act is devoid of receptivity; if there is a reception, it is a reception and therefore *qua* reception is devoid of activity. Thus, the imposition of a receptive quality on an act seems to be unnecessary, and if we do perform this imposition we must recognize that receptive acts are receptive simply because of their association with receiving, not in themselves.

In response, I would say that if we bracket our current assumptions and look at beings insofar as they are beings (as we did in the last section), we can see that receptive activity is an aspect of *esse* that is present to the degree that *esse* is present. Act is not merely associated with receiving; beings are receptively (I use the awkward adverb for as much clarity as possible), in the senses of readiness and receiving receptivity. Thus, the imposition of a receptive aspect on *esse* is demanded by the act of existing itself and its secondary acts which must be seen as modifications of the primary act of existing. Insofar as Long continues to deny this receptive activity of *esse*, he continues to miss an aspect of being.

Finally, let us move to a third objection. There is an everyday example which seems to suggest that receptive activity is a weakness and imperfection. Consider a child. A child seems to be receptive to a high degree, yet all of us—especially parents—work hard to help children leave

behind this receptivity and emerge into the self-sufficiency of adulthood. There is no ontological perfection, it seems, in receiving diaper changes and elementary education. Accordingly, Long says the following:

[I]f “receptivity” is truly a metaphysical perfection, then why are we not content in viewing the child’s neediness as such as a perfection (or is perfection something to be overcome, as the child’s ignorance and lack of self-possession are overcome)? Clearly we think this neediness a potency for further “act” which we hope to engender.⁴⁴

This objection is compelling insofar as we refer to passive receptivity, but insofar as we recall that passive receptivity is distinct from receptive activity, the objection loses its force. This is especially the case because our distinction between passive receptivity and receptive activity allows us to see that what the child needs, on one level, is not less receptive activity but more (along with the relevant inward and communicative activity). The passivity involved in being changed, spoon fed, rocked to sleep, and so on is indeed an ontological imperfection, but simultaneously the readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity that the child possesses is a perfection. It is a perfection to stand actively ready to receive touch and one’s surroundings; it is a perfection to receive actively the communication of others. On the level of personal being, the child’s receptive activity must be increased; on the level of the entire range of being, the child’s receptive activity is unparalleled and only surpassed by other persons. Compare the receptive activity of a child to the pigeon on a balcony or the gold in a wedding ring. Thus, all of this points to the conclusion that the imperfection of receptivity in childhood is contained in passive receptivity or in receptive activity viewed as limited, that is, possessed in an imperfect mode (just as our intellectual activity is seen as imperfect, if it is viewed as limited). Receptive activity in itself, to the degree it is present, is an ontological perfection.

6. The Boundaries of Thomistic Personalism

⁴⁴ Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” 159.

In Chapter 3, I argued that it is acceptable to integrate William E. Carlo's thick-*esse*/thin-essence view into Thomistic personalism, even if we assume that St. Thomas offers a slightly different view of *esse* and essence. The boundaries of Thomistic personalism, I argued, must extend beyond the work of St. Thomas. This is especially important to recall here because some may suggest that it is illegitimate to integrate receptivity as a transcendental perfection into Thomistic personalism. It strays too far from the thought of the Angelic Doctor, much further than the thick-*esse*/thin-essence view. Thus, in order to defend the legitimacy of receptivity in Thomistic personalism, in the sense discussed in Section 4, the following must be said.

To begin, we should note that Thomistic personalism is *essentially* open to work that goes beyond St. Thomas; otherwise, the work of personalists and their distinct emphases would be illegitimate. Furthermore, we should note that the spirit of Thomistic philosophy is a spirit of openness to the truth—no matter its source. St. Thomas's appropriation of ancient philosophy and Islamic philosophy provides all the evidence that is needed to substantiate this claim. Thus, to resist all change and modification, to avoid any deviation from St. Thomas's work, seems to be incompatible with the essence of Thomistic personalism and the spirit of Thomism.

What change and modification of St. Thomas's work should be allowed? By my lights, the boundaries of the project must allow for purification, pruning, extension, creativity, and assimilation. By purification, I mean the removal of error; by pruning I mean the removal of error precisely because of other plausible theses held by St. Thomas; by extension I mean the application of St. Thomas's work to new domains; by creativity I mean addition to St. Thomas's work that is completely novel but compatible with it; and by assimilation I mean the appropriation of work whose provenance is outside the tradition of Thomism. And obviously modifications of St. Thomas's work may include multiple categories at the same time (e.g., purification and assimilation can easily go together).

But at what point, exactly, does modification of St. Thomas's work place us outside of Thomistic personalism? Our answer, I think, must be that we depart from Thomistic personalism if we reject the overall method or essential theses of Thomism. What counts as such a rejection is clearly difficult to discern (and each potential rejection must be assessed on its own to determine whether it is indeed a rejection). It is manifest, however, that there must be some latitude; otherwise ossification will result, not a living practical philosophy.

Consequently, I think we can say that the incorporation of receptivity as a transcendental perfection in Thomistic personalism is legitimate. St. Thomas does not defend this thesis, but some of his other theses seem to point toward this reality (e.g., his work on the transcendentals, analogy, the inward and communicative dynamism of *esse*, the distinction between active and passive potency, etc.), and I also hope the discussion in Sections 4 and 5 shows the philosophical superiority of the account of receptivity we have developed. The incorporation of this account, then, can reasonably be classed as an instance of pruning.⁴⁵ And it also seems safe to say that this instance of pruning (or, if one prefers, purification-cum-extension) does not approach anything like a rejection of an essential thesis of Thomism. There is no rejection here, for example, of the division of all being into act and potency, nor is there a rejection of the distinction between passive and active potency.

7. Receptivity and Christianity

Now, as promised in Section 1, I will offer some brief comments on the relationship between receptive activity as a transcendental perfection and Christian revelation. In particular, I will discuss whether the account of receptivity we have developed is compatible with (i) the Mystery

⁴⁵ Cf. Clarke's claim that his work on receptivity as an ontological perfection is "an explicit thematizing of what is *implied* in the Thomistic understanding of being as dynamic and self-communicative" [emphasis mine]. See *Person and Being*, 20.

of the Holy Trinity, and (ii) the authoritative tradition among Christians that unaided reason cannot demonstrate that God is a trinity.

Let us begin with the former. How does our account of receptivity relate to the Mystery of the Holy Trinity? To be clear, our question is not about whether our account of receptivity can demonstrate the Trinity. It is about whether our account is compatible with the Trinity. It is about whether our account coheres with the Trinity. Let us recall the mystery. God is a trinity in unity and unity in trinity. Who are the three persons? They are the Father (the principle without principle), the Son (eternally begotten of the Father), and the Holy Spirit (eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son).⁴⁶ Who is God? The Father is God (fully and completely); the Son is God (fully and completely); and the Holy Spirit is God (fully and completely). Yet the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. For Catholics, at least, this is the magisterial interpretation of the revelation at the most basic level.

Now, how does our account cohere with the Trinity? I think a promising way to see this relationship is as follows. Since (i) it is the very “nature” of *esse* to be inwardly, communicatively, and receptively active; and (ii) communicative and receptive activity at the highest levels of being require real giving and receiving, we can say that each person possesses the fullness of giving and receiving (along with inward activity) in such a way that mutual indwelling—which is precisely the mystery of mysteries—is the result. The giving and receiving would be always complete and yet always continuous; the distinction between the persons would be made through reference to their origins. Accordingly, on this account each person possesses all that is in Pure Act, and this explains the unity of the Trinity; but, on the other hand, Pure Act

⁴⁶ According to the Eastern Orthodox Church, it should be noted, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.

possesses the fullness of communicative and receptive activity, and this explains the plurality of the Trinity. In thinking of the Trinity we reach Unity, and in thinking of Unity we reach the Trinity (or at least plurality). There is no “solution” or “comprehension” of this mystery here, but our account of receptive activity (along with communicative and inward activity) does seem compatible with the mystery on at least a basic level.

The strength of this account, I think, is that it is consonant with real giving and receiving in the Trinity that is beyond all time and change, not simply constitutional giving and receiving. Constitutional giving and receiving are necessary in the Trinity, for they allow us to explain the origins of the persons—the unoriginated Father, the begotten Son, and the proceeding Holy Spirit—and therefore distinguish the persons. But real giving and receiving seem to be necessary, too. This is primarily the case because the fullness of Pure Act involves real giving and receiving, and from this it follows that each person must own real giving and receiving. Moreover, looking at the same issue from the perspective of love, it seems completely mistaken and against love to say that the Son eternally receives Pure Act from the Father, for instance, in the sense of a constitutional receptivity, and yet never receives the Father as Father or gives himself back to the Father as Son (which entails, of course, that the Father receives the Son in the sense of receiving receptivity as opposed to constitutional receptivity). In at least one place the Catholic Church seems to suggest this truth:

But St. John goes even further when he affirms that “God is love”: God’s very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.⁴⁷

How should we understand “exchange”? I do not think we can understand it simply as an “ontological collapsing” in which the bare possession of Pure Act by each person entails that all

⁴⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 221.

the persons are a unity, and then say further that each one receives the others and gives itself to the others—in a sort of static and immutable ontological unity.⁴⁸ Following a suggestion of Hans Urs von Balthasar, I think we need to see that there is “room” in the immutability of Pure Act for real giving and receiving—a real giving and receiving that implies no diminution of act (and no passive potency) because the giving and receiving *always was, always is, and always will be; the giving and receiving is complete and continuous*. Thus, the mutual indwelling of the persons takes place *both* because the persons give and receive each other *and* they are all identical in the pureness of their act. Gerry O’Hanlon describes a relevant aspect of von Balthasar’s thought as follows:

In this description of the trinitarian event it is important to understand that love is this way always in God. This means that the processions in God do not just explain how the persons originate—rather they refer to the fact that the nature of God is constituted by this eternal giving and receiving between the persons. All the persons share in this mysterious interchange, so that although there is an obvious sense in which it is the Father who gives while the Son and Spirit receive [i.e., constitutional giving and receiving], still, on further reflection, *it is clear that all three persons give and receive—so that, for example, the Father receives in the sense that his love is accepted and returned by the Son*, while both the Father and the Son are united in their difference by the Gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

Thus, to sum up, it is true that the word “person” in God signifies relation (for unity lies in Pure Act); nevertheless, each person is Pure Act only insofar as it really gives itself to the other persons and receives the other persons. Thus unity or indwelling is brought about by *both* real giving and receiving *and* the ontological sameness of Pure Act. In the mysterious indwelling of the Trinity in Unity, then, there really is a circulation of love (the plurality) that is no circulation at all (the unity). This, as far as I can tell, is the line of thought that can best incorporate the philosophical understanding of receptivity we have developed.

⁴⁸ To envisage this sort of “ontological collapsing,” think of three perfectly overlapping circles, or two circles being superimposed perfectly upon a first. Cf. an explication of Stephen T. Davis’s work in Dale Tuggy, “Trinity,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/trinity/>>, at Section 2.5, “Perichoretic Monotheism.”

⁴⁹ Gerry O’Hanlon, S.J., “Does God Change?—H.U. von Balthasar on the Immutability of God,” 170, my emphasis, and footnotes removed.

Some might argue, though, that our metaphysical vision cannot do justice to the Trinity.

Indeed, in discussing how Clarke's vision of metaphysics applies to the Trinity, Matthew

Levering says the following:

For Clarke, [in the Trinity] being itself is relational, in the sense that "being" flows internally into relations. Relations emerge from the self-communication intrinsic to being. The risk associated with this account is clearly that of conflation of divine unity and divine Trinity: it becomes impossible to speak of a "unity" that is not intrinsically relational. In Clarke's account, the word "being" applies equally well to the Trinity (since "being" is intrinsically communion), and thus it becomes difficult to speak of a divine unity that is conceptually distinguishable from divine threeness.⁵⁰

Does this objection apply to our account? I do not think so. This is because our account allows us to talk about divine unity without referring to divine threeness. Pure Act is a unity; it is an absolutely simple (i.e., part-free and uncomposed) act of existing without any limiting essence, and this unity necessarily involves the fullness of inward, communicative, and receptive activity. But our conceptualization of Pure Act *qua* Pure Act does not involve cobbling three persons together to arrive at Pure Act (as if each person is a piece of a puzzle); instead, Pure Act refers to the nature each person possesses fully and completely. Pure Act understood in this way does entail plurality in some sense, or else the relational activity of real giving and receiving would be absent, but it is conceptually distinguishable from divine threeness. Consequently this objection does not undermine our account.⁵¹

There is one problem with our line of thought, however, that worries me, and I will flag it here. As I have noted, Christians believe that God is three persons in one substance or being, with the persons being distinguished via their relations (the Son begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son). But if this is the case, it would seem to

⁵⁰ Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 213. In this work Levering focuses mostly on Clarke's discussion in "To Be Is to Be Substance in Relation."

⁵¹ Clarke's work on the Trinity, though, often does seem susceptible to this objection. Cf. "To Be Is to Be Substance-in-Relation," 109; and "Person, Being, and St. Thomas," 616–7.

follow that the Father possesses the fullness of Pure Act only “after” begetting the Son. This is because the receiving receptivity of the Father—as an aspect of Pure Act—requires the communicative activity of the Son. But how is this possible? How can the begetter require the begotten? Here, it seems that the Son plays a role in helping the Father own Pure Act, rendering the Father unable to be the principle or originator (i.e., source) of the Trinity.

The best response I can offer, and I am not sure it is satisfactory, is this. Because the eternal procession of the Trinity has no beginning or temporal succession, we may be able to say—all in terms of ontological dependence—that the Son is begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, but the Fullness of Act that each owns fully is grounded in the continuous and complete giving and receiving of the persons. In other words, to be as clear as possible, the Father on his own could not possess the fullness of Pure Act, although this does not entail that the Father has ever lacked the Fullness of Act, or that the Father cannot be the source of the Son and (with the Son) the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Father really is the ontological ground (i.e., source or principle) of all that is in the Trinity (i.e., all in the Son and the Holy Spirit can be traced back to the Father as ground), but he could not be the Fullness of Act without the Son.⁵² All of this seems to suggest, though, that the Father does not generate the Son in the robust way maintained by Christian tradition (and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church).⁵³ Thus, should not we escape this problem simply by declaring that the Father possesses

⁵² Another possible response might be to say that the Father as Father does, on his own, possess the fullness of communicative and receptive activity without any reference to the real giving of the Son. In other words, if we say that the intellectual and volitional activity of the Father includes all of the relational activity in Pure Act—e.g. we say there is a willful contemplation of the self by the self, and this involves the fullness of communicative and receptive activity—then we could say that the Father possesses all of the communicative and receptive activity proper to Pure Act without reference to the giving of the Son. The problem with this response, however, is that it leaves no room for the giving and receiving between the persons, for Pure Act is already “full” prior to any giving and receiving between the persons.

⁵³ Cf. a relevant part of The Nicene Creed: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.” See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, between Sections 184 and 185.

the Fullness of Act without needing to receive from the Son? This would indeed eliminate our problem, but it produces another in its place: once we say this it follows that the Fullness of Act excludes real receiving between the persons, and this means that the Fullness of Act does not involve—in its Act—love (at least in the sense of reciprocity and exchange). Moreover, this simple solution contradicts our philosophical account of receptivity; and, although philosophy must be submissive to revelation, there is also a significant sense in which philosophy (as helper) serves to guide interpretation of revelation. Regrettably, at this stage, in my capacity as a philosopher, I cannot see further (and I fear I have not seen well enough here at all), so I will simply note the ostensible tension and move on, with the hope that others more qualified may be able to clear the air. If the air cannot be cleared, of course, this is a serious theological problem for our philosophical account of receptivity.

But now onto our second question. Have we not said too much? Have not we come close to saying that unaided reason can demonstrate that God is three persons in one being (even though unaided reason cannot grasp how this unity in plurality occurs)? I think the answer is no. Reason grasps that *esse* involves inward, communicative, and receptive activity; that all finite instances of *esse* must be sustained by Pure Act; and that Pure Act must be personal, relational, and loving. Personal because it is greater to possess intellect and will than not; relational because the laws of finite being must have their source in Pure Act; and loving because love is perfective of persons (for evidence of this final claim, consider Clarke's relevant argument discussed in Section 2).

But reason only offers more or less plausible argument hereafter, not certainty. Reason cannot conclusively move from the points just mentioned to the Trinity. This is because, as I discussed in Section 5, there are a variety of ways one could try to make sense of the relational activity and love in God. To pick up our Aristotelian line of thought once again, for example, we

could argue that Thought Thinking Itself allows for the fullness of communicative and receptive activity which ground a circulation of self-love, for the thinking of thinking involves an uninterrupted giving and receiving that, at first blush, involves none of the logical problems involved in the Trinity. The idea of self-love, of course, might be challenged, but a respondent might say this befits a self-sufficient being—that self-love in this sense is the highest form of love. Moreover, even if we reject this move as untenable, there is the difficulty of demonstrating that God is three in one, as opposed to any other plurality in unity.

Consequently, although I do think there is a profound harmony and fittingness between our philosophical understanding of *esse* (outlined in Section 4) and the Mystery of the Trinity, I do not think the Trinity is something we can demonstrate with certainty. It is not something we can claim to have demonstrated, as if we have conclusively completed some philosophical investigation. Thus, I think reason can take us towards the Trinity, especially when we keep the thought of Richard of St. Victor in mind, but not bring us to the Trinity. Reason can see, in other words, that the revelation of the Trinity is compatible with philosophy, and maybe even philosophically fitting.⁵⁴ But it cannot demonstrate the Trinity, and it most certainly cannot comprehend, in any way, in any manner, the sublime Mystery that hides itself in its supra-intelligibility—in one moment surrounding us in dark clouds, peels of thunder, and flashes of lightning, and in the next dazzling us with the brilliance of a thousand suns.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, I hope to have defended a single front of Clarke's Strong Thomistic Personalism: his claim that receptivity is an ontological perfection. To achieve this objective I explicated Clarke's account of receptivity and noted two problems associated with his account. In

⁵⁴ Cf. Clarke's "Person, Being, and St. Thomas, 616–7. Here, Clarke goes a bit further, saying that reason can demonstrate there must be a plurality of persons in God, although it cannot determine the number of persons precisely.

response to these problems, I suggested (i) that constitutional receptivity should be placed on the periphery of discussions seeking to show that receptivity is an ontological perfection, and (ii) that receptive activity—found in readiness receptivity and receiving receptivity—is a transcendental perfection of being. I then tried to justify (ii) by outlining a path of intellectual penetration into *esse* that would allow one to see that receptive activity is an aspect of being that is present to the degree that being is present. Following this, I responded to three objections articulated by Steven Long, and explained why this account of receptivity is legitimate in Thomistic personalism. Finally, I identified some points of compatibility and a tension between our account of receptivity and Christianity, with the hope that further attention may clarify these matters.

In his work *Existence and the Existent*, Jacques Maritain writes eloquently concerning the generosity of being:

By the very fact that the metaphysics of St. Thomas is centered, not upon essences but upon existence—upon the mysterious gushing forth of the act of existing in which, according to the analogical variety of the degrees of being, qualities and natures are actualised and formed, which qualities and natures refract and multiply the transcendent unity of subsistent Being itself in its created participations—this metaphysics lays hold, at its very starting point, of being as superabundant.⁵⁵

I hope it is now clear that the mysterious gushing forth must also be paired with a mysterious drawing in throughout the entire range of being. The generosity of being must be paired with the hospitality of being, and these, of course, must be seen in connection with what we might call the centeredness of being (i.e., the inwardness and selfhood of each being that separates it from all other beings). In this sight we may be able to grasp, in a synoptic vision, that all being breathes and exhales, draws in and pours forth, with increasing intensity, until the order of creation reaches its fitting denouement: persons in relationships of love with both persons and Subsistent Being Itself. In my eyes, all of this is philosophically plausible; as a Christian philosopher,

⁵⁵ *Existence and the Existent*, 51.

however, I recognize—and would like to remind others—that full validation requires compatibility with the Mystery of the Trinity. If compatibility remains elusive after a deeper assessment, we must seriously reevaluate whether we have made some mistake in our philosophical account of receptivity, and be ready to submit to the truth of revelation (even if we cannot see our error).

CONCLUSION

Such a uniquely contemporary synthesis [of Thomism and personalism] can indeed, I propose, present Thomism as—rather than “out of date,” as so many contemporary thinkers brand it—a significantly “up to date” interlocutor on the contemporary philosophical scene.

—W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism”¹

Let us sum up the main threads of the dissertation as follows. Personalism involves three main commitments: (i) a third way between collectivism and individualism is needed; (ii) a philosophical anthropology is needed to discern this third way; and (iii) persons possess an inalienable dignity, inexhaustible mystery, and communal *telos*. As a species of personalism, Thomistic personalism can be divided into three species: Weak, Moderate, and Strong. Weak Thomistic Personalism is indefensible because it fails to integrate phenomenology into the project. Moreover, the move from Moderate to Strong Thomistic Personalism merits serious consideration—for the two most disputed fronts of Clarke’s Strong Thomistic Personalism are highly plausible (after some modification). The territory covered here is not extensive, I agree, but I hope to have compensated for this limited exploration by covering it carefully and in detail.

In closing, I would like to point out four pressing tasks in Thomistic personalism, and note two regulative intuitions which I believe ought to govern the project. The first task is to get clear on the best way to conceive of the relationship between Thomistic personalism and natural law theory (especially in terms of theoretical ethics and political philosophy, as opposed to general jurisprudence in legal philosophy). Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons, in a recent book, has started this task well.² In particular, as I noted in Chapter 2 (Section 2), she reminds us that the

¹ Clarke’s final words (in his final article) concerning his vision of Thomistic personalism in “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism,” in *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 226–31, at 231.

² *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas’s Personalist Natural Law* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

eudaimonia (or *telos*) involved in natural law theory must be a perfection of the integral person, and she also reminds us that all our obligations are grounded in our obligations to love God and neighbor. Still, more needs to be done. For example, we need to think more about whether practical syllogisms somehow obstruct our grasp of the incommunicability and unrepeatability of persons (and if so, what follows from this), and we also need to see if we can find ways to connect more tightly rationality and communion. Could we even be more daring and develop St. Thomas's work to say that persons are individual substances of a loving nature? This would not be a rejection of our status as rational beings, but rather a more accurate definition in light of our final end and goal. These issues and others like them must be taken up. And it seems fair to say that Thomistic personalism will survive and flourish to the extent it grounds itself in the natural law theory of St. Thomas and yet is willing to go beyond it in a spirit of development.

The second task is to undertake phenomenological analyses explicitly in line with and under the banner of Thomistic personalism. Thomistic personalists can and should make reference to Buber, Mounier, Marcel, von Hildebrand, Levinas, St. Wojtyla/John Paul II, and other phenomenologists, but they need to work on phenomenology in terms of the needs and issues facing their project at the present, and they need to do so in connection with the project (or else people will not see how all of the work hangs together). To offer a couple of examples, phenomenological analyses of the communicative and receptive dimensions of the self would be invaluable, along with analyses of the mystery of the person. If analyses such as these are directly linked to the Personalist Norm and the project of Thomistic personalism, the plausibility of the Personalist Norm and overall project should only increase.

The third task is to expand the work of Thomistic personalism into other domains of practical philosophy. The main focus on this dissertation has been on Thomistic personalism vis-à-vis theoretical ethics, and this seems to be where most recent work has been performed. Thus, it

is incumbent upon Thomistic personalism to stake out more clearly its positions in other areas—in political philosophy, applied ethics, and legal philosophy. In the domain of political philosophy, for example, what exactly is the role of political authority? And in applied ethics, for example, what exactly does Thomistic personalism say about legal punishment or business ethics? Some may say that Thomists and personalists have already dealt with these issues. In one sense this is true. I am aware that Mounier, for instance, says a great deal about how we ought to comport ourselves in the domain of commerce, or that Thomists often discuss political matters. Still, these points of departure are not uniform, and if Thomistic personalism wishes to achieve a unity and breadth that makes it recognizable and understandable, it seems that investigations explicitly tied to Thomistic personalism should undertake the work.

The fourth task is to engage contemporary alternatives in a substantive manner. A couple of examples are all that is needed to illustrate the point. Surely Thomistic personalists think that both T.M. Scanlon's contractualism and David Gauthier's contractarianism are mistaken in some ways, so their work should be addressed. And surely Thomistic personalists think that Rawls's severing of justice and metaphysics is mistaken, but what does this mean? What sort of changes follow once we acknowledge the basic commitments of personalism and the metaphysics of Thomism? Can the political authority—rejecting neutrality between different conceptions of the good—structure the common good in such a way that communion or love is promoted? Or does this run afoul of the inalienable dignity of each person because it entails manipulation of some kind? The importance of this sort of engagement is undeniable.

Finally, the two regulative intuitions. The first regulative intuition can be found in a passage from Gabriel Marcel:

In fact, it seems very likely that there is this essential difference between a problem and a mystery. A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am

myself involved [making personhood a mystery], and it can therefore only be thought of as *a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity*.³

Contra everyday usage, a mystery here is not something that is unknowable; it is something that must be known in a particular manner—in the concrete, in a non-spectatorial manner. I have, to be sure, emphasized this reality in Chapter 2, but I suspect that one is gripped by it only to the extent that one is seized by one's status as a presence in the world as opposed to an object. One is gripped by this reality, in other words, to the extent that one intuits—i.e., grasps immediately—that the self *is* subjectively and not just objectively. Let us call this intuition the intuition of mystery.⁴ It rushes into our awareness in experiences of despair, exhilaration, love, silence, contemplation. Now, obviously this intuition grounds and justifies the need for phenomenology. I bring it up here, though, to mention that it should be given a regulative status in the project of Thomistic personalism. In brief, those working in Thomistic personalism should continually refresh their intuition of this mystery and use this intuition as a gateway to phenomenological analysis, or at the very least use it as a reminder of the limits and dangers of objective thinking. This regulation can therefore serve to ensure that the subjective dimension of the person is not dominated by the objective dimension of the person and his place in the universe. In a cosmologically and objectively focused Thomism, this is important.

Let us now consider a passage from Jacques Maritain:

It is not enough to teach philosophy, even Thomist philosophy, in order to possess this intuition [i.e., the intuition of being]. Let us call it a matter of luck, a boon, perhaps a kind of docility to the light. Without it man will always have an opining, precarious and sterile knowledge, however freighted with erudition it may be; *a knowledge about*. He will go round and round the flame without ever going through it. With it, even though he stray

³ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. K. Farrer (London: Collins, 1965), 127.

⁴ In later work Marcel explicitly rejects the claim that awareness of mystery in this sense is intuitive. But I have trouble grasping his arguments on this matter. See Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick (Evanston: Northwestern Press, 1973), xxxiv and 14–5.

from the path, he will always go farther than he can advance by years of mere dialectical exercise, critical reflection, or conceptual dissection of phenomena⁵

Maritain boldly declares that the intuition of being—discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, and to a lesser degree in Chapter 1—serves as a crucial ground and light for philosophical investigation. I believe this is especially the case in Thomistic personalism. Speaking from personal experience (for that is all I can give), this intuition is that which takes Thomism from a dry and desiccated system (grey, forced, and static) to a roaring fire of existential goodness and beauty that is undeniably from and for Being Itself. (Indeed, I confess that I have little idea of how one could feel fully at home in Thomism without it.)⁶ And it is this intuition that reminds one of the objective source (i.e., efficient cause), structure, hierarchy, and end (i.e., final cause) of the universe in which we live. This intuition, too, as result, should be given a regulative status in Thomistic personalism. Not only can it serve to render Thomistic personalism more plausible overall, it can also serve to ensure that the subjective dimension of the person does not dominate the objective dimension of the person and his place in the universe. As we reflect upon the mystery of the person, and explore the inner universe, the intuition of being can serve as a tether to the rest of the real. Most importantly, it can help us contextualize all that we find in the depths of ourselves, and remind us that the scope of our other-regarding activity includes both human persons and God.

⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Image Books, 1957), 31.

⁶ This does not mean that the overall plausibility of Thomism can be reduced to an intellectual sight that is completely unjustified. On the contrary, many arguments can be given in support of the content of this sight (e.g., work on essence and *esse*, contingency and necessity, analogy, the transcendentals, and so on), but the sight is something separable and different from a grasp of all of these argumentative moves.

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