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**THOMISTIC PERSONALISM AND  
CREATION METAPHYSICS:  
PERSONHOOD VS. HUMANITY AND  
ONTOLOGICAL VS. ETHICAL DIGNITY\***

There is a remarkable coincidence between Thomistic personalism and the thought of W. Norris Clarke, S.J., confirmed by the latter’s trajectory pointing precisely in the former’s direction.

The collection of Fr. Clarke’s essays published in 2009 by Fordham University Press under the title *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* includes four that were not otherwise published in his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The first of these I had the privilege to hear when he first delivered it in 2002 at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver. It is titled “The Immediate Creation of the Human Soul by God and Some Contemporary Challenges.”<sup>2</sup> Fr. Clarke told his audience that he had chosen this topic because he thought the immediate creation of the human soul had lost its place in basic catechesis of the faithful, with very serious consequences for our ability to understand the Church’s

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<sup>1</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009). Hereafter cited as: *Creative Retrieval*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–190.

teaching in some critically pressing areas. He believed the topic needed to be revived as a philosophical focus in the education of Catholic priests in order to address the confusion generated by this lacuna.

Earlier, in 2001, Fr. Clarke's metaphysics text book, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* came out from the University of Notre Dame Press.<sup>3</sup> That book serves as the metaphysical counterpart to the *summa* of Clarke's anthropology, captured in his Aquinas Lecture, *Person and Being*, given in 1993 and published that year by Marquette University Press.<sup>4</sup>

Read together, these two books ground Clarke's claim that metaphysics ultimately culminates in what he calls a "Person-to-person" vision of the source and meaning of reality. The final essay in the new Fordham collection confirms this: it is titled "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism." In this essay, Fr. Clarke gives "marching orders" to those of us who have learned so much from him. The task:

to uncover the personalist dimension lying implicit within the fuller understanding of the very meaning and structure of the metaphysics of being itself, not hitherto explicit in either the metaphysical or personalist traditions themselves.<sup>5</sup>

I intend this paper to take a first few steps in my part of this march. And, since Fr. Clarke also recommends to us the work of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, I'd like to begin with an intriguing distinction drawn

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<sup>3</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism," in *Creative Retrieval*, 231.

by him, namely, the distinction between a human being's personhood and his humanity.<sup>6</sup>

### Personhood vs. Humanity

Some views of the human being are rooted ultimately in a form of essentialism, a focus on the human individual as a member of the human species, a one among many. But the defining note of personhood is uniqueness, irreplaceability, irreducibility, incommunicability. There are many human beings but there is only one Socrates, and to adequately understand Socrates we cannot simply see him as an instance of the human. Gabriel Marcel offers an analogy to the experience of encountering an unfamiliar flower. If we ask "What is this flower?," we might receive a scientific answer identifying the botanical family, genus and species to which this flower belongs. That is, we might receive an answer in terms of the many to which this one belongs. But, Marcel observes, this

scientific answer, which enables me to classify the flower, is not an exhaustive answer; in fact in a certain sense it is no answer at all; it is even an evasion. By that I mean that it disregards the singularity of this particular flower. What has actually happened is as though my question had been interpreted as follows—"to what thing other than itself, can this flower itself be reduced?"<sup>7</sup>

Wojtyla's personalism applies this existentialist twist to our view of the human being, spotlighting the human person as an individual existent first and a member of the human species second. This is not to

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Karol Wojtyla, "Participation or Alienation?," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 201 (the book hereafter cited as: *Person and Community*); and Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community*, 237.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Faith and Reality, The Mystery of Being*, Vol. II, trans. René Hague (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951), 13.

make any kind of chronological or developmental claim—but it is a metaphysical claim which is of central import to our ethics and anthropology.

I think this existential insight is the basis for what Thomas Williams describes as personalism's "new take on Thomas's hierarchy of being."<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas' signature distinction between *esse* and essence is rooted in his perspective on the creature precisely as *from* the Creator. This leads to a view of the hierarchy of being that draws its brightest line between Creator and creature and sees all creatures in terms of their place along the "ontological continuum" of created being. Thus, Williams says, we are encouraged to "focus on man's place among created beings," and to define the human being as Aristotle does, in terms of the specific difference between the human being and all the rest of material creation.

But if our understanding of the individual human being is limited to its definition as rational animal, we have made precisely the error Marcel was talking about with the flower. We have reduced this one, this uniquely existing creature, to the many with whom it shares this characteristic. I think this is what Wojtyla is getting at in the contrast he draws between "underst[anding] the human being as an *animal* with the distinguishing feature of reason" and, on the other hand, "a *belief in the primordial uniqueness of the human being, and thus in the basic irreducibility of the human being . . .* which stands at the basis of understanding the human being as a *person . . .*"<sup>9</sup>

Personalism, while maintaining the radical distinction between Creator and creature in the hierarchy of being, invites us to draw a second bright line between persons and non-persons, thereby encouraging

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas D. Williams, *Who Is My Neighbor?* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 125.

<sup>9</sup> Karol Wojtyla, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in *Person and Community*, 211.

us to see the human being not primarily in terms of what distinguishes us from lower animals, but in terms of what we have in common with the Creator-Person(s) and with created-angelic-persons. It is our status as persons, not our membership in a species, which grounds our dignity as unique and therefore irreplaceable, non-substitutable, beings. It is our status as persons which allows what Wojtyla calls “participation,” our capacity to recognize another human being as “neighbor” and not merely as another instance of the human,<sup>10</sup> to recognize the other as an “I” who ought to be treated as a “thou.”<sup>11</sup>

Williams’ claim amounts to saying that Thomas’ view of the human niche in the hierarchy of being is too informed with Aristotelian essentialism and needs to be enriched with an existential personalism in order to adequately ground human anthropology. That existential personalism itself has roots not in Aristotelian philosophy but in Christian theological reflection culminating in the doctrine of the Trinity as a union of three Persons. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and others argue that through reflection on Christian revelation,

A profound illumination of God as well as man occurs . . . the decisive illumination of what person must mean . . . realized in its entirety only in the one who is God, but which indicates the direction of all personal being.<sup>12</sup>

Historically, theological reflection moves from the doctrine of God as Triune to Christological reflection on the Second Person of the Trinity and from there becomes available for anthropology. But Ratzin-

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<sup>10</sup> Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 237; *id.*, “Participation or Alienation?,” 201.

<sup>11</sup> Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 241–246, 252.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” trans. Michael Waldstein, *Communio* 17 (1990): 445. Kenneth Schmitz gives a more detailed discussion of the history of the idea of “person” in his “Geography of the Human Person,” in *The Texture of Being*, ed. P. O’Herron (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 149–159.

ger faults St. Thomas for failing to make that last move. He cites Richard of St. Victor, who in the 12<sup>th</sup> century defined the person as *spiritualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia*, the uncommunicably proper existence of a spiritual nature. Ratzinger says, “This definition correctly sees that in its theological meaning ‘person’ does not lie on the level of essence, but of existence.”<sup>13</sup> Later theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, developed this existential view of the person, but, according to Ratzinger, they limited the fruit of this reflection “to Christology and to the doctrine of the Trinity and did not make them fruitful in the whole extent of spiritual reality.”<sup>14</sup> In light of Ratzinger’s critique, we might formulate the project of Thomistic personalism as a retrieval of the personalistic insight for anthropology in the context of Thomas’ own existential metaphysics.<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not this critique is fair, and however developed or not Thomas’ own thinking on the anthropological implications of personhood, his metaphysics is more than adequate to the task of grounding the features of human personhood philosophically.

First, we must recognize the radical contingency of all finite being, the distinction between essence and existence in all beings with one possible exception. Given that distinction, we can attend to the operations of existing human beings which indicate that they have a share

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<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 449.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> I think Fr. Clarke might bristle a bit at this critique and point out Thomas’ “insistence that whenever existence is affirmed of individual human beings, such predications are always analogous, because of the uniqueness of the act of existence, and not univocal, as are all predications based on the common nature of members of the same species.” W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Integration of Person and Being in Twentieth-Century Thomism,” *Communio* 31 (2004): 438. Clarke credits Joseph de Finance, S.J., with bringing this to his attention in his article, “Being and Subjectivity,” trans. by Clarke, *Cross Currents* 6 (1956): 163–178. In response to the Ratzinger/Williams critique, see especially pp. 165, 170, 174. Cf. *S.C.G.* I, 32, 7; *D.P.* 7, 7, ad 2; also *S.C.G.* I, 42, 12, and *S.C.G.* II, 15, 2.

in existence beyond the merely material mode. Because *operari sequitur esse*, the immateriality of the rational functioning displayed by many human beings allows us to infer that our being, our entity, our way of being *entia*, is not merely material, that the sort of composite we are entails a form which is not merely form of matter but which bears an actuality beyond the actualization of material potency. Only thus are we able to account for the human capacity to grasp universals, the orientation of the human will and intellect to the infinite, and our capacity for self consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Thomas argues that these characteristic human activities reveal that the human form is in itself immaterial, spiritual, even as it is also the form of matter. The human soul is peculiar among all other forms of matter in that it owns *esse* in itself and shares it with matter, while all other forms of matter co-own *esse* with their matter and lose *esse* at the same time they lose their matter.

It is this “ownership” of *esse* that the human soul has in common with the rest of the persons in reality, both the created-immaterial-persons we call angels and the Creator-Person(s) we call God. We *are* spiritual beings. Because it is our nature also to be embodied we may be more accustomed to describing ourselves as embodied spirits, but we are fundamentally spirits with a very significant modifier.<sup>17</sup> Because our existence is distinct from our essence, we know that we are *caused* to be what we are, that we receive existence from another. And Thomas forcefully argues that the only mode of causation adequate to account

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<sup>16</sup> *S.C.G.* II, 49. Fr. Clarke explains and elaborates these arguments for a contemporary audience in “The Immediate Creation of the Soul by God,” 175–176. For an excellent contemporary discussion of the immateriality of conceptual thought, see Patrick Lee’s “Soul, Body and Personhood,” *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 49 (2004): 90–97.

<sup>17</sup> Pace Patrick Lee’s insistence on “animalism,” cf. “Soul, Body and Personhood,” 88. He refers us to his “Human Beings are Animals,” in *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Politics in the Work of Germaine Grisez*, ed. R. George (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 135–152.

for a caused spiritual being is divine creation, immediate creation by God.<sup>18</sup>

The act of creation is an act of utter endowment. There is no pre-existing recipient, already “primed” with its own actuality to receive some modification to its mode of being. Unlike the processes of accidental change and natural generation which surround us and which may come to serve as our paradigms for coming-into-being, creation is not an ingress of “further being” into an already existing thing. Creation is rather the “ingress of a creature into being.”<sup>19</sup> As Thomas notes in the *De potentia*, in creation “God simultaneously gives *esse* and produces that which receives *esse*.”<sup>20</sup> And, he insists, “*esse* is not determined by something else as potency by act, but rather as act by potency.”<sup>21</sup>

To understand what it is to create a person, we must focus on the *esse* which has been gifted onto the person as well as the essence, the mode of reception, which has been simultaneously given. This *esse* is in itself unlimited.<sup>22</sup> It is true that in creation God necessarily causes a finite being. But in the creation of a person, God causes a finite being whose *esse* is necessary. It is not merely a possible being, something that *is* but has the capacity *not-to-be*. Possible beings are merely possible in virtue of the potency to non-being that is a necessary aspect of the composition of form and matter when form has no actuality beyond actualizing the potency of matter. But, as the Third Way teaches us,

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<sup>18</sup> *D.P.* 3, 9; *S.Th.* I, 118, 2; *S.C.G.* III, 86–89. Clarke, “The Immediate Creation of the Soul by God,” 177–179.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), 74.

<sup>20</sup> *D.P.* 3, 1, ad 17: “Deus simul dans esse producit id quod esse recipit.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 2, ad 9: “[N]on sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam.”

<sup>22</sup> de Finance, “Being and Subjectivity,” 174: “Though limited and distinguished *in itself*—for it is in itself a relation essence—it is not so *by itself*—since it is from the side of essence that its limitation proceeds.”



“between” the utter necessity of the Creator and the possibility of merely possible beings, there is the caused necessity of caused necessary things (the “contingent necessity” of “contingently necessary” things). When Thomas speaks of the caused necessary, he has in mind the separated human soul, the angels, and the celestial heavens, the matter of which he believes has no potency to corruption. If there is no such celestial matter, then our understanding of the caused necessary is limited to the angels and to the soul of the human being, the form which owns the personal existence it shares with its body in this life and will share with its glorified body in the next. The caused necessary is the realm of the created person, the finite being to whom *esse* is granted in a way that is not vouchsafed to the rest of creation.

To summarize this in Aristotelian terms, human operation, which he calls “second act,” is rooted in human form, which Aristotle calls “first act.” But as Thomas repeatedly observes, Aristotle’s first act is, in fact, merely in potency to *esse* itself.<sup>23</sup> When we push what is revealed about human form through human operation we realize that human form itself has been created to own *esse*, to be composed with *esse*, in a way that is proper to no other form of matter. Immaterial operation reveals the immateriality of the human form but that immateriality, in turn, reveals that this form’s composition with *esse* allows that *esse* to retain its necessity.

Thomistic personalism teaches that I am not only a composite of mortal body and immortal soul. I am also a composite of finite essence, Susan-Selner-Wrighthood, and created eternal *esse*. I have been called into being as a being to be sustained in being forever. In creating me, my Creator has not only given me being, He has indissolubly married

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *S.Th.* I, 3, 4. Also, Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “St. Thomas and the Distinction between Form and *Esse* in Caused Things,” *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 353–370. Wojtyła makes this point and shows its relevance in *The Acting Person*, trans. A. Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979), 82–85.

me to it and only He could sunder me from it. This is what puts the “personal” in personal existence—it’s mine. And just as human marriage takes its meaning from the enduring nature of its bond, the enduring “you’re mine” entailed in the “I do,” existence takes on personal meaning precisely in its being given once and for-all-eternity. Its incorruptibility is the “flip-side” of its spirituality and thus of its “personality.”

This line of thought allows us to understand a second extremely important distinction Wojtyla makes: the distinction between the ontological dignity and the ethical dignity of the human person.

### **Ontological vs. Ethical Dignity**

Our ontological dignity is rooted in our very existence as persons, in what unites us with the persons above us on the hierarchy of being. Our ethical dignity, on the other hand, is rooted in our rationality, in what distinguishes us from what is below. Confusion about these two modes of human dignity has led to serious error concerning the status of embryonic human beings as well as disabled born human beings, not to mention the disabled unborn. Thomas’ metaphysics allows us to ground Wojtyla’s claim that “in the ontological sense the human being is a ‘someone’ from the very beginning,” even as we recognize that through human action and self determination “the human being becomes increasingly more of a ‘someone’ in the ethical sense.”<sup>24</sup> Thus we are able to argue that the human being has intrinsic personal dignity from the very beginning, regardless of his or her degree of development or capacity to manifest typically human operation, while also explaining the necessity to preserve the political and social space that human beings require in order to act humanly and come into their own as ethi-

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<sup>24</sup> Karol Wojtyla, “On the Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Person and Community*, 192.

cal agents and achieve ethical dignity. Ethical dignity is an achievement. But personal dignity is a given, given in the giving of personal existence.

This distinction is very important and I'd like to develop it here. Because human beings are created as embodied persons, our personal existence is given to us simultaneous with our "membership" in the human species. It is precisely our embodiment which makes possible our membership in a species and allows us to both image the unity-in-diversity of the Divine Person(s) and cooperate in the generation of other persons in a way that the angelic persons cannot. But another more challenging aspect of our embodiment is the fact that the capacities which are rooted in our personal existence necessarily develop in composition with our bodies, which means that they necessarily develop over time and that material defects will necessarily impact the manifestation of these capacities. Wojtyla says,

from the very beginning the human being is someone who exists and acts, although fully human activity . . . appears only at a certain stage of human development. This is a consequence of the complexity of human nature. The spiritual elements of cognition and consciousness, along with freedom and self-determination, gradually gain mastery over the somatic and rudimentary psychic dimensions of humanity. . . . In this way, . . . the human self gradually both discloses itself and constitutes itself—and it discloses itself also by constituting itself.<sup>25</sup>

To understand this last sentence as not only poetically apt but also philosophically sound, we must be aware of the distinction between personal or ontological selfhood, on the one hand, and ethical selfhood, on the other. Human activity, activity which is peculiarly characteristic to members of the human species, is merely a sign of personal selfhood. Self-consciousness is merely a manifestation of our existence as spir-

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<sup>25</sup> Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 225.

itual, personal, human beings. Wojtyla insists that we understand “conscious being [as] a being that is not constituted in and through consciousness but that instead somehow constitutes consciousness.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, using Aristotle’s terminology, it is imperative that we see characteristic human activity as a matter of second act, rooted in first act and manifesting first act, sufficient to prove first act, but in no way necessary for first act, the act of existing which is simultaneously the act of existing as a human being.<sup>27</sup> This is what Wojtyla means when he says, “from the very beginning the human being is someone who exists and acts, although fully human activity . . . appears only at a certain

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>27</sup> Of course anyone very familiar with St. Thomas will at this point start to wonder how this statement jives with Thomas’ understanding of delayed hominization. But it is important to recall that for Thomas it is at the moment of God’s creative act that the human being begins to exist as a human being—it is clear that *esse* and *essence* come into existence simultaneously. The question raised by delayed hominization is when that creative act occurs in relation to the start of embryonic development. The case has been very persuasively made that, given contemporary understanding of the specifically human organization of the single cell which results from karyogamy, Thomas Aquinas would conclude that God’s creative act occurs at that point and that the cooperation of the new child’s human and divine parents occurs over a matter of hours, not weeks, as Thomas supposed.

See John Haldane and Patrick Lee, “Aquinas on Human Ensoulment and the Value of Life,” *Philosophy* 78 (2003): 255–278. Haldane and Lee give a comprehensive bibliography of 33 works in English on the timing of ensoulment on pp. 259–260, n. 5. See also, John Meyer, “Embryonic Personhood, Human Nature, and Rational Ensoulment,” *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006): 206–225; Jason Eberl, “Aquinas’s Account of Human Embryogenesis and Recent Interpretations,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 30 (2005): 379–394; David Hershenov and Rose Koch, “How a Hylomorphic Metaphysics Constrains the Abortion Debate,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 5 (2005): 751–764; D. A. Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo* (London: Continuum, 2004), ch. 8; Denis Bradley, “*To Be or Not to Be*: Pasnau on Aquinas’s Immortal Human Soul,” *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 1–39; Kevin L. Flannery, S.J., “Applying Aristotle in Contemporary Embryology,” *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 249–278; Pascal Ide, “Le zygote: est-il une personne humaine?,” *Nova et Vetera* 76, no. 1 (2001): 45–88, and no. 2 (2001): 53–88; Angelo Serra and Roberto Colombo, “Identity and Status of the Human Embryo: The Contribution of Biology,” in *Identity and Statute of Human Embryo: Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, ed. J. Correa and E. Sgreccia (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 128–177.

stage of human development.” Existence as a human being is both ontologically and chronologically prior to an individual’s exhibition of characteristic human activity. That activity may, then, be necessary in order to make anyone, including ourselves, aware of our existence as human beings. But such awareness must always be understood as awareness of existence as already-having-been-prior-to-human-awareness of it.

The Creator’s awareness is simultaneous with beginning-to-be of a new human person. And an angelic person’s awareness of itself would be simultaneous with its beginning to be. But for us as embodied persons there is a chronological gap which can lead to ontological confusion. To be perfectly clear, then, the claim of Wojtyła’s Thomistic personalism is that the human being does not begin to be when he or she begins to manifest characteristic human activity. That is rather the point at which he or she becomes available to human awareness. In this way, Wojtyła says, “the human self gradually both discloses itself and constitutes itself,” i.e., through characteristic human activity the human self both (1) discloses its already-having-been-prior-to-human-awareness, and (2) develops, actualizes, realizes the capacities made possible through its spiritual existence. And, Wojtyła continues, “it discloses itself also by constituting itself,” i.e., through its further development it continues to disclose and confirm its already-having-been-prior-to-human-awareness and moves toward the achievement of the ethical dignity made possible by the personal dignity it has had all along.

This distinction also grounds our conviction that a person’s inability to be fully the subject of an action in no way diminishes his or her objective personhood and the imperative that as the object of human action he or she must be treated as a person.<sup>28</sup> Full development of our

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 225, 241; Williams, *Who Is My Neighbor?*, 125, 146.

capacities as persons, of course, requires the full development of our subjectivity, but this development is inhibited in this life by our bodies and for some of us the limitations of the body appear to preclude development of these capacities in this life. The good news is that there is hope, both for those who are now disabled in some way and for the rest of us who are merely handicapped. With a confidence born of faith and a well developed metaphysics, Thomas assures us that while in this life the human soul “is hindered by its union with the body, because its power over the body is not perfect,”<sup>29</sup> in the next life, “[b]y its perfect union with God, the soul will have complete sway over the body,”<sup>30</sup> and so we will all fully realize our subjectivity, whatever limitations there might have been on that realization when we were persons with earthly bodies.

It is the case though that in his reflection on human persons Wojtyla does generally focus on “the normally developed human self,” and so gives much consideration to developed human subjectivity and the human capacity for conscious relations. That focus could lead someone to conclude these are necessary for human dignity.<sup>31</sup> It is essential that we understand that these are necessary only for ethical dignity, i.e., for the status of being a responsible ethical agent. Many of us do not achieve ethical dignity in this life, either because we do not live long enough to achieve it or because there is some congenital or acquired flaw in our earthly materiality which prohibits either its achievement or its use. Wojtyla’s insistence on social and political accommodation of human subjectivity, self-possession and self-determination is meant to

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<sup>29</sup> *D.P.* 5, 10, ad 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 10, ad 3.

<sup>31</sup> A more muted version of this error maintains that an embryo whose material condition is such that it is impossible for it to develop to the point of manifesting activity characteristic of human embryos cannot be a human embryo and therefore can be treated in ways (i.e. experimented upon, cloned, harvested, etc.) that would constitute a violation of the rights of a human embryo.

ensure that those who *can* achieve ethical dignity will have the opportunity to do so. But part of their flourishing as responsible ethical agents will be their recognition of the inherent personal dignity of human beings who are not currently capable of self-possession or self-determination and the corresponding insistence that these persons' rights as human persons be respected regardless of their capacity to insist on or even be aware of these rights.<sup>32</sup> Wojtyla insists on the opportunity to become an "I" so that I may recognize my neighbor as a "thou" even if he is unable to constitute himself as an "I" in this life. In the act of creating this human being, my neighbor, God has created an "I," an I of whom God is fully aware and desirous. As a human being with the capacity and good fortune to constitute myself as an I in this life, I have a responsibility to act on my awareness of my neighbor as God's deliberate creation and do my part to assure this neighbor the opportunity to develop his capacity for self-possession and self-determination to whatever extent he can in this life while anticipating eternal union with him and many happy surprises upon the full realization of his and my human capacities in the next life.

Which brings us back to Fr. Clarke. May he, and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.



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<sup>32</sup> Personalism's capacity to ground talk of human rights is the theme of Williams' *Who Is My Neighbor?*, which is subtitled: *Personalism and the Foundation of Human Rights*.

**THOMISTIC PERSONALISM AND CREATION METAPHYSICS:  
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SUMMARY

The author seeks to respond to the philosophical appeal of W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “to uncover the personalist dimension lying implicit within the fuller understanding of the very meaning and structure of the metaphysics of being itself, not hitherto explicit in either the metaphysical or personalist traditions themselves.” She does this by discussing the distinctions drawn by Karol Wojtyła: (1) between a human being’s personhood and his humanity, and (2) between the ontological dignity and the ethical dignity of the human person.

KEYWORDS

Thomistic personalism, personalism, person, personhood, human being, humanity, dignity, ontological dignity, ethical dignity, being, metaphysics, W. Norris Clarke, Karol Wojtyła.

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