

Thomist Existentialism According to Jacques Maritain

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The power for growth is the measure of life.

Countless has been the number of schools of thought that have striven to provide answers to the age-old questions that confront the inquisitive mind of man; yet none has been revered for already so many ages past as the philosophical system that most closely approaches the idea of a *philosophia perennis* or an eternal philosophy as THOMISM.

Seven centuries of water has already passed under the philosophical bridge and, yet, ST. THOMAS AQUINAS continues to be universally deemed "*the special bulwark and the glory of the Catholic Church.*" Thus were the prophetic words uttered in 1248 by his master, St. Albert the Great, fulfilled. Indeed, the "*loud bellowing of the Dumb Ox of Sicily*" has filled the world.

Thomism, the Scholastic synthesis built by St. Thomas Aquinas on an Aristotelian basis, has come down into our time as an invaluable source of well-defined religious truths and doctrines of the faith as well as of philosophical principles in perfect harmony with natural reason and common sense, the firm foundation of sacred studies, and the sure touchstone for the appraisal of modern philosophical systems and ideologies.

The Thomistic cause was all the more bolstered by the epoch-making encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII issued in 1879, calling for

the Revival of Thomism and a return of the modern mind besieged by perverse philosophies and false ideologies to the spirit of St. Thomas Aquinas. Under this impetus, Neo-Thomists furthered Thomism with their double characteristic of "*respect for tradition*" and a "*spirit of progress*" — concerned effort in assimilating modern advances of thought within the achievements of the past: *vetera novis augere et perficere*.

In the opening years of the 20th century, a French philosopher newly-converted to the Catholic faith joined forces with the Neo-Thomists to give new proofs to the enduring value and fertile utility of Thomism with his promising labors.

His name: **JACQUES MARITAIN** (1882-1973).

Deemed the most illustrious Catholic-Thomist philosopher of our time, Maritain brings to light the *developmental* character of Thomism -- that it is an open synthesis capable of growth and progress by a vital assimilation and integration of the truths of all other systems of thought that have been fabricated since the time of St. Thomas and, thus, manifests the hallmark of a true perennial philosophy and of life -- indeed, a *LIVING THOMISM*.

Among these fresh currents of thought is one that made it into the pages of history as the most significant philosophical trend of the post-war era. Fundamentally a search for the meaning of life, what began as a movement of protest against the German Idealism gradually evolved into a number of Existentialist philosophies customary classed collectively under the blanket-heading **EXISTENTIALISM**.

Although manifesting a great divergency of expressions, Existentialist philosophies are basically Philosophies of Life and of Man, and offering certain themes that can be considered the most general features of existential thought: primacy of existence, consciousness and freedom, and human subjectivity. Such a new trend of thought could have had a plain-sailing into the mainstream of philosophy were it not for the well-pronounced atheistic-nihilistic slant that a good number of Existentialist philosophies manifested. Existentialism, in effect, poses as a great challenge to Thomism, raising the issue of *TREND vs. TRADITION*. In keeping with the sound principle, "*Whatever life we discover at the*

*margins must be verified and tested at the center,*¹ the claims of Existentialism, then, need to be evaluated in the light of the principles of the traditional philosophy. Hence, the modern mind may ask: *What place does Existentialism occupy in the whole corpus of philosophical thought? What must be the attitude of a modern Thomist towards Existentialism?*

Maritain trenchantly answers these vital questions by exposing the fallacy of atheistic Existentialism and by tracing the core of true Existentialism in the thought of the Angelic Doctor, thus, setting forth with characteristic lucidity and eloquence a position which he calls **THOMIST EXISTENTIALISM**.

To advance such a synthesis of the traditional **Philosophy of Being** that is Thomism and a current **Philosophy of Subjectivity** that is Existentialism, and then christen it with the name **THOMIST EXISTENTIALISM** is to go deep into the ontological roots of the matter -- into the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas himself -- and then probe whether the Angelic Doctor manifested an existential frame of mind in his philosophy.

This is precisely what Maritain has done in his brief treatise on *Existence and the Existent*² which may be described as an essay on the *Existentialism* of St. Thomas Aquinas. In no way is our author seeking an easy rapprochement with Existentialism, to the detriment of the very principles of Thomism. Maritain makes it clear in his introduction to the treatise that "the 'existentialism' of St. Thomas is utterly different from that of the 'existentialist' philosophies propounded nowadays." Nevertheless, he believes that "**Thomist Existentialism is the only authentic Existentialism.**"³ And when he makes this claim, he likewise asserts that St. Thomas Aquinas was an 'Existentialist' in his own right.

¹Paula Ripple, *Growing Strong at Broken Places* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1986), p. 129.

²Trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald Phelan (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1948).

³*Existence and the Existent*, p. 11. Hereafter, all parenthetical paginations would refer to the same book.

Maritain has made his stand. Accordingly, the philosophical inquiry arises: **In what sense was St. Thomas Aquinas an 'Existentialist' according to Jacques Maritain?**

Picking up the cue from the French philosopher, this textual analysis follows the lines Maritain pens, traces the Thomistic documentations he offers, and evaluates the arguments he posits in his treatise.

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE PERSON IN THOMISM

SUBJECTIVITY as a philosophical concept and theme enjoys a pedestalled place in the Existentialist lexicon. Upon careful analysis, though, there appears good grounds for holding that subjectivity likewise comes as a central underlying theme in the Thomistic Metaphysics, clearly permeating St. Thomas' thought. Its centrality as a Thomistic doctrine, however, is rarely thematized with full explicitness; hence, its thematic obscurity. A reason for this is that the vantage point from which the Angelic Doctor elaborated his thoughts is not so much the inner world of man as the outer world of nature. Unless it is reformulated and highlighted, thus, in more explicit Existentialist and Personalist terms by contemporary Thomists, it will not gain effective entry into the bloodstream of contemporary thought.

Maritain responds to this need in his opus, *Existence and the Existent*. He presents his exposé on **subjectivity** and the **person** in Thomism in three sections. Firstly, Maritain reformulates the notion of **The Subject (Suppositum)** and the place it occupies in the overall vision of Thomistic philosophy. Secondly, he focuses on the theme **Subjectivity as Subjectivity** and places the order of subject-object and subject-subject relations in their proper perspectives. And lastly, he frames **The Structure of the Subject** and the three central characteristics of the subjectivity of the person as **self-possession, self-communication** and **self-transcendence**.

1. THE SUBJECT (*SUPPOSITUM*)

Maritain writes at the outset that precisely because of the '*Existentialism*,' i.e., **Existentialist Intellectualism**, of Thomistic philosophy, the notion of subject plays a capital part in it; he goes on to say that "*subjects* occupy all the room there is in the Thomist universe, in the sense that for Thomism, only subjects exist, with the accidents which

inhere in them, the action which emanates from them, and the relations which they bear to one another" (p. 70). Only individual subjects exercise the *actus essendi*, and everything that actually exists is an individual. Hence, individuality in the metaphysical sense has a special relation to the act of existence, the final perfection of substance.

Following the Scholastic *modus operandi* in the presentation of a thesis, Maritain first offers a definition of terms, three in particular: **substance**, **subsistence** and **supposit**.

Substance is that which has autonomy in existence and not simply a modification or a dependent of some other essence. Substantial being means a being "existing in itself and not in another"⁴ as do accidents. And because of its primacy in existence, it has the ability to sustain other beings in existence.

When a substance exists directly through the real being that corresponds to its nature, it is said to *subsist*. **Subsistence** designates a determinate mode of being by which a substantial being becomes an individual in such a way that it has a unity within itself, is complete in the order of existence and is incapable of being assumed into the existence of another, though it can sustain other beings in existence. In other words, it is that substantial perfection by which an individual substance is made perfectly subsisting and, hence, autonomous and altogether incommunicable.

An individual, complete, autonomous, incommunicable, subsistent substance is called a **supposit**.⁵ This is the Thomistic terminology for the *subject*. The **supposit** is the ontological subject that subsists in the individual substantial nature. This individual substantial nature is the principle by which the **supposit** is made commensurate for existential actuality, subsistence and operation. Herein is a distinction between the

⁴St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, q.9, a.1, c; *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum I*, D.23, q.1, a.1.

⁵The term **supposit** squares with the individual substantial nature as the immediate subject of subsistent actuality and as subject of accidents. It draws from and conforms to the etymological meaning of the Latin term *susstantia* (<sub + stare + to stand under): for, the original Greek *hypostasis* (<hypo + hithasthai + to stand under) and the Latin equivalent *suppositum* (<sub + poni + to be placed under) both mean subject in the sense of substratum.

principle which (supposit) and the *principle by which* (substantial nature). As St. Thomas says: "Existence belongs to the supposit and to the nature: to the supposit as to *that which has existence*; and to the nature as to *that by which something has existence*."⁶ To exist is not attributed to nature but to that which subsists, that which has essence, that which exercises being and action. Here enters the Thomistic dictum: "*Actiones sunt suppositorum*."⁷ Operational acts, especially and primarily the act of exercising existence, are proper of supposits and the act of exercising existence. Existence is not only received, but is also exercised by the existent subject. But to exercise existence, something besides the bare essence is necessary; the essence must be completed by subsistence and, hence, become a supposit.

Maritain elucidates this special function of subsistence in a footnote:

So the proper effect of subsistence is to place the individual nature in a state of *exercising existence*, with the incommunicability proper to the individual nature . . . Subsistence renders the essence (become supposit) capable of existing *per se separatim*, because it renders an individual nature (become supposit) capable of exercising existence. (p. 73)

Inasmuch as the individual substantial nature is the principle by which the supposit enjoys a specific nature, commensuration for existence and subsistence, and capacity for operational activity, it is simply ordained to the supposit; so that upon attaining the supposit, it obtains ontological value and thereby becomes being simply. This means that it likewise attains by and through the supposit ontological termination and ontological incommunicability, by which it becomes ontologically complete and sealed up from another supposit; and existence by its own ontological right (*sui iuris*), which is **supposital subsistence**.

The ontological ordering, therefore, of these constituent components of being is the following: first, individual nature; then, supposit or substance; and finally, existence. The supposit receives specific deter-

⁶*Summa Theologica* III, q. 17, a. 2, c.

⁷*Summa Theologica* III, q. 20, a. 1, ad 2; 1.19, a. 1, ad 3; *In I Sent.* D. 5. q. 1, a. 1; *In III Sent.* D. 18, a. 1, ad 2; *De Veritate* q. 20, a. 1, ad 2.

mination from the substantial nature which, in turn, receives ontological determination, as being simply, from the supposit. Again, the suppositional subsistence or perseity is made possible by the substantial subsistence which, in turn, attains ontological fullness and termination from suppositional subsistence.

In this context, subsistence may be described as really distinct both from essence and from existence in the sense that it adds a real mode to essence or nature, i.e., a transcendental order or relationship to existence. Abstractly considered, subsistence is this order to existential actuality; concretely considered, it is the essence so ordered. In material substances, it brings to nature a termination making it apt for existential ordination.

Maritain clinches this consideration by saying that when Scholastics, particularly Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, explain subsistence through this notion of nature-ordained-to-existence, or

that by which, on the plane of reality, the quod which exists and acts is other than the quid which we conceive, they attest to the existential character of metaphysics, they shatter the Platonic world of pure objects, they justify the passage into the world of subjects or supposita, they rescue for the metaphysical intellect the value and reality of subjects. (p. 73)

Such is an ontological analysis of the structure of reality. Maritain remarks that essences are not what God creates but existent subjects or supposita which subsist in the individual nature that constitutes them and which receive from the creative influx their nature as well as their subsistence, their existence and their activity. (p. 74) Each supposit, in its own individual existing reality, possesses an essence and pours itself out in action.

Now this subject or supposit becomes more and more rich in inner complexity, whose individuality is more and more concentrated and integrated, whose action manifests a more and more perfect spontaneity, as we pass progressively to higher degrees in the scale of beings: from the 'merely transitive' activity of inanimate bodies, to the 'occultly immanent' activity of vegetable life, the 'definitely immanent' activity of sentient life, and the 'perfectly immanent' activity of the life of the

intellect. (p. 75) At this last degree, borrowing Maritain's words, "the threshold of free choice is crossed, . . . liberty of spontaneity becomes liberty of autonomy, the suppositum becomes *persona*," (p. 75) and individuality becomes *personality*.

The essential significance of this metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality, or of this concept of man as at once an individual and a person, is rooted in the principles of St. Thomas Aquinas and in the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine, and lies at the heart of the **Personalism** of Jacques Maritain. Maritain calls this distinction "a classical distinction belonging to the intellectual heritage of mankind."⁸ And yet, it was through his works that this Thomistic doctrine has come within our reach.

In many passages, principally in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, St. Thomas teaches that the formal principle of individuation or of the "thisness" of corporeal beings is the "*materia prima quantitate signata*" (prime matter designated with quantity). That is to say, it is by virtue of its material constitution that a corporeal being exists as an individual within a given species, "*individuum in se, divisum ab omni alio*" (undivided in itself and distinct from all others). Individuality, therefore, has its first ontological roots in matter.

Applying this to the human species, Maritain interprets individuality, being that which renders oneself autonomous and incommunicable in relation to the rest, to be the embodiment of tendencies to isolation, to selfishness, to "the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager to grasp for itself."⁹ Accordingly, the picture we get of man as an individual is far from being promising. He is characterized as a corporeal being enclosed and wholly wrapped up in himself, selfishly preoccupied with his own end, completely absorbed in his own singularity. Paradoxically, his individuality likewise embodies the tendency to dispersion. Man as an individual is an undifferentiated unit, just one among the many material bodies in the vast universe. Maritain observes that "as a material individuality, man has only a precarious unity,

⁸Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), pp. 33-34.

⁹*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 37.

which tends to be scattered in a multiplicity. For of itself, matter is inclined to disintegration just as space is inclined to division." Faced with this viewpoint, we see man merely as a part of a whole, with the whole coming first.

As an individual, each of us is a fragment of a species, a part of the universe, a unique point in the immense web of cosmic, ethical, historical forces and influences -- and bound by their laws. Each of us is subject to the determination of the physical world.¹⁰

However disheartening this picture of man may be, it is not meant to be heaped right off on dumping ground. To the astronomer, man may appear to be "an infinitesimal dot in an infinite universe"; nonetheless, man is still *the astronomer*! For man is not only an individual. He is also a *person* and, as such, "is not controlled by the stars."

Thence, we touch on the dimension of personality which Maritain deems "a much deeper mystery," inasmuch as it rests on the subsistence of the spiritual soul which is in us the principle of creative unity, independence and liberty.

In the Thomistic lexicon, while a complete subsistent substance is called a **supposit**, a supposit of intellectual nature is called a **person**.¹¹

¹⁰*The Person and the Common Good*, pp. 37-38.

¹¹*Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.1, c. Etymologically, the term **person** seems to have come over into philosophical use from the Greek drama. St. Thomas, taking the cue from Boethius, traces its historical etymology either from the Greek *prosopon* or from the Latin *personare*. In either case, it has reference to the stage mask which the performers put on (*pros* = over + *ops* = the face); firstly, in order to conceal their natural faces in such vast open-air theatres where changes of facial expressions would largely have gone unseen, and to stylize and thus preserve the dignity befitting the roles they played; and secondly in order to magnify their voices by way of sounding boxes or through the concavity (*per* + *sonare* = to sound through or to magnify the sound).

From the characters of these dramatic presentations (*'dramatis personae'*) whose feats they narrated in song, the term has been extended by usage to the stage actors themselves, perhaps, on account of the fact that they usually portrayed people of great nobility and dignity and, hence, '*person*' refers to 'subjects characterized with some dignity.' (Cfr. *In I Sent.* D.23, q.1, c; *Summa* I, q.29, a.3, ad 2).

St. Thomas, speaking on his own, derives the term '*person*' from '*per-se unum*': When *person* is said, as if *per-se una*, the essential unity is not meant, but the unity of person." (*In I Sent.* D. 23, q.1, a.3, ad 5). The reasonableness of this derivation can readily be grasped if we call to mind that the supposit or existential subject is the root principle of the individuality and consequent unity of being. In other words, being is one and has unity of nature because of the individuality of its existential subject.

'Person' signifies "*that which is most perfect in all nature*" -- that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature."¹² This formal ontological definition of person -- "*rationalis naturae individua substantia*" -- originates from Boethius.¹³ It was adopted and given the following necessary modifications by St. Thomas: (1) '*rational*' in the Boethian definition is to be understood in the wider sense of '*intellectual*' -- which is likewise applicable to God and to angels who in their cognition do not proceed from potency to act through ratiocination; (2) '*individual*,' in the sense of implying '*incommunicability*,' inasmuch as divine and angelic individuality do not come from matter; and (3) '*substance*,' in the sense of signifying '*subsistence*,' inasmuch as the Divine Persons are not substances but relations (subsistents).¹⁴ A reformulated definition can thus be: "*Persona est distinctum subsistens naturae intellectualis*" (person is a distinct subsistent of an intellectual nature).

What do we mean precisely when we speak of man as a person? Our French philosopher himself provides the answer.

"When we say that man is a person, we do not mean merely that he is an individual, in the sense that an atom, a blade of grass, a fly or an elephant is an individual. Man is an individual who holds himself in hand by his intelligence and will; he exists not merely in a physical fashion. He has a spiritual superexistence through knowledge and love, so that he is, in a way, a universe in himself, a microcosm, in which the great universe in its entirety can be encompassed through knowledge. By love he can give himself to beings who are to him, as it were, other selves. For this relation no equivalent can be found in the physical world. The human person possesses these characteristics because in the last analysis man, this flesh and these perishable bones which are animated and activated by a divine fire, exists 'from the womb to the grave' by virtue of the existence itself of his soul, which dominates time and death. Spirit is the root of personality. The notion of personality thus involves that of totality and independence; no matter how poor and crushed a person may be, he is a whole, and as a person, subsistent in an independent manner. To say that a man is a person is to say that in the depth of his being he is more a whole than a part and more independent than servile. It is to say that he is a minute fragment of

¹²*Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, c.

¹³*Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis*, ch.3, v.2.

¹⁴*Summa Theologica* I, q.29, a.3, ad 4.

matter that is at the same time a universe, a beggar who participates in the absolute being, mortal flesh whose value is eternal, and a bit of straw into which heaven enters. It is this metaphysical mystery that religious thought designates when it says that the person is the image of God. The value of the person, his dignity and rights, belong to the order of things naturally sacred which bear the imprint of the Father of Being, and which have in him the end of their movement."¹⁵

Once more, with the characteristic lucidity of a philosopher and the eloquence of a writer, Maritain crystallizes his deepest thoughts into words with this single paragraph which, as a commentator of his would put it, "might almost be considered the charter for Maritain's doctrine of the person, in relation to which all else he has written on the subject is commentary and exegesis."¹⁶ This already serves as the compendium of his entire philosophy of Personalism.

A perusal of the salient features of this exposition would lead us to set forth with the Maritainian position that for St. Thomas Aquinas to be a human person is to manifest the three central characteristics of **self-possession, self-communication and self-transcendence**, or to put it in another way, a personal being is a *self-possessing, self-communicating, and self-transcending* being.

Maritain's analysis of the nature of the relationship between the individual and the person involves a *distinction*, not a *separation*. The two concepts are distinct, and it is the '*rationality*' of the person that spells the difference. But the individual and the person are not two separate entities. There is not in me one reality, called *my individual*, and another reality, called *my person*. One and the same reality is, in a certain sense, an individual by reason of that which derives from matter and, in another sense, a person by reason of that which derives from the spirit.¹⁷ I cannot, however, split my individuality from my personality,

¹⁵Jacques Maritain, "The Conquest of Freedom" in *Freedom, Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., 1940), pp. 635-636.

¹⁶Charles Fecher, *The Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 159.

¹⁷*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 43.

by saying, for instance, that the former is the body and the latter is the soul.

In other words, in the actual individual person, there is simply a conceptual, not a real difference, between individuality and personality. His whole being is *entirely* an individual and *entirely* a person, although if we consider his individuality we are focusing on his undividedness in himself and on his distinctness from everything else, making him incommunicable and unique, self-enclosed and autonomous; whereas if we consider his personality we are focusing on his openness, through rationality, to *being*, to *knowledge*, and to *love*.

Laying stress on this personality, Maritain proceeds to the idea that each existent subject or supposit, in its individual existing reality, is for us "an inexhaustible well of knowability." (p. 74) By sense or experience, science or philosophy, we know the world of subjects, not as subjects, but in their role as objects. Objectifying them as something of the subject transferred into the state of immaterial existence of intellection in act, thus, we shall never get through knowing them.

Now the paradox of consciousness and personality is, as Maritain lays bare, that "each of us is situated precisely *at the centre* of this world. Each is at the center of infinity. And this privileged subject, the thinking self, is to itself not object but subject; in the midst of all the subjects which it knows only as objects, it alone is subject as subject." (pp. 75-76)

We are, thus, confronted by **subjectivity as subjectivity**.

2. SUBJECTIVITY AS SUBJECTIVITY

Knowledge of self as subject is by consciousness and reflexivity. St. Thomas explains that in spontaneous reflection, which is a prerogative of the life of the intellect, each of us knows that his soul exists, and grasps in a flash of illumination the singular existence of his subjectivity -- that *he is a self*. The intuition of being simultaneously evokes the intuition of subjectivity. And this Maritain considers an existential intuition which surrenders no essence of our self to us. (p. 76) We know our subjectivity -- *that which* we are -- by our phenomena, our operations, our flow of consciousness. But subjectivity *as subjectivity* is inconceptualisable, an unknowable abyss, and Maritain explains why.

It is unknowable by the mode of notion, concept, or representation, or by any mode of any science whatsoever -- introspection, psychology, or philosophy. How could it be otherwise, seeing that every reality known through a concept, a notion, or a representation is known as object and not as subject? Subjectivity as such escapes by definition from that which we know about ourselves by means of notions. (p. 77)

Some kind of knowledge of subjectivity, though, comes in two ways which Maritain briefly enumerates. The first is what may be called "unconscious or preconscious knowledge" -- knowledge of the 'concomitant' or spontaneous consciousness which, without giving rise to a distinct act of thought, envelopes *in actu exercito* our inner world insofar as it is integrated into the vital activity of our spiritual faculties. (p. 77)

The second is knowledge as formed and actually given to the mind -- knowledge by mode of inclination, sympathy, or connaturality which appears under three specifically distinct forms:

- (1) *practical knowledge*, which judges both moral matters and the subject itself, by the inner inclinations of the subject.
- (2) *poetic knowledge*, in which subjectivity and the things of this world are known together in creative intuition-emotion and are revealed and expressed together, not in a word or concept but in a created work.
- (3) *mystical knowledge*, which is directed not towards the subject but towards things divine, and does not of itself issue in any expression, but in which God is known by union and by connaturality of love, and in which this very love that becomes the formal means of knowledge of the divine Self simultaneously renders the human self transparent in its spiritual depths. (p. 78).

Maritain notes, however, that in none of these instances is the knowledge of subjectivity as subjectivity, however real it may be, a knowledge by mode of knowledge, i.e., by mode of conceptual objectisation. Neither is any of these considered philosophical knowledge, since every philosophy proceeds by concepts.

This is the sense in which Maritain holds that "subjectivity marks the frontier which separates the world of philosophy from the world of

religion." (p. 79) In dealing with epistemological relation of intelligence to object, philosophy knows subjects but only as objects. The divine Self is of no exception to this principle.

When philosophy, taking its start in the being of things, attains to God as the cause of being, it has then, thanks to ana-noetic knowledge, rendered the divine Self an object of philosophical knowledge expressed in concepts. These concepts do not circumscribe the supreme reality presented to them. On the contrary, that divine reality infinitely overflows the banks of conceptual knowledge. But philosophy knows thereby, or ought to know, that the reality thus objectified 'through a glass, darkly,' is the reality of a transcendent Self inscrutable in its being and its goodness, in its liberty and its glory. (p. 79)

It is one thing, adds Maritain, to know that God is a transcendent and sovereign Self; it is another thing to enter into the vital relationship in which created subjectivity is brought face to face with this transcendent Subjectivity and, trembling and loving, looks to it for salvation. This is the business of religion.

Religion is essentially that which no philosophy can be: a relation of person to person with all the risk, the mystery, the dread, the confidence, the delight, and the torment that lie in such a relationship. And this very relationship of subject to subject demands that into the knowledge of uncreated subjectivity which the created subjectivity possesses there shall be transferred something of that which the latter is as *subjectivity*, i.e., as that uncreated subjectivity is in the mystery of its personal life. (p. 80)

This is why all religion carries an element of revelation. God has opened a conversation with man. In the course of this conversation He has communicated certain truths which otherwise are inaccessible to the human mind. And it is "the First Truth in Person which makes known to man the mystery of the divine subjectivity."¹⁸ As before, this knowledge is still, to employ a Pauline phrase Maritain borrowed, "through a glass, darkly"¹⁹ and therein the divine Subjectivity is still

¹⁸Cf. p. 80. Maritain cites the New Testament passage: "*Unigenitus Filius, qui est in sinu Patris, Ipse enarravit.*" (Jn 1:18)

¹⁹1 Cor 13:12.

objectised in order to be grasped by us. The difference is that this time it is "in the glass of the super-analogy of faith" -- in concepts chosen by God Himself as His means of speaking to us about Himself -- until the end "every glass shall fall away" and "we shall see face to face," and then "we shall know truly as we are known." "Then we shall know the divine subjectivity as subjectivity in the vision in which the divine essence itself actuates our intellect and transports us in ecstasy within itself." (p. 81)

With these preliminary insights on the notion of **subjectivity as subjectivity**, Maritain now returns to the aforementioned, yet unresolved, paradox of consciousness and personality as regards the privileged subject's being situated at the center of the world. Hereafter he shifts to the first person point of view. He articulates the singular problem set by this situatedness of the privileged subject which knows itself as subject in respect of all other subjects, which it knows as objects. The problem is expressively enunciated by the contemporary English writer and dramatist, William Somerset Maugham, whose lines our author quotes:

To myself I am the most important person in the world; though I do not forget that, not even taking into consideration so grand a conception as the Absolute, but from the standpoint of common sense I am of no consequence whatever. It would have made a small difference to the universe if I had never existed.²⁰

The resultant force is a twofold image -- of myself and of my situation in respect of other subjects. With regard to my subjectivity in act, I *am* the center of the world. "My destiny is the most important of all destinies. Worthless as I know myself to be, I am more interesting than all the saints. There is me, and there are all the others." With regard to the world itself, on the other hand, I am at its fringe. "I know that I am one of the herd, not better than the rest, worth no more than the rest."

Expressed in somewhat similar terms: I figure the world to be *my* world, and myself, its shaping limit. But the fact of death forces me to face the contradiction that *my* world is not *the* world, for the latter will go on even when I am gone.

²⁰Maugham, *The Summing Up*, 1938.

The intricacy of this '*Gordian knot*' lies in the fact that subjectivity cannot be made to coincide. The subject oscillates rather miserably between these two perspectives, each of which is without grave consequences.

If I abandon myself to the perspective of subjectivity, I absorb everything into myself and, sacrificing everything to my uniqueness, I am riveted to the absolute of selfishness and pride. If I abandon myself to the perspective of objectivity, I am absorbed into everything and, dissolving into the world, I am false to my uniqueness and resign my destiny. (p. 82)

This knot can be untangled though, but not from below. Maritain believes that it is only from above that this antinomy can be resolved. "If God exists, then not I, but He is the centre," (p. 82) and this time not in relation to a certain particular perspective, as each created subjectivity is the center of the universe it knows, but to an absolute perspective, as the transcendent Subjectivity to which all subjectivities are referred. The resolution is such that I can know both that my destiny is of highest importance and that I am of no importance without falling into pride and without being false to my uniqueness respectively.

To this Maritain offers an explanation:

Because, loving the divine Subject more than myself, it is for Him that I love myself, it is to do as He wishes that I wish above all else to accomplish my destiny; and because, unimportant as I am in the world, I am important to Him; not only I, but all the other subjectivities whose loveliness is revealed in Him and for Him and which are henceforward, together with me, a *we*, called to rejoice in His life. (p. 83)

This is **self-transcendence** in the vertical dimension which involves a *radical de-centering of consciousness* from created subjectivity to transcendent Subjectivity, from self to the Great Self, to God. From the state of having my self as the main focus of my consciousness, I am drawn out of my self and towards the state of having God as the Great Center of my being and of all being and goodness. In a word, I am afforded a share in the Divine Vision. I take on, as it were, a God's-eye view of the whole universe, seeing all existents as He sees them in the ordered unity of being as a whole, and loving them all as He loves them

in the ordered unity of goodness as a whole.²¹ Even my very own self I know and love, no longer as the center of the world, but only as known and loved by God. And yet, it is in this de-centering of my self, or what dogmatic theology calls '*kenosis*' that I truly discover my deepest self—an age-old paradox very much in harmony with St. Paul's eloquent declaration, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me";²² and again, with Christ's loving invitation, "Lose yourself in Me and you will find yourself."²³ With this radical shift of focus of consciousness, this radical self-transcendence, "I can only surrender to God's transforming love, becoming entirely His in the rapturous communion of divine friendship."²⁴

As subject or person, I was made for this love, for this communion, for this friendship. I was meant to be known. This is the deepest desire of my being. For only in being fully known in a loving relationship can I fully be.

Now there are two modes by which I can be known: I, *as object*, and I, *as subject*. Maritain sets forth to expound the striking contrasts between knowledge of me by other men and knowledge of me by God.

I am known to other men. They know me, not as subject, but as object -- *in bits and pieces, in the slices of the present*. They are altogether unaware of my subjectivity as such, of its inexhaustible depth, of its existential complexity, of its immanent vitality. This mode of knowledge severs me from my self and wounds me in my identity, for to be known as mere object is to be always unjustly known. (p. 83)

At the same time, *I am known to God*. He knows me *whole and entire*, as subject. I am present to Him in all the depths and all the recesses of my subjectivity itself, *all in one gaze*. Only God knows me in this wise; to Him alone am I completely uncovered. For I am not

²¹*Summa Theologica* II-II, q.26, a.1 ad 3.

²²Gal 2:20.

²³Cf. Mt 16:25: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

²⁴Paul Hinnebusch, O.P., *Friendship in the Lord* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1974), p. 94.

uncovered even to myself: the more I know of my subjectivity, the more it remains obscure to me. On this score, if I were not known to God, no one would know me -- me in my truth, in my own existence, in my subjectivity. What this comes to is that no one would render justice to my being. Hence, my existence would be immersed in the injustice of the knowledge of my own ignorance of myself. (p. 84) And, as Maritain perceives its deeper consequences, such is the path that leads to what the contemporary Existentialists would invariably designate as the experience of a desperate solitude, the longing for death, the aspiration to total annihilation of the self.

Maritain adds a further good to knowing that I am known as subject in all the dimensions of my being. It is not only to know that my truth is known; it is also to know that I am *understood*. The idea that I am known to God Who searches the mind and probes the heart evokes in me that fear and trembling on account of the evil that is within me. But a deeper reflection summons up that consolation on account of the realization that God Who knows me in my subjectivity must also know the secret beauty of the human nature He has bestowed upon me, the intrinsic goodness of my being. God's exhaustive knowledge of me is a loving knowledge. Hence, to know that I am known to God is to experience not only justice but also mercy. (p. 85)

Ultimately I am ordained directly to God as to my Absolute End. This **relation of intentionality** towards another than oneself is the same self-transcendence which in the vertical dimension is directed towards God. My deepest self is made for a participation in the perfection of being. My intellect is ordained towards the truth, which is being, and my will, towards the good. And since the Source and Fullness of all being is Infinite Being, and that of all goodness is Infinite Goodness, I am drawn to know and to love Him Who is Infinity -- God Himself.

The need to be known is the need for intimacy. Embedded in me as a human person is the need for a fuller intimacy, for a deeper form of '*at-home-ness*' in communion with the other. In the end, God alone can give me the fullness of intimacy for which I was created. It is only in Him that I can be completely at home in my very subjectivity, for He alone knows and loves me down to the deepest recesses of my being. Only in intimacy with God am I my deepest *who I am* -- a person whose inherent dignity lies in my having been created in the image and likeness of God. Only

in communion with Him am I my truest self. Only He can fully satisfy my longing for the perfection of my being-- good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. The deepest form of the I-Thou relationship, then, has to be between me and God.²⁵

Moving onto an eschatological dimension Maritain conjectures that it must be one of the natural features of the state of damnation that the subject, engulfed in the sterile darkness of guilt and sin and haunted by his past, does not see himself in God and his whole life in the eternal instant in which everything is present. In contrast, when the subject enters the state of eternal happiness and reaches his Absolute End towards which he is directly ordained, he sees himself in God and in divine eternity with all the moments of his past life clearly made known to him in the actuality and the presentness of the instant in which they were lived, and all his acts rendered transluminous out of the freshness of his subjectivity. And in virtue of the vision in which his intelligence possesses the *Ipsum esse subsistens* -- this taking on of God's-eye view -- he knows not only himself and all his life in a sovereignly existential manner, but also other creatures whom in God he knows at last as subjects in the unveiled depths of his being. (pp. 86-87)

All in all, what Maritain has profoundly expressed by these considerations of the self-transcending of the subject is the so-called Creator-creature relationship which is "an existential exigency for any dialogue of love."²⁶ The possibility of a relation of intentionality between the Infinite and finite being is grounded in the Thomistic actualist conception of being as a dynamic tendency towards the Absolute. This is an appraisal of finite beings in their ontological relationships. St. Thomas it was who originated and elucidated in his metaphysical synthesis the central concept of **participation in esse**. It is this absolute dependence of actual participating beings on the Unparticipated Creative Being that makes their relationship to God an inevitable consequence of their being created or called into existence by Him. Thus did St. Thomas likewise expound the essence/existence structure of finite beings within a framework of existential relationship to God.

²⁵Hinnebusch, pp. 90-96.

²⁶Clark, *An Aquinas Reader*, p. 33.

All the more is this true for the subject, or the supposit, or the person who, precisely because of this prior network of participation in existence, is drawn to an open, dynamic, vertical relationship to God; and because he shares this existence with all other participants he is at the same time horizontally related to them as being-in-the-world.

3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SUBJECT

From the consideration of the subject in the vertical dimension, i.e., the relation of created subjectivity to the transcendent Subjectivity, Maritain shifts to the consideration of the same in the horizontal dimension, i.e., the relation of created subjectivity to another created subjectivity. Thus, he ushers in his Personalist view that for St. Thomas Aquinas to be a human person is to manifest the three central characteristics of *self-possession*, *self-communication* and *self-transcendence*.

"What reveals subjectivity to itself," declares Maritain, "is self-mastery for the purpose of self-giving." (p. 89) The terms '*self-mastery*,' and '*self-giving*,' otherwise rendered as '*self-possession*' and '*self-communication*,' together with '*self-transcendence*,' are what he holds to be the central characteristics of a personal being according to the mind of his Master-Teacher. And when our author asserts that *to be*, for St. Thomas, *is to be self-communicative* or self-sharing in a way appropriate to the nature of his being, what he is saying is that it is part of the very nature of being as existential act to overflow in self-communication to others through its characteristic action. Now if this is true of every being, all the more is this true of what the Angelic Doctor calls "*id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura*" and what Maritain refers to as "a universe in itself, a microcosm which possesses a higher ontological density than that whole universe" (p. 75) -- the person. Here, in one single breath, we touch the very roots of being, of the person, and of love.

3.1 Self-possession.

The substantial perfection, as has been earlier established, by which an individual substance becomes perfectly subsisting, a unity within itself, complete in the order of existence and, hence, autonomous and altogether incommunicable, is **subsistence**. This is the ontological root of the self-possession of personal being.

Maritain affirms this Thomistic doctrine when he considers personal being as that which subsists and exercises existence for itself, not only as other existents do, "but eminently, in self-possession."²⁷ As *a per-se ens*, a person is thereby a *per-se* agent by excellence, an agent *by itself* and *of itself*, that is, a being by its own ontological worth and right.

This ontological self-possession by which the person belongs to itself as autonomous subject in a community of existence expresses itself in two primary modes: a) in the order of knowledge, it is self-possessing through **self-consciousness** and b) in the order of action, it is self-possessing through **self-determination**.²⁸

In the order of knowledge this self-consciousness, according to the Thomistic tradition, is that "full return of the soul to itself."²⁹ This entails a kind of self-awareness or reflexivity which enables the person to say *I* meaningfully. When the person's act of existence as **presence** becomes luminous and transparent to itself, this becomes presence *to* and *for* itself, as a conscious self-presence.

In the order of action, this self-determination dovetails with moral responsibility. This is self-governance or freedom of the will which enables the person to say, "*I am responsible for my act.*" Herein lies the true dignity of every person as a moral agent: when he who is the ultimate, autonomous, responsible source of his own acts, freely and deliberately guides himself towards his end. It is in this sense that Maritain in his definition of 'person' writes of him as one "who holds himself in hand by his intelligence and will." This is the very essence of self-possession. For "*to hold oneself in hand*" is to exercise control or dominion over oneself, to be in-charge of one's own life, to be "*the master of my fate, the architect of my own destiny,*" to be what St. Thomas designates as "*dominus sui*" (master of itself).³⁰

²⁷*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 40.

²⁸W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "To Be is To Be Self-Communicative: St. Thomas' View of Personal Being," *Theology Digest*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Winter 1986), p. 444.

²⁹*De Veritate*, I, 9.

³⁰*Summa Theologica* I-II, q.6, a.2, ad 2; II-II, q.64, a.5, ad 3; *De Veritate*, V, 10.

Personality, therefore, signifies interiority to self and a free and responsible governance of self, which follows upon the nature of the rational soul. "Spirit," as Maritain rightly asserts, "is the root of personality," in the sense that when an existential being is endowed with a spiritual existence consisting of the faculties of the intellect and will, it *ipso facto* becomes a personal being. This makes the being capable of self-possession, "capable of containing itself thanks to the operations of the intellect and freedom, capable of super-existing by way of knowledge and of love."³¹

3.2. Self-communication.

The act of existence of any being is not just a static presence. Being superabounds existentially, overflows into existence, and "scatters its gifts and fruits in profusion." (p.52) By the natural dynamism of this initial act, its primordial *self-presence* or *presence in itself* becomes an *active presence*, actively presenting itself to the community of other existents.³²

Stemming from this existential meaning of being is the close link between **being**, as existential presence, and action. Action (what St. Thomas calls the 'second act' of being, its first act being existence), is seen as the *natural overflow* of real being, the natural *self-manifestation* and *self-revelation* both of its presence (its act of existence) and its made of presence (its essence). Hence, the classical adage: *Agere sequitur esse* (To act follows from, or naturally flows out of, to be).

A perusal of ancient Greek philosophy reveals that what St. Thomas has actually done is to incorporate into his Metaphysics of being as act the basic thrust of the whole Neo-Platonic tradition of the **self-diffusiveness of the good**: "*Bonum est diffusivum sui*." He has reversed the order of priority of terms, though. For, while Neo-Platonism maintains the primacy of the good with being as its derivative, St. Thomas, instead, holds the **primacy of the act of existence**; and since the good implicitly presupposes the actual existence of what is good, it must be grounded in this most radically immanent, ultimate act that grounds all else.

³¹*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 40.

³²Clarke, p. 442.

Every being, therefore, by virtue of its existence in act, has a natural propensity for self-communication through its characteristic action.

St. Thomas develops this theme in different writings.

It is the nature of every actuality to communicate itself insofar as it is possible. Hence, *omne agens agit quatenus est in actu* (every agent acts according as it is in actuality).³³

And again:

It follows upon the superabundance proper to perfection as such that the perfection which something has it can communicate to another.³⁴

And again:

Active power follows upon being in act, for anything acts in consequence of being in act.³⁵

And again:

Communication follows upon the very intelligibility (*ratio*) of actuality. Hence, every form is of itself incommunicable.³⁶

The core of this catena of classical citations is this: **action is necessarily the self-communication of being.** All action, inasmuch as it is manifestive of the particular being from which it emanates, is intrinsically and necessarily a communication, a revelation of this being. This opens up a metaphysical vision of the universe as a vast communication network linked together by the universal dynamic bond of action and interaction through which the inner act of self-presence of one being is made known to another. And when this same inner dynamism of self-diffusiveness, self-sharing, or self-communication is viewed not as a strict law of metaphysical necessity but as a connatural aptitude under the control of freedom, the being in question is a person.

³³*De Potentia Dei*, q.2, a.1.

³⁴*Summa contra Gentiles*, II, 6.

³⁵*Ibid.*, II, 7.

³⁶*In I Sent.*, D.4, q.1, a.1.

"Personality," Maritain asserts, "of its essence, requires a dialogue in which souls really communicate."³⁷ This harmonizes with the theme of **intersubjectivity** which lies at the heart of the philosophy of contemporary Existential Phenomenologists and Personalists. A dialogue requires the presence of at least a subject and an other. In this frame of dialogue, by the very fact that each one is a person who expresses himself to himself, each one has the need and the propensity, the dire indigence and the innate generosity, to "overflow into social communications in response to the law of superabundance inscribed in the depths of being, life, intelligence and love."³⁸

This leads to the second of Maritain's assertions: "Personality tends by nature to communion."³⁹ This is why a person seeks to live in a community, which is a communion of selves and which, then, becomes the primary locus of countless relational encounters that issue in a dialogue.

For the Angelic Doctor the pre-eminence of intersubjectivity or interpersonal relations has a clear foundation. Whereas for the I-Thou philosophy, the essence of man is *dialogical*, St. Thomas employs the similar term, *societal*.⁴⁰ Man is a social being by his very essence. No doubt, he did recognize the social nature of man, manifested in man's need for interdependence and integration in an ordered social matrix, not only for the satisfaction of the basic conditions of his existence, but more so for the full development of his person. Furthermore, St. Thomas has captured in a beautiful phrase the spontaneous natural joy there is in a community of persons: "*Delectabiliter vivere in communi*"⁴¹ (It is natural for human beings to take delight in living together). Nay more, he has accentuated the moment of love in the interpersonal relation or, as he would put it, in the social condition of human nature. From insight into social nature he has presented social love as a social virtue: "It is natural for all men to love one another."⁴²

³⁷*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 42.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁰Arno Anzenbacher, "Thomism and the I-Thou Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 11 (Winter 1967), p. 246.

⁴¹*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 114, a.2, ad 1.

⁴²*Summa contra Gentiles*. III. 117

Accordingly, this love is *relational*. It is never closed in upon itself; rather, this love is an open *encounter*, an open communication, an open 'we'. Personality, then, and this is the third of Maritain's assertions, naturally leads us to this great web of love in which we are woven together in interpersonal relations.

3.3. Self-transcendence.

Every communion is a transcendence -- transcendence in the sense of an opening up to relate with a larger presence.

In the mind of St. Thomas, necessarily inherent in communion is the element of *otherness*.⁴³ This propensity to open up, to reach out and to relate with the other and with others as constituting that larger presence implies an act of leaving behind one's natural self-centeredness in order to focus this centeredness on another self. All authentic love and friendship, in this sense, becomes a self-transcending act.

A good number of thinkers down through the ages have made various attempts to work out philosophies of love and friendship. St. Thomas himself has clearly and concisely developed one in his analysis of natural friendship and supernatural charity.⁴⁴

Communion of selves in the world -- this is the kind of relational matrix that results from self-transcendent acts in which existential presences are woven to coherence, the kind of encounter in which each person manifests and unfolds his essential being to himself, to another, and to the world. Every presence, thus, becomes a manifestation, an unfolding, an epiphany. And since every person is fully involved in this *symbiotic relationship* as an integrating center which is constantly pouring over into self-expression through its characteristic actions and at the same time actively assimilating all that it receives from the action of other subjects on it, every presence (*present*) can truly be considered a *gift*.

⁴³*Summa Theologica* II-II, q.25, a.4, c.

⁴⁴*Summa Theologica* I-II, qq.26-28; II-II, qq.23-27.

This is what Maritain means when he speaks of "the discovery of the basic generosity of existence."

Subjectivity, this essentially dynamic, living and open centre, both receives and gives. It receives through the intellect, by super-existing in knowledge. It gives through the will, by superexisting in love; that is, by having within itself other beings as inner attractions directed towards them and giving oneself to them, and by spirituality existing in the manner of a gift. (p. 89)

This kind of active super-existence of the immanent acts of knowing and loving is rendered intelligible only by way of analysis in terms of existence:

... knowledge as the immaterial super-existence in which the knower intentionally is, or becomes, the known;

love as the immaterial super-existence in which the beloved is, or becomes, in the lover, the principle of a gravitational pull or intentional connaturality by which the lover tends inwardly towards existential union with the beloved, as towards its own being from which it has been separated, and thus loses itself in the reality of the beloved. (p. 49)

Existence as self-giving -- such is the supreme level of existence according to the mind of Maritain. Only by love is this zenith attained. For love is "capable of giving and of *giving itself*; capable of receiving not only this or that gift bestowed by another, but even another self as a gift, another self which bestows itself."⁴⁵

Thus, St. Thomas describes the love of a subject as being the *first gift* he offers to another and the root of all other gifts.⁴⁶ This innate fecundity and generosity expressed in the giving of self speaks so eloquently of a person. Only a person is capable of giving, in the fullest degree possible, not only what he has, but even what he is -- his very self -- as a gift to others. Departing from this idea of existence as self-giving being the supreme level of existence, it is no wonder, then, that the person towers the degrees in the scale of participating beings and merits

⁴⁵*The Person and the Common Good*, p. 39.

⁴⁶*Summa Theologica* I. q. 38, a.2, c.

the title "that which is most perfect in all nature." By love he can give himself completely to beings who are to him, as it were, other selves.

By love, at the same time, "is shattered the impossibility of knowing another except as object." (p. 90) This has been the crux of the matter in Maritain's exposition. When I love another directly I shatter the little circle I form with myself where I would lodge the other simply as an idea. Union in love makes the being I love another '*myself*' for me, another subjectivity for me, another subjectivity that is mine. And in this communion of love by which I become actually present to another, I come to the awareness of that value I love in myself, of my '*I-ness*,' of myself as an '*I*,' a unique human person. I cure myself of the exclusiveness, the poverty and the solitude inflicted by my egoism in constituting myself the center of the universe, through the reaching out of another to me, recognizing me as a '*Thou*' and, at the same time, appealing to me as a '*Thou*,' thus inviting me to respond, not as a self-enclosed, self-centered being, but as a personal '*I*' open to the other. Thence is established that intimacy which means being fully at home with another. Home is where I am more fully known and loved just as I am. The more I become at home with another in love, the more I get to know myself. This at-homeness is nothing else but the interpersonal-social matrix of the '*I-Thou-We*' communion come to full stature through love.

But a person cannot manifest his very essence in an encounter and give himself in the order of knowledge and of love unless he first exists as a being which subsists and exercises existence for itself. **Essence, existence and encounter** -- these are a triad of moments in a single event -- the being of the person. "Just as '*essence*' implies '*potentiality for existence* actualized,' namely existence itself, so existence implies '*potentiality for relationship* actualized, namely encounter."⁴⁷

Hence, we are led to the significant discovery that "all being is caught up in the unending dialectic of the within and the without, the in-itself and the toward-others, the inward-facing act of existential presence in itself and to itself, and the outward-facing act of self-expression and self-communication to others. So too the whole life of personal being resolves around the basic polarity of presence to self and

⁴⁷Leonard C. Feldstein, "Reflections on the Ontology of the Person," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 9 (1969), p. 324.

presence to others -- a living synthesis of substantiality and relationality."⁴⁸

There is no radical disjoining of self and other. **Relatum** and **relationship** jointly constitute the whole datum of person. Correlative, concurrent and complementary, **self-possession**, **self-communication** and **self-transcendence** are not separately distinguishable phases but essentially interwoven processes of an integral activity -- the *be-ing* of the person. Paradoxically, the last process of self-transcendence turns out to be the fullest possible degree of self-possession.

And the ultimate mystery of being turns out to be: *TO BE IS TO BE SELF-GIVING AND LOVE-GIVING*.

Maritain beautifully captures this mystery of the *givenness of one's own self* in terms of love in prosaic lines:

Thus it is that when a man has been really awakened to the sense of being or existence, and grasps intuitively the obscure, living depth of the Self and subjectivity, he discovers by the same token the basic generosity of existence and realizes, by virtue of the inner dynamism of this intuition, that love is not a passing pleasure or emotion but the very meaning of his being alive.⁴⁹

The notion of **being**, therefore, far from negating that of **relation**, actually necessitates it, since it is in the metaphysical analysis of concrete being that we discover its absolute dependence upon God and its relative dependence upon others. In other words, **relation is consubstantial with existence**. And when we touch on this fully, we come face to face with the mystery of *love* -- the mystery that underlies the universe.

A person, accordingly, is meant to know and to be known, to love and to be loved -- the very reason why he *is*. And because he *is*, participating in the divine Act of Existence, he is likewise called to participate in the superabundance of the divine Plenitude of Existence Whose very existence is Intelligence and Love and Who does not merely give, but *gives Himself*; and it was, in the last analysis, in order to give

⁴⁸Clarke, p. 446.

⁴⁹Jacques Maritain, "A New Approach to God" in *Our Emergent Civilization*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), pp. 285-286.

Himself that He created the world. As St. Thomas says, it is not for Himself but for us that God made all things for His glory. And it is to this Plenitude of Love that a person opens himself so that he may continue through time God's work and communicate His overflowing goodness to others.

To be a human person, then, *is to be a gift, to be an epiphany of love.*

Maritain's recapitulation of the whole chapter formulated in seven *if*-clauses sets the seal on his stand that Thomism as a **Philosophy of Being** is not a Dialectic of Essences but a **Metaphysics of Esse** and a **Metaphysics of Love**.

If love and propensity are coextensive with being;
 if the good is an epiphany of being;
 if all things are at grips with existence;
 if all things pour out their being in action;
 if all things strive, each after its own fashion, towards the subsistent Good which infinitely transcends them;
 if, in all things, being and the transcendental properties of being tend towards that plenitude which is higher than any name, where all are identified in an intangible life, and exist in pure act --
 is it not clear that the philosophy of being is also, is identical with, the philosophy of the dynamism of being? . . .

Devoted to the mystery of the act of existing, this philosophy is by that very fact devoted to the mystery of action and the mystery of movement. (pp. 53-54)

Insistence on the existential character of Thomism is really resistance to the natural tendency of the human mind to remain on the level of abstraction. Now, if this is necessary for Metaphysics in general, as Maritain holds it to be, it is doubly so for what may be termed a **Metaphysics of Love**.

When all is said and done, it is only honest to admit that the Angelic Doctor's thematic treatment still falls short of the Existentialist and Personalist viewpoint on subjectivity and the person; hence, its deepening remains as one of the major tasks of contemporary Thomists.

Nevertheless, it must be equally pointed out that the thought of St. Thomas, which abhors any form of Irrationalism and ever follows the path of philosophical reflection, provides the real metaphysical framework for a true Philosophy of Subjectivity and possesses the vitality and the power to keep pace with the thrust of the **I-Thou Philosophy**. This is precisely the measure of a philosopher's greatness: the ability of his system to cope with problems he did not consider during his lifetime. St. Thomas has left the field open to discovery after having prepared the rational frames for a proper coordination with authentic philosophical knowledge. As a result, Thomism as an 'open' metaphysical synthesis can readily absorb the positive values of dialogical thought -- a *living spirit* which can assimilate all other manifestations of the human spirit.

With the concepts of **subjectivity** and the **person** seen in this Maritainian perspective, we come to understand the sense in which our contemporary French Thomist speaks of St. Thomas Aquinas' "*existential philosophy*," of the Angelic Doctor's '*existentialist*' frame of mind, of a **THOMIST EXISTENTIALISM**.

The editor of *An Aquinas Reader*⁵⁰ has done a considerably good job with her apparently paradoxical opening line, which we may well borrow for a fitting bottomline -- originally written as a *grabber*, now rewritten as a *clincher*:

THE ESSENTIAL AQUINAS IS EXISTENTIAL.

⁵⁰Mary T. Clark, ed., *An Aquinas Reader* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).