

## Toward a Postmodern Recovery of “Person”

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In his encyclical letter on *Faith and Reason*, the late Pope John Paul II pointed out that the “delicate question” of what means “postmodernity” for philosophy requires that we start with a clear understanding of what defines philosophical modernity.<sup>1</sup> And in philosophy, “modernity” means the “turn to the subject”, especially as came to be thematized under the moniker “epistemology”, or “theory of knowledge”, especially as the Rationalism and Empiricism of early modern philosophy came to be synthesized and systematized in the work of Immanuel Kant.

According to modern theories of knowledge, everything that the mind directly knows of any object is something that the mind itself makes, and these mental representations at which cognition terminates are the *ne plus ultra* of human understanding. Kant criticized Descartes and Locke for being “too subjective” in equating objects with ideas; and to move from that early modern “subjective idealism” to his own “objective idealism”, he introduced not only *relations* between psychological subjectivity and objectivities, but also the a-priori “forms of understanding” needed to account for the necessities that science found in the objects of its investigations. Of course, “objectivity” in Kant was but a veil of rationally structured sense perceptions hiding from view the things of the world, with no way to get “beyond” or “behind” that veil.

But the *problema pontis* that modern epistemology created —how to get from the representation veil within our consciousness to anything existing behind or beyond that veil— turned out to admit of no solution. And it is one of the great ironies of intellectual history that the modern

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<sup>1</sup> “Perdifficilis quaestio”: JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, 91.

philosophers tirelessly worked to persuade others of the truth of their view quite without realizing that *if*, indeed, the human mind worked in the fashion that they claimed it functioned, *then* there is no such thing as communication beyond the realm of brute force physical interaction. For each of us, in the immortal words of Leibniz (the only one of the moderns who seems fully to have recognized and embraced the solipsism that modern epistemology entailed as its inescapable consequent), is a “monad without windows”. For *subjectivity*, after all, is everything that separates us from the rest of the universe; and *objectivity* obtains wholly within consciousness as a subjective aspect or mode thereof. Thus “objectivity”, epistemologically considered, on every mainstream modern account, is no more than an extension of subjectivity in just that sense that separates us from our surroundings and from one another within consciousness; each “consciousness” is a bubble surrounding and enclosing each of us with our own thoughts and objects —a casket, in effect.

That is why, as I have said<sup>2</sup>, “the moment people began to thematize their experience of communication and to think of communication as such as something real, the moment they began to think of *that* experience as a proper starting point for philosophy, the days of modern philosophy were numbered.” For communication cannot be real unless relations are real, and —with a rare unanimity— the moderns all concurred with Ockham’s view that relations are no more than comparisons among objects made by the mind, pure and simple mind-dependent beings.

Now few things, if anything, are as unpredictable as the weather at the time of change of seasons. What one day seems like spring next day seems like winter all over again. And so it is with the present intellectual climate as we stand on the threshold, the time of transition, between modernity and postmodernity as eras of philosophical culture, as “seasons” of intellectual life. Modern philosophy is not about to fade quietly into the night. All sorts of pretensions at “postmodernity” or “being postmodern” are about us<sup>3</sup>, yet it remains that the majority of these pretensions are not *postmodern* at all but rather what I should call “ultra-modern” —utmost extensions of the modern theory, Kantian to the core, that only relations (and relations as mind-dependent) constitute

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<sup>2</sup> J. DEELY, *Four Ages of Understanding...*, 589, *inter alia*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. DEELY, *Four Ages of Understanding...*, 611 text and note 1.

the world of human awareness and content, including the content of “personality” and “person”.

“In the semeiotic theory of the nineties”, for example, Gerard Deledalle ventured the opinion that for postmodernity<sup>4</sup> “there will be no ground, except inside the sign-action, far away from Being and without any relation to Being”, that “there will no longer be any substance, but only relations, productive of objects within a system of signs in process.”

But in speaking thus, I think Professor Deledalle did no more than to show once again the incapacity of late-modern idealism to realize the distinctive perspective of the doctrine of signs as perforce —by virtue of the very demands of its subject-matter— arising from a standpoint no longer tied to either side of the old *ens reale / ens rationis* distinction, but rather a standpoint transcending anything thematically to be found not only in modern philosophy but equally<sup>5</sup> in premodern thought. This point, central to the matter of signs, Peirce presciently pointed out in the very opening paragraphs of his *Tractatus de Signis* of 1632.<sup>6</sup> To be locked into a perspective restricted to the latter branch of this distinction has been the characteristic of modernity, even as near-exclusive preoccupation with the former branch of the distinction characterized ancient and medieval concerns, as well as, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that “Second Thomism”<sup>7</sup> in the modern, national language stage of philosophy’s development.

<sup>4</sup> G. DELEDALLE, Peirce’s Sign, 293-294.

<sup>5</sup> “Equally”, but with this difference: whereas the standpoint needed properly to develop a doctrine of signs is found neither in modern thought nor in ancient Greek together with medieval Latin thought prior to modernity, in the case of modern thought the needed standpoint is precluded in principle, whereas in premodern thought (particularly after Augustine) the absence is a matter of fact but not an exclusion in principle.

<sup>6</sup> J. POINSOT, *Tractatus de Signis*, B. I, q. 1.

<sup>7</sup> If we consider the development of a commentary tradition on the works of St Thomas as “Thomism”, then the “First Thomism” was the Latin-language tradition initiated by John Capreolus (c. 1380–1444) and extending continuously to John Poinsot (1589–1644). Over the modern period, as has been well and often documented, “Thomism” properly speaking disappeared, its place taken by the work of Suarez (esp. 1597) mistaken to accurately represent both Thomas and “First” or Latin Age Thomism. Not until 1897 with the call for restoration by Leo XIII did we see a genuine effort of recovery of Thomas’ own work in the movement known to history as “Neothomism” which developed in the modern languages over the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but especially in the interval between the Church Councils Vatican I (8 December 1869–1870 October 20) and Vatican II (11 October 1962–1965 November 21). In the years

Whatever may be said of any philosophy “transcendental” in a primarily modern sense (a “philosophy of the subject”), or of Deledalle’s “semiotic theory of the nineties” insofar as it betrays unbroken ties with the epistemological paradigm defining modernity (as not only in the work of Saussure himself but also in the work of Derrida, Foucault, and any number of those ultramoderns falsely even if commonly<sup>8</sup> called “postmodern”), the semiotic development of the doctrine of signs in the definitively postmodern perspective and paradigm of a noetic<sup>9</sup> proper to semiotics guarantees that the 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to a new age of understanding, an understanding that at once *goes beyond* modernity’s “ne plus ultra” and *retrieves* the whole of medieval and ancient thought, thus restoring to philosophy its history as a whole.

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after Vatican II, Neothomism remained strong indeed but began to flounder, by reason of its unbalanced focus solely on the matter of restoring *ens reale* as “knowable” in the wake of Kant’s denial and the 19<sup>th</sup> century triumph of philosophical idealism in modern intellectual culture. Inasmuch as the reversal of that triumph was the very purpose of Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* call of 4 August 1879 formally initiating a late-modern “Thomistic” movement, Neothomism can only be regarded as a great success. Yet its all-but-complete ignorance of the Latin Age First Thomism, in particular the culmination of the Latin Thomistic tradition in the work of John Poincaré as, in Maritain’s correct assessment (1953: vi), “the latest and the most mature of the geniuses who explained St. Thomas”, was a great mistake. Ironically, as it now turns out with the recovery of Poincaré’s original demonstration of relation’s singularity as the key to semiosis, this neglect on the Neothomists’ part proves to be the principal reason why “Neothomism” has entered the historical museum of the modern era in philosophy, albeit as one of modernity’s last and greatest achievements, preparatory in spite of itself for yet a “Third Thomism”. This “Third Thomism” is the distinctively and definitively *postmodern* development of philosophy within the global culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by reason of Poincaré’s distinctive contribution, with his *Tractatus de Signis*, of the “missing link” (as SEBEOK put it, 1982: x) between the ancients and the moderns in the passage of philosophy beyond the *ne plus ultra* epistemology of the moderns and the establishment—centrally through the doctrine of signs—of an irreducibly *postmodern* era of philosophy within intellectual culture wherein the objective dependence of socially constructed reality upon *ens rationis* no less than the objective knowability in science of *ens reale* can be taken fully into account.

<sup>8</sup> See J. DEELY, *Four Ages of Understanding...*, 611, text and note 1.

<sup>9</sup> The term from Maritain that I prefer as alternative to the tainted term “epistemology” as an offspring of the modern contrast to ontology: cf. J. DEELY “Realism and epistemology”. From the semiotic standpoint, epistemology amounts to no more at best than “a midmost target”, as SEBEOK (*Semiotics in the United States*, 2) remarked, in contrast to the “whole story” that it constitutes for modern philosophy.

## I. Defining Postmodernity, or What Constitutes Its Frontier?

There is no better characterization of the “line” separating modernity (as including Neothomism) from postmodernity than the remark made by Pope Benedict XVI in his lowly days as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the man who pronounced that “the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality”.<sup>10</sup>

Now what, philosophically, does that mean? How can relation, *ens minimum* in Aquinas’ terms, be equiprimordial with *ens in se* or substance? Or is Ratzinger simply referring to the theological doctrine of the Persons of the Trinity subsisting as relations within the single unity of the godhead?

Not at all. He is referring to the fact that a proper understanding of substance in general, and of the human person in particular as a singular variety of substance<sup>11</sup>, cannot be reached without a thorough re-thinking of the “reality” of relation, a re-thinking that can succeed only to the extent that it arrives at a realization of the *singularity* of relation in the order of *ens reale*, with the *further* realization —and this is no doubt the *key*, the *new* requirement distinguishing postmodern from modern philosophy not only within intellectual culture as a whole but also, and specifically, on the question of “person”— that it is relation which constitutes the *entire* reality of objectivity within human understanding, both that aspect of objectivity which coincides with the being of things in themselves<sup>12</sup> thanks to the nature of *sensation* as preceding logically (and ontologically) any involvement of animal consciousness with the “mental (other) representations” or “concepts” that animals form in order to interpret sensation, and that aspect of objectivity which transcends (in the sense of being irreducible to) the boundaries of the physical environment as an *ens reale* common to the whole of life — that aspect of objectivity designated by the term *ens rationis*, which Jacques Maritain, speaking

<sup>10</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 132. See the comments in S. J. CLARKE, *Person and Being*, 2ff.

<sup>11</sup> In the relational notion of person, considered RATZINGER (*ibidem*), “lies concealed a revolution in man’s view of the world.”

<sup>12</sup> Yes, the very being declared “unknowable” by the tenets of modern epistemology.

from within the perspective of Neothomism, frankly admitted: “I do not know how to translate”.<sup>13</sup>

Well, neither did anyone else in Neothomism achieve a proper translation of the term<sup>14</sup>, with the difference that Maritain at least was aware that there was a problem here. In Neothomism you will find *ens rationis* all but universally translated literally and superficially as “being of reason” without a second thought, in blithe ignorance of the fact, underscored by Poinsot<sup>15</sup>, that *all* animals, whether brute or rational —that is to say, any animal which moves about in the environment, including animals without any intellectuality or “reason” whatsoever— *absolutely depend* upon the formation of *entia rationis* to survive and to thrive, in the absence of which formations they could never escape early death, for want of being able to hunt or find shelter.

My main focus in this essay is not on history, but on the future, on explaining the requirements for any philosophy truly to be called “postmodern”, especially in the matter of understanding “person”. And my claim is quite simply that it is the understanding of relation that draws this “line of separation”, whence a historical comment on the point, however brief, is unavoidable.

In ancient times, the first to thematize the problem of relation as a mode of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$  was Aristotle, and he had a time of it. His first two at-

<sup>13</sup> It is true that, in the succeeding two paragraphs, Maritain tosses out no less than five alternative attempts at a rendering, only one of which —“*ideal entity*”— even comes close the requirements of the Latin expression “philosophically speaking”. The situation reminds me of Maritain’s assertion in 1924 that *species impressae* are formal signs, thus proving that, as of that time, he had either not read at all or not yet carefully enough read J. POINSOT, *Tractatus de Signis*, B. II, q. 3, “Utrum species impressa sit signum formale”. In *Distinguer pour Unir*, J. MARITAIN retracted his error on this technical point, though without quite realizing the far implications: see J. DEELY 2008 for more-or-less full details! In this case, the same can be said regarding *ens rationis* of J. POINSOT, *Tractatus de Signis*: First Preamble, a. 1, where Poinsot told Maritain (or any other reader of the passage at 48/21–22): quod “solum obiective dicitur esse ...”. For a full development (in fact, for the first and so far only full development so far as I am aware) see J. DEELY, *Purely Objective Reality*, 350–355.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion and notes on this point in J. DEELY, “Editorial AfterWord” and critical apparatus to *Tractatus de Signis...*: EA 409–410, 465–467, 481–485, text and notes; also *Four Ages of Understanding*, 350–355.

<sup>15</sup> J. POINSOT, *Tractatus de Signis*, First Preamble, a. 3, “Per Quam Potentiam et Per Quos Actus Fiant Entia Rationis”, 65–76, esp. 66/46–68/34. See then J. DEELY, *Four Ages of Understanding*, “Nonbeing in Latin philosophy”, 350–354.

tempts, in fact, undermined his very notion of substance as the basis of the categories of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ . Finally, on try three<sup>16</sup>, he succeeded to pin down the fact that the uniqueness of relation within the order of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$  lies in the fact that relation is not a being "in" something, whether in itself (substance as the subject of existence) or in another (inherent accident as the subjective modifications individualizing substance and locating its position and posture among its surroundings). Rather, wholly and solely (as far as its positive and distinctive being is concerned), relation is a "being toward" another (*adesse*), irreducible to, however dependent upon, "being in" (*inesse*, whether *in alio* or *in se*).

In medieval times, when the Latins, beginning mainly with Boethius, took up the question of Aristotle's categories of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ , they introduced the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, identifying (rightly) only the former with  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ , using (at least in the work of Aquinas himself and Poinset) *non ens* as a synonym for *ens rationis*. And from the start, among the Latins was entertained the suspicion that relation as *adesse* (i.e., relation in its positive contrast with the *inesse* of substance and the inherent accidents) might reduce to *ens rationis*, specifically an *ens rationis* that results whenever the mind *compares* two objects in this or that feature of each of them.

Aquinas and others (notably Scotus) harbored no such suspicion. They recognized full well that relation as an *ens rationis* had as such no place in categories of *ens reale*, and that Aristotle in finally positing relation as a mode of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$  was specifically adjudging that relations in their positive and distinctive being as "toward" another, even though *founded upon* some or other inherent accident, and terminating also at some other inherent accident or characteristic of an existing subject, could not *reduce* to either or both of those subjective characteristics as, on the one hand, founding or basing the relation and, on the other hand, terminating the relation. "In itself", i.e., in its proper, positive, and distinct character as a mode of *ens reale*, the relation itself (as an *ens reale*) was over and above, because "between", two existing substances or aspects thereof.

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<sup>16</sup> For full details, including Aristotle's Greek texts, see J. DEELY, "Editorial After-Word" and critical apparatus to *Tractatus de Signis*, EA 472–474, text and esp. notes 112, 113, and 114 for the Greek.

In modern times, the consensus of the mainstream moderns (without exception) was that the early suspicion, as concretized, thematized, and settled in the work of William of Ockham, was in fact the truth of the matter: relation itself as a “being toward” had no *ens reale* status in its distinctive positive being, none at all save in its subjective fundament and subjective terminus. There is no “being between” in *ens reale*; anything seen as “being between” is so seen and constituted by the comparative activity of awareness. That was the essence of nominalism, and the seed of the *problema pontis* between mind and world; for without real relations, when one focally considers the matter, it springs out like a lion to its prey that there can be no real communication, no intersubjectivity at all beyond the “brute force” of subjective interactions, as when a meteor crashes to earth, a panther eats a lamb, etc.

To move beyond modernity in this matter, then, it is not enough to recognize intersubjectivity<sup>17</sup>, though that is as a first step essential for the overcoming of nominalism<sup>18</sup> as a distinctive mark of modernity. Still, merely to restore in thought relation to the intersubjective status of a mode of *ens reale* does not so much move us *beyond* modernity as move us *back* to the middle ages, exactly after the manner of Neothomism. To get *beyond* modernity in the understanding of relation that is essential for establishing a new —a “postmodern”— understanding of person, oddly enough, we need to achieve the standpoint indicated by Poinset as required for achieving a doctrine of signs, namely, a standpoint which *transcends the distinction* between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*; and such a stand-

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<sup>17</sup> See J. DEELY, *Purely Objective Reality*, Part II, Chap. 9, “Why Intersubjectivity Is Not Enough”, 155–178

<sup>18</sup> Not to mention those naive and numerous thinkers who, to this day, persist in the delusion that “conceptualism” is an alternative to “nominalism”, despite Ch. S. PEIRCE’s admonition (CP 1.27) concerning the fact that “Many philosophers call their variety of nominalism, ‘conceptualism’; but it is essentially the same thing; and their not seeing that it is so is but another example of that loose and slapdash style of thinking that has made it possible for them to remain nominalists. Their calling their ‘conceptualism’ a middle term between realism and nominalism is itself an example in the very matter to which nominalism relates. For while the question between nominalism and realism is, in its nature, susceptible of but two answers: yes and no, they make an idle and irrelevant point which had been thoroughly considered by all the great realists; and instead of drawing a valid distinction, as they suppose, only repeat the very same confusion of thought which made them nominalists.”

point is provided only with the realization of the fact that relation in its positive being is *indifferent to the difference* between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, by reason of the fact that *surrounding circumstances alone*, not the positive being unique to and distinctive of relation as a “being toward” (*esse ad*), determine to which order the relation belongs; whence it is that *one and the same relation with positive being or essence unchanged* will in one set of circumstances be an *ens reale* and in a changed set of circumstances an *ens rationis* (whatever that is!).

But that is not all. One has also to recognize, even in the order of *ens reale*, the difference between a subjective characteristic which founds a relation *as* subjective characteristic versus *as* fundament of the relation, and also between the subjective characteristic which *terminates* the relation *as* subjective characteristic versus *as* terminating or terminus of the relation, for this reason: While a relation to be intersubjective in the order of *ens reale* must have a fundament and a terminus both subjectively existing, it is only during the time that the relation itself actually obtains that the subjective characteristics in question obtain precisely *as* fundament and *as* terminus.

This —that the fundament *as* fundament (regardless of its subjective status), as also the terminus *as* terminus (also *regardless* of its subjective status) is such only *insofar and as long as* the relation itself (as and “in” its *adesse*) exists— is easy to see, but only once one has considered the fact that two things, A and B, “similar” by reason of their shape, cease to be similar if B ceases to exist, *and yet the shape of A, which was fundament of a relation while B existed, is in no way subjectively modified by the ceasing to be of B, while yet it ceases to be a fundament*. The same is true of that same subjective characteristic, the shape of A, insofar as it *was* the terminus of the reciprocal relation of similarity founded on B’s shape.

## II. Theoretical Implications Distinctively Postmodern

So what? Well, the point becomes important when we recall the observation of the medieval schoolmen, most famously bandied about in late modern times by Franz Brentano, to wit, that psychological states differ from physical states in that they cannot exist without being “of” or “about” something (other than themselves), which is to say that they cannot be without being fundaments of a relation to an object, the object

thus being the terminus, regardless of whether it *also* has a *further* subjective dimension of “reality”. Thus the “*passiones animae*” differ from the “*passiones corporis*” precisely in this: that the former *necessarily* while the latter only *contingently* provenate<sup>19</sup> relations, while in every relation, necessary or contingent, there have to be the three elements of a foundation, the relation itself, and a terminus. Since, as the medievals pointed out, objects and things differ in this, that the former are necessarily while

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<sup>19</sup> From J. DEELY, *Semiotic Animal*, xiii: “Here too, perhaps, is the place to mention a neologism introduced into my analysis from the Latin semiotic of John Poinset, namely, the English verb-form *provenate*. This verb in English derives from the Latin infinitive ‘provenire’, to come or issue forth, appear, arise, be produced; its closest relative in existing English being the noun-form ‘provenance’ (‘where something originated or was nurtured in its early existence’). Hence, as will appear, a relation *provenates* from its fundament only *contingently* in *ens reale* restrictively conceived, but *necessarily* when the fundament is a psychological state. Thus, as psychological states cannot be without being ‘of’ or ‘about’ something other than themselves, so as qualities they belong to subjectivity as entangled inescapably with suprasubjectivity, but they do not depend upon a *subjectively existing terminus* in order to give rise to relations. In this case, the relation *provenates*— i.e., issues forth from or ‘on the foundation of’ the psychological quality —*necessarily* regardless of any subjectivity on the side of its terminus; for just as terminus as terminus and fundament as fundament equally depend upon the suprasubjective being of relation *alike* when the terminus *also* has a subjective dimension *and* when it does *not* have such a dimension, when a quality —besides being subjectively inherent— is a fundament necessarily and so not just contingently gives rise to an actual relation, that relation *in turn*, while making the fundament a fundament (as formally distinct even though materially identical with the subjective state as inherent accident founding the relation), cannot be except as *also* making a terminus, even though that terminus is only contingently and not necessarily *further* given subjectively as an instantiation in its own right of the subjective dimension of *ens reale*. Relations which arise contingently, the only kind considered in Aristotle’s circumscription of relation as an irreducible categorial mode of  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\upsilon$ , in other words, *necessarily* have a terminus which is *also* a subjective accident; but the necessity in the case directly bears only the question of the relation’s *intersubjectivity*, not its presupposed and more basic *suprasubjectivity*, without which latter ‘feature’ it could not be a relation at all, but with which it may, or may not, depending solely upon circumstances, be intersubjective *as well*. As we will see, especially in Chapter 8 (notably Section 8.3.), this is the ‘*singularity*’ of relation which makes semiosis, or the action of signs, possible in the first place, because it is the ground of the prior possibility of the being of signs which semiosis is consequent upon, and which also provides (in anthroposemiosis) the ground of the prior possibility of that conformity between ‘thought’ and ‘thing’ in which truth consists. But here is the occasion only to make the terminological point of how I have introduced ‘provenate’ as an English verb, leaving the theoretical implications and context of the stipulation for the body of the work to follow.”

the latter only contingently are involved in a relation to a finite knower, we have the answer to the actually quite puzzling question of how objects need not exist at all in order to be public and to influence the course of human affairs, as in the case of an execution for a murder the convicted in fact is innocent of having committed, or the manifold influences of myth and fictional figures in human history, the successful lie, etc.

Of the three elements without which there is no relation —fundament, relation itself (*esse ad*) as over and above subjectivity, and terminus— it is evident that object is first of all and normally the third element, rather than the first or second. When the object is terminus of an intersubjective relation, i.e., a relation in the order of *ens reale*, then the terminus as such, while having its being *as* terminus from the reality of the relation, *also* as terminus has its own subjective dimension as an accident of an existing substance. For example, if one person is on the way to meet another person, he or she of course assumes that the other person is alive and will be there at the appointed time and place. The second person is an object of the first person’s awareness, yes, but that same object of a cognitive relation is also, as an existing person, a thing. In the *absence* of the *thing* in question (the second person), of course, that same thing (the second person) as *terminus of the affective and/or cognitive relation* is as object *present* to the knower. In both cases, moreover, both as subjectively existing thing and as object —and here is “the heart of the matter”— the relation terminates over and above the subjectivity of the knower, even though as object (while not as thing) that other person is dependent upon a quality —a psychological state— which is part of the *knower’s* subjectivity. The person absent on the way to being met is present as object dependent upon but not reducible to the subjectivity of the other person.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> As we will see shortly below, relation has no secondary matter directly attaching to it. For this reason, objective realities as the terminus of relations, whether or not they are also physical and subjective realities, participate in the uniqueness of relation itself as unaffected in its positive being by *distance*. As J. POINSOT summarily puts it (*Tractatus de Signis*, 85/11–12), “far or near, a son is in the same way the son of his father”. By reason of this same “immateriality” respecting secondary matter, relations impart to their terminus as terminus, even when it has the further being of material individuality, a potentiality for being known intellectually, and not only by the sense-perception shared among all animals, “quia ex hoc est aliquid intelligibile actu, quod est immateriale”, as Th. AQUINAS remarks (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, a. 3, in c) leading up to his

Dependent upon the psychological state, yes, but not *reducible* to it: the psychological state is fundament of a relation *terminating* at the other person, both as object and as thing while the other person lives, as object only and no longer as thing when the other person has died. Obviously, what determines whether the other person is living or deceased are circumstances in which the relation is *involved* but which the relation in no way *determines*. That is why those circumstances, while the other person lives, makes the relation an *ens reale*, while once the person dies those circumstances make the relation be rather an *ens rationis*; but under both sets of circumstances the object as terminus of an *esse ad* remains and continues as terminus even when and though the terminus ceases to have a subjective dimension and has become a purely objective being.

Now we come to Ratzinger's point that "relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality" along with substance.

How so? Is not substance the most solid and independent form of mind-independent being, by comparison with which real relations are, in the words of St Thomas, the feeblest and least aspects of *ens reale*? How can relations be "equally valid and primordial" with substance?

Because, to begin with, substance cannot exist without interaction with its surroundings ("*agere sequitur esse*"), and these interactions directly give rise in every case to relations, some of which —like the lungs to oxygen— are essential to the continued existence of the substance in question, while all of which contribute through their foundations to the individual identity of the substance even when, as intersubjective realities or modes, they have passed away. Physical relations, generically dyadic, may be of their nature contingent in the sense of able to come and go, but they are nonetheless essential in differing circumstances to the existence of the subjects related, however temporarily. If there were *no* relations, there would be *no* finite substances, period; for action follows on being, and relations follow on action and passion. (And that, incidentally, is the meaning and point of the Latin expression, *relatio secundum dici*.<sup>21</sup>)

Psychological relations —relations having psychological states as their fundament— are even more important to the animal organism than the

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posit of the need that a distinctive action of intellect is required in order for the intelligibility of material being to be formally constituted.

<sup>21</sup> See J. POINSOT, *Tractatus de Signis*, Second Preamble; and note below.

over-all (but sometimes essential) contingent relations of living being to physical surroundings. For it is the psychological relations, both cognitive and cathectic, that give rise to objective surroundings as something in principle distinct from even though (by reason of sensation) partially inclusive of the subjectivity of the physical surroundings. Without an awareness of objects in their distinction and difference from things, the animal would not be able to go looking to find food when food is not physically at hand, or home when it has gone away from home. And if sensation in its difference from perception did not include a direct awareness of the physically present as within objectivity, the animal could not know even when it had found what it was searching for!

Higher still, and more important in that sense: it is the cognitive and cathectic relations arising from psychological states that give the animal its identity and distinctive “personality” as an individual within a species. Here is where we verge upon the postmodern advance in our understanding of “person”, by contrast both with the modern epistemologies (which in principle, by reason of their underlying assumption that objects are in every case products simply of mental representations as a veil behind which things in themselves stand as inaccessible to direct awareness or knowledge), and with the medieval understanding of “person” as (simply) a *supposit* — an existing substance — of a rational nature.<sup>22</sup>

The “higher” animal, brute or human, comes from the womb with no identity other than its biological one as a substance of a given species. Immediately it begins to interact with its surroundings, and new relations impossible within the womb develop between the animal individual and its surroundings. These relations “shape” its development, presupposing of course (and no doubt) whatever dispositions and talents the animal has from its “nature” as not only a member of this or that species, but as an individual with distinctive inclinations, talents, and gifts. Of the physical relations into which the organism enters, some are constant (the dependence upon atmospheric pressure, breathing, digestion of food), others come and go; but even the ones that “come and go” leave in the

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<sup>22</sup> Th. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 3 in c, “Person signifies ... a subsistent individual of a rational nature”, following BOETHIUS’s work of 512AD *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, ch. 3 (in PL 64, 1343): “Persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia.”

qualities and quantities that were their fundamentals the *traces* on the basis of which the scientific researcher can reconstitute as mind-dependent objective relations the very same relations that in the past *were* physical instantiations of intersubjectivities often not objective at all during their time as intersubjective.<sup>23</sup> We see thus that “suprasubjectivity” is the more essential characteristic of relation in its positive essence as *adesse*, for all relations are suprasubjective, while only relations obtaining here and now among physically existing subjects are intersubjective —and this regardless of whether they are also objective or not objective (i.e., not contained within any finite awareness)<sup>24</sup>, at all.

Here we come to a second crucial point regarding the equiprimordiality of relation with substance for understanding the identifying being of persons: both substance and relation are alike in being neither of them directly instantiable to sense.

Substance, as composite of prime matter and substantial form, too, is not directly sensible. Directly sensible are only the qualities and quantities exhibited by “secondary matter”, the consequence of quantity itself as the first accident of material substance mediating all other accidents of that substance. Thus, all animals have a direct awareness of sensible qualities and quantities, because these are directly sustained by secondary matter: everything and anything that can be seen and touched is an exemplification of secondary matter. But that secondary matter presupposes and depends upon primary matter together with a substantial form: that is something that can be understood but in nowise directly illustrated to sense. Thus substance is an intellectual inference, but not as such directly sensible.

Well, the same is true of relation. Relation in its formal being, even as substance in *its* formal being, has no secondary matter. That is why, exactly as with substance, relation in its distinctive and positive being, can be

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<sup>23</sup> This is the singularity of relation which explains the prior possibility of truth as correspondence, notice. Forensics is possible in police work because substances are *relationes secundum dici* even though not *secundum esse*! Subjectivity is, comparatively speaking, the most “independent” mode of finite being, but without *intersubjectivity* subjectivity cannot survive, and intersubjectivity depends upon suprasubjectivity as the particular mode depends upon the general mode.

<sup>24</sup> See J. DEELY, *Purely Objective Reality*, for full systematic treatment of this crucial point.

*understood* but cannot be *perceived by sense*. Sense can be aware only of what has directly secondary matter, whence animals other than human animals can be aware of objects only as sensibly instantiable. They can know *related things*, but not *relations in their distinction from related things (or things in their distinction from objects, for that matter)*. And since signs consist in triadic relations uniting sign-vehicles to significates for the animal, the animal other than human, in Maritain's famous formula ("Language and the Theory of Sign", 53), "make use of signs but without knowing that there are signs", i.e., "signs" in the sense that relations constitute the formal being of any sign as such. It is the ability intellectually to know relations in their difference from related things, and hence to deal with relations directly in thought and not only with sensible objects related, that enables human animals not only to use signs (like any other animal) but also to "know that there are signs". And since it is the study of the action of signs that constitutes the discipline we call today "semiotics", the human being is rightly said to be and defined as "the semiotic animal".

### III. The Implications in Their Bearing on "Person"

But now we come to the nub of the importance of this new understanding of relation for our understanding of "person": awareness of the self presupposes the complete reflexion whereby the intellect, by reason of its activity depending only indirectly rather than directly upon a bodily organ, recognizes its identity as a conscious self. The self of any animal is not "identical with itself"; it simply *is* itself. But to *recognize* itself in the interiority of consciousness requires the immateriality of intellect as a power emanating from a form irreducible to the potency of matter, and hence capable of achieving through "relationes rationis" a self-awareness that includes but transcends the bodily involvement with the physical surroundings which the semiotic animal shares with all animals. And it is here that the distinctiveness of the *human* person must be located. Far from being an "embodied spirit" kin to the angels, the human being is rather, as Aquinas went so far as to insist<sup>25</sup>, a *spiritualized animal*.

<sup>25</sup> Th. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 90 "De prima hominis productione quantum ad animam, in quatuor articulos", Art. 4 "utrum anima humana sit facta ante corpus",

The human individual has the status of an individual human animal by birth, but its personal identity develops only over time and through objective relations, both intersubjective and *purely* objective relations. In other words, just as the ancient notion of “rational animal” and the modern notion of “thinking thing” are subsumed and replaced by the postmodern notion of “semiotic animal”, so the ancient and medieval notion of “person” as a “substantial being of a rational nature” needs subsumption and replacement by a developed notion of the human self as a *semiotic self*. Other animals have personalities, no doubt, and develop them over and above their substantial being, just as do the personalities of “rational animals”. But just as only human animals are *semiotic* as well as semiotic, so too only human personalities are *semiotic* as well as semiotic. Along that line lies the postmodern development and understanding of the distinctiveness of the human *person* in contrast to the individual material self.

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St Thomas, responding to the assertion that “anima rationalis magis convenit cum angelis quam cum animalibus brutis” (“the human soul is more like the substantial form of angels than that of brute animals”), points out to the contrary (= “ad 2”) that “anima si per se speciem haberet, magis conveniret cum angelis. sed in quantum est forma corporis, pertinet ad genus animalium, ut formale principium” (“if the human soul by itself were a natural kind, it would indeed be more like the forms of angels than than like the forms of brute animals; but because it is the form of a body, the human soul achieves the specification of a natural kind only as formal principle of an animal body, and therefore within the genus of animal”; wherefore it is not the embodiment of a spirit but rather the principle whereby the genus of animal itself becomes spiritualized through the human species of animal).

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MARITAIN, J. *Note*: the writings of Maritain are so diverse and have appeared in so many translations with so many modifications that it needs to be noted that in the thirteen years spanning 1983 and 1995 the Cercle d’Etudes Jacques et Raïssa Maritain (in the persons of Jean-Marie ALLION, Maurice HANY, Dominique and René MOUGEL, Michel NURDIN, and Heinz R. SCHMITZ) established the definitive text of all the writings and brought them to publication in 15 volumes entitled *Jacques et Raïssa Maritain. Oeuvres Complètes* (Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse et Editions Saint-Paul Paris, 1983–1995). In citing Maritain from various individual editions incorporated into this set, I will indicate their place in this set

abbreviated to OC (for “*Oeuvres Complètes*”) followed by volume number in Roman numerals and pages in Arabic numbers. And where I have consulted only the OC text, I will note that page numbers so refer.

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