

## Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'

by Robert Spaeman

Notes by David Alexander

### Introduction

"Persons" have a special position in existence as they do not compose a natural kind. Attempts to identify the attributes which enable us to apply the term "person" have taken two routes. On the one hand, there are those who sought precision about what it means to be rational, assuming Boethius's definition of the person as "the individual substance of arational nature." Some went too broad, associating it with subjectivity or consciousness, too broad because even birds share some kind of subjective inwardness. Some have sought to distinguish human, personal inwardness from other inwardness. The other route to understanding persons has focused on the social character of personal existence. The state of personal existence depends on a communicative event.

Up until recently, the concept of person has served as a concept with evaluative connotations. After Kant, it became the central plank in the foundation of human rights. But now its role has been reversed so that it plays a key role in demolishing the idea that human beings as human beings have some kind of rights before other human beings. It is argued that only human beings have rights, and only through being persons, but not all human beings are persons. Incredulity at the moral cretinism, while appropriate enough as a first response, needs to be supplemented in the long run.

To assert that all human beings are persons makes some prior assumptions which some are not willing to make. One such assumption is that, although persons relate to one another *a priori* through mutual recognition, recognition is not an antecedent condition for being a person but a response to a prior claim. Demonstration of attributes is not a prerequisite for recognition as persons, but merely membership of the species. Persons are "individuals" in an unparalleled sense and it is because of this that we do not recognize persons by their individual demonstration of specific features. This book is prompted by a challenge to tradition, but to not a defense of tradition as tradition developed its own destruction. Life is not an attribute but "the being of living things." Persons are living things that are grouped not in species or genus but in community.

### Chapter 1: Why We Speak of Persons

The term "person" is often used in a way that is the opposite of emphatic, in contrast to the forceful and solemn "human being." On the other hand, to ascribe "personal existence" is to recognize that someone can claim a certain kind of treatment from anyone who encounters him. There is an old, faded use of person in the term "dramatic personae," but this is not the modern meaning of person. The discussion in this book will mainly have to do with the sense of the word "person" as a predicate, when we say someone is a person.

In order to know if someone is a person, we must first know they are a human being. However, to say someone is a person does not describe some further property as there is no "property" of personal existence. On the basis of some identifiable properties, we are licensed to say of some that they are persons. What does the predication of personal existence add? By paying attention to the usage of the

word we may deduce that a person is someone who is what he is in a different way from that in which other things, or animals, are what they are.

"Being a man" uses the term "Man" as a classificatory term that excludes some. It gives primary *a limine* specification to anyone we propose to say anything about. We do not think of a man's relation to manhood in the same way that we think of a dog's to dogginess. We think of only human beings in terms of a mental self-differentiation. "Human" is used in normative terms except when we say "to err is human," but that does not extend to acts of malice, even though these are characteristic of human beings. We call such "inhuman."

Medieval philosophy treated "man" as one among the animal species but for us, "animal" carries the connotation of "non-human," so we prefer "living creature" when we want a category including both man and animals.

"I" is ostensive as it exemplifies the thing or quality being described. Unlike other pronouns, few can doubt "I" refers to something real. (What about "I robot"?) I does not refer to the "ego" but the whole person. The universally attested idea of the metamorphosis points to this recognition that the human being is not what he is in the same way as everything else we encounter is what it is. The stories of metamorphoses are not stories of "substantial change", the coming to be of a new thing out of the material of a prior thing. The distinctive feature of the stories is that the subject himself, not only a material substrate, survives the transformation. Only human beings undergo metamorphoses with their identities intact. Abstract individual identity is a feature of dreams too. These are cases of abstracting individual identity from qualitative similarities. The same conception is at work in ideas of reincarnation.

Any entity in nature displays what it is by what it does, by its manner of expressing itself. Even plants and animals display "deviation from type." The ideas that are present to animals are food, mate, prey, peril. We as observers may see these drives as a system explained by the theory of evolution. Human beings, as living creatures, participate in the inner difference of all higher life-forms, the difference of living and living well. Human beings are apparently unique in being conscious of this difference.

No one is simply and solely what he is. Self-acceptance is a process that presumes non-identity with self, and must be seen as the conscious appropriation of the non-identical, as integration.

There are "secondary volitions," the phenomenon of taking a position on one's own desires and acts of will. We can desire to have, or not have, certain desires. We evaluate not only the objects of our desires, but the desires themselves. When we succeed in bringing our desires into line with our evaluation, we feel free. When we fail, we feel impotent. In secondary volitions, we treat ourselves as we would another person whose behavior we seek to control. However, we run up against a boundary: it lies beyond our control to alter the fundamental direction in which we influence ourselves.

To speak of ourselves in the third person is to step out of the central position that all living things in nature occupy in relation to their environments, and to see oneself with other people's eyes as something "out there," from a point of view from outside one's organic center. This self-objectification makes both speech and morality possible. Speech anticipates the standpoint of the one who is to hear what is spoken. Rather than merely "expressing ourselves," we must submit to a prescribed system of rules that makes understanding possible. The system of speech itself prompts the emergence of self-

difference. Our experience of the "view from nowhere" makes it impossible to view ourselves as mere organic systems, where every encounter has meaning only in relation to the system's requirements. Speech is the communicative event in which we realize ourselves as what we are, as persons.

## Chapter 2: Persons

We looked at reasons initially asking why human beings are classified not only biologically but in a different kind of class altogether, the class of 'persons.' But is it correct to that say persons constitute a class? There are two reasons which make it awkward to speak of persons as a class. First, when we speak of persons, we do not mean that they belong to a certain class, or are instances of a generic category. While persons always belong to some natural species, they do not belong to it in the same way that other individual organisms belong to their species. The second reason that makes describing persons as a class is ontologically awkward because when we apply the term "persons" to an individual, we accord them the special status of inviolability. If we do not intend to respect human beings as persons, we either deny that they are persons, or we consider the designation vacuous.

To call someone a person is, for us, to acknowledge definite obligations to those we so designate. The decision as to who is a person depends on certain describable features but personhood is not itself a specifying feature but a status. Since "person" is not a descriptive term, it cannot be defined by reference to simple qualities, nor by telling a story to fix its reference. The use of the term has a normative implication because the designation of someone as a person makes a demand. How does this demand arise?

Without Christian theology, we would have no name for what we now call "persons," and since persons do not simply occur in nature, that means we would have been without them altogether. Plato never once conceived the thought that we have when we use the term. Human autonomy is the concern of Plato and Plato's Socrates. For Plato, the wise man is free and he does what he wills because he himself is the ground of his actions. What does it mean to say "he himself"? This question leads to the person but it is clear that this precise thought was never entertained by Plato. Autonomy is simply reason's dominion. But reason in Plato's conception is a common possession, the organ of truth that all share. The particular individual is of no significance. A regime of philosophers is a regime not of men but of the idea.

## II

One thing which never enters Plato's mind is that someone who 'achieves the Universal' by breaking out of particularity attains a higher level of being than the Universal itself. Hegel coined the term "the Individual" for one who, having taken the Universal into himself and realized it, attains a standing beyond the opposition of particular and universal. Individuals are not parts of a larger whole, but totalities who are the Universal. Plato saw reason as the medium of the universal, and where reason rules, man is free. Plato would not accept the answer that the reason so many people are not ruled by reason is that they refuse reason. He held that if people have refused the reasonable, it was only because they did not know it. Why they did not know it reaches the end of Plato's thought where ancient philosophy begins to go around in circles.

The New Testament answers the question as follows: they do not know it because they refuse to know it. They 'loved darkness rather than light.' In the Gospel of John, the meaning of sin is not believing in

Christ (See John 15:22;16:9). This is very un-Socratic, and it is the source of the discovery of the person. Following this thought, what determines if the absolute claim of the rational good prevails lies in "the heart." The heart is always in control, but it makes its own decision about who or what it will accept direction from. The heart goes deeper than every specific quality. In the New Testament, evil is the basis of ignorance, whereas with Plato's Socrates, ignorance is the basis of evil. That explains the hard words of Jesus against his opponents (See for example Matthew 15:1-20) and the friendly, ironic way that Socrates speaks of this. In the New Testament, the decision between good and evil is not a decision about an idea but about a person, who is the ultimate revelation of truth. Knowledge of the truth is thought of as a personal act of belief. Truth itself appears, not as the universal that is greater than any individual, but as the unique countenance of another individual person.

### III

The Latin word *persona* was rooted, like the Greek *prosopon*, in the world of theatre. It meant the 'part' as distinct from the 'player.' Later, the word was extended to mean a role in society, the social position one held. The modern usage of person treats it as what lays behind the performance of a role but in contrast, for the ancients, the person was the role itself and what lay behind it was 'nature.' Although a secondary identity, the role that one performs is something they are responsible for. Detectable in the modern conception of an 'official' is the ancient idea of the person, in which one's duties were determined by one's roles. When the philologists of Alexandria distinguished the three possible positions in the speech-act as the 'first', 'second', and 'third person', they based themselves on the concept of the person as a role.

*Persona* as used in the Roman jurisprudence of the imperial age is the first time we find *persona* as equivalent to the human agent. It distinguished the status of the freeman, or that of a human agent as opposed to all other entities.

All the ancient applications of the word have in common a view of human beings not as instances of a kind or examples of a general concept, but bearers of a social role, or as occupants of a legal status. In Stoicism, the subject of a human nature is acted out like a part, or, rather, there is no subject at all, for it all came down to a matter of destiny whether a performance succeeded or failed.

### IV

In order to understand how the term 'person' came to mean a subject relating to its nature like an actor to a role, we must examine the way the term was used in in speculative Christian doctrine after the first centuries of Christ. There were two occasions in which the term proved serviceable in broad controversies. The first was in the endeavor to reconcile Jewish monotheism to Jesus's description of himself as 'one' with the Father. John's Gospel speaks of the Logos become flesh in Jesus simply as 'God.' On the other hand, Jesus prays to God as his Father, ruling out that Jesus was simply an earthly appearance of God the Father. The 'Pneuma' or 'Spirit' of God is also acknowledged as a reality that is distinct from the Father and Son. In order to conceive of the unity of God consistently with the distinction of Father, Son, and Pneuma, Christian thinkers such as Origen and the Cappadocians were influenced by Plotinus's theory of the primordial One and its emanations, but they also crucially modified it. According to Plotinus, from the One is derived Intelligence, or *Nous*; from *Nous* is derived the World-soul. With Christian thinkers, the Godhead could no longer be conceived as a Monad without self-mediation. The Other does not proceed immediately and necessarily from the One but is

mediated by the Logos within the One, so that the One knows and affirms itself. The One contains its own Other within itself and the creation is consistent with the continuing self-possession of the One.

Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic thought held that the replication of one and the same thing many times over requires a medium distinct from the multiplied form which facilitates the form's multiplication of itself. Leibniz abandoned the concept of indeterminate material and thereby denied the possibility that there could be a plurality of individuals numerically but not qualitatively different. What the Greeks called the three 'hypostases' of the godhead were distinguishable only numerically. The One does not replicate and there is only inner differentiation, so the unity came to be thought of as self-mediation, an eternal occurrence. Unity was thought of as life. The One is self-expressing. The hypostases are not qualitatively distinct but only numerically and symmetrically.

The term 'hypostasis', which meant something like a self-standing existent, was called upon to answer we can think if purely numerical distinction of emanations and origin without imagining a spatial separation. Following the Johannine discourse of the divine Logos, and Tertullian's use of the grammarians' analysis of the speech-act that is associated with the concept of 'person,' Western theologians applied it to the whole Bible. Tertullian replaced the Greek conception of hypostasis with the less abstract and speculative 'person.' The same individual can be spoke of in first, second, and third person. Christian orthodoxy settled on the formula "One being, three persons."

## V

The second time in the history of Christian history that the concept of person served to resolve a paradox had to do with how Jesus could be thought of as the incarnation of the eternal divine Logos and as man in the true and proper sense at the same time. At the Council of Chalcedon the controversies were brought to an end with the formula: Jesus Christ had two 'natures,' divine and human. The name Jesus refers to a person, not a form of being. What is born is not something, but someone. The term person allowed the understanding of the application of the personal pronoun in the statement, "Before Abraham was, I am," without making Jesus appear a theophany, thus allowing the exclusion of all associations with ancient mythology.

*Phusis*, or nature, is the tem that is opposed to 'person' in Christology. It is the being of finite things which are subject to becoming and passing away. The term nature took on several meanings. Boethius distinguished four: 1) every intelligible thing; 2) things, whether material or immaterial; 3) all non-artificial bodies; and 4) not the concrete thing but the general form or kind of being to which it belongs. Boethius used the last meaning of nature to lay down a benchmark which lasted a thousand years. In this definition, personhood is the specific way that 'rational natures' are concrete and individual: 'the individual substance of a rational nature.' The primary sense of Boethius's definition is ontological: the rational nature exists as a being-in-itself. That is to say, no description can replace naming.

## VI

Boethius's definition lies behind all medieval discussion of the person. Richard of St Victor deepened Boethius's intention that was based on a misreading. He observed that a person cannot be a substance, but only the bearer of a substance. A 'substance' denotes a something of which there could be other instances but a 'person' stands for 'a property of a unique subject.' Personhood is the sustaining of existence as a particular individual, a mode of existence, and not essence. Things like cars exist in a

purely logical sense but natural beings exist in other than a purely logical sense. For them there is something 'it is like' to be themselves. The 'what' of a subject's existence is a 'way of being.' In the case of the bat, it would seem that its being is wholly swallowed up in its way of being. Human beings in contrast exist by distinguishing their being from their specific way of being.

"Life is the being of living things.' A lion does not exist on the one hand and live on the other. But there is no analogous word for the being of persons. It is peculiar to personhood as the mode of the existence of a rational nature that it is defined singularly, not as a kind of thing that could in principle appear in multiple copies. St. Thomas Aquinas, like Boethius, designated a person as a 'substance' but stipulated it is a *substantia prima*, meaning it is a concrete individual.

*Person does not denote the kind but the member of the kind, and not as a member of the kind, but as an individual.*

[The subversion of justice and the paving of the way to atrocities is reflected in discarding attending to the individual person and treating them as a member of a class. Much of the perniciousness of the sexual revolution is in the politicizing of family and intimate life, the subverting of the treatment of the person to lesser grades, to treating them as members of classes and groups. See examples in the addendum at the end below]. Person is not a concept but a name for an indeterminate individual. 'Person' is not used to refer to an individual in the aspect of its nature, but to a thing which subsists in that nature.

*A nature is a principle of specific reaction. With the concept of person, however, we come to think of the particular individual as being more basic than its nature.* Such individuals are not without a nature but they assume a new relation to it in their nature. They freely endorse the laws of their being, or they rebel against them and they 'deviate.' They cannot be categorized exhaustively as members of their species, only as individuals, who 'exist in their nature,' that is, as persons.

#### Addendum

Note how Bolshevik and feminists subvert to perdition the concept of the person as Robert Spaemann describes it when he writes, "*Person does not denote the kind but the member of the kind, and not as a member of the kind, but as an individual.*" --->

"Compare the similar instructions of Bolsheviks and feminists describing their own criminology. First, Martin Latsis, a Cheka leader and 'true Bolshevik,' explains how to exterminate a category of people: 'We are not waging war on individual persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation, we do not look for evidence that the accused acted in deed or word against the Soviet power. The first questions you ought to put are: To what class does he belong? What is his origin? What is his education and profession? And it is these questions that ought to determine the fate of the accused.'

Next are the instructions of influential feminist Catherine McKinnon, who advises legislatures throughout the world on how to punish men who fit a certain profile: "Instead of asking did this individual commit a crime of battery against that individual, the court would ask did this member of a group sexually trained to woman-hating aggression commit this particular act of woman-hating sexual aggression?.. The testimony of other women...would be central: How does this man treat women

sexually?... We might have learned whether pornography...was part of the defendant's training.' This shifts the prosecution from the legal culpability of an individual for a specific deed to the component in a political campaign against a targeted group."

-Stephen Baskerville, *The New Politics of Sex: The Sexual Revolution, Civil Liberties, & the Growth of Governmental Power*, (2017), Angelico Press, p. 119. Citations in order from Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, (2013), p.5, and Weiss and Young, *Feminist Jurisprudence*.

### Chapter 3: Persons

#### I

Words referring to classes of things are used either 1) to indicate a particular entity belonging to the kind in question, or 2) to indicate the kind. Recent trends in logic dispense with the second by explaining the first in terms of the second. But in a sentence like 'this is an apple, and this is red', how do we determine what 'this' stands for? We are confronted with what Quine called 'indefiniteness of reference' which is closely connected with the fact that, in original acts of naming, we cannot identify without ambiguity *this thing here* that has to be named. To say anything about the thing, you must know what it is already.

We must also know who is talking about 'this thing here.' A relation is implied to the position of the one pointing to the thing. A singular object is identified only in relation to someone who identifies it, and only by being classified. But this rule does not apply to the one who points, who can refer to himself without classifying himself in relation to a kind and without clarifying his position in relation to the position of anything else. Yet self-identification cannot occur solipsistically, for it necessarily implies the existence of others and the possibility of being available to their knowledge. Others, however, have only an external criterion for my identity, my body as a continuing existent in space and time.

If the observer's view were irrelevant to identity, we would have no right to say that a split-personality patient was psychotic and suffered from delusions.

There is no observer's view that can tell what it is like to be an animal, but we humans can talk with one another about ourselves. For the view from the inside the outside view is important while the outside view needs what information it can get about the inside view. This interaction of perspectives is what makes the very possibility of psychiatry.

#### II

When personal identity is treated as no more than a consciousness of personal identity, one fact is generally overlooked: we identify with ourselves over time without being conscious of all our previous states. From Descartes's philosophy of subjectivity to the contemporary philosophy of mind, our moment-by-moment states of conscious self-presentation are treated as an irreducible last frontier, to which the past and future relate as (eidolons, as feeble as Epicurus's gods). Thoroughgoing solipsism always involves isolating the present instant, something Descartes was aware of when he had to support the continuous unity of consciousness by appealing to the truthfulness of a God who would never allow our memories systematically to play us false.

A person's solitude is tied up with its incommunicability. It is defined by a 'place' in the universe which it alone occupies. The person is defined by a relation to everything else that can never be that person. Though this involves external observation, the person knows the uniqueness of his or her place and his

or her essential uniqueness. Since it is a relational uniqueness, it cannot be conceived apart from the external aspect of the person, mediated through the body.

### III

In a split personality, the two 'I's are different qualitatively. All qualitative differences may be thought of as complementary. Each person stands in relation to each other person *a priori*. That relation does not result from qualitative differences that repel or attract, but on a fundamental relation, 'recognition' or its refusal, a relation more basic than sympathy or antipathy, 'elective affinity' [*Elective Affinities* is the title of a novel by Goethe] or repulsion. Qualitative peculiarities are the basis for more superficial repulsions and attractions than the aforementioned more basic relation. They allow persons to engage in unifying structures, societies, and institutions, but as persons they are never 'integrated' in a real sense into these. Human beings relate themselves to their part-function freely in a greater whole, or they refuse it. But even when they devote themselves to the larger whole and give up their lives for it, they are no longer mere parts, but a whole, which cannot be accounted for as a means to an end. [Much of scientific materialist determinist thought rejects this irreducibility of the person].

Antagonism and the complementarity of persons is always built on qualitative differences. The myth of the androgyne [which Plato's Socrates attributes to Aristophanes] interpreted male/female difference as springing from an original identity, split into complementary parts that yearn to be reunited. But different persons cannot be thought of as originally identical. Empirical observation can only establish unlikeness. It is a great mistake to think we must suppress observations of human differences if we are to do justice to human dignity. The dignity of a person is not touched by such observations, for the dignity of human beings as persons is not an object of observation but of recognition. If we say that someone is a person, we are saying that he or she is someone, a unique Individual. The what we can observe and comprehend; the who is accessible to us only as we recognize something ultimately inaccessible.

Inwardly we see ourselves as phenomena, and as phenomena we disclose no more than that our properties and states are sustained by some subject. There is no categorical reason why we should know ourselves better than others know us 'from within.' The person is neither within nor without, but transcends the inner-outer difference that is the boundary of the mental sphere.

To re-identify persons as persons we already know, perception from outside is decisive, which means physicality is decisive.

Solipsism is incompatible with the concept of the person. Personhood arises only in a plurality. Philosophical monotheism is invariably ambiguous, either advancing to become trinitarianism, or slipping back into pantheism. We began to speak of God as a person only when we began to speak of three persons in one God.

## Chapter 4: The Negative

### I

Persons think and feel but, not only that, they think behind their thinking. They, like all animate beings, are defined by a difference from what they are, a "negative moment", but persons are defined by this to the greatest extent. Persons think the thought of 'being' only by a double step of negation: being is not the thought, and the thought is not the thing thought about.

Thought itself is defined by a difference from what simply is. The negative cannot be elicited from the



positive even though the negative presupposes the positive. This is why machines cannot think. Simulation cannot achieve the difference from what simply is. Only human beings can read positive facts of the world as signs, and so transform them into something thought. If there is nothing that symbols symbolize, there are no symbols either, only things in the world. That is how the computer processes them.

Despite the illimitable 'intellectual feats' a computer may perform which exceed what humans perform, it is not pointless to say that 'the computer does not think.' It means it does not know that it is thinking.

Knowledge is a subjective experience, but all subjective experience is experience of something. Drive utilizes the twofold difference of the inside and the outside. The difference is at the root of our space-time perception. The difference between the inner and the outer in us is projected onto what we deem as systems. The inner-outer difference within ourselves is the source of our personality.

'Selfhood' means emancipation from the conditions of one's coming-to-be, which can only be conceived as a momentary happening, as distinct from "alteration." We commonly speak of "emergent properties," meaning properties whose coming-to-be regularly arises out of certain material combinations.

## II

What does it mean to say that there is something 'it is like' to be a person or an animal? It is only through being attuned that we are ever in the world and that there is ever a 'world' for us.

Consciousness, effort, will and knowledge are all part of attunement, or embedded within it. A computer in contrast has no consciousness, it does not think, it makes no efforts for anything and it knows nothing because there is nothing 'it is like' to be a computer.

For non-personal animals on the other hand, there is a difference between the inside and the outside. There is something that is not identical with the animal that is to be experienced. Its significance is anticipated through the drive-structure of the individual animal and through the difference between striving and satisfaction. A living creature is on the look out for 'input.' Since satisfaction is not the climax of an inner paroxysm but demands the input, the living creature is essentially incomplete. It can never be certain of input and so pursue it.

Pain is the form in which the negative intrudes upon straightforward being-in-the-world. Pain cannot be defined by its function. It can outlast its usefulness as a warning sign, and be 'unproductive.' Pain is in every case what it is, but its specific quality is irrelevant to its function. It is essentially negativity.

Pain, which nature abhors, can actually be sought out as such - not for its usefulness but in spite of its usefulness, which is to make us avoid it. It is as pain that we seek it. It does not become enjoyment when we seek it. Rather, we enclose negativity itself within square brackets and introduce it with a plus sign. Only persons do this. They do not simply exist as they are but step back from whatever it is they are and enclose it all within square brackets, placing a sign, negative or positive, before it.

## III

Biological species are themselves modes of normality. They have attained an ecological niche that enables the satisfaction of certain expectations and the survival of the species. For each species, there are specific expectations of the arrival of expected things the arrival of which is the norm, the non-arrival of which is an anomaly. Every form of life, including human life, has its own form of normality to give structure to its expectations.

Surplus poses a threat to the extent that it may undermine survival under normal conditions as the

normal amount of effort and exertion may quickly fall away for the sweepstakes winner.

Pain is the irreducible negative, the essential anomaly. Even if it were the statistical norm, it would be so. It is the essence of pain to be abnormal, irrespective of statistics.

The consideration of pain falsifies Hume's assertion that Is and Ought belong to two incommensurable realms, unless we deploy a strictly 'positive' sense of 'Is,' in which case pain and negativity no longer count as things that are. Pain is essentially and immediately what we do not want. The negative, as distinct from what simply is, arises only where there is life, where interests are already in play.

There are two things presupposed by a conscious act of will. Besides life as a going-out-after things, as a drive, there is also the disclosure, which we can never get behind, of a dimension of rational universality, with which the acts of rational beings are implicated from the beginning. Neither of these is set in place by a free decision of our own. Persons can extricate themselves from formal requirements to an extent, perhaps pleading a pseudo justification for deeds that do no more than disguise a particular interest (eg. feminism does not change the general rules of action between a man and a woman but politicizes them), but they cannot in principle renounce the formal condition of general rules of action. To do so would be to make themselves invisible as persons and their acts as acts; they would thus exclude themselves from the community of mutual recognition among human persons. (Benjamin DeMott rued "tough-guy feminism" dominated by "kick-butt extremists" enthralled by a "women-becoming-men fantasy" resulting in a new brand of feminists embracing "stereotypical male standards of self-expression", with men not stepping in to fill the cultural void by themselves becoming merciful, tender caregivers. He discerned a gender disorientation that can only be 'catastrophic for the human essence.') Rationality is a form of life.

"I am a man; nothing human is alien to me" wrote Terence, but what happens when we embrace an ideology that is anti-person, that militates against the core structure of our beings, affecting to, like the serpent with Eve, advocate for our freedom? As under Communism, under feminism and sexual radicalism, or democratic sexual pluralism, we become divided into distrustful cells in new flowerings of seeds of enmity. "When a partner isolates their spouse from friends, associates, and public spaces, it is called domestic abuse. When it is done to an entire gender, it is called feminism," writes Helen Smith. "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female...?" (Matthew 19:4) God provided the dimension of rational universality and shaped us in His image. Our bodies themselves are shaped for the other, for sexual complementarity with the other sex. This can be attacked and subverted linguistically and surgically and in the captivity of one's thoughts, but this does not subvert the dimension of rational universality but only our correspondence with it.

## Chapter 5: Intentionality

### I

In this section Spaemann critiques Dualism and Materialist Monism in relation to the unity of the external and the mental state in an act.

Persons are among those beings with an 'inward' side who have subjective experience and possess 'mental states.' Just what the ontological status of these mental states has been a preoccupying question of the philosophy of the modern era since Descartes. There is an incommensurability of inward experience and outward perception. Pain, for example, is experienced by the sufferer only but inferred by the observer externally.

Mental states and brain states always occur together. How is this correspondence to be understood? Idealists took the external representations as epiphenomena of mental processes while Materialists took the mental processes as epiphenomena of the external.

The starting point, in modern modernism as well as in dualism, is the problem that was originally determined by dualism, the existence of two different spheres of existence, conceptually distinct. To look at a brain is not to look at anxiety but there is a persistent persuasion that it is. Both dualism and monism are faced with the task of thinking the unity of incommensurables. Dualism has to give up incommensurability to accommodate interaction of mental awareness and physical events, "for a causal relation needs homogeneous entities." Monism downgrades subjective experience to an epiphenomenon of matter.

We observe people's motions and discern anxiety from them but physical motions only count as actions when they express an intention, or a psychological state. Despite not having the subjective experience of another person, their experienced is disclosed in a way we comprehend. Dualism dissolves the perception of an action into two parts: 1) the perception of physical motion and 2) its interpretation as the expression of mental processes. But the two are neither of them the act in and of itself. The mental state cannot be defined apart from the act it initiates. Materialist monism fails to emphasize the unity of the inner and the outer as a teleological unity belonging to the act as a whole. It assumes that the two spheres are independently definable, that possibly it was led to this error by Dualism, and then it interprets the mental sphere as a function of the physical. The act could only be a function of the physical if it were not already defined by its intentional relation to physical events.

## II

Whether it is possible or rational for dualism to be overcome by monism is a matter for experience in the broadest sense to decide. A dualist description usually is in place when describing non-intentional and non-propositional mental states such as pain or a mood. These states are described without reference to physical data. Spinoza described them as the subjective side of objective physical processes. The ontological status of these states cannot be settled definitively at this level but this stalemate does not mean that materialism carries the day. Materialist monism is counter-intuitive in all its variations since it must explain the self-understanding of experience as self-misunderstanding, and so it must carry the whole burden of proof. Airy assurances that physical explanations, while not currently available, have not been proved impossible can never substitute for proof that would meet this burden. The result is a "promissory materialism."

The simple impossibility of bringing subjective and objective language under the same roof does not suffice to defeat reductionism. The claim of reductionism is that subjective experience is ontologically irrelevant. Epiphenomenalism sees subjective experience as standing in a strict one-to-one relation with objectively observable neuronal processes, in an asymmetric relation where the neuronal processes effect the experience but the experience does not affect the neuronal processes.

There are questions to be pursued about the interest driving the reductionist endeavor. It is an interest in a tight physical nexus of cause and effect to explain everything that is. The interest that drives the postulate is the continuing expansion of our mastery of nature and the possibilities of control. The discovery of the dependence of mental states on physical processes opens up the possibility of

manipulating those states. The closed system of cause and effect enhances the possibilities for interventionist action, while at the same time destroying the very idea of action. If action is included in the closed physical system of causality, it is unintelligible why we postulate this system, or make any postulate at all.

### III

We must make a distinction between psychological states and intentional acts. Reductionism cannot translate non-intentional states of mind conceptually so as to include them in a discourse of physical events, but it can be argued that they are a residuum resisting translation that do not really exist. However, when we turn to acts of "thinking that...", materialist reductionism comes to grief. Without acts of "thinking that...", even the objective physical world is inaccessible to us. If these are dismissed as contentless epiphenomena, the objective world disappears with them, a world that is only there for us in the first place, thanks to such acts. Wherever theoretical or practical intention enters the scene, materialist reductionism in all its forms becomes self-contradictory.

Intention can never be described satisfactorily as a psychological state. Intention is not a psychological reality, but a spiritual or intellectual one. It is a feature neither of the inward nor of the outer world. Like psychological states, it can be manipulated by physical intervention, but it can be manipulated only negatively. It can be removed but it cannot be positively induced. (This seems to a point where we overlook a chasm between reality and those who think we will eventually be able to download consciousness. But what about "brainwashing"? Is it characterizable as induced positive intention?) Practical intention differs from theoretical intention chiefly in that the non-identity of its object with a state of the subject is not simply implied, but it is expressed as the defining content of the act. Intentional acts and intentional attitudes are still 'in the mind' to the extent that it is an event of subjective experience when we form them. We know psychological states only by being aware of them as psychological states. Our knowledge of psychological states is part of the states themselves. Awareness of life is the irreducible paradigm for life and experience of every kind. Intentionality is simply the most intense mode of experiencing.

The reductionist attempt to treat the ontological status of psychological states as mere phantoms, seen without being believed, comes to grief if there is actually no clear dividing line between states of mind and awareness of states of mind. We have no idea what states of mind of which no one was aware would be like. Awareness of states of mind, whose irreducible ontological status is beyond question, is an aspect of those states. Intentionality is not itself a psychological state; but a psychological state is something with intellectual potential, and we cannot say what it is in itself without alluding to this potential.

We can only bring our will to a resolution in the first place as we experience within ourselves an interest that is already there. Without such interest, the world would be a matter of indifference and there would be nothing to guide us to will one thing rather than another. To describe this interest, we resort to vocabulary borrowed from conscious acts of will which we then apply erroneously in a way that excludes the actual moment of intentionality. The conscious act of will finds in itself a tendency to be anterior to consciousness and to 'come to itself' in the moment of dawning consciousness. The dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* implies that life can be given definition from the point of view of consciousness only by way of negation. Early modern philosophy tried to eliminate not only the concept of finality but of potentiality also. But we can speak sensibly of life only if we mean

potentially conscious life, life with the experience of potential intentionality.

#### IV

It is true of all psychological acts that they are potentially intentional. We lack the categories to specify the soul and subjective life but we cannot dispense with talking about them as the sphere of personal centeredness which stands between us and the myth of the ghost in the machine, a myth inconsistent with our experience of the world.

Persons *qua* persons are encountered only in the context of a world that is common to them and to us. They are encountered in such a way that we understand them only when we 'look in the same direction,' entering into their carrying out of their intentions.

It is a feature of persons that they are subjects of different and clearly distinct kinds of acts from other animals. In particular, acts of thinking, preferring, and willing in any human being are independent variables. What distinguishes other animals from human beings is that willing and thinking are not independent variables. It is always a package, in which what the animal 'thinks' is related to how it is to reach its goal, or to avoid whatever it wants to avoid. Its ambition, however, is confined within the limits of what its natural conditioning prescribes for it, and it cannot transcend the given *conditio animalis*. Its thoughts about the world are strictly functional and have to do with the conditions for fulfilling its wishes.

Intentional acts are directed at objects independently of the condition of the subject. Human beings form wishes that go beyond the *conditio humana* and hence have a history. Because human beings can form a view of how the world is made quite independent from any practical ambitions, human beings can make unanticipated breakthroughs in discovering how the world is made. (Activist tendencies in this context seem more animalistic, or more bound by the *conditio animalis*, less detached in contemplation of reality from a pressing agenda).

This independence is the reason we speak of persons as continuous acting-centers. To be a free beginning, a subject has to pursue things and exercise its will. But on the other hand, the subject must not only but have a power of theoretical reflection and theoretical intention. Otherwise it is a blind 'drive'. (Those seeking conquest of the world are always looking for blind drives to control, it would seem).

In the Middle Ages and in modern philosophy, there is a debate about the priority of the will over knowledge or vice versa. Spaemann posits Scheler's argument for the priority of a basic intentionality of love, lying behind and providing the ground for theoretical acts as well as purpose and will, as the bridge between Heidegger's "attunement" and the "intentional acts" of Husserl's phenomenology.

#### Chapter 6: Transcendence

##### I

To understand higher life-forms, we must credit them with 'intentions.' Intentional acts distinguish *homo sapiens* in a more important way than rational organization of life. The person, despite being

wholly present in each act, occupies a position at a distance from it. "Transcendence" means first of all expanding the horizon of intentionality by conceptual abstraction. The highest level of abstraction is the type of thought we call philosophy.

Descartes's doubt rested on a leap beyond the rationality of the man, "rational animal", to the sphere of intention. He asked if all our thoughts might be nothing more than thoughts. To even think this presumes there is a space that consciousness cannot occupy, a space to which consciousness is "nothing more than" consciousness, a space Descartes called the infinite. No beast reflects on the fact that the world surrounding it is no more than its world, relative to its specific organization. It does not situate itself as simply the feature of some other animal's world, a bearer of meanings that are meaningless to itself.

This illuminates a second sense to the word "being" beyond that of merely "something in general". Phenomenological methodology (Husserl) tried to apprehend what was apprehensible without resort to the second sense of being, but the question of the ontological status of transcendent consciousness was bound to blow the phenomenological approach apart (Heidegger).

## II

Descartes and Hegel understand the absolute and infinite dimension as the presence of God. Hume dismisses it: "We never really advance a step beyond ourselves." Yet objectivity-as-phenomenon suggests something lying beyond it, but something that bestows itself and persists in itself, revealing itself but not exhausted by its revelation.

The phenomenological distinction between being with a friend and being with a friend in a dream does not arise at the level of the intentional object. Being-in-itself, by definition, is not an object of intention. Everybody knows that there is someone else, the "other," and there is no continuum from what I know to what you know.

Kant's "thing in itself" is but a mathematical point generated by reflection on the objectivity of the objects of consciousness. Only when we experience ourselves as Being-in-itself, situated at that mathematical point, do we have a ground for metaphysical realism. The content Kant provides for that point is the human experience of freedom. The mutual relation of persons must be a metaphysically real relation. The other is not accounted for merely in terms of objectivity; other person's reality to themselves is real to us.

## III

Personality is the paradigm of being as the transcendence of objectivity, "being in itself." A solipsistic experience of the self is not first; rather, the experience of the other is co-original with the experience of the self. For Descartes it takes the thought of another thinker, God or an evil demon, to break the solipsistic infinite regress in "I think that I think that I think..." In relation to the other, one's own thought acquires the dignity of Being. We stand in relation to one another as existents. With the thought of Being there arises the thought that consciousness transcends its intentional content, that is, itself.

Persons are beings to whom the thought of being occurs as beyond all material, substantive, or intentionally directed thought, since they are themselves beyond it, that is, free. The subject exists by having the contents of his consciousness, not by being them. He stands outside all of his attributes.

In the community of persons, each person has a place uniquely defined as his or hers. There is no idea of the person, but only actual persons. Living is how animate things exist, and this includes human beings. Personal life consciously experienced is for us the paradigm of life in general and we understand non-personal life only by analogy with personal life, for example by subtraction from it.

What distinguishes the space of the community of persons from the space of generational relations of natural biological species? Personal relations can 'rise out of' biological relations. Unlike animals in whom blood relation tends not to result in lifelong connection, relation among humans often does not cease with the cessation of biological function.

Are living things always alive? Is being alive simply the attribute of a living thing as we encounter it, or is it "the being of living things"? Aristotle had no concept of contingency. The biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing makes possible the thought that some particular thing can either be or not be.

Existence carries with it a moment of sheer facticity that cannot be got round. If we think of facticity as a creator, we must, it follows, think of God as sheer freedom. Life as such is a once-for-all event, an occurrence, not a form that may or may not occur. We derive the concept of being by subtraction from the concept of life, in the same way that we achieve the concept of life by subtraction from that of the life we are conscious of living. Living consciously is the fullest being. Life belongs to its concept but we cannot infer from the concept that it was realized.

[One thing that catches my attention in this section is Spaemann's noting that only in relation to others does thought acquire the dignity of Being. I think of this in conjunction with the modern attempt to live without ritual. Thomas Howard in *Chance of the Dance?: A Critique of Modern Secularism* notes that "we dispose our experience ritually. That is, we subject the common functions of life to an ordering that does not always serve the idea of mere efficiency," handling our experience in a way that both imposes upon and draws significance from it. It occurs to me that part of the drive of the formalizing, and the ritualizing, is the recognition of the other, not merely personal solipsistic idiosyncrasy. Because we are aware of the other, the gaze which Sartre despised, we are motivated to a clearer and more advantageous presentation of ourselves, a more dignified presentation of ourselves. This need not be merely vanity, it seems to me, but rather a positive disposing of oneself to the other, hopefully less belligerently than Sartre. It can denote assiduity toward the other and be part of the style of love. But a solipsistic authenticity that lacks the formalism that denotes orientation to the other suggests, I think, deprivation, unfulfilled potential for a fullness of life. At what point does a ceremonious-less dishabille spoil from a frank and authentic demotism into solipsism and dissolution of the person?]

#### IV

Personal life is distinguished from non-personal life by the fact that we cannot describe it as a 'way' of living. They have their way of being but it is not what they are, but what they relate to: they take it on, they carry it through, or they refuse it. For a person, to be real is always to be alive. The personal experience of contingency is in contentment or discontentment at one's own attributes, and in astonishment at one's own existence. The conception of being as an act befalling an entity presumes that there is an entity already there for it to befall. This brings us back to thinking of different kinds of

beings as 'ways.' Finite being can only be a way of being.

Non-personal beings are so immersed in their way that only we who stand outside them can think of them as contingent. A person is not a kind of being but a being that relates itself to its kind. But a person is not the Being. Persons are not the absolute Being because they only have being through having a kind of being, a finite set of attributes, a nature.

Personality hovers at a point between being and kind. This point of indifference we call 'freedom'. It is the situation of the person from which it always appears in principle that one's thinking and willing might be one's own only anomalously. Transcendence can last only while this consciousness lasts, in a movement which reaches out beyond thought.

The difference between the immanence of thought and thought of something beyond immanence, itself lies within the spheres of thought. Being is not an object of intention. The thought of Being is never so complemented that being is disclosed as such. How is what is conceived as beyond thought to become the content of thought?

## V

The theoretical angle we have opens up from a life context in which we always have something we are in pursuit of. What is the final object of our practical intentions? There must be something we want to have for real, not only in appearance, what Plato calls the 'good.' But might not the good be just another subjective condition? The first challenge that produced philosophy came from the sophists' answer that the thing we want for real is pleasure, 'feeling good.'

Paradoxically, if human beings understand themselves in this way, they lose touch with what distinguishes them as human. We who observe the animal can observe its behavior as only concerned with certain states of equilibrium. In some species, self-sacrifice is the condition for the state of equilibrium.

Only persons reflect explicitly on the gulf between 'how it appears to me' and 'how it really is.' They can opt for appearance and self-deception, for the pleasure of feeling good in place of joy at something or other. But to do this consistently is to surrender humanity. Epicurus acknowledges that good friends are essential for pleasure in life and to have good friends you must be a good friend, willing to sacrifice your life for your friend if the need arises. But someone who is not perverse wants real friends, not content with the impression of having them. We do not want artificial euphoria.

[Being perverse is here linked to a mendacious satisfaction or complacency with the semblance of a good rather than the true good. This applies to physical masturbation and mental masturbation. Spaemann by implication is saying Epicurus's doctrine hinges on a lie and that human beings have to suppress the truth in themselves to adopt it].

Spaemann notes the encroachment of an anti-human Utopian 'virtual reality' but he predicts it will not be so easy to abolish man. To want to be deceived is always a mark of despair, expressing the sense that one is not up to coping with reality. This is most obvious when someone accepts a transparent pretense of love. Real enjoyment of friendship begins when we know, or are persuaded, that the warmth shown to us conveys real feeling.

Love cannot have an object whose ontological status is in doubt. It is directed to the other, to a self that



is more than is given. Objects of intention are defined by their attributes, qualitatively. The object of love is identified indexically. There is no indeterminacy in love's reference.

We feel alive in the fullest sense only when we love. A person becomes known to us only through the medium of a bundle of qualities but real love is not directed to these but to the unique particularity of the other, even when he or she alters in some way.

Faith, or trust, is the normal form of human transcendence rather than a state of mystical union. The other's being, though not immediately experienced, does not disappear. The elementary form of absolute encounter with reality in recognition is the intersection of the other's gaze with mine.

## VI

Modern science tries to simulate life in order to understand its nature, but the only things that can be simulated are qualities and quantities. Every means of display is susceptible in principle to simulation. Personality arises when we refuse to treat the other like a simulation or a dream, as a mere 'something,' existing for me without my existing equally for it. This refusal is implied by love and recognition, which are incompatible with doubt as to the other's reality. This is incompatible with solipsism and also with treating realism as a mere hypothesis. The loss of relation to reality goes along with the dissolution of the person and the loss of personal unity. Not being someone else's 'Thou,' I cannot be my own 'I,' and I no longer possess the necessary principle of inner unity.

For human beings there is no pure subject-object relation. We empathize with animals because we see in them a resemblance of our own pain.

Metaphysical realism means that if we cannot transcend appearance and get through to the being that reveals and conceals itself, there can be no persons. Persons themselves are beings who reveal and conceal themselves, being both subject and object. Continuity of person is tied to the continuity of an organism in the world. It is the hallmark of personality to see in another's body the disclosure and revelation of another centre of being.

## Chapter 7: Fiction

### I

In the view of the ancients, all human device and fabrication was secondary to nature and depended on nature for its possibility. How has the modern view of devices changed? What would the ancients think of "strong Artificial Intelligence (AI)"?

"'Nature' is one of those concepts that include their own opposites." It is "natural" for humans to speak but there is no "natural language."

It is characteristic of human nature that the fictive and artificial forms exist as a separate and independent dimension of life. This is an example of the non-identity of human beings with their nature that entitles us to call them 'persons.' (Does transgenderism show personhood?)

What is the significance of animals' play and nature's 'play' with beautiful forms?

How do Aristotle's and Josef Pieper's view of "play" track with or contradict Plato's view of play, as described on p. 82? According to Spaemann, Plato attacks the view that we put up with the serious things for the sake of play. He says rather than the good life being in service of play, it must be play. Huizinga asked "how far every ritual act falls within the category of play"? Well?

What is the difference between Felix Krull's view of "living symbolically" as freedom, coupled with a contempt for the "grossly factual situation," and the Apostle Paul and the Stoics' treatment of life as a role? (p. 83)

-With persons, life itself is within the category of mimesis and becomes its own imitation. We know that the mimic is only playing but we suspend our knowledge. The audience of an artistic fiction is not taken in by the illusion and then disabused of it but lets itself in for the play despite knowing that the players are not real. (This brings adjacent in my mind a passage from T.S. Eliot about the value of coming under the spell of successively different giants until one begins to develop a separate understanding of things. This is not quite the same thing though, being more a point about the eros of learning than about being taken in by artistic fiction. Yet many materialists today seem taken in by their favorite analogies of human beings with computers, etc.)

## II

What is the significance of saying that persons are not a role but role-players? What does it mean to say that we stylize ourselves in one way or another?

Stylization takes place within a culturally determined framework and, when that framework is weakened, the need for "self--discovery", etc. can assert itself, together with a readiness to accommodate forms of totalitarianism, whether dictatorial or democratic. Why does Spaemann mention these last three here (p. 85).

Compare and contrast Augustine's self-stylization with Rousseau's self-stylization (p. 85). Augustine's, for example, is marked by his search not for himself but for God, for ultimate truth. Rousseau on the other hand adopts the style of the poor savage who tried unsuccessfully to play the game of social convention, then the citizen of the ancient Roman kind, and then gave up and decided to be his "authentic self" so to speak. A major difference is on the point of repentance. He Rousseau shockingly expresses pathos for his innocence at the moment he has accused his employer's housemaid of a theft he himself committed.

-Rousseau is the first time we encounter a programmatic refusal of the self-stylization that characterizes personal being. Do you see a continuing legacy of this phenomena which Spaemann describes today?

>What do you think of Spaemann's statement: "The humanity of a civilization can be measured by how much hypocrisy flourishes in it- 'the homage that vice pays to virtue'...The play is the thing. Art suspends the control of reality over our construction of the world. It describes possible worlds, of which the real world is one among others and looks strange by comparison...Art shows up what is true of persons all the time. 'Poetically man dwells,' wrote Holderin"? (pg. 87)

## III

-The personality of human beings is evinced in their capacity to distinguish the world of signs from what is signified.

-The metaphorical use of words is not a secondary use but matches the original function of speech.

>What do you think of his interpretation of the Genesis text (see pg. 88)?

>Do you agree with Spaemann when he writes that the "poetic use of words is primary" and that "the artistic play of words protects the freedom of a relation to the world that is genuinely historical and not bound to nature"? (pg. 88).

>Is it possible for the world of music to come to an end?

## IV

"Art and nature together compose the human world, and we cannot make a clean break between the way we construct ourselves and the way we really are. It is equally pointless to want to make a break between reality and our interpretation of it, for every attempt of this kind is bound to be just another interpretation in the end". How does what Spaemann is saying here differ from a surrender to solipsism? (pg.89) He is drawing an implicit distinction between solipsism and the subjective.

-Gold:

"In psychology scientific and confirmable experiment that screens out all the researcher's subjective factors may yield quite precise results, but will tell us very little about what anyone really is. The reality of a human persons in all its depth and complexity is available only to someone who invests something of himself or herself in the encounter. It is not the most impersonal, but the most personal observation that reveals most of what reality is in itself. It is one of those persistent prejudices of modern thought to think that the less subjective something is, the more objective." ( pg. 89)

-What do you think of Spaemann's descriptions of art as instructing us how to see, hear, and understand reality (pg. 89) in its correspondence with the capacity of personal transcendence which has the power of reaching beyond its own patterns of interpretation, and his remark that art anticipates what is dawning (pg.90). What does Spaemann's view of art suggest about the place art should occupy in our lives?

-Spaemann remarks that human personality is apparently turning against human nature.

Closing Reflection:

"The so-called 'naturalist epistemology' claims to have uncovered the mechanisms of biological function - a claim that demonstrates a peculiar lack of self-awareness. For brains, too, are 'pictures', obviously enough, and so cannot be an explanation for pictorializing. Naturalist epistemology deals entirely in pictures- it is merely that they are not pictures of anything or anyone. For our purposes, what it amounts to is simply this: finite persons, capable of distinguishing the 'way I see it' from what is 'really there', can systematically adopt the policy of isolating the way I see it as the sole object of

interest... The now common expression for this is 'virtual reality.' This is no longer a matter of conscious play, not even of conceiving the whole of life as play.... 'Virtual reality' cannot actually replace reality. But what it can replace is art, the fiction of alternate reality experienced as fiction." Art can be supplanted by simulation that is bound to be felt as real, since reality, and with it life itself, has long since been understood technologically as simulation. The new form of fiction understands human beings in a radically objective way, which is to say, understands them as animals not living in an open world but at the centre of their own self-referential environment."

-Robert Spaemann, *Persons*, pgs. 90-91

-In Patrick Dineen's *Why Liberalism Failed*, he has a chapter in which he argues that liberalism itself has been undermining and attacking liberal arts. What Spaemann says above has implications for the arts and implies that materialism and technological approaches to human beings are vying with, or winning out against art. Art is supplanted by simulation. A kind of worship of techne shapes the way we view the human and consciously or not we temper our view of the human to fit the technology. Instead of being wily masters of our tools, we become their lieges.

-Spaemann describes a lack of self-awareness in 'naturalist epistemology' and posits as one example that they claim to have uncovered the mechanisms of biological function when what they invoke are pictures of the brain, which cannot therefore be an explanation for the pictorializing. To say that we pictorialize because of this picture is to assume what you are trying to explain. Spaemann here and elsewhere in the book stresses against the conceits of modern materialism that science is irreducibly rooted in the person, if I understand him right. He goes on to describe a kind of naïve avidity or sanguinity in the belief that reality and life are a simulation. He says they have long been understood this way technologically.

This raises an additional question about the relation of art and technology. If technology shapes the way we view the human so that we conceive of our whole lives as simulation, this vies with or, for the time being, overcomes the view of the human that art evokes and corresponds to - a kind of knowing play that is not sanguine about its fictions. Instead, we lose the sense that our fiction is a fiction as we limit to one fiction while banishing the poets from the republic like Plato.

What Spaemann seems to be positing is that we are descending into a broad-based solipsism. (Some would say, "What?! We're already there!") It is claimed for science that it overcomes solipsism, but when science is held captive by this view of the whole of human life as a simulation, it is not a defeat of solipsism but a still birth in its womb. But is that adequate to describe current science and technology? How sanguine are people really about the simulation?

As Ryszard Legutko noted, modernity made Prometheus a hero and techne was believed the best thing that happened to man because it was believed to be an vehicle of infinite progress. In both the systems of communism and democratic liberalism, a "cult of technology" translates itself into acceptance of social engineering as a proper approach to reforming society (and so a debased human anthropology is the price of self-superior progress). In both systems society and the world are considered as being under constant reconstruction. In one system, this meant reversing the current of Siberia's rivers, in the other a formation of alternative family models. In both, it is the constant remolding nature which is conceived to be "barely a substrate to be modeled into a desired form." Both regimes distance themselves from the past and embrace the idea of progress based on a belief in the power of techne.

It is hard to bear the weight of glory, the weight of transcendence that is regnant in human persons, so

materialism offers a way to hide.

## Notes and Questions from Robert Spaemann's *Persons*, Chapter 8: Religion

Reflection on how the given appears to us proceeds on the formal assumption of Being. If our consciousness does not occupy a sphere that it has not itself defined and circumscribed, reflection on how an object appears to us is itself tautological, trivial, and empty of meaning.

-If we suspend, deny, or suspend in doubt any reality beyond appearance, what effect does this have on reflection? The mind spins but it does not apprehend.

It may seem that transcendence is a contentless and purely formal moment within reflection, always liable to be overtaken by further reflection. Every thought about what lies beyond thought is itself a thought. Hegel made this overtaking thought the constructive principle of the *Phenomenology of the Mind*.

>How is the Hegelian dialectic a putting of the 'notion' of person into motion?

>What does it mean to say that the Absolute always was the truth of consciousness, and the process of searching for the Absolute always was the original for/of the Absolute's presence?

>Is it possible for thought to catch up with the presence of the Absolute and bridge the gap between the thinking of Being and Being itself?

Key passage: "Already present, and already known to be present, the Absolute is encountered in the form of religion." (p. 94). Descartes, the first to base his whole philosophy on subjective reflection, could only assure himself that subjectivity was real by way of the conception of God that he found there i.e., religion. Only in religion does subjectivity assert its own reality and substance without reneging on its standing as subjectivity. (pp. 94-95)

>How is the standstill of reflection confronted with itself as a Being different than naturalistic monism? In what way does religion allow for the treatment of subjectivity as a person while naturalistic monism does not? Why must thought think of the Unanticipated itself as subjective personality if it is not to be frustrated at the unintended nature of being? (p. 95)

>What is the distinction that Spaemann makes between certain habits of speech that are decisive for our epoch and religion which is un-dialectic in comparison?

Key passage: (p. 95) What is Spaemann's point about Utopia. Why must thought necessarily dissolve the unity of being and thought? What propels forward into an incessant flight towards Utopia?

>Is materialist monism inevitably "promissory materialism" which we have to forget while we are speaking to one another? If so, can it be excused?

## II

Human activity is not prescribed by the system of human instincts. A person has a nature, nature does not have a person.

>Is it true that nature has no normative significance for human beings? If man is 'Nature's liberated captive,' why should he willingly deliver himself up to captivity at the hands of this same Nature?

Religion's answer is that nature is "creation" and its teleological structures allow us to discern the Creator's will for humankind.

>Can anything less than the personal will of God be the source of normative 'natural right' for persons? Spaemann, Dostoevsky, and Wittgenstein think not.

>Can there be any standard for how we exercise control if we ourselves make and remake the terms and conditions?

### III

Only with a religious idea is there something to whom, not merely something for which, we are responsible.

>What are the implications for "natural morality" and "natural law" that the religious idea alone bears?

>What do you think about this statement: "Nature sets no obligatory limits, only religion does. But the limits religion sets are what would be natural limits, if there were natural limits for persons." Nature has no numinous influence on us as nature, only as God's creation.

-Once we have to do with teleological structures, we encounter 'malfunction,' the failure to accomplish ends, and from that point on nature is in principle relevant to morality. There are actions and impulses that we approve or disapprove, think well-intentioned or mischievous, irrespective of whether we have the impulse to do them.

>How does religion enable human beings to see themselves as creatures of nature without having to abrogate their personhood? (p. 99)

>How does being that is responsible for absolutely everything undermine the very idea of responsibility?

>Why do utilitarian agents and those that are affected by the utilitarian agent not qualify as persons?

>How is the idea of universal responsibility Utopian? What should take its place?

>How does religion relieve moral responsibility of universal responsibility? (p. 100)

### IV

Religion also relieves us and enables us to act by lifting the burden of objective guilt and despair through forgiveness. Only the consciousness of forgiveness permits the person once again to make a creative destination of his or her acts without hindrance from the past. Repentance cannot achieve liberation on its own, for guilt is an objectively imprisoning complex of circumstances that cannot be overcome by the guilty complex of circumstances that cannot be overcome by the guilty subject unilaterally.

>What implications does Spaemann's comments in this section have regarding counsel often embraced

by Christians that we should "forgive ourselves", or that we should "never regret"?

-Spaemann notes that the idea of such a guilty complex of circumstances is not a religious one and it is shared by Anaximander and in the Indian idea of Karma. The religious aspect comes in the certainty of forgiveness. The religious possibility of forgiveness is indispensable for persons as such because it makes it possible to keep continuity with oneself as a person over time.

>Any comments about his parting remark about the Second Law of Thermodynamics? (p. 101).

## Appendix

Reasons why, if you self-identify as a "None", you need to go back to your attachments and seek the Absolute, while there is still a you:

Denial of the existence of Nones who are real nones:

"...we really only believe in something which we do in practice cling to or hold to: now, to cling or hold to something is to have some sort of living link with it; the man who believes in nothing, like the man who clings to nothing, can have no such links. But such a man is notional or even chimerical. He cannot actually exist. Existence without living links is not concretely conceivable. It is not among real possibilities." Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, p. 47

We are defined by our attachments and every human being is attached to something.

Your subjective personhood depends on a religious understanding of subjectivity:

"Already present, and already known to be present, the Absolute is encountered in the form of religion...(I)n religion... and only in religion, subjectivity asserts its own reality and substance without reneging on its standing as subjectivity... In conceiving of God and of its own creation, reflection comes to a standstill confronted with itself as Being, but not in the way naturalistic monism does when it tells us that our understanding of ourselves is a misunderstanding, a second and supervenient phenomenon quite easily explained by evolution. From this point of view transcendence with its posit of Being is but an impotent reduplication, constantly overtaken by reflection on its conditions, while reflection itself is merely a natural phenomenon. A religious understanding of subjectivity can treat it as a person, i.e. an existent that was 'meant to be' subjective and could not exist otherwise. Thought, with its aspiration to truth and to the disclosure of Being, is doomed to frustration at the unanticipated nature of being, except on one condition: it must think of the Unanticipated itself as subjective personality."

-Robert Spaemann, *Persons*, pp. 94-95]

What happens to you when you deny that you are a created being:

"So soon as man denies to himself that he is a created being, a double peril faces him: on the one hand he will be led ...to claim for himself a kind of self-dependence that caricatures that of the Deity. He will be led, that is, to consider himself as a being who makes himself and is only what he makes of

himself... But from another point of view, and yet in a closely connected way, the man who conceives himself as Sartre conceives man will be led to think of himself as a sort of waste product of a universe which is, for that matter, an inconceivable universe - so that we see such a man, at the same time and for the same set of reasons, exalting and abasing himself beyond all measure." - Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, p. 50

Divine forgiveness, which is only experienced through religion, makes it possible for persons to keep continuity with themselves as a person over time:

Religion also relieves us and enables us to act by lifting the burden of objective guilt and despair through forgiveness. Only consciousness of forgiveness permits the person once again to make a creative destination of her acts without hindrance from the past. Repentance cannot achieve liberation on its own, for guilt is an objectively imprisoning complex of circumstances that cannot be overcome by the guilty complex of circumstances that cannot be overcome by the guilty subject unilaterally. Spaemann notes that the idea of such a guilty complex of circumstances is not a religious one and it is shared by Anaximander and in the Indian idea of Karma. The religious aspect comes in in the certainty of forgiveness. The religious possibility of forgiveness is indispensable for persons as such because it makes it possible to keep continuity with oneself as a person over time.

(Summary of section IV of chapter 8 of Robert Spaemann's *Persons*)

Failure to contemplate the Absolute is not neutral but leads to misosophy as a civilization:

"... a civilization in which technical progress is tending to emancipate itself more and more from speculative knowledge, a civilization which, one may say, finally denies the place of contemplation and shuts out the very possibility of contemplation, such a civilization, I say, sets us inevitably on the road towards a philosophy which is not so much a love of wisdom as a hatred of wisdom: we ought rather to call it a misosophy." - Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, p. 48

"Propaganda is a cynical refusal to recognize that ordering of man's awareness in subordination to truth which it is the imperishable glory of the great rationalist philosophers, whatever may have been their metaphysical errors, to set in the clearest light." *Ibid.*, p. 51

[Marcel is very much against what seems to be happening in the liberal democracies today. The liberal arts are vanishing from the schools. There is no place in the modern mindset for philosophy, art, history, literature and theology. But these disciplines were largely made to self-immolate and self-destruct from within first. The result is that there is less and less reflection. We cheapen as a society, in the name of being hard-nosed and practical. Everything is subsumed under the state of emergency of getting a living. We begin to become misosophists.]

## Chapter 9: Time

### I

Descartes assumes that consciousness is already self-consciousness but it is not clear what that hyphenated 'self' means. The self becomes more definite when we are conscious of ourselves as feeling, thinking, and striving. In such a case, subjectivity must be conceived as more than a structural moment in intentional acts.



Why is it not adequate to say that persons are merely subjects of consciousness? (See pg. 103)

Why does the act of persons reflecting on themselves as subjects demonstrate that they are more than subjects? What does it mean that nonhuman animals have purely subjective experiences in contrast to human beings? What does it mean that they have no inkling of their own being, or of any being?

How does temporality enable persons to command a view of the inner-outer difference? How is the personal relation to self constituted through temporality?

Memory stretching beyond the resonance of the immediate past is mediated knowledge, and so it may deceive us.

What does Spaemann mean when he says that for Descartes the contents of memory are *cogitatum* not *cogitatio*, object rather than subject? This contradicts what Spaemann asserts is true of the memory. What significance does this have for our understanding of ourselves? p. 104. Since Descartes's theme is not personality but subjectivity, he does not reflect on the fact that *cogitatio* itself turns into *cogitatum*. What is wrong with defining the identity of persons by the continuity of memory? Why does this "run into the sands of self-contradiction"? (p. 104). Locke treats memory as "the form of immediate self-identity" which Spaemann says it most certainly is not. Memory 'recovers' the past self, presupposing an explication of subjectivity. It fuses with the past self. This fusion is not a new immediacy as Locke would have it but the person's identity is still a mediated one.

What is meant by saying "The identity of consciousness is not... the same as the consciousness of identity"? (p. 105)

## II

Immediate familiarity with oneself is not the same as self-consciousness. The latter arises through externalization, because we can only possess what is separate from us. A subject that becomes certain of itself by reflection can only do so by recalling its past self into the present. However, this way of putting it is misleading. Beginning with the subject in this way has the effect of reconstructing a complex reality that was actually there behind subjectivity from the first.

How does the anticipation of the view of everyone enable us to get beyond the abstract idea of ourselves as incarnate subjectivity? (p. 106)

Why is it that the condition for personal intersubjectivity is that the subject externalizes itself in time? (p. 107) The problem with intersubjectivity is that other people's inwardness is accessible only through symbolic representation in the form of natural features. We do not know it as subjectivity. The only thing someone else can present to me is an exterior surface.

How does existence in time mean that subjectivity is in pursuit, reaching out to become what it has not yet become? (p. 107)

How does the objectification of past subjectivity make it possible for subjects to be objectively accessible to others as subjects, and so make them persons? (p. 107)

Why does inner subjectivity on its own not suggest such a thing as time?

By memory we mean subjects have become an outside taken back inside again. It is memory that really reveals us to ourselves. Momentary subjectivity is merely a limit-concept. Only the godhead, as Augustine sees it, occupies the perennial Now because only the godhead is thought of as an infinite particularity, such that its relations *ad extra* constitute its inner being.

Why according to saint Thomas Aquinas can the godhead not have real relations to the creation? (p. 108, first par.)

Persons cannot simply 'be' their nature without further ado; they must persist in the task of 'having' it. How can a person rid itself of the being that it has as its nature?

Why is a line, on which one may go to and fro, not a fitting metaphor for time? (p. 108 last par.)

### III

In what sense does the objectivizing of inwardness mean that time is unreal? (pg. 109, mid par.)

What does it mean to say that the objectivizing of inwardness amounts to an unrealizing? If happiness is the objective success of life as a whole, how does it follow that the only happy life is one that has come to an end? (bottom of page)

We are never free of the idea of a real, timeless unity of the person within and without. It forms the background against which our awareness of time's peculiarly 'annihilating' character stands out in relief. (What implications does this have for the soul's immortality?) (p. 110, first par.)

Plato thinks of timelessness wholly from the starting point of objective form. The particular is not an object of knowledge in his view. Only by assuming a timeless knower with knowledge extending to temporal and contingent events can we attribute atemporality to the knowledge of contingent things.

How does thinking about the personal, triune God transform the idea of timelessness from indifference into eternity? (p. 111, middle of 2nd par.)

How is God's subjectivity described in distinction from man's subjectivity?

### IV

How does the thought that there is a timeless consciousness of temporal things, and that eternity is contemporary with every moment lead to time losing its ontological reality? (p. 111, last par.)

What is wrong with the "spatialization of time" such as in Boethius metaphor of a traveler in a fog for how God knows today what will happen tomorrow?

What does it mean to say, "What is, in an absolute sense, is simply the Absolute"? (p. 112, first par.)  
In what sense does time assume a form for people?

Reflection on the following last section of the chapter:

"The paradigm case of temporal form is music. The constituent elements of a piece of music are not the individual notes, but small clusters short enough to be retained in the memory immediately, something like an extended moment. The form of the whole piece is then realized by conscious recollection and comparison of its elements. Often we have to hear a piece several times to grasp it; we may even need a program note. The realization of a piece of music in time is entirely 'ideal'; it is a timeless something that we cannot think of without time. For temporal form is constructed on the fact that individual moments are neither simultaneous nor indistinguishable.

There is a paradox in this situation. The more indistinguishable the moments, the more inconsequential their difference, so much the more relentless is the annihilating passage of time. To 'kill time' means to give oneself up to time's killing effects. To take time seriously, to use time, to wait, to recognize a moment, to see something is 'on time'; this is to overcome time by making it a material for form. Even our complaints about our own transitoriousness may assume a form, and that form is already an answer to our complaints. As persons, we are suspended between awareness of time's annihilating effects and awareness of time's own annihilation against the backdrop of the eternal present. Laid out flatly alongside one another like that, these two ideas cancel each other out without the contradiction giving rise to anything sensible... To think of a person is to think of one's own existence as a form - not a form that maintains itself through time as an unfluctuating object of timeless knowledge, but a form that is itself a formation of time, a 'temporal form.'"

-Robert Spaemann, *Persons*, p. 113

[Spaemann seems to have primarily in mind classical music here. His reflection on music in relation to time provides for me, as a side effect, a compelling reason to listen to classical music, to strive to attain a greater appreciation of something so fine. When he describes the conscious recollection and the comparison of elements that goes into grasping the form of the whole piece, I have an "ahh, here is the inner room of the ethos" kind of feeling. Today, classical music is encountered largely as background music in splinter pieces fractured from the whole except by the connoisseurs who I am abjectly admiring. But here is attentive, reflective devotion that pays, the only way to deepen appreciation, and to get past the giddy and empty excitement at something's mystique. (At least I make sense, to some extent, to myself.)

Music which consists mostly of the same rhythmic beat, with almost indistinguishable moments, seems in comparison a 'killing of time', inebriation similar to alcohol's, and one characterized by a passivity, (or gyrations). Classical music, in contrast, takes time seriously, reflectively turning over the moments to discern a form in time. I think of George Eliot's definition of genius as being the power to make and do and it seems to me that the kind of ethos required of the serious listener to classical type music is one that also trains their minds, limbers their minds and emotions, in a way conducive to awakening genius or at least powers to make and do, rather than deadening them. But there is a place for alcohol and what Aristotle disdainfully called 'slave music', it seems to me, though it is vain to think it is not lower in a hierarchy of excellence.

At this point I tangent into a contiguous reflection. It occurs to me that I may cause confusion or offend by referring to Aristotle's use of the term 'slave music.' I assume Aristotle's use to be one laced with oppressive prejudice toward slaves, so that it may confuse my use of the term. Regarding the United

State's African American spirituals, these are some of the most moving songs in our entire repertoire of music. But there is a certain limit to them when comparing them to classical music's variations. But there is a lot of craft to these short songs, much more so than the kind of dead beat rhythmic and often vulgar and licentious songs. Thinking of the songs only in terms of the music, however, they are much more limited instantiations of the forming of time, yet they too are often windows into eternity. Indeed, they may have more depth and power often than a cleverer and longer piece. There are different excellencies that should each be given their due, that sometimes are combined in truly fine works. A lot of classical music is shaped by the Negro or African American Spirituals. Now I am thinking of a favorite piece called "Bamboula" by Gottschalk. I think it is terribly clever, energetic and brilliant, and it is fashioned on and inspired by music heard from slaves. But it has much, much more variation than a "killing time" song. I guess the reason the phrase "slave music" resonates with me despite the apparently racist origin is that it can describe the kind of music which deadens and dulls the creative powers, and so enslaves, in contrast to the kind of music which awakens, trains and inspires the creative genius. (Do I detect something smarmy in the term "creative"?)

It is interesting how much accessibility to classical music has grown and permeated our technologies and the inner ability and ethos to attend to it appreciatively seems to have nose-dived. More people used to go to classical music concerts than to ball games if that is any indicator.]

## Chapter 10: Death and the Future Perfect Tense

### I

The Future Perfect Tense is used to express an action which, the speaker assumes, will have completed or occurred in the future. It gives a sense of the completion of a task that will happen in the future. e.g. The patient will have recovered from illness by the next month.

We cannot banish, as Epicurus had attempted to do, the knowledge that one day we shall not be, but shall have been. We foresee a retrospective view on ourselves that is someone else's view of us. In death we foresee a radical objectification in which integration is no longer possible through a sustained continuity of meaning. In Christianity, conversion and baptism are fittingly described as a kind of death.

Animals only aim to maintain, to achieve, or to alter certain states. Only for persons does the question of their own existence or non-existence arise. From the "view from nowhere", the viewpoint of intelligence, we see the world as a process that goes on without us. Personal life is not defined by the imperative of self- and species-preservation. Its essential distinguishing mark is self-transcendence.

To say "life goes on" in order to dismiss the end of our personal life is an escapist self-deception because what our own death amounts to is the end of the world, for the world has to be someone's world, and as my world it comes to an end.

### II

Knowledge of our own death is incommensurable with every other knowledge that we have. Specific endeavors form the underlying structure or foundation of our day-to-day practical rationality. The point of confusion is where we view life itself as an endeavor of this sort, upon which it is up to us to impose a meaningful shape. The idea of a cost-benefit spreadsheet applied to life itself is an illusion, resting on the fantastic notion that there are criteria to measure the value of living as such, as though we can

somehow stand outside the life we were actually living and then weigh it up. It is precisely the personal character of life that is misrepresented in this fantasy. If a person gives up his life, he simply gives up himself, not some entity over and beyond life. There is and can be no criterion to settle decisively whether living is a sensible thing to do or not. The effect of the fantasy of such a calculation is to rip the intelligence's 'view from nowhere' out of the life of the individual - as though the two were unrelated! (p. 117)

- How does the effect of the cost-benefit analysis of life "rip the intelligence's 'view from nowhere' out of the life of the individual?
- What implications does Spaemann's dismissal of cost-benefit analysis have for arguments for abortion and euthanasia?

When it comes to life as a whole, the persistent calculation of probabilities is no longer a rationally defensible procedure. The closer we get to understanding our lives as a whole, the less significant probability becomes. To apply probability to one's own life is to adopt the standpoint of pure reason, treating one's life as one among others. But since we are personally concerned with our life, probability calculations about its length have no meaning because unique happenings are not susceptible to probabilities.

What the discovery of the person amounts to is that every personal life, not only one's own, is actually incommensurable. Knowledge of one's own death colors each moment of life to the same extent. Its meaning can only be meaning here and now.

- What does Spaemann mean when he says we must make it possible for the child to die at any point without being compelled to say that it died too soon? (p. 118)

### III

Reflection on death relativizes all the meaning we derive from vital impulses. Only life makes vital goals meaningful; so they cannot make life meaningful. What implications does this have for the formation of bucket lists?

Beyond the complex of vital meanings which come to seem meaningless, a further horizon comes into view. This may be a factor only for the kind of life that, knowing about death, has discovered the finitude of finite things. The complex of vital meanings strikes us as absurd because it is predicated on the assumption of life itself and has no way of engaging with life as a totality. The sense of absurdity belongs to a second complex of meaning that is beyond the complex of vital-meaning, the complex which we call 'significance.'

'Significance' is meaning 'toughened' by the consciousness of finitude which asserts itself in the face of death. Grasping the significance of things is associated not only with the satisfaction of vital impulses, but their frustration. Spaemann gives the example of someone losing his life in a fruitless attempt to save someone else's. Even without the positive value in terms of vital impulses, the act is revered in terms of the significance in the very fact that it occurred.

An example, though his endeavors were not without benefit to the complex of the vital impulses: [His

name was Saman Gunan (Guana/Kunan). He has recently died taking oxygen to the Thai youngsters that were trapped in a cave.]

Meaning, taken on its own, is finite. Something that has meaning for us now will one day lose its meaning. Having meaning is not something with an ontic standing of its own; it is purely relative to something else that does have meaning.

Consciousness of finitude delivers life from inherent absurdity, and supplies the condition for finding it precious.

#### IV

The wish for a quick death so often voiced these days contrasts with the wish for death as personal act. Religious rites and *memento mortis* assume human beings approach the end of life not as extinction but a last duty laid upon them to perform.

Suicide is not the model for a truly personal death. The actor and victim are one, though the roles are in contradiction. In suicide one does not surrender one's life; one 'takes' one life. In personal death, activity and passivity are not violently opposed in this way, but passivity and suffering are what is performed as an action. If surrender is the true proof of possession, dying is the supremely human act. An anticipation of death makes our life personal by penetrating and structuring it. Only the affirmation of the future perfect makes the present tense fully real.