

The Concept of Person: Philip A. Rolnick's *Person, Grace, and God*

ABSTRACT Key Words: Trinity, person, grace, gift, incommunicability, altruism, naturalism, transcendence, the true, good and beautiful, deconstruction, analogy, Polanyi, Aquinas, Boethius, Nietzsche, Rorty, Lyotard, Derrida.

This article is a discussion of Philip A. Rolnick's Person, Grace, and God with comments by Andrew Grosso, Paul Lewis and Paul Gavrilyuk and a response by Philip Rolnick.

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Incommunicability, Relationality, and Self-Donation: Philip Rolnick on Persons Divine and Human

Andrew Grosso

In *Person, Grace, and God*, Philip Rolnick undertakes a two-fold task. First, he demonstrates that a Christian understanding of the concept of the person is able to withstand the critiques of both empiricist naturalism and postmodern deconstructionism. Second, he outlines what a personalistic account of knowing and being implies for our understanding of both God and humanity. His approach to this task is chiefly axiological, and more specifically ethical; although he touches on matters of truth and beauty, his primary concern has to do with the question of the good, especially as it is embodied in acts of compassion and altruism. Rolnick suggests that his work can be seen as an extended commentary on the “paradoxical” teaching of Jesus (see esp. Mk 8.35, 12.28-31) that it is only in losing our lives that we find them (*PGG*, 7).

As one might expect, Rolnick's opening gambit involves a survey of the development of the Christian concept of the person. After providing some advance organizers intended to orient the reader to the nature and scope of his project, Rolnick plunges in with an examination of several Hellenistic antecedents that influenced the early theological tradition. He marks the emergence of Nicene theology as a watershed in the development of the concept of the person, and goes on to outline the way both the Cappadocians and Augustine elaborated this tradition. He devotes significant attention to Boethius and to Richard of St. Victor, especially the way they each articulated the notion that personhood involves incommunicability. Rolnick gives surprisingly little attention at this point to the way Aquinas both received and extended the theological legacy to which he was heir, but Rolnick circles around later (in the fourth, constructive section) to pick up Aquinas. He offers a passing glance at contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology (i.e., Zizioulas) before wrapping up his survey and moving on.

The second major section is, like the first, delimited to a single chapter, and is dedicated to examining the challenges that arise from theological attempts to engage evolutionary naturalism. Specifically, Rolnick tackles the neo-Darwinian critique of the concept of the person, especially as it relates to the problem of altruism and, less so, the possibility of affirming a transcendent order. He first demonstrates that the presumed critique

of the concept of the person by some neo-Darwinian thinkers is not nearly as devastating as its proponents imagine. Next, he suggests that evolutionary naturalism has not been able to provide a satisfactory naturalistic account for altruism. Finally, he proposes that it is possible to accommodate the contributions of the empirical sciences without mitigating a commitment to moral virtues such as altruism as well as the reality of a transcendent order.

The third major section of the book is dedicated to engaging another contemporary challenge to the traditional concept of the person, namely, postmodern deconstructionism. Over the course of three interwoven chapters, Rolnick considers the work of a number of theorists (including Nietzsche, Lyotard, Rorty, and especially Derrida) whose rejection of the concept of the autonomous self is often taken to amount to a comparable rejection of the concept of the person. Eschewing combative rhetoric, Rolnick adopts an irenic stance and acknowledges the contributions of postmodernism even as he identifies those features that he believes are problematic. He appreciates the postmodern “opening” of the concept of the person (i.e., an approach that avoids both reductionism and essentialism, and instead favors relationality) as well as its emphasis on alterity (he sees here a potential point of contact with Christian ethics). However, he judges deconstructionism to be too beholden to a dualistic manner of conceiving human knowledge and action; over and against what he sees as the false antithesis of strict univocity or strict equivocality, he charts a third way, one that is characterized by an emphasis on the *via media* of analogy.

Committed as it is to a metaphysics of radical participation (even though, as Rolnick acknowledges, most postmodern thinkers would deny that they are committed to *any* metaphysics), postmodernism provides a useful starting point for thinking about the contingency of the world. When seen from the perspective of Christian faith, this contingency is not a curse but a blessing: our experience of the world “is a particularly lovely gift of the creation that is susceptible to the mixed phenomenon of givenness and construction, for it allows a three-fold integrity: the integrity of the world that communicates its act of being in sundry but dependably law-like ways; the relative integrity of persons who can progressively understand this world; and the interactions of persons and world that becomes the intervening phenomenon of culture” (*PGG*, 136). There seems to be here a pattern at work that is comparable to Polanyi’s account of the triadic structure of the tacit dimension, but Rolnick does not elaborate this correspondence.

Rolnick begins to track towards the more constructive section of his project by following up his consideration of the participatory character of our knowing and being with an analysis of the postmodern critique of the concept of the gift. He affirms (*contra* naturalism, deconstructionism, and the anthropology of Marcel Mauss) the possibility of the gift, and maintains that it is precisely the concept of the gift that enables us to apprehend the possibility of affirming transcendence and freedom within a context conditioned by contingency and radical relationality. Rolnick’s essential insight here is to highlight the correspondence between the concept of the gift and that of the person: he argues that “person and gift are mutually constitutive,” both arising from and being disposed towards creativity and freedom (*PGG*, 167). Affirming this correspondence allows us to recognize that contingency and relationality need not be taken to signify “failure, lack, or deprivation,” but should rather be seen as “a summons and invitation to participate in an utterly new expression of divine being” (*PGG*, 173). Here again, we find an implicit similarity between Rolnick and Polanyi: the former’s analysis of the gift and its correspondence to personal knowing and being bears no small similarity to the latter’s account of the responsibility that is engendered when one indwells concepts and values that orient one to a transcendent horizon.

In the fourth and final section, Rolnick outlines the parameters of a personalistic theology that makes use of the insights developed in the previous sections. This section is comprised of two chapters, the first of which takes up the question of divine personhood and the second of which takes up the question of human personhood.

Reflection on divine personhood, Rolnick suggests, involves consideration of the ways that the concepts of person, nature, and grace enable us to understand something of the being and action of God. Appreciation of the tension between divine simplicity and trinitarian relations has the “salutary effect of keeping us from the self-deception of conceptual mastery of the being of God” (*PGG*, 193). Rolnick’s purpose here is to argue that the being and action of God is best understood in terms of “self-donation” (*PGG*, 190-191), that is, in terms of the communication of truth, beauty, and goodness in the relations between the divine persons. In other words, Rolnick proposes that the trinitarian being and action of God can be understood precisely in terms of gift, each divine person both actively communicating and actively receiving the “beauty, delight, and love” (*PGG*, 198) that is offered by the other persons.

This pattern of mutual donation becomes the foundation for thinking about contingent personal being and action. After carefully identifying several errors to be avoided relative to our understanding of human personhood, Rolnick suggests that human personality is best understood to be “incommunicable, expansile, continually identifiable in the midst of change, and functions as a relatively unified unifier” (*PGG*, 222). Rolnick borrows Ricoeur’s notion of “attestation” as a way of making sense of the perdurance of human personhood, but disagrees with Ricoeur with regard to the nature of attestation: whereas Ricoeur grounds perdurance in the cultivation of character, Rolnick suggests that its very malleability renders character incapable of accounting for the continuity of personal being. Instead, Rolnick suggests that the exercise of self-donation (one might call it “being as gift”), grounded as it is in faith and trust, is what makes the cultivation of character possible and is thus that which constitutes the nature of persons.

Rolnick concludes with some observations about the ramifications of his understanding of personal knowing and being. For example, he notes that personal being necessarily “interrupts” the natural order, given both its transcendent origin and its transcendent telos (*PGG*, 235); the chief example of this is the incarnation, “a personal opening that disrupts any closed and self-sufficient ontology” (*PGG*, 256). Likewise, he touches on the dialogue between theology and neuroscience: he appreciates some of the insights of nonreductive physicalism but wants to say more about the way that human persons are oriented towards God and the salvation he provides, a salvation that seeks to raise the creation to new life in a way that does not overwhelm either the integrity or the freedom of the creation but rather fulfills them.

Polanyians will find much throughout Rolnick’s book that will be familiar to them. He explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Polanyi relative to such themes as the fiduciary component in all knowing, the dynamics of emergence, the necessary role of tradition in all discovery, and the paradoxical way whereby obedience and submission provide us with the means to freedom. As noted above, he also seems to lean decisively towards Polanyi in his exposition of our experience of the world and his account of the responsibility of persons who find themselves oriented towards a horizon of transcendent concepts and values. Borrowing Alister McGrath’s distinction between the “illuminative” as opposed to the “foundational” use of Polanyi’s thought, we would probably be better off saying that *Person, Grace, and God* is characterized more so by the former than the latter, although the apparent correspondence between certain important elements of Rolnick’s

arguments and Polanyi's thought at times takes it close to the latter as well.

There is one noticeable lacuna in Rolnick's work, namely, his neglect of the doctrine of the *enhypostasia* and its elaboration by John of Damascus. This was, of course, a significant clarification within the Nicene tradition that Rolnick justifiably regards as the foundation of the Christian concept of the person. The Damascene's efforts would have been especially useful at that point, late in the fourth section, when Rolnick finds himself arguing that any consideration of contingent personhood will necessarily involve "some form of *twoness* and a way of *unifying* the twoness" (PGG, 246-247). Granted, the doctrine of the *enhypostasia* is intended to express the idea that the two natures of Christ are united in and by the one person of Christ, and is thus something that can strictly be said to apply only to the incarnation. However, given the fact that the doctrine provides a means of approaching some understanding of how "twoness" might be unified (and within a distinctly personal form of being, at that), it's somewhat surprising to find that Rolnick makes no mention of it. One wonders how Rolnick's efforts might have been abetted had he given further attention to this aspect of the Nicene tradition, and to the Eastern theological tradition in general.

Do We Need to Go Through Trinity to Relate *Person, Grace, and God*?

Paul Lewis

Some Opening Observations

In *Person, Grace, and God*, Philip Rolnick develops an understanding of personhood that is both sensitive to the historical development of ideas about the person and responsive to contemporary criticisms that arise from sociobiology and post-modern critical theory. He seeks to overcome these criticisms by appealing to classical Christian Trinitarian theology since it is his conviction that human personhood is best understood as analogous to divine personhood (189). That conviction requires Rolnick to explore Christological and Trinitarian debates, for those debates have shaped a Christian (and western) understanding of the person.

The book does more than recount doctrinal developments, however, for Rolnick's task also requires him to engage a wide range of non-theological sources, including evolutionary biology, psychology, physics, cultural anthropology, and various post-modern philosophers. Rolnick treats these sources irenically and acknowledges insights that Christians should take from them, even if their larger claims are ultimately untenable.¹ In short, the book exemplifies the kind of mutually-critical conversation that should take place between theology and other intellectual disciplines. Interestingly, Rolnick brings Polanyi to bear on the argument at two points.

There is much to like about this book. It is clearly written, effectively structured, and engages a topic of interest to philosophers, theologians, and ethicists. However, I do offer for our reflection two issues raised by Rolnick's project. One is theological in nature and I suspect arises from differences in theological method and temperament. The other is more philosophical or ethical in nature. Before getting to those issues, however, I begin with a summary of Rolnick's arguments, painted with an admittedly broad brush.²

An Overview of *Person, Grace, and God*

Rolnick develops his account of person in three stages, the first of which is to offer a genealogy, if you

will, of the concept of the person (Chapter 1). He begins by summarizing etymological developments in ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Latin cultures. Of the emerging ancient, pre-Christian concept of person, Rolnick concludes, “The route taken was evidently from a type of mask, to a type of dramatic character, e.g., a young ingénue or an old miser. Eventually a social or moral conception arose that was proper and unique to the individual” (14). Whatever insights into the nature of personhood developed in these ancient cultures, little was done to expand upon them until the Christian tradition was forced to clarify its claims about Jesus as the incarnation of the divine, a task that led to a more detailed account of Trinitarian relationships.

According to Rolnick’s narrative, there are several key turning points in the concept of the person that emerges by the Middle Ages. The first is the Cappadocian innovation of using *ousia* to refer to what is common in the godhead and *hypostasis* to what is distinct within the godhead. In so doing, the Cappadocians distinguish between two terms that had heretofore been treated as synonyms (17-20). In addition, since *ousia* is often translated into Latin as *natura* or nature, Rolnick understands the Cappadocians to distinguish between person and nature, a distinction Augustine later affirms (28). As with the Cappadocians, Augustine contributes to the development of the concept of the person indirectly, since the goal of his relevant writings is to clarify Christological and Trinitarian doctrines in light of the views of his opponents. What Augustine puts into play are two ideas that would bear later fruit. The first is that persons exist in relationships and the second is that human personality is in some way analogous to Trinitarian processes (25-26, 33). Chalcedon’s innovation is to treat personhood as something that unifies (34). The final development begins with Boethius, extends through Richard of St. Victor, and culminates in Thomas Aquinas. Trinitarian thought now comes to associate person with incommunicability, a term that refers to the unique, untransferable quality of a human being. Thus, “each person knows itself to be a center of freedom, thought, and action that can only be itself; it cannot be another center” (54). In sum, Rolnick suggests that in the Middle Ages, the person comes to refer to that which is a unifying center, distinct from but related to nature, as well as unique or unrepeatable.

In the second stage of his argument (Chapters 3-5), Rolnick deals with two developments that undercut this received notion of personhood. One is biological science and the other is post-modern thought. The biological science that arises with Darwin challenges the belief that human persons somehow transcend nature, but then runs into difficulty trying to explain the existence of seemingly altruistic behaviors in the animal world. After recounting theories of kin selection and reciprocal altruism, Rolnick creatively draws together insights from psychological experiments, Michael Polanyi’s ontology of hierarchical levels, and Thomistic theology in order to defend the Christian tradition’s view that a qualified self-love and love of kin can provide training for the expanded circles of love to which Jesus calls us. Thus persons participate in nature (self-love), but are not rigidly determined by it.

The second challenge to person comes from post-modern theorists who treat the person, (sometimes called the self or subject) as variously, a “fiction” (Nietzsche), “just complicated animals” (Rorty), a “fabric of relations” (Lyotard), or “a pause” (Derrida). These ideas about the subject are themselves embedded in a worldview that existence is so contingent and conflictual that no metanarrative can make sense of it. Rolnick responds to these claims in two ways, the first of which is to point out their internal incoherence. In their denial of metanarrative, Rolnick argues that Derrida and his ilk, are in fact, committed to their own metanarrative, which post-modern thinkers would realize if they understood how language works analogically (123 ff) and were aware of their own colonizing efforts (137ff). On this last point, Rolnick again brings Polanyi to bear, arguing that Polanyi’s understanding of dwelling in and breaking out offers a more satisfactory way of relating person, community, and language (138ff).

Rolnick then devotes a chapter to gift giving, a topic of recent fascination among cultural anthropologists. In their analysis, gifts are never free because they are part of a cycle of obligation in which exchange is calculated to serve one's self interest, a position that echoes that of sociobiologists who say that altruism and sacrifice are illusory. Derrida takes the anthropological analysis and applies it to religion to conclude that religious claims of giving and receiving gifts maintain the pattern of exchange, only it exchanges infinite rewards for finite (154). These views on gift giving therefore seem to threaten the Christian claim that life is gifted or graced in creation and Christ. In response to this perceived threat, Rolnick draws from and supplements his earlier counter-arguments to assert the point that persons and gifts constitute each other in that they "arise from and are disposed to creativity" (167), a fact that is disclosed in friendships that are based on the good (183-185).

Having disposed of criticisms of person found in sociobiology and postmodern thought, Rolnick then enters the final stage of his work by articulating his view of the person (Chapters 6 and 7). He begins by delving more deeply into Trinity, guided by the conviction that by discovering how grace, nature, and person are related in God we can illuminate human personhood (190). Rolnick begins by working through some of the logical and philosophical difficulties that accrue when one tries to affirm both God's simplicity and multiplicity. In order to solve them, Rolnick sides with Aquinas' move to make relationship one of the attributes or perfections of God (196). Doing so allows Rolnick to claim that, by willing the highest good (the well-being of the divine nature), God wills what is necessarily personal and relational (196-198). That personal/relational nature is characterized by giving and receiving, which are best understood as two dimensions of the same action that lead to the perfection of the divine nature's simplicity (203-205). In the end, then, God as Father, Son and Spirit are related by both nature and grace, for God's nature is graceful gift-giving and receiving that makes personal life possible (206-207).

In moving from Trinity to human persons, Rolnick develops four major affirmations. First, human beings are relational creatures whose very existence is from the very beginning always already imbedded in webs of natural, social, and divine histories. In short, life begins as graced or gifted. Secondly, human personhood ultimately remains indefinable mystery that can be shared with but never possessed by others. Some of that mystery is exposed in various polarities found in human existence (e.g., permanence and growth; see 225-231). Rolnick's third affirmation is that human persons represent the unity of body, mind, soul, and spirit. Finally, human personhood is transformed by our participation in the teachings, leadership, and mission of Christ.

Theological and Ethical Issues Raised by *Person, Grace and God*

There is much about this book that I wish to affirm, especially its appreciative, but critical engagement with non-theological sources. Rolnick achieves a degree of clarity in his treatment of the post-modernists that I wish they could achieve in their own writing. Moreover, Rolnick offers solid and sensible answers to the challenges they pose to theology. His emphasis on persons as always already graced by their embodiment in the physical world, as well as their embeddedness in social and spiritual worlds is well-taken. Nonetheless, I want to press Rolnick on two points.

The first is the centrality of the Trinity for his understanding of the person. I am simply not persuaded that Trinity is particularly helpful in getting us to where Rolnick wants to go. For one thing, Trinity does no work in Rolnick's deconstruction of either the biological or postmodern challenges to personhood. Instead of grounding his objections in Trinity, Rolnick disposes of those challenges in other ways. Sometimes he simply

exposes logical inconsistencies in the arguments, as mentioned above. At other times, he brings additional data into the conversation, such as his appeal to the psychology experiments on altruism by Batson and Shaw (78-82) or situating the biological world in the cosmic history described by contemporary physics (155-157). Along these lines, Rolnick could have drawn from more of the richer, less reductionist accounts of psychology and biology to show that those fields are not monolithically reductionist.³ At still other times, it is not Trinity, but Jesus (e.g., 82-90), Aristotle (e.g., 184-185), Aquinas (e.g., 243), or the doctrine of creation (168-169) that provide Rolnick with the leverage that he needs. In sum, as I look more closely at the arguments, I am left wondering if Trinity does enough of the “heavy lifting” to be that important to Rolnick’s argument.

But I have another problem with making Trinity the cornerstone of the work (and to be fair, I must admit that I have long been tone deaf when it comes to this particular doctrine). I am happy to accept the Trinity as an integral part of Christian confession, but I see it as a theological construct intended to make sense of a wide range of biblical and experiential data. Moreover, when I read the history of theology, I am struck by the historical contingency, political expediency, and terminological vagueness that accompanies these formulations. The creedal formulations of Christology and Trinity emerge out of controversy, are the result of (at least in the case of Nicea) political pressure from the emperor, and clearly represent linguistic innovations in that they try to equate Greek and Latin terms that are not exactly interchangeable.⁴ Thus the doctrine of Trinity, by my way of thinking, represents an enduring—and therefore still valuable but nonetheless contingent—attempt by Christian thinkers to affirm that the divine power that is experienced variously as creative, redeeming, sustaining and convicting is not many, but ultimately one.⁵ Schleiermacher therefore seems more sensible to me when, instead of using Trinity as the organizing principle of his *Glaubenslehre*, he makes it the conclusion. Doing so seems to me more in the spirit of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, among others, who caution that we should be very circumspect when talking about Trinity. To be sure, Rolnick acknowledges the warnings of both Augustine (24) and Aquinas (189), but I still worry that he says more about Trinity than can or should be said with such confidence—even analogically. (Of course, Rolnick is in stellar company at this point, for Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin are often guilty of failing to heed their own cautionary words.)

However, beyond these concerns, I also think we are better served by beginning theology at a different spot. Whereas Rolnick wants to start with knowledge of the Trinitarian God in order to understand human existence, I find it more sensible to work from the bottom up. I suspect that behind this preference lies a different understanding of revelation that puts less emphasis on God revealed from above than on God revealed in and through the details of concrete human experience. On this point, I, like Rolnick, appeal to Calvin, whom we obviously read differently. Rolnick rightly notes that Calvin sees knowledge of God and knowledge of humanity as intricately intertwined and thus legitimate starting points for a theology (208). However, Rolnick claims that Calvin is reluctant to begin theology with knowledge of humanity because of his appreciation for the “human defect.” Calvin does say explicitly, however, that he makes the choice to begin with knowledge of God in order to follow “the order of right teaching.”⁶ I take it that Calvin decides on his starting point more because of custom—perhaps even a desire to avoid controversy—than conviction. Trying to discern Calvin’s actual intentions is futile, of course, but it does seem to me that, regardless of what they were, he legitimates a theology done from the ground up.

What difference might such a change make? Consider the analogical use of language, a use Rolnick contrasts with the univocal or equivocal.⁷ Take, for example, the claim that God is father. On Rolnick’s terms, that claim made univocally assumes that there is no difference in the meaning of the term father when it is applied to God or a human male. Made equivocally, such a claim means that God is not *really* a father (biologically or

sociologically speaking), but that there is still poetic value in using the term to describe God. Analogically made, the claim that God is father means that God is at the same time both similar to and different from human fathers. Analogy, according to Rolnick, thus provides us with a way of relating and distinguishing between finite and infinite, thereby allowing us to chart a course between certainty and skepticism (124 and 182). I do not have a quarrel with these specific points, but it seems to me both historically and methodologically more plausible to say that we begin from our experience of human relationships and then draw analogies to the divine.

To adapt a favorite example of Polanyi's, in my view we use human experiences, images, metaphors, and imagination to probe the divine reality like someone might use a stick to probe the entrance to a cave. These all-too-human perspectives comprise the "stuff" that we indwell as we strive to discover the meaning of a reality that always remains tantalizingly beyond our ability to grasp completely. Put differently, and with apologies to Jonathan Edwards, human existence provides us with images and shadows of the divine, rather than knowledge of the divine providing us with images and shadows of the human.

Finally, I have my doubts about betting the ranch on Trinity because I wonder if Rolnick adequately acknowledges the pervasiveness of the human fault. To be sure, Rolnick does talk about sin and evil at several points in the book. In good Augustinian/Thomistic fashion, evil is best understood as the negation of good (142) that can neither be the first nor the last word about human existence, given the pervasive reality of grace (175). Human sin is best understood at its most basic point as a denial of the gift of relationship with God (250), a denial that leads to a radical myopia, (Luther's *incurvatus in se*), a situation that can only be overcome by grace (178-182). But are there epistemological consequences of this fault that need to receive their due? I think there are and that makes me a bit uncomfortable wagering too much on any understanding of Trinity.

The second issue I raise for our consideration—much more briefly—is more philosophical or ethical in character. Does the emphasis placed on incommunicability as central to personhood defeat Rolnick's intent to provide a richer account of personhood than either the modern or post-modern? One point Rolnick and I agree on is that the modern autonomous, individualistic, disincarnate self is problematic—but does stress on the unrepeatable, unique, and ultimately mysterious nature of each person not lead to another form individualism that obscures the commonalities between and interdependencies among persons? I worry that it can, unless it is more carefully elaborated and qualified. Perhaps extending the analogical method that Rolnick likes so much would help us better identify how persons are similar to and different from one another.

Topics for a Convivial Conversation

To conclude, I have tried to articulate what I see here as two issues in *Person, Grace, and God* that warrant further critical discussion. The first, and the one that I have spent the most time developing, has to do with Rolnick's appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity, an emphasis that leads me to ask three questions. First, does Trinity, in fact, do the work that Rolnick wants it to do? Secondly, should it do the work he wants it to, given the history of doctrine? Finally, can it do the work that he wants it to, given the epistemological humility that the reality of human sin would seem to require? The second issue has to do with the moral implications of his emphasis on the uniqueness of persons—does it unintentionally lead to a new individualism?

Despite our differences and these criticisms, I do celebrate the publication of this book. It offers an able example of a much-needed critical conversation between theology and a range of non-theological discourses. His selective and constructive use of Polanyi keeps that name before readers who will likely be unfamiliar with

his ideas. Rolnick's claims about persons have merit. In the end, therefore, I trust that whatever disagreements he and I have are those between friends who are together seeking to grow in friendship with God and one another.

Endnotes

¹See, for example, his treatments of Derrida on p. 138 and Levinas on p. 181.

²I do so in part because the arguments are intricate and detailed, and in part because I am not yet sure I have grasped all the implications and connections.

³See for example, Raymond W. Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006 or Jeffrey M. Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

⁴See Douglas F. Ottati, *Jesus Christ and Christian Vision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 23-34, and 138-140.

⁵I am also influenced by H. Richard Niebuhr's treatment of the Trinity throughout his analysis of the various types in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). For Niebuhr, Trinity functions to affirm that the God who creates is also the God who redeems.

⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill (ed.) and Ford Lewis Battles (transl.) (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 39.

⁷For Rolnick's more comprehensive treatment of analogy, see his *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

Rolnick on the Metaphysics of the Person

Paul L. Gavrilyuk

Philip Rolnick's book *Person, Grace, and God* opens a new chapter in the development of Christian theological anthropology by offering a deeply original account of the metaphysics of the person. The book aims at accomplishing three things: first, to provide a metanarrative of the development of the notion of the person; second, to engage select contemporary deconstructions of the robust metaphysical notion of the person; third, to offer the author's own constructive vision of the person.

How does one write a history of the subject as elusive as person? From the perspective of evolutionary anthropology, such a history begins with the emergence of humanity and will continue more or less indefinitely, as long as there are persons (humans or their evolutionary successors) in the universe. To state the obvious, much in the discussion depends upon the context in which the person is discussed. Human persons have been construed as masks, political animals, loci of social interaction (or, even more reductively, as products of social engineering), consumers, commodities, gamers, pieces of physics and chemistry, genetically programmed automata, evolutionary successors of apes, free intentional agents, embodied or disembodied souls, living mind-body problems, species of rational substance, subjects, levels or streams of consciousness, entities uniting the ideal and real worlds, monads without windows, microcosms, bundles of perception, the actors and writers of history, the mysterious selves capable of "I-Thou" relationship, beings who share human, or angelic, or divine nature, and last but not the least, those created in the image and likeness of God. (My learned readers are welcome to add their own favorites to my list).

Clearly, writing a history of the person is no easy task, given such a baffling plurality of contexts. While most of the just mentioned understandings of person are at least alluded to in Rolnick's rich account, anybody writing on the subject would have to approach the matter selectively. Rolnick focuses on important etymological questions, as well as the development of personhood in some patristic and medieval Christian authors. Such selectivity is inevitable, for no book, even Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, can cover all contexts in which the concept of the person can be conceivably discussed.

As far as the historical metanarrative is concerned, Rolnick proposes that we do not have a robust metaphysical notion of the person until the arrival of the central Christian doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation. This point, I suspect, is bound to be controversial, for surely Rolnick does not want to dismiss the Socratic turn from 'physics' (as conceived by the pre-Socratics) to the phenomenon of man and attendant moral questions. Should one discount, for example, the profound insights of Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, or Aristotle's *De anima*, as altogether irrelevant for our theme? I suspect that Rolnick, whose metaphysical project involves a recovery of Plato's transcendentals, would agree that such a move is too dismissive. While pre-Christian Greek philosophy had a highly developed psychology, I would agree with Rolnick that pre-Christian philosophy lacked a developed intuition of personhood, and especially of personal uniqueness and interiority. I think there is a danger in Platonism to emphasize the metaphysical centrality of the transcendentals to such an extent that the centrality and metaphysical uniqueness of the person is lost. (One interesting indication of this is the controversy in the Platonic and Aristotelian circles over the question whether the body alone is the *principium individuationis* indwelt by an originally non-individualized soul).

Rolnick proposes—and this I take to be one of his central claims—that the key elements of the metaphysics of human personhood are latent in the account of the Trinity. He highlights three crucial aspects of patristic and medieval discourse about the Trinity: the three divine persons are united in one divine essence; the three persons subsist in relation to each other; the three persons are distinguished from each other by their relational characteristics (e.g., the Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten from the Father). By analogy, the human person is that which unites, relates, and distinguishes. Building on his previous work on analogy, entitled *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (1993), Rolnick emphasizes that the analogy does not amount to identity. For example, the divine Trinity is perfectly simple, meaning that the three divine persons are perfectly unified among themselves and hold their attributes in perfect unity. Human beings, in contrast, are imperfectly unified unifiers, unfinished projects of unification.

It is fruitful to compare Rolnick's theological anthropology to what is commonly referred to as St Augustine's psychological images of the Trinity. If Augustine draws his analogy from certain features of human existence (love, will, understanding, etc.) to the Trinitarian relations, Rolnick's project moves in the opposite direction. The doctrine of the Trinity, far from being only an exercise in negative theology, turns out to have explanatory potential for the key metaphysical aspects of the human self: namely, unity, relation, and difference. While Augustine does not insist on the analogical possibilities of his psychological models, Rolnick's account, in contrast, builds on Aquinas's theory of analogical predication. Rolnick's proposal turns the Augustinian psychological model on its head by developing an analogy from the features of the triune God to the self, not vice versa.

Another important notion, which Boethius stumbled upon and later medieval authors developed, is that of *incommunicabilis*, i.e., the irreducible, non-transferable uniqueness of each person. By insisting on the

importance of *incommunicabilis* Rolnick does not mean to suggest that somehow all aspects of human personality are unique and unrepeatable. If this were the case, these aspects could not be generalized about or perhaps even meaningfully discussed at all. But if *incommunicabilis* is not any one particular property of the person, what is it precisely? Rolnick addresses the question indirectly, when with great elegance he develops his notion that the person is always nature/ essence-transcending. According to Rolnick—and this idea takes its inspiration from Michael Polanyi—persons are always *more than*, their nature is to transcend their nature. Clearly, *incommunicabilis*, the incommunicable, has something to do with human freedom, freedom to transcend all definitions, freedom to be open to the transcendent. But precisely, again, what is the incommunicable? If we say that it is a unique way in which each person transcends the context, we are only begging the question. What is at stake here is the issue of how precisely each person is unique. One could say that the question is potentially unanswerable, since to answer it is to define the person in a particular way and ultimately reduce the person who is always *more than* to a specific context. Still, one could probe a bit further the content of the incommunicable. If the incommunicable is not a property among other properties, maybe it is a meta-property, a way in which the self unifies all other properties? Or, perhaps, the incommunicable is the freedom which allows the self not to be deterministically conditioned by any of its properties? That is, the *incommunicabilis* refers to irreducible subjectivity, ineffable interiority, and free unification of all personal properties.

In the second part of the book, Rolnick engages two main challenges: (1) the claim of some evolutionary biologists that a genuinely altruistic behavior is impossible, and (2) the deconstructions of the person by various post-modern philosophers. In response to the first challenge, Rolnick observes that the description of the animal behavior in terms of egoism or altruism involves anthropomorphic imagery, which could be as misleading, as it could be illuminating. More importantly, altruism is not an exercise in masochistic self-destruction, but rather the losing of the self for the sake of the other in order to find the more authentic self. For Rolnick, the crucified love of Christ on the cross, which culminates in the resurrection, is the paradigmatic case of altruism. Far from being a denial of the self, altruism is a higher form of self-affirmation, uniquely characteristic of free agents.

Rolnick begins to address the post-modern challenges to person (or subject) by questioning the coherence of Jean-François Lyotard's celebrated dictum that the postmodern condition is characterized by the denial of all metanarratives. Rolnick observes that the denial of metanarratives is itself at least an implicit metanarrative (p. 123). The author follows John Milbank in describing the post-modern project as an "ontology of difference." Rolnick's central point seems to be that the denial of the transcendentals is fraught with as many difficulties as the assumption of the transcendentals. The post-modern thinkers have not freed the world of all metanarratives, but have only replaced various modern metaphysical proposals with their own.

Building on this point, Rolnick enters into a recent discussion of the possibility of genuine gift-giving. Derrida, along with others, has argued that any form of the acceptance of the gift annuls the gift. Rolnick explores the complex moral logic of gift-giving and receiving, and admits the difficulty of genuine gift-giving. However, *pace* Derrida and company, Rolnick contends that at least some ways of giving and accepting the gift *intensify* the gift, rather than annul it. More strongly, Rolnick also argues that the reality of persons, commonly denied by the postmodern authors, is the condition of the possibility of gift-giving. Without persons, who freely enter into the reciprocal relations of gift-giving and receiving, there could be no genuine gift-giving. The triune metaphysics, the metaphysics of personhood, and gift (which Rolnick subsequently translates in terms of grace) are bound up together.

In relation to Rolnick's valuable discussion of the gift, I would like to raise my second main question

(the first question being the nature of *incommunicabilis*). Rolnick soundly argues that the postmodern denial of the enduring, unifying subject is both performatively and self-referentially incoherent. If I am denying the subject, I am denying the denier. The claim that there is no subject, but only self-perpetuating discourse is simply incoherent. But in this regard, I have a problem with Rolnick's tendency to identify persons with gifts, or even more strongly, the fullness of divine life with grace. I would agree that the life of the Trinity could be aptly pictured as eternal gift-giving of the Father reciprocated by the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the gifts, as understood in everyday discourse, cannot give themselves. Therefore, in this particular context the analogy of trinitarian self-giving and human giving appears to be stretched. Just as any discourse requires a speaker, the gift requires a giver that could be meaningfully differentiated from the gift itself. Since, in Rolnick's own terms, persons are always *more than*, persons by extension must be *more than* gifts too (unless the gifts themselves are ever self-transcending).

The most significant and controversial insight that I took from Rolnick's book is that the metaphysically robust notion of the person "rises" and "falls" together with Christian trinitarian metaphysics. The rudimentary pre-Christian accounts of personhood, if one can speak of them at all, do not do justice to interiority and the incommunicable—two crucial characteristics of personhood. The post-Christian deconstructions of personhood are predicated upon the denial of the reality of grace and of trinitarian metaphysics. Rolnick's insightful book reminds us that there is always a danger to depersonalize persons, to acquiesce in a version of reductionist anthropology, when one denies that grace and the infinite love of the triune God are at the core of all being.

Responses to Responses to *Person, Grace, and God*

Philip Rolnick

In the *Confessions*, Augustine observes that everyone knows what time is until someone asks what it is. Likewise, everyone thinks they know what persons are until someone demands an account. When I set out to write a book on *person*, I did not intend to write something difficult and abstruse. However, as issues presented themselves, especially possible "defeaters" like evolutionary biology and most postmodernist writing, it became impossible to render a plausible account that did not get into some deep conceptual water. Given the difficulty of the topic, I would like to thank Andrew Grosso, Paul Lewis, and Paul Gavriluk for their efforts in responding to *Person, Grace, and God*.

Response To Andrew Grosso

Andrew Grosso's account catches many of the central features that I intended. With only a few exceptions, I find his comments accurate and insightful.

Grosso rightly sees that Jesus' paradox is central to the work: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). Grosso's understanding of the history/genealogy of the person is also quite good. I would only add that my historical account obliquely continues through the postmodern engagement of the modernist subject. Grosso again rightly sees altruism and transcendence at the heart of the issue with biology and postmodernism. Transcendence is actually more basic because without it altruism itself would not be possible.

Grosso's claim that my overall account is "axiological" or "ethical" comes as something of a (minor) surprise. I hold that (1) the true, good, and beautiful are mutually implicative; and (2) the true, good, and beautiful constitute the ground of ethics (once these transcendentals are themselves grounded in the being of God). Nonetheless, Grosso's remark set me to thinking further about the issue, and at least he perceives how central transcendence is to the overall endeavor.

Postmodernists are not really dualistic, as Grosso interprets me to represent them. Following Heidegger, postmodernists reject univocity because in their judgment it is only applicable to Being, and they assert that Being is not accessible to us except through beings and becoming. In other words, we live among and can only perceive flux, change, and heterogeneity. Postmodernists generally deny that unity is available to us. Hence, the postmodern focus is a dizzying metaphysics of change and the new, without a stabilizing sense of tradition or a unifying possibility of transcendence. From Nietzsche to Rorty, transcendence is seen as a sort of con game, where what is allegedly transcendent, i.e., *beyond* us, is then incongruently claimed as the anchor of our discourse. Their skeptical question is: Is it beyond us or not? If it is beyond, then let us not talk of it. In this postmodern picture of change without transcendence, reason, divorced from faith, cannibalizes itself.

There is no knock down argument for convincing skeptics that the true, good, and beautiful are real—infinitely real in the being of God and increasingly real in the experience of those who pursue them. We are "relatively unified unifiers" (*PGG*, 222) because there is always more to be known of truth, more to be accomplished that is good, and more to be appreciated of beauty in others and in nature (science) and perhaps to be increasingly accrued in our own souls and society. The true, good, and beautiful are coterminous with the infinity of the divine being, but graciously, in creation, these qualities are progressively accessible to human experience. The true, good, and beautiful are also the ingredients of love and of every real gift. Relationships all too often include what is false, evil, and/or ugly, but these occurrences are failures of love and gift, not their achievement. Analogy, as a theory from Aquinas to the present, is a way of expressing the relation between divine and human; but the use of this language depends upon faith, not merely argument. Hence I present an *alternative* to postmodernism, not a knock down refutation of it. Whatever Polanyi's religious affirmations and limitations, he clearly had a keen sense of transcendence, and he even characterizes himself as a Platonist—but one who sees the import and potential of history.

I must differ with Grosso's claim that postmodernism is "committed ... to a metaphysics of radical participation." Participation, which is at the heart of the analogical tradition, means that we have a *part* or share of being, and hence a share of the true, good, and beautiful. At its root, it is really a metaphysical elaboration that presupposes creation. By contrast, the postmodernist writers that I engage would not allow anything like participation in something greater. For them, there is no transcendence, nothing greater, nothing privileged. Lyotard, for example, does not advocate conversation as a way of mutual edification and advancement. Instead, he claims: "to speak is to fight" (*PGG*, 104, citing *Postmodern Condition*, 10.) In fact, I frame my response to postmodernism as "A Dispute about the Finite" (*PGG*, 123-137). Hence, I would not say, as does Grosso, "postmodernism provides a useful starting point for thinking about the contingency of the world." Anyone who maintains that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," has the kind of grand narrative—and starting point—that postmodernism dogmatically prohibits. I think that Grosso and I would agree that the universe is contingent because creation is not automatic; rather, it is a gift (grace).

The way Grosso links aspects of my work to Polanyi's thought is very helpful. Grosso's use of Alister

McGrath's distinction between "illuminative" and "foundational" application of Polanyi is likewise instructive.

Grosso nicely grasps the cumulative nature of what I am trying to do: "In the fourth and final section Rolnick outlines the parameters of a personalistic theology that makes use of the insights developed in the previous sections." He likewise has a knack for lifting up key points, as when he writes: "Appreciation of the tension between divine simplicity and trinitarian relations has the 'salutary effect of keeping us from the self-deception of conceptual mastery of the being of God'" (*PGG*, 193). Theology, if it is to be something more than human construction, can never be about conceptual mastery, only about conceptual faithfulness to the gifts that we have received and may continue to receive.

Lifting up the phrase, "person and gift are mutually constitutive" (*PGG*, 167), Grosso raises another key issue. A gift is elusive because it is not natural; likewise, persons, if there are any, are not natural, as opposed to "subjects" or "individuals." Like gifts, person is distinct from nature without being removed from it. The very name "person" historically carries a greater dignity than a mere individual. Person, gift, and the possibility of transcendence live or die together. Derrida's obsession with gift as "the impossible" is really his way of chasing transcendence—which he has a priori ruled out. Ultimately, if there is no truth, goodness, and beauty that transcend us, then we might as well not talk about *persons*. If we choose to speak about persons as opposed to individuals, then we must *believe* in some higher reality toward which persons are oriented. There is an inherent excess about persons, what I have thematically developed as "more than," and this excess is also found in gifts, and in our participation in the true, good, and beautiful.

Neuroscience and the Soul

A somewhat stronger objection to Grosso's account is his understanding of my section on neuroscience and the soul (*PGG*, 239-255). Here Grosso mischaracterizes the text in two ways en route to an unnecessary critique: "[Rolnick] touches on the dialogue between theology and neuroscience; he appreciates some of the insights of nonreductive physicalism ..." First, a 17 page engagement of theology and neuroscience might be considered a bit more than "touching" on the subject, especially since this particular section has already been excerpted (*Global Spiral*, Dec. 2007). Second, and more importantly, the section attempts to show the incoherence of nonreductive physicalism. Advocates of nonreductive physicalism, e.g., Nancey Murphy, rule out talk of "soul" as a presumed condition for being able to engage neuroscience. They variously attempt to show that mind emerges from the body but is never a separate entity. Leaving much aside here, my basic argument against nonreductive physicalism is: If there is only one level of human being, then the physicalism is reductive; if there are two levels, either the upper level is real or it is not. If it is real and not identical with the brain, then it must have being, ontology. Hence, for anyone who believes in God and thus wants to be nonreductive, there must be "some form of *twoness* and a way to *unify* the twoness" (*PGG*, 246-247). Throughout Christian history, especially since Chalcedon (451 AD), person has played that unifying role, but the nonreductive physicalists, who are Christians, neglect this historical solution. The name assigned to the upper level, aspect, property, or even substance, does not much matter. I oppose naturalism but consider it a coherent position. I embrace both mind and soul because I do not think that the most important aspects of human experience can be accounted for without them. Impossibly, nonreductive physicalism tries to locate itself between these two positions. However, it can only do so by obfuscating its commitments—something Polanyi never much liked.

Grosso claims to find a "lacuna" in my account because I omit "the doctrine of *enhypostasia*," which "is intended to express the idea that the two natures of Christ are united in and by the one person of Christ ..."

Grosso apparently missed the theological punch line of my argument against nonreductive physicalism: “Since the hypostatic union settled upon at Chalcedon, in which the two natures of Christ were unified in one Person, Christian thought has consistently opposed dualism through the unifying force of the *person*. Just as the one Person unifies the two natures of Christ, so too are the different levels of body, mind, soul, and spirit unified in each human person” (PGG, 247). What Grosso is demanding from a later source, I utilize from an earlier and more foundational one, the very one that John of Damascus (8th century) was trying to defend with *to enhypostaton*. Furthermore, I also cite the argument as Aquinas employs it (PGG, 55, citing *ST I.19.1. ad 2*).

The theological payoff from these complex arguments is twofold. First, even God respects the dignity of the person. Human nature is assumed by the incarnate Logos, not a human person. Second, person *unifies* diversities, whether we are talking about the one person of Christ unifying divine and human natures, or, in the debate with nonreductive physicalism, how person unifies body, mind, and soul.

Nonetheless, I hope that Grosso, who has generally given such a fine account of my work, will give us a future publication on the Eastern tradition and person. I look forward to being instructed by it.

Response to Paul Lewis

At the end of his critical response to *Person, Grace, and God*, Paul Lewis reminds his readers and me of our friendship: “I trust that whatever disagreements [Rolnick] and I have are those between friends who are together seeking to grow in friendship with God and one another.” So noted and mutually affirmed.

While hesitating to respond to my friend Paul Lewis’s paper, I thought of an (unfortunately) popular song from *Jesus Christ Superstar*: “I Don’t Know How To Love Him.” When a theologian publicly confesses, as Lewis does, that he is “tone deaf” to the Trinity, but then dares to publish a critique of a work because its central topic historically emerges from and theologically engages Trinity, what are we to make of it? Should the tone deaf also write public reviews of a symphony orchestra’s performance? Should the orchestra conductor respond?

Questioning The Trinity

The understanding of God as Trinity arose because, in stark contrast to *Jesus Christ Superstar*’s Mary Magdalene, who sings: “He’s a man. He’s just a man,” every Christian thinker of the patristic period agreed that Jesus Christ was more than a man, that Jesus was the Son of God, a revelation of God the Father, and the Logos incarnate. In response to the revelation in Christ, and the conviction that Father, Son, and Spirit must be equal, relation becomes understood to be at the heart of divine being. God is understood as Father, Son, and Spirit; not as me, myself, and I. The incipient notion of *person* emerges as the solution to how Father, Son, and Spirit can be at once distinguished, related, and infinitely, intensively one. Basically, Jesus’ teachings (e.g., Mark 12:28-31) are about relationship to God and relationship to people, and these teachings are beautifully harmonious with the *ontological* relationships within the divine being.

Following Lewis, let us assume that God is not really Trinity, that God is monolithically One. Having no equals, such a God would have to bear the frustration of never being able to communicate fully (see the arguments of Richard of St. Victor in PGG, 46-54). Aquinas charmingly portrays the problem of a non-trinitarian Deity: “If plurality of persons did not exist in God, He would be alone or solitary. For solitude is not removed by association with anything that is extraneous in nature; thus anyone is said to be alone in a garden, though many

plants and animals are with him in the garden. Likewise, God would be alone or solitary, though angels and men were with Him, supposing that several Persons were not within Him” (PGG, 204, citing *ST I.31.3 ad 1*). It is a historical fact that the concept of the person, upon which most contemporary people place great value, emerges as the early church thinks through the trinitarian and christological controversies. As Polanyi notes, making a move in the right direction often bears greater results than the initial explorer could imagine (PK, 310).

Because *Person, Grace, and God* does not merely repeat trinitarian formulas of the past, but reworks them in connection with other themes in exploration of *person*, I was disappointed to read what amounts to a critique of Christianity, rather than my interweaving of Trinity, person, and the metaphysics of action and receptivity. Rather than launch a mini-meta-critique of the last 20 centuries of Christian teaching, I would strongly prefer that Lewis, who is after all a Christian theologian, had attended to the particular trinitarian articulation that I gave. For example, Chapter Six, “Trinitarian Simplicity: the Unification of Nature and Grace,” presents a reevaluation of medieval metaphysics that proposes a certain kind of receptivity as a divine perfection (PGG, 196-205). With this metaphysical reversal in place, the Son, who receives his being from the Father, can be thought of as grace or gift. Hence, grace is soteriological for us because it is first and foremost ontological within the being of God. Just as listening is a verb, a chosen action, so too can receptivity be conceived as a willed action proper to a being of love. Hence, we can conceive of the Son as the Listener/Logos. The Son, the Eternal Listener, the perfection of receptivity, is also the Word who has much to communicate in his life and teachings. For human beings, listening is a way that we give ourselves to another; it is a necessary ingredient of love. When loved ones do not listen to us, we are sometimes deeply hurt. A God who could speak but could not listen would be something less than perfect.

In its eternal stability, the Trinity is also the infinite realization of dynamic movement toward and for the other—i.e., God is love. Likewise, human love is only accomplished by turning attention away from self and toward the other. Movement toward the other is the movement of grace that escapes the ruinous turning back onto the self (*incurvatus in se*) and its endless self-concerns.

With a passing nod to my repeated citations about being careful and modest when speaking of Trinity, Lewis nevertheless charges: “I still worry that he says more about Trinity than can or should be said with such confidence—even analogically. (Of course Rolnick is in stellar company at this point, for Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin are often guilty of failing to heed their own cautionary words.)” Now let me see if I have this right: Lewis, acting as a one-man magisterium of Christian doctrine, finds Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and me *guilty* of believing that God is Trinity and offering articulations of the doctrine? Presumably, all of us should have kept silence. However, Lewis has a great deal to say about the doctrine: The Trinity is not something that arises from the revelation in Christ; rather, it is a “construct” qualified by “historical contingency, political expediency, and terminological vagueness,” “the result of . . . political pressure from the emperor,” and a muddle of “linguistic innovations.” Drawing upon my former teacher and Polanyi scholar Charles McCoy, I would like to ask Lewis: From what ontological peak do you render these judgments? Counseling circumspection to all others while saying so much himself, Lewis even suggests that my account lacks “epistemological humility.” And he places this accusation in a section called “Topics for Convivial Conversation”?

Of course Lewis has the right to honest dissent from the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a place for Unitarianism (Boston, 19th c.) and the noble tradition of Reformed Judaism. However, it is rather weird to critique Trinity, a central feature of Christian faith, in a work in a series called *Sacra Doctrina*. It is like someone who has been invited to a tennis meet demanding that the game be played without racquets.

Lewis's claim that "Trinity does no work" in my responses to evolutionary biology and postmodernism is tendentious. He complains that my responses to these challenges, rather than arguing from Trinity, sometimes point out logical inconsistencies in their arguments, at other times appeal to psychological experiments, and sometimes use Jesus, Aristotle, Aquinas, or the doctrine of creation. Could Lewis possibly think that using any of the above responses is somehow mutually exclusive with understanding God as Trinity? When dealing with an interlocutor who is not only atheistic but also denies transcendence—a central feature of my book that is tellingly absent from Lewis's critique—what conversational purpose could be served by beginning with Trinity? The fact that I do not butter bread with my chainsaw is not a refutation of the chainsaw.

Bottom Up or Bottoming Out?

Lewis proposes that it is better "to work from the bottom up." He then offers what can only be called a bizarre critique of my very non-controversial reading of the opening of Calvin's *Institutes* (PGG, 208). In a paragraph beginning and ending with the virtues of starting from the "bottom up," Lewis maladroitly cites Calvin, who famously and explicitly chooses to start with knowledge of God (not exactly bottom up). Highlighting this massive counter-example to his own thesis, Lewis even notes that Calvin does so "in order to follow 'the order of right teaching.'" Staring at evidence pointing in the opposite direction from where he is heading, Lewis asserts that, "Calvin decides on his starting point more because of custom—perhaps even to avoid controversy—than conviction." That old chicken-hearted Calvin. Well, having heard again from the ontological peak, at least the world now knows what made the Reformer tick. Yet there is more to come. Apparently conscious that he is psychologizing Calvin, Lewis incoherently adds, "Trying to discern Calvin's actual intentions is futile, of course, but it does seem to me that, regardless of what they were, he legitimates a theology done from the bottom up." Fantasy has now replaced fact. Moreover, it is rather irritating to read about the futility of discerning Calvin's motives while Lewis is in the act of doing so.

Historically, heresy trials represent the most perverse Christian behavior; nonetheless, we can glean some gallows humor from Lewis's embrace of Calvin. When the Spanish physician Michael Servetus fled from the Catholics and appeared in Calvin's Geneva, he was arrested for heresy as soon as he was recognized. Servetus, who had a doctrine of Trinity indistinguishable from Lewis's, was burnt at the stake there in 1553.

Lewis's plea that human sin should lead us to take a bottom up approach to theology is topsy-turvy. If he is as serious as he claims to be about human sin, then why trust "human experiences, images, metaphors, and imagination to probe the divine reality"? Lewis, like Sallie McFague, adopts a "from here to there" approach that is incoherent with his own claims about human inadequacy. By contrast, the discourse of revelation presupposes a "from there to here" starting point. We can only speak if we have first been spoken to.

Grad School Cant

Lewis's accusation that *Person, Grace, and God* could "lead to a new individualism" is residual cant from graduate school days. In particular, Lewis cites my treatment of *incommunicabilis* as prone to this dreaded individualism. However, without incommunicability, personal permanence evaporates. If we become something other than ourselves every time we enter into a relationship, progress in character, or change in important ways, then all accounts of personhood become absurd and the promise of eternal life becomes meaningless. Incommunicability, as developed from Boethius to Berdiaev, is the sine qua non of meaningful relationship, community, and love.

Problematically, Lewis never mentions the biblical theme of the entire work, i.e., Jesus' paradox in Mark 8:35, where the way to save our lives is to lose them for Jesus and for the gospel, i.e., for the sake of *others* (not exactly individualistic). In a reasonably good summary of my treatment of the human person, Lewis in part writes: "First, human beings are relational creatures whose very existence is from the very beginning always already imbedded in webs, of natural, social, and divine histories. In short, life begins as graced, or gifted." Once again Lewis cites evidence (in this case strongly anti-individualistic evidence) which argues against his critique. My advice to Lewis: Drop the metaphysically impoverished attack on the individual. Any sane discourse, such as Polanyi's "Dwelling In and Breaking Out" (PK, 195-203), needs both individual and community.

Conclusion

To his credit, Lewis tells us that he has painted my constructive work "with an admittedly broad brush." Lewis then adds in an endnote: "I do so in part because the arguments are intricate and detailed, and in part because I am not yet sure I have grasped all the implications and connections."

In contrast to Lewis's critical remarks, I found his summary of *Person, Grace, and God* quite well done (apart from the noted absences of "transcendence" and the thematic use of Mark 8:35). In his critical remarks, I appreciate Paul Lewis's honesty, and hope that some good will come of our public exchange.

Response to Paul Gavriyuk

I am grateful to Paul Gavriyuk for having seen so much of what I intended in *Person, Grace, and God*. We are in agreement about most things, but even when he raises questions or criticisms, he ends up answering them much as I myself would.

Development of the Concept of the Person

As an internationally prominent scholar of church history, it is not strange that Gavriyuk ruminates about the origin of the concept of the person—as I did myself. Under the section "Conceptual Development," in a brief sub-section "Pre-Christian," I wrote:

Before Christian theologians ... the concept of the person was here and there foreshadowed but never given sustained, diachronic development As early as Heraclitus, there are incandescent moments at which some key notions briefly appear. But nowhere is the concept presented and then built upon by subsequent thinkers. This lack of development is a sign of the importance and power of *ekklesia*, the church community that is so integral to Christian life and thought. (15)

Those familiar with Polanyi will not be surprised to see that *tradition*, i.e., a community that sustains itself through time, is the launching pad of further development. I do not think it possible that all the depth of *person* could be uncovered by a single person or generation. A community sustained over time, and one with a vital interest in the question, was required. As Gavriyuk suggests, Plato and Aristotle nibbled around the edge of the question, especially the somewhat different but related question of the soul, but as Gavriyuk concludes, "I would agree with Rolnick that pre-Christian philosophy lacked a developed intuition of personhood, and especially of

personal uniqueness and interiority.” I would add that Plato’s development of the good, the true, and the beautiful (the transcendentals) are great contributions to and correlates of the Christian development of the person. As Jacques Maritain suggests, these are the food of the personal (*PGG*, 171). Likewise, John Paul II contends that “transcendence . . . is to a certain extent another name for the person” (*PGG*, 6). Perhaps we could say that Plato and Aristotle, by their great influence upon Christianity, especially their work on transcendence and soul, indirectly contribute to developing the concept of the person.

Three Insights About Persons

What is so clear and helpful in Gavrilyuk’s analysis of *Person, Grace, and God* is that he seizes upon the central insight about persons gained from trinitarian controversy and development: person distinguishes (the Father is not the Son; the Spirit is neither Father nor Son); person relates (there can be no Father without a Son); and person unifies (each of the three is said to be perfectly unified with the entirety of the divine *nature*). Analogously, these three insights about *person* apply to human beings made in the divine image and likeness. In the human case, however, unity is a quest rather than a state of being, so that we are “imperfectly unified unifiers” (*PGG*, 222, as slightly modified by Gavrilyuk). While the analogy works well, there are important differences. As Gavrilyuk notes, “analogy does not amount to identity.”

Incommunicability

Gavrilyuk raises the issue of how persons are *incommunicabilis* (incommunicability) and once again convincingly answers his own question. First used by Boethius, *incommunicabilis* means that the reality (and value) of a given person is absolutely unique; it cannot be taken or given to another. If my best friend dies, I cannot put on a list of things to do tomorrow: get new best friend. Over time, I may be fortunate enough to develop another great friendship, but that new friendship, like the one now lost, will also be unique. The splendor of relationships is made possible by the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the persons who enter into them.

By contrast, *nature* is common and can be given (communicated) to another. Hence, God gives rise to God in the Trinity, and human beings give rise to human children; we do not give rise to oak trees. But while common human nature can be given to another, the personal reality of each parent cannot be given to the child. Gavrilyuk captures the sense of this distinction between nature and person: “person is always nature/essence transcending”; “persons are always *more than*, their nature is to transcend their nature.” Persons have “freedom to transcend all definitions, freedom to be open to the transcendent.” As Aristotle explained, a definition gives the essence of a substance or nature, i.e., what is held in common. But the point of speaking about persons is that each person is unique, even though nature is commonly possessed. In Gavrilyuk’s excellent summary, “*incommunicabilis* refers to irreducible subjectivity, ineffable interiority, and free unification of all personal properties.” In Polanyian terms, we might slightly enhance Gavrilyuk’s summary by substituting “*tacit* unification” for “free unification,” although both terms are helpful.

Person and Transcendence

Gavrilyuk’s summaries of the chapters on evolutionary and postmodern chapters are again very helpful. I would only add that the issue of transcendence is in many ways decisive. The denial of transcendence is typically accompanied by the denial of *person*, as when postmoderns prefer to speak of *subject*—if only in order to

deconstruct it. The possibility of transcendence, of the progressive discovery of the true, good, and beautiful, renders personal life meaningful; the denial of transcendence renders life absurd. One way leads to meaningful and progressive education; the other to inculcation of propaganda, where instruction devolves to the views of the powerful. The denial of transcendence bets against itself and civilization. Such denial is the antithesis of Polanyi's life work.

Person and Gift

Gavrilyuk's only real objection is my alleged "tendency to identify persons with gifts, or even more strongly, the fullness of divine life with grace." I do say that person and gift (grace) are mutually constitutive, mutually implicative, and that if either one turned out to be falsified, the other would share its fate. However, I do not believe that I anywhere equate person and gift without remainder, and I notice that Gavrilyuk does not supply any specific quotations that would support an identity *simpliciter* of person and gift. Gavrilyuk agrees "that the life of the Trinity could be aptly pictured as eternal gift-giving of the Father reciprocated by the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the gifts, as understood in everyday discourse, *cannot give themselves*."

Respondeo: First, discourse about Trinity, and analogously, discourse about the highest sort of human self-giving, is not "everyday discourse." The doctrine of the Trinity is strongly counter-intuitive and a prima facie contradiction of divine simplicity—which was Arius's objection. It definitely requires some stretching of normal discourse. Since the Son is "begotten of the Father," let us assume that the Father does not completely give himself in this begetting. In this case there would be an inequality, Arius would once again prevail, and Trinity would not be possible. In one sense, the self-giving must be complete. However, as is often the case in discussing the divine reality, we must say more than one thing. For the Father does not give himself in such a way that he disappears in the Son, for the Father is *incommunicabilis*. Derrida might demand that sort of giving for a gift to occur, but here the reality of *person* is present in all its force: the Father gives himself so that the Son is begotten in equality to the Father, but the Father remains Father—remains incommunicable.

After examining the question, Gavrilyuk once more answers his own objection: "Since, in Rolnick's own terms, the persons are always *more than*, persons by extension must be *more than* gifts too ..." Precisely. Gavrilyuk's statement has, I think, uncovered the logic of personal incommunicability. Gavrilyuk would agree that the Son gives himself in incarnation, human life and teachings, the cross, and communion. But even when the Son gives himself, even when he gives the gift of his death on the cross, he remains incommunicable; he remains the Son—in this case raised up and glorified.

Likewise, human beings give themselves in marriage, childbirth, nurturance and instruction of the young, in every event of what M. Buber calls the I-Thou relation, and sometimes in martyrdom. Movement away from self and toward the other is the basic direction of human love, the movement of grace; it is, *mutatis mutandis*, the love that constitutes the trinitarian being of God. Gavrilyuk sees how person and grace (gift) are intertwined: "Post-Christian deconstructions of personhood are predicated upon the denial of the reality of grace."

We really do need something more than our own wits to succeed in answering the most basic questions of our lives. Whether or not I have successfully answered his objection(s), I think Gavrilyuk and I share some basic understandings of how the close interrelatedness of person, *grace*, and God begins to orient us toward answering those basic questions.

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