II

THE LOSS OF THE PERSON

The philosophical search for the adequate definition of a concept may appear an idle occupation of intellectuals but we should be aware that in all scientific disciplines concepts are the basic media of thought whose value for life may depend very much on their adequacy. For instance, to define such a term as ' person ' adequately is to gain a proper view and evaluation of those beings that are persons and it enables one to adopt the proper attitudes and relations towards them. If, on the other hand, the meaning of ' person ' becomes falsified, those relations are disturbed to the detriment of persons themselves.

1. The Refinement by the Schoolmen of the Notion of Person

For Boetius, ' person ' meant an individual substance possessed of a rational nature. The terseness of this definition made its success but I have already indicated the dissatisfaction which it was to arouse in the best of the medieval schoolmen.

First of all, they objected to the term ' substance ' on account of its ambiguity. ' Substance ' could mean either that part of a finite essence which is the basic support of accidents and which is also called ' nature ' or it could, according to the prevalent usage of Aristotle, mean the whole existent subject, the complete *hypostasis*. Richard of St. Victor and St. Thomas Aquinas insisted that this second meaning alone could suit a definition of ' person '. Aquinas explained further that what is proper to the subject thus understood existentially and holistically is that it subsists, i.e., exists in its own right. As such, it exists by its own act of being, its own inner energy (*energeia*) of existing, whether it is identical with this energy as in the case of God, the Absolute, or whether it receives it in a limiting essence as in the case of creatures which are existentially dependent on this Absolute as on their total Cause. The term ' subsistence ' must, therefore, be substituted for ' substance ' and we must say that the first condition to be a person is to be subsistent. ' Subsistence ' had already been introduced into Latin by Rufinus at the end of the IVth century A.D. to render the Greek *hypostasis* in the sense of ' person ' and had been used as such by Pope John II in 534 and by the Church Council of Lateran in 649.

A further refinement introduced by St. Thomas is that the subsistent to be personal must be understood in its totality. The meaning of 'person' is holistic. "It must," he says, "comprehend the whole reality of the subject, i.e., not only its essential elements, (such as its nature or substance in the restricted sense of the term and its intellectual and other faculties) but also its individuating qualities and other accidents. Thus only will it retain the denotation of totality which the notion of 'person' requires." (*In III Sententiarum*, 5, 3, 2, 3.)

St. Thomas, therefore, opposes the platonism of many philosophies which reduces the person in man to man's soul or conscious 'self'. This, he thinks, is neither proper linguistic analysis, for it fails to give a right account of linguistic usage, whether of the Church or of the secular culture, nor does it tally with the desire rooted in man's very nature for the salvation and fulfilment of his whole self. "By nature," he says, "man desires that his whole self be saved; his soul, on the other hand, is not the whole man but only a part of the corporeal man : my soul is not myself; hence, though it be saved in the other life, this does not yet mean that I am saved or that any man whatsoever is saved" (*In I Cor.*, xv, 2.) But the Christian promise of the resurrection assures that the whole person of man, body and soul, will be granted full redintegration by God.

Many other assertions of St. Thomas become clear in the light of his teaching of the holistic character of the person. Man's soul, he says, is immortal but man himself is mortal. Death is not the freeing of the spirit from the jail of the body but a physical evil, a disaster which breaks asunder the natural unity of the human person. To impose it unjustly upon any man is a moral evil, a sin against the inviolability of the person. Christ died the victim of such a sin and, between his death and his resurrection, he was no longer absolutely speaking a man, since his soul was deprived of his body. Further, we should never consider the living Christ as a human person or as a conjunction of two persons, one human and the other divine, but only as one divine Person in two natures. Indeed, the human nature he took up does not exist by a created "act of being" of its own level but by the existential energy of the divine Person who assumed it; hence, it lacks the subsistence which

personality requires. Finally, in the case of God, the two conditions for personality so far demanded are obviously fulfilled. For God being the Absolute is the very subsistent Esse, the perfect existential Energy whose fulness implies in identity all the illimitable ontological perfections. He is without qualities, *nirguṇa*, not because He lacks them but because they are not present in Him as accidents of a substance. Rather than *having* them, He *is* them; He is their Fulness, incomplex, undiversified, simple. This is the Christian conception of God, Subsistence of Being and Fulness of all perfections, as sanctioned by the first Councils of the Church and faithfully adhered to by St. Thomas Aquinas.

In his definition Boetius had indicated that a person must be an individual. Now, this term also required further refinement. In Latin, '*individuum*' originally meant 'undivided' and designated the 'monadic' character of unparticipable units which could usually retain their wholeness and particularity and oppose themselves to others as original centres of existence, resistance and activity. The above explanation of the holistic character of 'person' has already taken care of this meaning. However, a natural consequence of the undividedness of individuals is that they are by the very fact 'divided from others' or, at least, ontologically distinguishable from them. Individuals are generally observed as single units, distinguishable by their individuating characters; but they are also generally groupable into classes according to their more universal characters. Such are the individuals presented to us by common experience and we are not directly acquainted with any "concrete universal," i.e., with an individual which would at the same time be a universal. However, this would not be in itself absurd since the subsistent forms of Plato and the angels of Christianity are defined as subsistent species. Besides, for all those who hold the unicity and transcendence of the divine Fulness, God is singular and other than all the rest and, in that sense, He is the prefect "concrete universal" or the supremely "universal individual". To include such considerations while avoiding the ambiguities to which they might give rise, St. Thomas opts for the term 'singular' or 'distinct' in preference to 'individual.' Thus the twofold term 'individual substance' of Boetius' definition is so far replaced by the threefold term 'singular (or distinct) integral subsistent'.

Boetius had said finally that a pesson is ' possessed of a rational nature '. This is important since it marks the difference between personal and non-personal subjects. But the term ' rational ' must be understood as Boetius probably meant it, namely, as equivalent to the Greek *logikos*, " of the nature of the *logos* ", i.e., intellectual. And ' intellectual ' must be understood in reference to the intellect proper, which is characterised by the total reflection of self-consciousness and the transcendence which permits to evaluate any object in terms of being. Neither animal intelligence nor the so-called intelligence of machines give any evidence of reaching that level although they are capable of quasi-judgments and quasi-reasonings. On the other hand, reasoing activity as a matter of combinatory calculus would not be intellectual if it were not permeated by the power of the intuitive intellect. Rationality, therefore, stands on the lowest rung of the scale of intellect and the discursivity it generally denotes is not a property of intellect as such but only of the human intellect. Hence, it is better to say that a person must be ' possessed of an intellectual nature '. The term ' possessed of ' translates here a mere Latin genitive and does not imply that there should be a distinction between a person and his nature or his intellect. Indeed, we know that in the case of God any such distinction would be absurd. Because He is subsistent Esse, God is Consciousness, is Knowledge, is Intellect, just as He is Power, Freedom, Bliss, etc.

The role of a definition is to provide the primary elucidation of a notion but the properties which are derivable from it may extend considerably our understanding of it. In the case of the person, these properties are furthermore of vital importance.

First of all, since a person is a subsistent, he is either the pure act of being (God) or in possession of an act of being received from God (created persons). Hence, every finite person is as such grounded in God and the self-awareness of which he is capable extends virtually to an apprehension of his ontological dependence upon the Absolute and he may recognise the hyper-personality of this Absolute God who verifies eminently all the constitutive notes of the definition of ' person '. Thus the religious dimension is introduced into the world of persons by the bias of the *esse* or energy of being which is intrinsic to personality.

Secondly, since a person is possessed of an intellectual nature, he is endowed with the will which follows the intellect. This means that, consequent upon his acknowledgement of realities and his intellectual evaluation of their goodness, he can choose to bypass them or adhere to them in the measure of their goodness. The proper object of the will is the good as such. Whatever is good attracts the will insofar as it is good, i.e., if relative relatively, if absolute absolutely. The absolute desire for the supreme Good constitutes the human will as a dynamic tendency innately oriented towards a fulfilment which can only consist in a blissful possession of the Godhead. Short of the latter, a man's will is characterised by liberty of choice : It can either adhere to finite goods insofar as their deficient similarity with the divine Good suits this man or neglect them because their goodness is ever deficient. God himself, so long as a man's intellect is still unable to present Him to the will through a perfect intuition, stands within the scope of this liberty of choice. But once revealed through a perfect intuition, He immediately obtains the complete self-surrender of that man whose will has attained its perfect object. In this ecstasy of love, man is still free though not of the freedom of choice but of the freedom of self-determination.

Thirdly, being possessed of an intellectual nature which makes him the free author of his activity, a person is either the pure Energy of the perfect Activity of absolute Bliss (God) or endowed with the dynamism of a constantly self-integrating and spiritually progressing being. The human person tends innately towards this spiritual self-integration. His personality is meant to grow on every level, physical, psychological, social, intellectual moral and affective. St. Thomas, in his Treatise on Man of the *Summa Theologica*, constantly recalls this dynamism of growth and refuses any static conception of the human person.

Fourthly, besides God who is the noblest of all beings, created persons are the noblest of all creatures. Because of the perfection of their nature and the greatness of their end, they have the dignity of ends-in-themselves as opposed to the inferiority of means or instruments. In reference to this, St. Thomas quotes *Book of Wisdom*, xii, 18 : " You have dealt with us, O God, with great reverence ". Human persons, though the lowest in the

scale of persons, are capable of spiritual activities, even ultimately of knowing God by intuition and loving Him in blissful self-surrender, which in the realm of activity are ends, pursuable for their own sake, and not only steps towards a final attainment. In such highest activities, they accomplish the purpose of the whole creation which non-personal creatures can only subserve but not attain. This is why men are ends-in-themselves, are inviolable, have rights, and are lovable for their own sake. This is why the least of men is to be respected and not abused of, and I may sacrifice my own life for his sake. This is why also the good even of the whole human society must not be sought by trampling on the essential rights of any individual. In brief, the whole of ethics and morality derives from this acknowledgement that each man is an end in himself.

Fifthly, because of his freedom and his spiritual powers, the human person is capable of initiating interpersonal relations of dialogue, free exchange, free contracts, friendship, love, service of love, etc. with other persons. Through these relations he extends and fulfils himself and helps others to fulfil themselves. What has been called the "I–Thou" relationship is an exigency of his very nature. It must constitute the fabric of human society. As a member of that society, each man is bound to contribute his part of the common work in view of the common good of the whole of his species. But, as a person, he transcends this society, and must above all pursue his own personal vocation. This consists in uniting himself by the love of friendship with his human breathren and with God. Since each man has such a personal vocation, the common good is subordinate to each individual's personal good. Hence, the temporal order and welfare is an end (because it is the common good of persons) but only an intermediary end. Not being ultimate, it is to be pursued during the whole course of human history in a way which is autonomous but subordinate to the ultimate end of each human person.

2. The Twilight of the Person

The views of St. Thomas concerning persons become a living part of medieval culture and have never ceased to inspire what we may call the silent majority of Christian orthodoxy. But many of the philosophers who came after him followed contrary

winds of thought and, often unwittingly, jeopardized his comprehensive doctrine.

The first rent was made by Duns Scotus. He was a voluntarist and a formalist. His fundamental theory asserted that the universe consisted of absolute individuals depending exclusively on the absolute Free-Will of God. Whereas St. Thomas, the intellectualist, had explained that the Will of God, though absolutely free, should never be considered apart from His intellect and Wisdom, Scotus considered it absolutely, as a purely arbitrary power. For him the laws of nature and morality do not express ontological exigencies of being at its various levels but are pure impositions of the divine Will. God could have willed their opposites. He could have willed that evil acts be acts of virtue, that lies, hatred, murders be good deeds, etc. Similarly in man the will is given primacy over the intellect and the blissful end of man is to be obtained in a supreme act of the will rather than in a supreme intellectual intuition. This will is no longer Aquinas's " rational appetite " but an absolute power free of any necessary relation to reason. It is no longer derivable from the possession of an intellectual nature but an isolated datum. Thus Scotus initiated a voluntaristic trend which afterwards reappeared again and again and gave rise to such nefarious political doctrines as fascism and nazism.

He also endangered the thomistic understanding of the integrality of the human person. Better gifted for analysis than for synthesis, he multiplied the distinctions and conceived man as a bundle of " formalities ", i.e., of intelligible elements set side by side but not linked by any intrinsic relation. Scotus's conception of personality remained apparently holistic but in reality it was emptied of the necessity of inner unity without which it is liable to all forms of disintegration.

Ockam, whose thought was to dominate the xivth and xvth centuries, opposed this Scotistic riot of ontological formalities through his theory of terminism but this theory closed the door to any deep metaphysics of man. Further, he retained and even exaggerated Scotus's voluntarism.

The xvith century saw an important revival of Thomism but which, in Suarez at least, remained too eclectic. Suarez

failed to see the constitutive role of the act of being, the *esse* of St. Thomas, in the ontological making of personality. Therefore, he invented the astonishing theory that personality is only a mode which is superadded to the subsistent essence. Thus it becomes merely accidental and perhaps alienable.

Modern philosophy at least up to Kant is dominated by the influence of Descartes. The problem of personality is at the centre of his philosophy. His *Cogito* reveals immediately the intellectual nature of the human person. Unfortunately the *Cogito* is already an abstraction : it brackets out not only the *cogitata* but also the sensible as such. This is serious because sensing is intrinsic to the act of concrete knowledge, the direct judgment, which is synthetically sensitive and intellectual and which alone should be our adequate point of departure. On the basis of his narrowed starting-point Descartes could only discover that the I who thinks is a thinking reality. According to his definitions of substance and attribute, this thinking reality is a substance, characterised by the fundamental attribute of thinking; hence, it is distinct, complete, absolutely simple and, consequently, spiritual and immortal. If this were correctly derived, I would indeed be a person since the defining notes of 'person' are verified here (subsistence, distinction, completeness, intellectuality) but I would be only a mind. Yet, Descartes has to face the fact that to all evidence he is also a body. But he cannot prove it to himself indubitably except through a queer roundabout way. He first proves—by arguments which, I think, are invalid—that God exists as the infinitely perfect Being, supremely personal and the all powerful and free Cause of the universe. Now those of our ideas which are clear and distinct can only be innate and, hence, received from God. But God would not be God if He were not truthful. Hence, those ideas cannot be erroneous. But among them is the idea of matter or extension, and since it is warranted by God, I am right in thinking that a material universe exists and that I am not only mind but body.

The question, however, comes up, what is the relation between mind and body. The first answer of Descartes is that each of the two is a complete and independent substance. But it

seems monstrous to say that man consists of two independent substances. Their union, answers Descartes, is stricter than the merely accidental union of the pilot and his ship but it cannot be the substantial union affirmed by St. Thomas because two substances can never merge into one. Neither can it be a necessary union because each of the two can be conceived apart from the other. Hence it is contingent and consists in a certain interaction of which Descartes avows the mystery. To clarify this somehow, he has recourse to the voluntarism which he has inherited from the late medieval thinkers. God, he says, has willed these two substances to co-exist and interact, and God's will is absolute and independent of rationality though assuredly good.

To sum up, Descartes bequeaths to his successors the so-called body-mind problem. It is already the problem of the mind in the machine, since for him an animal and, hence, a human body too is only a highly complex machine, and it will after Hume become the problem of the ghost in the machine. Thus, for Descartes, the human person is no longer a unitary and integral subsistent, it is no longer the centre and source of a whole network of relations, and the will of man like the will of God has been isolated from his intellect. The kind of radical individualism which dissolves society into a mere aggregate of isolated units and was to triumph at the French Revolution has its source in Cartesianism.

Spinoza abolishes the body-mind problem but at the high cost of his monism of the substance. For him, the correspondence between psychic events and physical events results from the fact that these two forms of existence express the same eternal reality, which is divine. Since, for him, there is only one substance, Descartes' difficulty over the interaction of substances is avoided. The supposed interaction of body and mind is for him an illusion. To believe that it occurs would be to make the mistake of someone who, seeing the same action in a number of mirrors, believed that what he saw in one mirror was caused by what he saw in another. Plurality is due to the variety of the modes of the one substance which is simply expressed in various ways as a thought can be expressed in diverse languages. Man is neither a substance nor an original source of activity and relations, but only a peculiar mode of God. He has only an appearance

of freedom, for determinism, both physical and rational, reigns supreme and admits of no contingency.

Leibniz refuses the monism of Spinoza and flatters himself that he has overcome the Cartesian dualism through his doctrine of the monads. His reduction of space to an infinity of points leads him, first, to an atomic conception of matter. And matter is not merely extension, as for Descartes, but it resists pressure, it exerts a certain force, which is not the case with mere extension. The source of the force thus exerted cannot be merely a geometric point; it must be a point endowed with force. This is the final indivisible element of material reality, the monad. On the other hand, Leibniz tells us, minds as thinking substances are indivisible in space like monads and, like them, have force. Could not each thinking substance be regarded as a monad, and each monad as a thinking substance ? The virtue of this idea would be to conceive the whole universe as made up of substances of the same nature and thus avoid the dualism of Descartes. This idea would constitute a sort of monism, not the monism of Spinoza but a unitary view of reality which reduces all forms of being to substances of one and the same kind. Leibniz' monism is a spiritual monism; each monad is conceived as a kind of mind, either actually or virtually conscious. Each monad mirrors the whole universe from its particular angle and position. Leibniz calls this its *perception*. Conscious monads are aware of this perception. This awareness is their *apperception*. The internal force of a monad is called *appetition*. In this view of the universe each monad is " windowless "; it remains shut up in its own universe and its own internal structure determines the entirety of its changes and development. Solipsism is avoided by recourse to the hypothesis of a pre-established harmony among monads. In brief, reality is conceived by Leibniz as a complete series of monads which differ imperceptibly from each other and which constitute a harmonic scale extending up to God. God is the perfect Monad whose apperception is equal to his perception and whose appetition is unrestricted Free Will. His decrees, however, are governed by the principle of the best which imposes moral necessity upon his Freedom.

Leibniz' monads retain some essential traits of the ' person ' but his extreme reationalism perverts his understanding of

personal freedom, and hence, of interpersonal relationships, of society, of the transcendence of God, of the sovereign freedom of His creative causality, etc.

After considering the reduction of the person in the hands of Rationalists, we may look at the other end of the philosophical spectrum and see what happened to it in the hands of empiricists.

Hobbes eliminates the Cartesian dualism by subjecting man's reason totally to his senses and describing him in a mechanistic language in which the genuine notion of freedom is reduced to mere absence of external constraint. But Hobbes inaugurates a new kind of dualism between the natural and the social states of man. In this he is probably inspired by the modern theory of Natural Law. This theory is itself a novelty as compared with the ancient or classical theory of Natural Law of St. Thomas Aquinas and other medieval thinkers. For the latter, man is a social being by essence and metaphysical reflection upon this essence can descry the necessary principles which form the basis of private and social morality. All positive law must develop in conformity with this order of nature. For the moderns, on the contrary, man is first of all an individual and autonomous being independent of any social attachment. It is from the inherent properties of this isolated individual that these jurists extract or deduce the first principles of social order. This is what they call the state of nature, which is logically prior to social and political life. The passage from the natural to the social and political state is a matter of contracts or covenants. In Hobbes we find a similar passage from man to the commonwealth, from the state of nature where man is " solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short " to the artificial state of commonwealth where he accedes to pure rationality but by entering into political subjection. For Hobbes the social is restricted to the political. Indeed, if man is not social by nature, one can pass from the individual to the group only in terms of " covenant ", i.e., in terms of conscious transaction or artificial design. And what can the individual bring into the bargain except " force " ? It is by pooling their forces, more or less contractually, that isolated individuals can constitute the political Leviathan which subjects them to itself despotically. This despotism is mitigated only

by Hobbes' assertion of the natural convergency of the social good with the individual good.

For Locke as for Hobbes the origin of society is contractual but he evades the consequence of despotism by distinguishing two contracts. The "social" contract introduces the idea of fellowship in equality; the "political" contract introduces subjection to a ruling agency but only in terms of Trust. Citizens retain their rights, especially to property, except the right of coercion which they entrust to a limited monarchy. The triple political power of such a monarchy originates in the people who retain the faculty of claiming it back even through violence and revolution. The political doctrine of Locke is thus liberal and more favourable to persons but his conception of the origin of society and, we must add, of morality and religion views them as rational constructs rather than postulates of man's nature. For him also the human person rather than being social by essence is radically an isolated atom.

Berkeley, though he belongs to the empiricist current, is to a large extent a reactionary. He dematerializes the ego but asserts its permanent subsistence as spirit. Rejecting the static conception of substance of the Rationalists, he comes nearer to St. Thomas' dynamic conception when he affirms that this spirit is not an inert substratum of accidents but an active principle endowed with intellect and free-will. He also retains the essentials of the classical conception of God as the Personal Absolute though he weakens God's transcendence by his perceptionism. However, Berkeley's influence does not seem to have been determinant in the development of social philosophy.

Hume's radical phenomenism is much more influential in this evolution. He does away with the Berkeleyan active self and sees the ego only as the pure possibility of a series of felt phenomena. As to the foundation of morality and social life he cannot see it in God, whose existence we cannot know, or in reason, which cannot prescribe anything, but he sees it only in the natural instinct for general utility and in the natural feeling of "humanity". The universality of moral ideas results from the strength of social habit. Regarding the birth of political society, he rejects the theory of the divine right of kings as well as the

theory of the social contract and attributes the birth of nations solely to force or ambition. The legitimacy of a government remains constantly dependent on its actual efficiency in pursuing the common good.

To end this survey, let us turn to J. J. Rousseau. Like Hobbes, Rousseau posits a discontinuity between the man of nature and political man whose " social contract " marks the actual birth of humanity proper. He also starts from premises which are extremely individualistic to proceed to anti-individualistic conclusions. And he too endeavours to legitimize social order and the transcendence of the Sovereign, though in his case the Sovereign is not Hobbes' Ruler but the General Will and is thus in a sense identified with the subjects. Rousseau's position of the problem is purely utopian :

" Some form of association ", he writes, " must be found as a result of which the whole strength of the community will be enlisted for the protection of the person and property of each constituent member, in such a way that each, when united to his fellows, renders obedience to his own will and remains as free as he was before ".

And this is the startling solution which he immediately proposes : " The complete alienation by each associate member to the community of all his rights ". (*The Social Contract*, I, vi).

Another quotation may bring forth even more forcefully the paradoxical nature of Rousseau's theory : " To institute a People (means) to change, as it were, the very stuff of human nature; to transform each individual who, in isolation, is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of something greater than himself, from which, in a sense, he derives his life and his being " (*Ibid.*, II, vii.). Truly we are here not far from the divinised State of Hegel.

Such are the vicissitudes of the person from the XIVth century to the eve of the French Revolution. It has been atomized, formalised and disintegrated into a bundle of formalities by Duns Scotus; modalised by Suarez; dualised by Descartes; pantheised by Spinoza; monadised and mentalised by Leibniz; desocialised and despotised by Hobbes and even by Rousseau; and fictionalised by Hume.

Towards the end of the XVIIIth century the theories of those philosophers begin to yield their fruits, good and bad, in the Declarations of the Human Rights and in social and political revolutions, especially the French Revolution. I intend to study next what happened to the person during the tumultuous period inaugurated by this revolution and to pass on finally to our own times in which, I believe, a recovery of the person is increasingly taking place.

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