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[N. MILLER]

# PERSON (IN PHILOSOPHY)

A term derived from the Latin *persona,* traceable to the Greek πρόσωπον, and originally used to denote the mask worn by an actor. From this it was applied to the role he assumed; and finally, to any character on the stage of life, i.e., to any individual. The term has taken on a special significance in SCHOLASTICISM, where it has figured importantly in theological discussions of the INCARNATION and the Holy TRINITY. This article is restricted to a consideration of the notion as used in scholastic philosophy and is divided into two sections: the first sketches the historical development of the concept and the second provides a metaphysical analysis. (For the psychological treatment and the use of the term in modern philosophy, *see* INDIVIDUALITY; PERSONALISM; PERSONALITY; and SELF, THE; for the theological discussion of the term, *see* PERSON [IN THEOLOGY]; PERSON, DIVINE.)

**History.** The main stages in the evolution of the concept are its early formulation by Boethius, its adaptation by St. Thomas Aquinas, and its various refinements by later scholastics.

*Boethius.* The classical definition is given by BOETHIUS in his *De persona et duabus naturis,* where he teaches that person is ''an individual substance of a rational nature'' (ch. 3; *Patrologia Latina,* ed. J. P. Migne, 271 v., indexes 4 v. [Paris 1878–90] 64:1345). Boethius uses the term ''SUBSTANCE'' in the definition primarily to exclude accidents: ''We see that accidents cannot constitute person.'' The term ''substance,'' as Boethius understood it, can be used in two senses, one referring to the concrete substance as existing in the individual and called first substance, the other referring to substance conceived abstractly as existing in the GENUS and the SPECIES and called second substance. It is disputed which sense of the term was here being used by Boethius. It seems probable that he prescinded from the technical significations of first substance and second substance, but used the qualifier ''individual'' to make his meaning equivalent to that of first substance. Individual, in turn, refers simply to what is undivided in itself; unlike the higher branches of the PORPHYRIAN TREE, namely, genus and species, it cannot be further subdivided. Boethius does not seem to attach any further signification to the term, but makes it a mere synonym for singular. The most important part of his definition is the expression ''of a rational nature.'' This serves to indicate that person is predicated only of intellectual beings. The generic term that includes all individual existing substances is supposit (*see* SUBSISTENCE); supposit may be applied equally to rational and irrational, to living and nonliving individuals. The sense of Boethius's definition is that a person is a particular type of supposit, namely, one with a rational nature.

*Thomas Aquinas.* The definition proposed by Boethius is not completely satisfactory as it stands, since the words taken literally can be applied to the rational soul of man and also to the human nature of Christ. St. THOMAS AQUINAS accepted it nonetheless, possibly because by his time it had become the traditional definition. The terms in which St. Thomas explained it, however, practically constitute a new definition. ''Individual substance'' becomes, for him, a substance that is complete, subsists by itself, and is separated from others (*Summa theologiae* 3a,16.12 ad 2). When the remainder of Boethius's definition is added to this, there are five notes that go to make up a person: (1) substance—this excludes accident; (2) complete—the person must have a complete nature, and thus that which is but part of a nature, either actually or aptitudinally, does not satisfy the definition; (3) subsistent by itself—the person exists in himself and for himself, being the ultimate possessor of his nature and all its acts, and therefore is the ultimate subject of predication of all his attributes; (4) separated from others—this excludes the universal notion of second substance, which can have no existence apart from the individual; and (5) of a rational nature—this excludes all supposits that lack rationality. To the person, therefore, there properly belongs a threefold incommunicability expressed in notes (2), (3), and (4). The human soul belongs to the nature as part of it, and is therefore not a person, even when existing separately (*see* SOUL, HUMAN). The human nature of Christ does not exist by itself alone, but in another, i.e., in the divine personality of the Word; thus it is not a person. Lastly, the divine essence, though subsisting by itself, is so communicated to the three Persons that it does not exist apart from Them; it is therefore not a person.

*Later Scholastics.* Further scholastic discussions of the notions of person have been largely disputes over the ultimate foundation of personality, i.e., to ascertain the precise determination of a nature that, if present, will make it subsistent and a person, and, if absent, will not.

According to John DUNS SCOTUS, as he is usually understood, the ultimate foundation of personality is a mere negation. An individual intellectual nature is a person if, in its nature, it is neither destined to be communicated, as is the human soul, nor actually communicated, as is the humanity of Christ. Were the hypostatic union to cease,

Christ's humanity would, ipso facto, without any further determination, become a person.

To Duns Scotus's position it is commonly objected that the person possesses the nature and all its attributes, and it is difficult to regard this possessor, as distinct from the objects possessed, as constituted only by a negative. Consequently, traditional Thomists, following Tommaso de Vio CAJETAN, hold that personality must be based on a positive determination, which they call the MODE of subsistence. It is the function of this mode to make the nature incommunicable, terminated in itself, and capable of receiving its own *esse,* or EXISTENCE. Without this mode the human nature of Christ subsists only by the uncreated *esse* of the Word.

F. SUÁREZ also insists that the ultimate foundation of personality cannot be a mere negation but must be a positive perfection. Since he holds that there is no real distinction between nature (or essence) and existence, he does not regard personality as something that prepares the nature to receive its own proper existence. In his view, personality is something added to a nature conceived as already existing. Subsistence can be added to a substance actually existing because, according to his teaching, existence itself is quasi potential. The sense in which personality or subsistence consists in incommunicability is that it excludes only communication to another as to the ultimate term of existence (*De incarn.* 11.3; *Disp. meta.* 34). Thus personality, for Suárez, is the final term or complement not of a substantial essence but of existence itself.

Other thinkers have attempted to define the formal constitutive of personality without employing Cajetan's mode or Suárez's conception of a positive determination. Some hold that a substance is a supposit, and an intelligent substance a person, from the mere fact of its being a whole, a *totum in se.* This totality, it is contended, is a positive note that adds no reality, just as the whole adds nothing to the parts that compose it. Those who reject this explanation do so because the concept of totality seems to reduce, according to their analysis, to the Scotistic concept of a mere negation. Still others consider personality to be ultimately constituted by the *esse,* the actual existence of an intelligent substance. That which subsists with its own *esse* is by that very fact incommunicable. This theory finds some support among the writings of the early Greek Fathers, but otherwise has not been regarded as completely satisfactory by philosophers and theologians.

**Analysis.** In the light of the foregoing, a more systematic analysis of the concept of person may be given, drawing mainly on the insights of St. Thomas and other scholastics but making their presentation more relevant to contemporary discussions among philosophers.

*Ontological Foundation.* The problem of the metaphysical definition of person is basically that of ascertaining what the notion of person adds to the more general concept of supposit, and, whatever this may be, of determining its ultimate ontological foundation. St. Thomas points out that person has a special dignity, that it represents what is most perfect in all of nature, and that its special excellence consists in having dominion over its own activity (*Summa theologiae* 1a, 29.1). Although in explaining this dignity he does not refer to the special mode of subsistence, there can be no doubt that for him the special excellence of the person derives from its entitative sufficiency for independent existence. The person is thus superior to the THING, which, although something in the order of substance, has a substantial form that is limited in its existential capabilities (*see* MATTER AND FORM). For example, the substantial form of a material thing, although itself a formal principle of substance, has no immediate aptitude to existence, because of its essential dependence on matter for both its becoming and its being. To this extent its ability to subsist is minimal, since the union of matter and form can be disrupted at any time under the influence of external physical agents. The human soul, on the other hand, although the substantial form of a body, by reason of its spirituality has a special aptitude for existence that it actually communicates to the body (*see* SPIRIT). Because of this, it has a more perfect type of subsistence than a material thing; at least on the part of the soul, existence is independent of any extrinsic causal influences. Thus the primary note that distinguishes human persons—and a fortiori ANGELS—from lower types of beings is the perfection of their spiritual forms, which confers on them a more perfect and enduring manner of existing.

The metaphysical basis of personality is thus traceable to a special mode of subsistence that is rooted in the spirituality of the form or substantial act of the intellectual substance. It is true, of course, that man's spiritual substantial form, or his soul, though complete in the order of substance, is not complete as a species and is thus not to be identified with the human person (*De anim.* 1; *De spir. creat.* 2, 2 ad 5, 2 ad 16). This notwithstanding, the proper perfection of man as a person derives from the subsistent character of his soul, because man exists and subsists only through the existence and subsistence of his spiritual soul. For this reason, the spirituality of man may be regarded as the metaphysical root of his personality; it is this characteristic that confers on him a more perfect type of subsistence than that found in other corporeal creatures.

*Corollaries.* As a consequence of this existential independence of material conditions, certain corollaries

follow that relate to the person's activities and to his relationships to others.

The human person, precisely as spiritual, is free from the limitations of space and time that circumscribe irrational beings. Although he has a beginning in time, his subsequent duration in being is in a certain sense extratemporal; he cannot be considered merely as an integral part of the physical universe, completely subject to the laws of its history. Viewed from another aspect, he exhibits a type of IMMATERIALITY that is best seen in his rational or intellectual character. He is able to possess abstract and universal knowledge that transcends the data of sense (*see* INTELLECT). He has the capacity also of reflecting on his activities and even on himself; thus he is said to be endowed with CONSCIOUSNESS. Having dominion over his own activity, he also possesses FREE WILL. From this follows his moral character and all that this implies, e.g., the personal responsibility that is his for having dominion over his own activities.

Other properties of the human person are associated with the complex of relationships man may have with beings below him, with other finite persons, and with God. Because he transcends the rest of corporeal creation, the human person has a type of dominion over it and can use it for his own proper good. Since he stands in the relationship of EQUALITY to other humans, he may not derogate from their personal independence and liberty or deprive them of their rights. Even more, his community of nature with other humans provides the ontological basis for FRIENDSHIP and for LOVE. Similarly, man's personal character provides the foundation for all his social relationships, whereby he and others strive to attain the common good in civil SOCIETY. Finally, the person, precisely as rational or intellectual, is an image of his Creator and thus stands in special relationship to God. His autonomy and freedom are not absolute, but are limited by his dependence on God, i.e., on the divine will and on the eternal law. His ontological limitation as a finite person is the ultimate reason in the natural order why man should love God more than himself and should order his entire life toward God as his final end and ultimate completion.

*See Also:* MAN, 2, 3; SOUL-BODY RELATIONSHIP.

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[L. W. GEDDES/W. A. WALLACE]

# PERSON (IN THEOLOGY)

Christianity is love and its ''God is love'' (1 Jn 4.8, 16). Love manifests personality—a person loving and a person loved. Hence Christianity is an eminently personal religion and its God a very personal God. Three personalist mysteries summarize Christianity: (1) God, the absolute and infinite, unique and wholly ''other'' One, is three Persons; (2) Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man, is the Person of the WORD having both a divine and human nature; (3) there is a mystical personality of Christ, in which Christians enter into personal communion with God. All theology is ultimately a reflection on and seeking an understanding of these three personal realities. Because the developments of the concept of personality in Trinitarian and Christological theology are so intimately interconnected, these are here treated together. There follows a consideration of person in MYSTICAL BODY theology.

**Person in Trinitarian-Christological Theology.** Hebrew is without a term for our concept ''person.'' There are instances in the Old Testament when the word *pānîm* (face) practically corresponds to our understanding of person. The Greek word for face, πρόσωπον, likewise has the meaning of person (cf. 2 Cor 1.11). Postapostolic Christian teachers soon discovered that mere repetition of biblical phrases inadequately preserved the integrity of the Christian faith taking root in the Greco-Roman world. Because of the central place personality has in the mysteries of the Trinity and of Christ, there was need of a gradual clarification of the notion of person in Catholic theology. We shall trace this theological development of the notion of person in the mysteries of the Trinity and INCARNATION through four general stages.

*Nicaean-Chalcedonian Formulation.* The Trinitarian-Christological controversies of the 2d to the 5th centuries in the Greco-Roman world occasioned the first development in the notion of person. Christian Trinitarian monotheism had to be preserved while being incarnated in a new culture steeped in Neoplatonic philosophy and language. Whereas the starting point of Eastern writers was the distinction of Persons with an ever-present danger of SUBORDINATIONISM, the Western writers looked to the unity of the divine substance, with a dangerous tendency toward MODALISM. It was Tertullian's exact egalistic mind that gave precision to Western terminology at a very early date. *Persona* referred to that which is