

# Looking at the Sun

New Writings in Modern Personalism

Edited by

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and

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**Philosophy of Personalism**



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## Preface

This volume of essays began life in the summer of 2016. The venue was York St. John University; the occasion, an international conference, the third in fact, organised by the British Personalist Forum. There were many exceptional papers delivered during that week; those selected for this collection were judged to be among the very best. Having witnessed our authors hone their insight and perspicacity to a razor's edge, we are delighted to present their work here.

Our conference coincided, by no accident whatsoever, with the twentieth anniversary of the British Personalist Forum and its journal *Appraisal*. The Forum originally grew out of a society dedicated to the work of Michael Polanyi, the Hungarian-British scientist, philosopher, sociologist, and economist. In 1996, this society opened its arms to welcome others interested in the personalist tradition. Since then, it has remained a bastion of personalist thought in the UK. It exists, not only to promote the works of its local representatives – Michael Polanyi, Austin Farrer, and John Macmurray, to name but three – but also to defend personalism as a way of doing philosophy, a way that champions the creative and constructive over the reductive and destructive. In short, the Forum seeks to remind the scholarly world of an important intellectual movement and a valuable resource for philosophers and theologians of every cast and kind. It seeks, moreover, to forge international links between those working within the tradition and those new to it; perhaps most importantly, to encourage young scholars from all corners of the globe to join the conversation. In this last aspiration, the conference at York St. John was a great success. We were joined by new friends and old, fledgling philosophers and venerable sages, from Western and Eastern Europe, from America, and from as far away as Tasmania.

The principle aim of this gathering, and therefore to a great extent, of this collection, was to encourage the participants to consider new applications of person-concepts. We sought, as far as possible, to put personalism itself to work in fields as wide-ranging as the moral and the metaphysical, the practical and the political, the cultural and the cosmological. Whether we have been successful in this, too, let the reader judge.



## Acknowledgments

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all those who helped in the crafting of this volume and in organising the conference from whence it came: in particular, Richard Allen, Benjamin Bâcle, Alan Ford, Karl Simms, and Orla Smith. Much, indeed, is owed to Dr. Allen. It is largely thanks to him that the British Personalist Forum and its journal, *Appraisal*, have survived the vagaries of philosophical fashion for twenty years now. When it comes to running the Forum, publishing the journal, organising conferences, and much else besides, Dr. Allen has always undertaken the lion's share of the work. More importantly, perhaps, when it came to providing others with valuable scholarly opportunities, he showed no stinting hand. The editors of this volume, no doubt along with many others, are grateful for all his efforts. Thanks are also owed to the editors at Vernon Press for all their help, advice, and patience: Argiris Legatos and Carolina Sanchez. Last but not never least, for their support and encouragement, we also thank Thomas Buford and his son Russ; their friendship offers the finest example possible of what it really means to be a person.



# Introduction

Simon Smith

## 1. Setting the scene

The title of this volume, *Looking at the Sun*, comes from a line in Austin Farrer's *Faith and Speculation*.<sup>1</sup> The line and the image were chosen for the beneficial light they cast upon personalism as a distinct way of doing philosophy. By that light, then, we should like to take a few moments to set the personalist scene, in order that readers unfamiliar with this philosophical tradition may be equipped for the several *tête-à-têtes* to come.

And yet, in saying so, we have already led the reader astray: we have referred to personalism as a “way of doing philosophy.” This is not strictly accurate; for, in reality, there is no single *way* that all personalists follow, no one methodology they all apply. When Jacques Maritain, a significant figure in European and especially Catholic personalism, surveyed the field, he encountered “at least, a dozen personalist doctrines, which at times have nothing more in common than the word ‘person.’”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Maritain may well have been underestimating the numbers. There are almost as many personalist doctrines as there are personalist thinkers.<sup>3</sup> Equally, however, Maritain may have miscalculated the differences between them. There are many things that bind these thinkers together. There is, for example, a vital challenge to reductivism in all its forms: the desire to vehemently resist the impersonal and depersonalising influences that seem to dominate, not only the cloistered world of academic scholarship but also real life.<sup>4</sup> More than this, at the root of all forms of personalist thought there is a fundamental commitment to the idea that, logically and epistemologically, morally and metaphysically, persons are at the heart of things. Thomas O. Buford put the point best when he identified persons as “the supreme value and the key to the measuring of reality.”<sup>5</sup>

This brings us back to our title. Farrer was evidently alluding to Plato when he talked about the sun. This image points to the

philosopher's highest goal, the pinnacle of truth and goodness. The sun is that which transcends the world of illusions and shadows, and in transcending, illuminates it. *Faith and Speculation* is a work of philosophical, more specifically, pragmatic theology; we should not be surprised, therefore, to find that Farrer practices on the theological possibilities of his borrowed image, using it to rebut any faux Wittgensteinian interpretation of religious language. Twentieth-century philosophers and theologians hoped to rescue 'God-talk' from positivist reduction by designating it a language game. Nowadays, faced with an ever more aggressive atheism, it is dubbed a "non-overlapping *magisterium*", which may sit alongside, but must never interfere with, the physical sciences. In either case, Farrer would respond with a simple "No." "The theologian," he insisted, "is not picking a colour from the rainbow; he is looking at the sun."<sup>6</sup> Theology is not merely one discourse, or language game, or *magisterium*, among others. Rather, it seeks to go beyond the entire spectrum of physical science and worldly knowledge to offer a conception of reality, which underpins all further notions of the finite. The sun is Plato's symbol for the fundamental grounds of truth and goodness, and so the only proper subject of real knowledge. Likewise, in Farrer's hands, it represents a metaphysically basic level of understanding. This is the notion we want to borrow for our scene setting.

No doubt, the well brought up readers have felt their philosophical hackles rising at this sudden shift from infinite to finite. An appeal to metaphysical basics may be all very well for pragmatic theology, but here, in a philosophy of persons, the leap seems unaccountable at best. The well brought up reader need not worry unduly, however. Certainly, any metaphysically inclined readers might reasonably wonder whether a proper account of 'personhood' could be formulated without some attempt to make sense of the language affirmative of God. One might even argue that person-concepts are inherently religious: to be, or rather to *become*, a person is essentially – and literally – an act of lived faith.<sup>7</sup> For our present purposes, however, no such bold statements are required. Instead, we shall simply reverse the metaphysical emphasis, thereby softening the claim. Our philosophy of persons and our theology are intrinsically interconnected because persons supply the analogical key to religious language. In its very immediacy, our experience, indeed our embodiment, of 'personhood' supplies the clue, the model, and the primary datum required for making metaphysical sense of the cosmos. To conceive a God of grace and providence, of

creation and salvation, we have no other clue than our own capacity to reflect them, that is, to represent them, as far as we are able, within our own capacity to act. There too lies the model, in adumbrated form. We should not know the meaning of divine creativity if we were incapable of creative action, most especially, perhaps, that creative action wherein we ourselves are made. In turn, those acts may supply the data, the evidence of a divine will at work. If such encounters do not embody that will, that work, then, as Farrer observed, “nowhere in the universe do we directly meet the divine love.”<sup>8</sup>

For John Macmurray – another of the of the twentieth century’s great personalist thinkers – the “Form of the Personal” is utterly foundational; its expression in and as the practice of religious faith is the most “fully concrete expression” of that form.<sup>9</sup> This is because, in lived belief, we find the primal connections wherein persons come to be. In such connections, we discover the images and ideas through which life may be lived to its moral, spiritual, and intellectual limits. Most importantly, of course, in such connections, we encounter the others who convey those images and ideas, who enact and embody them, and in so doing, share with us the means by which we might make ourselves in their image. From this, it follows that other expressions of the Form of the Personal – specifically, Macmurray tells us, art and science – are inevitably abstract and derivative. They discount from the concrete relation of self and other, do not encounter the other directly and immediately, but only as a shadow, a reflection of some narrower aspect of experience or as the subject of some narrower mode of self-conception and description. Indeed, Macmurray would go so far as to suggest that the physical sciences are the most abstract and, therefore, the most subjective because they rely, not on the direct encounters from which real experience is made up, but on idealised conceptual constructs and diagrammatic representations.<sup>10</sup>

Macmurray’s influence, his insistence on the primacy of the personal, is clearly detectable in several of the works in this collection. His writings have played a significant role in David Treanor’s anti-reductive, anti-utilitarian analysis of end of life care, on James Beauregard’s reflections on technology, and on my own anti-metaphysical metaphysics. The reader may also detect a connection between Macmurray and Farrer. In this case, the influence was more direct: Macmurray was Farrer’s tutor at Balliol College, Oxford. Just here, we find a crucial personalist motif in

action: the interconstitutive relation of teacher and student; the intertwining of personalities which, as they inform one another, also *in-form* one another; the creative participation of one mind in the development of another. Little wonder they shared a person-centred approach to philosophy.

The vital interplay of persons, finite *and* infinite, might suffice to make our person-concepts metaphysically basic. The idea comes home, however, in a more immediate and, as it were, more personal manner. Our concept of persons supplies the key to the deepest and most intransigent philosophical mysteries we are likely to discover in ourselves, not least those arising from our talk about minds and brains. This sounds like an ill-concealed tautology, and so it might be if it were meant to signal Gilbert Ryle's kind of bluff common sense towards those mysteries.<sup>11</sup> That way lies disaster and defeat. We could not hope to fend off the logical and empirical reduction of 'personhood', ever more keenly felt with the rapid advance of neuroscience, by closing our eyes to them. To talk about whole persons and their behaviour instead of brains and minds is not to address the special problems those sciences have raised in recent years. But let us not play false with Professor Ryle; he had a good part of the answer when he fixed on human behaviour; if he had only thought to apply it. For in human behaviour, which is to say, personal action, we find the physical extension of personal consciousness, the 'I' embodied. Further, given that action is always and necessarily *interaction*, we find the 'I' embodied in a world of other 'I's. In personal action, that is, we have the clue, the model, and the primary datum required for making psycho-physical sense of ourselves.<sup>12</sup> For personal action and the personhood, it embodies are logically and epistemologically basic.

At this point, the reader may be wondering at the wisdom of placing so much philosophical weight on the narrow shoulders of the simple human subject. So ephemeral a concept is surely not robust enough to supply the hoped-for moral and metaphysical key.

In fact, the reader may be surprised to discover that many personalists would agree. *Persons* may well be able to carry that weight, for persons are an incontrovertible reality; they cannot be denied without self-stultification. The *human subject*, on the other hand, is an abstract concept; unnecessarily abstract for so concrete and constant an element in everyone's experience. Although we have no desire nor, indeed, any right to legislate on language, such abstractions seem likely to generate nothing but misunderstandings.

The danger here lies in taking such abstractions for realities and allowing logically unsanitary habits of thought to tempt us into the cardinal sin of classical metaphysics, which Whitehead named the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.”<sup>13</sup> Should we be led into temptation, we are liable to find ourselves thinking of persons in terms of their separateness, their distinct individuality. Let us be clear, then: when speaking of persons and personalism, we do not mean any kind of abstraction; perhaps especially not the isolated egoism advocated, in their different ways, by the likes of Max Stirner and Ayn Rand. We do not mean the kind of social, political, and moral individualism, so often masquerading as so-called ‘enlightened self-interest’, the kind of individualism which flowered during the last two centuries with, let us say, mixed results.<sup>14</sup> We do not mean the kind of individualism which dominates Western and, increasingly, global culture, fuelling rapacious capitalism and consumerism. Nor do we mean the kind which has infected every branch of Western thought, from the “dog-eat-dog dogma” of “selfish genes” and “survival of the fittest” to the rationalist’s utilitarian reduction of human life and human values to the mere calculation of cost *vs.* benefit.<sup>15</sup>

We cannot do justice to such bold claims in this brief introduction. Fortunately, there is no need to do so; the reasons for holding such views are better and more fully expressed by our authors. For the present, suffice to say that such individualism is rejected primarily *because* it is, as indicated, reductive. It separates the self – emotionally and psychologically as well as politically and morally – from its natural context: that is, the community in which it comes to be and subsequently blossoms. Reduced to a kind of bio-mechanism bent on – rightly so, we are told – the satisfaction of desire, concerned with our own self-interest, however enlightened, we are encouraged to reject the very other-orientation which is the underlying framework of properly personal existence. There lie the seeds of moral relativism. Embracing relativism not only forecloses on the moral discussion, but also on morality itself. Once there is nothing more to moral rectitude than what I or my society believe, then there is nothing more to be said or done. The foreclosure of morality completes the bankruptcy of human personality. That will hardly do. Who we are and hope to be is inextricably intertwined with others, embedded in the relationships through which we body forth our identities. ‘Morality’ is the name we give to our thought and talk about our conduct of those relations. ‘Morality’ is the tool we use to understand that most basic of experiences. In short, moral relativism denies the fundamental experience of being human,

an experience which takes shape in our responsibilities to and for others.

This should not be taken to mean that, in response to the depersonalising forces of rationalism and relativism, all personalists subscribe to moral absolutism. If there is another thing most personalists agree on, it is the risks of overweening certainty. Rather, as Buford's work on global bioethics indicates, the tendency seems more often towards an honest recognition of a plurality of perspectives. This is then coupled with the articulation of those underlying, universal features which express the common and shared truths of 'personhood' in all its manifestations.<sup>16</sup>

Just as we do not mean the socio-political individual when we speak of persons, nor do we mean the metaphysical subject-self, the self-in-itself.<sup>17</sup> For that, too, is an abstraction and a logically incoherent one at that. This is because to conceive 'personhood' as radically subjective, is to conceive 'personhood' isolated from all possible knowledge and reference. Knowledge and reference require a concrete connection but what something is in itself is, *ex hypothesi*, what it is *apart* from all connection.

The underlying assumption here is, broadly speaking, empirical, more properly, 'activist' or 'voluntarist', insofar as knowledge is presumed to be a coefficient of activity. As any teacher knows, learning is a by-product of doing. In claiming knowledge of this self-in-itself, we should be claiming knowledge of something about which we could *do* nothing at all; for that matter, something which could do nothing about us. The disconnection is complete; the self-lies forever out of epistemological reach, transformed into a kind of psychological square-circle.<sup>18</sup>

May we not still appeal to direct awareness or experience of our own cogitating ego, such as Descartes claimed to have? That, as Descartes himself discovered, leaves us radically separated from other persons once again. Perhaps I *am* immediately aware of my own subjectivity, but how can I know whether *you* are too? I have no access to your subjectivity; so how can I know if it is there or not? By analogy perhaps?<sup>19</sup> You walk and talk and think, just as I do. Is it not reasonable to assume that you are, indeed, a genuine subject then? But the radical subject is what it is *apart* from such activity. Since I cannot know whether my *own* actions are expressive of my essence, I am not entitled to extend the inference to you. The self-in-itself offers no analogical hook on which to hang such judgements.

Even if we were entitled to draw conclusions concerning the reality of your interiority based on your activity, our problems would not be solved. Assuming we could avoid behaviourist reduction – difficult enough under the circumstances – we should still wonder how we know what analogies are; more importantly, how do we know what it means to be a person, at all. To say “from one’s own case” is no answer, for now, we must explain how we know what it means to be *a case* in the first place. Any attempt to do so will inevitably find itself thrown back on the resources of a social context from which this construct seeks to exile us. It is in such a context that we *first* learn to talk and think, to do and so to know. Otherwise put, the logical and epistemological tools we use to explore our world and ourselves are invested in us by other persons. It is only after they have planted these seeds, after they have taught us how to tend them and make them grow, that we are able to abstract ourselves, play at being ego-isolationists. Shorn of those resources, this self-in-itself has neither others nor objects to occupy it. About what, then, does it think? What is the content of its experience, its knowledge? Well might one wonder.

Insist, nevertheless, that there is a core of irreducible and inexpressible subjectivity, and the question remains, how do you know? How do you know that this personal experience cannot be shared with others? How can you be sure that it is not, as seems more likely, a lack of linguistic facility? That I find myself faced by the ‘inexpressible’ may signify nothing more than my inability to express myself. After all, history is positively overflowing with writers and artists who have sought to capture the heights and depths of human experience with considerable poetic precision. It is difficult to imagine how, as Daniel Gustafsson suggests below, the likes of William Blake could be considered anything but eminently successful in this endeavour.

Ultimately, then, when faced with this notion of radical subjectivity, we are left wondering how it came to be and how anyone came to know about it. To respond that it just is (there) and that one just does know, is hardly the sort of answer to gladden the philosophical eye, still less satisfy those bent on reducing ‘personhood’ to its neurological, biochemical, or merely physical constituents. But what another answer could such subjectivism have to offer?

So much for radical subjectivism and socio-political egoism. They are nothing but shadows and illusions, logical, moral, and metaphysical abstractions, empty of sense and meaning. Now the

Cartesian hangover is clearing, its ghosts and phantoms flee before the light of our borrowed image, the sun.

Our point, here, is a simple one. As the sun is Plato's image of truth and reality, so too it is ours, for the foundational truth and reality of 'personhood'. Our every experience is framed in personal terms. How could it be otherwise? All our experiential apparatus, from the perceptual to the logico-linguistic, testifies to it; they are ours and no one else's; they supply our only access to the world of others and objects. All our various ways of seeing and understanding and describing are devised within, indeed, are expressions *of*, the matrix of personal relations wherein persons are born and learn to be. This matrix of relations is, in short, the necessary coefficient of every thought and every action, all human experience. Even those descriptions and discourses where no effort has been spared to isolate and abstract the personal, to refine our thought and reduce our presence, cannot step out, as Charles Conti puts it, from "under the sun".<sup>20</sup> The practice of science remains grounded in those primary relations. Its discoveries are the result of the free action, notwithstanding their frequent materialist and determinist content. They must be so, otherwise, the scientist's own claims would, themselves, be nothing more than causal consequences of the interplay of natural forces. In and of themselves, causal consequences are incapable of bearing meaning, even that ascribed to materialist and determinist claims. More than this, the discoveries of science are the result of primary faith commitments made by the scientist. They are commitments to the history and tradition in which she has been trained; to the community in which she now participates, taking responsibility for its judgements; to the belief that the truth is 'out there' somewhere; and ultimately, to the idea that the epistemological tools we bring to bear will be up to the job of finding it.<sup>21</sup> Without such personal commitments, the scientist cannot do her job. Macmurray may have considered the sciences to be the most abstract level of thought and action, but it remains, nevertheless, one in which personal reality takes shape.

In the end, of course, scientists are not the only ones who need their faith commitments. Philosophers, too, must have theirs. This idea, that 'personhood' and all its manifestations in personal action are logically, epistemologically, and, indeed, metaphysically basic, is one of ours. It informs the essays in this volume as they seek to shed light on their chosen aspects of it. It informed our gathering in York and drives the Forum under whose auspices we came together.

Here, then, under the image of this sun, our Personalist scene is set. All that remains for us to do is to introduce those who are to play their parts upon it: our authors.

## 2. Summary of the chapters

We begin in the classical territory, where Stefano Rossi grapples with that most difficult of Aristotle's bequests, the notion of substance. Moreover, explicating the role of that notion within the personalist tradition takes Rossi to the root of a debate which often divides personalists very sharply indeed: namely, the ontological structure of persons. The choice between substance-'thing'<sup>22</sup> and agency-concepts is not a merely theoretical or speculative matter. It cuts to the quick of moral agency, concerns what it means to *be* a person at all.

Rossi's intervention in this debate seems timely; it may well lure adversaries from their entrenched positions on both sides of the conflict.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on the work of two great European thinkers, Robert Spaemann and Edith Stein, he attempts to energise solid-state-substance with the phenomenologists' greatest treasure: the experience of *being* a person. This shift in emphasis, away from the inert in-itself-ness of objective being towards a subjectivising of that older abstract metaphysic, works in both directions. It illuminates person-concepts with substance formulae while simultaneously enlightening substance concepts with the radiance of personal relations.

Rossi has begun the task of putting person-concepts to work, then. In the first instance, this work is purely philosophical, undertaken in the service of a reconstructed metaphysic. However, if we are to talk of 'work' here, then we ought to consider how such a conception of persons might play out in the real world. James Beauregard attempts to supply this need with a personalist view of technology. Lest the reader is misled, we should note that the concept of a person underlying Beauregard's discussion is not identical to Rossi's. It is, however, a close family relative, a conceptual kissing-cousin, grounded in substance metaphysics, likewise influenced by the European Catholic tradition and, in particular, the Modern Ontological Personalism of Juan Manuel Burgos.<sup>24</sup>

Given how utterly pervasive technology is, the reader may be surprised to learn that this is one of the few occasions on which a

personalist has discussed the topic in any detail. Such neglect is certainly strange, given just how central technology has become to almost every facet of human life. In particular, modern information and communications technology have profoundly shaped our relations to others and ourselves, as well as our understanding of those relations; most obviously perhaps, in its ability to connect us electronically while simultaneously disconnecting us emotionally and psychologically.<sup>25</sup>

This chapter is not a course, an invitation to give up and retreat into pastoral fantasy. No Luddite, Beaugard. Like all of us, he has many reasons to appreciate the benefits of technology ancient and modern, from the cello to the computer. Rather, in mapping out a philosophy of technology compatible with what he regards as core personalist principles, he has begun to identify some of the tools needed to think about technology and the way it affects and potentially distorts human life. Beaugard's aim is to find ways of using these tools which challenge the predominant tendency to allow technology its head; his hope is to remind us that persons are more than functions of a system which they are, it so often seems, inevitably bound to serve.

The next stage of our journey carries us from *praxis* back to *theoria*. In company with another giant of European thought, this time Paul Ricoeur, Dries Deweer returns to the ontological question. Are persons substances? No, they are not. 'Personhood', Deweer suggests, is an attitude born of crisis, one in which we come to recognise both the historicity of our values *and*, nonetheless, the need to commit to them. This Ricoeurian response marks another important shift in emphasis. We are, it seems, no longer concerned with the *being* or '*is-ness*' of persons, nor even the experience of being a person as such. Our focus now is on what the concept 'person' actually *means*. How, that is, do we make sense of the language affirmative of persons?

In fact, this is only one strand within a valuable critique of personalism, most especially in its European incarnation. Contrary to received opinion, Deweer assures us, Ricoeur was not rejecting that philosophy with which, in his youth, he had been closely associated. Rather, he was attempting to address those fundamental difficulties which, as he saw it, threatened to undermine personalism and condemn it to obscurity. Our understanding of the concept 'person' was, as indicated, only one aspect of this; alongside stands the apparent elision of particular

personal relations with impersonal institutional ones; a deeply worrying vulnerability to structuralism; and an over-reliance on Christian thought and Christian values.

The principle target of Ricoeur's critique is, as Deweer shows, Emanuel Mounier. This is hardly surprising since, besides their personal relationship, Mounier is one of the founding fathers of European personalism. Given that, it would, perhaps, only be fair to offer readers unfamiliar with our tradition an alternative perspective on Mounier's thought. Just such a view is to be found in Benjamin Bâcle's exploration of personalism and poetry.

In this chapter, we see some of the key tenets of a personalist philosophical anthropology coming to the fore. To begin with, and echoing Beauregard, the attempt to balance, or better still to *integrate* the physical and the spiritual as essential elements of 'personhood', without which our understanding of persons is inevitably incomplete. Just here, the reader may detect the resonance of other disjunctive dichotomies that dog the steps of Western philosophy: mind and body; substance and accident; act and agent. Likewise, Mounier's refusal to surrender to the common forms of philosophical reduction, to allow the concept 'person' to slide into empty abstraction, will resonate with anyone familiar with personalism.<sup>26</sup>

The insistence on beginning with the bodily person keeps at bay all those nonsensical disjunctions and reductions to which philosophers have so readily fallen prey; the door is barred to both sheer materiality and mere spirituality. More than this, it resists the lure of absolutes and ultimates so very tempting to the metaphysically minded; demands instead concrete conditions for all transcendent notions, so keeps philosophical feet firmly on the ground.

For Bâcle, the key to this integration, transcendence fully mediated by the imminent bodily expression, is to be found in acts of self-overcoming: the self-striving for an ideal which always lies, as ideals, inevitably must, just out of reach. For a deeper understanding of such transcendent ideals and the 'mechanisms' by which we try to reach them, Bâcle turns to poetry. This is not altogether surprising since poetry not only claims insight into our ideals and higher aspirations; in some vital sense, it also embodies them. To weave the world from symbol and myth is the most typical human activity there is. In it, we find the roots of a very practical metaphysic.<sup>27</sup>

Following a similar path, Daniel Gustafsson also turns to poetry and art in search of a deeper understanding of personhood. Once

again, we are not surprised since Gustafsson is himself a poet. However, it is central to his thesis that Western philosophy and theology have proved themselves profoundly ill equipped to walk this path. Thus it is through poetry, through the life of myth and symbol, that Gustafsson seeks to bring personalists into closer dialogue with the fertile images of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Combining the mythopoeic resources of William Blake and Fyodor Dostoevsky with Eastern Orthodoxy's dynamic Trinitarianism takes us to the very heart of personalism. It takes us to the fundamental *interpersonality* of human existence which is the *meaning* of personhood. Moreover, conceiving persons *in and as* acts of self-transcendence, fulfilled in other-orientation, serves more than a metaphysical purpose, however practical that may be. Such images, constructively deployed as they are here, preserve us, again, from the isolationist tendencies that have come to dominate Western thought and action. Resisting the opposition of individual and community, self and other, such images can overcome the violent disconnections which lie behind it, so redeem us from the moral and political crisis engendered by modern materialism.

As valuable to the future of personalism as such images doubtless are, nevertheless, we must acknowledge that it still takes considerable courage to bring the Trinity to the modern philosophical marketplace. Fortunately, Gustafsson is in good theological company, for Jan Nilsson follows a similar path in his exploration of the nature of persons.

Nilsson is, of course, perfectly aware of the difficulties. The Trinity, he notes, has been described as "an offence against reason." Indeed, it is hard to disagree with Dante here: "he's a fool who thinks our reason can / Trace all the paths one substance takes in three / Persons, for they are infinite."<sup>28</sup> We shall hardly blame him, then, if, like Farrer, he chooses to leave its definition to scholastic recidivists and other neo-realists, most "especially in view of the fact that it cannot be verbally defined."<sup>29</sup>

This, however, does not mean that the Trinity is entirely beyond our ken; it can be comprehended if we have the right tools. Those tools, Nilsson argues, may be found within the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In that tradition is the cure for metaphysical dyspepsia, that Aristotelian leaven which over-inflates so much philosophical theology. For this other Orthodoxy supplies a dynamic understanding of the Trinity, the very model of interpersonality. The model is reflexive: as we use it to gain purchase, however slender, on the

meaning of ‘God-talk,’ the model reflects back upon us, offering a crucial reminder – which theologians would do well to heed – of the divinity of our natural state: relation, mutuality, interplay. As it reminds us that we are made in the image of God, it simultaneously reminds us of the nature of that God in whose image we are made. The result is a reconception of persons, not as a substance but as embodied relation: all-inclusive and fully interactive, open and other-oriented.

By this point, the reader may be sated, for a while, with poetry and personalist metaphysics. Just what, he or she might have begun to wonder, are the practical implications of all this? For David Treanor, they are significant indeed. So far, our authors have, by and large, sought to locate the reality of persons in dynamic relation; now Treanor will seek to locate the fundamental value of persons there too. Doing so, he argues, throws light on the kind of life we live and, perhaps more importantly, the kind of death we die.

Drawing on Macmurray, Treanor has set his face against a mode of practical morality that seems increasingly dominant in the political and economic world today. Treanor’s challenge – which echoes Bâcle’s – to the devaluing of persons which utilitarianism entails is especially robust because it is not undertaken in an abstract or speculative manner, but in concrete, practical terms. On the one hand, that is, the discussion is substantially informed by a wealth of empirical evidence such that even the most committed empirical philosophers rarely manage. This evidence and the philosophy of persons which it supports are, moreover, supplemented and underpinned by an “end of life narrative.” Personal memoir might be a more apt description, for personal it is, in the best possible sense. To be clear, this memoir, in which the author describes the death of a friend, is no sentimental illustration of personalist principles; to suppose it would be to miss the point entirely. In fact, it is the other way around. The narrative shows how sound philosophical principles may be drawn *from* concrete experience. More simply, it is a meditation on what it means to be a human being. Consequently, it reveals just how right Macmurray really was.

One might be tempted to suppose, just here, that Treanor’s focus on Australia for his supporting data and on a personal memoir to reveal its significance might offer too narrow a scope for philosophical significance. *Nota bene*, however, that there is an old and venerable philosophical maxim at work here. The particular and the universal are intrinsically connected, the interplay between them, as

vital for philosophy as for any scholarly endeavour. Hence the Delphic injunction, *gnothi seauton*: know thyself. What value, in the end, does self-knowledge have unless it illuminates the nature of our universal condition? Equally, what good would there be in understanding that condition if it sheds no light on my own experience of 'personhood'? In this, particulars are, as Treanor put it to me, the very stuff of the world. In making fertile use of them, he has provided us with an example, a sadly rare example, of what we might call 'applied personalism.'

A central feature of our journey thus far has concerned the essential sociality of persons. Ultimately, the thinking goes, we are con-natural with others; 'mutuality' and 'interpersonality' are our meta-physical watchwords. But what of the person as an individual, as one who takes her stand in relation to others? Surely, without some such conception, the very sociality we hoped to establish is fatally undermined. Quite so, and yet we cannot simply resurrect outdated notions of the self-in-itself or the person as person-apart. Sound philosophy and empirical fact will no longer permit it.

There is, readers will doubtless be pleased to discover, another route for personalism. In the next chapter, Torgeir Fjeld shows us the way. The solution to our problem is to be found in a kind of *narrative* conception of persons.<sup>30</sup> At its simplest, we might say, a narrative *requires* an author (whether it actually *necessitates* one is moot). Crucially, authors do not transcend their narratives absolutely, they are not and cannot be authors independently or apart from the stories they tell. The author, as Fjeld demonstrates, is always, in some sense, present, that is, *immanent*, even when they are absent from the textual lives of their protagonists. Indeed, one might say, it is only by embracing immanence that authors are qualified to 'rise above' their narrative, to view and overview it while at the same time bodying it forth. To illustrate this, Fjeld considers two decidedly unconventional characters: Alex, from Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Johnny from Mike Leigh's *Naked*. In both cases, though in different ways, these characters illustrate the notion of a self-embedded in narratives, not of their own making, but nevertheless taking authorial control: becoming an 'I' by becoming the author of their own life-stories. Here, in this image of an author who must negotiate transcendence with immanence is another a lesson that theologically minded would do very well to heed.<sup>31</sup>

Just as our social conception of persons has practical implications, so too does our conception of the person as an individual, as Julian Stern suggests in our next chapter. If the 'I' can somehow 'rise above' the world of relations, then surely there is room for solitude in our picture of interpersonality. Once again, here is a question that has rarely, if ever, been discussed by personalists. And yet, it is undeniably an important one, not least for those of us who tend to focus, almost exclusively, on the sociality of persons.

By reminding us of the reality and value of solitude, Stern also reminds us that we are always and inevitably more complex than our philosophical diagrams can capture. He invites us, moreover, to supplement those diagrams, rethink them in an effort to devise a subtler and more sophisticated philosophical psychology. For, unlike loneliness, which imagines the connection with others cut, so undermines our identity, solitude does not isolate; it merely suspends, for a time, those crucial connections. Solitude, in Stern's sense, is valuable; but it does not, indeed cannot contravene the basic social truth of persons, it cannot take us absolutely out of the milieu of mutuality in which we are who and what we are. Whether our solitude is time taken to reflect upon our interactions with others or to read quietly, we are never quite alone. We carry the images of others with us: the author who speaks from the pages of the book, inviting us to converse; or the reflection of those, now absent, but immanent in our efforts to understand ourselves and our relations.

Journey's end and images of otherness take centre stage. My aim in this final chapter is not to trade back any of the ground gained for the 'self as agent' or 'author-I'. We have come too far for that. Rather, this chapter seeks to locate our newly enriched conception of persons within its natural context, indeed, within the widest possible context: the world with which it transacts itself. Here, the self takes on a cosmological cast. As it does so, we find that our images are, as Stern avers, much more than mere idealistic projection or anthropomorphic personification, ghosts to keep the loneliness at bay. In fact, otherness is an integral element of coherent epistemology *and* metaphysics. The vital role it plays in developmental psychology is recapitulated time and again as we strive to understand ourselves and the universe in which we live. And it does so, despite the fact that our understanding of both has been systematically – and falsely – characterised as utterly impersonal and mechanistic. No rejection of the sciences, the rebuttal of dead mechanism with living

image stands upon a *rapprochement* of physics and metaphysics. Pursued by two of the last great metaphysical minds, Farrer and Whitehead, the result, I contend, has been to fully embed personhood as transactional, participative, as a conscious physical agency, within the matrix of processes which constitute the universe as a whole, a *uni-verse*.

That, then, is our journey through the many facets of modern personalism. The time has come to meet our authors face to face, as it were; they are eager, as they should be, to engage with their readers. Here, after all, is where they are best encountered: disclosing themselves, their meaning, in the midst of dialogue. That, after all, is the key to this book: dialogue, encounter, meeting; creative engagement with one another, participation *in* one another, as persons must if they are to become persons at all.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1947), 12.

<sup>3</sup> For excellent summaries of the many different ways or approaches to personalism, see Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson's article "Personalism", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/personalism/>; and Thomas O. Buford's "Personalism" in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed 26/02/2017, [www.iep.utm.edu/personal/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/personal/).

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these reductive and depersonalising influences, particularly as they are at work in modern philosophy and theology – much to the detriment of lived faith – see S. Smith, *Beyond Realism: Seeking the Divine Other* (Delaware/Malaga: Vernon Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas O. Buford, "Personalism" *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed 26/02/2016, [www.iep.utm.edu/personal/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/personal/).

<sup>6</sup> Farrer, 20. In this context, the phrase, "non-overlapping magisteria" appears to have been coined by Stephen Jay Gould; see his essay of the same name in *The Richness of Life*, 584-598, (London: Vintage, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> That was certainly Farrer's view; Charles Conti, too, has made the case, elegantly and convincingly, in his *Metaphysical Personalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995). Indeed, the religious or, perhaps better, divinely inspired and extended nature of persons was also the crucial element of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); and his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. M. H. Vogel. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co. 1986). So much is the central thesis of *Beyond Realism*, itself an attempt to supplement and extend Farrer and Conti.

<sup>8</sup> Farrer, *A Science of God?* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd, 1966), 100. See also *Finite and Infinite* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Westminster: Dacre Press 1959) and *Faith and Speculation* on the personal analogy.

<sup>9</sup> John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 86. "The Form of the Personal" was the title of his Gifford Lectures for 1953-4. These were published in two volumes as *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) and *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 200. For a conception of science as a prototypical expression of human freedom in community, cf., although not

necessarily in search of conflict, Polanyi's *The Logic of Liberty* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998) and *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). For further discussion of Polanyi's view on this, see S. Smith's "Unfair to Social Facts: John Searle and the Logic of Objectivity" in *The Balkan Journal of Philosophy* 6:1 (2015) and "Authority and Practice: General and Specific Authority in Science and Society" in *Freedom, Authority and Economics*, ed. R. T. Allen (Delaware/Malaga: Vernon Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> See Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> That, in fact, is what Farrer did in the central chapters of *Finite and Infinite* and then, in greater detail, his Gifford Lectures for 1956-1957, published as *The Freedom of the Will* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960). By locating the seat of consciousness, not in the brain, as is traditional, nor any other *thing*, but in personal action, Farrer resolved that classical dichotomy and realigned mind and body. Personal action locates the agent immediately and unmistakably in a social situation, suggesting that consciousness or 'personhood' does not exist *in* the self at all but rather flowers in and as interpersonal transactions.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 18. There is also the risk that our understanding of persons might be supposed to have some underlying biological bias, 'persons' being intrinsically or inevitably members of the species *homo sapiens*. We shall not pursue the contentious question of whether non-human animals such as dolphins and the great apes could, in some sense, be persons. Instead, we need only ask whether our concept 'person' necessarily rules out the possibility of non-human persons, thereby leaving us open to Peter Singer's charge of "speciesism" (Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 55-68; 105-107). Personalists, like other philosophers, may well have their doubts about dolphins. Yet, should we ever encounter other life forms capable of being, as Stuart Hampshire put it, "interested in recalling their own past and parentage" and, perhaps most importantly, of wanting to "tell each other stories," few would deny that they were, in some crucial sense, persons; see Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (London: Penguin, 1992), 44.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* revised edition, John Carroll (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971); and, perhaps most famously, Rand's *The Fountainhead* (London: Penguin Books, 2007) and *Atlas Shrugged* (London: Penguin Books, 2007). This egoism is a corollary of the decisive shift away from notions of absolute truth and authority and the embracing of radical scepticism which, in tandem, characterised the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Polanyi points out in *The Logic of Liberty* the rise of totalitarianism was an inevitable consequence of this shift. Fascism and Marxism defined concepts such as 'truth', 'authority' and 'reality' as power relations to be wielded by a socio-political elite. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century a

refinement has been added as such notions are understood almost exclusively in terms of economic value.

<sup>15</sup> For the expression “dog-eat-dog dogma” see Robert Newman’s *Entirely Accurate Encyclopaedia of Evolution* (Glasgow: Freight Books, 2015; Kindle Edition) 518. The phrase “survival of the fittest” was coined by Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Biology*, first published in 1864, which sought to draw parallels between Spencer’s economic theories and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution.

<sup>16</sup> For a preview of this programme and its far-reaching implications, see Thomas O. Buford, “What Can Personalism Contribute to Bioethics?” *Appraisal* 10:4 (2015) 7-17.

<sup>17</sup> In all conscience, this is not a view that can be ascribed to all personalists; it is a bold claim and many would reject it vehemently. Juan Manuel Burgos, the prominent Spanish personalist, is one who argues that “experience of the self reflects in an existential way the irreducible subjectivity of the subject, what each person is; what, in its deepest root, is not transmissible. It is not possible to fully communicate to others one’s own subjective world” (“Integral Experience: A New Proposal on the Beginning of Knowledge,” *In the Sphere of the Personal: New Perspectives in the Philosophy of Persons*, eds. James Beauregard and S. Smith. (Delaware/Malaga: Vernon Press, 2016) 43). Burgos’ conception of the self is complicated considerably, not to say confused, by the fact that he also and simultaneously holds that human experience is “external and objective” and therefore, one supposes, *can* be “communicated to and observed by others” (43). Burgos goes on to state that this apparent inconsistency does not, in fact, result in the fragmentation, or more likely, the dissolution, of the self. Exactly why it this is, is not, however, explained. More seriously, perhaps, for the intelligibility of Burgos’ construction is his insistence that, while the person is ontologically prior to any relation – and so *is* a person *in se* – persons are also, in some sense, essentially or ontologically constituted by love. However, these two claims are not compatible for the simple reason that love is *essentially* social, a relation in which self and other are co-opted in mutual becoming. The idea of love that could be held perpetually in abeyance is not coherent. These latter claims occurred in Burgos’ paper “A New Personalistic Proposal: Modern Ontological Personalism (MOP)” which was presented first at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Persons, Lund (Sweden) August, 2013; and then at the British Personalist Forum 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference, *Philosophies of the Person: New Horizons and Perspectives*, York (UK) June, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed exposition of this issue, and of an ‘activist’ or ‘voluntarist’ epistemology, see “A Convergence of Cosmologies: Personal analogies in Modern Physics and Modern Metaphysics”, below.

<sup>19</sup> For the analogical argument to other minds, see Bertrand Russell, ‘Analogy’ in *Essays on Other Minds*, ed. Thomas O. Buford (Illinois:

University of Illinois Press: 1970) 3-8. For a response, see the Introduction to *Beyond Realism*, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Conti, xxv.

<sup>21</sup> See Polanyi's *Science, Faith and Society* and *Personal Knowledge*, esp. Ch. 7: "Conviviality".

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note the signalled metaphoricity of this term 'thing' here. Few, if any, personalists would accept the suggestion that persons are things in any meaningful sense. Things are objects; they can be dissected, conceptually and literally, taken to pieces in an effort to understand them; they carry no moral implications in and of themselves, they can have no responsibilities towards us and can make no claims upon us; they can be causes or effects, but they cannot be agents in the proper sense; they can impact upon one another, but they cannot act freely. In short, things cannot and do not *mean* anything, as the sciences never tire of cheerfully telling us, and scholastic cosmologists have learned to their cost. To persons, so the thinking goes, belongs a radically different kettle of concepts. The personal world, to make the contrast explicit, is one in which morality is central to the very possibility of existence. In this world, ideas such as dignity and responsibility, the 'claimingness' of others, are essential in every sense of the word. In this world, as Charles Conti puts it, we "live under the shadow of an 'ought' and in the presence of a holy 'Thou'." (*Metaphysical Personalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 31). Indeed, it is the very real need to resist the reduction of persons to things that drives personalist thinkers. Hence, in this case, the attempt to mitigate outrage by isolating the term 'thing' within quotation marks, logically quarantined lest it contaminate the concepts around it.

<sup>23</sup> Until his death in 1968, Farrer strove to re-balance this seemingly intractable conflict, to strike out in a new and more fertile direction. Retrieving action-concepts from the Whiteheadians, he used the logic of intentionality to re-vitalise and so redeem them. This put the intending agent, conscious, physical person, at the heart of the matter. See *The Freedom of the Will*, *passim*; and *Faith and Speculation*, Chs. VII, "The Theology of Will," and VIII, "Justifiable Analogy;" see also, Conti, Ch. 5, "Purging the Leaven," for a detailed discussion of the logic of intentionality and Ch. 6, "The 'Becoming' of Being," for an analysis of its theological application.

<sup>24</sup> See, Burgos "A New Personalistic Proposal: Modern Ontological Personalism (MOP)".

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon grounded in substantial empirical research, see, in particular, Chs. 6, "Digital Natives," and 7, "Teens and Screens," in Susan Pinker, *The Village Effect* (London: Atlantic Books, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Among British philosophers, Farrer and Macmurray would tirelessly pursue that integration in *The Freedom of the Will* and *The Self as Agent*

respectively. More recently, in the Spanish speaking world, Burgos has followed a similar path in “Integral Experience: A New Proposal on the Beginning of Knowledge” and *Antropología: Luna Guía Para la Existence*, 5a edición, (Madrid: Editions Palabra, 2013), 67. Before Farrer, Macmurray, or Burgos, Feuerbach effected the concrete instantiation of conscious, bodily persons in both *The Essence of Christianity* and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. He did so, as Marx Wartofsky shows, by deploying that “much-inflated yet workaday German expression, *Dasein*” (*Feuerbach*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 18). That expression was later bequeathed to Heidegger.

<sup>27</sup> On the development and use of symbol systems as fundamentally human, see Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957); also Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) and *Language and Myth* New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1953).

<sup>28</sup> Dante Alighieri, Book II, ‘Purgatory’, Canto 3, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Clive James, (London: Picador, 2015), 186. Aquinas was, as one might expect, more restrained. He was ready to concede that the Trinity may well be inaccessible to reason, but it remains a crucial matter of revelation. See, for example, Reese’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 782, 10; F. C. Copleston’s *Aquinas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 52; and Anthony Kenny’s book of the same title (Oxford: OUP, 1980), 8, 15 and 16. The real issue for Aquinas, as Timothy McDermott points out, is not whether the Trinity is a rational construct as such, still less whether it can be proved as real. Rather, the question is “*how we can conceive of distinct persons in God*” (“Introductory Comment” to Ch. 3, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (London: Methuen, 1991), 64).

<sup>29</sup> Like McDermott, Farrer – who described himself as a ‘binatarian’ – would put the emphasis on the revelation of God in Christ, who was, after all the embodiment of divine love, the “personal existence of the Second Person in the Trinity” (Farrer, “Very God and Very Man,” in *Interpretation and Belief*, ed. Charles Conti (London: SPCK, 1976), 135).

The Trinity is an image as easily misused as it is misunderstood. For a prime example of this, see the work of Farrerian scholar, Edward Hugh Henderson; for example, “The Supremely Free Agent” in *Human and Divine Agency*, ed. F. Michael McLain and W. Mark Richardson (Maryland: University Press of America 1999); and “The Divine Playwright” in *The Personalist Forum*, vol. 12, no. 1, (1996). According to Henderson, the purpose of Trinitarian thinking is to refrigerate, and so metaphysically and logically solidify, the sociality of divine relation, returning it to the glacial heights of scholastic orthodoxy. For a detailed discussion of Henderson’s deeply problematic analysis of this notion, and of Farrer’s work in general, see *Beyond Realism*, Ch. 3, “Prior Actuality and the Divine Playwright.”

<sup>30</sup> For another take on the narrative self, see Richard C. Prust, “Personal Identity With and Without Monotheism,” *In the Sphere of the Personal: New Perspectives in the Philosophy of Persons*, 31-40.

<sup>31</sup> For two different but closely related attempts to supply just that theological application, see the analyses of Farrer’s “playwright allegory” (from “The Prior Actuality of God” in *Reflective Faith*, ed. Charles Conti (London: SPCK, 1972), 178-191) in S. Smith, “The Age of Immanence: Whiteheadian Metaphysics from a Farrerian Point of View” in *Process Studies Supplements* 13 (2009); and Ch. 3, “Prior Actuality and the Divine Playwright” in *Beyond Realism: Seeking the Divine Other* (Delaware/Malaga: Vernon Press, 2017).

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