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Personhood in Classical and Process-Oriented Metaphysics

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One major source of conflict in contemporary sexual ethics (e.g., artificial contraception and abortion) is the implicit difference in the worldviews represented by the terms "pro-life" and "pro-choice." Those who are pro-life support the notion of human personhood as a fixed and unchanging reality from conception to death; those who are pro-choice, in contrast, support the notion of human personhood as developmental, never fully realized. The pro-life position basically reflects the worldview of classical metaphysics; the pro-choice position is logically grounded in process philosophy and theology. The aim of the present article is to compare and contrast these two worldviews so as to see whether or not there is unexpected common ground between the two that could logically justify a consensus position on the more specific moral issues.

Keywords: human personhood, contraception, abortion, Thomas Aquinas, A. N. Whitehead

In an earlier issue of *Horizons,* I argued for the possibility of a new, socially oriented metaphysics as a way to provide common ground for more fruitful discussion of the meaning of human personhood within contemporary bioethics, notably on the key topics of artificial contraception and abortion.[1] The purpose of that article was clearly not to provide a solution to the question of the morality or immorality of contraception and abortion, but simply to urge participants in this discussion to broaden the scope of their inquiry so as to take into account all the relevant circumstances before coming to a

[1] Joseph A. Bracken, SJ, "Personhood and Community in a New Context," *Horizons* 35, no. 1 (2008): 94–110.

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personal decision on these highly controversial issues. My aim in the present article is to continue that analysis, this time with attention to the question of whether human personhood is a fixed reality, a developmental reality, or (more likely) both fixed and developmental, albeit in different ways. In terms of the artificial contraception/abortion debate what is at stake here, of course, is whether a fertilized human ovum is a human person with the same rights as its biological parents and other members of the human community. If so, does the right of the fetus to survive "trump" the right of the mother and father to choose to give birth to and subsequently to rear and care for that child? For many people, this is not an easy question to answer except perhaps as a matter of personal preference. What seems to be needed, however, is a more rational justification for such an important decision. Here then is where the question about the nature of human personhood—whether it is a fixed or a developmental reality or somehow both fixed and developmental—has its place and where one's position on this matter has to be further thought through and articulated.

The goal of this article, accordingly, is also not to offer any kind of definitive answer to the question of the morality or immorality of artificial contraception and abortion, but only to make clear that different worldviews or metaphysical systems seem to be presupposed by those take pro-life and pro-choice positions on this matter. The proponents of the pro-life position, who favor the right of the fetus to survive over the right of the biological parents to choose to have a child right now, presumably make that choice on the basis of some adherence to a presupposed framework rooted in classical metaphysics with its understanding of the analogy of being. That is, they understand personhood as a fixed reality, grounded in the priority of actuality over potentiality, since the prime analogate of personhood is God as pure actuality with no admixture of potentiality. The proponents of the pro-choice position, on the contrary, presumably think in terms of personhood as a developmental reality, thereby giving potentiality, the ability to change or develop, priority over actuality here and now. Their prime analogate is not God as Supreme Actuality, but an organism, however primitive, which continues to develop internally and externally (in interaction with its environment) over its allotted life span. So must one choose between the classical philosophy of Being and some form of contemporary process-oriented metaphysics as one's rational basis for the above-named choice in the field of sexual morality? Or is there a way to bring these differing worldviews closer together so as ultimately to achieve something like a consensus position on these specific moral issues, with both sides feeling that they made their basic point in the eventual formulation of that position. The present article then is designed to look more carefully at both the strengths and the

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weaknesses of these two basic worldviews, seeking common ground for a possible consensus position on a pair of very important moral issues. Such rational reflection, of course, is not the only source of moral certitude in human life. But it provides a neutral point of view among well-intentioned individuals who might not agree on the role of biblical tradition and the traditional teaching authority of the church in the present context.

I. Seeking Common Ground

The analogy of being is a time-honored principle in the classical philosophy of being, above all, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas and other Christian philosophers and theologians to the present day. Yet various meanings have been attached to the term "analogy of being" within classical metaphysics. The article "Medieval Theories of Analogy" by E. Jennifer Ashworth in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* offers useful insights:

> Medieval theories of analogy were a response to problems in three areas: logic, theology, and metaphysics. Logicians were concerned with the use of words having more than one sense, whether completely different, or related in some way. Theologians were concerned with language about God. How can we speak about a transcendent, totally simple spiritual being without altering the sense of the words we use? Metaphysicians were concerned with talk about reality. How can we say that both substances (e.g., Socrates) and accidents (e.g., the beardedness of Socrates) exist when one is dependent on the other; how can we say that both God and creatures exist, when one is created by the other?[2]

For the sake of brevity, I will focus on Ashworth's overview of Thomas Aquinas' understanding of analogy with reference to the divine names, what can be predicated about God without undercutting the transcendence of God to the world of creation. In her view, Aquinas first leaned toward the analogy of attribution, then moved toward the analogy of proper proportionality, and finally settled on a combination of the two for dealing with the divine names. That is, Aquinas' initial understanding of the analogy of attribution involved a relation between God and creatures which was much too "determinate," thus neglecting the essential difference between God and creatures.[3] So Aquinas turned to the analogy of proper proportionality; but,

[2] E. Jennifer Ashworth, "Medieval Theories of Analogy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/analogy-medieval/. Ashworth is Professor Emerita of Philosophy at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

[3] Ashworth, "Medieval Theories of Analogy," n. 6.

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unless carefully qualified, this understanding of analogy does not seem to say anything specific about God and God's properties versus creatures and their properties.

In the end Aquinas returned to the analogy of attribution but linked it much more closely to causal similitude, the active transmission of properties from God to creatures, using the notion of cause not in a univocal or an equivocal sense, but in an analogical sense. Univocal causes have effects fully like themselves; equivocal causes have effects that are really different from themselves. Only analogical causes say something specific about the effects they produce, provided that "definitional inclusion" is implied. That is, the analogical term understood in a prior sense must be included in the definition of the term in a posterior sense. Healthy food implies a reference to a healthy animal. But in analogical reference to God, the same reference through *prius* and *posterius* is indirect rather than direct. That is, when humans are said to be good, this means that they have only a participated goodness, which must be caused by that which is goodness itself and which remains humanly incomprehensible.[4]

The analogy of being in Aquinas's metaphysics, accordingly, works from the top down. That is, God as Pure Act is the prime analogate, and creatures in varying degrees of actuality are the secondary analogates within the Thomistic understanding of the analogy of being. Alfred North Whitehead, however, seems to have employed an analogy of becoming in his own process-oriented metaphysics that works from the bottom up. That is, in *Process and Reality* he sets forth a generic understanding of societies of actual entities that could apply to subatomic particles as well as to living organisms and even to human communities and entire environments within nature. Hence, for Whitehead, the equivalent of the prime analogate is the simplest form of society, namely, a subatomic particle as itself composed of quarks and leptons; the secondary analogates are all the more complex societies of actual entities making up the persons and things of ordinary human experience. Must one then choose between the analogy of being and the analogy of becoming as one's starting point in a metaphysical scheme, or is there a way to combine the two forms of analogy so as better to understand the nature of reality?

For this purpose, I make use of what Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell call "metaphoric process":

> Analogic process equates a known concept (C1k) in a field X with an unknown concept (Cu) not in any known field of meanings: C1k = C2u.

[4] Ibid.

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> In this way, analogic process makes the unknown concept known, that is, isomorphic in the X field of meanings. Analogic process creates no tension and does not distort the X field of meaning. Metaphoric process, in contrast, equates a known concept (C1k) on the field of X with another known (C2k) on the field Y thereby forcing the two different concepts to be isomorphic on a new field of meaning (X + Y): (C1k + C2k). Metaphoric process connects the two original fields with a force that creates tension and distortion in one or both fields, X and Y, that contained the original concepts.[5]

Using this notion of metaphoric process, I propose that both top-down and bottom-up causation are involved both in the understanding of person within the classical analogy of being and in the process-oriented understanding of personally ordered societies within the metaphysics of Whitehead. The classical understanding of person, for example, is chiefly grounded in top-down causation, namely, the agency of the soul in determining the day-to-day conduct of a human person. Yet the soul is necessarily linked with a body that continues to change and develop over a lifetime. By implication, then, potentiality (purposive growth or development) is also part of what it means to be a human person. The process-oriented understanding of person (i.e., a personally ordered society of actual entities), on the contrary, seems to be grounded in bottom-up causation, namely, the way in which the constituent actual entities relate to one another from moment to moment within a personally ordered society. But there is also top-down causation in the way that each personally ordered society possesses a common element of form or defining characteristic that is passed on from one set of actual entities to another so as to constrain how the constituent actual entities relate to one another from moment to moment.[6]

To elaborate on these similarities and differences between the two rival metaphysical systems, I first analyze Whitehead's understanding of personally ordered societies of actual entities and indicate how it could positively influence the notion of person in classical metaphysics. Then I review the historical concept of person within classical metaphysics and make clear how its function as a principle of enduring identity for a human being amid

[5] Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, *New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 10–11.

[6] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology,* ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corr. ed. (New York: Free Press), 34: "The common element of form [defining characteristic] is simply a complex eternal object exemplified in each member of the nexus [group of actual entities]." But an eternal object for Whitehead is equivalently a logical universal, something generic to a group of entities rather than specific to one entity.

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ongoing change could be very helpful within a process-oriented context so as better to establish the enduring ontological identity of a Whiteheadian society as more than an ever-changing succession of momentary experiences. In particular, W. Norris Clarke's understanding of physical reality as grounded in the experience of intersubjectivity rather than simply in the firsthand experience of the individual self brings classical metaphysics into much closer proximity to Whiteheadian process-oriented metaphysics with its own emphasis on intersubjectivity. This is especially the case if one accepts my own rethinking of Whitehead's notion of society as a structured field of activity for its constituent actual entities, momentary subjects of experience, from moment to moment. The conclusion of the article returns to what I proposed at the beginning—namely, that what is needed in the contemporary Christian understanding of personhood is to find a suitable middle ground between the claims of classical metaphysics and process-oriented philosophy as to the nature of reality, and in particular the nature of human personhood, so as to have a rational basis for some sort of consensus position on the issue of the morality or immorality of artificial contraception and abortion.

II. Whitehead's Notion of Persoanlly Ordered Societies

The pertinent text on personally ordered societies of actual entities is found in Whitehead's *Process and Reality*:

> Thus the nexus [group of actual entities] forms a single line of inheritance of its defining characteristic. Such a nexus is called an "enduring object." It might have been termed a "person," in the legal sense of that term. But unfortunately "person" suggests the notion of consciousness, so that its use would lead to misunderstanding. The nexus "sustains a character," and this is one of the meanings of the Latin word *persona.* But an "enduring object," qua "person," does more than sustain a character. For this sustenance arises out of the special genetic relations among the members of the nexus.[7]

Whitehead is using very precise language here. For him, a nexus is any combination of actual entities here and now, even if only for a moment—precisely as an aggregate of actual entities—it has some kind of defining characteristic making it different from other momentary aggregates of actual entities. But in Whitehead's scheme actual entities come into and go out of existence with extreme rapidity. Only if the succession of actual entities within the same nexus sustains one and the same defining characteristic over time does the

[7] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 35.

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nexus become an enduring object or a society. Finally, only in this latter sense is an enduring object or a society a person in the legal sense. But does this mean that a rock as a personally ordered society of actual entities involves consciousness? Definitely not; but a rock according to Whitehead is composed of actual entities, momentary subjects of experience, which are in some minimal way responsive to the conditions of their environment in their self-constitution here and now. So, while the rock itself is not a subject of experience, its elementary components, actual entities, are by definition subjects of experience that together constitute the ongoing reality of an inanimate thing. Admittedly Whitehead's stipulation that momentary subjects of experience (equivalently spiritual atoms rather than inert material atoms) are the ultimate components of inanimate things is hard to accept on the basis of commonsense experience. But, as a theoretical physicist, Whitehead was well aware that the deeper reality of the entities found in common sense experience is other than their sense appearance. Rocks, for example, are said to be made up of atoms with protons and electrons as their components. Thus, whereas a rock has the appearance of a solid object, it is actually a physical force field or energy field with, relatively speaking, lots of empty space for the dynamic interplay of its protons and electrons.

In any case, with respect to Whitehead's notion of an enduring object or person, a society or nexus of actual entities with personal order must through its constituent actual entities have a feeling-level responsiveness to the environment in which it is located. Hence, a fertilized human ovum that successfully implanted itself in the uterine wall of the mother is a personally ordered society of actual entities and thus is a person in a rudimentary sense. Yet only over an entire lifetime will this fertilized ovum achieve its full actuality as a human person. Whitehead's generic understanding of personhood, accordingly, is not ipso facto applicable to the resolution of controversial issues like the morality or immorality of artificial contraception or abortion. But it does put that discussion in a new context and might as a result contribute to a better understanding of where pro-life and pro-choice advocates basically disagree and where they might unexpectedly agree, and thus find a basis for a possible compromise position on the contested moral issue.

Still another feature of Whitehead's claim that a society is a consecutive series of actual entities with personal order is the very rich notion of intersubjectivity therein involved. The physical world for Whitehead is based on intersubjective relations between momentary self-constituting subjects of experience. That is, only in virtue of ongoing intersubjective relations among its own constituent actual entities at any given moment does a Whiteheadian society survive and prosper, achieve its full potentiality. What

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Martin Buber claimed in *I and Thou*,[8] therefore, should be seen as valid not just for human beings in their relations with one another and with God as their commonly shared transcendent Subject of experience, but also for all entities (societies of actual entities) in their relations with one another. That is, the I-Thou relationship is not a relatively rare moment of interpersonal encounter between human beings but the necessary presupposition for all entities in this world together to survive and prosper. The I-It relation, of course, is also an ever-present possibility in the ongoing exchange between momentary subjects of experience, especially among human beings in their dealings with one another and with the world of nature. But whenever and wherever it happens, the I-It relation is an impediment to the survival and prosperity not only of the "I" as an individual subjectivity but of all the subjects of experience with whom it is regularly involved, and thus in the final analysis to the survival and prosperity of the cosmic process as a whole.

Because it represents a retreat of the "I" or individual subjectivity into itself with its own self-centered interests and desires, the I-It relation is quite damaging for intersubjective relations. In treating another subjectivity as an "It," the individual subjectivity unconsciously reduces itself to an It, simply one thing in a world of things, where the desire to be different from other things (subjectivities) and the need for one's subjective private space are paramount. Lost is the instinct to cocreate with other subjectivities a common space within which together they survive and prosper. We contemporary human beings, for example, are beginning to realize the destructive consequences of the I-It relation as we see all around us at present the growing negative effects of human exploitation of the environment on which we all depend. Buber claims in *I and Thou* that the intimacy of an I-Thou relationship can be extended not only to human beings and the members of other animal species but even to things like trees.[9] In terms of Whitehead's notion of universal intersubjectivity, this is not romantic fancy but the sober truth. *Mutatis mutandis,* something akin to an I-Thou relation can be extended even to the dynamic components of inanimate things, namely, their constituent atoms and molecules. One can admire, for example, the aesthetic beauty of the way in which these basic components of physical reality work together to produce the thing in question, and remind oneself that all of us in this world depend on such ongoing dynamic interplay for our own survival in an otherwise highly unpredictable world.

[8] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner's, 1970).

[9] Ibid., 57–59.

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III. The Classical Notion of Person

I turn now to the historical development of the notion of person within classical metaphysics up to and including the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas. My basic guide in this overview will be Mary T. Clark's *Augustine, Philosopher of Freedom.*[10] Likewise, as noted above, I also make reference to W. Norris Clarke's notion of human personhood as presented his *Person and Being* and *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person*.[11]

In part 1 of her book, Mary Clark surveys the notion of personal freedom in Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. The terms "freedom" and "person," to be sure, are not identical. But, as Clark makes clear at intervals throughout the book, they are closely related: "Even in possession of physical liberty, social and political liberty, and psychological liberty, man [*sic*] longs for a more positive form of freedom, a kind that is bound up more profoundly with his metaphysical status as a person in living relation to God."[12]

She begins by noting that for the early Greek philosophers human personality only slowly extricated itself from social structures: "The man of antiquity was aware of novelty, of contingency, but he seems to have feared it and to have preferred necessity. He recognized necessity as the law of his mental life, knew the inexorable static security of the changeless idea, felt certainty in conclusions that inevitably followed from valid premises."[13] Thus Plato, like Socrates before him, believed that evil was the result of human ignorance, the failure to understand the appropriate means for accomplishing a predetermined end or goal. Hence one is never unjust voluntarily, although the unjust act can still be done as a result of ignorance of the proper way to accomplish the necessary good. For the Greek philosophers, accordingly, "the power of free choice belongs to the realm of opinion, the region of the undetermined. It is a lack of power, a lack of perfection. Perfection flows rather from the determinism of the Good."[14] Aristotle contested Plato's claim that a human being is never unjust voluntarily. Wickedness, after all, is voluntary; one can know that something is wrong and still do it for personal reasons.[15] Clark comments that Aristotle clearly had a better notion of free

[10] Mary T. Clark, *Augustine, Philosopher of Freedom: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New York: Desclée, 1958).

[11] W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993); Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1994).

[12] Clark, *Augustine,* 236.

[13] Ibid., 9.

[14] Ibid., 10.

[15] Ibid., 11. See Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, trans. W. D. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 3.5.1115b.

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choice. But was that free choice a true self-determination of the human will or was it made in conformity with a law of nature extrinsic to itself as the Stoics believed? She concludes: "If will is not an infinite capacity, can the radical indetermination of free will be grasped? Is there any mention of that freedom born of man's efficacious choice of the good, by which he is free for attaining his end?"[16] The ultimate good, in other words, must be infinite and thus humanly incomprehensible if the human will is to be free to choose a particular good for the present moment. Likewise, by implication Clark argues that the ultimate good is not an impersonal Infinite but a loving God with whom the human being exists in a strictly interpersonal relation. This is evident when she compares Plotinus' quest for union with the transcendent One and Augustine's passion for union with the God of Christian revelation.

In analyzing Plotinus' understanding of free will, Clark discusses what he meant by free will in human beings and then what he understood as free will in the One. The two are closely related but not identical. With respect to free will in human beings, Plotinus argues that self-determination is opposed to chance. But necessity is also opposed to chance. So the higher one ascends in the realm of being, the more necessity there is one's ongoing self-determination, just as the lower one descends in the realm of being the more chance one finds at the level of self-determination. Furthermore, the higher one ascends in the realm of being, the more independence of others one acquires. Hence, self-determination or freedom to be oneself implies a separation from others, ultimately a separation from all finite things to achieve union with the One.[17] The One as the source of reason and order in the world exists necessarily; nothing external can influence its character as the One, absolutely free Spirit, whose activity is strictly self-determined.[18] Clark summarizes Plotinus' understanding of freedom as follows: "We cannot be really ourselves unless we are concentrated in the One; the pursuit of truth becomes the pursuit of self-knowledge, and through self-knowledge, of the 'One' in ourselves. …When knowledge is fully achieved in its principle, the One, the soul has the absolute autonomy that is the aim of its thinking, its metaphysical voyage through various spiritual levels."[19] Action in terms of free choice among alternatives is abandoned in favor of strictly intellectual self-determination.

By way of contrast, in analyzing Augustine's philosophy of freedom, Clark emphasizes that "Augustine is never tempted to erase the distinctively human

[16] Clark, *Augustine,* 12.
[17] Ibid., 25–26.
[18] Ibid., 33–34.
[19] Ibid., 40–41.

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trait of desire, movement towards Being, from his conception of human freedom."[20] Thus there are two interrelated dimensions of human freedom for Augustine: "the faculty of free choice or free will, and the freedom that qualifies man when free choice is used according to its purpose – to attain the true end of man, thereby enabling him to be all that he should be. And for Augustine the drawing power of love is crucial for the perfect exercise of free choice."[21] Accordingly, in his early dialogue *De Libero Arbitrio* (On Free Will), where Augustine was exploring the problem of evil, he makes clear that even though human free choice can be responsible for evil in a world that God made good, it is still a perfection, an asset not a liability. So it is worth the risk of error and painful consequences. Furthermore, not even God can overpower human free will. A human being has to choose to follow the law of reason, which participates in the eternal law of God: "Whether reason is to be master, that is, whether man is to enjoy personal freedom, is decided by the will."[22] So the pursuit of truth, the truth of man's relationship to God and all God's creatures, is intimately bound up with the desire to be truly free: "Augustine's quest for truth became a quest for freedom, the fulfillment of the individual in the widest kind of community life in God."[23]

Elsewhere Clark deals with the controversial question of whether Augustine's belief in the absolute freedom of free choice can be reconciled with his other belief in divine efficacious grace for the individual to choose good over evil in any given situation. Her argument in defense of Augustine runs as follows: Human beings always make decisions based on an antecedent motive. Yet human beings are not masters of their own first thoughts on any issue. Therefore, in virtue of God's foreknowledge of what will motivate an individual to choose good over evil in a given context, God sends to the individual an efficacious grace: "It is a grace that does not cause us to act but causes us to want to act. …It inclines but does not compel the will; the will determines itself."[24] Clark freely admits that Augustine does not say how God can infallibly know what will motivate an individual to choose the good here and now, unless in the divine foreknowledge of a human free will decision God also predetermines that it will indeed happen just as anticipated.[25]

[20] Ibid., 224.
[21] Ibid., 45.
[22] Ibid., 55.
[23] Ibid., 240.
[24] Ibid., 104.
[25] Ibid.

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In any case, Augustine's position here is unexpectedly close to Whitehead's understanding of divine "initial aims" to individual actual entities in their process of momentary self-constitution.[26] In each case, God seeks to persuade rather than to coerce, that is, to provide a directionality for the exercise of free choice, not to issue a command that cannot be disobeyed. As Clark notes, "The special characteristic of this victorious grace is that it substitutes delight in the good for delight in evil. Man is not constrained to keep a law previously repugnant to him, but he spontaneously finds his joy in it."[27] Whitehead is perhaps more realistic in claiming that a given initial aim from God "is the best for that *impasse*."[28] It may be, in other words, the lesser of two evils in this or that situation. Only in this restricted sense would Whitehead think that an actual entity always takes joy in its self-constituting decision.

In later chapters of her book, Clark compares Augustine's philosophy of freedom with those offered first by Anselm of Canterbury and then by Thomas Aquinas. As Clark sees it, both unquestionably amplify Augustine's reflections on human free choice and our personal relation to the God of biblical revelation. But, contrary to Clark's own view here, in my judgment both Anselm and Aquinas inadvertently impoverished Augustine's understanding of human freedom by explaining it as something other than a spontaneous response to the offer of love from God to be found in Sacred Scripture. Anselm, for example, "suggested as his program for human fulfillment and freedom a devotion to duty, an undeviating pursuit of what one ought to do, and declared that the purpose of free choice is the preservation of rectitude or justice, or the affection for justice for the sake of rectitude itself."[29] A sense of duty or moral obligation is certainly part of a loving relationship to God and one's fellow human beings. But it lacks the warmth and spontaneity of Augustine's passionate search for the consummate love of his life as expressed in the famous soliloquy in the *Confessions*: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee."[30]

Aquinas follows in much the same moralistic pattern of thought as Anselm when he "reveals that the human will's natural orientation towards unlimited goodness accounts for this human restlessness. And he teaches that the reason for the will's natural orientation to the total good is the intellectuality

[26] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 244.
[27] Clark, *Augustine,* 105.
[28] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 244.
[29] Clark, *Augustine,* 175.
[30] *Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1949), 236.

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of man."[31] This statement by Aquinas is, of course, perfectly true; but in its emphasis on a human being's individual, strictly internal self-determination, it is quite different from Augustine's strongly interpersonal approach to the divine-human relation. Aquinas uses the heavily teleological "means-end" orientation of Aristotle's philosophy to explain what is experienced more on a feeling level by a reader of Augustine's *Confessions*. Feelings, to be sure, can be quite ephemeral; rational reflection is generally needed to give stability and endurance over time to those same strong feelings of the moment. Yet, as already noted, Aquinas's focus is more on the single individual than on interpersonal relations. Attention is directed to the human individual's quest for perfect Being in the form of universal Truth and supreme Goodness. One must recognize the connection of a particular good to the Supreme Good. This requires a last practical judgment, which, to be sure, does not necessitate the eventual choice of good for a human being but certainly heavily conditions it. As Clark emphasizes, "The decision that any particular good is a fitting object for man's will must come from the will."[32] But it is always the rational will that in the mind of Aquinas makes the final choice, not the spontaneous will of someone in love.[33]

IV. Clarke's Notion of Persons-In-Relation

Turning now to W. Norris Clarke's two books, *Person and Being* and *Explorations in Metaphysics,* I note first of all that for the most part in both books Clarke presents what might be called a standard neo-Thomistic understanding of human personhood, that is, the understanding of personhood initially presented by Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae* but rendered more dynamic by insights from Joseph Maréchal's *Le point de départ de la métaphysique.*[34] In *Person and Being,* for example, Clarke revises Aquinas' own definition of a human person, namely, "an intellectual nature possessing its own act of existence, so that it can be the self-conscious, responsible

[31] Clark, *Augustine,* 177.

[32] Ibid., 181.

[33] In this sense, John Duns Scotus with his emphasis on God as Love as opposed to God as the divine Mind—that is, feeling-level understanding of the love of God manifest in creation as opposed to intellectual knowledge of the Plan of God for creation—may be closer to the thought of Augustine on the divine-human relationship than Aquinas, his senior in the medieval world of theology (cf., e.g., Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962], II/2: 261–64). But this view could certainly be contested on other grounds.

[34] Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique,* 3rd ed. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1944).

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source of its own actions,"[35] in favor of a more dynamic understanding of person: "A *person* is an actual existent [i.e., with its own act of existence], distinct from all others, possessing an intellectual nature so that it can be the self-conscious, responsible source of its own actions."[36] What is notable, however, in both definitions of human personhood is that the focus is still on the individual human being within a preestablished hierarchy of beings. For whether one thinks of a human person as an intellectual nature possessing its own act of existence or as an actual existent possessing an intellectual nature, the implicit focus is on the individual human being, "distinct from all others," rather than on the individual as intrinsically constituted by its relation to other persons.

However, what is truly remarkable about Clarke's treatment of human personhood in his other book, *Explorations in Metaphysics,* is that he recognizes the latent defect in this individualistic understanding of personhood, which up to that time he had shared with other Thomists, such as Bernard Lonergan and Étienne Gilson, and sets out to correct it in a chapter entitled "The 'We Are' of Interpersonal Dialogue as the Starting-Point of Metaphysics."[37]

Clarke begins the chapter by making reference to the classical Thomistic presupposition of a realist epistemology in order to do bona fide metaphysics.[38] He speaks approvingly of Lonergan's and Gilson's efforts to reach "real being" through either the act of rational judgment by an individual or the "immediate realism" of an individual's sense knowledge.[39] But he then comments, "My point in writing this article is to suggest that there is indeed a privileged starting point within real sensible being which at once establishes both a secure realism and a peculiarly fruitful vantage point for further metaphysical development."[40] This best starting point for metaphysical reflection is the experience of the Other as different from myself and yet just as real as myself: "I know that *we are*, that *we are like each other,* that *we can engage in meaningful communication with each other*."[41] So, *pace* these other Thomists, the experience of interpersonal communication is the best way of making contact with real being on a regular basis. Likewise, contrary to what Immanuel Kant said in *The Critique of Pure*

[35] Clarke, *Person and Being,* 27–29; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1951), I, q. 29, a. 1–2.

[36] Clarke, *Person and Being,* 29.

[37] Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics,* 31–44.

[38] Ibid., 31.

[39] Ibid., 31–32.

[40] Ibid., 32.

[41] Ibid., 33.

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Reason, messages or information can immediately pass from one subject of experience to another; what I as an individual human being can know from moment to moment is not limited to an ongoing synthesis of raw sense data and a priori structures of experience within my own consciousness.[42]

Clarke draws the following conclusions from this reflection on interpersonal communication for the development of metaphysics. (1) "Real being is revealed as *active presence,* as self-communicating active presence which distinguishes it decisively from merely mental being." (2) "The intellectual awareness of *We are* immediately reveals to us real (i.e., actually existing) being, not as a solitary ego or object but as a *field of interaction* which is at once *one yet many*." (3) The I and the Thou as a "We" are "different from all the other non-human real beings that we encounter together in our common world." (4) "Each being exists *in itself* (not as a part of any other being), as an originating center of action; yet it is also *related* to others. To be real is to be substance in relation." (5) Being is not merely an object for a mind; it "has an *inner subjective dimension,* as a unique, self-aware subject or 'I.'" (6) Truth must be seen as emergent out of an interpersonal context. It "tends naturally to embody itself in language and to take the form of affirmation to another person in a common community-owned language."[43]

Clarke thus remarkably confirms what Whitehead asserted at the beginning of *Process and Reality*: "Actual entities [momentary self-constituting subjects of experience] . . . are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real."[44] Both Whitehead and Clarke, accordingly, even though working out of different metaphysical systems or worldviews, presuppose the starting point for understanding the nature of reality in the lived experience of intersubjectivity. Whitehead, to be sure, includes nonhuman entities in this intersubjective world, since they too are subjects of experience either in their own right or in virtue of their being constituent parts or members of various societies, aggregates of genetically linked actual entities. Likewise, Whitehead would stress that not just information but intersubjective feeling binds different subjects of experience to one another.[45]

[42] Ibid., 37–38.

[43] Ibid., 40–42; see also 218: "To be an authentic person, in a word, is to be a *lover,* to live a life of *inter*-personal self-giving and receiving. Person is essentially a 'we' term. Person exists in its fullness only in the plural."

[44] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 18.

[45] Ibid., 40–43, 244–65.

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V. Critique of Whitehead's Personally Ordered Societies

Yet Whitehead's metaphysics lacks what Clarke and other Thomists simply take for granted, namely, a guaranteed principle of continuity in a world marked by constant change. Hence, in this section, I offer a way to overcome that same deficiency in Whitehead's worldview so as to make it more compatible with Clarke's own revision of Thomistic metaphysics in favor of a starting point in the experience of intersubjectivity. That is, I argue that to be an effective principle of continuity for its ongoing succession of constituent actual entities a Whiteheadian society should be understood as an enduring structured field of activity for the dynamic interrelation of those actual entities, momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, from moment to moment.[46] Understood in this way, a Whiteheadian society is like an Aristotelian substance, given its structural continuity from moment to moment. Yet, unlike an Aristotelian substance, it undergoes gradual evolution in terms of its defining characteristic or common element of form.[47] So whereas an Aristotelian substance can undergo only accidental modifications over the course of its existence, a Whiteheadian society can gradually evolve into something significantly different from what it is at the present moment. In this sense, a Whiteheadian society is perhaps better disposed than an Aristotelian substance to deal with species change as part of an evolutionary worldview. In any event, given this revised understanding of a Whiteheadian society and given Clarke's proposal that intersubjectivity is the necessary starting point for explanation of reality in general but also of the reality of human personhood, one can legitimately say on the basis of both classical and process-oriented metaphysics that a human person is at every moment both fact and process, already an existing reality but as such still only a moment in an ongoing process of growth and maturity as a person.

For if a human being is a person in virtue of his/her relation to other human beings rather than in terms of what he or she is simply as an individual, then as one's relationship to others changes over time, one's personhood

[46] See, e.g., Joseph A. Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Bracken, *Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Intersubjectivity: A New Paradigm for Religion and Science* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2009); Bracken, *Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence for a World in the Making* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012). Likewise, cf. Marc A. Pugliese and Gloria L. Schaab, eds., *Seeking Common Ground: Evaluation and Critique of Joseph Bracken's Comprehensive World View* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012). A number of prominent Whiteheadians (including John Cobb) who contributed to the volume acknowledge the basic validity of my reinterpretation of Whiteheadian societies without endorsing it fully.

[47] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34–35.

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should also change and develop (either for better or for worse, depending on the quality of the relationships one has with these other human beings). The experience of intersubjectivity, in other words, converts personhood into a complex relational rather than a self-centered individual reality. Likewise, the notion of intersubjectivity as the ontological foundation for human personhood inevitably carries along with it a necessary reference to the community in which human persons live and to which they contribute their own efforts toward its continued existence and prosperity—in a word, toward the common good. Individual human beings are then truly persons only to the extent that they live in a social setting that emphasizes the importance of personhood for life together in community. Otherwise, they are simply individual members of a larger social reality.

In brief, then, the notion of intersubjectivity can serve as a bridge or important point of contact between classical metaphysics and process-oriented metaphysics. It does not reduce either one of these worldviews to the other. Nor does it create a third worldview that is superior to both of them, but it only makes clear that in principle one can draw similar though not identical conclusions about the nature of human personhood from either worldview taken separately. Accordingly, one can no longer legitimately argue that one's ethical stance on artificial contraception and abortion is based on a worldview that alone is valid and true. If one were to hold that latter view, one's ethical stance on these controversial issues would never change, never be subject to further negotiation and eventual compromise on various details in order to accommodate the views of those with another worldview, such as process-oriented metaphysics. For their thinking on contraception and abortion is wrongheaded from the start because the worldview out of which they operate is clearly erroneous. Quite the contrary, serious discussion of remaining differences of opinion on these controversial moral issues by proponents of the two different worldviews should over time result in a compromise position that is fair to the basic interests of both sides even if not totally inclusive of what one personally believes to be required, based simply on one's own worldview.

VI. Conclusion

I began this article with the argument that the current heated debate about the morality or immorality of artificial contraception and abortion will never be settled until the rival groups (popularly known as pro-choice and pro-life) recognize that their different views on this matter are presumably grounded in antecedent philosophical worldviews, each of which is

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only a partial representation of reality. The one worldview lays heavy stress on current actuality (what de facto is the case); the other on future potentiality (organic development or evolution toward an as-yet unrealized goal or end). Hence, if there is any hope of resolution of this contentious debate about the morality of artificial contraception and abortion, it will come about only if both sides concede that their current position is only half-right and that it needs to be complemented by the legitimate claims of the other position. Only then will the contending parties be psychologically motivated to look for a compromise position that will embrace the key points of both sides even as it necessarily demands a willingness to yield to the arguments of the other side on still other related issues.

As I see it, this is what Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell, whom I cited earlier, meant by "metaphoric process," namely, creating a new, broader field of meaning and value by deliberately extending the conventional boundaries of two rival fields of meaning and value so as to take account of one another's perspective while still maintaining their own individual identity as different approaches to reality. The result will not be a new third approach to reality that will claim to represent a "universal viewpoint" on the nature of reality (an impossible task, given the necessarily perspectival approach to reality of any human system of thought) but an ongoing convergence of the two rival approaches to reality on how to deal with the key moral issues that divide them. For only in this way can mutual agreement on a suitable course of action be achieved, and the controversy that here and now so radically disrupts the common good of the civil community be resolved.

In this article, accordingly, I briefly summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the pro-choice and pro-life positions in the light of their antecedent philosophical worldviews and then indicated how in my judgment a rational consensus as to a compromise position might be worked out to the basic satisfaction of both sides. First of all, I contrasted the classical understanding of the analogy of being with what might be called Whitehead's analogy of becoming. That is, the analogy of being is based on top-down thinking, the actuality of God (Pure Act) as the prime analogate and the actuality of creatures as secondary analogates more or less akin to God as the prime analogate. The analogy of becoming in Whitehead's metaphysics is based on bottom-up thinking, namely, how one moves from a basic understanding of the workings of a Whiteheadian society at the subatomic level of existence and activity within nature to progressively more complex societies of actual entities initially at the level of organisms and then at the level of entire communities and environments. Both of these analogies, the analogy of being and the analogy of becoming, are legitimate approaches to reality that need to be somehow reconciled with one another by way of a fuller analysis of the nature of reality.

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Keeping the notion of metaphoric process in mind, I then analyzed Whitehead's notion of personally ordered societies, above all, his notion of a person as a process with a defining characteristic that makes it different from the processes proper to other human persons. So persons exist as determinate individual entities from moment to moment even as they continue to evolve and grow in maturity over the course of a lifetime. The residual weakness of this process-oriented approach to personhood is that the defining characteristic or "common element of form" is subject to change over time in a way that does not happen within the classical understanding of person based on the metaphysical categories of substance and accident. Furthermore, classical metaphysics is easier to understand, since it is based on common sense experience. But natural science has made clear to us that the persons and things of this world do not exist precisely in the way they look in common sense experience. Structured fields of activity and systems have in large measure replaced substance and accident as preferred categories of explanation for natural scientists at the present time.[48]

I then looked at the historical development of one aspect of the notion of person in Western theology, using Mary Clark's *Augustine, Philosopher of Freedom*. In particular, I contrasted Augustine's emphasis on freedom as grounded in one's interpersonal relationship with the God of Love with a more "Aristotelian" means-end approach to human free choice in the light of one's personal relation to God as Infinite Goodness and Truth. There is nothing wrong with this more rationalistic approach to human personhood, but it does overlook what Augustine saw so clearly, namely, that human personhood really makes sense only in terms of an intersubjective relation with God and other human persons. Here is where Clarke's insight into intersubjectivity as the starting point for a true metaphysical understanding of reality is in my view so important. Even though he remained a Thomist in his thinking, Clarke saw the way in which Thomism was unconsciously focused on the dynamics of individual subjectivity in its understanding of human personhood and thereby overlooked the deeper reality of human personhood as a relational reality grounded in the ongoing ever-changing dynamics of interpersonal relations. Finally, I offered a modest revision of Whitehead's category of society as an enduring structured field of activity for its constituent actual entities, momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, from

[48] In a forthcoming book, tentatively titled *The World in the Trinity: Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), I make this argument in much greater detail and urge that Christian theologians at least experiment with the current scientific categories of structured fields of activity and systems for the explanation of Christian doctrine.

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moment to moment so as to provide the continuity and ontological identity that is necessary for the existence of a "society" as an objective reality in its own right in an ever-changing world of momentary subjects of experience. As I saw it, this modest alteration of Whitehead's metaphysical scheme brought it into much closer alignment with the Thomistic philosophy of Clarke.

This somewhat elaborate comparison and contrast of the strengths and weaknesses of classical and contemporary process-oriented metaphysics was, of course, not an end in itself. Rather, it was designed to make clear how the technique of metaphoric process can break down the protective walls of two rival metaphysical systems and thereby release for their respective proponents a new way of looking at reality. But if a breakthrough on the level of antecedent worldviews can be achieved, there is reason for hope that the rival ethical stances that logically follow conscious or unconscious profession of different worldviews can be sufficiently harmonized so as to produce a compromise position on controversial issues like artificial contraception and abortion. In a pluralist society like the United States at present, one cannot forever debate what should be public policy on practical issues that clearly threaten the common good of society if not resolved. Admittedly, many Americans are more motivated by antecedent religious beliefs than by rational argument in evaluating the merits and demerits of various approaches to resolution of controversial issues like the morality or immorality of artificial contraception and abortion. But in a pluralistic society that contains a multiplicity of individuals holding different worldviews, both religious and nonreligious, movement toward a compromise position on controversial issues that threaten the common good of civil society would seem realistically achievable only on the basis of rational argument.

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