Abstract: The recent Catholic philosophical tradition on the human person has tried
to articulate the irreducibility of the human person to anything non-personal, and
to synthesize all of the best of what has been said on the human person. Recently,
a debate has arisen regarding the concrete existence and relationality of persons. I
analyze these debates, and show how both sides of these debates can be synthesized
into a view on which human persons are both subsistent beings and identical to
certain relations. First, I examine those strands of recent Catholic tradition that
defend the concreteness and relationality of the person, drawing on some Existential
Thomists and phenomenologists; in connection with this, I consider the ideas of
the beauty and "mysterium" of persons. Second, I examine the opposing view, drawing
on some traditional Thomists and personalists. Finally, I show how the scholastic
notion of transcendental relations can reconcile these views.

To understand the recent Catholic philosophical tradition on the human
person (CT), one must consider what is common to most members of
that tradition. Here, I consider two such commonalities. First, nearly
all members of CT have portrayed the human person as irreducible to anything
non-personal (e.g., to matter). This focus on irreducibility has led in some strands
of recent CT (e.g., Existential Thomism and some phenomenology) to a focus on
the concrete existence of persons to the point that they have abandoned much of
traditional—that is, scholastic, Aristotelian, or Platonic—metaphysics for its ap-
parent lack of attention to the concrete. By “a focus on the concrete existence of
persons,” I mean a focus on the real existence of persons with their properties and
in their actual historical situation, rather than a focus on the essence or accidents
of persons in abstraction from their real existence or situation. Other strands of
CT (e.g., some Personalism and traditional Thomism) have criticized this focus on
the concrete for its reductionism regarding those features of human nature that can
only be known abstractly. This controversy indicates the importance of the second
commonality of members of CT, including the members of both strands of this
debate: the desire to synthesize the best of what has had been said on this topic
from both within and outside of CT. Far from being an insoluble disagreement, CT has the resources to synthesize the concerns of both sides. I show this in this paper by examining a debate in CT in which the ramifications of the controversy over concreteness are apparent, that over whether human persons are fundamentally relational, or are substances whose relations are accidental. 4

I have two goals in this paper: first, to analyze and tell the story of recent CT on the question of the right account of the concrete existence and relationality of the human person, and second, to show how a synthesis of the sides of the aforementioned controversy can be drawn out of that story. This synthesis yields a theory of human persons as both subsistent and identical to certain relations including a relation of dependence on God, and as including what were traditionally regarded as essence and accidents, including accidental relations, where both of these are crucially important for understanding the person. To accomplish these goals, I first present the views of those in recent CT who argue that relationality is a central, irreducible feature of the human person, and evidence for that view; I then present the opposing view. Finally, I show how both historical and recent CT have the resources to synthesize the main concerns of each side.

One strand of the controversy over persons’ concreteness and relationality arose in the context of an even broader debate in scholasticism over the relationship between essence and existence in created beings. Essence (essentia) is that by which a being (ens) has its intelligible content; an act of existence (esse, actus essendi) is that in virtue of which a being actually exists. Traditional Thomism holds that these are distinct principles in creatures. They are distinguished, among other reasons, to account for the facts that no creaturely essence exists necessarily, that any creaturely essence can be considered apart from knowing whether it exists, and that no creaturely being expresses the full actuality of existence. Rather, beings have a structure in which an act of existence is the actuality of an essence; by being added to an essence, the act explains the contingent existence of a being with that essence, and the essence explains the limitation of each act of existence to being the existence of this being with this intelligible content. 5 This view was opposed by other scholastics, such as Francisco Suárez: on his view, essence and existence are distinguishable only mentally: essence is a being considered as capable of existing, with all its intelligible content, and existence is a being considered in its concrete reality. 6

Both these views were challenged in twentieth-century CT by Existential Thomism (ET), which developed Aquinas’s claim that the act of existence is the fundamental actuality and perfection in a being, by arguing that this act, not essence, is the foundation of the unity, intelligibility, appetibility, and dynamism of each being. 7 The most “radical” of this school 8 argued, against traditional Thomism and Suárezianism, that essence is not really distinct from existence, nor can essence be considered as prior to existence, as capable of existing. On ET, nothing can be without, prior to, or outside of existence. Beings just are acts of existence with an intrinsic limit, which we call essence; they are not limited by an essence different from the act of existence. The sciences and traditional metaphysics cognize these limits by abstraction and thereby attain truths about creatures; however, abstraction cannot
attain knowledge about the fullness of the concrete existence that each creature is. The way in which we attain knowledge of concrete existence will be discussed below in a consideration of intuition and aesthetic experience. On ET, human persons are acts of existence first limited in a spiritual way, so that they are capable of giving rise to self-perfective intellectual and free acts, and second limited in a material way, so that they are capable of being modified by external forces, and tend to give rise to effects external to themselves. Aside from identifying persons with acts of existence, this is somewhat similar to traditional scholastic views, on which persons are composites of spiritual soul and matter, the former being the form of the latter.

On the basis of this version of ET, Norris Clarke argued that all created substances are both subsistent and relational. Each substance is a dynamic, self-diffusive act of existence. Following traditional Thomistic terminology, Clarke calls this act a “first act,” which tends to cause and manifest itself in “second acts,” such as acts of knowledge and love in human persons. Since second acts are beings, they too are intrinsically limited existences. Through these acts, the human substance is related to others, since these acts are intrinsically related to their objects. Because of his or her irreducible immateriality, a human person can perform acts by which he or she intends (and so is related to) all of Being and its transcendental properties: by the intellect, the human person can cognize any being, revealing that Being is intelligible or true; by the will, the human person can love any being, revealing that Being is attractive or good and self-giving. While on this view a human person’s existence differs from his or her acts, and so is not a relation but something related, the human person cannot exist without acting, that is, without second acts. While second acts are accidental with respect to first act, they are, on Clarke’s view and contrary to traditional scholasticism, principles that are just as important in persons as their first acts. Since all being is self-diffusive, Clarke argues that action or self-communication is a transcendental property of Being, and so, in order to understand a being fundamentally, one must understand its relational acts. Relationality and substantiality differ, but are equally important “poles” of human persons, and of created substances in general.9

Others influenced by ET, such as Kenneth Schmitz and David Schindler, extend these claims.creaturely beings are, on this view, three kinds of created esse. First, to be a creaturely being is to be from (esse ab) God, dependent on Him for one’s being. The relation of dependence cannot be ontologically posterior to a creaturely existence, as an accident or second act, since creaturely existence is constituted by it—that is, this relation is prior to a substance’s subsistence and to any of its other relations. One exists and subsists only by being dependent on God. First act in itself contains this relationality apart from any second act, though there is some distinction between first act’s substantiality and relationality; they are two “poles” or aspects of one act of existence. These considerations provide strong reason to go beyond Clarke’s view in this direction. Second, to be a creaturely being is to be in (esse in) oneself, to possess one’s being stably and subsistently, such that one is capable of further action as a certain kind of being. In persons, esse in appears as subjective interiority, self-presence, and self-consciousness.10 Third, to be a creaturely existence
is to be directed towards \( (esse \ ad) \) others. First acts are actualized by and tend to cause second acts, and so first acts are intrinsically related to second acts. To be a being is to be active and self-manifesting not just through second acts, but in oneself, that is, in first act. This point is sometimes further extended by some members of ET: what were traditionally called second acts or accidents are not numerically different beings from first act, but are intrinsic developments of first act—that is, when I perform acts, especially spiritual acts of loving, knowing, and accepting what I receive from God, these acts are reductions of the amount of limitation that my dynamic, changeable first act has. A person is not just an act of existence with an intrinsic limitation (i.e., human nature), but is an act of existence with a unique history of relational acts and receptivities, which are intrinsic modifications of the act that is the person.\(^{11}\)

ET is a metaphysics that highlights the concrete reality of beings more than their abstractly-knowable essences and properties; understanding this concrete reality requires a focus on beings’ relationality and what were traditionally called accidents. These ET claims can be defended and furthered with evidence from other strands of CT that consider the human person to be relational, most of which are in the phenomenological tradition. Seeing how these strands of CT connect to those rooted in scholasticism allows us to see better the interconnectedness of recent CT, and to see some ways in which its various strands can be synthesized. Phenomenology sets aside theorizing about real existence and causality to consider what is given or appears in experience. As Jean-Luc Marion puts it, to be given is not the same as being caused: to be caused is to receive definable, stable being;\(^{12}\) to be given is to be allowed intentionally and lovingly to appear and to be revealed.\(^{13}\) While some phenomenologists in CT reject metaphysics, most in CT who have considered the relation between these approaches either use phenomenologically-clarified experience as evidence for metaphysical claims (reasoning like Aquinas from experienced effects to their causes), or they see experience as directly revealing reality,\(^ {14}\) or they think phenomenological findings require grounding in and explanation by metaphysical principles.\(^ {15}\) In each of these approaches, phenomenology and metaphysics work together for a more complete understanding of the human person.

Experiential evidence for the claim that persons are intrinsically relational is presented by Marion, on whose view one is fundamentally given to oneself as a gift from an other, God. I do not experience myself fundamentally as a “self.” A “self” has been described variously in CT as a pure ego that has experiences and acts but no content itself,\(^ {16}\) a subjective interiority experienced as both material and spiritual,\(^ {17}\) a stream of experience,\(^ {18}\) or a directedness towards others.\(^ {19}\) Rather, underlying these experiences is my experience of being given to myself; I am not a “self,” but a “gifted one.” I do not exist prior to or apart from this givenness. Here we find not only experiential evidence for the ET claim that I am fundamentally relational, but also evidence that we should take a step beyond ET: my relation of being given must be identified with myself, rather than being a distinct “pole” from my selfhood or subsistence, for even these appear only and entirely in their being given. At no point can I fully comprehend myself; rather than having an essence
that exhaustively accounts for what I am, I am constantly given to myself, such that understanding myself requires attending to this fundamental givenness, and openness to new ways in which I am given, none of which are determined or excluded by essential limitations in me. But being given is not purely passive. Rather, I am given to myself such that I am called to respond to the Giver and to others with acts of knowledge and love according to my vocation, though with freedom to assent or refuse. Here again Marion goes beyond the claims of ET: for Marion, the relations of being from a giver and being oriented to others appear and are identical; they are not distinct “poles” in our existence, as ET claimed. To experience the givenness of a thing, we must perceive it as given in love and tending thereby to self-manifestation, as exceeding our comprehension, requiring infinitely many interpretive acts to be fully known—all of this, Marion sums up, is to perceive it as beautiful. This brings us to another central feature of recent CT on this topic. Many members of recent CT have argued that beauty is a transcendental property of all Being, but Marion suggests going further: Beauty is just what Being fundamentally is.

For many members of recent CT, the notion of beauty expresses the self-manifesting relationality and mysterious, unconceptualizable concreteness of beings. We can begin to understand these ideas by turning to a source for some of the ideas of Marion and ET, Hans Urs Von Balthasar. We shall see in the next section that Balthasar critiques the focus on the concrete, but here I examine his contribution to that focus. He holds that our fundamental experience of ourselves is of receiving ourselves from a Giver, and of being oriented toward and fitting with the world as a whole person. I fundamentally have a holistic cognitive-appetitive experience of the world, an experience of the “heart” whereby I “feel” the world as intelligible and valuable, that is, as beautiful. My experience of knowing and responding to the beautiful is shaped by the object, rather than by any of my concepts. Cognitive or appetitive acts, including acts of abstraction, arise only on the basis of this original, holistic experience. Beings are given in experience as exceeding themselves in referring to a Source that expresses Himself in them—that is, as intrinsically related to that Source, and to others through action, receptivity, and self-manifestation.

Many others in CT also take up these themes. On the view of these thinkers, no concept can fully capture the uniqueness, beauty, and richness—or mysterium—that we encounter in beings, especially persons, for example, in the experience of another whom one deeply loves or of one’s own subjectivity. Traditional metaphysics can be criticized for reducing the richness and uniqueness of beings to what can be known through concepts, without denying that concepts allow us to know beings in a realist manner. In agreement with Balthasar, many members of recent CT have argued that prior to all concept formation, we have a holistic intellectual, sensory, and appetitive encounter with concrete existences. We do not always experience in temporal order the causal sequence in our powers, as presented by the scholastics, from sensory reception and collation of forms, to intellectual abstraction of species, to concept formation and judgment, to appetitive response. Rather, some scholastics, like Jacques Maritain, contend that we have unconceptualizable “intuitions” of the sensible and intelligible beauty of the world or of our own subjectivity, which involve...
our senses, intellect, and affections together, without the concept-forming power of the intellect. John Deely elaborates on Maritain’s views: in causing a sign, that is, a form or species, of itself to come to be in my mind, a being manifests itself to me, and allows me to be intentionally united to it; underlying all concept formation is this basic orientation to self-manifestation in each being. Similarly, Lublin Thomist Piotr Jaroszyński, with similarities to Balthasar, describes an experience that we constantly have of the “impact” of the being as beautiful upon our cognitive and appetitive powers together, which underlies and allows for all our separate cognitive or appetitive experiences. In such an experience, will, intellect, and sense “interpenetrate,” appearing as mutually conditioning parts of one holistic experience of fitting with Being. In their holistic, supra-conceptual, and mysterious concrete givenness beings appear as intrinsically related to us, and we to them.

The relationality (esse ad) of intelligibility, appetibility, and, most fundamentally, of beauty, thus appear as intrinsic to beings, as the self-manifesting relationality of each being. Traditional scholasticism interpreted such relations as relations of reason: to say that a being is intelligible is not to say that it is really related to others, but just that a mind could cognize it. But members of recent CT, such as Balthasar and Edith Stein, have argued that this is inadequate to how we experience beings giving themselves: beings appear as actively manifesting and signifying themselves holistically even when there is no other to perceive them, and to manifest God in Whom they participate and Who expresses Himself in each being. It is in part due to these expressive relations, especially the relation to God Who cannot be comprehended, that each being appears as mysterious and unconceptualizable.

To encounter the mysterium is to encounter a being in its rich uniqueness, individuality, and incommunicability. These features have tended to be explained in CT as having a minimum of intelligibility, by attributing them to prime or quantified matter, accidents, a formal “this-ness,” a mode of incommunicability, or an act of existence, each understood as adding no content to the being beyond making it a ‘this,’ an incommunicable instance of some species, that is, unable to be received by or become part of another. Or, these features have been attributed to a static individual essence, albeit one with individual intelligible content. I make no claim here as to which of these is correct, but while each of these theories would explain why a being is a “this,” an instance of some kind, each fails to explain the dynamic uniqueness and mysterium with which it gives itself. ET and Lublin Thomism capture what is missing in these accounts with the idea that the acts and experiences a person undergoes, and especially the free acts he or she performs, are modifications to who he or she fundamentally is. Similarly, some versions of personalism such as Edith Stein’s present the idea of a changeable essence: through acts, one can change who one fundamentally is, even while some of one’s essential features always remain the same. Each of these is an attempt to articulate the claim that to be a unique individual, especially a unique person, is to be intrinsically, dynamically variable, not just to have unique matter, this-ness, or static individual essence. It is to have what poet Gerard Manley Hopkins called an “inscape,” a style or pattern of acting and relating that manifests an intelligible content in spontaneously chosen ways,
which manifest the being and the ways in which God gives it and Himself in it.\textsuperscript{39} In these claims, the relationality of including accidents in the existence of the person is joined to the relationality of self-manifestation: having both is intrinsic to beings.

If all of the foregoing is correct, no person can be fully described conceptually or abstractly. Rather, a person can be described in a narrative or history of his or her acts, relations, virtues, and vices, or in a poetic account of the initial encounter with his or her beauty or \textit{mysterium}, or by a theological or sacramental account of the infinite depth by which he or she reveals God.\textsuperscript{40} For the metaphysician who focuses on concreteness and relationality, these aesthetic and interpretive approaches are as necessary for metaphysics as traditional abstract methods. Indeed, many in recent CT have turned to narrative and history as a proper approach to understanding the person, including phenomenologists (e.g., Richard Kearney), the Radical Orthodox (e.g., Catherine Pickstock), analytic Thomists (e.g., Eleonore Stump), and virtue ethicists (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre).\textsuperscript{41} While in traditional metaphysics these approaches would have been the study of accidents, on the view that focuses on concreteness and relationality, they are foundational to any account of the human person, due to the elevated status that these acts have in an understanding of the person as concrete, dynamic existence. Some relations, such as a person’s givenness, are identical to or constitutive of the person’s substance, that is, these relations do not inhere in the substance as accidents, but are “subsistent relations,” relations identical to the subsisting substance. Other relations, such as relational acts of knowing and loving, are posterior to but intrinsically modifying of that substance. Considering the person to be intrinsically embedded in a narrative or history allows for further elaboration of ways in which the person is relational. Human persons are not just constituted by their relation to God, but are also intrinsically related to their ancestors,\textsuperscript{42} and thereby to their whole historical and traditionary situation.\textsuperscript{43} Through these considerations, a focus on the relationality of the human person allows a synthesis of many strands of CT, and a more complete account of the irreducibility and concreteness of the person.

I now turn to the other side of the debate, which objects to what it sees in the first side as a one-sided focus on the concrete and relational. These responses center around the claim that this focus fails to attend fully to all of our experience, and so are actually reductionistic of the fullness of human persons. As Personalist Josef Seifert, following Stein, argues, the intellectual experience of abstract and universal ideas, and of real essences, is no less a correct experience of the world than the experience of concrete existence.\textsuperscript{44} We experience things as having stable natures, which explain the powers, acts, and teleological orientations they exhibit. Erich Przywara and Balthasar note that the development of a being is only understandable if it is guided by an underlying, identity-preserving essence, and essence is only understandable on the basis of the concrete existence from which knowledge of it was abstracted. If we are to have a metaphysics that is rooted in the fullness of our experience, as many in CT desire, then that metaphysics should include essences distinct from, but united to, existence.\textsuperscript{45} Przywara expresses this by saying the two principles are proportional or analogical to one another, that is, they fit together,
and are understandable only in relation to one another. Furthermore, as the analytic Thomistic hylomorphists emphasize, beings, including ourselves, are also given in experience as having material parts, and a form-matter structure. We understand beings, including ourselves, better when we know their material structure in itself, not as reduced to dynamic, concrete, relational existence.\(^{46}\) Even beauty is experienced as analyzable, that is, not just as a single cognitive-appetitive whole, but as having a real intelligible and sensible structure. Metaphysics should account for the concrete holism of beings, but also for their abstractly analyzable structure.\(^ {47}\)

While the opponents of the focus on the concrete generally do not deny that relations are important to understanding the person, they resist any claim that the person is identical to relations, or has relations at the same metaphysical level as his or her subsistence. Against Balthasar and ET, Steven Long argues that created substances, including persons, are independently existing beings with natures that have relations as accidents. By His act of creation, God produces *ex nihilo* things other than Himself, with their own existence and causality. If these beings were relations to Him, then they would be insufficiently other than Himself, and it would not be clear how they could be causes in their own right, since all causality would just be a relation of givenness by God. To be beings different than God, to whom God can give further gifts, substances must have their own natures and ends, which result from God’s free decision, but which are not identical to any relation to Him. Long follows Aquinas, who holds that, like all relations, the relations of dependence on and being created by God differ from the substance as accidents inhering in the substance, such that the substance is prior in being to the relation.\(^ {48}\)

Scholastics before the contemporary period but after Aquinas, however, moved to some extent in the direction of ET. Suárez argued that the relation of dependence on God, while not identical to a substance, is not an accident; rather it is a “mode,” a feature of a being that is distinct from its parts, really inseparable from that being, and helps to constitute that being.\(^ {49}\) Suárez’s view seems somewhat similar to that of Schindler, for whom this relation is a “pole” within the being, though distinct from its subsistence; on some versions of the modal view, the mode is not really distinct from the being, but rather is rather modally or formally distinct. Other scholastics, including some Thomists, have held that substances are identical to relations of a sort, transcendental relations, coming closer to Marion’s view. The notion of transcendental relations in this context originates in John Duns Scotus,\(^ {50}\) who held that a relation of dependence on God is identical to each substance. This relation is a transcendental relation, which is a relation or ordering to another that is identical to its foundation, as matter is identical to its ordering to form.\(^ {51}\) Transcendental relations were posited to account for the observation that principles such as form and matter are in themselves ordered to correlative principles, and effects to their causes, and vice versa—sometimes even when the things to which they are ordered do not currently exist. For example, something that can be a final cause is of itself ordered to its possible effects, even if it has no actual effects. Relationality, and subsistence and causality, are not opposed; rather, subsistent things are relational because dependent on their causes, and ordered of themselves to possible effects—that is,
intrinsic relationality is necessary to be and constitutive of what it is to be a created cause or effect. We tend to think and speak of these orderings as accidents, but on this view they belong to what it is to be a created being.

The seventeenth-century Thomist John of St. Thomas did some work to reconcile Aquinas and Scotus’s positions, and thereby provides a basis for reconciling the two sides of the current debate over the concreteness and relationality of persons. On his view, the relation of dependence on God is accidental to the individualized essence—that is, the essence plus its principles of individuation and incommunicability—of a being. But as existing, a being is a transcendental relation of dependence on God, as every effect is a transcendental relation to its causes.\(^52\) The claim here is not that an existing being is a relation but not subsistent, nor that it is a relation without a foundation; rather, the claim is that to be a subsisting, existing, created being just is to be related to God by dependence: the subsistent foundation is the relation. This claim is furthered by some in recent CT, including Przywara and the Lublin Thomists Mieczyław Krapiec and Andrew Woznicki.\(^53\) On their views, persons, and all created substances, are composed of real principles—essence and existence, form and matter—that are transcendental relations to one another. Persons are also transcendental relations to their causes. Likewise, persons and all created beings are transcendental relations to one another, inasmuch as all beings form a single order or community, with each related to the others by analogy, that is, by proportions of similarity and difference. This structure and depth of each being manifests itself in intuition, as described above.

Drawing upon this notion of transcendental relations as found in CT, we can reconcile the main claims of the two sides of the debate. A substance’s act of existence, on Aquinas’s view, actualizes not only its individualized essence, but also its accidents; a human person (or, more generally, a supposit, that is, a complete being of any sort) includes not only substantial form and matter, but also accidents. While accidents can rightly be regarded as beings different from a substance or individualized essence, a supposit or person includes both.\(^54\) On many recent interpretations of Aquinas, a person is a person through the act of existence: by existing, one possesses one’s individualized essence and accidents, and is a subjective, free person, irreducible to anything purely non-subjective.\(^55\) Drawing on this interpretation and the phenomenological data given above, it should be said, first, that the dynamic act of existence confers concrete actuality and \textit{mysterium}, and self-manifesting intelligibility, appetibility, and beauty, on the other principles of a being, and, second, that those principles limit the act of existence to being the actuality and self-manifestation of this one kind of being. We should distinguish: (1) the substantial being and unity of a person, composed of the individualized essence, and an act of existence as actualizing that essence, where the essence is unchanging, different from any relation, and knowable by abstraction; (2) the accidental being and unity of a person, composed of the substantial being plus accidents considered as separate beings from that substance; (3) the personal or concrete being of a person, composed of the substance and accidents as all actualized and united by the one substantial act of existence. As a personal being, I have an unchanging essence, but through my accidents, I change.
in who I fundamentally am; I include, but am not reducible to, my matter, form, their composite, my accidents, or anything that is not a person. God creates and gives concrete beings, that is, persons and other suppositas, in themselves, and only causes (or “co-creates”) substantial and accidental beings as constituents of concrete beings. A person is both identical to some transcendental relations, and includes other relations, including relational acts, as intrinsic modifications, though they are accidental with respect to the person's substance. My acts are as important as my substance to who I am, considered in my personal being.

What ET said about existence and Marion about givenness can be said on this view of each concrete, composite being (ens), allowing a synthesis of both sides of the debate. In light of the claims regarding essence made by Seifert and Przywara, and contrary to ET, concrete beings are not identical to existence. Rather, they are wholes that have an essence and act of existence, that subsist or exist in (esse in) themselves, that include their accidental acts as intrinsic modifications of their personal being, and that are transcendental relations of being given and caused by (esse ab) God and other givers, and of being oriented toward (esse ad) others in active self-manifestation. The person is not just a system of relations, nor are all relations reducible to accidents, either in reality or in the way in which the person is experienced; the notion of transcendental relations avoids these extremes. One’s orientation to self-manifestation, which one has just by being a person with an act of existence, leads to acts, which are intrinsic modifications of one’s personal being. These acts manifest the person as dynamic, given, mysterious, and beautiful, with an analyzable structure. For the metaphysician to give the best possible account of persons requires an abstract account of their internal structure and essence, but also requires the use of narrative, poetic, phenomenological, and theological modes of discourse. Each mode of discourse is rooted in the self-manifesting reality of beings, though each also can only achieve, through interpretation of the encounter with the mysterium of each being, a partial account of the full concrete existence of each being. Metaphysics is an endless task.

This synthesis expresses a more complete account of the irreducibility of the person to anything non-personal than either side of the debate on its own. It furthermore brings together the concerns of both sides of the debate over the concrete existence of persons in a way that uses all the strands of recent CT. In this way, we can see the genuine unity and synthetic power of recent CT on the human person.

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Notes

1. By CT, I mean the intellectual tradition that has been historically shaped by the appropriation of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy in a Catholic context. I include in CT those participating in this tradition who are not members of the institutional Catholic Church, and also those influenced by this tradition who do not themselves use the methods.
or categories of Greek philosophy. By ‘recent’ CT, I mean the CT of the last hundred years. This is a vast tradition, and I certainly make no claim to give an exhaustive treatment of it here. Rather, I only treat its main strands as they are centered around the problem of giving a philosophical account of concrete personhood.


3. I distinguish between metaphysics as traditionally done, e.g., in scholasticism, where it largely employs causal reasoning, and metaphysics in a more expansive sense, as any philosophical reflection on the fundamental features of reality (this is the sense in which I mean it here). In this more expansive sense, modes of philosophical reflection like Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of givenness or John Caputo’s radical hermeneutics would still count as metaphysics. For a good summary of Caputo’s critique of metaphysics and of his radical hermeneutics, see Christopher Ben Simpson, Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 7–13.

4. Other debates could, perhaps, have been chosen to discuss and synthesize the main lines of recent CT on the philosophy of the human person, e.g., debates over the principle of individuation. But, the debate over the relationality of the person contains and goes beyond those other debates.

5. On Aquinas’s account of existence and existence, see Expositio libri Boetii de hebdoma-dibus lect 1; De ente et essentia c. 4; Quaestiones disputatae de potentia q. 7, a. 2; Quaestiones disputatae de veritate q. 1, a. 1; Summa contra gentiles II, c. 52; Summa theologiae (ST), I, q. 3, a. 4. See S. Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia, ed. Enrique Alarcón, http://www.cor-pusthomisticum.org/ opera.html. See also the summaries of the view given by recent members of CT e.g., my “The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” Nova et vetera 12 (2014): 863–912; John Wippel, The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2000), chs. 5–6. To speak of God as each creature’s efficient cause does not mean that God alone efficiently causes beings. Rather, God must bestow an act of existence immediately on each being, even when that being is also efficiently caused by some secondary, created being.

6. Francisco Suárez, Disputationes metaphysicae (DM), ed. Salvador Castellote and Michael Renemann, available at http://www.salvadorcastellote.com/investigacion.htm, d. 31, s. 1, n. 13. This view, as contemporary Suárezian José Pereira, Suárez: Between Scholasticism and Modernity (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 101ff., contends, is meant to express the concrete reality of beings more clearly than the Thomistic view: every being is its own concrete essence and existence, rather than only sharing in these as principles.

7. See, e.g., Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: PIMS, 1949); Joseph Owens, “Thomas Aquinas,” in Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the

9. Clarke’s views presented here are summarized from his Person and Being (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993); see also “Action as the Self-Revelation of Being,” “To Be is to be Substance in Relation,” and “Person, Being, and St. Thomas” in Clarke, Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1994). The orientation of beings, especially persons, toward action, is drawn from others in recent Thomism, e.g., Joseph de Finance, Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas (Rome: Presses de l’Université Grégorienne, 1965), especially 241–246, who expresses the unity and relationality of being and action. It is also a major theme of many in the Personalist school of CT, e.g., Karol Wojtyła, The Acting Person, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1979); “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in Person and Community. Correlative to the transcendental property of self-communication, on Clarke’s view, is the ability to receive the self-communication of beings in some way; receptivity, and openness to communion, are thus likewise transcendental properties of Being, and especially of persons as the highest form of created beings. This is a further way that beings are intrinsically relational. Clarke says much here in line with traditional scholasticism, on which substances in first act—whether the first essential act, which is the form or soul, or the first act of being, which is existence—give rise to powers, whereby they perform second acts, and so relate to others and can be fulfilled. Something analogous to what is said here of intellectual cognition and appetite can be said of sensible and natural apprehension and appetite. Our openness to all of Being is a major theme in much recent CT; see, e.g., Edith Stein, Finite and Eternal Being, trans. Kurt Reinhardt (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2002), 294–324; Fernand Van Steenberghen, Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1980), 71; Jan Aertsen, Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 430–432; Alice Ramos, “Introduction” in Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2012), 1–6.

10. On the idea that subjectivity is what is irreducible in the human person, see Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 211. But see also Catherine Pickstock, Repetition and Identity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–38, on how there is something analogously like subjectivity in other beings.

Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 275–311. Several of these thinkers draw parallels between the relationality of creatures and the Trinitarian relations; I make no such claims here. I shall examine Marion and Balthasar’s elaboration of similar relations in the being of the person below, but some of the Personalists suggest similar things. For example, Emmanuel Mounier, Personalism, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Routledge, 1952), 33–50, argues that the person is fundamentally both a bodily-spiritual interiority and secret subjective life, and also a directedness towards others through vocation, and towards oneself in self-affirmation.

12. Since participation involves taking part or sharing in the attributes of another, and so is a formal or exemplary causal relationship, being given is not the same as participating either.


15. Schmitz, “Created Receptivity.”


17. This position is especially well developed by the Lublin Thomist Mieczysław Krapiecz, I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology, trans. Marie Lescoe, Andrew Woznicki, and Theresa Sandok, et al. (New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1983), 89–106. See also Stein, Finite and Eternal Being, 46–52; Mounier, Personalism, 3–6; Karol Wojtyla, Acting Person, part III; Crosby, Selfhood, chs. 3–4.


20. Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 65, 284–288. Similar claims are made by John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 42–49. These claims are linked to the great nature-grace debate: the claim is that I am given to myself as a person such that I do not have a closed nature with its own limited end, but that I am rather given to myself as an open-ended person, capable of ever higher fulfillment if it is given to me by God—that is, my given existence is of itself open to grace. I do not intend to make any claims regarding this debate, but the view I conclude to in this paper is meant to be able to provide a basis for a future resolution to the nature-grace debate on which I both have a stable nature with its own proximate natural limited end, and have an entirely open-ended given historical concrete existence that is oriented by its Giver to a vocation of receiving grace.


24. Similar claims are made by Marion, *Being Given*, 215–219. See also personalist phenomenologist Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The Sacred Heart* (Balitmore: Helicon, 1965), 110–114, on the notion of the heart as the true self, in which I feel and respond to value in the world, and accept or reject my self.


27. Following Husserl, Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 279–281, and Gabriel Marcel, “On the Ontological Mystery,” in *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Citadel, 1984), 12, contend that ideas of essences, genera and species, and of act and potency, are “empty” schematic concepts, that needs to be “filled” with the rich contents found in concrete individuals.

28. There are exceptions to this realism within CT. Some within CT (e.g., John Caputo, Gianni Vattimo) hold to a radical hermeneutics, wherein everything is ultimately a matter of interpretation, and so concepts would not correspond to a reality outside the interpretive scheme. Others (e.g., Michel Henry) hold a view on which only subjectivities with their immanent contents or stream of consciousness really exist, and so concepts would not correspond to any extramental reality.

29. See the summary of Maritain’s statements on this experience at Trapani, *Poetry*, 40–49. For other statements of this experience, e.g., that of the Transcendental Thomist Pierre Rousselot see Gerard McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 107. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 569–572 notes that even when we understand the being through concept, the mystery remains, for we always use concepts by turning to images, which have a richness that cannot be summed up in concepts, for we are “by nature oriented to mystery.” Marcel, “On the Ontological Mystery,” 12–22, likewise notes that attempts to comprehend the world conceptually, rising above experience, leads to “mystery,” because we are located within and parts of the very thing we are trying to understand. See also Balthasar on Guardini and Siewerth at *Seeing the Form*, 380–389.


32. See, e.g., Aquinas, *DV* q. 1, a. 1, and q. 24, a. 1.


34. On participation see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, ch. 4. On how participation points to primacy of relation over substance see Radical Orthodox philosopher Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 44–47, and on how all phenomena are rooted in participation in God, leading to excess of meaning in every name see Pabst, *Metaphysics*, 143–144 (though he wrongly claims that Marion denies this). CT has the resources to overcome a debate in secular phenomenology between the followers of Levinas and the followers of Merleau-Ponty. The former claims that the human person is entirely constituted by encountering the other and being directed to serve the other; the latter claims that the person is always in a reciprocal relation with the world, affected by but also affecting the world. CT overcomes this: an individual being is simultaneously entirely given by God, and oriented to active, reciprocal, receptivity to the world, and response to God. cf. Ian Leask, *Being Reconfigured* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2005),100–105; Milbank, “Reciprocity, Part Two”; Caitlin Smith-Gilson, *The Metaphysical Presuppositions of Being in the World* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 74–82, 169.
35. cf. D. C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 73. Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, section VIII, distinguishes the uniqueness of a being, i.e., the content that is particular to this being; its individuality, i.e., that it is a “this”; and its incommunicability, i.e., its belonging to itself and not to another.


42. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 50–53. This claim incorporates the analytic notion of essentiality of origins into a Catholic metaphysics of the person.

43. There is a “humanist” or “conservative” strand in recent CT that provides evidence for this claim; see, e.g., the works of Russell Kirk and Marion Montgomery.


45. Some, like Seifert, *Essence and Existence*, 454, think that the Existential Thomist view is pantheistic, since everything is existence, and pure existence is God, but this seems to overlook the relation of efficient causality between God and creaturely existence on the
Existential Thomist view. But even Norris Clarke (“What Cannot be Said,” 129–131) admits that the Existential Thomist account of essence as “thin,” that is, as just an intrinsic limit within existence, renders it very difficult to know how to talk or think about such essence as a real limit, unlike the traditional “thick” account of essence as really limiting the existence.

46. See, e.g., David Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (London: Routledge, 2008); Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2005), for good accounts of analytic Thomist hylomorphism. Especially among those influenced by analytic and Laval Thomism, e.g., William Wallace, *The Modeling of Nature* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1996), there is the recognition, rooted in a hylomorphic approach, that facts about material structures and events in the human body are crucial parts of the cause and explanation for human experiences; see, e.g., Eleonore Stump’s account of motor neurons as part of the explanation for how we encounter other persons as persons, not just knowing facts about them (*Wandering in Darkness*, 67–73), or various explorations of quantum indeterminacy as part of the basis for free human action upon matter, though the human form or soul “selecting” among quantum states in event of quantum state reduction, e.g., Wolfgang Smith, *The Quantum Enigma* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2005). Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Blackwell, 2014), 265 claims that realism about matter and its non-conceptualizability is required to avoid idealism.

47. cf. D.C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason*, 70–71. Furthermore, as phenomenologist Richard Kearney notes, in encountering another person, I experience him or her not just as given, but as having unactualized potential that is currently unknowable by me: beings are not just what is currently being given in them, but include stable potentialities in themselves.


49. *DM* d. 20, s. 3, n. 14–16; d. 31, s. 6, n. 18.

50. A similar notion, *the relatio secundum dici*, often equated by Thomists with transcendental relations, is found in Aquinas, *ST* I q. 13, a. 7, ad 1. To predicate a *relatio secundum dici* of some subject is to signify that that subject that has an ordering to another. I make no claim here as to whether this and transcendental relations are equivalent notions.


52. John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicorum in primam partem divi Thomae*, v. 2 (Lugundi: Petrus Prost, 1642), d. 18, q. 44, a. 2, n. 19–22. See *DV* q. 21, a. 1, ad1, where Aquinas says that essence of itself is absolute and non-relational, but as good, a being is intrinsically
participating in God. Good is really identical to being, and so this is a place where Aquinas seems to implicitly endorse that each created being is identical to a relation to God.


54. *ST* I, q. 45, a. 4; q. 90, a. 2; I-II, q. 110, a. 2; III, q. 2, a. 2; *In III Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2. Cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 241, 255–265.

55. cf. Spencer, “Personhood”; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 252 A similar view is that of Jacques Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 455–457; *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John Fitzgerald (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1966), 41, on whose view, personhood or subsistence is a mode of completion in an essence by which a substance has its own proper act of existence, and so is capable of acting and giving itself on its own. A mode is a property that cannot exist, even by divine power, apart from its subject.

56. On the creation/co-creation distinction see *ST* I q. 45, a. 4. Some in CT draw a distinction between the transcendental or ontological beauty of a being, and its accidental or aesthetic beauty, but both are equally contained in the personal or concrete being and its beauty, which is what we first encounter in a being.


59. cf. Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics*, 41–63; Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 473–474; Jaroszyński, *Metaphysics and Art*, trans. Hugh McDonald (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 150. Realist metaphysics requires developing practices rooted in genuine love for and wonder at these others, so that these interpretations will be guided by the things themselves. The notion of practice, developed by MacIntyre, has taken on an important role in virtue ethics and philosophical anthropology in much recent CT. The idea of metaphysics as a practice that we engage in is developed, with attention to the links between traditional metaphysics and aesthetic genres like narrative, by Thomas Hibbs,
Aquinas, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion: Metaphysics and Practice (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), which builds on many strands in recent CT, including the scholastic and phenomenological. The way in which each being is oriented to infinite interpretations allows an integration of the most radical hermeneutics into a realist, scholastically-based metaphysics.

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