ABSTRACT: Many personalists have argued that an adequate account of the human person must include an account of subjectivity as irreducible to anything objectively definable. The personalists contend that Aristotle lacks such an account and claim that he fails to meet three criteria that a theory of the human person must fulfill in order to have an account of subjectivity as irreducible. I show first that some later Aristotelians fulfill these criteria, and then that Aristotle himself also does so. He describes four characteristics of human subjectivity that are considered crucial by many personalists. I do this through an interpretation of Aristotle’s accounts of substantial actualities, nous, friendship, and beauty.

In a seminal essay, Karol Wojtyła distinguishes two approaches to philosophical anthropology. He calls one approach “objectivistic” and “cosmological.” When using this approach, one explains human beings and our actions using third-person terms, thereby treating us as objects of intentional cognitive acts. He calls the other approach “subjective” and “personalistic.” When using this approach, one explains human beings and our actions in first-person terms, that is, in terms of lived experience or “subjectivity,” thereby treating us as unique conscious subjects, “irreducible” to anything objectively observable or definable.¹

In this paper I draw on both Wojtyła and other personalists as well as on some non-personalistic phenomenologists who have dealt with subjectivity in ways similar to the approach favored by the personalists. These thinkers hold that there are four characteristics of the human person that one must meet in order to satisfy the necessary conditions for having human subjectivity. First, one has subjectivity only if one knows oneself or is consciously self-present in a reflexive, non-objective, non-intentional way.² Subjectivity differs from intentionality in that the latter is


directed towards objects while the former is an immediate, reflexive experience of oneself, not as an object. Second, one has subjectivity only if one experiences oneself as capable of cognizing anything. Third, one has subjectivity only if one has an experience of personal “efficacy” or of being able to determine oneself to act. Fourth, one has subjectivity only if one has an experience of self-sensing, that is, an experience of one’s body from a first-person point of view. I shall refer to these four necessary conditions for subjectivity as the “characteristics of subjectivity.”

On Wojtyła’s view, an account of the human person is adequate only if it explicitly takes into account subjectivity as an irreducible feature of human persons. I shall call this necessary condition for an adequate account of the human person the personalistic condition. A theory fulfills this condition if and only if it takes into account the characteristics of subjectivity and fulfills the three criteria for an account of irreducible subjectivity given below. These characteristics and criteria are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for fulfilling the personalistic condition. In this paper, I consider only the fulfillment of this condition, not other conditions that might be needed for an adequate account of the human person. The personalistic condition should nevertheless be a guiding rule for any philosophical anthropologist, because (as experience shows) the rich interior depth of human subjectivity is a distinctive and central feature of human persons. Meeting the personalistic condition should especially be a concern of those who are non-reductionists about the human person, among whom are Aristotelians.


This is not to say that every human person actually has subjectivity since some (such as those at early stages of development and those with certain neurological disorders) are incapable of realizing their subjectivity. Rather, it is to say that subjectivity is a central feature of the human person in his or her normal, mature condition.
But Wojtyła and other personalists argue that Aristotle’s view is cosmological, for it either ignores or excludes an account of irreducible subjectivity. The personalists acknowledge that Aristotle presents three aspects of an account of subjectivity, but they hold that the way in which he considers these renders his account inadequate because it does not meet the personalistic condition. Aristotle begins his account of human nature with experience, but the personalists say that the experience that he considers is intentional, not subjective. While Aristotle does take into account the soul’s openness to knowing all things and its self-determination, his personalist critics allege that these points are made in the context of an objectivistic account of human nature, not in an account of lived experience. If this interpretation is correct, Aristotelianism does not fulfill the personalistic condition, and so it is an inadequate theory of the human person.

But in my judgment this interpretation is wrong. Aristotle does provide an account of subjectivity and fulfills the personalistic condition. He does so by unifying the cosmological and personalistic approaches, and thereby he achieves a “convergence” of metaphysics and phenomenology. Interestingly, this was also one of Wojtyła’s aims. Even though Aristotle and later Aristotelians do not use the personalist language of “objectivity” and “subjectivity,” they nonetheless present the realities denoted by these terms. In order to discuss this claim about a continuity between Aristotelianism and personalism, I shall refer to Aristotelian accounts of objectivity and subjectivity throughout this paper, despite the fact that Aristotelians do not use these terms. None of this is to say that Aristotle fulfills every demand of the contemporary personalists for an account of the human person, or that the personalists have not added to knowledge of subjectivity. Nor is my claim that Aristotle has a concept of “person” in the modern sense. Rather, I claim that Aristotle gives an account of the realities picked out by these concepts, and that his account meets the personalistic condition. In this way his account overcomes an obstacle to having an adequate account of the human person that he is often thought not to have met.

9DA III.8.431b20–21.
13I refer here to subjectivity in the personalistic sense, not to “subject” in the logical or metaphysical senses, which are clearly found in Aristotle, as in Categories (hereafter Cat) 2–5, and Metaphysics (hereafter Met) VII.3. cf. Alain De Libera, “When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?” in American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 82 (2008): 194–95, 204.
I demonstrate my thesis by first outlining the three criteria for the irreducibility of subjectivity that the personalists think Aristotle fails to fulfill. Next, I show how some Aristotelians, especially Thomists, meet these criteria.\(^\text{14}\) I consider these thinkers before considering Aristotle because it can be more easily shown how they meet the criteria than how Aristotle meets them. Their work provides an indication about where to look in Aristotle for his account of subjectivity, and in turn this allows us to see how he does meet the critiques that have been directed against him by the personalists. Next, I show that Aristotle presents the characteristics of subjectivity and meets the criteria for an account of subjectivity. Finally, I show how these claims about Aristotle are well supported by his accounts of friendship and beauty.

This argument is important for several reasons. First, it reveals the antireductionism and the personalism of Aristotelianism. Second, it allows a response to misinterpretations of Aristotle that have been given by personalists and other interpreters of Aristotle, including some in the Aristotelian tradition. Third, it challenges personalism to expand and improve its account of the human person. Fourth, it points toward a more unified Catholic philosophy by synthesizing its historical roots in Aristotelianism with its recent focus on personalism and phenomenology.

1. CRITERIA FOR THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF SUBJECTIVITY

Let us now turn to the three criteria given by the personalists for an adequate theory of the human person as irreducibly subjective. Just as with the characteristics of subjectivity listed above, these are drawn from a synthesis of the views of the chief thinkers of the personalist tradition, especially Wojtyła. Each criterion is a necessary conditions for an adequate account of the human person.

First, a theory includes an account of subjectivity as irreducible only if it does not take the human person to be substantially just an instance of an objectively definable species. I shall call this the species transcendence criterion. But Aristotle is supposed by the personalists to have thought of the human being as substantially just an instance of the species “rational animal,” individuated only by matter, without a place for a unique subjectivity with unique interior content that is irreducible to objective nature.\(^\text{15}\) For Aristotle to meet this criterion, he would have to give an account of human substances as being subjective not only in their second acts but also in their first act. By “first act” Aristotle and his followers mean the actuality that makes a thing be of some kind. For example, the human soul is the first act of the human person since the human soul makes the human person to be the kind of thing that it is; knowing how to sculpt habitually but not currently thinking about sculpting is a first act of the human mind since this knowledge makes one the sort of person who

\(^{14}\) Some personalists, e.g., Crosby, *Selfhood*, pp. 18, 20, 59, 139, allow that later Aristotelians such as Thomas Aquinas gave an account of subjectivity, but nearly all deny that Aristotle did so. Crosby acknowledges Aquinas’s claims that rational creatures are never mere parts of anything, exist for themselves and not just for the species, have reflexive self-knowledge, and are incommunicable. See *Scriptum super sententias* (hereafter *In Sent*) III d.5, q.2, a.1 ad 2 and q.3, a.2; *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter *SCG*) III cc. 111–14; *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) I-II q.21, a.4 ad 3; *Super librum de causis expositio* (hereafter *In LDC*) lectio 15. Citations of Aquinas are from www.corpuschristicum.org.

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knows how to sculpt. By “second act” Aristotle and his followers mean the actions or operations that some things performs, over and above that thing’s first act. For example, an act of actually thinking about sculpting is a second act of the human person, both with respect to the first act of the whole human person, the soul, and with respect to the first act of the human mind, habitual knowledge of sculpture. On the personalist interpretation, Aristotle allows that the human person has subjective second acts, such as acts of thinking or of appetite. But on their interpretation, these acts are entirely founded upon an objective underlying first act. For Aristotle to meet this criterion, it would have to be the case for him that our souls too are subjective, that is, that they can only be fully described in irreducibly subjective terms, as well as, perhaps, in objective terms.

The species transcendence criterion specifies that an adequate account of the human person cannot consider the human person to be purely objectively definable or understandable, or just an instance of a purely objectively definable species. It is not an a priori exclusion of certain theories of individuation. Although Wojtyła and other personalists sometimes criticize the material theory of individuation, and although that theory may turn out to be incomplete, it is not plausible to consider the lack of such a theory (prior to much investigation) to be a criterion for an adequate account of the human person. Their reason for rejecting this theory of individuation is that, on such a theory, the human person would just be a composite of a specific form with no unique individual content, and a purely potential material principle, also with no individual content besides individuating the resulting substance as a “this.” So, the human person would be a mere instance of an objectively-definable species. But, as we shall see, this is not the only way in which the Aristotelian account of the individual human can be understood. The criterion required here by the personalists is just that an account of the human person must include an account of irreducible, substantial subjectivity. The question of the principle of individuation is just the question of what it is about the substance that makes it this substance. The question at issue, however, in considering this criterion is whether anything about the substance makes it irreducibly subjective. These questions should not be conflated.

Second, a theory includes an account of subjectivity as irreducible only if it does not take the human person to be just a part of something purely objective, such as a political community or the cosmos. I shall call this the non-parthood criterion.

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17 The need for these items was pointed out to me by Mary Lemmons. Some philosophers have held that the principle of individuation is the same as the principle of incommunicability, but the two are, even in such cases, conceptually distinct. See Stephen Hipp, “Existential Relation as Principle of Individuation,” The Thomist 72 (2008): 67. Some might object that, on the strict material theory of individuation, the human soul cannot continue to be an individual after death since it will lack matter, and so human subjectivity cannot continue after death. On such an objection, humans could not really transcend being mere instances of a species since they would not, as individuals, be immortal. But the question of subjectivity must be distinguished from the question of immortality. While a full personalism would certainly include an account of immortality, it is not necessary for an account of subjectivity, and my claim in this paper is just that Aristotle includes an account of subjectivity. There is great controversy as to whether Aristotle thinks some part of the individual human is immortal, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider this controversy. I owe this objection to Gary Gurtler.
According to the personalists, communities are defined by inter-subjective relations organized around the self-giving of persons, not by objective orders of which the person is a part. But Aristotle is said to understand the person just as a part of the state and of the cosmic hierarchy, with a nature understood by objective comparison with other beings.¹⁸

Third, a theory includes an account of subjectivity as irreducible only if it does not explain it in terms of a purely objective category of being. Wojtyla argues that lived experience is a unique category of being since it is irreducible to anything that can be considered objectively. I shall call this the category criterion. But Aristotle is said to understand experience in terms of categories such as actions, passions, and qualities, all of which, Wojtyła alleges, are purely objective.¹⁹

The category criterion, however, introduces a problematic and possibly contradictory tension into the personalist account of subjectivity that requires further clarification. On the one hand, subjectivity seems to be the actualization of an underlying objective potentiality on which it relies for its identity over time.²⁰ For example, in the experience of illness, as described by the phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, one’s subjective awareness of one’s illness is experienced as conditioned by and arising from material structures that are part of a person but that are inaccessible to subjective inspection and are only knowable objectively.²¹ For another example, in subconscious experience subjectivity is structured by currently inaccessible mental contents, some of which can over time be brought to consciousness.²² In part, objective nature seems to determine lived experience, and so Wojtyła thinks that an adequate account of the human person must be in part “cosmological.”²³ On the other hand, subjectivity cannot be reduced to anything purely objective. Subjectivity is given experientially as entirely sui generis, and it is inconceivable how it could arise from what is not subjective.²⁴


²⁰Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” p. 223; Crosby, Selfhood, pp. 127–31; Mounier, Personalism, p. 3.


²²Wojtyła, Acting Person, pp. 91–95; Crosby, Selfhood, pp. 129–31.


Because of this tension a dualism arises in the work of some personalists between subjectivity and the objective “being” of the person. The relation between them becomes difficult to understand, for it seems that we must simultaneously maintain that subjectivity is the actuality of underlying objective potentialities and that subjectivity is an irreducible category of its own that cannot arise from or be reduced to anything objective.\(^{25}\) That the category criterion leads to this tension indicates the need for a revision of this criterion. The core of the category criterion—the irreducibility of lived experience to anything objective—can be fulfilled and thus this dualism can be overcome not by introducing a new category but also by showing how lived experience is identical to the members of other categories as a subjective interiority essential to them, such that the members of those other categories are not purely objective.\(^{26}\) On my revision of the fulfillment conditions for the category criterion, some objective beings and some subjective lived experiences are identical, with neither reducible to or separable from the other.

2. THE THOMISTIC ACCOUNT OF SUBJECTIVITY

Having seen both the characteristics of subjectivity and the criteria for an account of subjectivity, let us now turn to the Aristotelian account of subjectivity, beginning with the account in some later Aristotelians and then moving to Aristotle’s account.

Among the various kinds of Aristotelianism, Thomists clearly fulfill the species transcendence criterion by explaining both that human persons are not just categorical substances but also “supposits”—that is, they are beings that exist properly speaking and per se and are the logical and metaphysical subjects of actions. Further, human persons have immaterial souls that give them a self-present intellectual nature.\(^{27}\) But for Wojtyła, because it uses the apparently purely objective language of “supposits,” this account is merely the best possible objective account of a being with subjectivity, not an account of subjectivity itself. He claims that it still reduces lived experience to something objective, and so it does not fulfill the category criterion.\(^{28}\)

Wojtyła, however, does not recognize that the notion of supposit really includes an account of subjectivity. Supposits are incommunicable, that is, they cannot give themselves to another in the manner of a part, a universal, or an individual nature.

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\(^{26}\) This is a strategy similar to that employed by psychophysical identity theorists, who argue that some mental and physical properties are identical.

\(^{27}\) Aquinas, *ST* I q.29, a.2; III q.2 a.2 and a.3 ad 2; *Quodlibetal Questions* (hereafter *QQ*) q.9, q.2, a.1; Suárez, *Metaphysical Disputations* (hereafter *DM*) disp. 34, available at www.salvadorcastellote.com/investigacion.htm. Other scholastics also consider persons as supposits, but I focus here on Thomists because they explain supposits through a perfection added to the individual nature.

assumeable by another (as when Christ’s human nature was assumed by a divine Person). Supposits have individualized natures, but they are not merely pure instances of a nature. Rather, they include a unique, non-accidental, incommunicable perfection over and above the individualized nature. On some interpretations of Thomism, this is the act of existence. In virtue of this incommunicable perfection, supposits not only exist but also possess themselves, their souls, and all of their second acts. Furthermore, on Aquinas’s view, individual human persons exist, act, and are governed by divine providence for their own sake and not just for the sake of the species, and they are capable of understanding this and acting accordingly.

By possessing themselves incommunicably and by having immaterial souls, persons have the characteristics of subjectivity. They are capable of conscious intellectual reflexivity and self-determination and of having conscious intellectual acts that are open to all things, entirely as their own, that is, in a subjective manner. On Aquinas’s view, human subjectivity arises from and is essentially rooted in the potentialities of the soul. It is dependent on the body and its sense powers, and it includes a felt knowledge “by connaturally” of one’s body and its inclinations.

So, for Thomism, although the human person is essentially an instance of rational animality, a human person is also more than an individualized essence, for each one also includes a unique perfection that renders that individual incommunicable and self-possessing, and thus renders the person irreducibly subjective—that is, only able to be known and described, at least in part, from the first-person point of view. The notion of the person as having a self-possessed, incommunicable, intellectual nature is an account of substantial subjectivity that is compatible with being

29 Aquinas, In I Sent d.5, q.1 a.1 ad 6 and ad 8; In III Sent d.5, q.2, a.1 ad 2; ST I q.29, a.3 ad 4; Thomas de Vio Cajetan, Expositio super sancti Thomae Aquinatis (Rome: Leonine ed., 1888) [hereafter In ST] I, v.4, q.3, a.3 n.1; Suárez, DM Disp. 34, s.7, n.1. The view that the act of existence is the constituent of incommunicability is defended by Cardinal Ludovico Billot, De verbo incarnati (Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1895), c.2, s.1, q.2, following Aquinas, In III Sent d.5, q.1, a.3; QQ q.2, qq. 3 and 4; q.9 q.3 ad 2; ST III q.19, a.1 ad 4. Other Thomists hold other views as to the constitutive formal principle of incommunicability, such as that it is constituted by a substantial mode, but the details of those views are not important for this paper. Nor does it matter for my argument which of these views is correct, so long as there is some formal constituent of incommunicability and personhood in each person beyond the individualized human nature; see my “The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” Nova et Vesta 12 (2014): 863–912 for details on those views.

30 See Aquinas, In I Sent d.17, q.2, a.3; In II Sent d.7, q.1, a.2; In III Sent d.18, q.1, a.2; Disputed Questions on Truth (hereafter DV) q.5, a.10; SCG II c.23 and III c.155; ST I-II q.6, a.2 ad 2; II-II q.64, a.5 ad 3 and q.104, a.5 and q.122, a.1. See also Cajetan, In I ST, v.4, q.29, a.1 n11, p.329; Salmanticenses, Cursus theologicus (Paris: Victor Palme, 1877), v.3, t.6, d.9 dub1.

31 Aquinas, SCG III c.113; Expositio super Iob ad litteram, pr. I owe the emphasis on this point to Mary Catherine Sommers and Siobhan Nash-Marshall.


33 Sentencia libri de anima (hereafter In DA), II, lect.13, n.390; ST I q.64, a.1; II-II, q.45, a.2 and q.97, a.2 ad 1 and q.162, a.1. See Martin Rhomheimer, “The Cognitive Structure of the Natural Law and the Truth of Subjectivity” in The Perspective of the Acting Person, ed. William F. Murphy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2008), pp. 172–73, which explains well our self-experience as an embodied intellect, which is an experience of a whole supposit.
an instance of a species, insofar as the person substantially has an individualized nature. Subjectivity, on this view, is irreducible to what is objective and actualizes objective potentialities, without being a new category, for some individuals that belong to the Aristotelian category of substance—including human beings—are both subjective and objective.

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Thomism thus meets the species transcendence and the category criteria. We must now consider how Aristotle meets them, after which we shall consider the non-parthood criterion. Some who have considered whether subjectivity is found in Aristotle have held that, if it is found there, it is found in second acts, but substance and first act are purely objective. If this were true, then Aristotle would not meet the personalistic condition since, as we have seen, he would then not meet the species transcendence criterion.

As a first response, it is not clear to me that this claim, if true, would in fact show that Aristotle fails to meet that condition. Fully exercised subjectivity necessarily involves having subjective second acts. These acts are not entirely reducible to the person’s substance. Rather, they are new beings and perfections over and above the person’s substance. When I say that a person’s second acts are new beings, I mean that they are actual realities in their own right, over and above the first act of the person, and not mere aspects or parts of that first act, even though still belonging to the person. When I say that they are new perfections, I mean that they confer new positive intelligible content upon the person over and above the content conferred by the first act, though still content that really belongs to the person. In this way the acting person is not, on such a view, wholly reducible to an instance of a species or to anything categorically objective, for each individual person includes these irreducible, subjective acts. This response would not ensure that Aristotle meets the species transcendence criterion, because substance would still be purely objective. But this criterion might be unreasonable: there might be no reason to require that the person as substance be irreducibly subjective, so long as the person as person, including the acts of the person, is irreducibly subjective. The common interpretation of Aristotelianism on subjectivity might meet reasonable revisions of the species transcendence and category criteria, and it certainly includes characteristics of subjectivity. We have already seen that the personalists allow that Aristotle’s accounts of thinking and self-determination are accounts of some of the characteristics of subjectivity, and below we shall see further evidence that Aristotle includes the characteristics of subjectivity.

But I contend that this interpretation of Aristotelianism as holding that the human substance is purely objective is wrong, as I shall now show. If this can be shown, it

34Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” pp. 170–71. Even some who have defended the view that subjectivity is present in Aristotle have focused only on acts and habits of cognition, e.g., Marco Sgarbi, “Aristotele e il Problema della Soggettività,” Trans/Form/Ação 34 (2011): 105–16. This point was also raised to me in conversation by Stephen Hipp and Christian Washburn.

35See Cat 8, Met V.7.1017a23–30; NE I.8.1098b17, I.13.1102a5, II.1.1103a26–b1.
will allow a stronger response to the personalist objections to Aristotle, by showing that Aristotle indeed meets the original species transcendence criterion. I shall argue that even though we do not have lived experiences without second acts, these acts reveal to us that our substance is only fully understandable subjectively.36

One piece of evidence for the claim that Aristotle holds that our substance is only fully understandable subjectively comes in his account of the act of touching something. There Aristotle describes how the tangible object, one’s interior sensing power, and one’s material flesh, which is part of one’s substance, are experienced together. I experience my material flesh both as an object of my perception and as the subject of perception in the experience of touch.37 Aristotle thus sees some experiences as presenting one’s substance as both objective and subjective.38 This provides evidence that the human substance is not fully understandable objectively, and so the Aristotelian account of the human substance meets the species transcendence and category criteria, and thus it fulfills the first, third, and fourth characteristics of subjectivity listed above.

The claims that Aristotle meets the species transcendence and category criteria will be further substantiated if it can be shown that, as on the Thomistic account of supposita, Aristotle holds that human beings are substantially incommunicable and self-possessing, not mere instances of an objectively definable species, even though he lacks the notions of “supposit” and “act of existence.” First, I shall show that, on Aristotle’s view, the human substance, the actuality of the human substance, is an individual substance that

36See Martin Rhoneheimer, “Practical Reason and the Truth of Subjectivity: The Self-Experience of the Moral Subject at the Roots of Metaphysics and Anthropology” in Perspective, p. 268; Wojtyła, “Personal Structure,” p. 190. Crosby, Selfhood, p. 140 (with reference on p. 139 to Aquinas’s In LDC lect. 15) says that subjectivity and personal selfhood seem “almost to coincide with the idea of Aristotelian substance, or rather [they seem] to be substance raised, as it were, to its highest power.”

37DA II.11, esp. 423b15–17, 25–26. Phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty corroborate Aristotle’s claims by describing experiences such as touching one’s hands together. In this experience, the hands’ motile and tactile powers, and the matter of which they are made, are presented as having an objective “outside” and a subjective “inside” that are experienced as intertwined and unified. If we reason about this experience in an effect-to-cause manner, it is plausible to conclude one’s substance includes subjectivity; see Merleau-Ponty, Perception, p. 503; Visible, p. 49, 133–36. The link between Aristotelian and phenomenological accounts of bodily subjectivity is brought out in my own “Habits, Potencies, and Obedience: Experiential Evidence for Thomistic Hylomorphism,” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (2014), forthcoming, as well as in Brague, op. cit.; John Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One: Reciprocity Refused,” Modern Theology 17 (2001): 336–38; Milbank, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two: Reciprocity Regained,” Modern Theology 17 (2001): 490–92, 495–501; David Braine, The Human Person (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 70–73, 283–86, 309; John Haldane, “The Breakdown of Contemporary Philosophy of Mind” in Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytic Traditions (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2002), pp. 57–58, 68; “Insight, Inference and Intellection,” Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 73 (1999): 42.

38Likewise, later Aristotelians argued that we can simultaneously experience our bodies as objects of modification and as subjects of awareness, as when we train our bodies through exercise or dance. See Aquinas, ST I-II q.50, a.3; Cajetan, In I-II ST, v.6, q.50 a.1–3 n.2; Suárez, DM d.44, s.2, nn.1–4; s.3, nn.1–5; Conimbricenses, Commentarium in octo libros physicorum Aristotelis (Coloniae: Lazari Zetzneri, 1609), bk.2, c.1, q.5, a.1, p. 272; q.6, a.2; John of St. Thomas, In I-II ST, De habitibus (Quebec: Laval, 1949), d.13, a.1, nn. 3.98–99; d.13, a.2, n6, 223, 12.242, 14.248–49.
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are not mere instances of a species. Second, I shall show that they are irreducibly subjective on his view.

Aristotle emphasizes that substances are not universals or common to many. Unlike accidents and universals, they belong metaphysically only to themselves, not to another. He furthermore holds that these things can be said of the actuality of each individual substance. Based on this, some argue that forms confer individual content or an individual difference on a substance, though Aristotle never states this.\(^3^9\) It is not necessary for my argument that Aristotelian forms are the source of anything more than the specific content of what a substance is. For my argument to succeed, it is necessary that Aristotle hold (though not in these words) that human substances as a whole and their first acts are individual, incommunicable, and subjective, regardless of whether their form, proximate matter, or something else is the source or principle of these traits.

The highest actuality of a person on the Thomistic view, the act of existence, provided the justification for claiming that Thomism meets the species transcendence and category criteria. Similarly, it seems likely that, if Aristotle meets these criteria, it will be because of the highest actuality on his view, the first act or substantial actuality of the person. Aristotle, as Jiyuan Yu points out, treats “form” in two ways: as that which makes a substance to be “such” a kind of thing, and as the actuality of a substance. In the former way, form seems to confer merely specific content on a substance, and in the latter way, it seems to be an individual.\(^4^0\) Yu thinks that these aspects of form are incompatible, but others, like Aquinas, think that they are compatible.\(^4^1\) It is not important for my account who is correct here; what is necessary for my account is that human beings, on Aristotle’s view, have an actuality that is, at least in some way, individual and irreducibly subjective—that is, that the human substance actually, and not just potentially, is individual and irreducibly subjective.\(^4^2\)

An actuality of a material substance actualizes the substance’s proximate matter, that is, matter that is in immediate potency to being a substance of the kind determined by the form. In the case of the human being, the proximate matter is the organized human body, rather than more remote matter like the elements making up this body. Actuality is so closely proportioned to its proximate matter that Aristotle says that they are in a sense identical, for “unity [or identity] has many senses (as many as “is” has), but the most proper and fundamental sense of both is the relation of an actuality [or complete reality] to that of which it is the actuality."\(^4^3\)

\(^4^1\) Aquinas, In IX Met lect. 8.
\(^4^2\) Met VII.16.1040b22–28; VIII.1.1042a23; IX.8.1049b13, 1050a3–10, 1050a35–b6.
substance itself, though under different and yet correlative notions. An actuality is the “complete reality” of an individual composite substance, and potentiality is that individual insofar as it is immediately capable of this actuality. For an actuality to be the actuality of this proximate matter, and to be the complete reality of this substance, it must be an individual, for the substance is an individual.

That a substantial actuality is an individual can be further seen, as Terence Irwin notes, from the fact that Aristotle takes the actualities of individuals to explain causally the peculiar effects of that individual substance qua individual, such as the traits of a man’s offspring. This does not mean that we can give a scientific (or epistemic) explanation of those effects and causes in the same way that we can for the effects of a substance qua member of a species. Individuals are grasped by nous or non-discursive intellectual intuition and by sense perception (aisthēsis). It seems that on Aristotle’s view we can grasp through noetic thinking or by sense perception the way in which these effects flow from a substance’s actuality. All causes are individuals, and individuals (not universals) exist, act, and cause individuals. An actuality is a cause of a substance’s actions, and so it is an individual. This account of the actuality of a substance provides us further reason to hold that Aristotle meets the species transcendence criterion. For, if the actuality of an individual substance explains the peculiar effects of that substance, then the substance and its actuality are not reducible to being just an instance of a species. In its actual causing of individual acts and effects, the substance is shown to be a unique individual, incommunicable in its actuality to others, because of its unique role as this cause, and so not a mere instance of the human species.

Having seen a few reasons why Aristotelian substances and substantial actualities are individuals irreducible to being mere instances of a species, we must now see why Aristotelian actualities can only be understood fully in a subjective, first-person manner, and described in subjective, first-person terms, and can neither be entirely understood in an objective, third-person manner nor be entirely described in objective, third-person terms. But one might object here that even if it can be shown that Aristotle has some consideration of subjectivity, this is not the main thing that Wojtyła contested. Wojtyła agreed that Aristotle has some account of subjectivity but denied that it was in personalistic or subjective language. Rather, he argued that Aristotle’s account was in objectivistic language and that phenomenological language is necessary for expressing the lived experience of the individual as such.
but this is lacking in Aristotle.\footnote{The importance of this objection was impressed upon me in different ways by John Crosby, Janet Smith, and Michael Wiitala.} An initial response to this objection, and a positive beginning to an account of substantial subjectivity in Aristotle, is to point to the account of touch already given, which certainly seems to describe the lived experience of touching something.

A further response to this objection is that Aristotle gives a good deal of attention to many sorts of individual lived experience in his accounts of the various virtues, for example, in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, books three to five. Aristotle emphasizes that these virtues and the processes of their formation take different forms in different people, and different people know these differences through lived, subjective experiences, such as experiences of pleasure and pain in the face of various goods.\footnote{\textit{NE} II.9.1109b2–6.}

The presence of these detailed accounts of individual virtues shows just how important individual lived experience is to Aristotle’s account of human persons.\footnote{This response was suggested to me in different ways by Siobhan Nash-Marshall, Jonathan J. Sanford, and Mary Catherine Sommers.} In this way his approach to the human person joins the “cosmological” and “personalistic” approaches and overcomes any divide between them.

A further, more decisive response to his objection is to show that, for Aristotle, the human substantial actuality—and indeed the very notion of subjective actuality itself—can only be fully understood subjectively and through an account of lived experience. The human actuality is numerically identical to the living of human beings and their existing—that is, to be actually a human substance is to be a living and existing human substance. Human actuality, living, and existence are an activity (\textit{energeia}) that can be understood only by analogy with an activity like thinking, which is continuous, self-productive, and its own end.\footnote{\textit{DA} II.1.413a2; 2.413a20–25; 4.415b13; \textit{Met} IX.6.1048b26–29; XII.6.1072a5.}

But the activity of thinking, which is an accident, can only be fully understood subjectively, through lived experience. Aristotle describes the activity of thinking as reflexive—for example, in his account of the prime mover, who is a continuous act of self-thinking, the highest form of living, and the paradigmatic actuality and substance. Other substances exist to imitate the prime mover in continuous reflexive activities, such as in reproduction.\footnote{\textit{Met} XII.7.1072b14–23. See \textit{DA} II.4.415b1.} Humans imitate the prime mover most perfectly in contemplative thinking, which, like the thinking that is the prime mover, is reflexive and self-determined. When we think, we perceive that we think, and we desire and choose to continue this reflexive thinking.\footnote{\textit{DA} III.4.429b5–9; 5.430a20–25; \textit{Met} XII.7.1072b14–23; \textit{NE} III.1.1110a17; IX.9.1170a28; X.8.1178b17–32. See Irwin, \textit{First Principles}, pp. 343–44; Crosby, \textit{Selfhood}, p. 99.} Thus, Aristotle accounts for the first and third characteristics of subjectivity and describes them in subjective terms of self-reflexivity, not in purely objective terms. We have already seen that Aristotle accounts for the other two characteristics of subjectivity, namely, cognitive openness to all things and bodily self-sensing. It is only by analogy to thinking that Aristotle understands substantial actuality, living, and existing, and thinking can only be fully understood subjectively. So, human substantial actuality—and, indeed, the
notion of substantial actuality in general—can only be fully understood by analogy to subjective activities and thus can only be fully understood subjectively (that is, from the first-person point of view), on the basis of the lived experience of thinking. Hence, Aristotle understands the very notion of substantial actuality, and thus the very notion of substance, subjectively (as well as having objective aspects), and so fulfills the category criterion.

Aristotle also holds that through the actuality by which we exist, we also transcend the human level of being. This is further evidence that he meets the species transcendence criterion. The highest part of our actuality, nous, is “something divine in us”: it allows us to live a divine life of contemplative thinking, transcending the animal and political life of the human species, and it is most properly “each man himself.” By nous, and so by our substantial actuality, we are self-present, capable of cognizing all things, and able to determine ourselves to a divine life. This is an experience that we can “live” and that Aristotle describes in terms of reflexivity. Aristotle thus fulfills the species transcendence criterion and accounts for the characteristics of subjectivity through his account of the human actuality. Even if my claims about Aristotle on individual actualities were wrong, humans would still transcend being a mere instance of the human species on Aristotle’s view because of nous. Humans thereby have an essentially subjective part of their substance, thus again fulfilling the category criterion.

We must now see how later Aristotelians, and then Aristotle himself, fulfill the non-parthood criterion. In seeing that, further evidence will be provided for the claim that Aristotle meets the category criterion and accounts for all the characteristics of subjectivity in a subjective, not just objective, manner.

4. THE ARISTOTELIAN FULFILLMENT OF THE NON-PARTHOOD CRITERION

According to the non-parthood criterion, human persons must transcend being merely parts of some objective order or community. Here I focus on the paradigmatic and most natural community, the hierarchy of the cosmos. If we were reducible to being mere parts of any community, it is most likely that we would be reducible to this, the most natural community. Other communities can be understood according to the same model.

Some Aristotelians, such as Aquinas, include subjectivity in their account of the cosmic hierarchy—that is, they take the cosmic order, of which we are parts, to be not fully understandable objectively but to be only fully understandable subjectively. In this way they meet the non-parthood criterion not by denying that the human person is part of a larger order but by denying that this order is entirely objective. Even though Aquinas often says that persons are “parts” of a hierarchy or community, this does not entail that they are entirely reducible to that hierarchy or community. Rather, “part” is said in different senses, and only being part of a substance entails such reduction, not being part of a hierarchy or community. Furthermore, these

communities are not things on which their parts are dependent for existence. Rather, the “parts”—individual substances—are what properly exist, and they found the order and community of the cosmos (as well as other communities, which Aquinas likewise understands partly subjectively).

Far from reducing persons to the cosmic hierarchy, the hierarchy is founded on the interiority of substances, that is, the hierarchy presupposes and metaphysically follows upon and is constituted in part by the interiority of substances. Aquinas explains the hierarchy of beings that constitutes the cosmos through correlating deeper interior causality to a higher position on the hierarchy. Plants have internal production through which they cause themselves to grow. Animals have interior subjectivity insofar as one sensory power can affect another; thus they have some degree of immateriality. Human and angelic persons have completely reflexive interiority; here, interior causality is subjective. For humans, this follows from the complete immateriality of the spiritual soul. As immaterial, it is capable of understanding itself immediately. But in its embodied state this requires accidental acts of understanding to come to awareness. Aquinas thinks that the human soul, the human actuality, is essentially ordered towards self-knowledge and openness to all things. For this reason he calls the human soul “habitual self-cognition” and “cognitive acquaintance” (notitia). In its substance, and so in its place in the cosmic hierarchy, it is ordered to these subjective acts. Because of our intellectual nature, we exist, act, and are governed by divine providence for our own sake, not just for the sake of our species or the cosmic order. Our place in the hierarchy helps us better understand our subjectivity. Like animals, we depend on the senses, but unlike them we have intellectual interiority. Like angels, we have the latter, but we depend on the senses to experience it. But even though we are more understandable through our place on the hierarchy, this understanding requires that we see that the hierarchy is constituted by (not prior to) different kinds of subjectivity.

Although on Aquinas’s view substances, including human substances, are ordered by God toward the end of the perfection of the whole universe, this does not entail that we are mere parts of the universe as an objectively-definable thing. The universe is an order that can only be understood on the basis of its parts, especially its highest parts, persons. They are only fully understandable subjectively, and they exist and are willed by God for their own sake, not just for the sake of the universe. Indeed, it is precisely as existing for their own individual sakes that they most contribute to the perfection of the whole universe.

58 SCG IV.11; In II DA lect.5 n.284; QDDA a.13. See In I Sent., d.44, q.1, a.2, ad 6; SCG II, c.45; S.Th. I, q.20, a.4; q.93, a.3 In III DA lect.3., n.612; lect.10, n.733; Oliva Blanchette, The Perfection of the Universe (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992).


60 ST I q.85, a.1.

61 See SCG III c.111–13; ST I q.23, a.7.
Aquinas thus meets the non-parthood criterion. He does not hold that human persons are reducible to being parts of communities that are wholly objectively definable because he holds that they have reflexive subjective interiority that serves to found the communities of which they are a part. Some personalists allow all this but still argue that Aquinas’s account is Platonic, not Aristotelian. So, following the model set by Aquinas, we must see how Aristotle gives an account of the community of the cosmos as partly constituted by the interiority of substances.

Aristotle holds that substances cannot compose other substances. So, on his view humans cannot be parts of larger substances. For example, the individual human is a “part” of the state only insofar he or she is ordered toward the flourishing of the state, and the state is ordered toward the individual’s flourishing, which consists in the highest form of subjectivity, the contemplation that is the act of nous, in which we act like the divine and transcend every purely human community.

On Aristotle’s view the cosmic hierarchy is organized around life and the way in which certain living things are ordered and related to others. Non-living things exist to benefit living things. Living things lower than humans exist to benefit higher ones, such as human beings. All things exist to desire and imitate the highest living thing (zoon), the prime mover. Human beings do not exist to benefit higher beings, but to imitate them in the highest form of living, contemplation. Thus humans exist also for their own sake, that is, for the sake of their own contemplative flourishing. The hierarchically-arranged levels of life are, for Aristotle as for Aquinas, based on degrees of reflexivity. Plants have the reflexivity of self-moving growth. Animals (including humans) have the reflexivity of perceiving that they perceive, insofar as by each sensory power, and by the perceptive part of the soul itself, one perceives that one perceives whenever one actually perceives. Rational humans can entirely think themselves when they think of other things because nous is open to cognizing anything actual. Once an intentional object actualizes the potential part of one’s nous, nous is, because of its presence to itself, immediately cognized by itself. This self-thinking is not intentional self-cognition. Rather, Aristotle understands thinking, like all cognition, to be becoming what one cognizes insofar as it is actually cognizable. Nous thinks itself by its identity with itself insofar as it is actually cognizable, as it is when it is actually cognizing. As we saw in the last section, to think oneself is to be subjectively, reflexively self-present.

References:

62 Crosby, Selfhood, p. 139; Stein, Finite, p. 277.
63 Met VII.16.1041a6.
64 Politics (hereafter Pol) I.2.1253a2, 19–40.
70 DA III.4.430a2–9.
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In its most active part, *nous* is always active and present to itself. One might object that it is not at all clear that Aristotle thinks that the active part of *nous* is a part of each individual soul at all, and so perhaps subjectivity is not in the individual soul at all. But Aristotle does seem to hold that the *nous* that is capable of being actualized by intellectual forms, and thereby of knowing itself as actualized, is in each individual soul. This reflexive thinking, though it may not persist after this life, is sufficient for the individual human soul to be essentially subjective. Since the hierarchy is founded on subjectivity and only subjectively is knowable, and since other communities of which we are a part, such as the state, exist in part to facilitate contemplation, which transcends the state, Aristotle meets the non-parthood criterion.

From the last few sections, then, it can be seen that on Aristotle’s view, subjectivity is irreducible to any objectively-definable species, community, or category, since it is part of the human substance and actuality. The human substance and actuality can only be understood from a unified subjective and objective point of view. Aristotle, like Aquinas, fulfills all three criteria.

5. ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP AND BEAUTY

The claims that Aristotle gives an account of the characteristics of subjectivity and meets the criteria for giving an account of irreducible subjectivity are corroborated in his discussion of friendship. Aristotle identifies human living and existing with human perceiving and knowing, at least insofar as the latter are the principal parts of the human actuality or soul, and so of human life and existence. Aristotle also holds that pleasure completes excellent activity, and thus pleasure completes excellent human knowing, perceiving, living, and existing. Because of the identity between human living and perceiving and because we perceive our own perceptions, we also perceive that we live whenever we perceive anything. We thereby perceive that our life is pleasant. Because of this pleasure, we desire living. Self-knowledge and self-perception are pleasant and desirable because they are kinds of reflexive awareness of one’s life and existence, which are among the best of things, and awareness of what is best is pleasant. Each of these forms of self-presence is more enjoyable the better the one lives. Here we can see a number of interrelated lived experiences of oneself, which Aristotle describes as they are experienced, not in purely objective terms.

One can share activities like perceiving and knowing with a friend, for example, when one converses with a friend, or when one engages in aesthetic or philosophical contemplation with a friend. When sharing these activities, one perceives one’s
friend’s thinking, life, existence, and actuality, just as one perceives these in oneself, and one desires his good just as one desires one’s own good. This good is the excellent performance of these activities. In knowing a friend, one better knows oneself. Both self-knowledge and the knowledge of a friend are described by Aristotle in terms of subjective reflexivity, rooted in the substantial actualities of oneself and one’s friend. Having a genuine friend involves noetically or aesthetically perceiving this subjective structure of the human being both in oneself and in others. The experience of friendship reveals the subjective structure of human actuality, life, and existence.

A related part of Aristotle’s philosophy, which also corroborates the claims of this paper, is his account of beauty (to kalon). Just as in my earlier arguments I was guided by the arguments of Thomas Aquinas, so here in considering the importance of beauty for the Aristotelian account of subjectivity I am guided by the arguments of a later thinker in the broader Aristotelian tradition, the twentieth-century thinker Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar argues that Thomistic metaphysics overcomes the divide between cosmological and personalist approaches, and I think that the same is true of Aristotle’s views.

On Balthasar’s view, the experience of beauty arises from our “attunement” (convenientia) with all of being. In attunement, being is experienced as beauty, that is, as radiant, ordered, evoking love and wonder, as an interiority that communicates itself in exterior forms and as able to order one’s life. Attunement with being and the experience of beauty come through “consent,” an act whereby one affirms and is receptive to everything that exists. One is thereby voluntarily united to being and thus knows it directly and with feeling, not purely conceptually, in a manner like that of the knowledge by connaturality described by Aquinas. In this experience, on Balthasar’s analysis, I experience myself as something having objective aspects that can only be known intentionally or “cosmologically” but also as having subjective aspects that are only grasped through feeling and are irreducible to my objective aspects. Likewise, I find that there are aspects of the world that can be known conceptually and intentionally in a “cosmological” or third-person manner, but there are also other aspects of the world that can only be grasped subjectively through feeling and “consent.” For example, the beauty or self-revelation of the interiority of things only appears to me through my subjectivity, that is, along with and by means of my interior, reflexive self-presence. By reflexively experiencing

79 NE VIII.3.1156b10; IX.9.1170b6–12; EE VII.12.1244b15–17. See Irwin, Aristotle’s First Principles, pp. 376–78. See Anthony Flood, “Aquinas on Subjectivity,” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 84 (2010): 69–78, on self-love as subjectivity in Aquinas, In III Sent d.27, q.1, a.1 ad 4; q.2, a.1; ST I-II q.28, a.1 ad 2; q.28, a.2; II-II q.25, a.4.


82 Balthasar, Glory of the Lord, v.1, pp. 236–38. The importance of feeling for Aquinas’s account of intellect and will is seen at ST I q.77, a.5 ad 3; I-II q.15, a.1; q.24, a.3 ad 1; q.31, a.5 ad 3; q.33, a.1. See Diana Fritz Cotes, Aquinas on the Emotions (Washington DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 194–200.
myself in relation to other beings, by consenting to and thereby being receptive
to them, rather than by considering them through active, conceptual intention, I
experience their beauty.\textsuperscript{83}

Aristotle gives a somewhat similar account of our awareness of beauty and thereby
provides a further basis for a defense of the view that he includes an account of
subjectivity. Even though Aristotle never fully works out his account of beauty, it
plays a crucial role in his ethics and metaphysics.\textsuperscript{84} On his view, beauty is perceived
either by sense perception (\textit{aisthēsis}) or by \textit{nous} in all material things, in virtuous
actions, and (in its highest form) in the prime mover, who is the most excellent of
actualities. It inspires wonder and contemplation.\textsuperscript{85} It motivates virtuous actions
since beauty is sought for its own sake. We act in order to do what we perceive to
be beautiful, for the sake of becoming beautiful, and in imitation of beautiful actions
and persons.\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, all things act in order to reveal their interior beauty and thus
to imitate the highest beauty, the prime mover.\textsuperscript{87} In the prime mover we see that
what is most beautiful is also what is most subjective, that is, the highest form of
reflexive thinking and acting, and the highest form of actuality, life, and existence.
We can fully understand this paradigmatic beauty only on the basis of understand-
ing subjectivity. All things other than the prime mover can only be fully understood
insofar as they are imitative of that mover, and so can only be understood fully if
we adopt a subjective point of view, that is, on the basis of understanding the prime
mover’s contemplation rather than from a purely objective point of view.\textsuperscript{88} Beauty
is in part objectively and intentionally seen by \textit{nous} and \textit{aisthēsis}, but it is only
completely knowable subjectively.

This account of beauty can be combined with Aristotle’s account of friendship
in order to produce a richer basis for the claims of this paper. For humans who can-
not directly see the prime mover, beauty can be directly and most perfectly seen in
virtuous, contemplative people who have made themselves beautiful. In friendships
centered on the good, the beauty—and so the subjectivity—of the human being is
most perfectly revealed. In considering the beauty of a virtuous, contemplating friend,
I perceive him objectively, but because of our shared life, I come to experience his
life, existence, and actuality as if it were my own, subjectively. In perceiving my
friend contemplating and acting virtuously, and in helping each other to contemplate

\textsuperscript{83}There are elements of this account that may be at odds with the Aristotelian tradition, such as the way in
which conceptual thinking is portrayed. For criticisms of similar views in Henri Bergson from a Thomistic
point of view, see Jacques Maritain, \textit{Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism}, translated by Mabelle Andison
(New York NY: Philosophical Library, 1955), chaps. 7 and 8. This is not important for my argument. What
is important here is that Balthasar directs us toward Aristotle’s account of beauty, which in turn helps us
better understand his account of subjectivity. I am not making any claims as to the truth or adequacy of
Balthasar’s account.

(Washington DC: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1981); Kelly Rogers, “Aristotle’s Conception of To
Kalon,” \textit{Ancient Philosophy} 13 (Fall 1993): 355–71; Thomas M. Tuozzo, “Contemplation, the Noble, and

\textsuperscript{85}\textit{Met} XII.7.1272b24; \textit{NE} III.4.1113a31; \textit{EE} VII.15.1249b16–20.

\textsuperscript{86}IV.1.1120a23; \textit{EE} VII.15.1248b34, 1249a17.

\textsuperscript{87}\textit{Topics} I.5.102a6; \textit{Parts of Animals} I.5.645a23–25; \textit{Met} XII.7.1072b31–36; \textit{XIII}3.1078b4.

\textsuperscript{88}\textit{Met} XII.7.1072b14–36; \textit{EE} VII.15.1249a17.
and to act virtuously, we each become more beautiful, and so our transcendence over everything objectively definable through our irreducible subjectivity is revealed. It is revealed through acts that include both aspects of shared subjectivity and aspects of intentional, objective perception of beauty and of my friend. In the experiences of friendship and beauty, the substantial unity of the objective and subjective aspects of human beings is revealed. In this account of the human substance, the split between Wojtyła’s cosmological and personalistic approaches is overcome. Aristotle’s hylo-morphic, categorical, “kalon-ic” account of the human being already includes both approaches, without opposition or divide. Aristotle’s philosophical anthropology fulfills the personalistic condition, thereby providing an account of subjectivity, the “irreducible in man.”

89 Portions of this paper previously appeared in my unpublished 2007 Franciscan University of Steubenville thesis Intimations of Eternity: Knowledge of Beauty in Aristotle and Balthasar, and my unpublished 2012 dissertation at the University at Buffalo, Thomistic Hylomorphism and the Phenomenology of Self-Sensing, I am grateful to all those who assisted me with those works. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a session of the Society for Thomistic Personalism at the 2013 annual meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. I am grateful to the following people for their comments on earlier versions of this paper: Therese Cory, John Crosby, Tony Flood, Matthews Grant, Gary Gurtler, Mary Lemmons, Mathew Lu, Siobhan Nash-Marshall, Turner Nevitt, Tim Pawl, J. J. Sanford, Janet Smith, Mary Catherine Sommers, Michael Wiitala.