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# The Personalist Foundations of the Ethics of Reproduction<sup>1</sup>

John F. Crosby

*The author, who is presently at the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein, gave the following address at the Bay Area Conference on the Ethics of Human Reproduction. It is reprinted here with permission from Dr. Damian Fedoryka, president of Christendom College, Front Royal, Virginia.*

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On the occasion of being made a cardinal in 1879, John Henry Newman gave a famous speech in Rome, in which he said of his life's work, "For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of Liberalism in religion." He proceeded to explain just what this life-long adversary of his was. He said:

Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another . . . . It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy.

In this liberalism we all recognize the subjectivism and relativism which are second nature to so many people today, and which are such an impediment to the reception of the Vatican instruction on reproductive technology, and indeed an impediment to all of Catholic moral teaching insofar as this teaching talks of objectively valid moral norms, which human beings did not devise.

There is, however, something in Newman's address which may surprise you. At the end of it, reflecting on the future of liberalism and Christianity, he says:

Christianity has been too often in what seemed deadly peril that we should fear for it any new trial now. So far is certain; on the other hand, what is uncertain, and in these great contests commonly is uncertain, and what is commonly a great surprise, when it is witnessed, is the particular mode by which, in the event, Providence rescues and saves His elect inheritance. Sometimes our enemy is turned into a friend; sometimes he is despoiled of that special virulence of evil which was so threatening . . . .

It is surprising, is it not, that Newman considers whether the enemy which is liberalism might not yet be "turned into a friend" and "despoiled of its virulence of evil". Of course Newman does not mean that Christianity could ever make its peace with the idea that "one creed is as good as another". What he means, I think, is that this liberalism may be a manifestation of a deeper movement of thought, and that this deeper movement of thought may bear within itself energies and ideas which can be appropriated by Christianity, and which can even enrich Christianity, and enrich it at the very time that Christianity repels as abhorrent to itself the relativism of liberalism.

What might this deeper movement of thought be? We can get a glimpse of it in Newman himself. While Newman was absolutely committed to the objective truth of revelation, as we have just heard, he was at the same time extraordinarily sensitive to the subjectivity of belief. He was not only concerned with believing what is in itself true, but also with believing it in such a way that our existence is transformed through our believing. He did not think it was enough to lead people to give just any assent to the truth; he distinguished between real and notional assent, and held that a merely notional assent, even if its object were ever so true, cannot support a committed religious existence. He held that believers have to give a real assent to revelation, a concrete, imaginative assent in which they assent not just with their mind, but with their whole being. This is why Newman was so sharply critical of a certain kind of apologetics which tried to give formal demonstrations of the truths about God and revelation. Newman said of such demonstrations that they "do not warm me and enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice." Newman was looking for an experiential knowledge of God; only concrete experiential religious knowledge could take away the winter of his desolation. But the traditional demonstrations gave him only abstract knowledge *about* God, and so seemed to him barren. Newman tried, instead, to find God in *conscience*, for there, he thought, God can be encountered, not just inferred but encountered, and in this encounter we can give a *real* assent to His being. You see, then, why I say that Newman was especially sensitive to the subjectivity of religious belief; he was not only concerned with the objective truth about God, but also with the lived experience of God.

### **An Additional Observation**

One more observation on Newman. One of the richest and most original parts of Newman's work is his probing of the subjectivity of the believer, and attempting to make it deeper and more truthful. Newman's thought would not have its seminal power and its unique fascinating character, nor would it be able to touch us so deeply, if Newman had not taken his turn toward the subjectivity of belief. This means that Newman did not just

react against liberalism, but appropriated for his faith the awakening to personal subjectivity which underlies it, even as he rejected its subjectivism, and in this way he tried to deprive an enemy of its special virulence of evil, and even to turn him into a friend.

I have begun with Newman because it seems to me that what he did for our understanding of religious belief, we have to do for our understanding of man. In the modern period there really has occurred something which can be called "the discovery of the person and of personal subjectivity". This is a dangerous movement of thought, and it has spawned the crippling subjectivism which we see all around us, and which makes Catholic moral teaching seem unintelligible to many of our contemporaries. But it is not to be simply rejected; for we can deepen our understanding of man by considering him as person, and by probing his subjectivity and freedom. This is not just my opinion; as everyone knows, it is also the view of John Paul II, for whom the future of the Christian understanding of man lies in the direction of a new Christian personalism. And this personalism is not just favored by a pope; it is incorporated in many ways in the documents of Vatican II. What, for example, is the Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* if not a monument to this personalism?

And so I will venture to speak of the autonomy of the person, and the subjectivity of the person, knowing full well that these terms are often used in a destructive and anti-Christian sense, but at the same time convinced that, probed deeply enough, they will yield up a Christian sense. Let us hope that in our deliberations together we will find fulfilled the scriptural promise that Christians will be able to handle poisonous serpents without being harmed by them.

I have been asked to speak to you about man as a spiritual being. I propose to attempt this by unfolding the structure of man as person; for it seems to me that the spiritual nature of man is nothing other than his personal nature. Of course an inquiry into man as spiritual being will usually include some reflections on the *immateriality* of spirit, and I will not have enough time to raise the question of what is immaterial in man. But I think that by approaching the spirituality of man through his personality, we can lay the foundation for important new arguments for the immateriality of the most inward part of man, and below I shall indicate some of them. And besides, there is a very considerable personalist contribution to be made to our understanding of man as spirit, even apart from the question of the immateriality of spirit.

There are obviously great pastoral advantages in speaking the language of a personalist understanding of man; the more we speak of man as person, and express moral truths in a personalist way, the more we are likely to be heard. But it is not primarily these pastoral advantages which I want to explore, but the purely theoretical enrichment which we can expect from a Christian personalism.

There are three highly significant and revealing aspects of man as person which will form the main points of reference of my talk.

## Major Points of Reference

1. I begin where Karol Wojtyla often begins in his reflections on the human person, namely with the *inwardness* of the person. In "Gaudium et spes", the Council fathers speak of the same thing under the name of the *interiority* of the person. This inwardness is manifested, I believe, in the power of the person to act through himself, out of himself, or in other words, to perform acts which are radically his own. We know what it is to act in such a way that we merely transmit what originates in others rather than act on our own and out of ourselves. This happens when, for example, we repeat the opinions or imitate the practices of someone without really understanding those opinions or practices, and thus without having those opinions and practices as our own, as the imitated person has them as his own. This is, in fact, the form of all merely *conventional* opining and acting. We come alive as persons only when we make our opinions and practices our own; only then do we act out of ourselves, and give evidence of our inwardness as persons.

This throws some light on what Vatican II taught about the respect which must be shown for the religious liberty of all persons. The idea behind this respect seems to be that coercion hinders persons in forming religious convictions which are entirely their own, and thus hinders them in living as persons. Even if that which persons are coerced to hold is objectively true, and even if this coercion unifies the whole society in the truth, persons are violated by the coercion. One ought to respect persons even if one thereby pays the price of many people falling into error and of society losing its unity in the truth.

Some may want to object already at this point, saying that this train of thought is nothing but a concession to subjectivism. One may say that I am speaking as if the main thing for each person is that his opinions and practices be *his own*, and that it doesn't much matter if they are *true* opinions and *justified* practices. But to focus on the inwardness of the person involves no such subjectivism; just the contrary. It is not difficult to show that the person achieves this inwardness precisely in encountering what is objectively valid, and it is especially easy to show this by referring to the moral life.

As long as I am just motivated by what is subjectively agreeable, I tend to lose my power of acting through myself. When Oscar Wilde looked back on his life of unrestrained pleasure-seeking and gratification, he said, "I ceased to be captain of my soul." But when we let ourselves be motivated primarily by what is objectively good and right, when we recognize the *demands* which the good makes of us, it is different. No one who is in the habit of serving what is good and right ever complained with the words of Oscar Wilde, "I ceased to be captain of my soul." Though that which is objectively good and worthy may demand from us a commitment which imposes pain and sacrifice, it never tends to cramp and hinder our

acting through ourselves; it never dethrones us as persons when we submit to it, or carries us away with a seductive sirensong. On the contrary; the demands of right and wrong take us seriously as persons; they stir up in us the depth of conscience, which is the supreme inwardness of the person. It is never so much we ourselves who act, as when our acting is a matter of conscience. In conscience we come fully alive as persons, and experience in ourselves our inwardness, and manifest this inwardness to others.

All of this is well expressed by the Thomas More of the play, *A Man for All Seasons*. More says to Norfolk:

I will not give in because I oppose it — I do — not my pride, not my spleen, nor any other of my appetites but I do — *I (MORE goes up to him and feels him up and down like an animal . . .)* Is there no single sinew in the midst of this that serves no appetite of Norfolk's but is just Norfolk? (pp. 71-72)

Notice that it is in a matter of conscience, in which he discerns the demands of the moral law, that Thomas More can most emphatically and expressively say, "I", and be called by his name. Insofar as he is subject to appetites and subjective wants, this "I" gets lost, for these appetites do not reach down into the "I", and have no power to call it into life. Now this "I" is nothing other than the inwardness of the person.

### Obstacles to Inwardness

We have, then, found three obstacles to the inwardness of the person. This inwardness is weakened, first, by merely conventional acting; secondly by coercion; and finally, by being dominated by appetite and the merely agreeable. What do not — precisely do not — weaken or eliminate this inwardness, are the demands of right and wrong, for these demands have a power of eliciting this inwardness like nothing else has. Indeed, we discover the ultimate depth of our inwardness only in relation to these demands, for it is in conscience that we achieve this depth of inwardness, and conscience is nothing else but that spiritual organ which is sensitive to the demands of right and wrong.

You see, then, that the inwardness of the person, rightly understood, has no tendency to imply subjectivism, or to loosen in any way the relation between the person and the objective moral law. You see, in fact, that the very opposite is the case.

2. If we recall the Scholastic axiom, *agere sequitur esse*, "as a thing is, so it acts," we are led to the second aspect of the person which I want to discuss with you. If the acting proper to the person is acting through oneself, how must the being of the person be? What is that ultimate structure of being in the person which lets the person act through himself?

It seems to me that the answer which Karol Wojtyla has given to this question constitutes one of the most important parts of his personalistic anthropology. He answers with a principle first formulated by the Roman jurists: *persona est sui iuris*. "A person is a being of his own", or "A person is a being which exists in his own right." Rendering more freely into a



familiar idiom, we can say, "A person is an end in himself, he exists in a sense for his own sake." Wojtyla's preferred way of rendering it freely is this: the person is one who *belongs to himself*, or who *possesses himself*.

Only because the person is gathered into himself as one who belongs to himself and possesses himself, can he act through himself. If the person were so strongly integrated into his surroundings as to be a mere part of them, and were thus eliminated as a being *of his own*, he could not possibly act with the inwardness of which I was speaking, that is, he could not act through himself.

Let us try to find a revealing experience of our self-possession. We all know what it is to be in a conscious condition which is the very opposite of self-possession, namely in a condition of distraction and dispersion. In this condition we are lost in the things around us. Our inwardness is weakened, so that we lack a firm ground in ourselves on which to stand in dealing with the impressions which we receive and the experiences which we undergo. This weakening of our inwardness can, under certain circumstances, go very far, as when a person watches television in a very passive way. The glazed look on his face reveals the far-reaching loss of himself in that at which he is looking. Such a state of consciousness approaches a mere succession of impressions, in which memory in all its deeper forms tends to be extinguished, and the person tends to live completely in the present impression, and to be unable to take any spiritual distance to it. Such a person does not amount to a subject consciously facing some object. He cannot really originate any life and activity which is his own, but he rather tends to be borne along by what happens to him and what happens in him. It is clear that in this dispersed state of consciousness the person loses possession of himself, and tends, thereby, to be weakened as person.

### Coming to Center of One's Being

But in this condition of inner dispersion, a person has the power of what is expressively called *recollecting himself*. This means that he can come to himself. He can recover the center of his being. He can take a distance to what he experiences, and awaken to it. He can become a subject facing an objective world, and not just the shadow cast in consciousness by the objective world. In all this he comes alive as person, and revives as a being of his own. But what is this coming alive as person but a taking possession of himself? Before recollecting himself he was possessed by the objects of experience; now he deals with them out of his self-possession. We find in the experience of recollection exactly what we are looking for; in recollecting ourselves we experience self-possession, and we experience the fullness of personal life, and we experience the connection between the two. We experience this fullness as consisting in self-possession.

This is perhaps the place to report the observation of Josef Pieper (*The Philosophical Act*) that, according to the tradition of Western philosophy, the essence of *spirit* lies precisely in this self-possession. You see, then, why

I think that a philosophy and metaphysics of the person is capable of deepening our understanding of man as a spiritual being.

And yet despite this link with the tradition, I am sure that, with my reflection on recollection, I revive in some people the suspicion that I will, after all, not succeed in avoiding subjectivism. For it will be objected to me that a person is a person whether recollected or not, whether in full possession of himself or not. One will say that, by making so much of recollection in my account of the person, I make it difficult to understand how the embryo could be a person, since the embryo does not yet have a conscious life which could be more or less recollected. One will say that I have given up a metaphysical analysis of the person in favor of a merely psychological one.

I answer that of course the being of the person does not exhaust itself in conscious self-presence, and that of course a person belongs to himself no matter what his conscious condition, and, in fact, can exist even in the absence of any conscious life. My idea is simply that a person actualizes his personal being most fully in recollection, and that therefore personal being shows itself most clearly for what it is in and through recollected self-presence. Wojtyla has said much about the way in which the metaphysical structure of personal being shows itself in *Erleben*, in conscious self-presence. He warns against a dualism of metaphysical being, on the one hand, and consciousness, on the other, as if our metaphysical being were completely hidden from our conscious self-presence, or as if conscious self-presence were in no way formed by the metaphysical truth of our being. He is surely right to say that the basic structure of the person, who is *sui iuris* and belongs to himself, manifests itself in — does not exhaust itself in, but manifests itself in — consciousness.

### To See More Clearly

Those who want to see more clearly the continuity of our approach to the human person with the tradition of Western metaphysics, should consider that in talking of the person as belonging to himself, and acting through himself, we are in effect speaking of the *substantiality* of the person. For a substance is nothing but a being which exists not as the part or property of another, but on its own, standing in itself. My thesis, expressed in terms of substance, is simply that a being which is capable of recollection must have a particular perfection of substantiality, and such a being gives evidence of this perfection in a uniquely revealing way in the experience of recollecting itself.

You see, then, that there is no need to play off the experience of the person against the being of the person, and you see why Wojtyla and others think that the approach to the being of the person through the experience of the person ought to be cultivated more seriously than it has been cultivated in the Christian philosophical tradition.

But there is another objection which I have to face from the critics of



modern subjectivism. One will say that this self-possession of the person is just another name for the autonomy of the person, and that if you take autonomy to be one of the most significant facts about the person, you undermine all subsequent ethical analysis. For then you play right into the hands of those who say that since persons belong to themselves and are their own, they have to be understood primarily as holders of rights, such as a right over their bodies, or a right over their lives. Such rights are then taken as justifying say, a woman renting out her uterus as an incubator, or as justifying a suffering patient requesting a lethal injection.

My response is this. Just as the idea of an agent intellect was often understood in a pantheistic way in the middle ages, and was nevertheless retained by St. Thomas, who gave it a theistic interpretation, so the idea of the autonomy of the person has to be retained. Our task is to despoil it of the virulence of evil which it all too often has, and to make it fruitful for a true vision of the human person. Just a couple of thoughts on how this might be done.

a) We have to remember that though the person belongs to himself, he nevertheless does not exist through himself. He is not a divine being. He rather exists through God. But in existing through God, he comes to belong to God. Depending on God for existence, which is *de facto* relation, gives rise to belonging to God, a *de iure* relation. And so the human person, though as person he is his own, as creature is not his own, but is God's. There is in the human person a paradoxical unity of selfhood and dependency, of being anchored in himself and being anchored in God. The idea of the autonomy of the person can be made to serve and enrich the Christian understanding of man as long as it is not divinized, but keeps its place within this paradoxical unity.

I know of no better way to probe this unity of autonomy and theonomy, as it could be called, than by returning to the experience of recollection. It is no accident that almost all the accounts of recollection which we have are found in religious writers (recall, for instance, what authors such as Guardini and von Hildebrand have written on recollection). For as everyone with only a little experience of the religious life knows, nothing has such power to recollect as turning to God, and immersing ourselves in the ultimacy and absoluteness of God; in this encounter with God we return to ourselves, we recover ourselves, and retake possession of ourselves. In recollection we can "read" the creaturely character of our self-possession.

### **St. Thomas Expresses Unity**

This unity of autonomy and theonomy in the human person is expressed profoundly, though less experientially, by St. Thomas Aquinas in the important Chapter 111 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, where he explains why divine providence governs rational creatures for their own sake. In speaking of God exercising providence over man, and governing

him, he expresses the theonomy of the human person. In speaking of God governing man *for his own (that is, man's own) sake*, he expresses the autonomy of man as person.

You see, then, how we can despoil the Egyptians as we go out of Egypt, appropriating for our own purposes the autonomy of the human person. And once we accomplish this work of appropriation, we can speak of the autonomy of the person without making any least concessions in our ethical analyses. Thus for instance a suffering patient has no right to request a lethal injection, because as creature he is not in every respect his own; he would act impiously towards the one to whom he belongs by making the ultimate disposition over his life of directly ending his life.

b) One other thought on the fruitfulness of the concept of personal autonomy. In his profound study, *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla has tried to revision the love between man and woman in terms of the self-possession of the human person. His thought is that it is only because each person belongs to himself and is his own, that he can give himself away in a spousal way. If men and women were not *sui iuris*, there could be no spousal self-donation between them, nor could they perform the consent of marriage. There is no reason, but no reason at all, why the self-possession of the person should be explained merely in terms of rights which the person has; it should also be explained in terms of the power of self-donation which he has and which surely reveals his self-possession more fully than does his ability to be a right-holder.

Notice that we have found two ways in which the self-possession of the person underlies the acting of the person. It underlies all acting through himself, as we saw, and it underlies, as it were a second time, all such acting when it is the acting of spousal self-donation.

Now consider how fruitful it is for ethical analysis to think of the love of man and woman in terms of self-donation. John Paul thinks that we can, on this basis, show in a particularly convincing way the unity of the sexual union of spouses, and openness to procreation. His claim is that the sexual union of spouses, when it is sterilized and deprived of its procreative possibility, is gravely comprised as an expression of spousal self-donation, and is even turned into something opposed to self-donation; that the possibility of procreation must remain open if the spouses are to give themselves to each other without reserve and without deformation of their love. I do not mean to reproduce his whole analysis right now, but if he is right, then he has advanced an extremely attractive "personalist" argument in behalf of this difficult teaching of the Church. It is an argument based on spousal love as a self-donation of persons, and self-donation is, in turn, based on the self-possession of persons. You see then how erroneous is the view that persons, once recognized as having the autonomy of self-possession, can only become solitary, promethean beings.

And it is not just the question of artificial contraception which is illuminated by understanding the spousal union as a union of self-

donation. The issue of artificial fertilization is also illuminated. For if the spousal union had nothing to do with self-donation but were only say the exercise of "legalized lust", why would it be irreplaceable as the direct origin of a new human person? If it provided the spouses nothing but the relief of their concupiscence, what would be lost in the way of deep human meaning if one bypassed it as the direct source of a new human being and instead brought one into existence *in vitro*? Only because in the spousal union the spouses "make a sincere gift of themselves one to another," as the Council put it, and do not exploit each other for their own gratification, does it become a serious question whether this spousal union can ever be replaced by artificial means of fertilization. As I say, this self-donation is possible only in beings who have the autonomy of being *sui iuris* and of possessing themselves in the sense explained.

### Reflections Began on Person

We began our reflections on the person with the *acting* proper to the person, which, as we saw, is acting through oneself, and have proceeded to the *being* proper to one who can act in this way, which as we saw is the being of belonging to oneself and existing as an end in oneself.

3. I proceed now to the third aspect of personal being which I want to discuss with you, and that is the unrepeatability of the person. This, too, is an aspect of the person which, as far as I can see, has come into prominence only in recent centuries. It is, to my mind, a particularly significant aspect of the person, and deeply reveals to us man precisely as person.

Let us suppose a person who loves another. And let us suppose that it is proposed to this person that the beloved person be removed from his life for good, but at the same time be replaced by another person *just like* the beloved person. The one who loves will, of course, not accept the idea that he can continue to love the other in the same way after this exchange of persons. No less would he reject the proposal not just to replace the beloved with an equivalent person, but to improve on the beloved with a better person, as if he could love this new person with the same love with which he loved the previous person, only with the love having been made more ardent by the superiority of the new person. He will protest that he does not love an exemplar of certain repeatable traits, but this particular person, who is unrepeatable. Precisely the attitude of love for another makes us alive to this unrepeatability in persons.

This unrepeatability is too often identified with the unrepeatability of the genetic makeup of a human being, or of those traits of race, temperament, intelligence, etc., which depend on the genetic makeup of an individual. These traits are indeed woven together in a given individual in a way which is hardly ever repeated by other individuals, but this is only a relative unrepeatability; there is, after all, no absurdity in exactly these traits being repeated in exactly these interconnections in a second and a third individual, and indeed, this repeating is just what happens in the case

of identical twins. The unrepeatability of which we speak lies at a deeper level in a human being. It lies in the depths of his personal being; perhaps we could say that it is not a relative but an absolute unrepeatability.

Let us try to understand the absolute unrepeatability of the person in terms of the self-possession which we were just discussing. We begin by considering things which really are in a sense repeatable. Consider for example one of the millions of copies of today's newspaper; whatever it contains is almost entirely repeated by all the many other copies; it is nothing but the bearer of a content which is just as well borne by each of the millions of copies. If I should lose my copy, my loss can be entirely replaced by buying a new copy, so that the interest which I took in reading the first is exactly like, and perhaps even identically the same as, my interest in reading the second; for my interest has as its object simply "today's newspaper," and not this copy of it as distinct from that one, though of course my interest requires some individual copy or other. If each human person were related to "man" or to "the human person" as an individual newspaper is related to "today's newspaper"; if each human person were merely a copy of "the human person"; if each were a mere exemplar or specimen of it, then he would be abolished as person, and it would after all not be the human person who is instantiated by the individual. And why? Because as exemplar a human person would cease to be what we found him to be above in #2: he would cease to stand in himself and belong to himself and have a being of his own; his whole being would instead lie in the general type, "the human person," which would belong as much to all other human individuals which instantiate it as it belongs to himself. As exemplar, a human person would not be anchored in himself in the sense of being *sui iuris*, but would exist for the sake of that which he exemplifies. The truth is that a human person is no more a mere exemplar of a type than he is a mere instrumental means for realizing some result: his belonging to himself excludes the former no less than the latter. It follows that the human person must have his human nature, and much else which he has besides, as unrepeatably his own; he must be unrepeatably himself if he is to have that "being of his own" which we found above to belong to persons.

### A Remarkable Fact

With this we encounter one of the most remarkable facts about persons: we experience such an amazing *concreteness* in persons; most non-persons are by contrast experienced as *abstract*. This concreteness, this density and heaviness of existence, is nothing but an aspect of the unrepeatability of the person; it comes from the fact that the person is so strongly a being of his own, that he is never a mere exemplar of his kind, or of the attributes which he has. The abstractness of most non-persons comes from the fact that what we experience in them is not inseparably one with their concrete being but is a kind of general type which can as well be instantiated in other beings of the same kind.

We catch sight here for the first time of an all-important aspect of personal being, namely of the *worth* or *dignity* of the person. Precisely in grasping this concreteness of the person, we feel — we do not infer it but we spontaneously feel it, whether we want to or not — the worth of the person, and we feel a respect for the other, and even the beginnings of something like love for the other. It is no accident that I made my first approach to the unrepeatability of the person *through the experience of loving a person*. We can, of course, find worth and ontological dignity in the basic powers of the person, such as the power to understand and to choose freely; but it is above all when we experience these powers *as possessed by* a particular person that we strongly experience what we call the worth or dignity of the person.

This means that we should take care not to speak of the dignity of the person as if it were conferred from without by God, or as if it were intelligible only by directly setting the person in relation to God. Though this dignity is ultimately grounded in God, it is at the same time entirely intrinsic to the person, and grows out of the person at exactly that point at which the person is a being of his own. We do not have to get people to share our faith as a condition for understanding the dignity of the person. It is enough, at least for a start, if we can get them to listen more closely to their experience of persons.

One last thought on unrepeatability. It enables us to understand why it is that, though there are so many human persons, each one exists as if it were the only one, and never as merely “one among many”. If each human being merely exemplified the human species and the various excellences of which human beings are capable, it would follow that the more human beings there are, the more each would get reduced to insignificance in comparison to all the many others. But the person, through his unrepeatability, has in himself that which can never be reduced to insignificance by ever so many others.

As we have seen, this unrepeatability is understood precisely in terms of the belonging of the person to himself, which means that it belongs to the autonomy of the person. I suppose that those who are suspicious of all talk of the autonomy of the person will be surprised to find that the study of this autonomy does not just lead to a theory of the person as subject of rights, but leads into the depths of the being and the preciousness of the person.

### **Arguments for Immateriality**

Here we might make a brief mention of some of the arguments for the immateriality of the core of the person to which I referred above when I was reflecting on what it means to say that man is a spiritual being. Could it not be shown that no material being can act through itself in the sense in which the person acts through itself? That no material being can take possession of itself as persons can and must? That nothing material can have the unrepeatability which we have found in persons? Of course, the bodies of persons participate in various ways in the unrepeatability of the



person, but do they not have unrepeatability in a derived and secondary way? Is it not non-bodily and non-material being which is required as the primary "seat" of this unrepeatability? As I already said, these questions will have to remain only questions in this paper, but I did not want to omit at least a mention of them, and an indication of the direction in which, in my opinion, the answers to them lie.

Surely the unrepeatability of the person, even if developed only to the point to which we have developed it, can be made fruitful for the issues of bioethics which we want to study at this conference. On the basis of this unrepeatability, we understand better the unconditional respect which must be shown to all the persons involved in the use of the newest reproductive technology. We understand that it is not a morally indifferent matter *how* persons come into existence, but that the procreation of them must be appropriate to the unrepeatable personhood of each. If a new human being were just another specimen of the human species, and were related to the species in basically the same way any animal is related to its species, then what is so ethically disturbing about artificial methods of bringing a new human being into existence? Why would these methods be fundamentally more problematic with human beings than with animals? Indeed, what would be wrong with simply destroying defective specimens of the human species, if we were really dealing with specimens? There is an ethical issue here, because human beings are not specimens but persons, and as persons are unrepeatable. Of course I do not think that all the difficult ethical questions which might be asked about this reproductive technology can be easily answered by invoking the unrepeatability of persons, but this unrepeatability has to form the constant background of all our deliberations on these questions, otherwise we have no chance of reaching the truth about them.

To conclude. All Christians have to reject subjectivism. We all have to reject the doctrine, first formulated by the Greek sophist, Protagoras, that "man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." But in rejecting subjectivism, we must not reject the modern attention to and concern with the subjectivity of the person. For this turn to personal subjectivity can be deprived of its potential virulence of evil, and be transformed into a friend of philosophical realism, and be made to serve the development of a Christian humanism, and of Christian ethics.

### Reference

1. Address given at the Bay Area Conference on the Ethics of Human Reproduction, San Francisco, July 27-31, 1987.
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