

Person, Truth, and Freedom



Course FL2820 Second Cycle

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Person, Truth, and Freedom

Schema:

1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?
 2. The relation between truth and freedom
 3. Modern “scientism”: its history and implications
 4. The freedom to promise and to forgive
 5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism
 6. The truth and meaning of our mortality.
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Person, Truth, and Freedom

Bibliography:

(For the exam it will be necessary to read one of the books in bold)

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- S. Kampowski, *A Greater Freedom. Biotechnology, Love, and Human Destiny*, Oregon 2013.
- J. Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom”, *Communio* 23 (1996), pp. 16-35.
- **R. Spaemann, *Persons. The Difference between “Someone” and “Something”*, Oxford 2006.**
- E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago, 1951.
- **K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, Dordrecht, 1979.**

1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

For what follows cf. R. Spaemann, Persons, chapters 1 and 2)

How do we usually use the word “person”?

- **1. Numerical use:** “we are expecting eight persons for dinner” – abstract and impersonal
 - **2. Attributive use:** “This being is a person.” – one already has to know the qualities – *nomen dignitatis*
 - **3. Theatrical use:** the “persons of the drama”: the roles that are interpreted by the actors.
 - **4. Grammatical use:** first, second, third person
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What do we learn from these uses?

- The word person does not serve to describe and identify certain characteristics of a thing.
 - There is no quality that is called “being a person”. Rather, “person” describes the bearer of certain qualities.
 - We attribute a dignity to whom we attribute this word.
 - At times we use the word only to identify quantities without any other determination.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

I. Theatre

- Lat. *persona*; Greek: *prosopon*: “to sound through”:
 - the **mask** of the one reciting a role
 - the **role** recited
 - the social role, **social status**
- In contrast to today’s meaning, the person is not what is behind the role, making possible the interpretation, but the role itself.
- That what was behind the role for the ancients was “nature.” Antiquity did not know a return behind nature.



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

II. Grammar

- Latin grammarians used the word “person” to identify the three different speech situations:
 - the person who speaks
 - the person to whom one speaks
 - the person about whom one speaks
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

III. Roman jurisprudence

- The word “person” identifies a particular social status:
 - the free man in contrast to the slave
 - all men in contrast to animals or things.
 - Slaves were “*personae alieno juri subiectae*” in contrast to the free who were “*personae sui juris*”.
 - The ancient use of the word:
 - defines human beings not as exemplars of a species
 - but as bearers of a social role or owners of a social status.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

IV. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- Jesus affirms to be one with the Father.
 - St. John directly calls the *Logos*—who became flesh in Jesus—“God.”
 - Jesus calls God “his Father”; in prayer the Father is his interlocutor.
 - The New Testament speaks of God’s *Pneuma* who is poured out on man through Christ.
 - How can one think the oneness of God in a way to reconcile it with the difference between Father, Son, and *Pneuma*, understood as internal difference in God himself?
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

IV. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- This internal differentiation cannot be thought of as qualitative, as if the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were *something* different from one other.
 - In the Christian conception, the *Logos* is not something different (ἕτερον), but another (ἕτερος), distinct from the Father only by the asymmetry of the relation:
 - The Father generates the Son, not the Son the Father.
 - The Spirit is spirated by the Father and the Son.
 - The difference is only in the relations, not in the qualities.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

IV. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- At the origin of the notion of person in theology is prosopographical exegesis, a form of literary interpretation that has its roots in antiquity.
 - The ancient poet created different roles to make the story more dramatic by telling it in the form of a dialogue.
 - In their reading of Scripture, the Church Fathers have found something similar.
 - Here, too, the story is told in a dialogical way.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

IV. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- Examples of biblical accounts that are related in dialogical form:
 - “Let us make man in our image” (*Gen 1:26*).
 - “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand’” (*Ps 110:1*).
 - Justin Martyr (103-165): The dialogical roles introduced by the prophets are not mere literary devices.
 - The “roles” really exist.
 - Tertullian (155 – 240) (*Adversus Praxean*): “For himself exists the one who speaks, namely, the Spirit; further the Father to whom he speaks, and finally the Son of whom he speaks.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

IV. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- The grammarian’s concept of person prescind from the differences among the persons.
 - The persons are distinct only by their relative position in a linguistic situation.
 - “One essence, three persons” becomes the orthodox Christian formulation.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

V. Christology

- How to think of Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of the eternal divine *Logos* and at the same time as true man?
 - Jesus has two “natures,” the divine and the human one.
 - These two natures are united “unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably” by the fact that they are both possessed by the same person:
 - The Council of Chalcedon’s (451) definition of the “hypostatic union” (*hypostasis* is Greek for “person”).
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The history of the word “person”

V. Christology

- This person is the divine person, the very person who relates to the divine essence in the way of “owning” or “possessing” it.
 - Because the proper name “Jesus” does not refer to an essence but to “someone,” that is, to a person that is the bearer of a nature, it is possible to say that
 - Jesus is God and that
 - Mary is *Theotokos*, the one who gives birth to God.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Conclusions and Prospects

- The person is the bearer of a nature.
 - But the person is not something opposed to or beyond his or her nature.
 - “Person” is the concrete and individual way in which rational natures exist (cf. the definition of Boethius that will follow shortly).
 - This remains true even if this rational nature is not yet fully developed or if this full development is impeded by external factors.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Conclusions and Prospects

- The person is the “who” that possess his or her “what.”
 - Therefore there is always a certain non-identity between *who* human persons are and *what* they are.
 - Human beings are never fully what they are.
 - Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), *Pensées*, 434: «Man infinitely transcends man.»
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Conclusions and Prospects

- The person is the origin of the single individual more originally than his nature is:
 - not in the sense that the individual did not have a nature or that he could decide freely on what he is,
 - but in the sense of being able to take position in front of this nature.
 - For example: only persons can freely give their lives.
 - Their life is their existence, their very being.
 - It is not something different from themselves.
 - They can nonetheless relate to it and therefore relate to themselves.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

We will now give six evidences for the peculiar mode of existence proper to persons as beings who

- transcend themselves,
 - possess themselves,
 - take a stance toward everything they are,
 - relate themselves to themselves.
 - Relation presupposes difference.
 - There can be a self-relation only if there is an internal difference within the self:
 - the difference between who and what
 - Persons are never completely what they are.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

I. The sayings of the poets

- Sarastus (Magic Flute): “Who does not rejoice in these teachings does not merit to be a man.”
 - Pindar (518-438 a.C. circa): “Become what you are”.
 - How is it possible for us to understand these sayings?
 - A human being is a human being as a lion is a lion – is he not?
 - Can one *merit* or *demerit* being what one already is?
 - Can one *become* what one already is?
 - Affirming these questions means to presuppose an internal difference within the human person who relates to his nature and can make it flourish more fully or can cause it to degenerate.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

II. The use of the personal pronoun “I”

- Who says “I” exists.
 - There is no doubt about the referent of “I”, even if someone were to forget everything about himself.
 - “I” refers to a who that says “I”, independent of anything else he is.
 - For the referent of the pronoun “I” to be sufficiently determined, it is not necessary to specify it with *any quality whatsoever*.
 - There is an internal difference between the “who” (the referent of the word “I”) and the “what” (the referent of all words indicating qualities).
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

II. a. Is the person perhaps an “I”?

- No. It is not without reason that someone waking up from amnesia asks, “Who am I?”, “Where am I?”
- David Sparti: “The use of the expression ‘I’ does not explain [human] identity any more than a disoriented mountaineer explains his position to his rescuers by indicating that he is ‘here.’”



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

II. a. Is the person perhaps an “I”?

- The person awaking from a coma presupposes that he is not only an “I,” but someone made in a certain way, who finds himself in a certain place in the world.
 - As soon as someone has consciousness, he knows that he is not only consciousness.
 - The who and the what are not two things. The who is the way in which the what exists.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

III. The necessity of integration (C. G. Jung 1875-1961)

- Persons can distance themselves from certain qualities, desires, impulses.
 - They can dislike what they are.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

III. The necessity of integration (C. G. Jung 1875-1961)

- They can desire to modify themselves.
 - No-one is simply and strictly what he is.
 - Self-acceptance is a process that pre-supposes non-identity and must be understood as deliberate acquisition of the non-identical, i.e., as “integration.”
 - There is a difference between the “who” and the “what.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

IV. “Second order volitions” (Harry Frankfurt *1929)

- Persons can desire to have or not to have certain desires.
- The lion will desire the beef steak even on Good Friday.
- He will not evaluate the appropriateness of his desires in a given context or in any other way relate himself to them.
- He will just act on them.



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

IV. “Second order volitions” (Harry Frankfurt *1929)

- Human persons, too, may desire a beef steak on Good Friday.
 - But they can relate to their desire.
 - They can desire not to desire the beef steak.
 - They do not only evaluate the things that correspond to their desires, but they even evaluate their desires themselves.
 - There is an internal difference between “who” and “what.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

V. Language

- In order to be able to speak, one needs to take on an “eccentric position” (H. Plessner, 1892-1985), anticipating the point of view of the listener.
 - When someone says, “I feel pain,” this affirmation is not a way of screaming by other means.
 - I can speak of my pain only because the pain is something I *have*; it is not something I *am*.
 - The same holds true for every other characteristic of mine.
 - To be able to speak, I need to be able to distance myself from myself and look at the reality of my life from the perspective of the other.
 - There is an internal difference between the “who” and the “what.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

VI. The Idea of Metamorphosis

- In fictional literature we encounter the phenomenon of metamorphosis.
- How is it even possible to *think* of a man becoming a cockroach (Kafka) or of a woman becoming a tree (the myth of Apollo and Daphne)?
- How can we even ask what it is like to be a bat (Th. Nagel)?
- Any change that is not substantial change (generation or corruption) requires a principle of unity.



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

VI. The Idea of Metamorphosis

- How can we even think of Daphne *becoming* a tree, i.e.,
 - not of Daphne ending and
 - a tree beginning to exist,
 - but of Daphne *becoming* that tree, which no longer has any characteristics in common with Daphne?
 - We think of something in Daphne that is irreducible to her qualities.
 - For the literary figure of metamorphosis to be intelligible at all, we need to make the distinction between “who” and “what.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The Definition of Boethius (476-525)

- “Persona est naturae rationabilis individua substantia / subsistentia –
 - A person is the individual substance of a rational / reasonable nature” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*).
 - In what follows we will examine each term of this definition.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- Etymologically, “nature” comes from Latin “natus,” “being born”.
 - A first use of the word “nature” stays close to this etymology:
 - “Let’s go to the nature park.”
 - “This dish has only got natural ingredients.”
 - “Natural” is that which has remained as it was born, untouched by human hands.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- It is thus “natural” for lions to eat zebras.
- Lions are “born this way.”
- But what about the zebra?



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- While we may say that it is the natural course of things for some animals to eat other animals, we’d hesitate to say that it is “natural” for the zebra to be eaten by the lion.
- In addition, we’d hesitate to call “natural” everything that is as it is born.



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- If we hesitate to call the zebra’s being eaten by the lion “natural,” and if we’d refuse to say that a two-headed turtle is “natural,” then we do so because we still have a second concept of nature.
 - It is not natural for the zebra to be eaten by the lion.
 - The zebra’s death frustrates all the characteristic *ends* of its nature.
 - Inasmuch as “nature” indicates a being’s ends, it is a normative concept.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- In fact, for Aristotle, nature is both a formal and a final cause.
 - It indicates what a being is and what it is meant to become.
 - *Politics* I, 1, 1252b: “Nature is an end, since that which each thing is when its growth is completed we speak of as being the nature of each thing.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- Hence nature is
 - a being’s dynamic principle of characteristic actions and reactions; the totality of the characteristics and ends of a thing that are inherent in it from “birth.”
 - a being’s formal cause: it makes the thing be what it is.
 - a being’s final cause: it is also a task, something to be realized to the full.
 - Where do we have to look in order to know the nature of a being?
 - We look at an exemplar that is fully developed.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “nature”?

- Nature is not only a formal but also a final concept.
- It is a teleological term.
- The end of the lion is the full development of its lion nature, of all that it means to be a lion.



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “rational” nature?

- It is a nature that has the capacity for self-reflection, for thought, for language.
 - This capacity is intrinsic to the rational nature, even if the capacity should not yet, not any more, or never manifest itself.
 - The capacity for self-reflection, for thought, language, self-governance and self-determination is a substantial capacity of every rational nature that exists individually.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a “rational” nature?

- A substantial capacity: it is a substantial condition for the realization of a certain event.
 - It is a disposition in the substance that is defined by the event even in absence of the end.
 - Mozart can play the piano even in absence of a musical instrument.
 - A dog can bark even if it does not now bark or cannot now bark because it is now fast asleep.
 - A person who has never learned how to play the piano, in contrast, has no substantial capacity to play the piano, even if one is there.
 - Similarly, a bird, has no substantial capacity to bark, even if it is awake.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

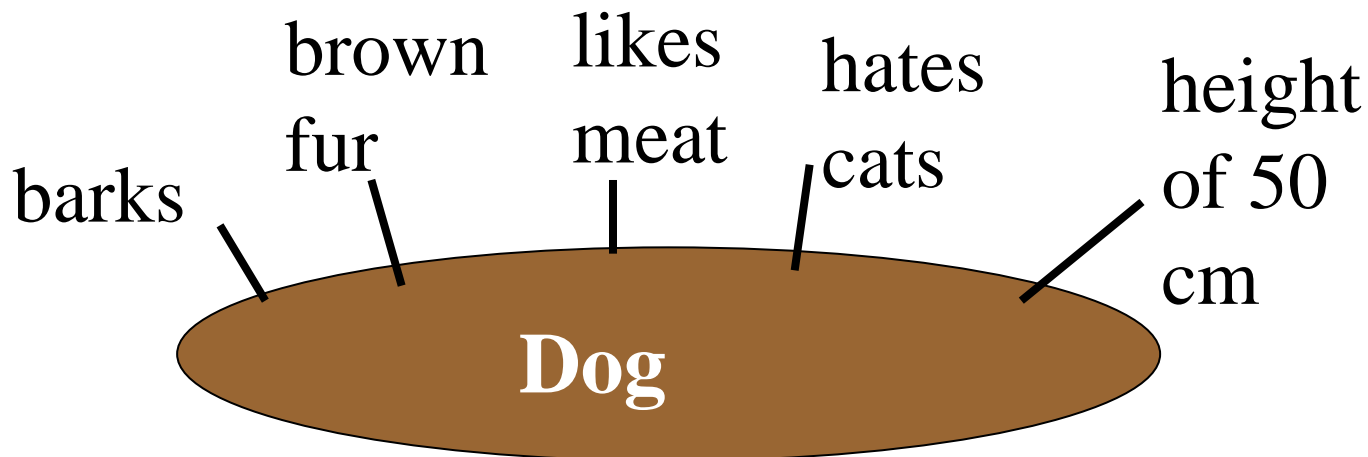
What is a “rational” nature?

- For a substantial capacity to be realized, the presence of a number of accidental conditions needs to be given.
 - For Mozart: to play, he will need a piano.
 - For the dog: to bark, he will need to be healthy and awake.
 - A person will always be a rational being, even if on account of circumstances, he or she is not now able to exercise and manifest his or her rationality.
 - To be a person, it is enough to subsist in a rational nature.
 - It is not necessary to actualize all the potentialities of this nature.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- Literally, it is that which “stands under.”
- Modern philosophy first proposes a completely distorted of the idea of “substance,” and then finds it easy to argue against its existence.
- For instance, John Locke *falsely* thinks the idea of “substance” refers to a sort of “pin cushion”:



1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- A substance is not a mystical substratum that one does not see; an invisible “stuff” or a kind of pin cushion that one can do without.
 - It is not a quality apart from a thing’s characteristics: one cannot think of a cat without its color.
 - A dog is not something apart from its height.
 - Substance “stands under” in a different sense.
 - It is that which perdures in an accidental change.
 - It is impredicable: it is not predicated of other things, but other “things” – the accidents – are predicated of it.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- S. Tommaso, *De veritate*, I, 1: “Substantiae exprimitur specialis quidam modus essendi, scilicet per se ens – Substance expresses a special mode of being, namely to be for itself.”
 - A substance has its own act of existence.
 - “Substance” refers to a particular mode of being.
 - It is an individual being that exists in itself and not in another.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- Why does Boethius speak of “individual substance” if “being an individual” is part of the definition of “substance”?
 - Boethius speaks of “individual substance” to indicate that he speaks of
 - “first substance,” i.e., precisely an individual
and not of
 - “second substance,” which is a universal.
 - Only the “first substance” exists in itself.
 - The “second substance” has a different mode of existence: it exists in reason.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- “Person” is the mode in which a rational nature exists when it exists as an individual (and not as a being of thought).
 - But all first substances exist, by definition, as individuals.
 - The lion, too, exists as individual.
 - Why do substances of a rational nature receive a special name, the name “person”?
 - What is so special about them?
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

What is a substance?

- St. Thomas: “In a more special and perfect way, the particular and the individual are found in the rational substances which have dominion over their own actions; and which are not only made to act, like others; ...
 - Therefore also the individuals of the rational nature have a special name even among other substances; and this name is ‘person’” (*Sth* I, 29, 1).
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The definition of Richard of Saint Victor († 1173):

- “Persona existens per se solum juxta singularem quamdam rationalis existentiae modum –
 - “The person is an existent that exists for itself in the singular mode of a rational existence”.
 - He criticizes Boethius: “Person” cannot mean “substance”.
 - Richard: the person is not a “substance”, but the bearer of a “substance”.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

The definition of Richard of Saint Victor († 1173):

- In his criticism of Boethius, Richard of Saint Victor thinks of substance in terms of “essence” or nature.
 - But Boethius did not use the term in this sense.
 - By “substance” he meant an individual mode of existing or “subsistence”.
 - In *Contro Eutychem et Nestorium*, III, Boethius says within the space of 20 lines:
 - “[Persona est] naturae rationabilis individuum substantia” and then:
 - “[Persona est] naturae rationabilis individuum subsistentiam”.
 - The person is the mode in which rational natures exist when they exist concretely or «individually» (and not only in thought).
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Do persons form a class?

- No.
 - Personhood is a mode of existence. It is not a qualitative entity: existence, not essence.
 - According to St. Thomas, “person” is not strictly speaking a concept, but rather a name: the name for a vague individual, an undetermined individual.
 - *Sth* I, 30, 4: “this name ‘person’ is common by a community of idea, not as genus or species, but as a vague individual thing. ... this name ‘person’ is not given to signify the individual on the part of the nature, but the subsistent reality in that nature.”
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Do persons form a class?

- Spaemann: “Person” is not a genus, but a general proper name.
 - In absence of a proper name (John, Martha...) we use the general proper name (“person”).
 - “Person” is the name we use to refer to a being that is so individual that it can never be adequately described.
 - No description absolves us from calling this being by name.
-

1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

Do persons form a class?

- To refer to John adequately , we need to say, “John” and not “the guy with the hat”, or “the old man over there” .
 - All this is not enough because he is much more than this:
 - A being that transcends all its qualities
 - An individual in the strict sense that possesses itself and transcends itself.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

- Why do we use a general proper name only for individuals existing in a *rational* nature?
 - Because these individuals find themselves in a relation to their nature that is different from the way other individuals relate to their nature.
 - Individuals of a rational nature are not only “cases of”.
 - St. Thomas: Persons “have dominion over their own actions”, they “are not only made to act, like others; but ... can act of themselves” (*Sth* I, 29, 1).
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

- Their actions do not simply derive from their nature.
 - Things don't just happen through them, as is the case in other beings. Rather, they act in relation to themselves.
 - They are free.
 - Nature is a principle (i.e., origin) of specific action and reaction.
 - With the idea of the person the single individual is thought of as being more originally at its proper origin.
 - Not in the sense that these individuals don't have any nature or that they'd need to freely decide who they are, but in the sense that they can relate to their nature.
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1. What does it mean to speak about “persons”?

- They can freely make the essential laws of their nature their own or they can violate these laws and “degenerate”.
 - Inasmuch as they are rational beings, they cannot be denominated only as members of their species but as individuals who “exist in this nature”.
 - This means that they exist as persons.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

Why is the question of truth important?

- The openness to truth contradistinguishes the human person as a free being.
- There is a connection between truth and freedom.
- For there to be freedom, there needs to be a truth about our willing, a truth about the good.
- Only the one who does what he or she really wants can be said to be free.
- Who does what he or she does not want to do, is not free.
- Who thinks to do what he or she wants to do but does not really want it, is not free.

2. The relation between truth and freedom

- Do we ever make the experience of making a mistake about what we really want?
 - If so, then there needs to be a criterion for why we can say, this is what we really want, this is what we did not want.
 - There will need to be a truth of our willing, a truth about the good, which one can get right or wrong.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- How can one be willing wrong?
 - We make **technical mistakes**. Those who are ill-informed about important matters touching their choices are not free.
 - There is a connection between truth and freedom.
 - We make **moral mistakes**: sins. We make the experience of *repentance* thereafter.
 - When we acted, we did what we thought we wanted, but afterwards what we did pains us and we would like to distance ourselves from it
 - Our willing admits of truth and falsity.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- How can one one's willing wrong?
 - We make the experience of being disillusioned by the things we wanted and obtained.
 - We are disillusioned by finite things as such.
 - Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) distinguishes
 - the *willing will*, which desires the infinite from
 - the *willed will*, which desires the concrete things of earth (*Action*).
 - The moment of disillusionment tells me: I wanted, I obtained, and I did not really want, but I wanted more.
 - There is a truth about our desires.
Something we really want, and something we just seemingly want.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- If we can make mistakes about what we want, then there has to be a truth about what we want.
 - A mistake is possible only where there is a criterion.
 - There is a truth about our willing, a truth about the good.
 - K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*: We are free because we depend on the truth.
 - The will has the capacity to respond to goods, to have motives, and to let itself be motivated by goods.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- The responses presuppose a “a reference to truth and not only a reference to the objects which elicit it” (Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*).
- The dependence on truth “makes will independent of objects and their presentation, and grants the person that ascendancy over his own dynamism which we have here described as the transcendence in action” (Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*).
- Persons transcend themselves in the act inasmuch as their act is not only the result of the dynamisms of their human nature (their inclinations).

2. The relation between truth and freedom

- Freedom means dependence on truth.
 - Freedom means the capacity to have reasons and to be guided by reasons.
 - Why do I let myself be motivated by this good and not by another?
 - It is not on account of a causal dynamism, but on account of reasons, on account of a truth to which I am open.
 - Freedom is openness to truth, capacity for truth.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

What else could “freedom” mean?

- **Karl Marx** (1818-1883): Freedom is the possibility “for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (*German ideology*).
 - How free is such a will?
 - Is an irrational freedom really free?
 - **The Reformation**: Freedom is the freedom of conscience from the authority of the Church.
 - What saves us the completely personal faith in Christ.
 - Redemption is the liberation from the oppression from any organizational structure that goes beyond the individual.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

What else could “freedom” mean?

- **I. Kant:** *sapere aude*: dare think for yourself.
 - Freedom is the vindication of the individual with respect to any authority.
 - Freedom is the freedom of the individual.
 - The institution is opposed to freedom.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- The radicalization of this logic is achieved in **existentialism**.
 - The human being is radically free.
 - **Existence precedes essence.**
 - I am the product of my choices and nothing else.
 - Human persons decide about themselves.
 - There is no nature. The human person decides what “humanity” is supposed to mean.
 - **J.-P. Sartre (1905-1980):** the choice is radical in the sense that there are no criteria.
 - Existentialism alone takes human beings seriously.
 - In every choice I am responsible for all of humanity.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- Example: during the second world war and the German occupation of France, a young Frenchman addresses Sartre with a question.
 - Should he join the French Resistance or stay with his mother, who needs him?
 - According to Sartre, there are no criteria.
 - The young man will have to make a leap, jump.
 - No one can help him.
 - He is left alone. The choice is radical.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- Charles Taylor (1931): Sartre's example shows the contrary of what he intended it to prove.
 - There is a moral dilemma.
 - But why?
 - There is only a moral dilemma because there are two strong moral claims that confront the young Frenchman.
 - These moral claims were not created by any radical choice of his.
 - If the claims were created by the man's radical choice, he could have a grave dilemma of whether to go take an ice cream or go to the cinema.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- The young Frenchman could just as well choose that his mother is not very important, freeing himself from the dilemma.
 - If all this seems absurd to us, then because we evaluate things prior to our choices.
 - We choose something because it is important to us.
 - We do not choose that something is important to us.
 - Existentialism: any value, any importance in life derives from our choice.
 - I choose that something is important to me.
 - There is no nature; there are no goods that are given.
-

2. The relation between truth and freedom

- Existentialism:
 - My choice is not a response to a good or value, but rather the producing of a good or value.
 - But such a concept of freedom has a great problem:
 - the problem of the criteria for our choices.
 - Why does human freedom choose this rather than that?
 - The fact is that human beings have the most diverse desires?
 - Is there any way to say that a given desire is good or bad?
 - If there is nothing pre-given, then there is not criterion on the basis of which to say that one course of action or one desire is better than another.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- The very terms “good”, “bad”, “better,” “worse” would lose any kind of sense, since they presuppose a being for whom things are good or bad, better or worse: a being that has a given nature.
 - In absence of any given ends, it would be impossible to give a rational justification of our choices, because any criteria that would allow us to do so would be abolished.
 - For existentialism what counts is not what is chosen, but how it is chosen.
 - One needs to choose authentically.
 - With the idea of authenticity at least one last remaining “good” is tacitly reintroduced.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

- It is not important *what* I will, but only *that* I will.
 - That there is no criterion for what one chooses is acknowledged as something that leads to absurdity and arbitrariness, which are affirmed as such.
 - At the summit of the will willing itself to will, for the existentialist Albert Camus (1913-1960) the greatest problem for philosophy becomes why not to commit suicide.
 - The ultimate consequence is nihilism.
 - Without the truth, freedom has no direction or measure.
 - The liberation from the truth does not produce freedom but abolishes freedom.
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2. The relation between truth and freedom

What is truth?

A. The correspondence theory of truth

- St. Thomas Aquinas: “veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus” - “Truth is the conformity of thing and intellect” (*De veritate*, I, 1).
 - Truth is the relation of correspondence between things and the intellect.
 - Presuppositions:
 - Our intellect is open to reality.
 - Reality is open to being known: things are “true,” i.e. intelligible.
-

2. The relation between truth and freedom

A. The correspondence theory of truth

- The human speculative intellect is judged by things.
 - The divine intellect judges things.
 - The truth of a being is the design God has for it.
 - The truth is always a relation between things and the intellect.
 - “If, by an impossible supposition, intellect did not exist and things did continue to exist, then the idea [*ratio*] of truth would in no way remain” (St. Thomas, *De veritate*, I, 2).
-

2. The relation between truth and freedom

B. The coherence theory (for instance Francis Herbert Bradley 1846-1924)

- A proposition is true if it is coherent with all other propositions that are reasonably to be affirmed.
 - Reality is no longer the criterion of truth.
 - Truth is no longer understood as a relation between intellect and reality, but as a relation between propositions, i.e., as a logical relation.
-

2. The relation between truth and freedom

C. The pragmatic theory of truth (for instance William James, 1842-1910).

- True is what works.
- If Newtonian science has brought us to the moon, then it is true.
- Richard Rorty (1931-2007): Truth is solidarity.

2. The relation between truth and freedom

D. Logical positivism (for instance A.J. Ayer, 1910-1989)

- “The principle of verification”.
 - “A proposition is meaningful if and only if it is empirically verifiable or if it is a tautology.”
- There are two kinds of propositions with meaning:
 - Empirical propositions
 - ✓ “The stone weighs five pounds”
 - Analytical propositions – tautologies
 - ✓ “All bachelors are single.” “A circle is round.”

2. The relation between truth and freedom

D. Logical positivism (for instance A.J. Ayer, 1910-1989)

- The proposition “God exists” is not empirically verifiable and not analytical either.
- It is not false, but rather unintelligible, not meaningful, similar to “Saturday stays in bed.”



2. The relation between truth and freedom

A criticism of logical positivism

- “A proposition is meaningful if and only if it can be verified empirically or if it is a tautology.”
 - This affirmation is itself a proposition.
 - It does not purport to be a tautology but claims to say something useful and add a new insight.
 - How can it be verified empirically?
 - ✓ It cannot be verified empirically.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

Scientism

- Scientism is a cultural current that has survived the critique of logical positivism, despite its philosophical inconsistency.
 - Scientism has two central elements:
 - The principle of verification: only what is measurable is knowable.
 - The technological imperative: what can be done must be done.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

What does scientism mean for the objects of our knowledge?

- Many things commonly given in our everyday experience would not strictly speaking be knowable:
 - Love
 - Faithfulness
 - The great questions of meaning
 - Limit situations (*Grenzsituationen*: death, guilt, suffering, cf.: Karl Jaspers, 1883-1969).
 - Metaphysics
 - There could not be a truth of our willing. The good is not knowable.
 - Thus the very possibility of freedom disappears.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- How is it possible for a current that so greatly contradicts our experience and that is counter-intuitive to be nonetheless quite widespread?
 - There are some events that may shed light on these cultural developments.
 - In what follows, we will present some of the historical roots of pervasive scientism.
 - For some of these: cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958.
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3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- In antiquity and in medieval times people placed great trust in human reason.
 - Human reason was considered able of getting into contact with ultimate reality.
 - St. Thomas' Five Ways:
 - In the world the traces of God the Creator can be found.
 - Reality is open to being known.
 - Visible reality speaks of the invisible.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- Modernity is characterized by a great mistrust in reason and the senses.
 - The central question is no longer about what is the case (being), but about what are the conditions for knowing.
 - The central issue is about certainty.
 - The question of philosophy is no longer
 - “Is it true?”
but
 - “What can I know?”
 - One passes from the reign of metaphysics to the reign of epistemology as principal philosophical discipline.
 - For modernity philosophy *is* epistemology.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- What does an epoch's desire for certainty tell us about the epoch?
- It is an epoch plagued with doubt.
- There is doubt in the religious realm: for Luther (1483-1546) I am saved only if I have the *certainty* of being saved.
- Descartes (1596-1650) feels the need to prove the existence of the material world by means of the idea of God (*Meditations*, VI).
- “Cogito ergo sum” – I can at least be sure of my thought.
- Where does this obsession with certainty come from?

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- The one who is obsessed with certainty is usually someone who has made the experience of having been deceived.
 - Modernity starts with events that made people to feel like the victims of a great deception.
 - Which events might have been at the root of the epistemological crisis in Europe at the dawn of modernity?
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- There was the discovery of the Americas in 1492.



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- There were the religious wars in Europe from 1524 to 1648.



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- There was the invention of the telescope (Hans Lippershey, 1608) and the cosmological discoveries that it permitted.
 - Galileo Galilei (1564-1646) improved on the telescope and gave definitive proof of the fact that the earth was not at the center of the universe.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- The heavenly bodies are made up of the same stuff as earthly realities.
 - There is no celestial hierarchy.
 - The earth revolves around the sun.
 - Our senses deceive us. They do not put us into contact with reality.
 - Reality does not reveal itself, but hides.
 - Knowledge could no longer be understood as a union between the knower and what is known.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- Two ways of arriving at some kind of certainty remained open:
 - Mathematics
and
 - The experiment
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

Mathematics

- Instead of studying *things*, one can study *relations*, which are completely independent from the real existence of objects.
- One can engage in mathematical research and be completely certain about its results, even if one is not certain about the real existence of the material world.
- **Two** real apples **plus two** real apples **are four** real apples, just as **two** imagined apples **plus two** imagined apples **are four** imagined apples.
- Here is the root of the reduction of science to mathematics, the new queen of the sciences.

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

The experiment

- It is not the same as experience.
- It is a practical test to verify how a given thing acts and reacts under certain conditions set by the scientist.
- It is a test created by the scientist to extract nature's secrets.
- Francis Bacon (1561-1626): "The secrets of nature reveal themselves better through harassments applied by the arts than when they go their own way."
- What are the secrets of nature? The mathematical laws that constitute things.

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- The experimental mode of getting to know presents itself as objective, neutral, and universal.
- The experiment must be repeatable by any person in any place.
- But is never completely possible to bracket the person's subjectivity.
- Even in the most neutral forms of scientific research, there is always the subject that expresses his or her desires.
- Research is motivated.
- The answers are already prejudged by the questions.

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679): To know a thing is to “imagine what we can do with it, when we have it.”
- The perfect experiment is the production of a thing: only a *factum* is a *verum*.
- Francis Bacon: knowledge is power, the power to produce.
- Knowledge is know-how, i.e., knowing how to produce things.
- Since science needs the experiment to verify its hypotheses, knowledge can not be thought of without practical application.
- Science as theory is impossible.

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

- The problem is this: in the end, all we know is whether our experiments work or not.
- Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) expresses the following concern:
- Given that it is always the scientist who establishes the conditions of the experiment, there is the risk that perhaps the results
- “may have nothing to do with either the macrocosmos or the microcosmos,” but that
- “we deal only with the patterns of our own mind, the mind which designed the instruments and put nature under its conditions in the experiment” (*Human Condition*, 286-87).

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

Critique of scientism

A qualification of that which follows:

- The scientific method as such, if seen as a method applicable in its specific realm and not as an instrument to explain all of reality, is valid and has undeniable merits.
 - The following criticism is not against science but against scientism.
 - Technological progress has produced undeniable benefits.
 - At the same time, however, it cannot serve as human destiny.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

1. The inconsistency of scientism when it is affirmed as a universal principle:

- One cannot use the method itself to establish that it is the only method to arrive at valid knowledge.
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3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

2. While scientism negates that belief and trust are authentic modes of knowledge, experience shows that in fact they are.

a. It is impossible to verify everything personally.

- John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 31: “There are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification.”



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

2. While scientism negates that belief and trust are authentic modes of knowledge, experience shows that in fact they are.

a. It is impossible to verify everything personally.

- “Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based? ...
 - “This means that the human being—the one who seeks the truth—is also the one who lives by belief” (*FR* 31).
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

2. While scientism negates that belief and trust are authentic modes of knowledge, experience shows that in fact they are.

b. The search for truth requires a common commitment of friendship, which implies a relation of trust.

- *Fides et ratio*, n. 33: “Reason ... needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship.”



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

2. While scientism negates that belief and trust are authentic modes of knowledge, experience shows that in fact they are.

b. The search for truth requires a common commitment of friendship, which implies a relation of trust.

- “A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical enquiry” (FR 33).
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

3. Descartes reaction (“de omnibus dubitandum est”) was excessive.

- The error was not in our senses, but in our interpretation of the data provided by our senses.



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

4. Descartes' ideal of certain knowledge is itself mistaken

- “De omnibus dubitandum est” will never get me at a single certainty.
 - Our knowledge always implies an exercise of our freedom that entrusts itself to the evidence and overcomes every doubt.
 - In our access to reality (=in our capacity for truth), a free act of recognition will always be necessary at some point.
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

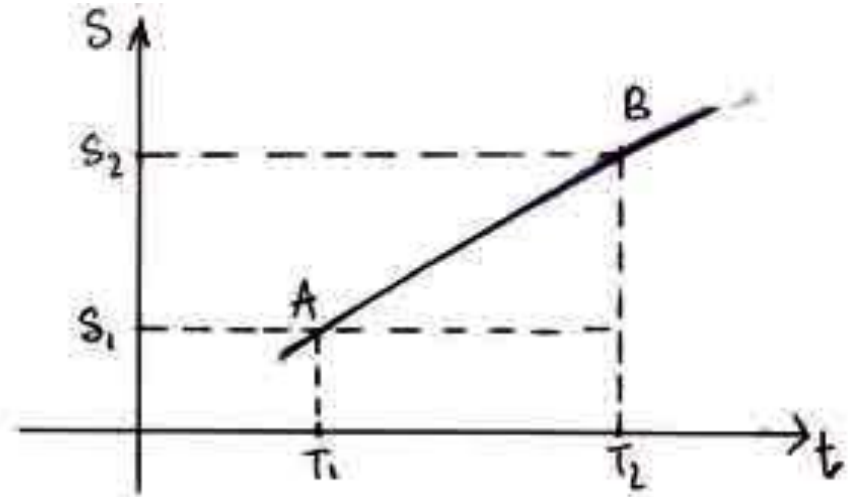
5. The human desire for ultimate truth, for a final meaning speaks to us about the presence of this truth.

- *Fides et ratio*, n. 29:
 - “It is unthinkable that a search so deeply rooted in human nature would be completely vain and useless.
 - “The capacity to search for truth and to pose questions itself implies the rudiments of a response.
 - “Human beings would not even begin to search for something of which they knew nothing or for something which they thought was wholly beyond them.
 - Only the sense that they can arrive at an answer leads them to take the first step.”
-

3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

6. The impossibility for mathematics to know movement and with that to know living beings, organisms (cf. H. Jonas, “Is God a Mathematician?”)

- To deal with movement, mathematics uses calculus.
- With this method mathematics deals with moving beings as if they were standing still.
- Every moment of time is correlated with a point in space.



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

6. The impossibility for mathematics to know movement and with that to know living beings, organisms (cf. H. Jonas, “Is God a Mathematician?”)

- Movement is looked at as in a cartoon.
- One image follows upon another.
- In this way one avoids having to speak about finality (teleology).
- But to think of movement without thinking about the end of movement is non-sensical.



3. Modern scientism: its history and implications

7. A critique of the technological imperative:
“What one can do one must do so as not to
impede progress.”

- Hans Jonas (1903-1993): The problem of progress as an end in itself: technology creates solutions to problems that it has created itself.
- Who dominates the progress?
- J.-J. Rousseau (1712-1778): technology creates new dependencies.
- C.S. Lewis (1898-1963): Human dominion over nature means the dominion of some human beings over the rest of humanity with nature as an instrument.