

Person, Truth, and Freedom



Course FL2820 Second Cycle

Prof. Stephan Kampowski
Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II
Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano, 4
00120 Città del Vaticano / Vatican City

06 698 95 538

kampowski@istitutogp2.it

The slides will be available after class at:

www.stephankampowski.com/corsi.html

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”?

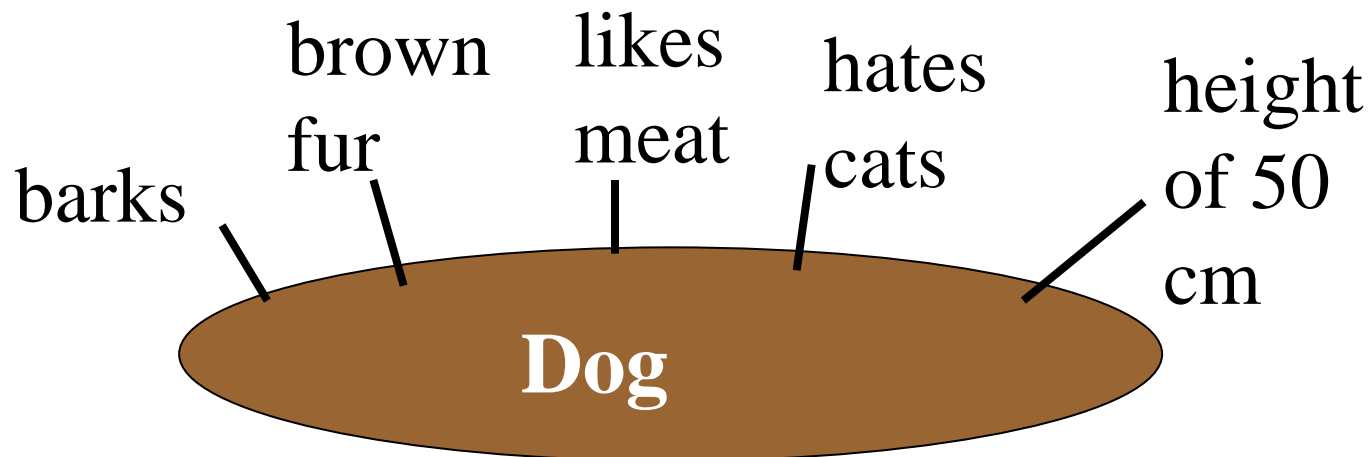
What is a “rational” nature?

- 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.
-

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.
-

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.
-

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.
-

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.
-

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.
-

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.
-

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

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.
-

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.
-

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

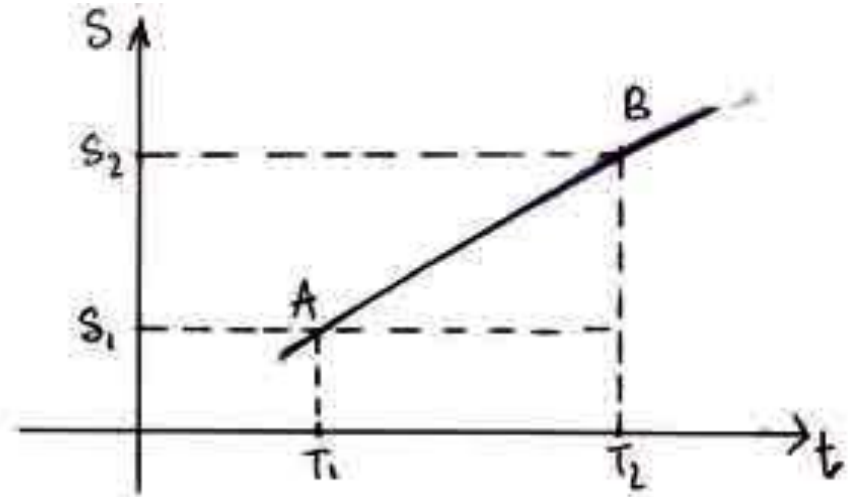
5. The human desire for ultimate truth, for a final meaning speaks to us about the presence of this truth.

- *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.

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- For what follows: cf. S. Kampowski, “A Promise to Keep: Which Bond, Whose Fidelity?” *Anthropotes* 30 (2014), pp. 187-215.
 - What is a promise?
 - Is a promise binding, and if yes, why?
 - Why do we promise?
 - To whom or what do we promise fidelity in the act of promising?
 - What is specific about the marital promise?
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

1. The Promise as a social convention in David Hume and Thomas Hobbes

- David Hume (1711-1776): “A promise wou’d not be intelligible, before human conventions had established it; and ... even if it were intelligible, it wou’d not be attended with any moral obligation” (*Treatise on Human Nature*).
 - The institution of promising exists in society because promises are undoubtedly useful and advantageous for society itself.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Hume offers the example of organizing the imminent harvest:
 - If my crops are ripe today and yours will be tomorrow and none of us has enough capacity to do the harvest just by ourselves, then I will ask you to help me today and promise you that I will help you tomorrow.
 - According to Hume's anthropology human beings are essentially egoistic, so that there is little hope one would help the other simply out of fellow feeling.
 - You will help me today only if you can be sure that I will help you tomorrow.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- For Hume, the point of the institution of promising is to make sure people do what we want them to do without having to resort to force or deception.
 - Why are promises binding for him?
 - Their obligating character derives exclusively from the sanction that is attached to not keeping one's word.
 - Who does not keep one's promises will be unable to convince people in the future that helping him is in their interest.
 - He won't be able to benefit in the future from the institution of promising: he will find himself without help when he needs it.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) approach to promising is similar.
 - For him, too, the promise is a creation of society aiming at its benefit.
 - Unlike Hume, however, he does not leave the sanction for breaking a promise simply with the risk of not being trusted in the future.
 - The institution of promising is of paramount importance for the State.
 - Therefore the State ("Leviathan") imposes the obligation created by a promise with the concrete threat of punishment:
 - "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all"
(*Levithan*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Why do we promise according to Hobbes?
 - Again, so that people will do what we want them to do.
 - Why do we keep our promises?
 - Because if we don't we will have to pay a fine or go to jail.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Why discuss these two views of promising here?
 - These very legalistic ideas of promising are still very much around today.
 - Promises are seen as something completely impersonal.
 - The person to whom we make the promise does not enter the calculation.
 - The promise has nothing to do with love of the other.
 - Therefore, the “faithfulness” that the promise implies is only a faithfulness to the institution of promising and to its usefulness.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- In this case, however, it becomes difficult to understand why a competent authority could not dispense someone from any kind of promise he has made.
 - In the end the obligatory character of promises is seen to reside only in the sanction imposed on us by some authority.
 - The “bond” created by the promise is an external obligation imposed on us by society.
 - Why then should competent authority not be able to dissolve the bond and free the individual from the obligation he has created by the promise?
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

2. The promise as faithfulness to oneself in Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche

- For Kant (1724-1804) it is not entirely clear why we promise.
 - But it is evident that the obligation to maintain one's promise derives from an application of the categorical imperative with its universalizability principle:
 - “I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Prior to reflecting about it, I could feel tempted to get myself out of trouble by means of a promise I do not intend to keep.
 - But I could not well want lying to become the law of the land.
 - Such a custom would be unreasonable, amounting to abolishing the institution of promising.
 - For Kant the obligation to keep my word derives from reason's necessity not to contradict itself.
 - This means that the fidelity implied in promising is ultimately a fidelity to myself as rational agent.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Kant's confidence in his universalizability principle seems to be exaggerated.
 - “What would happen if everyone did this?”
 - As ultimate foundation of morality it may be wanting.
 - It cannot answer the question of motivation:
 - Why should I want to be rational, or consistent with myself?
 - Walt Whitman: “I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself; I am large, I contain multitudes” (“Song of Myself”).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- But the universalizability principle already encounters grave difficulties on a much more obvious level.
 - In his *After virtue*, MacIntyre (*1929) can give examples of maxims that can be coherently universalized, but which are absurd or immoral:
 - “Keep all your promises throughout your entire life except one.”
 - “Persecute all those who hold false religious beliefs”.
 - “Always eat mussels on Mondays in March.”
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- In addition, Kant's theory of promises – just like that of Hume and Hobbes – does not consider the person to whom the promise is made.
 - The promise is thus not an intersubjective reality and has nothing to do with love of the other.
 - For Hume and Hobbes, the obligation created by a promise resides in the relation between the individual and society/the state.
 - In Kant, this obligation is based on the relation of the rational agent to him- or herself.
 - For Kant, promising is an *intrasubjective* reality.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- This last point holds true also for Nietzsche
 - This is why we have grouped him together with Kant here.
 - In his *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche dedicates a substantive section to the question of “breeding ... an animal which is entitled to make promises.”
 - He suggests that the capacity to promise can function as the specific difference of the human being with respect to the animals.
 - He presents it as a privilege rather than a duty.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- To be able to give one's word as something that can be trusted is a major accomplishment of the will.
 - Here we have the “liberated man, who is really entitled to make promises, this master of free will,” is the “the owner of an enduring, indestructible will.”
 - What distinguishes him from other people is that he “gives his word as something which can be relied on, because he knows himself strong enough to uphold it even against accidents, even ‘against fate.’”
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- For Nietzsche the promise is “the memory of the will.”
 - It is in the will that we find both the reason for making promises and the reason for keeping them.
 - Giving promises is a splendid occasion to exercise our power.
 - The obligation to keep our promises derives from our desire for greatness and sovereignty.
 - To break one’s promise means to be servile.
 - In other words, it is a question of honor.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Indeed, the capacity to promise reveals much about the human being's personhood as someone who possesses himself and is, as such, able to anticipate his future.
 - Someone who were to say, "Yesterday I promised you to do this and that, but so what? Today I'm someone else," would simply disappear as a person.
 - Thus, Robert Spaemann can place the foundation and guarantee of the promise in the person him- or herself: "The person is a promise" (*Persons*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Here Nietzsche would seem to be right: The question of promising is indeed intimately bound up with the issue of personal identity.
 - Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) quite insightfully points out:
 - ✓ “We can understand two different things by identity. One is the permanence of an immutable substance which time does not affect. ...
 - ✓ But there is another model of identity, one presupposed by our previous model of the promise. ...
 - ✓ The problem of the promise is precisely that of maintaining a self in the face of what Proust called the vicissitudes of the heart” (*La persona*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Hence we may say that Nietzsche is getting at something profoundly true:
 - At least part of the reason we promise is to maintain our identity in time and part of the reason of its obligatory nature is truly our honor.
 - It is a matter of fidelity to ourselves.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- And yet here too, we have to ask ourselves about the role of the person to whom the promise is made.
 - As Ricoeur himself points out:
 - ✓ “The obligation to maintain one’s self in keeping one’s promises is in danger of solidifying into the Stoic rigidity of simple constancy, if it is not permeated by the desire to respond to an expectation, even to a request coming from another.”
 - Nietzsche’s approach would entirely seem to fall under this criticism.
 - For him it does not seem to matter to whom the promise is made.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- On this account it does not even seem important *what* is being promised:
 - Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) writes to this extent:
 - ✓ “To make it a point of honour to fulfil a commitment what else is this but putting an accent on the supra-temporal identity of the subject who contracts it and carries it out?
 - ✓ And so I am brought to think that this identity has a validity in itself, whatever the content of my promise may be.
 - ✓ This identity is the one important thing to maintain, however absurd the particular commitment may appear, to the eyes of a spectator, through my rashness or weakness in undertaking it” (*Being and Having*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- In this context, then, Marcel sees the great danger of confusing fidelity with pride:
 - ✓ “A fidelity to another of which I was myself the ground, the spring, and the centre ... would expose ... the lie at the heart of that existence which it shapes.”
 - ✓ This lie consists in “the contention that fidelity, despite appearances, is never more than a mode of pride and self-regard” (*Being and Having*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- If what is at stake in promising is simply a fidelity to myself
 - ✓ in terms of a desire for self-consistency as in Kant,
 - ✓ or in terms of a sense of honor as in Nietzsche,
 - then it is I myself who can also dispense myself from my promise.
 - Others could come to my aid by trying to help me see that keeping a word once given has now become unreasonable given the new circumstances.
 - They could tell me to swallow my pride, admit my failure, and go on with my life.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

3. The promise as an intersubjective reality in St. Thomas, Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur

- It is truly curious how the philosophers we have mentioned above, while taking into account important and valid aspects of promising, were nonetheless able to disregard its probably most important characteristic:
 - Ricoeur: “It is, in truth, at the very first stage, that of firm intention, that the other is implied: a commitment that did not involve doing something that the other could choose or prefer would not be more than a silly wager” (*Oneself as Another*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- It seems that it is the other, to whom we have made a pledge and who now relies on us, who is the primary reason for why we should keep our promises.
 - Here Gabriel Marcel really seems to get at the heart of what is at stake in giving one's word:
 - ✓ “There is no commitment purely from my own side; it always implies that the other being has a hold over me.
 - ✓ All commitment is a response.
 - ✓ A one-sided commitment would not only be rash but could be blamed as pride. ...
 - ✓ Fidelity is never fidelity to one's self, but is referred to what I called the hold the other being has over us.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Fidelity to one's word is fidelity to someone else, to a friend to the beloved.
 - It is a response to someone.
 - In promising then, I am not primarily bound by society, the State, my logic or my honor, though all these surely enter in various degrees.
 - I am bound to the other, in whom I have raised expectations and who now relies on me.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Why do we promise, then?
 - For St. Thomas there is more than one answer, but the first and foremost reason is that we promise to others for their good:
 - ✓ “We promise something to a man for his own profit; since it profits him that we should be of service to him, and that we should at first assure him of the future fulfilment of that service” (*Sth* II-II, 88, 4).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The Angelic Doctor's anthropological presuppositions are very different from those of Hume's, for instance.
 - For the British empiricist all human beings are naturally selfish.
 - For St. Thomas, in contrast, "it is natural to all men to love each other" (*SCG* III, 117).
 - With this he does not mean that people are not capable of hatred or selfishness.
 - It just means that it is these latter that need explanation and not love and benevolence.
 - Now "love consists especially in this, that the lover wills the good for his loved one" (*SCG* III, 90).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Example: a match between two soccer teams.
 - As Hannah Arendt keeps insisting, in order to achieve anything significant in life, people have to act together.
 - They can act together, only if they are bound together by mutual promises.
 - Thus, people benefit from promises collectively the moment they enter into a common endeavor.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- But already simply as an individual someone receiving a promise earns a decisive advantage.
 - Receiving a promise gives one the possibility “to rely on its performance, so as to be able to presume upon it safely in his or her own plans for action” (Robert Spaemann).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

Is it morally licit to promise?

- St. Thomas poses himself the objection that our freedom is the greatest good that God has given to us.
 - It would seem to be inappropriate deliberately to deprive ourselves of it by placing our will under necessity.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Gabriel Marcel even goes so far as to raise the question whether there is not a sense in which every promise is a lie.
 - I have no power over how I will feel tomorrow.
 - Today I may tell a friend that I will come to visit him tomorrow, because today that seems to me a good thing.
 - Tomorrow I may betray my friend if the visit no longer appears good to me and I no longer feel like it.
 - ✓ If I go anyway, I will be insincere.
 - ✓ If I do not go at all, I will have gone against my word
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Given that I am constantly changing, by promising perhaps I betray my future self, the person that I am becoming, of whom I do not know yet whether he should then want to be burdened by the commitments I make for him now.
 - Again, the question is raised, “Can a commitment exist that is not a betrayal?” (Marcel, *Being and Having*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Let us have a look at the response St. Thomas gives to this objection.
 - Freedom is freedom for the good, and the firmer the will is fixed on the good, the freer it is.
 - Aquinas points to the fact that God and the saints cannot sin, but this does not amount to a reduction of freedom but to its perfection (*STh* II-II, 88, 4, ad 1).
 - By promising we do not lose our freedom, but we actualize it.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- By promising we give firmness to our will.
 - This is one of the reasons why according to the Angelic Doctor an act done because of a vow or promise is better than the same act done without a prior binding of the will.
 - In the former case the good is willed more firmly:
 - ✓ “A vow fixes the will on the good immovably and to do anything of a will that is fixed on the good belongs to the perfection of virtue” (*STh* II-II, 88, 6).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Thomas looks not only at the actual performance of an act but also at its genesis.
 - An act born of a virtuous disposition is performed with more stability, joy, and ease than the same act done without such an active disposition.
 - Likewise, an act that is generated by a promise is performed with greater stability, with a firmer will, and hence it is more virtuous.
 - Here we see that Nietzsche's account is not all wrong: being able to promise is an excellence, a virtue, it bespeaks a oneness with oneself.
 - The promise is a paradigm for personal identity (Ricoeur).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- To the objection “I must not promise because I do not know who I will be tomorrow,” one can respond:
 - “I must promise so that I will know who I will be tomorrow.”
 - A promise is what allows me to maintain my personal identity over time.
 - A promise strengthens the will, it gives unity to the moral subject.
 - As Robert Spaemann puts it, its goal is virtue, the capacity to rely on oneself – and, we may add, the capacity to be relied upon.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

Why, on this account, are promises binding?

- Paul Ricoeur can think of three reasons.
 - 1. There is indeed such a thing as my personal honor, which consists in maintaining a recognizable identity over time.
 - By breaking a promise I implicitly say that I am no longer the same now as I was then.
 - I become invisible as a person, a being capable of owning and leading his life over time and become reduced to a mere accumulation of instances without inherent unity or continuity.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- 2. But there is, of course, also the *other* to whom the promise is made.
 - “It is because someone is counting on me and expecting me to keep my promise that I feel that I am connected” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*).
 - To make a promise that I do not intend to keep is to do him violence. It is an act of injustice.
 - A false or broken promise is not only a thing
 - ✓ between me and an impersonal society (Hume, Hobbes),
 - ✓ nor just a matter between me and myself (Kant, Nietzsche),
 - ✓ but first of all an issue between me and the other and of the love that governs *interhuman* relationships (Thomas, Marcel, Ricoeur).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Third, for Ricoeur there is the respect I owe to the institution of language, which binds me to others and allows me to communicate.
- Language is oriented to truth; its purpose is to reveal reality, to be the “house of being” (Heidegger).
- It may not be a coincidence that in many languages the expression “to give one’s word” is a synonym for “promising.”
- By speaking, by saying a word to others, we promise them reality.
- Hence Erik Erikson can say, “A spoken word is a pact” (“The Problem of Ego-Identity”).

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The word binds us to being and binds us to each other.
 - Such is our innate trust in the affirmative power of the word, that says and affirms reality, that for the human mind it is much easier to understand affirmations than it is to understand negations.
 - Our spontaneous attitude towards anything said or written is to believe it.
 - Suspicion and mistrust are always secondary phenomena.
 - Inasmuch as we are beings who “have the word” (Aristotle, *Politics*), the institution of language mediates our access to reality.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Language allows us not only to relate to others,
 - but it is at the very foundation of our spiritual life, allowing for our thought to be actualized.
 - Romano Guardini formulates it in these terms:
 - ✓ “Man by his nature is in a dialogue.
 - ✓ His mental life is ordained to be in communication. ...
 - ✓ Language is not only the means by which we communicate conclusions, but mental life and activity are carried on in the process of speech. ...
 - ✓ Language is not a system of signs by means of which two monads exchange ideas but it is the very realm of consciousness in which every man lives” (*The World and the Person*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Taking into consideration the dyadic structure of promising, i.e., the basic fact that promises are to someone, what is the nature of the bond created by the promise?
 - The bond would seem to reside in or even be the relationship between the one who gives and the one who receives the promise.
 - The obligation is to the other.
 - We are obliged to the other because we love him or her, love being the reason we made our promise in the first place.
 - It is the same love for the other that was the reason for making our promise that is now the reason for our keeping it.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Under which conditions can one be dispensed from one's promises?
 - If keeping one's promise is primarily an act of fidelity to the other, then it is the other who can normally dispense.
 - Dispensation may be asked for on account of new, supervening circumstances that make fulfilling one's promise significantly more difficult or cause it to collide with unforeseen new obligations.
 - At times, we even dispense ourselves, when the other is not at hand or when he unreasonably insists on the fulfillment of a promise given under completely different circumstances (cf. Spaemann, *Persons*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Without entering into a casuistry, however, we can insist, with Spaemann that one thing can never be the ground for a dispensation:
 - ✓ “It can never be a reason for non-performance that the promiser simply asserts that he has changed his mind.”
 - For Ricoeur a promise is a redoubled intention: “the intention not to change my intention.”
 - The not-changing one’s mind was exactly the content of the promise.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

The marital promise and other life-promises.

- What distinguishes a marital promise from other promises is that their irrevocability is part of the content of what is being promised, with the result that here two people form a “community of destiny” (Spaemann, *Persons*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- What makes us request dispensations of our promises, and what makes us gladly grant these if we are being asked for them, are the strides of fate:
 - ✓ new, unforeseeable circumstances that change the whole context in which a promise was made.
 - Now the marital promise is a promise by which the spouses tell each other:
 - ✓ Whatever may happen, whatever destiny holds in store for us, I pledge my fidelity to you, in sickness or health, for better or worse.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Thus by the very intention of the promise, the spouses promise each other not to ask to be dispensed nor to dispense each other.
 - The nature of the marital promise is such that it radically changes the spouses' relationship.
 - Its idea is that it is capable of turning strangers into kin.
 - Even if husband and wife were mutually to agree on dispensing each other from their marital vows, this could not be done, inasmuch as their vows have instituted between them a relation of kinship that is no longer in their power to change.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The case is similar to that of a father and a son who wanted to dispense each other from their father-son relationship.
 - They would be attempting the impossible.
 - The idea of marriage is that a marital promise can establish kinship as well, so that Adam, after having been led to Eve, can say in all truth:
 - “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gn 2:23)—which means saying precisely: “She is my kin.”
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- How is it possible to make such a promise?
 - Can one truly build a common life in the face of fate?
 - Very often things happen in life that are completely out of our power: illness, infertility, economic difficulties, problems with the children.
 - In this situation—called the general human condition—how is it possible to promise one's life, including also what one will want *in the future*,
 - and not just the authenticity of one's emotions, including only what one feels *in the present*?
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Here Robert Spaemann offers us a profound reflection:
 - He suggests that by exchanging the marital vows, the spouses do not simply commit to hang on to their promise with an iron will, even if they should come to feel differently, even if they should come to regret their choice and change their minds.
 - Rather, the marital promise implies the promise to do everything in one's power to prevent coming into situations that would incline one to reconsider one's commitment to the other.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- While our feelings are not under our immediate control, our day-to-day decisions are.
 - It is by the big and small choices we make every day that we develop our character and personality.
 - We are constantly changing, and our choices are a major factor in this process.
 - According to Spaemann, then, the marital promises imply not viewing “the growth of one’s personality as an independent variable that may or may not turn out to be compatible in some degree with the growth of the other’s personality” (*Persons*).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Thus a married person will take as the decisive criterion for any decision he or she has to make the question
 - “What effect will such and such a choice have on the relationship with my spouse?”
 - There will always be some events that are completely unrelated to our prior choices and for which we carry no responsibility at all.
 - But even here, a married couple is not entirely at the mercy of fate.
 - While by definition we cannot choose what merely happens, we can always choose how to respond to it.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Being married means that some options one would otherwise have to react to a blow of fate are closed.
 - However, no longer having all the theoretical options open does not mean one is no longer free.
 - It just means that one's range of options has become delimited.
 - But one could not possibly have actualized all the options anyway.
 - Here the married person is not in a situation that is qualitatively different from the general human predicament:
 - The moment we walk through one door, we close all the others.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The same holds true for the other kind of promises that are for life: religious vows or the promise of priestly celibacy.
- Here, too, people give definitive shape to their lives.
- Here, too, they have to deliberately cultivate their vocation, asking themselves how their individual small choices and bigger projects will impact their attitude toward their state of life.
- By making a life promise, we intend to dispose of our entire future, look at our life as a whole and thus, as Mansini rightly points out, already anticipate death (*Promising and the Good*).

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Guy Mansini:
 - ✓ “What is the same in marriage vows, priestly celibacy, and religious chastity ... is that they all bear on the body and the sexuality of the body.
 - ✓ Life promises, which look toward death, are dispositions of the procreative power that looks beyond it.”
 - On the natural level, the response to our mortality is our fruitfulness.
 - It is no accident that life promises, in which we regard our lives as a whole, would dispose precisely of our capacity to be fruitful.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- To be able to promise our lives, we need the sense of having a goal, a mission, a call to some kind of fruitfulness.
 - Pope Francis:
 - ✓ “Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love” (LF 52).
 - The problem with contemporary culture that makes it so difficult for people to promise is that essentially they have lost the idea of love’s fruitfulness.
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4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Jesus tells his disciples what we are entitled to believe he tells every human being:
 - I “appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16).
 - Any composite reality derives its unity from its end or aim.
 - Life can have a unity only if it has a purpose, an end, or goal.
 - Jesus tells us that this purpose is fruitfulness.
 - Prior to the modern age his words would have been self-evident to any reader or listener.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- There is more to life than just living.
 - If there is nothing we desire more than living, then soon enough we will begin to loathe living.
 - There is hardly anything that people desire more in their lives than a mission, something to live and possibly to die for.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Until recently it was very clear to people that this noble striving was naturally related to the family.
 - Recognizing oneself as a son or daughter one appreciates and accepts the original gift of life.
 - Responding in gratitude to the gift of life that one has freely received, one becomes aware of a calling to pass this life on in love:
 - to become husband and wife who together are called to become father and mother.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Also for those who receive the call to continence for the sake of the kingdom, this fundamental structure remains intact.
 - They too are called to fruitfulness.
 - It is not only the pleasures of intercourse that they renounce for the Kingdom.
 - They also renounce their earthly fruitfulness: to have a family and to have children of their own.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Jesus' promise to them is a superabundant recompense precisely for this renunciation.
 - Theirs will be an abounding spiritual fruitfulness:
 - “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come” (Lk 18:29).
 - It is thus the question of fruitfulness, and with this the question of life's meaningfulness, that is at stake when it comes to life promises.
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4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Forgiveness (cf. Spaemann, *Persons*).
 - Forgiveness presupposes guilt, and thus the person's freedom.
 - It is the person himself who is at the basis of his evil action: not his genes, his culture, his social condition...
 - On the other hand, forgiveness presupposes that the person has not manifested his definitive being in his evil act.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Personal identity is the totality of one's the human being, as such including certain predicates, such as “having done this or that.”
 - And yet, the meaning of these predicates for the being of the person is never definitive.
 - Also the repudiation of one's action – repentance – is a way of integrating what one has done, giving it a new and different kind of value.
 - E.g.: the conversion of St. Paul.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Forgiveness consists in the willingness of the one who has suffered the injustice:
 - not to identify the guilty person with his evil act,
 - But to allow him to redefine himself with respect to what he has done.
 - There is no right to being forgiven which one could appeal to. One can only invoke forgiveness.
 - The “creditor,” however, has an obligation to correspond to this request.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Refusing to forgive someone who repents of his evil and asks for forgiveness means to identify him definitively with one of his predicates (here: as the one who has done this or that).
 - Therefore, refusing to forgive means to refuse recognizing the other as a person, that is, as a being who is free with respect to all of his predicates.
 - This does not mean that there could not be certain conditions for the granting of forgiveness.
 - Certain acts may be required by the nature of the case: restitution, for instance, to the point it is possible, without which the repentance would not be sincere.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- If the evil act concerned the community as a whole, restitution may even imply a punishment:
 - ✓ to prevent similar delinquent acts in the future (to protect and to deter).
 - ✓ to reestablish the order of justice.
 - For Hegel, punishment is the “honor of the delinquent” inasmuch as he is a person.
 - He is taken seriously as someone responsible for his actions.
 - If he repents, he will take up the punishment willingly as a restitution.
 - While restitution does not undo the wrong, it is a symbolic act that give expression to one’s desire of undoing the wrong.
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4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The question remains:
 - does the concession of forgiveness precede the inner distancing of oneself from one's act (=repentance),
 - or is repentance presupposed in the concession?
 - Both seem to be the case.
 - The one who feels definitively judged by every other human being will understandably place all his pride in defining himself this way.
 - But how can one forgive someone who does not distance himself interiorly from what he has done?
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- How to get out of this paradox?
 - The solution has something to do with the way in which evil presents itself to human beings.
 - While it is true that evil is not based on inculpable ignorance,
 - It is also true that evil committed by human beings is always connected to a kind of ignorance that deprives the one who acts of complete clarity.
 - This obscuring of one's view is precisely what renders conversion possible.
 - Conversion equals a path to clarity.
 - “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The Socratic intellectualist has nothing to forgive: evil for him is just a mistake.
 - But also the one who demonizes every evil cannot forgive, inasmuch as an evil directly willed as evil is unforgivable.
 - However, this culpable blinding of oneself as which evil presents itself among human beings always contains an element of being caught up in something.
 - St. Ambrose: Why, after the bad experience with the angels, did God still create human beings?
 - “So that finally he would have someone whose sins he could forgive” (*Hexaemeron* VI, 10, 76).
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- The one who forgives refrains from seeing the other in the way in which he experiences him here and now.
 - In this way, he offers him to see himself in a different way.
 - The one who forgives says to the other: “I know that this is not you.”
 - Forgiveness means a look of hope, comparable to a new creation, a new beginning.
 - The one who forgives participates in the hope God has for the other.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- Forgiveness fully reaches its goal only in reconciliation.
 - Forgiveness ceases when reconciliation has occurred.
 - Reconciliation brings about the disappearance of the asymmetry that is presupposed and reestablishes reciprocal equality.
 - Equality can be reestablished only because in reality it had never been completely destroyed.
-

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

An example of forgiveness.

- The Trappist monk Christian de Chergé was killed on May 24, 1996 in Algeria.
- Prior to his assassination he wrote a letter to his family and friends to be read in case he would indeed be murdered (cf. the film: *Of Gods and Men*):
 - “I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this.
 - I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder.
 - It would be to pay too dearly for what will, perhaps, be called “the grace of martyrdom,” to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. ...”

4. The freedom to promise and to forgive

- “For this life given up, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God ...
 - In this “thank you,” which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, ...
 - And you also, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you were doing. Yes, for you also I wish this “thank you”—and this adieu—to commend you to the God whose face I see in yours.
 - And may we find each other, happy “good thieves,” in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen.”
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- Utopia: “no-place” (οὐ - τόπος) or even “good-place” (εὖ - τόπος): a good place that exists no place
 - The word was first coined by Thomas Morus (1478-1535)
 - In his work *Utopia* Morus described an ideal society.
 - He had no intention actually to *produce* this ideal society.
 - His description of the ideal society served him to provide criteria of judgment for real society.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- Modern utopianism, in contrast, has the ambition to bring the “good place” (eu-topia) about.
 - What the different sorts of modern utopianism have in common is the idea that human history has an earthly final goal, which alone gives meaning to humanity’s present existence.
 - The present is only meaningful if it leads to the better future situation.
 - Human beings as they exist today are not yet the authentic human beings, who still have to be created.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- The two most common forms of utopianism are
 - Communist / Marxist utopianism:
 - It aims at social conditions of perfect harmony.
 - And technological utopianism:
 - Technological progress is the vocation of man, and man’s salvation is brought about by techno-science.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- For a Marxist anthropology, human beings are fundamentally good.
 - If they do become immoral and corrupt, this is on account of the existing, bad social conditions.
 - Conditions of poverty and want corrupt man.
 - By modifying the social conditions, one can create a new man.
 - For this one needs the Revolution.
 - The modern means of mass production are so powerful that they could easily create a society of superabundance.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- The reason not everyone lives in superabundance is that the means of mass production are in the hands of a few capitalists.
 - To realize new social conditions of material superabundance for everyone one needs the Revolution.
 - The Revolution places the means of mass production into the hands of the people as a whole.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- Then everyone will give “according to his capacity” and “receive according to his needs” (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*).
 - Marx was more interested in how to get to the Revolution than in what would happen afterwards.
 - From this side of the Revolution one cannot say how the post-Revolutionary man will live.
 - In the post-Revolutionary society, man will become truly himself.
 - Human beings will be good, and it will be easy to organize them in a society.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- R. Spaemann: Marx’s point is not to create a just society, but a society in which (distributive) justice will no longer be necessary, given that all material goods will be available in superabundance.
 - Marx: one needs the Revolution for the equal distribution of wealth.
 - Communism and capitalism are in agreement that what counts is producing wealth and that the way of doing so is modern industry and technology.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

Critique: the feasibility of the utopian ideal

- Hans Jonas (1903-1993), *The Imperative of Responsibility*: The utopian ideal is impractical from the point of view of the necessary material conditions.
 - The production of the material abundance necessary for the utopian ideal would have too great an impact on the environment.
 - There is the energy problem and the risk that the planet would simply overheat.
 - Jonas: one needs humility in the goals of technological progress.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

Critique: the desirability of the utopian ideal

- Jonas: The decisive question, however would be: supposing in a world of this kind, we would indeed be *free from* material necessity, what would we be *free for*?
 - The new men of the new society will have leisure, but how will they fill this leisure?
 - Marx is silent on this.
 - Ernst Bloch, in his *The Principle of Hope*, has two suggestions:
 - the hobby as profession
 - the cultivation of interpersonal relationships
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- Even in a post-revolutionary industrial society of superabundance, some real professions will remain: engineers, inventors, medical doctors, teachers...
 - But the great majority of people will be “liberated” – or rather excluded – from any serious activity.
 - People will want to work, not because the results of their work would be necessary, but because they desire to work.
 - The demand for work will be greater than the supply.
 - Ernst Bloch: the solution is the hobby as profession.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- The products of the hobby do not matter: a hobby is not a serious activity.
 - This continues to be the case, even if the hobby were to become a “profession”.
 - The utopian society is a society in which everything that one does could very well be left undone, or be done badly, without consequences.
 - This world of fiction does not take the person seriously.
 - It is part of the person’s dignity to prove him- or herself in the face of the seriousness of life.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- For Jonas, the fundamental fallacy proper to Marxism, but also to any other kind of utopianism is this one:
 - To think that the sphere of freedom begins only where the sphere of necessity ends.
 - Jonas: freedom, in order to be at all,
 - “lives in pitting itself against necessity.
 - Separated from it, freedom loses its object and becomes as empty as force without resistance.
 - Empty freedom, like empty force, cancels itself” (*The Imperative of Responsibility*).
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- The “true human being” is always already there.
 - Also the idea of technological progress contains utopian elements.
 - Technological progress has by now become the ideal of the vocation of humanity.
 - The ideal of technological progress has become its own advancement.
 - The idea of technological progress shares an element with Marxism that is characteristic of every type of utopianism:
 - It devalues the present in the name of the future, sacrificing or endangering present humanity in the name of a better, future humanity.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- We are dealing here with an “ontology of the not yet.”
 - Jonas:
 - “Genuine man is always already there and was there throughout known history:
 - in his heights and his depths, his greatness and wretchedness . . . in all the ambiguity that is inseparable from his humanity.”
 - “The really unambiguous man of utopia can only be the flattened, behaviorally conditioned homunculus of futuristic psychological engineering.”
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- Jonas: we must not risk, with the magic tools of our technology, the image of man as we know him, in the name of a future humanity.
 - We are the custodians of this image, called to cultivate and preserve the heritage that has been entrusted to us.
 - It is immoral to run every incalculable risk in order to improve what has been achieved.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- To preserve the image of man is a task, for which we need hope, which is the presupposition of every action.
 - The despair is on the side of those who appreciate so little what has been entrusted to them, that they are ready to run every risk to improve on it.
 - But where do they take the wisdom from?
 - If humanity is truly of such a defective stock that one can risk losing it, then the scientists who seek to improve it at any cost are not qualified, since they themselves are part of humanity.
-

5. Building the “Kingdom” on earth? A critique of social and technological utopianism

- The reverence for the image of man implies a negative duty.
 - Jonas puts it this way:
 - “We must not try to fixate man in any image of our own definition and thereby cut off the as yet unrevealed promises of the image of God.
 - We have not been authorized, so Jewish piety would say, to be makers of a new image, nor can we claim the wisdom and knowledge to arrogate that role” (*Philosophical Essays*).
 - “Thou shalt not make an image of me” (Ex 20:4): This can be applied not only to the Lord God, but also to the human person made in God’s image.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

Cf. R. Spaemann, *Persons*, chapter 10: “Death and the Future Perfect Tense”

- Why did the Greeks define human beings as “mortals,” despite the fact that other living beings, too, have to die?
 - Perhaps the definition is erroneous, and death does not even exist?
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- Epicurus: As long as we live, we are not dead. When we are dead, we are no longer.
 - “Being dead” is not the characteristic of anyone.
 - This is true for brute animals.
 - The human person, on the contrary, is a *temporal* being:
 - We can remember the past
 - We can anticipate the future
 - There is a self-transcendence involved in remembrance and anticipation
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- The problem is that the presence of death in our life cannot be integrated in a context of relevance within life.
 - Death rather calls into question the whole context of vital significances.
 - We experience that things are relevant inasmuch as we have the experience of ends and goals that are given with life.
 - These “vital ends” open up to us contexts of importance.
 - But these vital ends have importance only under the condition of life itself.
 - Every context of vital significance is relative to life itself.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- Within the context of life, things have their relevance.
 - But life itself does not have “vital relevance.”
 - Putting questions of significance in these terms can easily lead to a sense of absurdity.
 - This sense of absurdity, however, is not necessary.
 - There is not only a context of *vital relevance* (things are important inasmuch as they serve life – an importance that passes with life itself).
 - There is also a context of *significance* or *meaning*, which remains, even if life has passed away.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- One could say that significance is the sense of vital importance that is toughened by the consciousness of finitude.
 - We take the experience of being with a friend:
 - If life now ends, is it true to say that it “wasn’t worth it”?
 - One could say, “The awareness of the imminent end destroys the event’s meaning.”
 - But not necessarily.
 - The experience of this last encounter may contain the sense of something particularly precious.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- “It is good and will remain good that this fleeting moment has occurred.”
 - Relevance is taken away from the realm of the contingent and inserted into the “eternal” dimension of meaning.
 - Having had a last good conversation over a glass of wine with your best friend before his passing away, is and will always have been good and significant.
 - The contingency of what disappears in time is transformed into something precious.
 - The consciousness of life’s finitude does not as such render life absurd, but can even be seen as the condition for experiencing life as something precious.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- All our activities are characterized by the knowledge that our time is limited.
 - We *spend* our lives. This implies a finite quantity.
 - Hans Jonas: “Man has not been given the capacity to appreciate what has been given in abundance.”
 - The scarcity of a commodity contributes to its value.
 - The sense of “being spent” in our life cycle contributes to a sense of urgency that is given to life in the face of death.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- “Teach us to number our days so that we lean the wisdom of heart” (Ps 90:12).
 - Leon Kass: We need to count our days to make them count.
 - It is the sense of finitude that gives a certain thrust to life.
 - Why not leave for tomorrow whatever one could do today, if there is an infinite number of “tomorrows” available?
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- The anticipation of death makes it possible for us to assume our life as a whole.
 - In this way, the anticipation of death makes possible the self-possession that constitutes the being of the person.
 - Only a life is owned can be surrendered.
 - “Greater love has no man than this, that he give his life for his friends” (John 15:13).
 - Only a mortal being can love so radically: offer his or her entire life for the beloved.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- Inasmuch as it is an act of dedication of one's life, dying is an essentially personal act.
 - The forms of extreme artificial prolongation of life reduce dying ever more frequently to a kind of "succumbing."
 - The opposite extreme, the desire for an instantaneous death, too, is contrary to the desire to live one's dying as a personal act.
 - For a good reason the ancient Christian prayer asks to be spared from a sudden death.
 - Time continually subtracts the world from us.
 - Time continually subtracts ourselves from us.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- Knowing how to let go is a constitutive and fundamental element of conscious life.
 - The end of human life can be understood as an act, because the person relates to his life, takes position in front of it.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- In suicide one is effectively the one who moves; one is the one active.
 - But it is precisely this fact that explains why suicide cannot constitute the paradigm of death as a personal event.
 - In suicide the killer and the victim are one and the same person.
 - However, from what they are, the two roles of killer and victim can never coincide.
 - Killing is not dying; being killed is not killing.
 - Suicide is the most extreme form of non-identity, of self-alienation and self-objectification.
 - One does not *offer* one's life, but literally "*takes*" one's life.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- In dying as a personal act, the very passivity that is undergone is realized as an act.
 - Suffering / undergoing / a passion as an action: this structure corresponds to the specific structure of personal life.
 - Human beings possess their life, but they possess it as something that they receive and accept, without having asked for it.
 - For human beings existing is something that happens to them, in the sense of having to realize and actualize it.
 - In being, a having to do is “suffered.”
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- Living in time does not only have the character of a “having to do that is suffered,” it is also always a dying in the sense of having to give.
 - Having to let go is a constitutive element of conscious life.
 - The present life passes into the past.
 - In memory we still possess that part of our life that is past.
 - But we have it as if we did not have it, because it has been taken away from us.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- In dying we do not only have to surrender our present life – this is something we've always have had to do.
 - At that point we will also have to surrender our past life, which is now possessed only in the memory of those who have survived.
 - If giving constitutes the true confirmation of a real ownership, then dying is the *actus humanus* per excellence.
 - The anticipation of death is the consciousness of having to give and having to give inevitably.
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6. The truth and meaning of our mortality

- This awareness structures our life and makes our life personal.
- It is this awareness that allows us to possess our life.
