

The Modernist Condition

I. THE QUESTIONS OF PERSONHOOD AND SELF IN PERSPECTIVE

The inquiry about the theological and philosophical meaning of the notion of “person/personhood” is undoubtedly far more sophisticated, challenging, and demanding than any inquiry on this notion within the general, anthropological contexts, where one would, for instance, only ask “why *Homo sapiens* is ‘person’ and other animals are not?”¹ When it comes to the inquiry on the conceptual connotations of the idea of “personhood,” as Alistair McFadyen correctly notes, “It is rarely as easy to give a good answer as it is to raise a good question.”² I believe there are three reasons for this difficulty.

1. PHILOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY

The first reason is philological. The word “person” as such is not clearly monolithic in meaning or conception, neither in today’s scholarship nor in antiquity’s. From the time of the Stoics and the Presocratic philosophers onwards, the term was linguistically used in a variety of ways and was applied to various contexts of constructive scholarly discourses. Each one of these linguistic spheres and scientific settings generates numerous meanings and presume equally versatile connotations for the term “person”—even if the perennial reading of the history of thought may invite the reader to conjecture that the moral connotations of the concept of “person” seem to be the only common, combining constituent between all the various, extractible meanings and definitions. And, even if this possibility justifies the conclusion that it is these moral connotations alone that bestow upon the concept of “person” a prominent combining and interdisciplinary role between fields likes bioethics,

1. Brain Garrett, “Person,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 7:319.

2. Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 1.

law, political science, philosophy, and theology,³ this does not exempt the one who examines this notion from paying attention to such a variety of meanings and miscellaneous usages of the word “person” in the discourses of the different relevant disciplines.⁴

2. PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFICULTY

The second reason is philosophical. At an early stage of the age of modernity, philosophers and scholars established that personhood cannot designate any clear-cut distinction that can be ascribed exclusively to the human race. Scientific explorations and empirical observations led scholars of the modern age to establish that there is a continuity, rather than substantial ontological difference, between *Homo sapiens* and other species on earth. It was the realization of the possibility of such continuity rather than difference, for instance, between humans and animals, as John Brooke reminds us, that motivated Charles Darwin’s study of the origin of species, tracing their evolution and dissolving, eventually, any serious divide between them.⁵

Today, science is far more advanced than in the time of Darwin, and we can go way beyond the frontiers that the latter reached in terms of understanding nature and its species’ evolution. This advancement, nevertheless—and instead of challenging Darwin’s and the modernist belief in the continuity between humans and animals—affirms this continuity more inarguably than ever before and leaves the belief in human ontological uniqueness and superiority on noticeably shaky ground.⁶ Modernist philosophers from the eighteenth century onwards also adopted an early edition

3. Thus argues Niel H. Gregersen in “Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues,” in *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, ed. N. H. Gregersen, W. B. Drees, and U. Görman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1–17, 1. On the centrality of morality and practices in discerning the meaning of personhood, see John F. Crosby, *Selfhood of Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 9–40, and Karol Wojtyła, “Human Nature as the Basis of Ethical Formation,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. Karol Wojtyła, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 95–100.

4. Paul Ricoeur eloquently points to the same heterogeneity in the character of the notion of “person,” yet in different terms, when he states that “the notion of person is determined by means of the predicates that we ascribe to it . . . the person is thus in the position of a logical subject in relation to the predicates that are ascribed to it.” Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35–39.

5. John Hedly Brooke, “Science and the Self: What Difference Did Darwin Make?” in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen*, ed. F. LeRon Shults (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 253–73, 254.

of this conviction about the indistinguishability of the human being and, in the light of it, developed a reductionist philosophy of human identity, which states, according to Peter Hick, that the human is just “an animal, or nothing but a bundle of experiences or electrical impulses in the brain.”⁷ Philosophers such as Kant, Hume, Diderot, Herder, and others also acknowledged the biological and behavioral similarities between humans and animals, and even conceded that human psychological and physical functions could be understood via studying and analyzing those of animals.⁸

One, however, should notice here that these modernist thinkers differ from the postmodernists of today in their (the modernists’) reluctance to pinpoint unique features that distinguish humans from animals, or to single out personhood as the unique defining particularity of the human race. They realize such difference is strictly specified in human mental or cognitive capacities. According to the modernist reason-centered philosophers, what makes human beings different and unique, first and foremost, is their cognitive function, which demonstrates itself in self-realization, moral law development, representation, reflection, the ability to abstract, and in the communication and accumulation of knowledge.⁹ Even the patron of evolution, Charles Darwin, recognized certain intellectual capacities that are to be exclusively ascribed to the human race. This mental distinction for him is detected in one unique

6. See on this, for instance, Nancy R. Howell, “The Importance of Being Chimpanzee,” *Theology and Science*, ½ (2003): 179–91. Howell shows that the latest genetic research has proven a 98.4% genetic similarity between humans and the chimpanzee. This percentage drives scientists rapidly to group chimpanzees and their species as “*hominids*,” the term, Howell says, “once reserved for humans and human ancestors” (180). Charles Taylor gives an interesting example about this trend of thought, which attempts to prove an existence of “self” or “sense of selfhood” in animals: “I remember an experiment designed to show that chimps too have a ‘sense of self’: an animal with ‘a paint mark’ on its face, seeing itself in the mirror, reached with its paws to its own face to clean it. It somehow recognized that this mirror image was of its own body”: Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 32, citing from C. G. Gallup Jr., “Chimpanzees: Self-Recognition,” in *Science*, June 6, 1983, 86–87.

7. Peter Hick, “One or Two? A Historical Survey of an Aspect of Personhood,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 1, no. 77 (2005): 35–45, 38. Hick offers a brief but valuable sketch of the development of the notion of personhood and the changes it faced since it was reflected upon in the Presocratic period. Hick argues that the definition of self as an intellectual reality rather than an expression of belonging to the whole, to all that is, is the outcome of the unfortunate Platonic search for a metanarrative of all that is and of Plato’s rejection of relativism. Plato’s monism, Hick believes, marked the deadly turn to plurality and change in understanding the self (*ibid.*, 38ff.).

8. Aaron Garrett, “Human Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1:161–77.

9. *Ibid.*, 164.

human element, namely the religious orientation, about which Darwin opines the following:

The feeling of religious devotion is a highly complex one, consisting of love, complete submission to an exalted and mysterious superior, a strong sense of dependence, fear, reverence, gratitude, hope for future, and perhaps other elements. No being could experience so complex an emotion until advanced in his intellectual and moral faculties to at least a moderately high level.¹⁰

It is not my intention here to research the notion of “personhood” in the light of the discussion about human-animal similarities and differences; however, I do want to show that one of the main complications of inquiring about personhood lies in the difficulty of stating clearly what “human” means and what “human personhood” designates in particular.

3. THEOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY

The third reason for the complication of the inquiry about the meaning of “personhood” is basically theological in nature, and it is what I am primarily concerned about in this study. Christian faith believes that everything pertinent to the human being and existence, personhood included, is meaningless unless it is understood on the basis of belief in God. This claim as such is deemed problematic and rationally unreliable in the intellectual, dominantly atheistic context of modernity. As a result of the modernist disenchantment position toward religiosity and the concept of deity in principle, theology found itself harshly criticized by the modernist rationale when it insisted on considering God and God’s self-disclosure a criterion for any truth-claim or method of understanding, including those related to the interpretation of the notions of “personhood” and “self.” As a matter of fact, such a theistic criterion was not only challenging, even puzzling, to some modernist thinkers in general; it also created challenges to other theological forms of inquiry, especially the theological hermeneutics of the triunity of God, which is in fact the foundation of the hermeneutics of Christianity’s understanding of personhood.

In Christianity, the foundation of the meaning of “person” lies primarily in the theological understanding of the nature and identity of the God of Jesus

10. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Murray, 1906), 146, and Brooke, “Science and Self: What Difference Did Darwin Make?,” 260.

Christ, who is biblically and doctrinally triune in being and in dynamic and relational existence. The personhood of God is threefold because God's very self, not only God's actions, is trinitarian in nature: Father, Son, and Spirit. One of the crucial, challenging facts expressive of this trinitarian personhood is that although the Spirit and the Son both reveal to us the personal nature of God's Being as equally "God from God"—consubstantial with the Father—they do not represent a totally identical form of personhood in God because, despite their ontological oneness, they are distinct in existence and in personal identity. The challenging, difficult issue here is that their distinction is not that one is to be considered "person" while the other is not, or that one is a revelation of God's personhood while the other is just a secondary testifier to this revelation, and never personally a revealer of God's identity. Rather, they equally reveal God's personhood in the very way by which each is *particularly and differently* a "person." More complicated still is the fact that one of these two persons has a timely, corporeal personhood, that is, the Son, whose incarnation and humanity as Jesus Christ are constitutive of his being, while the other, namely the Holy Spirit, by her very nature, has not.

If, therefore, the previously mentioned, biological understanding of personal identity can by any means duplicate the complication, it would be by means of possible attention to the noticeable difficulty of speaking (in relation to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in rational and plausible terms about an alleged personhood, such as, for instance, the personhood of the Holy Spirit whose nature substantially and conceptually transcends physical being-ness.¹¹ This inarguably makes the theological endeavor for understanding personhood in the light of a belief in a God who has a personal identity of a *triune*, rather than a *monos*, nature the more difficult and tricky task, especially if we take into consideration the wider, general difficulties that originated from use of the concept of "person" in the theology of the Trinity throughout the history of Christian doctrine, and particularly during the age of modernity.

Keeping these three complications in mind, I will begin this first chapter by looking at the understanding of the concept of "person" in its wider philosophical and anthropological framework within the intellectual context of modernity. I will do this by examining specific modernist trends in the notions of "personhood" and "self." Second, I will present two major theological approaches that developed a theology of God in interaction with the modernist trends of thought about personhood. One is mainly existence-oriented, while

11. For a brief introduction on the physical theory of personhood, see B. Garrett, "Personal Identity," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 7:307–8.

the other is revelation-centered. I will argue that these two options are only echo-variations of the modernist, nontheological understanding of “self” and “personhood,” rather than attempts to transcend or challenge such understanding. In his essay on human nature, Aaron Garrett claims that “in the end, the battle between reason and ‘above’ reason which had raged throughout the eighteenth century was won by reason and a uniquely strong assertion of it: Hegelian absolute knowledge.”¹² I shall be trying to show in the ensuing sections that in its attempt to offer a plausible understanding of the notions of “self” and “personhood” *from* the context of the doctrine of God, theology in modernity could not confront and deal with the challenging difficulties of the battle to which Garrett points. Instead, theology lost this battle and ended up succumbing to “reason” and endeavoring time and again to prove its intellectual allegiance and loyalty to the rules of the new winner.

II. “INDIVIDUAL” OR “PARTICULAR”: WHICH IS BOETHIUS’ CONCERN?

In an article titled “Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issue,” Niels Gregersen takes us back to the ancient interaction between Christian theology and Greek philosophy in an attempt to detect in this interaction the roots of the modernist concept of “personhood.” Gregersen points out that the habit of defining “personhood” by means of the human rational capacity and restricting it to human cognitive activities already finds traces in the Stoic tradition. The Stoics spoke about personhood simply as the “role” that is played, or the “outlook” that is demonstrated or imaged by each individual in her societal presence or embodiment. With the Roman philosopher Cicero, Gregersen continues, the Stoic notion of personhood survived in the following centuries, yet this reason-centeredness is now overindividualized and accompanied by a consideration of human moral actions as inherent to the person’s *what*, while the human rational ones are inherent to the person’s *who*. “Person,” accordingly, connoted a rational, individual being who acts particularly “as a moral subject [who is] accountable for his or her deeds.”¹³

Gregersen afterwards suggests that the first serious attempt at developing a fully structured understanding of “personhood” in Western Christianity was offered in the writings of the philosopher and theologian Boethius. Boethius developed this interpretation, according to Gregersen, specifically in his *A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius*. In his study of this text, Stephen Hipp surmises that in the definition of “personhood” that Boethius offers, we attain

12. A. Garrett, “Human Nature,” 680.

13. Gregersen, “Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues,” 8.

for the first time “a formal speculative definition of the term [person],” as well as the “culmination in the genesis of the concept of ‘person,’ and the point of departure for its seminal future in the West.”¹⁴ Personhood for Boethius, as Niel Gregersen explains, is mainly “the capacity for rational discernment [that is] present in an individual human being.”¹⁵

Both Gregersen and Hipp believe that despite his awareness that the dimensions of communion and mutual contact ought to be reckoned with for understanding “personhood,” Boethius mainly focuses on the public roles of personhood as demonstrations of an *individual* substance. This focus on individuality, Gregersen and Hipp contend, passed through the centuries to the modernist Western understanding of “personhood” and caused problems for the intellectual context of that era. For, despite the fact that the theological interpretation of “personhood” that one finds in the writings of other church fathers—mainly the Cappadocian fathers—maintained strict attention to the notions of “communion” and “relationality” in the hermeneutics of “personhood” (especially in the context of the theological discussions on the triune God), Western modernity selectively inherited from Christian theology the Boethian focus on rationality and individualism, and left behind the Cappadocians’ attention to relationality, particularity, and otherness. This argument notwithstanding, the question that one should still ask is the following: Is the modernist adoption of an emphasis on individualism and rationality, heavily invested in Boethius’ classical definition of “person,” expressive of an accurate understanding of Boethius’ own hermeneutics of “personhood”?

In his significant study of the notion of “person” in Boethius and other traditions in Christian history, Stephen Hipp argues that there is a substantial conceptual link between Boethius’ definition of “person” and his understanding of the notion of “nature.” Hipp affirms that this link is indispensable for conducting subtle considerations about Boethius’ classical definition of “personhood.” Hipp argues that, following Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Boethius jots down four meanings to the notion of “nature,” the fourth of which specifically refers to the idea of “particularity” and construes it as one of the defining elements of the states of being-ness and of being a substance. “Nature,” Boethius says, has more than one meaning. Yet, one can still generally say, according to him, that nature “belongs to those things which, since they exist, can in some way be apprehended [as well as the inapprehensibles (e.g., God)] by the

14. Stephen A. Hipp, “Person” in *Christian Tradition and the Conception of Saint Albert the Great* (Münster: Druckhaus Aschendorff, 2001), 79.

15. Gregersen, “Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues,” 8–9.

intellect.” Nature, in other words, is the specific difference that gives a defining predication of any existing thing.¹⁶ Therefore, Boethius’ suggestion means that one cannot just be made *of* a nature. One should also exist *as* and *in* nature as well.

Understanding this emphasis on “in nature” is necessary for perceiving Boethius’ reliance on Aristotle’s metaphysics of “nature” in his (Boethius’) endeavor to define “person.” This conceptual reliance, nonetheless, cannot be apprehended apart from the context of Boethius’ critical assessment of Eutyches’ Christology. In his thinking about “personhood,” Boethius has in mind the Eutychian claim that while Christ or the divine *Logos* in eternity is *of* two natures, human and divine, he does not exist as them or does not subsist *in* them both after the incarnation.¹⁷ The incarnate *Logos* in, or as, Jesus Christ, Eutyches concludes, must then be of one nature and one personhood. This means that the divine *Logos* takes merely a figurative human form, but not a substantial human personhood.

In his interaction with such Christological logic, Boethius rejects Eutyches’ interpretation of the *Logos*’ humanity, because he believes that its logic is based upon the philosophical assumption that two different natures can constitute together the substance of something, without both equally or similarly acquiring a concrete form of existence. There are, that is, natures that exist beyond, or even without, any concrete substance, any form of existence, or ultimately any personal presence. In the case of Eutyches’ Christology, Boethius finds such a philosophical background expressed in the claim that the *Logos* has a human nature, yet he does not subsist in a human personhood, but only in a divine one. And, since the nature and the personhood are one and the same thing, according to Eutyches, it is better, from this perspective, to speak about the *one, single* nature and person of the *Logos* after the incarnation. Boethius concedes that the human nature’s presence in the incarnate is not necessarily denied in this view. Yet Boethius criticizes this understanding by opining that the human nature, according to this logic, instead exists in Christ via his divine personhood, without needing a concrete form of subsistence of its own (that

16. Hipp, “Person” in *Christian Tradition and the Conception of Saint Albert the Great*, 101; and Boethius, “A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,” in *Boethius, the Theological Tractates, the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/London: Heinemann, 1973), 1: 5–60 (77–81). The other three are: 1) “nature belongs to those things which, since they exist, can in some way be apprehended by the intellect”; 2) “nature is either that which is able to act or be acted upon” 3); “nature is a *per se* and non-accidental principle of movement” (ibid., 1:100–101).

17. Boethius, “A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,” the introduction, 1–15.

is, the human nature exists *within* the divine nature that is incarnate as human). In such a Christology, Boethius concludes, we have here what can be possibly described as the “religious withering of humanity.”¹⁸

Boethius rejects Eutyches’ Christological logic primarily because it does not in his opinion present a proper understanding of the relationship between “substance” and “existence,” or “nature” and “personhood.” Though he is as strongly critical of the Nestorians’ claim of the existence of two persons that are representative of the two natures in Christ as the Eutychians are, Boethius does not support the philosophical understanding of the relation between “nature” and “substance” that underlies the Eutychian logic. Against Eutyches’ claim that nature can *be* without concrete subsistence, Boethius argues that every nature exists in a concrete form of subsistence, whether this subsistence was corporeal (bodies) or incorporeal (substances) in form. Why does every nature exist or subsist? Because nature, according to Boethius, is “either that which can act or that which can be acted upon.”¹⁹ Action indicates concrete existence, for the substance that has a certain nature must subsist in order to act, or in order for its actions to reflect its nature’s predicates. But is nature confined only to corporeal bodies? Boethius says it is not. Nature exists in corporeal as well as incorporeal bodies, because nature is “the principle of movement per se, and [it is] not accidental.”²⁰ This is not to mean that what applies to the relation of nature to its existence in corporeal entities applies completely to nature’s existence in incorporeal ones. What, for instance, applies to the human (corporeal) in this regard does not apply to God (incorporeal). Boethius takes this logic to the arena of Christology to argue that in the God–human relationship, the relation of nature to existence is different from the same relation in the case of the divine–human natures in Jesus Christ. In the first, there is a nature that exists in corporeal form (human), which is related to another nature that exists in incorporeal reality (God). In the second, nevertheless, we have two natures,

18. C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (New York: Morehouse, 1992), chapter 8. For some classic literature on Monophysitism within the framework of the councils’ history see, for example, Leo Donald Davis, S.J., *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical/Michael Glazier, 1983); H. M. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils, from a Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), vol. 14; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); and Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

19. Boethius, “A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,” I.25.

20. *Ibid.*, I.40–45.

divine and human, that are not only related to each other, but each also is related to its particular corporeal existence and action.

Be that as it may, nature for Boethius is inherent to the subsistence of its substance, and is not concealed behind this subsistence. Rather, this subsistence is what makes the thing its particular being and what bestows upon the thing its distinction as a substance with a particular form of existence. “Nature” becomes intelligible by means of the particular form of its existing substance. This form of the substance’s existence not only reveals the substance’s predicates, but also defines the substance’s nature in its individuation.

It is upon this meaning of “nature”—which Hipp believes Boethius derives from Aristotle’s four meanings of “nature”—that Boethius develops his definition of “personhood.” Before looking at this definition in Boethius’ writing, let me briefly visit Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and read his understanding of the relationship between “substance,” “form,” and “existence.”

In his attempt to answer whether or not only sensible substances exist, Aristotle states that “absurd is the [Platonic] doctrine that there are certain entities apart from those in the sensible universe, and that these are the same as sensible things except in that the former are eternal and the latter perishable.”²¹ Substances, in other words, cannot, in Aristotle’s opinion, exist without forms and without being sensible. Forms are not related to substances by means of intermediaries. They are rather immediately predicative of their substances. Why? Because, says Aristotle, “if there are intermediate objects of sense and sensations, clearly there will also be intermediate animals between the ideal animals and the perishable animals”;²² the thing, that is, which Aristotle believes to be impossible.

Does this mean that the sensible forms *are* the substance they represent, as if they are its nature? Aristotle thinks that this is far from being the case. It just means that the first principles, which are the constituents of something and the generators of what this thing is in nature, can be perceived from this thing’s forms and sensible elements. This is just an epistemological and not an ontological relationship. Knowing the nature of the substance via its forms and sensible elements does not mean that these latter are constitutive or exhaustively definitive of the nature of this substance: “to judge from these arguments [i.e., that are related to the forms’ and elements’ observation and examination] the first principles will *not* be the genera of things.”²³

21. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I-IX, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/London: Heinemann, 1975), III.2.997b.20–21.

22. *Ibid.*, III.2.997b.24ff.

One may sense here a possibility of solely focusing on individuality, by means of reading Aristotle as linking to an organic extent the substances and their specific forms. This possibility becomes plausible when one focuses on Aristotle's attention to particularity at the expense of his emphasis on universality. Aristotle knows that this might be gleaned from a face-value reading of his emphasis that the substance exists in and as its form. Therefore, he states that he is not turning individuals into first principles, but rather maintaining that "the first principle and cause must be apart from the things of which it is a principle, and must be able to exist when separated from them." "If this is a sufficient reason," Aristotle continues, "it is the more sufficient that universal concepts should rather be considered to be principles . . ." ²⁴ Aristotle is here neither denying the universal character of the substance's nature, nor this nature's substantiation in individual, particular forms. Yet, more crucially, he avoids stressing one of these two poles at the expense of the other. Intelligibility *and* sensibility, Aristotle states, should both be maintained as equally constitutive of the substance's knowledge. ²⁵

This explains why for Aristotle "one" does not always connote oneness in number, or at least not always strictly so. This is Aristotle's other way for showing that stressing the presence of the nature in the substance's sensible form is not a negation of universality because it is not an affirmation of individuality. If oneness here does not mean "numerical oneness," it does not then defend individuality, because, for Aristotle, "numerically one' and 'individual' are identical in meaning." ²⁶ The form of the substances is inherent to the substance's existence not because it individualizes or images it as a numerically single isolated entity. Far from this, the form defines the substance's nature in the sense of reflecting it in its particular, concrete existence. The elements that form the substance's existence are as substantial as their substance's nature. This is why they predicate its nature as such.

23. Ibid., III.3.998b.3. Italic is mine. Even if we considered the *genera*, which we infer *from* the form and the sensible elements, a first principle, this does not make the forms a *first* principle for Aristotle because "the definition by *genera* will be different from that which tells us of what *parts* a thing is composed" (ibid., III.3.998b.5).

24. Ibid., III.3.999a.20.

25. "If nothing exists apart from individual things, nothing will be intelligible; everything will be sensible, and there will be no knowledge of anything . . . nor again will anything be eternal or immovable, since sensible things are all perishable and in motion. Again, if nothing is eternal, even generation is impossible; for there must be something which becomes something i.e. out of which something is generated, and of this series the ultimate term must be ingenerated" (ibid., III.4.999b.1-4).

26. Ibid., III.4.1000a.9-10.

In the light of the previous understanding, one can notice that oneness for Aristotle can also mean “oneness in kind,” not in number. This makes his speech on oneness and particularity in relation to “substance” and “subsistence” a discourse on the meaning of “individuation,” not on the centrality of “individuality.” The idea of “individuation” is what underlies Aristotle’s saying “if the substance of each thing is one in no accidental sense, and similarly is of its very nature something which *is*—then there are just as many species of Being as of Unity.”²⁷ There is in this attention to “one of a kind” an acknowledgment of difference in terms of “otherness,” as well as an attempt to show that the otherness of the substance that expresses its privation subsists or hypostatically stands (i.e., exists firmly, stably, and durably) in a substantial manner in the concrete form of existence, which this substance takes. Without this existence, the privation of the substance is reduced to mere numerical oneness or individuality.

This Aristotelian attention to the particularity or individuation of every substance (which lies in its subsistence in particular forms of existence) is the backdrop of Boethius’ understanding of the relation between the nature and its personal form of existence (i.e., *hypostasis* or *substratum*). It shapes the track of Boethius’ focus on the category of “particularity” and points ultimately to its central role in his philosophical and theological discourse on personhood in relation to both the triune God and the human species. “Person” designates the thing that makes the human, in his or her individuation, a being in comparison to, and contrast with, other beings. “Person” cannot designate so unless the meaning of “substance” in relation to it circles around particularity; around, that is, what makes the personhood its distinctive subsistence. This meaning of “substance” (i.e., “the specific difference that gives form to anything”) is, in Boethius’ thought, the “substrate of person”—what carries personhood, what makes it possible and firmly, stably, and durably existent.²⁸ “Personhood,” as viewed from the perspective of this definition of “substance,” cannot, then, be predicated to universals, because this would be contrary to the factor of particularity. Particulars, Boethius says, “are those which are never predicated of other things.” In such things, he continues, the term “person cannot anywhere be predicated of universals, but only of particulars and individuals; for there is no person of man or animal or a genus; only Cicero, Plato, or other single individuals are single persons named.”²⁹ By being ascribed to individuals and not universals, “person” is properly expressive of itself. It is its own substance.

27. *Ibid.*, IV.2.1004a.8–9.

28. Boethius, “A Treatise Against Eutyches and Nestorius,” II.5–10 (83).

29. *Ibid.*, II.45–50 (85).

Therefore, the definition of “person” that properly expresses substantiality in terms of particularity should be “an individual substance of a rational nature.”³⁰

The previously exposed logic in Boethius’ text not only explains why for Boethius “person” can only be predicated of particulars and individuals, and not of universals.³¹ More importantly and crucially still, and contrary to what Hipp thinks, this explains, in my conviction, why Boethius incorporates the concept of “individuality” into his definition of person.³² If “person” can only be designative of particulars because it is reflective of what makes the thing its distinctive substantial form, then speaking about individuality as inherent to personhood makes sense as an expression of a “one-of-a-kind” form of distinction. Individuality in this view indicates *individuation* and “one-of-a-kindness,” and not singularity or any ontological or existential monistic sense of self-enclosure. Modernity’s big fault was in taking Boethius’ understanding of “individuality” into a dead end when it separated this notion from Boethius’ understanding of “nature” as a designation of particularity and uniqueness, and linked it unwittingly to a notion of metaphysical “rationality” that indicates self-awareness and self-contemplation. Stephen Hipp correctly notes that “individual” in Boethius’ definition is married to “substance,” and not to “reason” or “rationality.”³³ Individuality designates the being’s personal individuation and particularity, and not of an individual, single being that is rationally self-sufficient and subsistently self-oriented. This latter meaning was imposed on the Boethian definition and led ultimately to the opposing of “personhood” to “selfhood”: to be a “self” meant to be fully and individually a self-contained being, and not a substance in a particular, unique form of personal subsistence.

Stephen Hipp makes a very valuable contribution to the explanation of Boethius’ usage of “individual” in his attention to the crucial relation between Boethius’ previous definition of “person” and his central insight that “essences can indeed be universals, but they ‘sub-stand’ in individuals and particulars alone.”³⁴ In the intellectual context of modernity, this claim was inappropriately rephrased into “essence that ‘subsists’ in individuals.” This is a dangerous

30. *Ibid.*, III.5 (85).

31. Hipp, “Person” in *Christian Tradition and the Conception of Saint Albert the Great*, p. 106.

32. *Ibid.*, 107. “The concept of individuality intended by Boethius when defining ‘person’ as an ‘individual’ is not easy to determine, not only because of the extreme difficulty in distinguishing his own opinion from that of the author from whom he borrows the notion, but also because of the different and apparently contending theories his analysis brings into discussion.”

33. *Ibid.*, 108.

34. *Ibid.*, 111.

reading, or misreading, of Boethius' thinking because it indicates that substantiality is restricted to, and conditioned by, singularity and closed oneness. Whereas "the essence *sub-stands* in individuals and particulars alone" means that the essence qualifies, and gains, an existence that has a particular form, rather than hides or remains concealed behind its particular form of existence.

III. THE TRACES OF BOETHIUS' LEGACY IN MODERNITY

In its core, the Boethian notion of personhood states, as Hipp accurately notes too, that "subsistence' . . . is undetachable from the notions of 'being', 'substance' and 'essence' (broadly understood)," and individuation, in relation to the triune God or the human being, similarly results in "substantiality" and not in "singularity" or "rationality," in the first place.³⁵ The modernist intellectual context failed, so it seems, to notice the strong link between "particularity" and "individuality" in Boethius' definition of "person," because in modernity there was a tendency to segregate "existence" from "being" and "substance" from "subsistence" according to an "either-or" reasoning strategy (which I will point to when I speak about the impact of Fichte on modernity). This "either-or" criterion led eventually to a division between speaking about the self as "personal and relational" on one hand, and speaking about it as "rational and individual" on another.

From the Enlightenment onwards, both theology and the Western secular, intellectual context associated "personhood" with the common interpretation of the notions of "self" and "subject," which reflect in its content nothing other than the aforementioned one-sided misreading of the Boethian definition of "person" as "an individual subject of rational nature."³⁶ Instead of maintaining the distinction between the inner nature of being and its concrete existence—which characterizes the original meaning of the oldest Greek patristic term that is designative of "personhood," namely "*hypostasis*," which Boethius also used—"essence" and "existence" were conceptually separated from each other on the basis of the belief that the patristic term "*hypostasis*" per se

35. Ibid., 111–12, 116–17.

36. Peter Hick and C. Webb believe that Boethius' "*persona est naturae rationabilis individual substantia*" should rather be interpreted as "the essence of human nature is a specific expression of the rational order of things," which would eventually show that the Western stress on "individuality" and "rationality" by the help of Boethius' definition is not quite congenial with the thinking of the latter's Aristotelian, medieval figure. See Hick, "One or Two? A Historical Survey of an Aspect of Personhood," 41; and C. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), 47.

originally designated “individual/singular subject,” and had nothing to do with the subsistence of this subject.

Instead of highlighting “individuation,” the modernist thought-form shifted Boethius’ definition into an invitation for centralizing “individualism.” The logic behind this shift becomes even clearer when we look at it from the modernist one-sided concern about “selfhood” as “inwardness,” and specifically as *rational* inwardness. By default, individuation has to do with one’s presence with and before others, because it designates the thing that makes this one person his or her unique and different self *in relation to and in comparison with* others. Individuation, therefore, does not help when the point of departure in understanding one’s self is a narrow attention to his individual, intrinsic structure of awareness. The attention needs instead to be paid to individualism as a more appropriate expression of *the* inner rational constituent of the human self.

Charles Taylor is one of those who persuasively pave the way for this conclusion when he invites us to see the influence of Plato’s notion of “self-mastery” on Western modernist thinking. It was Plato, Taylor argues, who gave to the modernist context the conviction that “reason is at one and the same time a power to see things aright and a condition of self-possession. To be rational is truly to be master of oneself.”³⁷ In Plato’s imagination of the ideal human being-ness and selfhood, singleness and rationalism were totally identified and conditioned by each other in the form of conditioning self-awareness, and even defining it, by means of an understanding of the mind as a “unitary space,” which alone enables the human to reach into “the state of maximum unity with oneself.”³⁸

Apart from Plato’s “self-mastery” notion, Taylor continues, the modernist interpretation of “selfhood” as an expression of interiority that lies in individualism and rationalism could have never developed.³⁹ This notion

37. Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 116 (115–26). Taylor finds this mainly in Plato’s *Republic*.

38. Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 119. Taylor associates this thinking with the Platonic speech about the soldiers of the Republic who aspire at becoming self-sufficient, single agents among others, and points to the derivation of this description in the image of warriors in Homer’s writings. The Homeric warriors now represent those single individuals who represent the image of the great hero, whose heroic identity lies in himself, despite the god’s empowering of him (e.g., like Achilles). The Homeric warrior is a single, self-aware person, great by virtue of his very own single self (*ibid.*, 118–19). Taylor, however, equally points to a difference between Plato’s Republicans and Homer’s warriors, in that Plato considers the disposition of the soul more crucial than external success. For Plato, reason’s central place in one’s self-awareness makes itself apparent in the fact that “the truly, wise, just—and thus happy—person is disinterested in the world of power,” that is usually relevant to the life of warriors and their passion for glory (*ibid.*, 120–21).

arrived to the modernist mind, as Taylor ably shows, via Augustine's attention to self-reflexivity and consideration of it as part of the human orientation to God, and through Descartes' twisting of this Augustinian thinking by means of centralizing the self's inward reflexivity in the individual's cognitive mastery ordering of his inner ideas.⁴⁰ In Descartes' "*cogito ergo sum*" axiom, Plato's association of the centrality of reason, along with the notions of "order," "giving reason," and "giving an account," reaches its ultimate end. It is one of the major factors that encouraged the adoption of Boethius' definition of "person" and invited its interpretation in the way described here. Boethius' Aristotelian attention to individuation was in modernity baptized with the Platonic emphasis on rational self-mastery and self-awareness, eventually turning individualism and rationalism into *the* main constituents of human selfhood. The specific outcome of this shift that concerns me here is the ensuing modernist dichotomization of "the state of being personal" (i.e., dependent on relations with others: subsistence) and "the state of being an individual subject" (i.e., self-sufficient, fully in/as yourself: substance), which I will discuss in the following chapter.

39. *Ibid.*, 120.

40. *Ibid.*, 127–58ff.