

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE GLOBAL AGE

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Abstract

Filsafat bergulir seiring dengan zaman. Inilah hakikat filsafat, ia mengalir sepanjang aliran sungai peradaban manusia membawanya. Atau, dinamika filsafat mengawal sekaligus mengarahkan dinamisme perkembangan sejarah kehidupan. Dinamika filsafat Kristiani diawali dengan perspektif baru dalam membaca filsafat Aristotelian. Tidak hanya dari Thomas Aquinas kita mewarisi perspektif Kristiani di dunia filsafat, tetapi juga dari Nicholas de Cusa kita memiliki purifikasi terminologi semacam “the single and the individual” atau “the whole”. Zaman kini telah bergulir kepada “global age”. Pertanyaan dasar yang diajukan dalam artikel ini: Apa peranan filsafat Kristiani di dunia global? Penulis dengan melakukan studi panoramik mengajukan beberapa tesis pandangan. Pertama, filsafat Kristiani mesti mewujud dalam sosok-sosok yang mampu menyatukan peradaban. Filsafat Kristiani perlu melampaui perdebatan dari level terminologis kepada upaya-upaya konkret personal eksistensial untuk membangun peradaban baru. Yohanes Paulus II harus disebut sebagai salah satu sosok partisipatif “beyond” terminologi filosofis Kristiani. Ia menghadirkan “sense of unity” dari peradaban zaman ini.

Keywords: the single, individual entity, the whole, the Christian philosophy, the global reality, existential narrative.

Today there is a reason to question the adequacy of the individualist paradigm characteristic of modern times which can be traced from the nominalism of William of Ockham¹ and Siger of Brabant in the late Middle Ages. For them all was simply single and hence self-interested; universal and unifying terms were merely names: hence the term “nominalism”. With this as the ruling paradigm, Hobbes and Locke generated philosophical

1 Patric Aspell, *Medieval Western Philosophy: The European Emergence*, Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999, VII.

individualism, Adam Smith elaborated the corresponding capitalist economy theory of equal competition, and political life was organized in terms of a set of nations exercising power in terms of national self-interest – or, as was classically said; “war by another name”.

The result ranged from the spectacular to the abominable. On the one hand, industry flourished, the quality of life soared, and man literally reached on the moon. On the other hand, the wretched conditions of urban factory life were chronicled by Karl Marx; capitalist exploitation reached the level of colonialism, whence it descended into enslavement; and the world took the path of mass death and mutual threats of extermination in world wars both hot and cold.

1. The Global Reality

In these times human forces are magnified exponentially and we find our lives increasingly shaped in terms not of isolated single nations, but of their increasingly global multiplier. This has been building gradually over the last 25 years as manufacturing has been partialized out between countries and trade has intensified. Where before different regions of each country carried out specific tasks, such as mining, agriculture, textiles, manufacturing and finance, now each task is concentrated in a specific region of the world and the global network of transportation and trade distribute the products universally. Typically my car is from Japan, my clothes is from China, and both are made with materials from Africa. I solve the problems with any American credit card by talking with someone in India and television makes information and images from every part of the globe instantly and constantly available to every living room.

The modern paradigm of self-interested individualism and its structures for orienting these forces are now insufficient and the center no longer holds. In the economy greedy mortgage practices in the U.S. have caused a financial disaster which like a tsunami sweeps across the world. In the political –military arena any single home, car or person can now be targeted and obliterated by the touch of a button in any part of the world. The battle for minds and hearts is now fought on the TV screens in every one’s home.

We have then a new set of facts: that the human race and its physical world now constitute a global reality, that this is self destructive if lived in terms of the old modern individualist paradigm, and that together these impose the need to develop a new paradigm for global times. This must be based not on single self-interested entities related only as the bricks in a wall, but by recognition of the newly organic interrelatedness of the global whole which we now constitute. Here our question is: what is the role of Christian philosophy in this?

2. Nicholas of Cusa

Here, Heidegger had a suggestion. Looking at philosophy as an ongoing encounter with human challenges he pointed out that at each major juncture one response or path has been chosen and pursued while its alternate(s) is left fallow. Consequently, when the chosen path later comes to an impasse the way forward is not to try to continue in the same terms, but to a step back to the path that had been left undeveloped and which now offers the promise of great progress.

In this light if the path of modernity reflected the choice to build upon the single individual, the step back would return to its alternate paradigm in terms of the whole as was then proposed by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). This may indeed suggest the paradigm needed for our global age, though after modern individualism it may not come so easily. Let us then first look briefly at the paradigm built in terms of the whole as proposed by Nicholas of Cusa. Then we shall consider the modern difficulties in its reconceptualization in our day. Together these in turn can serve as pointer to the work now needed from Christian philosophy.

The Whole Contracted

The thought of Cusa retained the mark of a Christian philosophy with its focus upon unity, of which Cusa notes four types: (1) the single, individual entity, (2) a collection of such individuals, (3) the whole of which the individuals are parts, and (4) that of the one divine Absolute from which all come and to which all are directed. Thus, his thought is inspired by the Christian philosophy of God (4) as the basis for the unity of the whole of creation (3) within which each individual relates to all others (2) and thereby achieves his or her meaning and dignity (1).

Cusa's paradigm while rooted in the divine proceeds rather in terms of the whole (3) and its contradictions, that is, beginning from the significance of the whole it sees individuals (1) as its contractions. Thus, the individual shares in something of the ultimate or definitive reality of the whole of the being. One is not then an insignificant speck, as would be the case were one to be measured quantitatively and contrasted to the broad expanse of the globe. Rather one has the importance of the whole as it exists in and as me – and the same is true of other persons and of the parts of nature.

The import of this can be seen through comparison with other attempts to state this participation of the part in the whole. For Plato this was a repetition or imaging (*mimesis*) by each of the one ideal form. Aristotle soon ceased to employ the term participation as image because of the danger it entailed of reducing the individual to but a shadow of what was truly real. Cusa too rejected the separately existing ideas or ideal forms.

Instead what had been developed in the Christian culture was a positive notion of each creature participating in being² and together constituting a concrete whole. This is retained by Nicholas of Cusa.

But he would emphasize that the being in which each person or thing participates is the whole of being³. This does not mean that in a being there is anything alien to its own identity, but that the reality of each being has precisely the meaning of the whole as contracted to this unique instance. To be then is not simply to fall in some minimal way on this side of nothingness, but rather to partake of the totality of being and the meaning of the whole of being, and indeed to be a realization of the whole in this unique contraction or instance: things retain their identity, but do so in and of the whole.

De Leonardi formulates this in two principles:

- The Principle of Individuality: Each individual contraction uniquely imparts to each entity an inherent value which marks it as indispensable to the whole.
- The Principle of Community: The contraction of being makes each thing to be everything in a contracted sense. This creates a community of beings interrelating all entities on an ontological level.⁴

Hierarchy of the Internally Related

After the manner of the medievals Cusa saw the plurality of beings of the universe as constituting a hierarchy of being. Each being was equal in that it constituted a contraction of the whole, but not all were equally contracted. Thus an inorganic being was more contracted than a living organism, and a conscious being was less contracted than either of them. This constituted a hierarchy or gradation of beings. By thinking globally or in terms in the whole, Cusa was able to appreciate the diversity of being in a way that heightened this ordered sense of unity in which relationships are not externally juxtaposed, but internal to the very make up of the individuals.

This internal relationship is made possible precisely by a sense of the whole⁵. For this Cusa may have drawn more directly from the Trinity, but this in turn is conceived through analogy to the family of which individuals are contractions.

2 G. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation: The Unity of Man in God*, Madras: University of Madras, 1978; *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994, 95-102.

3 *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans., London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954, 84-88.

4 David De Leonardi, *Ethical Implications of Unity and the Divine in Nicholas of Cusa*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998, 228.

5 *Of Learned Ignorance*, I, 9-10.

In a family all the persons are fully members and in that sense fully of the same nature. But the father generates the son while the son proceeds from the father. Hence, while mutually constituted by the same relation of one to the other, the father is and is received from the father. As giver and receiver the two are distinguished in the family precisely as the different terms of the one relation. Thus, each shares in the very definition of the order: the father is father only by the son, and vice versa.

Further, generation is not a negative relation of exclusion or opposition; just the opposite – it is a positive relation of love, generosity and sharing. Hence, the unity or identity of each is via relation (the second unity), rather than by opposition or negation as was the case in the first level of unity. In this way the whole that is the family is included in the definition of the father and of the son, each of whom are particular contractions of the whole.

This is lived in the interpersonal relations especially now in the global reality constituted of economics and politics, information and relation between civilizations. The philosopher can look here and find a new and special manifestation of being. Indeed, hermeneutics⁶ would suggest that this constitutes not only a *locus philosophicus* whence insight can be drawn, but the prejudgments of philosophers which constitute the bases of philosophical insights themselves. The critical scientific interchange of philosophy is a process of controlled adjustment and perfection of these insights.

Explicatio-Complicatio

Cusa speaks of this an *explicatio* or unfolding of the perfection of being, to which corresponds the converse, namely, folding together (*complicatio*) the various levels of being which constitutes the perfection of the whole. Hence Cusa's hierarchy of being has special richness when taken in the light of his sense of a global unity. The earlier classical had been a sequence of distinct levels of beings, each external to the other. The great gap between the multiple physical or material beings and the absolute One was filled in by an order spiritual or angelic beings. As limited there were not the absolute, yet as spiritual they were not physical or material. This left the material or physical dimension of being out of the point of integration.

In contrast, Cusa, while continuing the overall graduation, sees it rather in terms of mutual inclusion, rather than of exclusion. Thus inorganic material beings do not contain the perfection of animate or conscious being,

6 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroads, 1975.

but plants include the perfection of the material order as well as life. Animals are not self-conscious, but they integrate materials, animate and conscious and perfection. Humans include all four: inorganic, animate, and conscious and spiritual life.

In this light, the relation to all others through the various contractions of being is intensified as beings include more levels of being in their mature. On this scale humans as material and as alive on all three levels of life: plant, animal and spirit, play a uniquely unitive and comprehensive role in the hierarchy of being. If the issue is not simple individuality by negative and exclusive contrast to others (the first level of unity), but uniqueness by positive and inclusive relation to others, then human persons and the human community are truly the nucleus of a unity that is global. Cusa carried this line of reasoning to its epitome in his theology of Christ as both man and God.

Global Dynamism

Thus far we have been speaking especially in terms of formal causality by which the various beings within the global reality are to specific degrees contractions of the whole. To this, however, should be added efficient and final causality by which the ordered universe of reality takes on a dynamic and even development character. This has a number of implications: directedness, dynamism, cohesion, complementarity and harmony.⁷ Cusa's global vision is of a uniquely active universe of being.

Dynamic Unfolding of the Global Whole: As an unfolding (*explicatio*) of the whole, the diverse beings (the second type of unity) are opposed neither to the whole (the third type of unity) nor to the absolute One (the fourth type of unity). Rather, according to the Platonic insight, all unfolds from the One and returns thereto.

To this Cusa makes an important addition. In his global vision this is not merely a matter of individual forms; as a whole beings are directed to the One by interacting with others (unity three). Further, this is not a matter only of external interaction between aliens. Seen in the light of reality as a whole of which the particulars are unique and indispensable contractions, they interact not merely as a multiplicity, but as an internally related and constituted community with shared and interdependent goals and powers.

Direction to the Perfection of the Global Whole: as contractions of the whole, finite beings are not merely products ejected by and from the universe of being, but are limited expressions of the whole. Their entire reality is a

7 De Leonardis, 233-236.

limited image of the whole from which they derive their being, without which they cannot exist, and in which they come together (*complicatio*) to find their true end or purpose. As changing, developing, living and moving they are integral to the universe in which they find their perfection or realization, and to the perfection to which they contribute by their full actuality and activity.

This cannot be simply random or chaotic, oriented equally to being and its destruction, for then nothing would survive. Instead, there is in being a directedness to its realization and perfection, rather than its contrary. A rock resists annihilation; a plant will grow if given water and nutrition; an animal will seek these out and defend itself vigorously when necessary. All this when brought into cooperative causal interaction has a direction, namely, to the perfection of the whole.

Cohesion and Complementarity in a Global Unity: every beings is then related to every other in this grand community almost as parts of one body. Each depends upon the other in order to survive and by each the whole realizes its goal. But the global vision of Cusa takes a step further, for if each part is a contraction of the whole then, as with the DNA for the individual cell, "in order for anything to be want it is it must also be in a certain sense everything wick exists."⁸ The other is not alien, but part of one's own definition.

From this it follows that the realization of each is required for the realization of the whole, just as each team member must perform well for the success of the whole. But in Cusa's global view the reverse is also true, namely, it is by acting with others and indeed in the service of others or for their good that one reaches one's full realization. This again is not far from the experience of the family and civil society, but tends to be lost sight of commercial relations. It is by interacting with, and for, others that one activates one's creative possibilities and most approximates the full realization of being. Thus, "the goal of each is to become harmoniously integrated into the whole of being and thereby to achieve the fullest development of its own unique nature."⁹ This is true human dignity and a Christian philosophy.

In the end, however, this vision and wisdom of Nicholas of Cusa was not chosen for implementation. In its stead the flow of philosophical concern was with reality as constituted of nominalist singles which it sought to clearly conceive and hence control. This raises special difficulties today in regaining the sense of the whole.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

3. The Whole for Kant and Hegel

Nicholas of Cusa was truly a bridge person, often termed: the last of the ancients and the first of the moderns. Given the former it was easy for him to think in terms of the whole, for as depending upon and expressing the one divine source and goal all creation naturally constituted a single whole. This was vivid in his mind. But as Charles Taylor recounts at length in his *A Secular Age*,¹⁰ in modern times the path taken by the “social imaginary” or “common understanding” has moved precisely from unity in the divine to the many, to the finite rather than the infinite, and to the relative rather than the absolute. Precisely because for so long this has been our mode of understanding it is now difficult to think in terms of the whole. Instead, our world is physically constructed and socially and legally organized in terms of competing and conflicting entities and self-interest. As such it easily slips into extremes.

To gauge this difficulty more precisely it may help to look with Robert Piercey at the thought of Kant and Hegel.¹¹ Neither rejected a sense of the whole; on the contrary both considered it essential for thought. Yet the difficulties they encountered in adequately articulating it might help to guide the present efforts to develop a more adequate paradigm.

For Kant, just as the idea of is the condition for unifying our states of consciousness, the idea of “world” is the condition for the synthesis of all appearances,¹² both spatial and temporal. Yet as we can never encounter the entire sum of appearances, ‘world’ can never be an object of experience. Hence, it is a “principle of totality” without content.¹³ It serves as a necessary regulative idea, for objects must be conceived as if in the whole in order to have significance. However, as the meaning of persons and other realities become subject to these integrating ideas, Kant’s key sense of the person as end in itself is on slippery ground. Not only will the sense of the particulars vary along with the sense of the whole, but they are in danger of being supplemented by the whole and losing their integrity, as Hegel will soon demonstrate.

Hegel saw this idea of ‘world’ as whole to be necessary, but noted that in Kant it remained too abstract and empty. Instead for Hegel it must be a “concrete whole” with a limitless content, an “underdetermined manifoldness (each) inwardly complete and independent.”¹⁴ Moreover, with dialectical

10 Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

11 The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly (ACPA) 82 (2008).

12 *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith, London: Macmillan, 1927.

13 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraers, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, 70. *Ibid.*, 268-269, n2.

14 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of The Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 11.

logic the objective spirit explains just how these forms evolve in a necessary order, such that “the true is the whole”.¹⁵ But by thus “hypostatizing” the objective spirit Hegel overachieved in the opposite direction rendering such wholes as the state more real than the manifold of individual humans that comprise it.

Thus in basic contrast to Kant’s overly abstract whole, Hegel in making the whole to be the concrete would render the individual humans abstract. In this case the “cunning of reason”¹⁶ puts the individual to work for itself, such that we begin to “hypostasize social and political entities, to raise power to the heavens and then tremble before the state.”¹⁷ In brief, both Kant and Hegel recognize a sense of the “whole” to be indispensable, but both overshoot the mark by making it either overly abstract (Kant) or overly totalizing (Hegel), both at the expense of the particulars whether as persons or nature.

4. A Christian Philosophy for the Global Whole

As with Kantian antinomies, what this would seem to belie is that for reasoning in terms of the modern paradigm the present global reality requires reason to go beyond its real capabilities. It recognizes the need for an active role of a whole in its thought process, but seems able to realize this only in ways that have proven to be positively destructive of the reality of persons and things. In view of this, a special task of Christian philosophy is to pick up the suggestion of Cusa and contribute to the elaboration of a new and more adequate paradigm for the global age upon which we now enter. This must have a number of characteristics:

- (a) It needs to support persons in their distinctive free creativity while uniting them in societies which promote rather than enslave them.
- (b) It must be able to develop a sense of the whole as the field of being which brings persons together in ways that reach beyond self-interest and carry the sense of the common good to global dimensions.
- (c) As Christian it should reflect one of the great human narratives of origin and eschaton, situate evil in the context of the good, and heal injustice in the broader horizon of love.

15 G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, New York: Dover, 1956, 33.

16 Paul Ricoeur, “Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity,” in *From Text to Action*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991, 245.

17 G.F. McLean, “Karol Wojtyla’s Mutual Enrichment of the Philosophies of Being and Consciousness,” in *Karol Wojtyla’s Philosophical Legacy*, N. Billias, et al, eds., Washington: D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008, 23.

This challenges modern philosophical rationalism to open its horizon to additional levels of understanding and meaning. After 400 years of intensive individualism and rationalism this is not an easy path. Indeed, it is among those tasks which, as *Fides et Ratio* notes, philosophy would never take up for purely speculative reasons. Yet it is imposed by the global character of life in our age if seen in terms of an exalted sense of human dignity and the high hopes this evokes for the human adventure. This is the exciting call of Christian and other philosophers to creative philosophical work in our times.

Philosophy of Existence

The materials for this work were noted by Karol Wojtyla just prior to becoming John Paul II. He wrote of two currents of Christian philosophy: a philosophy of being and a philosophy of consciousness. For him, these were typified at their best by the schools of Lublin (the philosophy of being) and of Krakow (the philosophy of consciousness). The need was to establish a positive relation between the two¹⁸ which would advance Christian philosophy and enable it to confront the imposed Marxism of the day.

For the philosophy of being the first step was to uncover the unique existential reality of each being. Where in Greek philosophy all were individual instances of a form by predicamental participation in the context of the Christian proclamation of human dignity and freedom a millenium of work by the Church Fathers and the Islamic philosophers uncovered *esse*, which finally was integrated as act with essence as potency by Thomas Aquinas.

Cornelio Fabro traces this transformation as taking place in the specifically Judeo-Christian context. Because the Greeks had considered matter (*hyle* – the stuff of which things were made) to be eternal, no direct questions arose concerning the existence or non-existence of things. As there always had been matter, the only real questions for the Greeks considered the shapes or forms under which is existed. But the Hebrew account of creation meant that all was under the dominion of God. Hence, at the conclusion of the Greek and the beginning of the medieval period Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), rather than simply presupposing matter, attempt its first philosophical explanation. The issue in other words had moved from the forms which matter possessed to the far more radical issue of existence: to quote Hamlet, it was quite simply “to be or not to be”.

This is to ask not only how things are of this or that kind, or the compossibility of two forms, which Aristotle had taken as a sufficient response to the first scientific question: “whether it existed”; but how they

18 *Ibid.*

exist at all rather than not exist. It constituted an evolution in the human awareness of being, of what it means to be real, namely, to exist or to stand in some relation thereto.

But Fabro suggests another factor in the development of this awareness of being as existence which was yet more specifically Christian, namely, reflection upon one's free response to the divine redemptive invitation. This response goes beyond any limited facet of one's reality, any particular consideration of time, occupation, or the like, to the self-affirmation of one's total actuality. Its sacramental symbol, baptism, is not merely that of transformation or improvement, but of passage through death to rise to radically new life. This directs the mind beyond my specific nature or individual role. It focuses rather upon one's unique reality as a self for whom living freely is to dispose of my act of existence, and living socially is to do this in cooperations with others.

This depended metaphysical sense of being in the early Christian ages was catalyzed by the new sense of freedom proclaimed in the religious message. I say "catalyzed", not "deduced from", which would be the way of science rather than of culture. Where the former looks for principles from which conclusions are deduced of necessity, a culture is a creative work of freedom. A religious message inspires and invites; it provides a new vantage point from which all can be reinspected and rethought; its effects are pervasive and enduring. This was the case with the Christian *kerygma*.

But this was more than light to the mind. Christ's resurrection was also a freeing of the soul from sin and death. It opened a new ability to be or exist – and this not merely to some minimum extent, but to the full extent of one's actuality, which Fabro calls an 'intensive' notion of being.

This power of being bursting into time:

- directs the mind beyond the ideological poles of species and individual interests, and beyond issues of place or time as limited series or categories;
- centers, instead, upon the unique *esse* of the person as a participation in the creative power of God which is and cannot be denied;
- rejects being considered in any sense as nonbeing, or being treated as anything less than one's full reality;
- is a self affirmation of one's own unique actuality irreducible to any specific group identity; and
- is an image of God for whom life is sacred and sanctifying, a child of God for whom to be is freely to dispose of the power of new life in brotherhood with all humankind.

It took a long time for the implications of this new appreciation of existence and its meaning to germinate and find its proper philosophical articulation.

lation. Over a period of many centuries the term 'form' was used to express both kind or nature and the new sense of being as existence. As the distinction between the two became gradually clearer, however, proper terminology arose in which that by which a being is of this or that kind came to be expressed by the term 'essence', while the act of existence by which a being simply is was expressed by 'existence' (*esse*)¹⁹. The relation between the two was under intensive, genial discussion by the Islamic philosophers when their focus on the Greek tradition in philosophy was abrogated at the time of al-Ghazali.

This question was resolved a century later in the work of Thomas Aquinas through a "real distinction" between existence and essence, not as two beings, but as two principles of being, each totally dependent upon the other in its own way. This rendered most intimate the relation of the two principles related as act and potency respectively, and opened a new and uniquely active sense of being and hence of person.

The Conscious Existent

1. If Thomas were to be interpreted reductively in the object terms of Aristotelian substance or essence, for John Paul II to introducing the phenomenological elements of subjectivity would have done violence to his thought. Fabro and others, however, have just shown that Aquinas' thought was in continuity with Augustinian subjectivity and Platonic participation – that it was indeed an enrichment of that Christian Platonism with the systematizing tools of Aristotle. Hence it contained, and might even be said to consist extensively in, those elements of existence and subjectivity which were strongly emergent in the continental existential phenomenologies of Wojtyla's time. Moreover, Brentano had shown the young Husserl that this interior reflection could be grounded in Aristotle's sense of intentionality²⁰. Thus subjectivity was not antithetic to the mind of Aristotle, though due to his concern for realism in contrast to Plato's world of ideas, it was for him the path less followed.

The interior path of human consciousness, so brilliantly developed by Augustine as the archetype of Christian philosophy, was at the root of Thomas' philosophy. If in times of modern objectivism, especially in a Marxist context, it was not helpful to point outward and upward as

19 Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d' Aquino*, Torino: Societa Ed. Internazionale, 1950, 75-122.

20 *Aristotle and His World View*, trans. By R. George and R. Chrisholm, Berkeley: University of California, 1978; *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, trans. By R. George, Berkeley: University of California, 1975; Wojtyla's Mutual Enrichment of Philosophies of Being and Consciousness.

did Plato, there was a crying need to point inward to the life of the Spirit in humanity. In this project Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness could help, provided it could escape idealist closure within the human spirit. Hence, the need to provide a foundation in being for this philosophy.

2. This pointed to the work on participation which had been begun by Cornelio Fabro prior to World War II. This renewed the study of Aquinas by identifying not only the much noted Aristotelian elements of form and essence which were especially relevant to rationalism, but also the key Platonic notion of participation (*mimesis* and *methesis*). What this 'brought to light' (the etymology of 'phe-nomen-ology') was not only the systematizing elements of the structures of form as a key to the species of material substance, but even more the sharing in being or *esse* in imitation of the creator. As seen above Fabro had carefully traced the gradual evolution of this notion through the Church Fathers and early Scholastics²¹ to *esse* in relation to essence. Thus, when Karol Wojtyla gives participation so central a notion in his philosophy he is at base speaking of the character of *esse* as formal effect of God's creative activity and as this realized in beings according to their essences.
3. In this way Fabro elaborated an intensive notion of *esse*,²² graded according to the various levels of being. The orders of inorganic, vegetative, organic and animal life are graded intensively, each at a higher level than its predecessors. And if, as Thomas states, *esse* for a living being is to live, the *esse* of human being is to live consciously, reflectively, freely and responsibly according to its properly human nature or essence.

Perhaps most importantly, this conscious life is not an accident adjoined to the substance, but is the very *esse* of that substance. Thus, if the subject or *supposit* is the substance as exercising its proper act of existence, then the very being of the person is most properly its self-conscious, and hence free and responsible, life. Wojtyla's Acting Person, seen in the light of the investigations at that time of *esse* in terms of participation, brings not merely a sense of the importance of action as a human activity and engagement, but a penetrating insight into the very being of the person. This is properly free, unable to be assumed by state or class, yet bound in solidarity with nature and all humankind as participants in the divine Unity, Truth and Justice, Goodness and Love.

21 *La nozione*, 39-122; *Participation et causalité Selon S. Thomas d' Aquin*, Louvain: Pub Univ. de Louvain, 1961, 179-244.

22 *La nozione*, 135-139.

This was the exciting new development in scholastic metaphysics at the time that Cardinal Wojtyla was working on adding to the philosophy of being insights from the philosophy of consciousness or phenomenology, especially of Scheler regarding values. Both of these were vastly enriching, but what was key was the combination of the two so that the two philosophies each transformed the contribution of one another. Together they constituted not only a reconciliation of opposites, but a decisive step ahead in the understanding of the human person. This was the proper philosophical contribution of Karol Wojtyla to a Christian philosophy.

Hence, the notion of the human person – rather than being only formal, specific and abstracted from the uniqueness of the human person – is precisely that of a unique, irreplaceable and hence consciously free being. Moreover, this is not true only a spirit which is somehow added to a body; rather it is the one person which is, or exist in a bodily manner. Conversely, all the physical characteristic of the body – whether DNA, sexual differentiation, or physical action – are personal and carry the dignity of a unique, free and responsible being. Both physical and spiritual dimensions point to the unique character of a human person.

Here the exploration of interior conscious life takes on its full significance as the way in which the person (a) lives, (b) reflects the creative act from which one comes, and (c) is oriented teleologically toward the goodness of God as subsistent love. Every human has this dignity, and not only for human acts done consciously, but even as regards ‘acts of man’, where one’s freedom is not engaged, yet one must take this human dignity into account, whether in infancy, prison or senility.

In the 1950s and 60s what could be known of the truth about man was refounded in *esse* taken intensively according as the person consciously manifest the uniqueness and ineffability it participates from the divine creator. Mystery, uniqueness and incommunicability, as inability to be simply assumed by class or category, are characteristics of the existing substance or “*supposit*” as existing not or itself, but in itself. In the face of Marx’s class conflict this now took on enriched meaning.

Yet paradoxically, with this comes the basis for communication with all existents with whom we deeply share. Friends are not only abstractions or “gifts we give ourselves”, but relationships in which we are immersed by the very fact of being created and creative participations in God as *alpha* and *omega* – the One at the summit of Plato’s levels.

This creative historical juncture of *esse* and consciousness which Karol Wojtyla elaborated suggests that we look at Christian philosophy not statically as a structure out of time, but rather as a constructive effort. His situation at the point of human crisis which was the Marxian collapse of modernity recalls Heidegger’s method of interpretation noted above. In this light Wojtyla’s thought is not a static work with fixed pieces to be deci-

phered, or even to be assembled, by external juxtaposition. Rather, it is an organic and creative process not merely choosing but forging a new path. In this respect philosophy recalls more the plastic artist, creating by shaping and reshaping materials to aesthetically constitute a new and unique sense of being and of life.

It is not, then, that metaphysics can come to be recognized by contemporary man provide it be complemented or enriched, but instead, the enrichment of metaphysics by the Christian sense of being today provides the ground for recognizing the proper dignity and rights of the person as self-conscious, free and responsible being. Similarly, it is not that consciousness alone is now central, but rather, it is the founding of consciousness in being precisely as participation in the absolutely *Esse* that gives consciousness the uniqueness, freedom and transcendence which characterizes the person.

A Phenomenology of Narrative

Paul Ricoeur would complement this by exploring the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger (as would John Paul II more in terms of Scheler and Ingarden). In their approach the world is “a structure of meanings constituted by the acts of a subject” or conscious existent.²³ These self-aware and free acts constitute a world or *lebenswelt* which is not a set of brute things, but the network of meaning in which all is encountered. This does not so much point back to a history of what has happened, as open up possible modes of one’s own being. Thus the symbolic dimension of the *dasein*’s consciousness constitutes “a proposed world that I could inhabit and wherein I could project some of my ownmost possibilities.”²⁴ This transforms Kant’s empty time into “human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative”²⁵ such as that of the Judeo Christian tradition which in turn serves as a matrix for the interpretation of all experience. The whole or world, rather than being an abstract totality is “a set of existential possibilities that are disclosed through the application of a narrative to a highly specific situation.”²⁶ For Ricoeur this remains highly individual, being constituted through a projection performed by an individual and collective entities are derivative of individuals and their acts. In turn, this protects the creative freedom of the person to recast history in new ways such that persons are never puppets of the cunning of reason.²⁷

23 Piercey, 472.

24 Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in *From Text to Action*, 86.

25 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, vol. I, 3.

26 Piercey, 476.

27 *Ibid.*, 477.

However, does defense of the freedom and individuality of persons and peoples do full justice to our experience of the force of the global whole? Is it enough to understand this as a composition of entities even with Ricoeur's convergent intentions (or Rawls' "overlapping consensus")? By nature, essence and form, things do differ one from the other and thus allow for Descartes search to render all in terms of clear and distinct. Yet if, as Kant and Hegel, Cusanus and Ricoeur perceive, nothing make sense except in some unity or whole, and if this global reality now moves from serving as context to becoming the main existential determinant shaping human life in our times, then more is needed to understand this "whole" and its meaning for man and nature. For this we need to move not only from the essence to the *esse* of each and their convergent intentions to their proper cause, Ipsum Esse or Being Itself. This is the subsistent existent, absolute in unity and truth, goodness and beauty. Not incidentally are the characteristic of the Brahma as *sat, cit, ananda*: existence, consciousness and bliss, in which terms we engage in the *Quest for the Living God*,²⁸ the title of a recent book by Elizabeth Johnson.

Here the full power of Ricoeur's sense of narrative becomes manifest. It is not a simple statement, a univocal or unchanging proposition. Rather it is the narrative of a people's whole tradition through history in which God has ever the initiative, but to which human life is the ongoing response. This tradition as now marked by engagement in the global whole is no longer only to set of existential possibilities opening before one, but is rather the global whole of the actual and possible beings.

The Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition is heir to the one of the great religious narratives which recounts the ways of God with man. Yet even this cumulative tradition of a single people with all its content can never exhaust the infinite divine source and goal. Hence, it must ever be open to being complemented. "Naming of God is not simple but multiple. It is not a simple tone, but polyphonic."²⁹

5. Conclusion

In this light the role of Christian philosophy in a global age receives some specification. Confronting the task of generating a new paradigm for our new global times it should not attempt to bring us back to the age of faith with its paradigm of unity. This has already been succeeded by a secular age with its paradigm of individual or, more properly, of multiple

28 New York: Continuum, 2007.

29 Ricoeur, "Naming God," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans. D. Pellauer, ed. M. Wallace, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1995, 207-216.

singles. We need now to supercede both in a paradigm in terms of emerging human consciousness of the global whole.

To this, Christian philosophy has much to contribute. As we have noted, (a) it can reach back to its work during the Age of the Church Fathers who gradually brought out the sense of existence beyond that of form which had characterized the philosophy of the Greeks. (b) With this it has elaborated a sense of the self-sufficiency and autonomy, the unique diversity and freedom, of the person. (c) To this the sense of *esse* as participation in the divine provides an absolute foundation.

Yet it is focused upon the whole of creation rather than upon the creator itself and in any case it recognizes that as a human product no sense of the whole can ever hope to exhaust fullness (as Kant well noted). As detailed by John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*³⁰ this challenges reason to escape the bonds of the modern philosophical search for clarity and control and to reach out to the whole realm of human life experience. This has two dimensions: the one horizontal as we move out into this global age, the other vertical to a deeper and higher sense of Being as divine source and goal. The proper task of a Christian philosopher today would seem to be to unite these in a philosophy of the lived whole that becomes ever more inclusive, more intensive and more deep.

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30 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html, VI-VII (accessed on September 2008).

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