

PERSONAL PARTICIPATION IN THE THOMISTIC ACCOUNT OF NATURAL LAW

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The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to certain personalist implications in the Thomistic definition of natural law as “nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law.”¹ While Thomas himself does not invoke the concept of “person” in his account of natural law, I argue that “participation” can and should be understood as a personal act. Justification for this interpretation is found in the commonality of rationality: that which both makes a substance to be a person and renders the participation of man in the eternal law to be a truly natural *law*. Taking these Thomistic concepts as foundational, Karol Wojtyła would later unify these discrete accounts within his formulation of *Thomistic Personalism*.²

There are, however, initial difficulties for the approach of “Thomistic personalism,” which Wojtyła himself acknowledged and answered. He begins by noting that “personalism” as a movement arose after Thomas and that it is concerned with predominantly modern problems.³ There is also a seeming incongruity in formulating a *philosophical* Thomistic personalism because Thomas’ own treatment of “person” is largely found within a theological context.⁴ Seeking to explain in some part the mystery of the Trinity, he sought a clear definition of *person*

¹ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1882. ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2c: “...lex naturalis nihil aliud est quam participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura.”

² The essays of Wojtyła that I refer to throughout this paper can be found in *Person and Community: selected essays*. Theresa Sandock, OSM, translator. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

³ “Thomistic Personalism,” 165.

⁴ Indeed, Wojtyła acknowledges that “we encounter *persona* mainly in his treatises on the Trinity and Incarnation, whereas it is all but absent from his treatises on the human being.” (“Thomistic Personalism,” 166)

that could be applied to both creatures and God.⁵ In answering both of these objections, Wojtyła grants that Thomas was primarily concerned with the *concept* of person rather than the *problem* of the person. But he nonetheless sees Thomas' account as providing a solution to the *problem* by examining the *concept*. In this way Thomistic personalism rises from theological concerns but has philosophical relevance. And despite the lack of an explicit treatment of personalist problems, then, Wojtyła holds that Thomas' philosophy and theology "allows us to speak of Thomistic personalism."⁶ This same reasoning, I argue, justifies speaking of natural law as a "personal participation."⁷

Personalism for Wojtyła is largely a practical and ethical concern. This means that he employs speculative concepts (for example, of "person" and "nature") primarily with an aim to action.⁸ But he is keenly aware that lacking a correct understanding of who the human *is* leads to a deficient account of what he or she should *do*. Wojtyła recognizes the importance of understanding nature metaphysically in his account of natural law and attributes the supposed conflicts between "person" and "law" to a fundamental misunderstanding of these concepts. Both "nature" and "person" must, he holds, be understood in terms of what a human essentially

⁵As Wojtyła explains, the early theologians recognized that "what was especially needed was a conception of person and an understanding of the relation that occurs between person and nature." ("Thomistic Personalism," 166)

⁶ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," 165. Williams explains that "the term 'Thomistic personalism,' where the Thomistic element serves as a modifier of the substantive 'personalism' (as opposed to 'Personalistic Thomism,' which would take its place alongside the many schools of Thomist thought), the emphasis clearly falls on the personalistic nucleus of this current. Yet the Thomistic component is hardly extraneous. With his rigorous metaphysics and clear theological-philosophical anthropology, Aquinas provided fertile soil in which personalistic theory could take root, avoiding the subjectivist drift to which other personalisms were prone." (166)

⁷ As Janet Smith explains, Wojtyła "makes it clear that his anthropology and ethics are in no way incompatible with Thomism and indeed depend upon Thomistic metaphysics." (Janet E. Smith. "Natural Law and Personalism in *Veritatis Splendor*." *John Paul II and Moral Theology*. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, editors. New York: Paulist Press, 1998, 68). See Thomas D. Williams. "What is Thomistic Personalism?" *Alpha Omega* VII (2004): 163-197, 164: although "personalism" in its broadest sense can refer to "any school of thought or intellectual movement that focuses on the reality of the person (human, angelic, divine) and on his unique dignity, insisting on the radical distinction between persons and all other beings (non-persons)." In this paper, I use "personalism" to refer to the philosophical approach formulated by Wojtyła, one that certainly fits this general characterization.

⁸ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," 165.

is, an account of the person that includes but does not reduce to consciousness alone.⁹ Wary of the danger in over-emphasizing consciousness, Wojtyła retains and supplements Thomas' objective accounts of person, nature (and, later, law) to guard against a modern tendency to take consciousness as synonymous with and exhaustive of "person" (a move he sees as eventually severing the unity of man).¹⁰

"Nature" and "person" are foundational concepts in Wojtyła's account of natural law and he views the apparent opposition between person and law as resulting from a misunderstanding of the two. As he states, "I would now like to show the extent to which this conflict, which is so widespread and spontaneous, is an illusory conflict. To do so, I shall have to examine a very basic and elementary concept, the concept of nature, and its relation to the concept of person[.]"¹¹ Wojtyła immediately explains that he investigates "nature" and "person" not as "concepts for their own sake, but as signs of reality." This is because, again, his primary concern is practical and ethical, not speculative.¹² A mistaken view of nature erodes the foundations of Thomas' entire account of "person" and "natural law" and this is precisely the problem that launches Wojtyła's own essay on *The Human Person and Natural Law*.

The Boethian definition of "person" accepted by Thomas and later adopted by Wojtyła is

⁹ See Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," *Person and Community: selected essays*. Theresa Sandock, OSM, translator. New York: Peter Lang, 1993: "We in the Thomistic school, the school of 'perennial philosophy,' are accustomed to primarily or exclusively one meaning—nature in the metaphysical sense, which is more or less equivalent to the essence of a thing taken as the basis of all the actualization of the thing." (182)

¹⁰ See Paul Kucharski. "Pope John Paul II and the Natural Law." *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*. Billias, Curry, and McLean, editors. Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008: "Despite John Paul's introduction of personalistic principles as a means of supplementing a traditional Thomistic account of the person, we must always keep in mind that he acknowledges Aquinas's understanding of the person as valid and necessary. In fact, John Paul's personalism relies on a metaphysics or philosophy of being so as not to fall into the same dualistic error as Descartes and other modern philosophers." (119)

¹¹ Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," 181.

¹² As Smith reminds us, the metaphysical analysis of "person" is secondary for Wojtyła: "A metaphysical analysis would lead one to see that man is capable of being self-determining because he is a person, that is because he is rational and free, but for Wojtyła this metaphysical analysis is of secondary interest." (75)

of the person as “an individual substance of a rational nature.”¹³ Thomas parses this definition into “individual substance,” which signifies the singular within the genus of substance, and “rational nature.” This restricts the definition to *rational* substances, those which are properly “persons.”¹⁴ Yet the objection can be raised that individuals are indefinable and that the inclusion of “individual” within this definition is mistaken. By “individual,” though, Thomas does not mean a particular individual human being but rather what belongs to “the general idea of singularity.”¹⁵ In other words, this definition is not of an individual person but rather the particular elements needed for an individual to be constituted.¹⁶ The Thomistic treatment on the human being emphasizes hylomorphism, viewing the human being as a composite of matter (the body) and form (the soul).¹⁷ This is implicitly a personal understanding of the human, though, because the soul is the substantial form of the human and, because this form is rational, he or she is personal.¹⁸

The modern tendency to divide the person into body and consciousness does not view the

¹³ ST I, q. 29, a. 1, obj. 1: “...definitio personae quam Boetius assignat in libro de duabus naturis, quae talis est, *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*.”

¹⁴ ST I, q. 29, a. 1c: “...Et ideo etiam inter ceteras substantias quoddam speciale nomen habent singularia rationalis naturae. Et hoc nomen est persona. Et ideo in praedicta definitione personae ponitur substantia individua, inquantum significat singulare in genere substantiae, additur autem rationalis naturae, inquantum significat singulare in rationalibus substantiis.”

¹⁵ ST I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, licet hoc singulare vel illud definiri non possit, tamen id quod pertinet ad communem rationem singularitatis, definiri potest, et sic philosophus definit substantiam primam. Et hoc modo definit Boetius personam.”

¹⁶ Although the concept of “person” is presented within a Trinitarian context, the true reflection of “person” in the created order allows access to some understanding of the divine persons. But, as Wojtyła notes, “person” understood as the “highest perfection” in the world “must be realized in an incomparably more perfect degree in God.” (“Thomistic Personalism,” 166) He thereby maintains that a natural investigation into God understood as “person” is possible, while ceding Trinitarian speculation to revelation. In the general Thomistic method of advancing from what is more known to us to what is more intelligible in itself, knowledge of human persons lays a foundation for a conception of God as personal. While the latter “has its entire basis in revelation” the former “is the product of philosophical reflection, based on an analysis of the reality accessible to human reason itself.” (167)

¹⁷ For example, in ST I, qq. 75-76.

¹⁸ Wojtyła notes that the human person differs from other persons (divine or angelic) because the rational soul informs a body. For this reason, the soul has “in addition to spiritual faculties, faculties that are intrinsically dependent on matter.” (“Thomistic Personalism,” 168) As Wojtyła continues, the activities of the human soul are performed through its powers, both spiritual and material, which “contribute in their own way to the shaping of the psychological and moral personality.” (168-169)

soul as the form of the human being and first principle of his or her activities but rather as a substance unto itself. This over-emphasis on consciousness, Wojtyła warns, leads to a view of the person as “merely a certain property of lived experiences” which is distinguished from other conscious beings only by his or her own self-consciousness.¹⁹ This splits man into his consciousness and materiality and the problem then becomes how one can put him back together again. This is a radical departure from Thomas, who viewed consciousness as a consequence of man’s rational nature, not constitutive of it.²⁰ While this split is rejected by Wojtyła, he is nonetheless keenly aware of the importance of accounting for the subjective aspect of the person. Indeed, he regards Thomas’ objectivism of the human person as seemingly leaving little room for an analysis of consciousness.²¹ But in Thomism, he nonetheless finds the tools needed to repair the modern split. Thus he adopts and draws out personalist elements within Thomas’ accounts, presenting the concepts of “person” and “nature” in *Thomistic Personalism* and then showing their application to law in *The Human Person and Natural Law*.

For both Thomas and Wojtyła the natural law is a rational participation in eternal law. This participation is focused practically on doing good and avoiding evil. This practical aspect of natural law appeals, in particular, to Wojtyła the personalist who adopts Thomas’ account while drawing greater attention to the role of the person. The participation of natural law is realized through natural inclinations that are concomitant with man’s rational nature. As Thomas

¹⁹ “Thomistic Personalism,” 170.

²⁰ Williams nicely summarizes these issues: “Thomas’s objectivistic view of the person and his faculties explains how the person is able to act as he does. A purely subjectivistic approach to personhood, so characteristic of modern philosophy, risks losing the objective base which makes human subjectivity and lived experience possible. This is where a broader personalism, and particularly Thomistic personalism, ensconced as it is in an objective metaphysics, offers surer footing for anthropology and ethics than a strict personalism that endeavors to reinvent metaphysics on the basis of man’s self-consciousness. For Thomas, consciousness and self-consciousness derive from the rational nature that subsists in the person, and are not subsistent in themselves. Thus, as Wojtyła notes, consciousness and self-consciousness characterize the person, then they do so only in the accidental order, as derived from the rational nature on the basis of which the person acts.” (176-177)

²¹ See Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 170: “that in which the person’s subjectivity is most apparent is presented by St. Thomas in an exclusively—or almost exclusively—objective way.”

explains, “all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, namely insofar as from their being impressed on them, they have their inclinations to their proper acts and ends.”²² In the case of man, there is a natural inclination by which he is ordered to a share in divine reason.

All creatures participate in a being that is existence itself, God, and this participation entails taking part in the order of providence.²³ In this way, participation is understood by Thomas not only as a taking part in existence but also thereby a sharing in the order of divine providence.²⁴ Participation is understood generally by Thomas, then, and is particularly used within his definition of natural law as a kind of taking part in both existence and providence. Yet, though all existents participate in the perfection of God, only the rational creature’s participation is properly called a law. This is because natural law can only be truly law if it pertains to reason.²⁵ The participation of non-rational beings is a similitude of the natural law.²⁶ The lack of rationality omits an essential element of law and, therefore, non-rational participation is not properly speaking a law. Understanding man as a rational animal means that natural law is truly

²² ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2c: “...manifestum est quod omnia participant aliquantulum legem aeternam, inquantum scilicet ex impressione eius habent inclinationes in proprios actus et fines.”

²³ ST I, q. 22, a. 2c: “...cum enim omne agens agat propter finem, tantum se extendit ordinatio effectuum in finem, quantum se extendit causalitas primi agentis.”

²⁴ ST I, q. 22, a. 2c: “Cum ergo nihil aliud sit Dei providentia quam ratio ordinis rerum in finem, ut dictum est, necesse est omnia, inquantum participant esse, intantum subdi divinae providentiae.”

²⁵ ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 3: “Sed quia rationalis creatura participat eam intellectualiter et rationaliter, ideo participatio legis aeternae in creatura rationali proprie lex vocatur: nam lex est aliquid rationis, ut supra dictum est.” (v. VII, p. 154) To show the importance of natural law in John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor* is beyond the scope of this study, but here there is a particularly strong tie between John Paul II/Wojtyła and Thomas’ account: “In this way God calls man to participate in his own providence, since he desires to guide the world — not only the world of nature but also the world of human persons — through man himself, through man’s reasonable and responsible care. The natural law enters here as the human expression of God’s eternal law. Saint Thomas writes: ‘Among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, being provident both for itself and for others. Thus it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end. This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law.’” (par. 43)

²⁶ ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 3: “...etiam animalia irrationalia participant rationem aeternam suo modo, sicut et rationalis creatura. Sed quia rationalis creatura participat eam intellectualiter et rationaliter, ideo participatio legis aeternae in creatura rationali proprie lex vocatur: nam lex est aliquid rationis... In creatura autem irrationali non participatur rationaliter: unde non potest dici lex nisi per similitudinem.” See also ST I-II, q. 93, a. 5c: “Unde alio modo creaturae irrationales subduntur legi aeternae, inquantum moventur a divina providentia, non autem per intellectum divini praecepti, sicut creaturae rationales.”

natural to him because it is through the inclinations of his nature that man participates in the eternal law. Central to Thomas' account of natural law, then, is the meaning of "participation" and "nature." Man as a rational being, according to Wojtyła, fulfills his nature precisely through his rational participation in eternal law.²⁷ Understood in this way, participating in eternal law is not an external imposition but an activity fully in accord with man's nature.

To support his claim that the supposed conflict between "person" and "law" can be quelled, Wojtyła turns to the concept of "nature" and outlines two possible conceptions. He identifies one as the "Thomistic" or "traditional" understanding of nature wherein "the essence of a thing taken as the basis of all actualization." As he explains, the word "all" is extremely important because it allows one to view nature in the metaphysical sense of being integrated into the person: "Boethius, and the whole Thomistic school after him, defined the person in the following way: *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantiae*. Nature in this sense is integrated in the person."²⁸ This is the view he advocates, in preference to the alternative view that restricts nature to the subject of activity, not its source. The reduction of "person" that he rejects loses the person as the cause of actions and, he warns, "...nature in this sense excludes the person as an acting subject, as the author of action, because nature in this sense points to a thing's being actualized, and to its being actualized in a ready-made sense, without the efficient involvement of anyone—any subject who is a person."²⁹ In advocating the metaphysical

²⁷ ST I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 2: "...omnis operatio, rationis et voluntatis derivatur in nobis ab eo quod est secundum naturam, ut supra habitum est: nam omnis ratiocinatio derivatur a principiis naturaliter notis, et omnis appetitus eorum quae sunt ad finem, derivatur a naturali appetitu ultimi finis. Et sic etiam oportet quod prima directio actuum nostrorum ad finem, fiat per legem naturalem."

²⁸ Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," 182.

²⁹ Ibid. See also: The conflict between person and nature arises when human nature is seen merely as the subject of acts, not their source. As he explains, "the conflict between person and nature appears only when we understand nature in the sense in which the phenomenologists understand it, namely, as the subject of instinctive actualization, as the subject of what merely happens." (Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," 182). See also Kucharski, 112: "According to John Paul, the phenomenological understanding of nature leads to a conception of human nature which is completely reducible to the biological, to the human body and its make-up and processes."

understanding of nature, Wojtyła follows Thomas and explains that this metaphysical understanding of nature integrates it into the person. He holds that with the distinctions drawn between a reductive and metaphysical view of nature “we are perhaps within a step of asserting that this conflict is an illusory conflict, for it exists only between person and nature understood in a certain way.”³⁰

Yet Wojtyła nonetheless worries that the apparent objectivity of Thomas’ account of person and natural law could render it less equipped to directly address modern concerns with consciousness and subjectivity. Although the definition of person qualified the personal substance as *individual*, Thomas explains that this is not to be taken as referring to this or that singular human being. This is because the singular cannot be properly defined and in this account he is directly concerned with formulating a proper *definition* of the person. Thus the definition concerns “what belongs to the general idea of singularity.” This leads Wojtyła to note that “when it comes to analyzing consciousness and self-consciousness—which is what chiefly interested modern philosophy and psychology—there seems to be no place for it in St. Thomas’ objectivistic view of reality. In any case, that in which the person’s subjectivity is most apparent is presented in an exclusively—or almost exclusively—objective way[.]”³¹ Yet this *problem* of the person can only be resolved by invoking the *concept* of person expounded by Thomas. As he continues, “St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person.” Yet Wojtyła nonetheless recognizes that the *concept* must be adapted to this problem.³²

³⁰ Wojtyła, “The Human Person and Natural Law,” 182.

³¹ “Thomistic Personalism,” 170.

³² Indeed, Wojtyła goes so far as to suggest that “it would be difficult to speak in [Thomas’] view of the lived experiences of the persons.” (“Thomistic Personalism,” 170-171)

While consciousness does not constitute the essence of the person, Wojtyła views it as essentially following man's rational essence.³³ This emphasis on consciousness is characteristic of Wojtyła's personalist development of Thomism. Indeed, as Janet Smith notes, this is where he begins to build on the Thomistic foundation, doing so as an architect keenly aware of modern concerns. As she explains, Wojtyła "shares the modern interest in consciousness and self-consciousness, though he does not share the modern view that the person *is* consciousness" and in this way "he uses an analysis of consciousness to unfold his notion of man as being free and self-determining."³⁴ The conscious and free activity of man constitutes morality, the practice of which Wojtyła holds is the most distinctive act of the human person, one that allows him to realize his nature.³⁵

This metaphysical understanding of "person" leads to an understanding of natural law as a participation consisting essentially of the person rationally—and consequently personally—acting in accord with eternal law. Natural law thus understood is not in conflict with the person but rather manifests a correspondence between them, one grounded essentially in rationality. His account of natural law addresses the practical concerns of personalism because this participation is effected through acts. For Wojtyła, merely knowing the good is obviously not sufficient because while morality "presupposes knowledge, the truth concerning the good," it must be "realized by willing, by choice, by decision."³⁶ The dependence of morality on knowledge and its connection to freedom evidences the unique nature and activity of the person. Through man's

³³ See Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," esp. section 4: "The Relation of the Objective Element (Being) to the Subjective Element (Consciousness.)"

³⁴ Smith, 74.

³⁵ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," 172: "that which is most characteristic of a person, that in which a person (at least in the natural order) is most fully and properly realized, is morality."

³⁶ Wojtyła, "Thomistic Personalism," 172.

free actions which as rational acts are also moral, we can come to an understanding of his nature, their source and cause.³⁷

The causal relationship of the natural law to the eternal law is also seen in Wojtyła's account of "person." Reflection on "person" in the created order, he holds, allows access to some understanding of the divine persons, though Wojtyła hastens to note that "person" in this case "must be realized in an incomparably more perfect degree in God."³⁸ There is nonetheless a true analogy between human and divine "person." Recognizing the human as a person draws us to an understanding of God as personal; natural participation likewise introduces, as Wojtyła explains, "an encounter with the divine source of law" because "it involves participation in the eternal law, which is in some sense identical with God, the divine reason."³⁹ Personal participation in this way introduces "an encounter with the divine source of law...it involves participation in the eternal law, which is in some sense identical with God, the divine reason."⁴⁰ This hearkens back at the same time, then, to the originally theological context for Thomas' account of "person." Indeed, while maintaining that personalism is philosophical, Wojtyła grants that the supernatural

³⁷Wojtyła further sees in this understanding of "nature" the foundation for defending human dignity, though to explore this claim is beyond the scope of this study. See Wojtyła, "On the Dignity of the Human Person," 178: "the constant confrontation of our own being with nature leads us to the threshold of understanding the person and the dignity of the person. We must, however, go beyond this threshold and seek the basis of this dignity within the human being. When we speak of the human person, we are not just thinking of superiority, which involves a relation to other creatures, but we are thinking above all of what—or rather *who*—the human being essentially is. Who the human being is derives primarily from within that being. All externalizations—activity and creativity, works and products—have here their origin and their cause." Williams explores this connection. See esp. 176 ff: "Indeed, man's dignity is rooted in his rational nature, which separates him from the rest of visible creation and wherein chiefly lies his resemblance to God. No matter what other elements are emphasized—the person's freedom, his creativity, his action, his self-consciousness, his interiority, his sociability, and so forth—they all have their objective base in an intellectual, and thus a spiritual, nature According to Thomistic theology and philosophy, the distinguishing characteristic of the person is precisely his rational nature from which his unique dignity derives, and this essential tenet distinguishes Thomistic personalism from other personalist schools." He will later claim that "Dignity, an attribute of the person denoting both excellence and worth, bridges the gap between metaphysics and ethics. In the case of persons, an "is" really does produce an "ought." The ontological superiority of persons over things, makes persons worthy (*dignae*) of special regard. Persons must be treated in a way consonant with their nature as free subjects of action." (191)

³⁸ "Thomistic Personalism," 166.

³⁹ Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," 184.

⁴⁰ Wojtyła, "The Human Person and Natural Law," 184.

perspective of the person “also ultimately explains everything that, when viewed in the light of reason alone, must remain a deep and impenetrable mystery of human existence.”⁴¹

Both Thomas and Wojtyła go so far as to hold that “person” understood as a rational subsistence is the “most perfect” being. This is because, as Thomas explains, the rationality of “person” signifies what is most perfect in nature.⁴² Seeing “person” in the created order allows access to some understanding of the divine persons. Wojtyła thereby maintains that a natural—that is, philosophical—investigation into God understood as “person” is possible, while ceding Trinitarian speculation to revelation. In the general Thomistic method of advancing from what is more known to us to what is more intelligible in itself, knowledge of human persons lays a foundation for a conception of God as personal. While the latter “has its entire basis in revelation” the former “is the product of philosophical reflection, based on an analysis of the reality accessible to human reason itself.”⁴³

Wojtyła’s personalism is grounded in metaphysical realism and emphasizes the person’s unique place in reality as a rational being.⁴⁴ These are points he adopts directly from Thomas and does not repudiate. Natural law as the rational participation in eternal law and the metaphysical understanding of the person as essentially rational, I suggest, shows that there is warrant in Thomas’ account to characterize this participation as personal. By recognizing participation as essentially personal, Thomism is able to speak to the modern concern with subjectivity while not losing the objectivity of natural law. The supposed conflict between natural law and “person”

⁴¹ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 175.

⁴² ST I, q. 29, a. 3c: “...persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura. Unde, cum omne illud quod est perfectionis, Deo sit attribuendum, eo quod eius essentia continet in se omnem perfectionem; conveniens est ut hoc nomen persona de Deo dicatur. Non tamen eodem modo quo dicitur de creaturis, sed excellentiori modo; sicut et alia nomina quae, creaturis a nobis imposita, Deo attribuuntur; sicut supra ostensum est, cum de divinis nominibus ageretur.”

⁴³ Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” 167.

⁴⁴ See Williams, 184: “*Subjectivity is, then, a kind of synonym for the irreducible in the human being.* Grounded as it is in metaphysical realism, Thomistic personalism posits the essential difference between man and all other objects on man’s ability to reason[.]” (emphasis in original)

arises from a mistaken view of the person, reducing nature to the material subject of activity and identifying the person with consciousness alone. Wojtyła's personalist response recognizes the person as a rational subsistence and nature as the cause and source of human actualization. The solution to the supposed conflict between nature and law depends on a clear understanding of the nature of man. Only then can one understand the natural law as a free and personal participation.

In this study, I have shown how participation serves as a focal point of a Thomistic personalist account of natural law. While Thomas and Wojtyła do not employ the exact formula of "personal participation," common to both is their recognition of the essential connections between the person and natural law and, on the part of Wojtyła, his dependence on the Thomistic metaphysical account of "nature." Wojtyła holds that lying at the heart of modern rejections of natural law is a mistaken view of the human being. Returning to the metaphysical understanding of "nature" and "person" formulated by Thomas, Wojtyła shows how this conflict can be resolved without forsaking either consciousness or objectivity.⁴⁵ Personal participation thus can and should be understood as a central element in Thomistic personalism. Therein is found an essential link between the perennial and personal accounts of natural law. In this way, Wojtyła shows how Thomistic concepts are capable of countering even objections not raised to Thomas himself and in this way the personalist Thomistic account of the natural law is truly perennial.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ As Smith expresses these connections, "man's rational nature, which defines his personhood, intimately links man with the 'ordinance of reason' that defines natural law" and thus the person naturally participates "in God's reason. With a proper understanding of nature, there should be no conflict between natural law and personalism." (71)

⁴⁶ The present work arose from a seminar class on the philosophical thought of Karol Wojtyła led by John P. Hittinger at the Center for Thomistic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (Houston, TX). My thanks to Prof. Hittinger, Daniel Wagner, and Jon Haines for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

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