THE CLASSICAL NOTION OF PERSON
IN TODAY'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATE
A COMMENTARY ON THE PAPER BY ENRICO BERTI

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Introduction

My comment on the paper by Enrico Berti is larger than the paper it should comment. It includes two sections:

A) the first one refers to some aspects of Berti's paper, concerning the presence/absence of the classical notion of person in contemporary philosophical debate;

B) the second one is a development on person in political realm. Its method relies on political sciences and political philosophy which are fundamental field of application of the idea of person. We have to integrate the classical notion of person into to-day socio-political dialectics. With the focus on that my comment goes behind the face to face relationships or what I would name the 'short relationships'. As social scientists we are challenged by the present Plenary Session's subject to explore both the content of concept of person and its presence/absence in contemporary social sciences, sampling the notion of person prevailing in them. The ideas of man, human nature and person we at least implicitly form, influence deeply the development of social sciences and of the related policies; and reciprocally social sciences' researches shape our concept of man.

A. I willingly express my agreement with the paper by Prof. Berti. By exploring in depth the classic concept of the person, he brings out two aspects: the solidity of Boethius's conception of the person which combines a theological origin with recourse to truly philosophical notions such as nature, individual, substance, rationality; and the recovery of the idea of substance in various expressions of the recent analytic philosophy, which seems to go

beyond the analysis of language alone. Berti rightly underlines that an adequate grounding of idea of person requires an ontological approach and not only a moral one, and this implies that the idea of substance, deeply questioned in modern thought, is recovered and considered valid.

1. *Person and Substance*

Perhaps the recovery of the substance, underlined by Berti in respect of some currents, affects only a small part of present philosophical thinking, often marked in Continental philosophy by post-metaphysical disenchantment which considers the very idea of substance outdated and useless (and frequently also the concept of nature/essence).

I recall an expression of Kelsen and a sentence taken from a minority opinion in a document of the Italian National Bioethics Committee (NBC) on the embryo. The former, by dissolving the concept of substance and bringing it back to that of function, sought to undermine the substantiality of the person: 'The pure doctrine of law has recognized the concept of the person as a concept of substance, like the hypostatization of ethical-political postulates (e.g. freedom, property), and in this way has dissolved it. As in the spirit of Kant's philosophy, the substance is reduced to function'.[1] The term 'function' is highly revealing, as many present authors fix the concept of person as determined by the possession of some functions such as freedom, moral sense, memory, self-consciousness, and not by a basic ontological structure.

A statement drafted in 1996 by some members of the NBC, who dissented from the majority opinion with regard to the status of the human embryo and the idea of substance, claimed that the latter was superseded and that it belonged to an old and outmoded philosophy of nature, not to ontology.[2] Consequently they claimed that radically weak was the 'philosophical position when it claims to be based on such a high concept as the person on the basis of a philosophy of nature that is more than ever in crisis today' (p. 36). The assumption is that the crisis of the philosophy of nature involves that of the idea of substance and consequently the decline

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[1] H. Kelsen, in H. Kelsen, R, Treves, *Formalismo giuridico e realtà sociale*, edited by Stanley L. Paulson, ESI, Naples 1992, p. 216.
[2] The text of the statement is inserted in the document *Identità e statuto dell'embrione umano*, Rome, June 1996.

of substance-based idea of person. Of course a post-metaphysical climate is not a favourable environment for the ontology of the person; this explains the frequent recourse to a 'reduced' idea of person as denoted not by its substantiality, but by its more or less significant operations.[3]

As a result, the idea of the person that today attracts most attention in the debate appears the 'moral' concept, peculiar to a personalism based not ontologically but axiologically, which understands the person as a free, rational subject, endowed with self-consciousness and responsibility. The question that then recurs is whether being a person can be related simply to the exercise of certain activities (such as freedom, consciousness, memory and so on), or primarily to the possession of a given nature/essence, from which stem specific operations peculiar to it. The former is an actualistic register (namely one relevant to actions and operations of the self); the other is ontological and is expressed in terms of being and substance. While it is possible to include the former in the latter, it appears difficult to include the ontological in the actualistic scheme.[4]

2. *Gender Question*

A second problem concerns the relationships between classical notion of person and *gender problems.* For all the basic notions that form the classical concept of person are gender-neutral, it seems that the Boethian

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[3] According to the classical philosophical tradition the human person is endowed with two main characteristics: it is an *in se* existing being and a *per se* existing one. The former attribute explains that person is a substantial reality, and the second that person is a purpose in himself. In Middle Ages Latin philosophical language created the nouns of *inseitas* and *perseitas*, in order to express the features of *in se* and of *per se*. It is not so difficult to show that the doctrine of person in modern philosophy has frequently evolved in the direction of cancelling the *in se* or personal substantiality, and to maintain in some sort the character of the *per se*, that is the end value of person. But how long can we maintain the axiological value of the person as an end, when its ontological nucleus is cancelled or overlooked? This is an unstable situation, as decisive recent problems, which deal with the question concerning the personality and substantiality of the embryo, recall.

[4] With the progressive abandonment of ontological conceptualization in modern philosophy, the idea of the person is recovered not through the radical act of existence, but by means of the referral to 'second acts', in a way that is over-determined or under-determined depending on whether the accent falls on the noblest or on the poorest. Assuming that the person is denoted by self-consciousness and by cognitive acts, the question obviously arises if the person exists when these features are either suspended or gravely compromised, as in elderly sufferers from arteriosclerosis or Alzheimer's patients.

determination of person is free and independent from the gender: it is intransparent to gender, with no polarization of masculine and feminine characters. A lot of questions are likely to arise, such as: how can we include feminine (and feminist) gender questions in that notion? How can we develop relationships between *ghenos*, *biological body* and *polis*, and eventually modulate basic human right with regard to gender questions? The paradox is that person is not a gender concept, but its application to human kind implies gender problems concerning politics, biopolitics and the core of many social sciences which necessarily deal with human beings who are masculine and feminine.

The 'Letter to the bishops of Catholic Church on co-operation between man and woman in the Church and in the world' (July 2004) criticises two significant positions: the harsh competition between man and woman, and the assumption that the biological basis is fully available to human choice. According to the former position woman, in order to be herself, builds up herself as antagonist of man, and she understands men as enemy to be won/overcome. The idea of difference here intended does not believe in the equality between man and woman, but it exalts the peculiar characteristics of both. In the latter position, with the purpose of avoiding every supremacy of either sex, one tends to cancel their differences, deemed as simple effects of historico-cultural conditionings. In this levelling out, bodily difference, named *sex*, is minimized, while the cultural dimension, named *gender*, is considered primary and leading. The darkening of the sex duality produces huge consequences such as human person attempt of freeing himself/herself from own biological conditionings with the intention of shaping themselves at will. In both positions but mainly in the second, there is a deconstruction of gender identity with a criticism of the new biopower and of the heterosexual norms.

3. *Substance, relation and action*

A criticism frequently raised against the classical notion of person sounds as follows: this notion is not well suited to include relations with others and give room to subjectivity. In other terms circulates the idea that the ontological status of a personal substance is not propitious to relation, while it is true just the opposite: only being a substantial person you can act, think, be free and open to relationships with others. The spiritual openness of the person towards others is inscribed in his substantiality; then the very idea of rationality/spirituality immanent in the Boethius determination of person is able to include relations of all kinds.

Substantial rationality necessarily implies 'relationality', for the life of the spirit is by itself relational in knowing, in loving, in acting: knowledge and love are intrinsecally directed toward the *alter/autrui*, while a mere relation without substance has no centre and interiority.

If 'relationality' or 'being in relation' were the only intrinsic aspect of the person, the death will destroy him/her at all, as death is conceived as the end of any individual and social relation. With the death we go out of any form of relationships. The self who died, is disappeared. 'Disappeared' means that he/she has come out of the horizon of time and space, in which we as living beings are inserted and which permits reciprocal connections. 'Disappeared' means that no relation is possible with him/her. So the classical notion of person as bodily and spiritual substantial being is able to open the way to the question of immortality.

B. THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND POLITICS

1. To avoid dispersal, I will deal with Politics, which I understand both as political philosophy and as empirical political science. Politics is the most ancient social science: the *episteme politiké* dates back to the Greeks, and the fundamental political concepts (society, people, community, common good, self-government, consensus, people sovereignty) presuppose a personal subject; they are like the word 'man' written large, even though man acts within society as citizen, worker, operator of social practices, voter, participant in public opinion. Moreover the fundamental meaning of Politics has not deeply changed since Greeks and Romans, while for other social sciences, such as economics, the transformation has been radical.

In principle Politics is not only or mainly a technique of negotiating with powers but an existential experience which requires a deep knowledge of human nature and human person: the optimistic, realistic and pessimistic ideas on man shape very deeply the structure of Politics, as many writers and philosophers have showed. Political thinkers of all kind deem that they personally know at the best the *real* human nature. Machiavelli, after having underlined the paramount importance of man knowledge, adds: 'Perché degli uomini si può dire questo generalmente: che sieno ingrati, volubili, simulatori e dissimulatori, fuggitori de' pericoli, cupidi di guadagno; e mentre fai loro bene, sono tutti tua, offerenti el sangue, la roba, la vita e' figlioli, quando il bisogno è discosto; ma, quando ti si appressa, e' si rivoltano. E quel principe, che si è tutto fondato in sulle parole loro, trovandosi nudo di

altre preparazioni, rovina' (*Il Principe*, cap. XVII). Some centuries after C. Schmitt observed: 'You could analyze all the state theories and political ideas on the ground of their anthropology, subdividing them according to their presupposition of a man "bad by nature" or "good by nature"'.[5]

2. *Personalism Versus Antipersonalism*

In political philosophy of the XX century we find both *personalistic or antipersonalistic* approach, which reflects itself in the fundamental political notions just mentioned, testifying the insights from which they are born. Especially in the first half of the past century, there was an intense attack on the person and at the same time the development of 'personalism' with its various significances and difficulties. I apply the term personalism to every doctrine that attributes a central role to the person, even though this is defined in very different terms, with the result that there are many types of personalism. Their plurality was pointed out in the mid-1940s by J. Maritain: 'Nothing could be more false than to speak of 'personalism' as *a single* school or *a single* doctrine. It is a reaction against two opposed errors [individualism and totalitarianism], and is inevitably a very mixed phenomenon. There is no personalistic doctrine, but there are personalistic aspirations, that at times have nothing in common except the word person... There are personalisms that are Nietzschean in tendency and personalisms that are Proudhonian in tendency, personalisms that tend towards dictatorship and personalisms that tend towards anarchy. One of the major concerns of Thomist personalism is to avoid both these excesses'.[6]

2.1. *Anti-Personalism in Politics in the Early Twentieth Century*

The political practice of the early twentieth century was frequently conducted on the ground of a *non-substantialistic intuition of man*, which ended up denying him the character of a person, as happened in totalitarianisms. In other cases there was a nominal reference to the dignity of man, without however accepting the intellectual bases that justify the perspective, with the risk that the reference to dignity became nominal, almost a rhetorical formula. We would say, resorting to a term that has gained

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[5] C. Schmitt, *Le categorie del 'politico'*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1972, p. 143.
[6] *La persona e il bene comune*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1963, p. 8.

ground subsequently, that an attempt to deconstruct the person emerged. In deconstruction it was intended to dismantle and even to destroy the concept of the person with a series of attitudes and criticisms that presupposed a clear anti-humanistic intent, like that performed by Foucault in *Les mots et les choses*: 'Man is an invention of which the archaeology of our thought easily shows the recent date. And perhaps the imminent end'.[7] This was to be achieved in Post-Modern era, so that man, an invention of the European culture of the sixteenth century, will have walked on the earth's crust for a modest handful of centuries, no more than a few grains of sand in the infinite motion of the hourglass of becoming.

The renewal of the reference to the person has, therefore, to make its way within a culture of some outstanding anti-personalism, which goes beyond that openly totalitarian and takes various forms. I recall Weber's view, which brings out man's political action, inserting it in a field of forces and violence that the individual can hardly succeed in facing, when he is not a victim of it. Some brief evocations will illuminate it, starting from the well-known lecture *Politik als Beruf* (Munich, 1919), where Weber considers the state and politics under the aegis of dominion: a field of problems that can often be resolved only through recourse to force and violence. Also the ethics of responsibility, though it does not conceal an appeal to the self, is to be read in relation to the responsibility of the political man who can resort to violence. 'Whoever yearns for the health of his soul and the salvation of other people's souls, should not seek them through politics, which proposes quite different tasks and such that they can be resolved only with violence'.[8]

In general Weber's conception of man is apersonalistic, since he sees politics and the state as based on force, on the use of legitimate violence, on dominion, and not directed to the common good of human persons. After Weber a noteworthy example is the *Begriff des Politischen* by C. Schmitt, who saw politics as marked by the struggle to the death between friend and enemy: on the ground of this criterion centred on the clash, civic friendship vanishes and the apersonalistic tendency appears highly developed.

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[7] M. Foucault, *Le parole e le cose*, Rizzoli, Milan 1967, p. 414. Cf. also: 'To all those who still wish to talk about man, his realm, his liberation, to all those who still ask questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who want to start from him to gain access to the truth... to all these forms of clumsy and distorted reflections, we can only counter with philosophical laughter, namely in part silent'. (*ivi*, p. 368).

[8] *La politica come professione*, in *Il lavoro intellettuale come professione*, Einaudi 1980, p. 117.

The antipersonalism of Marxism is explicit, seeing man only as a set of social relationships (Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach). Gramsci wrote that the great innovation introduced by the philosophy of praxis (i.e. Marxism) in the science of politics was the demonstration that an abstract human nature does not exist.

2.2. *Partial Recovery of Personalism*

With the collapse of the right-wing totalitarianisms the antipersonalistic climate, already opposed in the 1930s by the personalisms of the period, began to change. A first major signal was the Charter of the United Nations (1945), which in its Preamble speaks of the 'dignity and worth of the human person', and another is in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man (1948), where the vocabulary evokes often the person ('Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person'; also the term 'human beings' is used). Subsequently the world's political thinking took a step of greater or lesser significance towards the recovery of the idea of the person.

We will focus attention on certain authors, where many personalist positions are encountered, as well as only partially personalist assumptions, or else incomplete or 'reduced' degrees of personalism. In Ricoeur we should speak of a personalism of a relational type, where the identity of the self is reconstructed narratively and the conception of the person is accorded with the theory of action, of narration and of ethics. However, the centrality of the person is unquestioned: 'Person still remains today the most suitable term for giving an impulse to researches for which... the term conscience, or subject, or individual are not adequate'.[9] While Maritain develops an ontological personalism, linked with Boethius and Thomas Aquinas, and based on the *cooperative* relationality of the person (*communitarian personalism*), in numerous authors there prevails the reference to 'man as agent', with numerous shades of meaning and variations in relation to the type of action that is given the greatest emphasis. In some of these authors (Habermas, Rawls) the social relationship is coordinated by means of rules. There is a difference between *cooperating* and *coordinating*: one can coordinate the action of *n* subjects by resorting to abstract rules of reciprocal interaction, while cooperation calls for a more direct and personal intervention on the part of individuals, who interact on the ground of common

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[9] P. Ricoeur, *La persona*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1997, p. 38.

values and shared purposes and who express mutually various degrees of civic friendship.

Rawls. In Rawls the treatment of justice as fairness introduces a conception of the person derived from and adapted to the idea that the society should be understood as a fair system of cooperation between generations, and that the subjects should accept the idea of tolerance reasonable in a democratic society. 'In both philosophy and law the concept of the person has been understood, since antiquity, as the concept of being capable of participating in the life of society... So we can say that a person is one who is able to be a citizen, that is to say a normal and fully cooperating member, through all his life, of society... Since we start from the tradition of democratic thought, we also conceive citizens as free and equal persons'.[10] Rawls's position adopts a 'reduced' concept of the person: the person as citizen, the person as a member of the political community, not the person as such and in all his dimensions.

It has been objected to Rawls, especially by some feminist thinkers, that his theory of justice ignores the needs of caring, because the persons affected by such needs cannot be normal and fully cooperative members of a well-ordered society and do not form part of the social relationships based on a contractualistic theory. The liberal theory of justice and of the person needs to be extensively modified, setting at the centre precisely those relations of dependence and care that are neither symmetrical nor cooperative, and so excluded from Rawls's scheme. In this respect Martha Nussbaum observes: 'We should replace the Kantian image of the citizen with a more Aristotelian image, so as to conceive persons as animals endowed with needs that they are capable of converting into operations – including, but without limiting ourselves to this, the need to take care of others by establishing relations with them... This conception of the person, which embodies both growth and decline in the human lifespan, will enable us to reflect adequately on what society should provide'.[11] The limitation signalled is bound up in a certain way with the Kantian dualism between the world of the nature and the world of freedom, so that we as human beings are rational persons subject to morality rather than animals that inhabit the world of nature.

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[10] *Liberalismo politico*, p. 34, Comunità, Milan 1994.
[11] *Giustizia sociale e dignità umana*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002, p. 40 and p. 120.

3. *Individualism and Liberal Democracy*

3.1. Personalism has to maintain a clear difference in respect of individualism. The centrality of the concept of the individual, strong in modern politics from the seventeenth century on and which remains a privileged reference of much of Politics, is embodied in three main variants: ontological, methodological and axiological. These have had a powerful influence on the conception of liberal democracy. There is perhaps no 'canonical' text on liberalism from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that does not refer to the individual rather than the person, with far-reaching results on the conception of democracy, the rights of man, the limits on the exercise of the freedom. According to R. Dahrendorf, political theory has concentrated so extensively on freedom of choice as to lose sight of the importance of ties and relationships. The contemporary individual sees himself as a bearer of individual rights, as a free member of society who seeks to loose the bindings towards political society and its institutions, and towards the people of his community.

Often the emphasis on the individual entails an idea of freedom as the right or possibility to do anything provided it does not harm others. *But who are others?* The individualistic conception widespread in the West meets high difficulties in answering this decisive question, and when it seeks to answer it, it ignores the others who have no voice. Sometimes the other (*alter*) is nobody, sometimes the *alter* is the *alienus*, rarely the *alter* is the *frater*. We must be aware that the problem of human person in social sciences is strictly connected to the question concerning the other. The self-centred individual who decides by oneself the concept of the existence of himself and of the other, in principle he is not a relational person open to the other.

In this respect the concept of individual has substituted that of person as a substantial and relational reality open to community. We can trace back this upsetting transformation up to Rousseau, who in *Le contrat social* defends a kind of atomistic individualism, tersely expressed: 'Each individual is by himself a perfect and closed whole' (*Contrat social*, l. II, c. 7). Then political society is an artificial reality, created by the social contract and by legislator. A statement which cannot conceal the radically individualistic intuition which it bears: perhaps in Hobbes (and in Locke) we meet a similar anticommunitarian idea of person, as for Hobbes man is not a social animal.

On the contrary the person does not carry the idea of an isolated, self-sufficient and sovereign individual, but that of a man community based and

community oriented. In opposition to the above individualistic assumption stand several constitutional traditions as those German and Italian. The German Constitutional Court takes a relational view of personhood, as expressed in a 1954 decision stating: 'The image of man in the Basic Law is not that of an isolated, sovereign individual. [T]he tension between the individual and society [is resolved] in favour of coordination and interdependence with the community without touching the intrinsic value of the person'. (quoted by Mary Ann Glendon in her paper, p. 7). For the Italian case I can refer to the art. 2 of Constitutional Charter, which says: 'The Republic recognizes and guarantees man's inviolable rights both as single and in social formations where he develops his personality and it requires the fulfilment of binding duties of political, economic and social solidarity'.

3.2. In 'communitarian personalism' the stress is placed on the cooperative structure of action that can emerge from the interpersonal relationship. In this line of thought political society is made up of human persons, not of isolated individuals that stipulate their relationships contractually. The political society is valid as a community of destiny and of the common good that possesses a binding normative potential, which can go up to asking individual a willingness to sacrifice himself. This representation of the political society is remote from that which sees it as a free association of legal partners who see themselves as the managers of a social contract or as the protagonists of an auto-legislation in which they are the authors of laws to which they lend obedience as their consignees. Even more than by justice, the political society is held together by civic friendship, this great force that preserves all social life, which can render possible even solidarity between strangers, for which the contractual scheme is inadequate.[12]

3.3. Individualism rests on the liberal opinion that the actions and decisions of consenting adults, especially in the area of sexual life and marriage, concern themselves alone, even though there exists considerable empirical evidence of the effects on others of such forms of behaviour. It also leads to a divisive competition and conflict between generations to corner resources rather than an attitude of inter-generational solidarity. The awareness that opening up ever new freedoms and opportunities to adults risks severely penalizing future generations is still rare.

[12] Cf. *Politics* 1262 b7 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155 a23-25, 1166 b30s.

Almost absent in perspectives that centre on the individual is the *family*, even though it remains an indispensable school of humanization and socialization. Habermas's idea of democracy, projected towards the cosmopolitical area, seems based only on dialogue and communication between individual subjects, without making any reference to the groups, networks and communities they belong to. Other approaches, that are based on the triple values of 'individual, market and state', marginalize the family and the intermediate social formations of civil society. According to W. Kymlicka 'The tendency that has emerged was that of excluding domestic life from both the state and from civil society. Why is the family excluded from civil society? The answer can only be that it is excluded because it belongs to the private sphere'.[13] Long-term solidarity between generations becomes difficult when the family is marginalized, with little political weight, and individualism is given a dominant role. In present situation civil law enters with force and many detailed prescriptions in the family daily life, looking at protecting freedom of the single rather than the life of the family as a group and community, and trying to adjust family to prevailing cultural models.

In social policies this produces an unrealistic emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the subject and a devaluation of the *real reciprocal dependence* in which human subjects find themselves, especially in the initial and final stages of life. The icon of the free individual, capable of full self-determination and self-sufficiency, exercises a strong attraction on the individual and social imagination, which tends to relegate to the margins the human condition of dependence: nevertheless human beings are, and remain, strongly dependent on one another, and a part of their virtues are developed in the consciousness of this and of the necessity of cooperating, of taking care of each other. In some versions of the Welfare State this limit is added to that of not estimating sufficiently the capacity of the subject to act on the basis of values and of his not being guided only by a calculation of his self-interest.

In its radical form individualism represents a dangerous principle for democracy since, by abandoning the concepts of relational person and of a people, it turns on the auto-centred inclination of the self. A weakness of democratic culture in the West is that it is often driven by radical theoreticians who focus on the individual, his rights, and the idea of the contract

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[13] *Introduzione alla filosofia politica contemporanea*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1996, p. 279s.

as an artificial fact on which to construct rules and sociality. The result is that the current liberal version of democracy has as its ultimate purpose almost solely freedom, rhetorically understood as a boundless and self-redeeming force, the only one capable by itself of generating progress, peace and the good society. Of course there is the concrete risk that freedom tends to become an end in itself, perhaps the supreme political end, without some restrictions operated by legal system and by social practices and norms. This position could draw on a crucial sentence by Spinoza: *Finis reipublicae libertas est* (*Tractatus theologico-politicus*, chapter. 20). Then arises an important question: which is the final end of a political society, freedom or common good?

It remains decisive not to separate the person from the community or, as Ricoeur observes in the wake of Mounier, the 'personalist revolution' from the 'communitarian revolution'. The two great revolutions of 1789 and of 1917 were not 'personalist communitarian'. In the historical vicissitudes of peoples and of nations there is still lacking a 'personalist and communitarian' revolution.

3.4. *Digression on common good.* A great problem that we as Westerners encounter every day is the relationship between person and common good. The concept of common good is almost disappearing in many accounts of political philosophy in accordance to the huge importance attributed to the individual interest, while its concept is positively related to that of person. Consideration of common good as mere means in order to reach individual ends represents an assumption which destroys the common good and the social life. This disappears when men are not disposed, should that happen, to pay a part of the social burdens.

Church social doctrine introduces an original, personalistic determination of common good, related to the idea of human perfection. Resuming terms already present in Pius XII and in the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, *Gaudium et Spes* defines common good as 'the set of those conditions of social life that allow groups as well as single members to reach their own perfection more fully and more quickly' (n. 26). We meet here an important determination which, rotating around the idea of perfection, establishes that single man as well as social groups can be defined by an end and a fulfilment. Now the present explosion of differences and the request of equal civil protection for all the living styles suggest the idea that there is not a human normality, and then that each living style benefit of the same legitimacy.

4*. Is man antiquated? Arguments Against the Colonization of the Person*

I have borrowed from G. Anders the expression 'man is antiquated', turning it into a question to indicate that perhaps the game is not yet played out. For Anders, however – who expresses a sort of 'despair principle' different from the 'hope principle' of Bloch and the 'responsibility principle' of Jonas – there is nothing more to be done, since man is victim of the industrial and technological revolutions. The subtitles of the two volumes titled 'Man is Antiquated', are: 'Observations on the soul in the age of the second industrial revolution' and 'On the destruction of life in the period of the third industrial revolution'. According to the author, the studies collected in *Man is Antiquated* I and II constitute 'a philosophical anthropology in the age of technocracy'.[14]

Conclusions

1. The concept of person plays a decisive role in theology, philosophy, politics, law, biology, medicine and sociology: we can say in all the human and social sciences, for which it represents a core of inexhaustible fertility. Up to a recent past common sense was more 'Boethian' than is generally believed.

2. Previous considerations are a temporary attempt to shape an initial response to the huge but vital problem laid down by the organizers of this Plenary Session. Of course a more developed treatment requires a much more elaborate and extensive dealing with the matter. This can suggest resuming the problem in a subsequent Plenary Meeting.

3. The Boethian determination of person establishes a deep revolution in the universal history of philosophy, a sort of turning point for it towards what I would name as 'principle-person'. This principle acts as a nucleus of permanent reform of politics and the real respect of person, opposing the enormous violations perpetrated during human history.

4. Despite the rather chequered picture traced, it is not necessarily true that personalism is losing the 'battle of the concept'. Ricoeur's unequivocal statement: 'Personalism has not been so competitive as to win the battle of the concept', seems referred to the personalism of *Esprit* and Mounier.[15] The

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[14] *L'uomo è antiquato II*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2003, p. 3.
[15] *La persona*, Morcelliana, Brescia, p. 22.

ontological personalism that circulates in the Social Doctrine of the Church has valid opportunities in the battle of the concept, despite the difficulty raised by the widespread post-metaphysical or anti-metaphysical orientation of a considerable part of world philosophy, but also drawing on recoveries which are taking place.

ANNEX I – *The new centrality of the anthropological theme*

In recent years the 'anthropological question' has imposed itself on our attention, forcefully joining the usual public issues that for long time have been termed the 'democratic institutional question' and the 'social question': at least in the West, they have set the tone for two centuries. With respect to these issues, the anthropological question has more radical features and appears destined to become more pervasive. Man is being undermined in his biological and bodily basis as well as in the consciousness that he forms of himself/herself. And that not just abstractly, but practically, because the new biotechnologies affect the subject, transform it, they tend to make a change in the way we understand the central concepts of everyone's experience: being generated or produced, being born, living, procreating, seeking health, aging, dying, etc. These are transformations of highly sensitive nuclei that affected thousands of generations and that constitute the fundamental fabric of the human experience in all places and times. The human generation risks passing from procreating to producing, going towards a subject serially designed, manufactured, with the risk of not having a face of its own.

One sign of the problematic situation in which the culture lies, are the widespread doubts about the person: man can change himself but also destroy itself. The more man's power expands, the more his potential for good and evil increases, and perhaps in a way the risks increase more than the opportunities. Meanwhile, in culture the question echoes increasingly insistently: what remains of the traditional concept of the person? How will it be possible to restore a centre of gravity to man, a polymorphous being pulled in so many directions?

It seems, however, that the closer the sciences seek to press on the knowledge of man, the more man struggles free and escapes from the grasp of scientific-analytic knowledge, leaving behind him questions and tensions. The challenge had already unfolded before the searching eye of Pascal. 'I had spent a long time on the study of the abstract sciences, but

the lack of communication that one has there with men had disgusted me with them. When I began the study of man, I realized that those abstract sciences were not suited to man, and that I strayed further from my own condition the more deeply I penetrated into the study of them than others by being unaware of them. I forgave others for knowing little of them, but I believed at least that I would find many companions in the study of man. I erred: they are even fewer than those that study mathematics' (*Pensées*, n. 144, ed. Brunschvicg).

With this thought Pascal asks the binding anthropological question a few years after the Cartesian separation between thought/mind and body/extension, according to which the self resides in thought, while the body – entrusted to contingency and the inessential – is ready to be turned over to science and enter the technical domain. The premise of many recent uses of the genetic and biological discoveries can be reliably identified in the Cartesian dualism, improbable like few other things, and against whose revival it is necessary to maintain a high level of intellectual vigilance. The simplistic division of tasks between science and philosophy – to science the *res extensa* and to philosophy thought – has become an obstacle to knowledge, especially to that which turns on life, which absolutely refuses to be reduced to mere extension.

ANNEX II – *Politics and transcendence*

Among the reductionisms I would place those incomplete forms of personalism that are silent on the relationship between person and transcendence, or that consider God an extra-political subject. The classic notion of person with its capacity for horizontal and vertical openness inserts the person in a network of relationships with otherness. A purely immanent conception of the person not only fails to do justice to its real condition, but lays heavy burdens on its shoulders.

Modernity has often understood the task of the politics as *alleviating suffering in the world and creating prosperity*, fostering actions of solidarity and helping the weak. On the whole it could be maintained that the intuition conveyed in the idea of the person has found a practical path in culture and in politics, oscillating, however, since certain aspects of the person have been selected and not others: for example, freedom of choice rather than the need for identity and recognition. Secularized humanism, which does not reject the idea of the person, though it offers a partial account of

it, nurses a justified indignation against injustice and oppression and urgently demands that they should be righted. The big question here is: is man *on his own* capable of bearing the heavy ethical burden that this position, aiming at the redemption of the common life, places on his shoulders? The ethics of human dignity and benevolence place on *real person's* moral burdens which it is unlikely can be honoured without openness to Transcendence and recourse to agape. Secularized idealism is sensitive to the impulse that stems from the idea of the dignity of the person, but tends to defend itself from its theistic root.

Perhaps completely secularized politics endangers the finest achievements of modernity, which will have difficulty in being maintained for long if all contact with Transcendence is cut off. Nothing can assure us that without it we will be capable of defending ourselves from the moral cynicism or from the inefficacy of the appeal to the person and to its value. A humanism proud of its secularism could easily be deceived about the man of flesh and blood: it knows neither its grandeur nor its mediocrity and could easily turn into its opposite, namely into contempt for man.