

PERSON AND INDIVIDUAL

I.

FRENCH Personalists, in condemning the totalitarian ideologies and decadent individualism, elaborate at length the distinction between person and individual. Their solution of the whole social problem is based on this doctrine.

In his *Revolutions personaliste et communautaire*, Emmanuel Mounier has set out the considerations which necessitate the distinction. The individual is definitely inferior: he is a prey to selfish complacency, to the inordinate love of his own singularity. Enclosed in the fortress of his own egoism, he is deaf to the importunities of social claims. The person, by way of contrast, represents man's triumph over this ignoble self. According to the exposition given in his *Personalist Manifesto*,¹ the person embodies the nobler elements of human nature: generosity, self-possession, individual vocation, renunciation and self-sacrifice even to the point of heroism. Such a being enjoys autonomy and spiritual liberty in its true sense (pp. 76-80).

The considerations by which Mounier seeks to reinforce this contrast are purely psychological in character. Thus, he argues that the person is 'open,' while the individual is 'closed.' Here the individual is credited with a psychological complex orienting all his activities towards his own selfish ends. The person, on the contrary, recognises his social duties; he is open to social intercourse, to the divine attractions of love, etc. But these psychological descriptions can in no sense replace the metaphysical doctrine of personality. If they have any intelligible sense, they must be interpreted in a broad Christian sense. Thus, man is destined to a transcendent end, in the light of which we must evaluate all his being and his activity. From this view-point, we might say that man is truly a person only in so far as he really expands his being to the attractions of Divine love; and in the measure in which he transcends himself and offers his gifts in order to realise the glory of his Creator which is his proper end, as it is the end of all creation.

Understood in any other sense, the dichotomy of person and individual is open to grave objection. For in every man the notions of personality and individuality meet: we must insist that there can

¹ This is the English translation (1938) of Mounier's *Manifeste au Service du Personalisme*.

be no bisection of man, that the *whole* man is the human person as the *whole* man is the human individual. Even as an individual member of the species, man is never completely isolated: he is open to all the influences of his human environment. The principal error of Individualism lies in an attempt to minimise, if not to deny completely, the dependence of man vis-à-vis the community. On the other hand, his personality founds man's right to inviolability; as person, he is *sui juris* and free, and is thereby 'closed' to the tyrannical exactions of his fellow-men. In a sense, then, we could reverse the verdict of the Personalists and declare that the person is 'closed,' while the individual is 'open.'

II.

The distinction between person and individual is especially associated with the name of M. Jacques Maritain. It has become the *leitmotif* of his political writings, for he has been insistent that the distinction lies at the basis of all social thinking. His use of this doctrine raises many problems, but here we can single out only two issues, raised by the applications he has made and by his claim to expound a Thomistic doctrine.

In opposing person and individual, Maritain asserts that to develop one's individuality is to develop the inferior elements of human nature: it is to lead a selfish existence, to be a slave to one's passions, to think and act as an egoist. On the other hand, a man develops personality in proportion as he cultivates the higher elements of his nature, and strives to open the richer veins of his being, to make it accessible to the spiritual communications of intellectual and the compelling power of love. By thus placing the individual in the inferior and material elements of man, Maritain attributes to it all our human frailties. But the inferior and material elements thus attached to the notion of individual constitute an integral part of the totality which is the person. Since for every Scholastic the person is an individual (though, indeed, an individual that is high in the scale of being) it follows that everything in the human composite flows from the personality. Passion, affectivity and sensibility, which presuppose a material organism, enhance the person as well as will and thought: they are all integral parts of his personality. The human person is an ego that is partially corporeal. In this personal totality, there are faculties and qualities of unequal status, implying varying degrees of perfection. But this hierarchy does not coincide with Maritain's distinction of person and individual, a distinction which, from the metaphysical view-point, seems to disrupt the unity of the ego.

III.

Maritain asserts that the whole principle of individuation shows that, for St. Thomas, the individual is a part, a fragment of the species, and that this doctrine of personality and individuality is fundamental in Thomistic metaphysics.² This raises the question of the Thomistic origin of the distinction. To do justice to the doctrine of St. Thomas on this point it will be necessary to distinguish carefully two problems apparently confused by Maritain: the problem of individuation and that of individuality.

The problem of individuation deals solely with the multiplication of individuals within the same species. In the case of incorruptible beings, this question does not arise, for the species is realised in a single individual. Each angel constitutes a distinct species. With such beings, there is no need to distribute the specific type into a number of individuals. In the case of corruptible beings, on the contrary, there exists within the framework of the same specific nature a plurality of individuals: the specific form, of itself incapable of enduring in all its fullness, is perpetuated in the series of numerically distinct individuals, individuated by matter.³ Thus, each man is by definition an exemplar unique in himself and irreducible to all others. The matter which constitutes an essential part of each human composite is incommunicable because of its extension. But from the fact that there would be no individuals if there were no bodies, it does not follow that it is the body which confers on man his dignity and originality. On the contrary, these qualities come from the form. The substantiality of the human composite is communicated by the form to the matter. The principle of the Thomistic solution, then, is this: The form of man cannot of itself subsist as an individual subject. Nevertheless, it is in virtue of its form that the quality of substance belongs to the human subject; for the form gives being (*dat esse*) to the composite and thus permits the individual to subsist.

This leads us to our second problem: individuality. What is an individual, according to St. Thomas?

'An individual,' he tells us, 'is that which is an undivided unit and differentiated from others.'⁴ Though matter is the principle of individuation, and thereby renders individuality possible, it does not constitute individuality. Man is an individual (i.e. a being undivided

² *Three Reformers*, p. 195.

³ St. Thos., *Sum. Theol.*, Ia, q. 43, a. 2.

⁴ *Sum. Theol.*, Ia, 29, 4.

in himself and distinct from others) because he is a concrete substance taken as a whole.

Let us apply these considerations directly to man. Every man is an individual substance and the form is the source of substantiality. This means that though matter individuates the form, it is the latter (when individualised) that becomes individual. The soul of man is an individual form which invests matter with its own proper existence and thus permits the individual to subsist. St. Thomas often remarks that several human souls are numerically distinct by their union with the body. Though this is so, it is no less true that the total man constitutes the individual. Moreover, each human individual is a substantially different participation of the same specific nature. Thus, the soul of Peter and his body, constituting his individual nature, are of a substantial perfection different from that of Paul. Between them there exists, within the framework of the same specific nature, a substantial distinction.

In the last analysis, therefore, the concrete human substance is endowed with individuality because of its form. How is this doctrine related to the notion of personality? St. Thomas defines the person as 'the individual substance of a rational nature.'⁵ In the context he carefully specifies the rôle of the adjective 'individual' in this definition. This adjective is added, he tells us, to show that it is here a question of first substance, of concrete substance, and not of second substance. But this concrete substance is the individual, undivided in itself and distinct from others. The notion of individual is wider than that of person, which implies a spiritual element. The term is applicable to all concrete substances, and, to designate a man, it is necessary to add a qualification: we speak of the *human* individual. Moreover, this term is synonymous with person: the individual with a rational nature is called a person.⁶ Applied to man, person and individual denote the same concrete totality, the same substance.

IV.

Clearly, then, the distinction expounded by Maritain is not explicitly propounded by St. Thomas. Yet the underlying thought is genuinely Thomistic. As a matter of fact, Maritain has here extracted a precious truth from Aquinas, but, as often, he has clothed it in terms that are his own. His brilliant mind has given new and vigorous expression to a truth of perennial value.

⁵ *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 29, a. 1.

⁶ *Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 29, 3 ad. 2.

The individual human being is, for St. Thomas, a part of society. 'Each particular person is compared to the community as a part to the whole' (IIa IIae, q. 64, a. 2). And yet the person is not merged in society. For 'a man is not ordained to the political community, of which he forms part, in regard to his whole being and all that he has . . . for all that a man is and that he can accomplish and can possess must be ordained to God' (Ia IIae, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3).

If we would deal successfully with the problem of man's value relative to society (which is the pith of the social problem) we must be clear on fundamentals. The true definition of the human person is that it is man considered in the *totality of his being*. In this human composite, the all-important element is the spiritual, immortal soul, which is, by its destiny, the true foundation of man's value and dignity. Hence, our picture of man is incomplete if we do not consider his personal destiny in all its fullness. By the fact that the person is destined for God, he is superior to the order of Society. The organisation of society is intended to aid him in the attainment of his end, and the common temporal good is ordained to him.

In the social problem, therefore, the ultimate end of man is the fundamental criterion. In virtue of this transcendent end, the person can never be a mere instrument or means, and can never use other persons as such. Nevertheless, man is called to realise his destiny with other men in a social life. He is so constituted that he can attain the full perfection of his nature only by submitting himself to social relations. Man is not a purely instinctive being; nor is he self-sufficient. Normally, he needs the assistance of other men, not merely to attain physical well-being, but moral perfection as well. Endowed with free-will, and called to a definite destiny, the person can realise his perfection only by conscious organisation of his activities. To affirm, therefore, a certain juridical subordination of man to society is not to degrade his dignity as a person, since social ties cannot be in fundamental opposition to the exigencies of his nature. Social life and private life are not in contradiction: they are complementary. Social life serves personal ends and personal life has a social end. In this conclusion we are merely expressing the essence of Thomistic solidarism.

To qualify this we must add that such subordination must never be servitude. In the regulation of his moral activity, as in the attainment of his personal salvation, the person always remains, with respect to other men, autonomous. Man is not solely a 'homo politicus.' As St. Thomas says, 'he is not to be looked upon in the

integrity of his being as wholly subordinate to the community' (IIa, IIæ, q. 64, a. 2).

In political society, the end is the common good, which attracts human wills and leads them to co-ordinate their activities to achieve a common object. Essentially, this society is a unity of order. But this formula gives us no more than the bare essence of society. Two further elements must be added which necessarily proceed from unity of order: authority and organisation. For, despite his social nature, every man is limited by the faults and imperfections of his individuality. His preoccupation with personal interests withdraws him, to some extent, from the pursuit of the common good. There is, then, need of a directing force to co-ordinate personal activities, and to prescribe the means to be adopted to attain the common end. Authority orders the activities of men by influencing their intelligence and will. The totality of means which it employs to effect this result is called organisation.

The person naturally aspires to complete human perfection. His social nature demands that he pursue this perfection in a unity of order with other men. It is not, then, derogatory to the nature of man to assert that he must pursue his perfection in a perfect society (the State). His social nature imposes on him the obligation of submitting himself to the common good, and of finding there, at the same time, the highest degree of individual perfection. Hence, it is wrong to subordinate man to society only in so far as he is an individual, a fragment of the species. It is in his activity, and chiefly in his spiritual activities, that man's social nature is expressed. To emphasise the fundamental exigencies of human nature is not to degrade the person, but, on the contrary, to point the road which complete and personal development must follow. True humanism teaches that, as the person necessarily aspires to complete perfection, he tends, in virtue of his social nature, to pursue it in society. Society, in turn, must envisage the common good as embracing complete human perfection, or an aspect of this perfection. For every common good worthy of the name is, in the last analysis, a good of persons.

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